

Big game parks versus big farming: A battle for the ages on the Klaserie River



View of the Olifants River valley

Photo: D Botha

Kevin Bloom

Article first published in the Daily Maverick

On a small plot of land outside Hoedspruit, a fight has been brewing that goes to the very heart of South Africa's environmental legislation. One of the country's largest citrus exporters is taking on 15 of the biggest brands in nature conservation, with the provincial authorities so far favouring the former. If the final battle is lost, say the conservationists, it will

be open season on the region's ecological treasures.

"Insects form the base that supports intricate food webs."

With this statement of fact, included in a report that detailed the likely impact of a proposed citrus farm on the Klaserie River basin, the ecologist Jessica Wilmot was echoing the work of Rachel Carson. Published in 1962, Carson's Silent Spring was an investigate masterpiece, an exposé of the catastrophe in the world of beetles and bugs,

where pesticides were disrupting the food chain and silencing all birdsong. Back then, the public had no idea of the damage caused by habitat conversion and monocultural farming practices — almost 60 years later, thanks to the role played by Silent Spring in igniting the environmental movement, we know that pesticides are directly implicated in our current insect apocalypse.

Of course, to every type of global ecological crisis there is a profusion of local

contexts. On the Klaserie River, as Wilmot pointed out in her report, that context had everything to do with where the citrus farm had been staked out

"The property occurs in an area where the main land use is either wildlife-based tourism or wildlife economy initiatives," she wrote, before noting that it was sandwiched between two of the largest private game parks in the country, the 60,000-hectare Klaserie Reserve and the 53,000-hectare Timbavati

Reserve.

Wilmot, who published her report in April 2019 on behalf of the NGO Elephants Alive, came to the fight when she realised that the elephants on these two reserves would almost certainly sniff out the orange orchards, which would result in "human-wildlife conflict" and the possible slaughter of the animals.

The Kruger National Park and the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region, in a response to the mooted project published five months

before, had likewise foreseen the problem.

"The current fencing system 'keeping animals in' is very porous," these conservation heavyweights had noted, "due to the fact that the Klaserie River itself cannot be fully fenced, meaning movement levels from the reserve to the proposed citrus area could be high."

There were a number of reasons for their interest. Firstly, as they had stressed, the proposed development was located ...

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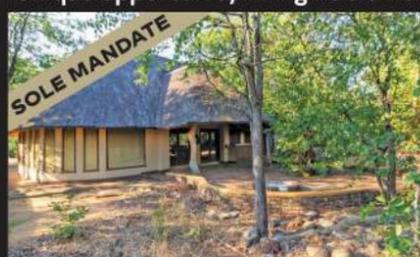
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“In my opinion...”

David Batzofin - Editor



EDITOR

David Batzofin

Several issues are of interest to me this month.

Should I tackle them in order of importance or by how much they irritate me and the rest of my fellow South Africans?

Currently (and I use that pun intentionally) many of us are being subjected to various stages of load-shedding. But the stages change like the price of Bitcoin and go from a ‘stable grid’ to a catastrophic failure in a matter of hours. We as consumers of the product, electricity, are being asked

to use less and then Eskom makes representation to Government to increase tariffs to help resolve their historic debt that is increasing at an alarming rate. Really? You have the product, you sell the product. You ask consumers NOT to use the product and then you ask those same consumers to pay increased tariffs and the cycle starts all over again. Yes, there are solutions that individuals can install, like generator sets or solar arrays, but at the end of the day, not everyone has access to those options.

With COVID-19 going back into a revised Level 3 of lockdown following the most recent ‘family’ chat by our President; I would have

thought that the vaccine roll-out would have been a top priority, but seemingly not. As we move from the healthcare workers and the vulnerable over 80, there seems to be a stumbling block as to who, what, where, and when.

At present, the roll-out has been extended to include those over 60, and as I fall into that category, have already had my first dose of the Pfizer vaccine at a local hospital in Johannesburg. In Hoedspruit, it seems that residents had to travel in convoy to their nearby hospital and stand in line to get theirs. The Government is keeping a tight rein on vaccine distribution, instead of allowing outlets like phar-

macies to offer customers who produce the correct documents to get their jab.

And finally. Following up on a letter in our last edition about house transfers and the difficulty that Hoedspruit estate agents are experiencing, light appears at the end of the tunnel...apparently. The full book has been replaced but it seems that there is more than just this that meets the eye. Is it a perception that the local municipality is allegedly working at a non-optimal pace?

How many of you have had issues when trying to get to either speak to or interact with the municipality?

In my opinion, it should be for the people and by

the people? But perhaps I am mistaken? Elections are coming up in October and you have the right to use your vote to make changes if you want that to happen.

What are the most pressing issues that are bothering you? Causing YOU to lie awake at night wondering when will it all end and we can emerge back into the light with a renewed sense of purpose?

Drop me an email editor@kruger2canyon.co.za and we will print your thoughts and opinions in our next edition.

Until next time, stay safe and stay healthy.

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WORDSEARCH

Words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other - good luck!

FIND THESE WORDS:

- abject, cast, ensue, garden, heist, literal, migrate, occupy, phone, record, usurp,
- whiskey, zone, body, coffee, envy, gene, joist, livery, montage, orient, protein, scream, trident, valet, yearn, burden, dialect, femur, height, leaflet, median, nominal, pelt, recede, seismic, unify, village, zephyr, telescope

Newspapers boost business after lockdown

Mark Bishop

I was browsing through the Internet the other day, looking at and reading interesting articles. One of the subjects that interested me was how people and businesses have reinvented themselves and their processes since this pandemic hit us. Some of the ideas that have developed have been inspirational others very much off the “beaten track” – but the common denominator was that all those that I read about were successful.

The advertising in print gives an element of the company being tactile and tangible, a really important component of any brand. There’s nothing better than sitting over a cup of coffee and reading the paper – its something physical after all this online stuff! We are too used to digesting everything in bite-sized chunks on social media – much better to spend time discovering a newspaper (of course with content!).

One that really caught my eye dealt with newspapers and how these were now being used to boost business! Yes, believe it or not but the pen seems now to be stronger than the gadget!

Brands are now repositioning themselves for the future and marketing spend is expected to rise by 14% in 2021 worldwide! There has been an increased demand for transparency and above all for authenticity and turning to newspapers has struck the cord of the tricky balance between “fresh” and “familiar”. Print is a welcome change to screens that we have all become accustomed to because it’s an accessible and agile format. It also affords creativity in a physical rather than a “virtual” medium.

