



The Farm House, R527, Zandspruit, Hoedspruit, Limpopo email: editor@kruger2canyon.co.za

A photograph of three rhinoceroses in a natural habitat. Two large adults and one smaller calf are standing in a grassy field. The rhinos have thick, grey, wrinkled skin and prominent horns. The background shows green trees and foliage.

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Lady Godiva and your October Horoscope

October is a month that shakes the dust off your boots. Expect sharp turns, bold conversations, and opportunities that look risky but pay off if you've got the grit to follow through. Relationships spark — some with fire, others with friction. Money matters tighten early in the month but loosen their grip mid-way if you stay disciplined. Above all, October rewards courage: fortune is flirting with the brave.

Libra (23 Sep – 22 Oct)

Happy birthday season - and luck is on your side. Money finally bends your way; use it smartly, not flashily. Romance sparks hotter than usual - enjoy the spotlight.

Scorpio (23 Oct – 21 Nov)

Your season begins with a bang - raw power, raw passion. Work shifts demand bravery; play small and you'll regret it. Love is intense - expect fireworks or walk away scorched.

Sagittarius (22 Nov – 21 Dec)

October whispers "adventure" - listen. An overdue breakthrough in work or studies gives you wings. Love comes through travel or a chance encounter - stay open.

Capricorn (22 Dec – 19 Jan)

Money drama clears but only if you stop clinging to old ways. A mentor figure opens doors - be ready. Love takes patience; resist the urge to micromanage.



Aquarius (20 Jan – 18 Feb)

Partnerships test you - business and personal alike. Break free of routines; your creativity is begging for air. Love thrives if you ditch the rules.

Pisces (19 Feb – 20 Mar)

Energy surges - finally! Use it to tackle the tasks you've dodged. Money rewards effort mid-month; no shortcuts allowed. Romance is deep, soulful, almost fated - swim with it.

Aries (21 Mar – 19 Apr)

Your patience will be tested, but don't snap too soon - hold the line and the win will be yours. A financial twist mid-month could turn into a jackpot if you stay sharp. Love demands honesty - sugarcoating won't cut it.

Taurus (20 Apr – 20 May)

Slow and steady won't work this month - speed is your ally. Expect a shake-up at work; trust your gut, not the peanut gallery.

Romance brings surprises - say yes before you overthink.

Gemini (21 May – 20 Jun)

October gives you the mic - everyone's listening, so speak with purpose. A side hustle idea could spark into something real - don't dismiss it. Love thrives on laughter; make time for play.

Cancer (21 Jun – 22 Jul)

Home life feels wobbly, but that's where the growth is. Cash flow steadies after a rocky first week - breathe. Romantic tides rise - let yourself be swept.

Leo (23 Jul – 22 Aug)

You're centre stage, whether you like it or not - own it. A bold move at work gets you noticed by the right eyes. Love is magnetic this month - passion leads, logic lags.

Virgo (23 Aug – 22 Sep)

Details matter, but don't strangle the bigger picture. An unexpected ally smooths your career path. Love feels complicated - simplify, or walk.

Lady Godiva's Hot Tips for October 2025

Money: Bold choices open doors, but discipline keeps them open.

Love: Sparks turn into wildfires - play with passion, not with matches.

Health: Balance the late nights with grounding rituals - your body will thank you.

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Trivia for a change

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|
| 1 | Which Mediterranean country had an orchestra (up to 2013) that was larger than its army? | 11 | What does a tailor do with his plonker? |
| 2 | What links stag tails, pickled worms, gallstones and toma toes? | 12 | Churches in Malta have two of what? |
| 3 | Baked beans were originally served in what sauce? | 13 | What did Marnie Nixon do the same for Deborah Kerr, Natilie Wood and Audrey Hepburn? |
| 4 | Where can you buy a copy of the Penguin News? | 14 | Which Italian tractor maker moved to making luxury cars in 1960s? |
| 5 | Which African country was established by the American Colonization Society? | 15 | What first appeared on Page 1 of the Times on the 3rd May 1966? |
| 6 | What was Britain called (the oldest name) - before it was known as Britain? | 16 | Caruso put what in Nellie Melba's hand whilst singing an aria ('Your tiny hand is frozen') from La Bohème? |
| 7 | What part of a frog do you rub to hypnotise it? | 17 | What would you do with an Edzell blue? |
| 8 | What's involved in 20% of car accidents in Sweden? | 18 | In what month did the Russian October revolution take place? |
| 9 | What's unusual about evangelist Amy Semple McPhersons coffin? | 19 | "Nobody's perfect", is the last line in which classic comedy film? |
| 10 | Who would use a swozzle? | 20 | How did Buffalo Bill stick to one glass of whisky a day? |
| | | 21 | In 1760 what means of personal transport was invented? |

My 5 Sent

Oupa Bobbili

Wat is die een ding wat ons vir ons kinders moet los? Mooi en gesonde herinneringe. Die rykes soek rykdom vir hulle nasate, die armes soek 'n beter lewe vir hulle kinders, die middel klas soek geleerdheid vir hulle kinders. Almal soek iets om agter te los wat hulle kinders aan hulle laat dink en na verlang. Ek reken goeie herinneringe wen enige geleerdheid, enige bankrekening. Ek is in die proses waar ek 'n boek bymekaar sit met staaltjies uit my dogters se lewens en van toe ons almal jonk was. Hulle kan dit oordra aan hulle kinders eendag.

In die proses besef ek die grootste lesse wat my dogters geleer het is die lesse waar

hulle die seerste gekry het. Dit is ook die tye wat ek vandag die hardste lag oor. Dit is wat hulle gaan onthou vir die res van hulle lewens. Ook wat hulle vir hulle kinders gaan leer. Goeie gesonde morele waardes gee karakter, en dit is die grootste erfenis wat jy enige kind kan agter laat.

Het eendag gelees een man sê sy grootste rykdom, is die feit dat sy kinders altyd wil huis toe kom al is hulle op hulle eie. Dit is hoe ons moet voel ook. Dit is waar ons rykdom moet lê, by ons kinders. Hulle moet wil huis toe kom. Maar as ek so na ons samelewing kyk dan sien ek kinders word verniel deur ouers. Jy dink jy doen goed om jou kind nie dissipline en respek te leer nie. Nee Sonskyn, jy leer jou kind net die tee-

noorgestelde van ware liefde.

Goeie gesonde karakter se driepoot is Liefde, Dissipline en Respek. Lekker lang gesprek die een. Die donker is besig om die lig op te vreet met al die geweld en onheilighede wat in die wêreld aangaan. Wat ons nalaat gaan bepaal wie gaan wen. Donker of lig. Ek dink almal wil sien dat die lig gaan wen. Ongelukkig gaan dit nie gebeur as ons dit nie vir die jonger generasies leer nie. Daar is egter goeie nuus in alles, ek hoor van 'n jong groep kinders wat nie nonsens vat met kinders wat nie respek het nie. Hulle vermaan daai kinders op 'n mooi manier en laat hulle mooi verstaan hulle gedrag is nie aanvaarbaar nie.

Dit gee ons hoop en sit 'n glimlag op die

ou kêrel plooi gesig. Daar is hoop en dit is die lig wat onder ons wandel. Dit kom van die ouers af en ek haal my hoed vir elke moeder en vader af wat hulle beste gee vir hulle kinders. Wens ek kon hulle name noem en ook die skool waarin is, want die skool se waardes lê ook in lyn met die lig van die lewe.

Kom ons geniet ons kinders en gee hulle jou beste. Leer hulle om goeie gesonde leiers te wees vir die toekoms. Ons kan geen aardse skatte eendag saam vat nie, maar dit is die grootste skat wat ons toegelaat word om altyd saam met ons te dra.

Mense sal jou altyd onthou deur jou kinders. Groete.



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African White Rhino Numbers Fall in 2024, with Startling 15% Decline in SA — Report

Cont. from page 1

In South Africa, official government data showed a decline in the number of rhinos killed in 2024 to 420 from around 500 in 2023. Still, poaching pressure remains – even if it declines, a dead rhino is one less – and the report cites it among three key drivers that led to the fall in the estimate of South Africa’s white rhino numbers.

“First, 420 white rhinos were poached, with 47.1% of those losses occurring in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park in South Africa’s KwaZulu-Natal province,” the report says.

“Second, some provinces did not update their population estimates after 2023. Third, there is uncertainty about whether distance sampling methods overestimated the population size in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park.”

Uncertainty

A couple of things come to mind from this state of affairs. The first is that some provincial governments simply did not do their jobs, and the second is that there are concerns about past overestimates at reserves such as Hluhluwe.

That underscores the point that there seems to be some uncertainty around rhino numbers at a time when certainty is required to aid policy makers and conservationists.

The report itself is aimed at providing guidance for discussions at the CITES COP20 in Uzbekistan from 24 November to 5 December. These meetings, held every two or three years, review the conservation status of numerous species and consider the protections required when it comes to the international trade in animals and animal parts.

For example, it seems unlikely that the next CITES will lift the global ban on the international trade in rhino horn – a ban that critics contend has fuelled poaching to meet Asian demand for the product. Supporters of the ban maintain that a legal trade will simply open the floodgates to more poaching, with illicit horn laundered with legal supplies.

South Africa was the only range state that reported domestic trade in rhino horn. The moratorium on such trade domestically was lifted in 2017.

“For the 2022 to 2024 reporting period, South Africa reported permits issued for domestically trading 10.6kg (2022), 1,079.0kg (2023) and 203.7kg (2024) of horn from southern white rhinos, and 3.2kg (2023) and 7.0kg (2024) of horn from black rhinos. South Africa did not provide prices for these sales,” the report says.

A decline was detected in the number of horns sourced by the illegal international trade, but the report urged “... the need [for] caution when interpreting trends.”

That is not the only trend that needs to be treated with caution. The estimated increases in South Africa’s white rhino population in 2022 and 2023 – a cautiously hopeful sign – now have a scent of doubt.

