



Celtis africana



Sterkfontein Country Estates

December/Desember 2013

One of the things I really love about living here is watching the interaction of different wildlife. As it is the Festive Season, I want to write about something nice. It is about my favourite little animal - the Yellow Mongoose (*Cynictis penicillata*), sometimes referred to as the red meerkat. I have a "restaurant" some distance away from the house, where I leave eggs and other meaty morsels for them and have taken some amazing photos whilst enjoying their goings-on! However, I do take care not to try and tame them – they are wild animals and should always be treated as such.

The yellow mongoose averages about half a kilo in weight and averages a length of about 500mm (including the tail). It is the only member of its genus but as many as 12 subspecies have been recognised.

They have a hierarchical social structure and live in colonies of about 20. The alpha male will mark members of his group every day with anal secretions – what a way to greet your family! Boundaries are also marked with anal and facial secretions as well as urine, and he will rub his back against raised objects, leaving behind fur as a visual marker of his territory. Other members will mark their dens with facial secretions. They often share their burrows with the Cape Ground Squirrels or other meerkat, adding new tunnels and burrows as the need arises and a burrow has more than one entrance located nearby latrines.

This little animal is mainly active during the day (and the weather such as sunshine, prevailing winds etc. also plays a role in their daily habits) but some nocturnal activity has been observed. In the mornings they will often be found warming themselves in the sun at the burrow before going about hunting and foraging. They are mainly carnivorous, feeding on insects and invertebrate, small mammals, lizards, snakes and eggs of all kinds. Eggs will be positioned to the side of a stone or rock and then rolled between the legs and shot onto the rock to crack it open! Their main enemies are birds of prey, snakes and jackal.

In the southern, cooler, parts of their habitat, their hair is longer, more reddish to yellow and their tails are longer, bushier and with a distinctive white tip. In the northern, warmer parts (Namibia etc.) they are of a more greyish colour, their hair is shorter and the tip of their tails not the distinctive white.

Lifespan of this mammal is between 11 and 15 years – averaging 13 years. Mating takes part mainly between July and September with most births

occurring in December. Gestation period is 42 to 57 days and typically one to two offspring are born. The birth takes place in a cleaned-out chamber of the burrow system, with no bedding material. Offspring is weaned at about 10 weeks and adulthood is reached at about 10 months of age.

It is believed they are not capable of sexually reproducing until one year of age. The young is usually much lighter in colour than the adults. Mongooses are mainly silent, but can growl when threatened and sometimes bark, scream or purr. It is believed that they use their tails to communicate mood and status.

Another interesting fact of them is that they have five digits on its forefeet and four on the hind feet. The first digit of the forefoot is raised above the rest and does not make an impression in its spoor. The palm of the forefeet are basically naked, but hairy in the hind feet. The claws in the forefeet are also longer than on the hind feet.

They do play an important role in controlling certain insects, snakes and rodents. However, do not try to tame them. They can potentially be carriers (asymptomatically but not infectiously) of rabies. So let them live their lives in peace and enjoy their antics – they are part of the precious wildlife of our Estate. Do make sure you protect your pets against rabies (as required by law!) by inoculating them annually.





Just for fun: What did Adam say the day before Christmas?

“It’s Christmas, Eve!”

What did Tarzan sing at Christmas time? Jungle Bells!

Have a look at the photo Michael Van Harmelen (SCE 157) sent to me of his little boy with eco-friendly owl houses! Now this is something wonderful we could all have on our plots. Owls are nature's very own rodent controllers and we should encourage them to live in the area.



They suffer from the hands of humans due to some of us putting out poison for rodents, being run over by cars when sitting in the road waiting for prey etc, so we should really try to encourage them to have a safe haven on our Estate. I have contacted JoJo Tanks, the manufacturers of these owl houses and they have sent me their price and other info (provided you collect directly from them), but if you buy from a retailer, remember the price might differ. For the price list and other interesting information about this product, click on the following link:

<http://www.jojotanks.co.za/index.php/component/virtuemart/agricultural-products/owl-house-eco-friendly-pest-control-detail?Itemid=0>.

Een van die lekkerste dinge van woon op ons Estate is om die verskillende wildlewe dop te hou. Met die Feesseisoen wou ek dus graag oor iets oulik skryf. My gunsteling diertjie is beslis die witkwasmuishond (*Cynictis penicillata*), soms ook genoem rooi meerkat. Hulle is vir my net te oulik en ek het 'n "restaurant" vir hulle so 'n ent weg van die huis geskep, waar ek gereeld eiers en ander snoepgoed neersit – ek het al die oulikste foto's geneem van hoe die klompie dit geniet. Ek is egter versigtig om hulle nie mak te probeer maak nie – hulle is en bly wilde diertjies en moet as sodanig gerespekteer word.

Ek hou nie van die naam “muishond” – dit klink vir my te veel na ‘n stinkspul en hul is gans te oulik om aan so ‘n naam te moet dra! Ek noem hulle sommer “my katjies” of sonsoekertjies. Hul gemiddelde lengte is sowat 500mm (wat die stert insluit) en hul het ‘n gemiddelde gewig van sowat 500 gram. Hulle is die enigste lid van hul genus maar soveel as 12 subspesies is geïdentifiseer.

