

# NEWSLETTER JUNE

Dear clients,

It is June, and we are already halfway through the year! In this newsletter we give you more information on the bizarre life of the female hyena. 10 June a small workshop was given about feeding rhinos in the drought, and we give you short summary on what has been said. Lastly, we proudly tell you more about an epic translocation; taking elephants from dry Namibia to lush DRC!

All the best!

Kind regards, Ulf and Mariska

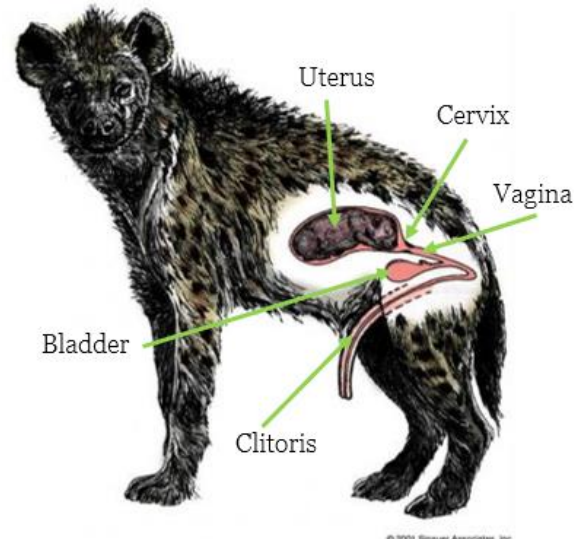
## THE BIZARRE LIFE OF THE HYENA FEMALE

Although hyenas have a bad reputation, they are actually fascinating animals! They are intelligent, excellent predators, and have an incredible social structure. On top of that, the females have a bizarre anatomical feature; a pseudo-penis!

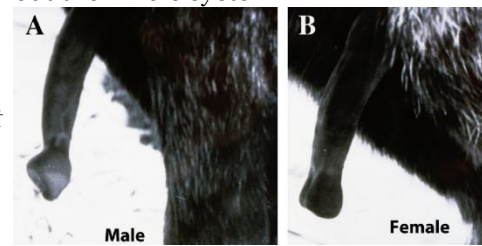
In the female hyena the clitoris is shaped and positioned like a penis (pseudo-penis) and can become erect. The hyena female is the only female mammal on Earth who does not have an external vagina opening. Urination, mating and giving birth all happen through the pseudo-penis.

High-ranked females develop offspring with higher levels of androgen (male sex hormone associated with aggression) than low-ranked mothers. This gives her cubs a better survival chance than those of low-ranking females. However, providing extra hormones for the cubs comes at a price... It damages the ovaries of the mother, making it more difficult to conceive next time. It also causes the reproductive organ to grow, the clitoris (with birth canal) can protrude to about 17-18 cm from the body. The birth canal is only 2.5 cm in diameter, and the tissue often tears when the 0.9 kg cub squeezes through... First-time mothers therefore have a high death rate of 9-18%, and lose 60% of their first born young.

Why hyenas have this extraordinary genital system is still unknown. One theory is that natural selection favoured the largest and most aggressive females, and the accompanying higher levels of androgen might have caused the genital system become more and more male-like. This genital system also gives the female control over the father of the offspring, as the female must give her full cooperation in order for a male to mate with her (some say it is an anti-rape device). The female's bladder empties in the same channel, so when a female mated, and she changes her mind about her partner, she can flush out the whole system.



*The difference between the male's penis, and the female's pseudo-penis is quite difficult to see. In females (B), the pseudo-penis is a bit shorter, has a greater thickness and a more rounded glans (structure located at the tip of the penis) © Cunha et al (2014)*



