

EDITION 13  
DECEMBER 2020

# WILD TIMES

*Rebirth, rehab and release*



## IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 Message from Karin
- 2 A delight of wildlife babies in 2020
- 3 Getting down and dirty with our volunteers: our wild heroes for 2020
- 4 Our wishlist

# Message from Karin

2020 was quite the year. Covid-19 changed the world and transformed our lives. We all felt the economic downturn, missed our family and friends and feared that loved-ones might contract the virus. Yet here we are, we came out the other side, slightly worse for the wear, but we have made it. South-Africa's Covid-19 cases have reduced, and we have a 92% recovery rate, better than many first world countries.

For the hospital it was no different. At first, funding spiked at the start of national lockdown. We suspect this was because people were at home and more active on social media than usual, but as lockdown was extended, our donations dwindled. Thankfully, we have weathered the storm and our funds are slowly increasing again.

This is our busiest time of the year as many species are breeding and we generally experience an influx of baby birds and mammals. For us it is a time of renewal and especially this year, a time of rebirth. One of our happiest moments this year was with an adult female pangolin named Ally. She was confiscated from illegal wildlife traders and soon after her arrival we realised she was pregnant.

Ally recovered from her ordeal and she was released into a safe environment. She settled in well and two months after being released, gave birth to a healthy pup.

This was the first recorded case in South Africa of a pangolin giving birth in the wild after being rehabilitated and released, post-confiscation from illegal wildlife traders. We were all reduced to tears of joy and it filled us with hope in an otherwise bleak year.



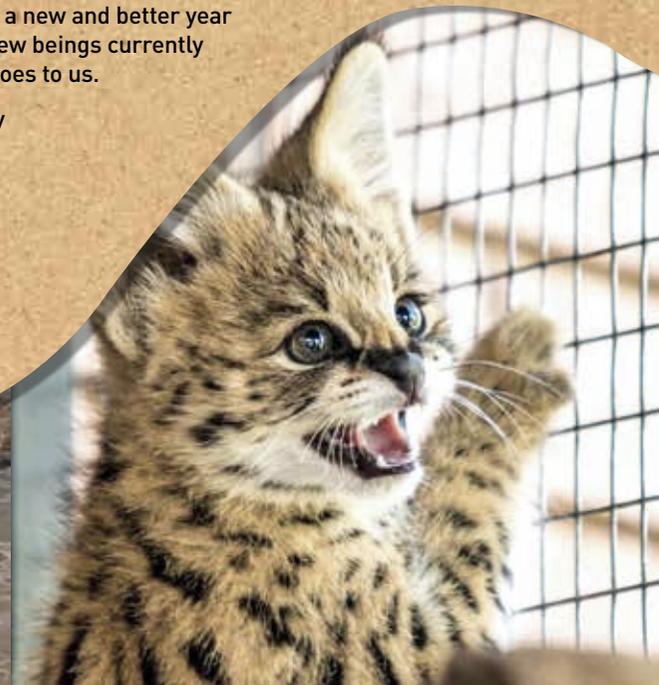
We also had a pangolin give birth in the hospital, but unfortunately the mom was not able to take care of her pup. We named the little female Tot and Nicci took over caring for her. Thankfully Tot is thriving! See later in the newsletter for more detail and pictures of Tot.

