



The Meerkatter

The Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project Report – www.kalahari-meerkats.com – June 2026

Succession of the Sisters	1-2	Pregnancies in June.....	2
		Life History Details.....	2-6

Succession of the Sisters

June marks another tumultuous month this year for Lazuli, with the group's remaining females fighting it out for the vacant dominant position after the death of the previous dominant female Masiwa (VLF308).

As discussed in the April Meerkatter 'Lazuli in Limbo', Lazuli lost eight group members between March and May of this year as a result of a series of unfortunate events. Critically, the biggest loss to the group was that of Masiwa, the dominant female.



Figure 1: Previous dominant female, Masiwa (Photo: Sean Nelson)

Masiwa was found dead on the 19th of April at the end of an afternoon session, after acting very lethargic and unable to leave the sleeping burrow to forage that morning. It was later determined that her death was caused by acute heart failure, possibly from a Cape cobra bite. It was also found that she had a high parasitic worm load in her stomach and intestine. This could have caused a suppressed immune response to the cardiotoxic effect of the bite, of which meerkats are usually immune, bringing about the end of her 14-month dominance reign.

As a result of these events, Lazuli entered June with just 11 members, and critically, no dominant female. The only two remaining females within the group are yearling subordinate littermates Pataud (VLF319) and Bumble (VLF320).

Born on the 30th of October 2024 to dominant female Dumpling (VLF272), Pataud and Bumble were just short of two months old when Masiwa became dominant on the 13th of December that same year, following Dumpling's death. They did not have the easiest time under Masiwa's rule, frequently being evicted from the group once nearing yearling age.

Since the position of dominant female opened up at the group, these sisters have been in constant dominance competition with each other, neither willing to concede the status of dominant. As

subordinates, breeding opportunities are suppressed through acts of aggression by the dominant female. These include frequent evictions and infanticide of the subordinate's pups. Therefore, the position of dominance is certainly one worth fighting for!

Often, in groups where the dominant female dies, it is the eldest subordinate that quickly assumes dominance over her younger female group members. However, in the case of Lazuli, both females are from the same litter. It is found that dominance competition between females of the same age is often more aggressive and prolonged in comparison (Sharp and Clutton-Brock 2011). This was evident as the two females battled it out over the course of the month.

Following the death of Masiwa, observers noted dominance assertion and general dominance behaviours from both females over the following few weeks. However, it was not until the beginning of June that a notable increase in the intensity of the competition between the females was reported. Dominance in the group is determined by the individual receiving submissions from mature individuals of the same sex. This means that the competing individual needs to receive direct submissions from more than half of the mature females in the group. Lazuli though is once more an interesting case in that there is only one other female within the group. This meant that a submission from one sister automatically confirmed the other as dominant.

On the 7th of June, Pataud received multiple submissions from different individuals in the group, including Bumble. Bumble was also observed submitting to Pataud in response to dominance assertions. As a result of the direct submissions, Pataud was named dominant female of Lazuli that day. Her hold on the dominant position was,



Figure 2: Pataud, taken in the weeks following Masiwa's death (Photo: Jeremy Pustilnik).

however, tenuous at best with Bumble challenging her over the next days.

In the days following Pataud's ascension to dominant she attempted to solidify her position through continuous acts of dominance assertion across the entire group. However, Bumble stopped responding to these assertions with submissions, instead simply ignoring them or responding in kind with aggression. Eventually on the 10th, this escalated to continuous dominance competitions between both females. It was frequently unclear in these interactions which female was initiating or winning. These competitions reached a climax on the 15th when an observer visited the group for a morning session.

