



Monthly Newsletter

06/24

CONTACT: Main Office - 033 330 3036.

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Editorial

Hand-raised to Death

When an antelope lamb arrived at the Centre weak, emaciated, severely dehydrated, and showing signs of advanced neuropathy, a sad, but all too familiar history began to emerge. The lamb had been found 'abandoned' and a home-made attempt to hand-raise it for a week had resulted in it being dropped off with us at death's door. We knew when we looked at it that it was now a week beyond saving, and it was left with us so we could have the heartache of watching its last agonizing breaths.

What possesses a person with absolutely no training or experience in hand-raising baby antelope (or any other baby wildlife species) to think they can do it? Is it because wildlife rehabs like FreeMe Wildlife make it look easy? Is it because every now and then a member of the public does get it right? Is it because farmers raise calves and lambs all the time, so how different can it be? Firstly, it is not easy. Secondly, for every success 'Joe Soap' had at raising one, dozens of others have failed, AND kept quiet about it. And no, raising a wild lamb is not the same as raising a domestic one.

FreeMe Wildlife has an entire manual on raising wild lambs which includes everything from how to get them onto a bottle, correct holding and feeding techniques, how to work out how much to feed, how often, and how to adjust milk formulas to make sure they are getting optimal nutrition, how to avoid aspiration, how to stimulate them to urinate and defecate, how to keep them warm, how to keep them calm, how to reduce stress, how to prevent imprinting, how to introduce solids, how to treat bloat, diarrhea, coccidia... etc, etc.

And, here's the thing – we will HELP anyone who asks for help with an antelope lamb. There is no excuse in this modern day and age not to seek professional advice. The honest truth is that when people realize just how NOT EASY it is to do it on their own, they usually bring the lamb in (to our relief). But if someone is prepared to do it, and do it right, we will help. Not for their sake, but for the animal. Because it is the animal's life being gambled with, and when the gambler loses, the animal pays the price.

Statistics for May:

ADMISSIONS			
BIRDS	RAPTORS	MAMMALS	REPTILES
28	8	10	2

RELEASES			
BIRDS	RAPTORS	MAMMALS	REPTILES
10	6	1	4





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New Admissions

Bird admissions for May were headed up by Laughing Doves, Red-eyed Doves, and Cattle Egrets, followed by singular admissions of a White-faced Duck, Amethyst Sunbird, Black-collared Barbet, Chorister Robin Chat, Speckled Pigeon, Olive Thrush, and Burchell's Coucal. Added to this two Bronze Mannikins, two Sacred Ibis, and two Helmeted Guinea Fowl

The White-faced Duck (1), and both Helmeted Guinea Fowl (all juveniles) were picked up sickly, and all died in care overnight, despite our best attempts to save them. Mortalities like this are common over the winter months as those individuals which do not have the strongest immune systems are the first to succumb under the harsh seasonal conditions.

Bird of Prey admissions included two Spotted Eagle Owls, two Barn Owls, a White-faced Owl chick, an African Harrier Hawk which had been shot (mentioned in the editorial last month) another grounded Cape Vulture, and a juvenile Verreaux's Eagle Owl (2) picked up with a concussion and associated temporary blindness.

Another African Wildcat (3) was admitted to FreeMe Wildlife after being trapped as a 'poultry thief'. We detest the term as it implies that the cat understands the context of ownership, as well as what constitutes a criminal activity. However, we cannot protest too much about the punitive action taken, as trapping for relocation is still better than the alternative of the farmer imposing a death sentence.

Other mammal admissions for May included another Serval kitten (we now have 3 in care) four Grey Duikers (3 of which succumbed to trauma and injuries) two Vervet Monkeys (both had to be euthanized due to the severity of their injuries – dog attack and vehicle strike) a Large-spotted Genet that died after dogs attacked it, and an adult Cape Serotine Bat picked up emaciated, frozen, and covered in parasites that died overnight.

In the reptile's department, a small Nile Monitor died on arrival after a vehicle had ridden over it, and a Natal



1



2



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Hinged Tortoise (4) has joined the Tortoise Project release program after it was confiscated as an illegally kept 'pet'. It will undergo the usual health checks in quarantine before getting a vet clearance and the necessary permits for release.

Releases - *the best part!*

Two of the bird admissions in May were quick releases. The Chorister Robin Chat caught in a resident's home only had a very small abrasion on one leg, and so it was released back near the same property after the wound had been treated. A Burchell's Coucal (5) hit by a vehicle near Cedara College recovered quickly from a concussion and was released back in the same area a few days later.

Other birds released included another Burchell's Coucal hand-raised at FreeMe Wildlife, four Red-eyed Doves, two Cattle Egrets and a juvenile Hamerkop.

In the bird of prey sector, the juvenile Verreaux's Eagle Owl was returned to Wartburg after fully recovering from its concussion, and a Barn Owl admitted in May with an injured wing also recovered and was returned home. Four of the Cape Vultures (6) in care were ready for release, and a big collaborative effort between FreeMe Wildlife, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and Wildlife Act saw the birds fitted with patagial tags, colour rings, SAFRING ID rings and backpack transmitters to track them once released. In addition to this, various samples for research were also taken for universities, both here in South Africa and abroad. The Vultures were released at the new [Mzimkulu Vulture Hide](#) in Underberg.

In the mammal's department, we only had one release for May. One of the Grey Duikers (7) which came into care had fallen into a resident's swimming pool and been rescued by the SPCA. The duiker then came to FreeMe Wildlife for stabilization and assessment. With no injuries, and no sign of aspiration, the duiker was released a few days later, and has since been seen looking happy and well on the release property.

