



# Lion Dog Digest

Sponsored by the  
Rhodesian Ridgeback International Foundation

**A**fter that gentle story about Marloth Park last issue we now return to the real world of the Rhodesian Ridgeback. In that world of our dogs there is no such place as ‘virtual reality’. We try to devise tests/exercises which will ready them for what they might meet up with out there so that they are not caught unprepared. But nothing can compare with the real thing.

Some years ago we stopped at a garage on the way down to Cape Town from Johannesburg and let the two dogs out to stretch their legs. As we strolled around the extensive facilities both dogs became very interested in some object behind a low fence. We couldn’t identify anything significant and let them advance unhindered. We enjoyed a good little chuckle when they threw themselves backwards with a yelp/growl in response to a magnificent male ostrich jumping up hissing and spreading out his wings. Now that ostrich wasn’t going to harm the dogs, but the immediate thought going through your mind in that instant was, did they react quickly enough to save themselves from something more aggressive. And again, some

months later, you think of the experience once more when hearing how proud some people are when their dogs score well on the umbrella test. Would you expect your RR to remain steadfast when the umbrella springs open in front of him? If he could blindly watch one thing jump



Dusty and Oscar, ready for duty, on their conventional vehicle.

out at him wouldn't it be the same with another?

There is an awful gap in our understanding of how animals respond to each other. Down at Buffelsbaai there are several Oyster Catchers to be seen, in fact they make a specific effort at the Goukamma Nature Reserve to protect the species. Whilst walking along the beach to Brenton (home to the well known endangered butterfly of the same name) the dog was chasing gulls off the beach and generally enjoying himself which I regard as a pretty inoffensive game as the gulls observe him long before he even thinks about them. Unfortunately there also was an Oyster Catcher present and he had a good run at the black bird with the curved red beak. It proceeded to fly up the coast parallel with the water edge enticing him on towards Brenton before swinging back and doing a beat-up over and past him. When we returned to that spot half an hour later there were three of them there all close together in the water. The dog was commanded to leave them alone and to remain at heel. We closed in on them and stopped ten metres away (paced it out). Probability says that one of the birds had been chased by him earlier that day; now it was showing no fear whatsoever and further it is doubtful if I'd ever approached within thirty metres of one of these birds in my life until then.

There was the other occasion when an elephant was advancing on the bakkie which had two protective bars along each side and two RR's on the back between them. When the elephant advanced, within fifteen metres of the vehicle, one of the dogs released a very audible growl which caused the big one to throw himself to the side and continue in a totally different direction. Obviously these dogs represented no threat to the elephant, but in that particular scenario they 'held the power'.

When our Ridgebacks encounter lion are they really at risk? Being very respectful indeed of the big cats they are not going to try to chase them around, and obviously lion does not regard a Ridgie as presenting a threat in any shape or form whatsoever. So if the RR comes too close he would just chase it away the same way as he would chase the jackal that come in to share his kill. There is no need for him to eliminate such opposition so why bother to do so. Or is that really the case?

**T**he Citizen Newspaper is showing an abnormal amount of interest in what must be Southern Africa's greatest tourist attraction, the Kruger National Park (their issue dated 24 September, 2001 advises that its "coverage of animal welfare issues won it the award for Best Publication at the National SPCA's annual awards ceremony). We have read about exceptional labour practices when this state-controlled enterprise indulged in the most unusual strategy of declaring the complete labour force redundant and asking them all to re-apply for their jobs. Now we, the Lion Dog Group, happen to have a particular interest in the KNP, and for its stability ie for the future success of using the Rhodesian Ridgeback in that environment. It is essential that those employing the greatest sporting dog do so under consistent management conditions.

The KNP is not the only place on earth where our Ridgies can meet up with the planet's noblest animal. Not at all. We have farmers in the Free State who breed lion as an alternative to cattle. But nothing equals that Park when it comes to having large numbers roaming freely over an area bigger than several countries. We must remember that these RR's are not expected to advance on the powerful cats, they are there to report on lion etc. advancing on them; and with their remarkable versatility, our dogs are doing an excellent job.

## Who let the cats out?

**I**n an article headlined "Eight walkabout lions shot, caught" which appeared in the Citizen Tuesday 28 August 2001, the following story appeared written by Mark Visser." The eight escaped lions, which terrified a community near Bushbuckridge in the Northern Province for three weeks, have all been accounted for. The last three were captured at the weekend.

