



# Monthly Newsletter

## 07/24

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## Editorial

### The GEF-7 Project

With the escalating illegal trade in wildlife, [the South African National Biodiversity Institute \(SANBI\)](#) starting putting a DNA barcoding reference database together for species listed on the Threatened or Protected Species (ToPS) list and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered species (CITES) list.

This project (the GEF-7 Project) aims to help in the struggle against the illegal wildlife trade by providing a reference for which confiscated species, or even the body parts of confiscated species, can be tested against. Even a tiny piece of evidence can be tested through DNA to give a positive species ID thanks to the project.

Because the evidence provided by the GEF-7 project has to be acceptable in a court of law, all samples collected by SANBI follow what is known as 'chain of custody' standard operating procedures as adopted by any law enforcement agency. This procedure, when followed correctly, proves that samples have not been tampered with and come conclusively from a verified source.

FreeMe Wildlife is one of a few wildlife rehabilitation centres in South Africa which provide the GEF-7 project with wildlife DNA samples. We are proud of our association with SANBI and proud to be playing our part in helping combat the illegal wildlife trade.

DNA sample collection is a minimally invasive procedure which causes very little (if any) discomfort to wildlife. Samples of hair, fur, and feathers can all be used to extract DNA. A tiny drop of blood (from a needle prick on an ear or toe) stored on special FTA paper is also enough to extract DNA from.

With over a thousand wildlife patients coming through our doors each year, it makes perfect sense for FreeMe Wildlife to be part of this project. The question is, why are all the wildlife rehab centres not doing the same?

## Statistics for June:

ADMISSIONS			
BIRDS	RAPTORS	MAMMALS	REPTILES
44	10	13	0

RELEASES			
BIRDS	RAPTORS	MAMMALS	REPTILES
13	6	1	0





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## New Admissions

While the number of birds admitted has understandably dropped over winter, we were amazed by the number of Red-eyed Doves and Laughing Doves admitted in June. These species do not seem to have received the memo that they can take a break from raising young! Other species admitted in June included Cattle Egrets, Hadedda Ibis, an Egyptian Goose, Speckled Pigeon, two Buff-spotted Flufftails, two African Olive Pigeons (1), a Sacred Ibis, Cape Robin-chat, Burchell's Coucal, and Red-billed Quelea.

While the bird species that should be breeding during the spring and summer are still going strong, the winter breeders, like owls, are not having a good season. Again, the unseasonal heat this winter is probably the reason for this. During June we received five [Barn Owl](#) chicks (2) from disturbed nests, an African Harrier Hawk which died of internal injuries, a Black-winged Kite hit by a vehicle, a Jackal Buzzard that was dead on arrival, and two Spotted Eagle Owls, one of which had been caught in a barbed wire fence and had to be euthanized due to the extent of the damage.

In the mammal's department, bats (3) seem to also be taking strain. Instead of being able to go into a deep sleep known as [torpor](#) over the cold winter months, this usual sleep pattern has been disturbed by hot weather. This triggers the bats to come out of torpor and go out hunting, only for the temperatures to drop suddenly again, leaving stranded bats cold and starving.

Apart from bats, other mammal admissions included a Nyala lamb, three Scrub Hare leverets, three Grey Duikers, two Serval kittens (4), and a baby Vervet Monkey that had been shot and had to be euthanized. One of the Serval kittens wandered into a house, starving and lost, while the other was found during fire break burning, but both are doing well in care.

There were no reptiles admitted during June.



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## Releases - *the best part!*

Bird releases for June included a Cattle Egret, Red-eyed and Laughing Doves, Hadedas, an African Olive Pigeon and two Bronze Mannikins. Both [Buff-spotted Flufftails](#) (5) admitted after interactions with cats fortunately survived their injuries and were released.

The Black-winged Kite hit by a vehicle recovered quickly from a concussion and was released, as was the African Harrier Hawk that had recovered from being shot. Other releases included two Barn Owls sent for soft release, and a Spotted Eagle Owl (6) sent back to Hebron Haven Hotel where the bird is one of a resident breeding pair.

