



KRUGER2CANYON

NEWS

February 2025

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

The Cost of 'Progress': Hoedspruit's Struggle with Urban Development without Infrastructure Improvement



Magnificent view of the Drakensberg Mountains, iconic scenery towering above Hoedspruit

Image: Canva

Mark Bishop

Hoedspruit's rapid growth has the potential to benefit the town and its surrounding communities. However, without addressing the underlying issues of infrastructure and social services, this growth could quickly become a burden rather than a blessing.

Hoedspruit, a once tranquil small town, has long been known for its proximity to some of South Africa's most cherished natural wonders: the Kruger National Park and the Blyde River Canyon, and is known as the safari hub of South Africa. In recent years, however, the town has experienced a wave of rapid urbanization, heralded by a new hospital, new housing developments, a potential mall, and a growing number of businesses that have sprouted along the town's once tranquil roads. The allure of living in a town that blends rural charm with urban convenience is absolute.

The promise of progress seems undeniable: new homes, jobs, and infrastructure that could transform Hoedspruit into a regional hub of economic activity. But as the town grows, its residents have long realized that the infrastructure needed to sustain this growth is sadly lagging far behind. Beneath the glitzy new façades, there's a growing concern that the town's rapid expansion is being pursued at the expense of its most basic and essential services—water and sewage infrastructure, with the resultant serious consequences for the town's social and economic fabric.

The question must be asked: can a town really be considered developed if it lacks the foundational infrastructure that ensures the health and well-being of its residents? In Hoedspruit, the answer has to be a resounding 'No'. As the town grows, the pressure on its already struggling water and sewage systems has reached a tipping point. The town's existing systems were designed to serve a much smaller popu-

lation and are struggling to cope with the demands of the expanding community. Water shortages, inconsistent supply, and sewage overflow are becoming more frequent, and without urgent intervention, this 'progress' may well be more of a setback. It may even spiral into a public health crisis if left unaddressed.

As the population of the town itself increases, these critical infrastructural aspects have quite clearly failed to keep pace. The most troubling aspect of this crisis is the apparent lack of coordinated planning between the municipal authorities and private developers. While new residential units, retail outlets and potentially a shopping mall spring up with impressive speed, the same urgency has not been applied to improving the underlying infrastructure that these developments depend on.

In Hoedspruit, however, development seems to be occurring in isolation, with scant regard for the strain these new developments are placing on already over-

burdened systems.

This mismatch between growth and infrastructure is causing a host of issues that are beginning to affect the quality of life for all of Hoedspruit's residents. The rise of informal settlements, potential crime, traffic congestion, and social strain serve as the most immediate signs of distress. So, are we truly prepared for the unintended consequences of this growth, especially when the town's municipal commitment to infrastructure, services, and policing capacity are struggling to keep up?

Informal Settlements and Shacks: The Invisible Impact of Growth

While Hoedspruit's housing market is expanding outward to accommodate newcomers, many individuals and families find themselves priced out of these developments.

cont. on page 4

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From the Editors desk

Can you believe that we are about to turn the tide and move very steadily towards winter! Already!

This last month came with tragedy – we all know what I am talking about. The participation in the ‘Glow Walk’ in remembrance of those lost in that tragic accident on the R40 was amazing, as the town pulled together in support. Kruger2Canyon News was the first media outlet to run a report on social media. Our thoughts and prayers are with all the families mourning their loved ones.

On a happier note – March is already upon us! This is the month we celebrate all the amazing women in our lives with International Woman’s Day on the 8th March. Celebrate with appreciation and joy – without them we would be lost, and the world would be that much a poorer place. Happy Woman’s Day to all the women out there.

Here are some interesting quirks about March: March has two birthstones – aquamarine and the bloodstone. It is named after Mars, the Roman god of war, and was in fact the first month of the Roman calendar. The first tweet on Twitter was made on the 21st March 2006 – how time flies.

And of course, we have the March equinox on the 20th, when we well and truly begin the journey into winter. This means that the Earth is perpendicular to the sun, with the sun shines in a straight line to the equator, so the days and nights on both the north and south poles are exactly the same.

Our continued problems with infrastructure in the town are ongoing issues and is brought to light in our lead article this month.

Love The Hoed® Titbits

Kampersrus cameras

Great news from Farmwatch that there are now cameras in Kampersrus – this extends our net of security which is so integral in our community. This is a community funded project. Thanks must go out to AM Tech and Herotel for their invaluable input. Thorough training has been done, and monitoring is well underway, with some significant successes already! Well done to Farmwatch and all those involved – keep up the good work. You can participate in the project my WhatsApp’ing Marie on 084 0459 236.

Phalaborwa SPCA

Phalaborwa SPCA lost a bakkie in an accident – courtesy of a pothole! They are urgently looking for a bakkie to continue

their good work. Any help would be welcome. They can be contacted on 015 781 2415.

Load shedding

And for some inexplicable reason, load shedding has raised its ugly head again. Just when we all thought that the government had got something right, we get thrown back into the dark! Some analysts state that we have been lucky over the past year in escaping the loadshedding ‘pandemic’, but the resurrection of this plague seems to be as a result of Eskom treading close to the line – a stumble and you’re back into loadshedding.

Communication from Eskom is poor – “there will be stage 3 loadshedding” – with no indication as to what might be the problem. The energy plants are old and they really have been pushed to their limits. At the time of going to print we have moved to stage 6 (!) and Eskom does not really know what is wrong! Light the candles.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter to ask when, if at all, will the Mall be built. I find that there has been less than transparent communication in this regard. There are so many stories floating around town about what will, what will not, what might, what might not, be the current situation in this regard. We hear that finance has been cancelled, investors have bailed, and another one is that the main business, being Checkers, has reversed their intentions of being the key lessee. Please can you investigate this and shed some light on what’s happening.

Apart from an ugly mess and the decimation of the flora on site, nothing much has happened in a very long time.

I look forward to reading the result of some investigation.

Thank you for your paper, it is my months highlight, as I am retired and not on the web, and it really is the only publication worth reading in these parts.

Regards Mike

Editor: Thanks for the letter, Mike – and of course the compliment. Unfortunately, I received your letter the day before we went to print, and so there was little to no time to investigate. I will reach out to the party concerned (as per my last interaction some time ago) and see if there is any news about the mall that I can pass on, and maybe shed some light as to the progress.

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Hoedspruit Private Hospital, Medical Centre North

Ruggedwear® opens its doors at Korongo Centre

In a quest to bring quality and comfort closer to their market, Ruggedwear® opened its iconic store at Korongo Centre in late December 2024. Customers are invited to visit the new store to experience why Ruggedwear® has become Africa's favourite bush wear and uniform solution.

After much consideration and a demand from customers, it was an easy decision to bring the real and original Ruggedwear® experience to their most loyal market.

But who is Ruggedwear®?

This company is a proudly South African manufacturer of uniform solutions and outdoor clothing of the highest quality, ONLY employing South Africans in a quest to make a real difference through employment and development of valuable skills. The company is based in Nelspruit, literally on the doorstep of the

world-renowned Kruger Park. They have five manufacturing sites and a fabric warehouse in KwaZulu Natal.

