



KRUGER2CANYON

NEWS

May 2022

The Farm House, R527, Zandspruit, Hoedspruit, Limpopo Tel 078 979 6486 email: editor@kruger2canyon.co.za

A 'pilgrimage' of 800km but is the journey over?



Trailblazer and one of the other bulls on the move
Image: Johan Strauss

Environmental Correspondent in collaboration with Elephants Alive

Eleven young elephant bulls moving through the Namaacha Valley, around 36km to the west of Maputo, caught the attention of the Mozambique Wildlife Alliance. Elephants Alive, stationed in Hoedspruit were alerted, and as part of the combined projects of the two organisations collectively addressing human-elephant-conflict, it was decided to collar one of the largest of the bulls in the

herd, Trailblazer. The collaring took place on the 15th May 2022.

The collaborative project in Mozambique is aimed at trying to collar elephants that are known crop raiders in order to develop early warning systems, that allow the team to warn communities of the imminent arrival of elephants in their areas. Part of the project is to create 'rapid response units' – two-man teams – trained to respond to any potential dangers that elephants may pose to communities.

The Mozambique Wildlife Alliance and Elephants Alive

started off with one rapid response unit and they have already affectionately become known as "the elephant shepherds". The team educates the communities they engage with as to how to behave around elephants and play a crucial role persuading the elephants to move out of a designated area. The elephant shepherds are well trained and are armed with toolboxes containing flashlights, fire-crackers, bear bangers and the faithful old vuvuzela, all as part of their scare tactics to make a loud noise to herd the elephants to safety and

away from crop raiding.

The model has worked so well that the elephant shepherds have offered training courses in various places in southern Mozambique, and Elephants Alive is working tirelessly to fund more of the same units across the landscape.

Elephants Alive has collared over forty elephants in Mozambique. Ten elephants are corridor moving elephants that are monitored moving between protected areas. Together with funding partners such as the Elephant Crisis Fund, The Oak Foundation, Jamma In-

ternational and the US Fish and Wildlife Services, more collars and response units are in the pipeline.

To get back to the story of the eleven bulls – the project uses the AWT (African Wildlife Tracking) collars – developed in Johannesburg. These collars are developed for all sorts of animals from elephants to pangolin. Collars have also been developed that have lights in them, that can be triggered when elephants move over a boundary that is put down on-line (geofencing). This helps the elephants to be seen by the shepherds and

communities at night so that they can effectively deter them. Most of the time the project has hourly settings on the collars, so information on the elephants that are collared come through to the monitoring stations every hour. The batteries usually last between 3-4 years. Signals are transmitted via satellite pings, and VHS units are also used to track the collared animals in the field.

The eleven bulls started the 'pilgrimage' just south of the Namaacha Valley.

Cont. on page 3.

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From the editors seat...



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From the editor/publisher

My goodness we are almost halfway through the year, and we haven't even stopped to take a breath! Time does fly when you're having fun.

Three main matters were

dealt with in the last month. Firstly, we went to the Africa Travel Indaba in Durban and dished out over 1000 copies of the Kruger2Canyon News! That was a surprise from some, but it was well received, and we have had some very positive feedback and meetings as a result. Also, I think that the Indaba went well – it was

always going to be down-scaled – organisations that used to have 100 square metre stands, only had a desk. I can understand that, because no one knew what the response to the show was going to be, and it was a conundrum ... do we, don't we? There were enough exhibitors, buyers and media to ensure that it was well received and a success under trying times. I think that those lodges that did not get there, through whatever means, missed out on an opportunity.

Secondly, I have managed to get an audience with our mayor every month, which I believe to be a fantastic opportunity to get the municipal news directly from source. I hope that this is beneficial and of interest to the community.

Thirdly, we are busy working on a 'supa-dupa' digital platform for those that want to subscribe to the publication. We have had interest/requests for this from far-

flung places, from beaches in the Caribbean, to cities in the US, towns in Holland, farms in outback Australia, and more, from Sedgfield to Windhoek, Maun to Mutare, and even a request from Vilankulos - your calls will be answered. Subscription will soon be possible.

The plight of the elephants (our lead story this month) really brings home to me (again) how delicate our environment is and how our relationship with the animals is intricately sewn into our fibre. I just hope that humankind somehow comes to its senses and does not focus on always 'chasing the buck', self-enrichment, and environmental abuse, and realises that we are one with nature – if we fail nature, nature and indeed the planet will fail us! This is a two-way street, and we need to take serious cognisance of that. Conservation goes beyond animals and plants, seas, oceans and fishes, it's our atmo-

sphere and us as well – it's also about conserving us! If we don't pay attention, we will all face demise!

On a happy note – its Father's Day this month. To all the fathers out there, happy Father's Day and we hope you will all be spoilt for all the love and sacrifices that you make. This is our day, lets enjoy it!

It's also the month of our Winter Solstice – from here on in, it's a run up to summer! Roll on the heat, 'sunny skies, braaivleis and Chevrolet' as the old tune said.

To all the contributors and advertisers, thank you. We are constantly on the lookout for material and advertisers because that is what keeps this publication alive. Thanks also to all those that have sent personal notes, emails and have stopped me in the streets, to talk to me regarding the publication. It's great support and constructive input is much appreciated.

Enjoy the month ahead, be safe and hang in there, and contemplate this:

"If the thrill of success doesn't make you jump out of bed in the morning, then the fear of failure should do" — Henry Joseph-Grant.



Mark Bishop
Editor/Publisher



Letters to the editor



Dear Editor

Never thought that I would say this, but I really do look forward to the month end newspaper. I have over the past months really enjoyed your content and my goodness I have learnt a lot. Thank you for a great publication – I think it's probably the best community newspaper in SA! Keep it up and thank you. Best regards Vince

Ed: Why thank you Vince. So great to have that feedback,

we will endeavour to keep it up!

Dear Editor

Wow 16 pages! Fantastic! I do particularly like the idea of speaking to the Mayor – it kind of keeps us up to date in a way. Dee

Ed: Thank you. We will to chat to the Mayor EVERY month as you will see.

Dear Editor

What's the chance of someone doing a book review every month? It's so difficult to choose a book these days as we are always spoilt for choice which is somewhat intimidating.

Regards Dave and Ann

Ed: Lovely idea – I'll try and find someone willing to contribute, but if you have anyone in mind, ask them to drop me a line.

Dear Editor

I am concerned with this new plan for low-cost housing on 'Berlin' – my fear is once that starts it will swamp the town in no time. Surely regulation on the costings of taxi and bus fares for workers is an answer? And what of the potential crime issue? Not to mention the associated litter, etc.!

Concerned resident

Ed: Dear Concerned resident, these issues are relevant and should be brought

up with the Mayor and our Ward Councillor together with other concerned parties. I will certainly ask the Mayor in our next chat. If you get any answers, be sure to send them through to me!

Dear Editor

Why can we not clear up all these horrible signs on the roadside in town – we look like a hillbilly village!?

Ed: You need to speak to the council about that. It certainly is shoddy and it may be a great idea to get them positioned in a couple of places in a nice, neat frame with 20 odd signs/frame, all the same size within the

frame. That would work to clean matters up, I am sure.

Dear Editor

Can I submit stories to publish? Can anyone do that? Regards, Budding Jorno

Ed: Dear Budding Jorno, absolutely! I would love people to submit their stories – if they are newsworthy, and we have space then we will publish them. Remember that we almost always edit the stories to some extent, never promise that they WILL be published, and if it includes submission of a picture or two, please ensure that the picture is high resolution. So YES! Please submit your contributions. Looking forward to getting

your first submission.

Dear Editor

Please can you distribute your paper at the entrance to the estates around Hoedspruit? I often miss getting my copy because I am out of town or too late. If you could get them handed out at the gates to the estates, then I am sure most people would get their copy. Thanks Rod

Ed: Dear Rod, what a great idea! This will take some negotiating with the estates for security to hand them out, but I do not see this as an insurmountable hurdle. Let's see what I can do over the next month or two. Thanks for the suggestion.

Magic square sum=34

Each column, row and diagonal must add up to the given sum. Answers on page 15.

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A 'pilgrimage' of 800km but is the journey over?

Cont. from page 1.

They covered a little over 500km in Mozambique before they started moving towards South Africa. On the 1st May they crossed into South Africa to the west of the Ndumo Wilderness Reserve, through the Lebombo Mountains, and into Eswatini on the 3rd May, around the Big Ben Conservancy. Here they fed on sugarcane. The farmers in that area were very helpful and sent through pictures and monitored the movements of the herd. Elephants Alive are very grateful to the people of Eswatini's for their response, which was incredible, empathetic and vital.

The bulls then covered about 128 km, moving north through Eswatini, and crossing over into South Africa on the 7th May at 02h00 in the morning (near the Magudu/Sibange area). Unfortunately, this area of South Africa is quite densely populated, with lots of agriculture and plenty of communities. This was a tense situation for the team and the elephants. Due to the inevitable interaction that occurred in this area, the herd was sadly shot at by civilians. Some distance to the north of the incident, one bull was noticed to have quite a bad limp and was desperately trying to keep up with the group. Elephants Alive immediately rallied an expert vet and wildlife pilot to be on standby to treat the bull.

From the satellite monitoring it was evident that the elephants had been in contact with humans. They had been confronted, and looking at the tracking data, it was obvious that this was taking place because of the disruptive directional fast movements of the elephants. It was here that the bulls sought refuge in dense thickets in the area.

The bulls then tried another route to get toward the Kruger National Park – retracing their route almost exactly to a point, and then turning north-north-west towards the Park. They walked along a clear unpopulated route until they came across a more populated area (the Ntunda area) where they managed to shift their course more to the west.

They then pushed up towards the Park border. Here

they came upon quite a few agricultural lands, but they moved through quickly with no directional change, indicating no crop raiding. This shows that they were on a mission to find the Park.

The herd came onto villages after resting, around the Emjeane Community, and they tried 4 times to get through the community, each time retreating. By this time the group had split into three. That night Trailblazer made the decision to continue the journey home on his own. He hit the Kruger National Park fence for the first time on 10th May at 01:30, the elephant then turned west proceeding through croplands and eventually getting to an area close to the Malelane airstrip.

Trailblazer then hit the Kruger fence again, and here he paced up and down this fence line south of the river trying to find a way through the fence. Sadly, he was the first and only bull able to find Kruger's border, with the rest of the herd split between two different properties further south. From the time they first crossed into South Africa, Elephants Alive had been in contact with the Mpumalanga Park and Tourism Agency (MPTA) and SANParks, sending half hourly updates on the animal's movements. SANParks and MPTA decided that the best option would be to capture the bulls and relocated them to safety, north of the Kruger boundary.

On the 10th May SANParks arrived and found four uncollared bulls who were originally with Trailblazer. These they darted and loaded – they then found Trailblazer, darted him and loaded him up as well at about 17h00 that afternoon. The five elephants were trucked to the Shingwedzi area, some 290km north as the crow flies!

One bull that was wounded from the shooting incident was euthanised. The autopsy revealed that he had one bullet in his femur and one lodged in his chest cavity – there was nothing that anyone could do for him, his condition was serious and deteriorating.

The other five bulls' location, those that were not relocated, has not been confirmed – people have reported that bulls have been



Elephants on the roam, feeding on sugar cane (above)

Image: M.Dlamini

Trailblazer en-route to the Kruger

Image: Johan Strauss

seen around the Hlane Royal National Park in Eswatini. There is however no conclusive evidence that these are in fact the remaining 5 bulls.

