

When the Heavens Opened and the Rivers Rose How Farm Watch’s Unified Force Held Hoedspruit Together



Mark Bishop

Hoedspruit has always lived in a delicate balance with water. The rivers that sustain our farms, wildlife and livelihoods can, in a heartbeat, become forces of destruction. Over the past two weeks, that balance tipped violently.

From Thursday, 8 January, relentless rains pounded the Lowveld. By the second weekend, the Blyde, Zandspruit, Klaserie and Oliphants rivers had burst their banks, roads disappeared beneath swirling brown water, bridges failed, and entire pockets of our region were cut off

from the outside world. For many, it was the worst flooding since 2012. And yet, in the chaos, something remarkable happened. Hoedspruit did not descend into panic. It organised. It mobilised. It responded.

At the centre of that response stood Farm Watch - our crime-fighting and security body, but also a fully-fledged community disaster response unit. Tested under extreme pressure, Farm Watch’s newly unified structure proved its worth not on paper, but in mud, rain, darkness and danger.

This is the story of how a volunteer organisation became the backbone of Hoedspruit’s flood response - when time,

weather and circumstance gave no second chances.

From Safety to Survival: A System Built for Crisis

Just over two years ago, Hoedspruit’s two principal safety organisations - Farm Watch and Town Watch - merged under one umbrella: Farm Watch. The intention was simple but ambitious: remove duplication, streamline communication, and create a single, powerful safety structure serving the town and rural surrounds alike.

Few could have imagined that within months, this new system would face its greatest trial - not in the form of crime, but nature.

The floods of January 2026 became the first true stress-test of Farm Watch’s unified model. And it passed with flying colours. What distinguished Hoedspruit from many other flood-affected towns was not luck, nor geography - but readiness.

While rainfall warnings were being issued elsewhere, Farm Watch volunteers were already monitoring river levels along the R527, at low bridges near Driehoek, the Blyde River crossings, farm access routes stretching towards Moria, The Oaks and the Air Force Base perimeter, and the R40 from Bushbuckridge to Phalaborwa. No access route was left to chance.

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From the Editor Why Farm Watch Matters More Than Ever

This month has Valentines Day - but it has always fascinated me as to where did it originate and why?

Valentine's Day is now synonymous with roses, chocolates and candlelit dinners. But it has roots far less polished - and far more intriguing.

Its story begins in ancient Rome with Lupercalia, a mid-February fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the god of agriculture. The celebrations were earthy affairs involving feasting, matchmaking lotteries and rituals believed to promote fertility. Hardly Hallmark material - yet the timing stuck.

As Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, the Church sought to replace pagan festivals with saintly ones. Enter St. Valentine - or rather, Valentines, because several martyrs carried that name. The most famous legend speaks of a priest (Valentine) who secretly performed marriages for young lovers at a time when Emperor Claudius II had banned them, believing single men made better soldiers. For this defiance, Valentine was imprisoned and executed around 270 AD, supposedly signing a farewell note "...from your Valentine" - the earliest recorded Valentine's card, if folklore is to be believed.

By the Middle Ages, Valentine's Day had become firmly associated with romance, particularly in England and France. It was widely believed that birds began mating in mid-February, reinforcing the day's romantic symbolism. Poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer helped cement the idea of Valentine's as a celebration of courtly love.

The exchange of handwritten love notes flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries, evolving into mass-produced Valentine cards by the 19th century, alongside lace, ribbons and romantic verse. By the 20th century, the commercial machine was in full swing: chocolates, flowers, jewellery and lavish marketing campaigns transforming a once modest observance into a global industry.

Yet beneath the glossy surface, Valentine's Day still carries its original heartbeat: a celebration of love in all its forms - passionate, playful, awkward, enduring and sometimes wildly inconvenient.

From pagan fertility rites to billion-dollar business, Valentine's Day has come a long way... but love, in all its messy glory, remains at the centre of it all.

It is easy for us to celebrate Farm Watch when disaster strikes. When the rivers burst, roads collapse and lives hang in the balance, their value becomes immediately visible. Uniforms in the rain. Radios crackling through the night. Volunteers pulling strangers from danger.

But the real question is this: will we remember their value when the skies clear? Because Farm Watch does not only exist for moments like floods - it exists for every quiet night when crime doesn't happen. Every bridge that isn't crossed recklessly. Every emergency that never makes headlines.

Farm Watch is not a service we consume. It is a structure we sustain. What January's floods showed us is something deeply important: that Hoedspruit is not safe because we are lucky. We are safe because we are organised and cared for.

Farm Watch did not replace government. They did not criticise. They did not wait. They acted - calmly, lawfully, relentlessly - in partnership with SAPS, Traffic, SAAF, and more.

And they did so as unpaid volunteers. That should humble us all.

Now, as we return to routines and "normal" life, it is tempting to believe the crisis has passed and so too has the urgency. That would be a mistake. Because extreme weather is no longer rare. Crime is not disappearing. And communities that rely solely on outside help will always respond too late.

Farm Watch is Hoedspruit's first responder - long before sirens. If this town is to remain one of the safest in South Africa, then Farm Watch must remain strong. That strength does not come from heroism alone. It comes from membership. From donations. From participation, and ultimately - from community choosing not to be passive.

Farm Watch matters. Not just when rivers rise, but every day they don't. So, for all those readers out there - get involved and donate. And any donation goes a long way. Play your part in thanking this organisation by ensuring it endures.

To all at Farm Watch - we, every single one of us, owe you a debt of gratitude. We can show this by donating to the organisation as outlined in adverts and the lead story. Let's all play our part in ensuring the longevity of our paradise. Thank you.



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Obituary
Thelma Kleynhans passed away on the 11th of December 2025 - a day I shall never forget. But through the sadness of it all I would like to celebrate her life, and all those that helped in the end. Special thanks go to Spar - Anton and Dan'le. The wonderful staff of Hoedspruit Private Hospital, Peter from MedAlert, Dominic and the choir, Father Pobel and Dominee Hennie le Grange, Elite Funerals and all at the community church - all of you helped in such amazing ways to help me get through this very difficult time. thank you. To my darling Thelma, thank you for your love and devotion, I will always remember your fighting spirit. May you rest in peace in Gods love and Jesus's arms. Your forever loving husband, Franz.



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An Unseen Waste Crisis, and the Community-led Solutions Taking Shape



Lauren Booth
Communications Implementation Officer
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Across many rural parts of South Africa, an often overlooked but growing environmental and public health crisis is brewing, requiring urgent attention. It is a crisis shaped by everyday necessities, limited services and difficult choices, and it centres on the disposal of disposable nappies and sanitary products, known collectively as Absorbent Hygiene Products, or AHPs.

A problem without a bin

In communities with irregular or no waste collection services, there are few safe or practical options for disposing of AHPs. With limited bins or skips to discard waste and no nearby landfill sites, used nappies and sanitary pads are frequently buried, burned, dumped in open spaces or end up in pit toilets and waterways. These products break down very slowly, releasing plastics, chemicals and pathogens that pollute soil and water systems. With rural villages relying on these resources for daily life, the conditions quickly become unsanitary. This is not a problem caused by carelessness or lack of awareness. Research conducted by the University of the Western Cape, in partnership with the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region, shows that many caregivers are deeply aware of the risks and challenges. Households already spend significant time and effort digging holes, carrying waste away from homes, or attempting to burn materials that do not burn easily. However, the issue is not rooted in behaviour, it is access.

The cost of necessity

In villages such as Phiring and Malaeneng, baseline research shows that families may spend between R200 and R500 per month on disposable nappies. In households where



AHP Project - Nappy starterpacks received Malaeneng (above left), signing of the conservation agreement (middle) and Phiring receiving the starterpacks.

income is limited and often reliant on social grants, this is a substantial financial burden. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of used nappies accumulate daily in areas that form part of important water catchments. The baseline study shows that in Bushbuckridge and Maruleng, alone (190 700 households) an estimated 207 300 nappies are used per day. The impacts are not always immediately visible, but at a scale such as this, they are compounding rapidly over time. Polluted soil, degraded wetlands and compromised water quality affect both human health and ecosystems, creating far-reaching and long-term risks that are far harder and more expensive to address later.

Solutions start with listening

It was within this context that Kruger to Canyons, together with UWC and local partners, began working with communities to understand not only how much AHP waste is being generated, but why existing options are so limited. Instead of arriving with pre-designed solutions, the Absorbent Hygiene Products Project was shaped through community workshops, household surveys and ongoing engagement led by trained, local fieldworkers. What emerged challenged many common assumptions. While concerns around water use, comfort and stigma do exist, research showed that most households do have water access within their yards, that most caregivers do not believe reusable products are unhealthy, and that when waste services are absent, disposing of disposable nappies can require as much effort as washing reusable ones. Perhaps most importantly, the research highlighted the role of public perception. Disposable nappies are often associated with modernity and progress, while cloth alternatives are seen as a sign of poverty or being “left behind”. Shifting these views



cannot be done through instruction alone, it requires trust, peer learning and visible local leadership.

