

Secret Electricity Price Hikes in South Africa to be Curbed in a Game-Changing Court Ruling



Image : CanvaPro

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A recent high court judgment could be a game changer for the setting of municipal electricity tariffs in South Africa. In late October 2025, the court ruled that the process used by the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa) to decide yearly electricity price hikes was unconstitutional because it stifled public participation and violated the right to fair administrative action.

This means that the way municipalities decide on annual electricity price increases will change. Everyone who uses electricity will now be able to see how price increases are justified. Municipalities will be compelled to publish key financial documents used to justify price increases.

The judgment also forces municipalities to plan far ahead by setting strict new deadlines for tariff applications.

Nersa is the regulatory authority for South Africa's electricity, gas and fuel industries. It has to approve all bulk electricity tariffs proposed by Eskom, the state-owned energy provider. But it also has to do this transpar-

ently in a way that allows public input.

The court found that Nersa had failed on this point. Its process was consistently late and secretive, which meant the public didn't have a good chance to give feedback on proposals to hike electricity prices.

Afriforum, an advocacy group for South Africa's Afrikaner population, took Nersa to court because over a number of years, the regulator had recommended high price hikes without justifying this publicly.

For Nersa, the judgment means that it can no longer ignore rules that say it must consult the public. It will also need to do this in future according to a strict, court-

ordered timetable.

I'm a legal academic who researches how the constitution promotes accountability, justice and rights such as the right to fairly priced electricity.

I believe the high court ruling is a victory for public transparency and accountability because it addresses long-standing failures in the system, such as secretive decision-making and impossible deadlines for public comment (for example setting aside just one day for people to make an input on the proposed electricity price hike).

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Letters to the Editor

Excerpt from an anonymous letter to the Editor:

On the evening of Friday 8 November 2025, a devastating fire, allegedly started in a drug den, destroyed most of the shacks in the “Plastic View” (PV) settlement in the centre of Hoedspruit, leaving an estimated 58 persons without shelter and now temporarily housed in the municipal hall.

After more than a week of meetings, there is still a lack of a clear way forward towards resettling the victims. Following a request by the Hoedspruit Concerned Rate Payers Association, the deadline for a decision on resettling the displaced individuals was postponed until Friday, 21st November 2025.

The HCRPA’s position was clearly indicated in an application to the Limpopo High Court in November 2024 regarding the illegal occupation of land in the town of Hoedspruit. At the time, the HCRPA demanded that the issues regarding the PV land invasion be addressed by the authorities. The only demand made by the HCRPA was that all the respondents act to meet their relevant legal obligations. Subsequent discussions amongst the HCRPA leadership identified serious legal implications for solutions regarding the resettlement tabled to date and the longer-term implications of the HCRPA supporting any legally noncompliant solution.

Now that a crisis has occurred, the focus has shifted to a quick, temporary solution. The Maruleng Local Municipality (MLM) is currently not considering the legal implications of its actions. They appear to be drawing residents into providing a solution based on the spirit of “ubuntu,” leading them into a rabbit hole from which escape would be difficult. The municipality is, however, aware of the potential for further legal action. The MLM, having confirmed that they are aware that human settlements are a provincial competency, continue to persist in trying to resolve this issue independently. The failure to comply with a court order requiring a proper further census has caused additional complications in assessing the extent of rehousing requirements.

The HCRPA cannot change its stance on

legal compliance by supporting any of the proposed solutions that would undermine its position and its integrity. There is little chance that the MLM will be able to meet all the required legal and regulatory compliances at any of the proposed relocation sites, not least of which is their own moratorium on water and sanitation connections.

The HCRPA is firmly of the belief that it can only support compliant solutions and that the authorities must take responsibility for finding one that is both compliant and acceptable to the Hoedspruit community.

The result of the meeting on the 21st November 2025 saw the Mayor of Maruleng Local Municipality, Hon. Cllr T.C. Musolwa, confirm that the municipality has finalised its decision regarding PV and its former residents. After reviewing various data sources - including municipal records, the IEC, and the National Housing Register - the municipality has determined that very few individuals qualify for emergency housing assistance.

SANRAL, as the legal owner of the affected property, has committed to securing the land, and the municipality has begun clearing the remaining structures. No further land invasions will be permitted.

The municipality will make the town hall available as a temporary shelter only until 03rd December 2025.

The Mayor noted that the decision was influenced in part by the high levels of criminal activity previously associated with PV. Members of the public and local businesses are requested to assist with food donations for the remaining individuals over the next 5 days (as of date of publication). To avoid oversupply and wastage, please ensure that any assistance is coordinated with Director Helen Pasha at the municipality. Ward 1 Councillor Christine du Preez is also available for communication.

The PV catastrophe is a direct result of the inaction of the authorities. The situation was caused by the authorities and must be resolved by the authorities in line with their statutory responsibilities and their obligations to their ratepayers.



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Secret Electricity Price Hikes in South Africa to be Curbed in a Game-Changing Court Ruling

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Crucially, it introduces a strict new set of rules that could change how electricity prices are calculated.

Keeping vital information secret from the public

Every year, South Africans face rising electricity prices. For instance, in April 2025, the state-owned electricity provider Eskom announced a 12.74% price increase.

These steep annual increases are a financial burden for many households and businesses.

The process for deciding the increase starts when Eskom proposes its bulk electricity tariffs to Nersa.

Nersa approves Eskom's bulk prices. Then municipalities set their own prices based on Nersa guidelines. By law, Nersa reviews municipal tariffs using a study that sets out how much the electricity costs to generate and supply. It then publishes the new prices for public comment, and only then approves them. Municipalities cannot charge unapproved rates.

The court found this system broken in practice. The first issue identified by the court was that the process was consistently late. Nersa delayed in telling municipalities the new Eskom

bulk price, making municipalities late in submitting their own tariff applications to Nersa.

This delay squeezed the time available for public comment to such an extent that, in certain instances, there was no participation at all. Regulations under the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act explicitly require a comment period of at least 30 days from the date a notice is published.

For example, proposed electricity price hikes for one local area (Mogale City, with a population of 438,000 people) were published on 19 June 2025, and Nersa approved it the very next day. This made public comment impossible.

The court also found that Nersa withheld the cost-of-supply studies from the public, claiming that they were confidential. The public was denied access to the single most important document needed to make a meaningful comment. This is unconstitutional because supply studies submitted to Nersa by municipalities are public documents that should be open for public scrutiny.

The court further found that Nersa had ignored the law by publishing proposed tariff increases only on its website and social media. The law clearly states that the notices must be published in the Government Gazette and South Africa's newspapers in at least two official languages.

What the court ordered Nersa to do instead

The court issued binding directions that create a strict, non-negotiable timetable for all future tariff approvals.

- By 31 January every year, Nersa must tell municipalities what the new Eskom bulk tariff will be for the following year.
- Municipalities must submit their full tariff applications, including their cost-of-supply studies, to Nersa by 30 March of every year.
- The public must know exactly what proposed price hikes are based on. Therefore Nersa must publish every single municipal application for an electricity tariff increase along with its cost-of-supply studies.
- Finally, Nersa must finalise its decisions and communicate them by 5 May every year.

This new timeline is designed to end the chaos, which the court described as consistent lateness, that has plagued the process for years. It should ensure Nersa's decisions are made in time for municipalities to finalise their

own budgets, which must be tabled 90 days before their 1 July financial year starts.

Why this is important for ordinary South Africans

This judgment empowers ordinary citizens by compelling the publication of the cost of supply studies. This gives the public the tools to hold their local municipalities accountable. The law already provides for public participation in other municipal processes, such as Integrated Development Plans.

Even though studies have found that in practice this engagement is often ineffective, the electricity ruling is important because it means that for the first time, communities and experts can scrutinise the data and ask: is our tariff hike paying for efficient services? Or is it paying for a bloated salary bill, electricity theft and general mismanagement?

Hence, the judgment moves the public from passive bill-payers to active watchdogs. As active watchdogs, people will be able to make sure that electricity price hikes are transparent, timely and open to the public scrutiny.

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Hoedspruit Concerned Rate Payers Association

The Hoedspruit Concerned Rate Payers Association (HCRPA) was registered with the CIPC on 04 June 2024 to represent the interests of rate payers in the town of Hoedspruit.

Illegal Occupation of Land

The Association has engaged with the Maruleng Local Municipality demanding that the municipality apply the laws of the country and the by-laws of the municipality concerning the illegal occupation of the land in the town of Hoedspruit and to attend to inhumane living conditions within "Plastic View". Summons was subsequently served on five respondents, including the Maruleng Municipality in November 2024. The only respondent to file an answering affidavit was the local municipality. After protracted and expensive legal action, an interim court order was made by the Limpopo High Court on 11 March 2025. Since then, the municipality has submitted a flawed report to the court regarding the occupants of "Plastic View". The Association has been unable to get clarity from the municipality on its plans to resolve this long-standing issue and is now considering further urgent legal action after the recent devastating fire at Plastic View.

