

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE ANIMALS OF KIMBERLEY AND SURROUNDS

With special reference to  
Magersfontein Battlefield



# Acknowledgements

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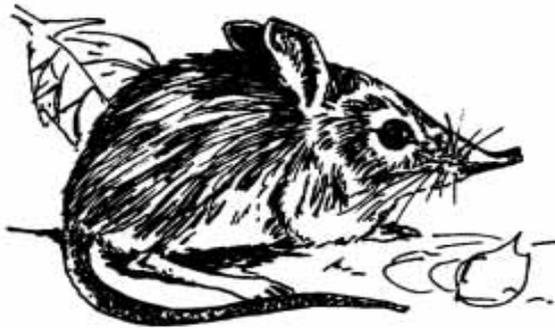
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Other booklets available:

- \* A beginner's guide to the plants of Kimberley and surrounds, with special reference to Magersfontein.
- \* Magersfontein species lists.
- \* Magersfontein 11 December 1899, by Colonel Duxbury.

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## INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been designed to help you learn more about the birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians of Kimberley, its surrounds and Magersfontein. Magersfontein Battlefield Museum is one of the McGregor Museum's field museums. It was established to preserve Anglo Boer War battlefields and some of the beautiful koppie veld surrounding Kimberley. This guide goes hand in hand with the Beginner's Guide to the Plants of Kimberley and surrounds, with special reference to Magersfontein.

### Climate

The semi-arid savanna surrounding Kimberley is known for its hot and often dry summers followed by cold winters. The temperature varies from a minimum of  $-8^{\circ}\text{C}$  in winter to a maximum of  $41^{\circ}\text{C}$  during the summer months, with an average of  $19^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The unpredictable rainfall mostly occurs in the form of short downpours or thunderstorms. On average about 400 mm of rain falls annually and long droughts are common. Most of the rain usually falls during October to November and February to March.

### Geology and vegetation

This is described in the Beginner's Guide to the Plants of Kimberley and surrounds, with special reference to Magersfontein.

### Animals and their habitat

The vegetation surrounding Kimberley is classified as Kimberley thorn bushveld, and is an open savanna of mostly trees and grasses. This vegetation can be further subdivided into a variety of veld types. The plants within these are adapted in interesting ways to survive in dry areas. Not only are the plants able to survive in this semi-arid climate; a diversity of animals are also able to thrive on the drought-resistant vegetation. Some of these are the abundant Armoured Ground Crickets, the spritely Springbok and the Whitebacked Vulture that scavenges on animal carcasses.

The natural environment of Magersfontein is a good example of an unique ecosystem that is only found around Kimberley and Windsorton. The wildlife here is mostly small and seldom conspicuous, but can be found if searched for. Often there is ample evidence of their presence. The birds are usually the first to be seen and easily identified. This field guide only illustrates the most common species as an introduction to the area's wildlife.

### People and their environment

The ecology of this area reflects the relationship between people and their environment. During earlier times people had less impact on the ecology; mostly because there were fewer people then. More recently the number of people has drastically increased and cities and towns have been built and expanded. Farming has increased to provide food for the growing population. All these developments change the landscape and the delicate ecological balance of the natural environment.

Taking a closer look at Kimberley's surrounds, the effects of mining (mine dumps and pits) and farming (farm dams, bare patches of veld, soil erosion) are easily noticed. Game and cattle farming on farms surrounding Kimberley have had an effect on the plant and animal species on farmland. Bare patches of ground occur around water holes and farm dams because of continuous trampling by game or cattle. Fences have restricted the movement of animals and as a result many areas have become overgrazed, and now have a much sparser vegetation cover. Hunting, often intensive, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards has led to the low numbers of herbivores left today.

At Magersfontein Battlefield Museum, recent historical events have changed part of the natural environment. One of South Africa's most famous battles was fought here in 1899, as part of the Anglo Boer War of 1899 - 1902. Trenches dug then are still visible, and these defences, together with British shellfire and the Boer forces who occupied the area for four months all

affected the vegetation. Magersfontein was also a stock farm for many years and certain areas were overgrazed, which resulted in an increase in a number of undesirable shrubs. Many of the larger wildlife species were killed or fled during this period. Since 1971, when Magersfontein was established as a museum, a few larger game species have been reintroduced and other wildlife has returned.

How to use this booklet

Once you have found an animal you want to identify, turn to the reference sheets on the centre pages. Try and find the sketch that is the most similar to the subject and then turn to the page listed below the sketch for further details and information.

Please remember that animals should not be disturbed or harassed in any way, and birds' eggs and nests should be left untouched and only studied from a distance to prevent the birds abandoning the nest and eggs/chicks.

Resemble not the slimy snails,  
That with their filth record  
their trails.

Let it be told where you have been  
You leave the face of nature  
clean.

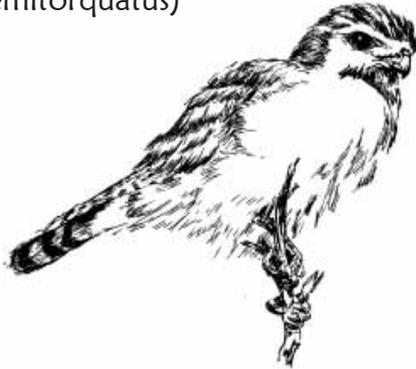
Litter causes injuries to, or the death of, many animals, so place your litter in a refuse bin or keep it in your bag until you can safely discard it in a bin when you get back from your trip.

Suggested further reading material is listed on the last page.

For further information contact the McGregor Museum at  
Tel. 053-8420099.

Common birds  
PYGMY FALCON

Dwergvalkie, segwetsane (Roberts no. 186)  
(Polihierax semitorquatus)



**DESCRIPTION:** This tiny bird of prey, shrike-like in size and appearance, is the smallest diurnal raptor species in southern Africa. This is its most distinguishing feature. The trend of male birds being more brightly coloured than females is reversed in the Pygmy Falcon; in contrast to the plain, grey upper backs of males, those of females are adorned with rich, red-brown coloured feathers.

**BEHAVIOUR:** It is intimately linked to a “host” species, the Sociable Weaver, as it utilises their nests for both breeding and sleeping purposes. Its high pitched, penetrating call, usually accompanied by vigorous head bobbing and tail wagging displays, is often heard at Magersfontein and on game farms around Kimberley. Pygmy Falcons are effective little hunters, with items such as large insects, small lizards, small rodents and birds regularly on the menu. Sociable Weavers, however, are seldom preyed upon.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Its eggs are laid in one of the numerous chambers of a Sociable Weaver nest, and the entrance to occupied chambers are distinctly marked by a coating of pinkish-white



- See page 53 for explanation

## PALE CHANTING GOSHAWK

Bleeksingvalk, mmankokonono (Roberts no.162)

(*Melierax canorus*)



**DESCRIPTION:** The Pale Chanting Goshawk, simply known as a PCG, is a pale blue-grey raptor with long, red legs and white rump, which is very obvious in flight. The name is derived from the bird's colour and tuneful piping call uttered whilst flying or arching. Juvenile birds, mottled brown in appearance, also show the broad, white rump as well as the upright posture characteristic of these birds.

**BEHAVIOUR:** PCGs are a common sight in arid savanna, Karoo and semi-desert habitats, where they perch on the tops of the thorn trees, and are also often seen on the top of the Highland Regiment's Memorial on Magersfontein. They prey on lizards, insects, birds and small mammals.

**DID YOU KNOW?** These fierce hunters are known to remove the heads of larger bird species with a single strike of their talons.

## WHITE QUILLED KORHAAN

Witvlerkswartkorhaan, tlatlawê (Roberts no. 239,  
(*Eupodotis afraoides*)



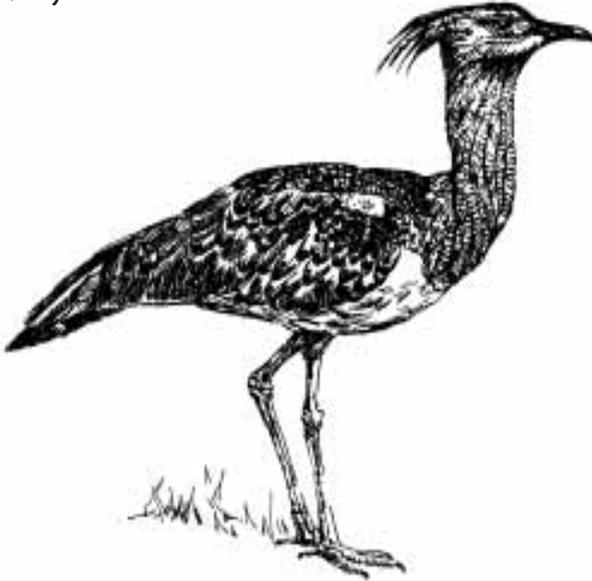
**DESCRIPTION:** These medium-sized birds are encountered in habitats ranging from grassveld to semi-desert conditions. The males are very noisy and also territorial (defend a territory), usually standing on termite mounds or other prominent positions, to proclaim their presence. This feature makes this bird easily recognisable.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Other White Quilled Korhaans are actively chased from an occupied territory. The call, frantic and harshly loud, is usually uttered when the male is airborne, and when it comes in to land its almost vertical fall is marked by frantic calling, rapidly flapping wings and dangling yellow legs, giving the impression of a small, black helicopter. Females are less noticeable and also tend to be more secretive in nature. The White Quilled Korhaan's food mainly consists of plant material and seeds, but insects are also regularly taken.

