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Message from Karin

To a new year, new challenges and new adventures!

We celebrated our hospital's 3rd birthday on 15 March, and we are very proud of our achievements. This first newsletter of 2020 focuses on climate change – but isn't all doom and gloom. Often people feel powerless in the face of all the media coverage on this topic, but there are small things that we can do to make a difference.

- 🌱 **Stop using poison in your garden, or anywhere for that matter. It does more harm than good and often kills secondary predators; birds eating the insects that were killed by insecticide on your rosebushes or the owls that eat poisoned rats.**
- 🌿 **Plant indigenous plants and trees. This will attract urban wildlife to your garden and can be a haven for bees and butterflies.**
- 🍷 **Organise clean-ups for local rivers, dams and parks. This would be an ongoing project and can be part of school initiatives.**
- 🥩 **Have meat-free Mondays!**
- 🛒 **Use less plastic, and buy fruit and veggies as is – they already come in the perfect packaging, as nature intended.**
- ♻️ **Recycle!**



With a few small changes, each and every one of us CAN make a difference. These changes maybe enough to inspire someone else to do the same, and so you can pay it forward. It starts with you.

Deserts - not quite deserted

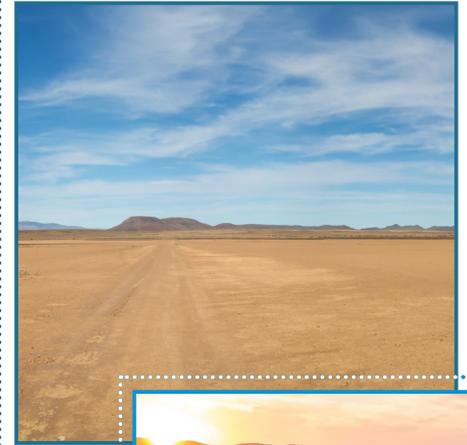
Deserts are extremely useful as climate indicators, and, while we don't want them growing, the world's deserts play a large role in absorbing atmospheric carbon dioxide. They are also home to all kinds of adaptable creatures that show us what it means to be resilient in tough times. As a result of climate change, scientists expect the amount of land affected by drought to grow by mid-century and water resources in affected areas to decline by as much as 30 percent, which makes it extremely important for us to study and care for the creatures that call deserts home.

Southern Africa's desert regions are home to a wide variety of species. Though they are incredibly hardy, many of these are at risk due to the significant impacts that extreme heat and reduced water supplies have on their natural habitat and food supply. This knock-on effect is particularly felt when species are unable to naturally sustain their population growth, causing supply and demand shortages for other species. A decline in insect numbers, for example, has a direct effect on the bird and bat populations of some areas.

What we remind ourselves of is this:

Yes, desert birds, bats and mammals are being forced to adapt to climate change, but one look at the amount of conservation efforts and people dedicating themselves to studying these animals shows us that us humans aren't forgetting about our adaptable friends.

The Cape fox, aardwolf and pangolin are natural residents of our southern African desert and semi-desert landscape. We have been fortunate to treat and rehabilitate these species at the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital, significantly growing our knowledge and understanding about them.



Cape fox (*Vulpes chama*) found further and further afield

This dainty creature, when fully grown, measures 35 cm at the shoulder and weighs between 2.3 and 4.2 kgs. They live in mated pairs, sharing a territory but foraging alone. A pair will produce a litter of up to six pups between August and October. This nocturnal animal is the region's only true fox and has a diet of rodents, hares, insects and birds. They provide a useful service on crop farms by eating rodents and insects.

Their silver-grey fur, light yellow undersides and black-tipped tails make them as stunning as they are impressive at adapting to arid environments. Their black-tipped tails and ears are used to give signals such as stress or aggressions during interactions with one another. Cape foxes are normally associated with deserts or semi-deserts, such as the Kalahari and Karoo regions of South Africa as well as semi-arid and open grassland. They occur in Namibia and Botswana and interestingly, have been found in the slightly different habitat of areas in Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Earlier this year, we successfully treated, rehabilitated and released a Cape fox.

Andrew Loveridge, a conservation biologist with the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit at Oxford University, observed that :

“this northward extension of the Cape fox distribution may be another example of range expansion by an adaptable and opportunistic canid in the face of changing environmental conditions. The occurrence of Cape foxes outside the northern margins of the accepted species range may be the evidence of colonisation of formerly moderately moist areas by an arid-adapted species, as a result of increasing aridification in the region.”