Development of portion 39 of Berlin (405 residential units)

Lawyers retained by the HCRPA challenged a previous environmental impact assessment (EIA) and were advised by the consultants as

late as October 2024 that the proposed EIA process had been withdrawn. A new EIA process has since been filed by the authorities. The HCRPA's legal advisers have registered the organisation as an interested and affected party to the new EIA process that commenced on 01 July 2025 and will be responding on behalf of members throughout the process.

Water and Sanitation

The HCRPA has been at the forefront of efforts to address the ecological threats to the Southern Cross Schools, the Zandspruit, and the Raptors View Wildlife Estate caused by large-scale sewerage spills over an 18-month period. In collaboration with the Department of Water Affairs and Sanitation enforcement division in Nelspruit and the Deputy Minister of Water Affairs and Sanitation, the Mopani District Municipality was eventually compelled to repair the wastewater transfer station in Leguaan Street. A criminal case was opened against four Mopani officials, which has now been joined by DWS to two other cases and is expected to proceed in the coming months.

The HCRPA is also working with government departments to find a sustainable solution to the longstanding water and sanitation infrastructure issues in the Maruleng municipal area. To this end, the Association gave a presentation to the Deputy Director General of Water Affairs and Sanitation on 24 July 2025 in Hoedspruit to suggest a public-private partner-

ship solution. We will continue to engage with the Mopani District Municipality, Department of Water and Sanitation, and Department of Defence next week to speed up a solution.

Municipal Rates

The HCRPA recently met with the Maruleng Municipality's Chief Financial Officer to unpack the long-standing concern that residents are carrying an unfairly heavy municipal rates burden. The CFO confirmed the accuracy of the following: property rates income makes up 80% of Maruleng's own revenue for the 2025/2026 financial year, a figure that's climbed by 12% over the last four years. In that same period, total income from rates has doubled, and continues to rise at around 16% year on year.

For five consecutive years, every application to COGHSTA for a special dispensation to reduce Hoedspruit's rates tariff has been rejected. Meanwhile, about 20% of billed property rates are in default. Compounding matters, funds from National Government have dropped by 13% over the past four years. According to Stats SA, Maruleng now relies on property rates for a share of total revenue that is almost three times higher than the national average - a level that speaks volumes about where the load is being carried.

Analysis by a resident suggests that less than 5% of municipal revenue is spent on the town of Hoedspruit.

Passenger Transport

The ever-deteriorating service and safety levels provided by the Great North Transport company (owned by the Limpopo Provincial Government) are of major concern to the Association. In the coming months, the Association hopes to engage with the company and other stakeholders to seek an understanding of the challenges facing the company and formulate possible solutions.

Funding Requirements

In the short term, the HCRPA is seeking to raise R 230 000.00 to cover anticipated legal costs and has a limited window in which to raise this, should it become necessary to lodge an urgent application in the Polokwane High Court. Funds received to date have been applied only to legal costs associated with Plastic View matter and to a lesser extent, legal costs of objecting to the Berlin 39 EIA. The future of any surplus funds remaining after the resolution of these two matters will be discussed with the donors.

If you have an interest in the efforts of the Association, please consider becoming a member and making a financial contribution (if possible). Please contact us at hoedspruit-crpa@gmail.com for more information. The HCRPA is a registered NPC with a registered bank account: FNB, 63106903388, Ref: Donation, POP to the email above.

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First on Scene - What to do in a Vehicle Accident Emergency



With the holiday season comes increased travel. More people will be on the roads, and unfortunately, that means a higher risk of accidents.

Whether minor or severe, an accident is a frightening and stressful experience, and it's easy to lose your composure if you're involved or just a witness. But do you know what to do if you're first on the scene and need to deal with the emergency?

Prioritise safety and keep these tips in mind:

Stop safely

If you witness or arrive first at an accident, switch on your vehicle's hazard lights and stop in a safe location. Ideally, park off to the side of the road and in front of the accident to keep your vehicle out of harm's way and the path clear for emergency vehicles. However, on a blind rise or bend, parking behind the accident in a "fend-off" position with hazard lights on may help prevent further collisions. At night, keep your vehicle's headlights on to illuminate the scene and warn other drivers.

If you're involved in a minor accident, remember to apply the handbrake and turn on the hazard lights. If there are no serious injuries, move the vehicles to the roadside, out of the way of traffic. If they can't be moved, place a warning triangle or traffic cones 45-100 metres behind the scene.

Assess the situation

In major accidents, you may see smoke or steam coming from the vehicles. Unlike in the movies, explosions are rare unless there are

flames. If there is fire, water won't help – use sand or a fire extinguisher.

Do not move anybody who is injured unless absolutely necessary, for example, if the vehicle is burning or at risk of falling. If you must move them, place them on level ground and keep them still.

Make an emergency call

Dial 112, the global emergency number for all cell phones in South Africa. It connects you to the police, ambulance, and fire brigade, and works via satellite, even in areas without cell phone signal. Alternatively, contact the police on 10111, and the ambulance and fire brigade on 10177.

Call the police to an accident if anyone is seriously injured or killed, if alcohol or drugs are involved, or to manage traffic flow. Provide your name, number, location, what happened, and how many vehicles and people are involved. Share details on injuries so authorities can dispatch the right resources, for example, ambulances, pathologists, and the jaws of life.

If the accident happens in the middle of nowhere and you're unable to send a location pin, refer to the route marker boards. These blue-and-white boards are found on all national roads (N1, N2, N3, etc.) in South Africa, positioned 200 metres apart, and show the route name, section, kilometre position, and direction of travel.

While waiting for emergency personnel to arrive

Even those without medical or first aid ex-

perience can assist. Calm and reassure those involved that emergency services are on the way. Try to get the injured to remain still, even though they'll want to do the opposite. If someone is bleeding, apply pressure to the wound using any available cloth, and don't lift it to check if the bleeding has stopped.

If there is fuel on the road, cover it with sand to prevent fire and slips. Also, disconnect the vehicle's battery so no sparks can occur.

Gather as much information as possible. Try to get names and medical details, and ask what is hurting. Ask how many people were travelling in the vehicle. Anyone not wearing a seatbelt may have been flung from the vehicle, so if someone says there are more people, search for them.

Observe carefully – who is quiet, who is passing out, and so on. The more you observe, the more valuable information you can pass on to the paramedics.

Other important information

If you are involved and in a position to do so, exchange information with the other driver(s) and document the scene with photos – vehicles, number plates, license disks, driver's licenses, street names, property damage, road signs and conditions. Look for CCTV cameras that may have captured the accident.

Don't offer food or drink to badly injured people, not even water, as they may go straight from the scene into surgery.

If you are involved in an accident, only drive away if it is safe and possible to do so, and wait for police to dismiss you if anyone has been hurt. If towing is required, call your in-

surer's towing service or request a quote before your vehicle is moved.

Prepare ahead

Prepare a kit of essentials to keep in your car. Include a first aid kit, rubber gloves, water, a torch, emergency numbers, and tools such as a seatbelt cutter or safety hammer. You may also want to include a small fire extinguisher and a reflective jacket or belt. Make sure your vehicle's warning triangle is in place. All of this will help if you arrive at a scene where you can assist, and if you are in an accident yourself.

Also, save your medical aid information on a sticker on your windscreen or on your phone. On most phones, holding the power button brings up "Power Off", "Restart", "Emergency Call" and "Medical Info" options. Make sure your emergency contacts and medical info are saved.

"If you're taking to the roads this holiday season, drive safely, keep these tips in mind for emergencies, and remember that vehicle tracking technologies can help keep you and your family safe," says Duma Ngcobo, Chief Operating Officer at Tracker. "Some tracking services include impact detection, which instantly alerts the control centre if your vehicle is in an accident and detects its severity. The control centre will attempt to contact you, and if you're unreachable, emergency response teams will be automatically dispatched to your vehicle's location – providing support when you need it most."

