



The Greater Makalali Private Game Reserve

BUFFALOS ARRIVE!

On the 19th November 2008, Ross Kettles (GMPGR Warden) and Dr Peter Rogers had an early morning start, heading out to Jacob's Creek to oversee the loading of the GMPGR buffalo. The plan was to drive the buffalo into corridors and eventually onto the loading ramp where they would “walk” into the truck... Unfortunately, this plan failed and luckily Dr Rogers was on hand to take charge and revert to plan B – immobilising the animals and loading them onto the truck using stretchers. Luckily the weather was ideal! Whilst Dr Rogers, Ross and the ground crew were darting and loading, Audrey Delsink (GMPGR Research Ecologist) was racing to meet them from Hoedspruit where she had just collected the collar that had been couriered the day before. Our timing was perfect, and the last adult cow had just been immobilised as Audrey arrived. After loading her onto the truck, we started to fit the tracking collar.



All was well till the cow's 9 month old calf was loaded. Boy oh boy! What a feisty little thing! It took an army load of ground crew to keep her "still" and prevent her thrashing around – all while Dr Rogers, Ross and Audrey were still in the little compartment finishing up fitting the collar!



Finally the collar was fitted, and Dr Rogers administered the antidote – after we all made a hasty retreat out of the truck. Ross and the State Vet's Assistant the placed the seals on the truck. These seals would be opened by the representative in our region at the release point.



At last, all the "official" things were done, permits were signed and handed over to Ross. What a relief!



After a final check, the long journey to the reserve began. The heavily laden truck could only travel at 70 km/h, and with the wet and muddy roads, progressed very slowly. Finally, it arrived and we escorted the driver to the release site. Ross guided the driver to align with the off-loading ramp to facilitate the buffalo's alighting from the truck without injury.

Finally, the truck was lined up, the seals officially opened and the first 2 animals (collared cow and her calf) stepped off the truck.





They were followed by the sub-adult bull and cows, and lastly, by the old “dagga boy”. The young bull turned back to give us a rather indignant look, but soon, all was forgiven as the little herd started feeding.





The herd moved off slowly and were spotted a few km's down the fence line, feeding happily.

Congratulations to all on an exciting development for the GMPGR! Well done to Ross and his team for their tremendous effort.

Audrey Delsink