**DID YOU KNOW?** These birds do not construct a nest. A single, very camouflaged egg is laid in a slight scrape on the ground.

## KORI BUSTARD

Gompou, kgôri (Roberts no. 230)  
(*Ardeotis kori*)



**DESCRIPTION:** With a body mass of up to 19 kg, Kori Bustards compete only with the Mute Swan as the heaviest flying birds. It is characterised by its large size, long legs, large grey bill and thickly feathered throat. A raised tail and fanned undertail coverts add the finishing touches to the display posture.

**BEHAVIOUR:** They are reluctant flyers, but once airborne fly with slow, powerful wing beats. The diet consists mainly of insects, small vertebrates, seeds and thorn tree gum. The throat can be filled with air when displaying, and this leads to the drumming wum-wum-wum calls uttered by males during the breeding season. This season commences in summer, and the well-camouflaged eggs are laid on the bare ground. After breeding these birds can gather in flocks of up to 40 birds, a truly magnificent sight.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The Afrikaans name came from this bird's habit of eating thorn tree gum.

## ROCK MARTIN

Kransswael, phêta (Roberts no. 529)  
(*Hirundo fuligula*)



**DESCRIPTION:** This small, cinnamon-brown member of the swallow family is characterised by a square, dark-brown tail which, when fanned, is adorned with a row of little white “windows”. Leisurely gliding, twisting and circling, and characteristically fanning the tail, this little bird is hard to miss.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Rock Martins are aerial hunters, eating flying insects while in flight. Rocky cliffs and gorges can be considered their natural habitat, but these friendly creatures are now so closely associated with man that they regularly nest against vertical walls of buildings, culverts or bridges. They like to perch on rock and window ledges. Magersfontein’s café is fortunate to have a resident breeding pair, which use the same nest every year. Two to three broods per breeding season, which usually commences in August, are raised by the energetic parents.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The nest, a half-cup shaped structure built with small mud-pellets and lined with feathers or grass, is normally placed under a roof or any available overhang.

## MOUNTAIN CHAT

Bergwagter (Roberts no. 586)  
(*Oenanthe monticola*)



**DESCRIPTION:** As the name implies, the Mountain Chat is mainly associated with a rocky habitat. These birds come in a number of colour varieties, ranging from a pale grey to a jet black form. The rump, however, is always white and the broad, white outer-tail pattern highly noticeable in flight. Males can easily be distinguished from females by the white shoulder patches, grey crowns and napes, which contrast sharply in especially the black forms.

**BEHAVIOUR:** This is a bold bird in its selection of prominent perches, which include rocks, termite mounds and even garden walls. Foraging mainly takes place on the ground, but flying insects are sometimes taken on the wing. Two to three broods per season are raised in the neat cup-like nest, lined with fibres and hairs and usually situated under a sloping stone, or in a hole in a rock or wall.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The male has a loud and flute-like call, but can also perfectly mimic the calls of more than eight other bird species.

## CRIMSONBREASTED SHRIKE

Rooiborslaksman, kgorogoro (Roberts no. 739)  
(*Laniarius atrococcineus*)



**DESCRIPTION:** The combination of highly contrasting colours, namely jet black, pure white and bright red, makes this large, insect-eating shrike species the most striking bird at Magersfontein, indeed in the entire Northern Cape. On very rare occasions the crimson is substituted by a rich, yellow colour.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Despite its striking colours, it is surprisingly hard to see, which can be attributed to its habit of crawling amongst the branches of bigger trees and bushes. The deep, resonant call from the female, almost immediately answered by a sharp reply from the male, is one of the most characteristic duets of the Kalahari sand veld and thorn veld areas.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The nest, a bark-covered bowl lined with fine fibres and roots, is well camouflaged and usually very hard to locate.

WHITEBROWED SPARROWWEAVER  
Koringvoël, mogale (Roberts no. 799)  
(Plocepasser mahali)



**DESCRIPTION:** The Whitebrowed Sparrowweaver is characterised by appearing more heavysset than other birds of similar size, with a broad white eyebrow and white rump. The distribution is closely linked to arid regions; it mainly occurs in open thorn veld and Kalahari sand veld habitats around Kimberley.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Whitebrowed Sparrowweavers, being social in nature, tend to keep up a constant, loud and repetitive chatter. The nests are built close together and are usually situated on the western side of thorn trees to avoid the scorching morning sun. Two types of nests are constructed; a roosting nest with two entrances, and a breeding nest with a single entrance.

**DID YOU KNOW?** This bird has numerous common names in Afrikaans and two of them, when directly translated into English, are “war sparrow” (oorlogsmossie) and “dumb sparrow” (dommossie). Both names are derived from the fighting behaviour amongst males, which is often so fierce that the birds, so involved in battle, sometimes fall to the ground and are easily picked up by a person.

## SOCIABLE WEAVER

Versamelvoël, kgwêrêrê, thaga (Roberts no. 800)

(*Philetairus socius*)



**DESCRIPTION:** This small, highly gregarious bird, a true Kalahari citizen, is mainly identified by its black face mask with bluish bill. However, an even more distinctive and well-known feature than the actual birds themselves are their nests, which are huge, jointly-built thatched structures easily weighing more than a ton. They are normally situated in the forks of stout Acacia branches, the tops of quiver trees (kokerboom) and the crosspieces of telephone poles.

**BEHAVIOUR:** The nest is maintained, and even enlarged, throughout the year. Grass straws cleverly placed diagonally downwards into the chamber entrance forms a secure barrier against most intruders. The well-insulated nests are used for breeding, which is initiated by rainfall, as well as to escape the harsh, midday Kalahari temperatures. It is usually a hive of activity, and marked by the fast chatter of the owners. Sociable Weavers seldom drink water, and forage together in large flocks in their search for insects and seeds.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Unoccupied nest chambers are regularly taken over by other species such as the Pygmy Falcon, Rosy-faced Lovebird and Red-headed Finch, and even their main predators, the highly poisonous Boomslang and Cape Cobra.

## CAPE BUNTING

Rooivlerkstreepkoppie, thagapitse, mmaborokoane

(Roberts no. 885)

(*Emberiza capensis*)



**DESCRIPTION:** The Cape Bunting is a small, slenderly-built bird (roughly the size of a mossie) easily recognised by a streaky, grey back and crown, and boldly striped black and white head. It has bright, reddish-brown wings and grey underparts which are characteristic of this species. Its song is usually performed from a prominent perch.

**BEHAVIOUR:** These birds are normally associated with well-watered, rocky habitats and are well camouflaged while perched on rocks. Cape Buntings spend most of their time foraging on the ground, with seeds, insects and spiders the main items on their menu. The nest, a somewhat tatty cup of twigs and roots, is usually built in a low bush or creeper, or sometimes on the ground next to a rock.

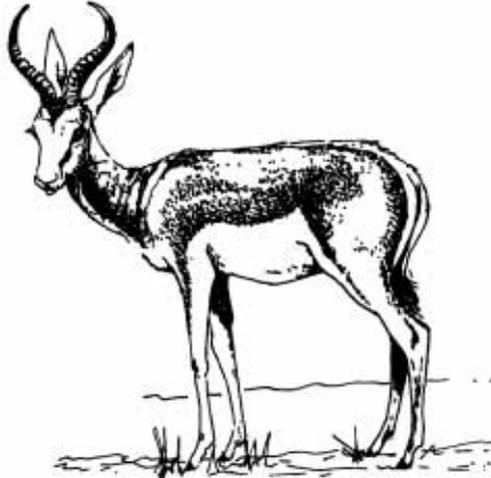
**DID YOU KNOW?** They are quite common on the koppies around Kimberley and around the Magersfontein's café area.

Common mammals



SPRINGBOK

Springbok, tshêpê (Smithers no. 314)  
(*Antidorcas marsupialis*)



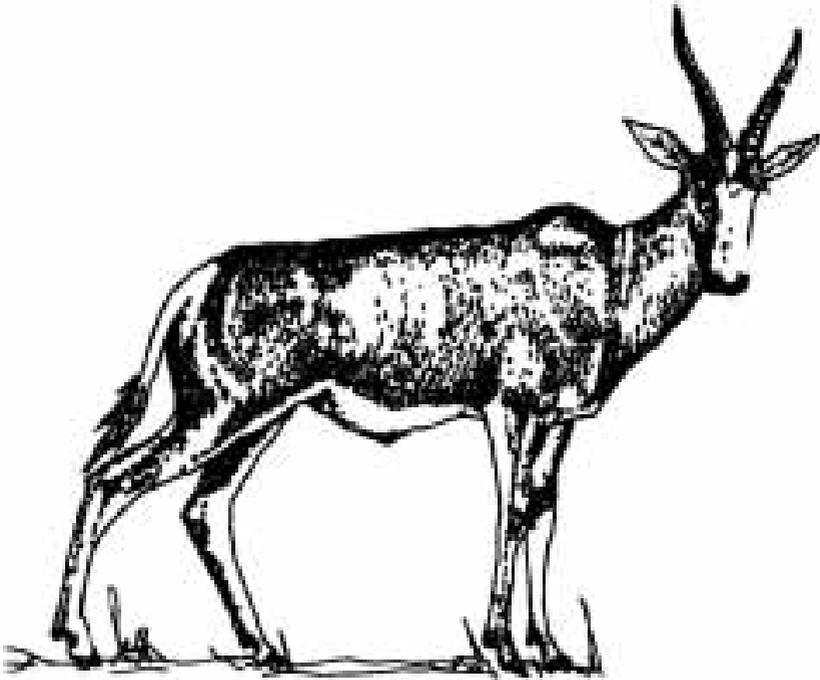
**DESCRIPTION:** Springbok are well-known for their historical migrations, or so-called “treks”. Not only is this handsome animal the best-known antelope species in the Northern Cape, but it was also both South Africa’s national and sports emblems. Springbok prefer arid open grassveld and Karoo habitats. Both the rams and ewes carry lyrate horns, with those of the rams being thicker and heavier than those of the ewes.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Springbok browse and graze, often concentrating around pans and enjoying the small karoo shrubs that grow there. These animals are well known for their spectacular “pronking” or stotting displays, where the dorsal crest of white hair, the so-called “pronk”, is erected while stiff-legged bounces are performed.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The specific name *marsupialis* (from the word *marsupium* meaning ‘pouch’) refers to the pouch of white hair on its back.

