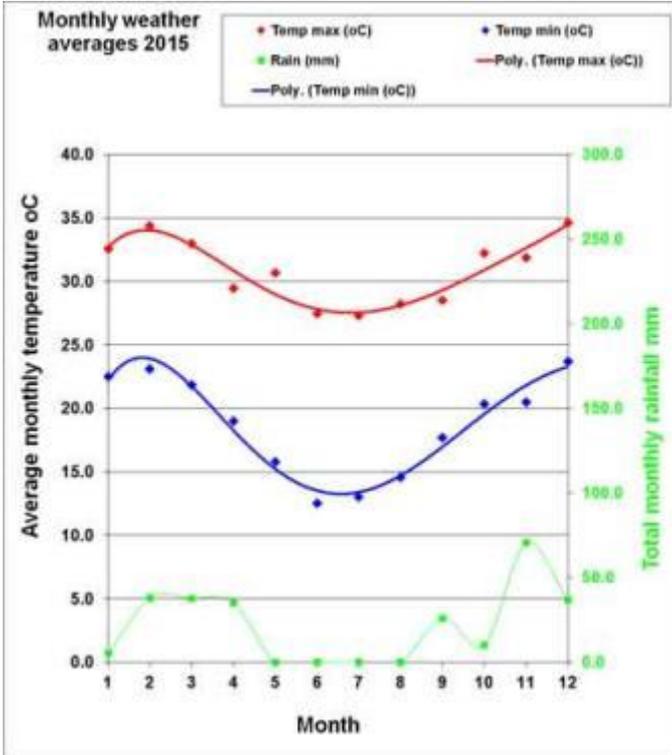
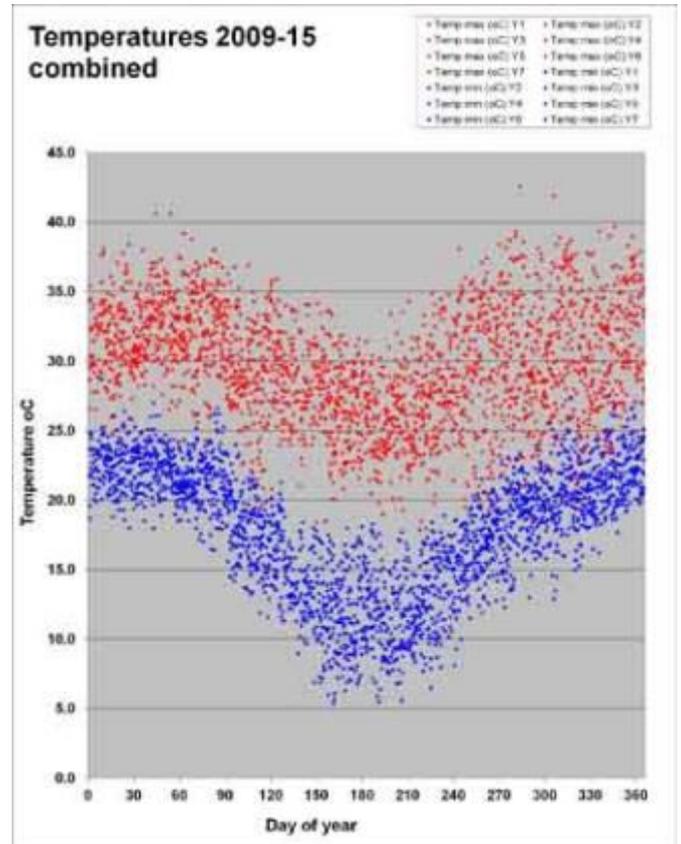




Leopard's View Newsletter – March 2016



As usual for the first newsletter of the year, we start with the weather data for the previous calendar year. Also, below is the combined temperature data for 2009-2015 inclusive. As always, it shows the huge scatter of daily maximum temperatures in contrast to the relatively narrow band of night time minimum temperatures: the seasons are a function of night time temperature far more than of day time readings.