Now is a great time to re-evaluate how you’re showing up to your community and get a new perspective. Think about what you love about your brand and experiment with ways of communicating that through print!

Local newspapers like the Kruger2Canyon gives the local community the chance to celebrate the small things that have a big impact on people and nurture that community ethos that we are all seeking. It’s nice to belong! Here’s a toast to the continuation of our beloved print!

Letter’s to the editor

Letters to the editor – June 25th 2021



Dear Editor

We are very happy to see that the paper is in print again. Thank you for that and we look forward to getting it at the stop street at the end of the month ... its quite a highlight for us.

Margaret

Dear Editor

I was sad to see Heidi go, but I like the look of the “new” Kruger2Canyon and wish you all the best going forward.

Henk

Dear Editor

The inclusion of a puzzle was a great addition – please can we have more like that.

Joan

Dear Editor

Fresh, good content and just a good feel. Thanks.

Tanya

Dear Editor

This has to be the best publication in the Lowveld!

Dave

Dear Editor

Great to see that you do not concentrate on the bad stories – in fact I have not seen one in two months! So nice to read interesting articles and to learn from some – like the constellation of the month.

Deon



Dear Editor

Can anyone contribute to the paper ?

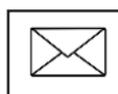
Vusi

Editor : yes we would love to hear from you.

Dear Editor

This really helps with the image of our town. Yes we do have a newspaper that we all love, and we hope in these trying times that this keeps going forever. A big yes from us.

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Painting the road to success...

Gail Sham

As our country's unemployment levels are deepening, especially among young people, employers are struggling to fill vacancies due to a chronic shortage of candidates with the necessary skill sets.

According to Stats SA, the unemployment rate among youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is an alarming 63.2%, however, creating more economic opportunities is only part of the solution.

Developing vocational skills is a priority in ensuring that South Africa makes progress in combatting unemployment. The Department of Higher Education reinforces that it is imperative to identify skills needs and ensure that education and training, at all levels, respond to the needs of the economy. Vocational education can help fill the skills gap, boost productivity, and enhance industry employment.

Individuals like Rodney Maduwa have heeded this call. Through his

company, Maduwa Paint World, a specialist paint manufacturing company supplying paint for commercial and industrial uses, he is committed to creating employment opportunities within the sector, among unskilled youth from the local communities and villages within the ages of 21-35.

Born and raised in Ha-Maduwa, a small village in the northern parts of the Limpopo province, Rodney founded Maduwa Paint World in 2013.

The business has seen phenomenal growth despite the current difficult economic environment. The company has already doubled its annual turnover on last year to over R1.3 million.

This growth is aligned with the findings of a recent StatsSA report, revealing that South Africa's retail trade sales unexpectedly rebounded in February and rose 2.3 percent on the previous year, recovering from a revised 3.7 percent contraction in January. Retailers in food and beverages



The smile of success Rodney Maduwa

Photo: supplied

stores, and those specializing in hardware, paint, and glass, were among those that recorded positive results.

Rodney is passionate

about providing mentorship and skills training to develop the youth and enable them to gain on-the-job experience in the manufacturing and process-

ing of paint products and detergents.

"We have trained and upskilled over 15 painters last year despite the lockdown, all of whom are now

employed by the company. We are currently in the process of training another eight young people in the areas of factory manufacturing and paint application".

Employing 35 staff members in Gauteng and Limpopo, the company has evolved from the humble beginnings of a small manufacturing plant in Soshanguve to a large industrial warehouse in Rosslyn, Pretoria. "We are committed to making a difference and intend to train at least 50 young people over the next year and yes, I do believe it's possible because by the grace of God the business is running very well," says Rodney.

Rodney believes it is critically important to provide skills development gained through work experience.

"Vocational skills are especially important, and we must all work together to make a difference. This is what will help the country combat issues of unemployment".

Time for tea



Lucas Ledwaba
Mukurukuru Media

In the mid-morning sunshine they are hard at work harvesting tea leaves to be processed at the nearby Mukumbani Tea Factory below the picturesque plantation. This is the home of Midi Tea, grown in the lush valleys of Venda in Limpopo.

In another time the plantation, which was established under the Venda Development Corporation, employed as many as 2,000 workers. But changing busi-

ness and political dynamics have seen the workforce reduced to 231, only 80 of whom are farm workers. Then, the workforce covered an area of 1,057 hectares which has now been reduced to 70 hectares.

But plans are in place to return the plantation to its former glory.

Leo Gama, spokesperson for the Limpopo Economic Development Agency, which manages the tea estate, says they need a cash injection of up to R10-million to achieve this.

The tea produced at the

plantation, Midi Tea, is available for sale at selected stores around the country.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations notes that tea (*Camellia sinensis*), which was discovered in around 2,700 BC, is the manufactured drink most consumed in the world.

According to the organization Statista.com, the global tea market was valued at nearly \$200-billion in 2020 and is expected to exceed \$318-billion by 2025.

China, where it is believed tea was first discov-



Workers in different types of colourful clothing toiling in the lush green field resemble a swarm of bees in search of nectar among rows upon rows of crops

ered, remains the largest producer in the world. In Africa the highest tea producing countries are Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and Zimbabwe, with South Africa producing the least.

The revival of the estate could be a major boost for the rural Mukumbani community, especially with the unemployment rate in South Africa hitting a record 30.8%, described by Statistics SA as the highest since 2008.



Photo: supplied

Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey, covering the fourth quarter of 2020, noted that the agricultural sector was among the industries that recorded the largest employment increases.

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Frank and his wonderful guests from Johannesburg and Polokwane enjoying a sundowner

Kerstin Nyberg Peart

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for the tourism sector in our country.

According to a report released by Statistics South Africa, foreign arrivals dropped by 71% to less than 5 million in 2020. Many businesses will not survive; others are adapting to the new situation and surviving as best they can.

But, as the saying goes, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Tourist attractions and lodges may have lost their international clientele, but by changing their focus they have opened up for domestic tourism. Game lodges and tour operators who used to cater almost exclusively for the international market are now attracting domestic, and even local, guests. Many South Africans who

may never have seen a wild animal before are reclaiming their heritage.

Frank Watts, together with his partner Dianne Wichman, runs a Hoedspruit-based safari company with the entertaining name The Other Animals Safaris. Frank has worked in the tourism industry for over 28 years, and in 2012 he decided to set up his own company. From a modest start, he and Dianne built up a thriving business until the devastating blow struck by the pandemic brought it to its knees. They were left with only two vehicles, and no guests, but carried on – and discovered an amazing change to the face of tourism.

