



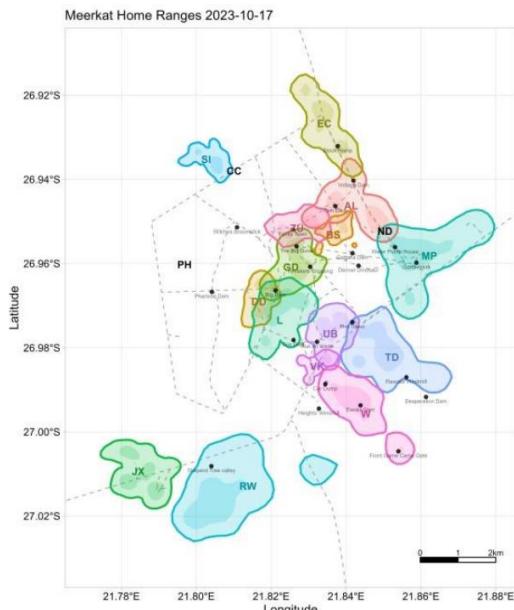
The Meerkatter

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

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Bad Neighbours

December represents one of the peak months of the meerkat breeding season, a period of paramount importance. When considering a group's long-term survival, key influences include reproductive success, the stability of group dynamics, cooperative pup-rearing, and foraging efficiency. Undoubtedly, these are critical for the meerkats within our study population; however, there is another essential factor which is often understated in its importance - the group territory. Territorial defence is a fitness-related behaviour, shaped by resource distribution and population density, and it has profound implications for the survival and reproductive success of both individuals and groups (M. Dyble, et al., 2019).

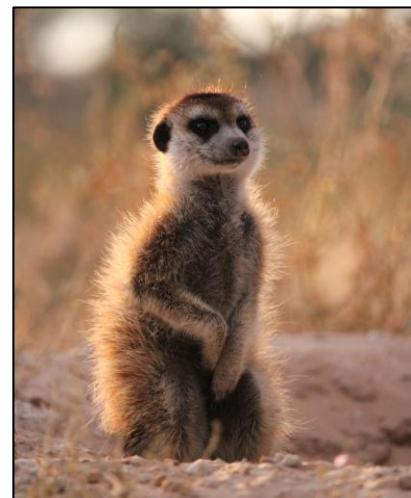


|Fig. 1: Initial group territory map from Vetkoek's formation in 2023 showing home ranges of the study populations. Note the closely overlapping home ranges of Vetkoeks (VK) and their neighbours.

One group, for which the territory has played a particularly significant role, is Vetkoeks. Since their first sighting in July 2022, and the group's subsequent official formation in October 2022, Vetkoeks have, until recently, remained a small group, consistently lower in member count compared to their neighbouring groups. As success during intergroup encounters is strongly correlated to group size, a small group is substantially limited in their ability to expand and maintain a territory. As shown in Figure 1, in September 2023, Vetkoeks, with a group size of just 6, were effectively sandwiched between four major groups – Lazuli, Trackie-Daks,

Ubuntu, and Whiskers – whose group sizes during this period were 30, 21, 17, and 18 individuals respectively. Furthermore, the limited area occupied by Vetkoeks was intersected by a main road, meaning that a large proportion of this terrain offered minimal shelter and foraging opportunity, and, although traffic surrounding the reserve is minimal, it posed an immediate and severe risk to the group. Vetkoeks, were on the brink of collapse and navigating towards a prosperous and secure future was to prove no small task.

The group was unable to pursue direct territorial expansion through aggressive encounters, and instead, relied on opportunistically exploiting reductions in neighbouring pressure. Favourable shifts in territory boundaries or temporary declines in neighbouring group size allowed Vetkoeks to establish themselves in low-contest areas. Impressively, the group endured, and their territory gradually expanded. This process, however, did not occur overnight, and the group faced inevitable setbacks. Vetkoeks proceeded to lose one litter before pup emergence, and three more unsuccessful litters over the following months resulted in the death of at least 14 pups. Shockingly, not a single individual born within Vetkoeks between January 2023 and November 2024 survived infancy, underscoring the importance of securing productive and safe territories.