Upon waking, both sisters began hip slamming and chinning the other each time they moved within striking distance. As well as this, both carried out continuous marking frenzy behaviour around the sleeping burrow, rubbing and chewing the surrounding bushes and burrow entrances. The rest of the group did not escape the consequences of the power struggle and were frequently caught in the crossfire, being hit and chinned as they attempted to warm themselves up in the chilly winter morning sun. This behaviour did not stop as the group began to forage. Pataud and Bumble stuck close to each other the entire morning, hip slamming every time they passed, ricocheting off the other and moving on in different directions over and over again. Both were exhibiting very intense dominance behaviours, intently marking boltholes along their foraging route. Later that morning when the group came across one of their usual sleeping burrows that Dik-Diks had recently been using, both females spent so long in marking frenzies that the rest of the group stopped digging with them and started grooming each other (which the females disrupted by inserting themselves in the middle of the huddles).

When the observer left the session that morning the competition between the sisters was still ongoing, however, upon returning to the group later that afternoon, a whole different story was playing out. Bumble was still displaying obvious signs of dominance, but her sister was expressing an entire shift in behaviour. Pataud was actively avoiding Bumble, fleeing every time she approached and making continuous submission calls. Bumble carried out frequent dominance assertions on Pataud, hitting her and sitting on her, to which Pataud responded by submitting and rolling in a ball. As this was not a direct submission to Bumble, the dominant female title could not yet be passed to her. This change in behaviour between the sisters did, however, mean that dominance at Lazuli was declared uncertain, with Pataud losing her position so soon after gaining it.

This state of limbo did not last long as the next day Pataud was seen giving multiple direct submissions to Bumble who, on the 16th of June, was then identified as the new dominant female of Lazuli.



Figure 3: New dominant female Bumble (Photo: Jeremy Pustilnik).

As it stands at the end of the month, things have finally settled down in the group with Pataud making no challenges to Bumble's new position. After a very challenging three months at Lazuli, the group have earned a bit of respite that, hopefully, their new dominant female will be able to bring to them. Long may she reign.

References

Sharp, S.P. and Clutton-Brock (2011) 'Competition, breeding success and ageing rates in female meerkats', *Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, 24, 1756-1762.

Pregnancies in June 2026

Females pregnant in June	0
Females who aborted	0
Females who gave birth, litters lost	0
Females who gave birth, litter emerged	0
Females who gave birth, unknown outcome	0
Females still pregnant at the end of the month	0

June 2026 Life History Details

Due to the large number of groups we are covering, four different levels of data collection are currently in use, briefly outlined below.

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):

- All 25 members of Alba were present this month.
- There were no individual movements at Alba in June.
- There were 2 group splits this month at Alba. On the 17th, a daily split involved subordinates Xue (VALM024), Bachue (VALF025), and Albert-Le-Blanc (VALM034). On the 22nd, a daily split involved subordinates Xue, Sunbeam (VALM028), Yibo (VALM030), Albert-Le-Blanc, Pembroke (VALM036), Lorraine (VALF041), and Speedy Gonzales (VALM045).
- There were 2 individual encounters at Alba in June. On the evening of the 17th, the group war danced at two unknown meerkats repeatedly during the session. On the morning of the 18th, two unknown meerkats again approached the group only to once more be chased away.
- There were no inter-group interactions observed at Alba throughout June.
- There has been a decline in the health of several group members this month. Signs of TB are being seen in dominant female Cleopatra (VALF008) and dominant male Pucky (VECM023), as well as in subordinates Tress (VALF020), Chia (VALF023), Xue, Bachue, Sunbeam, Little-Creek (VALF033), Lorraine, and Speedy Gonzales. Samurai (VALM027) is showing signs of deteriorating health. His submandibular lump has now burst, and he has lost a considerable amount of weight. All other group members appear to be in good health this month.

Brussels Sprouts (FDC):

- All 18 members were present at Brussels Sprouts in June.
- There were no individual movements this month at the group.
- There was a daily group split at Brussels Sprouts on the 22nd of June involving subordinates Toadstool (VBSM013), Shiitake (VBSM014), Gus-Gus (VBSM016), Gazoch (VBSM017), Gizmo (VBSM018), Bubek (VBSM019), Neer

(VBSM021), Noiree (VBSF022), Milanesa (VBSM027), and Joaquina (VBSF028).