Our lives here have continued to be dominated by the ongoing drought. The four months of December to March produced 128 mm of rain: the average over the previous 6-7 years was approximately 350 mm for that period. The summer total up to end February was 200 mm (annual average 450mm): 71 mm in March was therefore a real blessing and may yet prove vital in seeing things through to the next summer rains. The situation has been aggravated by hotter than normal temperatures: December was some 2-4 degrees warmer than usual and several monthly readings represented the hottest we have recorded in our time here.

A high water table level has meant that the browsing (i.e. the leaves on the trees) was quite healthy but the grazers (grass-eaters) have been struggling. Just about the only blessing of the drought was the virtual absence this summer of our usual spiders' webs stretched across paths and tracks. The heat aggravated the red algal growth first seen in our waterhole last year, we assume as a result of thermocline development: the red colour looks odd but has no effect on the animals drinking there.



Our record of animals visiting the waterhole was hampered slightly by defective batteries in the waterhole camera in December and by the accidental deletion of many of the March pictures from the lodge birdpool camera trap. However, we still saw or recorded many interesting things, both large and small, including a good selection of carnivores. Boxing Day 2015 was graced by the whole of our local lion pride (the male, three adult females and six sub-adults)

spending the middle of the day in the shade just behind the waterhole. Ten days later (7th January) the male was back late in the afternoon, again just behind the waterhole: he proceeded to give a wonderful display of territorial roaring. The video we captured is on the Leopard's View Facebook page and is well worth watching – make sure the speakers are good enough though, otherwise he sounds more like a wheezy domestic cat. The sound is one of Africa's most iconic.



Takazile pride females, 26.12.2015



Takazile pride male, 07.01.2016



Takazile pride male, 07.01.2016



Impala fawns, early December 2015

We have seen leopard twice, the first time back in December when a large male tried to ambush two impala females and two young fawns 100 m from the lodge decks. In early January we were intrigued by the behaviour of a giraffe standing by the lodge birdpool at dusk: it stared intently into the bush, not moving a muscle. Suddenly it galloped off down the hill and then a minute or so later we saw the explanation as a leopard walked across just behind the pool. The impala fawns seemed to be born a little later this year but by mid-December there were once again many. Elephants were reasonably active in the area – we saw them on 28 separate days, including a few small breeding herds. Our biggest bull, Ezulwini,



Impala fawns, 08.03.2016



Breeding herd at the lodge birdpool

03.31.2016 21:04:00



Bull elephant at our house

had to be chased off a couple of times: one night it took from midnight to around 2.00 a.m. to persuade him to leave the trees near the lodge fence alone. Our other large and very relaxed elephant bull, Soshangane, easily identified by a radio collar, sadly died in early March. A wound received in a fight with another bull became badly infected and he died quickly as a result.



Three young bulls at our house birdpool

The camera trap at our house captured a passing cheetah shortly before 3.00 a.m. on the 31st March: sadly (but understandably) we were asleep at the time. Nor did we see the



Young elephant by the lodge birdpool

01.24.2016 21:47:27



“Ezulwini” – our big tusker



Honeybadger at the waterhole

03.30.2016 22:23:53



Cheetah outside our house

03/31/2016 02:48:14

hyena bathing in the lodge birdpool in the early hours of February 19th. No doubt partly as a result of the drought conditions, we have seen vervet monkeys around the lodge on many occasions: unfortunately they can be a significant nuisance and they donot get a friendly reception! The opposite is true of the bushbabies: they