A practical, people-centred response

The AHP Project therefore takes a multi-pronged approach. Reusable nappies and sanitary pads have been introduced to some communities to significantly reduce waste entering the environment, while also lowering household costs over time. At the same time, local seamstresses are being supported to produce reusable sanitary pads, creating income opportunities and keeping production rooted in the community. Eco-Savings and Credit Groups form a key part of the model. They provide the financial backbone so families can access starter packs of reusable cloth nappies through a revolving loan model. This allows mothers access to loans from the savings groups they are part of to buy the nappies and repay the value of the via monthly instalments, building responsibility and collective ownership rather than dependency. It also allows the scaling of the project to reach more households over time. Governance that starts locally This work is grounded in community governance systems, as shown in Kruger to Canyons documentaries *Our Waste* and *Our Governance* (available on <https://www.youtube.com/@K2C.biosphere>). Traditional leadership structures, savings group chairpersons and community forums play a central role in decision-making, accountability and feedback. Solutions are tested, adapted and refined through these structures, ensuring they respond to real conditions and needs on the ground, rather than abstract policy ideals.

From villages to national policy

What is happening in these communities



is also shaping conversations at a national level. In 2025, the South African government drafted a revised National Waste Management Strategy that, for the first time, explicitly recognises AHPs as a material of concern. The strategy begins to acknowledge that one-size-fits-all waste systems designed for urban areas will not work everywhere. Drawing on research and lived experience from rural and traditional authority areas, Kruger to Canyons has submitted feedback to the national AHP forum and will engage directly with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment emphasising that effective solutions must prioritise underserved areas, align with traditional governance structures and respect cultural sensitivities around dignity and disposal. Importantly, the experience from Phiring and Malaeneng shows that when communities are included from the start, they are not passive recipients of policy, but essential contributors to what really works.

Seeing what is usually out of sight

While rooted in rural waste management, this story invites a broader reflection. It asks us to consider where waste goes when there is no service to collect it and how systems shape choices long before individuals do. It reminds us that environmental harm is not only about personal responsibility, but about access, infrastructure and dignity. By supporting community-led solutions, grounding policy in real human experience and reflecting on our own consumption choices, we become part of a shared effort to protect water, health and livelihoods. The waste may be out of sight, but the solutions are already being built, shaped by the people who live with the consequences every day.

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Elephants or Marula Trees? A Plant Ecologist's Uneasy View from the Kruger Park



A historical view of mature marula trees in central Kruger National Park. Image: Eugene Moll

Eugene Moll

Elephants are steadily reducing the number of mature marula trees in the park, while regeneration has all but collapsed due to browsing from other herbivores. By allowing their numbers to remain at current levels we are choosing short-term comfort over long-term ecological integrity.

I have spent my life studying trees in the Kruger National Park. What I am seeing now troubles me deeply. While the elephant debate grows louder and more emotional, a quieter ecological collapse is unfolding. This is not an argument against elephants. It is a plea for biodiversity conservation before we lose something irreplaceable.

I have watched Kruger's trees for most of my life. As a professional plant ecologist, I have walked its landscapes, studied its vegetation and photographed its changes over decades. Few things have disturbed me as much as the steady disappearance of mature marula trees.

These are not marginal plants. Marulas are among the most iconic, ecologically valuable trees in the park. They anchor savanna systems, feed birds and mammals, shape animal movement and define the character of large areas of Kruger. And yet, within my lifetime, their numbers have collapsed.

To the casual observer this loss is easy to miss. Kruger still looks vast, green and alive. Elephants are abundant. Tourists are reassured. But ecology is not judged by abundance alone. It is judged by balance, regeneration and long-term sustainability. And that balance is breaking.

A line from Aldo Leopold's: *A Sand County Almanac* has never felt more relevant to me: "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds."

Those wounds are often invisible to people who do not work closely with ecosystems. Trees do not die dramatically. They decline quietly. And when they stop regenerating, the damage is already far advanced.

A landscape that no longer renews itself

Historical photographs of central Kruger show magnificent stands of mature marulas with expansive canopies. Today, in many areas, what remains are broken trunks, stripped bark and bare ground. In places like the Crocodile Bridge area, the pattern is unmistakable:

elephants have smashed or ring-barked the trees, and exceptionally high numbers of impala and other herbivores have removed every seedling and sapling that tries to establish.

The result is a closed ecological trap. Old trees are dying, and young trees are not replacing them.

From a plant ecological perspective, this is not a debate. It is a diagnosis.

How we got here

As a student in the early 1960s, I was taught that conservation meant "the wise use of resources". Preservation – freezing nature in time – was understood to be neither realistic nor desirable.

During those years I was actively involved with what is now Wessa. Two major conservation battles dominated our attention in Kruger. One was the successful fight to prevent coking coal mining inside the park. The other was raising funds to build artificial water points.

At the time, I was proud of both achievements.

With hindsight, I now recognise that one of them was a serious ecological mistake.

Artificial water points fundamentally altered Kruger's ecological dynamics. They removed natural constraints on herbivore movement and population size. They allowed animals to remain year-round in areas that would otherwise have offered seasonal refuge to vegetation.

This is not about blame. It is about learning. Conservation is not static. When evidence changes, management must change too.

The elephant debate – and what it misses

Elephants are extraordinary animals. They are intelligent, social and powerful ecosystem engineers. In open systems, their impact is moderated by movement, drought and spatial complexity.

Kruger, however, is not an open system. It is fenced. Movement is constrained. Predators do not regulate elephant numbers. Humans do.

That makes Kruger a managed system, whether we are comfortable with that idea or not.

The elephant debate has become globally politicised and emotionally charged. I understand why. But from my perspective as a plant ecologist, much of the discussion is disconnected from basic ecological principles.

I see emotional arguments, armchair opinions and political positioning. What I see far less of is serious engagement with plant ecology and long-term biodiversity outcomes.

Elephants are slowly but steadily reducing the number of mature marula trees. At the same time, regeneration has all but collapsed due to intense browsing pressure from impalas, nyalas and other herbivores that find marulas highly palatable at every life stage.

This is not speculation. It is observable, measurable and predictable.

Closed systems demand management

Every farmer understands a simple truth: in closed systems, stocking rates matter. If herbivore numbers exceed what the land can sustain, the most palatable species are eaten first – often to local extinction.

John Acocks demonstrated this clearly in South Africa decades ago. Given choice, herbivores repeatedly select the same species until those species disappear.

Marulas are among the most palatable trees in Kruger. Being a marula in today's Kruger is, quite simply, extremely hazardous.

If biodiversity conservation is our mandate, then allowing this process to continue unchecked is a failure of that mandate.

The question we keep avoiding

I am often told that this is a false choice. That we do not have to choose between elephants and trees. In principle, that is true.

In practice, choices are already being made.

By allowing elephant and herbivore numbers to remain at current levels in a fenced system, we are choosing elephants over marulas. We are choosing short-term comfort over long-term ecological integrity.

So, I ask the question directly: Do we value elephants more than trees – yes or no?

If the answer is yes, then we should be honest about it and accept the ecological consequences. If the answer is no, then we must be willing to manage populations in a way that protects biodiversity as a whole.

Doing nothing is not neutrality. It is a decision with predictable outcomes.

Custodianship requires courage

Kruger is a national treasure. But it is also a human-bounded system shaped by fences, water points and management decisions. We already intervene. The only question is whether we intervene wisely.



Ultimately large parts of Kruger will resemble marula graveyards, with no regeneration and heavily overused veld, as this photograph shows. Taken in September 2025 in the Crocodile Bridge area where elephants have smashed down all the trees, and the impala have cleaned up all the regeneration, leaving bare earth and scattered, unpalatable shrubs.



In the past elephants removed small patches of marula bark, but today trees tend to be totally stripped, ultimately resulting in death.



Today elephants heavily use any marulas. Images: Eugene Moll

True conservation is not about sentiment. It is about responsibility. It is about acting before losses become irreversible.

Trees take centuries to replace. Once regeneration collapses, recovery is not quick or guaranteed. If we wait until the marulas are gone, no amount of regret will bring them back.

The wounds Leopold wrote about are visible to those who know where to look. I see them every time I walk through Kruger.

The marulas are telling us something. As custodians of this extraordinary landscape, we would do well to listen – and to act – while there is still time.

This article was previously published in the Daily Maverick/Op-Eds/Ecological Peril Op-Ed

Eugene Moll is a retired plant ecologist, currently with an honorary appointment with the University of the Western Cape's Department of Biodiversity and Conservation Biology. Previously he was the Foundation Chair in Natural Systems Management at the University of Queensland, Australia, head of the Department of Botany at UCT and director of the Southern African Wildlife College. For the past 14 years he has been the botanical adviser to the Keys to Kruger's Trees project.

