

Project Update: April 2020



LEFT: From left Gilbert Busieneri (field assistant) and Leo Malingati identifying a grass rat through taking of body measurements and checking on skin colouration on different parts of the body. Mpala Conservancy has two species of *Arvicanthis* that look alike and can only be differentiated by body colouration, rostrum and incisors. Nile grass rat (*Arvicanthis niloticus*) is light brownish yellow and heavily speckled with black and yellow, hairs dark brown at base with yellowish-buff sub-terminal zone and blackish tip, head blunt and short muzzle, tail dark above and pale brown below, short brown ears with reddish hairs. Nairobi grass rat (*Arvicanthis nairobea*) is grizzled chestnut brown, small round ears with short brown hairs, somehow tapered muzzle compared to *A. niloticus*.

RIGHT: From left Sarah Weiner and Leo Malingati processing small mammals in the early morning. Our small mammal traps are set overnight then checked early morning before the savanna's intense heat in the day. Most of the rodents and shrews are nocturnal and diurnal, the reason for setting the traps late evening through the night. The traps are checked in the early morning to prevent the animals from dying from the intense heat in metal trap cages. Here, me and Sarah will collect faecal samples from the animals and identify the individual (species, sex, age, and reproductive status).



LEFT: Leo Malingati tags a small rodent (a fringe tailed gerbil) with small Monel ear tags. The ear tags will be helpful in identifying an individual throughout the trapping bouts and over a long time the data on recapture histories can be used to estimate

the survival probabilities of individuals. The Monel ear tags have unique numbers that help identify each individual.

RIGHT: A tagged and sampled fringe tailed gerbil (*Gerbiliscus robustus*) ready for release. Gerbils have strong hind feet for jumping to escape predators and large eyes for quickly spotting predators. © Sarah Weiner.