Vetkoeks individual sunning in the early morning. (Photo Credit: Giulia Bigotti)

During 2024, Vetkoeks were observed to engage in 4 intergroup encounters, during all of which they were forced to flee from Ubuntu, and on the 14th of March 2024, Ubuntu succeeded in killing 5 of Vetkoeks' pups during an inter-group interaction whilst the groups were foraging. Regardless, by this

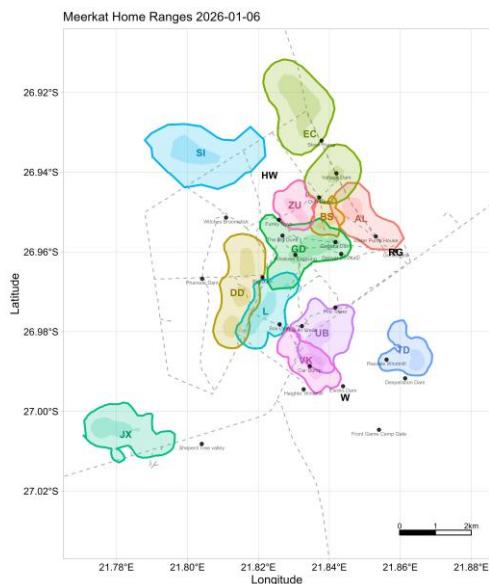
time Vetkoeks' territory had grown significantly, and they had begun to show growing resilience during these chaotic interactions – in some cases, even venturing to war-dance back towards Ubuntu – though their efforts ultimately proved futile. Reproductively, towards the end of 2024 the group also began to show promise, signified by the emergence of 4 pups – their first successful litter since December 2022. As mentioned previously, in the months preceding the birth of this litter the group's territory had been steadily growing, potentially enabled by Trackie-Daks moving further South-East, relieving the pressure on both Vetkoeks and Ubuntu. Numerous influences are at play regarding reproductive success; hence we cannot attribute the success of this litter solely to an improvement in the group territory. However, it is likely that without the larger territory that is shown in *Figure 2*, Vetkoeks would have continued to be reproductively suppressed, and the group would have continued to diminish and disappear.



Vetkoeks individuals at the sleeping burrow awaiting leave time.
(Photo Credit: Giulia Bigotti)

In 2025, Vetkoeks experienced a rise in observed intergroup encounters, with a total of 9 over the course of the year, during which, the group demonstrated much greater resilience. June 2025 marked the first observed occasion where Vetkoeks did not retreat during an interaction – a group encounter with Mandalore on the 17th of June resulted in a fight between both groups and Vetkoeks chasing Mandalore from the area. Similarly, on the 4th of July, Vetkoeks engaged in an intergroup interaction with Ubuntu, yet in contrast to previous encounters, it was now Ubuntu that retreated. Considering Vetkoeks had a group size of just 8 compared to Ubuntu's 22 individuals, 12 of whom were sub-adults or older, this marks an unusual occasion where group size alone did not necessarily determine interaction outcome. It is important to consider that in May 2025 Vetkoeks became a full data collection group, resulting in an increase in both the time spent observing them, and the accuracy of our group territory map, possibly contributing to the subsequent increase in observed inter-group interactions and the accuracy of their territory map. Despite the apparent turning tide, for the latter half of the year Vetkoeks continued to retreat during the vast majority of the intergroup interactions that we observed, yet two successful litters born in September and November 2025 increased their

group size substantially to 18 individuals, matching their neighbours.



|Fig. 2: Current group territory showing home ranges of the study populations, note the increased home range of Vetkoeks (VK).

This increase in group size appeared to correlate with a shift in group behaviour; as the group grew larger, they also appeared to become more confident. In December, Vetkoeks gradually foraged further south, approaching the established territory of Whiskers. Although Whiskers had a total group size of 19 individuals, 11 of these were young pups from a mixed litter born at the end of November 2025, meaning that, in the event of an intergroup conflict, they aren't able to contribute to the group's efforts. Additionally, Vetkoeks now outnumbered Whiskers in subadults and adults and therefore held the advantage in terms of fighting power.

