

NEWS & VIEWS

A 'Meerkat Manor' for HESC

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HOEDSPRUIT – 'Kom Kiara, kom Kiro, kom Javel! Kom na mamma toe', Willa Riekert coos as she calls her family of meerkats to come and introduce themselves to *K2C News*. Willa, from Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre (HESC), was the architect behind the new designer home for the meerkat family, an enclosure measuring 7x4.5m which has been carefully planned to

cater for their every need. The foundation is 800mm deep, which gives them space to dig holes, and rocks, stumps, aloes and toys have also been installed for their enjoyment. The enclosure was sponsored by BUCO in Hoedspruit, who also adopted one of the male meerkats, Javel, for life. It is situated next to the HESC Deli, so the meerkats can entertain guests waiting for the departure of a tour. As a novel feature of the enclosure, there are glass panels in the walls to

give children the opportunity to watch the meerkats from their own perspective.

The meerkats are very much at home in their new abode, but their lives were not always as happy as this. They were confiscated from people who kept them as pets, and were possibly bought illegally on the black market. The baby meerkats are irresistibly cute, but once they reach the age of three to four years they start biting and many owners no longer want them as pets. In an act of unbelievable cruelty, one of the meerkats had simply been abandoned in an empty house when the owners moved away.

Meerkats are a small *Herpselid* species found in many dry areas of South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. They dislike rain intensely and are most upset during wet weather. The HESC family has been provided with safe and dry night quarters to protect them from the Lowveld rains. Their tan fur colouration reflects their natural environment, arid desert, with black ears and tip of tail. They are typically around 50cm long and weigh just over 700g, although the HESC family is beginning to show signs of the good life and one tips the scale at just above 1kg! They are given a healthy normal diet which includes insects, scorpions, vegetables, fruit, eggs and mince.

The meerkats are at HESC purely for educational

purposes, with no intention of captive breeding. They are engaging little creatures to observe in so many ways. Even in captivity, one meerkat is on sentry duty while the others forage. You will see one of them on a perch within the enclosure, just as they would in the wild, and if a raptor is spotted he gives out an alarm call which sends the others dashing for cover in the burrows. They have a different alarm call for the various kinds of danger they encounter. Willa is familiar with most of these, and says that staff walking past on the HESC veranda elicit different responses depending on their clothing! The chance to watch these very active little creatures so close up is a delightful addition to the many attractions on offer at HESC.



R40 no-go for entire day!

...from pg1...of the mall construction going ahead and is trying to put pressure on the SANLAM group by organising community mass action.

The ANC members however are protesting for reasons relating to internal party politics. The disgruntled ANC group blockaded the R40 burning tires and singing songs. They refused to speak to *Kruger2Canyon News*.

Cleopas Maunye, the BRA secretary, says they have submitted a memorandum to the owners and shareholders of Mega City. 'We encourage