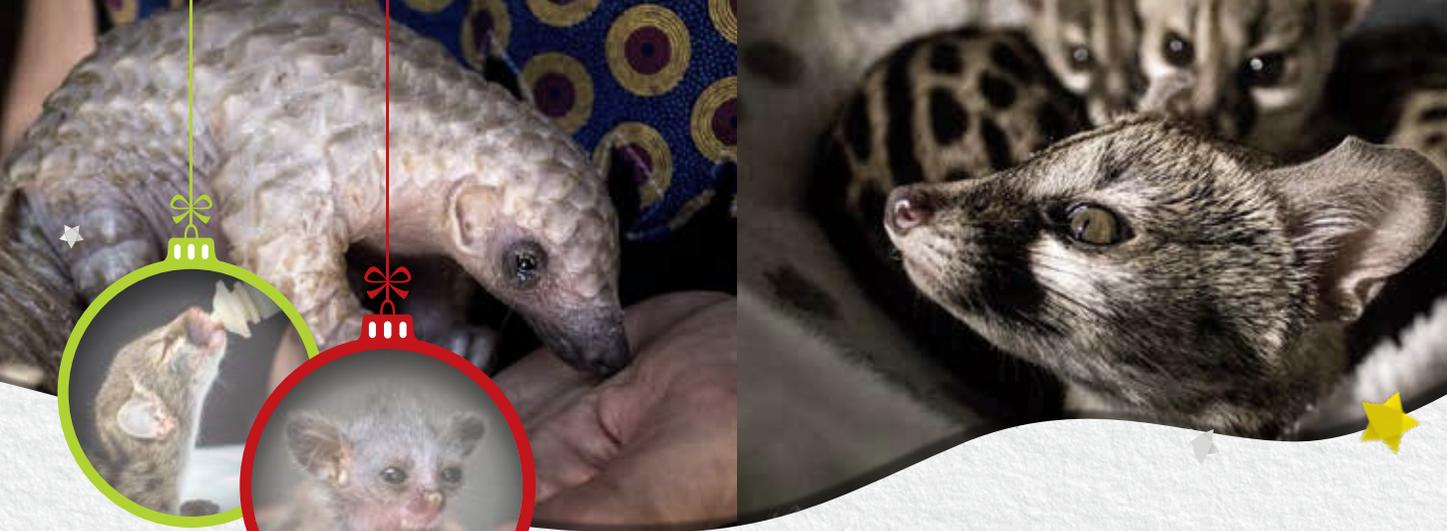
We are currently raising a number of babies from a variety of species – genets, bushbabies, bats, aardwolf, garden birds, owls, vervet monkeys, baboons and porcupines.

We would like our last newsletter for 2020 to be filled with hope, new life and new beginnings. Let us start the festive season with the promise of a new and better year to come and celebrate life! This edition features some of the new beings currently at the hospital and we trust it will bring you as much joy as it does to us.

Thank you for your continued support and we wish you a happy festive season.

*Karin*





## Large-spotted genet kittens (*Genetta maculata*)

Adult genets are solitary except during periods of courtship or when young genets accompany their mothers. A female may have up to two litters a year with two to four young in each. Kittens are born in a cavity nest; their eyes and ears are shut at birth and open after about ten days. They receive their first solid food at about six weeks, but they continue to nurse for a few weeks longer. They start to feed on small pieces of prey that overflows from the mother's meal, then progress on to eating pieces of prey from the mother's mouth. After this, they progress on to hunting insects and other small prey as they mature.

We have five large-spotted genet kittens that are being hand reared by Dr Kelsey Skinner this season. Their histories include being displaced by tree fellers and being genuinely orphaned. Wherever possible, we attempt to reunite mothers with their kittens but if this does not work after several attempts, we make the decision to hand rear them.

Once they are feeding on their own, they will move into an outside enclosure where they will be able to exercise and have exciting enrichment to stimulate their instincts and development. From here they will be moved into an enclosure in situ from where they will be released. This is a long, slow process which will take place once they are able to recognise natural prey items and feed from them successfully. They will be independent enough for their soft release between 6 to 8 months.

# A delight of wildlife babies in 2020

## Temminck's pangolin pup

Female pangolins have a gestation period of five to six months and give birth to just one pup every 18 months or so. At birth, pups, are only about 30cm long and weigh about 230-250grams. Their scales are pink and soft, but start to harden and separate over the next few weeks.

The most notable and memorable of the babies we hand reared this season is a tiny-tot pangolin which we named Tot. A female pangolin had been confiscated from illegal traffickers having been poached. She was named Tayta and, like almost all poached pangolin, was physically and psychologically compromised. She was also heavily pregnant with a pup which we discovered during a routine ultrasound.

On the morning of the 14th September, we found that Tayta had given birth to a tiny, female pup which weighed 236 grams. We weighed her and left them quietly together in the hope that Tayta would feed her pup. A few hours later, we weighed the pup again and checked her blood glucose level. This perfect little pangolin had a very low glucose reading which indicated that she had not been fed. Dr Karin Lourens tube fed her some milk formula and she slowly improved. We made the decision to hand rear the pup so that Tayta, who was still physically compromised and unwell, could gain her strength and recover fully.