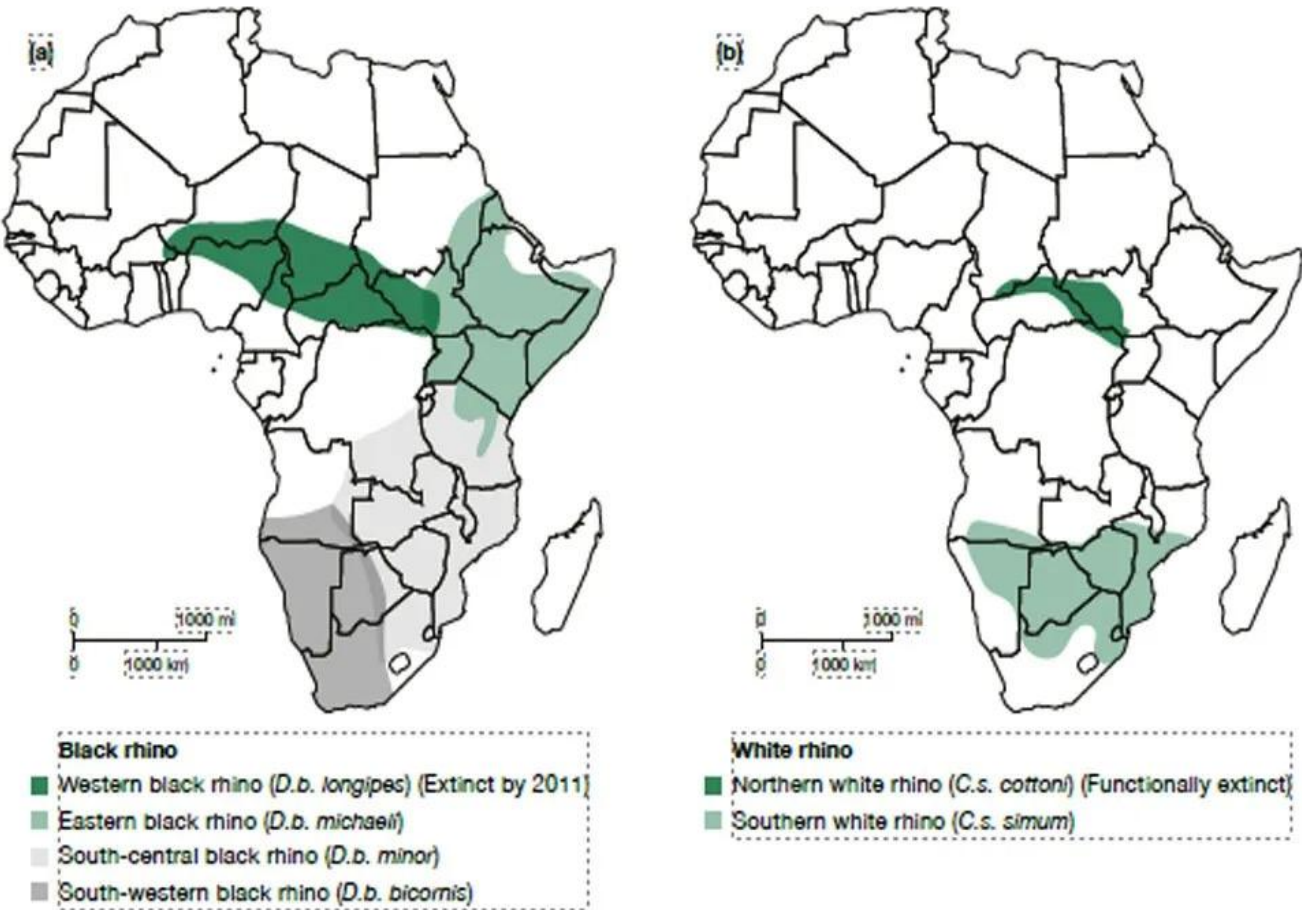
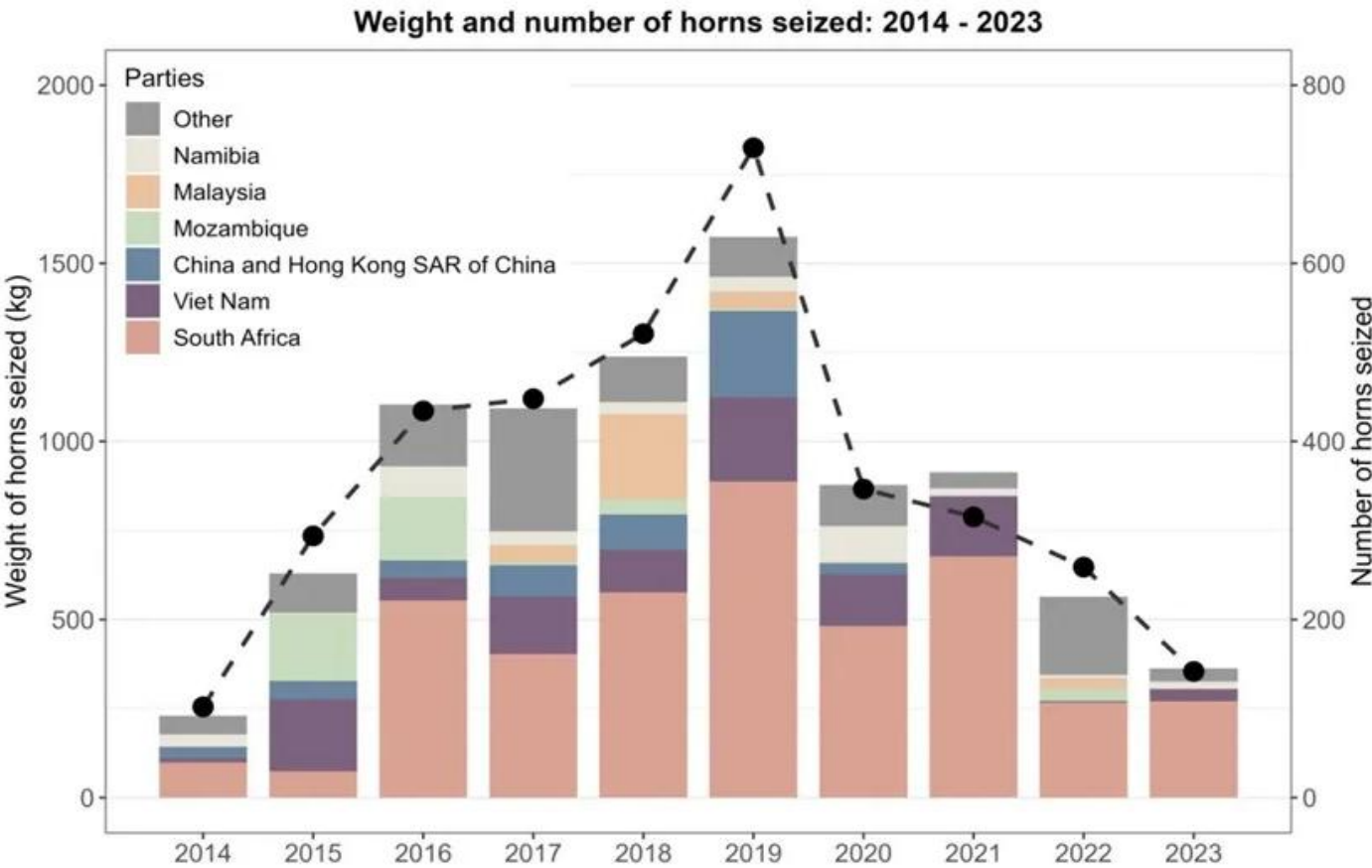


Figure 1: The contemporary distribution of African rhino subspecies for (a) black and (b) white rhinos as illustrated in the African contemporary framework (above). Rhino horns seized (below). All images supplied.



This article was previously published by the Daily Maverick/Our Burning Planet/Wildlife Conservation

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How Mindful Walks Help us Harness Nature’s Rhythms for Emotional Clarity and Inner Peace



How mindful walks help us harness nature’s rhythms for emotional clarity and inner peace

Image/ Unsplash/ Simon Wilkes

Louise Janovsky

When we think of the words “the laws of nature”, we tend to think of solid, trusted and age-old wisdom. Within a continuously evolving environment, nature strives to adapt; but also continues with much of its innate time-tested rhythms, in order to survive.

It’s an admirable mixture of flexibility and focused adherence to an established blueprint.

It is easy to “tune out” of nature, and to become more focused on the plethora of man-made substitutes that we find all around us. The thing is, we can each choose, if we want to, to incorporate ways of bringing more of the natural world into our lives.

There is something deeply calming about watching nature just get on with things — a bird building a nest; a bee collecting pollen from a flower; a tree — silent and still but growing right in front of us; a storm; a sunrise; spring blossoms, or animals in their natural habitat.

Being in nature and appreciating its wonder and complexity brings the reward of simplicity; both in positive emotions and in the understanding of a wider perspective. Our problems may seem overwhelming and insurmountable sometimes, but distancing ourselves from them by interacting with the natural world can bring us the peace and space that helps us to begin the process of solving them.

Albert Einstein wisely said: “Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.”

Where to start

Find the space to look up, on a clear day. Notice the shades of blue that you can see, and how calming the colours are.

You may see birds flying across your field of vision and find that you become aware of their calls. You may find clouds and find interest and distraction in their colours and shapes.

We have blue sky above us, always. There may be clouds or storms in the middle, but above that it is indeed pretty much always blue sky. Sometimes it helps to remember this simple fact, on the days when the clouds roll in and problems abound.

Find ways to watch weather, the earth in action, or nature. The world keeps spinning, and nature keeps doing what it does — and slowing down to witness and admire it can bring the perspective and the solace that we seek.

Everybody hurts, sometimes

This common experience is part of what connects us all. There will be times in our lives when we experience indescribable pain, and unhappiness. There are no quick fixes for healing sadness. Sometimes it can help to recognise the things that will make a difference and help us to slowly cover ground as we heal.

Time. Getting the minutes, hours, days, weeks and months under our belts. There is no real hurrying up healing, and the saying attributed to the poet Robert Frost: “The only way out, is through,” is particularly relevant here.

Acknowledgement. Experiencing the feeling as fully as we can. No denial, or avoidance. Allowing the feeling to be felt, fully, in our being. Whether it is anger, extreme sadness or disappointment, it will not even begin to move on until it has been fully acknowledged, and felt, for as long as it needs to be recognised.

Perspective. Adjusting the lens that we look through. Another angle can provide another viewpoint, and renewed perspective can sometimes bring peace.

Nature. The natural world continuing according to its own rhythm, regardless of our pain and circumstances. Nature grows, blossoms, blooms, breathes and busies itself, completely in the moment. Taking time to be in nature can work a special kind of healing “magic”.

Breathe. The simple act of taking mindful breaths in and out centres and calms. Slow, deep breaths do not invite panic or hysteria, and they can help, in time, to instil clarity and acceptance.

Sunlight. Light brings warmth and optimism. Look for light daily.

Try healing walks for release and perspective

There is something about forward motion that encourages movement and progression of thought too; contrasted with the swirling thoughts that can come with sitting.

Make time for a long, solitary walk (of approximately 60 minutes) in natural surroundings, on a clear day. No music, just the sound of your own deep breaths and the sounds that nature gifts you as you move.