Trailblazer is still hanging around just north of Shingwedzi, taking a well-deserved break and resting there. Elephants Alive is not sure whether the other four bulls are with him. His tracked movement is now more normal. It will be interesting in the next few weeks to see what his movements will be.

Could this extreme journey potentially have been an ancient migratory route? Could the elephants be travelling north to find Kruger National Park out of instinct? The fact that these elephants were all young bulls could indicate that they may have been moving away from their breeding herds. They try to get naturally far from their natal breeding herd when young and understand the lay of the land to stop inbreeding, and to try and establish their "home ranges" before they have their first musth cycles around 25 years old. Elephants Alive has found that young bulls have the largest exploratory home ranges. Older bulls are relatively predictable in their movements with the onset of their musth cycles. Younger bulls are far more unpredictable in search for space and resources. With no older mentoring bull leading the young brigade of bulls, it is unlikely that



they were following an ancient migratory route.

On the Elephants Alive Facebook page, Dr Michelle Henley, CEO, Co-founder and Principal Researcher of Elephants Alive, posted a very thought provoking, relevant comment that needs to be seriously considered:

"Trailblazer is only one of the many elephants who have undertaken this remarkable journey across several countries. His satellite collar allowed Elephants Alive a snapshot of the journey and the obstacles the elephants had to overcome to reach safety. If nothing else, this journey has stressed the importance of developing wildlife corridors that take into consideration the highly fragmented landscapes of today. This

is of extreme importance when one considers that more than half of the African elephants current home ranges occur outside established protected areas.

What do we need to consider? The world we have left for them is too small. We have fragmented the continuity and freedom of the land they once knew. We have made refugees of so many wild species as we do to ourselves in war-torn areas. Science has taught us that 76% of African elephant populations are spread across one national border, while 57,4% of the elephant's current range occurs outside protected areas. It stands to reason then, that these challenging situations are not simply going to go away.

Trailblazer has flagged where we need to devote our attention. We as South Africans need to lean into the discomfort and increase our tolerance towards wildlife, if we compare how both the Mozambicans and Eswatini citizens cheered the group of eleven elephants along their journey.

We cannot afford to truck all courageous elephants (or any other animals for that matter) like Trailblazer back to protected areas, or simply destroy them if they enter our world".

Our intertwined journeys are far from over.

Note: SANParks were contacted for comment but clearly were constrained by our time deadlines, and as a result we have had no feedback from them as yet.

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Trophy hunting quotas stopped by animal protection NGO – for now

Don Pinnock
Environmental Journalist

The decision by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment to issue quotas to trophy-hunt leopards, black rhinos and elephants has been suspended by court order.

The Western Cape High Court has blocked the issuing of quotas to hunt 10 leopards, 10 black rhinos and 150 elephants following an application by the **Humane Society International/Africa**, provisionally agreeing that they were invalid and unlawful.

Final judgment will be determined in a second part of the case, which is to follow. But for now, no quotas may be issued by Environment Minister Barbara Creecy.

The court concurred with HSI/Africa that Creecy's department was not permitted to defer the 2021 quotas to 2022, as it had attempted to, because this was not authorised under regulations on international trade of these species, and also violated the common law principle of legitimate expectation. It also found that:

- The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment had failed to comply with the required public participation conditions;
- The quota announcement was not published in the *Government Gazette*; and
- The minister was not permitted to issue a quota for trophy hunting when there was no scientific proof that such hunts would not be detrimental to the species.

In his findings, Judge Patrick Gamble pointed out that if the interdict was granted, the lives of 170 wild animals would be spared pending the final hearing of the review. If the review was successful but the interdict was



Lions are in the top 5 species exported as trophies from South Africa

Photo courtesy of Canva.

not granted, the protected animals would have been killed, their rights violated and their populations irreversibly affected.

If the review fails, he said, the quota will still stand. Then "the desire of the fortunate few who can afford to hunt protected animals exclusively for the purpose of transporting their trophies for display overseas will not have been lost, only delayed".

The executive director for HSI/Africa, Tony Gerrans, welcomed the High Court's ruling. It enabled the terms by which the quota alloca-

tions were determined to be fully reviewed. "We are thankful that the High Court recognises that the killing of our threatened, vulnerable and critically endangered wildlife cannot continue while this matter is heard."

What the decision means is that, until the review is undertaken by the Court, the department may not issue any quotas to hunt the three species, may not publish quotas in the *Government Gazette* and may not permit the export of their trophies.

It's a considerable victory for conservation NGOs fighting for the welfare of ani-

mals in South Africa and an end to trophy hunting. They point out that leopards are categorised as vulnerable on the Red List of Threatened Species, black rhinos are critically endangered and elephant numbers across Africa have plummeted. Issuing licences to hunt them is bizarre.

South Africa is the world's second largest exporter of hunting trophies, accounting for 16% of the global total – an average of 4,204 a year. This is 50% more than Africa's second-largest exporter, Namibia, and more than three times

that of Africa's third-largest exporter, Zimbabwe.

Between 2014 and 2018 South Africa exported 574 leopard trophies (98% of them wild-sourced), 1,337 elephant trophies (virtually all wild-sourced) and 21 black rhino trophies (all wild-sourced).

The top five species exported as trophies from South Africa are lions (mostly captive), chacma baboons, southern lechwes (captive, non-native), caracals and vervet monkeys. Most foreign hunters come from the US, and the rest from Russia, Denmark, Canada, Mexico,

Germany, Hungary, Sweden and France.

According to the 2022 Good Governance Report dealing with trophy hunting, the South African government's apparent commitment to trophy hunting "neither considers the opportunity costs associated with the practice, nor its negative externalities".

It adds that while trophy hunting may generate some economic benefit, this is hardly enough to substantiate the overall harm that it does, or to promote it as a conservation mechanism.

Previously published in the Daily Maverick.

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RAPTORS VIEW R 3 200 000
Bedrooms 4 | Bathroom 3.5 | Floor size: 200 m²

This lovely family home, on a large stand; is conveniently located in the estate, with a beautiful mountain view & in close proximity to the nature based, Southern Cross School. Ideally located for quick access to the school and other amenities.

Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 1456317



CANYON GAME RESERVE R 2 500 000
Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 4 | Floor size: 250 m²

Situated halfway up the North Drakensberg mountain, the property consists of a main home with 2 en-suite bedrooms, 170 m² in size, as well as a cottage with 2 en-suite bedrooms, 60 m² in size. Units have backup water and is sold furnished.

Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 1456236



NDLOVUMZI R 3 950 000
Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 3 | Floor size: 380 m²

This 21-ha Olifants river property has a 2 bedroom main home and a separate 2-bedroom cottage, all located under large indigenous riverine trees. The outdoor entertainment area has captivating views of the garden, pool & river.

Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 1459005



LISSATABA R 3 500 000
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3 | Floor size: 220 m²

Stunning Olifants river views! This newer home has been well constructed, is in good condition and is perched on the hillside overlooking the river. There is an open plan kitchen, dining room & lounge, leading out to a patio with gorgeous views.

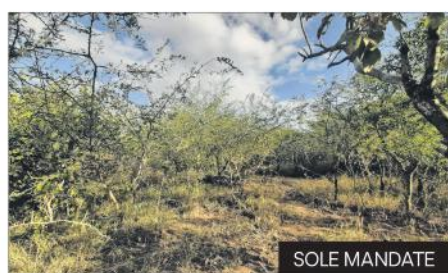
Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 1458608



N'TSIRI NATURE RESERVE R 7 000 000
Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 2.5 | Traverse: 2651 ha

N'tsiri Nature Reserve is an exclusive, private use, Big 5 reserve where wildlife roam freely across the unfenced borders with the Kruger National Park, Klaserie & Timbavati Private Nature Reserves. Membership is limited to 65 homes.

Yvette Thompson - 083 655 7176 Ref: 1450349



MORIA, MODITLO R550 000
Stand size: 1,6 hectares

This large stand is located in the Knobthorn carousel. The stand is close to the main entrance, but a good distance from the road noise of the R40. The stand has lovely trees and bushveld. It is fairly flat and should be easy to build on.

Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2027738



LISSATABA R 1 500 000
Bedrooms 2 | Bathroom 1 | Floor size: 107 m²

This lock up and go two-bedroom bush home has a lot of potential! The perfect spot where you can come & relax, away from the stresses of city life. The reserve is 2.500ha in size & has only 54 sites. There is an excellent network of game drive roads.

Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 1449027



JEJANE R 2 000 000
Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 4 | Floor size: 426 m²

By purchasing this 17,5% share, you will have access to traverse 2500 ha of prime Big 5 game viewing in Greater Kruger. There are several dams and game hides on the reserve, a large communal pool and a well-maintained network of roads.

Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 1449006



RECREATIONAL GAME FARM R 7 150 000
Bedrooms 5 | Bathrooms 4 | Farm size: 441 ha

Located midway along the Northern Drakensberg mountains, and 25km from Hoedspruit, this 441-hectare game farm has stunning scenery. The buyer will be the majority land owner of Canyon Game Reserve.

Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 1444594



MAFUNYANE, KARONGWE R 15 000 000
Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 4 | Traverse: 8,000 ha

This property is stunning and has a wow factor that will take your breath away! Very exclusive, modern bush home, overlooking a seasonal river bed, located in a Big 5 reserve with 8,000 ha traverse. Sold furnished & including game viewer.

Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 1443333



GREATER MAKALALI R 20 000 000
Bedrooms 5 | Bathrooms 5 | Farm size: 640 ha

This commercial property forms part of the Greater Makalali Nature Reserve, which is home to the Big 5 & there is 20,000ha of pristine traverse. Approvals in place for 10 commercial beds. There is a main 2-bedroom home and 3 guest chalets.

Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 1459112



FULL TITLE FARM R 13 500 000
Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 4 | Farm size: 133 ha

The farm is situated only 35 minutes from Hoedspruit. The home is ideal for a family and it has the potential to be turned into a boutique guesthouse. There are stables, carpools, a dam, storeroom and viewing deck. So many options...

Delaine Muller - 072 117 1133 Ref: 1427931



HOEDSPRUIT WILDLIFE ESTATE R 4 250 000
Bedroom 4 | Bathroom 2 | Floor: 267 m²

This home has a spacious patio area overlooking the wilderness area; making it very private. The home comprises 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and an open plan lounge and kitchen area with guest toilet, with the potential for B&B operation.

Mike Dodds - 082 906 7004 Ref: 1323091



SILONQUE, PHALABORWA R2 950 000
Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 2 | Floor size: 160 m²

Easy to maintain bush home located on a 21 ha farm portion within a conservancy and 3 kms from the Kruger Park fence. It's located 7 km from the town of Phalaborwa and within a conservancy with a boomed security gate & a large variety of game.

Mike Dodds - 082 906 7004 Ref: 1317289



LISSATABA R 2 200 000
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 2 | Floor size: 180 m²

This unfenced well-maintained camp has a true bush feel. The buildings are built with solid rock and thatch which keeps them insulated and cool in summer. The thatch patio has spectacular views of the Drakensberg Mountains.

Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 1408817



LISSATABA R 5 000 000
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3 | Floor size: 270 m²

This property will take your breath away! The views are gorgeous and the living room has large glass windows framing the view and bringing in plenty of light. The main house has one bedroom and another building has the 2nd and 3rd bedrooms.

Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 1459717

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Symbols of prophecy, vultures are being

Dominic Naidoo
Alexandra Howard

Vulture brain trade vexes conservationists. Unless the poisoning of vultures for alleged belief-use by bogus traditional healers is decisively tackled, these raptors – crucial to our ecosystems – face a very uncertain future.

Peter Jean Roberts remembers the grisly event all too well.

It was two days before Christmas, 2019. He had been enjoying family holiday time in a sweltering KwaZulu-Natal when a call came in. It was from a property manager on Rolling Valley Ranch, between Pongola and Mkuze in the far north of the province.

"We had responded to a previous incident in August that year on the same property, so when I saw his name come up on my phone, I immediately knew this wasn't good," recalled Roberts, who manages a wildlife emergency response team for the conservation organisation, Wildlife ACT.

Staring into his cup of coffee, Roberts relived the day. "Confirming my fears, the property manager told me he had found a poisoned African white-backed vulture, again. He asked for support. I contacted a couple of my colleagues and we converged on the site."

"At first, we struggled to find immediate evidence of poisoning beyond this lone dead bird. The vulture had, however, clearly been poisoned," said Roberts.

Aerial support

"The team needed aerial support to sweep the area to help find other birds or the laced carcass", said Roberts, referring to how vultures are commonly harvested by lacing the carcass of a freshly killed animal with poisons and highly toxic pesticides.

After a 45-minute search from the air, the poison site was found.

"Waiting for us, in the open veld, was a snared, poisoned impala carcass and 15 dead African white-backed vultures (*Gyps africanus*) and a lone lappet-faced vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*)," Roberts said. Most were concealed beneath a bush near the impala carcass. The heads and feet had been cut off the birds, whose remains were still fresh.

Toxic meals

It was the fourth such incident recorded in northern Zululand that year, bringing the total recorded number of vultures harvested for body parts in the region alone to 53. The actual number of birds killed was believed to be much higher



FIGHTING TO SURVIVE: : In this drone photo, an African white-backed vulture chick takes its first steps in its journey to leave its nest. Photo courtesy Wildlife ACT.

as many incidents go undetected.

As with nearly all vulture poisoning incidents, no arrests were ever made in the Rolling Valley Ranch incident.

Warnings

At the time, experts warned that unless the poisoning of vultures for belief-use trade was decisively tackled, vultures faced extinction not only in KwaZulu-Natal, but throughout Southern and Eastern Africa.

And it looks like things may have gotten worse. The Covid-19 lockdowns, coming after years of high unemployment and a stagnant economy, have pushed people to seek new sources of income. This includes poaching wildlife to be sold for belief-use, with some people convinced that animal-based concoctions could keep them safe from contracting Covid-19.

While the killing of vultures is not part of this recent trend, the writing has been on the wall for these raptors for some time. Some people believe they possess psychic power. This has led to false beliefs that muthi made from vulture brains could, for example, help you win the lottery.

False beliefs

According to a study in a peer-reviewed paper by ecologist Mbali Mashele, vultures play a significant role in the spiritual practices and occult beliefs of various communities in Africa. Mbali and her team interviewed 51 traditional healers and 197 other people in nine villages in the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, near protected areas including Greater Kruger. They found that vulture body parts were commonly used by people hoping to see into the future, appease their ancestors, for good luck and to cure illnesses.

And a September 2020 scholarly paper highlighted that vulture poisoning was rife in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, a vast area spanning national parks (notably the Kruger) and private and communally-owned land in South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

The paper, published in the journal of Global Ecology and Conservation, noted a spike in intentional vulture poisoning and poaching. "Conservation stakeholders have identified evidence that a number of vulture species in particular ecosystems are being systematically targeted by poisoning with potentially significant effects on human, wildlife and ecosystem health," said Meredith Gore, an associate professor at the University of Maryland, and her co-authors.

Worrying

A couple of years earlier, in 2018, conservation group BirdLife South Africa warned of widespread threats to raptors. In its "State of South Africa's Birds" report, it listed 22 raptor species of the 80 known in the country, as either Threatened or Critically Endangered. These include the bearded vulture, Cape vulture, hooded vulture, African white-backed vulture and the white-headed vulture. BirdLife South Africa noted a worrying decline in scavenger raptors and vultures, not only in South Africa but in Central, West and East Africa too.

Andre Botha, the Vultures for Africa programme manager at the Endangered Wildlife Trust said an ongoing aerial survey in the Kruger National Park had revealed a considerable decline in active nests of the lappet-faced vulture in the park since 2015. Botha said the significant

decline in numbers of lappet-faced vultures in two areas surveyed in 2020 was particularly concerning.

Then, late last year, Wildlife ACT reported that the lappet-faced vulture was well on its way to disappearing from KwaZulu-Natal skies. The not-for-profit said that an aerial and ground survey it did in November with the provincial conservation authority, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, noted an alarming decrease in active nests – from 15 in 2020 to four in 2021.

Parent birds

Wildlife ACT and Ezemvelo detailed how a Zululand Vulture Project team followed up on the poisoning of a lappet-faced vulture in the region's north, visiting the nearest known active nest. "Sadly, a young vulture was found dead in the nest, suspected to have died from starvation due to the possible death of the parent birds," the organisations said in a statement.

The nest belonged to a vulture that had been ringed and tagged as a chick in 2016 and fitted with a global positioning system (GPS) tracking unit in May 2020.

Vultures only start breeding from the age of five so this may have been its first breeding attempt. "This individual's GPS unit dropped off the grid in early October and the bird has not been seen again," said Chris Kelly, a founding member of Wildlife ACT and its director of species conservation. "It is possible that the single remaining parent was attempting to rear the chick until it too succumbed to a poisoning event."

Chicks on satellite

Four lappet chicks from other nests in Zululand have since been fitted with tracking units. The lightweight, solar-powered units let researchers monitor the birds' movements when they are ready to leave the nest, providing a better understanding of the birds' dispersal range, habitat use, flight paths and the threats they face. The units also help teams to respond quicker if abnormal movements are detected.

Intrinsic value

The lappet-faced vulture – named for the folds of flesh on its bald, pink head – is

found in many parts of Africa as well as the Arabian peninsula. In 2015, the International Union for Conservation of Nature updated its status to Endangered. The African white-backed vulture, is also listed as once the most common and widespread vulture in sub-Saharan Africa, is listed as Critically Endangered, due to a decline of more than 90% in its population across the range over the past 35 years.

Why does this matter? Beyond the intrinsic value of the birds, vultures play a vital role in our ecosystems by consuming rotting carcasses. This limits the spread of certain diseases and keeps populations of opportunistic scavengers such as feral dogs in check, said Botha.

He said aside from deliberate poisoning and poaching for myth-based uses, vultures faced threats from a number of other quarters. This includes indirect poisoning – where vultures consume poison intended for predators such as leopards and jackals – and collisions resulting in electrocutions on electrical generation and transmission structures.

Mystified

So how have efforts to protect these important birds fared in the past few years?

Kelly said there had always been a strong presence of vulture conservation in KwaZulu-Natal, but poisoning for the illegal trade in body parts had been an increasing problem. Conservationists were mystified by the recent "spike" in vulture poisonings and were working to better understand its causes.

"There is also a sense that better monitoring and detection is part of the reason for the increase in reported incidents," said Kelly. "Over the last three years, we have recorded and responded to over 14 vulture poisoning events, most of these in the greater Zululand area."

Cont. on page 7.



CASUALTY: The first dead African White-Backed vulture discovered by the Wildlife ACT team in December 2019 had a full throat and crop, indicating it was still processing the poisoned meat and may have been regurgitating when it died. Picture: Dani Theron, Wildlife ACT

targeted by charlatans and criminals



At least 87 critically endangered vultures died after consuming the poisoned carcass of a poached elephant in Mbabashene, Mozambique, in early 2018. The Endangered Wildlife Trust reported that some of the dead vultures were mutilated, suggesting they had been killed for parts in the belief-use trade. Picture courtesy: André Botha, Endangered Wildlife Trust

Cont. from page 6.

More than 200 vultures died in those incidents, but many more were saved due to early detection and site decontamination. A few were saved and released back into the wild."

Few arrests

What about catching and punishing vulture poachers? Why are there so few arrests and convictions? KwaZulu-Natal SAPS spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nqobile Gwala said among the difficulties police faced was the fact that poachers were embedded in the communities, so people were often reluctant to share information with police.

"Potential witnesses are afraid to come forward with information or to testify as they fear for their lives," she said.

While rhino poaching cases are referred to the police Organised Crime Unit, vulture poisonings are most commonly investigated by police Stock Theft Units which already have their hands full dealing with a deluge of cattle theft cases. They are sometimes assisted by the SAPS Endangered Species Unit, provincial conservation authorities bodies and SANParks, depending on where the incident took place.

On the investigation procedures, Roberts said an investigating officer would usually visit a crime scene with a forensic officer. They take photographs, bag samples for the lab for analysis and get statements from first responders and witnesses. All of this was used to open and build a case.

But how often were police able to build sufficiently strong cases that led to successful prosecutions?

Conviction rate

The KZN Stock Theft Unit confirmed it had handled

six vulture poisoning cases in the past three years: one in 2020 in which four vultures carcasses found, two in 2021 (21 vulture carcasses) and three poisoning incidents so far this year (total of 97 carcasses found). Investigations resulted in the arrest of four suspects in 2021, but only one conviction with an accused fined R2000.

Before this, the only successful prosecution in Zululand was of two perpetrators back in 2011, said Botha. And given that many cases go by undetected, the actual number of vulture poisoning incidents and total number of vultures killed is believed to be far higher, he said.

At the time of going to press, the National Prosecuting Authority had not responded to queries on the number and outcome of vulture poisoning cases it has handled.

Reporting on the realities of the trade is complex and difficult. Disclosing the bizarre myths and legends that fuel demand may have unintended consequences, potentially increasing the demand for vulture brains, eyes and feet. Similarly, conservationists often caution journalists against reporting on the prices fetched for vulture and other wild animal body parts, lest it leads to more poaching.

Myths

And the use of the popular term, muthi, for animal based concoctions is contentious. Muthi refers to herbal medicine prescribed by an inyanga (traditional healer), so belief-use is the preferred language of the day when it comes to the trade in wild animal parts.

However you choose to phrase it though, the fact remains that in African lore vultures are credited with supernatural powers – and how best to address this has got conservationists vexed.

Amos Kafera, a registered traditional healer from Zimbabwe says that the vulture (Gora, in Shona language) is widely recognised for its powers of prophecy. But people who knew how to make these powerful medicines had long passed on, says Kafera. "These days people are killing vultures indiscriminately. We do not encourage it. The bird should not be killed," he says.

A spokesperson and former chairman of the KwaZulu-Natal Traditional Healers Association, Sazi Mhlongo, agreed.

He dismissed myths that consuming, smoking or inhaling muthi derived from dried-out vulture brains could improve odds when gambling on the lottery, or placing sport bets, or preparing for exams. He also scoffed at claims that vultures' eyes can be used to see into the future or simply to improve eyesight; their beaks for protection and their feet to heal fractured bones or make a person run faster.

Bogus

"These false beliefs about the medicinal use of vultures are caused and perpetuated by people who do not have enough information about traditional medicine," said Mhlongo.

"And traditional healers who are not trained practitioners and who want quick cash continue to mislead people by convincing them that killing a vulture or using the bird's parts will create wealth for them," adds Mhlongo. "They are bogus inyangas. These are senseless killings of a bird with no medicinal significance or healing properties."