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Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2462283



SOLE MANDATE

KAMPERSRUS R 4 300 000
Beds 4 | Baths 2 | Floor: 274 m² | Stand: 1,625 m²

Spacious home with open-plan living areas, well-finished kitchen, scullery and guest loo. Large windows capture mountain views. Upstairs rooms open to a balcony, while a large rooftop patio offers sweeping 360° vistas. Features landscaped garden, powered shed, ample covered parking.
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SOLE MANDATE

CENTRAL HOEDSPRUIT R 1 900 000
Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 1.5 | Floor size: 106 m²

Spacious duplex with open-plan living area, modern kitchen and study nook. Lounge opens to private patio and access to the communal garden. Bedrooms and full bathroom upstairs, guest loo downstairs, private courtyard and covered carport. Secure complex with easy access to amenities.
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SOLE MANDATE

LISSATABA NATURE RESERVE R 4 950 000
Beds 3 | Baths 3 | Floor: 252 m²

Newly renovated bush home with mountain views. Includes 2 bedroom main house with wraparound deck, TV lounge, kitchen, scullery, and dining area. Guest cottage with kitchenette and private patio. Boma, inverter, solar, gas stove, double carport, storeroom, and game vehicle. Partially furnished.
Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2392842



SOLE MANDATE

ELEPHANT ROCK ECO ESTATE R 3 500 000
Beds 2 | Baths 2 | Floor: 109 m²

Immaculate, furnished home with high-end appliances. Open-plan living with stacking doors flows onto a wraparound deck in a natural setting. Features are a kitchen with breakfast nook, enclosed courtyard, gas geysers, aircons, water filtration system, paved driveway and double carport.
Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2431012



MODITLO WILDLIFE ESTATE R 6 200 000
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



ZANDSPRUIT VALLEY R 2 250 000
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, covered patio overlooking lovely garden, and double automated garage. Conveniently located near town and amenities.
Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2425474



UMFULA ESTATE, HIPPO POOLS R 6 900 000
Beds 3 | Baths 3 | Floor size: 190 m²

This double-storey home is designed to embrace sweeping Olifants River views beneath mature trees. Open-plan living flows to a patio with splash pool and boma, while the en-suite bedrooms offer comfort and privacy. Sold with the adjoining stand for added seclusion and future potential.
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This home offers an inviting open plan lounge and dining area with separate kitchen that has been well thought out. Leading from the lounge, sliding doors open to the garden area and pool. This home includes a full solar system connected to an inverter. Completed by a double garage.
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Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2404188



RENTAL

RAPTOR'S VIEW WILDLIFE ESTATE R 25 000 pm
Beds 3 | Baths 3 | Furnished

Available immediately, not pet friendly - Open-plan lounge and kitchen flow onto a deck and pool with mountain views, plus a separate dining room and study. Bedrooms are en-suite. Solar system powers the home except the pool. Includes storeroom, two carports, and tenant-paid utilities.
Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2434176



RENTAL

ZANDSPRUIT MANOR ESTATE R 23 500 pm
Beds 3 | Baths 2 | Unfurnished

Available immediately (no pets) - Newly built home with spacious open-plan lounge and dining area with built-in study nook opens to the garden. Modern kitchen with ample storage, scullery and courtyard. Aircons installed, and double automated garage with direct access. Long-term lease only.
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From Play to Progress: numiknow® Build on Lessons Learned

Thias Taute

The third iteration in the Hoedspruit area of the Social Employment Fund (SEF 3), part of South Africa’s Presidential Employment Stimulus, is under way in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region. Running from November 2025 to July 2026, the project builds directly on lessons learned during SEF 1 and SEF 2, with a strong focus on mathematical proficiency through the numiknow® approach.

SEF 3 is implemented through a partnership between Hoedspruit Hub, the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region, Greater Stellenbosch Trust, Citizen Connect and media partner Kruger2Canyon News. The project involves 300 previously unemployed participants from the Acornhoek and Ga-Sekororo areas, while also supporting early childhood development centres and learners in Grades 4 to 9.

Evidence from the previous SEF phases showed that learners and adult participants who regularly played numiknow® games demonstrated improved numeracy levels. In several schools, mathematics marks improved in Grades 5 to 7 where numiknow® clubs were implemented effectively.

These findings confirmed that structured, game-based learning can support both informal numeracy and formal curriculum outcomes. They also highlighted the value of learning environments that reduce anxiety around mathematics and encourage exploration, discussion and play.

At the same time, the data revealed important gaps. Many learners struggled with basic number sense, including place value, fractions and estimation. In higher grades, challenges were evident in areas such as variables, probability, patterns and working with positive and negative numbers. Experience also showed that while digital tools are valuable for track-

ing progress, they work best when focused purely on learning, without social media or other distractions.

These insights directly informed the refinement of numiknow® for SEF 3. Foundational tools such as abacuses, fraction blocks and number rollers have been added to strengthen basic number sense. The game set has also been expanded, particularly for Grades 7 to 9, with new games covering variables, probability, estimation, patterns and integer values.

The seven new game icons

A new numiknow® website and a redesigned application featuring 23 games are being rolled out in 2026. SEF 3 participants will have unlimited access, while learner access is intentionally limited and data-driven, allowing facilitators to monitor progress responsibly. The platform is available in English, Sepedi and Afrikaans, with further translations encouraged. If you are interested to improve the current translations or assist with the translation into another South African language, please feel free to contact us (details below).

Implementation during SEF 3 is more structured than before. Sixty numiknow® clubs will operate in 20 schools. Daily sessions rotate between basic number sense, coding with dominoes and numiknow® game play, ensuring a balance between enjoyment, foundational skills, logical thinking and problem-solving.

Beyond clubs, numiknow® will also be implemented in two additional primary schools to support the normal mathematics curriculum. An enrichment programme for selected learners will further extend learning opportunities.

Monthly feedback articles in Kruger2Canyon News will track progress across the different numiknow® initiatives. Together, these activities reflect a clear shift from pilot learning to deliberate scaling.

In short, 2025 demonstrated that nu-

miknow® works. In 2026, the focus will be on applying those lessons with intention - strengthening foundations, extending curriculum coverage and embedding mathematical proficiency as a shared community asset.

For more information, visit <https://numiknow.com>, try the games at <https://play.numiknow.com> or contact Thias Taute at thias@hoedspruithub.com.



South African Tax in 2026: What to Expect

Suzanne Smit

As we move into 2026, SARS Commissioner Edward Kieswetter’s term is coming to an end, with the current compliance-driven approach at SARS expected to continue. He has been a stalwart of compliance in a digital and very much global era, and we are excited to see who will take the reins from him.

We do not expect increases to VAT and income tax rates, although bracket-creep remains a reality. We expect the focus to remain on improved tax collections with increased audits and verifications partly because of SARS’s investment in its information technology infrastructure. We also expect a specific focus on trusts, investment structures and cross-border arrangements. Commercial rationale should always underpin planning.

One of the most important investment developments is the proposed removal of Section 42 roll-over relief for transfers into Collective Investment Schemes (CIS). Industry responded and submitted that a distinction be drawn between ‘closely held’ and ‘widely held’ CIS’s (i.e. depending on number of investors, the target market, regulatory oversight and the tax treatment), in order for roll-over relief to be retained for widely held CIS’s subject to regulatory oversight (such as FSCA policies) Treasury has partially accepted this proposition and confirmed to postpone the change to 1st January 2027 to consult with stakeholders in order to define “closely held” CIS’s.

This allows a limited window for investors to review restructures or transfers under the current rules.

Trusts

Based on our experience, SARS is intensi-

fying audits and tax collections on trusts. Fidelis Vox remains fully committed to assist our clients with trust compliance and administration and we work with trusted service providers to assist with financial statements and tax compliance. All trusts must file annual returns, even if dormant. SARS is sophisticated with information sharing and data analysis capacity and can easily pick up on non-compliance. Trusts must have bank accounts and trustees’ meetings must be held at least annually and resolutions signed for all trust transactions.

Foreign Pensions

Effective from 1st March 2026, foreign retirement pensions and lump sums received by South African residents will generally become taxable. Clients who have foreign pensions should consider this change based on its jurisdiction to determine if a tax treaty will mitigate potential double tax. This

will generally relate to pensions earned because of previous foreign employment.

Tax transparency essential

Tax transparency remains a core theme for 2026. Trying to hide structures and investments will do much more harm than good. Whilst we expect tax rates to remain unchanged, changes to investment rules and compliance expectations mean proactive review of current planning is essential, particularly ahead of the 2027 CIS changes.

For any specific queries relating to the above, please contact Marteen Michau (marteen@fidelisvox.co.za) or Suzanne Smit (suzanne@fidelisvox.co.za)



FIDELIS VOX SPECIALISES IN PROVIDING BESPOKE ESTATE PLANNING AND STRUCTURING SOLUTIONS, TRUST ADMINISTRATION AND TRUSTEESHIP, AND WILLS, WITH A STRONG COMMITMENT TO INTEGRITY, DISCRETION, AND PERSONALISED CLIENT SERVICE.

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Lady Godiva's February Forecast: Love, Lust and Other Dangerous Hobbies



Love is not proven through grand gestures alone - it's revealed in consistency, curiosity, and care. Ride wisely, dear readers. March never forgets what February exposed.

Pisces (19 February - 20 March)
Romance glows, intuition sharpens, and boundaries wobble. February asks you to dream and discern. Not every fantasy deserves your emotional investment. Protect your energy like it's sacred - because it is.

Aries (21 March - 19 April)
February pokes the bear - and you are the bear. Passion runs high, patience runs low, and honesty arrives unfiltered. Speak your truth, but don't scorch the furniture. A pause before reacting will save you from cleaning up unnecessary mess.

Taurus (20 April - 20 May)
Comfort is calling, but growth is knocking louder. February asks you to loosen

your grip on what feels safe but stagnant. Romance improves the moment you stop being stubborn (just a little). Change doesn't mean loss - it means expansion.

Gemini (21 May - 20 June)
Your mouth may outrun your heart this month. Conversations carry weight - choose words like you mean them. Someone is listening more closely than you think. Say less, mean more.

Cancer (21 June - 22 July)
Emotions swell like a full-moon tide. February invites you to ask for reassurance instead of testing loyalty. Vulnerability will be rewarded - sulking will not. Let people love you without setting traps.

Leo (23 July - 22 August)
You want to be adored, but February wants you authentic. Drop the performance and let someone see you without the spotlight. The right audience will

applaud anyway. Real intimacy begins where ego steps aside.