Before the pandemic, Frank's customers were exclusively international. Many were here to see the Big Five and had high expectations, which he sought

to fulfill, but the guests were often missing out on the smaller things. He now takes mainly his own countrymen into the bush, and the experience has been uplifting.

Frank remembers special occasions, as when a lodge on Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate asked him to take a local couple on a game drive on the estate.

He was apprehensive, worrying that there wouldn't be enough to keep them interested, but how wrong he was. The guests appreciated all the small things and were ecstatic at seeing giraffe, zebra, and wildebeest, and Frank remembers the drive as one of the most rewarding he'd ever done – without seeing a single representative of the Big Five!

The Other Animals Safaris do a variety of tours, including locally into the Pridelands reserve which is open

to the Kruger National Park but only minutes from our town centre. I was invited to go on an afternoon drive with Frank and six guests, a foursome from Johannesburg and a young couple from Polokwane. The good cheer in the vehicle was obvious already when they picked me up outside the Rhino Convention Centre and continued throughout the drive. For some of the guests, this was their first-ever encounter with wild animals and they thoroughly enjoyed it. Even as the temperature dropped, the enjoyment on board did not!

The Other Animals Safaris offer morning, afternoon, and whole day tours into the Kruger National Park, but during the winter months setting off before sunrise in an open vehicle may not be ideal. But why go all the way to Kruger, when the Greater



Kruger Conservancy is on our doorstep?

The Pridelands Conservancy is open to the Kruger, and it even has all the Big Five for those who are keen to see them. Throughout the winter months, The Other Animals Safaris will offer mid-morning drives into Pridelands, leaving around 9.30 for a 3 – 4 hour drive. Bring your own picnic to

enjoy in the middle of the bush in the winter sunshine – what a lovely way to see the wildlife right on our doorstep.

To find out more about The Other Animals Safaris, go to their web site www.theotheranimals.co.za

For bookings please contact Dianne – 0768345602 or Frank – 0796970442

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Sarah Solomon

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Wildlife recordist and

sound expert Derek Solomon is passionate about natural sound and has been recording for the past 25 years and his collection includes ants to elephants and everything in between.

"Specialized sound equipment is set up on the game drive vehicle with individual earphones to listen in to and interpret the sounds of the bush".

He is hosting a series of sound safaris in the coming

months. Join him at Sausage Tree Safari Camp in July for either a one or two-night stay to discover the world of sound for yourself.

Dates are the weekend of 3rd and 4th, Monday 12th and Wednesday 28th; or choose your own dates (minimum 4 and maximum 6 guests). At R3650 per person per night sharing, the cost includes accommodation, meals, and game drives.

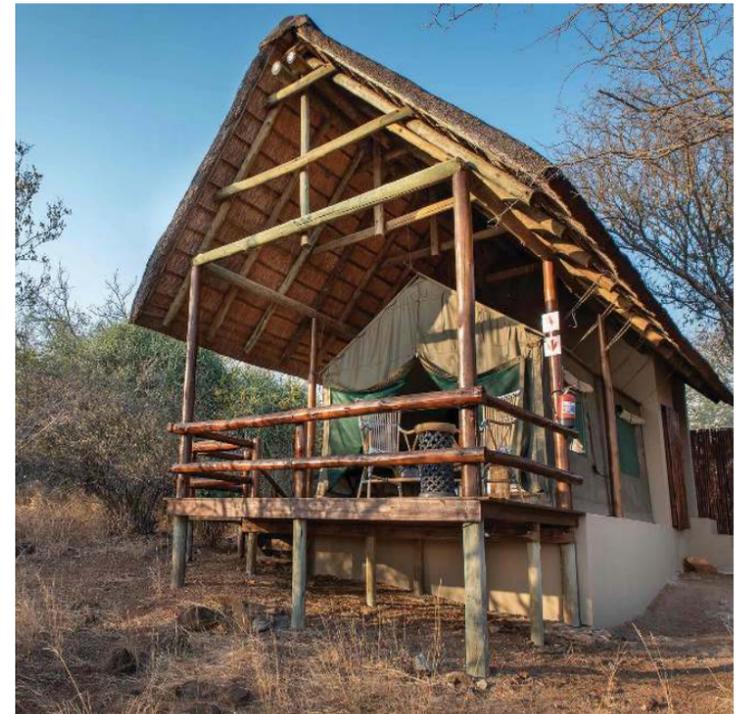
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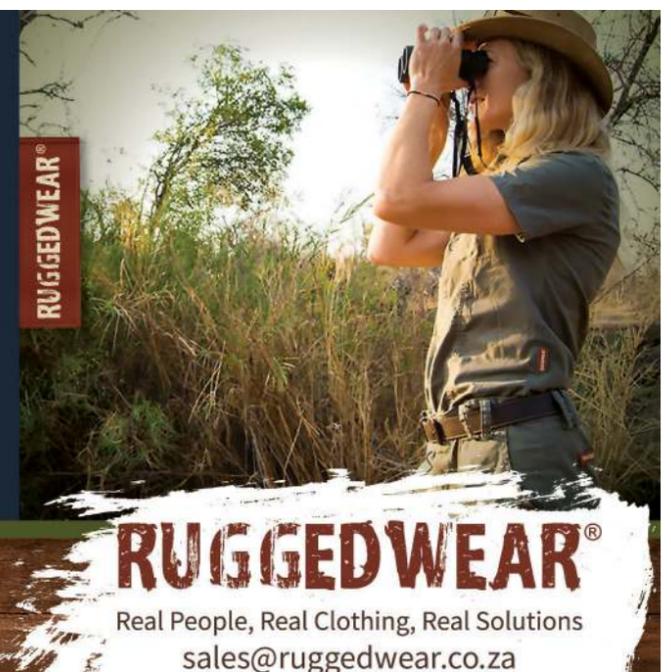
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Big game parks versus big farming:

Cont. from page 1 ...

Firstly, as they had stressed, the proposed development was located inside the Kruger National Park Land Use Buffer, which had been “earmarked for expansion”. In anticipation of the proclamation of the UN’s Convention on Biological Diversity of January 2020, an international gathering that would call for a third of the surface of the earth to be “under protection” by 2030, the response had explained that the property was slap-bang in the middle of the Greater Kruger Open System in South Africa — a vast wildlife corridor that (all things being equal) would eventually connect to the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, as run trilaterally by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Second, there was the fact that the Klaserie River flows into the Olifants River, one of the Kruger Park’s largest watercourses. Here, given the use of pesticides and herbicides that commercial citrus farming typically entails, the response had been pretty blunt:

“Vast amounts are being invested in the clearing of the Klaserie headwaters of invasive alien plants so as to improve streamflow. This additional water is not for uptake by a single entity but is intended to maintain basic human needs and

river health to the confluence. Downstream impacts on the protected areas are likely and there is little evidence of mitigation.”

