



# KRUGER2CANYON

## NEWS

July 2022

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## The myth of too many elephants in Kruger Park, and why culling is redundant



There is no authoritative or scientifically accepted definition of how many elephants there should be in the Kruger Park. Nor is there any scientific basis for setting elephant carrying capacity. Photo: Francis Garrard

Don Pinnock

Because of their size and visible effects on vegetation, Kruger Park's elephants are a highly emotive subject, fuelling acrimonious debates, cries of 'too many elephants' and 'Kruger has an elephant problem' – followed by demands for 'unavoidable culling'. The reality is far more complex.

The story of elephant management in Kruger National Park has something in common with the tale of por-

ridge in the paws of three bears: too few, too many and just right.

But let's get one thing straight right up front: there's no authoritative or scientifically accepted definition of how many elephants there *should* be in the park. Nor is there any scientific basis for setting elephant carrying capacity. Because of the absence of historical records, we don't know if high elephant densities in the park are a "new normal" or an "old natural".

So the idea of the right

number is a moving target, depending on personal opinion formed through experiences, anecdotes, numbers, rates of growth, limited visual impressions and hearsay. Along the way, as numbers have fluctuated, there has been much confusion and pain – especially for the elephants.

Before European hunters arrived with guns, the Lowveld would have rippled with elephants. By the end of the ivory hunting carnage, they had been exterminated. Then, in

1905, one was seen at the confluence of the Olifants and Letaba rivers, probably having moved in from Mozambique.

Kruger National Park became a national park in 1926 and, with protection, elephants drifted back into the area, spreading across the park and doing what elephants have always done: pushing over trees and creating open savanna landscapes with more grasses. In 1938 there were an estimated 400 – and the herds kept growing.

### Culling thumb-suck

By the 1960s, park management, keen to preserve the park's pristine state (whatever that means, in an ever-changing biome), decided there were too many elephants and recommended culling. But how many was too many?

The answer appears to have come from a former Kruger Park director, Dr Salomon Joubert, who assessed (a thumb-suck, it turns out) that an optimum number was one elephant per square mile, which meant

around 7,000 elephants max – roughly what the park had at the time.

In 1967, as numbers grew, the culling began. By 1995, when it ended, 14 629 elephants had been killed. By then, a large abattoir had been built at Skukuza to process the mountains of meat.

What stopped the slaughter was growing public disgust and a challenge. Dr GA Robinson, then head of SAN-Parks, placed a moratorium on culling, and challenged scientists to find a workable alternative.

Cont. on page 3.

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# From the editors desk...



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From the editor/publisher

As we forge forward towards a welcome summer, one is slightly intrigued if not confused by the strange weather being experienced around the world. Floods, fires, extreme temperatures, and rain in Hoedspruit in July! The world is certainly changing regardless of what anyone says. Those crazy afternoon thunderstorms that used

to be welcomed summer showers at 16:00 on the dot, when I was a kid in Johannesburg, have now retreated into the darkness and 'may happen' at 20:00, if you're lucky. It's all over the place, although I must say that the rain was a welcome 'clearing agent' for all the winter dust in the air – and it has been mild. Roll on summer.

I had the good fortune to go to Namibia recently – wow, do they have that spot organised. They are so 'tourist orientated' it makes us look like amateurs. It's a spotless country – you can happily stop at roadside picnic sites, and they are spotless – not a paper or a piece of plastic lying around. The people are so welcoming

– they realise the value of tourism for sure. And then we come to load shedding – well what is that in Namibia? They don't know about that AND their petrol price is a cool R5.00 cheaper than ours per litre – well how the hell does that work!? The roads are great – not a pothole in sight – it's fantastic. I am certainly looking forward to my next visit and it's well worth a visit should you not have been.

There's certainly amazing stuff happening in the wildlife arena as you will read. The good work to try and save the rhinos, the continuing debate about the elephants and the work to save other species, most notably the pangolins. We need more

of this because conservation is also about us – kill nature and we will kill ourselves.

Then there is space – not just around us, which we cherish dearly; but up there, far, far away. As NASA gets ready to shoot a rocket 60 000 miles beyond the moon and back, and works towards establishing a base there, I marvel at the distances involved ... in space. The magnitude of it all amazes me. Light is the fastest moving 'stuff' in our universe – it travels at 300,000 km/sec! And thus a light-year is 9.46 trillion kilometers! Beyond comprehension.

Consider this: Voyager 1 (launched about 40 years ago!) is the most distant human-made object from

Earth, and it still has not escaped the influence of our Sun. As of Feb. 1, 2020, Voyager 1 was about 22.2 billion kilometers from the Sun – do you get that?

Let's put it into perspective, if we were to put the universe on a football field, and the Sun is on the goal line, the distances from that goal line are as follows: Mercury 3/4m, Venus 1,3m, Earth 1,8m, Mars 2,7m, Asteroids between 3,6-7,3m, Jupiter 9,6m, Saturn 17,4m, Uranus 34,7m, Neptune 54,8m, and Pluto at 72m.

On this scale little Voyager 1 is out of the stadium parking lot and beyond! Think about it!

Until next month, stay safe and lets appreciate

and treasure the space and all that is in it.



Mark Bishop  
Editor/Publisher



# Letters to the editor

Dear Ed,

I think that the way you guys have changed the paper has been amazing. I do like it that you now concentrate a lot on the wildlife and those matters. Thank you – Arno

*Ed: Thanks Arno, that was the vision from the start and will will endeavour to maintain this going forward*

Dear Ed,

Thank you for the collaboration with FGASA to bring the kids side to us on the back page. What a great idea, my kids love it and it's become a bit of a competition between them every month. Celeste M

*Ed: Thank you for your comment, Celeste. We think it important to begin interesting our kids in wildlife from a young age – and what better way than through the FGASA program.*

*I am happy your kids love it and I hope that is true for all the others around town*

Dear Editor,

Is there any way of possibly putting a job section in the paper? Thanks ST

*Ed: I'm happy to see if there is traction on this front but as yet I have not really had any queries about this*

Dear Ed,

Maybe you could get some weather boffin to give us an explanation about this crazy weather we are experiencing? Eugene

*Ed: That's a great idea Eugene – let me see what I can find out*

Dear Editor,

I'm finding your paper very interesting. I never used to read it, but now I can't wait to get the next edition! Thank you.

*Ed: Thank you – here's hoping that sentiment is widespread!*

Dear Editor,

I am very interested to hear about the progress with regards to what the Mayor has had to say about the plans for Hoedspruit. We are concerned about some of the proposed items on the agenda. Is there any update ?

Andrew

*Ed: Thank you Andrew, sadly we could not get an update this month, but promise to get further insights in August.*

# Sudoku

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

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# The myth of too many elephants in Kruger Park, and why culling is redundant

Cont. from page 1.

By then, there was a growing global backlash against culling.

## Adaptive management plan

What they produced was an adaptive management plan that would provide sufficient evidence to control elephants without shooting them. And it worked.

SANParks shifted from controlling to adaptation, noting the impact of elephants on their environment — how and where they move and use the landscape, the time they spend in those areas, the demographics of the specific elephants and what they're doing when they're there.

Instead of managing numbers, policy changed to influencing how elephants used space, using fire, water and fencing off large trees. It was flexible, anticipated surprises and was prepared to re-set objectives as people learnt.

The closure of artificial waterholes across the park has been key to this, as a way of controlling heavy impact near water sources. Increasing distances between waterholes also decreases the survival rate of young and weak individuals — particularly during times of drought — which reduces population growth.

## Natural engineers

It was recognised that elephants are also important natural engineers integral to the African landscape. They open up thickets of invasive species, convert bush into grassland for grazers, and create habitats for a variety of other species.

During droughts they don't increase — they simply disperse. It was found that their impact was unrelated to their distribution, but to the movement of bulls, soil types and water.

There have also been shrill complaints that, in pushing over trees, elephants are destroying raptor nesting sites. SANParks research has shown, however, that there is no clear link to the loss of large trees and populations of martial eagles or lappet-faced, white-headed and white-backed vultures.

## Constant gardeners

Elephants are, in fact, the park's constant gardeners, essential as seed dispersal agents, able to transport seeds up to 65km from the parent tree.

Acid in their digestive systems can also help with the seed germination of some plant species, while their dung provides a fertile environment for germination. By felling trees or pulling down branches, they also create "browsing lawns" of reduced height for other herbivores.

What about fears that a runaway elephant population would trash the park? The latest Kruger census (2021) put the number of elephants at 27,998, a figure that, in the 1960s, would have given Dr Joubert apoplexy.

Yet Kruger scientists say they're not close to resource limitation level in the park, and that the population is lower than the expected ecological benchmark.

Since culling ended, overall elephant population has grown at just 4.1% a year and has not yet reached a point where environmental constraints curtail overall population growth.