Their clothing is worn in the toughest environments and yet still looks good and provides comfort to the wearer. The Lowveld was the perfect 'breeding' ground for their clothing, because it is worn by people working and playing in the outdoors and the bushveld of Limpopo and Mpumalanga. As a result, the clothing 'passed the test' in the Lowveld, and so was clearly suitable anywhere in Africa, or elsewhere in the world with similar conditions!

Hoedspruit calls

Ruggedwear® is now proudly represented in Hoedspruit, bringing their quality range closer to its market. Their customers expect quality fabrics, workmanship and exceptional service. In fact, Ruggedwear® demands it. At Ruggedwear®, they are proud to fully guarantee the

workmanship on all their garments. Using only the best quality fabric, threads, zips, buttons and other trims, they are confident that their garments will stand up to the tough environments in which they were meant to be worn. The Ruggedwear® guarantee is subject to prescribed laundry care and normal wear and tear.

Local involvement

Ruggedwear's® involvement in the local communities is integral in the very essence of their being. The brand is proud to be the apparel retail partner to FGASA (Field Guides Association of southern Africa) and a very proud sponsor of Safari Guide of the Year since 2021. WildEarth presenters have also chosen to only wear Ruggedwear® as they present on the world's largest safari experience. Ruggedwear® has literally become the "uniform of choice"!

The complete Ruggedwear® range,

with a variety of new styles and fabrics, is complimented by a quality corporate wear range and a selection of affordable but quality workwear. Abundant stock levels supported by a substantial inventory in Nelspruit, reduce lead times to our market, should stock not be available in store.

Fastest growing

Ruggedwear® can confidently state that they are the fastest growing outdoor brand in southern Africa. A premier, but still affordable clothing range to complement one's staff and customers in style, comfort, and durability. Superior quality is a non-negotiable in the Ruggedwear® world.

The invitation is to come and experience the feel of the Ruggedwear® adventure. Visit them at 1 Korongo Centre, Zandspruit Boulevard, Hoedspruit, and come prepared to be amazed.

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The Cost of 'Progress': Hoedspruit's Struggle with Urban Development without Infrastructure Improvement

Cont. from page 1

For those who already reside in surrounding villages, the hope of moving closer to Hoedspruit's economic opportunities is restricted and often leads to the construction of makeshift homes, or shacks, both inside and on the outskirts of the town, mere yards from affluent dwellings. The rise of these informal settlements is an inevitable consequence of urbanization when proper planning fails to address the problem.

Although these shacks are not part of the official housing plan, their rapid expansion places an immense strain on the town's infrastructure. These informal settlements lack access to basic services like water, sanitation, and electricity. With the local water and sewage systems already overburdened, the residents of these makeshift communities face unsanitary living conditions that can lead to disease outbreaks, environmental contamination, and a growing sense of disenfranchisement. These areas quickly become hotspots for social instability, as residents, many of whom are frustrated by the lack of opportunity and basic services, feel increasingly disconnected from the formal economy.

Rising Crime and Social Friction

The economic pressures of living in informal settlements, combined with the lack of access to adequate services and job opportunities, inevitably lead to a rise in crime and social unrest. In the absence of formal housing, law enforcement, or social support systems, drug trade and abuse, petty crime, theft, and vandalism will become more prevalent in the informal areas and surrounding neighbourhoods. With the town's police force stretched thin by the demands of an expanding population, it becomes difficult to keep up with these rising criminal activities, despite the fact that Farmwatch seemingly is the basic strength of the town's security. There is only so much that the volunteer organisation can do, albeit that what they do, they do very well. As it stands currently without them, Hoedspruit would be in serious trouble.

Moreover, the strained relationship between residents in informal settlements and those living in developed areas fuels social tension. With the perception that new businesses and housing developments cater primarily to the wealthier

population, there is potentially a growing sense of resentment from those who feel left out of the benefits of progress. As this divide deepens, social cohesion falters, and the town becomes a battleground for scarce resources.

Traffic Congestion

With the arrival of new residents, businesses and retail outlets, Hoedspruit has already witnessed a significant increase in traffic, further exacerbating an already fragile infrastructure. The town's road system, built for a smaller, quieter population, is ill-equipped to handle the increasing number of vehicles on its streets. As more residents and commuters from surrounding areas flock to Hoedspruit for holidays, retirement, work, shopping, and services, traffic congestion has become a daily headache in comparison of what it was a mere four years ago. During peak hours, roads become congested, creating possible delays, increased pollution, road rage, and a general sense of frustration among residents.

The Environmental Impact

One should not be leaving the environmental impact at the back of the 'concerned' queue. The lack of proper sewage management has far-reaching consequences for the local environment. Hoedspruit, being so close to nature reserves and wildlife areas, faces the constant risk of contamination of nearby rivers and water sources, which provide

for both human and animal populations. Reports of raw sewage overflowing into drainage lines, dams and possibly rivers, has sounded the alarm bells. Such pollution endangers the already fragile ecosystems of the area, threatening wildlife and agricultural productivity, and complicating the region's already strained water supply.

The Effect on Tourism

The economic benefits of tourism, which are essential to Hoedspruit's livelihood, could also be jeopardized. Tourists flock to the area for its pristine natural beauty and the opportunity to see wildlife in their natural habitat. But as the town's infrastructure continues to fail, so too does the town's reputation as a tourist destination. Clean, accessible water and properly managed sewage systems are not just a matter of convenience; they are a matter of survival for a community so closely tied to the land and its natural resources.

How Do We Handle Hoedspruit's Growing Pains?

The pressing issue of infrastructure cannot be ignored. While Hoedspruit's growth is inevitable, it must be managed in a way that accounts for all facets of urban life - not just the new businesses, retail centres, malls or residential developments. To prevent further social division, crime, and infrastructural collapse, the town needs to adopt a more integrated and sustainable approach to its growth.

First and foremost, the expansion of essential services must be prioritized as a matter of urgency. This includes upgrading water and sewage systems to accommodate the increased demand, as well as improving the town's roads. Development must be holistic: as new developments rise, they must be matched with corresponding infrastructure investments, ensuring that basic services like water, sanitation, and waste management are not overlooked.

Lastly, improving community policing and ensuring that crime prevention strategies are in place will help mitigate social unrest and maintain the safety and well-being of Hoedspruit's residents - something residents have become used to. This is thankfully already in place with our Farmwatch, but 'deployment stress' could become an issue as incidents increase and there is the upward swing in intervention demands. There are only so many people to do the job at any one time.

The way ahead

The town must embrace a more balanced approach to development—one that integrates economic, social, and infrastructural planning to ensure that the benefits of progress are shared by all. Developers cannot only 'chase the buck' without taking due consideration of what, how and when they are going to develop, their environmental impact and an inescapable need to consult and merge into the town's infrastructural planning. If there is no infrastructural planning and upgrades, then developments have to be put on the back burner until such time that is done. True progress cannot simply be measured by the number of new homes, shopping centres or malls.

Only through such a comprehensive approach can Hoedspruit avoid the pitfalls of unchecked growth and build a thriving, sustainable community for years to come. If the current trajectory continues, Hoedspruit risks turning its dream of urban prosperity into a cautionary tale of unchecked development. The town's 'progress' cannot be truly celebrated until its basic infrastructure catches up with its ambitions. Without this, the very essence of what makes Hoedspruit such an attractive place to live and visit—its natural beauty, its healthy environment, and its vibrant community—will be in jeopardy.