While you walk, for the first 20 minutes do so at a medium pace, and do your best not to think, but to observe. Look all around you and soak everything up — plants, trees, the sky, clouds, people, animals, the man-made elements. Walk with wonder, as if you are seeing it all for the first time.

For the second 20 minutes, delve into the cause of your pain; walk at a slower pace; observe it and feel it. Try not to branch off into the reasons for it or other people’s inputs. Just focus on the feeling of the pain itself, and feel it. Imagine it deep inside you - burrow down there to find it and acknowledge it fully. Stop and stand still for a bit if you feel you need to.

For the final 20 minutes, increase your pace to faster than medium, and switch to free thought - anything you like, and about anyone you like. No rules about what comes to mind.

For your final few minutes, switch back to nature and a medium pace. Have as few thinking thoughts as possible and go back to your breath and what you can see around you. Soak it all in.

Remember the sense of wonder at everything you see whether it is natural or man-made and be aware of your breathing.

Spending 60 minutes in nature, and with your mind and your body, is a gift to yourself. Here’s hoping that this practice may provide you with just the right level of processing and perspective that you need.

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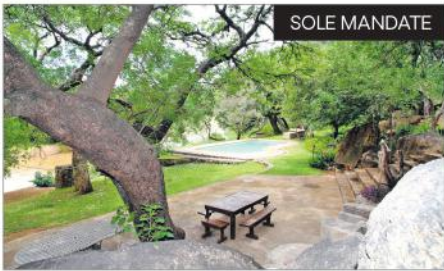
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Lissataba Private Nature Reserve R 1 600 000
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Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2416802



NDLOVUMZI NATURE RESERVE R 4 250 000
Beds 4 | Baths 4 | Floor: 176 m²

This tranquil home on a 21 hectare property overlooks the Olifants river and is surrounded by large riverine trees and rocky outcrops. The open plan living, dining area and newly fitted kitchen are all under high vaulted ceilings that make this home light and bright, adding to the appeal.

Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2152063



BLYDE WILDLIFE ESTATE R 6 950 000
En-suite bedrooms 2 | Floor size: 400 m²

Located in the riverine area with mature trees, this home offers privacy and tranquillity. Featuring an open-plan lounge and dining area, separate kitchen with pantry and scullery, courtyard, pool, sauna, and a built-in braai. The garden and entertainment area is perfect for relaxing or hosting. Sold with all contents.

Calin Leppan - 082 824 9482 Ref: 2413668



RAPTORS VIEW WILDLIFE ESTATE R 6 300 000
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



MODITLO WILDLIFE ESTATE R 7 000 000
Beds 4 | Baths 4 | Floor size: 324 m²

Newly built, low-maintenance home with open-plan living, kitchen, scullery, and pantry. Covered patio with bar, braai, fire pit, and pool. Air-conditioned study and bedrooms, all en-suite with indoor/outdoor showers. Features include storeroom, water tank, double garage and carport.

Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2401966



COMMERCIAL: Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate R 8 470 000
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



KAMPERSRUS R 2 995 000
Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 2 | Floor size: 125 m²

Charming thatched home with open-plan living, scullery, covered patio, and swimming pool in a lush garden. Features include air conditioning, solar system with panels, inverter and batteries, water storage tanks, viewing deck with bar, double carport, alarm, and versatile outside room.

Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2411987



COMMERCIAL: Elephant Rock Eco Estate R 2 490 000 until end Oct.
Stand: 1,500 m²

Rare opportunity - This commercial property is perfect for those ready to establish a wedding venue or launch their own private commercial lodge. This exceptional site that is adorned with magnificent large trees and showcases breathtaking views of the Olifants River.

Calin Leppan - 082 824 9482 Ref: 2380118



COMMERCIAL: Leopard Rock Nature Reserve R 13 200 000
Beds 7 | Floor: 650 m²

Well-maintained lodge in a prime bush setting. Features 7 en-suite rooms, rock pool, private splash pools, lounge, dining areas, and 2 kitchens for catered or self-catering stays. Sold as a going concern. Movable items negotiable separately. Monthly levy includes use of 2 game drive vehicles.

Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2403447



RAPTOR'S VIEW WILDLIFE ESTATE R 6 500 000
Beds 4 | Baths 2.5 | Floor size: 272 m²

Inviting bush home overlooking dry riverbed with scenic views, open-plan living, loft, storeroom, solar backup, and shaded patio with pool, boma, and gas braai. Main en-suite opens to a private deck with indoor and outdoor showers. Traverse rights into 1,300 ha Big Game reserve included.

Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2385364



WILD RIVERS NATURE RESERVE R 8 200 000
Beds 5 | Baths 5 | Floor: 323 m²

Exceptional bush home on 1 hectare stand overlooking the Blyde river. Features open-plan living, plunge pool, patios, braai areas, staff chalet, tool room, and netted garden. Located in a secure 2,500 hectare reserve with game and birdlife. Great for permanent living or holiday home.

Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2404188



BLYDE WILDLIFE ESTATE R 5 950 000
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3.5 | Floor: 280 m²

Newly built bush home with open-plan living, kitchen, and dining flowing onto covered patio, pool, and boma. Features en-suite bedrooms with indoor/outdoor showers, AC, ceiling fans, scullery, storeroom, courtyard, guest toilet, and double carport. VAT included in price.

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Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2406124



HOEDSPRUIT CENTRAL R 13 600 pm
Beds 2 | Baths 1 | Unfurnished

Available immediately, 2 small dogs allowed - Neat, compact home on a quiet street. Open-plan living and kitchen with stove and ample cupboards. Two bedrooms, one bathroom, fenced yard, and carport. Water and electricity excluded; no Wi-Fi.

Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2406224



Research Tackles the Tensions Between Nature and Necessity.



Prof. Dan Parker and the new UMP Gate Images: UMP.AC.ZA

Yves Vanderhaeghen

In Mpumalanga, where farmland, forests, mining, and communities meet the Kruger National Park, Professor Dan Parker leads groundbreaking research on how humans and nature can coexist. Backed by a major research chair funded by Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation, he is exploring how science can guide sustainable solutions amid competing development and conservation needs in a climate-challenged world.

“We’re right at the intersection of the different needs that society has. We want to conserve ecosystems, biodiversity, but we also need to be able to go to Woolworths and buy our roast chicken because we need to eat.” Professor Dan Parker catches himself: “Maybe Woolworths is a poor example, but we need to be able to eat. How do we eat? We have to have agriculture. We need to make money. How do we make money? We’ll sell timber, and so on.”

Parker is Professor of the School of Biology and Environmental Sciences at the University of Mpumalanga. He is also the first holder of the Oppenheimer Research Chair in Biodiversity Conservation, a landmark position that brings R6 million in funding over six years. This is the first-ever Research Chair hosted at the University of Mpumalanga and administered through the Benjamin Raymond Oppenheimer Trust (BRO Trust).

He emphasizes the value of conducting research in this region because it is not only a biodiversity hotspot, but also a place where multiple pressures - farming, forestry, mining, and human settlement - intersect, creating unique opportunities to study how ecosystems respond to competing demands.

“We are at this point where we’ve got all sorts of conflicting needs and require-

ments. We know that the population is likely to double in the next 50 years, and we’re seeing conflict over land use. The priorities around areas that are set aside for conservation, for agriculture, for forestry, for mining, become so much more intense. And in Mpumalanga, we are cheek by jowl with all these needs. You have the Kruger National Park, one of the premier conservation areas in the world, literally right next door to at least three and a half million people that are right on the boundary, living in very, very challenging conditions. They’re wanting to lift themselves out of those difficult socio-economic situations. Right next to that, you’ve got very lucrative commercial agriculture. There’s commercial forestry. In other parts, we’ve got mining as well.”

Clearly, this is where conservation gets real, and this is where, says Parker, meaningful research can be done into how to maintain the stability and resilience in natural systems to ensure biodiversity. “If we don’t have biodiversity, the planet can’t survive,” Parker says bluntly.

Parker says the close proximity of these different land uses in the same general geographic area is crucial in that it allows the region to be used for “natural experiments” or “quasi-experimental approaches”. This is important because to study the impact of agriculture on biodiversity, you can’t compare the Kruger Park to an orange farm in the Eastern Cape. We’re comparing a banana to an orange, and that’s not going to work. But within our geographic area, we can compare agricultural areas to natural areas. We know we have to spray the oranges before we export them to the EU, and they can’t have insect pests and so on. Okay. That means there might be some decreases in our insect biodiversity. Are there other ways of approaching this? For example, bats in orchards in the Lowveld area can make a huge impact on decreasing pests. And

so perhaps we’ve got a natural solution to one of these problems, which means development can succeed, and conservation and sustainable development can go hand in hand.

“It means we don’t have to damage the entire planet because we just have to develop at all costs.”

Parker notes that the sub-tropical climate, while contributing to high biodiversity, also enables an abundance of invasive weeds, which affect both conservation efforts and constrain livelihoods, for example when they clog waterways, decrease biodiversity, and make fishing impossible.

One of the main reasons to channel funding through the formation of a chair, rather than simply giving money to a department, says Parker, is that it is able to free up and focus an individual or a group. “It channels funds specifically for research and capacity development, allowing the chairholder and their group to dedicate more time to these activities compared to time-consuming tasks like teaching, setting, or marking exams. This dedicated time allows them to drive a research agenda and implement ‘grand ideas’ that might otherwise be difficult to achieve due to time constraints.”

Parker says there is an added benefit in that the funding provides leverage for other funding. Springboarding allows the scale of vision to match the scale of the landscape.

Parker enthuses about a project in the pipeline. “We asked ourselves, ‘What do we have?’ Well, we have this entire area in and around Kruger National Park. And what’s important to stress is that this proposed project isn’t the kind of traditional conservation work where people go into a protected area, count elephants, and call it a day. This is about looking at broader

socio-ecological regions and thinking outside the box.

“So we recently pitched a concept note to the NRF. If it moves forward, it will include multiple collaborators, many students, and cover a significant area. At the core of the project is a comparative study of three very different landscapes surrounding Kruger: The Kruger National Park itself, which is the quintessential protected area with no permanent human population and intact ecosystems; private protected areas nearby which function very differently, both ecologically and socio-economically; and the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, where people live and sustain themselves within a national park, making it very different from Kruger.

“Our aim is to assess vertebrate biodiversity across these three socio-ecological zones using standardized methods, sampling everything from reptiles and amphibians to birds, bats, and soil eDNA. We’ll run broad transects from outside Kruger, into Kruger, and then into Limpopo National Park to assess how biodiversity responds to different land uses and management contexts.”

Parker reiterates that “the more we have a look at it, the evidence out there is that we can’t just carry on business as normal in the face of global challenge”. The high-impact research he and his team are embarking on hopes to address how habitat restoration, species conservation and sustainable development can take place alongside population growth and in the face of climate change.