Virgo (23 August - 22 September)
You're analysing everything - again. February gently suggests feeling instead of fixing. Love isn't a spreadsheet, darling, even if you colour-code it. Trust that not everything needs improvement to be valuable.

Libra (23 September - 22 October)
Balance feels elusive this month, especially in relationships. Stop trying to keep the peace at your own expense. February favours honesty over harmony. Discomfort now prevents resentment later.

Scorpio (23 October - 21 November)
Intensity is your love language, but February warns against emotional brinkmanship. Say what you want without testing loyalty. Power lies in clarity, not control. Transparency is far more seductive than mystery right now.

Sagittarius (22 November - 21 December)
Freedom is calling - loudly. February tempts you to run from emotional depth instead of diving in. Stay curious, not avoidant; connection needn't cage you. Commitment doesn't cancel adventure.

Capricorn (22 December - 19 January)
You're carrying more than you admit. February asks you to soften, share, and stop "handling it" alone. Let someone show up for you - shocking, I know. Strength includes asking for help.

Aquarius (20 January - 18 February)

You're emotionally detached but mentally buzzing. February nudges you back into your body and heart. Real intimacy requires presence, not just clever conversation. Feel first, analyse later.

- Lady Godiva's Fiery February Titbits**
- Valentine's Day rewards effort, not expense.
 - Mixed signals are still signals - just not good ones.
 - If it's not a clear yes, it's a polite no.
 - Emotional labour counts, even when invisible.
 - Stop explaining yourself to people committed to misunderstanding you.
 - Desire thrives where resentment dies.
 - Being chosen feels best when it's intentional.
 - Silence can be an answer - listen carefully.

Lady Godiva

SUDOKU

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When the Heavens Opened



Cont. from page 1

"This wasn't coincidence," one senior Farm Watch volunteer said later. "We remembered 2012. We didn't wait for confirmation that it was serious - we assumed it would be."

Before the Rivers Broke Their Banks

Looking back at the first night of the floods, one of the most important interventions came even before the rivers rose.

The Water Users Association (Water Gebruikers Vereniging Afrik.) which includes all the farmers linked to the pipeline system, had already raised the alarm. Johan Malan shared critical information about the volume of rain that was on the way and the risks that lay ahead. With his input, farmers acted proactively. Runoff channels were cleared. Dam outlets were opened. Infrastructure was prepared. And that early work mattered. It is the main reason why so many drifts (drainage lines), bridges and dam walls held. Because when one dam wall fails, it rarely fails alone - it breaks in a chain reaction. This time, that chain reaction was avoided.

Zandsput Bridge: The First Major Test

By Tuesday afternoon, the situation was already deteriorating. At around two o'clock in the afternoon, the Zandsput bridge began overflowing. The decision was made to close it immediately. That, it soon became clear, was only the beginning.

"By that evening the water was already nearly 1.6 metres deep - up to chest height."

In the meantime, the Klaserie River started coming down with force. The next morning, rescue teams went in at the Klaserie Dam to evacuate people trapped with caravans, vehicles under water, and families stranded overnight in small houses and tents. Vehicles were switched off, placed in neutral, and towed through to prevent engines from ingesting water. Dozens of recoveries followed.

Zandsput soon became a focal point, not because of the bridge itself, but because of the deteriorating condition of the R40 from Phalaborwa and Acornhoek. It was a matter of extreme urgency that something be done.

The call went out. Machines and equipment arrived courtesy of Mareul Aitchison, Johan Joubert, Fred Barnard and Koos Boshoff. A 20-ton excavator lifted tons of reeds that had jammed against the bridge and

blocked the flow. Tar washed away on one side was repaired with gravel. Throughout this operation Sanral was there in support. When the bridge was reopened later that day (around 18:00), it stayed open - because the community had responded. That intervention prevented the bridge from being flooded again.

R40: Vehicles Washed Away

But even as the Zandsput stabilised, the crisis shifted. On Wednesday evening, between seven and eight o'clock, reports came in that four vehicles had been washed off the R40 between Mica and Griekie. In some places, 170mm of rain had fallen in just two hours. Rescue teams reached people clinging to vehicle roofs. Ropes and harnesses were used in an extended, highly dangerous operation. Everyone was brought out safely. There were no fatalities.

Lodge on the Oliphants River: The Air Rescue

Then came the call from a lodge on the banks of the Oliphants River. Before midday, concerns were raised. Initially, the situation was not yet life-threatening. But by 21:00 that evening, Deidré Carter of Limpopo Agri requested urgent evacuation.

This is where the Air Force stepped in. Farm Watch received the call and relayed the message to the Air Force, who took the situation on immediately. Authorisation

was given and the helicopter was airborne.

"Those pilots - they were incredible and fearless. We owe them."

Flying at barely 100 feet, in very poor visibility, with low cloud and rain, the helicopter extracted 15 people from the lodge and dropped them at an accessible pickup point. For some families, those hours were agonising.

One family member later said she believed her parents had already been swept away downstream - they had not. Again, there was no loss of life.

Elsewhere: The Disaster Widens

On Essex Road, an elderly woman was swept away while trying to cross the floodwaters. Farm workers saw it happen, alerted Farm Watch, and she was rescued further downstream. She was admitted to Hoedspruit Private Hospital with a serious leg injury and is now recovering well.

By then, more than a hundred drifts (drainage lines) and bridges across the region had been washed away.

Even now, as this edition is released, the full extent of the damage is still being assessed. Roads remain closed. Infrastructure inspections are ongoing. Engineers are still determining which bridges can be repaired and which must be rebuilt from scratch. What is already clear, however, is that the

final cost - in money, time and disruption - will run into many tens, if not hundreds, of millions of Rands.

If this flood has taught us anything, it is this: Proper planning prevents poor performance.

The early warnings from the Water Users Association, the pre-emptive clearing of runoff channels, and the rapid closure of vulnerable bridges were critical. But equally important was something far broader: Farm Watch is not a structure built only for floods. It is a permanent, standing system designed to react to any crisis, at any time.

Its patrols, reaction units, communications network and command structure exist every day - whether the threat is crime, fire, medical emergency or flood. In January, that permanent readiness meant the town did not have to invent a response in the middle of a disaster. It already had one.

Phalaborwa was without power and water for days. Shops were emptied. Fresh produce vanished from shelves. Water infrastructure was destroyed. Helicopters and boats ferried in personnel to restore services. In the reserves, a different crisis unfolded.

Roads were impassable. Lodges and staff were cut off. People isolated for ten days began trying to reach town for food and water - only to become stuck again. Every day, 15 to 20 vehicles were being winched out of the mud by Farm watch volunteers.

When Radios Saved a Life

Communications became critical. Contact Communications and Herotel kept networks alive throughout the crisis.

On Mariepskop, entire sections of road - 40 metres wide and 30 metres deep - had vanished. With Eskom unable to access the site, diesel had to be flown in by helicopter to keep the repeaters operating.

"If the radios had failed," one responder said quietly, "that child would not be here today."

Without the radios, lives would almost certainly have been lost. That was proven one night on an estate near Hoedspruit. At half past eight, a radio call came through: a child was not breathing. A father was performing CPR in a ditch, somewhere off an unmarked road, with no cell phone signal! Search teams fanned out. One vehicle found them - stranded where the road had collapsed.

Cont. on next page



and the Rivers Rose



The three-year-old was taken immediately to medics, placed on oxygen, and rushed by ambulance to Hoedspruit Private Hospital. Three days later, the child was discharged. Fully recovered.

The Helicopters That Never Stopped

And overhead, the helicopters kept flying. From first light to dark, pilots ferried tourists out, food in, anti-poaching teams supplied, and isolated lodges sustained. Donovan de Wet, Gerry McDonald and Jana Meyer. Three names that appear again and again in this crisis.

Spar and Pick n Pay parcels were packed and distributed daily. Many flights were sponsored. Many pilots flew without certainty of payment. But everyone understood the same rule: Money later. Lives first.

In the beginning, tourists were flown out to dry ground. Later, food and medicine were flown in. Anti-poaching teams, carrying only two or three days' supplies, were resupplied to keep the reserves protected. This was not a single operation. It was hundreds of coordinated acts of quiet courage.

Eyes on the Rivers, Boots in the Mud

As the rains intensified, Farm Watch activated every layer of its structure. Patrol units moved into disaster surveillance. Stopper groups erected rapid roadblocks. Reaction Unit members deployed into washed-out zones. And when cell phone networks failed, Farm Watch's

radio system became the town's nervous system.

Volunteers pulled vehicles from flooded roads. Guided motorists away from deadly currents. Ferried food to marooned families. Cleared fallen trees. Drained flooded homes. Hauled bakkies from mud with tractors and bulldozers. This was not improvisation. It was a trained system in motion.

What Made Farm Watch Work

Farm Watch succeeded because it is built on seven interlocking pillars: Membership and Community Integration, Patrol Groups, Stopper Groups, Reaction Unit, Intelligence Unit, Camera Monitoring Network and Farm Watch Support Unit.

Overlay this with specialist groups - air support pilots, canine handlers, fire units, responder support teams - and you begin to understand why Farm Watch could step into roles usually reserved for formal disaster agencies. But note this carefully: they did not replace government support or intervention. They bridged the gap before government could arrive.

A Town Held Together by Volunteers

Every person involved through Farm Watch was unpaid. Every kilometre driven was fuel and time "donated" by every volunteer themselves. Heavy vehicles were immediately mobilised with only fuel sponsored. Every hour



worked by the volunteers was taken from families, sleep and comfort. And yet there were no complaints. Amazingly only smiles and resolve.