The mitigation plans, as both Elephants Alive and the Kruger Park made clear, should ideally have been included in the draft environmental impact assessment, completed in 2018. As it turned out, the final EIA, submitted in June 2019, would acknowledge the likelihood that water use for irrigation of the citrus orchard would have a “negative impact on available water resources in the region.” So how, then, did the citrus farmer get his environmental authorisation?

This question, among many others, would form the basis of ongoing litigation between the citrus farming company, identified in the court papers as Casketts Sirus (Pty) Ltd — a cosmetic name-change from Soleil Mashishimale (Pty) Ltd, a subsidiary of the Soleil Sirus Group, which exports to markets in Europe, Japan, the Middle East and Russia — and the Klaserie Reserve, the Timbavati Reserve and Elephants Alive.

As the leading conservationists in the fight, these three applicants would lean on the tenets of the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) to take Soleil’s environmental authorisation on review, a process — still pending at the

time of this writing — that would involve hauling the Limpopo provincial authorities before the Polokwane High Court. But, given Soleil’s alleged manipulation of the provincial authorities’ ineptitude, they would also seek an urgent interdict to halt the farming conglomerate in its tracks.

Backing up the applicants, as “interested and affected parties” in a concurrent appeal process, would be no less than 12 of the biggest brands in South African conservation, including SANParks and the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, with the Global White Lion Protection Trust offering support from the sidelines.

As all of them were aware, there was evidence to suggest that Soleil had acted unlawfully in its haste to plant saplings and get the operation going. By all accounts, once the trees were bearing fruit, it wouldn’t be long until there was a queue of farmers waiting to cultivate the Kruger Park buffer zone.

On 2 August 2019, the chief director of environmental trade and protection at the Limpopo provincial government’s Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism — or LEDET, which has featured heavily (and not entirely favourably) in *Daily Maverick’s* coverage of the Musina-Makhado SEZ —

granted Soleil the right to start preparing the ground. There were a number of caveats to the environmental authorisation, including the conditions that no more than 102 hectares would be open to cultivation, that a permit for removing “protected trees” would need to be obtained from the national department, and that no farming could take place within the flood line of the Klaserie River.

A month later, on 3 September 2019, the Limpopo MEC for economic development, environment and tourism, Thabo Mokone, was bombarded with all of 15 separate appeals against LEDET’s decision, as per the provisions of section 43 of NEMA. The appeal of Elephants Alive was submitted with a petition that had garnered 1,137 signatures.

From the perspective of the appellants, this was when the authorities began to reveal their “strangely disinterested” hand. For starters, they alleged, “despite repeated correspondence,” Mokone failed to adhere to the prescribed time limits for the processing of appeals. Of way more concern, however, was the fact that Soleil — in apparent contravention of sections 43(7) and 49A(1) of NEMA, which jointly state that an appeal “suspends an environmental authorisation” and that to “com-

mence with an activity” in these circumstances is a criminal offence — had in the interim brought in earth-moving equipment.

Still, as the appellants were about to discover, Soleil was just beginning to get warmed up. On top of the company’s disregard for the process, which it justified in legal correspondence (see below) by suggesting that the MEC’s delay was evidence of his intention to deny the appeal, it would soon appear likely to them that the conditions of the original authorisation had been breached. Although Soleil had been granted permission to repair one of the dam walls on the property, Google Earth satellite imagery — captured by Wilmot in February and August 2020 — seemed to suggest that the company had deepened and widened the dam itself.

By October 2020, when the appellants managed to obtain a series of ground-level photographs, the full extent of Soleil’s activities had shifted to the realm beyond doubt. These images, shared with *Daily Maverick*, showed Caterpillar bulldozers, backhoe loaders and articulated trucks. In one image, a compactor was flattening a road; behind the machine, uprooted indigenous trees were lying prone in the rubble.

At which point, the appellants made the decision to call Mokone to account. On 19 November 2020, in a letter to the MEC on behalf of Elephants Alive — and copied to the Klaserie Reserve, the Timbavati Reserve, SANParks, Kruger2Canyons and the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area — attorney Richard Summers alleged that Soleil had transgressed NEMA and committed a criminal offence. Given that it was now more than 14 months since the appeal had been lodged, Summers demanded that LEDET, “as the competent authority charged with administering compliance,” investigate the case.

When nothing happened, Wilmot took a bash at raising the interest of some of the other public institutions in South Africa that are mandated with the investi-

gation and prosecution of environmental crimes. In late December 2020 and early January 2021, after unsuccessfully reporting Soleil’s alleged transgressions to the National Environmental Crimes and Incidents Hotline, she lodged various complaints with the Environmental Management Inspectorate, otherwise known as the Green Scorpions, which were all met with disturbing silence. Her next port of call was the South African Police Service, which, as per section 31 of NEMA, has the same powers as the Green Scorpions — but again, crickets.

Meanwhile, the surveillance of Soleil’s activities continued. On 15 December 2020, Bruce McDonald, a fixed-wing pilot who was working on behalf of anti-rhino poaching services in the area, buzzed the property. McDonald was able to capture images of the extensive land clearing that had been taking place. In mid-February 2021, working off these images, Summers tried his own luck with the Green Scorpions, to no avail. A few days later, Wilmot herself was taking pictures from a light aircraft — the photographs, when collated with those from Wilmot’s second flight in April 2021, appeared to show breach of environmental legislation on a large scale.

Soil preparation was at an advanced stage, blue PVC irrigation piping was visible on the ground and an excavator was clearing vegetation in the property’s southwestern corner, an area demarcated as a “no-go zone” by the environmental authorisation of August 2019.

By this late date, Wilmot and Summers were acutely aware that MEC Mokone — in fulfilment of Soleil’s prophecy — had denied the appeal. The problem was, in the two-page decision of 24 March 2021, which had been rendered a full 18 months after the original submission, only the appeals of Klaserie Reserve and Masungulo Lodge were addressed. Neither Timbavati Reserve nor Elephants Alive,

Cont. on page 7 ...



A compactor flattens the road on Casketts property.

Photo: Supplied

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A battle of the ages on the Klaserie River

Cont. from page 6 ...

Neither Timbavati Reserve nor Elephants Alive, nor any of the other conservation heavyweights involved in the matter, had received word of Mokone's decision.