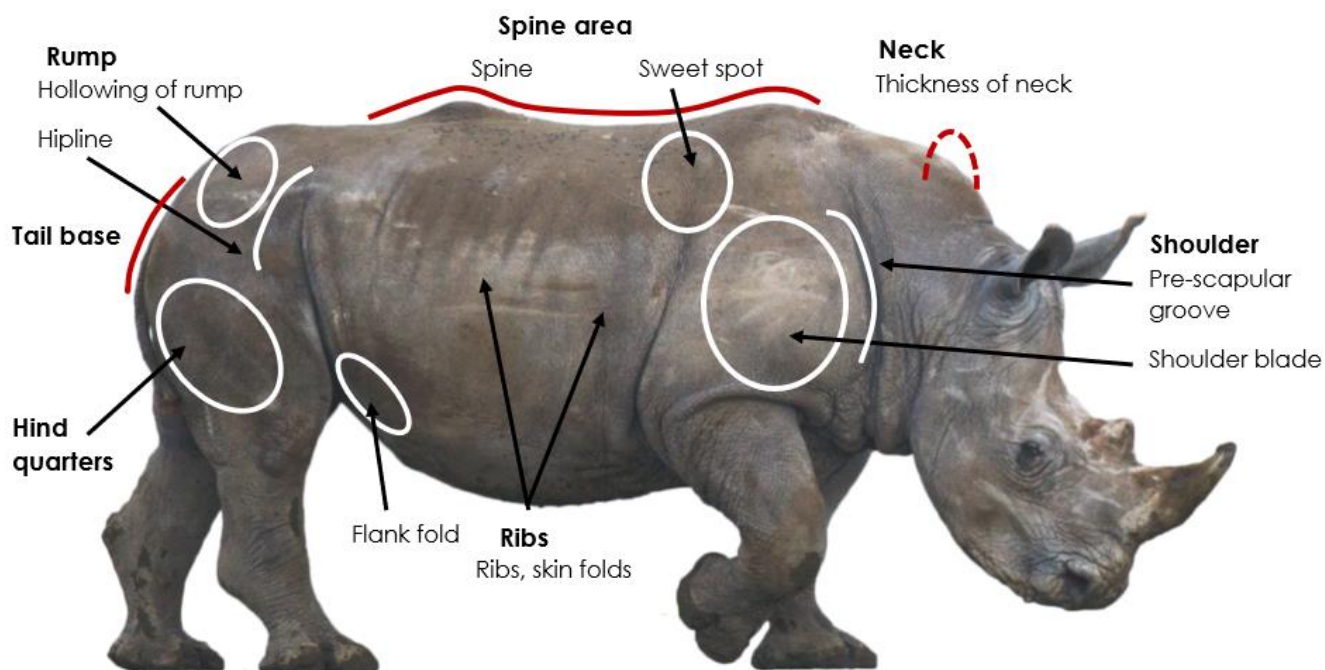
## RHINO NUTRITION WORKSHOP

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June HoRN organized a rhino nutrition day at Düsternbrook Guest Farm. This day focused on what to feed rhinos in the drought, and whether boskos (bush feed) was a good idea for white rhinos, which are after all grazers. The main speaker of the day was Craig Shepstone (Wildlife Nutrition Services cc), he spoke about nutrition in general, digestion, supplements, and made very clear that there are a lot of as yet unresearched/ unknown issues surrounding the use of boskos in hind-gut fermenters (horses, rhinos). Simone Kleber (veterinarian) spoke about her experiences with feeding boskos to her horses, and Larry Bussey (Bos Pro Feeds) explained about his boskos-making business. All in all a very interesting day!

Rhinos are hindgut fermenters, who depend on the action of microorganisms in the large caecum and colon (hindgut) to assist in the breakdown of dietary fibre into utilisable nutrients (energy and proteins). Because food first passes through a simple stomach and the small intestine, where digestion of most simple starches and protein take place, rhinos are more susceptible to harmful effects (toxins etc.) in poor quality diets. In ruminants on the other hand, microbial fermentation is believed to assist in neutralising many potentially harmful dietary constituents. The hindgut fermenters also don't have the advantage of utilising the hindgut microbes as a source of protein where these form a very important source of protein in ruminants.