## Behind the 'too many elephants' calls

So what's behind calls of "too many elephants"? Visitors to the park see less than 20% of the area from the tar and sand roads. These largely weave along waterholes and rivers where wildlife viewing is best, but where elephant impact is highest.

Roads can also increase encounter rates between elephants, trees and tourists because elephant bulls tend to favour them. So a downed tree at a waterhole or along a road does not represent a flattened forest in the park.

Science backs this up. The latest research found that there has been no decrease in heterogeneity — the variety of species — within the Greater Kruger region and trends are stable. There are more than 20,000 elephants in Kruger than when culling began in 1967 — but they're not trashing the place. As a result, SANParks does not have a plan to cull elephants.

There are many other reasons why culling is off the table. There is no scientific justification; it would re-



Elephants have a companionable drink. By 1995, when it ended, 14,629 Kruger Park elephants had been killed. By then, a large abattoir had been built at Skukuza to process the mountains of meat. Photo: Francis Garrard



Elephants are, in fact, the park's constant gardeners, essential as seed dispersal agents, able to transport seeds up to 65km from the parent tree. Photo: Francis Garrard

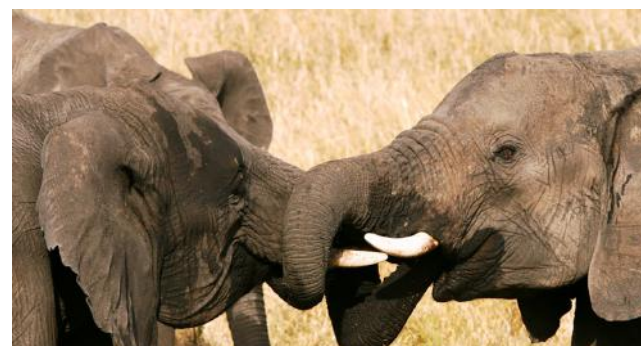
quire extensive prior scientific evaluation and public participation; it has been discredited for scientific, ethical and moral reasons; it would cause a tourist backlash; proposals to cull would attract immediate litigation and, according to a recent paper by Prof Rob Slotow at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, is most likely illegal.

For all these reasons, Kruger has no culling plan and nor is any such plan in

preparation. In answer to questions about whether Kruger has too many elephants ruining the park, the answer is simply: No, it doesn't.

The numbers today, to invoke the metaphor of the three bears, are "just right".

*This article was originally published in the Daily Maverick.*



There are more than 20,000 elephants in Kruger than when culling began in 1967 — but they're not trashing the place. Photo: Francis Garrard

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# Connecting communities: How can we build inclusive wildlife economies?

Rio Button  
Conservation Biologist,  
Roving Reporters

## Tide turning for Africa's wildlife economy: Communities coming into their own

Keeping bees, marketing local delicacies, and starting village B&Bs are just some of the ways African communities are unlocking the potential of the continent's wildlife economy. But while pursuing these and other wildlife-centred ventures they must guard against politicians meddling in their affairs.

That's according to Prof Victor Muposhi, a Stellenbosch University African Wildlife Economy Institute (AWEI) research fellow.

Muposhi was among a panel of guest presenters on a recent Tipping Points webinar on the wildlife economy. The webinar organised by the Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation, focused on how communities could play a bigger part in developing wildlife economies.

"To achieve sustainabil-

ity and leverage the wildlife economy we must harness the power of nature, our natural heritage and the environment, to address societal and economic needs," said Muposhi.

### The worm has turned

Dr Tario Kamuti, another AWEI research fellow, sees a bright future for African conservation and community initiatives, if ways can be found to take age-old, local knowledge and natural resources, add value and get it to market in a way that's sustainable.

He gives as an example of the traditional Southern African snack of dried mopane worms. The juicy caterpillars were now being given fancy packaging and promoted as a banting snack. He stressed there was no need to reinvent the wheel when it came to developing community wildlife activities.

Old practices should be repurposed and existing work could be tweaked to reach and create new markets. Packaging, marketing, and upscaling production would help connect existing prod-

ucts and services to new markets, Kamuti said.

Hosted by Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation, a not-for-profit organisation that fosters research and dialogue on human-nature relationships, the webinar brought together industry and academic leaders to look at increasing community involvement in the wildlife economy.

### Collaboration vital

Collaboration and knowledge sharing was needed to make a success of this, said Chanda Mwale, drawing on her experience as the Executive Director of the Wildlife Producers' Association of Zambia.

Mwale's work involves listening to association members and lobbying for the interests of private members and community-owned game ranches. She facilitates the gathering and sharing of technical information on game ranching among the private sector, NGOs and communities.

Communities producing similar products can work together to leverage econo-

mies of scale while sharing risks, Muposhi said. This would also give them a bigger voice, to "push policy directives", such as removing tariff barriers to promote trade, Kamuti said.

### What were some do's and don'ts?

Avoid collaborating with political groups. Involving politicians puts community development projects at the mercy of the changing fortunes and priorities of those in and out of power. Another no-no is trying to copy-and-paste an activity that has been successful in one community to another. This frequently ended in disaster. Suitable community-based wildlife activities need to be carefully crafted.

They needed to be specific to the "wildlife or natural resources within the area and the community's existing knowledge and skillset," Muposhi said.

### Government's role

Conservation must not be separated from people's lives. It has to go hand in hand with community activities that benefit from

wildlife. When this was done properly, communities were motivated to protect natural assets so they can continue to benefit, Kamuti said.

But community wildlife activities would struggle to succeed when the broader economy was unstable. And Kamuti believes it is "the role of government to ensure the macroeconomic fundamentals are in place to enable a stable economic environment that is attractive to investment and carrying out business".

Training communities about business and increasing wildlife economic research make a big difference, said Mwale, drawing on her experience running courses on enterprise development, and how to set up game ranches and enterprises that can be linked to the wildlife economy. She said her work also involved creating enabling environments where communities "understand what it really takes to get involved in the wildlife economy".

### Community centred

"Communities must be at

the centre of everything that is being done," Muposhi said. "They need to drive these initiatives and we need to have good governance practices, holistic legislative, and policy frameworks in place to promote initiatives. We also need a multi-stakeholder engagement for cooperation and empowering local communities," he said.

Mwale felt "Africa is coming into its own", benefitting from the information age, which has brought "a lot more cohesion, and an understanding of what is going on".

"Communities have a lot more power and they're aware of it now so there is a lot less exploitation of communities. The tide is changing," she added.

*Rio Button is a conservation biologist and regular correspondent for Roving Reporters. She has a Masters of Science degree in Conservation Biology from the University of Cape Town. This story was first published by Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation.*

## Why do animals roll in mud? Why do animals roll in sand?

This behaviour is called **mud-wallowing** and is carried out primarily by animals with very little body fur for one or a combination of the following reasons:

- 1.To cool the body down in hot weather
- 2.To prevent sunburn in times when shade is limited
- 3.To keep biting flies and other insects at bay
- 4.To keep irritating flies off open wounds

It is common in elephant, rhino, warthog and old buffalo bulls that are losing body fur on their hindquarters. The latter will hang around in marshy areas because their teeth are wearing down and the soft, green

vegetation at these sites is most suitable for survival. Even hippos, and crocodiles to a lesser extent, will wallow in the mud of drying waterholes in an effort to keep the sun from damaging the skin or overheating the body, leading to dehydration and death. After wallowing, most species will use rocks, logs or trees as rubbing posts. In so doing, they remove parasites, which are encrusted in the muds, as well as old skin cells – so the behaviour certainly has health benefits. Mud that persists on body hairs and within cracks of the skin have the benefit of insulating the body in cold, windy weather.



Zebra rolling in the sand having a dust-bath  
Image: Canva

This behaviour is called **dust-bathing** and is done primarily to rid the body of skin and fur parasites (mites, fleas, and to a lesser extent, ticks), and is more common in summer when parasite numbers are

higher.

For this purpose, animals will use any area with soft, very fine soil. These so-called dust-bathing sites are often around, on or alongside roads where vehicles have turned the sand to

powder. They are also found in middens (advertisement spots) of territorial antelope such as wildebeest, where the constant use and scratching with the feet has had the same effect on the soil. The immediate area surrounding waterholes and mud-wallows will also have fine sand due to the constant trampling of animals coming and going. Many of these sites are used by residents on a daily basis, but animals that are more nomadic will opportunistically make use of any suitable spot they find. Most dust-bathing sites are used by many different animal and bird species. The behaviour

is very common in birds that will rid themselves of parasites before flying off to their evening roosting or nesting spots.