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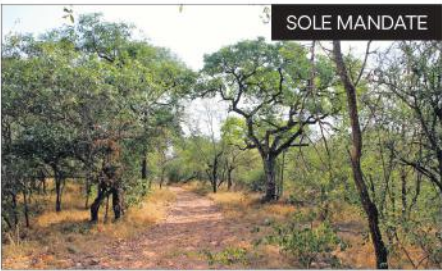
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LIVERPOOL - FREESTANDING R 1 900 000
SMALLHOLDING Land size: 21 ha

Untouched rare find! 21-hectare full-title stand with magnificent Lowveld trees, northern boundary adjoining a Nature Reserve, three sides fenced. Elevated areas offer stunning views. No levies or restrictive reserve rules - ideal for a bush home or commercial retreat. 35km from Hoedspruit.
Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2422143



ZANDSPRUIT VALLEY R 2 330 000
Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 1 | Floor size: 98 m²

Modern home on a spacious stand with open-plan living area and well-equipped kitchen. Features fans and aircons on inverter, solar with 2x5kW batteries, covered patio overlooking lovely garden, and double automated garage. Conveniently located near town and amenities.
Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2425474



COMMERCIAL: Hoedspruit R 8 470 000
Wildlife Estate Beds 6 | Baths 6 | Floor: 780 m²

Guest house with 6 spacious en-suite guest rooms and owner's quarters. Colonial-style home with a wraparound patio, pool, bar, central lounge, and dining area. Rooms include bath, shower, aircon, minibar, and DSTV. Sold fully furnished as a going concern, without liabilities. Backup power & water.
Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2380743



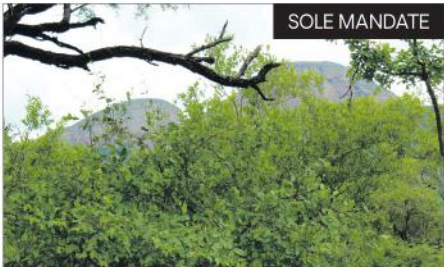
RAPTORS VIEW WILDLIFE R 6 300 000
ESTATE Beds 4 | Baths 4 | Floor size: 484 m²

Expansive riverfront home with open-plan lounge, dining, kitchen and scullery with courtyard. Covered patio with boma, pool and uninterrupted views. Air-conditioned bedrooms with private decks, and a guest room or study. Includes traverse rights into 1,300ha Big 4 reserve for exceptional game drives.
Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2411374



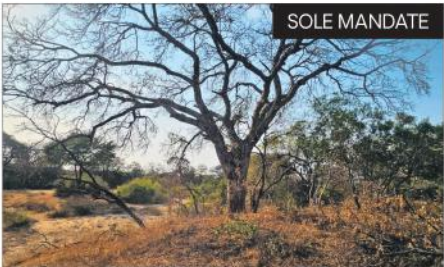
LISSATABA NATURE R 3 080 000
RESERVE Beds 2 | Baths 2 | Floor: 162 m²

Brand-new, low-maintenance bush home with central living area and open-plan kitchen. Set on a 7,500m² full-title stand within a 2,500 ha reserve. Includes two en-suite chalets with aircons, patios, and outdoor showers. Features include double carport, large boma, paved walkways, tool shed.
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CANYON GAME RESERVE R 900 000
Stand size: 9,978 m²

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MODITLO WILDLIFE ESTATE R 2 400 000
Stand size: 12,000 m²

Prime stand near the Blue Canyon gate, positioned along a seasonal riverbed that attracts frequent wildlife. Surrounded by mature indigenous trees, it offers privacy, natural beauty, and a level building area with superb bush and river views.
Calin Leppan - 082 824 9482 Ref: 2414829



CANYON GAME RESERVE R 2 800 000
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 2.5 | Floor: 275 m²

This comfortable home has a lounge, open plan kitchen, upstairs library and large patio. The house has a new thatch roof and there are solar panels, 5kVa inverter and 5kVa batteries. The views from the spacious patio are towards the Drakensberg mountains, and a large Tamboti tree.
Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2344618



LEOPARDS LANE, R 2 850 000
HOEDSPRUIT Beds 2 | Baths 2 | Floor: 141 m²

Stylish off-grid home with open-plan living that flows onto covered patio with built-in braai. Quality finishes, aluminium windows, Chromadek roof, and free-standing gas stove. Powered by solar system with two lithium-ion batteries, 12 panels, and water tank with pressure pump. Pet-friendly, sustainable.
Calin Leppan - 082 824 9482 Ref: 2432359



MODITLO WILDLIFE R6 200 000
ESTATE Beds 3 | Baths 3 | Floor size: 290 m²

Elevated home with beautiful bushveld and mountain views. Features spacious open-plan lounge, dining room and kitchen, scullery, a bar, large patio, and pool, plus a boma for outdoor evenings. Modern bedrooms open to the bush, with a separate private guest room.
Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2430164



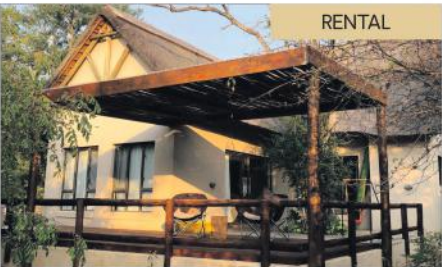
NDLOVUMZI NATURE R 4 000 000
RESERVE Beds 4 | Baths 3 | Floor: 125 m²

This 21 hectare Olifants river property offers stunning views, a beautiful garden, and riverine tree surroundings. The property includes a 2-bedroom main house and a separate 2-bedroom cottage, as well as an expansive entertainment area with braai, pizza oven, dining area and pool.
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COMMERCIAL: UMBABAT R 46 750 000
Big 5, Greater Kruger Farm size: 428 ha

An exceptionally rare full-title farm within the prestigious Umbabat, sharing unfenced borders with Kruger, Timbavati and Klaserie where the Big 5 roam free. It offers extensive infrastructure, proven commercial income and two independent camps for versatile private or commercial use.
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RAPTOR'S VIEW WILDLIFE R 22 000 pm
ESTATE Beds 3 | Baths 2 | Unfurnished

Available from 1 Jan 2026, not pet friendly - Lovely home featuring an open-plan kitchen and living area. Sliding doors lead out to a covered patio with wooden decking, plus an enclosed courtyard accessed via the kitchen, and carport. An additional loft room offers extra space.
Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2358464



HOEDSPRUIT CENTRAL R 14 850 pm
Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 2 | Unfurnished

Available immediately, pet friendly (2 small dogs) Neat, compact home in a quiet central street, featuring a spacious open-plan living area and well-equipped kitchen with ample cupboards, fenced garden, and a carport. Prepaid electricity; water included; no Wi-Fi.
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CemAir Joins the Party – New Hoedspruit-George Routing



Image CemAir

CemAir is thrilled to announce the launch of a new domestic route connecting George and Hoedspruit, commencing 17 May 2026. This strategic addition to CemAir’s growing network offers passengers a convenient link between two of South Africa’s most iconic travel destinations - the safari-rich Lowveld and the picturesque Garden Route.

The new route will operate three times weekly on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and a limited scheduled on Sundays, providing

flexible travel options for both leisure and business travellers. CemAir will increase the frequency of flights as demand grows, ensuring even more convenient connections between these key destinations.

With fares starting from R4,800, passengers can enjoy CemAir’s full-service offering, which includes complimentary checked baggage and onboard catering.

“We are pleased to launch a direct connection between Hoedspruit and George - two destinations that showcase the very best of South Africa’s natural beauty,”

said Shaniel Singh, Chief Commercial Officer at CemAir. “This route removes the need for travellers to transit through major hubs and strengthens local tourism by making travel between the bush and the coast more convenient and accessible.”

The new service reinforces CemAir’s commitment to expanding regional connectivity and supporting South Africa’s domestic travel and tourism sectors. It provides a valuable link for tour operators, safari lodges, and travellers seeking efficient travel between the Kruger area

and the Garden Route.

Flights will depart Hoedspruit at 10:55 on Tuesdays and Thursdays (arriving at George at 13:20), and at 12:40 on Sundays (arriving at George at 15:05).

Flights will depart George at 08:10 on Tuesdays and Thursdays (arriving at Hoedspruit at 10:25), and at 10:05 on Sundays (arriving at Hoedspruit at 12:20).

Bookings are now open at www.cemair.co.za.

2025 is Coming to an End...

The year is rushing to an end. New Year’s resolutions are way back in the past – whether they were met or discarded along the way. But we all have a to-do-list to complete and tick off before we close our suitcase, lock our front door behind us, and leave on our well-deserved December holiday.

The following may be on your list, and to help you to tick it off in time before your holiday, please email us to assist you.

Foreign Investments

If you have not made use of your foreign investment allowance for 2025, and you want to obtain advice to do so – please email suzanne@fidelisvox.co.za with a brief summary of your situation.

Your Will

Update of your will, because a family member/nominated trustee/nominated ex-

ecutor passed away during the year - email tamryn@fidelisvox.co.za with the person’s name and a copy of your current will if not drafted by us.

Updating of your will, because you have decided to change some bequests - email tamryn@fidelisvox.co.za with the change you want and a copy of your current will if not drafted by us.

Review your will and structures if a child of yours have left South Africa during the year - email suzanne@fidelisvox.co.za and she will set up a call to discuss the effect with you.

Review your will and structures if you acquired assets outside South Africa during the year - email suzanne@fidelisvox.co.za to set up a call to discuss the possible effect hereof.

Sign a living will with the wish to not be kept alive by artificial means- email marteen@fidelisvox.co.za to assist you.

Nominate a guardian in your will, if you

had a child during the year - email tamryn@fidelisvox.co.za with the names of the nominated guardians.

If you got married during the year, to ascertain the effect thereof on your wills, as a marriage may revoke a will in terms of the laws of some countries outside South Africa where you may have assets and have signed a will before - email tamryn@fidelisvox.co.za to set up a call.