Mukoni Ratshitanga, the executive assistant to the MEC for Tourism and Environment in the Northern Province said yesterday the remaining three of the initial eight lions at large had been caught by park rangers and returned to a reserve in the area, over the weekend.

The wild cats which escaped from a nearby game park, and made several attacks on livestock, were hunted by villagers, as well as park rangers.

It is not known from which reserve the animals escaped, though the general consensus is that they

escaped from the state owned Manyeleti game park, situated nearest to the community. Recently park rangers tracked and destroyed three of the lions, in difficult circumstances, at night when the cats began charging them.

Events took another turn a week later when villagers took the situation into their own hands, and began hunting the beasts. Members of the community had killed two of the lions the previous weekend."

**W**e do not like the use of that description "wild cats" in the above article because one immediately thinks of an African Wild Cat. The next story concerning the KNP appeared in the "Citizen" dated 6th September 2001, where we read, under the front page heading "Kruger Inferno Claims 19 Lives",. Carol Hill's story of massive loss of life as a result of a serious bush fire between Pretorius Kop and Skukuza. Later reports indicated that apart from 20 temporary female thatch grass collectors, three rangers perished in a frightening blaze that also claimed four rhino and five elephant. The eventual toll will obviously exceed that tally by a large margin and the reason for the blaze was not immediately made known. These grass-collecting employees lived in their own temporary camp and those that remained there survived.

The very next day, 7 September 2001, again in a front page leading article Deon Wiggett obtains 28mm high capitals for – Kruger Lions Used as "Hunter Fodder". There is a smaller heading which states 'Kruger Officials have discovered donkeys tied to trees near damaged fences'. Hereunder a few snippets from that short story:

"... Giving foreigners the opportunity to kill them through permits issued by the Northern Province Government.

The hunting opportunity comes about when lions escape from the Kruger Park, as they do on a fairly regular basis.

... Northern Province has now started issuing permits to professional hunters to shoot these animals - presenting the hunters with a lucrative business opportunity.

... the lions are now being lured through the fence using carcasses and even live bait like donkeys ... Kruger officials have discovered donkeys tied to trees near damaged fences ...

The Animal Protection Act prohibits using live bait to catch another animal.

The National SPCA's Rick Allan, pledging the organisation's support and co-operation ...".

It really is not possible to identify any stray lion as having come from a specific reserve.

## What our Rhodesian Ridgebacks do in the KNP

**F**orgetting about a misguided vet in Germany, what do our Ridgebacks actually accomplish in the KNP? The first thing to realize is that it is very many years since the Rhodesian Ridgeback strode through the location of the park for the first time. Back in the 1940's there was still a lot of hunting going on within the present boundaries of the Park and Boerboel was the preferred dog of the time. The hunters were about to forsake those Boerboel



for the faster, lighter, more maneuverable Ridgeback, but it was happening at a time when dogs were becoming unwelcome in that environment.

There is nothing new about dogs being permitted within the veterinary fence around the KNP, neither is there anything revolutionary about dogs being available to help certain rangers perform their duties. The limiting restrictions were severe however, and even though dogs were within the perimeter vet fence they had to be contained within the "elephant" fences around the living quarters of the very few who were permitted to bring them through the first mentioned fence. Only twenty or so employees in the Park are offered the opportunity to be aided by dogs in their daily work, and obviously those privileged few were severely restricted regarding what the dogs could (or more importantly could not) do.

So dogs in the KNP accompanying Section Rangers in their daily activities had been out of vogue for several decades and it was only through the interest of Ralf Kalwa that they were given this opportunity to roam one of the earth's most prolific Reserves, catering for the broadest possible selection of animals, in very large numbers. Naturally the catch in this idyllic scenario is the presence of the world's best known animal killers, ie the large predators with lion obviously holding pride of place, pun intended. Then there is the most efficient and ruthless killer of them all, the leopard; but because the latter is nocturnal of habit he doesn't get involved in the conventional working day of the Rangers.

One can not emphasize strongly enough just how the routine dangers to be faced in the KNP multiply out of control well beyond the capabilities of the human, when night descends. There is a well known homily stating that fools and birds fly, but birds don't fly at night. Walking in the KNP at night fits the same format.