Yves Vanderhaeghen writes for Jive Media Africa, science communication partner of Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation.



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Lessons from Sofaya: How a rural village turned data into action

Keneilwe Mmushi and Lauren Booth

On 22 August 2025, Sofaya Village along the Makhutswi River did something remarkable. With limited resources and few formal services, 53 residents joined forces to launch their first-ever community-led clean-up campaign. Together with the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere (K2C) and the Maruleng Local Municipality, they rolled up their sleeves and cleared waste from pollution hotspots that had been threatening their river, their crops and their health.

But this was not just a clean-up. It was the culmination of months of dialogue, evidence and determination - a powerful example of how deep understanding of a problem followed by collective action can spark real change. It shows how even with limited resources, a community can lead powerful environmental action when knowledge is shared and understood.

From Concern to Clarity

The story began on 17 June 2025, when K2C's Catchment Team met with the Mohlabe Traditional Council and Sofaya community members. During the session, the team screened the *Our Waste* documentary and shared scientific data from freshwater monitoring sites downstream of Sofaya, that indicated declining river health.

K2C conducts this monitoring on key rivers across the region on a regular basis, tracking water quality to detect changes and guide community and conservation responses.

The findings resonated immediately. Farmers voiced concerns about nappies



and other waste being dumped into waterways that fed their irrigation dam. Alarmed by the potential health risks and impact on crops, the Traditional Council requested water testing at local pollution hotspots identified along the Makhutswi River.

In early August, K2C technicians joined the Traditional Council and village stakeholders for a site visit and sampling. Together, they tested water clarity, pH, oxygen levels and temperature at the identified hotspots.

These results were then presented back to the community, together with science-based recommendations. The evidence confirmed poor water quality and highlighted key pollution sites. Importantly, the findings were explained in clear, relatable language, free from classic scientific jargon, allowing the community to fully appreciate the situation and agree on the

next steps.

From Data to Action

Within days, Sofaya residents had organized themselves, set dates for clean-ups on 22 and 29 August, and committed to long-term solutions. The importance of this moment cannot be underappreciated - a moment where evidence had become the foundation for collective ownership and action. It is a reminder that data becomes most powerful when it moves beyond reports and resonates with people's lived realities.

The first clean-up was an inspiring statement of unity. Fifty-three residents, joined by K2C staff and a municipal representative came together to tackle illegal waste dumping along the river.

Farmers, youth, elders and partners worked side by side to clean up their waterways. Waste was removed, but more

importantly, a community demonstrated what is possible when people feel empowered to respond. Change can take place very quickly!

It is a lesson for all communities - real impact doesn't always require major funding, but shared responsibility and action.

Building for Tomorrow

After the clean-up, Sofaya didn't stop. They formed committees to prevent further dumping, requested skip bins from the municipality and began planning recycling initiatives. In short, they are building their own system to manage waste sustainably into the future.

This forward-looking approach shows true vision: identifying the problem, solving it together and setting up governance to manage it into the future.

A Lesson Beyond Sofaya

Sofaya's story holds a mirror for communities elsewhere, showing what can be achieved when science and community action come together. With few resources and limited formal services, Sofaya has demonstrated that if you fully understand an issue and are motivated to act, you can achieve lasting impact. That vision, ownership and unity are the true drivers of sustainability.

It is a reminder that sustainability is about commitment, collaboration and courage. Sofaya Village turned science into action, and in doing so, created a model for others to follow - if one rural village can transform concern into collective action, imagine what could be achieved if more communities did the same!

The Importance of Investigating Career Support Services When Choosing a University

Francine Mashabela

Choosing a university is one of the most significant decisions you'll make as a prospective student. Beyond academics, one critical factor often overlooked is the quality of a university's Career Services offering. These services play a pivotal role in preparing you for the workplace, and equipping you with the skills, connections, and confidence needed to succeed in today's competitive job market.

"Investigating a university's Career Services offering before enrolling can make all the difference in shaping your future career," says Francine Mashabela, Manager: Career Services at The Independent Institute of Education's Varsity College, IIE MSA and IIE Vega School.

The Role of Career Services

Career Services acts as a bridge between your academic journey and professional life, says Mashabela.

"It equips you with essential skills for career and work readiness, ensuring a smooth transition from the classroom to the workplace. These services go beyond job placement. They provide tools, resources, and opportunities to develop the mindset and capabilities employers value, such as innovation, holistic thinking, adaptability, and engaged citizenship.

"By offering industry exposure and profes-

sional development, Career Services helps you become a well-rounded, employable graduate ready to thrive."

Mashabela says public universities and private higher education providers with robust Career Services demonstrate a commitment to producing graduates who are not just academically proficient but also highly employable.

"Employers today seek candidates who combine academic knowledge with practical, work-based skills. A strong Career Services programme collaborates with faculty and industry partners to ensure you gain these competencies. This strategic partnership fosters professional networks, real-world experience, and the confidence to navigate the job market, giving you a competitive edge."

What to Check

When evaluating an institution's Career Services, ensure that it offers a comprehensive programme that provides a range of support tailored to students' career journeys.

This should include individualised support with one-on-one consultations to guide your career planning and decision-making. Employability workshops which provide training in critical skills like CV design, interview preparation, job search techniques, workplace etiquette, emotional intelligence, self-leadership, digital etiquette, networking, career confidence,

and personal branding. Industry insights by way of workshops and masterclasses that offer insider knowledge from professionals in your field. Industry immersion programmes which provide hands-on opportunities to engage with real-world work environments and a career services portal to provide access to career resources and job boards.

"We often say to students that their career journey does not start when they complete their studies. The journey requires intentionality so that they can have a competitive advantage in the job market. Thus, prospective students should look for Career Services that will walk their career journey with them," says Mashabela.

"They should look for an offering of career readiness programmes that provide meaningful industry exposure, foster professional skills, and support entrepreneurial thinking. Career Services does not just prepare students for their first job, but equips them with adaptable skills for a lifelong career journey, and provides a clear advantage in today's competitive job market."

Francine Mashabela is the Career Services Manager at The Independent Institute of Education's Varsity College, IIE MSA and IIE Vega School. Take a look at <https://iieworldofwork.iie.ac.za> or www.iie.ac.za

Image credit : Pexels



South African hunters chewed the kanna plant for endurance: new study tests its effects on mouse brain chemistry

Catherine H Kaschula
Senior Lecturer, Stellenbosch University

***Sceletium tortuosum* is a little succulent plant that grows in the semi-arid Karoo and Namaqualand regions of South Africa. It has a long history of traditional use among the hunter-gatherers of the region.**

The plant, known as kanna or kougoed by the San and Khoikhoi people, was mainly chewed or smoked to stay alert and suppress appetite during long hunts. The San were traditionally hunter-gatherers, while the Khoikhoi were pastoralists who herded livestock.

The name kanna (meaning “eland” in the click language of the San), has a symbolic reference to this large antelope, as the “trance animal”, which was called upon during religious and spiritual gatherings. Kougoed is Afrikaans for “something to chew”. The plant can be chewed after being dried and fermented, which is believed to intensify its effects.

The first colonial governor of the Cape colony, Simon van der Stel, in 1685 wrote about kanna in his journal:

They chew mostly a certain plant which they call Canna and which they bruise, roots as well as the stem, between the stones and store and preserve in sewn-up sheepskins.

I’m part of a group of scientists from different disciplines with an interest in this plant and we pooled our expertise to understand its effects on neurochemical concentrations in different parts of the brain.

Our studies were done in mice, so there is caution about establishing effectiveness on humans. Still, the results are striking.

As a chemist with an interest in natural products, I wanted to know which alkaloids in the plant were important in bringing about these effects.

Our latest study explored the effects of *Sceletium tortuosum* extracts on mouse brain chemistry.

We found that *Sceletium* increased the levels

of certain brain chemicals which may balance mood and reduce stress. These findings lend support to the calming and mood-enhancing use of this plant in traditional medicine.

Plant chemistry

Our study examined how extracts from different chemotypes of *Sceletium tortuosum* can have different effects on brain chemistry. Chemotypes are groups of the same plant species that differ in the alkaloids they produce. This is because plants often produce alkaloids in response to external cues such as the weather or the presence of a plant-eating animal or pathogen.

Alkaloids are carbon-based compounds produced by plants. They are often toxic or taste bitter, making the plants less appealing or even harmful to the predators or invaders that want to eat or inhabit them. Alkaloids generally have physiological effects of use to humans. Some commonly used ones include caffeine, morphine and quinine.

We harvested two chemotypes of kanna from the Touwsrivier and De Rust regions of South Africa. These areas were chosen because of their interesting and unusual alkaloid profiles. The chemotypes were given to healthy mice as a supplement once a day for one month. The mice were monitored every day for behavioural or unexpected adverse reactions, but none were noted.

At the end of the month, the levels of chemicals in the mouse brain were measured. Both the chemotypes were found to cause a marked increase in noradrenaline and a decrease in GABA in all brain regions studied. Both molecules are neurotransmitters that transmit nerve signals in the brain affecting memory, mood, attention and sleep.

This effect on noradrenaline supports kanna’s traditional use as an appetite suppressing drug. Increased noradrenergic stimulation is also the basis of many anti-depressants as well as drugs that improve attention and alertness.

We also found an impact on the brain chemicals serotonin and dopamine which may act

together to balance mood and reduce stress. Serotonin affects emotional well-being and mood; dopamine motivates feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. These findings lend support to the calming and mood-enhancing use of this plant in traditional medicine.

Importantly, the control kanna extracts that did not have the interesting alkaloid profiles did not cause any of these chemical changes in the mouse brain.

Most studies on kanna have focused on the alkaloid mesembrine. The two specific chemotypes of kanna harvested from the Touwsrivier and De Rust regions of South Africa do have the mesembrine, but they are also packed with some other lesser-known or “minor” alkaloids. These differences in alkaloids may arise from a combination of geographic, environmental and inherent genetic factors found in a particular subset of plants.

Both the Touwsrivier and De Rust plants contained higher levels of alkaloids called mesembrine alcohols, which are different from mesembrine, and were barely present in the control extract. Another minor alkaloid, known as *sceletium* A4, was also identified as possibly being important. Mesembrine alcohols and *sceletium* A4 may be the ones responsible for the activity.

This suggests that the source of the plant, and the area in which it is grown, can influence its potential as a natural treatment for mood disorders and sleep.

What the results tell us

Stress, anxiety and depression pose a risk to the ability to lead a meaningful life. The World Health Organization has reported a 25% increase in anxiety and depression worldwide since the emergence of COVID-19.