On the 24th December 2025, during the morning session, Vetkoeks began to forage south, taking their new litter of 6 for just their second ever foraging session. The group rapidly covered distance, and as they neared the border between Whiskers' territory and their own, the group underwent an evident behaviour change. Although foraging continued, the observer noticed that the number of members who assumed guarding roles increased, and the group composition shifted from dispersed foraging to a more compact unit – all typical signs of the group's heightened vigilance. Despite this behavioural shift, it was still unclear to the observer if Vetkoeks had sighted Whiskers, who were now foraging approximately 50 meters from Vetkoeks. All of a sudden, Vetkoeks quickly gathered and war-danced towards a hesitant Whiskers, who were now sheltering beneath a fallen tree. The groups clashed, and Whiskers, with 11 small pups, and an insufficient number of large individuals, were forced to retreat. Vetkoeks subsequently pursued and attacked adult subordinate female Kylie (VWF265) and pup Butternut (VWF299). Whilst Kylie was eventually able to escape, the interaction ended with Vetkoeks killing Butternut, who was unable to retreat. Following the altercation, Whiskers were not seen

again until the 27th December, having moved further south, whilst Vetkoeks slept in a former Whiskers burrow on the evening of the 28th December.

This interaction reflects Vetkoeks' increasing dominance within the area. It also demonstrates the resilience of our study population, illustrating how a small group, surrounded by large and well-established neighbours, can survive and prosper, even potentially displacing those same neighbours.

As we near the end of the breeding season, Vetkoeks appear to hold a strong position. Towards the end of the month, dominant female Mooncake began showing signs of pregnancy, indicating the potential for further group expansion. Whether territory size will grow accordingly is a question that only time can answer. Furthermore, it will be interesting to monitor the impact that such a drastic shift in group dominance might have on an intergroup scale.

References

Dyble M, Houslay TM, Manser MB, Clutton-Brock T. (2019). 'Intergroup aggression in meerkats'. Proc. R. Soc. B 286: 20191993.

Pregnancies in December 2025

Females pregnant in December	18
Females who aborted	1
Females who gave birth, litters lost	1
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	2
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	4
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	10

December 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):

- Alba increased from 22 to 23 members present at the end of December.
- Dominant female Cleopatra (VALF008) gave birth this month. Following the birth, lactation and babysitting immediately commenced, indicating that the litter is thought to be alive. Subordinate sub-adult female Little-Creek (VALF033) was made officially pregnant this month.
- On the 5th, subordinate adult male Bibu (VALM014) immigrated back into the group, but he left the group again that same day. On the 21st, Bibu returned to Alba and foraged with the group. On the 22nd, Bibu left the group – that same evening he followed them into the sleeping burrow after they had gone below. On the 23rd, subordinate yearling female Tress (VALF020) left the group, likely caused by increased dominance assertions by Cleopatra, though immediate eviction was not observed. On the 24th, subordinate yearling female Chia (VALF023) left the group – also likely due to dominance assertion within the group. Both Tress and Chia were accepted back into the group on the 24th. On the 27th, Bibu returned to the group.
- There were 3 group-splits observed at Alba this month. On the 12th, a daily group-split including Tress, subordinate yearling female Florence (VALF031), subordinate sub-adult males Albert-Le-Blanc (VALM034) and Pembroke (VALM036), and pup (VALM044) was observed. After also splitting from the group on the 12th, subordinate yearling males Sunbeam (VALM028) and Yibo (VALM030), subordinate sub-adult females Fleetfoot (VALF032) and Juanita (VALF040), and pup (VALF043) remained in a group-split overnight, rejoining Alba the following day. On the 27th, Tress, Chia, Sunbeam, Yibo, Florence, Fleetfoot, Little-Creek, and Pembroke, as well as subordinate yearling males Xue (VALM024), Samurai (VALM027), and Disco (VALM029), subordinate sub-adult female Lola (VALF039), and 5 pups (VALF041, VALM042, VALF043, VALM044, and

VALM045) were all involved in a daily group-split.

- Alba had 4 encounters observed this month. Three times on the 2nd, and once on the 4th, Bibu approached the group. Each time he was attacked and subject to dominance assertion from the group without being accepted back.
- There were no inter-group interactions observed at Alba this month.
- Dominant female Cleopatra (VALF008) was observed to be limping this month – she appeared to have regained her health by the month's end. All other individuals appeared to be in good health throughout December.