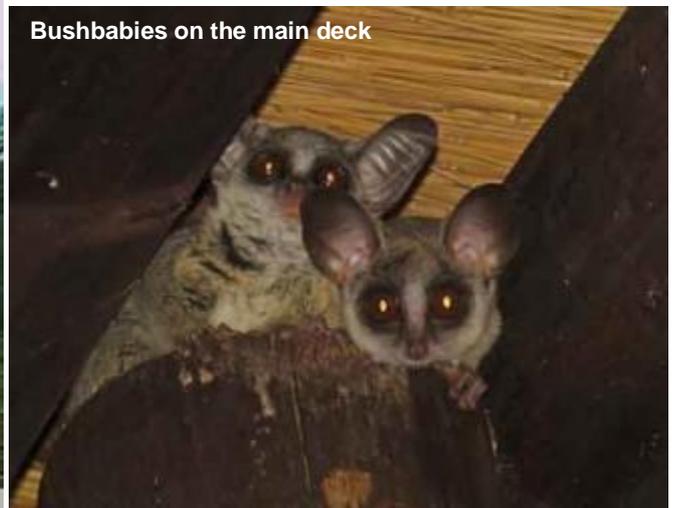
Black-backed jackal

have had something of a disturbed time. Early in December thee fibre-glass coping on the roof of the tower blew off in a ferocious wind during the night: we found it the next morning 50 m away in the bush. We replaced the old coping (damaged beyond repair) with a new one, made to measure from two galvanised iron coping sheets. Fixing it on in quite a high wind was both difficult and nerve-wracking. Possibly as a result of the disturbance to their tower-roof home or and/or of the higher daytime temperatures with the new coping, the bushbabies have sometimes been spending the daylight hours in the roof of the main deck area, affording us and guests some excellent views as they emerged at dusk.



Retrieving the tower roof coping after it had blown off in high winds

Ltl Acorn 080 F 027 12.08.2015 08.25.38



Bushbabies on the main deck

The usual larger plains game has been ever-present: although we see these animals on a regular, almost daily basis, it is always good to do so. One species has visited us more frequently than ever before, namely banded mongoose: unlike their dwarf mongoose cousins, the bandeds are very skittish and run off at the slightest disturbance.