Also, the appeal decision had imposed one further condition on Soleil — that they “erect an elephant proof fence around the property, in order to enhance the safety of freely roaming elephants and other damage causing animals.”

According to Wilmot, the images from the flyover of April 2021 showed that no such fence had been erected.

Like the conservationists, Soleil Citrus had been heavily lawyered up from the start. Although *Daily Maverick* could not obtain the financial statements, it was obvious from the website that the company could afford to go toe-to-toe with the NGOs and game parks on every accusation — with 370 permanent employees, 500 seasonal employees and thousands of hectares under cultivation on 11 farms in multiple provinces, Soleil's founder, Kobus van Staden, was clearly a man who was not fond of losing.

In a letter to Elephants Alive dated 10 September 2020, Soleil's attorney, Leon Doyer of WdT Inc, noted that it had been more than a year since the conservationists had lodged their appeals. Referring to the National Appeal Regulations, Doyer pointed out that decisions on appeals were supposed to be a “speedy process,” allowing the authorities no more than 50 days from receipt of the responding statement.

“You are in charge of the current appeal,” Doyer insisted, in the correspon-

dence with Elephants Alive.

“Our client cannot verify that all the correct steps were taken to lodge the appeal timeously and procedurally correctly. It is obvious by now that [LEDET] either has taken the view that it is not obliged to even consider the appeal (due to some or other mistake in the process) or does not intend to do so.”

Accordingly, continued Doyer, “[our] client intends to proceed to act on the authorisation and commence with the development of the property for citrus farming.”

Six weeks later, however, after being informed that the appeal decision was expected on 27 November 2020 — and less than a week after Summers had requested Mokone to “investigate” the alleged criminal breach of NEMA — Doyer informed Summers, Mokone and LEDET that his client would “await the MEC's final decision and then react accordingly.”

In light of the fact that a decision on just two of the 15 appeals was handed down on 24 March 2021, and given the ongoing “proof of development” that the appellants had gathered in the interim, *Daily Maverick* wanted to know from Van Staden whether he could provide a reasonable explanation for the contradiction.

Van Staden chose not to engage with this question, opting instead to refer *Daily Maverick* to the court papers, so that we could “remain fully informed of proceedings.”

If nothing else, these papers, like Doyer's legal correspondence, had been consistent in their framing of Soleil's counter-arguments. Where the conservationists would point out that the



Caterpillar earth-moving machinery on Casketts Citrus property.

Photo: Supplied

property had lain fallow for a decade and thus retrieved its natural ecological state, Soleil would argue that it was registered farmland, which hadn't been pristine bushveld since 1967. Where the conservationists would contend that Soleil had breached their environmental authorisation by extending and deepening the dam, Soleil would counter that they “were not developing the dam wall,” but “repairing the wall that already existed.” Where the conservationists would insist that there was still no elephant-proof fence, Soleil would maintain that “the fences currently in place” were “more than adequate deterrence against elephants.”

The dispute over water rights was another matter entirely, one that Soleil — with apparent justification — claimed to have settled to the satisfaction of the authorities.

Here, *Daily Maverick* wanted to know, since Van Staden had co-signed the initial responding letter to the appeals with a certain Jurie Jansen van Vuuren, chair of the Klaserie Irrigation Board, whether

he refuted the contention of the appellants that this represented a conflict of interest.

Again, Van Staden chose not to engage.

As for the office of the MEC, the 18-month delay on the appeal decision was explained by “the involvement of multiple parties, the complexity of the matter as well as the lock down,” with the MEC extending his “regrets and apologies” via LEDET head of department Solly Kgoopong. *Daily Maverick* was further informed that decisions had now been made on “all appeals,” although no explanation was offered — other than the fact that the matter was pending before the Polokwane High Court — for why the MEC had not investigated Soleil's apparent breach of section 43 of NEMA.

As it happened, the “pending matter” was the judicial review that the Klaserie Reserve, the Timbavati Reserve and Elephants Alive had launched against Soleil's original environmental authorisation, with the MEC and LEDET listed as co-respondents. But on 14 May

2021, aware that they were losing ground with each passing day, these same applicants had approached the court for an urgent interdict, hoping to stop Soleil from “further clearing the land, installing irrigation systems, planting citrus saplings and erecting fences” until the decision on the review had been handed down.

On 8 June 2021, the interdict was denied — Judge Veronica Semanya, who had just one day to rule on the hundreds of pages in the court record, chose to set aside the ecological arguments and focus on the ineptitude of the authorities.

The applicants had been aware for some time that they “weren't being assisted,” she noted in her ruling, “so why was the application only launched now?”

Still, in the face of what was looking more and more like a Kafka novel, the conservationists weren't about to give up. The review application had been drawn up to go at the heart of the fight, where the ultimate arbiter would hopefully be NEMA itself. Among the reasons for challenging the envi-

ronmental authorisation was its failure to consider key policy documents — including the Kruger National Park Management Plan, the National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy and the Convention on Biological Diversity — and the allegation, argued at length with reference to NEMA, that it did not adequately assess “the cumulative impact on water resources.”

The review, when it happens, will see the Klaserie Reserve, the Timbavati Reserve and Elephants Alive up against Soleil Citrus for what is likely to be the last time. With SANParks and the rest of the “interested and affected parties” watching closely, the outcome won't be limited to the region around Hoedspruit. As Deon Huysamer, the chairman of the Klaserie Reserve, told *Daily Maverick*, “it will set a very dangerous precedent if we allow the development to continue unchallenged.”

Just like Carsons in *Silent Spring*, it appeared, Huysamer was considering the knock-on effects for the entire nation's natural heritage.

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The countdown to the Safari Guide of Year event begins

David Batzofin

With Safari Guide of the Year taking place in the latter part of June, the winner of this prestigious event will not be known in time for this edition. However, editor David Batzofin got to chat with the finalists about their nomination and their involvement in the 10th anniversary Safari Guide of the Year event.

Togara Charingira: TJ, a guide at Royal Madikwe Safari Lodge, has been guiding for 10 years. He trained with various people and training providers, namely Nightjar, Lowveld Trails Company, African Bush Company, Beat about the Bush, and Cameron Pearce.

"FGASA has been an amazing journey of learning, gaining valuable training and qualifications. It has changed my life. The best thing about being a guide is sharing my knowledge with my guests. I am a people person who enjoys spending time with my guests and I have a love for track and sign".



Mike Medlinger

Mike Medlinger is a guide at More Family Collection and has been guiding for 16 years.