Brussels Sprouts (FDC):

- Brussels Sprouts increased from 14 to 18 members present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female Arabella (VMPF035) gave birth this month. On the 24th, 5 pups (VBSP024, VBSP025, VBSP026, VBSP027, VBSP028) emerged from the burrow for the first time.
- On the 3rd, Gurke (VHMM036) left the group – returning that same day. On the 17th, Gurke and Toadstool (VBSM012) left the group separately. Toadstool returned the following day, whereas Gurke remained absent from the group until the 24th. On the 29th, Gurke left the group.
- Gurke remained absent from the group at the end of the month.
- There was 1 encounter observed at Brussels Sprouts this month. On the 17th, an unknown adult female approached the group – the group alarmed and guarded – the individual left the group and Gurke followed.
- There were no group-splits or inter-group interactions observed at the group in December.
- Gurke was observed to have a limp and an injured tail – both of these injuries appeared to have healed by the end of the month. All other group members appeared to be in good health throughout December.

Gold Diggers (FDC):

- All 24 members of Gold Diggers were present throughout December.
- On the 20th, dominant female Goldeneye (VGDF007) gave birth – lactation and babysitting indicate that the litter is alive. Subordinate adult females Peanut (VGDF047), Serafina Pekkala (VGDF049), Manchego (VGDF054) and subordinate yearling females Shambles (VGDF066) and Aapje (VGDF068) were all made officially pregnant this month. On the 27th, Shambles aborted a litter.
- This month, an increase in the intensity of dominance behaviours likely caused females to depart the group – though immediate evictions had not been observed. Hence, on the 6th, Peanut, Manchego and subordinate yearling female Dottie (VGDF071) left the group – returning that same day. Also on the 6th, subordinate yearling male Snackajack (VGDM063) left the group – returning that same day. On the 13th, subordinate yearling Bubba

(VGDM069) left the group – returning later that same evening. On the 13th, Serafina Pekkala was evicted, and subordinate sub-adult female Ares (VGDF075) left the group. Ares returned that same day. On the 19th, Peanut was also evicted. Serafina Pekkala and Peanut's evictions ended on the 25th, when they appeared to have been accepted back into the group.

- There was 1 daily group-split observed at Gold Diggers in December. On the 29th, Peanut, Serafina Pekkala, Manchego, Snackajack, Bubba, Ares, adult subordinate male Captain Patel (VGDM048), yearling subordinate males Broson (VGDM064) and Bokkie (VGDM067), sub-adult subordinates Sonskyn (VGDF076), Larkin (VGDF077), and Sid (VGDM079), and juveniles (VGDM081, VGDF084), split from the group in the morning but had rejoined that same afternoon.
- There were no encounters or inter-group interactions observed at Gold Diggers this month.
- All individuals at the group appeared to be in good health this month.

Jaxx (FDC):

- Jaxx decreased from 21 to 20 members present at the end of the month.
- Dominant female, Jub Jub (VJXF160), was made officially pregnant this month.
- On the 11th, yearling subordinate male Gobi (VJXM194) left the group – returning that same day. On the 14th, 1 pup (VJXU218) was missing from the group. On the 16th, sub-adult subordinate male Tunafish V (VJXM202) and juvenile males Woof (VJXM209) and Matty G (VJXM212) left the group – Tunafish V and Matty G returned to the group that same day. On the 29th, Gobi left the group – he returned that same day.
- Woof remained absent from the group at the end of the month.
- Enough time has passed for the missing pup (VJXU218) to be given its last seen this month.
- There were no group-splits, encounters, or inter-group interactions observed at Jaxx this month.
- Habituation is classed as *Advanced Progress*. Habituation of the Dominant male Mr Worldwide (VJXM200) is going well, he has not yet shown interest in egg or water but is comfortable with observers sitting at 1 meter distance at the sleeping burrow and follows at 3-5 meters. All members of the group appeared to be in good health throughout December.