Trust Deeds

Your trust deed should be amended or updated - email jean@fidelisvox.co.za with a copy of the current trust deed and letters of authority and the change to be made.

You want to appoint a succeeding trustee to yourself in your will - email jean@fidelisvox.co.za with a copy of the trust deed and your current will and the name of the person you would like to appoint.

Sign a letter of wishes to the trustees of a trust or to your executor - email marteen@fidelisvox.co.za with a brief summary of your wishes.


Power of Attorney

Sign a power of attorney to enable someone to act on your behalf while you are outside South Africa or if you are going for an operation, or if an elderly relative is finding it difficult to manage their own affairs - email marteen@fidelisvox.co.za to assist you.

Tax Advice

Obtain tax advice if you are considering relocating to a different country in 2026, to mull over when you have time during your holiday - email suzanne@fidelisvox.co.za to set up a call.

Let us help you to make the most of the first two weeks of December to be able to relax on your well-deserved year-end break. Have a wonderful holiday.



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Biosphere Reserves at the Heart of Global Biodiversity Goals — and Why South Africa's Support Matters



K2C team monitoring a controlled burn in the Upper Blyde Catchment

Image supplied

Lauren Booth
Communications Officer, Kruger to Canyons
Biosphere Region

Earlier this month, the world marked the International Day of Biosphere Reserves (3rd November) - a day dedicated to celebrating the 748 UNESCO-designated regions that safeguard biodiversity, while supporting sustainable livelihoods across the planet.

This year's celebration carried special significance, coming shortly after the release of a new UNESCO report at the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in Hangzhou, China. The report highlights how Biosphere Reserves are emerging as key implementation mechanisms of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), a landmark international agreement adopted in 2022 to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2050.

"Biosphere Reserves are connected through a global network that crosses borders and cultures, fostering exchange, solidarity and hope. We call on governments, partners, and citizens worldwide to recognise and invest in their potential" - António Abreu, Director of the UNESCO Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences and Secretary of the MAB Programme

The KM-GBF sets out 23 global targets, including protecting 30 percent of land and sea areas by 2030, restoring degraded ecosystems and integrating biodiversity into all sectors of society. As a signatory to this Framework, South Africa has committed to

setting national biodiversity targets and reporting on progress toward achieving them. This puts renewed emphasis onto the work of landscape partnerships such as the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region (K2C), one of South Africa's ten recognised Biosphere Reserves.

K2C's Contribution to Global Goals

Covering 2.6 million hectares stretching from the Letaba River in the north to the Sabie River in the south, and from the Drakensberg escarpment to the Kruger National Park, the K2C Biosphere is a living example of how people and nature can thrive together. Through its Catchment, Pro-Nature Livelihoods, Protected Area Expansion, and Community Engagement and Learning Programmes, K2C is building local ecosystem and community resilience, and directly contributing to South Africa's biodiversity targets in the process.

These programmes connect government, NGO's, the private sector, communities, researchers, farmers and the public to co-designed, locally relevant solutions, from water security, rangeland restoration and sustainable agriculture to eco-tourism and leadership development.

"The work done by K2C, together with our partners, shows that biodiversity goals are not abstract metrics - they are quantified measures of the impact of our projects on the people and landscapes that make up this region," says Booth. "Each hectare of alien vegetation cleared, each small business built around nature-positive livelihoods, and each local partnership is a building block towards

achieving not only South Africa's commitments under the KM-GBF, but a better, more sustainable future in the K2C landscape and beyond."

Recognition at National Level

In September 2025, the Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment visited K2C's Demonstration Site in Phiring Village; to learn first-hand how agro-ecology and nature-positive livelihood initiatives are improving the resilience of both the landscape and people at Phiring, all the while driving biodiversity outcomes. He then showcased this community-led example on the global stage at the World Congress in China.

More recently, the Deputy Minister has been heard referencing the impactful work of Biosphere Reserves, including K2C, calling for stronger government and organisational support.

His recognition underscores a crucial point: while Biosphere Reserves are internationally endorsed by UNESCO and recognised as effective implementation tools for achieving biodiversity objectives, in South Africa they currently rely heavily on partnerships and self-funding to continue their work.

Across much of the world, national governments provide core funding to Biosphere Reserves, recognising their central role in delivering on global biodiversity targets. Strengthening this model in South Africa has the potential to unlock even greater impact and long-term sustainability for the country's network of Biosphere Reserves.

From the Lowveld to the World

The showcasing of K2C at the World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in China demonstrated how local action fuels global progress. In presenting K2C's its integrated approach to conservation and development, the Deputy Minister joined hundreds of delegates aligning their work with the new Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035) - the roadmap for the coming decade of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme.

But this global recognition also arrives at a pivotal time. As the world moves toward 2030, when the first KM-GBF targets come due, one message is increasingly clear: landscape-level partnerships remain essential to achieving global biodiversity goals. Yet the long-term success of these partnerships relies on stable, strategic financial support. This global and national recognition offers a hopeful opportunity to build on what is working - to scale what is delivering results and to ensure that South Africa's Biosphere Reserves - proven engines of innovation, inclusion and sustainability - can continue their work with confidence.

"The K2C Biosphere is part of a worldwide network built on collaboration, learning and change," Booth concludes. "If South Africa continues to invest in these living laboratories of sustainability, we can show that nature and development can truly coexist - here and everywhere."

If you want to read more, have a look at the UNESCO report: New report shows UNESCO Biosphere Reserves advanced biodiversity targets, and the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region: www.kruger2canyons.org.

The World's Quiet Carbon Banks: Nature's Hidden Climate Vaults



Mark Bishop

Peat bogs, mangroves, seagrass beds and frozen soils quietly hold the keys to Earth's carbon balance - but when these ancient systems falter, the climate debt comes due - and fast.

From the misty peat swamps of the Congo Basin to the vast mangrove deltas of the Bay of Bengal, nature has spent millennia locking away carbon in silence. These are Earth's true banks - slow, steady, and irreplaceable. Yet as we drain, dredge and heat the planet, their quiet work unravels, and what's released could shape our future far more than what's yet to be burned.

When we think about "carbon sinks," it's tempting to picture a vast rainforest swallowing up tonnes of CO₂. And yes, forests absolutely matter. But some of the world's most powerful carbon banks are the quiet, humble places: the soggy bogs of central Africa, the fringe mangrove forests in the Bay of Bengal and Sundarbans, the under-sea meadows, the grasslands and the far-northern frozen soils. They don't always demand attention, but they do the heavy lifting. If we mess with them, the consequences are more than one might expect.

A metre of peat represents a thousand years of patience - and five minutes of recklessness to destroy.

Peatlands: our slow-motion vaults

Imagine a landscape so soggy that leaves and branches don't fully decompose, instead piling up into peat. Over centuries, that peat grows by mere millimetres each year - but accumulates massive amounts of carbon. Consider the vast peat-swamp forests of the Congo Basin: research shows that peat in the central basin covers around 167,600 km² and stores roughly 29 billion tonnes of carbon! That's equivalent to three years of global fossil-fuel emissions.

These peatlands cover only around 3 % of the planet's land yet hold nearly 30 % of all soil carbon - more than all forests put together. Drain or damage them, and the slow-motion process reverses. Oxygen races in, microbes wake up, and centuries of stored carbon are released back into the atmosphere. It's like deleting decades of savings in a single misguided move.

Where land meets sea: mangroves, marshes and meadows

Along the coast, mangroves, saltmarshes and seagrass meadows quietly bury carbon in soggy, low-oxygen soils. They're more efficient than many forests at storing carbon per hectare, especially when you count deep sediment. In the case of the Sundarbans - the largest contiguous mangrove forest spanning India and Bangladesh (in the Ganges Delta) - stocks of sediment organic carbon are substantial. A recent study there recorded sequestration rates (a measure of the speed at which carbon is captured from the atmosphere and stored) in the mangrove of roughly 5 to 6 tonnes of carbon per hectare per year. The kicker here is that they're also

An example of a Mangrove Image : Canva

very fragile. Development, dredging, storms, warming - all of these can disrupt their soils. Once disturbed, that massive bank of carbon can be released into the atmosphere. A coastal ecosystem gone wrong doesn't just stop saving carbon - it becomes a source of it, and often it takes decades to recover.

Seaweed and kelp forests: the under-sea frontier

Beneath the waves, kelp forests and other seaweed systems are hard at work too. They capture large amounts of carbon and some of their biomass drifts offshore and sinks into deep, stable marine sediments. We're still figuring out exactly how much of that is locked away permanently - and how much just sits temporarily. But this is one of those "why didn't I think of this sooner" systems. Protecting our coasts and keeping them healthy becomes more than just about fish and scenery; it becomes a climate strategy.

