



Conserving wildlife. Inspiring the world.

FreeMe Circular – May 2016

Dear Benefactors, Members and Supporters of FreeMe

It has been a while since we have been in touch. We therefore trust that this circular will update you on matters that have taken place in the last few months.

Even though FreeMe has encountered some obstacles, we as the Board and Management of FreeMe, want to assure you that we are continuously working to stabilise and grow the organisation into one that is more professional, compliant and transparent.

In the latter part of 2015 FreeMe was faced with challenges that were very disruptive to our daily operations. However, there have been some exciting new developments that we would like to share with you:

Appointment of a new Board

The Board of 2014 selected Margo Bansda as a Board member and then appointed her as the new Managing Director of FreeMe in March 2015. Shathi Govender and Constant Hoogstad joined the team in May 2015. The three, together with Ros Gerber, embarked on the long awaited new direction of FreeMe, to streamline the organisation's animal and operational practices with the objective of striving towards realising the FreeMe mission of "Conserving Wildlife, Inspiring the world". Constant has since resigned.

With the objective of working towards a more professional and accountable organisation, the new Board agreed to appoint regular on-site vets and a vet nurse. These appointments were in addition to the existing pro-bono services given by current vets to improve the immediate level of in-house animal care we are providing. Currently these services are being provided on an ad hoc basis.

September 2015

We started discussions with the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (**GDARD**) on how we can improve our operational systems and facilities.

Karien Schmidt was appointed as our new rehabilitator. Karien has the necessary knowledge, qualifications, skills and experience to take FreeMe to the next level.

Sadly, a group of volunteers, communicated falsely to the public, that FreeMe was not the upstanding animal welfare organization that they said they are. We took this matter very seriously and made it a priority to put a stop to this false and inappropriate communication by obtaining pro-bono legal advice.

FREEME WILDLIFE REHABILITATION NPC

Reg. No. 2004/000431/08 | PBO 930017678

BBBEE Level 2

138 Holkam Road, Paulshof, Sandton | P.O. Box 1666, Cramerview 2060

T: +27 (0) 11 807 6993 | (A/H) +27 (0) 83 558 5658

E: info@freeme.org.za | www.freeme.org.za

Directors: M.R. Bansda, R.M. Gerber, S.Govender

October 2015

The NSPCA received complaints from the same group of volunteers that did not agree with FreeMe's new strategy. FreeMe was falsely accused of animal abuse and maltreatment. This group decided to take it a step further, by embarking on a go-slow strike, followed by a stay-away, while giving the Board an ultimatum to resign, so that they can take over the reins. The NSPCA paid numerous visits in response to these complaints. They provided valuable advice on additional operational procedures to assist in improved animal treatment and on the upgrading of FreeMe facilities. We took the advice to heart, and look at us now!



Photos of work-in progress by staff, volunteers and interns

This, however, was not the end. To further complicate matters, someone actually stole a duiker that was under treatment from the premises! Some of our stock and property control equipment went missing and even more concerning, FreeMe's donor database with confidential information was compromised. When we investigated this unfortunate incident we discovered that due to many 'helping hands' over a period of time and poor systems control measures, these perpetrators were able to carry out their crimes. Subsequently we have implemented strict security measures to prevent this from happening in future.

After the above-mentioned incidents the volunteer group (now ex-volunteers) took to Social Media, Internet and radio, as a mechanism to further discredit the FreeMe Board. Of course, no proof has ever been presented to support any of the false accusations. FreeMe has further consulted with legal representatives to address the various attacks on FreeMe. Unfortunately this still has not been resolved and the legal matters continue.

Permit Status

In October and November 2015 further meetings took place with GDARD, which included NSPCA. FreeMe in collaboration with GDARD and NSPCA temporarily closed its doors to manage the existing animals that were in treatment and to restructure and upgrade the facilities until the new permits were re-issued. FreeMe presented GDARD, for the first time with an Operational Management Plan and Standard Operational Procedures in support of these permit

applications contributing to a sustainable operation. The good news is that we have motivated for the permits to be issued in the name of FreeMe and not of individual staff members.