## BLESBOK

Blesbok, nônê (Smithers no. 309)  
(*Damaliscus dorcas phillipsi*)



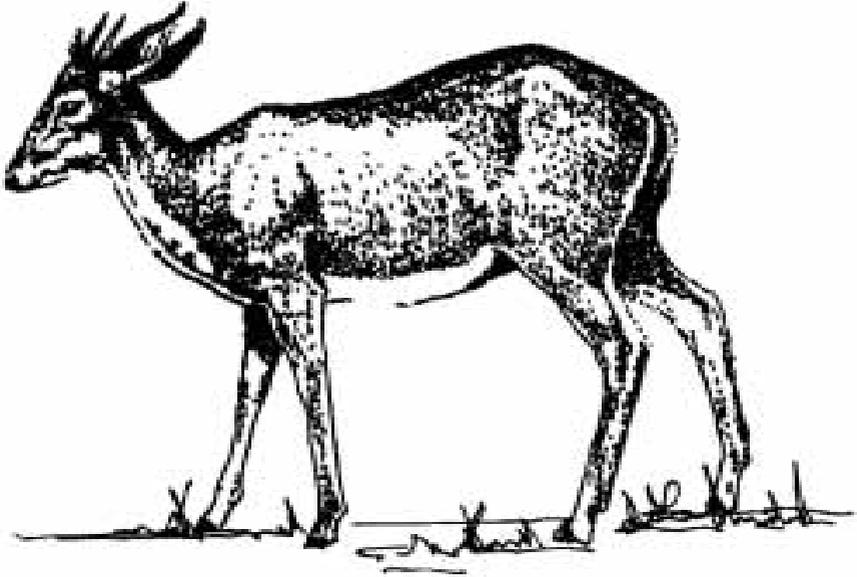
**DESCRIPTION:** The common name of this antelope species is derived from the white blaze on its face. Both sexes carry heavily ridged horns, with those of the rams being thicker and heavier than those of the ewes.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Blesbok have a definite preference for an open grassveld habitat and readily available water sources. These animals are mainly grazers, are highly gregarious and stick to the same social structures. A peak in births, where a single lamb is born, is usually experienced during November in the Northern Cape.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The Blesbok is the closest relative of the Bontebok, the rarest of our South African antelope.

## COMMON DUIKER

Gewone duiker, photi (Smithers no. 313)  
(*Sylvicapra grimmia*)



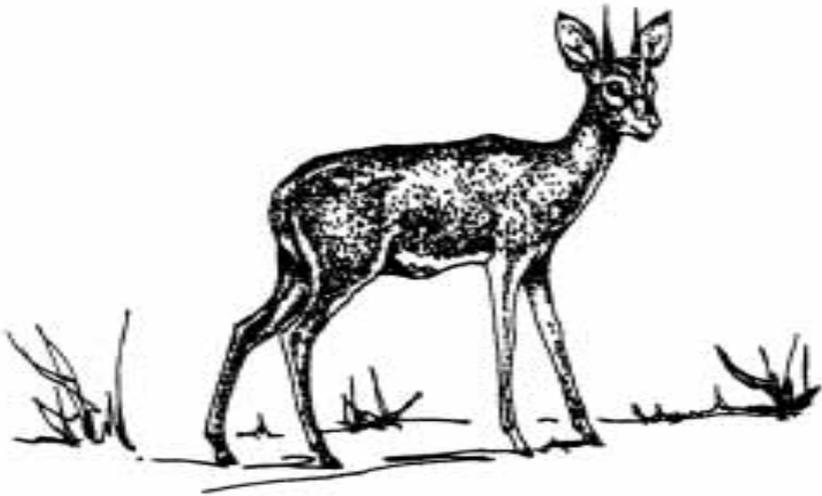
**DESCRIPTION:** Only the rams, which are smaller than the ewes, are equipped with short, straight horns arising close together on the head.

**BEHAVIOUR:** The name of this small antelope is derived from the Dutch word “duiker” which, translated into English, means diver. This is a description of the way this plump little animal tends to plunge or “dive” into the undergrowth to escape predators. It is a browser, independent of water. Duikers have also been known to eat young birds, lizards and caterpillars, while carcass nibbling has also been observed. They are generally solitary in nature and a single lamb, rarely twins, is born at any time of the year in the Kimberley area.

**DID YOU KNOW?** A sharp tuft of hair, looking very much like a third horn, grows on the top of the skull.

## STEENBOK

Steenbok, phuduhudu (Smithers no. 318)  
(*Raphicerus campestris*)



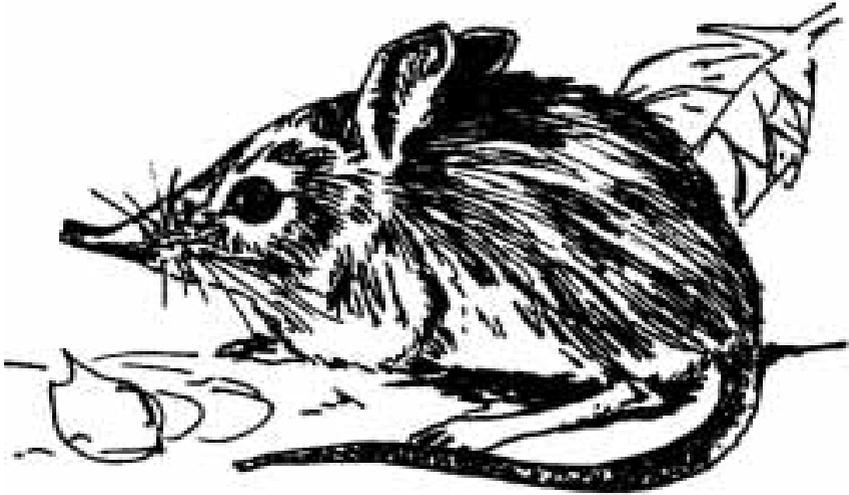
**DESCRIPTION:** Only the rams are adorned with long, straight horns rising vertically from the head. These small, graceful antelope inhabit open grassveld and are found practically everywhere around Kimberley.

**BEHAVIOUR:** They browse and graze, but are very fussy about what they eat. Feeding usually starts after dark, and the day is spent in shelter. They are also known to hide in burrows when placed under severe stress. Steenbok lead solitary lives and a single lamb may be born at any time of the year.

**DID YOU KNOW?** They maintain little “latrine” spots near the borders of their territories, and all dropping and urine patches are carefully covered by scraping soil over it with their front hooves.

## ROCK ELEPHANT SHREW

Klipklaasneus, nthufê (Smithers no. 38)  
(*Elephantulus myurus*)



**DESCRIPTION:** A characteristic feature of this tiny mammal is its long, trunk-like, mobile snout, hence the name Rock Elephant Shrew. Rock Elephant Shrews look like large-eyed, round-eared little rodents, but are in fact insectivores, with very tiny, sharp teeth to crush the often hard exoskeletons of their main prey items, insects.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Rock Elephant Shrews are closely confined to rocky areas and koppies. They are diurnal, live in rock crevices and spend most of the day in shady places on the lookout for their prey. One or two fully haired young are born during the summer.

**DID YOU KNOW?** They have the habit of drumming the hind limbs, which are much longer than the forelimbs, rapidly when alarmed, thus producing a purring noise.

## SMITH'S RED ROCK RABBIT

Smith se rooiklipkonyn, tlhōlwê (Smithers no. 124)  
(*Pronolagus rupestris*)



**DESCRIPTION:** This is the smallest of South Africa's four endemic rabbit species. They are characterised by a chubby, short-legged, short-eared appearance, in comparison to the hares that are more slender with longer ears. The rich, red-brown colouring of its coat and furry, powder-puff tail further enhance the appealing appearance of this rabbit species.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Smith's Red Rock Rabbits are nocturnal and strictly associated with rocky terrain or boulder-strewn areas. Daylight hours are spent resting deep in rock crevices, emerging only after sunset to graze. People hiking the Magersfontein koppies regularly flush these animals from their dens.

**DID YOU KNOW?** One to two naked, defenceless kittens are born during the summer in a cozy nest lined with the mother's fur, and only leave the nest when almost fully grown. The nest is constructed in the base of hollow trees or in rock crevices.