"FGASA has offered a platform within which to enroll and improve me, not just within one specific field but in all aspects of the natural world. Having progressed through Apprentice and Field Guide, Trails Guide, and on to the level of Professional Guide alongside the merit badges that are SKS Birds, National Bird Specialist, and SKS Astronomy, FGASA has allowed me to continually better myself throughout my career. The best thing about being a guide, wow, this is both a tough question and an easy one. There are many aspects to being a guide that are fantastic; the exciting lifestyle, the beautiful dawns, and sunsets, the jovial atmosphere around the campfire to name but a few. For me, the best thing about being a guide is being able to form and share moments with your guests. What do I mean by moments? Moments are memories in time that both you and certainly they will never forget, it could be a breath of the wind through the grass while sitting silently with elephants or the cough of a leopard with a pre-dawn coffee. It can be the first lazy lion sighting while on honeymoon, or the final sundowner on the last "big trip" with grandparents. Each safari is punctuated by many many moments making those few days spent in the bush seem both swift and yet, at the same time, incredibly slow. The ability and privilege to help create memories and moments that will last a lifetime. That is the wonder of being a guide".

Shaun D'Araujo is a guide at Londolozi, started out as an apprentice guide and student 16 years ago in the Sabi Sands but has been actively guiding full time for the past seven years. Shaun completed a Diploma in Nature Guiding through Damelin and EcoTraining in 2007 and completed the Londolozi guide training course in 2015.

"For me personally, the best thing about being a guide is to be able to live in wilderness areas, among wildlife every day and to be able to share this with people who travel from afar to experience it themselves. In the process of attaining my Specialist Field Guide and Trails Guide qualifications, FGASA has helped me gain knowledge about what is most important to me. FGASA has helped me improve myself as a guide, by helping me to set tangible goals. Achieving these qualifications is challenging and rewarding and inspires me to do more. I feel that my greatest personal strength is empathy and the ability to try and understand people beyond a surface level."



Togara Charingira

Safari Guide of the Year 2021, Finalist Wayne Howarth.

Wayne Howarth is a guide at Kariega Game Reserve and has been guiding for 11 years.

"FGASA has helped me and my guiding become more professional, they set a high standard for field guides to follow which is great, being selected for SGOTY has been a great achievement for me which has been made possible by FGASA. Being in the bush on a game drive and being able to give your guests a once in a lifetime experience, it can be extremely rewarding to get feedback from these guests on how much of a life-changing experience it was for them."



Wayne Howarth



Shaun D'Araujo

Civilized Ngwenya is a guide at Tanda Tula, has been guiding for 12 years.

"I believe I can make people feel comfortable and safe around me. Respect and willing to help where help is needed. Through FGASA I have achieved FGASA Field Guide and Trails Guide Qualification. This has inspired me to learn and keep growing in the field of guiding. It played an important role in me having a long-term career and encouraged me to help others who want to grow as Field Guides and Trackers who want to become guides. Being a guide is doing something that I like and have passionate about for a living. Willing to share knowledge and experience with the others".



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Although both large and imposing, the lodge, due to its setting within the surrounding landscape manages to be welcoming at the same time.

After a 3 hour drive from Johannesburg, the waiting drinks were exactly what was required to remove the dust from throats as the ubiquitous indemnity forms were filled out.

The vista that awaits arriving guests is truly sublime, the magnificent Waterberg mountain range stretching as far as the eye can see.

Turning away from the mountain, if you can, you get to see the main lodge building laid out in front of you. An incredible sight not viewed from the car park and one that will have arriving visitors gasping in amazement.

Sitting in the garden or on the deck is a great spot to enjoy a meal, a beverage or just to sit and absorb the

surrounding beauty.

Who needs to go on a game drive when the wild-life comes to you? The free-roaming Bushbuck will freeze mid-chew to see who you are and, of course, the inevitable troop of Vervet monkeys that have to be carefully watched lest they steal food from your plate.

The waterhole in front of the lodge can also produce some interesting sightings without guests having to leave the comfort of their chairs.

The main building is split into three distinct areas with the reception and curio shop being found in the center, while the lounge to the right and dining room to the left provide comfort and style as befitting their

stated purpose.

If the weather is accommodating, then all the meals, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, can be enjoyed outdoors.

Not to mention a high tea that is served just before the afternoon game drive. There is Wi-Fi available, which can be both a blessing and a curse depending on your point of view.

The accommodation, in the form of luxury tents, is well hidden amongst thick foliage and they all enjoy a view of the imposing Waterberg Mountains. Although are several tents along the same path they are separated by dense vegetation, and as a result are all very private.

All the tents are the same,

except for two which have recently had a second bedroom/bathroom built on. The main bedroom is very spacious, with a bathroom on the left and a deck out front so that guests can enjoy a view...of the mountain.

In the second bedroom of the family accommodation, there are comfortable bunk beds for the children as well as an en-suite shower and a toilet for their own use. The lodge is child-friendly and they have a dedicated staff member to entertain the youngsters.

An interesting feature is the beaded wire curtain separates the bathroom from the bedroom, not so much for privacy as a design feature.

With both a bath as well

as an indoor and outdoor shower, guests are spoiled for choice.

There is a dressing area behind the wall at the head of the bed. This has two hand basins as well as shelves and hanging space, for those who wish to unpack. If you want to make a visit here special, time your stay to coincide with a full moon. Being in the bush, listening to the hyena "whoop" and the lion's vocalization can be an evening that will remain memorable for a long time.

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Spectacular mountain views from the front lawn at Marataba Safari Lodge

Photo's: David Batzofin



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Sophia's delicious date & coffee balls recipe



Date and coffee balls

Makes about 20

Ingredients

- 6 cardamom pods
- 115 g salted butter, cubed
- 100 g sugar
- 2 tsp instant coffee granules
- 250 g dates, pips removed and chopped
- 200 g Marie biscuits, broken into small pieces
- 5 ml orange blossom water
- 100 g diced almonds, dry roasted and cooled

Method

Remove the seeds from the cardamom pods and toast in a dry pan. They puff up slightly. Remove from the heat and allow to cool. When they have cooled, place them in a mortar and pestle and grind to a powder. Place the butter and sugar in a pot and warm over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved. Add the coffee granules and stir until dissolved. Now add the dates and cook until the dates have disintegrated, stirring occasionally. Add the biscuits, orange blossom water and the cardamom and mix well.

Using a tablespoon measure for size, form balls and roll those in the diced almonds. Repeat to finish the mixture.

Store in an airtight container.