At 03:00, ankle-deep in mud, one exhausted volunteer said:
"If this was your house, you'd want someone here too."

After the Flood: Why Farm Watch Now Needs Us

Hoedspruit Farm Watch stood for us when the rivers rose. Now, they need us to stand for them. The floods placed extraordinary demands on this voluntary organisation. Vehicles were damaged. Equipment strained. Fuel reserves depleted. Medical kits emptied. Radios worn down. Protective gear destroyed. Some equipment lost.

Farm Watch receives no state funding. It survives on volunteers, membership and community support. And yet it is this very organisation that saved lives, possibly yours, prevented serious injuries, preserved infrastructure, maintained order during chaos, and delivered humanitarian relief when formal systems were overwhelmed.

"We cannot allow such a structure to weaken after proving its value so powerfully."

How You Can Help

There are many ways to help - but right now,

after this massive operation, financial support is critical.

1. Donate Financially. Here are indications of some costs that have had to be covered:

- ☐ R1,000 restocks first-aid and rescue kits
- ☐ R2,500 refuels a TLB (a tractor-load-er-backhoe)
- ☐ R5,000 services critical radio and recovery equipment
- ☐ R10,000 covers one helicopter flight

2. Volunteer Your Time or Skills

Patrollers, camera monitors, medics, mechanics, cooks, pilots, tractor owners, administrators.

3. Contribute Equipment or Services

Recovery gear, radios, generators, lighting, fuel, protective clothing, IT support.

4. Become a Member

Ongoing monthly support is the backbone of Farm Watch's sustainability. Farm Watch is not only a safety organisation. It is Hoedspruit's emergency spine. Without it, this town would not have coped the way it did. So, let's make this a community effort. Everyone join. Everyone benefits. Everyone helps hold the line when the rivers rise.

"We are forever indebted to Farm Watch. Thank you!"

Marketing Authorisation number: 20260123

FLOOD RECOVERY COMMUNITY CALL TO ACTION

Recent floods have caused devastating damage to roads & essential infrastructure in Hoedspruit.

DONATE NOW

Bank: First National Bank
Acc name: Hoedspruit Protection NPC
Acc No: 63085942572
Branch Code: 250655
SWIFT Code: FIRZAJJ

Ref: Flood - Business/Individual Name
NPC Reg No: 2022/553828/08
Trading as Hoedspruit Farm Watch

Kruger2Canyon News is offering two months FREE advertising to any business/persons donating in excess of R10,000 to FARM WATCH. T's & C's apply.

What's Happening?

Throughout the crisis, Hoedspruit Farm Watch has worked tirelessly to keep residents safe, protect property, and respond to emergencies, often in dangerous conditions.

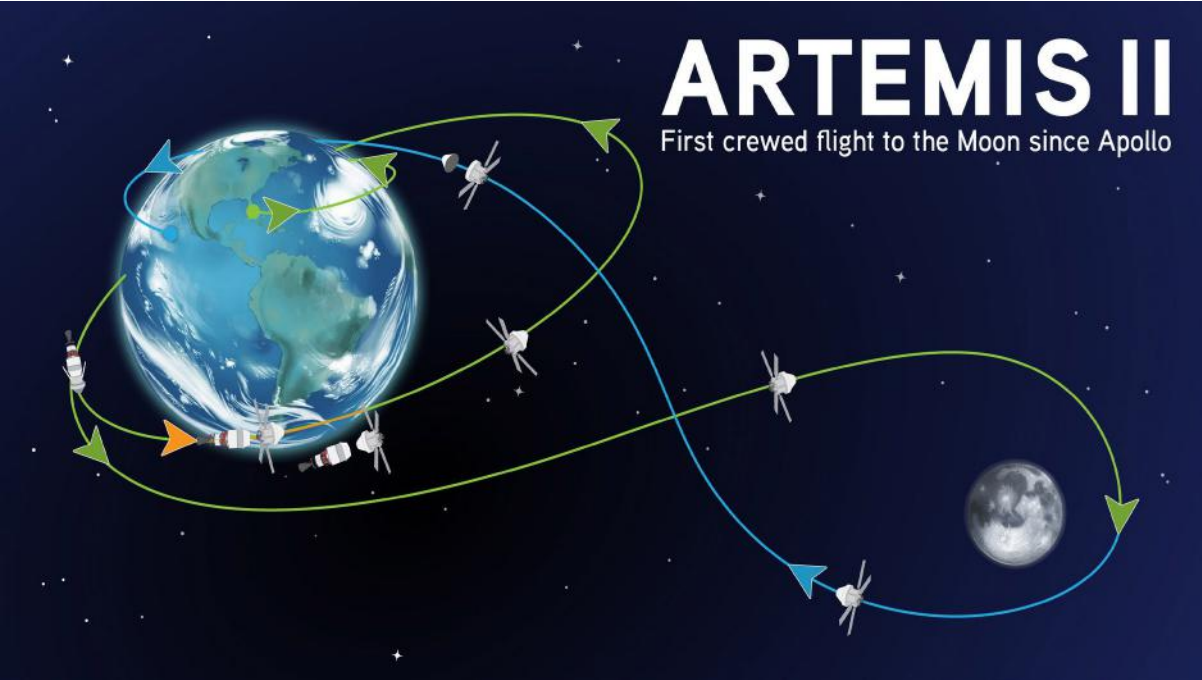
Now the real work begins.

Items we need the funds for:

- Fuel for generators
- Costs of helicopters
- Radio system repairs
- Emergency road signage
- Recovery equipment repairs
- Temporary road repairs – potholes



Artemis II: Return to the Moon



Artemis II Flight Plan I

Image: Canadian Space Agency



Artemis II crew

Image:NASA



Neil Armstrong's footprint on the moon

Image: NASA

Ben Coley
Celestial Events SA

In 1903, the Wright brothers conducted the first successful powered flight, yet just 66 years later, on the 20th July 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin become the first humans to set foot on another world. This monumental achievement marked one of mankind's greatest achievements.

After the 6th and final successful Apollo landing in 1972, human exploration of the Moon came to an end. Since then, robotic spacecraft have continued the work of studying and mapping the lunar surface, analysing its composition, and identifying potential resources. These discoveries, combined with advances in technology, have laid the groundwork for a return - not merely for brief visits, but for longterm exploration and more permanent utilisation.

As NASA prepares for the second Artemis mission, the world stands on the threshold of a new chapter in humanity's long relationship with the Moon. Artemis II is scheduled for launch sometime before April 2026 and will mark the first time humans will travel beyond low Earth orbit since the Apollo era more than half a century ago. While it will not land on the lunar surface, the mission represents a critical step toward the goal of returning astronauts to the Moon and establishing a sustained human presence there.

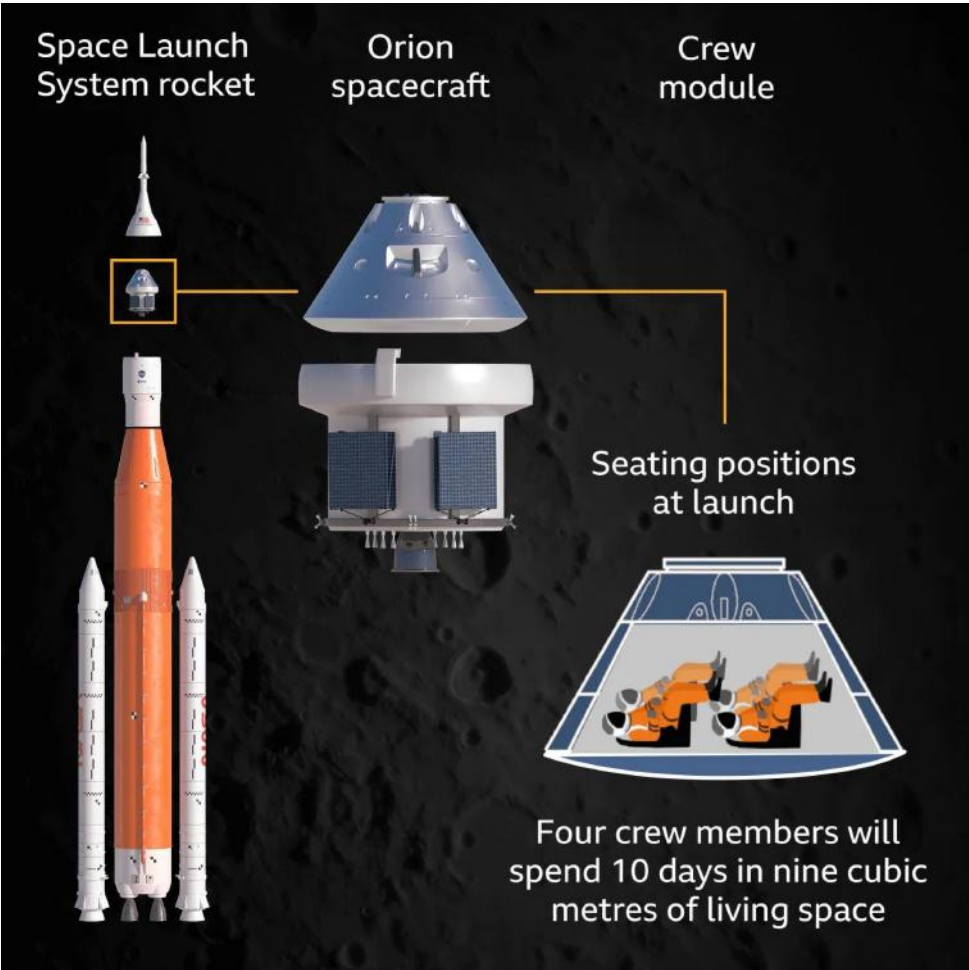
Artemis II will carry a crew aboard NASA's Orion spacecraft, launched by the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket. Astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch, and Jeremy Hanson will embark on

a multiday journey around the Moon and back to Earth. The primary objectives of this lunar flyby are to test the new generation of space exploration vehicles, and monitor human performance in deep space.