Tropical forests: still vital, still vulnerable

We love the image of dense, vibrant rainforests - and for good reason. They absorb huge quantities of CO₂. But here's the troubling twist: a forest is only as good as its health. As droughts deepen, temperatures climb, and once-intact ecosystems are stressed, parts of these forests are starting to shift from carbon sinks to carbon sources. This is a warning: even our most iconic forests aren't invincible. The risk is especially acute in hot, drought-prone tropical zones where tree mortality climbs and regeneration falters.

Grasslands, savannas and soils: the often overlooked heroes

Out in the open - savannas, grasslands, rangelands - the carbon story is subtler. These systems don't store vast quantities of carbon in visible tree trunks. Instead, a lot of it is tucked away deep down in the soil. And it depends on the right balance: grazing, fire, vegetation - all matter. It might look like 'nothing much happening', but in the soil, there's a slow accumulating ledger of carbon. Over decades, with good management, these lands can become significant players in the climate story.

Permafrost: the frozen over-drawn account

Far up north, beneath tundra and lichen, lie soils that have stored carbon for millennia. We're talking roughly 1,400 - 1,600 gigatons of organic carbon - nearly double all the carbon in the entire Earth's atmosphere!

But here's the frightener: when permafrost thaws, formerly frozen microbes wake up and liquefy our "climate savings" into greenhouse gases - raising global temperatures by several degrees. It's a feedback loop that snowballs. Pretty much every climate model now factors this in, and that's for a reason.

When scientists warn that permafrost thaw is a major climate tipping point, that's why - it's not a small deposit; it's the biggest carbon store on land, and it's starting to melt.

Carbon security isn't about tall trees alone; it's about soggy ground, quiet seas, and time itself.

What's at stake if we lose them?

When these natural carbon banks are damaged, the loss is immense and long-lasting. We don't just forfeit their ability to quietly draw carbon from the air - a service that took centuries to build. We also flip the system from storage to release, turning safe deposits into dangerous emissions that can pour out within decades. And it doesn't stop there: the ripple effects reach far beyond carbon. We lose the flood protection of wetlands, the nursery grounds for fish, the biodiversity of forests, and the fertile soils that sustain life. In short, when we disturb these carbon vaults, we're not just tampering with CO₂ - but we're also dismantling the very ecosystems, livelihoods, and resilience that keep the planet in balance.

How long does it take to build? How quick can we lose?

That part is sobering. A metre of peat might take a thousand years to build. Mangrove soils settle over centuries. Old forests formed over hundreds of years. Permafrost carbon? Millennia. Yet the damage? A year's drought, a clear-cut logging event, drainage-ditch in a bog - we can reverse decades of built-up storage in one fell swoop. It's the opposite of compound interest: slow to build, fast to leak.

What we can do about it

There are still simple, practical ways to safeguard these carbon vaults before their losses become irreversible. It starts with keeping wetlands wet - resisting the urge to drain peatlands and instead restoring those that have been damaged so they can begin storing carbon again.

Along our coasts, we need to protect mangroves, marshes and seagrass meadows, treating the sediments beneath them not as waste to be cleared but as living storage banks.

Forests, too, must be valued as more than just stands of timber; their resilience depends on how we manage them through increasingly hot and dry years.

Out in the open landscapes, the way we handle fire, grazing and human pressure can mean the difference between degradation and renewal, with well-managed rangelands quietly building strength below the surface.

And finally, we can no longer ignore the frozen soils of the far north - climate policies and corporate carbon accounts must recognise that permafrost is not permanently safe, and that its thaw could rewrite the global carbon budget.

These aren't nature's extras. They're our planetary infrastructure.

A sharper alarm call for action

These landscapes and seascapes might not be Instagram-glamorous, but they're the hard-working vaults of our climate system. The peat swamps of the Congo, the mangrove fringe of the Sundarbans, the hidden seagrass meadows off coasts, the grass-root soils of grasslands and the frozen soils of the far north - all of them are doing us the favour of buffering our carbon overload.

But their silence belies their fragility. Once damaged, they don't just stop pulling carbon - they actively release it. Imagine expecting a bank to keep a balance of billions, only to have someone smash the vault open. That's what we're doing with rain-soaked peat, marine-sediment rivers, and permafrost soils.

It's time we treated these ecosystems with the urgency they deserve. Not as optional extras, not as ancillary nature bits, but as carbon infrastructure - as critical as power grids or water supplies. Because when you lose them, the odds aren't just worse - they're irreversible on human timescales. And in the race to stabilise the climate, our "quiet" carbon banks may just be the loudest alarm we'll ever ignore.



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Celestial Signs of Summer



Eridanus, the river (top left), the water (above) and starlore (bottom left)
Images supplied



Ben Coley
Celestial Events SA

Summer is here! The dry, dusty days of winter are long behind us, and the bush is bursting into life with the promise of the long-awaited rains and sweltering Lowveld temperatures. We are now entering the planting season, and people across the land are busy sowing their seeds and crossing their fingers for a bountiful harvest.

We can look at our calendars to know the best times to plant, but before the advent of precise timekeeping, how did ancient people know when to prepare their fields, when to plant, and when to harvest? Knowledge of the seasons was imperative to secure a successful crop.

Thankfully, they had a celestial calendar to follow. High above their heads, in skies free from light pollution and industrial haze, the stars shone brightly. Early humans watched their arrangements and the subtle changes that unfolded over the course of the year, making associations with what they saw above.

As we roll into December, the heavens are full of watery portents - celestial signs of the coming rains that will bring sustenance to the bush over the next few months. Let's look at some of the most famous aqueous constellations above our heads:

Aquarius

Look low to the west and you'll find the constellation Aquarius, the Water Bearer - the god of rain in Roman mythology. As his trickle of stars grazes the horizon, his gourd of water is tipped toward the Earth, releasing divine rain to nourish and soothe the parched soil. Its arrival refills the seasonal pans, rouses seeds from their earthen wombs, and marks the beginning of the calving season for many animals eager to take advantage of the lush summer growth.

Pisces and Pisces Austrinus

Aquarius is flanked by three fish in the sky. According to most star maps, Aquarius pours his water into the mouth of the Southern Fish, Piscis Austrinus. Its most noticeable star is the bright Fomalhaut, from the Arabic meaning 'mouth of the southern fish.' To the Shona people of Zimbabwe, this star was known as Ndemara, the Sweetheart Star, while the Tswana called it Ntshuna, the Kiss-Me Star. Its rising signalled the time for young lovers to steal away into the warm night for a secret rendezvous - a charming reminder that not all star stories are about gods and monsters!

Following Aquarius, the bound fish of Pisces swim across the sky. In Greek mythology, they represent Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, and her son Eros. Chased by the hundred-headed monster Typhon, they

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leapt into a river to escape, transforming themselves into fish and tying their tails together so they would not be separated in the torrents. Typhon, in turn, became associated with the neighbouring constellation Cetus, the Whale.

In an African sense, Pisces also echoes the return of fish to the newly filled seasonal pans. It remains one of nature's small miracles that fish appear in what were once cracked mudholes. Today we know that some species can burrow into the soil and encase themselves in mucus to survive until the rains return - but perhaps, as ancient storytellers imagined, they have simply been waiting in this watery region of the sky all along.

Pegasus

One of the most recognisable figures in Greek mythology, Pegasus the winged horse sprang from the blood of Medusa after she was slain by Perseus. His father was Poseidon, God of the sea, and so Pegasus has long been associated with water. It was said that when his hooves struck the ground, springs would burst forth. How fitting, then, that our rains reach their peak just as Pegasus's hooves dip toward the north-western horizon after sunset - their impact heard as the rolling thunder of summer storms that quench the thirsty land below.

Eridanus

Eridanus is the great river that winds its way across the southern sky. Its sinuous

form flows from the bright southern star Achernar (Arabic for 'the End of the River') all the way to the feet of Orion. To the Egyptians, this heavenly river represented the Nile; to the Romans, it was the Po. Here in southern Africa, it might simply be called the River of the Heavens - a celestial mirror of the life-giving waters that bring renewal to our world each summer.

A Sky that Still Speaks

Perhaps these stories are what makes this time of year so magical. The same patterns that ancient herders once watched by the glow of campfires are visible tonight from your backyard or farm. They remind us that, though our world has changed, the bond between sky and earth endures.

When you see the Water Bearer and his companions shining through the summer dusk, take a moment to remember our ancestors who once looked to these same stars for the promise of life-giving rain. Their stories remind us that the sky was humanity's first weather forecast - and that understanding it meant survival.

So, as the water constellations douse the land this summer, may their message remain clear: *"The rains are coming, the world is renewed, and the sky above still whispers its timeless wisdom."*

See Celestial Events SA advert for contact details.

The Art of Seeing: How Birding and Tracking Speak the Same Language



Credit: BirdLife South Africa

John Kinghorn

For many people, birding and tracking appear to belong to two entirely different worlds. Birders are often imagined with binoculars pointed skyward, scanning treetops for flashes of movement and bright colours, so fixated on their target that they seemingly disconnect from their surroundings entirely. Trackers, on the other hand, although equally fixated, are imagined with eyes on the ground, studying the faintest impressions in the earth, interpreting even the tiniest tell-tale signs of an arthropod's presence, or perhaps, even serving as members of nature's very own crime scene investigative unit.