Another two Leopard Tortoises were sent for release as part of the Tortoise Project. With genetic tests showing



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their origins to be in the Western Free State, they were sent off to a suitable property there; vet tests done, permits cleared, and flown by [The Bateleurs](#). They were not the only reptiles released in May, and the two Rock Monitors (8) we had in care were ready to be released at [Babanango Game Reserve](#) in Zululand where they soon found refuge in rock piles near the river.

Outreach and Engagement



The educators at the [Siyabonga Helping Hands for Africa](#) care centres in Pietermaritzburg were busy in May with the continuation of the 12-Month Biodiversity Program. The program is divided into levels 1 to 4, with students learning different components of biodiversity throughout their 4 years on the program. In May their studies included looking at the biodiversity of coastal wetlands, ancient African cultures and their links with the natural world, and snakes and frogs (and addressing some of the superstitions and fears)



Meanwhile, the educators at the [Uvemvane Lwe-Africa](#) schools supported by the Kloof Conservancy continued with their training on the 12-month Biodiversity Program, covering sections on soil (Life Beneath our Feet) and having well-know snake expert [Nick Evans](#) present a talk on snakes as part of the section on reptiles.



Another wonderful Kid's Bush Camp was held at [Fountainhill Estate](#) in Wartburg with the kids going out on hikes to the waterfall, biodiversity treasure hunts, bird walks, nocturnal surveys, and evenings making the fire and helping cook 'camp food'. The group in May was all boys. Come on Junior Custodian girls. We can't let the boys have all the fun!

In the talks and courses arena, two talks on bird of prey rehabilitation (Rise of the Phoenix) were held in May for the Amber Glen Garden Club and U3A (University of the Third Age) club, respectively.



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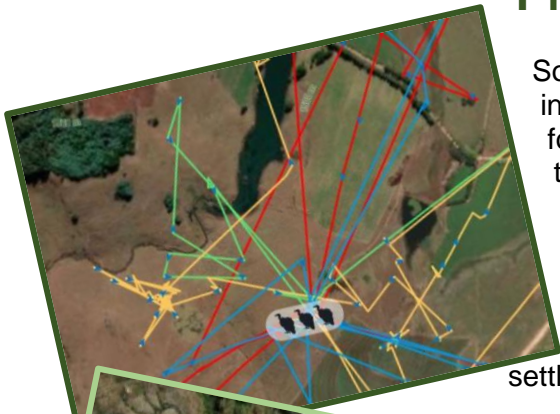
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Projects and Research



Some of the vulture research FreeMe Wildlife is now involved in was mentioned earlier with the release of four Cape Vultures that have been in care. The tracking data from the released birds has continually been monitored as it provides some interesting information on movement patterns. For example, the juvenile birds appear to be more nomadic, moving around quite erratically and in some instances, quite far, while the adult bird appears to have settled happily in the release area.



The Cape Vultures are not the only ones providing interesting release data, as a Serval released up in Zululand on [Wild Tomorrow's](#) Greater Ukuwela Conservancy with a tracking collar on is also providing fantastic movement data. The cat seems to have found a place to settle after moving 20 kilometres from its initial release site. The cat is now being monitored for its nocturnal activities to establish peak hunting periods and habitats.



The Black-backed Jackals released at [Thula-Thula](#) Game Reserve in Zululand have been sighted post release (thanks to the ear tags that identify them) feeding on a Zebra foal carcass on the reserve. At the time, all three jackals, which had been hand-raised from tiny pups, looked in prime condition and were behaving as they should, fighting with the White-backed Vultures around the carcass to make sure they were getting their share of the meal.

Another post release sighting was that of the juvenile Crowned Eagle released on the [Karkloof Nature Reserve](#). Now several months later, the young bird has settled on the reserve and was last seen down on prey in a drainage ditch next to one of the reserve roads. Again, it is thanks to the ID rings, including the colour ring, that the bird can be positively identified, and the information fed back to the [Crowned Eagle Research](#) team.





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May Champions:

The next two small predator enclosures are up at FreeMe Wildlife, and we have the following donors to thank for making it possible: **Animal Survival International**, **Cemcon**, and **the Spencers**.

May also saw an animal charity auction take place organized by **Louise Dix**. FreeMe Wildlife, CROW, PARR, and the Coastal Horse Care Unit were all beneficiaries of the event, but the real champion was Louise for organizing and pulling off such an enjoyable evening.

We would also like to welcome the following new Custodians who joined our tribe in March, April, and May: **Robyn Retief**, **Jessica Byron**, **Kaycee Turpin**, **Helen Gee**, **Morgan Smit**, and **Linda Nel**.

The Nature of Art FREE ENTRY

An Exhibition of Art
A Celebration of Nature
LIVE AUCTION-SUNDAY
Proceeds to "FREEME WILDLIFE"
"Sip & Paint" Workshops for Adults
"Paint & Shake" Workshops for kids

Guided Nature Walks
Food Vendors
Kids Activities

Shannonne
078 760- 5436

HEBRON HAVEN HOTEL

21 -22 September 10am-4pm Daily

Art Day Alert

Join us at Hebron Haven Hotel in the Dargle on the 21st and 22nd of September 2024 for 'The Nature of Art' exhibition and art auction.

The exhibition will be open from 10am to 4pm daily with the auction taking place on Sunday.

There will be lots of activities for people of all ages.

Any artist wanting to exhibit their work at the exhibition must please contact Shannonne Gradwell on shannonnegradwell@gmail.com or 078 760 5436