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

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**HOEDSPRUIT WILDLIFE ESTATE** | Bedroom 4 | Bathroom 2 | Floor: 267 m<sup>2</sup> **R 4 250 000**

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



**KHAYA NDLOVU GAME RESERVE P.O.A** 3 Bedrooms | 3.5 Bathrooms | Floor size: 340 m<sup>2</sup>

This modern, elegant bush home has been built on the banks of a dry riverbed in this sought-after reserve. It offers spectacular views with loads of entertainment space. The reserve is 1,307 ha in size with only 35 stands. Home is sold furnished.

Yvette Thompson - 083 655 7176 Ref: 2028774



**LISSATABA** Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 2 | Floor size: 180 m<sup>2</sup> **R 2 200 000**

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



**PET FRIENDLY PROPERTY** Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3.5 | 1 Bedroom Cottage **R 3 400 000**

The property is located in a 25-hectare gated conservancy and it has views onto the Blyde river and the Drakensberg. It is zoned residential, but can be used commercially, it has previously been run successfully as short-term accommodation.

Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2052436



**OLIFANTS RIVER PROPERTY** Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 4 | 50% share **R 4 500 000**

By purchasing this 50% share in Parsons Nature Reserve you will have access to 2080 ha of prime Big 5 game viewing in Greater Kruger. This quaint bush home also has a lapa, pool and lush garden. The sale includes the use of a game view vehicle.

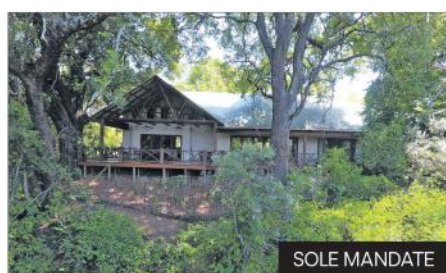
Mike Dodds - 082 906 7004 Ref: 2048251



**HOEDSPRUIT WILDLIFE ESTATE** Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 1 **R 2 300 000**

This home is tucked away on a 4900m<sup>2</sup> stand with lovely big trees. The home has a living room, kitchen, bathroom with outside shower, as well as an outside dining area on the patio with a built-in braai. A single carport completes the property.

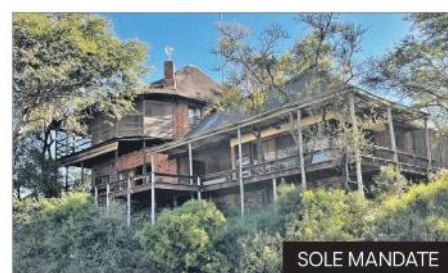
Delaine Muller - 072 117 1133 Ref: 2052166



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

This farm within Greater Makalali Nature Reserve, which has the Big 5 with 20,000 ha of traverse. Approvals in place for 10 commercial beds. There is a main 2-bedroom home and 3 guest chalets. Ideal for syndication, families, or convert to boutique commercial lodge.

Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 1459112



**NDLOPFU, UMBABAT** Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 3.5 | Floor size: 240 m<sup>2</sup> **R 11 500 000**

The house is privately situated on the banks of the seasonal T'siri river. Ndlopfu is a share block in the heart of a Big 5 Greater Kruger, with only 32 member sites on 2,500 ha of pristine bushveld in the sought-after Umbabat Private Nature Reserve.

Yvette Thompson - 083 655 7176 Ref: 2032793



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

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



**SILONQUE, PHALABORWA** Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 2 | Floor size: 160 m<sup>2</sup> **R2 950 000**

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** Bedrooms 2 | Bathroom 1 | Floor size: 107 m<sup>2</sup> **R 1 500 000**

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



**LISSATABA** Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3 | Floor size: 220 m<sup>2</sup> **R 3 500 000**

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



**RAPTORS VIEW** Bedrooms 4 | Bathroom 3.5 | Floor size: 200 m<sup>2</sup> **R 3 200 000**

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



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

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



**NDLOVUMZI** Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 3 | Floor size: 380 m<sup>2</sup> **R 3 950 000**

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



**GRIETJIE, GREATER KRUGER** Big 5 | Floor size: 400 m<sup>2</sup> | Stand size: 21,4 ha **R 8 800 000**

This property offers elevated views of the surrounding bushveld, with peace and quiet only the bushveld can provide. This beautifully maintained property offers 3 dwellings - a 3-bedroom main home, a 2-bedroom cottage and a rondavel.

Yvette Thompson - 083 655 7176 Ref: 2050020

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Moditlo Big Game Estate / R8.9 million  
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Spectacularly private  
Engela 082 565 3611



Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate / R5.25 million  
4 Bedrooms / 4.5 Bathrooms  
Commercial lodge - sound business investment  
Engela 082 565 3611



Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate / R3.35 million  
3 Bedrooms / 1 Bathrooms / Double Carport  
Well priced, excellent condition, lovely location  
Tracy 072 223 0520 Engela 082 565 3611



Sandringham / R270 million



Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate / R5.6 million  
3 Bedrooms / 3.5 Bathrooms / Double Carport  
Includes all furniture. Commercial / Private  
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Blyde Wildlife Estate / R4.95 million  
3 Bedrooms / 2 Bathrooms / Garages 2  
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Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate / R4.35 million  
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Leadwood Big Game Estate / R6.25 million



Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate / R4.35 million  
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# Rhino return to Zinave National Park, Mozambique, after 40 years



Rhino offload operation in Zinave

Photo: Peace Parks Foundation

Peace Parks Foundation

**The first 19 white rhinos have been successfully translocated from South Africa to Zinave National Park in Mozambique through the longest road-transfer of rhinos ever done.**

This landmark and pioneering rewilding initiative, the first in a series of white and black rhino translocations still to follow, is the result of a partnership between Mozambique's National Administration for Conservation Areas (ANAC), Peace Parks Foundation and Exxaro Resources, in support of and in collaboration with the Governments of Mozambique and South Africa. The President of Mozambique, His Excellency Filipe Nyusi visited Zinave to celebrate the return of the species to the park in more than four decades.

The rebuilding of a founder white and black rhino population will take place over the next few years as part of a national conservation initiative to reintroduce rhino back to safe havens in the country. The introduction of the rhino to Zinave will create the only "big five" national park in Mozambique. The overall objective since the signing of a long-term Co-management Agreement in 2015 between ANAC and Peace Parks was to rewild the park to create a healthy ecosystem by introducing viable wildlife populations, attract tourists back to the park and support the livelihoods of local communities living around the park.

To date 2400 game animals representing 14 different species have been introduced to Zinave including elephant, sable, giraffe, buffalo, zebra, wildebeest, leopard and hyena. Notably a small lion population introduced themselves to the park indicating the functionality of the corridors

between the five national parks in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) between Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The Great Limpopo is one of the largest transfrontier conservation areas in the world, spanning 100,000 square kilometres and was formally established 20 years ago by the Heads of State of the three countries through a Treaty.

## Wildlife reintroduction program

The introduction of rhino to Zinave is the pinnacle of the wildlife reintroduction program and an important measure for the survival of the species, by establishing a new founder population in a national park in Mozambique. To put this in context, over the past decade, over 8,000 black and white rhinos (over one third of the entire population left in the world) have been lost to poaching in southern Africa, and this has greatly reduced the last remaining wild populations of this keystone species. To protect rhino for future generations, the reintroduction of rhinos to new suitable habitats, with capacity to rebuild large viable breeding herds in big open systems, under strong security and conservation management measures, is one of the many measures currently undertaken by Peace Parks to help safeguard this flagship species – and Zinave is such a safe haven, and a true conservation success story.

The 408,000 ha park was left decimated following a civil war that lasted 16 years. Through an extensive rewilding and restoration programme, commencing in 2016, ANAC and Peace Parks, has completely transformed the landscape – developing infrastructure and capacity, enhancing conservation management and security, and breathing new

life into what was once referred to as a 'silent park'.

Rewilding is a vital component of restoring nature and ecological balance in large landscapes. By reintroducing wildlife to areas where the species once thrived, biodiversity is once again restored. The restoration and preservation of natural ecosystems is also recognised as one of the most effective tools we have in mitigating climate change and can increase global carbon uptake by up to 12 times through the creation of ecosystem "carbon sinks".

"Significant and noteworthy progress has been made in the rewilding and rehabilitation of our national parks in Mozambique over the past decade," said Mozambique's Minister of Land and Environment, Ivete Maibaze. "We are very proud of our collaboration with long-term partner Peace Parks Foundation that has played a key role in this journey."

"The return of the rhino allows for Zinave to be introduced as a new and exciting tourism destination in Mozambique with the sought-after "big-five" species – the only national park in Mozambique that has elephant, rhino, lion, leopard and buffalo" said Werner Myburgh, CEO of Peace Parks Foundation. "This will open doors for international investment and tourism development, which in turn will generate income to sustain park operations, whilst also giving back to the local communities who will receive twenty percent of park revenues, and directly benefit from additional job creation and a whole range of livelihoods opportunities now being realised. This speaks directly to the core mission of Peace Parks to create a future for people and nature to co-exist."