Everybody is talking about boskos these days, but the most important question one must ask is what is exactly boskos? What bushes do you have? The same bush likely differs in the North or the South when you compared the nutritional value of it. Also the stage of growth and time of harvesting is very important, when there are no more pods/green leaves on the bushes, the nutritional value will be very low, and the lignin content high. Before one starts feeding boskos, it is advisable to have you water and some of your target bushes analysed. A nutritional specialist can then advise you on what supplements are needed for a specific farm. It is NOT advisable to start feeding boskos without this input from an expert...!

We also shortly discussed our body condition score system for white rhinos. Below you see which body regions of the rhino are important to look at when you want to score the condition. We work with a 4-scale system, whereby 1= emaciated, 2= thin, 3= ideal, 4= fat. On our website you can find an article about body condition in rhinos, download it [here](#).



## ELEPHANT TRANSLOCATION

As you might have heard, in a joint operation with Parc de Vallée de la N'Sele, Mount Etjo Safari Lodge and Erindi Private Game Reserve, we have translocated African elephants from Namibia to the DRC. On our website we have uploaded an information document with a more detailed story about the whole translocation, you can download it [here](#). Below a short summary of our epic trip!

### Why translocating elephants?

The elephants we took to the DRC originate from the Mount Etjo reserve, Namibia. The current elephant population has started to outgrow the reserve's carrying capacity, and the persistent current drought in Namibia has put additional strain on the habitat. To prevent severe habitat degradation, the elephant population had to be reduced but how?

No reserve in Namibia was willing or able to take more elephants, birth control is very expensive and culling was not an option for the Mount Etjo team. In 2017 we started a big translocation project in the DRC, where we translocated African game species to a new nature reserve in the DRC; Parc de la Vallée de la N'Sele. We believed this reserve was the perfect solution for the elephants!

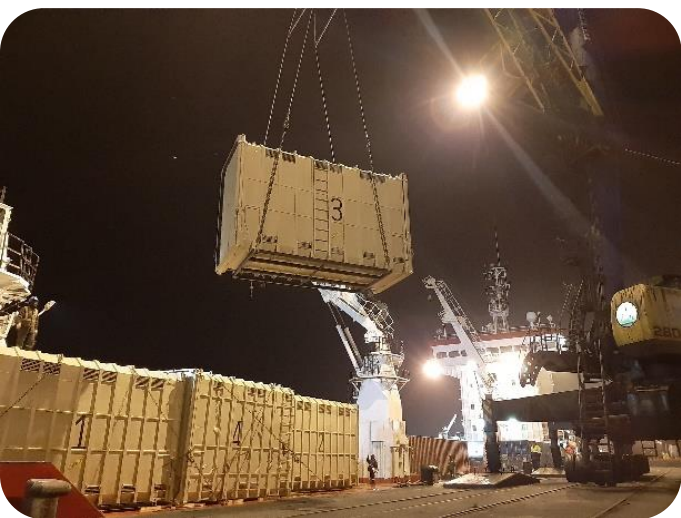
### Translocation process

After a year of planning, meetings and consulting we finally started the translocation process on 23 May. With the help of the Erindi Private Game Reserve team we captured a family herd on Mount Etjo. The elephants were transported in special elephant crates from Erindi.



*Elephant capture, always a stressful job, but all went well! Photo credits: Annette Oelofse.*

We transported the elephants by ship, as road transport would take too long and would be too uncomfortable for the elephants. As we translocated an entire family (including the big matriarch), flying was also not an option. The game we translocated so far tolerated the ship very well, the speed is constant, and its much cooler than on land.



Around 20:00 we arrived in the harbour of Walvis Bay. To give the elephants as much space as possible, all four Erindi elephant crates were loaded on the ship the 'El Nino', and we opened all interconnecting doors. This way the family could be together for the 5-day trip on the ocean and Congo-river.



*Taking care of elephants is a privilege, but also hard work! We fed and watered the elephants several times per day. As we had 4 crates available, we were able to lock the elephants in on one side so we could clean the other side, and vice versa. The elephants were very calm throughout the sea trip, possibly because they had the comfort of each other.*



When we were out on sea, we started to 'train' the elephants to get them used to a watering- and feeding routine. We had put water- and feeding troughs outside the crates, and they quickly learned to put their trunk out to get water and food via specially designed ventilation/feeding hatches. Soon they also discovered that it was lots of fun to receive water directly squirted into the trunk, and we were rewarded with the occasional shower in return! We fed the elephants grass, lucerne, camel thorn pods, branches and a special game pellet.