Livelihoods

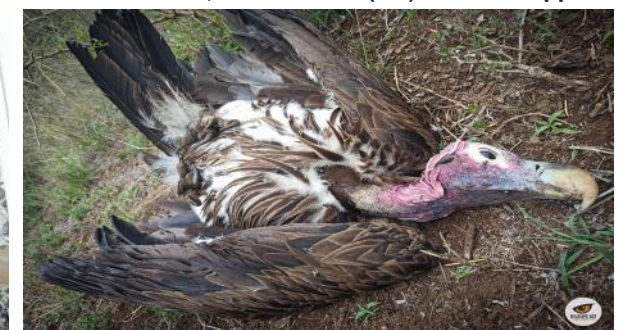
He stressed that until people who live near protected areas were better off or were provided with other



This African White-backed vulture was among the sixteen vulture carcasses incinerated at Rolling Valley ranch to remove the fast-acting poison from the environment (above). Photo courtesy Wildlife Act.



Traditional healer, Amos Kafera (left). Photo: Supplied



opportunities to make a living, it would be hard to stem the illegal wildlife trade.

And for as long as myths about vultures' supernatural powers were believed, they would be harvested for their body parts, said Mhlongo.

He said that formal recognition of traditional leaders could help save vulture populations.

"We are the people who can help demystify these myths in communities," said Mhlongo.

So, are conservation leaders, traditional healers and the users of wildlife muthi concoctions talking to each other? Not enough, said Botha.

Engagements

"In my experience, engagements with traditional healer organisations are usually constructive in sharing information about the risks to human health from the consumption of poisoned vulture and other animal products, but more of this is needed on a continuous basis," he said.

Encouragingly, when Mashele and her team did their research in the Bushbuckridge area, the traditional leaders they interviewed expressed concern about the fate of vultures and how this decline would affect their cultural and traditional heritage.

"Contrary to what was previously thought, vultures are indeed used in traditional medicine close to the Kruger National Park," wrote Mashele. She ex-

pressed concern about the health risks people faced from consuming concoctions made from poisoned wildlife.

"We therefore encourage investigation into the human healthcare component, and sharing of results to create awareness," said Mashele.

Diseases

Given the vital role vultures play, cleaning up carcasses and other organic waste, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environmental Affairs warned that the decline in vulture populations could contribute to the spread of diseases among wild and domestic animals as well as people.

The department's chief director of communications, Albi Modise, also expressed concern about the environmental impact of the poison-laced animal carcasses used to kill vultures.

He said a National Vulture Task Force was established in 2019, leading to the development of a biodiversity management plan for vultures, and a national wildlife poisoning prevention working group.

The working group, he said, had been making interventions to ensure wildlife populations were safeguarded from poisonous substances "through the safe and responsible import, sale, storage, use and disposal of agricultural pesticides and appropriate interventions to prevent and respond to illegal use."

On alert

In the meantime, Roberts and his colleagues are on perpetual alert, awaiting summons to scenes similar to those they witnessed at Rolling Valley Ranch on December 23, 2019. "It's not a case of will we get such a call, but when, and from where?" mused Roberts.

By the time the sun had set on that sweltering day, Roberts and the Wildlife ACT team had gathered all that remained of those 16 vultures into a single, lifeless heap.

"But there was more to be done," he recalled. The poison that killed the vultures had to be removed from the natural system to protect other birds and wildlife. "We set the remains alight and watched the carcasses of these critically endangered birds disintegrate into ash." – Additional reporting, Nomfundo Xolo, Tulani Ngwenya and Fred Kockott.

Dominic Naidoo is a freelance environmental journalist. Alexandra Howard is a zoologist committed to finding people-oriented solutions to wildlife trafficking. This collaborative story, first published by Daily Maverick, arises from the Khetha Journalism Project. Supported by USAID and developed by WWF-SA WESSA and Roving Reporters, the project explores the broader context of wildlife trafficking and examines ways to counter its impact, particularly in and around the Greater Kruger National Park.

Why do impalas make such a noise and 'roar'?

In late summer to early autumn one can often hear strange guttural 'roaring' sounds in the bush that invariably get mistaken for predator sounds. It is in fact the sound made by dominant impala males during the rut or mating season.

The roar is unique among our antelope, and probably evolved as a vocal means of advertising and intimidating potential rivals so as to reduce physical encounters. For a species as numerous as impala, the energy saving for the male is, therefore, self-explanatory.

During the rut these males become distracted from feeding and energetically chase off young males. They pursue females vigorously with necks outstretched, heads held low and mouths open while emitting the 'roar'. This continues all day and into the night – especially moonlit nights. The roars are often accompanied by loud snorting when air is expelled so violently from the nasal cavity that it causes the nasal membranes to resonate (this is also used as an alarm signal). Because so much energy is spent on these activities, the male soon loses condition and is displaced



by younger males from the bachelor groups. This process may repeat itself a few times during the rut of about eight weeks, ensuring a good influx of genes into the breeding pool. When chased by makes during the rut – and occasionally during other times of the year – females will sometimes bound high into the air and upon landing will flick the hind legs up high (almost vertically) in a spectacular display. The reason for this is unclear. Great excitement within the herd, even running across roads, can also be a catalyst for this behaviour, referred to as high-leg gait.

The conspicuous big, black, furry blotches just above the hind hooves of impala enclose what is called a metatarsal gland, unique to impala.

The function of this gland has not yet been determined beyond doubt, but it is reasonable to assume that it plays a role in communicating an olfactory (scent) signal to other members of the herd, which could serve a variety of social or defensive functions.

Because impalas are among the most common antelope, they are preyed upon by a wide variety of predators, and

What are the black tufts on the hind legs of impala?

therefore have good reason to be skittish. At the slightest disturbance they explode in different directions and bound away – a very effective way of confusing predators. The metatarsal gland releases

a sweet pheromone scent when they run or jump, and this could conceivably allow them to follow one another or regroup once they've been dispersed. This is a very good safety mechanism, particularly when used in conjunction with the white tail that might actually trigger a 'follow me' reaction because the tail is so conspicuous. Because the scent is secreted by muscu-

lar contractions around the glands, the effective delivery is more suited to the hind legs that strenuously propel the animal, and this could account for the lack of these glands on the forelegs.

An excerpt from 'Beat about the Bush – Mammals and Birds' by Trevor Carnaby, Published by Jacana Media, Second Edition reprint 2018.

Purchase for a discount of 30% at <https://jacana.co.za/product/beat-about-the-bush-mammals/> Coupon code BAB30 is valid until 30 June 2022

The June Solstice

Edited version as a collaboration by Vigdis Hocken and Aparna Kher, www.timeanddate.com and other referenced material.

The June Solstice is welcomed every year around June 21. Solstice comes from the Latin words sol, meaning Sun and sistere, meaning to come to a stop or stand still.

This signifies the first day of winter in the Southern Hemisphere (Winter solstice) and the first day of summer in the Northern Hemisphere (Summer Solstice). On this day the Sun reaches its northernmost position in the sky. In 2022, this will happen on June 21st at exactly 09:13 Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) or 11:13 SA time. At that moment, its zenith does not move north or south as during most other days of the year. On this day the Sun is directly above the Tropic of Cancer, and slowly starts its journey southwards.

The Earth will also be at its aphelion (farthest from the Sun) a few weeks after the June solstice. The Earth is closest to the Sun, at its perihelion, about two weeks after the December solstice. This is a significant yearly occurrence - the days start getting longer and the nights shorter in the Southern

Hemisphere, and quite the opposite in the Northern Hemisphere where the days get shorter and the nights longer.

The June solstice is the only day of the year within the Antarctic Circle where there are 24 hours of night. Any location south of this circle has Polar Night several days before the June solstice. The opposite happens in the Arctic Circle where locations within that circle experience a continuous period of daylight for 24 hours. Due to atmospheric refraction, however, the midnight Sun is visible for a few days before and on the June solstice from areas as far as 97 km south of the Arctic Circle. As one moves further north of the Arctic Circle, the number of days with the Midnight Sun increase.

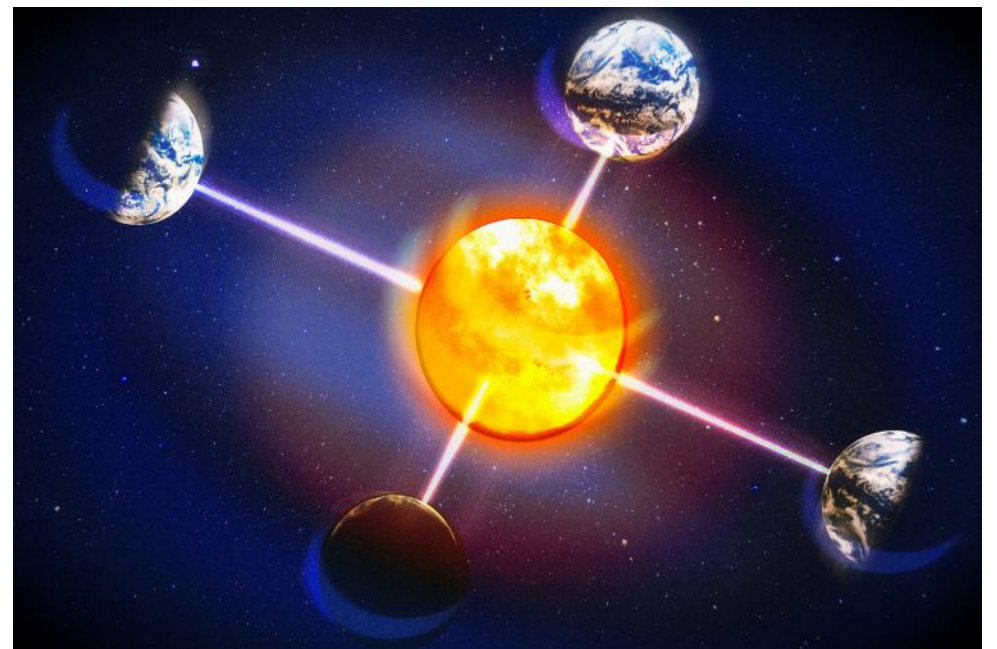
Celebrations surrounding the June solstice have a time-honoured history. In ancient times, the date of the June solstice was used to organize calendars and as a marker to figure out when to plant and harvest crops. Traditionally, this time of year was also popular for weddings, and is often associated with change, nature, and new beginnings.

Some historians point to Stonehenge, a prehistoric monument in Wiltshire, England, as evidence of the fact

that ancient humans used the June solstice as a way to organize their calendars. Some believe that Stonehenge's unique stone circle was erected around 2500 BCE in order to establish the date of the June solstice. Viewed from its centre, the Sun rises at a particular point on the horizon on the day of the solstice. Some theories suggest that the builders of Stonehenge may have used the solstice as a starting point to count the days of the year.

In ancient China, the June solstice was observed by a ceremony to celebrate the Earth, femininity, and the "yin" forces. It complemented the December solstice that celebrated the heavens, masculinity, and "yang" forces. According to Chinese tradition, the shortest shadow is found on the day of the summer solstice.

In ancient Gaul, which encompasses modern-day France and some parts of its neighbouring countries, the Midsummer celebration was called the Feast of Epona. The celebration was named after a mare goddess who personified fertility and protected horses. In ancient Germanic, Slav, and Celtic tribes, pagans celebrated Midsummer with bonfires. After Christianity spread in Europe and other



Solstice comes from the Latin words sol, meaning Sun and sistere, meaning to come to a stop or stand still. Image courtesy of Canva

parts of the world, many pagan customs were incorporated into the Christian religion. In parts of Scandinavia, the Midsummer celebration continued, but was observed around the time of St John's Day, on June 24, to honour St John the Baptist, instead of the pagan gods.

