



The Meerkatter

The Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project Report – www.kalahari-meerkats.com – August 2025

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Old Foes.

Whiskers have, once again, had an eventful month. The Meerkatter article published in June, “What a Carry-On”, reported on the intense competition for dominance between the three sisters Kylie (VWF265), Bruce (VWF266), and Sheila (VWF267), who returned to Whiskers at the end of May. Since then, the tension in the group seems to have eased and competition between the sisters has reduced in both frequency and intensity. Although some observers at the project have their suspicions as to whom is now in charge, the dominant female at the group is yet to be officially confirmed. As mentioned in the June Meerkatter, Bruce was confirmed to be pregnant around this time, and we suggested that the weight gained in pregnancy may help her in prevailing over her sisters to gain dominance. This was not the case, however, as the first week of July saw both Kylie and Sheila be confirmed as pregnant as well, further restructuring the dominance hierarchy within the group.



Whiskers' pup Mya (VWF268) – photographed in May 2023. Photo credit: Livio Flueeler.

The pregnancies of Bruce and Kylie were reported to have ended on the 22nd of July, and 7th of August, respectively, and as neither pregnancy was followed by signs of lactation or babysitting at the group, the pregnancies were assumed to have been

aborted. Meerkats are fossorial, meaning they spend a significant part of their lives in underground burrows, therefore, behaviours such as birth events, require a degree of speculation as they rarely occur above ground. In this case, it is possible that the pups from these litters were born and lost before emergence, or potentially even killed by another female. Pregnant females occasionally commit infanticide to affect reproductive sharing within the group and increase the likelihood of survival for their own offspring (Young & Clutton-Brock, 2006). Sheila's pregnancy, however, which ended on the 11th of August, was followed immediately by lactation and babysitting at the group – indicating that the litter is alive. On the 29th of August, three healthy pups emerged. Two days later, on the 31st, an observer was present at Whiskers collecting weights and life history data, as well as attempting to get a glimpse at the newborn pups – a much rarer sight during winter. The observer waited at the sleeping burrow for the group's return, as is protocol with habituation groups, since following the group can negatively affect the habituation of previously wild individuals, potentially further affecting other group members.

At the sleeping burrow Bruce was babysitting the newborn litter. She frequently emerged from the burrow to scan the surrounding area for threats, before disappearing back down the burrow to care for the pups – not before giving our observer a brief inspection. Shortly after arriving at the burrow, our observer could not help but notice that Bruce seemed especially alert, spending a lot of time bipedal and scanning the surrounding area in a seemingly anxious manner. Three pups did emerge from the burrow, allowing the observer to confirm their presence in the group, but were quickly ushered below to safety. Something was evidently causing Bruce's heightened vigilance. After around

40 minutes at the burrow, the observer was surprised to see dominant male Raclette (VTDM017) return to the burrow. He was early and alone, and he was barking frantically, although the cause of his distress was unclear. After a quick check of the burrow and scan of the area, he was gone again, disappearing back in the direction of which he came.

It was another 20 minutes before Raclette returned, this time along with the rest of the group, all of whom showed caution upon approaching the burrow. The evening weights session continued smoothly and just after 18:00, around 20 minutes after the group's return, all individuals except Raclette and sub-adult female Luna (VWF279) had gone below. It was not until this point, that the observer noticed that another individual was sat around 10 meters from the burrow. Her dye marks were very faded, but it was clearly the previously dominant female, Gnoll (VWF262). Gnoll had left the group at the end of May, upon the arrival of the three sisters. It is unclear where she has been since leaving Whiskers, but she appeared to be in good health. Despite this, returning to a group with three large females is a significant risk to take, especially considering the presence of newborn pups and the seemingly fragile structure of dominance in the group. A returning adult female can be a threat to vulnerable pups, as well as the dominance hierarchy established in her absence.



Whiskers' individuals – photographed in May 2023. Photo credit: Livio Flueeler.