## Translocation of wildlife

The plan is to translocate

more than 40 rhino to the park over the next two to three years. It is then envisaged that in eight to ten years, a thriving rhino population in the park could be used to restock other protected areas. To everyone's elated surprise, the growth curve was kick-started much sooner than anticipated, with the first healthy female rhino calf born in Zinave just a month ago.

The rhino were kindly donated by Exxaro Resources who has also made a significant contribution to the operational costs of the Park. Exxaro's CEO Designate, Dr Nombasa Tsengwa said "We are very proud of our association with Peace Parks Foundation and to be at the forefront of introducing rhino back into a national park in Mozambique. We stand here today as Exxaro, to utilise the strength of our business to collaboratively foster enhanced biodiversity and environmental preservation practices by investing in projects of this nature."

This translocation operation is a prime example of how the corporate sector, government and civil society can work together to make a significant contribution to safeguard our natural world for future generations."

Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi joined dignitaries from all three partner countries of the Great Limpopo TFCA to commemorate these achievements and to release the white rhino from the bomas into the wider sanctuary. "A word of sincere appreciation goes to the funders and partners, notably Peace Parks Foundation, for choosing to work with us in conserving biodiversity and restoring habitats under constant threat in our country. The protection of biodiversity is a universal imperative and together we will continue to fight for the preservation of our natural heritage, because only then

will future generations be able to enjoy the benefits of nature and join our mission of preserving our natural resources."

Vice-Chairman of Peace Parks Foundation, former President Joaquim Chissano said "I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the donors that have supported Peace Parks in the restoration of Zinave National Park and in particular Exxaro, German Postcode Lottery and MAVA Foundation who have helped make the introduction of the rhino possible. What is happening here in Zinave bodes well for the future of biodiversity conservation, economic development and regional peace and stability through the development of transfrontier conservation areas with our neighbouring countries."

## Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area – celebrating 20 years

This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA), of which Zinave is a vital component. In 2002, the Governments of Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe entered into a Treaty to establish the Great Limpopo TFCA, spanning over 100 000 square kilometers, and incorporating five national parks, including the iconic Kruger National Park. Peace Parks Foundation played a significant role in facilitating this process and has supported the development of the TFCA since 1998. As part of this agreement, the governments of Mozambique and South Africa are working together to rewild Mozambique's national parks. Zinave also holds shared interest for both countries as it is an anchor park for migrations corridors that run between them. It is therefore fitting to celebrate two decades of continued development and restoration of this globally important cross-border conservation landscape with the introduction of these keystone species.

## Safety and protection of the rhino

In order to maximise the safety of the rhinos, they have each been fitted with a state of the art tracking sensor, enabling the live tracking of animals and assets in a central operations control room that is operational 24/7. The rhino movements are also restricted to a dedicated sanctuary in the park that enables the ability to concentrate counter-poaching efforts and maintain tight perimeter control. The sensors form part of a suite of integrated security interventions aimed at keeping the rhino, and the park's other wildlife, safe. Significant investment has been channelled into additional protec-

tion efforts that includes the recruitment of 34 additional rangers that received specialist training on rhino protection, bringing the number of rangers deployed in the sanctuary and surrounding areas to 80. In addition, 20 sanctuary guards will be deployed for first-line detection of incursions. A helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft – integrated into a rapid response unit with a canine team – was introduced to boost surveillance and counter-poaching reaction capabilities.

## Trailblazing translocation logistics

Not only is the return of rhino to Zinave a historic occurrence, but the groundbreaking translocation process developed by the project partners, Conservation Solutions and Mozambique Wildlife Alliance, in itself holds great potential for changing the way in which new rhino ranges can be established in Africa. Faced with a distance of about 1600 km to traverse, that would take approximately 60-70 hours to complete, the team had to quickly come up with innovative solutions to keep the rhino safe and healthy. The translocation process was broken down into three phases: in the first phase the rhino were captured and temporarily offloaded into holding bomas to monitor their physical condition and ensure that they were fit for travel. Once cleared as being healthy and in good condition, the capture process was repeated, but this time the rhino were 'walked' into crates and lifted onto flatbed trucks with a special crane, before being transported to a half-way point. Here they rested and took on food and water for a day or two, before being loaded once more for the third and final leg of the trip. In Zinave the crates were offloaded as quickly as possible and the rhino allowed to walk into temporary holding bomas. They were immediately given feed and access to water, and a veterinary team was on hand to check up on each one. Only once they have taken in the necessary sustenance and are declared as healthy, will they be released into the much larger rhino sanctuary specifically built for this purpose, and where they can roam freely.

Never before has anyone made use of a halfway house to break a long journey, and ensure the well-being of the animals, and it has worked extremely well. It has provided a new methodology for moving rhino across the continent and will allow for the restocking of protected areas that were previously not accessible for translocations of this nature, creating more options to set up founder populations in suitable remote habitats



# The Safari Guide of the Year – winner Cameron Pearce – an exclusive interview



Mark Bishop

The annual Safari Guide of the Year (SGOTY) was held over the week of 27<sup>th</sup> June to 3 July 2022. As explained in past articles on the subject, this is a chance to showcase the level of knowledge and professionalism, and to give recognition to, the five nominated FGASA candidates as they competed for the prestigious title of ‘Safari Guide of the Year’.

The competition is judged over eight categories (with the ninth being a subjective choice by viewers) – track and sign, driving safari, birding (sight and sounds), hospitality and professionalism, storytelling, photography, advance rifle handling, dangerous game walking, and Wild Earth viewer’s choice.

At the end of the week, in a very closely contested event, Cameron Pearce, from Ongava in northern Namibia was bestowed with

the title and accolade as the Safari Guide of the Year.

Kruger2Canyon News (one of the co-sponsors of the event) had the chance to catch up with him in Namibia after the competition had ended, and the celebration dust had settled.

**K2CN: What did you hope to get out of SGOTY?**

Firstly it was really amazing and lovely to receive such heartfelt recognition for something that I have spent my entire adult life pouring my heart and soul into this career, and it was lovely to receive some of that recognition. Secondly, the opportunity to be amongst such a magical group of people; there’s so much sharing of ideas and its also humbling to be amongst such a field of giants. It’s a great place to pick up such positive energy and take that away from the competition.

**K2CN: How did you originally see SGOTY in terms of what it was and what it offered?**

I’ve always seen SGOTY as the premier way in which guides are recognised – obviously we all have qualifications that we work towards, and with enough dedication and hard work you can pretty much achieve any of the qualifications. But this the one that is a once off, it will only happen once in your lifetime and career, and its something that is very valuable to me and something that I am very personally proud about and im just very happy that I got to be a part of it.

**K2CN: What was the highlight (not winning it!) of the week?**

The highlight was seeing how big it has become, not only having a bunch of safari guides in the bush together, but having the media, the Wild Earth crew, the journalists, overseas sponsors, the people from Bushwise and the Wildlife College – it was just a massive event. The whole week was just one incredible event - and

we were aware that it was going to pass by quickly, so we sucked in and digested every moment. It was over far too soon, and we look forward to next year.

**K2CN: What was your most difficult category?**

I would say that it was a combination of the story telling and the television appearance. These two things both put you in the spotlight, and that’s always a bit nerve-racking. I look back on those two with some anxiety (laughs).

**K2CN: Did it live up to your expectations?**

It far exceeded anything I could have imagined. It was the most magical week of my life and I really cannot wait to be there next year and to observe from behind the ropes and to relax a little – there are lots of nerves when you are in the mix. I don’t think you take in 100% of what’s going on so it will be nice to partake in it from behind the scenes.

**K2CN: If you could single**

**out one factor that you will take away from SGOTY – what would that be?**

Just that if you work hard and you persevere and show dedication, and care for your craft, you can achieve big things. Even something that seems like a holiday job, I think that most guides don’t realise that when they get into safari guiding, how far they can take it. If something is fun does not mean that you cannot achieve big things – keep working, persevere, keep learning; that’s what it has given me, and inspired me to push even further. Spending time with the likes of Juan Pinto and James Steyn and Lucas Matonsi, inspires one to keep pushing in the hope that one day you might achieve the levels that they have achieved.

**K2CN: Would you recommend this competition to other field guides?**

Absolutely, that’s the biggest challenge is putting your hand up in the first

place, its nerve-racking and you must put yourself on the block. But even if you don’t win it, just being there in that environment and being exposed to that calibre of person around you is so valuable. So, I would absolutely, without hesitation say even if you feel like you are not ready, don’t hesitate, there is no such thing as the right time, put your hand up and give it a go and who knows .... You might just do it!