A farm girl by birth, and city girl by marriage, SOPHIA LINDOP was raised in Douglas in the Northern Cape, the daughter of a father of Lebanese descent and an Afrikaans-speaking mother from Cape Town, the combination of these two cultures nurturing in her from a young age an abiding love for food, for cooking, for her diverse heritage. Learning from the dinner tables and menus of her mother, grandmother, and aunts, she was encouraged to observe, explore, taste and experiment. Finally, having studied food and wine for six years, Sophia insists that her formal training provided only the words for a melody playing in her heart since childhood. Although she has followed many different paths, the kitchen has always been her home. Sophia conducts regular cooking classes from her home kitchen, as well as delectable food tours to Lebanon, the heartland of her forefathers, whilst continuing to experiment with innovative ideas for future cookbooks. Visit www.sophialindop.com for more...

Starry starry night - Constellation of the month - Argo Navis

Ben Coley

Carina, the Keel, Puppis, the Stern & Vela, the Sail

Canopus is the brightest star in Carina and the 2nd brightest star in the Sky. Bushmen knew it as the Ants' Egg Star as its visibility coincided with an abundance of this food source.

History & Mythology

The Argo Navis represents the ship piloted by Jason of the Argonauts during his quest for the Golden Fleece. Jason's father, the king, was killed by his brother Pelias and the young Jason was sent to the wise Centaur, Chiron (represented by last month's constellation, Centaurus). Here Jason was educated and raised until it was time for him to reclaim his throne.

However, Pelias would let it go without a price and set Jason the task of capturing the Golden Fleece, the pelt of a winged, golden-haired ram.

To help, Jason was gifted a ship from Athene which was constructed from Zeus's sacred oak tree and housed 50 oars that were manned by 50 Greek heroes, including Castor, Pollux, Orpheus, and Hercules. During this epic journey, the great heroes encountered many obstacles including the Sirens, beautiful women that lured sailors to the rocks with their song before their ships were dashed, the 6-headed sea monster, Scylla, and Charybdis, a deadly whirlpool!

The constellation was huge and dominated the southern sky, but in 1763, Nicolas De La Caille split it

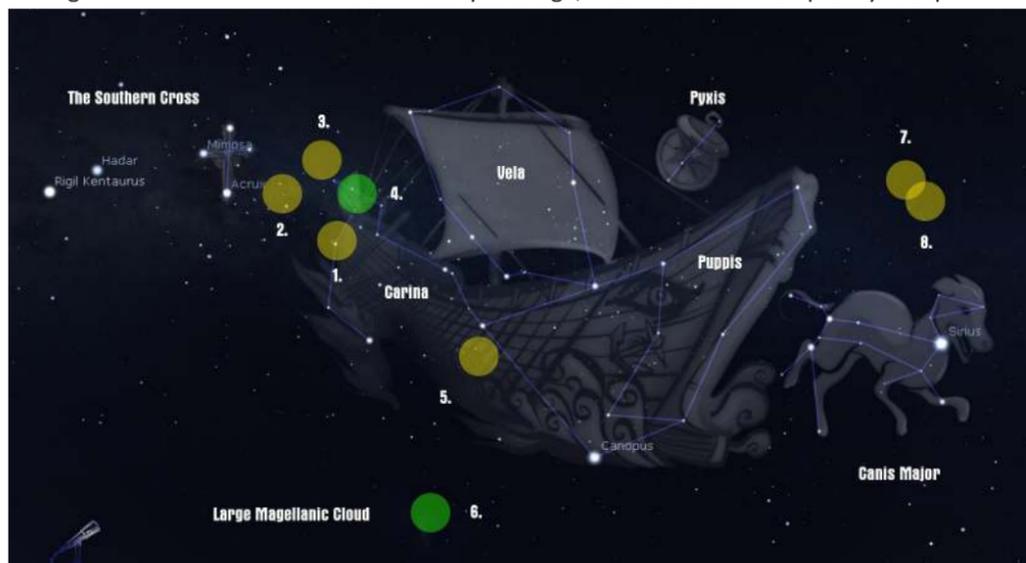
up into 3 parts, Carina (The Keel), Puppis (The Stern) and Vela (The Sail). All 3 constellations are hard to visualize but the area is rich in Deep Sky Objects thanks to the Milky Way running through it.

Notable Stars

Eta Carina (Carina) One of the brightest known stars but seems dim due to its distance of 7,500 light-years. It is 4 million times brighter than the Sun. About 150 years ago, Eta

Carina was the 2nd brightest star in the sky thanks to the 'Great Eruption' – a massive explosion caused by a merger of 2 stars. The debris created began to obscure the star and within a few years, the star completely disap-

peared from view. It is now visible to the naked eye at a magnitude of around 6. Eta Carina is approaching the end of its life and is expected to go Supernova in the relatively near future.



"In the Wishing Well Cluster (Caldwell 91), the 150 stars are said to resemble coins sparkling at the bottom of a wishing well. The 1st object ever viewed by the Hubble Space Telescope".

Carina, the Keel, Puppis, the Stern & Vela, the Sail



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Tintswalo Hospital CEO Extraordinaire leads by example

Annie Hartley

It's a sweltering Saturday morning in the Lowveld, and Tintswalo Hospital, a pillar of the surrounding rural community in the Bushbuckridge sub-district of Mpumalanga, is bustling with activity.

All the patients joining the queue snaking along the dirt road, barely notice a 55-year-old woman in her sweats and a plastic apron, painting the walls of the casualty unit. Out of her usual business suit, even the staff don't recognize her as the remarkable and dedicated CEO of the hospital, Ms. Merriam Moyimane.

Volunteering her time over the weekends to assist a team from the Tshemba foundation to transform the hospital one stroke of paint at a time.

Ms. Moyimane, born in Tintswalo's closest referral

hospital, Mapulaneng, is the oldest of 7 children and raised by her late grandmother, a strong role model in her life whose caring influence Merriam summarises as "we were poor, but never went to bed hungry".

Evidence of her hard work and determination can be dated back to her school record, receiving various best student awards before graduating from the Gazankulu nursing school as a professional nurse. "Tintswalo hospital is not just a workplace for me", says Ms. Moyimane. "My heart is here".

Indeed, since graduating, she has not looked back, dedicating her life to improving the quality of care to the many patients that seek help at Tintswalo.

Merriam is a strong believer in continuous development, "Everything and everyone has the potential

to improve" she says matter-of-factly. "We are never done getting better". She walks the talk too, getting several diplomas and majoring in Nursing Administration & Education as well as earning a master's degree in public health from the University of Limpopo. And she is not done yet. Setting her sights on a Ph.D., funding permitting.