But the Rangers don't operate at night either: at least not normally, and they wouldn't have to take their RR's with them in that type of circumstance anyway. But this doesn't get away from the fact that there was no historical knowledge to support specific requirements when deciding what would be required of the dogs. At the time Ralf wanted company when spending two or three nights out in the bush tracking down errant elephant that had gone walkabout after pushing down the well known veterinary fence. When looking at these amiable big brutes one doesn't realize just how far an elephant can travel in a day or, put more simply, just how quickly they can get around. And though they are big, bulky, and heavy, it is not automatically a simple matter to follow their trail.

Ralf said he wanted company out there, over-night, and this is a plausible reason. Personally I think he wakened up one night to find hyena sniffing his toes and decided that was a bit much. Whatever the case he decided to get himself a ridgie, and we made sure that he was well inspired by stories of the remarkable tracking and herding capabilities of the breed, that is not only would they speedily track down the elephant but they could then escort them back to their "kraal" in true RR herding tradition. Ralf had had ridgies before when very much younger, and he had a pretty realistic view of their capabilities.

The role of the Ridgeback in the KNP is a very passive one, at least it is on that basis most of the early dogs were selected. They may not advance on the wild animals but remain at heel, off-lead, and never break away from their handler. They must show no aggression or shyness. They, dog and handler, are a team that is mutually dependant, and, basically, together they rise or fall. The dog has the sharper senses, and the human has the experience and, of course, the ultimate weapon of defence. That four-legged companion is the early warning system, but that doesn't mean that he (or more often than not, she) must bark his head off about it. That can be counter-productive, in fact it could attract unwanted attention. No, he must convey his concerns as quietly as possible, only when needed, and then be totally quiet again once he has been given reassurance that all is under control or, alternatively, conduct a tactical retreat with more than due decorum should it be decided that the present location is not the most suitable.

It is probably under these withdrawal circumstances that the RR is subject to the greatest temptation to hot-foot it out of the area using all the speed at his disposal. He may not allow himself to do so, and to be separated from his human companion. A little ridgie on his own in the KNP is a dead dog. His life span would be reduced to 30 minutes maximum, and it is assumed that hyena would be the most likely to take him down. We normally see them singly (except at kills) but a few hyenas can team up quite easily to take out a soft target like a Ridgeback.

To be continued in our next issue of *Lion Dog Digest*.

## Juba

**W**e have a tale to tell about that very happy young fellow, Juba, whose greatest joy has always been racing through the Kruger National Park with the Impala herds. He was in many ways the most successful of the dozen or so dogs in the KNP and its environs (Klaserie Game Reserve, Manyeleti, etc). Given more freedom to run than the rest of the RR's in the KNP he took full advantage of the scope bestowed upon him and proceeded to strike up a symbiotic relationship with all the animals around. The writer was lucky enough to witness this amazing situation at first hand, and most of the incidents to be related now were recorded on a camcorder (not at all professionally of course). We drove along one of the closed service roads to a riverside where Juba was told to jump off the back of the bakkie (LDV). He did so readily and was full of enthusiasm in spite of the four hour session he had enjoyed in the bush that morning.



As we moved down to the river he was pretty cautious at first and didn't move further than 20 meters ahead, constantly testing the air and checking all around him by sight and hearing. After a few minutes he raced across the river at a shallow section, splashing through 10cm of water and jumping over the rocks, and took a quick look at 100 Impala grazing happily in the presence of many other animals. Stopping short of them by about 20m he returned and reported back to his handler Jaco, then immediately thereafter setting off to check out the 5 waterbuck more than 700m down-river. We presume he stopped about 30m short of them before reporting back to Jaco that they were also fine before running off to check the baboon opposite us on the other side of the river.

We must emphasize that he always stopped short of these herds/troops and never disturbed their proceedings: he approached them at a "lazy gallop" ie very significant speed. They continued doing whatever they were involved in at the time and seemed to ignore him even though he bustled around non-stop at this frenetic pace. He certainly proved the incredible stamina of the RR on a daily basis and showed fairly frequently that he still had a good turn of speed which added even more evidence, if it was required, of his remarkable stamina.