**K2CN: One of your prizes was a scholarship for a person of your choice to attend NJ More Field Guide College for the Apprentice Trails Guide Course. Is there anybody that you see could be in line for that?**

Yes, not one person in particular but I have an outstanding team of guides at Ongava that I work with – I’ve been training them for the last five years. I’m opening that scholarship to them – whoever manages to attain the FGASA Apprentice Field Guides qualification first with the highest marks, I’ll give them that scholarship.

**K2CN: winning this competition is life changing, so where to now for you?**

It is, I think I would like to specialise further and more in terms of trying to get my private guiding fully off the ground, so that I can be doing that, spending a little more time at home, and spend more quality time on safari. Doing more specialised safaris that interest me – walking, birding, and photography stuff.

And so we look forward to next years competition. Mention must be made of the exceptional standard of the other competitors - Solomon Ndlovu, Liam Henderson, Ruvan Grobler and Nico Brits. They were all winners in getting to the final event.

Well done to all!

SAFARI GUIDE OF THE YEAR 2022

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# The fight to save pangolins



Pangolins, the only mammals with scales, making up about 20% of their body weight, close their ears and nostrils to keep out insects while eating. Image courtesy of Canva

## Wildlife Correspondent

**The name 'pangolin' comes from the Malay word for roller – 'peng-gulung' – it's the action the pangolin takes in self-defence.**

These animals are primarily nocturnal, solitary and easily recognisable from their full body armour of scales. When startled pangolins cover their heads with their forelegs exposing their scales for protection. If one touches them they roll up into a ball, but be aware as the sharp scales on the tail can be used to thrash around in self-defence.

Sometimes they are mistaken as reptiles but they are in fact mammals, albeit that they are scaly-skinned. Little is known about this elusive creature and so it is extremely difficult to estimate sizes of wild populations. They have been called scaly anteaters because of the diet of ants that they prefer.

There are eight spe-

cies of pangolins found, evenly split between two continents, Africa and Asia. The species range from Vulnerable to Critically Endangered. The four species found in Africa are the Giant Ground pangolin (*Smutsia gigantea*), the White-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*), the Black-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tetradactyla*), and Temminck's Ground pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*).

All eight species are protected under national and international laws – two species are listed as critically endangered. Even so, pangolins remain the most trafficked mammal in the world. The demand for their meat and scales comes primarily from Asia, but is growing in Africa. The United States also has a demand for their leather, used to make boots, bags and belts!

Pangolin meat is considered a delicacy and their scales are used in traditional medicine to treat numerous ailments including asthma, arthri-

tis and rheumatism. As yet there has been no stopping the massive international illegal trade in pangolins and their body parts, and demand seems to be growing.

Given this demand and the massive seizures of scales that occurred in 2019 and 2020, experts believe that the worldwide population of pangolin is in decline. The WWF released a statement that more than 1 000 000 pangolins were trafficked over a 10-year period with 2019 data, indicating that a pangolin is poached every three minutes.

There are many organisations, foundations and the like around the world, trying their level best to help combat this carnage of pangolins. We are blessed to have one such organisation in the Umoya Khulula Wildlife Centre (UKWC).

The UKWC is a wildlife rehabilitation centre situated in Limpopo, not far from Tzaneen. Here an array of South African wildlife are rescued, re-

habilitated and released; from the tiny dwarf mon-goose to the magnificent hippo and pretty much everything in between. UKWC joined the fight to save the most trafficked mammal in the world, the pangolin, 4 years ago. After seeing the rate that the Temminck's Ground pangolin being poached, the UKWC knew that they had to save these amazing animals.

The centre receives pangolins that have either come out of the illegal wildlife trade or have been compromised by electric fences, snares or roads. Pangolins that come into the centre from the illegal trade route are normally very sick and have to undergo a long medical and rehabilitation process to get them back out into the wild.

After they are ready to leave Provet animal hospital in Hoedspruit, where they undergo vital treatment, (more especially from Dr Debbie English), they come back to the centre at an

offsite, undisclosed location. The pangolins then have to be nursed back to perfect health.

Nearly all of the pangolins have been kept in horrific conditions for long periods of time, with the result that when they are rescued, they are extremely emaciated and dehydrated. Many of them have wounds from either trying to escape their capture or from torture. It takes a long time, and a team of very dedicated staff to get them to a point where they are ready for release into the wild.

Once released the centre monitors each pangolin intensely for a year. This is to make sure that they are thriving in the wild. Telemetry and satellite tags are attached to each individual to be able to track them. This is a very expensive endeavour and with the help of Scales and their contributions, this is made possible.

There is something so pure about pangolins; they do not hurt anyone,

and they are shy, little creatures. To see what is being done to them is heart breaking. At this point of time we all need to act to save these animals – if not the line of extinction is fast approaching.

UKWC (like most organisations of its kind) rely on the support of the public to be able to do the important work that they do. Support can be in the form of a donation to this cause, or just simply to raise awareness of what is happening to these wonderful creatures.

Let's ensure that these efforts bear positive fruit, and that we retain our national wildlife heritage for generations to come. Support, be aware and spread the word!

*Umoya Khulula Wildlife Centre is a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation organisation*

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# Twitching – the chase is on



Golden Pipit

Image : John Edwards



Wood Warbler

Image : Shawn van Rooyen



Twitchers !

Image : John Edwards



Pectoral Sandpiper

Image : Tony Dodds

Mike Meidlinger

**This month, the plan was to digress, to refrain from commentary on the nature of birding and focus more wholesomely on what factors make up birds, their traits and their components.**

That was until, quite possibly, the discovery of the year and most certainly one of the decade's best birds. For those reading this that are already fully fledged birders, pun most definitely intended, you will already know about the species, and individual in question.

The Wood Warbler is a small arboreal, or tree-dwelling, species which normally spends its non-breeding season in West Africa with a handful regularly in Uganda. It belongs to the family *Phylloscopus*, similar to the much more familiar migrant Willow Warbler and forest dwelling resident, the Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler. Bright lemon yellow in the face, with a bold strong eyebrow and distinctive wings and tail, this species is not only a new record for Southern Africa but undoubtedly one

of the prettiest and most charismatic members of its entire family. It is for this reason that the author has, for one month only, decided to digress from the digression and focus on yet another aspect of birding and its various forms.

Twitching refers to the single-minded - bordering on obsession for some, absolutely a full blown obsession for others - practice of chasing after rare birds and vagrants. Chasing refers to the fact that, being vagrants, species that arrive in countries where they shouldn't be in are not only highly unpredictable in terms of movement, but also have an undetermined time-limit for observation.

Some individual vagrants are flyovers or one-day'ers seen by single observers, but in other cases rarities can stay put, faithful to a small area for days, weeks, months or sometimes even years. In the case of the former two, rarities committees exist for each country which consists of national specialists and revered figureheads. Observers of glimpsed rarities or those seen by only one person require descriptions, preferably

accompanied by photographs laying out the exact details of the record. Even with moderate evidence, if a bird's identity is even suspected as being mislabelled by the 'submittee', then it is simply not passed as a recognized official record.

For those rarities that are correctly identified, and which remain at least for more than a single day, the race is on. Simply put, because these birds are usually alone or in small groups and because they are out of their normal range, in other words, lost, they could vanish without a trace at any moment.

This fundamental feature of vagrancy means there is always an invisible force at play for twitchers, birders who twitch. For those that have crested through the event horizon of this level of birding, there is generally no way back.

It is an exciting, challenging, rewarding and sometimes heart-breaking way of adding new species to one's list, as, even if you are lucky or quick on the draw to get to the spot, there will be times when the bird has already moved on. Missing a bird, or dipping as its techni-

cally known, is what makes the successes of connecting so sweet.

The amount of twitching that takes place in the average birders life does vary from country to country. In places like the United Kingdom and Holland for example, they receive or record many, many scarcities each year and thus most birders chase to some degree.

Here in South Africa, the twitching culture is certainly growing, most certainly aligning with the increased number of new birders, the advent of technology like cameras, social media and the opening of minds as to what could be out there. Social media is an interesting one, as here, even members of the public, non-birders, can photograph a weird bird in the garden which turns out to be the rarest bird of the year or a brand new one for the region.

Most of South Africa's vagrants luckily for us, tend to occur in our summer months. Exceptions are pelagic species, which are invariably one-day birds seen at sea, and thus un-chasable, and recent records of reverse migrants. Reverse migrants, such as this year's

Wood Warbler, are species that have migrated southwards, not north, in the reverse direction to normal, and have thus popped up during our winter.

Summer rarities in South Africa are often long-stayers once they settle in, this is because we represent the southern tip of our continent and thus the end-point of their journey. In all cases the best thing to do for twitchers, is to get their as soon as possible. Some birds last a week, others a month but on average most will last the first weekend, and then it's up to the gods.