With all this experience, her trajectory to success was guaranteed, and she was officially appointed as the Tintswalo CEO in May 2018. Ms. Moyimane says "I accepted the position because I love my community. I grew up in the hospital as a junior nurse and feel that it is part of my own history."

This position is not for the faint-hearted. The challenges of resource-limited healthcare are enormous and politically fraught with many sleepless nights to

ensure ethical management decisions in an environment that is often plagued by corruption.

Merriam has navigated her path with aplomb, producing a squeaky clean audit report in 2019 and all the while getting down and dirty with the painters and spending entire weekends covering during strike action, working in the kitchen to ensure the patients were kept fed.

Ms. Moyimane sees the potential of Tintswalo as a Centre of Excellence in rural medicine. She interrupts her own sentence to assert "It is not some pipe-dream - We just need support to improve our infrastructure and staffing". She adds "I am confident for the future."

"It is not some pipe-dream. We just need support to improve our infrastructure and staffing"



Miriam Moyimane

More information and opportunities to contribute to the casualty renovation project can be accessed here: <https://ruralmedicine.wixsite.com/tintswalo>

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ELEVATE YOUR OWN PREPAREDNESS : TIPS FROM VICTOR SWAN

1. Will your weapon be ready in your hand within seconds if necessary?
2. Do you draw your curtains at dusk? (Are they thick enough?)
3. Do you keep all outside doors locked?
4. Do you keep your car doors locked while driving, no matter how short the trip is?
5. Do you check your house before dark to see if all is well?
6. Do you pay any attention to your dogs when they bark and do you leave the house when they bark at night? (Not a good idea to go out alone. Call Town Watch to assist)
7. Is the whole family alert, prepared and trained how to react in an emergency?
8. Could someone in the house administer first aid and CPR, if required?
9. Do you check your alarm and communication system on a regular basis?
10. When arriving home, does the whole family get out of the car or does one person first get out to check if everything is safe?

These are just some of the questions that families should be asking in order to maintain an acceptable level of preparedness.

If you have any questions, or if you would like to join the Hoedspruit Town Watch, contact Marie Helm on 0826832835. Swan said that the recent burglaries in town had been a wakeup call and that all the residents need to make certain that they get involved and join the Hoedspruit Town Watch to prevent the levels of crime from increasing in our beautiful little town.

E-Mail: hoedspruitdorpswag@gmail.com
Chairperson: Victor Swan 082 338 4198

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KEEP CALM & WASH YOUR HANDS

Wildlife Photography ... Choosing a lens



Up close and personal

David Batzofin

David Batzofin Photography

“People are taking more pictures now than ever before, billions of them, but there are no slides, no prints. Just data. Electronic dust. Years from now when they dig us up there won’t be any pictures to find, no record of who we were or how we lived”, Ed Harris in the movie Kodachrome.

In this article, I would like to focus (pun intended) on lenses that are relatively affordable for field guides and that will be able to be utilized under various conditions.

As a guide, it will depend on the lodge policy when it comes to camera equipment allowed on game drives. For this reason, many guides usually have a 70-300mm, f/5.6 as their minimum requirement.

Personally, my go-to lens is a Sigma 50-500mm f/5.6 that is ideal for both land-

scapes as well as close-up wildlife images. Because of the high f/stop, the lens is not ideal for low light or late-night images. However, with the correct spotlighting techniques, it does perform adequately.

If your specialty is birds, then it is time to go large or go home. Depending on space, I would suggest a 500mm, F/5.6mm, or perhaps even a 600mm. That being said, these lenses can be cumbersome and will not give you the range that a zoom or smaller prime lens offers. Should you find yourself in a situation where you have the incorrect lens for the image that you are trying to capture, then think outside the box and photograph parts rather than the whole.

There is an adage that says: “How do you eat an elephant? One piece at a time!” And it is the same with photography.

In addition to the zoom lens that is a necessity, I tend to keep a 15-30mm, f/2.8 in my bag for those wide landscape shots or to capture sunrises and sunsets. Because of the fast f/stop, it performs better under low light conditions.

The lower the f/stop number, the faster the lens. F/2.8 would, therefore, be faster than an f/5.6 and the former can offer faster shutter speeds.

Macro lenses, like a 100mm, f/2.8 can be useful if you are interested in insects or plants. With a macro lens, you can fill your frame with minute details, but you will need a tripod or a very steady hand. They are not great for wildlife photography as they focus slowly and are not designed for general game images.

The best option if the price is an issue is certainly a zoom lens as it gives you more flexibility when com-

posing your images and it also means that you do not have to change lenses. You are therefore able to act swiftly to capture a fleeting moment that might otherwise be lost while changing lenses.

Top Tip. Spend money on good lenses. They will be with you for much longer than your chosen brand of camera body where the technology changes on an almost annual basis. Don’t worry about using generic lenses. Modern lenses are manufactured to very high specifications and perform just as well as their branded counterparts.

“The Holy Grail of wildlife lenses is without a doubt a 400mm, f/2.8 but that comes at a huge price, and, if you are flying, you will probably need to purchase a seat for the lens given its size”.



A ‘Water Fund’ initiative for catchment management

Nicholas Theron

One of the key programs managed by the K2C Biosphere team focuses on protecting and improving the management of catchment areas. Our mountains and rivers are the source of our water. This underpins the local economy regardless of who you are and in what sector you may work. It therefore makes sense that these areas should be a priority for conservation action.

Historically, the focus has been on alien invasive plant clearing, but over the past few years this has also shifted to the use of fire to protect, safeguard and enhance the restoration effort. This type of work is also labour intensive, and is thus an important potential employment driver.

Over time Government programs such as ‘Working for Water’ have largely funded this type of work, but there is an increased

focus on exploring models to sustainably finance these initiatives because this is something that impacts on us all!

In this regard K2C, with key partners such as the Kruger National Park and Conservation South Africa, are ‘The Water Fund’ model, and developed by the Nature Conservancy, this model has been identified as a framework to sustainably achieve these initiatives.

‘Water Funds’ have proved successful throughout the world with the Cape Town Water Fund the most well known local example. The aim of this fund would be to galvanize partnerships, to drive processes into the future that aim to protect and better manage catchment areas. This then will support a resilient and thriving local economy, especially in the face of climate change.

The success of this initiative relies on the support of a diverse range of partners and stakeholders from dif-

ferent sectors, but luckily the greater Hoedspruit area can boast that these are in abundance!

If you would like to find out more please feel free to contact us at: nicktheron@kruger2canyons.org or wehncke@kruger2canyons.org



Our beautiful biosphere landscape



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