

Marcel Buhler visits the South African Molkontin Stud

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Our last big trip with my partner to Africa took place early March 2024. This time we had scheduled a trip to Zambia, Botswana and South Africa.

First, we flew via Johannesburg to Livingston in Zambia, where we spent a few days directly on the Zambezi River right next to the Victoria Falls. The boat trips on the Zambezi River, the countless Hippos and, above all, the fantastic Victoria Falls will always remain in our memories.

Next, we traveled almost 100 km along the Zambezi River to Kasane in Botswana where we spent a few days with safaris in the Chobe national park either by boat or by car. An open river landscape with large parades of elephants and thunder of hippos characterizes the Chobe National Park. Furthermore, we encountered such a wide variety of birds on the boat tours which we had never experienced before. My personal highlights were the various bee-eaters these “flying gems”, as well as close-range sighting of various kingfishers.

For the third leg we took the plane from Kasane back to Johannesburg and then drove by rental



car to Sun City, where we spent a few days in the Pilanesberg National Park. Here it is permitted to do self-drive safaris on your own. That's what I love, because it's the only way to follow your own schedule and spend time on what often one group finds interesting whilst others might not. Just stop somewhere and enjoy nature and wildlife for as long as you want, fantastic!

From the Pilanesberg National Park it is approx. a 2 hours drive to Tierpoort and this trip has been part of our “standard program” for the last few

years: Visiting our good friends Holger, Christine and Jutta Molkentin.

We had an excellent lunch on the terrace when we discovered an unexpected visitor, an over 2 meters long *Naja nigricollis* (black-necked spitting cobra) had quietly crept right next to the dining table. Luckily the dogs started barking and Holger was able to put the “uninvited guest” to flight with a seat cushion. I’ve always wanted to see a cobra, but not necessarily that close. The picture was taken by Holger a few days later...

After I had calmed down again, Holger and I made our way to the breeding aviary.

Once more it was overwhelming as 224 breeding cages and +/- 1,000 show budgies are not something you see every day and that is exactly what prompted me to put together a few of my impressions for the readers of Chatter Magazine.

Feeding



Budgie food mixes as we know them in Europe are also available in South Africa. However, they are quite dear or, if reasonably priced do not meet the quality requirements.

For this reason, Holger has opted for basic mixture with various types of millet. At the same time, he mixes his own high quality and nutritious soft food, whose base consists of boiled rice.



A few years ago, I adopted the rice for my own breeding food and have had very good experiences with it. Cooked wild rice is very popular with both budgies and Bourke’s parakeets.



In addition, Holger adds soaked oats, some sunflower seeds, grated beetroot and carrots, as well as fresh, home-grown alfalfa, rosemary, peppermint to complete the mixture. He feeds



this soft-food twice a day, which makes good sense as temperatures are often over 30 degrees Celsius. For the same reason, the drinking water in the aviaries is changed three times a day and medication is never administered via the drinking water.

The birds’ need for minerals is covered by self-produced limestone. In addition, sand on the flooring in the breeding boxes and in the 7 large aviaries as well as silica and large salt licks are always at the disposal to the budgerigars in the aviaries.

Breeding Boxes / Aviaries

Almost without exception, solid wire cages are used for breeding. On the one hand, they have significantly better air circulation than our European plastic breeding boxes, highly important at the high temperature in South Africa and on the other hand they are also much easier to clean, which quickly saves a significant amount of cleaning time for the numerous breeding cages.

The “box in the box” nest boxes are attached to the outside of the cages, which ensures a simple and efficient handling.

All of the 7 large aviaries are placed directly in front of the windows. As these are most of the time open a good ventilation in the aviaries is ensured, which the budgies really appreciate, especially in the hot summer months.

As the birds use the large open water bowls in the aviaries also often for bathing the water gets unfortunately dirty very quickly. Therefore, the water bowls are thoroughly cleaned each time before being refilled with clean drinking water.



Take aways

- Holger's own breeding mix based on boiled rice and fresh vegetables and herbs ensures that the budgies get high quality food at an affordable price
- The South African high temperature of over 30°C means good hygiene is even more essential. Therefore, the budgies get fed 2 times a day and given fresh water 3 times a day.
- Handling such a large number of birds necessitates an easy and practical handling e.g. using wire cages and box-in-box nest boxes.