Hustle and bustle

Image: Supplied

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SOLE MANDATE

HOEDSPRUIT WILDLIFE ESTATE R 4 800 000
Beds 5 | Baths 4 | Floor: 276 m²

This well-located, charming property comprises 3-bedroom house with a rondavel which could be rented out, as well as a flat that is currently rented out. Sliding doors from the main home's living area lead to the covered patio with splash pool. The patio area also features a pizza oven.
Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2360126



SOLE MANDATE

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

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



SOLE MANDATE

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

This 21 hectare Olifants river property offers stunning views, a beautiful garden, and riverine tree surroundings. The property includes a 2-bedroom main house and a separate 2-bedroom cottage, as well as an expansive entertainment area with braai, pizza oven, dining area and pool.
Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2330912



SOLE MANDATE

CANYON GAME RESERVE R 3 000 000
Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 4 | Floor size: 290 m²

The main house comprises 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, open plan lounge, dining area and kitchen. A covered patio and decked area is found off the living area with a pizza oven and pool. The self-contained cottage comprises lounge, dining area, kitchenette and two en-suite bedrooms.
Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2345896



SOLE MANDATE

GRIETJIE, GREATER KRUGER, BIG 5 R 25 000 000
Beds 9 | Baths 7 | Floor: 800 m²

COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITY WITH 16 BED RIGHTS - Upgraded and ready for new owner to start trading. Main house with 3 bedrooms. Guest accommodation consists of 5 en-suite rooms, of which 2 are set up as family rooms. Extras include solar system, bar area, look-out deck, pool.
Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2344985



SOLE MANDATE

NDLOVUMZI NATURE RESERVE R 4 458 000
Beds 4 | Baths 4 | Floor size: 176 m²

This tranquil home is situated overlooking the Olifants river and is surrounded by large riverine trees and rocky outcrops. The open plan living, dining 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



SOLE MANDATE

GRIETJIE, GREATER KRUGER, BIG 5 R 9 700 000
Beds 5 | Baths 4 | Floor: 965 m²

Positioned in an excellent location; the main house has lounge, kitchen with scullery, sitting room and dining room. Outside is a covered patio area with braai, pool and fenced garden. To the one side is a 2-bedroom cottage with stunning views, and on the other side a large entertainment/games room.
Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2361952



SOLE MANDATE

LISSATABA NATURE RESERVE R 2 800 000
Beds 2 | Baths 2 | Floor: 140 m²

Lock-up-and-go home with great views! Overlooking the Olifants River this property features a main unit with bedroom, open plan kitchen, living and dining area, leading to a covered patio. A spacious stand-alone chalet with en-suite bathroom and a storage area overlooks a waterhole.
Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2355906



SOLE MANDATE

ORCHARD HILLS New Development from R 2 500 000 excl
Beds 2 | Baths 2

These off-plan, full-title luxury farmhouse-style homes feature an open-plan lounge, dining area, and kitchen with a separate scullery/laundry. The lounge extends onto a spacious covered terrace with a built-in braai, perfect for outdoor living
Calin Leppan - 082 824 9482 Ref: 2269562



SOLE MANDATE

HOEDSPRUIT R 4 000 000
Beds 3 | Baths 3 | Floor: 194 m² | Land: 31 ha

FREE STANDING FARM - The property features a main house with open plan kitchen, leading to a lounge and large patio with views onto a water hole and Drakensberg mountains. Another building consists of an inverter and battery room with a large generator, 2 staff bedrooms and kitchen.
Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2335158



SOLE MANDATE

HOEDSPRUIT WILDLIFE ESTATE R 4 950 000
Beds 3 | Baths 2 | Floor: 185 m²

This home is a blend of modern convenience and natural serenity, designed with everyday ease in mind. The open-plan design creates a seamless flow between the lounge, dining space, and kitchen. Sliding doors from the living areas open onto a covered patio with boma and pool.
Calin Leppan - 082 824 9482 Ref: 2343899



SOLE MANDATE

NDLOVUMZI NATURE RESERVE R 6 950 000
Beds 10 | Baths 5 | Floor: 1,255 m²

This property is a rare find, offering an impressive footprint and a truly unique living experience. The property spans 21 hectares, with a 3-hectare fenced section housing a total of 13 units in various configurations. The layout is designed for functionality and convenience.
Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2350976



RENTAL

MODITLO WILDLIFE ESTATE R 27 875 pm
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3 | Partially furnished

Available from mid-March, not pet friendly - This immaculate home has a spacious open plan living area which leads onto the deck with a bar, with a bar fridge, pool and covered entertainment area with built in braai and plug points. All the bedrooms are en-suite and have aircons.
Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2358464



RENTAL

MODITLO WILDLIFE ESTATE R 65 000 pm
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3 | Fully furnished

Available Mar - Nov 2025, not less than a 3 month lease, not pet friendly - Pristine, modern home in a quiet location. The open-plan lounge, dining room and kitchen area are perfect for entertaining. The 12.5m lap pool is great for daily exercise. All bedrooms and living area have fans and aircons.
Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2256351

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The Growing Threat of Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions in Hoedspruit: A Call for Action

AirNav Systems Sponsors Ingwe Research Program

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 AirNav Systems

 INGWE
RESEARCH PROGRAM



Road Ecology Project - Ingwe
Research Program

WhatsApp community



AirNav and Ingwe Advertisement for the Ingwe Research Program (left), the QR code for WhatsApp (above right) and an image of a leopard by Daniel Newton.

Conservation Correspondent

The rising number of wildlife-vehicle collisions in the Hoedspruit area has become a significant concern for conservationists, researchers, and local residents alike. Between May and October 2024, seven leopards were tragically killed on local roads, alongside other species such as wild dogs, hyenas, side-striped jackals, and civets. These are just the cases that have been reported—many others are likely to have gone unnoticed, underscoring the scale of the problem.

In response to this urgent issue, the Ingwe Research Program has launched the Road Ecology Project, an ambitious and innovative initiative aimed at identifying wildlife crossing areas, mapping roadkill hotspots, and developing strategies to mitigate the risks. Supported by a major sponsorship from AirNav Systems, the project brings together advanced technology, community engagement, and rigorous scientific research to drive meaningful change.

“We hear heartbreaking reports from residents about the loss of wildlife on our roads,” says Marine Servonnat, Director of the Ingwe Research Program. “But conservation is not just about reacting to these tragic incidents—it’s about understanding the causes and preventing them before they happen.”

A Comprehensive, Two-Phase Approach

The Road Ecology Project is structured into two phases, each focusing on a different aspect of addressing the issue. The first phase is the Baseline Research, which aims to identify key wildlife collision hotspots and assess the role of culverts in facilitating safe road crossings for animals. In addition, this phase will explore various environmental and human-made factors—such as fencing, vegetation, and road design—that influence animal movement patterns and their ability to cross roads safely.

The second phase, Mitigation Measures and Community Engagement, will build upon the data gathered during the research phase. This stage is focused on developing and implementing practical, data-driven solutions. Engaging local authorities and communities will be a key aspect of this phase, ensuring that interventions like improved

culvert access, clearer signage, and animal detection systems are not only realistic but also widely supported. The implementation and ongoing evaluation of these measures will be critical to ensuring their effectiveness.

AirNav Systems: Leveraging Technology for Conservation

With a strong background in global air traffic monitoring, AirNav Systems has adapted its expertise in data analysis and artificial intelligence to support wildlife conservation.