Lazuli (FDC):

- All 15 members of Lazuli were present at the group this month
- Dominant female Masiwa (VLF308) was made officially pregnant this month, and on the 27th she gave birth – lactation and babysitting at the group indicate that the litter is alive.
- This month, although evictions had not been immediately observed, an increase in dominance behaviours from Masiwa is likely to have caused an upturn in females departing

from the group. On the 2nd, yearling subordinate male Potbelly (VLM317) left the group – he returned that same day. On the 8th, 10th, and 18th adult subordinate male Tinashe (VLM310) left the group – returning to the group the same day that he had departed each time. On the 15th, yearling subordinate females Pataud (VLF319) and Bumble (VLF320) left the group after Bumble was observed to be evicted by Masiwa. The following morning, Pataud and Bumble had been accepted back into the group, marking the end of Pataud's eviction. Later that same day, the females left the group again and followed the group below that evening, but did not rejoin the group officially. Also on the 16th, female pup Liv (VLF329) left the group – returning the following day. Pataud and Bumble approached the group multiple times on the 21st, 24th, and 27th, before officially being accepted back into the group on the 29th and 30th, respectively.

- Lazuli had no group-splits, encounters, or inter-group interactions observed in December.
- Pataud had a small wound to her muzzle this month. The remaining group members appeared to be in good health this month.

Side Quest (FDC):

- Side Quest increased from 18 to 20 members present at the end of December.
- On the 19th, two pups (VSIM060, VSIF061) emerged from the burrow and on the 21st, they foraged with the group for the first time.
- On the 13th, yearling subordinate male Tex (VSIM035) left the group – he returned to the group that same evening.
- There was 1 daily group-split observed at Side Quest this month. On the 7th, Tex, adult subordinate male Brioche (VSIM032), sub-adult subordinate females Portman (VSIF045), Cece (VSIF046), Jungo (VSIF048), and Bucket (VSIF052), and juveniles Buffy (VSIF057), Beck (VSIM058), and Moro (VSIM059) split from the group, returning together that same evening.
- There was 1 inter-group interaction observed at Side Quest this month. On the 27th, the group war-danced and chased a group of unknown individuals – the unknown group retreated the area.
- There were no encounters observed at Side Quest this month.
- Pup (VSIP060) appeared to have an injured right hindleg, which was causing them to limp severely. All other group members appeared to be in good health this month.

Trackie-Daks (FDC):

- Trackie-Daks increased from 12 to 20 members present at the end of the month.
- On the 14th, dominant female Refilwe (VTDF041) gave birth – babysitting and lactation indicate that the litter is alive. Sub-adult subordinate females Kibo (VTDF049) and Timone (VTDF051) were made officially pregnant this month. Although they are yet to emerge from the burrow independently, 4 new pups (VTDP062, VTDP063, VTDP064, VTDP065) were identified at the group.

- On the 16th, sub-adult subordinate female Sip (VTDF050) was accepted back into the group. On the 17th, Kibo and Timone returned to the group – marking the end of Kibo's eviction. On the 19th, sub-adult subordinate female Meeko (VTDF052) was accepted back into the group.
- There were no group-splits, encounters, or inter-group interactions observed at Trackie-Daks this month.
- The habituation level is currently classed as *Advanced Progress*. Dominant male Guido (VWM275) drinks water and was weighed once this month. He is comfortable with 2m follows for 15 minutes.
- Refilwe was observed to have worms this month. Yearling subordinate male Peely (VTDM048) was observed to be limping due to a swollen right forearm, which appears to have healed this month. All other members of the group appeared to be in good health this month.

Ubuntu (FDC):

- Ubuntu increased from 13 to 18 individuals present at the end of December.
- On the 14th, pup (VUBP091) emerged from the burrow for the first time, and on the 18th, 3 more pups (VUBP092, VUBP093, VUBP094) also emerged.
- On the 3rd, adult subordinate female Hotfoot (VUBF071) immigrated back into the group. On the 29th, yearling subordinate male Teenietots (VUBM079) left the group – he returned that same day.
- Ubuntu had 1 encounter observed this month. On the 3rd, before her immigration back into the group, Hotfoot was spotted and ignored foraging 10-15 meters from the group.
- There were no group-splits or inter-group interactions observed at Ubuntu this month.
- Yearling subordinate female Ursula (VUBF077) had a wound on her tail base which appears to be healing this month. Sub-adult subordinate female Moppie (VUBF081) had a wound on her tail base this month which also healed this month. Sub-adult subordinate male Koka (VUBM085) appeared to have injured their lower back and ribs and was subsequently limping – by the end of the month he appeared to be back in good health. All other group members appeared to be in good health this month.