The undisputed hotspot for vagrants is the Western Cape, which receives at least several records of American species a year, as well as other vagrants, far away from their homelands. Moving through Southern Africa, the Mozambican and Kwa-Zulu Natal coastlines, alongside Walvis Bay in Namibia, hold their own, and even Gauteng receives a few good birds each summer. Generally the north east of the country is quiet, but the potential for a surprise, such as the little passerine (Wood Warbler)

hopping around Phalaborwa, which was still present at the time of writing, always exists.

So how does one, who is just getting comfortable with publicly calling themselves a birder, hear about what is happening in terms of vagrants? The easiest way is to keep tabs and regularly check the reports on the SA Rare Bird News google group. There are also Telegram groups for each province, and these offer a great forum for those on their way to birds, or in search of specific advice on where and how to get to exact localities.

This month, for those who are looking for a new chapter, or something out of the status quo, perhaps try a short twitch up for the Wood Warbler that has been flitting amongst a line of Fever Trees at Se-fapane Lodge in Phalaborwa for a month or so now. Strike whilst the bird is still there. Failing the chance at this, or if the bird has finally moved on, keep connected and the joy of this form of birding will show itself.



# Constellation of the Month: Pavo - The Peacock

Ben Coley

## Mythology

Pavo, the Peacock, was introduced by Plancius after it was documented by de Houtman and Keyzer during their exploration of the southern hemisphere. It was likely named after the Javan green peacock of the East Indies. It can be found in the southern skies close to the other avian constellations, Grus (The Crane) and Tucana (The Tucan).

In Greek myth, the peacock was said to be Hera's (Zeus' wife) favourite bird, and that her chariot was drawn through the air by a flock of peacocks. Zeus was well renowned for his relations with mortal women and began courting a maiden named Io (Jupiter's closest moon is named after her). Hera became suspicious and sought the services of the giant, Argos. Argos had 100 eyes and was therefore a great choice for a guard!

Zeus changed Io into a cow for her protection, but Hera ordered Argos to tie the cow to an olive tree where he could keep watch over her. Seeing this, Zeus sent his messenger, Hermes, to free her. Hermes disguised him-

self as a shepherd and spent the day telling Argos stories and playing his pipes. Eventually the many-eyed giant fell asleep, and Hermes killed him, freeing Argos. To honour Argos, Hera placed his eyes on the tail of the peacock.

## Notable Stars

Alpha Pavonis is also known as The Peacock Star and is one of the last stars to be officially named. This blue-white giant star was included by the UK's Nautical Almanac Office as one of the bright stars required to be known by RAF pilots in case of instrumentation failure. However, at that time, the star had no official name and was thus labelled 'Peacock' after its parent constellation. They also christened Epsilon Carniae in Carina, as Avior.

The Peacock Star is situated 180 light years from Earth and is a spectroscopic binary star, although the system cannot be resolved with amateur equipment. It is at least 6 times bigger and over 2000x brighter than our Sun.

## Deep Sky Objects

The Pavo Cluster is the third brightest globular cluster in the night sky, after the fa-

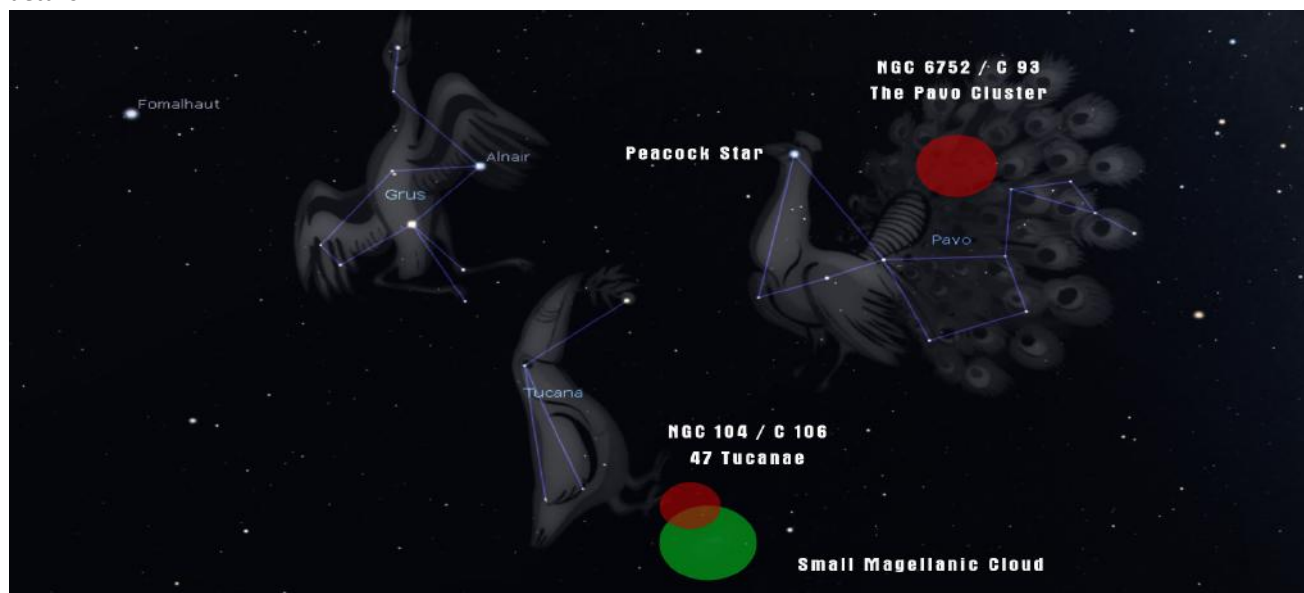
mous Omega Centauri (Centaurus) and 47 Tucanae. It is situated over 13,000 light years from Earth and can just be seen with the naked eye under dark skies close to Alpha Pavonis, Pavo's brightest star.

The cluster contains many binary stars and is one of the oldest globulars known, estimated to be around 12 billion years old. It also has a large number of 'Blue Stragglers', young stars formed from collisions within the cluster.

See *Celestial Events SA* advert on page 15 for contact details.



Pavo cluster (above) and Pavo (below) Images supplied Ben Coley



# Ficus abutilifolia - the Large-Leaved Rock Fig

Brett Heasman  
Guiding Naturally

**This month we have a 'cracker' of a tree - Ficus abutilifolia, the large-leaved rock fig. It has a difficult start to life (one may think it's a really rocky start), perhaps the toughest, but with a solid foundation one can argue.**

The large-leaved rock fig as the name suggests, has massive, almost heart shaped leaves, with a main vein almost yellowish in colour. It is located on rocky hillsides. The reason for me choosing this tree this month came from the soft light of a flickering candle placed strategically in my lounge, because of our ongoing issues with our stop-start electricity supply. As the wax dripped down the candle it reminded me of the way the large-leaved rock figs roots cling to the rocks for support.

The Tswana name, *momelantsweng*, refers to just that. It's twisted and contorted root system is probably the most impressive part, as it grows between the fissures of the boulders and rocks - the roots get larger and larger and over time with

the swelling, it eventually splits the rocks. This is referred to as mechanical weathering, so it is recognized and grouped with the elite rock-splitting fig plants of Africa.

Recently I heard that the tree only grows on granite rocky outcrops, and will germinate only once the rock on which the seed has landed, reaches a very high temp above 50°C. The interesting point being that it has to somehow land up on a rock, and this will only happen if animals and birds such as baboons and barbets eat the fruit of the fig.

Once pollinated by the fig wasp in the same fashion as was explained in my previous fig article, the seed lands up on a rock and the magic is that it only then stands a chance to germinate and start its incredible life on a rock - with limited to almost zero nutrients! It somehow finds the energy to produce this amazing root system that penetrates deep into the earth's surface, some reaching an incredible 60m below the surface to access the water table.

I didn't find any evidence of extreme temperatures but it does favour warm temperatures, and fresh

seed will tend to have more rapid germination. Regardless of the solely granite story above, it has also been recorded on sandstones, basalts and ironstone. In reality, the fig appears on almost any rocky hill in woodlands of low to medium altitude, and with hot and dry conditions. This is the preferred habitat. This is perhaps why it's restricted to the African continent.

Luckily this stunning tree has limited medicinal and human or traditional uses. Some decoctions from the leaves are used in promoting fertility, and the milky latex that seeps from the plant is used to remove skin warts. As a result there is no reason to chop them down in large numbers.

I still somehow want to believe there is a magical link between the seed, the transporters, the heat of the rock and germination, and the possibility of how all these factors play a critical role in the success of this particular plant. Nevertheless an impressive plant, with incredible rock splitting powers and a beauty that catches one's eye every time.