“Our mission is not limited to aviation,” explains Andre Brandao, CEO of AirNav Systems. “By collaborating with the Ingwe Research Program, we are now applying our technological capabilities to track leopard movements, identify high-risk areas for wildlife-vehicle collisions, and develop strategies to reduce these incidents, ultimately saving lives.”

How You Can Contribute to the Cause

You don’t have to be a researcher to make a meaningful difference. By participating in the citizen science movement, individuals can help track wildlife sightings and report roadkill incidents through a dedicated WhatsApp community group. All it takes is scanning the QR code to get started!

In addition, financial support is crucial to the continued success of the project. Funding is needed to cover operational expenses, fuel, and specialized equipment—costs that are essential to ensuring the project’s effectiveness. Equally important is raising awareness: the more people who understand the scope of this issue, the greater the impact the Road Ecology Project can have.

About the Ingwe Research Program

The Ingwe Research Program began as a project under the On Track Foundation, a UK-based initiative connected to On Track Safaris. After two years of mentorship, Will and Carol Fox enabled Marine Servonnat—now the Executive Director of the program—to register Ingwe as a non-profit organization in South Africa in 2024.

Today, the Ingwe Research Program operates across a network of 35 reserves, 26 lodges, and a growing community of over



380 citizen scientists. The program has made significant strides in tracking leopard populations, with more than 11,000 images submitted, over 7,000 leopard sightings reported, and 140 leopards fully identified in and around the Hoedspruit area. Using advanced AI-powered tools like the African Carnivore Wildbook, the program continues to track and monitor leopard movements.

Ingwe encourages reserves, lodges, landowners, farmers, and residents—whether inside or outside protected areas—to contribute data, such as leopard sightings or camera trap footage. The data collected is uploaded to the SMART conservation app, helping to build a comprehensive picture of local wildlife movement.

Ongoing Research Initiatives

In addition to the Road Ecology Project, the Ingwe Research Program is also involved in two other important research projects, both of which form the basis for students’ master’s theses. The first, the Leopard Distribution Study, aims to understand leopard distribution patterns in the Hoedspruit region. The study will examine the spatial patterns of leopards and the environmental factors, as well as human influences, that

affect their movement and habitat use.

The second project, the Socio-Ecological Survey, explores human-wildlife coexistence within South African wildlife estates. The goal is to better understand how people and wildlife interact in these areas, with the aim of developing more effective management practices that support peaceful cohabitation.

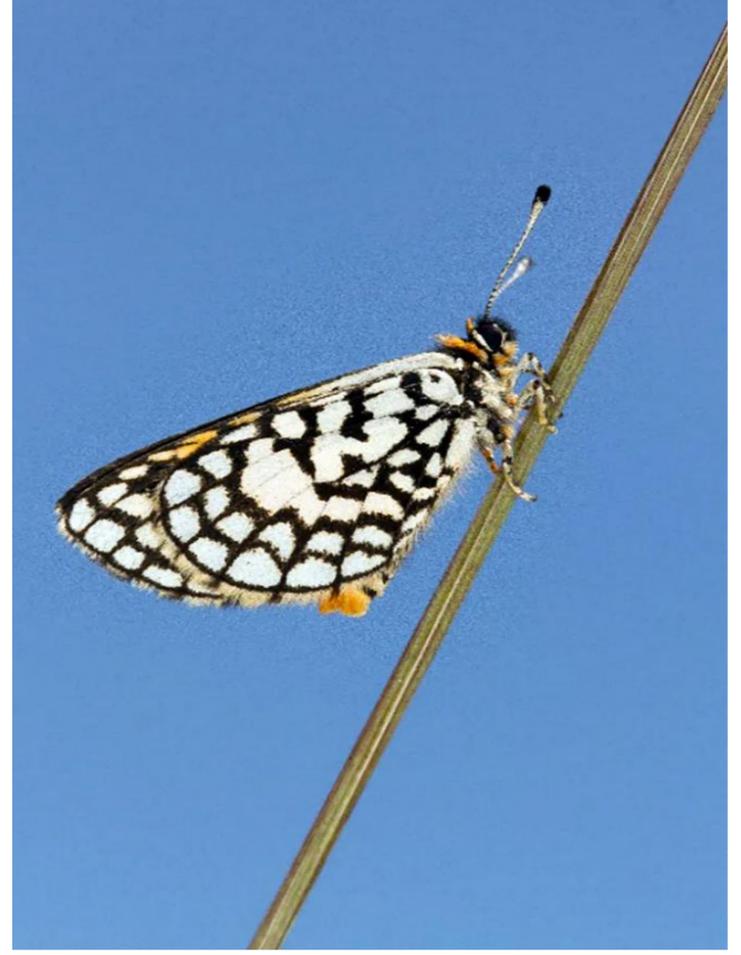
Both research projects are set to culminate in community presentations in the last quarter of 2025, where the findings will be shared with the broader Hoedspruit community.

A Collective Effort

Wildlife conservation is a collective effort, and everyone has a role to play. Whether you contribute data, provide financial support, or simply help spread the word, each action brings us closer to ensuring Hoedspruit remains a safe haven for wildlife. Together, we can make a real difference in preserving the biodiversity of this unique region.

To get involved, visit ingweresearchprogram.org or email admin@ingweresearchprogram.org.

Big win for a tiny butterfly in Limpopo — the rare Wolkberg Zulu gets legal protection



A male Wolkberg Zulu (*Alaena margaritacea*) with wings open on a tussock stem at its type locality (above left) and a male Wolkberg Zulu on a tussock stem with wings closed (above right).
Images: Andre Coetzer

Kristin Engel

An extraordinarily rare and unique little butterfly on the brink of extinction, the Wolkberg Zulu in Limpopo, has been given a fighting chance to ensure its survival with legal protection thanks to the first butterfly servitude in the country.

The Wolkberg Zulu (*Alaena margaritacea*) is a highly elusive species, 26mm long with pearly white wings patterned with dark markings, on the brink of extinction and found in only two tiny, high-altitude sites within the Wolkberg mountain range in Haenertsburg, Limpopo.

This critically endangered species was discovered exactly a century ago in 1925 and could be completely wiped out by the merest development or agricultural activity, with its major threat to date being habitat destruction and degradation of the woodbush granite grassland at its two localities.

According to researchers, what makes this butterfly so striking is its unusual diet – its larvae feed on hard rock lichens.

Due to its extremely restricted habitat and unique feeding habits, the species is incredibly vulnerable to environmental changes, with fewer than 30 butterflies left on the planet.

In the Lepidopterists' Society of Africa's (LSA) conservation assessments and Red Listing for this butterfly, they found that both sites where it's found fell outside officially protected areas and were threatened by plantations and other factors associated with commercial operations (change or reduction in fire frequency, invasive species and decreased soil moisture content).

They also found that this habitat, where the species is endemic, was deteriorating and severely fragmented.

Now a century after its discovery, a conservation servitude has been secured for this species on a farm in Limpopo where it is found, thanks to landowner Gustav van Veijeren, the LSA and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT).

This is a legal agreement that permanently protects a piece of land for conservation purposes while allowing the landowner to

retain ownership, which is why the landowner's support is crucial for success. It places legally binding restrictions on certain land used to preserve biodiversity, ecosystems or endangered species.