To most, there is a *prima facie* contrast: one looks up, the other looks down. One listens for songs, and the other reads the silence. And yet, for anyone who has spent time in the bush, exposed to masters of either of these, it soon becomes evident that these two art forms go much deeper than their face value may indicate, and are, in fact, far more alike than they may seem.

As vision and creativity are essential components of any piece of artwork, discipline, patience, and awareness are all integral components to both birding and tracking. The art forms - or styles - may vary, but they never detract from the core principles that guide them. Whether one is following the call of a cuckoo or the spoor of a leopard, one is learning to interpret signs; trust your senses, understand the land, and connect to nature in a deeper, more meaningful way.

In a world where we often find ourselves in constant pursuit of instant gratification, one that often rewards speed and distraction, birding and tracking pull us in the opposite direction. They reward slowness, curiosity, awareness, and presence. They coax us into becoming students of detail, forcing us to become the readers of subtlety, not spectacle, noticing the unexpected, not just the obvious. This is where their stories overlap most beautifully.

Listening as a Way of Seeing

Excellent trackers must be *exceptional* listeners. They don't *only* follow impres-

sions in the sand; they tune into the quiet information carried on the breeze - alarm calls, wingbeats, rustling grass, the sudden silence of a flock of birds. A Rattling Cisticola chattering anxiously over a patch of scrub, a tonal change in the call of a Grey Go-Away Bird, or even the single, high-pitched "skree" of a Common Myna means far more to a skilled tracker than a simple bird call. It is a signal, an alert, a clue that something larger, more threatening may be moving nearby.

Birders share this same intimacy with sound. Ask any experienced birder and they'll tell you: you hear far more birds than you ever see. Identifying a species by call is an art form in itself, and it requires the same sensory tuning that a tracker uses to interpret the bush. Both rely on patterns, what is normal, what is unusual, and what it means when nature suddenly shifts key.

A patch of bushveld that is ordinarily a hive of activity with bird calls, suddenly falling into eerie silence. A tracker raises an eyebrow. A birder stops mid-step. Yet somehow, both know something has changed, something that may or may not reveal itself, but is certainly worth paying attention to.

Reading a Landscape Like a Book

There is an analogy that tracking is often like reading: reading stories, reading moments in time, or even reading movement. A single print or impression that a tracker may come across is more like a single letter or a punctuation mark in a bigger sentence; it can be a comma indicating an animal's pause, a dash showing its burst of speed, or even a full stop beside a place it used to rest. A tracker will read each punctuation mark or letter, following each sign with faithful precision, piecing together the punctuation marks and letters to eventually form a sentence. Nature is constantly writing and rewriting the book, and all a tracker does is turn the pages.

Birding, too, can be linked to this analogy, a form of reading. The landscape becomes a text full of clues. Certain trees will attract certain species, certain habitats will influence distribution, the time of year will dictate movement, and the presence of food may impact numbers. A birder scans these spaces, or pages, in

much the same way a tracker inspects soil - their eyes sharpened for shape, colour, movement, and context.

To find a bird successfully, one must understand not only where it is likely to be, but *why* it prefers that specific place. That understanding of an area's ecology, bird behaviour, preferred habitat, and seasonal movements mirrors the exact mindset of a tracker who interprets animal movement based on food, water, shelter, temperature, and threat. Both crafts require not only knowledge, but also imagination, foresight, vision, and forward thinking.

Following What You Can't Always See

One of the greatest joys of tracking is the suspense, the knowledge that you may follow a set of tracks and signs for hours without ever seeing the slightest hint of the animal that was responsible for making them. And yet, the experience is still enriching. Each print sharpens the senses, deepens focus, and strengthens connection to the land.

Birding offers similar moments of pursuit. Similar bursts of suspense and adrenaline. A call in the distance becomes a challenge. A flash of movement in a thicket becomes a mystery worth solving. Even when the bird remains unseen, the journey remains exhilarating.

Perhaps it is the "*thrill of the chase*", but the true masters of these arts will explain how it is the opportunity to learn to appreciate the journey more than the result. To fully comprehend how patience is not a passive act, but rather an active discipline that requires one to engage fully with the present moment.

Humility in the Face of Mystery

Perhaps the most compelling similarity between these two arts is the humility that they teach us.

Nature does not always behave according to textbook descriptions. Birds refuse to perch in convenient lighting to reveal all their finer details to us. Animals double back on their tracks. Wind smudges impressions. Weather silences bird song.

Both birders and trackers often get it wrong (yes, you read that correctly). However, this is a crucial part of the lesson, and half of what makes these two

arts so impactful on our lives in more ways than one. Being wrong teaches us humility and prompts us to pay closer attention to detail, question our own way of thinking, and continually strive to learn more and further our own understanding of things. It helps us become better versions of our professional and personal selves.

A Shared Path Forward

As conservation pressures intensify, the skills honed through birding and tracking become more important than ever. Birders generate incredible amounts of citizen-science data that help researchers gain deeper insight and understanding into migration, distribution, and population trends. This, in turn, better equips dedicated conservation organizations, such as BirdLife South Africa, with the tools they need to implement their crucial conservation work and save these species.

Similarly, trackers contribute invaluable insight into animal behaviour, habitat use, and ecological change on the ground, whose skills are now becoming widely applicable in combating poaching syndicates and the fight against wildlife crime.

Both help connect communities to nature, inspire stewardship, and cultivate a sense of belonging in the wild. They remind us that conservation is not only the work of scientists and policymakers, but also of ordinary people who care.

Two Doors into the Same World

Ultimately, birding and tracking teach the same lesson: Nature is always speaking to us. The real question is whether we are listening. Whether you tilt your head to the forest canopy or rest your eyes on the sand beneath your feet, you are stepping into an ancient dialogue, a relationship that humans have shared with the land for millennia.

Birders and trackers may walk different paths, but they share the same quiet devotion: *the art of noticing*. And in a world increasingly full of noise, this art has never been more valuable.



Two Amazing International Organisations Touching Sides: Rotary and Scouting – Building Future Leaders



2025 group of scouts who attended the Rotary leadership programme at Koru Camp



Images supplied

Lovelle Henderson

When Rotarian and Adult Scouter Penelope Colly recently told me that, as part of Hoedspruit Rotary’s Youth Leadership Development programme, ten scouts from the Acornhoek Scout Group would be sponsored to attend a Koru Camp experience, it set off a flood of memories.

I was reminded of my grandmother, who proudly wore the title of King Scout. She once told me how she had hosted Lord Robert Baden-Powell - the retired British Army Lieutenant-General and founder of the Scouting movement - on her farm *Kleine Zalze* in Stellenbosch. I can still picture her donning her Girl Guide uniform for me, heavy with badges, and photos of her and Baden-Powell together. Where those precious relics are today, I have no idea. Sadly, my search for more about their friendship yielded little, and the older family members who might have known the stories are long gone.

It was while holidaying in Gordon’s

Bay that Baden-Powell, then Chief Scout, issued one of his famous Christmas messages, calling on all Scouts “to entertain their poorer neighbours of all classes in some “Scouty” way, and show them what Scouting is and what a jolly, happy brotherhood we are.” I have no doubt he would have been immensely proud of the Acornhoek Scouts today - and perhaps he would encourage them to reach out and initiate the formation of a Scout Group right here in Hoedspruit, where, surprisingly, no such movement yet exists.

Interestingly, Rotary International was founded just two years before the Scout movement, and their founders - Paul Harris and Baden-Powell - were well acquainted. It’s no wonder the two organisations share such deep parallels in their values of service, leadership, and community.

Baden-Powell’s early visits to South Africa and Mozambique were military in nature, yet it was in the Matopo Hills, where he claimed to have had “the time of my life” and that many of his ideas for Scouting began to take shape. My own research

took me on an unexpected journey: during his reconnaissance missions along the Mozambican coast, Baden-Powell spent time at Inhambane’s Barra Beach—the very same stretch where my family has owned a holiday cottage for over 20 years. It turns out, his naval operations took place just offshore, at the only safe anchorage for large boats within the coral reefs.

The threads connecting these two global organisations continue to amaze me. Nelson Mandela received Rotary International’s highest humanitarian honour, the Rotary Foundation Award, in recognition of his service to humanity. He was also a Patron of Scouts South Africa, and the movement continues to honour him annually on Mandela Day. In fact, he was presented with the Africa Elephant Award—Scouting’s highest distinction on the continent.

Given their shared commitment to community upliftment and character development, it’s little surprise that Rotary and Scouting have joined hands so often. A perfect example is the 39-foot cruising

yacht “Rotary Scout”, owned by Scouts South Africa. Sponsored by Rotary International, it supports an extensive sailing programme that trains scouts and offers development opportunities to underprivileged youth.

