



Monthly Newsletter

02/24

CONTACT: Main Office - 033 330 3036.

Email: admin@freemewildlife.org

Email custodians: custodian@freemewildlife.org

Website: www.freemewildlife.org

Editorial

If you want to pick a fight, discuss monkeys or cats...

Make that statement, and anyone involved in wildlife rehabilitation will nod their head in agreement. There is nothing that spirals a discussion out of hand quicker than discussing those two subjects because of the polarized opinions they elicit from people.

Leaving monkeys aside for another day, and focussing on cats, let's look at what exactly creates the conflicting arguments. Cats are domesticated pets. For many cat owners, their world revolves around the companionship of their beloved feline. Cats are amazing creatures – highly adaptable, they have populated even areas as barren as deserts and the poles.

But they are also a huge threat to small wildlife. Only because they are allowed to roam free. Somehow, all the rules that require domestic animals to be fenced in don't seem to apply to cats. But they should. There is enough research proving the effect cats have on small wildlife, and birds in particular. Throughout the world, the number one cause of garden bird admissions to any wildlife rehabilitation centre is cat attacks. The stats at FreeMe Wildlife prove no different.

Domestic cats don't belong in the wild. But wild cats do. And by that we don't mean feral cats, but pure wild cat species like the African Wildcat. Wild cats don't like domestic cats. Wherever the two meet, conflict is certain to follow. We have had calls of Servals, Caracals, and African Wildcats attacking domestic cats. What baffles us most of all is that inevitably the upset cat owner is insisting on the removal of the wild cat. The wild cat belongs there, the domestic cat does not. We are often at our wits end to try and make the line in the sand clearer: Serval, Caracal, African Wildcat – belong in the wild. Domestic, pet cat – belong in the house/yard. Prevent the two meeting, and you prevent the conflict.

Since we cannot remove all the wild birds a domestic cat may predate on, or all the wild predators that may predate on a domestic cat, the only solution is to remove the domestic cat from the wild. And this does not mean that we are advocating for lethal measures. Not at all. We understand the value of the love and companionship that pets bring to a household.

We are simply asking that the same rules be applied when keeping cats where they belong. Dog owners will not blink at putting a fence up to contain their dogs. Dog owners understand that all kinds of problems will result if their dogs are left to roam free. Dear cat owners, all kinds of problems result if your cats are left to roam free. Nature (and us wildlife rehabilitators) will heave a huge sigh of relief if you help keep kitty contained.





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Statistics for January:

ADMISSIONS			
BIRDS	RAPTORS	MAMMALS	REPTILES
58	10	20	2

RELEASES			
BIRDS	RAPTORS	MAMMALS	REPTILES
24	3	7	0

New Admissions

As usual, our mix of bird stories is enough to take anybody on an emotional roller-coaster ride, starting with the admission of 4 tiny White-faced Whistling Duck ducklings (1) These little balls of fluff were rescued after their distraught mother was frightened off by free-roaming dogs. Sadly, the stress and trauma resulted in 3 of the ducklings dying not long after admission to our Centre, leaving one lonely duckling survivor. As fate would have it, the same day a single Egyptian Goose gosling arrived to save the day, and the two have become firm companions since.

Another White Stork admission sadly did not survive its ordeal after colliding with a barbed wire fence. We have seen how these types of injuries often result in a fatal septicaemia as the barbs on the fence are very dirty and the cuts easily get infections which rapidly spread throughout the bloodstream. The birds are often very weak by the time they are caught, leaving us with very little time to try and reverse the damage done.

Apart from storks, ducks, and geese, other bird admissions for January included a Buff-spotted Flufftail (which sadly had to be humanely euthanized after a cat mauling) White-rumped Swifts, Spotted Thick-knee (hit by a car), sparrows, swallows, thrushes, starlings, canaries, doves and pigeons, a Black-headed Oriole, Cattle Egrets, Guinea fowl, wagtails, cuckoos, shrikes, bulbuls, white-eyes, flycatchers, and the inevitable Hadada Ibis.

The raptors department was also kept busy with the admission of 5 Spotted Eagle Owls, a Barn Owl, White-faced Owl, Jackal Buzzard, Yellow-billed Kite (2), and Lanner Falcon. The Lanner Falcon (a juvenile) was admitted with a torn wing after colliding with a fence and is presently recovering from its injuries. The Yellow-billed Kite (also a juvenile) was picked up by the Richard's Bay SPCA after a resident in the area found it grounded. It was transferred





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to the Empangeni Veterinary Clinic to be stabilized before being brought through to us. On admission, it was discovered that the young bird had a stick impaled in the wing, rendering it flightless. Thankfully with the stick removed, and the resulting infection treated, the young bird has made a full recovery.

Bats continue to pour into the rehab in unusually high numbers. The continuous wet, misty weather is wreaking havoc with these little mammals during their breeding season as they are not able to hunt at night in these conditions. This leaves cold, hungry adults grounded, and mothers unable to care for young are forced to abandon them. Thankfully, we have volunteers from The Bat Interest Group of KZN on hand to help as taking care of baby bats is an immensely time-consuming job with the tiny babies needing feeding every 30 minutes throughout the day and night!

Some of the other baby mammals admitted included two Scrub Hares (sadly one died from injuries sustained by a dog) while the other is doing well in care after being rescued in the yard at Midmar Crushers. A Warthog piglet has been joined up with the Bushpig piglet in care and the pair have become firm friends. Another Thick-tailed Bushbaby (3) infant was also admitted in January and is now happily sleeping in the log with the older one we have in care.