January 2016

We had our 1st general meeting for 2016 on January 20th, in terms of Section 63(1) of FreeMe's Memorandum of Incorporation (**MOI**) called by this group of ex-volunteers. Volunteer lawyers attended on members' proxies and the meeting was driven by legal debate and not the voting of the removal of current Board as originally requested. Therefore this meeting was scuppered by the very ex-volunteers and their attorney, who called the meeting in the first place! The meeting was adjourned and no vote took place.

FreeMe was also ordered to attend a Companies Tribunal mediation that originated out of a CIPC complaint by an ex-volunteer, about membership rejections and mission changes to the MOI. Only at that point did FreeMe discover that volunteer complaints were reviewed by a CIPC investigator in November, who reported that their complaints were very weak. The report also stated that regardless of the length of time a volunteer worked at FreeMe, the Board holds the ultimate authority and responsibility for the direction of the organisation and terms of the admission of members.

The Company's Tribunal mediation ended in dead-lock and there has been no further communications on this matter.

Animal Releases

We would like to reiterate that our animals are not imprisoned. They are being released as and when the various permits, locations and timing are right in line with release panels' regulations. Recent releases included a porcupine, various hedgehogs, barn owls, spotted eagle owls, garden birds, surricates, two red-knobbed coots and a bullfrog.





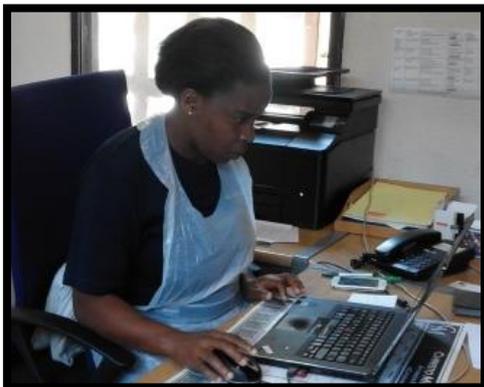
Photos of recent releases taken place in late 2015 and early 2016

Despite the rumours, FreeMe still has animals on site that requires daily feeding and care – support in this area is always welcome.

Strict policies need to be adhered to with the release of captive and rehabilitated tortoises and we may therefore not release any tortoises unless permitted by GDARD.

Digitization

In the interim we continue to strive ahead with the implementation of our strategy to upgrade and upscale FreeMe. We have accepted 10 learners from an EOH IT Learnership Programme, who are currently in training. Their first priority is to digitize some 40,000 patient admission cases for information to be used in research e.g. domesticated vs wildlife attacks, disease distribution and patterns, species specific differences in consecutive years and ultimately the success rate of past rehabilitation protocols. Additional programmes in which the interns will participate includes educational talks in township schools in their native language and a courier service to vets and the public for wildlife in distress. Other possibilities include research opportunities with some academic institutes that can contribute to rehabilitation and conservation.



FreeMe interns hard at work

Financial situation

FreeMe experienced financial constraints last year as a result of the abovementioned problems that transpired. We are, however, very optimistic and with the current limited resources we continue to work on various opportunities to raise funds.

While waiting for the permit renewal, FreeMe continues to exist. The operational costs for animal care and daily resources have to be paid - we ask Benefactors, Members and Supporters of FreeMe who are able to provide services or other contributions to help cover our monthly expenses, to please contact us on info@freeme.org.za

The latest bonus is that we now have acquired our **Level 2 BBBEE** status!

We wish to thank those dedicated staff members, interns, volunteers and local businesses who have stayed loyal to FreeMe, and continue to support our vision going forward. We are extremely thankful for your on-going motivation, physical and food support, but most importantly, for being there for our animals.

We hope this brief overview puts you in the picture, and that you will continue to believe in our chosen road forward, of professionalism, compliance and transparency. We strongly believe that this will take 19 years of rehabilitation, into a new dimension.

Regards

The FreeMe Board



The FreeMe Team