## GROUND SQUIRREL

Waaierstertgrondeekhorning, sekatamosima, Samare  
(*Xerus inauris*) (Smithers no. 140)



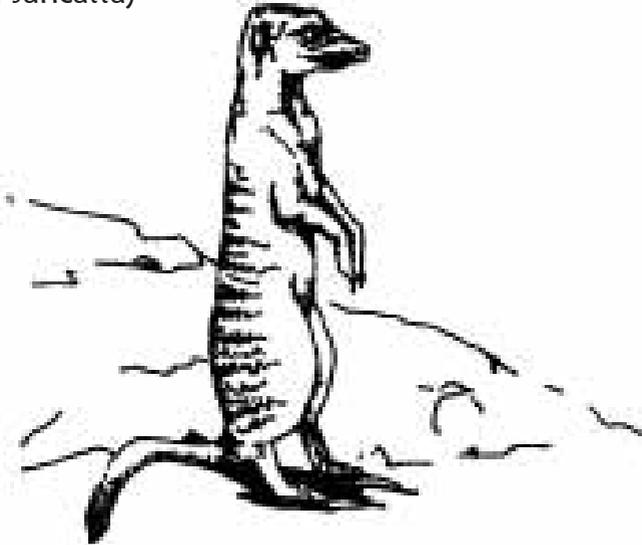
**DESCRIPTION:** The Ground Squirrel is adorned with a bushy tail, white stripe on its sides and a coat of short, bristly hair. Many uninformed people consider Ground Squirrels to be Meercats, but they are rodents in the true sense of the word.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Unlike it's arboreal cousins these animals spend their whole life on the ground. They prefer open, arid country with sparse bush cover to construct their warrens or burrow systems. They live in colonies numbering up to thirty animals, and these colonies are all dominated by female individuals. Ground Squirrels are diurnal and mostly herbivorous, although insects are periodically taken. Litters of up to three are born at any time throughout the year around Kimberley.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The bushy tails come in handy during hot days when it is curved over the head, like an umbrella, to provide a bit of shade.

## SURICATE

Stokstertmeerkat, kôôkwê, lejara (Smithers no. 269)  
(*Suricata suricatta*)



**DESCRIPTION:** This little animal, humourously portrayed as the Timone in Walt Disney's *The Lion King*, is the only true living meerkat species. Suricates can be considered the clowns of nature, and this image is further enhanced by the long, mobile snout and dark rings around the eyes. The Afrikaans name "Stokstertmeerkat" accurately refers to the slender, stick-like tail, which is carried upright like an antenna when the animal is moving. Females are usually bigger than the males.

**BEHAVIOUR:** They are diurnal, highly social, and live in burrows regularly shared by Ground Squirrels or Yellow Mongooses. Suricates feed predominantly on insects, but scorpions, lizards and centipedes are also regularly taken. They give birth to litters of up to three babies during the hot summers.

**DID YOU KNOW?** These animals are regularly kept as pets, a very cruel and selfish practice considering the trauma of depriving it of any social interaction with its own kind.

## ROCK DASSIE

Klipdassie, pela (Smithers no. 290)

(*Procavia capensis*)



**DESCRIPTION:** The Rock Dassie, is a roundish, tailless, short-limbed, little mammal. Dassies form a major part of the diet of their worst enemy - the Black Eagle.

**BEHAVIOUR:** These diurnal animals are found all around Kimberley where there are suitable rocky habitats. The soles of the feet are naked and padded with glandular tissue to keep them moist, a special adaptation to provide extra grip on the bare, often slippery rocks. Daylight hours are usually spent actively grazing or browsing, or just lazily sunning themselves on exposed rocky outcrops. They live in colonies, with deep crevices providing the necessary shelter. Sharp barks from the males usually act as a danger signal.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The elephant, strangely enough, is considered its closest relative. Both the elephant and dassie have internal testes (male reproductive organs) and a long pregnancy. Almost eight months of pregnancy for the dassie is unusually long for such a small mammal.

# COMMON BIRDS REFERENCE SHEET



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# COMMON BIRDS REFERENCE SHEET



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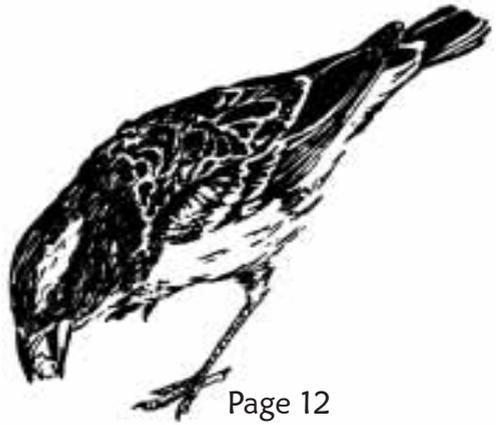
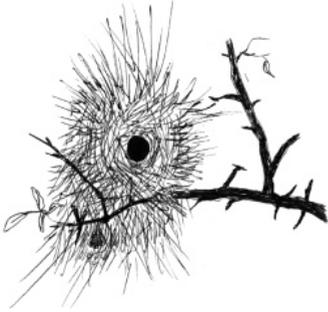
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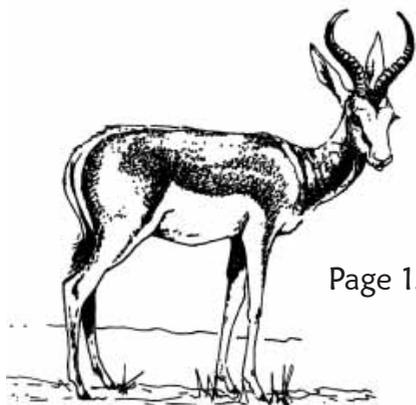


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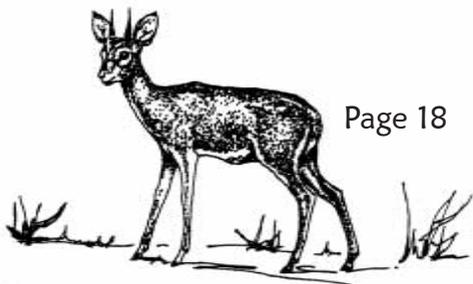


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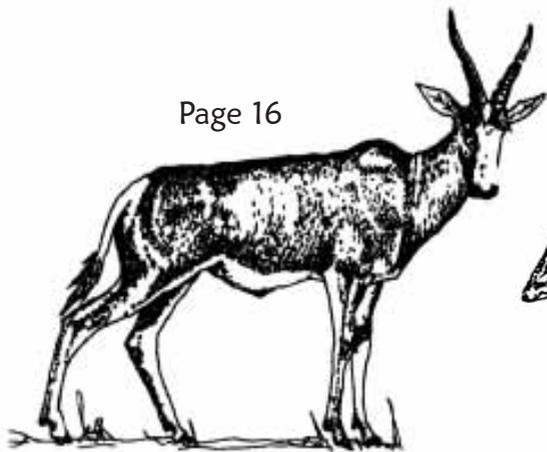
# COMMON MAMMALS REFERENCE SHEET



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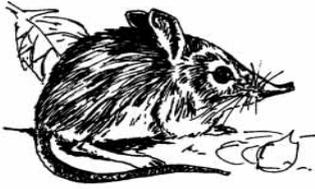
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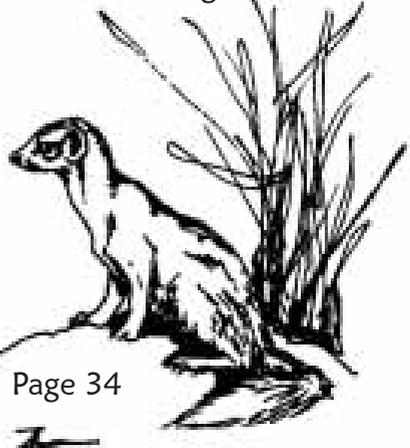
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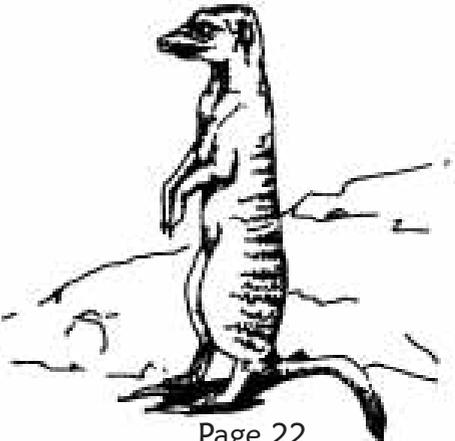
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# COMMON REPTILES REFERENCE SHEET

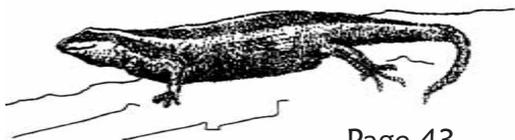
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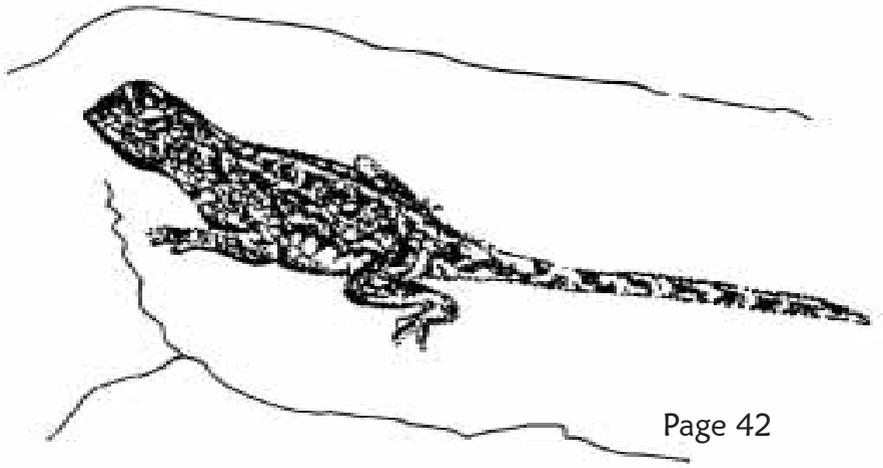