On Van Veijeren's farm the Wolkberg Zulu's habitat is now safeguarded from further destructive activities such as mining, agriculture or other development.

The servitude was made possible through LSA's Custodians of Rare and Endangered Lepidoptera (Corel) project, which allocates LSA members to act as custodians of threatened species, at one to five species per custodian.

Etienne Terblanche, the LSA's custodian of the Wolkberg Zulu, said it was Van Veijeren who came to the party and made this possible.

"We hope that more landowners will follow in Gustav's pioneering and big-hearted footsteps," he said.

A first for conservation servitude

In a 2015 article in an LSA journal, Andre Coetzer said the species was only known to occur at the type locality near Haenertsburg, where there was an observed decline in both habitat quality and population size.

After this, the species was included in the LSA's Corel programme, and a search for further localities was prioritised so that the society could plan for conservation efforts in future that would protect this and other similar species from further habitat destruction.

Then in January 2013, a second locality was discovered, which he said significantly improved the conservation outlook for this species.

Dr Dave Edge came up with the idea of conservation servitude for this species in 2021, with a rigorous conservation effort now legally ratified in the form of the servitude.

Terblanche told Daily Maverick: "Thanks to the servitude regulations provided by the state, which have been gaining traction over the past decade only, it is possible to arrange for the conservation of an organism and/or place privately.

Since this is the first butterfly servitude in the country, the ground has been broken for farmers to follow the lead so that more of these can be created.

The servitude also protects a critically endangered vegetation type, the woodbush granite grassland, of which 1% to 10% remains on Earth.

Threats to the Wolkberg Zulu

Terblanche warned that the species could be wiped out by the merest development or agricultural activity, especially because of the small number of individuals, but that the servitude pushes back on these by law.

"Plantations near the site pose the threat of usurping too much water for the butterfly to survive because it needs moisture on those hard rock lichens in order to feed. But the potential link between plantations and moisture needs to be established by research. The servitude prevents the expansion of the plantations into its domain."

Bush encroachment, in which shrubs and forbs push out grassland, was another potential threat to the species, although the management plan details how this can be prevented.

The previous major threat that faced the butterfly was habitat destruction, which Terblanche said would be caused by developments such as mining.

Doubts and worries about a given aspect or development had to be worked through with careful and caring dialogue.

Terblanche added that, because the servitude was a new procedure, one had to be patient, willing to go with twists and turns, and willing to act as a bit of a glue.

For instance, drawing up a valid contract was a cumbersome process involving toing and froing between the LSA, the EWT and the owner, and it took more than a year to draft and tweak to everyone's satisfaction.

Nobody made any income from this but the legal fees for registering the servitude at the title deeds office had to be paid. At a

lowered rate, Badenhorst Attorneys of Humansdorp were paid by the EWT.

Terblanche said the process of convincing stakeholders – such as local authorities and other landowners – to support the initiative was fairly smooth. Naturally there had been doubts and worries about a given aspect or development, which had to be worked through with careful and caring dialogue.

Next steps for conserving the Wolkberg Zulu and its habitat

Now that legal protection is in place, Terblanche said the species' habitat must be managed and research carried out to understand the butterfly better.

The first step was to clear bush encroachment where the butterfly used to occur. This area, ironically, fell outside the servitude since it's not on the same property, so they would need clearance for this step.

Ultimately, Terblanche said it comes down to the nitty-gritty and often scientific things: ensuring that a thorn tree species with imperial tendencies does not overgrow the breeding area, finding out what the moistures are that the microclimate needs, and even looking for new sites for the butterfly.

Ian Little, the EWT's head of conservation, said South Africa was home to an incredible number of threatened and endemic species, making it one of the world's most biodiverse countries.

"The formal protection of these unique and isolated habitats for these incredible species are the building blocks towards securing our natural heritage and the life-giving ecosystem services that are provided by these intact landscapes," he said.

Terblanche added that the Wolkberg Zulu's "extraordinary rareness and uniqueness" give impetus to protecting it. The individuals lived in a colony, which meant they remained in their patch year after year, season after season.

It would be enormously difficult to discover another colony, if it even existed.

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

Velvet Ants: Nature's Furry Warriors



Female velvet ants (above left and right)



Images: Tim Baynham

Tim Baynham
Wildlife Safety Solutions

The African velvet ants, belonging to the family Mutillidae, are a fascinating yet often misunderstood group of insects. Despite their name, these creatures are not ants but rather wasps.

The females are wingless and covered in, often brightly coloured hairs, giving them an appearance similar to ants, while the males are winged. Velvet ants are known for their striking colours, formidable sting, and intriguing natural history.

Velvet ants are widely distributed across Africa, thriving in arid and semi-arid environments, grasslands, and savannas. They are solitary insects; females are typically found scurrying along the ground in search of hosts for their larvae. Unlike social ants, velvet ants do not form colonies, instead, each female operates independently.

The life cycle of velvet ants is closely tied to other insects, particularly wasps. Female velvet ants lay their eggs in the nests of these hosts. Once the velvet ant

larva hatches, it consumes the host larva and eventually pupates inside the nest. This parasitoid lifestyle ensures that velvet ants can exploit existing resources without having to build their own nests.

One of the most remarkable features of African velvet ants is their often-vivid coloration. Many species exhibit bright red, orange, yellow, or white patterns against a darker background. This striking coloration serves as an aposematic warning (a warning that they are either dangerous or unpalatable) to potential predators, signalling their formidable defences.

Velvet ants are well known for their painful sting, which has earned them the nickname "cow killers" in North America. Only females possess a stinger, as the males have wings but no sting. Additionally, their exoskeleton is exceptionally tough, making them difficult for predators to crush. They also emit a high-pitched squeaking sound when threatened, further deterring potential attackers.

African velvet ants are primarily nectar feeders, often seen visiting flowers for sustenance. However, their larvae are parasitic, relying on other insects for de-

velopment. The females are active foragers, constantly searching for host nests, while the males, which are capable of flight, roam in search of mates.

Interesting Facts about Velvet Ants

They have a very painful sting ranking highly on the Schmidt Pain Index, a scale that rates the intensity of insect stings. Some species are considered to have one of the most painful stings among wasps and bees.

They are mimicry masters. Many species of velvet ants exhibit Müllerian or Batesian mimicry, resembling other toxic or unpalatable insects to enhance their survival against predators.

They are incredibly resilient. Their thick, armour-like exoskeleton makes them resistant to attacks from predators and even human attempts to crush them.

Last but not least, they have mysterious mating rituals. Male velvet ants must find and mate with flightless females, often engaging in aerial searches. Once mating is complete, the male plays no role in offspring development.

African velvet ants are one of nature's most intriguing insects, combining beauty, resilience, and a powerful sting. Their vibrant appearance and parasitoid lifestyle set them apart from many other wasps. While they may be feared for their painful sting, they play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance by controlling host insect populations.

As solitary, wandering warriors of the insect world, velvet ants remain a fascinating example of nature's ingenuity and adaptability.

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

The common guarrie – *Euclea undulata*

Nature correspondent

The common guarrie, *Euclea undulata*, is a hardy, evergreen shrub renowned for its dense, bushy form. Though it can grow up to 7 meters tall, it typically appears as a mound of dark green foliage. Its numerous branches, covered in closely packed, small leaves, often extend down to the ground, creating a thick, compact appearance in the landscape. Commonly found growing in close clusters, these shrubs form lush, dome-like shapes in their natural habitat.