Dwarf mongoose

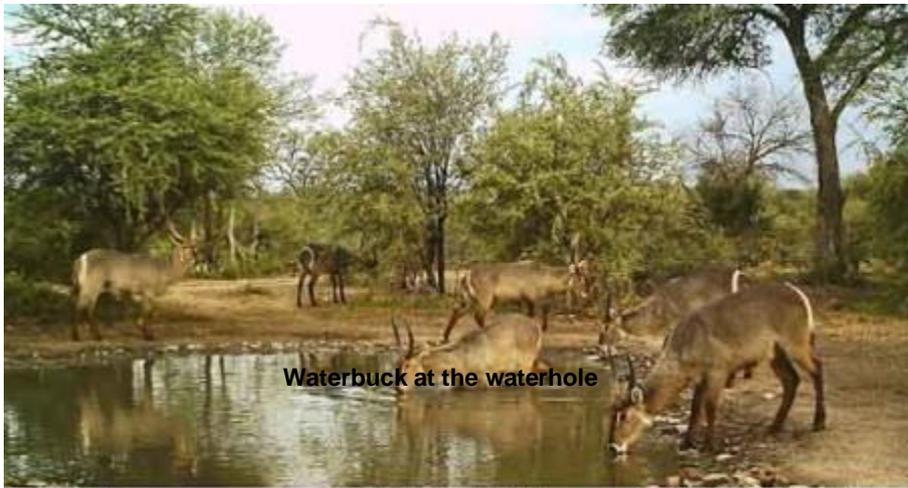


Banded mongooses

0 F 01/22/2011 20:25:07

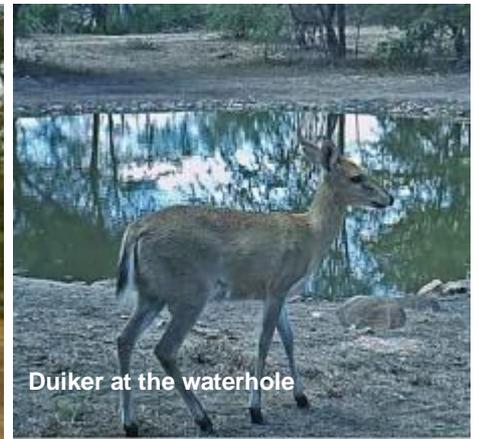


Warthog family by our house



Waterbuck at the waterhole

Ltl Acorn (086°F 030°C 01/28/2011 03:56:07



Duiker at the waterhole

03.04.2016 12:33:07



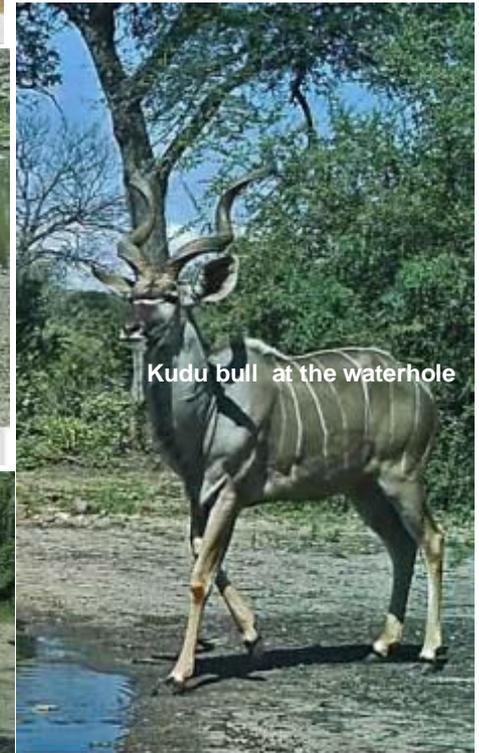
Zebra at the waterhole

Ltl Acorn (082°F 01/29/2011 22:08:30



Steenbok at the waterhole

02/19/2016 09:03:34



Kudu bull at the waterhole

03.21.2016 13:52:29



03.27.2016 16:19:52

Even when the larger game animals are not present, there are always smaller things on show. There is never an absence of birds, although we reckoned that there were less of the summer migrant visitors (European rollers, for example) than is usual, no doubt as a result of the drought, which severely reduced the amount of insect food available. The Wahlberg's eagle pair that has nested every year just a few hundred metres from the lodge did so again but we think they lost their eggs in the huge hail storm of mid-November. Subsequently we never saw them on their nest: indeed we even wonder whether one of them (the female?) perished around February or March as we did not see the two together – maybe she just migrated north earlier than her mate. We had a spectacular sighting during an afternoon drive of a martial eagle eating a legewan (monitor lizard) in a tree.



Giraffe near our house



Giraffe at our house birdpool

02.27.2016 08:04:06



Tree squirrel warming itself in the sun



Martial eagle with monitor lizard prey



Wahlberg's eagle pair



Red-backed shrike



Barn swallow



Lilac-breasted roller



Wood sandpiper



Levaillant's cuckoo



European roller



Swainson's spurfowl



Great spotted cuckoo



Hammerkop



Green wood-hoopoe



Green-backed heron



Southern masked weaver



White-backed vulture



Violet-eared waxbill



Woodland kingfisher



White-browed scrub-robin



African pipit

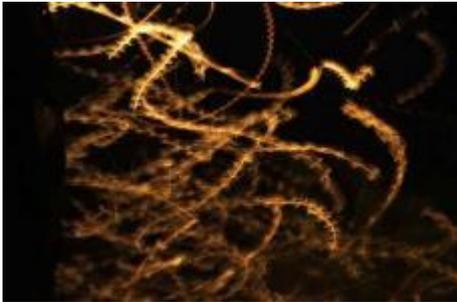


The black "powder" in the photo on the right is actually millions of minute (less than mm) springtails (a soil-dwelling insect) – they erupt in huge numbers by the office following rain.



0.5
in
wall

Our sunsets are always spectacular, especially when there is some cloud about.



Trails of moths and termites flying around the birdpool floodlight, captured using a 0.5 s shutter speed.

Foam-nest frog (often called the rain frog) – sitting on a camping chair in the shade



African giant land snail – they appear in daylight only when it is damp and cool after rain: this one was 20 cm long



Leopard tortoise – this one fell into the birdpool while drinking and had to be rescued

Dung beetle rolling his ball of dung – he will eventually bury it



Full moon – Christmas day 2015



Flower selection





The image above is a composite of various different impalas caught in mid-air by the waterhole camera trap.

Our best wishes to everyone.

Neil & Ann