The transformation these young South Africans experience through Rotary-sponsored leadership programmes is profound. Many return home deeply moved, speaking of “overcoming fears and challenges,” “understanding your place in the world,” and “gaining friends who keep you accountable to your promises.”

Penelope Colly proudly reports that the 2025 group of scouts who attended the Rotary leadership programme at Koru Camp excelled in all their scouting exams and returned with renewed confidence and purpose.

Together, Rotary and Scouting continue to shape tomorrow’s leaders - young people grounded in service, resilience, and a sense of belonging to something far greater than themselves.

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Global Number of Internet Users Increases, but Disparities Deepen Key Digital Divides

Geneva, 17 November 2025

The International Telecommunication Union’s (ITU) *Facts and Figures 2025* shows steady progress in connectivity, while highlighting gaps in quality and affordability.

The world’s online population grew by more than 240 million people in 2025, according to *Facts and Figures 2025* released today by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The new estimates confirm continuing progress in expanding digital connectivity, while pointing to differences in quality that impact how users benefit from Internet use.

Globally, an estimated 6 billion people – about three-quarters of the world’s population – are using the Internet in 2025, up from a revised estimate of 5.8 billion in 2024. However, 2.2 billion people remain offline, down from a revised estimate of 2.3 billion in 2024.

Overall, the report’s findings underline the importance of digital infrastructure, affordable services and skills training to ensure that everyone can truly benefit from advancing technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI).

“In a world where digital technologies are essential to so much of daily life, everyone should have the opportunity to benefit from being online,” said ITU Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin. “This report highlights how today’s digital divides are being defined by speed, reliability, affordability, and skills, all of which we must prioritize as we work to-

ward our mission of universal connectivity.”

Connectivity’s quality challenge

For the first time, *Facts and Figures* estimates the total number of 5G subscriptions, which now account for about one-third – or around 3 billion – of all mobile broadband subscriptions worldwide.

In 2025, 5G networks are estimated to cover 55 per cent of the world’s population, reflecting strong momentum in advanced mobile technologies. Coverage, however, remains uneven, with 84 per cent of people in high-income countries having access to 5G, compared with only 4 per cent in low-income countries.

While *Facts and Figures* shows that 4G and 3G services are available to most of the global population, these services are not best suited for keeping pace with advancing technologies.

Estimates in the report reveal deep contrasts in intensity of use as an indicator of the quality gap. A typical user in a high-income country now generates nearly eight times more mobile data than one in a low-income country.

Making connectivity meaningful

Facts and Figures 2025 highlights that affordability and digital skills remain essential to achieving universal and meaningful connectivity – reached when everyone can access the Internet with high-quality service, at an affordable cost, whenever and wherever needed.

Globally, the median price of a data-only mobile broadband basket decreased, but

access remains unaffordable in around 60 per cent of low- and middle-income countries.

Data also suggest that most Internet users possess basic skills, while more advanced capabilities – such as online safety, problem-solving and digital content creation – are being developed more slowly.

“Reliable data are the foundation of effective digital policies and of our shared vision to connect the world,” said ITU’s Telecommunication Development Bureau Director Cosmas Luckyson Zavaza-va. “Achieving that vision will require sustained and well-targeted efforts – in infrastructure, in digital skills, and in data systems. By working together and directing resources where the needs are greatest, we can ensure that no one is left behind and that everyone benefits fully and safely from the opportunities of the digital age.”

Detailing the globe’s digital divides

According to *Facts and Figures 2025*, digital development remains closely linked to economic development, gender, and location.

The report underscores the persistence of several digital divides:

- 94 per cent of people in high-income countries use the Internet, in contrast to only 23 per cent in low-income countries;
- 96 per cent of those offline live in low- and middle-income countries;
- 77 per cent of men are online

compared to 71 per cent of women;

- 85 per cent in urban areas are online versus 58 per cent in rural areas;
- 82 per cent of 15–24-year-olds use the Internet, compared with 72 per cent of the rest of the population.

Facts and Figures 2025 provides global, regional and income group estimates for indicators related to Internet use, mobile network coverage, Internet subscriptions, Internet traffic, affordability, digital skills and mobile phone ownership.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations agency for digital technologies, driving innovation for people and the planet with 194 Member States and a membership of over 1,000 companies, universities, civil society, and international and regional organizations. Established in 1865, ITU coordinates the global use of the radio spectrum and satellite orbits, establishes international technology standards, drives universal connectivity and digital services, and is helping to make sure everyone benefits from sustainable digital transformation, including the most remote communities. From artificial intelligence (AI) to quantum, from satellites and submarine cables to advanced mobile and wireless broadband networks, ITU is committed to connecting the world and beyond. Learn more: www.itu.int

Lady Godiva’s Horoscopes – ‘Tis the Season to be Jolly

December always feels like a race between joy and exhaustion. There’s wrapping paper under the couch, half-burnt candles on the table, and someone still arguing about who’s bringing the pudding. But between the noise and the nonsense, there’s magic - the kind that sneaks up in quiet moments, when laughter turns real and love feels simple again. Take it slow. The year’s done its best; now so should you.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22 – Dec 21)

It’s your month, firecracker. You’re loud, restless, and ready for anything - but remember, not every party needs you at full volume. Something small and unexpected will remind you why you love this time of year.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22 – Jan 19)

You’ve been running the show for months, and now you just want some peace. Let people help for once. A quiet Christmas morning might be exactly what your overworked heart’s been craving.

AQUARIUS (Jan 20 – Feb 18)

You’ve kept your cool all year - now loosen the reins. Let yourself laugh too loud and dance offbeat. By New Year’s Eve, a conversation shifts something big inside you.

PISCES (Feb 19 – Mar 20)

You’re feeling all the feels this month - nostalgia, gratitude, and that old ache for what’s gone. Let it come. The heart always heals a bit faster when surrounded by fairy lights.

ARIES (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

You’ve been charging ahead while every-

one else is still looking for the gift tags. Slow down, hero. You’ll find more joy in one honest moment than in any perfectly planned celebration.

TAURUS (Apr 20 – May 20)

You’re craving comfort - food, laughter, soft lights, familiar faces. But don’t cling too tightly to routine; one small change could make this Christmas one for the books.

GEMINI (May 21 – Jun 20)

You’re the life of the season - the story-

teller, the social butterfly, the one who somehow knows everyone. Just don’t spread yourself so thin that you miss the person who really matters.

CANCER (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

You’re happiest where there’s warmth, family, and too much gravy. Still, this December asks you to step outside your comfort zone - a simple “yes” might lead to a memory that sticks.

LEO (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

You love a grand entrance - even at

Christmas lunch. But this time, it’s your kindness, not your sparkle, that steals the show. A heartfelt gesture lights someone else’s whole week.

VIRGO (Aug 23 – Sep 22)

You’re holding everything together again - the meals, the plans, the people. Stop. Let it be a little messy. Nobody remembers perfect; they remember laughter.

LIBRA (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

You’re the peacemaker at every gathering, and yes, it’s exhausting. Let someone else pour the wine and settle the debates. A long-overdue moment of peace finally finds you.

SCORPIO (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

You’re quieter than usual, watching more than speaking - and that’s okay. The year’s taught you plenty. Before the clock strikes midnight, someone will thank you for being their constant.

Hot Tips for the Month

- **Do:** Laugh too loudly, eat the trifle first, and forgive people who don’t deserve it (yet).
- **Don’t:** Over-analyse family politics - they’ll still argue about the same thing next year.
- **Best day:** 23rd - something small and beautiful happens when you least expect it.
- **Avoid:** The urge to fix everything. Sometimes love just means showing up.
- **Lucky touch:** Anything hand-made or home-grown - real beats fancy every time.



Sunlight or Sunset?

Dr K M Hlophe
Dermatologist

Over the years, our relationship with the sun has shifted dramatically. We've gone from spending carefree hours outdoors to avoiding direct sunlight almost religiously, armed with high-SPF sunscreens and UPF-rated clothing. Before embracing or rejecting the current trend, it's worth taking a clear look at both the benefits and the risks.

The Benefits of Sunshine

A few minutes of sunlight on the skin allows the body to produce vitamin D, which plays a crucial role in calcium absorption. Calcium is essential for strong bones and teeth and helps prevent osteoporosis. Adequate vitamin D also supports the immune system, keeps muscles functioning well, and contributes to good brain health. New research increasingly links healthy vitamin D levels to reduced rates of intestinal, breast and prostate cancers.

Sunlight is a powerful mood regulator. Exposure boosts serotonin production and lowers cortisol - the body's main stress hormone - and helps ease Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a form of depression that typically develops during darker autumn and winter months and lifts again in spring.

Long before medical technology stepped in, people noticed that sunlight improved certain inflammatory skin disorders. This observation eventually inspired modern phototherapy, where controlled and precise doses of ultraviolet light are used to treat conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, neonatal jaundice and some forms of cutaneous T-cell lymphoma.