Gnoll slowly approached Raclette, head bowed and tail low, a clearly submissive stance. Raclette's tail stood directly upwards, he postured with his back arched

and hair on end, appearing as large as possible in a typically defensive manner. Gnoll slowly closed the gap between the two individuals before rolling onto her back to submit to Raclette. His posture relaxed after smelling Gnoll, seemingly accepting her submission and her presence at the group – although anal marking her was clearly deemed necessary too. Luna, however, who had stayed behind Raclette during this ordeal, made sure to give Gnoll a wide berth whilst maintaining a defensive posture – perhaps indicating that her return to the group might not be so seamless.

Gnoll then approached the entrance of the group's sleeping burrow and at this moment chaos erupted. In a fraction of a second Bruce set upon her, biting and thrashing from side to side, as if trying to tear at her skin. Gnoll lay on her back, squirming to free herself from Bruce, however, once Raclette had joined in with the attack she was overpowered completely. Submissive, desperate squeals cried out from the now writhing ball of dust, fur, and tails. This continued for around 30 seconds, with subordinate sub-adult male Dante (VWM283) and Luna cautiously watching from a distance. They paced back and forth anxiously but did not interfere. Interestingly, neither Sheila nor Kylie emerged from the burrow during this conflict, possibly remaining in the burrow to assume the role of pup protection. Gnoll finally squirmed from the grasp of Bruce, escaping in the only direction possible – down into the burrow. Within the dark tunnels of the burrow, one wrong turn could have led her directly to Sheila and Kylie, which almost certainly would have proven a fatal mistake. Instead, Gnoll swiftly shot from another burrow entrance and out into the shrubland. Bruce followed close behind and after another short scuffle, Gnoll fled into the denser shrubs whilst Bruce returned to the burrow.

Gnoll's attempt to return to her natal group had been rejected, and, unsurprisingly, she did not attempt to return to the group again this month. It is unclear what the future holds for Gnoll. Before this encounter she had survived away from our study population for almost three months,

potentially finding refuge with some wild meerkats for a short period. It will be interesting to see whether we encounter Gnoll again, possibly she will be with Whiskers, another of our study groups, or even a wild group.



Luna resting at the sleeping burrow minutes before the appearance of Gnoll. Photo credit: Matthew Shard, Life History Coordinator.

References

Young, A.J. & Clutton-Brock, T. (2006). 'Infanticide by subordinates influences reproductive sharing in cooperatively breeding meerkats'.

Pregnancies in August 2025

Females pregnant in August	11
Females who aborted	1
Females who gave birth, litters lost	0
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	1
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	4
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	5

August 2025 Life History Details

Due to the large number of groups, we are covering, we have made some changes to the way we are collecting data at the KMP. There are four different levels of data collection, that we will briefly introduce here.

Full data collection group (FDC)

We collect LH data at the group and regularly visit the group for full adlib and weights sessions.

Life History monitoring group (LHM)

Observers tend to visit these groups for shorter amounts of time. We collect LH data and increase our visits when new pups need to be habituated. We do

not collect adlib data at these groups but collect morning and evening weights a few times per week.

Habituation group (HAB)

Habituating meerkats to our presence is the main goal at these groups. As the group's habituation progresses, we start collecting LH and weights data as well. In a later stage, we try to follow the group after morning weights, introduce lunch weights and start approaching the group in the afternoon.

Sub-group (SUB)

The amount of data we can collect at these groups depends mainly on whether a radio-collared individual is present. If that is the case, we try to collect LH, weights and adlib data, as it is very interesting to witness group dynamics within these newly formed groups. However, we do not always have a radio collar at these groups. In these cases, we focus on collecting LH data during opportunistic sightings.

Full Data Collection Groups:

Alba (FDC):

- 19 out of 21 individuals were present at the end of August.
- On the 1st, yearling subordinate male Bibu (VALM014) approached the group. The group war-danced towards him and he retreated. On the same day, yearling subordinate male Kronk (VALM018) returned to the group. On the 2nd, Bibu returned to the group. On the 4th, Bibu left the group again. On the 15th, Kronk left the group again, returning later that evening. Bibu returned on the 22nd but left again the following day. Kronk was not with the group on the 26th, but he returned on the 29th, only to leave again on the 31st. Both Kronk and Bibu were absent from the group at the month's end.
- The group had no observed encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits this month.
- Subordinate sub-adult males Xue (VALM024) and Disco (VALM029) had small bumps on their muzzles this month. All other individuals appeared healthy at the end of the month.