- This month the group had two encounters with subordinate male Rainbow (VZUM078) from Zulus. On the evening of the 25th he was with the group on arrival, being chased when the dominants saw him. He went below in a separate burrow entrance to the group and was seen at the sleeping burrow the following morning on the 26th. He was present the entire morning session, being chased away by the group when the dominants saw him. The group also had an encounter on the 26th with subordinate male Bopp (VZUM081) from Zulus, and four other meerkats (likely also Zulus members), whom they chased away.
- There were no inter-group encounters in June at Brussels Sprouts.
- This month Porcini (VBSM012) was reported as having a submandibular lump. The rest of the individuals in the group appeared to be in good health throughout June.

Gold Diggers (FDC):

- All 26 members of Gold Diggers were present at the end of June.
- On the 6th, subordinate adult female Serafina Pekkala (VGDF049) was found missing from the group in the afternoon. On the 7th she was reported as waking up with the group.
- There were no group splits, individual encounters or inter-group interactions at Gold Diggers in June.
- All individuals appeared to be in good health throughout the month.

Jaxx (FDC):

- Jaxx increased by 3 members, from 19 to 22 individuals present at the end of June.
- On the 13th subordinate adult male Gobi (VJXM194) and subordinate juvenile Mikey (VJXF220) did not wake up with the group. Gobi returned to the group on the 13th, after he was found at the sleeping burrow in the evening. Mikey remains absent from the group at the end of the month. On the 16th subordinate yearling male TunafishV (VJXM202) did not wake up with the group and was instead seen returning to the group at the sleeping burrow that morning after they were up. On the 17th Gobi again left the group, having not been found with Jaxx on arrival. On the 18th he woke up and foraged with the group. In the afternoon of the 29th subordinate adult female Pulpi (VJXF189) was found foraging alone but reunited with the group that same evening at the sleeping burrow.
- On the 19th there was a daily group split at Jaxx involving subordinates Pulpi (VJXF189), Gobi (VJXM194), Fifi (VJXF211), Tainn (VJXF215), Elms (VJXM216), Liam (VJXM217), Callywag (VJXM219), and Tailbase (VJXM221).
- There were no individual encounters or inter-group interactions at Jaxx this month.
- Habituation of dominant male Mr Worldwide (VJXM200) continues and is classed as in *Advanced Progress*. He has allowed follows of 4

metres this month but remains very cautious of observers and shows no interest in egg or water.

- All individuals appeared to be in good health throughout the month.

Lazuli (FDC):

- All 11 members of Lazuli were present throughout June.
- There were no individual movements, group splits, individual encounters or inter-group interactions this month at Lazuli.
- Enough time has passed for juvenile male Finn (VLM328) to be given his last seen this month.
- *Female Dominance* was confirmed at Lazuli this month on the 16th, with yearling female Bumble (VLF320) identified as dominant.
- All individuals appeared to be in good health throughout the month.

Side Quest (FDC):

- All 24 members were present at the end of the month at Side Quest.
- Dominant female Pumba (VZUF048) was left behind by the group several times this month as a result of her poor health condition. On the 4th, she was temporarily separated from the group for 20 minutes in the afternoon. On the 10th she did not wake up with the group and was given her return during the afternoon session when she was found foraging with the group. On the afternoon of the 17th, she was not found foraging with the group but was back with the group the following morning.
- There were no group splits at Side Quest this month.
- In June the group had multiple encounters with subordinate yearling male Buckbeak (VHWM002) from Hogwarts. He was seen on the 23rd and 24th for the entire day foraging at the edge of the group. The group war danced and chased him continuously throughout the sessions. On the 27th Buckbeak again approached the group in the morning and was chased off multiple times.
- There were no inter-group interactions this month at Side Quest.
- Subordinate adult male Tex (VSIM035) is still showing signs of TB but his health has remained stable. Dominant male Legolas (VECM009) and dominant female Pumba (VZUF048) are both in worsening condition and have lost a considerable amount of weight. Additionally subordinate yearling female Jungo (VSIF048) is now showing signs of TB. All other members of the group appear in good health this month.