In northern European countries like Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland, Midsummer is a festive celebration. When the summer days are at their longest in the north, it is the time of the Midnight

Sun festivals, that celebrate the summer and the fertility of the Earth. In Sweden and many parts of Finland, people dance around Maypoles. Bonfires are lit and homes are decorated with flower garlands, greenery, and tree branches.

In the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) Midsummer is an occasion to travel to the countryside and connect with nature. Many people light bonfires and stay up all night drinking, singing, and dancing.

The June Solstice was considered as one of the most

important days in ancient Kemet (Egypt today). They believe that once the sun had arrived at its highest point, the Nile River would start rising again. This rise caused floods that would feed and nourish the crops of the Nile Valley and help feed the community. It was a sign of fertility and abundance.

There are many solstice observances held by New Age and Neopagan groups throughout the world. Thousands of people, including modern-day druids and pagans, usually gather at Stonehenge for this occasion.

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Lifestyle Correspondent

Khaya Ndlovu Manor House is not just a place, it's a feeling!

At Khaya Ndlovu, we believe that every child must experience the wonder, mystery, and excitement of the African bush, which is why we have created the perfect opportunity for families with young children to enjoy a bush break together.

The Manor House is situated in the Rietspruit Big-Game Reserve, within a securely fenced indigenous garden. This offers many exciting areas to explore, trees to climb and rolling lawns on which to play. A real-time Animal Planet show continues from the alfresco deck all day long, as an ever-changing assortment of animals arrive to quench their thirst at the Manor House water hole.

Our three wonderful chefs, Vandi, Princess and Jeff have an array of kid-friendly meals in their menu bank, and also offer pizza making sessions by prior arrange-

ment. Accommodation in our child-friendly suites is comfortable with camp cots and beds included, not just mattresses on the floor!

Well-behaved children are welcome on game drives, which are conducted on our own Reserve. Private vehicles need to be booked for any child joining a drive who is under the age of six. As safety is of paramount importance when in the vicinity of wild animals, joining a big game sighting with very young children on board will be at the discretion of the guide. We do ask that children accompanying other guests on a game drive be kept under control, and parents of young children are asked to be mindful of other guests who are also enjoying their experience in the bush.

Babysitting facilities are available by prior arrangement for mums and dads who wish to enjoy some time out over a bottle of wine, secure in the knowledge that their little ones are close by and taken care of.

... and then if your days of humouring children are over, there are enough breakaway areas on the Khaya deck for you to retreat to, for a relaxing space of your own!

#FathersDay2022...

As per usual, Khaya Ndlovu will be offering a delicious Father's Day Lunch at the Manor House on Sunday the 19th June 2022.

A 3-course lunch will be on offer with various choices in celebration of all the Dads in our lives. The cost is R550.00 per adult and includes a gift for the Fathers. For children under 12, there is 2-course kiddies option for R 150 per child. Booking is essential!

#youthmonthhappyhour...

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The incredible Khaya team welcoming kids and families to share the Khaya Ndlovu experiences, right here on Hoedspruits doorstep.

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Rest your eyes and ears on a 'bird party'

Chinspot Batis *Batis molitor*

Image : Canva

Mike Meidlinger

As we near and pass the solstice, mornings are crisp, breezes possess an unfamiliar chill, shadows and regions devoid of sunlight are noticeably cold, and winter is now undeniably in the air.

Despite this unseasonably wet year, there is still a thinning of vegetation, apart from some persistent moist green zones. This has perhaps been brought on by changes in daylight length and temperature, changes themselves brought on by an angular shift in sunlight intensity. All mornings take their time to warm up these days, with some even possessing a light frost atop the regular heavy dew.

In terms of overall birding and bird diversity, this month we have noted a change in which species are available. Migrants are all but gone, despite one or two over-wintering individuals, and the skies appear noticeably less active. As vegetation thins, so does the array of invertebrates that supported such a diversity of species merely weeks ago.

Thus winter birding is distinctly different from the glory days of summer. Birds are generally less vocal, they move around in a more random fashion, and in many cases interspecies boundaries break down. Many species that were in bright breeding attire have adorned their duller, almost dreary, eclipse or non-breeding plumage. Birds like Bishops, Weavers and Whydahs seem to vanish overnight. Despite its seemingly humble nature, birding in winter can be fantastically exhilarating, often yielding one or two surprises for the intrepid birder.

Due to reduced temperatures, peak periods of activity are longer, often lasting into, and even beyond, the mid-morning. Birds take longer to rise, with a slightly later chorus, still just after dawn, but most likely only commencing when the first rays of sunlight grace their hypothermic body's. Another factor is that, with vegetation thinning out, in some cases smaller insectivores become a little easier to see well. This is why woodland birding can be extremely rewarding.

This month, let's unlock

one of the major secrets of birding in these colder months, and offer some tips on how to get the most of this time. Despite having lost a number of migrants, many of the regional specials and in fact, the majority of all species, are resident. This means that, though some may be less obvious than when breeding, they are in fact still present.

Many species still sing in the early morning, but for most, territorial behaviour largely ceases as individuals now explore a home range. Priorities have changed, adult birds are no longer responsible for anything but themselves, and their primary objective, is the search for enough food to survive through until warmer times. Many species run a fine line between having enough stored fat and energy to survive a serious week-long cold-snap, or not. Many birds perish and thus feeding is an ever present activity throughout the day, especially for species depending on resources such as nectar and insects, which have also decreased in availability.

Whilst out birding, one of the most exciting experienc-

es is being witness to the advent of a bird party. This is a singular moment within both space and time when feeding passerines, associating closely or loosely, simply pass through a patch of woodland. The observer often remains still, and catches whatever species pass through. There are many aspects to what makes up the characteristics of, and the species involved in, these aggregations, some of which are still unknown. What is clear is that each bird party is its own unique collection.

What is interesting, is most species involved in these groupings are insectivorous and are those that glean or flick leaf litter for their food. Gleaning is the specific process of taking insects and other arthropods from the surface of leaves. This is largely done by passerine birds which can get their prey one of two ways. The majority "perch glean" by standing on branches and plucking individual prey from the leaves and branches themselves. Another way is to nab morsels from the underside of leaves by "sally gleaning". This is when birds, like Chinspot Batis, make short, half-hovering, sortie flights in order to get the right angle of attack before landing again.

Gleaning birds often associate with others, simply to take advantage of the dilution effect. This states that the more members in a group there are, the less risk for each individual from predation. Thus there is a diluted chance of danger. More members in a herd means it's less likely for each individual to get caught.

Bird parties are common associations, and if searched for, are a fantastic way of getting familiar with local birds. As an example, on average, if birding for a morning between May and September, at least two or three bird parties are sure to be found over an hour or

two. More if you are driving. So how can one recognize when one is privy to a party?

Some parties start with a bang. "Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, bang activity!" Others creep through with more purpose and much less flare. However, in most cases, there are clues that help indicate that something is afoot. Not all bird party members move around equally, some are much more obvious than others. By eye-catching behaviour or clear, obvious vocalisations, these species offer a big signboard that a party is nearby. Thus they are bestowed with the term 'indicator species'; they indicate the potential presence of other birds.

Most indicators are particular to habitat and area, with a few all-rounder exceptions found in a variety of regions. For alert birders, being aware of these indicators and their significance often offers chances at other, less obvious species, that are feeding quietly with them.

In the woodlands and savannah of north-east South Africa, good indicators include Southern Black Tit, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Long-billed Crombec and White-crested Helmetshrike. All are examples of species that often signal the presence of a winter bird party. Each region of the country, from Zululand to the Kalahari, the Western Cape to Gauteng, has its own indicator species. Some indicators, the all-rounders, are generalists with diverse habitat choices, but there are many others which are not.

In any terrain or habitat, knowledge of sounds and vocalizations is essential in realizing the full extent of which members a party consists of. Many birds, during the non-breeding season, have contact calls that differ from their territorial songs. Songs are still in play

for most species, as mentioned, during chorus hours. However, during the day while feeding, familiar birds may utter short strange and often simple notes or harsh sounds. These sounds are in fact also there in summer, but due to the fact that territory is less coveted, many individuals spend less time singing. This results in the amount of full song decreasing substantially. Nevertheless, winter offers the chance to become better accustomed with some of the more subtle aspects of birdsong, especially for those wanting to improve their handicap number, or skill level. Good examples include the contact calls of Golden-breasted Bunting, Camaroptera sp., Black-backed Puffback and the nocturnal call of Red-crested Korhaan (Bustard) are all very common sounds in our local bushveld.

Some bird parties are filled with headliners, others have one or two unobtrusive specials possible amongst a range of bolder, less sought after but associated species. Some parties move slowly, passing over 20 minutes or more, others flit through habitats with surprising speed, almost running pace, which may require a looping approach. This means that picking up on and following down the obvious indicators, alongside putting in the effort and sifting through the species found in each party, often yields rewards.

The overall dynamics of bird parties make them a truly fascinating aspect of winter birding, here in our region of the Lowveld, as well as across the country. They are excellent examples of why this time of year offers no less, in terms of great birding, as the height of summer. This month while out in the field, keep an eye, and an ear, out for passing bird parties, which can often be done from the porch or whilst out on a walk.

Networking evening

on a roll with FGASA



Field Guides Association of Southern Africa

When: 1 June 2022
Time: 17:30 – 19:30
Venue: FGASA Office
The Farmhouse
Hoedspruit

The Field Guides Association of Southern Africa is hosting an informative networking evening in Hoedspruit for all FGASA members and friends. Please join us for a presentation on **dung beetles** by Vaughan Jessnitz. FREE for FGASA members, friends R50 each
 RSVP Ashleigh on 011 8868425
 admin@fgasa.org.za

Constellation of the Month ~ Scorpio ~

Ben Coley

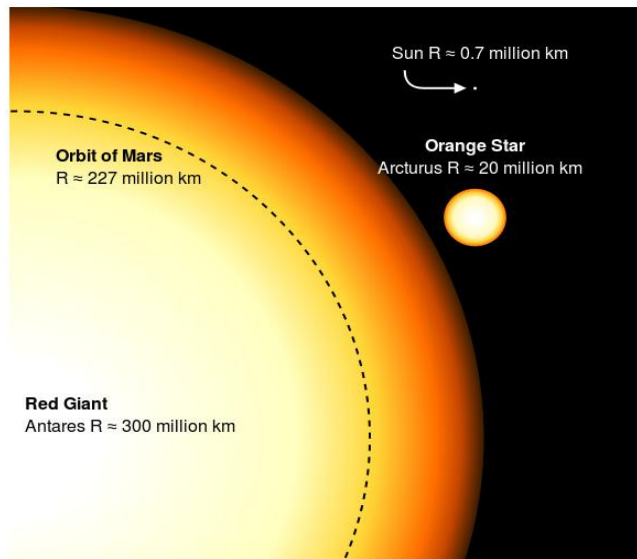
Mythology

Scorpius is among the most recognisable constellations in the sky, and one of the few that actually looks like its namesake! It is one of the oldest constellations and was known to the Sumerians about 5000 years ago, before being catalogued by the Greek astronomer Ptolemy, in his original 48 constellations.