Our study showed that the plant extracts had a broad noradrenergic effect in mice. But we have to be careful about making connections between results in mice and in humans. We need to explore the behavioural impact of these extracts in both mice and humans, especially in relation to sleep, alertness and mood.

The results also highlighted that without understanding the complex chemical composition of these plants, we risk overgeneralising their benefits, or worse, using them inappropriately.

Our findings have two implications. First, they point towards a future of precision phytotherapy (use of plants for medicinal purposes), where natural remedies are tailored not just to individuals but to selecting certain plant chemotypes that produce certain combinations of alkaloids. Manipulating the growing conditions and genetic make-up of plants to optimise for alkaloid content is an age-old art.

Second, they remind us of the enormous, still largely untapped potential of African medicinal plants in global health innovation if we invest in research that honours both indigenous knowledge and scientific rigour.

As the world searches for safer, more sustainable ways to treat mental health conditions, South Africa’s kanna plant may hold secrets worth rediscovering.

This article was previously published in The Conversation.
Disclosure: Catherine H Kaschula owns shares in Phynti, a phytopharmaceutical company developing kanna-based products.



Medically Significant Spider Species in South Africa



Tim Baynham
Wildlife Safety Solutions

South Africa is home to a fascinating diversity of spiders. While the vast majority are completely harmless and play vital ecological roles by keeping insect populations in check, a handful of species are considered medically significant. This essentially means that their bites may cause symptoms requiring medical attention. Understanding which spiders pose risks and how to prevent bites can go a long way in reducing fear and promoting safe coexistence.

Button spiders (*Latrodectus* species)

Perhaps the most infamous of South Africa’s spiders, button spiders belong to the *Latrodectus* genus and are also known as widow spiders.

Black button spiders are far less common in urban environments than their close relative

the Brown Button spider and prefer natural habitats. They are medium sized spiders, measuring between 20 and 40mm across and males are smaller than females. These spiders are typically black in colour and have a large bulbous abdomen. Most have some form of orange/red marking or markings on the dorsal surface of the abdomen above the spinneret. Their venom is neurotoxic and of medical importance, affecting the nervous system. Bites may cause severe muscle pain, sweating, abdominal cramps, nausea, difficulty breathing, and in rare cases, elevated blood pressure or heart complications.

If bitten one should immediately seek medical attention. Fortunately bites on humans are rare and usually occur when the spider is accidentally squashed. Historically antivenom was produced by the South African Vaccine Producers for the treatment of severe envenomations by this species. However, in recent times the production has ceased and there is currently no antivenom available.

Brown button spiders (*Latrodectus geometricus*) are far more common around homes and gardens, easily recognized by the red hourglass on the belly and sometimes geometric patterns on the back. Bites from this species are treated symptomatically and the venom is far less potent than the Black Button spider.

Violin Spiders (*Loxosceles* species)

Violin spiders are reclusive hunters that may be found in and around homes. They are light brown, with a distinctive darker marking on the carapace region shaped like a violin. The venom is cytotoxic, destroying tissue at the

bite site. Bites are initially painless but may develop into a painful boil like lesion that eventually forms an open necrotic wound that can take months to heal. No antivenom is available.

Sac Spiders (*Cheiracanthium* species)

Sac spiders are small, pale yellow to light brown spiders often found inside homes, particularly in curtains, bedding, and clothing. Most bites occur when the spider is accidentally squashed against the skin. Their venom appears to be cytotoxic, potentially leading to painful, swollen bites that may ulcerate. That being said, it is important to note that there is little evidence to support the claim that there is venom particularly potent. Many cases of bacterial skin infections and other infected insect bites are mistakenly diagnosed as sac spider bites. This misdiagnosis is so common that sac spiders are unfairly blamed for countless wounds not caused by spiders at all.

One of the biggest challenges in understanding spider envenomation in South Africa is the frequency of misdiagnosis. This misattribution can have real consequences. Incorrect treatment wastes time and may worsen the condition. For this reason, any suspected spider bite that worsens or becomes necrotic should be properly assessed by a medical professional to rule out other causes.

Preventing Spider Bites

Despite their fearsome reputation, bites from medically significant spiders are rare. By following a few simple precautions, the risks can be further minimized. Shake out clothing,

shoes, and bedding before use, especially if items have been left unused for a while. Use caution when gardening or working in dark corners of garages, sheds, and woodpiles where spiders may shelter. Seal gaps and cracks in walls, windows, and doors to limit spiders entering the home. Wear gloves when moving logs, rocks, or debris outdoors, and teach children to respect spiders and avoid handling them.

Spiders are often misunderstood and unfairly vilified. Of the hundreds of species in South Africa, only a handful are medically significant, and even these rarely bite unless provoked or accidentally squashed against the skin. Their ecological role as predators of flies, mosquitoes, and agricultural pests makes them valuable allies.

While button spiders, violin spiders, and possibly sac spiders can cause genuine medical issues, awareness and prevention go a long way in keeping encounters safe. Importantly, the myth that every skin lesion is a spider bite needs to be challenged. Proper diagnosis, respect for these fascinating arachnids, and sensible precautions can help us coexist with them without unnecessary fear or persecution.

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@wildlifesafetyolutions.co.za; www.wildlifesafetyolutions.co.za, FB Wildlife Safety Solutions, Ins-

Leopard Spots

Ben Coley
Celestial Events SA

Since the dawn of mankind, we have wondered if we are alone. According to scientific estimates, the Universe contains more than a *septillion* planets (that's 1 followed by 24 zeros!!). Surely, somewhere in this seemingly infinite darkness, other life might exist.

If this claim is indeed true, why have we not encountered evidence? Where are the aliens, the UFO's, the radio signals or visitations from curious interstellar travellers? But we have only been searching for less than a century and have explored maybe 10 celestial bodies in our immediate celestial neighbourhood. This is the equivalent of scooping a cup of water from the ocean and being surprised to not find a fish!

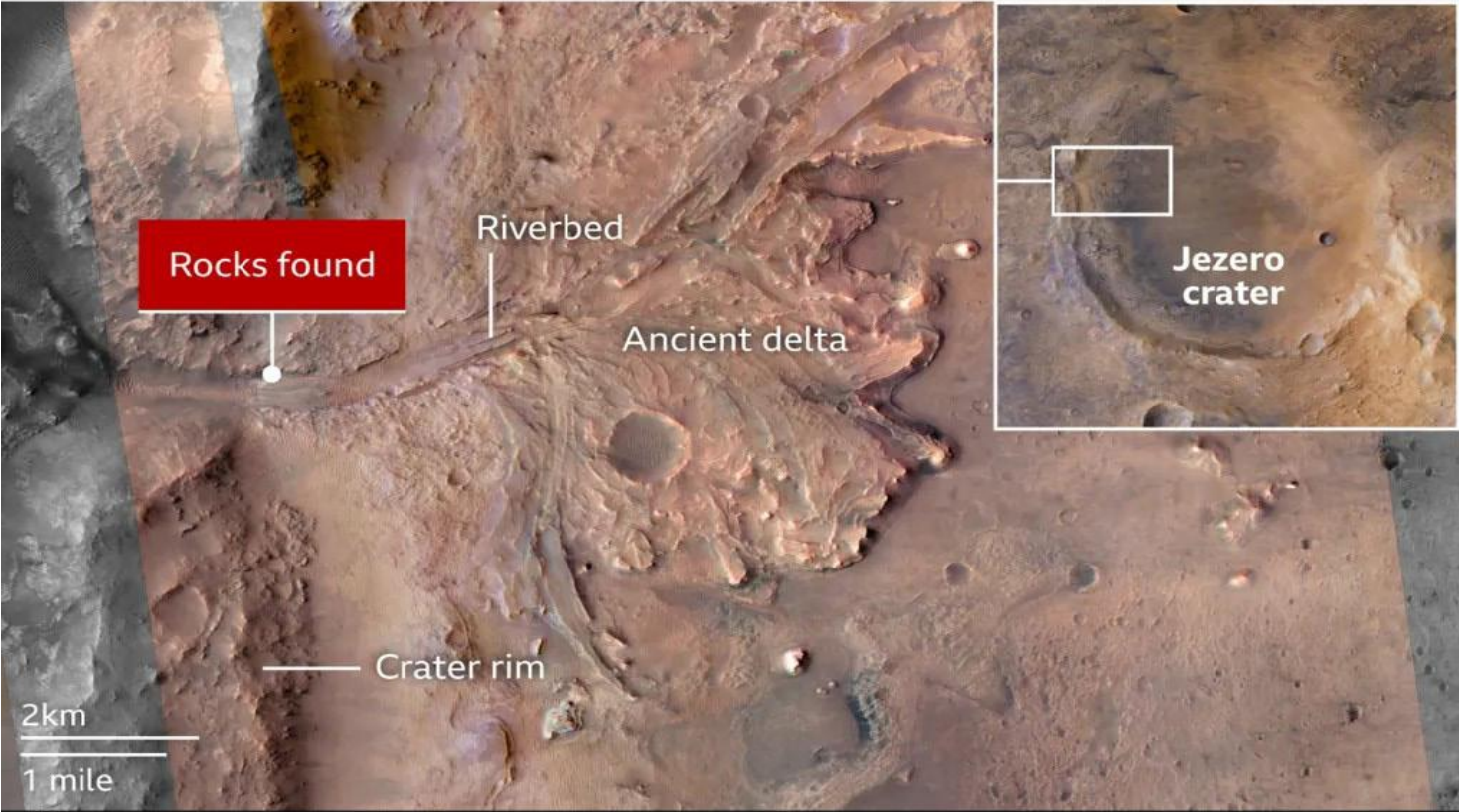
In the past few weeks, news has arisen that *could* constitute the first plausible evidence of biosignatures on another world. Before we delve into the specifics, it should be noted that this is not necessarily the 'smoking gun' we are searching for, but perhaps more of a lukewarm prehistoric spear.

So, what is all the fuss about? In 2021, the Perseverance Rover touched down on the Red Planet, in an area known as the Jezero Crater: a primordial delta system that shows unmistakable evidence of a once wet environment. For the past four and a half years, 'Percy' has been trundling across the Martian landscape looking for signs of life with its arsenal of scientific equipment, and recently it discovered some unusual patterning on sedimentary mudstone at the bottom of the crater's former lakebed. The deposits have been dubbed '*leopard spots*'.

Similar deposits can be found on Earth and are the result of biological activity. Tiny microbes can cluster on rocks and feed on elements like iron and manganese. As they do, they leave behind chemical by-products that stain the rock. Over time, these stains fossilise, preserving a kind of chemical fingerprint of biological activity. The Martian leopard spots might represent exactly that - not the microbes themselves, but their primordial signatures.