Vetkoeks (FDC):

- Vetkoeks increased from 12 to 18 members at the end of the month.
- *Male Dominance* is still unconfirmed at Vetkoeks this month.
- On the 14th, 2 pups (VVKP036, VVKP037), emerged from the burrow for the first time. On the 17th, 4 more pups (VVKP038, VVKP039, VVKP040, VVKP041) emerged from the burrow. All of the pups foraged with the group for the first time on the 23rd.
- There was one daily group-split observed at Vetkoeks in December. On the 9th, sub-adult subordinate male Tshembo (VVKM024), sub-adult subordinate female Thotho (VVKF027),

and juveniles Lele (VVKM031), Nini (VVKM033), and Louis Cyr (VVKM035) split from the group – they all returned that same day.

- Vetkoeks had 1 inter-group interaction observed this month. On the 24th, Vetkoeks approached, chased and war-danced at Whiskers, who war-danced before retreating. Vetkoeks attacked and killed pup Butternut (VWF299).
- Vetkoeks had 2 encounters this month. On the 2nd, an unidentified adult approached the group near their sleeping burrow. Vetkoeks war-danced towards the individual, who retreated. On the 3rd, the group alarmed at an unidentified meerkat, who ran away in response
- Pup VVKF034 had a scab on the right side of her chest, which appears to have healed. All other individuals appeared healthy at the end of the month.

Zulus (FDC):

- All 22 members of Zulus remained present throughout December.
- Dominant female, Leona (VZUF070), was made officially pregnant this month.
- On the 7th, 5 pups (VZUP090, VZUP091, VZUP092, VZUP093 and VZUP094) emerged for the first time. On the 11th, all pups foraged with the group for the first time and moved sleeping burrow.
- On the 8th, subordinate sub-adult male, McNaught(y) (VZUM082), left the group in the morning and returned on the same afternoon.
- Zulus had one observed daily group-split on the 3rd this month. Dominant male Baymax (VGDM028), subordinate adults Sooty (VZUF071), Sweep (VZUM072) and sub-adults Vesemir (VZUM080), Mcnaught(y) and Io (VZUM083), split from the group – they all returned later that same morning.
- There were no encounters or inter-group interactions observed this month.
- All members of the group appeared to be in good health throughout December.

Life History Monitoring Groups:

Dik-Diks (LHM):

- Dik-Diks increased from 17 to 19 individuals at the end of December.
- Eldest female subordinate Shelby (VDDF022) gave birth this month – the litter was lost before emergence.
- On the 8th, pup Binky (VDDM034) emerged from the burrow for the first time, followed by his first burrow move on the 11th and first forage on the 15th.
- On the 3rd, eldest female subordinate Shelby (VDDF022) approached the group, before being chased away by subadult female Stripe (VDDF028). Shelby appeared again in the afternoon – she was not seen by dominant female Juliet (VGDF009) and was ignored by the rest of the group. On the 5th, Shelby was seen babysitting, and she then foraged 15m from the group on the 8th and 9th. On the evening of the

9th, Shelby submitted to Juliet and was accepted back into the group. Although evictions were not observed, adult subordinate female Ciri (VDDF003) and yearling female Sibani (VDDF015) were not seen with the group on the 16th and were chased and attacked by Shelby after approaching the group that evening. On the 19th, Binky went missing from the group and is assumed predated.

- Both Ciri and Sibani remained absent at the end of December.
- Dik-Diks had one observed daily group-split on the 7th of this month. The group-split included subordinate sub-adults Sibani (VDDF015), Mushu (VDDM018), Lexa (VDDF024), Migi (VDDF025), Stripe (VDDF028), and juveniles Tiko (VDDF030), Dash (VDDM031), Heidi (VDDM032), who returned that evening.
- Dik-Diks had no encounters or inter-group interactions observed this month.
- Enough time has passed for pup Binky (VDDM034) to be given his last seen this month.
- Habituation is classed as *Advanced Progress*. Dominant female Juliet (VGDF009) has made significant improvements - she was weighed 3 times this month and regularly drinks water, consistently comfortable with observers sitting at a distance of 1-2m.
- Eldest-sub, Shelby (VDDF022), had a large, sandy wound on her tail base this month. All other members of the group appeared to be in good health at the end of the month.