Scorpius's mythology is directly associated with Orion. Orion was a mighty hunter but lacked respect for nature. Gaia, goddess of nature, soon became upset with Orion's actions and summoned a giant scorpion to teach him a lesson. A great battle ensued and both parties were honoured for their part by being immortalised in the stars.

Orion and Scorpius are at opposite sides of the celestial sphere. This ensures that the 2 mortal enemies never have to share the same area of sky.

When Scorpius rises in the east, Orion sets in the west, giving the impression that the great hunter is fleeing from his nemesis for eternity!



Notable Stars

Antares is the brightest star in Scorpius, and is easily recognisable by its orange colour. Antares is classified as a Red Supergiant, a massive old star that is reaching the end of its life, and is predicted to be around 1.4 billion kms in diameter! Antares is so large that if it were to replace the Sun, it would envelop all of the planets up to, and including, Jupiter!

Antares is positioned close to the ecliptic plane: the path that the Sun, Moon and planets seem to take

across the sky. At certain times, the Red Planet, Mars, passes close by the orange Antares and it is this conjunction that forms the origin of the name.

The Greek equivalent of Mars was Ares, and Antares means the 'Rival of Ares', and refers to the fact that sometimes the 2 similarly coloured objects seem to invade each other's personal space!

Deep Sky Objects

Messier 7 - The Ptolemy Cluster, is a bright open

cluster of around 80 young stars situated 1000 light years from Earth visible to the naked eye, close to the stinger of Scorpius's tail.

Messier 6 – The Butterfly Cluster, is an unrelated open cluster found very close to Messier 7. The young stars in this cluster resemble the shape of a butterfly, including a set of antennae! A hazy patch can be seen unaided, but a telescope is required to see and resolve the butterfly shape. Messier 6 is around 1600 light years from Earth. Messier 4 is a globular cluster containing hundreds of thousands of stars found close to the red giant, Antares.

Despite being over 7000 light years away, Messier 4 can be easily spotted, with binoculars, in the same field of view as Antares.

See *Celestial Events SA* advert for contact details



Antares Sun Comparison (left)
The globular star cluster Messier 4 (below)
Scorpius (below left)
Images supplied Ben Coley



The Wild Dagga plant or Lions Tail - Leonotis ocymifolia [leonurus]

Brett Heasman

Stop and marvel at the beauty of these bright orange coloured, not so subtle flowers, that are more than obvious within the drab colours of the autumn bushveld. They appear all over the biosphere and are somewhat of an eye catcher in summer and autumn.

The Wild Dagga plant, yes you read me correctly, is the common name for this long 'pompom-on-a-stick' looking plant, which also looks a little like a lions tail. Its other common name is in fact Lions Tail. Wild Dagga suggests links to cannabis, as 'dagga', which is derived from the Khoikhoi 'dachab', is also an indigenous South African name for the cannabis species.

You would be mistaken to believe that! This is a sparse native shrub, with spiky golf ball-sized heads spaced up the square shaped stems, supporting tubular orange flowers. It has leaves that are in pairs, that are narrow and toothed, are often hairy

and look nothing like the traditional dagga plant.

They are in fact a plant species of the mint family, Lamiaceae. The flowers are separated into two parts or lips, a hooded upper lip which encloses the stamens, and a small lower lip. Sunbirds often feed on the nectar of the flowers.

So why the name? Let's look into the Ethnobotany of the plant - which is the scientific term for the study of how human beings utilize the plant. One will realise very quickly that the name is misleading, as no part of the plant is used as a hallucinogen, despite the common name of Wild Dagga. The plant and leaves are not used as a substitute for the same purpose as cannabis, but are smoked for relief of other illnesses.

The main psychoactive medicinal property has been confirmed to be Leonurine which has an antidepressant like action, has also been investigated as a potential treatment for cardiovascular disorders, and has demonstrated anti-cancer



The Wild Dagga plant in bloom Images supplied

activity. Like other plants in the mint family, it also contains marrubiin, which has anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidative properties.

Many cultures use the plant for different purposes, from treatment of sores, aches, bites and pains to curing colds and

flu. There are properties in the plant that are believed to help with type 2 diabetes, epilepsy, haemorrhoids and constipation.

My quick conclusion is, it can fix a pain in the arse, but it can't fix stupid, so "leaf it be" and enjoy it's beauty.



Africa Travel Indaba 2022 review

Angus Begg

“There was some serious business done with the pent-up travel demand”, says Timbavati lodge owner Marco Schiess, speaking about this month’s Africa Travel Indaba in Durban, his 23rd attendance of the annual event. “A bit of both prospective and actual business. I heard more than one exhibitor say it was their best Indaba yet.”

The owner of Umlani, a rustic luxury safari camp of reed structures, paraffin lamps and optimal wildlife sightings, Schiess was not the only one to feel gung-ho about Indaba. The Chief Convention Bureau Officer at SA Tourism, Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, was quoted in the regional industry publication, *Tourism Update*, as being very upbeat. (Indaba declared a ‘resounding success’ | Southern and East African Tourism Update)

“Now that stakeholders in the African tourism sector have seen what we can do, we can only grow from here.” Some would say an understandable sentiment given the devastating floods that swamped much of KwaZulu-Natal, especially the greater Durban coastline and hills, just two months before Indaba.

Marking her 11th attendance of Indaba, but for the first time as Regional Director of Sales and Marketing of Minor Hotels - a new entrant to the South African market - Lindi Mthethwa echoes Schiess and Kotze-Nhlapo, noting that “returning from two years of lockdown both buyers and exhibitors were very eager to do business and make the show a success.”

The Warm and Fuzzy Face of Tourism

Many attendees stressed the importance of personal contact with clients and of the overwhelmingly negative impact the Covid lockdown had on tourism in Africa, with many businesses closing and industry colleagues losing their jobs across the continent. “It was particularly important for exhibitors to come showcase their products”, says Mthethwa, “and show the world

that we are ready for business again.”

The Chief Executive Officer of Tourvest Destination Management, Martin Wiest, says Indaba was “psychologically an enormously important show”, the start of what he calls a return to normality. Representing three core source visitor markets in German-speaking Europe, Italy and the US, Wiest says that from a pure sales perspective it was “ok”. Schiess, seen roaming around with his laptop bag on his back, says his arrival at Indaba was also last minute. “I thought it might not be well supported but then heard from a respected colleague it had picked up momentum so I went to support, reconnect and see for myself. Glad I did.”

A Numbers Game

The industry traditionally measures the trade show’s success and growth in terms of the number of buyers of mostly South African product, which reads roughly as accommodation, experiences and holidays, and on this score the Acting CEO of South African Tourism, Themba Khumalo, told *Tourism Update* that “since COVID-19, we have started from zero and we benchmark that success from zero”, noting that a total of 480 international buyers and 505 local buyers from South Africa had attended the three-day event. Drawing on data from SA Tourism’s Indaba website <https://www.indaba-southafrica.co.za/about/attendance.aspx> the sum of 985 buyers is the same as the 1996 Indaba, a number which peaked at 2600 in 2013, before slipping back to around 1500 buyers between 2015 and 2019.

“Trade shows depend on volume”, says Wiest, “and there weren’t enough international buyers”. But in the same breath he says that with short notice, due to the frequently changing Covid travel requirements in South Africa and its source markets, he didn’t expect any more.

Meanwhile Back at the Ranch

Some industry voices are less forgiving, like that of David Frost, the Chief Execu-

tive Officer of SATSA – The Voice of Inbound Tourism, the representative industry body to which most tourism establishments belong - and which kept pressure on the government to relax Covid restrictions when it was deemed safe and championed getting South Africa off various ‘red lists’ last year, to prevent the further haemorrhaging of jobs in the industry.

While he says he recognizes the seminal importance of Indaba, describing it as “incredibly important” to the regional tourism landscape, he described this year’s Indaba as “lacklustre”, comparing it to the smaller World Travel Market Africa (WTMA), the alternative, private-sector run industry exhibition held at the CTICC in Cape Town earlier in April. “It was infinitely better. There was a better atmosphere. A more vibrant buzz about it.”

Frost puts the blame for this squarely at the door of the Government.

“Government’s refusal to embrace the private sector as a proper partner, has impacted negatively on the industry. We hear parroting about (public-private) partnerships by SA Tourism and the Department of Tourism, but this all remains in the realm of rhetoric.

A former SA Tourism board member, Frost says an “explicitly discussed point” inside the marketing committee of SA Tourism in 2019 was to have a public-private advisory board to oversee Indaba, “comprising four of five private sector individuals and the balance from SA Tourism, where they could bring their expertise, nous and knowledge”, making it in his eyes a more relevant and trade-focused show. “This has not happened.”

So Who Didn’t Attend, and Why

Classic Portfolio has been one of the staple Indaba exhibitors for over 25 years. Representing a collection of independent lodges and camps in east, west, central and southern Africa, including some of the leading tourism brands in Africa, owner Suzanne Bayly says that “due to the sheer lack of organisation from SAT” they had to

withdraw their attendance.

“We for the last few years have had the biggest stand at Indaba, and were planning to do the same this year.” Bayly says that with 24 sharing partners spread across ten countries - from amongst Sao Tome and Principe, DRC, Seychelles, Tanzania, Zambia and South Africa - participating on a stand that would’ve been over 200 square metres, they required at least four months of planning before the show. “We reached out to the show organisers on a regular basis since 4th January asking what is happening, only to be told registration is opening next week, then next week, then next week. We finally gave up on the 22nd Feb.”

Echoing the words of Frost, Bayly says this was a missed opportunity for the tourism industry. “Indaba has a place as a truly inclusive show that celebrates all aspects of tourism. Unfortunately there are now too many international show organisers (WTM Africa, We Are Africa) who have moved into this space and, through entry restrictions and price point, divided our industry.”

Indeed, while some exhibitors and buyers have chosen to attend both Cape Town’s WTM Africa and Durban’s Indaba, before Covid already many were choosing to show face only at the WTM.

Nevertheless, with less than seven weeks to go in early March, registration for the Indaba finally opened, and despite the many empty spaces, lost opportunities and absent faces, the show went on and much business was done. Lindi Mthethwa says her team had “good business meetings with agents from our key source markets”, North & South America, Europe, South East Asia and East & West Africa among them. One lodge manager in the Manyeleti part of the Greater Kruger National Park said she had already taken bookings for June and July at the show.

“I’m glad SAT went ahead with it”, says Wiest. “If it was my decision, I probably would’ve cancelled, and that would’ve been a mistake”

What did it cost

South African Tourism hosted 194 international and

51 domestic buyers, plus 58 international media at this year’s Africa Travel Indaba. While SAT would not provide Daily Maverick with the cost of such hosting - which includes accommodation, meals and travel around South Africa and return airfare to and from their destination - it has long been seen by the industry as one way of keeping South and mostly southern Africa top of the international traveller’s mind, which speaks to the generation of jobs and careers in a crucial industry. But for which the South African taxpayer pays a small fortune.

Where to From Here

“Make it affordable for small and medium companies to exhibit”, says Onne Vegter, owner of Wild Wings Safaris. “Keep it free for buyers, but vet their quality. And how about we keep municipalities out of Indaba. Waste of taxpayers’ money.”

“Now is the time to establish that advisory committee”, says SATSA’s Frost. “Make next year’s Indaba better, more robust, focused.”

