



Common hippopotamus
(*Hippopotamus amphibius*).



PC Ferreira and Dr Julia Baum

A lonely HIPPO in the Karoo

Khoisan Karoo Conservancy, Northern Cape, South Africa
Member project of PLCnetwork of the Southern Hemisphere


Have you ever heard of hippos in the Karoo? Almost secretively, there is only one population of *seekoei* (the Afrikaans term for hippo) living in a private nature reserve in the middle of this open, semi-desert landscape.

The Khoisan Karoo Conservancy is an early member of PLCnetwork of the Southern Hemisphere. It is an 8 000ha property situated close to Hanover in the Northern Cape province and boasts a stunning Karoo environment. The conservancy comprises two parts: the original Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve and the newly proclaimed Hanover Aardvark Nature Reserve.

New Holme Guest Lodge is the main accommodation and PC Ferreira, the conservancy owner, offers his guests creative itineraries, for example a *veld braai* on the *koppie* (outdoor barbeque on a hilltop). A special outing is the trip to the Khoi etchings (rock art) and settlement site with stone tools. The conservancy is home to more than 200 bird species and a paradise for any birder enjoying early morning or afternoon photographic trips.

A highlight is the infamous Shy5-nightdrive during which the nocturnal wildlife of the Karoo can be encountered, including rare species such as the black-footed cat.

Adjacent to the conservancy meanders the Seekoei River, which was indigenous habitat to hippopotamus until the late 1700s. PC, a passionate sheep farmer, researched the history of his land and found historical paintings and travel notes of colonial explorers and governors that show how the last hippos along the river existed on his farm, where they then had been hunted to extinction probably in 1778.

 PC realised the immense loss to the environment and conservation and decided to take action by initiating a hippo reintroduction project in 2000. After much effort, a small breeding herd of hippos was released on the Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve portion of the conservancy in 2006. PC was then awarded the SANParks Kudu Award for his contribution to conservation in 2008.

Seekoei River.



Karoo braai.



Seekoei River sunset.

“PC has the vision to establish a viable wild hippo population all along the Seekoei River.”

Over the years, five hippos were born from the original breeding group; however, the dominant bull unfortunately killed most offspring and one cow before rescue measures could take place. This old male died in 2017 and sadly, also the second remaining cow passed in 2019. Today, only one young bull is still living in the hippo pool at the Khoisan Karoo Conservancy, and from afar engages curiously with guests visiting on the jetty during sundowner game drives. He is strong and healthy, but lonely and in desperate need of a family.

PLCnetwork seeks to support persons like PC Ferreira who are truly using an entrepreneurial approach to

enhance conservation outcomes. The permission to re-introduce hippos sparked his passion for conservation: PC has transformed his traditional sheep farm into a unique destination where biodiversity takes precedence. He has greatly reduced stocking rates of sheep below what is the norm for a Karoo property through operating a business based on combining a working farm with nature-based tourism activities.

In the long term, his goal is to see the entire Seekoei River valley of 300km in length under conservation status.

This will entail collaboration with other land-owners to form a landscape scale corridor of properties participating in the creation of a regional conservation economy.

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(*Felis nigripes*)

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Get involved

Together, Khoisan Karoo Conservancy and PLCnetwork aim to introduce three hippo cows to the Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve and re-establish a healthy hippo family in the Seekoei River. We are raising the necessary funds of roughly ZAR150 000 for the purchase and transport of these three cows and will appreciate any support or alternative innovative partnership to make this project a success.

Crowdfunding campaign:
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