Hul leefwyse is sosiaal, maar streng hiërargies en hul woon in kolonies van ongeveer 20 lede. Die alfamannetjie merk die ander lede van sy groep daagliks met annale afskeidings – wat ‘n manier om jou familie te groet! Die grense van die blyplek word ook met annale- sowel as gesigsafskeidings en urine gemerk en hy sal ook sy rug teen hoe dinge soos rotse of klippe skuur om hare agter te laat as ‘n sigbare teken van sy areagrense.

Ander lede van die groep merk ook hul lêplekke met gesigsafskeidings. Hul deel soms hul gate en blyplekke met ander meerkatte of waaierstertmeerkatte (Cape ground squirrel) en soos dit nodig word, sal meer tonnels en gate bygegrou word. Hul blyplekke en tonnels het meer as een uitgang en die is gewoonlik naby ‘n toiletarea geleë.

Hierdie diertjies is hoofsaaklik aktief gedurende die dag (nagtelike eskapades is wel al waargeneem) en die weerstoestande soos koue en wind speel ook ‘n rol in hul daagliks doen en late. Soggens kan hul naby die gate gesien word waar hul in die son “opwarm” voordat hul uitgaan om kos te soek. Die rooi meerkat is hoofsaaklik vleisetend en hul dieet bestaan uit insekte, klein soogdiertjies, knaagdiere, akkedisse, slange asook alle en enige eiers! Hul sal ‘n eier langs of naby ‘n rots of groot klip neersit en dan tussen hul bene deurskiet tot teen die klip om dit oop te breek! Die rooi meerkat se vernaamste vyand is jakkalse, roofvoëls en sekere slange.

In die koeler Suidelike gedeelte van hul habitat is hul hare langer, gelerig tot rooi van kleur en die sterte langer met die kenmerkende wit puntjie. In hul warmer, Noordelike habitat (bv. Namibië ens.) is hul hare korter en meer grys van kleur, hul sterte is korter en het nie die wit puntjie nie.

Hul verwagte lewensduur is tussen 11 en 15 jaar – gewoonlik so 13 jaar. Paring geskied enige tyd vanaf Julie tot September en meeste geboortes vind oor Desember plaas. Die draagtydperk is tussen 42 en 57 dae en gewoonlik word een of twee kleintjies gebore. Die kleintjies word in ‘n skoongemaakte “kamer” met geen beddegoed gebore en word na tien weke gespeen. Die kleintjies is heelwat lichter van kleur as die volwassenes.

Hul bereik volwassenheid op die ouderdom van sowat 10 maande en is eers op eenjarige ouderdom seksueel aktief. Die rooi meerkat is meestal stil maar kan soms grom wanneer bedreigd voel, hul kan ook kort blafluide of skerp skreegeluide maak en selfs spin soos ‘n kat! Daar word geglo dat hul sterte gebruik word om buie en sosiale stand oor te dra.

‘n Ander interessantheid is dat hulle 5 toontjies op die voorpote het en net 4 agter. Die eerste toontjie van die voorpoot is gelig en laat nie ‘n merk op hul

spoor nie! Die naels aan die voorpote is baie langer as op die agterpote en die palm van die voorpootjie is glad terwyl die agterste een harig is.

Hierdie soogdiertjies speel 'n belangrike rol om sekere insekte, knaagdiere en slange se aanwas te beheer. Moet hulle egter nie probeer makmaak nie, hulle mag moontlik draers van die hondsadolheidvirus wees (asimptomaties maar nie aansteeklik). Hulle is so deel van ons Estate, so laat hulle met rus en geniet hulle doen en late – daar is min genoeg wildlewe oor op die Estate! Onthou volgens wet is ons veronderstel om ons troeteldiere te beskerm teen hondsadolheid deur hul jaarliks in te ent!

**Net vir die grap: Wat is nuwe ouers se gunsteling Kerslied?
Stille nag!**

Die 4 fases in 'n man se lewe: 1. Jy glo in Kersvader. 2. Jy glo NIE in Kersvader. 3. Jy speel Kersvader vir die kinders. 4. Jy begin lyk soos Kersvader!

Michael van Harmelen (SCE 157) het vir my 'n foto van sy oulike seuntjie gestuur waar hy by eko-vriendelike uilhuise sit. Uile is die natuur se eie plaagbeheerders en ons kan gerus probeer dat hulle ons Estate as 'n bly- en broeiplek kies.

Die arme uile het 'n harde tyd onder die mens wat gif vir rotte en muise uitsit, hulle word doodgery op paaie waar hul sit en wag vir prooi ens - so as ons 'n veilige hawe op ons Estate vir die uilpopulasie kan skep sal dit wonderlik wees! Ek het JoJo Tanks, die vervaardigers, gekontak en hulle het aan my 'n e-pos met prysse (sou jy dit self by hulle gaan haal) en ander inligting gestuur. Al hierdie inligting, insluitende hulle prysse is op hulle webwerf:

<http://www.jojotanks.co.za/index.php/component/virtuemart/agricultural-products/owl-house-eco-friendly-pest-control-detail?Itemid=0>

Nou bly niks verder vir my oor as om almal weereens 'n genotvolle feestyd en Sterkfonteingroete toe te wens tot volgende keer wanneer ek graag weer oor iets interessants van ons area sal skryf!