It should be noted that there *are* non-biological explanations for these markings, but these should be accompanied by additional evidence, none of which seem to be present in these Martian

Inside Mars' Jezero crater



Source: Aster Cowart/NASA/ESA

rocks. Of course, the only way to know for sure is for the samples to be returned to Earth and scrutinised. 'Percy' has been depositing capsules of rocks and soil to be collected and returned during future missions, but with the recently proposed budget cuts to NASA, these sample-return missions are now looking less likely.

Interest in the potential biological history of Mars has been around for decades. We are convinced that Mars once had a substantial atmosphere with liquid water on its surface. Over millennia, this protective cloak has been stripped away by the unrelenting solar wind, leaving an environment incapable of housing liquid water on its surface. But radar imaging suggests the presence of underground aquifers, and water ice abounds in the colder polar regions. In fact, Mars hosts enough ice, that if melted, would cover the entire planet in an ocean 50 metres deep.

Equally compelling is the discovery of methane emissions in its atmosphere. Methane gas is quickly destroyed by UV light from the Sun, so some process must be continually restocking it on Mars. On Earth, methane is produced either as a byproduct of anaerobic microbial life, or geological activity. Whilst the latter is far

more plausible, there is still the chance that primitive organisms survive under the Martian surface, away from the damaging solar radiation, particularly since some studies have suggested that the methane peaks during the warmer summer months.

Carl Sagan, the late, great, American astronomer once poignantly stated that "...the Universe is a pretty big place, so if it is just us, it's an awful waste of space..." Maybe, just maybe, these innocuous markings are in fact the chemical fingerprints left by ancient microbes - silent messages from a world that once teemed with biological possibilities.

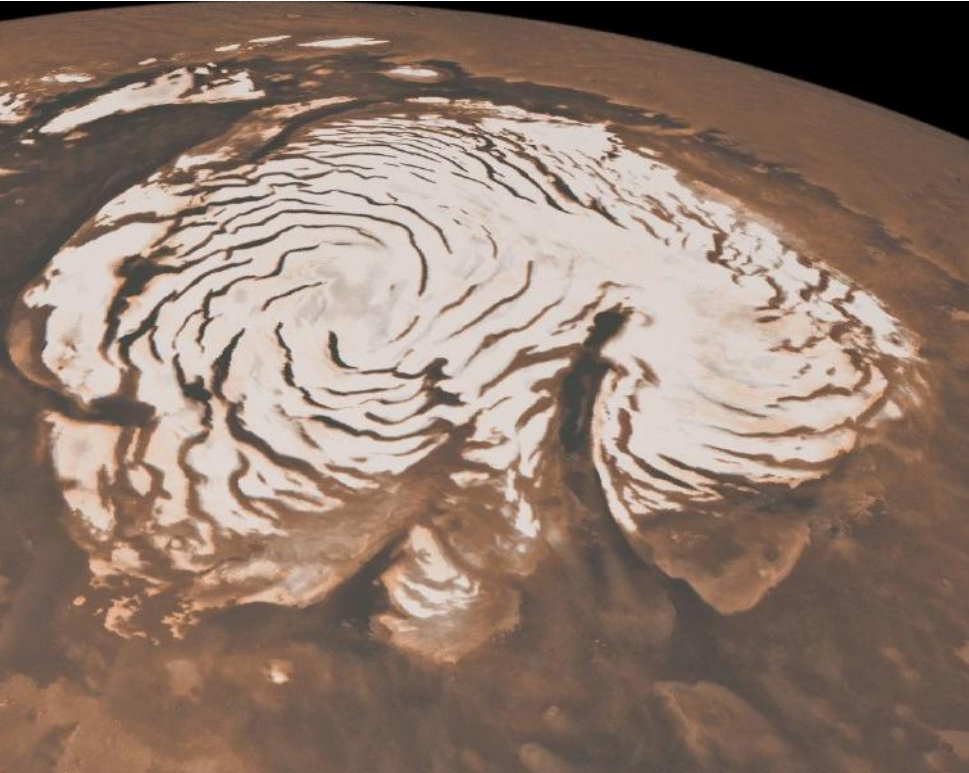
While Mars's '*leopard spots*' are not yet indisputable proof of life, their discovery keeps alive the hope that we are edging

closer to answering the most profound questions ever posed: are we alone in the Universe?

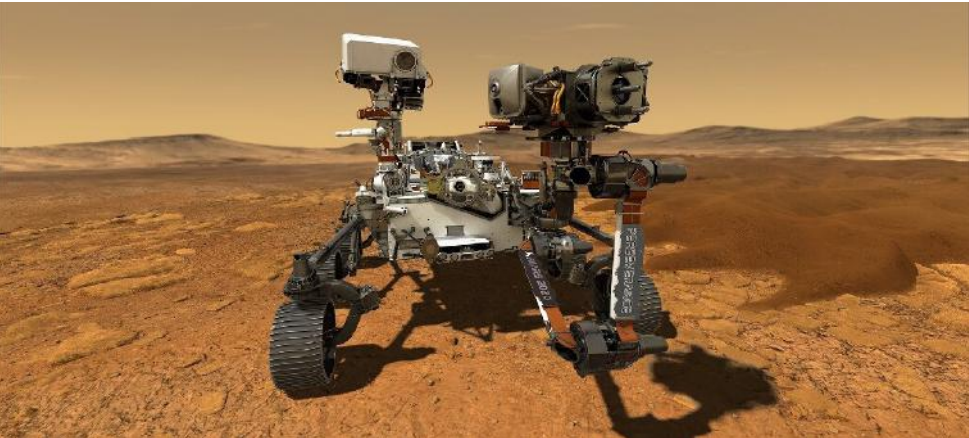
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Mars Polar ice cap (above), Perservearnace Rover (above right) and Leopard Spots (right)
Images : NASA JPL



Dullstroom: Where Birds, Landscapes, and Conservation Meet



Ant-eating Chat Clive Ferreira (43)



Yellow-breasted Pipit – Jandre Verster (50)



Verloren Valei Nature Reserve- Kyle LLoyd

John Kinghorn
Avitourism Project Manager: BirdLife South Africa

Dawn in Mpumalanga’s highveld grasslands is a sensory event. A fine mist rolls across a still dam, blurring the edges of the surrounding hills, while an Olive Thrush declares the day open with piercing clarity. From nearby shrubbery, a pair of Bar-throated Apalis trade rapid notes, and a Cape Robin-Chat busies itself on the dew-stained lawn. It is an orchestra of birdsong, punctuated by the irresistible call to explore.

This is Dullstroom, South Africa’s renowned fly-fishing capital. It is a town where mist and mountain merge, creating habitats that are as picturesque as they are ecologically important. Perched at over 2,000 metres above sea level, Dullstroom is far more than a weekend retreat for anglers, mountain bikers, and food lovers. It is also one of South Africa’s most rewarding birding destinations, a jewel in the Mpumalanga escarpment that attracts birders from across the globe.

A Jewel of the Escarpment

Dullstroom’s history dates back to 1892 when the late President Paul Kruger proclaimed it a town. Today, it thrives on tourism and offers a convenient escape from the nearby cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria, just two to three hours away. For international travellers, it is also a natural stopover on the road to the wildlife-rich Lowveld. While visitors may come to enjoy both trout and whiskey, birders know Dullstroom for something far more precious: its grasslands, wetlands, and montane habitats, which host an exceptional array of South Africa’s most sought-after bird species. Wattled, Blue, and Grey-crowned Cranes stride alongside the wetlands and

grasslands; Buff-streaked Chat and Ground Woodpecker perch among rocky outcrops; Yellow-breasted Pipits flit over high-altitude grasslands. Summer brings the thrill of species like Fan-tailed Grassbird (Broad-tailed Warbler), Cuckoo Finch, and Denham’s Bustard. The landscape here is alive with avian treasures.

BirdLife South Africa’s Role

BirdLife South Africa has been deeply engaged in the Steenkampsberg region surrounding and including Dullstroom. Conservation initiatives here focus on wetlands and grasslands, with particular attention to the elusive and critically endangered White-winged Flufftail. This secretive bird, which spends its life tucked into dense wetland vegetation, has become a flagship species for habitat stewardship. Through partnerships with landowners and stakeholders, BirdLife South Africa has worked to ensure that both biodiversity and local communities benefit from conserving these unique habitats.

Birding Hotspots Around Dullstroom

Walkersons Estate and Hotel - access on prior arrangement only. A private estate located just north of town, the 800-hectare Walkersons Estate is a birding gem. Its mix of rolling hills, wetlands, and grasslands makes it productive year-round. A well-positioned bird hide provides a rare chance to glimpse the elusive Red-chested Flufftail, while the grasslands above the estate’s Mountain Reserve echo with the calls of Fan-tailed Grassbird and Cape Grassbird. Malachite Sunbirds and Gurney’s Sugarbirds add flashes of colour among the blooming proteas. *Verloren Valei Birding Route* This route, centred on the Verloren Valei Nature Reserve and the scenic “De Berg” road, offers some of the most iconic grassland birding in the country. At over 2,000

metres, birders can expect Yellow-breasted Pipit, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, and in summer, the striking Cuckoo Finch. The reserve’s conservation significance extends beyond birds: its wetlands are a biodiversity hotspot for flora, amphibians, and butterflies.

Greater Lakenvlei Birding Route

To the south of Dullstroom, the Lakenvlei route offers a different birding experience. Here, all three crane species are often seen together in agricultural fields, while Secretarybirds and Denham’s Bustards patrol the grasslands. Lakes and dams are busy with White-backed and Maccua Ducks, along with a variety of other waterfowl. Early morning drives also frequently produce good sightings of Grey-winged and Red-winged Francolins feeding along firebreaks and road verges.

Accommodation and Avitourism

BirdLife South Africa’s *GoBirding* platform (www.gobirding.birdlife.org.za) connects travellers to the organization’s network of Recommended Members, including accommodation providers who actively support our organization’s avitourism and conservation work. For birders, these partnerships ensure a comfortable stay and direct support for conservation through responsible, sustainable tourism.

Linking Tourism to Conservation

The Steenkampsberg Birding Routes, developed by BirdLife South Africa in collaboration with the Escarpment Bird Club, represent a powerful example of conservation through tourism. By mapping and promoting key birding routes, the initiative creates opportunities for visitors while incentivising landowners to conserve habitats. When local communities and landowners see tangible benefits from birding tourism, conservation outcomes become sustainable in the long term.

This avitourism model has ripple effects: it supports local economies, encourages biodiversity-friendly land management, and creates awareness among both domestic and international visitors. For BirdLife South Africa, Dullstroom is not just a birding destination, but a living example of how conservation and tourism can thrive together.