Reverting to that day's activities, having stopped 30m short of the baboon troop of 30, he re-crossed the river and stopped to take a good look in two of the deep pools (we are convinced that he was checking them out for crocodile, and if this is the case he is the only RR there to have developed the habit). He picked up his routine running gait, told Jaco all was well, and set off up-river to check out the 50 Zebra at the roadside. They were about 200m away and he turned around about 50m short of them to report back to Jaco that they were also in good shape. Then off again to check those Impala once more.

The Impala were definitely Juba's favourite. Every now and then the herd would move off and he would run along next to them, 20m to the side. The pace was not fast, and he accompanied them at a very leisurely gallop for a kilometer or more before breaking off and rejoining Jaco at the spot where they had parted. If he came upon anything untoward at any stage he would tell Jaco all about it and Jaco had a pretty good idea of whether it was lion, leopard, hyena or wild dog, and what the direction was. Because of Juba's very broad scouting ability Jaco was never afraid of meeting up with a nasty surprise, something which takes a big load off your mind when you are walking around the KNP.

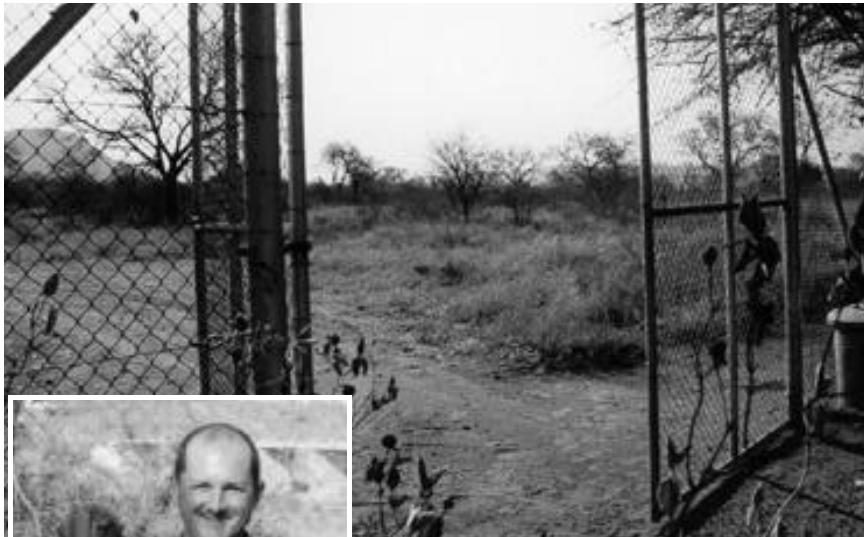
The Impala were still perfectly happy, Juba reported back before having another look at the Zebra. We should mention that not all of Juba's life is spent reconnoitering and reporting. He has his morning duty to perform at Jaco's gate should Elephant be there. Jaco is situated very close to the Crocodile River and the perimeter (veterinary) fence of the KNP; and because the animals don't particularly enjoy/trust the human society on the other side they tend to remain well back in the depths of the Park. Not so with

Elephant however: for one thing they are particularly partial to the sugar cane found right up to that fence and are quite happy to knock it down to satisfy their sweet tooth. So in Jaco's area you have a lot of the big fellows hanging around and there is a nice bit of shade there outside the gate and next to the bakkie, which is parked 30m from it. Now Jaco has no intention of side stepping the Jumbos just to get to his vehicle so he carefully opens the gate to let Juba out.

However there is a procedure before Juba is allowed out and it requires him to approach and stop in front of the open gate, to sit and offer a paw to Jaco, and only after the hand-shake is he commanded to go outside and do his duty.

This is the one time when the dog is allowed to have a good go at the animals and he carries out his task with great perseverance. A lot of persistence is required because those big fellows don't have much respect for little dogs, even if they are Rhodesian Ridgebacks. However Juba has the power in this case, they eventually decide that there are more pleasant places around, and amble off to find quieter pastures. Then Juba jumps up on to the back of the bakkie and Jaco joins him by sitting up front in the driver's seat. The day has begun.

On Saturday, 30 June 2001 there were no Elephant at the gate ie there was nothing requiring Juba's attention. He then proceeded to act completely out of character, not waiting to carry out the customary hand (paw) shaking routine and barged past Jaco before the gate was adequately opened for him.



Jaco with his new pup.

Above: The tall grass in centre picture...

see your daily companion of three years cut down in front of you, and for what? Juba has seen so many lion in his life he could give you a census count for his area. And the other predators too. Why did he suddenly decide to challenge an adversary he had spent his whole life avoiding and warning about right up until that moment?