The leaves are stiff and leathery, dark green or blue green on the upper side, with a paler underside. In some cases, they can also take on a rusty-brown hue. The bark is grey, often fissured or cracked as the plant matures. From December to May, the guarrie produces small, scented flowers in spikes that reach up to 20mm in length. These flowers, which appear in the leaf axils, are pale whitish to cream in colour and are visited by various pollinators, particularly bees.

By February, the guarrie begins to bear small, single-seeded, reddish-brown berries that ripen into a dark colour. In mature plants, flowers and fruits often ap-

pear simultaneously, creating a striking display. While the leaves are not particularly palatable, many wildlife species, including antelope and small herbivores, browse on them, while the fruit is enjoyed by birds and mammals.

Adaptable to a wide range of climates, the common guarrie is found across southern Africa, from tropical and subtropical regions to more arid, semi-desert areas. It thrives in diverse habitats such as rocky slopes, low hills, open woodlands, and even termite mounds, where it benefits from scattered moisture sources.

The guarrie has a variety of uses for both people and animals. It produces high-quality firewood, which burns with long-lasting coals. Its leaves serve as fodder for livestock and herbivores, while the fruits are eaten by birds, small mammals, and occasionally humans, though they are not particularly tasty. The dense, durable heartwood is valued for making fencing posts and other strong structures.

The plant is also important in traditional medicine. Its bark, which contains tannins, is used to alleviate headaches, while the roots are believed to treat toothaches and heart-related conditions. In some areas, powdered roots are used as a po-

tent purgative. In some areas, guarrie leaf preparations are used to treat diarrhoea, stomach disorders, and sore throats, even tonsillitis.

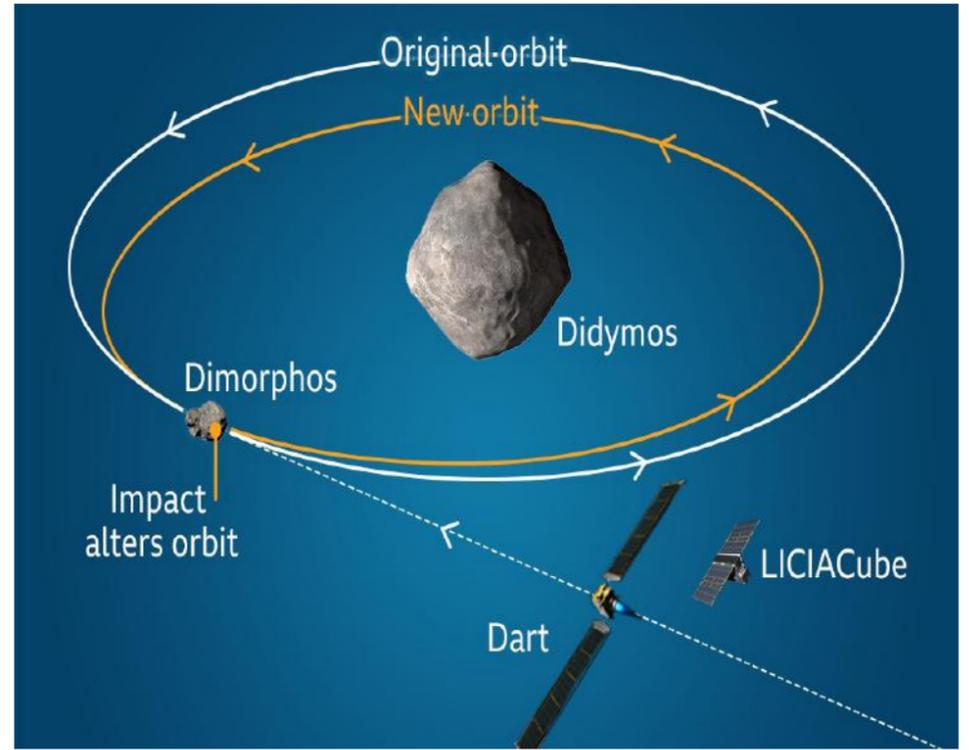
A versatile and hardy plant, the common

guarrie continues to play an important role in both the natural landscape and in the lives of those who rely on it for food, medicine, and materials.

Common guarrie Image: Tony Rebelo-iSpot



Apocalypse Now - Well...in 2032...Maybe...and Certainly not Apocalyptic!



079 575 0900

CELESTIAL EVENTS SA

An asteroid, Getty Images (top left), DART-NASA (above right), the atmosphere (left)-WorldAtlas and Tunguska devastation (left).

Ben Coley
Celestial Events

As we discussed last month, the solar system is awash with chunks of rock, most of which follow their uneventful orbits around the Sun for millions of years. However, occasionally, gravitational interactions between bodies can cause a shift in orbit.

On the 27th December last year, the ATLAS telescope in Chile caught sight of an asteroid, estimated at around 50m in diameter, speeding away from Earth. After careful orbital calculations, it now looks possible that its new path might put it on a collision course with Earth.

As dramatic as this (and the title of this article) may seem, it's not time to start building bunkers, hoarding canned goods and toilet roll, and generally picturing every disaster movie you have ever seen just yet! Currently, asteroid 2024 YR4 is speeding

away from Earth, and should our calculations be correct, any potential impact will not happen until December 2032.

During this time, it will complete two more of its four year orbits of the Sun, so there is plenty of time for its course to alter slightly; and for us to get a more precise prediction of its path. In terms of likelihood of a direct impact, the current figures suggest a 1:43 chance. As terrifying as this may sound, that equates to only about a 2% chance that it will careen into our home, and there is an excellent chance that this number will diminish as we gather more data.

Despite this, we can all brace ourselves for an internet onslaught of apocalyptic narrative as those trawling for click-bait ramp up their efforts! So before succumbing to their doubtless over-exaggerated scenarios, here is some background.

The Earth is hit by countless pieces of rock all day, every day. If you have ever witnessed a meteor (shooting star) in the night sky, you have seen evidence of this.

Thankfully, we are wrapped in a protective blanket of atmosphere that shields us from these impacts. As these rocky projectiles penetrate our planetary neighbourhood, the 'substance' of our atmosphere (gas, dust, water vapour, pollution, etc.) causes it to decelerate rapidly, and ultimately destroy itself due to friction. Amazingly, it is thought that over 15,000 tonnes of 'space dust' is added to our atmosphere each year from these destroyed meteors.

Admittedly, asteroid 2024 YR4 is a little bigger than the standard objects that hit us. At an estimated diameter of 50m, it does pose a *local* threat. However, before you are once again struck with impending doom, remember that 70% of Earth is ocean, and between 40 - 50% of the remaining landmass is unpopulated, so the chance of it doing serious damage to an inhabited area is incredibly small. Also, its composition, mass and angle of entry will also play a major role in how much potential damage could be done.

So, what is the worst-case scenario? To answer that, we can look back at our history – this is not the first time it has happened ... and nor will it be the last.