The Risks of Too Much Sun

Continuous, unprotected sun exposure can cause significant harm. It increases the risk of melanoma as well as non-melanoma skin cancers such as basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC). It can aggravate existing conditions like lupus, rosacea and porphyria, and may trigger ab-

normal reactions to sunlight in susceptible individuals, including polymorphic light eruption (PMLE) and Grover disease. Sun exposure also contributes to pigment disorders such as melasma and ashy dermatosis. Over time, it leads to photo-aging-wrinkles, sunspots and the gradual loss of skin elasticity caused by accumulated UV damage.

Finding the Balance

Experts generally recommend between ten and thirty minutes of sunlight a day, depending on skin type - fairer skins needing less time, darker skins a little more - to support vitamin D production and maintain mental well-being. The harsh midday period from 12:00 to 15:00 is best avoided.

For longer outdoor activities, sun protection becomes essential. This includes regular reapplication of high-SPF sunscreen, wearing UPF-rated clothing for activities like hiking or cycling, choosing wide-brimmed hats, and soothing the skin afterwards with after-sun lotions or thermal spring water sprays. Avoiding sunbeds, intentional sun-

bathing and old "tanning tricks" involving baby oil or brake fluid remains important for long-term skin health.

Handled with respect and moderation, the sun continues to be both life-giving and potentially harmful. The aim is not to fear it, but to use it wisely.

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Participants crossing the finish line (top) and others making their way en route (right). Riders relaxing (above)



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How to Train Your Chatbot for a South African Christmas Lunch (or Braai)

AI perspective ‘correspondent’

If you ever want proof that artificial intelligence will NEVER replace human beings, invite it to Christmas lunch in South Africa - or better yet, make it host one.

AI can land rockets, predict elections, and write a poem about the bushveld that sounds almost sincere. But put it in charge of a family Christmas braai and it'll crash faster than the fairy lights during Stage 6 load-shedding.

Let's picture it. ChatGPT's been given the honour of organising Christmas. It starts with a spreadsheet, because that's what machines do. "Please confirm number of guests," it asks. And that's where it all falls apart. Nobody in South Africa actually knows who's coming to lunch until they're standing at your gate with a salad, a cooler box, and three extra cousins "just popping in."

The Guest List

AI: Please confirm dietary requirements.

Human: "Well, Auntie Elmarie's gone vegan again. My brother's on the carnivore diet. The twins only eat yellow food, and Ouma's already on her second sherry."

AI: Processing error. Contradictory data detected.

Even the most advanced system can't compute that a "small family braai" somehow turns into forty-odd people, two dogs, a parrot, and a neighbour who just came to borrow ice and stayed for pudding.

Even the smartest AI would crash trying to survive a South African Christmas braai.

The Menu

AI, confidently: "Traditional Christmas meal: turkey, roast potatoes, glazed gammon."

South African reality: "Lamb chops, wors, chicken kebabs, a potato salad the size of the Blyde Dam, pap and rich tomato sauce bubbling on the side, garlic bread balancing between perfect and burnt, and that luminous green jelly thing nobody admits



Image : Canva

to making."

When told that no one here eats turkey - unless they lost a bet - the chatbot recalculates and suggests tofu skewers. It's clear it's never met a proper braai master or tried to dictate cooking methods to one.

The Drinks

Here's where things really fry its circuits. AI proposes mineral water and low-sugar punch.

Reality: the first beers crack open before the fire's even lit. By noon, the cooler box looks like a mirage, the ice has surrendered, and someone's swirling a brandy and Coke with the quiet authority of tradition.

When the chatbot timidly suggests "moderation protocols," it's met with laughter and a raised quart. The algorithm retreats.

The Schedule

AI's plan reads like a military op: 10:00 prep, 12:00 eat, 14:00 clean up.

Ha! Lunch will start when it starts - usu-

ally around 3 p.m., after "just one more" round, a few philosophical debates about the Springboks, and a quick rain shower that sends everyone scrambling under the lapa.

There's no algorithm for the rhythm of a South African Christmas: the storytelling, teasing, off-key singing, and general refusal to be rushed.

The Family Factor

This is where emotional AI would simply combust.

How do you code for Uncle Des's annual rugby monologue? Or that cousin who insists on bringing her new boyfriend and his emotional support bird?

And how would it handle the beautiful chaos - kids chasing dogs through sprinklers, someone losing a flip-flop in the pool, and that unspoken moment when everyone decides it's time for another round?

AI might measure tone and sentiment, but it will never understand the rhythm of real life - or the way love hides in all that noise.

The Clean-Up

By now, the chatbot's overheating. It launches Cleanup Protocol v2.1 and asks politely that everyone put their plates in the dishwasher.

But the dishwasher's full of Tupperware and braai grids. Someone's started karaoke, someone else is asleep in a camp chair, and the kids are roasting marshmallows dangerously close to the washing line.

So the AI does what any sensible system would do: it shuts down and prays for a reboot.

What It Might Learn

If you asked it later what it learned, it might surprise you. It would note that, amid the smoke and laughter, everyone seemed happy. That burnt chops might be forgiven, that pudding appeared when no one expected it, and that the conversations never really ended.

AI can calculate, predict, and optimise. But it can't capture the magic of human mess - the imperfect, noisy, beautiful kind that happens when we gather around a fire and call it family.

Because Christmas, whether around a table or an open flame, isn't about perfection. It's about presence.

So, if you ever do try to teach a chatbot about Christmas in South Africa, start small. Show it how to listen more than it talks. Remind it that a burnt chop isn't a disaster, it's just another story to tell. Teach it to laugh when the lights go out halfway through pudding, and to enjoy the quiet that follows. And, above all, let it know that some things are sacred - like pap and sauce done just right, that first icy sip of beer, a brandy and Coke at sunset, and the kind of laughter that no code will ever understand.

Happy Christmas!

This article was generated solely by ChatGPT.com and the text has not edited in any way

My 5 Sent

Oupa Bobbili

Pilletjie vir alles maar bitter min genesing. Ek vermoed ons word misbruik. "Guinea pigs", niks is 'n definitiewe oplossing nie, nee eerder "kom ons probeer die vir eers" sindroom. Alles gaan op "mogge troffe" as dit werk "yipee", maar as dit nie werk nie dan kry die liggaam die skuld. Maar die ontwikkelaars van die produkte maak biljoene uit die mens uit. Intussen trek ons swaar onder siektes en finansies om die gesondheid aan die gang te hou.

Ek sien hoe mense siek bly, al wat jy hoor is "die griep die jaar is aggressief en los nie" as hy jou vat is die nie flik toe nie. Maar gaan sien 'n dokter dan is die woorde, "Drink die

en kom terug as dit nie beter gaan nie". Hy weet dit gaan nie werk nie. Hier praat ek nou net van griep. Wat van die erger siektes, soos kanker, diabetes, bloeddruk ens.? Apteke verkoop net wat voorgeskryf word. Die middelman wat eintlik die oplossing het, mag nie optree nie. Die apteker leer wat is die beste vir die liggaam, maar in die selfde asem mag hy net opdragte uitvoer. Een simpel voorbeeld, ek was op hande vol bloed druk pille wat my energie getap het. Toe het een apteker gesê drink die natuurlike produk. Ek het meer as 'n jaar laas bloed druk pille gedrink en my bloeddruk is volkome onder beheer. Een pilletjie die oggend en "whalla" oupa voel stukke beter. Ons is al so gebreinspoel dat ons volg maar

die stroom van siektes. Ons aanvaar dit is hoe dit moet wees. Ons betaal maar en hoop en bid die pilletjies of stropies werk maar die eerste keer. Ons is al eintlik trots op ons siektes en ken die pille se name soos ons kinders se name. Het sulke spoggerige kassies waarin ons die pilletjies bêre, met aanduiding van elke dag om die nodige "drugs" in te neem soos voorgeskryf.

Hier is 'n hartseer storie. Energieke kinders is op pille vir "ADHD". Pleks van om hulle om die rugby veld te jaag, pomp ons hulle vol "drugs" en dit is ok. Die "slim" mense maak miljoen rande uit die wan persepsie van energie. Plaas van dat kinders gestimuleer moet word onderdruk ons hulle energie, want die ouers en onderwysers is te lui om

die kinders aan die gang te hou.

Die mens word beheer deur onbevoeg owerhede, media, en "drugs" en ons is ok met dit. Kom uit daai groef uit en begin leef. Steur jou nie aan wat die president sê nie, hy lieg in elk geval. Luister vir jou apteker (wat sy of haar sout werd is) en stimuleer jou kinders. Ek dink ons verdien om gesond te lewe. Geestelik en fisies. Jy lewe net eenkeer, en om onderdanig te wees aan ander manipulasies is nie regverdig teenoor jouself nie.

Lees elke dag iets positiefs, drink baie water, oefen, en slaap ten minste agt ure per dag. Jou lewe sal drasties verander.

Groete.

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