

Kalahari Wild & Vodacom deliver remote connectivity



Kalahari Wild is a
Ready Business

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Satellite solution creates platform to build sustainable farming future

Farming in South Africa is changing and for many, the old ways of doing business are no longer viable. To survive, farmers must think differently and act fast. Kalahari Wild is one such example. It is using the latest communication solutions to help diversify, automate and cut costs.

The challenge

Protecting the Roan

The Roan antelope is the second largest of the antelope species. Native to central and southern Africa, it is not yet on the endangered species list but its future is threatened by poaching and habitat loss. Numbers have drastically reduced across Africa; it's now estimated that just 60% of Roan antelope live in protected areas.

One such area is Grootfontein, a 12,000 hectare farm in South Africa's Northern Cape, 65km east of Kuruman where Kalahari Wild has commenced a Scarce Game Breeding programme. The farm is owned by the Van Der Merwe family, Jacques van der Merwe, a 38-year-old father of two and business partner Janus Kotze, an African buffalo breeder from Swellendam in the Western Cape. The farm has been in the family for 60 years, mainly with livestock and cash crops. Wildlife Conservation Breeding and in particular Roan antelope have only recently been part of the overall plan.

"The livestock industry is under so much pressure of late that we have had no option but to diversify in an industry that is at least growing at a reasonable tempo, that is the Wildlife Conservation Breeding Industry" says Jacques.

Diversification and sustainability

Kalahari Wild's motives are not purely commercial, but neither is this a totally altruistic project: "We farm in a very remote, very arid part of the country, and we provide work for 50 people. The farm sees an average of 400mm of rain each year, most of which falls between January and April. What little rain we get quickly seeps into the sandy soil. To survive we have to change from conventional farming practices to a more holistic approach to farming, also to diversify and farm sustainably."

The Roan antelope were introduced in early 2014 and they meet both criteria. "Rather than intensively fed in one area, they are managed in such a way that they migrate across the land through the year. This gives the soil time to recover; organic substances in the soil are enhanced and thus enhance the ability of the ground to sustain grazers over time and restore the soil's original composition. These are wild animals which means we have a harder job tracking and monitoring them. They are expensive animals as Roan cows can be worth up to R1 million each."

Tracking involves people on horseback following the Roan every day, recording location and physical data into a tablet device. They take photographs and carry out regular health checks; also recording abnormal behaviour and new births. However, to make sense of this data, to plot progress against time, Jacques and his team need to export the data to a central database. From here it can be shared, analysed and viewed remotely.

"Mobile coverage in this area is not great," says Jacques. "There are no masts and the population is so sparse there is not much economic sense in providers erecting masts. Fixed lines are no good – the cable is frequently stolen and it's too expensive to maintain."

Jacques is a Vodacom mobile customer, but it took a friend to point him towards Vodacom's Broadband Connect Satellite. The Broadband Connect Satellite service is totally independent from any terrestrial copper landline solution and can be provisioned anywhere in South Africa, provided there is a clear line of sight to the satellite. The service is installed and maintained by trained and accredited Vodacom Business Services installation teams.

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Co-founder and Director, Kalahari Wild (Pty) Ltd

The bottom line

Total coverage allows remote management

Broadband Connect Satellite allows Jacques to manage his farm business remotely, from Swellendam, a town 1,200 km to the south, in the Western Cape. It carries data and allows Voice Over IP calls. “I can check on the Roan data at any time,” he says, “talk to the guys, see the latest pictures and compare the tracking data.”

It means Jacques and his wife can focus on developing their guesthouse and restaurant business in Swellendam without losing track of operations on the farm. “Swellendam is important to us as the guesthouse and restaurant support the main farm business. The restaurant carries our organically farmed meat, and the guesthouse is a good way of promoting our conservation and sustainability efforts with tourists.”

He has plans to build a number of tourist retreats on the farm, allowing guests to stay and track the Roan as well as other wildlife. “We’ll need extra bandwidth for this, which is no problem with additional routers, and we’re also planning to put in a more sophisticated surveillance system to help control and monitor the animals that will, hopefully, benefit the whole industry.”

One aim, he says, is to allow investors to remotely view the Roan live from web cameras situated at grazing areas and water points. The Broadband Connect Satellite solution allows Jacques to increase data usage each month.

“Farming has changed so much in South Africa in recent years. For many, the old ways of farming are just no longer viable – it’s more tempting to sell the land to mining firms than to continue farming. I don’t think like that. You have to be entrepreneurial. There are many ways in which technology can help the farming industry, to make it more sustainable and more attractive to investors.

“Our aim is to build a sustainable, holistically managed farming industry, conserving our resources and sharing the pleasures of it with others. We won’t waste our children’s future efforts creating an ongoing legacy.”

Benefits

- Ensures data coverage, for the first time, across a remote farming region
- Allows remote management of the farm
- Delivers a consistent service, removing the variable connectivity standards experienced with mobile and fixed
- Provides a platform on which to add new data services, with flexible data usage
- Cements a long term partnership with the communications provider, improving the ability to plan future strategies.

About the customer:

- Industry: Farming
- Headquarters: Swellendam, South Africa
- Employees: 50
- Web: Search ‘Kalahari Wild’ on Facebook



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