Why Birders Return

Ask any birder why they return to Dullstroom; the answer is never just one thing. It is the haunting call of cranes drifting across mist-shrouded wetlands. It is the joy of hearing the faint trill of a Fan-tailed Grassbird above the grasslands. It is the delight of discovering a Buff-streaked Chat perched against a dramatic escarpment backdrop. And perhaps most of all, it is the feeling that this landscape, with its birds, people, and conservation stories, all form part of something much bigger. In Dullstroom, birding is not simply about ticking species on a list (although you can certainly still enjoy this!) It is about experiencing a region where birds, landscapes, and conservation are deeply intertwined. For those fortunate enough to visit, each dawn chorus carries the promise of elusive avian specials, and the reassurance that efforts to conserve them remain ongoing. So, whether you are a first-time visitor and budding beginner birder, or a returning seasoned twitcher, Dullstroom offers a timeless invitation: to explore, to connect, and to celebrate the wild beauty of South Africa’s highveld grasslands.

John Kinghorn can be contacted at john.kinghorn@birdlife.org.za
Donations to the Avitourism Project – specifically the upskilling and training of community bird guides – can be made by scanning the QR code, choosing a donation option, and selecting “empowering bird guides”.

Rotary's R650 000: Where Did All the Money Go?



Left to right - Rotary Hoedspruit President David Bertram and Club Secretary Jill Ovens presenting the Paul Harris award certificate and pin to Debby Thomson (above left)

Lovelle Henderson

Ten years on, the Rotary K2C Cycle Tour is more than just a ride. It is Rotary Hoedspruit's flagship fundraiser – and this year it raised a staggering R650,000 distributed at the awards evening hosted at The Clubhouse.

Thanks to the commitment of 126 riders, their support teams, generous sponsors and the private reserves who opened their land, the event has grown into one of the Lowveld's most impactful community initiatives. Past President Christine du Preez and event chair Michael Henderson handed over

cheques on the night, ensuring the money goes straight back into conservation and community upliftment.

Conservation First

Funding supported Timbavati Private Nature Reserve, Thornybush Game Reserve, Kapama Game Reserve, the Metapopulation Initiative, the Southern Ground Hornbill Project, Provet Wildlife Services and Nature on Tap – all fighting battles from anti-poaching to species survival. Timbavati Private Nature Reserve Warden Edwin Pierce and General Manager of the Timbavati Foundation Candice Pierce presented Rotary



Past Rotary President Christine du Preez and K2C Chairman Michael Henderson paying Farm Watch with their "big cheque" accepted by Lafras Tremper (above right)

with a certificate of appreciation, underscoring how vital these contributions are.

Backing the Community

Community recipients included Farm Watch, the Timbavati Foundation, Jahara, Hoedspruit FM Radio Stream and paramedic Pieter Papsdorf. Farm Watch summed it up: "We are truly blessed to have such a supportive community. We can never thank you enough."

A Decade of Dedication

Marking the tour's 10th anniversary,

Rotary honoured two stalwarts – Tony Patton and Debby Thomson – with the coveted Paul Harris Award, one of Rotary's highest distinctions, for their decade-long contribution.

As funding from government and foundations dwindles, Rotary's role becomes ever more critical each year. The Kruger2Canyon Cycle Tour proves that when Hoedspruit comes together, the results ripple through conservation projects and community services alike.

National Wills Week: why the emphasis on wills?

It was National Wills Week for 2025 in South Africa from 15 to 19 September. The purpose of Wills Week is to educate South Africans about the importance of having a Will and to encourage them to draft a will.

The importance of having a Will in South Africa

Your wishes as to where your assets should go, will be honoured if you have a valid will in place. If you do not have a valid will your estate will go to your intestate heirs in terms of the Intestate Succession Act, and not necessarily to the persons who you would have wanted to benefit after your death. If you leave a spouse and children, they will each receive a share of your estate.

Furthermore, this may have unintended estate duty and capital gains tax consequences in your estate. If you left your entire estate to your spouse, there would have been no estate duty or capital gains tax on your estate assets at your death as first dying spouse. The values now going to your children will be subject to estate duty, if more in value than the R3.5 million you

have as a deduction for estate duty purposes. Assets bequeathed to your children will also be subject to capital gains tax in your estate.

If your children are minors, their inheritance will be transferred to the Guardian's Fund which is managed by the state, in the absence of a will directing that their inheritance must be managed for their benefit by their legal guardian or by the trustees of a trust. Their guardians will have no control over or say in how the funds are invested and managed in the Guardian's Fund, and they will have no access to benefits therefrom for their schooling and other expenses until they are 18 years old. They can apply to receive their inheritance from the Guardian's Fund when they are 18 years old. At 18 a child is not necessarily financially savvy to manage an inheritance responsibly. In a will, to the contrary, one can set up a testamentary trust and nominate trustees to manage the inheritance of such a minor in the trust until a later age, say 21, 25 or 30. The trustees can apply the benefits for the child's education costs and general maintenance before they reach the specified age,

and at that age transfer the balance of the trust fund to them. You can stipulate in your will that the funds must be invested with your trusted investment advisor.

Without a Will no executor is nominated by you, and you do not exempt the executor from providing security for doing their job, which is a clause that would have been in your valid will, if you had one. An executor must now be appointed by the Master of the High Court. Your closest family members can make nominations of who they would want to be appointed. Only closest family members, and in most cases only a surviving spouse and children, will be exempt from providing security, and anyone else so appointed may be required to take out a bond of security equal to the value of the estate assets, which can come with high premiums payable by the executor. You may find in this case that you will struggle to find an executor willing to do so.

You can nominate a legal guardian to your minor children in a valid will, in the instance where both biological parents who were the legal guardians are not there anymore. In the absence of a valid will with such a

nomination of legal guardian, the courts in South Africa will appoint a legal guardian to your minor children. This person may not necessarily be the person that you would have preferred to look after your children. You also would have wanted to discuss the guardianship role with the nominated person(s) to make sure that they understand and know what your wishes were with regard to your children, such as where to educate them.

It is clear from the above examples that it is to the benefit of your loved ones and your heirs that you sign a valid will and keep it up to date from time to time and as your circumstances change or a life event happens.

Please make use of the weeks to come to make sure that you have an up to date valid will in place. If you need any assistance in this regard, please contact Marteen Michau at marten@fidelisvox.co.za or Tamryn de Villers at tamryn@fidelisvox.co.za.



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Century 21 Wildlife Properties Triumphs at the 2025 Pearl Awards



Century21 Team Market Leader Award - left to right Rob Severin, Lizette Pienaar, Eva August (CEO, Century 21 South Africa), Calin Leppan, Michelle Herb and Michelle Severin

On 4 September 2025, Century 21 South Africa rolled out the red carpet at Arabella Golf Estate in the Western Cape for its annual Pearl Awards – the flagship celebration of excellence across the real estate industry. Principals, managers, and top agents from all 43 franchises gathered for a day of insights and a black-tie evening that honoured the best in the business.

Hoedspruit stole the spotlight

Century 21 Wildlife Properties delivered a powerhouse performance, underlining their calibre as professionals and the strength and momentum of the Hoedspruit property market. Rob Severin, Principal, clinched the coveted title of National Top Selling Principal, recognition of his standing as both leader and industry professional.

Michelle Severin continued her stellar run, achieving Pearl Award Agent Status and ranking among the Top 21 Agents in South Africa. She also took home Highest Agent

Sales and Highest Agent Commission in her category, while nationally placing first runner-up in both. At office level, Century 21 Wildlife scooped the National Market Leader Award, National Winner – Top Office Sales and smashed through a historic barrier by becoming the first Century 21 South African office ever to reach R500 Million Office Club status – clocking more than R500 million in sales in just one year.

“These awards are not about silverware on a shelf,” said Rob. “They reflect years of hard work, in-depth expertise and the kind of professionalism our clients expect in a specialised market that spans game farms, lodges, wildlife estates, bush properties, rentals and residential stands.”

Hoedspruit Market Outlook

According to Principal Rob Severin, 2025 has kicked off with strong momentum. Buyer demand in Hoedspruit and the Greater Kruger region is outpacing supply, with a noticeable

shortage of listings across most property segments. This has inevitably pushed prices upwards, creating a market that is both robust and increasingly competitive. “It’s a classic case of supply and demand,” Rob explained. “There are more buyers than available properties, and that naturally drives values higher. The challenge now is affordability.” Despite tighter affordability, appetite remains strong from both local and international buyers. Century 21 Wildlife Properties reports a steady rise in foreign interest, particularly from European and American investors who are drawn to the area’s unique combination of lifestyle, conservation appeal, and value compared to international safari destinations. “After years of working with international clients, we’ve built up the necessary skills, networks and partnerships to manage these transactions smoothly,” said Rob. “That’s a big part of what sets us apart.” South Africans, too, continue to invest heavily in Hoedspruit, whether in wildlife estates, private reserves, bushveld homes, or smaller

residential stands. The market’s resilience has made the town one of the fastest-growing property hotspots in Limpopo – a place where lifestyle, tourism, and conservation collide. But this rapid success has come with growing pains. Hoedspruit’s municipal infrastructure has struggled to keep pace with expansion. The most pressing issue is water and sanitation: the municipality has recently placed a moratorium on new developments requiring connections to these services. While temporary, the move highlights how urgent infrastructure planning and investment have become if Hoedspruit is to sustain its growth trajectory. In closing, the Century 21 Wildlife Properties team paid tribute to the people behind their success – clients, sellers, buyers, investors, tenants, property owners, and service providers. “Every transaction is a partnership,” the team noted. “Our commitment remains the same: to bring professionalism, expertise, and dedication to every deal – before, during, and long after the ink has dried.”

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Macadamias Power Young Talent at National Culinary Showdown

South Africa’s next generation of culinary stars went head-to-head at the Jeunes Chefs Rôtisseurs National Final in Stellenbosch last week – and it was a feast of ambition, innovation and proudly South African flavour.

Hosted by the Bailliage of South Africa at the prestigious Institute of Culinary Arts (ICA), the competition drew the country’s top young chefs, each determined to earn the honour of representing South Africa at the International Final at Le Cordon Bleu, Istanbul in April 2026.

And the winner is...

Rising above fierce competition, Juan Fourie claimed the national title with a dazzling three-course menu that celebrated the versatility of macadamias. Fourie will carry the flag for South Africa on the world stage in 2026. Hot on his heels were Sheldon Wolfe (2nd place) and Amahle Sosiba (3rd), with Caeleb Naidoo and Elizabeth Ncubealso impressing the judges. Melanie Cunningham, a final-year culinary student, joined as an official observer – a nod to the competition’s commitment to nurturing new talent. “Whether or not they walked away with a trophy, each competitor brought innovation, discipline, and heart to the table,” said a Bailliage representative. “These chefs represent the future of gastronomy in South Africa.”