Trackie-Daks (FDC):

- Trackie-Daks decreased by 1 member, from 21 to 20 members present at the end of June.
- Subordinate yearling female Timone (VTDF051) has spent most of the month being repeatedly evicted from the group, despite several attempts to rejoin. As of the end of the month she has still not been accepted back into the group.

- There were no group splits, individual encounters or inter-group interactions at Trackie-Daks in June.
- Timone has received wounds to her tail this month due to her many evictions but is otherwise in good health. All other members of the group appeared to be in good health throughout the month.

Ubuntu (FDC):

- Ubuntu decreased by 2 individuals this month, from 21 to 19 individuals present at the end of June.
- On the 26th, subordinate yearling male PawPaw (VUBM080) was not seen with the group, however, he had returned by the morning of the 28th. On the 29th, subordinate yearling female Moppie (VUBF081) was found absent from the group, and she remains absent at the end of the month.
- There were 2 group splits observed at Ubuntu this month. On the 26th, subordinates Hotfoot (VUBF071), Bee (VUBM089) and Julieta (VUBF098) did not wake up with the group in the morning. Hotfoot and Bee were seen returning shortly before the group began foraging, but juvenile Julieta remains absent at the end of the month. On the 29th, a daily group split involved Hotfoot, Bee (VUBM079), PawPaw, Fifi (VUBM082), Kiki (VUBM088) and Bee who all returned in the evening.
- There were no individual encounters, group splits or inter-group interactions observed at Ubuntu this month.
- All members appeared to be in good health throughout the month.

Vetkoeks (FDC):

- All 17 members of Vetkoeks were present throughout June.
- *Male Dominance* remains unconfirmed at Vetkoeks.
- There were no individual movements observed at Vetkoeks this month.
- There was one group split observed at Vetkoeks this month. On the 2nd, subordinates Flicka (VVKF023), Tshembo (VVKM024) and Louis Cyr (VVKM035) split from the group following an alarm and remained separated overnight. They were seen returning to the group the next morning.
- There was 1 individual encounter observed at Vetkoeks in June. On the 6th, an unknown male approached the group in the morning but remained at a distance. Vetkoeks watched the unknown male closely until the individual retreated.
- There was one inter-group interaction observed at Vetkoeks this month. On the 22nd, Vetkoeks approached an unknown group of approximately 10 individuals before retreating.
- There were no individual movements observed at Vetkoeks in June.
- All individuals appeared to be in good health throughout the month.

Zulus (FDC):

- All 26 members were present at Zulus at the end of June.
- On the 14th, subordinate yearling male Catch-a-Mo (VZUM079) did not wake up with the group in the morning but returned on the 16th, when he was seen foraging with the group. Subordinate yearling male Rainbow (VZUM078) was seen to have left the group in the morning on the 14th, however, he was seen returning to the group the next morning after the group left the burrow. On the 25th, Rainbow was again found to have left the group during the morning. On the 25th and the 26th, Rainbow was seen at Brussels Sprouts, and he foraged on the edge of the group for both days despite the group chasing him away. Rainbow returned to Zulus on the evening of the 26th. On the 15th, subordinate adult female Sooty (VZUF071) was seen by herself away from the group by an observer, but she was found to have rejoined the group later in the afternoon.
- There was 1 group split observed at Zulus in June. On the 26th, subordinates Sooty, Bonnie (VZUF077), Bopp (VZUM081), Phil (VZUM091) and Dee (VZUF095) split from the group in the morning but were seen to have returned by the afternoon.
- There were no individual encounters, group splits or inter-group interactions observed at Zulus this month.
- All individuals appeared to be in good health throughout June.