This mission is a crucial precursor to Artemis III, and subsequent flights, which aim to place astronauts, including the first woman and the first person of colour, on the lunar surface. Unlike the Apollo missions, which focused on short stays, the Artemis program envisions building more sustainable capabilities, including a space station in lunar orbit known as Gateway, and surface systems that will allow astronauts to live and work on the Moon for extended periods. The knowledge gained from Artemis II will help ensure these future missions are conducted safely and efficiently.

Despite looking like a desolate wasteland, the Moon offers us some incredible opportunities to grow our presence in the solar system. Recent discoveries of water ice hidden at the bottom of icy craters and imprisoned within the lunar regolith, could be harvested to create breathable oxygen, drinking water and even rocket fuel. In the future, missions into the far reaches of the solar system could be launched from the lunar surface - the low gravity of the Moon meaning that far less fuel is required to achieve escape velocity. There are even plans to build visual and radio telescopes on the far side of the Moon to take advantage of its lack of atmosphere and radio-quiet zones.

The names "Apollo" and "Artemis" are drawn from Greek mythology, underscoring a symbolic continuity between past and present. In myth, Apollo is the god of the



Source: Nasa, ESA

Artemis II Rocket

Image: NASA,ESA, BBC



Sun, light, and knowledge, while Artemis is the goddess of the Moon and Apollo's twin sister. By naming the new program Artemis, NASA has intentionally connected today's lunar ambitions with the achievements of Apollo, suggesting not a replacement, but a continuation: an exploration led by a new generation, building on the foundation laid by those who came before.

Artemis II represents more than a technical milestone. It is a reminder that explora-

tion remains a defining human endeavour. As astronauts once again venture toward the Moon, we wish them Godspeed! The knowledge that they carry with them include decades of history, scientific curiosity, and the hope that this return will open the door to even greater journeys, including eventual missions to Mars and beyond.

See Celestial Events SA advert for contact details

Celebrating our Country’s Winged Wonders: BirdLife South Africa’s Bird-of-the-Year Initiative



John Kinghorn
Avitourism Project Manager: BirdLife South Africa

South Africa is globally celebrated for its rich biodiversity and nowhere is that more evident than in its avifauna. From the tiny, ever-present Cape robin-chat flitting around the lawns of suburban gardens to the majestic martial eagles effortlessly cresting the tops of the highest thermals, our nation’s birds reflect diverse landscapes, ecological health, and national pride.

Understanding the role that these species play in ecosystems, and the threats they face, is crucial, and that’s where BirdLife South Africa’s Bird-of-the-Year initiative steps in - a powerful blend of conservation, education, and public engagement that symbolises the urgency of safeguarding South Africa’s extraordinary birdlife.

What Is the Bird-of-the-Year Initiative?

For nearly two decades, our Bird-of-the-Year (‘BOTY’) campaign has spotlighted a single bird species which is used as a champion for bird conservation over the proceeding 356 days. Beginning in 2007 with the African Penguin, the initiative has since featured a captivating, star-studded avian roster, including the Cape parrot, secretary-bird, Cape gannet, southern ground hornbill, blue crane, and, most recently, the ever present red-billed oxpecker.

Rather than simply naming a species the “bird of the year,” this initiative goes far deeper, and places the chosen species at the centre of a suite of education, awareness and outreach efforts. Each year, we aim to produce educational materials (posters, infographics, media content, classroom resources), feature the bird in our flagship African Birdlife publication, and generate multimedia content which we then share across social media and through community presentations. These materials are designed to educate learners, birders, tourism professionals, and the general public about the species’ ecology, role in its environment, any threats it may face, and its conservation needs.

In 2025, we decided to change things up

a little bit, and invited the public to participate directly by selecting their 2026 Bird of the Year through a public vote - a first for the campaign. More than 10,000 votes were cast, and the black harrier (*Circus maurus*) emerged victorious!

Why Bird-of-the-Year Matters for Conservation

Birds are more than feathered additions to the landscape; they are indicators of an ecosystem’s underlying health, and essential participants within food webs. When the population of bird species declines or thrives, it provides crucial insight into the state of its habitat and any pressures affecting it.

The Bird-of-the-Year initiative harnesses the ecological significance of birds, and the role that they play as indicators within our ecosystems, for practical conservation impact in several key ways, including:

- 1. Conservation through Education: Raising Awareness of Threatened Species**
Many birds face existential threats from habitat loss, climate change, pollution, invasive species, and human-induced landscape changes. By spotlighting one species each year and making it a champion for bird conservation, BOTY turns intricate, often incomprehensible to most, scientific findings and data into compelling stories that everybody can relate to, rally around, champion, and support. This elevated visibility, and fresh, relatable approach around a serious conservation issue helps build public support for conservation actions.
The black harrier, for example, is classified as regionally classified as Endangered, with an estimated population of less than 1,300 individuals remaining. The species struggles, primarily due to habitat loss and fragmentation, as well as collisions with power lines and renewable energy infrastructure such as wind turbines. Featuring such species through this initiative helps mobilise attention and resources around their specific plight and the broader conservation challenges they represent.
- 2. Education and Community Engagement**
Awareness alone isn’t sufficient; lasting

conservation outcomes depend on informed and engaged communities. The BOTY programme generates structured, professionally developed teaching resources that help schools, educators, and informal environmental groups learn about birds, biodiversity, and ecological interconnections. Lesson plans, fact sheets, posters, and classroom activities bring real-world conservation into learning spaces, fostering the next generation of conservationists. Public events, talks, and webinars provide platforms for skilled birders and scientists to share up-to-date knowledge, and for any interested persons to ask questions, deepen their understanding, and feel empowered to act.

3. Supporting Citizen Science and Research
Our work is deeply rooted in science, data capture, and monitoring, often delivered through programmes such as the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2), which tracks the distribution and abundance of species across the region. By spotlighting specific species, the BOTY initiative helps drive citizen participation in public data collection, bird surveys, and monitoring efforts, strengthening long-term datasets that underpin our conservation planning and action.

Year of the Black Harrier
The black harrier (*Circus maurus*) stands out among southern Africa’s most noticeable avian treasures. Known locally as the witkruisvleivalk in Afrikaans, and umamhlangenomnyama in isiZulu, this striking raptor is arguably one of the region’s most sought-after near endemics among both local and international avitourists.
The species enjoys a stronghold in South Africa’s Western Cape province, specifically in areas dominated by fynbos and renosterveld. However, it is also prone to nomadic and migratory movements driven by the necessity to follow fluctuations in prey [mice] populations. Their distribution extends further into the Karoo and to Lesotho, and even up toward Gauteng, with movements often averaging 250 kilometres in a single day (maximum continuous flight recorded

Black Harrier adult
Image: Odette Curtis-Scott



on a single day was 523 kilometres across the karoo), and generally in response to rainfall patterns and prey availability. Unfortunately, its population has declined significantly due to habitat transformation, among others, earning it its current regional Red Data List Status of Endangered. In fact, the global population is predicted to be declining at 2.3% annually.

In naming the black harrier the Bird of the Year for 2026, we seek not only to celebrate its beauty and ecological role, but to galvanise attention around the urgent need for the protection and research of its habitats. Efforts coordinated with conservation partners such as the Black Harrier Task Force and the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust, and Birds and Bats Unlimited, aim to combine scientific research with habitat conservation, giving us an opportunity to ensure that this elegant hunter continues to dance across South African skies for many more years to come.

The Bird-of-the-Year initiative is far greater than an annual accolade. It’s a dynamic platform for conservation through education, community engagement and sustainable tourism development. By championing remarkable species like the southern ground hornbill, red-billed oxpecker, and black harrier, it bridges science, culture and public participation to inspire action that benefits both birds and people. In doing so, it also helps reinforces a powerful message: that our birds, and the ecosystems they represent, are worth understanding, knowing, appreciating, celebrating and protecting.

Snake and Scorpion Safety in the Aftermath of Flooding



Brown house snake

Image: TB Photography

Tim Baynham
Wildlife Safety Solutions

Flooding events can significantly disrupt natural habitats, forcing wildlife such as snakes and scorpions to move into new areas in search of shelter and warmth. As floodwaters recede, these animals are often encountered in and around homes, outbuildings, gardens, and debris piles. Understanding the risks and taking practical precautions can greatly reduce the chance of an unexpected encounter.

Floodwaters drive snakes and scorpions from burrows, rock crevices, and vegetation where they would normally shelter. They may seek refuge in dry, elevated spaces such as homes, garages, cupboards, firewood stacks, or stored equipment. It is important to remember these animals are not

at all aggressive by nature; bites and stings usually occur when they feel threatened, cornered, or accidentally disturbed.