One can only hypothesize on the issue as his actions were so totally out of character. So it is felt that he went into an excessively defensive routine probably brought on by various factors prior to that final encounter. Behind the fence, earlier that morning he must have witnessed the two big females wandering about and then settling down in those bushes. Probably there was a bit of aggro as they sauntered by, challenging him on his own turf. And he had his young girl friend there, and he would want to protect her. And then his human, his life's partner, was at the gate only twenty meters from those dangerous predators, and did he know how serious the position was? No, he didn't understand these things and had to be protected.

It will be very difficult to replace Juba with another dog that can gain such a deep measure of acceptance from all, and not only, the antelope. He proved how friendly the relations between wild animal and man's best friend can be.

He raced over to a tall grass section only 20m away and, growling very audibly, jumped in with as big a display of force as he could muster. Whatever "display of force" Juba intended to convey was never going to be enough. He jumped straight into the jaws of two adult lionesses. Death was instantaneous and under those circumstances, no slower or quicker had there been only one lioness present at the time.

Jaco was horrified and very shaken. Sudden death is a daily occurrence at the KNP and he sees lots of it, from close up. It's a totally different matter though to

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## Snake-bites and - spitting

A snake bite incident we did not report on earlier involved Dusty at the time of her first litter. The pups were three weeks old when a puff-adder approached, putting them very much at risk. Dusty had no alternative but to intervene and kill the reptile. Puff-adders are not normally the quickest of snakes at the best of times, but this one was no slouch when Dusty grabbed it a bit too far



Two of Dusty's pups.

behind the head during her attempts to neutralise it. She was struck on the right upper lip with serious consequences.

Though significant swelling immediately became apparent, she continued feeding her pups close to the dead adder while Ralf frantically contacted the vets at Skukuza. They wanted her up there immediately to administer serum, anti-histamine, and an antibiotic. With the strike in the soft, large, lip area, there was not such a serious risk of death from pressure building up in the

immediately affected area. All that this meant was that she had a bit more time available for treatment. (If struck in other parts of her body, eg. appendages, there would not have been sufficient time to save her by cutting, etc). In a way Ralf was fortunate in that it was already "closed time" in the Park and he was able to cover the 60 km between Malelane and Skukuza in just under an hour. The recommended allowed time for tourists is two and a half hours for this stretch.

### **PUFF-ADDER SNAKEBITE TREATMENT ON DUSTY IN THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK**

1. 100mg Cortisone (Hydro-cortisone succinate) Immediately.
2. 0.75 ml of FINADYNE
3. Test Dose of Anti-serum (Polyvalent anti-serum)
4. If no allergic reaction then administer 1 ampule of anti-serum (10ml at R350 per ampule!!)
5. Dose of strong anti-biotics.
6. Time Factor: Important to get this treatment ASAP.
7. Dusty was treated within the hour.
8. Roy Bengis State Vet at Skukuza in the Kruger National Park tel: (013) 735-5641 always willing to help telephonically.



Dusty's swollen face.



Dusty's large scars are barely visible here.

Dusty was not a pleasant sight with her whole face swollen to an absurd size. The vets went to work immediately and improvement was not long in coming. By the time she returned to her pups she was looking very much better and obviously the worst had passed. Being a very attentive mother she immediately provided the youngsters with a midnight snack and settled them down for the night. Though not easily seen in the photograph, she has two large scars on that lip and also a slash down to one of them. Apart from that she appears to be none the worse for the experience, but she is definitely more circumspect in her dealings with these reptiles now.



**C**ampbell Scott, who runs two Sitkas in the Djuma Game Reserve, Sabi Sands, reports that his pair have been hit [spat at] several times by Mozambican Spitting Cobra. In spite of repeated exposure [say 4 strikes] Bulu, the smaller one, shows no adverse consequences at all, in fact when Campbell wants to irrigate her eyes she strongly rejects his attention.

There is a fair amount of Sitka genetic component in the Ridgie, [that is where the ridge comes from after all] so one would hope that the breed derives the benefit of resistance to this blinding poison. Perhaps we must seek out Ridgeback bloodlines which are more resistant than those tried to date as these snake strikes are having disastrous consequences. If we cannot come up with a fix going that route, then the Sitka component in the RR is going to be increased by some "enterprising breeder".