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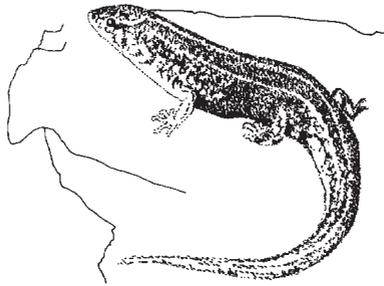
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# COMMON REPTILES REFERENCE SHEET

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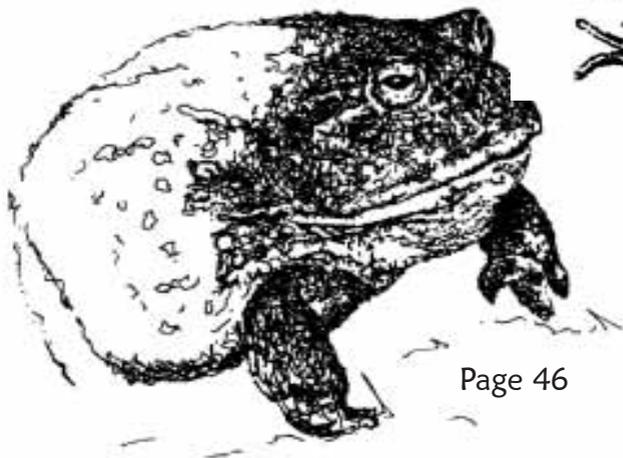
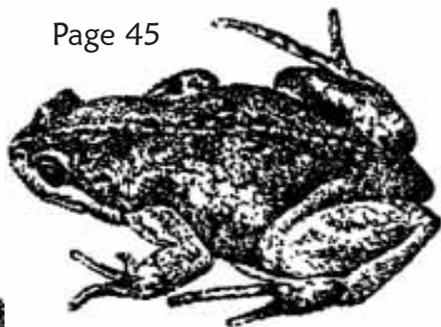


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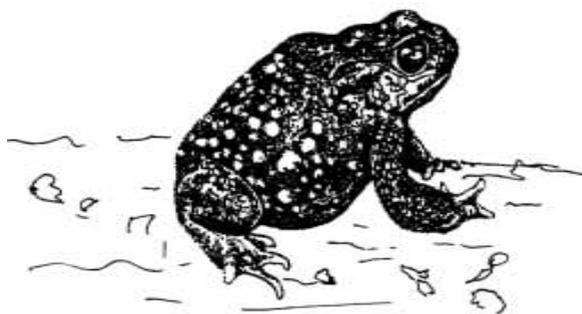


# COMMON AMPHIBIANS (FROGS) REFERENCE SHEET

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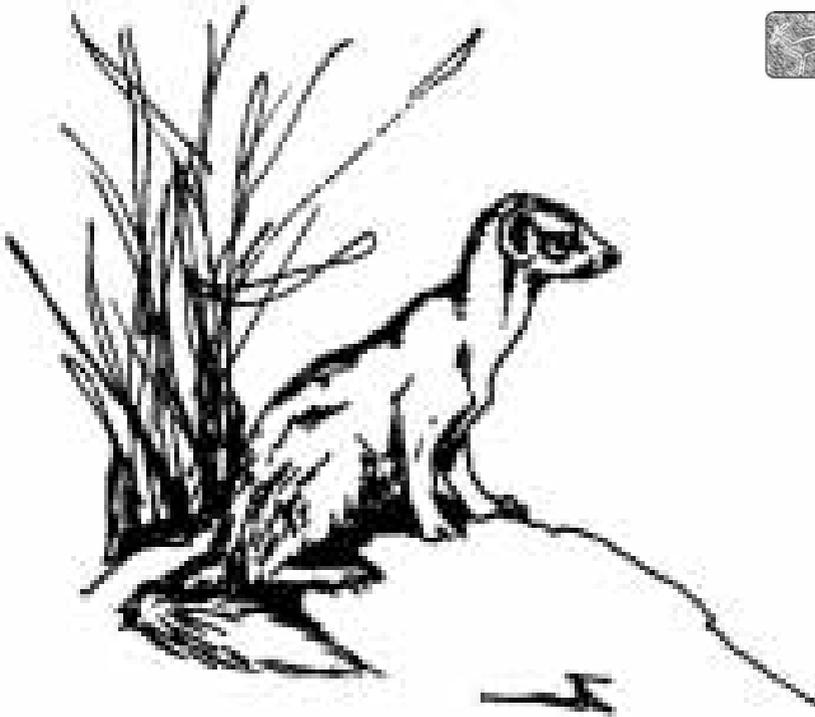
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## YELLOW MONGOOSE

Witkwasmuishond, moswê, mosa (Smithers no. 272)  
(*Cynictis penicillata*)



**DESCRIPTION:** The colour of this small mammal varies considerably from south to north, but around Kimberley they are yellowish-brown to reddish-yellow in colour, with a distinctive white tip to the tail.

**BEHAVIOUR:** These secretive animals live in burrows and are mainly diurnal, although foraging during moonlit nights regularly takes place. Insects are the main prey items in the diet, but the menu sometimes includes mice, scorpions and birds. They are often seen running across the road.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Litters of up to five young are born in the warrens during summer.

## Common reptiles



### LEOPARD TORTOISE

Bergskilpad, khudutlôu, khudu  
(*Geochelone pardalis*)



**DESCRIPTION:** Both the common and scientific names of this huge, terrestrial tortoise species refer to the yellowish shell, which is heavily spotted or streaked with black, a good identification feature. Shells tend to turn a uniform dark brown with age. Adults normally weigh between 8 and 12 kg, but may sometimes exceed 40 kg.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Leopard Tortoises are mainly associated with savanna-type habitats. They only reach sexual maturity at approximately 15 years of age, and may live up to a staggering 75 years in captivity. The female, which has a shorter tail, can deposit up to 15 large, ping-pong sized, hard-shelled eggs in the carefully prepared, flask-shaped pit. A single, large female may lay 3-6 clutches at monthly intervals during summer to ensure the survival of at least some of her offspring, which are considered delicacies by carnivorous ants, rock monitors, storks, crows and various small carnivore species.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Veld fires are also responsible for the many deaths of juveniles and adults.

## CAPE COBRA

Kaapse kobra, kakê  
(*Naja nivea*)

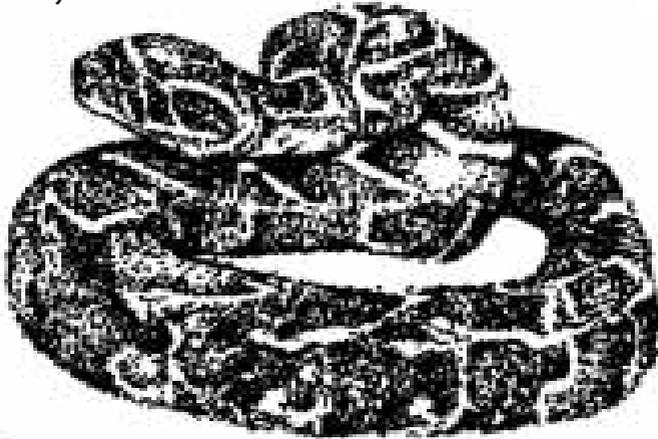


**DESCRIPTION:** Cape Cobras come in a variety of colours. The rich, butter-yellow individuals are the most common, but highly mottled and purplish-black forms are also regularly encountered. Juveniles are normally yellow with a broad, black throat band.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Cape Cobras are active during the day and early evenings, and a whole variety of vertebrate prey species, including other snakes, appear on the menu. This nervous, highly toxic snake fortunately does not spit, but is quick to spread its broad hood at the first sign of danger. The venom attacks the nervous system (neurotoxic) and death usually occurs from the rapid onset of paralysis. The eggs, 8-20 in number, are laid in a protected environment like a burrow.

**DID YOU KNOW?** With only 15-20 mg of venom necessary to kill a human, this aggressive species is responsible for some human deaths.