A young large-leaved fig securely sprouting from a rock

Image: B. Heasman



# Can Kruger's upgrades go beyond providing a better park experience?

Wildlife Correspondent

**In May, it was announced that the Kruger National Park is set to get a R370-million upgrade. The upgrades – which include rebuilding a gutted shop and petrol stations (burned down in separate fires), revamps of various tourist and accommodation facilities around the park, and resurfacing of roads – are set to take place over the next three years.**

As welcome as these upgrades will undoubtedly be to park visitors, they could potentially have a much wider impact. If implemented correctly, they could also have a positive knock-on effect on the businesses and communities in and around the park.

One person who knows

this all too well is Anton Gillis, CEO of the Protea Hotel Kruger Gate. Situated on the banks of the Sabie River at the park's Paul Kruger Gate, the hotel is close to Skukuza – the park's biggest rest camp and the location for its administrative headquarters.

That means that the hotel doesn't just have a front-row seat to Kruger's abundant flora and fauna, but also privy to many of the comings and goings in and around the park.

"Kruger attracted nearly two-million visitors in 2019, and is firmly established as one of South Africa's most popular tourist attractions," says Gillis. "But it doesn't exist in a bubble. Communities in and around the park depend on it for their livelihoods."

These communities pro-

vide for the waiters at the restaurants in and around the park, the hospitality workers at the various lodges and hotels, and the drivers that ferry tour groups around the park. They also staff the three airports that service the park, help grow at least some of the food that park visitors eat, produce the crafts that visitors take back with them as mementos, and so many other things.

"In 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic seriously dented the fortunes of those already vulnerable communities," he adds. "With even domestic travel severely curtailed during the early part of the pandemic, and international flights still getting back up to full speed, it'll take more than just a resumption of normal services to revitalize

them."

With the hotel being involved in several community initiatives, most notably sponsoring upgrades to a nearby primary school, Gillis is intimately aware of how important the park is and how much need there is for increased localised economic activity in the area.

"In order for that economic activity to come," he says, "people need to be excited and incentivised to come to the park. While the families that come year in and year out are important, you also need to attract new visitors and give people who haven't been for a few years, a reason to come back."

It's that kind of thinking which initiated hotel's own R100-million expansion, completed in November 2019. The upgrades included the addition of a special-

ty coffee shop, an expanded room count, and the construction of a helipad. The hotel's Kudyela and Lapa restaurants were also expanded and modernized.

"When we made the decision to invest in the hotel's upgrades and expansion, we had a specific vision in mind," says Gillis. "While we've always tried to blend the majesty of the Kruger National Park and all the comforts of an upmarket 4-star hotel experience, we knew that we could take that idea to the next level. This is most visible in our presidential and executive suites, which allow executive groups, whether family or corporate teams, to have an exclusive, private experience of the hotel."

"The hospitality sector is constantly evolving and the upgrades to the hotel allow

us to cater to that evolution," he adds. "They've also allowed us to bring in new guest categories and provide improved experiences to all guests."

The CEO believes that if the park upgrades are to make a real and lasting difference, they must always have a bigger picture in mind.

"Ideally, the upgrades should provide short-term working opportunities for people around the park," he adds. "Beyond that, they should form the basis for ongoing initiatives aimed at attracting new visitors to the park."

"The Kruger National Park is one of South Africa's greatest assets and we should aim to get as much out of it as possible, in the most responsible and ethical manner," he concludes.

## Utterly confusing

Hannes Wessels

**Listening, and watching, Bheki Cele, the South African Police Minister, go apoplectic with rage upon being quite sensibly challenged by Ian Cameron, a white community activist, looking for answers to his concerns about fellow citizens; mainly non-white people living wretched lives in the slums of Cape Town, was a profoundly disturbing experience.**

Everything about that ugly outburst from one of this country's most powerful people, with him screaming 'get out' at his interlocuter, indicated a vehement, visceral hatred of white people. I was left asking myself if I could find a way to ignore the signal that was so clearly been sent to people of my racial group, that it was indeed time, to 'get out.'

And this is the dilemma I face; I know our future is very bleak, the country seems firmly on track to a bloody denouement, and our time limited, but every time I look hopefully abroad for relief, I scratch my head and stop

packing.

Continental Europe is in deep trouble and could be heading for a catastrophe. Industrial powerhouse Germany confronts an energy crisis that could have disastrous consequences. Having taken their cue from Greta Thunberg and the 'Global Warmists,' the Germans have abandoned their thermal and nuclear power stations, pinning their hopes on renewable energy options, while increasing their dependence on Russian oil and gas. A perfect storm beckons; spiralling inflation can lead to hunger and that might lead to riots and societal collapse. If the German economy implodes, it will take much of Europe down with it.

Virtually all western European economies have been severely affected by the unnecessarily radical, authoritarian responses ordered by their governments in response to Covid. Sweden, which eschewed draconian laws, (and did not suffer increased fatalities), is the economy least affected by the so-called pandemic.

The elephant in the room is

Ukraine. While the world, full of useful idiots, in the thrall of a deceptive media, is obsessed with hating Putin and Russians in general, few are prepared to try and understand the genesis of the war that is wrecking economic stability across the globe and threatens a nuclear conflict that could engulf mankind.

The catalyst for conflict was the US backed coup, which unseated a democratically elected government in 2014 and brought the current regime to the fore. This is not conjecture; proof lies in the recording of a phone call made by Victoria Nuland, then President Obama's Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, in which she names the new prime minister two weeks before the incumbents were removed. Further proof, were it needed, comes from former National Security Adviser John Bolton, who acknowledged in a recent interview, US involvement in a host of recent coups. There is every reason to believe this intervention from Washington was deliberately done to provoke Putin and there would be peace in

the region today had it not happened.

This behaviour makes a mockery of White House claims to be leading the fight against Putin 'in defence of democracy' – or do they mean democracy only works when the electorate select the leadership Washington wants? The Zelensky government has shut down opposition media outlets, banned opposition parties and seized their assets. It is also worth noting that when it comes to the Gulf States, notably Saudi Arabia, the Biden people don't seem to have a lot to say about human rights and democracy. They need their oil at the moment.

Instead of looking for ways to end the conflict, the Biden administration pours fuel on the flames as it prepares to ship \$40 billion worth of weapons and equipment to support the Zelensky administration. The warmongers and he weapon-merchants are jubilant, as the world edges closer to the nuclear precipice.

On Hunter Biden's 'hard-drive from hell' is clear evidence that the president's family, benefitted financially

from business relationships with Ukrainian politicians that blossomed and flourished through the misuse of political leverage. There is little doubt, information in the possession of the FBI, proves Hunter Biden was involved in an array of criminal actions ranging from drugs to tax evasion but, just as in most African countries, the ruling family is above the law. Is the US on track to being another Banana Republic?

In Britain, thanks to an exaggerated response to Covid and reckless spending ordered by then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, the country's debt is at the same level it was at, at the end of WW II. Sunak, vigorously supported one of the harshest lockdowns endured by any country in the world. Despite his extreme wealth, his wife has 'non domiciliary' status which enables her to avoid paying tax in the UK and he is the likely prime minister to succeed Boris Johnson. He is Hindu and another likely successor, is Nadhim Zahawi, a Muslim; does this signal the end of Britain as ostensibly a Christian country? If so,

the future for pale-faced *infidels* is uncertain.

Australia has been the preferred destination for many of my generation displaced by adverse events in southern Africa. I have been assisting two friends from Bulawayo who are in terrible trouble for helping a mother hide her two children who she believed were being sexually abused. The mother had despaired of a system that seemed to favour the perpetrators. My friends' four-year ordeal is far from over. They have been jailed, bailed, and still await trial while living in penury. Their story is a disturbing one of a political, judicial, and law-enforcement apparatus that appears to be rotten at every level. Both of them rue the day they left Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe and would return tomorrow if they could.

My bags remain unpacked and I'm still scratching my head.

*This article was originally published by Africa Unauthorised part of [www.exmontibusmedia.co.za](http://www.exmontibusmedia.co.za)*

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# SA in ground-breaking rethink on protection of biodiversity

Don Pinnock

**As the world's biodiversity slips ever deeper into crisis, a ground-breaking South African White Paper demands a paradigm shift to put care of the creatures with whom we share the planet at the centre of our concern.**

The White Paper on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity, gazetted on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022 for public comment, is built around a set of definitions that, if implemented, have revolutionary implications for the welfare of animals in South Africa.

At its core is the contention that nature has value in its own right, independent of human uses, even if it does not benefit humans. Its intrinsic value, the paper says, cannot be calibrated against its economic worth.

The paper, issued by the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, comes close on the heels of a policy document that takes aim at lion farming and the intensive breeding of rhinos.

The White Paper seeks to remedy the shortcomings of the current conservation model which, it says, was founded on the historical colonial practices – entrenched by apartheid – of over-exploitation of nature and the exclusion of the indigenous and local communities.

It embodies the definition that the well-being of an animal involves circumstances and conditions conducive to its physical, physiological and mental health and quality of life, including its ability to cope with its environment.

imal involves circumstances and conditions conducive to its physical, physiological and mental health and quality of life, including its ability to cope with its environment.