One of the Scrub Hare leverets (7) was found in a firewood pile in a resident's garden. It was checked over for any injuries, given the all-clear, and was sent back again so that its mother could find and move it that night as is normal behaviour for the species. One of the grounded bats was returned to its colony once it had recovered, and a Grey Duiker that had quite an ordeal (it was hit by a vehicle, and then attacked by dogs) miraculously suffered very minor injuries and was declared fit for release a few days later.

No reptile releases took place in June.

## Projects and Research

Breeding season has started for Spotted Eagle Owls with two of the owl boxes in the Pinetown area being occupied. The box at St Michaels Complex has a camera in it which allows us to watch the activity of the owls there, and the female has been incubating two eggs (8)



If you don't already follow the Owl Box Project page, go have a look now to see more exciting updates on this year's season: <https://www.facebook.com/owlboxproject>



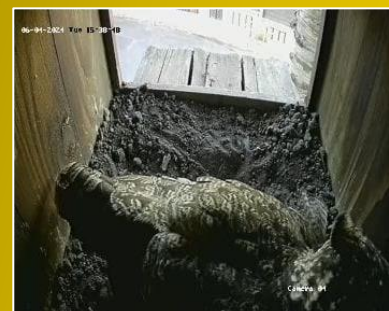
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## Outreach and Engagement



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. During June the environmental educators were busy with classes on river ecosystems and issues with pollution, as well as looking at life in soils and exploring the value of ecosystem services and studying the historical relationships that existed between man and the natural world.



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 the Level 1 introduction on water, and how incredibly important it is for sustaining life on this planet



Three FreeMe Wildlife Talks were presented during June. Two of these talks were on the rehabilitation of Servals (Spots in the Long Grass), presented to residents at Widenham Retirement Village and Umdoni Retirement Village on the South Coast. The third talk was presented on owls (All About Owls) to residents at Dunkirk Eco Estate on the North Coast.

A FreeMe Wildlife Course on Emergency Wildlife Rescue was presented at the Zimbali Country Club in Ballito to security companies and other first responders to wildlife call outs on the north coast.

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## June Champions:

We would like to bring attention to the wonderful work that [Snare Aware](#) does. This is a group of volunteers that spend as much time as they can removing snares from various areas. During June we were called in to assist them rescue an adult Bushbuck caught in a snare in Ferncliffe Nature Reserve.

We would also like to welcome the following new Custodians who joined our tribe in June: [Joleen Kotze](#) and [Bridget Lee](#)

**FUNDRAISING AUCTION**  
*Gala Dinner*  
**In aid of FreeMe Wildlife Rescue Facility**  
FOR THE SAKE OF FUTURE WILDLIFE...

**"CONNECTING WITH THE WILD"**  
PRESENTATION BY GRAEME DUANE  
EMMY AWARD WINNING  
WILDLIFE FILM DIRECTOR  
AND HIGHLY ENTERTAINING AUCTIONEER ROB THUNDER

🐾 FRIDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> AUGUST 2024  
🐾 ZIMBALI COUNTRY CLUB  
🐾 18:00  
🐾 DRESS CODE SMART, WITH A "TOUCH OF WILD"  
🐾 R650/PERSON INCLUDES 3 COURSE DINNER WITH WINE

PLEASE JOIN US TO RAISE FUNDS FOR FREEME WILDLIFE RESCUE'S VITAL MISSION OF OPENING DOOR'S IN BALLITO

EXCITING BIDDING ATTRACTION: **RACING COBRA CAR**

Tickets available on [www.quicket.co.za](http://www.quicket.co.za)  
Or contact Lindy on 083 607 4498 for more information

## Ballito Auction

FreeMe Wildlife is in the process of setting up an emergency rescue and stabilization facility for wildlife in the Ballito area.

To raise funds to set this facility up, we are having a fundraising auction at Zimbali Country Club at 18h00 on Friday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August.

There are some amazing items up for auction!

Tickets are available online on Quicket: <https://www.quicket.co.za/events/266736-free-me-gala-dinner-fundraiser/?ref=events-list#/>

Or contact Lindy on 083 607 4498 for more information