The elephants were very calm and took the sea trip very well. They ate and drank well. The weather during the first 2 days was excellent, overcast and cool. When we reached the waters of northern Angola it started to get substantially warmer and more humid.



After 4 days on the ocean, we reached the mighty Congo river. Now it was not long anymore!



### Final stretch

After half a day on the Congo river we reached Matadi harbour. The Congolese pilot boat provided us with fresh branches, and the elephants were locked into two crates for the road transport. In the harbour the two elephant crates were loaded onto flatbeds, and we started the arduous journey to Kinshasa. This was a long trip, but luckily again the weather was in our favour. It was misty and cool until late morning. We stopped a few times to give water and fresh food, which the elephants enjoyed a lot!

We reached Kinshasa around lunch time, which was not optimal, but unavoidable. Luckily a massive police escort was organized to get us through Kinshasa as quickly as possible.



*From left to right: the pilot bringing lots of fresh branches on the Congo river, offloading at Matadi harbour, driving through Kinshasa and the reserve*

And then finally... the moment we all have been waiting for... the release! Before releasing them into the reserve, the elephants were first released into a special pre-release elephant boma. This way we could closely monitor the elephants, they could recover from the trip, and learn that even Congolese fences have electricity. By learning them not to touch fences, the likelihood of break-outs is highly reduced.



*Release of the elephants in the boma*



*After 1.5 days the elephants were released in the 20,000 ha reserve. The first night they already crossed the river, and spend most of their time close to the river and its side streams. The elephants are closely monitored by the rangers to see which areas they like and what they eat. The matriarch has a VHF/GPS collar, so we get regular updates on where the elephants are.*

This is one of the first long distance translocations of a family group of elephants, including a matriarch and another adult cow by sea. We strongly believe that these elephants will greatly benefit from the translocation. Of course, the translocation was hard on the elephants but we believe some short-term discomfort is a far better outcome than the eventual and unavoidable culling of excess elephant populations. Translocations of wild animals are always stressful and risky, but an essential component of resettling wildlife into new or understocked reserves. With the human population explosion and ever-increasing pressure on nature and conservation areas, we believe it is essential that every effort is made to support credible conservation efforts.

The first group of elephants in the Parc de la Vallée de la N'Sele look happy and healthy. The first days they kept staying close to the boma, but now they are slowly exploring their new home. It is amazing to see that they spend a lot of time in and around one of the big rivers in the Parc, they truly seem to enjoy the all the water! They also seem very happy with the green grass and bushes, often having their mouth full with lots of green forage. We continue to have close contact with the people in the DRC, and we regularly visit the DRC ourselves to check on the elephants and the other wildlife we translocated there. We will reintroduce the other family soon, and thereafter both the bulls.

This translocation was an effort of many people and companies. We thank everybody who played a part in it, without them this translocation would not have been possible! In particular we would like to thank:

~Parc de la Vallée de la N'Sele ~ Mount Etjo ~ Erindi Private Game Reserve ~ Ministry of Environment and Tourism ~ ICCN ~ African Shipping SARL ~ Ship crew of the El Nino ~ Namport ~ Société Congolaise des Transports et Ports (SCTP) ~ Cowboys

DR ULF TUBBESING  
P.O. BOX 50533, BACHBRECHT,  
WINDHOEK  
+264 (0) 81 128 3050  
[ULFT@AFRICAONLINE.COM.NA](mailto:ULFT@AFRICAONLINE.COM.NA)  
[WWW.WILDLIFEVETSNAMIBIA.COM](http://WWW.WILDLIFEVETSNAMIBIA.COM)  
FACEBOOK: [WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA](#)  
YOUTUBE: [WILDLIFE VETS NAMIBIA](#)

Check out our  
video about  
the entire trip  
[here!](#)