In 1908, a meteor estimated to be between 50 - 80m wide plunged through the atmosphere above Tunguska in Siberia, Russia. The heat and friction caused it to explode 5 - 10kms above the surface of the Earth with the force of 15 megatons of TNT, about a thousand times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The resulting blast wave flattened 2000km² of forest and shattered windows in huts nearly one hundred kilometres from the epicentre. The blast was visible from 800kms away and seismographs in western Europe even picked up the event. Thankfully, the area was completely unpopulated and there were only three, unconfirmed

deaths. A similar, though less violent event, was also recorded above Chelyabinsk, Russia, in 2013. For those interested, there is lots of CCTV and dashcam footage of the explosion on YouTube.

If this happens in 2032, over a major population centre, the devastation would indeed be widespread and catastrophic. However, times have changed in the past 100+ years and we have made tremendous technological advances. It may sound like science fiction, but we have proven technology that can nudge an asteroid off its current orbit. In 2021, NASA launched DART (Double Asteroid Redirection Test) and aimed it at a small asteroid, a mere 170m wide. After a journey of 11 million kms, DART successfully impacted with Dimorphos 10 months later, altering its trajectory. Not only was this proof of concept, but a remarkable feat of engineering and maths!

Ultimately, we will not know the severity of Asteroid 2024 YR4 until at least 2028. To reiterate once again, this is not a doomsday scenario! Chances are, the current impact estimation of 2% will drop significantly, but it is comforting to know that we, as a species, have the ability to protect ourselves should it become necessary. Just imagine what we would be capable of if we stopped funneling our technological abilities into creating weapons of mass destruction and other financially motivated projects.

If nothing else, perhaps this scenario should give us renewed impetus to protect our fragile atmosphere. It is our last line of defence and has protected us for billions of years. The least we can do is return the favour.

See Celestial Events SA advert for contact details

How to get the most from a gap year

A gap year can be more than a chance to blow off steam and have fun. It can be life-affirming, offering opportunities for personal growth, cultural exposure, and professional development.

Cost is the first hurdle for many young South Africans planning to spend time overseas. Flights and the relative weakness of the rand against most major currencies make travel to popular gap-year destinations such as Europe, the UK, the USA, and Australia expensive.

According to Gavyn Letley, from specialist loans provider DirectAxis, turning the dream of an overseas adventure into reality starts with setting a budget.

“This may seem a mundane way to start the trip of a lifetime, but it will be worth every moment. It will reduce the stress of constantly worrying about money, and potentially cutting the trip short, allowing you to gain more from the experience.”

While it’s difficult to budget for the unknown, he suggests starting by listing expected expenses. These include airfares, visa costs and travel insurance. A medical emergency, flight or other cancellations or theft could ruin your trip, so

ensure you’re adequately covered. also consider and budget for transport when you arrive, accommodation, meals and a contingency for unexpected costs.

When budgeting, consider the cost of living at your destination as it may be more expensive than in South Africa. Once you understand the costs you can start considering how to fund the trip. Common strategies include getting a part- or full-time job and working while travelling. A paid internship will offer valuable work experience and some spending money. Alternatively, jobs such as *au pairing* can provide income and cover accommodation and meal costs. Consider volunteering or participating in educational programmes. While these may not provide an income, they often offer other support such as meals and accommodation.

If this all seems daunting or you’re unsure about the people or organisations where you are applying, there are specialist agencies which can help. There are numerous benefits of working with an agency. It will guide you through visa applications and work permits. Its networks of employers make it easier to get

seasonal work or jobs in sectors such as hospitality, *au pairing* and teaching. Reputable agencies vet employers and employment programmes, minimising the risk of job scams or poor working conditions. Some agencies will arrange accommodation and offer 24/7 emergency support. Many provide cultural orientation and tips to help you integrate seamlessly.

Letley says before choosing an agency or paying any money, check its credentials, ideally with someone who has used it. Also, compare prices, as some charge high placement fees. Agencies may also only offer jobs in particular, high-demand sectors. Researching job opportunities independently may provide more scope to work in your preferred industry.

Doing the homework beforehand will make your gap year less stressful, and more enjoyable so you’ll get more from it. While you’re away, stay on top of your finances and look for opportunities to stretch your budget. Some include opening a travel-friendly bank account with minimal foreign transaction fees, especially if you plan to travel to multiple countries. Use budgeting apps to keep

track of expenses and avoid overspending. Look for student and other discounts at attractions and on transport. Some attractions cost less if you pay and book ahead of time. If you’re regularly using public transport, a weekly or monthly pass is cheaper than buying a single ticket.

“A gap year can be a worthwhile investment for young people, enabling them to assert their independence, expand their world view, build character, learn new skills or accumulate a breadth of experience that will benefit their careers,” says Letley.

The Independent Institute of Education (Pty) Ltd (“The IIE”), a division of JSE-listed ADvTECH, is the largest private higher education institution in South Africa. It operates across 24 sites and via distance, offering 135 registered and accredited higher education programmes from Higher Certificate to Doctorate level on its IIE Varsity College, IIE Vega, IIE MSA, IIE Rosebank College and IIE HSM campuses.

Lady Godiva and your March 2025 horoscopes

Overview

March will be a month of introspection and renewal, as you prepare for the slower, more introspective energy of autumn. There may be a natural urge to declutter both your physical and emotional space, and to take stock of what’s working in your life. As the days get shorter, use this time to focus on self-care, relationships, and long-term goals.

Pisces (February 19 - March 20)

Creativity and romance are flowing this month, making it a great time to focus on self-expression and relationships. If you’ve been feeling stagnant, now is the time to tap into your passions and let them guide you forward. Trust your intuition to lead the way.

Aries (March 21 - April 19)

Your energy will be slightly more introspective this month as you reassess where you’re heading. Focus on your personal life and relationships, with an emphasis on creating harmony at home. Let go of unnecessary stress and embrace some quiet time.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

Your communication skills will be sharp, making this a great time to catch up on unfinished conversations. Look for ways to connect deeper with siblings or close friends. Expect some changes in your daily routine that will ultimately benefit you in the long run.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

Finances take a central role this month, prompting you to rethink your spending habits and long-term savings. You may feel drawn to secure your financial future, whether through investing or organizing your budget. Trust that hard work will pay off over time.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

A month of self-discovery and transformation is on the horizon. You may feel a strong pull to work on your physical and mental well-being, so embrace changes in your lifestyle that promote balance. Your personal identity and goals are evolving in a positive direction.

Leo (July 23 - August 22)

As the energy shifts, you’ll feel more intro-

spective, with a focus on your inner world. You may seek quiet moments to reflect on past experiences and let go of emotional baggage. The month offers an opportunity for healing and rejuvenation—take it slow.

Virgo (August 23 - September 22)

March will bring your social life into focus. You may feel a renewed sense of connection with friends and groups, prompting you to take more initiative in social matters. Trust that supportive relationships will help you thrive this month.

Libra (September 23 - October 22)

Career and public life are in the spotlight, with an opportunity to reassess your long-term ambitions. Your hard work may start to bear fruit but be mindful of avoiding burnout. Take time to rest and recharge as the month unfolds.

Scorpio (October 23 - November 21)

This is a great month for expanding your horizons, whether through travel, education, or spiritual pursuits. You may feel inspired to dive deeper into learning something new. Keep an open mind and embrace change—it will benefit you more than you expect.

Sagittarius (November 22 - December 21)

March brings a focus on shared resources and intimate connections. Whether it’s with a partner or a business venture, deeper collaboration could lead to growth. Be mindful of emotional boundaries and ensure your investments (time, energy, or money) align with your values.

