To say that September had been busy is to say nothing! We had worked on many exciting projects and campaigns. The highlight of the month was Jerusalema Dance Challenge that was organized between The Black Mambas and Transfrontier Africa in partnership with Pondoro Game Lodge.

The challenge aimed to celebrate the achievements of South Africans during the COVID-19 pandemic and was performed, filmed and launched on YouTube and other social media for The National Heritage Day on the 24th September.

The video was watched 30,522 times on Facebook and 10,635 times on Instagram. It also marks the opening of the South African borders for tourists on the 1 October, hence, the beginning of the new chapter in the life of our country.

Huge thank you to everybody for dancing their hearts out, Pondoro Game Lodge for organizing and sponsoring the filming and Avalon Media Africa for the stunning media.
In September The Black Mambas rangers continued with their core duties in the reserve. They patrolled the boundaries of the reserve day and night and did intensive snare sweeping. During one of the operations in the buffer zone, they found and removed a few snares. Mid September The Mambas found and seized items that belong to poachers and perhaps copper thieves too - plastic that they use to tie copper, and old clothing.

In September we also celebrated World Rhino Day. For this day our partner Empowering Success launched zoom talk about The Black Mamba APU to highlight their work in anti-poaching and wildlife security sector of Conservation.

Thank you, Alice Bromage, and Empowering Success for the inspirational talk and your efforts in spreading awareness further.

The Black Mambas would like to say a huge thank you to our amazing partners Hi-Tec South-Africa for donating new, quality combat boots to our all-female anti-poaching unit! Now The Black Mambas can conquer any rocky road to protect those who need it the most - our iconic African animals.
THE BUSH BABIES ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

BY LEWYN MAEFALA, PROJECT MANAGER

For The National Arbor Week South Africans were encouraged to plant indigenous trees as a practical and symbolic gesture of sustainable environmental management. The Bush Babies learners planted 3 Baobab trees donated by Marietjie Mare.

We would like to say thank you, Marietjie Mare for this donation and for the opportunity to educate our Bush Babies about the importance of Baobab trees.

In September The Bush Babies together with The Black Mambas and Olifants West Nature Reserve, delivered another 90 food parcels to the locals and it was our 5th trip! We would like to say A HUGE THANK YOU to every person who helped so much to provide food for the most vulnerable families. We never thought we would be able to do it 5 times! We are determined to continue our campaign to deliver more food to communities!
The team evaluated the condition of the Secheto tributary which passes under a busy bridge in the Makhushane village. This tributary has sewage feeding into the water source, diapers floating in bags and dead domestic animals. These issues were captured, stakeholders were engaged. We hope to see change soon.

A successful snare sweep was conducted in September by EMs in collaboration with The Black Mambas, Phalaborwa Natural Heritage Foundation, Wild Response and the local residents, reaching a total of 45 members including the ward Councillor. We are grateful for all members who were actively involved in the snare sweep, removing 12 snares, giving our animals a safe environment to live in.

On The National Clean Up day our Ems went to the Maseke community where litter was picked up, bottles were collected and separated from the other litter. In total, the team collected and filled 15 bags with garbage.

"Snare removal provides our animals with a safe environment to live in" - Lewyn Maefala
The beautiful day of 24th September was National Heritage Day in South Africa. To celebrate this day our Bush Grannies went to Kruger National Park with the aim to see the Elephant Matriarchs in their natural habitat. On our way we stopped at Masorini archeological and heritage site, then went to Letaba Rest Camp where The Bush Grannies and Grandpas saw different animals in the wild.

Upon arrival Letaba staff members took us on a tour around the museum where the grannies were educated more about the Matriarchs.

We would like to thank The Kansas City Zoo for funding The Bush Grannies program and The Letaba Rest Camp staff members for the great Kruger experience!

"Just like the Elephant Matriarchs, the Matriarchs of the local African communities lead their younger generation"

-Lewyn Maefala
September is when we traditionally do our phytomass study across Olifants West. This involves cutting 10 m² of grass at each location weighing the grass, drying it and then weighing it once all moisture has gone. For the last 13 years we have done this by air drying the bags with grass and weighing each day until the weight no longer drops. This can be quite a long process and then if the weather turns and we get rains the weight of the cut grass can even increase. This year we were very happy to get a large custom-built oven donated to us by SAION. This means we can dry the bags in a controlled fashion and get the results faster and more accurately.

Predator prey study has been in full swing with scat collection, sample crushing, hair cleaning and microscopy. We have made great progress and expect to finish all the field work in October.

Mike Holloway managed to get clearance from his university to continue with fieldwork so we were happy to see him return for more data collection. He is doing his Masters in geohydrology and is looking at the underground water and the interaction between that and surface water. This particular visit Mike measured the magnetic field below ground along dolerite dykes. This will allow for a very high resolution of some of the geological features and can be used to predict where groundwater will be stronger.
In September we continued working on our annual predator-prey survey. The scat of predators was collected in the bush and then examined under the microscope to determine what species apex predators are preying on.

Fire near Olifants West Nature Reserve had been reported in September. Thanks to Transfrontier Africa team, we spotted it very fast. Reaction from Olifants West reserve manager Roan Ravenhill made sure it would not spread further. Arsonists are suspected.

**Thank you, everyone, who took part in this operation and made sure the reserve itself is safe!**

An armed escort was done for the researchers doing the survey of water birds and water-dependent species along the Olifants River. While doing the survey, we also tried to identify nesting sites for the Pels Fishing Owl.

This month we had been very lucky to finally see Cheetahs in the reserve! It has been long time, and finally we could welcome them on our side.
We take this opportunity to say a big THANK YOU to all our sponsors and donors:

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