Begg’s Comment:

After attending maybe fifteen Travel Indabas, wearing my other hat as a travel writer, photographer and guide, I like to think I’ve witnessed the evolution of this seminal travel trade show. I’ve seen it at its zenith in 2014, a time when endless networking functions would follow on from days of buyers and exhibitors negotiating deals. But it’s not just hard business, as many of those deals are rooted in stories, such as the astounding tale of the resurrection of Mozambique’s Gorongosa National Park.

Travel speaks to story and people - the story of people - and wildlife, and conservation of cultures and landscapes. En route to the last page, it tags familiar, well-worn narrative themes, like resilience, compassion, perseverance, family, courage and hard work. Which I suppose is why the success of ‘Indaba’ - correctly known since 2018 as the Africa Travel Indaba - is such an emotive subject. For as Covid-19 proved, the basic, food-on-

the-table well-being of tens of thousands, depends on visitors coming to see what South Africa is all about.

That number explodes exponentially when considering that, as the name suggests - and as former colleague and South African Tourism’s convention head Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo called to remind me - Indaba is increasingly taking on the responsibility of marketing Africa to the world. In much the same way that London’s World Travel Market and Berlin’s ITB (Internationale Tourismus Börse) showcases the world to the global industry. For South Africans, the devil lies in the detail of just how we sell our country.

Should taxpayers be paying for a rural Limpopo or Mpumalanga mom ‘n pop shop to take their product to WTM London, without any real expectations of sustainable success. It’s a rhetorical question, as is the longstanding question about rural municipalities with no real product, let alone tourism ‘suss’, being funded to attend Indabas and WTMs. When staff, clearly with no idea of how to present their product, spend more energy lining up at the lunch queues, it presents a challenge for the organisers. As do provincial tourism staff more concerned with shopping at Harrods than learning about the province they’re in London to sell.

South Africa literally cannot afford to fix Eskom, PRASA, SAA and the host of government ministries on the operating table. Clearly, however warm ‘n fuzzy they may sound, we cannot afford the above extravagances, because the money all comes from the same pot(hole). But South Africans are famed for adapting. With the character of leaders running our private sector, combined with the likes of SAT’s Kotze-Nhlapo, common ground can, and has to be found, for the sake of all sector workers, public and private; to consolidate and ensure the ongoing success of this remarkable industry that touches all our lives, in almost every aspect of life.

Previously published in the Daily Maverick.

Xanatseni Private Camp

The lodge is located in the Klaserie Private Nature Reserve. It offers modern, luxurious accommodation in the Greater Kruger National Park, and consists of 5 luxury en-suite rooms with open views onto the watering hole and bushveld. The lodge has a Tseni two-bedroom family suite which can be booked out as a villa

option offering a private guide and vehicle.
reservations@xanatseni.co.za +27 (0)15 004 0803



Hoedspruit's shining Hockey star



Elita van Staden (above & left) Elita in action on campus at the University of Pennsylvania in the USA where she will captain the UPENN side in the upcoming season. Images supplied.

Mark Bishop

It was brought to my attention that Hoedspruit had a star women's hockey player that was rocking the boat in the United States.

This certainly piqued my interest having been a national hockey coach myself in a past life.

Some research revealed that this was in fact true, and that Elita van Staden, from Hoedspruit was indeed rocking the boat at the University of Pennsylvania (UPENN) on the east coast of the United States of America! I managed to corner her for an interview at The Farmhouse in Hoedspruit.

Elita's father, Kobus was born and grew up in Hoedspruit and works here. Her mother, Maleni came down to Hoedspruit and Elita lived here until the age of 9. It was then decided to move her to schooling in Pretoria because of better academic, and more especially sporting opportunities. Elita matriculated at Hoerskool Menlo Park with English as a home language.

Being a hockey coach, Maleni started coaching Elita in hockey from the age of 7. She played hockey all

through school. In her matric year, Hoerskool Menlo Park had a phenomenal first hockey team. Elita captained the team in that very successful season. It was so successful that they were ranked the number one school team in South Africa.

Elita was chosen for the Northern Blues Hockey team to play in the inter-provincial hockey tournament, that year to be held in Pietermaritzburg. The tournament was a success for Elita and she came away with being selected for the South African U18 hockey team to play a three test series against Australia. That series was won by South Africa for the first time in sixteen years!

Immediately after the series, SA Hockey wanted to know what Elita's plans were going forward. She was told that if she went overseas, she would not be eligible to be chosen for any South African hockey side!

In the middle of matric Elita began thinking of her future and whether she would go to university in South Africa or overseas. It was a big decision to make. With the encouragement of her parents, Elita contacted numerous coaches

in the United States. She sent out her CV and a list of her sporting accomplishments – many of the coaches responded.

In March of that year the van Staden family went over to the United States to visit six American universities, mostly on the east coast. Elita immediately fell in love with the UPENN. The whole university vibe was right and they had a very good Business Management faculty (which was what Elita wanted to study) and a fantastic sporting pedigree. She applied and was accepted.

As the American academic year starts in August, Elita had seven months before going to the States. She utilised her time by doing a mathematics calculus course at the University of Pretoria, coaching an U14 hockey team and training.

She then departed for UPENN to study Strategic Management and OID (operations, information decision processes) at the Wharton School of Business at UPENN. The magnitude of this opportunity can best be understood by looking at UPENN being one of the IVY League universities. The IVY League is the crème de la crème of

universities in the United States, add in Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Dartmouth, Cornell, Brown and Columbia and you have the best of the best!

Field hockey is one of the fastest growing sports in the States and there is a big initiative to grow the sport. The IVY league universities don't necessarily take in international players because they are focussed on growing the sport locally, and so only one international a year is brought into the UPENN, for example.

In Elita's first year she lived in a dormitory with a bunch of other first years, and then in her second year she moved into one of two field hockey houses (one for juniors and one for seniors). Elita lives with the rest of her class in a house with ten girls from the hockey team. They have a coach, two assistant coaches, a strength and conditioning coach, and a nutritionist. Soon UPENN will also have a mental health professional joining the university team, upping the professionalism to another level.

The UPENN team has Elita from South Africa, one Canadian and two Dutch girls. UPENN play in a league on

the east coast of the US and currently lie third in the league (Harvard and Princeton are usually the top two) - but going into next season UPENN believe that they have a realistic chance to upset the applecart and come in the top two!

Now going into her senior year, Elita has been involved in discussions with coaches and the team and after some voting, she was announced as the new captain for the next season. Elita considers herself a natural leader but realises the difficulties of being the leader of a group whose cultures vary and are fundamentally different to hers. She is confident that she is up to the challenge. There has never been an international captain at UPENN, much less a South African and Elita is in fact the first South African to captain any of the IVY League universities!

Elita plays centre midfield – one of the two centre players in the midfield line of four – either attacking or defensive. The university is sponsored by Nike, shoes by Asics, and they can choose from a selection of sticks – she plays with TK – and all of that kit is courtesy of the university!

Elita is very quick to state that probably the two things she misses the most are a good braai'd steak, and the South African humour. Her life is somewhat surreal, living in two complete opposite surroundings from the built-up city in the US to the bush in SA! She really does have the best of both worlds.

The U21 Woman's World Cup Hockey was held in March this year, and the South African woman's side was the exact same team as the U18 team from 2018 - except for Elita. "It was bittersweet for me but that is the decision that I have made, and I don't regret that decision for one second. That's the rules of SA hockey I guess," says Elita.

Elita went on to state that "I'm not sure what I will do once I graduate – let's wait and see. I graduate in May 2023. I will be sad and will miss UPENN. I would like to do my MBA but I think that will be a little later. I want to get some real-world experience first."

Hoedspruit can be proud of our star, shining brightly in the United States. Keep our flag flying high and here's a toast to a job being very well done!

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An Avoidable War



Image courtesy of Canva

Hannes Wessels

A regrettable tragedy is unfolding in Ukraine. This may well be the biggest war in Europe since the end of WWII and the great powers are dangerously close to a nuclear confrontation. Western media is almost unanimous in blaming Putin but looking back at events that have led to this there is another side to this sad story.

Going back to the period of Peter the Great and Catherine, Russia has had a close cultural and ethnic affinity with Europe. Just think of names like Tchai-

kovsky, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Gorky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninof, Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak, Pavlov, Sakharov, who contributed so much in the spheres of literature, music and science, to be reminded how close we are to the people east of the Caucasus. Despite this, Western leaders have arrogantly dismissed Russia as a backward, non-democratic political and economic wasteland.

Politically it diverged during the communist era, but even then, the divide was not as wide as we were led to believe. As far back as 1954, then Foreign Minis-

ter Molotov, with the backing of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, proposed that the USSR join an alliance aimed at achieving collective security on the continent but this was rebuffed.

Starting in 1989 with the breaking down of the Berlin Wall, Mikhail Gorbachev commenced collapsing the Russian empire and in so doing dispensed with Moscow's western buffer against US imperialism, EU encroachment and NATO power. He introduced *Glasnost*, and a semblance of liberal democracy. In a very short space of time, all the reasons for NATO's existence had vanished. Gorbachev asked for permanent peace and extended a hand of friendship. The response from the West was the aggressive incorporation, starting with Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, of the former Warsaw Pact countries and former USSR republics in the alliance. In 1991, Boris Yeltsin asked to join the NATO Alliance and in 2000 Putin tried. They were rebuffed and told to take their place at the back of the queue for consideration behind lesser nations from the former Soviet Bloc. Russia's status as a world power was downplayed and belittled. Amer-

ica's only response to the new dispensation was to send in a team of so called 'experts' to help restructure the country's economy who did little other than wreck it and set up the oligarchs who looted the country while Yeltsin was intoxicated.

From the UK, Tony Blair colluded with the power hungry socialists in Brussels to expand the EU by doubling it in size with the addition of thirteen Eastern European states, former Soviet Bloc nations. So wedded to this policy was Blair that he immediately gave UK's full recognition of all the new eastern European additions, even though the treaty admitting them allowed existing members to defer such recognition for at least five years.

Against this backdrop the Russians faced what they saw as a common foe in combatting widespread Islamic terrorism following the country's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. In 1999 the Russians looked on as America bombed Serbia which had only recently been a Russian protectorate. Far from getting any assistance in the fight against the fundamentalists, they were criticised by western countries for being too heavy-handed in Chechnya,

whose 'freedom fighters' massacred some 330 people (mostly primary school children) at Beslan. Russia has been left to fight Islamic terror alone with no support from the Western democracies facing a common enemy.

Bearing all this in mind, it is difficult to ignore Putin's concerns as Western leaders have been making public noises about Ukraine, which runs deep into the heart of Russia, joining the NATO and EU clubs. The threat posed by Kyiv was heightened in 2014 when a democratically elected, pro-Russian government was overthrown and replaced by a pro-Western regime. All Putin has repeatedly asked for, in return for peace in the region, is an assurance that Ukraine will not become a NATO member and this has not been forthcoming.

One cannot help but wonder if the current situation could not have been avoided, had Donald Trump been allowed to pursue the policy of constructive dialogue aimed at improving relations with Moscow, he sought to follow at the beginning of his presidency. This initiative was to have been led by General Mike Flynn who had been appointed as the new presi-

dent's National Security Advisor. No sooner had this announcement been made than outgoing officials in the Obama administration including Susan Rice, Flynn's predecessor, collaborated with the CIA and the FBI led by James Comey, to lure Flynn into a carefully laid legal minefield that would see him forced from assuming his position. This was quickly followed by the unfolding of the Russia collusion hoax and the Mueller investigation which hamstrung his presidency. Powerful people in the Deep State saw peaceful coexistence with Russia as a threat and stopped it happening.