Capricorn (December 22 - January 19)

Relationships take centre stage this month, especially one-on-one connections, whether in love or business. You’ll be working to balance your personal and professional life, so focus on finding harmony in both. Partnerships could become more serious, and there may be decisions to make.

Aquarius (January 20 - February 18)

Your health and daily routines are in the spotlight. Take a step back and reevaluate how you’re caring for your body and mind. Small, steady improvements to your routine could make a significant difference over time.



SUDOKU

ANSWERS

7	8	2	5	3	4	1	9	6
1	3	9	8	7	6	5	2	4
4	5	6	9	2	1	7	3	8
2	4	5	7	1	3	6	8	9
3	6	7	2	8	9	4	5	1
9	1	8	4	6	5	2	7	3
6	7	1	3	5	8	9	4	2
5	9	3	6	4	2	8	1	7
8	2	4	1	9	7	3	6	5

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The Role of Language in AI Interactions



AI perspective 'correspondent'

In the age of artificial intelligence (AI), interactions with digital systems have become an integral part of daily life. From virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa to complex language models like ChatGPT, these AI systems have the ability to respond to a wide variety of prompts. But one question often arises: does the way in which we phrase our requests affect the quality of the responses we get from AI? And, perhaps more intriguingly, do these responses carry an element of emotion?

First, it's essential to understand that AI, at its core, does not "feel" emotion in the way humans do. AI systems like language models are sophisticated algorithms trained on vast datasets, capable of analysing patterns in text and generating responses based on input data. These systems are built to mimic the ways people communicate and to generate contextually appropriate responses, but they don't have emotional experiences.

However, this doesn't mean that the way requests are phrased doesn't matter. In fact, language plays a critical role in determining how AI models interpret and respond to queries. The clarity, specificity, and tone of the input can directly influence the quality and relevance of the output.

Does Politeness Affect AI's Response?

While AI lacks emotional awareness, it is designed to understand and mimic human conversational patterns. This means that when requests are made in a clear, polite, and respectful manner, the model is more likely to generate responses that are helpful, coherent, and professional. This is not because the AI "feels" appreciated but because the phrasing of the request often aligns better with the language patterns the model has been trained on.

For example, when someone asks a question like, "Can you please explain this in detail?" as opposed to "Explain this now," the former request provides a subtle cue that the user is looking for a thoughtful, well-explained response. AI systems interpret this and may structure their response to align with the more considerate tone. On the other hand, an abrupt request may not necessarily yield a poor response, but it may feel less conversational or thorough.

Furthermore, polite and clear requests often provide better context, allowing the AI to generate more accurate and relevant answers. Requests that are vague or overly terse may lead to less satisfying results because the AI may not fully understand the user's intent. In this sense, the way a request is worded can certainly impact the quality of the response.

Emotional Perception in AI Responses

Now, let's address the second part of the

question: Do AI responses carry an element of emotion? Although AI does not experience emotions, it has been trained to recognize and simulate the emotional tone of human language. Through this process, AI can produce responses that seem emotionally attuned, empathetic, or enthusiastic, but this is all based on linguistic patterns, not genuine feelings.

For example, if a user expresses frustration in their input, AI might generate a response that acknowledges this emotion: "I understand that this situation is frustrating." This is done to mirror the conversational norms that humans expect when communicating with others, which often includes empathy and validation of emotions.

Similarly, AI might express enthusiasm or encouragement if the context suggests positive engagement, such as, "That's fantastic! Keep up the great work!" Again, these are stylistic choices based on human interaction patterns, not emotions.

The Perception of AI Emotion

While AI itself does not possess emotions, users may perceive an emotional element in the responses. This can be attributed to two factors: the tone of the language AI uses and the human tendency to anthropomorphize technology (attribute human characteristics to something). When AI responds with lan-

guage that includes empathetic phrases or enthusiastic encouragement, users may interpret these responses as emotionally intelligent, even though the system is simply mimicking emotional cues.

In a way, this perception of emotion in AI responses is an unintended consequence of its design. Because AI is programmed to generate conversationally appropriate responses, the tone it uses can sometimes seem emotionally aware. For example, a polite, warm tone in a response can create a sense of connection, leading users to perceive the AI as more personable or emotionally attuned.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the way requests are made to AI does indeed influence the quality of the responses, not because AI "feels" better when approached kindly, but because well-structured, clear, and polite requests provide better context for generating helpful and relevant answers. As for the element of emotion, while AI does not experience feelings, its ability to simulate emotional responses based on language patterns may give users the impression that the system is emotionally aware. Ultimately, AI is a tool designed to respond in ways that mirror human interaction, and its responses may appear more engaging when requests are made thoughtfully.

Credit: ChatGPT 4o mini - chatgpt.com

My 5 sent

Oupa Bobbili

Tyd is die enigste ding wat konstant verminder en kan glad nie vervang, herbou, bygelas, gekoop of verkoop word nie. Dit is die duurste gratis item in die heelal.

In die maand van liefde tref 'n tragedie ons dorp en verloor ons pragtige mense in 'n gru-ongeluk. Die gemeenskap staan saam, huil saam en besef saam, dat elke oomblik saam met geliefdes is baie kosbaar. Die werkgewers van die mense voel onmiddellik 'n groot verlies, en nie aan geld nie maar waar die mense eers was

is nou leeg. Vir die families is die verlies die ergste. Minder inkomste, maar die leë stoel in die huis maak die verlies die grootste. Hulle plekke is vir ewig leeg, hulle voetspore dood gestop.

Tyd is niemand se reg nie, dit word aan ons geleen. Daar is 'n tyd vir alles in die lewe. Tyd om te sing, tyd om te ween, tyd om te lag, tyd om te werk, tyd om te speel en ek kan aangaan vir dae lank. Maar daar kom 'n tyd wat ons nie beheer oor het nie, en dit is ons laaste asem. Ons weet nie wanneer dit kom nie, daarom kan ons nie mors wat aan ons geskenk word nie.

Een misdaad, vat baie lewens en bring

baie hartseer. Een misdaad laat dit reën van tranes in families en 'n gemeenskap. Elke dag ry drywers met geen gevoel vir ander mense se lewens nie, solank die geld vloei kan die gemeenskap en families maar bloei. Een man wat glad nie aan homself gedink het nie, maar net aan ander, het mense se lewens gered. Maar een selfsugtige man vat lewens.

Ek ken nie die feite van die ongeluk nie, net dit wat ek gelees het, maar ek ken pyn as ek dit sien. Die pyn is duidelik en aanvoelbaar as jy die winkel in stap.

As jy 'n geskenk oopmaak is jy opgewonde daarvoor en koester jy dit wat jy gekry het.

Kom ons wees so opgewonde oor die tyd wat nog aan ons geskenk is.

Aan al die families en werkgewers wat mense verloor het, my innige meegevoel aan almal. Dit is nie 'n lekker tyd nie, en niks wat enige iemand sê of doen gaan die pyn ligter maak nie. Tyd genees ook nie, net die mooi herinneringe wat julle het van geliefdes maak alles beter.

Julle wat soos varke ry en nie ander mense se lewens in ag neem nie, onthou net elke keer wat jy aan 'n stuurwiel vat is jy 'n potensiële moordenaar.

Groete



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