Brussels Sprouts (FDC):

- All 10 members were present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Arabella (VMPF035) was made officially pregnant this month.
- On the 19th, adult subordinate male Gurke (VHMM036) was seen at Zulus, but had returned to his group by the following morning. On the 21st and 30th Gurke left the group in the morning and rejoined his group later the same evening. Dominant male James Sawyer (VGDM011) left the group but rejoined a few hours later.
- Brussels Sprouts had no encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits observed this month.
- James Sawyer (VGDM011) had a cut by his right eye. All other members of the group appeared to be in good health.

Gold Diggers (FDC):

- Gold Diggers decreased by 1 individual, with 19 members being present by the end of the month.
- Dominant female Goldeneye (VGDF007) was made officially pregnant this month.
- On the 30th, subordinate adult male Captain Patel (VGDM048) left the group. Captain Patel did not return to the group by the end of the month.
- The group had no observed encounters, inter group interactions or group splits this month.
- Subordinate yearling male Snackajack (VGDM063) had a scab on the left side of his muzzle which appears to have healed this month. All other members of the group appeared to be in good health.

Jaxx (FDC):

- All 16 members were present at Jaxx at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Jub Jub (VJXF160) gave birth on the 27th, the litter is yet to emerge, but there is clear lactation and babysitting, the litter is thought to be alive.
- On the 12th, subordinate yearling male Gobi (VJXM194) and subordinate yearling females Pulpi (VJXF189) and Dexter (VJXF190) all left the group. Later that same day Pulpi and Dexter approached the group but retreated when the group war-danced towards them. On the 13th, Gobi returned to the group. On the 18th, dominant male Mr Worldwide (VJXM200) was observed to be away from the group – he returned on the 20th. On the 26th, Gobi left the group in the morning but returned that same day. Later in the day on the 26th, subordinate sub-adult male Icetruck (VJXM196), subordinate sub-adult female Trinity (VJXF197), juvenile male TunafishV (VJXM202), and pups (VJXM206, VJXM207) all left the group, and in the evening of the 26th, juvenile male Freddie (VJXM204) also left the group – all of these individuals returned the following day. On the 27th, subordinate sub-adult Skinner (VJXM199) left the group – returning on the 30th.
- Enough time has passed for subordinate adult female Brave (VJXF178) to be emigrated out of the group this month.
- Pulpi and Dexter are yet to return by the end of the month.
- Jaxx were observed to have one overnight group-split this month.
- On the 2nd and 8th, Brave approached the group, retreating both times when the group war-danced towards her. One unidentified adult male was observed approaching the group on the 18th of this month – he retreated when the group war-danced towards him.
- There were no inter-group interactions observed at Jaxx this month.
- Habituation was classed as *In Progress*. Habituation of dominant male Mr. Worldwide (VJXM200) was going well, he had not yet shown interest in egg or water but was comfortable with observers sitting at 1 meter distance at the sleeping burrow and follows at a 4-5-meter distance.

- All members of the group appeared to be in good health by the end of the month.

Lazuli (FDC):

- All 13 individuals were present at the end of August.
- On the 11th, subordinate yearling male Tinashe (VLM310) left the group, returning that same evening. On the 20th, juvenile males Scrumpy (VLM323) and Avon (VLM325) left the group, returning the following day. On the 24th, dominant male Rogelio De La Vega (VGDM015) was observed to be away from the group but returned that same afternoon. On the 29th, Rogelio De La Vega, Tinashe, and Scrumpy all left the group, returning that same day.
- The group had no observed encounters, inter-group interactions or group-splits this month.
- Subordinate yearling male Petit Bidon (VLM318) had a bump on the left side of his muzzle. Subordinate yearling male Tumtum (VLM315) had a swollen muzzle. Subordinate yearling male Fat Belly (VLM316) had a wound to the left side of his muzzle. All other members of the group appeared to be in good health by the end of the month.