**PUFF ADDER**  
Pofadder, lebolobolo  
(*Bitis arietans*)



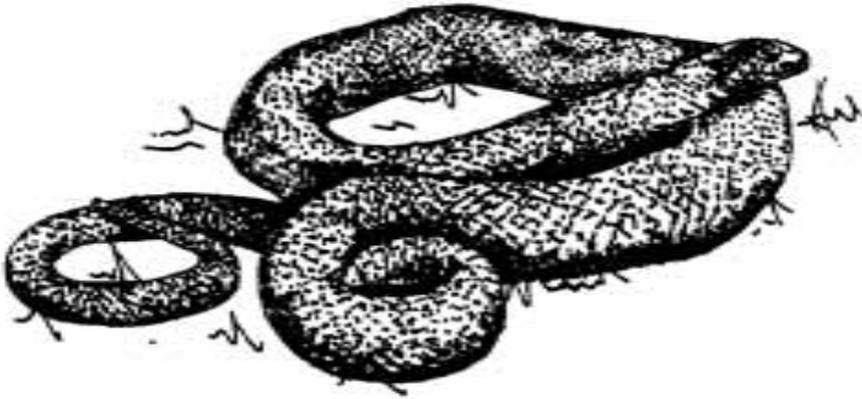
**DESCRIPTION:** The Puff Adder, a very common snake in this semi-arid region, is a thick, heavily built snake. Its large, flattened triangular head is typical of most adder species. Body colouration varies between a dirty yellow-brown and light brown, with black, arrow-like markings on the back. Males have longer tails, are smaller and are also more brightly coloured than females.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Prey items, which include rodents, birds and other snakes, are normally attacked from a spot where this snake lies unnoticed. If disturbed or annoyed, it adopts a striking posture and usually warns by giving a deep, hollow hiss, not unlike a tyre deflating. This is a sound that will remain with many a hiker who, unsuspectingly, treads on one of these sluggish, well camouflaged snakes. Although appearing to be lazy, Puff Adders can strike with lightning speed.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The venom, injected by 12-18 mm long fangs, attacks the cell tissue (cytotoxic) of the victim, causing extensive swelling and pain of the afflicted part.

## MOLE SNAKE

Molslang, tshosabosigo, tsosamasigo  
(*Pseudaspis cana*)

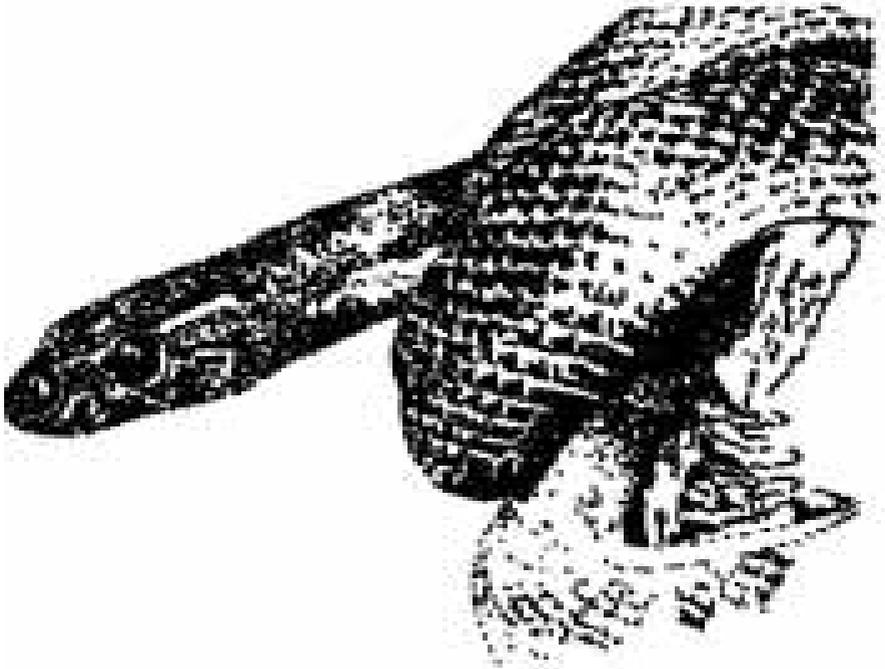


**DESCRIPTION:** This is a large, thick snake with a bluntish head and slightly hooked nose. The young are heavily blotched, while adults are normally plain, usually light brown in colour, but occasionally olive, grey, dark brown or black.

**BEHAVIOUR:** This harmless constrictor lives in abandoned animal burrows and feeds on various small mammals, including moles, hence the name. Up to 45 young hatch in the autumn months.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Although not poisonous, they are aggressive when caught or roughly handled and can inflict nasty bites that may require stitches.

BROWN HOUSE SNAKE  
Bruin huisslang  
(*Lamprophis fuliginosus*)



**DESCRIPTION:** This is a harmless little constrictor, uniform red-brown in colour with two distinct pale yellow streaks on the side of the head (“eyebrows”).

**BEHAVIOUR:** It is highly tolerant to urban sprawl and is regularly encountered in homes, which has earned it its common name. It reproduces in summer, and up to 16 eggs are laid.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Most of the hunting is done at night, with lizards, rodents and other small vertebrates, including bats, regularly falling prey to this predator.

## BIBRON'S GECKO

Bibron se geitjie, tsêgisane  
(*Pachydactylus bibronii*)



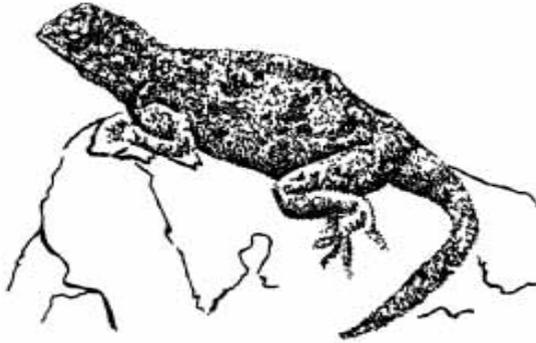
**DESCRIPTION:** These gregarious, nocturnal thick-toed geckos are characterised by their large size and tails that are thick at the base. The tail is almost the same length as the body. The prominent, marbled brown eyes have vertical pupils, with the non-functional eyelids forming a distinct ridge around them. The back is dark grey to grey-brown in colour, and adorned with 4-5 unclear, wavy cross-bands.

**BEHAVIOUR:** They are common on rocky outcrops or under loose tree bark, but also well-adapted to man's influence and regularly encountered in homes. The toilets at Magersfontein's café currently house a couple of these geckos. Although very useful in keeping their own as well as human living areas clear of grasshoppers, ants and termites, they are aggressive and ever-willing to bite if handled roughly.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Two hard-shelled eggs are normally laid in a rock crack or under bark.

## SOUTHERN ROCK AGAMA

Bloukoppoggelmander, kgatlampane, kodutala  
(Agama atra)



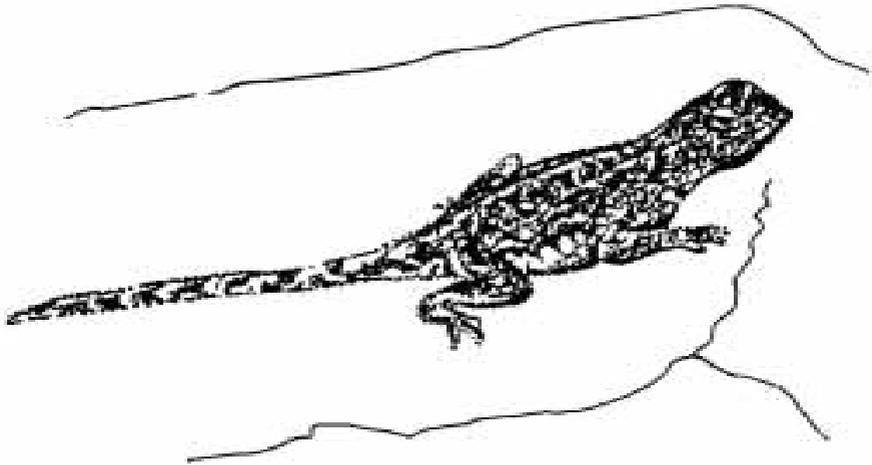
**DESCRIPTION:** Very common on the rocky outcrops at Magersfontein, this species is characterised by its relatively large size, flattened body and large limbs. The tail, flattened in males and cylindrical in females, is approximately half as long as the head and body. Breeding males, reddish-brown above and marbled with black, are further distinguished from the mottled brown, camouflaged females and non-breeding individuals, by sporting greenish-blue heads and forelimbs (hence their Afrikaans name). The colourful throats have intense, sea blue-coloured lines.

**BEHAVIOUR:** They are very useful creatures as they feed almost exclusively on ants and termites. The bright breeding colours are probably there to attract females. Breeding males can voluntarily “fade” these highly visible colours at the first sign of danger to blend in with the colour of the rocks. If this strategy fails, they scamper off at lightning speed. Southern Rock Agamas live in dense colonies. To advertise themselves, territorial males usually perch on the highest point of their territories, vigorously nodding their heads. This is a highly amusing sight as they look like tiny people busily doing “push-ups”.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Because of their brightly coloured heads, some people believe they are poisonous, but this is not true.

## GROUND AGAMA

Gewone koggelmander, kगतlampane, kodutala  
(*Agama aculeata*)

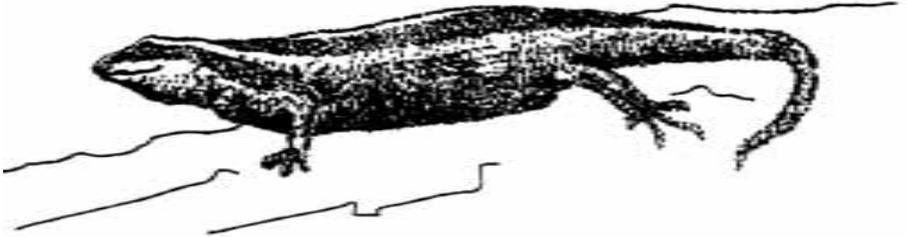


**DESCRIPTION:** These plump agamas are characterised by a triangular-shaped head, large earholes, sharp scales and enlarged spines which are arranged in rows on the back. The tail is also longer than the head and body. The body is a highly camouflaged, mottled reddish-brown in colour with a distinct yellowish stripe on the back and tail. Males have three parallel blue-black lines on the throat, and the side of their heads also turn a dull, bluish colour when breeding starts.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Although terrestrial, these creatures will often climb into low shrubs to bask in the sun. A shallow hole, usually situated at the base of a bush or under a stone, acts as home to a Ground Agama couple. Ants and termites are the main items on the menu.