Elrond's Council (LHM):

- Elrond's Council increased from 11 to 16 members present at the end of December.
- On the 8th, dominant female Cadenza (VECF059) gave birth, and on the 30th, 4 pups (VECP078, VECP079, VECP080, VECP081) emerged for the first time.
- *Female Dominance* remains unconfirmed at Elrond's Council this month.
- On the 17th, yearling subordinate female Nalane (VECF067) was accepted back into the group.
- Enough time has passed for yearling subordinate males Goujon (VECM062) and Bazooka (VECM065) to be emigrated from the group.
- Elrond's council had 1 daily group-split in December. On the 30th, dominant male Jonsnow (VECM070) along with subordinates Rza (VECM066), Madarauchiha (VECM068), Seven (VECM069), No-Teeth Keith (VECM074), Noah (VECM076) and Amaya (VECF077) were found missing from the group before returning to the sleeping burrow that evening.
- Elrond's Council had no encounters or inter-group interactions observed this month.
- Habituation is classed as *Advanced Progress*. Dominant male Jonsnow (VECM070) has shown significant improvement – he fairly regularly eats egg and is comfortable with observers standing at a 2-meter distance. He has not yet been weighed. He is comfortable with group follows but will forage at a distance from observers.

- Jonsnow and subordinate Seven continued to show submandibular lumps this month, and Seven also developed a slight limp. Yearling subordinate female Nalane (VECF067) also developed a submandibular lump this month. The status of all infected individuals will continue to be monitored closely. All other individuals appeared to be in good health at the end of the month.

Habituation Groups:

Hogwarts (HAB):

- All 19 individuals at Hogwarts remained present at Hogwarts throughout December.
- Dominant female Salazar (VZUF051) was made officially pregnant this month.
- Hogwarts had no encounters, group-splits, or inter-group interactions observed this month.
- Habituation is classed as *In Progress*. Habituation of Buckbeak and dominant male Caraxes has improved. Buckbeak is drinking water and comfortable around the scale – he was weighed once this month. Caraxes will approach the observer when lying down, and regularly drinks water – he was not weighed this month. Pup habituation has also continued to be successful, with them eating egg and drinking water throughout the month.
- All individuals appeared healthy at the end of the month.

Whiskers (HAB):

- Whiskers decreased from 21 to 18 individuals present at the end of December.
- On the 1st, 6 pups Chimney (VWP288), Samantha (VWP289), Sully (VWP291), Bugzy (VWP293), Attica (VWP294), and Stefan (VWP295) foraged with the group for the first time.
- On the 9th, 2 pups Peppa (VWP290) and Bugzy became separated from the rest of the group – they had returned to the group by the 15th, the next session an observer was present. On the 16th, VWP290 did not wake up with the group and is assumed to have been predated. On the 24th, pup Simz (VWF297) had left the group.
- On the 24th, following an inter-group interaction with Vetkoeks, pup VWP299 was killed.
- Simz remained absent from the group at the end of December.
- Enough time has passed for pup VWP290 to be given its' last seen.
- Whiskers had one inter-group interaction observed in December. On the 24th, Vetkoeks approached, chased and war-danced at Whiskers, who war-danced before retreating. Vetkoeks attacked adult subordinate female Kylie (VWF265), who was able to flee, yet pup (VWF299) was killed.
- Whiskers had no encounters or group-splits observed this month.
- The group's habituation is classed as *In Progress*. Adult subordinate male Agent K

(VWM276) was weighed once this month, eats egg and is comfortable with a 1-2m distance when the observer remains seated. We will continue to try and increase familiarisation with the scale and observers' movements.

- Pup VWP289 and VWP296 were seen to have partially closed right and left eyes respectively this month, however these were no longer observed by the end of the month. All other members appeared to be in good health throughout December.

The following authors contributed to this report:

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