

Jake White, The Brave Springbuck. A story of courage and dedication.

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On Saturday 14 June 2008, at roughly 14:00, I overheard some of the staff communicating on the radio. Listening to them, I realized that they were pursuing a stray Kudu bull on the service road from the direction of the service gate, and discussing different options of chasing the Kudu back into the veldt. They expressed concern for the wellbeing of the Kudu, which had suffered minor injuries from running into the fences (his mouth was bleeding and foaming).

I proceeded towards the village gate to see what was happening and if I could assist. At that moment, the Kudu came bursting through the bushes, slammed into the village gate and charged back into the bush. I immediately reported this incident on the radio, informing our staff of the position of the Kudu. Our head, Ms. Tilla Reinecke replied and asked that I open the gate to the Wildlife Centre to let the kudu in so it could calm down. Just as I was about to open the gate from the inside, the kudu burst out of the bush and slammed yeat again into the gate, breaking the gate fence and denting one of the support poles in the process.

I ran along the fence to the small gate that leads from the Wildlife Centre to the village, and saw the kudu running to the far corner of the village where it meets up with the buffalo camp.

Jake, our resident Springbuck, was grazing in the corner area...

Without avail the Kudu attacked Jake. I shouted at them, but to no avail. I called for help and Tilla told me to run and close the small village gate. When I got back, the Kudu was down on the ground lying on its chest, his body positioned in such a way that it offered no escape route for the Springbuck. Jake frantically continued to defend himself and fought the Kudu relentlessly, with the latter in return hammering Jake with its horns. I heard a loud snap and saw Jake limping. It looked to me like he had broken his left front leg. Jake became exhausted and panicky and got his horns stuck in the fence.

At that stage I knew that it was the only chance I had to try and help him. I climbed on the fence and moved along until I was above Jake. I managed to dislodge his horns and hold him until help arrived and we could pick him up and carry him to safety. Shortly afterwards the stress took its toll, and the life of the Kudu bull with it...

Some of our staff came to my aid, and I sent for my stethoscope, valium, needles and syringes. I listened to Jakes heart and lungs, which at the time seemed to be fine. His nose, however, was gushing blood everywhere. At first I thought his left front leg was broken in the knee cap, but he was very restless and I struggled to examine his leg. I injected him with 0.5ml valium. We waited for the drugs to take effect in and after re-examining him, I found that his left shoulder was fractured and his lungs was damaged and full of fluid. I knew I did not have the drugs nor the equipment to try and help him...

I phoned the local vet to consult with him regarding the extend of Jake's injuries and to hear if he thought that Jake could be saved. Regardless to say, he could not give a clear opinion without examining Jake himself, and so we proceeded to cover Jake with blankets and getting him ready for the trip to town and the veterinary's clinic, where it was confirmed that Jake had a fractured shoulder and that there was damage to and fluid on his lungs. He had extensive tissue damage to his face and neck, which had already started to swell up. The vet advised that Jake should be stabilized Jake first before he could sedate him in order to take x-rays of his shoulder and other injuries. He gave Jake a few injections and we left him there so that the vet could monitor his progress.

I phoned the clinic later in the evening to hear how Jake was, and learnt from the vet although Jake looked a bit better, the lung edema was still very bad.

The next day, Saturday 15 June 2008, I had yet another tele-conversation with the vet, who reported that Jake still seemed to be making some progress, and was even making small attempts at lifting his head and trying to get up. He didn't want to put Jake on a drip yet because he was afraid it may cause swelling on the brain.

Later in the evening, the vet phoned me again. Jake's condition was unchanged, and the vet was still struggling to get the fluid off Jake's chest. Jake seemed much disorientated and was placed on a drip as he had not taken in any fluids or food.

On Monday morning, 16 June 2008, we had to go into town to run errands, and took the opportunity to visit Jake. He seemed a little better, but was still non responsive with a very swollen head and neck and in need of intensive care. The doctor felt that Jake was not stable enough to get anaesthetic and radiographs yet.

The following morning the doctor phoned to give the bad news that Jake had died. My colleague and I went to collect his body. Upon arrival, the doctor called us to the back to show that after Jake's death, all the swelling went down and he realized that Jake had a broken skull as well. The whole area around the base of the horns was completely loose, and due to the extensive damage and swelling, he had not been able to pick it up. We collected Jake's body and brought it back to be buried in the wildlife centre.

Regardless of the unfortunate series of events that led to his injuries and death, I know that Jake was worth the effort. He was the only Springbuck on the nature reserve, and the guests loved him too. We are a rehabilitation centre and denying an animal a chance of life is in contradiction to our purpose.

I speak on behalf of all the staff at the wildlife centre when I say that we are truly sad at losing Jake. He will be sorely missed....