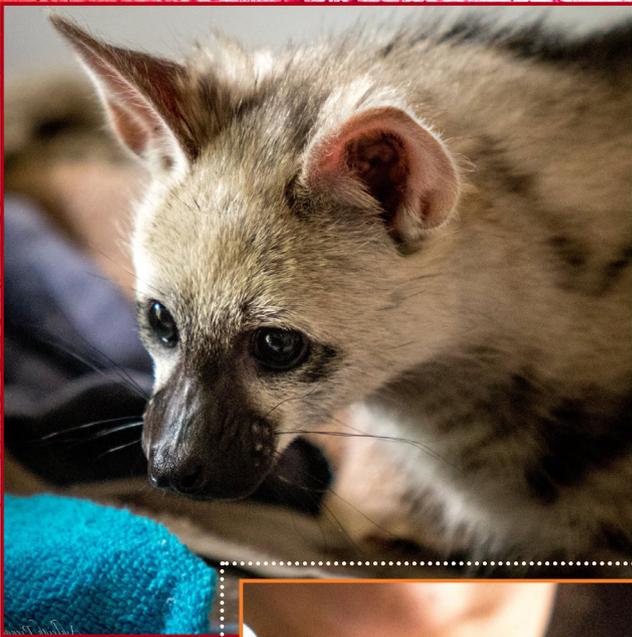
Aardwolves are sticking it out

The aardwolf (*Proteles cristata*) gives the impression of being a lightly built, jackal-sized hyaena. It has a dog-like head with a broad, naked black muzzle, a sloping back and pale buff coloured fur with up to five black, narrow vertical stripes and upper limbs. The hair is long and forms a mane along the top of the neck and back. When threatened, this mane is erected which makes the animal appear larger and a surprisingly deep roar is emitted. The aardwolf's primary food preference is harvester termites which it listens for and licks up with a rapidly flicking tongue.

The availability of ants and termites varies seasonally as a result of changes in temperature and rainfall. When conditions become very dry, ants retreat deep into their underground hive systems, making them inaccessible. This can cause a weight loss of up to 25%, and the animals will have to look to other species of ant to survive. Having very small teeth, they do not eat meat and rarely eat anything larger than a grasshopper. Although aardwolf forage alone, pairs do share a territory and raise their pups together.

The aardwolf occurs in two populations; the southern population covers most of southern Africa, Angola, Zambia and Mozambique, and the northern population extends across Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt.

They primarily inhabit open, grassy plains but can survive almost anywhere with an average annual rainfall of 100 to 800 mm, although they avoid forested areas.



Studying pangolins

(Smutsia temminckii)

The pangolin, otherwise known as the scaly anteater, is the only mammal in the world to be covered from head to toe in keratinous scales. Keratin is the same substance that rhino horn, hooves, nails and hair. These scales account for up to 20% of a pangolin's entire weight, and are the reason that the pangolin is the most trafficked mammal on Earth.

In southern Africa, they are found in both desert and bushveld. They are myrmecophagous feeders, meaning they have a specialist diet consisting of ants and termites. Pangolins prefer the particular ant and termite species found in their specific habitat, and, like other specialist feeders, their core diet is threatened by climate change. Territorial, solitary and secretive, these enigmatic mammals have been on Earth for 84 million years and have evolved to be perfectly suited to their natural behaviours.

Based in the Kalahari desert, PhD candidate Wendy Panaino is trying to establish the impact of global warming on ground pangolin in their natural habitat. The research is focused on analysing how their physiology and behaviour changes with changing environmental conditions.

Much research is being done on all eight species of pangolin, worldwide. It is a race for information to help us understand the behaviour, ecology and physiology of these amazing animals. Only once we have information on the Pholidota order, will we be better equipped to save these animals from extinction.



At the JVVH we are passionate about pangolins and the issues that they face. In the past, there has been little information about the veterinary treatment of pangolins. However, we now have a much better success rate as, we have developed our expertise in treating and rehabilitating these unique animals which are badly compromised when they are retrieved out of the illegal trafficking trade.

Wild Hero of the month: Our very own Ivy!



Ivy Machakaire started her journey with the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital as our cleaner in December 2017. Her tasks typically included general auxiliary cleaning, washing and assisting to keep the hospital presentable.

During the busy breeding season, Ivy assisted with the feeding of tiny bat pups. She showed a compassion and sensitivity toward these creatures and was soon helping with other species. Ivy demonstrated her understanding of each species and her ability to work with them in an insightful way, and this led to her becoming our Rehabilitation Assistant. She is responsible for overseeing and preparing the individual diets for each of our varied patients, cage enrichment, monitoring the progress of each case and assisting in many areas of our activities.

Ivy is an integral and cherished member of our team. She learns fast, works well under pressure and is keen to develop and assist wherever necessary.

Our wild wish list for the new year

Our wild wish for 2020 is that our facility continually strives for high standards that are based in science and recognised best practice while we offer the best possible veterinary care and rehabilitation for all of the indigenous species that we treat. ***We will continue to achieve this with all our valued supporters behind us!***

We always need:

Fencing material (poles, wire mesh etc)

Tarpaulins/shade netting

Towels

Blankets

A wooden garden shed in good condition