An adult breeding female of an endangered species is valuable to the population because she can continue to reproduce. Tayta continues to improve and is approaching her release soon. Tot continues to grow and develop while being hand reared by Nicci Wright who feeds her every 4 hours. Now 63 days old, Tot weighs 1.4 kgs. Her muscles are strengthening well by going on short walks and digging inside termite mounds. Her instincts are stimulated by being exposed to natural surroundings and soon she will realise why she has a long tongue that fits perfectly inside an ant hole!



# A delight of wildlife babies in 2020

## Bush baby neonates (Galago moholi)

Lesser bush babies have two breeding periods during the summer rainfall months when food is abundant. Gestation is between 121 and 123 days and female bush babies may birth a single baby or produce twins. The newborn neonates weigh between 9 and 12 grams at birth, are born with their eyes open and can hold onto their mother's fur. Bushbaby neonates develop rapidly and by day 15, the mother takes them out of the nest on foraging trips with her. She takes them out one by one and parks them in a tree, together or apart, and will fetch them again before dawn. They learn to hunt on their own and by 6 weeks, leave the nest and venture out independently, moving further and further away.

So far this season, Sr Alicia Abbott has hand-reared 11 lesser bushbabies which will all go into a pre-release enclosure in suitable bushveld habitat. This is to habituate them to their new area, its sounds and scents. Once they are ready, they will undergo a soft release with support feeding and monitoring.

## Maple the mischievous Aardwolf (Proteles cristata)

A baby female Aardwolf cub was brought to the Johannesburg Wildlife Vet after failed attempts to reunite her with her family or locate the den. We named her Maple. Our vets found her to be underweight and she had mange. We treated the mange by bathing her regularly in veterinary shampoo. Her weight-gain programme included a special carnivore milk formula which she took to immediately. She currently guzzles about 500ml a day. Maple has quadrupled in size and has a healthy appetite. Aardwolf are insectivorous and when she was ready, we offered her some crickets which she devoured overnight.

Maple is extremely entertaining. She tears around her enclosure while being fed, stops to nibble her carer's toes, only to rush off at full speed again, all the while, purring non-stop. Even at this very young age, she has an intimidating Aardwolf voice. When frightened, or even in play, she emits scary growls which bely her age.

Maple's next step in her rehabilitation process will involve a trip to the Kalahari to an affiliated and permitted rehabilitation centre. This habitat is ideal for Aardwolf as

it offers adequate food items, burrows and holds a healthy aardwolf population. In this environment, she will go into a pre-release enclosure in situ which will allow her to habituate to her new surroundings – the sights, scents and sounds. Here she will be fed natural food items by her new carer. When the time is right and when she is ready, she will be walked out every night so she can learn to forage for her food. As she matures and develops physically, Maple will be allowed out for longer and longer periods, often on her own. It is important that she knows that she can return for support feeding whenever she needs to. This way, her progress and development can be observed as she slowly but surely wilds up. The goal is that she develops her own territory and ultimately has cubs of her own.





# Getting down and dirty with our volunteers:

## *our wild heroes* for 2020



As 2020 draws to a close, we want to shine the spotlight on our wonderful volunteers and thank them for their hard work, dedication and passion.

While working with our unique patients is a privilege, it often involves some dirty and smelly work while avoiding being bitten and clawed! Being a volunteer at a facility like ours requires a willingness to learn about the unique requirements of each species and helping to provide these too.

Our volunteers step up whenever we ask for assistance, no matter what. They support the hospital and our staff and, most importantly, the wildlife we are all there for.

We appreciate our volunteers and everything they each do!

# Our wishlist

We appeal to our supporters to consider replacing their traditional “Christmas shopping” with donations instead.

We sure could use:

- Cosmic pet carriers (small and medium)
- Royal Canin kitty milk powder and Royal Canin puppy milk powder
- Any fruit and vegetables
- Stationery (whiteboard pens, clipboards)
- Steel weld mesh
- Huggies Premies Nappies
- Lactogen Starter Infant Formula 1