Sadly, we lost a Blue Wildebeest calf after it sustained fatal injuries to the head when its mother was disturbed giving birth and ran off with the calf dragging behind. Added to this a juvenile Rock Hyrax did not survive long post operative care to try and repair the damage done by a dog attack.

Two Rock Monitor (4) admissions made up the total of our reptile admissions for January. One of these, picked up in Durban, is suspected of being a pet since it is way out of its natural range, quite thin, and not as nervous of people as it should be. The other was picked up in Dundee and dropped off at the SPCA there with some mild injuries to its face. Both are doing well in care and will be released as soon as they have picked up sufficient condition.



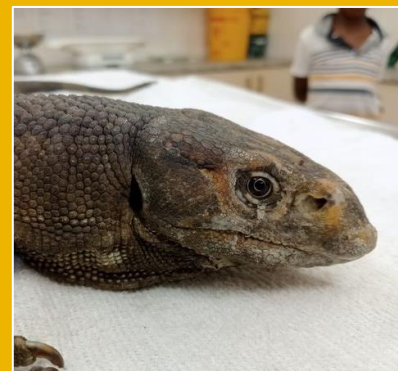
1



2



3



4



Releases - *the best part!*

Starting off the happy stories for January were a pair of White-rumped Swifts that were found grounded with dead siblings. While it is tragic that their siblings did not survive, the remaining pair were successfully raised and released on site at FreeMe Wildlife where they took to the skies to join others flying over the Centre. They were joined not long after by a Spotted Thick-knee (5) which had fully recovered from a broken leg, 6 Hadada Ibis, a White Stork picked up in Mooi River which made a full recovery, and the juvenile Woolly-necked Stork which had fallen out of a nest in Howick.

Added to these releases, 4 Egyptian Goslings were released on a dam in the midlands area. Some of the smaller garden bird releases included thrushes, doves and pigeons, egrets, bulbuls, weavers, and a Familiar Chat.

Two adult Spotted Eagle Owls (6) were returned to their areas of origin after recovering in care. One of these was originally picked up next to the highway near Cedara College with a severe concussion and temporary blindness. The other was picked up next to the road in Curry's Post, suffering from a broken wing. With both birds fully recovered, they were taken back to near where they were found (and away from roads!) and released. It is always beneficial to return adult animals to their territories and potential mates.

While some of the bat admitted remain in care, 3 of the adult Cape Serotine Bats were safely returned to their roosts once they had been fed up and the weather had improved. The two Common Reedbuck (7) we have been hand-raising from lambs were also ready for release and settled quickly onto a beautiful farm in the Hlatikulu area where there are plenty of other Common Reedbuck companions. Along with the two reedbuck, two of our African Wildcats (8) which have been in care were also released in the Hlatikulu area as it is prime habitat for these cats with plenty of rolling montane grasslands and rocky outcrops.

No reptile releases took place in January.



5



6



7



4



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Outreach and Engagement



January was off to a very exciting start for our outreach program as Kloof Conservancy have partnered with FreeMe FreeYou Outreach in bringing the 12-month Biodiversity Program to some of the local schools supported by the Kloof Conservancy.

The outreach team from Siyabonga Helping Hands for Africa Care Centres in Pietermaritzburg got together at FreeMe Wildlife with the FreeMe FreeYou Outreach team to discuss plans for the 12-month Biodiversity Program at their schools for 2024.

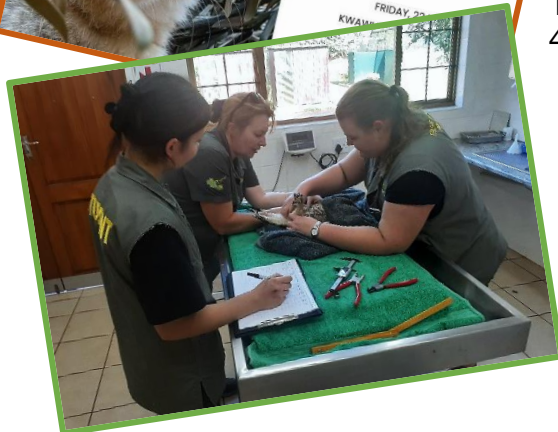


FreeMe Wildlife have launched a training program for eco-estates, security firms, and any parties engaged in responding to wildlife rescue emergencies.

January saw the pilot 'Emergency Wildlife Rescue' training course being rolled out at Zimbali Eco Estate in Ballito.



A talk entitled "Spots and Stripes in the Long Grass" will be taking place at Kwawula Estate in Howick on Friday the 22nd of March at 5:30pm. The talk is on Servals and African Wildcats and is open to all. Bookings must be made through Whatsapp – 083 709 4751



Our first student training courses for 2024 got off to a good start with Jenna joining us for the full 3-month FreeMe Wildlife Experience course, and Savanna joining us for the 1-month FreeMe Wildlife Work Experience course. Please drop us an email on admin@freemewildlife.org for more information on these courses. And remember, Custodians get discount.





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Projects and Research



Serenity Hills Eco Estate in Margate signed up as Green Custodians in December. As part of our value exchange program with Green Custodians, our consulting team undertook a survey of the estate in January to compile a biodiversity report to assist management in implementing strategies for biodiversity protection and preservation on the estate.

January Champions:



Dennis and Ann Gray put on a Christmas lights display each year at their house in Amber Valley. They have a small donation box at the event to raise funds for FreeMe Wildlife, which is a very touching gesture.

FreeMe Wildlife are now members of the Business Links network, which aims to put local businesses in touch with one another. Thank you, **Desrae Coventry from Business Links**, for thinking of us.



We also welcome three new Custodians to the family. **Elazar Indhur, Joanne van der Veen, and Brent Southgate.**