After a flooding event, always assume displaced wildlife may be present. Wear closed shoes or boots, long trousers, and gloves when cleaning up debris, moving furniture, or working outdoors. Avoid walking barefoot, especially at night. Use a torch when entering dark rooms, sheds, or storage areas.

Before picking up objects such as bricks, logs, or boards, inspect the area visually and use a tool to move items rather than your hands. Shake out clothing, towels, bedding, and shoes before use, particularly if they were left on the floor. Keep doors closed where possible and seal gaps under doors or around foundations to prevent animals from entering.

Clear debris, rubbish, and flood-damaged

materials as soon as it is safe to do so. Remove piles of wood, rubble, and dense vegetation close to buildings, as these provide ideal hiding places. Keep grass short and avoid leaving pet food or refuse uncovered, as these can attract rodents, which in turn attract snakes. Indoors, keep floors clutter-free and beds slightly away from walls. Never attempt to handle or kill a snake. If a snake is encountered, remain calm, keep a safe distance, and allow it an escape route. Most snakes will move away if not threatened. If necessary, contact me at Wildlife Safety Solutions for safe removal.

Scorpions may hide in shoes, bedding, and clothing. Regularly inspect these items, especially during the weeks following a flood. Use insect screens where possible and keep doors closed. In the event of a sting take a photograph of the scorpion for identification purposes and seek medical assistance.

Flooding increases the likelihood of encounters with snakes and scorpions, but awareness and simple precautions can significantly reduce any risk. By staying alert, maintaining clean surroundings, and knowing how to respond, communities can safely navigate the post-flood period while respecting the wildlife displaced by these natural events.

For more information on scorpions, snakes, spiders and other venomous animals, awareness training and talks, as well as a professional 24hrs problem snake rescue service, contact the author at Wildlife Safety Solutions:
073 934 6156; info@wildlifesafetysolutions.co.za; www.wildlifesafetysolutions.co.za, FB Wildlife Safety Solutions, Instagram [wildlife_safety_solutions](https://www.instagram.com/wildlife_safety_solutions)

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The Resilience Neuroscience of Fight, Flight, and Freeze



W R Leigh 1939

Andrew Paterson
Philosafaris.com

The loud, guttural growl of a lion shredded the stillness ahead. A sound that bypassed thinking to fuse directly into my nervous system. I halted mid-stride on the game path and raised my left fist—the pre-arranged signal for the six guests walking single file behind me to “Stop dead. No movement. No sound.”

Lioness

A dozen metres ahead, crouched low in the grass at the base of a granite kopje we were heading for. Ears flattened. Tail thrashing. Yellow eyes burning into mine with chilling hostility. Glancing briefly at the wide-eyed group behind me, I noticed David at the back scurrying to catch up—against explicit instructions—only stopping when he caught my glare.

Eyes front.

My brain's pattern recognition was instant and automatic, built by years on foot in dangerous-game country.

“Angry lioness. Not retreating. Probably cubs up the kopje. Brave mother.”

I lowered my arm to grip the rifle with both hands.

“Snarling. Tail lashing side to side in warning - normally. Not the vertical whip before a serious attack - usually. Never presume. Brace yourself.”

She rose, started forward, then launched herself with a loud grunt - 150 kilograms of muscle exploding towards us in a furious bounding yellow blur.

One lioness. Three human brain constructions

The moment she charged, three people experienced three fundamentally different realities.

Not three interpretations of the same event, but three distinct experiences, each actively constructed by three brains making different predictions about what was happening and what to do about it.

Modern neuroscience shows that emotions are not universally-shared responses governed by hardwired fear circuits or triggered by inherited instinct. The brain is a prediction machine, continuously generating best-

guess models from previous experiences, and current context about what sensory input means for the body. The senses refine prediction - they don't create emotion.

The old **Triune Brain** myth tells us that the primitive “reptilian brain” instinctively reacts to extreme threat by “hijacking” the mammalian “emotional brain” to overwhelm the *prefrontal cortex* of the “rational brain.”

That model has been thoroughly debunked. There are no separately evolved rational, emotional and instinctive brains fighting for control. There is one integrated, predictive network system working to keep you alive with the accumulated data it has.

Crucially, these predictions operate within certain thresholds where arousal, perception and action remain flexible. Beyond them, systems reorganise, locking in less options.

This is as true of natural ecosystems as it is of brains.

In resilience science, a threshold is the point at which a system shifts - often abruptly and negatively - into a different state of being. A mixed woodland becomes bush-encroached shrubland. A savannah becomes desert. A nervous system tips from mobilisation into panic or paralysis.

Same stimulus. Different thresholds crossed.

My construction: FIGHT the manageable threat

I cocked my .500 NE double rifle as it came up, butt unconsciously slotting into my shoulder, clear sight picture and finger on the front trigger. Roaring at the group to “Stand still!” and at the lioness to draw her focus onto me, steeling my nerves in a mixture of fear, projected bravado, and deterrence.

None of this was conscious deliberation. It was a prediction model built over decades of walking safari experience, weapons drill and shooting. Reinforced by repetition, feedback, and command & control responsibility under combat stress.

My *hypothalamus* triggered a massive *sympathetic nervous system cascade*. Heart rate doubled from 70 to 140. Blood pressure spiked. *Adrenaline* flooded my bloodstream.

Crucially, my system did not breach its threshold. Fear increased without fragmenting coordination and my brain remained functionally engaged with feedback

categorising the extreme arousal not as panic, but as preparation.

Each previous encounter with danger that ended in successful regulation had reinforced a stabilising loop: high arousal → coherent action → survival → updated prediction that arousal is survivable.

*“Here she comes. I’ve been here before. Stand your ground. **Fight**. Shout. Assess her intent. I know my rifle. I know my shooting ability. Aim centre.”*

My pupils dilated for more light, yet my visual field narrowed to a tunnel - not because my peripheral vision failed, but because my brain allocated all processes to the threat. Time seemed to slow down, forming crystal clear focus of her shape, speed, line, posture and purpose.

This is ecological resilience in neural form.

Skid-bouncing stiff-legged to a grunting halt about five metres in front of me, scattering dirt and dust, she spun round, ran back, turned snarling to face us again.

This wasn't over.

Sarah's construction: FLIGHT from catastrophic danger

Sarah experienced the same sensory input - but crossed a different threshold.

Her heart rate surged higher than mine. Her nervous system prepared for **flight**. Blood flow primed her legs for escape. Her brain retrieved its best available predictions: *“Lions kill people. Distance equals safety. Predator means RUN!”*

These weren't irrational. They were the only models she had. No prior experience managing threats at this scale. No embodied memory of standing firm and surviving. Her brain constructed the arousal as catastrophic. Her prefrontal regulatory networks struggled under the neurochemical load—not due to weakness, but because they had never been trained to operate there.

As arousal climbed, regulatory networks lost traction. Competing signals flooded the system. The threshold into catastrophic meaning-making was crossed - a threshold where adaptive stress transforms into system overload.

Beyond this point, feedback loops became reinforcing rather than stabilising: fear amplified fear; sensation confirmed danger; danger confirmed disaster.

Only external regulation - my voice shouting “Stand still! Hold each other!” and her partner gripping her - prevented her from bolting.

David's construction: FREEZE in system shutdown

David's nervous system crossed yet another threshold to construct a third reality.

His nervous system surged into high arousal, but instead of mobilising movement, it suppressed it. This is the **freeze** response. Not calm, not low arousal, but intense activation paired with motor inhibition.

Freeze occurs when the brain predicts that action will worsen outcomes. Movement feels impossible, not because the person “chooses” paralysis, but because the system has concluded that any action is unsafe.

David's muscles locked, halting movement. His attention narrowed inward. As the charge neared, dissociation crept in - perceptual distance, unreality, emotional blunting. This was not a full *tonic immobility* collapse, but a freeze-dominant state with emerging dissociative protection.

This response serves a short-term function: it reduces *metabolic load* and psychological overwhelm when no viable action is perceived. But it carries long-term risk because high arousal without acting fragments memory encoding and increases vulnerability to post-traumatic stress.

Importantly, freeze is not cowardice. It is what happens when a nervous system has no trained prediction for effective action.

Four charges. Three diverging feedback loops

She charged again. And again. And again.

Each time, my predictions updated. By the third charge, the pattern was confirmed.

“Protective defence. Not malicious aggression. Typical. Stand when she comes. Back off when she does. Control the Guests.”

My fear remained constant. But it became familiar, structured, even useful in a stabilising feedback loop where each charge refined and reinforced my predictions rather than destabilising them: arousal → action → outcome → learning.

Sarah's regulatory capacity eroded with each charge. Every one reinforced “*This is how I die*,” rather than “This is the lion's pattern” in a different loop of: arousal → terror → confirmation of catastrophe.

David sank deeper into freeze. Each charge confirmed pure helplessness. His brain constructed that nothing he did mattered. It was all useless - the feedback drove him over his threshold.

Same lioness. Same charges. Three constructed realities.

This is precisely how social-ecological systems behave under repeated stress.

What This Reveals

These four charges weren't just a terrifying lesson in neuroscience, but in resilience science.

They were a demonstration of how living systems - from brains to savannahs - respond to extreme uncertainty.

Resilience is not resistance to disturbance. It is the capacity to absorb disturbance without crossing critical thresholds that collapse function. Not the absence of fear - the ability to construct fear as functional.

Without training, exposure, and graded stress, nervous systems flip state when thresholds are breached.

We don't “rise to the occasion” - we fall back on the predictions our systems have learned.