Life History Monitoring Groups:

Dik-Diks (LHM):

- All 21 members were present at Dik-Diks at the end of June.
- There were no individual movements, encounters, inter-group interactions or group splits observed at Dik-Diks this month.
- Habituation is classed as *Advanced Progress*. Dominant female Juliet (VGDF009) appeared to improve significantly this month and approached observers for water frequently. She was weighed 5 times this month. Subordinate female Shelby (VGDF022) was also weighed 4 times this month and readily drinks water at the sleeping burrow. Both females allow close follows at 1 metre while foraging.
- All individuals at Dik-Diks appeared to be in good health throughout June.

Elrond's Council (LHM):

- All 9 members of Elrond's Council were present at the end of the month.
- Both *Female and Male Dominance* remains unconfirmed at Elrond's Council this month.
- On the 26th, subordinate yearling female Amaya (VECF077) was found missing from the group in the afternoon, however, she woke up with the group the next morning.
- There were no group splits, individual encounters or inter-group interactions observed at Elrond's Council in June.

- Subordinate males Rza (VECM066), Iron Mike (VECM073) and Noah (VECM076) continue to show TB symptoms and remain in worsening condition. All other individuals in the group appear to be in good health.

Habituation Groups:

Khoisan (HAB) :

- Khoisan appears to have decreased by one individual, from 15 to 14 individuals observed at the group.
- *Female and Male Dominance* is currently unknown at the group.
- Habituation is classed as *In Progress*. The group continues to improve and the majority of individuals are accepting of an observer sitting at 2 metres. The group still reacts strongly to sound and movement. Known male Princess Carolyn (VTDM013) was weighed this month and eats egg, a positive step in group habituation. All other group members do not yet show any interest in egg or water.
- The vast majority of them suffer from advanced TB symptoms. Princess Carolyn shows a large submandibular lump and is in visibly worsening physical condition. Nearly all other individuals show large, or burst, inguinal or submandibular lumps.

Hogwarts (HAB):

- Hogwarts decreased by 1 individual, from 20 to 19 individuals present at the end of June.
- On the 12th, subordinate adult male Buckbeak (VHWM002) was found alone at a sleeping burrow in the evening, and he remained absent from the group until the 19th, where he was seen to have returned to the group by the evening. On the 23rd, Buckbeak was seen waking up at the sleeping burrow that Side Quest were using. He marked vegetation around the sleeping burrow and followed Side Quest as they foraged for the full day on the 23rd and 24th. He was occasionally chased away by Side Quest males but continued to reapproach the group consistently. He was seen alone on the 29th and was absent from Hogwarts by the end of the month.
- There were no individual encounters, group splits or inter-group interactions at Hogwarts this month.
- Habituation is classed as *In Progress*. Habituation of dominant male Caraxes (VHWM004) continues to improve. He was not weighed this month but increasingly shows interest in water. He still reacts strongly to any movement and is very cautious of observer presence.
- All individuals appeared in good health throughout the month.

Whiskers (HAB):

- Whiskers decreased by 2 individuals, from 19 to 17 individuals present at the end of June.
- On the 26th, subordinate adult male Agent K (VWM276) was not seen to wake up with the group. He was seen returning to the burrow after

the rest of the group had gone below on the 30th, and as a result he is still classed as absent at the end of the month. On the 29th, subordinate yearling female Luna (VWF279) did not wake up with the group. She appeared at the group's sleeping burrow on the 30th, and went below at a different entrance after being chased away by members of the group.

- There was one group split observed at Whiskers this month. On the 25th, dominant female Sheila (VWF267) and subordinate adult male Agent K (VWM276) were found to have separated from the group, but the group reunited later that morning.
- There were no individual encounters or inter-group interactions observed at Whiskers in June.
- The group's habituation is classed as *In Progress* - the habituation of Agent K continues. He occasionally eats thrown egg and is generally comfortable with observers within 2 metres at the sleeping burrow and with follows at 10 metres.
- Given the continued positive progress of Agent K's habituation, short 1.5 hour observer follow sessions were reintroduced to the group at the end of the month. These will allow for increased group comfort in foraging with an observer present, and the frequency and length of these sessions will be calibrated based on the group's response.
- All individuals appeared to be in good health throughout the month.

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