Side Quest (FDC):

- All 16 members were present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Pumba (VZUF048) was made officially pregnant this month.
- On the 29th, subordinate yearling female Truffle (VSIF040) left the group but had returned by the following day.
- Side Quest had no observed encounters, group-splits or inter-group interactions observed this month.
- All individuals appeared to be in good health by the end of August.

Trackie-Daks (FDC):

- Trackie-Daks decreased by 1 individual, with 18 members present at the end of the month.
- *Female Dominance* remains *unknown* at Trackie-Daks at the end of the month.
- On the 15th, adult female Chinchilla (VTDF029) left the group. On the 17th, subordinate yearling male Tsodiyo (VTDM042) was spotted away from the group but returned that same day. Chinchilla approached the group on the 17th and 18th but retreated when chased by the group. On the 19th, Tsodiyo and subordinate yearling male Raisibe (VTDM043) had both left the group. Later, that same day, Tsodiyo approached the group but retreated when the group war-danced towards him. On the 21st, sub-adult female Mulan (VTDF046) left the group. On the 27th, Chinchilla, Tsodiyo, Raisibe, and Mulan had all returned to the group, although Chinchilla left the group again that same day. Chinchilla had not returned to the group by the end of the month.
- Enough time has passed for subordinate yearling female Unova (VTDF037) to be emigrated out of the group.

- One unidentified adult approached the group on the 21st – they retreated when the group war-danced towards them.
- Trackie-Daks had no group-splits or inter-group interactions observed this month.
- The habituation level was in *Advanced Progress*. Dominant male Guido (VWM275) drank water and ate egg multiple times and he was comfortable with 2m follows for 15 minutes. He was weighed nine times this month.
- Raisibe and sub-adult Peely (VTDM048) both had bumps on their muzzles which seem to be healing. All other members of the group appeared to be in good health.

Ubuntu (FDC):

- Ubuntu decreased by 2 individuals, with 16 members present at the end of August.
- Dominant female Agazoth (VUBF039) was made officially pregnant this month.
- On the 5th, subordinate yearling male Pap (VUBM074) left the group. On the 24th subordinate yearling female Hotfoot (VUBF071) was evicted from the group – she returned to the group the following day. On the 27th, Hotfoot left the group. On the 29th, subordinate yearling male Wors left the group. That same day he attempted to approach the group and was war-danced towards, before successfully returning to the group in the evening. Hotfoot and Pap remained absent from the group at the end of the month.
- Ubuntu had one inter-group interaction with Vetkoeks on the 21st. Vetkoeks retreated when Ubuntu war-danced towards them.
- The group had no observed encounters or group-splits this month.
- All individuals at the group appeared to be in good health.

Vetkoeks (FDC):

- All 8 individuals were present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Mooncake (VHMF053) was made officially pregnant this month.
- Vetkoeks had two inter-group interactions this month. On the 2nd, Vetkoeks saw and war-danced towards Mandalore, who despite initially war-dancing towards Vetkoeks, retreated. On the 21st, Ubuntu war-danced towards Vetkoeks, who retreated.
- On the 2nd, adult male Floki (VWM241) from Mandalore approached the group multiple times but retreated when the group war-danced towards him.
- The group had no group splits observed this month.
- All individuals appeared healthy at the end of the month.

Zulus (FDC):

- Zulus decreased by 1 individual with 11 members present at the end of August.

- Dominant female Leona (VZUF070) gave birth this month, with clear signs of lactation and babysitting the litter is thought to be alive.
- On the 20th, subordinate yearling female Sooty (VZUF071) left the group. Sooty foraged at the edge of the group on the following day but was not acting as part of the group. On the 28th, Sooty returned to the group.
- Hogwarts' subordinate yearling male Buckbeak (VHWM002) approached Zulus twice this month. On the 9th he was chased and the group war-danced towards him. On the 31st, he foraged on the edge of the group and followed them into their sleeping burrow. Subordinate adult male Gurke (VHMM036) from Brussels Sprouts approached the group on the 19th but was chased away.
- Zulus had no observed group-splits or inter-group interactions in August.
- All individuals at Zulus appeared to be healthy throughout August.