Resilience is learnable and trainable, and modern cognitive & behavioural therapies can change how your brain constructs experience by feeding it new data, new patterns, new predictions to work with.

Philosophy of resilience

The founders of this field of psychotherapy were *directly* inspired by the ancient Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers who were training resilience over 2,300 years ago without understanding the neuroscience behind it.

The Stoics framed this as **living in accord with Nature** - both *universal* and *human*.

They taught exposure, regulation, and perspective to keep the human psyche within functional bounds under pressure.

Today, neuroscience and ecology reveal why it worked.

Nature has been refining resilience for 3.8 billion years. Our nervous systems are one expression of those same principles.

Next month, resilience science shows what ecology teaches us about threshold tipping points, feedback loops, and the fragile space where resilience is either strengthened or lost - and what that means for the human psyche. If you want to get hold of Andrew you can email him on ecostoic@philosafaris.com.

Safaris to the Wisdom of Nature Philosophy means “love of wisdom” in ancient Greek, Safari means “journey” in Swahili



Heart Health: A Guide for Everyday Living

Dr C Coccia
Specialist Physician and Gastroenterologist

Why Heart Health Matters

Your heart works nonstop, pumping blood that carries oxygen and nutrients to every part of your body. Keeping it healthy is essential for energy, mobility, and long-term wellbeing. Heart disease remains one of the leading causes of illness worldwide, but the good news is that many risk factors are preventable through daily habits and informed choices.

Understanding Common Risk Factors

Several factors can increase the risk of heart problems. Some, such as age and family history, cannot be changed. Others are within your control. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, poor diet,

physical inactivity, obesity, chronic stress, and uncontrolled diabetes all place extra strain on the heart. Recognizing these risks early allows you to take steps to protect your cardiovascular health.

Eating for a Healthy Heart

A heart-friendly diet focuses on balance and variety. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds provide fibre and essential nutrients that support heart function. Healthy fats, such as those found in olive oil, avocados, and fatty fish, can help lower harmful cholesterol levels. Limiting salt, added sugars, processed foods, and saturated fats can reduce blood pressure and inflammation, easing the workload on your heart.

The Role of Physical Activity

Regular physical activity strengthens the

heart muscle and improves circulation. Activities such as brisk walking, cycling, swimming, or dancing can make a meaningful difference. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week. Even small changes - taking the stairs, stretching regularly, or walking during breaks - can add up and support heart health over time.

Managing Stress and Sleep

Chronic stress and poor sleep can negatively affect the heart by raising blood pressure and triggering unhealthy behaviours. Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, or spending time in nature can help manage stress. Most adults benefit from seven to nine hours of quality sleep per night, which allows the body, including the heart, to recover and regulate important functions.

Regular Checkups and Prevention

Routine medical checkups are vital for monitoring blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels. Early detection of problems allows for timely treatment and lifestyle adjustments. Avoiding smoking, limiting alcohol intake, and following medical advice all play key roles in preventing heart disease.

A Lifelong Commitment

Heart health is not about perfection but about consistency. Small, positive choices made daily can protect your heart and improve your quality of life for years to come.



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SCAN FOR QUOTE



My 5 Sent

Oupa Bobbili

So reis ons lekker na Nederland vir vakansie. Sien baie geskiedenis, en ook hoe die geskiedenis behoue bly. Geboue wat dateer uit die 1300's uit en steeds in gebruik is. Een kerk is bykans 2000 jaar oud. En is steeds in bedryf. Word nog elke Sondag dienste in gehou.

Strate wat gebou is met "cobblestone" lê al vir honderde jare, en elke dag loop duisende voete, fietse en soms karre daaroor. Bromponies geniet ook die paaie en hier is letterlik duisende van hulle. Fi-

etse het natuurlik meer regte as karre. Die mense ry tot laat aande met hulle fietse rond. Die weer pla niemand hier nie, selfs terwyl ek hier tik is dit -5 grade buite en die kinders speel in die sneeu.

Wat meer merkwaardig is, is die plekke is skoon en alles werk. Tot 'n blinde man kan sien hoe werk elke sent van die belasting betaler se geld vir hulle. Mense gehoorsaam die wed en respekteer mekaar. Elke oomblik wat ek die land en sy mense beleef, besef ek dat ons voorvaders daardie kultuur gehad het.

Ons sê ons wil graag die sneeu beleef, en

toe gebeur iets waarvoor ons glad nie beplan het nie. Dit sneeu, maar die meeste as wat hulle in jare gehad het. Ons sneeu in en kan nie huis toe gaan nie. Eina!!!. Wees versigtig waarvoor jy wens nê. Maar dit bly merkwaardig. Elke oomblik het sy eie herinnering gebou vir die toekoms.

Wonderlik om in 'n plek te wees waar niemand jou oordeel oor wie jy is en hoe jy lyk nie. maak nie saak van waar jy afkom nie. Maak nie saak of jy die rykste is of die armste is nie, almal geniet die selfde voordele. Elke mens daar het iets om na uit te sien. Mense werk baie hard en dink baie vooruit,

maar hulle werk hulle nie dood nie. 40 uur werks week en dit is dit. Oortyd word glad nie eens in aanmerking gebring nie, want jou familie kom eerste.

Maar, hoe sê ons altyd? Jou eie bed slaap die lekkerste. Dit was lekker maar dit is nou klaar. Ons het ons eie mooi en eie geskiedenis. Ons het braaivleis en biltong, teenoor hulle stroop wafels en kaas. Ons is darem nog 520m bo see vlak hulle is 7m onder see vlak. Iets om oor na te dink nê.

Dankbaar vir die wonderlike ervaring, maar meer dankbaar vir my eie bed. Groete.

Why Valentine’s Day Matters to Women – and Why Men Keep Getting It Wrong (Sometimes)



AI perspective 'correspondent'

Every year, like clockwork, Valentine’s Day rolls around and men everywhere fall into one of three camps: the confident planners, the quiet opt-outers, and the panicked last-minute brigade sprinting through a petrol station clutching a wilted rose and a box of “assorted” chocolates.

And every year, many women sigh and ask the same question: Why is this so hard?

The short answer is that Valentine’s Day is rarely about the flowers, the card, or even the dinner reservation. The long answer is... well, pull up a chair.

For many women, Valentine’s Day is symbolic. It’s not a Hallmark conspiracy or a pink-tinted trap designed to torture men. It’s a moment - one day in the calendar that says, “You matter enough for me to stop, notice, and choose you on purpose.”

That last part is crucial: on purpose. Most women don’t want extravagance. They want intention. Thought. Evidence that someone has paid attention not just to them, but to who they are.

Here’s where things start going sideways.

Men, generally speaking, are practical creatures. If the relationship is solid, the bills are paid, the car has fuel and the bin went out last night, then all is well in the world. From this perspective, Valentine’s Day can feel redundant - like congratulating someone for breathing. “But I love you every day,” many men say, baffled. Which is often true. But here’s the disconnect: love felt is not always love expressed.

Valentine’s Day, for many women, is about emotional visibility. It’s a check-in point. A little flag planted in the year that says, “I see you. I choose you. I remember what makes you feel special.” Miss that, and it can feel — unfairly or not - like being overlooked.

So why do men keep messing it up? Firstly, because men often treat Valentine’s Day as a task rather than a message. The thinking goes: flowers? tick. Card? tick. Dinner? tick. Job done. But women are often reading between the lines. They notice which flowers. Whether the card says something meaningful or just “Love, me”. Whether the dinner feels like a genuine effort or a last-minute obligation squeezed in between emails.

Secondly, men tend to underestimate the emotional memory of women. Many women

remember Valentine’s Days like mental photo albums. The great one from years ago. The disappointing one that still stings. The year nothing happened at all. Men, meanwhile, are often genuinely surprised to discover that something which happened five Valentine’s Days ago is still very much on file.

Then there’s the timing issue. Romance, in the male brain, is often reactive. Something reminds him — a billboard, a radio ad, a panicked WhatsApp from a friend - and suddenly it’s go-time.

But for women, anticipation is part of the romance. Knowing that someone planned ahead, thought ahead, remembered ahead - that’s the gift. This is also why “I’ll make it up to you next weekend” almost never works.

Now, before the men throw down the paper in despair, here’s the good news: this is not complicated. Valentine’s Day is not about grand gestures. It’s about specificity.

The best Valentine’s moments usually include at least one of the following: a reference to something she once mentioned casually months ago; a note that sounds like him, not a greeting card committee; an experience that reflects her, not a generic idea of romance.

It’s the difference between “I bought you

chocolates” and “I remembered you love dark chocolate with sea salt but hate the ones with weird fillings.”

And yes, women do sometimes contribute to the confusion. Expectations can be unspoken. Disappointment can be quietly banked instead of clearly communicated. Valentine’s Day can become a silent test - and nobody passes a test they don’t know they’re writing.

But at its heart, Valentine’s Day isn’t about pressure. It’s about reassurance. In busy lives filled with work, kids, stress and scrolling, it’s a pause button. A moment that says: “Us still matters.”

When men get it right, it’s rarely because they spent the most money. It’s because they showed presence. Curiosity. Effort.

And when they get it wrong? It’s usually because they treated Valentine’s Day as a date on the calendar, instead of a message in the relationship.

So, this Valentine’s Day, maybe skip the panic. Skip the clichés. Skip the petrol-station rose. And instead, do the one thing that almost always works: pay attention.

Because nothing says “I love you” quite like being seen.

Credit: ChatGPT 5.2 - chatgpt.com



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