**DID YOU KNOW?** When disturbed, they scamper off at lightning speed with the tails curved upwards, only to stop abruptly and, closely hugging the ground, rely on their superb camouflage to escape being seen.

**STRIPED SKINK**  
Streepakkedis, ntseane  
(Mabuya striata)



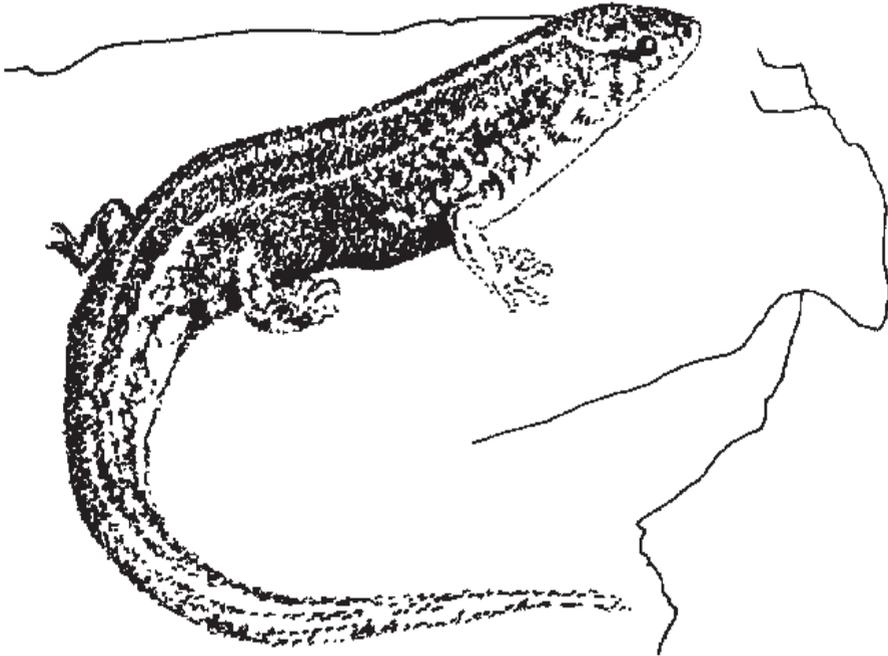
**DESCRIPTION:** This smallish, arboreal skink is characterised by a dark brown to black back, which is speckled with small, pale spots and a pair of pale, yellowish stripes on the sides. The limbs are well developed and the tail is long and narrows toward the tip.

**BEHAVIOUR:** They are diurnal, relatively common and live on rocky outcrops and houses, where small insects and other small invertebrates are actively hunted down with fast dashes. The tail can be dropped if the animal is seized by a predator, and this writhing, discarded piece of tail serves to draw attention away from the animal itself, which is then able to escape taillessly, but unharmed. The tail is quickly regrown. A single litter of up to nine young is born during summer.

**DID YOU KNOW?** These skinks are often seen in gardens and school grounds.

## CAPE SKINK

Kaapse driestreepakkevis, ntseane  
(*Mabuya capensis*)



**DESCRIPTION:** This large, fat (often obese) skink is fairly common in arid Karoo veld. It is much fatter than the Striped Skink and can be distinguished by its light to greyish-brown body and three pale, yellowish stripes on the back, instead of the two stripes down the sides as for the Striped Skink.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Cape Skinks are diurnal and live on the ground, where large insects are actively hunted. They are good diggers, but disused Springhare burrows also come in handy when up to 18 tiny replicas of the parents are born in late summer.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The tail can be dropped just like that of the Striped Skink and will also regrow again.

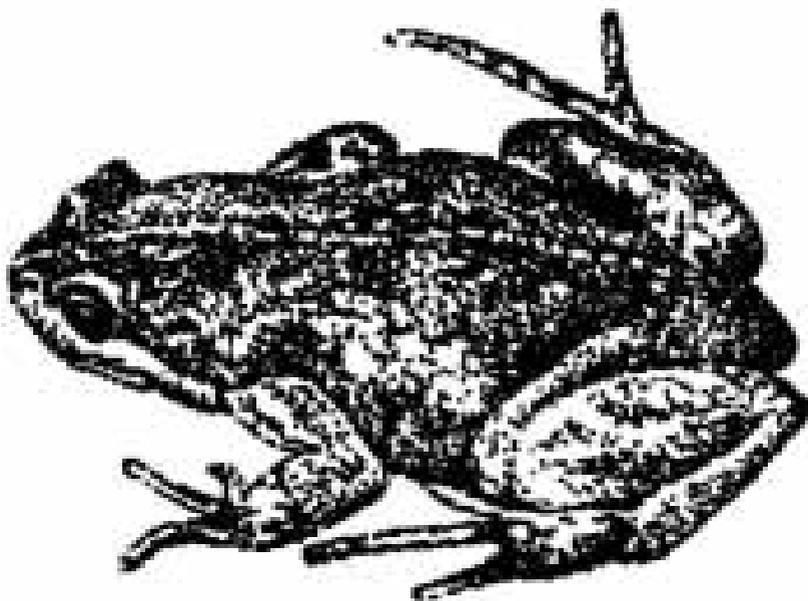
Common amphibians (frogs & toads)



## COMMON CACO

Bliklanertjie, segôgwane

(*Cacosternum boettgeri*)

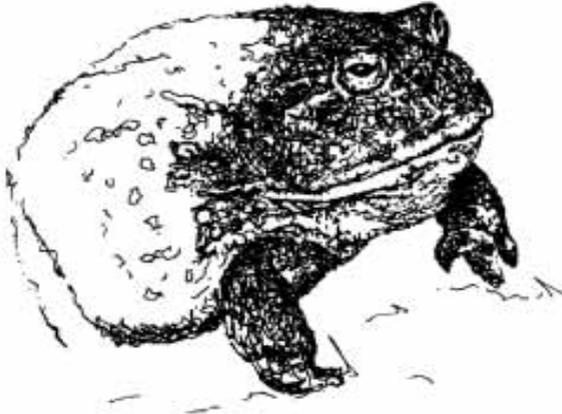


**DESCRIPTION:** Common Cacos are tiny, well-camouflaged frogs which come in a variety of colours and patterns, ranging from dark green to brown. However, they are all characterised by white bellies marked with distinctive black blotches, unwebbed toes and a very unique call. Males differ from females by having clear, orange-brown throats.

**BEHAVIOUR:** They are abundant after summer rains and can be heard calling from marshes, dam edges and even rain-filled hollows. The small clusters of dark eggs, individually surrounded by a jelly-like substance, are usually attached to submerged vegetation.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The rapidly performed, high pitched clicks sound very much like somebody drumming on a tin, hence its Afrikaans name.

**GIANT BULLFROG**  
Brulpadda, letlametlo  
(*Pyxicephalus adspersus*)



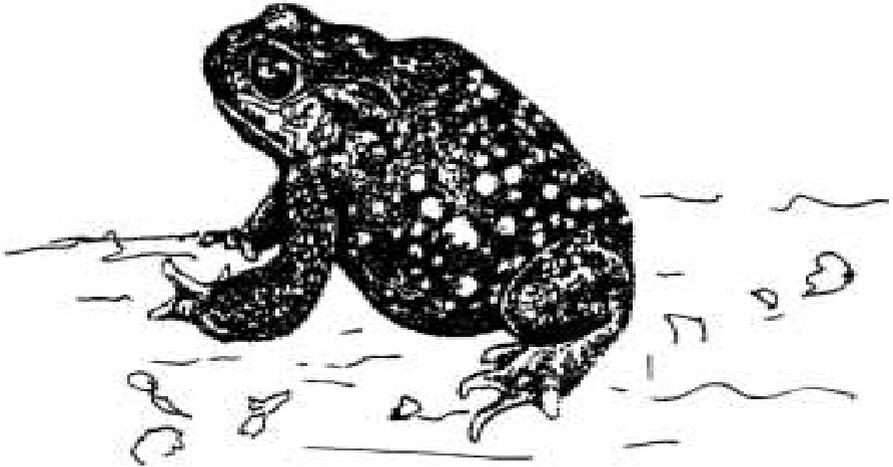
**DESCRIPTION:** The largest of the South African frogs, male bullfrogs can attain a length of more than 20 cm. Giant Bullfrogs are distinguished by massive, fat bodies, large oversized heads and a deep, whooping call. The green, yellow-throated males are easily distinguished from the much smaller, brownish females.

**BEHAVIOUR:** They are greedy predators, preying on fellow amphibians, reptiles, small mammals and invertebrates. Giant Bullfrogs are strong burrowers and can stay underground for 10 months, completely dormant and surrounded by a paper-like cocoon. They only emerge from this deep sleep after the first heavy summer rains. Males are highly aggressive during mating, even attacking inquisitive humans if disturbed. The hoards of tadpoles are carefully guarded by the males, which continue to fulfill the fatherly role of nursemaid until they are fully developed into bright green juveniles. Males are even known to build channels to allow stuck tadpoles to reach deeper water. According to literature, bullfrogs are considered a great delicacy by the Khoisan.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The two odontoids (tooth-like projections), situated in the lower jaw, can inflict a nasty bite.