Macadamias steal the spotlight

The 2025 challenge required competitors to showcase macadamias in sweet or savoury form – from oils and butters to pastes and whole nuts. With their creamy texture and rich flavour, the nuts proved an inspired canvas for culinary creativity.



Juan Fourie (1st), Sheldon Wolfe (2nd), Amahle Sosiba (3rd), Melanie Cunningham, Elizabeth Ncube and Caeleb Naidoo

The choice was no accident. Since 2017, South Africa has led the world in macadamia production, with an astounding 87,227 tons harvested in 2024. At the heart of the event was Macadamias South Africa NPC (SAMAC), the key sponsor, whose support elevated the profile of macadamias as both a luxury ingredient and a symbol of agricultural excellence. “This competition is about more than young chefs,” said Kerisha Raghunandan, SAMAC’s Market Access & Development Manager. “It’s about showcasing what South Africa can do – in our kitchens and in our orchards.”

Juan Fourie’s winning menu

Appetiser – *Ginger-cured seabass with macadamia crumb, herb oil and tomato pickle.* Fourie roasted macadamias to draw out their depth, pairing them with delicately cured seabass and a bright tomato pickle.

Main Course – *Pan-grilled lamb rump with macadamia dukkah, baby carrot confit, charred broccoli, butternut purée and macadamia-mint sauce.*

Here, toasted macadamias were ground into a fragrant dukkah to crown the lamb, while a spiced macadamia oil elevated the vegetables.

Dessert – *Apple Rose Brûlée with candied macadamias, nut tuille and apple-macadamia crème.*

The finale saw apple spirals poached into roses, crystalised macadamias for crunch, and a velvety apple-macadamia cream.

It was a menu that told a story: of craft, innovation, and the way a humble South African nut can be transformed into haute cuisine.

The Nutritional Value of Macadamia Nuts: they are rich in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats (especially Omega 7 and 9). With over 120 scientific health studies, macadamias offer a wealth of advantages such as supporting cardiovascular wellness, maintaining weight management, and they may even boost cognitive and gut health. Rich in antioxidants, they promote radiant skin and offer anti-aging benefits. Beyond the health advantages, by-products of macadamia processing can be harnessed for innovative uses such as biochar, and recyclable biomaterials. As global consumers seek food that supports well-being and contributes to the environment, macadamias make a compelling stance.

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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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A Generation of Dysfunction: Can South Africa Still Be Fixed?

AI perspective ‘correspondent’

South Africa is a land of beauty and promise, yet for citizens under 30, dysfunction has always been the norm. Born after apartheid, this “born-free” generation has never known a society where trains ran on time, schools delivered, or the lights stayed on. Instead, they’ve grown up amid crime, corruption, collapsing infrastructure, and a bloated civil service riddled with patronage. The danger is psychological as well as practical: chaos has become normal, and many young South Africans no longer believe anything better is possible.

The statistics tell a grim story: only one in 100 murders is solved, over R520 billion wasted on bailouts of failing state firms, and 81% of Grade 4 learners unable to read for meaning. Railways have been looted, Eskom keeps the country in the dark, and youth unemployment hovers around 62%. South Africa now ranks among the world’s most crime-ridden states.

The question is unavoidable: what does the future hold if dysfunction continues unchecked? And how can it be fixed?

Crime and Corruption: Living in a “Mafia State”

South Africa’s crime crisis is staggering. Experts warn the country increasingly resembles a “mafia state”: organized crime has infiltrated police, intelligence, and even state-owned enterprises. In KwaZulu-Natal, senior police have accused networks of planting unqualified officers to protect politically connected criminals.

The result? Violent crime with near impunity. Only 1% of murders lead to successful prosecution. Extortion rackets, kidnappings, and political assassinations have become commonplace. South Africa now ranks 7th globally for organized crime, alongside Colombia and Mexico. Citizens vent their anger with hashtags like #CriminalState, knowing full well that criminals often act above the law while the justice system falters.

The Civil Service: Cadres Over Competence

At the heart of dysfunction lies a public service hollowed out by cadre deployment. Party loyalty often matters more than competence in appointments. By 2021, 35% of senior managers lacked the qualifications for their jobs.

The Zondo Commission revealed how this practice enabled state capture: tenders were manipulated, cronies enriched, and billions siphoned away. More than R520 billion has been spent bailing out failing state-owned enterprises - Eskom, South African Airways, the Post Office - with almost nothing in return. To put it in perspective, that money could have built over 8,600 schools or 2.6 million homes.

Meanwhile, the public wage bill has ballooned to 10.5% of GDP, one of the highest in the world. Nearly 38,000 civil servants earn more than R1 million annually, while basic services stagnate. In short: South Africans are paying more for less.

Education: A Lost Generation

No sector reveals the damage more starkly than education. Despite significant budget allocations, outcomes are dismal. Four out of five Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning. International tests rank South African pupils among the worst globally in maths and science - directly linked to the current pass mark of 30%.

This crisis feeds directly into unemployment. With poor skills, millions of young people are locked out of formal work. The official jobless rate hovers at 33%, but among youth it soars to 62%. Frustration spills into crime, drugs, and despair.

The legacy of apartheid-era “Bantu education” lingers, but present mismanagement, weak teaching, and inadequate accountability are equally to blame. Teachers’ unions resist reform, and provincial education departments are too often run by political appointees. The result: a schooling system that fails its children and strangles the nation’s future and basically sets the youth up for failure.

Infrastructure in Collapse

Nothing illustrates decline more viscerally than collapsing infrastructure.

Since 1994, South Africa has lost around 3,600 km of rail tracks to theft and decay. Commuter rail in Johannesburg and Cape Town is almost non-existent. In some places thieves stole not just copper cables, but the steel rails themselves.

On the roads potholes and unserviceable streetlights and traffic lights plague cities and towns. Maintenance has fallen far behind; citizens often fill potholes themselves. Since 2007, rolling electrical blackouts have

become part of life. At its worst in 2023, Stage 6 load-shedding left businesses and households without power for up to 8 hours a day. Hospitals run on generators, students can’t study, and small firms collapse under costs.

More than half of municipal water systems are in “critical condition.” Cape Town nearly ran dry in 2018; elsewhere, sewage spills into rivers as plants fail. Johannesburg is suffering from lack of maintenance, and some areas have been without running water for months.

Billions that should have fixed these systems were lost to corruption or mismanagement. The result is a slow-motion collapse of the infrastructure on which modern economies depend.

The Argentina Comparison: A 35-Year Horizon

South Africa is not unique in its dysfunction. Argentina offers a sobering parallel: once one of the world’s wealthiest nations, it endured decades of corruption, inflation, and political mismanagement. Today, its leaders admit recovery may take as long as 35 years!

The lesson is blunt: when institutions decay for decades, there are no quick fixes. Rebuilding trust, competence, and prosperity is the work of a generation. South Africa should expect no less. But Argentina also shows that honesty about the scale of the challenge is the first step to recovery.

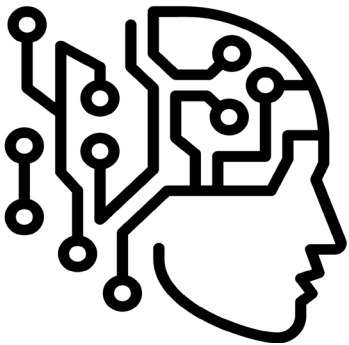
The Way Forward: Six Points on What Must be Done

Is there hope? Yes - if decisive action is taken. Solutions exist, but they require courage and long-term commitment:

Firstly, the government must professionalise the Civil Service - end cadre deployment. Appoint officials on merit, with independent oversight. The state must serve citizens, not parties.

Secondly, there must be a serious and firm crack down on corruption. Fund prosecutors, protect whistleblowers, and prosecute high-level offenders. Impunity must end - without accountability, nothing else matters.

Thirdly, fix education. Launch a national reading campaign to reverse the literacy crisis. Train teachers, simplify the curriculum, and hold schools accountable. Core skills - reading, writing, maths - must be non-negotiable - and the pass mark percentage must be raised.



Fourthly, rebuild Infrastructure. Redirect funds from bailouts and excessive salaries (also trim the civil service), into maintenance and upgrades. Partner with the private sector where necessary. Secure rail lines, modernise electricity, and fix water systems.

Fifthly, stimulate jobs and growth. Cut red tape for small businesses, reform labour laws (especially the failed BEE program) to ease youth employment, and invest in skills aligned with modern industries. Stability and clean governance will attract investment.

Sixthly, civic mobilisation. Citizens must demand accountability. Voting patterns are already shifting - the ANC fell below 50% in 2024, forcing a coalition government. Civil society, media, and communities must keep up the relentless pressure.

Conclusion: The Long Road Ahead

South Africa’s crisis is undeniable, but the future is not predetermined. The next 30 years could mirror Argentina’s: slow but steady recovery if the right steps are taken, or deeper decline if dysfunction becomes permanent.

Change will not be quick. It may take a generation to rebuild institutions and reset expectations. But small victories - prosecuting corrupt elites, restoring a rail line, improving literacy rates - can create momentum.

South Africa still has immense strengths: a free press, an independent judiciary, a vibrant civil society, and millions of resilient citizens who refuse to give up. If government and people work together, progress can once again become the norm.

The challenge is great, but the choice is ours: another generation lost to dysfunction, or the start of a long, hard journey to recovery. The time to begin is now. We need to be brave on the road ahead.

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TRIVIA ANSWERS

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|----|--|----|---|----|--|
| 1 | Monaco | 9 | It contains telephone | 14 | Ferruccio Lamborghini | 19 | Some Like it Hot (1959) |
| 2 | They were all once thought to be aphrodisiacs | 10 | A Punch and Judy puppeteer | 15 | News stories – instead of clasifieds, notices and announcements | 20 | The glass was the size of a pitcher (1,9 litres) |
| 3 | A molasses-based sauce | 11 | Press cloth and seams | 16 | A hot sausage | 21 | Roller skates by John Joseph Merlin |
| 4 | The Falkland Islands | 12 | Clocks - one with the correct time and one with the wrong time – supposedly to ‘confuse the devil’ | 17 | Cook it and eat it - it's a Scottish heri | | |
| 5 | Liberia | | | 18 | tage potato variety | | |
| 6 | Albion | | | | November 1917 | | |
| 7 | Its belly | 13 | She was a ‘ghost singer’ and provided their singing voices | | | | |
| 8 | A moose (elk) | | | | | | |



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