General Dwight Eisenhower, one of America's greatest presidents and the man who led the Allies to victory over Hitler's Germany, warned about the dangerous influence on American policy of the military-industrial complex. Looking at the number of pointless wars his country has involved itself in since 1945, it appears his warning went unheeded.

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The Mayor's minute in May 2022

Mark Bishop

We started on a good note in the month of May with the preparation for the new financial year, and the new budget. Legislatively on the 1st July we have to start implementing the new Integrated Development Plan.

There has been progress with respect to the relocation of Plastic View – we have encountered some challenges with the new interchange on the R40/R527, but we are starting the settlement very soon. The Department of Cooperative Government has agreed to bring in extra help with the upgrading of the facilities that will accommodate the size of the settlement. We also have the Housing Development Agency that wants to play a role in assisting the relo-

cation of Plastic View – we are hoping to extend that help to the Bango settlement. What is very important is that the town must have a face, and it has to be a clean one. This is very important for the economy of the town because this is a primary tourist destination.

We also have plans to put on an annual wildlife festival and we cannot do that with dirt around town. One of the main things that we are looking at to upgrading the face of the town, is by building the interchange. The South African National Road Agency has agreed to bring in the money to upgrade that route. The only challenge that we have picked up is that not all stakeholders involved were consulted. I have asked that my colleagues speak to the South African National

Road Agency and try to engage the engineers to further consult, so that at the end of the day we have a viable and implementable project that everyone will look up to.

We also have had discussions around the international licence at the airport – after the discussion we got a technical committee meeting together to estimate the number of tourists that we could be handling and talk to the other role players to check how far we can go if we are to get this licence. I know that the leaseholder of the airport in Hoedspruit is looking into investment into a terminal to accommodate the international travellers. As I have said before, there have been discussions in the past about the creation of a new tourism belt to

accommodate beach and wildlife – Vilankulos, Hoedspruit and Cape Town, or Victoria Falls, Hoedspruit and Cape Town. We have engaged with Airlink and we are looking forward to having a much improved tourism attraction point in Hoedspruit.

We also had discussions with the Department of Police with respect to the building of a new police station. I will meet with the Deputy Minister of Police around the pledge by the Department in this regard. As you may know the growth point of the municipality is primarily the villages. Currently people must travel 40km to Hoedspruit or 70km to Maake to receive help. We have seen growth in these areas which necessitates intervention regarding policing,

as the current setup of a satellite police station is not working.

With respect to the development of the Sepeke Cultural Village at the Oaks, the Department of Tourism has given us a 12-month completion period. At this moment it is not operational because the necessary construction points are not yet complete. This is a result of problems experienced between the construction company that was hired and themselves. Once that is ironed out, we should have that area sorted out within 12 months.

We also had a discussion with the Department of Education because in the entire province, we are the only municipality that does not have a basic post-matric educational facility. The Department has in

principle agreed to put up a TVET college and are busy with a plan for it. In the next meeting with the Department, I hope that they can advise us when and where that college would be. Those details are very important so that we can communicate that to the community.

One economic growth area that our locality as been blessed with is agriculture. Our engagement with the Department of Education is that they should look into this sector as a major benefactor. We are looking to grow employment opportunities and entrepreneurship so that people can venture into activities like farming. We want to create a great economic block in Hoedspruit that caters for agriculture and tourism.

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Drakensig champs in the making

Local correspondent

Drakensig Primary School first rugby team is reaching for the sky. It seems there is no limit to the success of this team, and they have swept all opposition aside. This season they have put up exceptional performances and have won all the matches that they have played. As a result of the efforts of the coach, the players (and of course the supporters, the team has now qualified for the next round of play-offs.

Within the next couple of weeks these play-offs will determine who the regional champions, and the Limpopo provincial champions will be.

One of the school's star players, Phomolo Shubane was selected to play for the U13 Limpopo Team in the pre-match of the Currie Cup game between the Pumas vs Western Province in Nelspruit. The match was broadcasted nationally on DSTV channel 201.

The string of team victories to date have been vs Messina Primary 60 – 0, vs Groenskool 38 – 34, vs Rooiskool 67 – 5, vs Mariepskop 19 – 15, vs



Piet Hugo 73 – 0, vs Duiwskloof 51 – 5 and vs Dr Annecke 53 – 3. What a set of results – certainly a fantastic achievement to be proud of! The whole of Hoedspruit will be holding thumbs for you in the play-offs. Good luck!

Back: Phenyo Legoai, Justin Relling, Junior Manavhela, AJ Roux, Ekene Arukwe, Rianco Haggard, Mason Boshoff, Oratilwe Mohlala, Phemolo Shubane, Morné Bekker

Middle: Hlulani Mazibane, Conrad Claassens, Johan Liebenberg, Ricardo Coertzen, Franco Landsberg, Zehan Wolmarans, Xeli Makhabane, Tiaan Müller, Jean-Pierre Müller

Front: Fanele Ndlovu, Mr. Buks Strydom, Junior Moriri, Kian Lötter, Koketso Lewele

NOTICE OF BASIC ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Notice is hereby given in terms of section 24 (2) of the National Environmental Management Act number 107 of 1998, and Regulation 41 of the EIA Regulations published in Government Notice 326 of 7 April 2017, of the intent to submit an application to carry out the following activity:

THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF A PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR SYSTEM

SITE LOCATION: Portion 14 of the farm Parsons 155 KT in the Maruleng Local Municipality, Mopani District, Limpopo Province.

SG code TOKT0000000015500014. The proposed development will trigger Activity 12, listed under Listing Notice 3 of the amended EIA Regulations published in Government Notice 324 on 7 April 2017. APPLICANT: Mr Per Grunert. Project EAP: Elize Osmer; Tel: 074 834 1977; Fax: 011 604 0533; E-mail: projects@eszro.com.

Date of publication of this advertisement is Friday 27 May 2022. If you wish to be identified as an interested and/or affected party, please submit, in writing, your name, contact information and interest in the above-mentioned project to the contact person given above on or before 27 June 2022.

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Hoedspruit Blinds & Shutters	079 601 7801	Hospital Sekororo Gvt-The Oaks	015 383 9400
Kruger2Canyon News	078 979 6486	Hospital Tzaneen Mediclinic	015 305 8536
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		SPCA Phalaborwa	071 519 7044
		Victim Support Unit	082 940 0651
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Drakensig Pre-primer	015 793 2401	Hoedspruit-info Tourism Centre	078 979 6486
Hoedspruit Christian School	015 793 2067	Hds Endangered Species Centre	015 793 1633
Lowveld Academy	015 793 3750	Jabulani Elephant Interaction	015 793 1265
Mariepskop Laerskool	079 529 6071	K2C Biosphere Region	015 817 1838
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Ambulance AFB	015 799 2065		
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Ambulance Services Swift	060 528 2784		
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Fire Brigade Maruleng	015 793 0536		
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WHAT MAKES UP THE UNIVERSE? THE PLANETS

The **universe** is made up of everything that we have discovered on earth and that which lies far, far beyond it, every galaxy, star, planet, dust cloud, light, radiation, magnetic field and all the space between them. The universe is gigantic and scientists have discovered that it is continuously expanding.

Here Are some important facts ABOUT the Universe:

- Some of the matter in the Universe gathers and forms stars
- Many of these stars live in big groups called **Galaxies**
- The Universe contains billions of galaxies which each contain millions or billions of stars
- The Universe includes living things such as planets, stars, galaxies, dust clouds, and light etc
- We do not know the exact size of the Universe



WHAT IS A SOLAR SYSTEM?

The solar system is sometimes referred to as the neighbourhood of space. A Solar System is the collection of Planets, and smaller objects that all travel around the sun.

Solar Systems consists of:

- Planets
- Moons
- Dwarf Planets
- Comets
- Asteroids
- Meteors

The Solar System is around 4.6 billion years old.

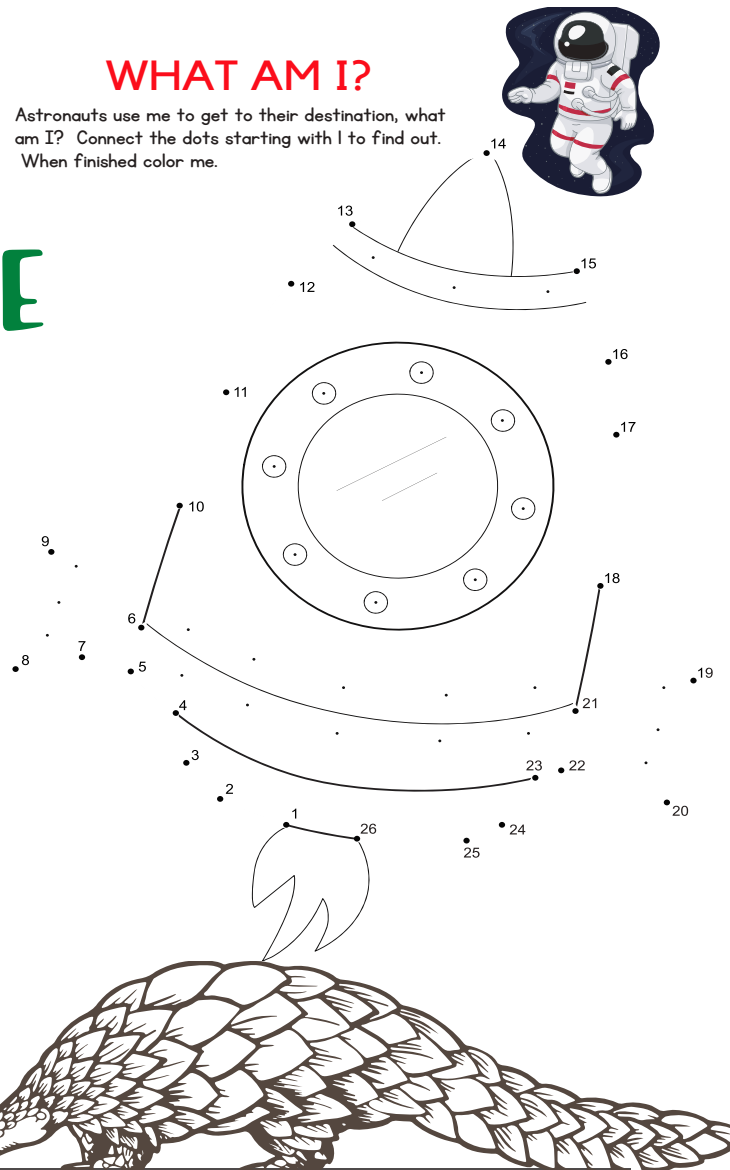
WHAT IS A GALAXY?

A Galaxy is a collection of stars and dust and it is held together by gravity. The smallest Galaxies have only a few millions stars while some of the larger Galaxies have trillions of stars. Galaxies are grouped by their shape.

We live in a Galaxy called the Milky Way. The Milky Way is a spiral Galaxy.

If you love the wilderness, and are passionate about conservation, then we have the perfect thing for you. **FGASA Junior** in partnership with **Kids In The Wild** bring you the new and improved Pangolin Course. **The Pangolin Course** includes an interactive platform for kids to reconnect with nature and the incredible wilderness that surrounds us on a daily basis. We will be offering online live lectures as well as on-demand courses that will encompass many different modules and will also include games, quizzes, homework and so much more.

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