## KAROO TOAD

Karoo skurwepadda, segôgwane  
(*Bufo gariensis gariensis*)



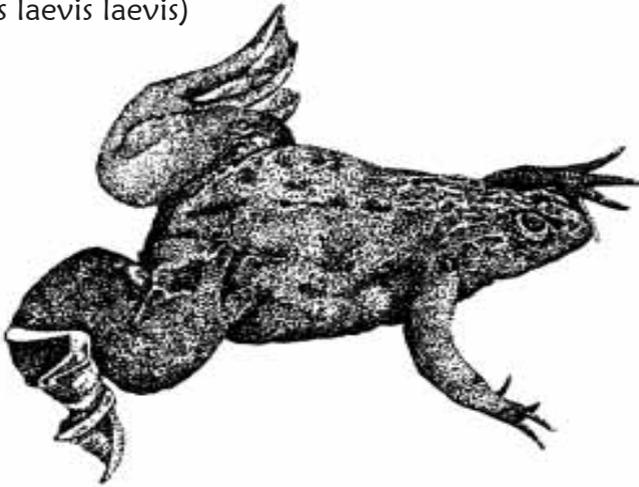
**DESCRIPTION:** Karoo Toads are characterised by their stout, short-limbed appearance, warty skins and rasping squawks. They are relatively common in the Karoo areas around Kimberley where small karoo shrubs are abundant. The skin looks dry, is light-brown in colour and covered with irregularly-shaped dark patches, which act as good camouflage.

**BEHAVIOUR:** When handled or attacked a sticky white substance, both poisonous and highly irritating, is released from special glands in the skin. Although daylight hours are mainly spent underground, in rock crevasses or beneath rocks or logs, they will readily emerge on rainy or overcast days to forage. These amphibians move around by either walking or hopping. They breed in streams, waterholes and rain pools.

**DID YOU KNOW?** At night Karoo Toads regularly forage for invertebrates, their main prey, in close vicinity to electric lights where prey is captured with their long tongues.

## COMMON PLATANNA

Platanna, segôgwane  
(*Xenopus laevis laevis*)



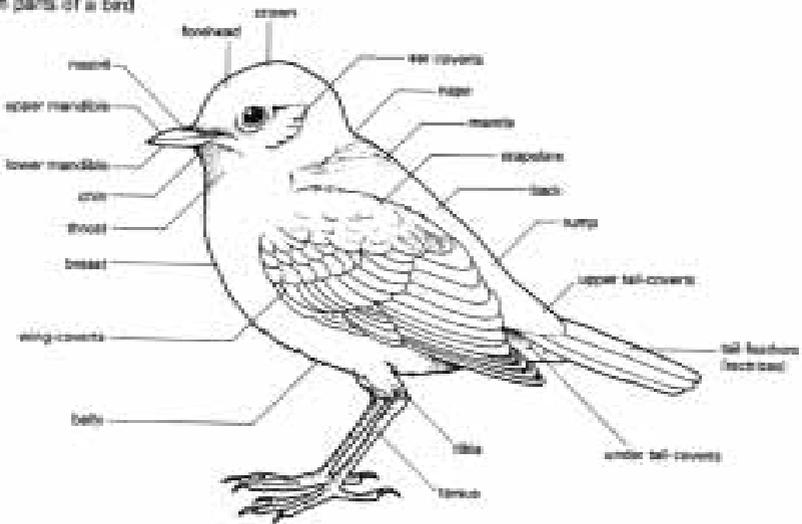
**DESCRIPTION:** These smooth, streamlined and very slippery amphibians are usually encountered in permanent or semi-permanent bodies of water. They have three noticeable black claws on the toes, which has given them another common name of Clawed Toads. They are further distinguished by powerful hind legs, fully webbed toes and highly visible sense organs along their sides. The eyes, which look like tiny periscopes, are situated on top of the head.

**BEHAVIOUR:** Although living an almost permanently underwater life, long migrations across land are occasionally undertaken after heavy rainfall to look for more suitable habitats. They are both predators and scavengers. In the absence of vocal cords and vocal sacks, a soft, vibrating buzzing is emitted underwater. Rainfall induces reproduction and the eggs, which are small and dark in colour, are deposited in individual jelly capsules.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Common Platannas previously played an important role in human pregnancy tests, and are currently still widely used in various research experiments.

## GLOSSARY

Main parts of a bird



Aerial hunters - birds and mammals that catch their prey from the air or while flying.

Amphibian - an animal that lives both on land and in the water e.g. a frog.

Arboreal - an animal that lives in trees.

Average - the generally occurring amount or degree.

Blaze - a white mark on the face of an animal.

Browser - an animal that feeds on leaves and young shoots.

Burrow - a hole dug by an animal, or to dig a hole as a dwelling.

A warren is a system of burrows.

Camouflage - a means of disguise or concealment so that the organism blends in with its surroundings.

Cannibalistic - an animal that eats its own type (species).

Carnivore - an animal that eats meat.

Colony - a group of animals that live close together.

Constrictor - a snake that kills by squashing its prey.

Coverts - a feather covering the base of a bird's wing or tail feather.

Crown - the top part of an animal's head. See bird sketch.

Cylindrical - shaped like a cylinder or a round pipe.

Cytotoxic - a toxin (poison) that affects the cell tissues.

Diurnal animal - an animal that is active during the day.

Dormant - sleeping or lying inactive as in a sleep in the case of animals, or not actively growing in the case of plants.

Dorsal - on the back.

Ecological balance - the well-balanced state of an ecological system (natural system).

Ecology - the study of organisms (living things) in relation to one another and to their surroundings.

Ecosystem - a system of interacting organisms in a particular habitat. A habitat is the natural home of an animal or plant.

Endemic - an organism (e.g. plant or animal) only found in a country or certain area.

Exoskeleton - the skeleton of an animal, especially an insect, that occurs on the outside of the body.

Forage - to search for food.

Glandular tissue - tissue that secretes substances to be used in the body or expelled from it.

Grazer - an animal that feeds on grass.

Gregarious - to live in flocks, groups or communities.

Herbivore - an animal that feeds on plants.

Herbivorous - feeding on plants.

Insectivore - an animal that feeds on insects.

Invertebrate - an animal that has no spinal column (backbone) e.g. an insect.

Juvenile bird - a youthful bird, not yet a subadult, but no longer a chick.

Latrine - a lavatory or pit for excreta (faeces).

Lyrate horns - horns shaped like a lyre which is a harp-like musical instrument with two symmetrical bows that curve inwards at their tips.

Migrations - to move periodically from one place to another and live part of the year there. Especially in birds.

Nape - the back of the neck of a bird. See bird sketch above.

Natural environment - the physical world around us, consisting of all living organisms (e.g. plants and animals) and the land.

Neurotoxic - a toxin (poison) that affects the nervous system (nerves).

Nocturnal animal - an animal that is active during the night.

Paralysis - loss of the power of movement, caused by disease or an injury to the nerves.

Predator - an animal that catches other animals i.e. preys on others.

Raptor - a bird that catches and feeds on animals.

Reptile - a cold-blooded animal that reproduces by laying eggs, e.g. a snake.

Rodent - an animal with strong incisor teeth for gnawing and no canine teeth, e.g. a rat.

Roosting - when a bird perches and settles down to sleep.

Rump - the tail-end of an animal or bird. See bird sketch above.

Savanna - a grassy plain with scattered trees.

Scales - the small, thin horny overlapping plates protecting the skin of many fish and reptiles.

Scavenger - an animal that feeds on carrion (dead animals).

Semi-arid - an area that is dry, with a fairly low, unpredictable rainfall (250 - 500 mm per year), but not as dry and hot as a desert that has a rainfall of less than 250 mm per year.

Social structure - the way in which the relationships between members of a certain species are arranged.

Species - a group of animals or plants with common characteristics. Two different species generally cannot interbreed.

Talons - the claws of a bird of prey, especially adapted so that it can catch and kill its prey.

Terrestrial - lives on dry land.

Territory - an area (areas) defended by an animal against other animals of the same species.

Vegetation - plant life, plants grouped together.

Venom -poisonous fluid secreted by certain snakes and other animals, and injected into the victim by a bite or sting.

Vertebrate - an animal that has a spinal column, e.g. birds, mammals, amphibians, etc.

Vocal cords - the folds of the lining membrane of the larynx (throat cavity), with edges that vibrate in the air-stream to

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- \* Why are there large numbers of Rock Dassies during certain years and fewer at other times?
- \* If you were using Rock Dassies as a food source, what factors would you consider when deciding how many to utilise each year?
- \* What possible effect did the Anglo-Boer War have on the animals at Magersfontein?
- \* How many other birds species can you observe on Magersfontein?
- \* Are there bird species in the veld around Kimberley that are not found in the city? Why is this so?
- \* Which animals do you think are predators of rock elephant shrews, and do they themselves catch other animals?
- \* How do you think the climate and general vegetation of the Kimberley area affected the Boers and English soldiers during the war?
- \* How would you find out, using experiments, how many different species of mice occur around Kimberley?
- \* Why do you think Blesbok nod their heads?



This is the logo for the EnviroZone hall, McGregor Museum, that depicts the major environs of the Northern Cape. Species marked with this logo can be seen on display in the EnviroZone.

## FURTHER READING

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