Life History Monitoring Groups:

Dik-Diks (LHM):

- Dik-Diks decreased by 1 individual, with 16 members present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Juliet (VGDF009) gave birth on the 30th. At the month's end it was unclear whether lactation and babysitting processes have begun or not – the litter's status is therefore unknown.
- Enough time has passed for subordinate adult female Tuna Fish II (VGDF026), and subordinate yearling females Devil (VDDF005) and Florentine (VDDF008) to be given her last seen this month.
- On the 22nd, subordinate adult male Jaivyn (VUBM048) and subordinate yearling male Scramble (VUBM007) left the group – both returning on the 24th. On the 28th, subordinate adult female Shelby (VGDF022), was observed to have left the group – she had not returned by the month's end.
- Dik-Diks had no inter-group interactions, group-splits or encounters this month.
- Habituation of the group remains in *Advanced progress* at the end of the month. Dominant female Juliet drinks water but was not weighed this month. Shelby drinks water and is comfortable with hands – she was weighed twice this month.
- All members appeared to be in good health at the end of this month.

Elrond's Council (LHM):

- All 17 individuals were present at the of the August.
- Enough time has passed for subordinate adult male Jatu (VECM071) to be given his last seen this month.
- Elrond's Council had one encounter this month. On the 2nd, two unknown adult males approached the group, the group saw, war danced and chased the individuals, who then retreated.

- The group had no inter-group interactions or group-splits observed this month.
- Habituation is classed as in *Advanced Progress*. Dominant male Jonsnow (VECM070) is now comfortable enough that we have resumed collecting behavioural data on the group, whilst still being very aware that the priority is his habituation. He is comfortable with observers standing at a 2-meter distance and is interested in egg – he was not weighed this month.
- Dominant female Snoop Kat (VECF039) has a deep, open wound to the left side of her chest and is subsequently limping and lethargic. Subordinate yearling female Cadenza (VECF059) had bumps on the left side of her muzzle. All other members of the group appeared to be in good health.

a 1-2m sitting distance and a 3-5m standing and moving distance. We will continue visiting the group and increasing Agent K's comfort distance as well as potentially recording his weight.

- All members of the group appeared to be in good health.

The following authors contributed to this report:

Matthew Shard, Life History Coordinator.

Habituation Groups:

Hogwarts (HAB):

- All 11 members of the group were present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Salazar (VZUF051) gave birth this month – lactation and babysitting indicate that the litter is alive.
- On the 9th, subordinate yearling male Buckbeak (VHWM002) had left the group and was seen at Zulus. On the 11th, he had returned to the group. On the 31st, Buckbeak was seen following Zulus below at their sleeping burrow – he had not returned to the group by the month's end.
- The group had no group-splits, inter-group interactions, or encounters observed this month.
- Habituation is classed as *In Progress*. Habituation of sub-adult subordinate male Buckbeak (VHWM002) is going well, he is drinking water, is comfortable around the scale and he was weighed 5 times this month. Dominant male Caraxes (VHWM004) drinks water but was not weighed this month.
- All individuals appeared healthy at the end of the month.

Whiskers (HAB):

- Whiskers increased by 3 individuals, with 10 members present at the end of August.
- Adult female Sheila (VWF267) gave birth this month. Adult female Kylie (VWF265) aborted her litter this month.
- On the 29th, pups Iron (VWP285), Katana (VWP286), and Maus (VWP287) emerged from the burrow for the first time.
- Whiskers had two encounters this month. On the 1st, an unknown adult approached the group but retreated when the group war-danced towards them. On the 31st, former dominant female Gnoll (VWF262) approached the group, but she was attacked and chased from the group.
- Whiskers had no inter-group interactions or group splits observed this month.
- The group's habituation is classed as *In Progress*. Adult subordinate male Agent K (VWM276) is eating egg and is comfortable with