**The issue of sentience**

The paper goes further. By acknowledging – and this has huge legal implications – that animals are capable of suffering and experiencing pain and are sentient requires us, in our use of animals, to show respect and concern for them individually.

The White Paper points out that, as a signatory to the International World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), we are obliged to abide by its standards of animal welfare which recognises animals as sentient.

In South Africa the foundations for change were laid down in a landmark judgment in a case brought by the National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA) against the Minister of Justice in 2016. The Constitutional Court not only elevated the welfare and protection of non-human animals to a constitutional concern, but also significantly related their welfare and protection to biodiversity and the constitutional right to have the “environment protected ... through legislative and other means” in Section 24 of the Constitution.

It set down that:

- The rationale behind

protecting non-human animal welfare has shifted from merely safeguarding the moral status of humans to placing intrinsic value on animals as individuals.

- Non-human animals are sentient beings capable of suffering and experiencing pain.
- Non-human animals are worthy of protection.
- Guardianship of the interests of non-human animals reflects constitutional values and the interests of society at large.

This was followed by Justice Edwin Cameron’s minority judgment in the case of NSPCA vs Openshaw, that recognised that animals are worthy of protection not only because of the reflection that this has on human values, but because animals “are sentient beings that are capable of suffering and of experiencing pain”.

**Sustainable use**

Tightly defining the status and treatment of animals has considerable implications for our use of them and the much-abused notion of sustainable use. The White Paper underscores the definition in the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (NEMBA).

To be considered sustainable, it says, the use of any “component” of biodiversity may not contribute to



World biodiversity Image: Canva

its long-term decline in the wild, disrupt the genetic integrity of the population or the ecological integrity of the ecosystem in which it occurs.

It must ensure continued benefits to present and future generations and, in the case of animals, must be humane and not compromise their well-being.

The White Paper expresses concern for the decline of living systems in South Africa, with 14% of taxa (groups of creatures) threatened with extinction. It notes that 99% of estuarine areas and 88% of wetland areas are threatened.

“Across the main ecosystems, estuaries and inland wetlands are the least protected ecosystem types, with less than 2% of their extent in the well protected

category.”

It notes that, in the wildlife sector, current practices promote short-term economic gain for the few, undermine ecological sustainability, are not culturally sensitive and exacerbate poverty and inequality. A goal in increasing biodiversity, it says, is to create large, connected conservation landscapes that enhance naturalness and wildness. Scaling up linkages and corridors within the country and with neighbouring countries would enhance ecological integrity and resilience and lead to the rehabilitation and restoration of natural landscapes.

**The road ahead**

The Biodiversity White Paper has been passed by Cabinet and will now stand for public comment. It then becomes a Bill requiring further discussion before it becomes law. There will certainly be opposition along the way from deeply entrenched vested interests benefiting from consumptive utilisation of biodiversity. Definitions become vitally important in the legal system when actions are challenged and defended.

Farming lions for canned

hunts, cub petting, or for their bones, for example, could not be considered supportive of their well-being.

If animals are seen to be sentient – capable of suffering and experiencing pain – and are regarded as individuals, this strengthens the case of charges of cruelty brought to court by the NSPCA or other parties.

The reshaping and restoration of South Africa’s biodiversity, says the paper, will require introspection, reflection and courageous discussions among all stakeholders. “Innovations will be required to develop new funding models, including an emphasis on public-private partnership that incorporate local rural communities in meaningful ways.”

To do this, strong partnerships will need to be forged between government agencies, community based organisations, the private sector, NGOs, women’s groups, the scientific community and individuals.

To get it right, the paper says, considerable investment will be required.

*This article was previously published in the Daily Maverick*



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



# Drakie go-cart fun



Local correspondent

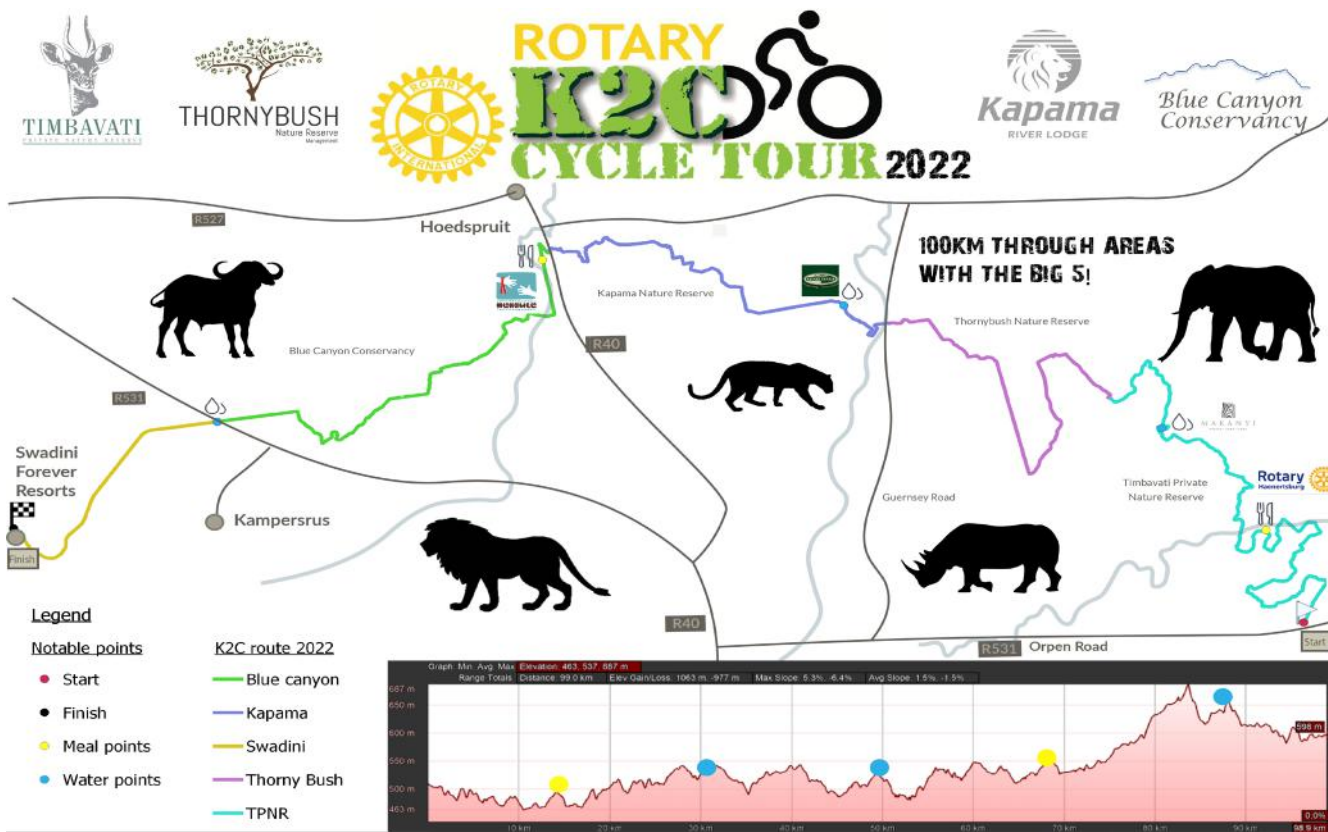
Drakensig Primary school ended its school term on a high note with a fun-filled go-cart race.

Each grade had to dress up according to a theme and complete as many rounds on their go-cart within a given time. Learners and teachers proved what they were made of and pushed with all their might.

The colourfest, face paint station and the three-legged and potato races ensured that there was no dull moment while teams waited for their turn to go. Drakensig Primary School would like to thank everyone involved for making this day spectacular. The school would also like to thank our generous sponsors for the day:

Aerotel, LeBamba and Fat Franks Butchery, Acornhoek Spares, Kapama Game Reserve, Luvit and Abupheli Waterproofing.

# An amazing cycle tour on the edge of the Kruger National Park



Lovelle Henderson

Eighty riders and their back-up teams experienced the ride of their lives through Big Five Country, many for the first time! Some were participating for their fourth or fifth time, as each year they find the ride more amazing. This year the field comprised of thirty percent women, which is a record.

The tired but excited riders wallowing in their remarkable achievement, spoke of sightings of treacherous buffalo and beautiful plains game - even a major herd of elephants was sighted and held up peloton 5 in their tracks.

The 100 km ride started in the Kruger National Park and

wound its way through beautiful riverine bush and the open grasslands of the Timbavati Private Nature. Riders traversed through rugged Thornybush, lovely Blue Canyon and were challenged by some sandy patches in Kapama, making for very diverse terrain and an exciting event. The main roads were easily crossed with the help of senior Rotarians and the invaluable assistance from both Farm and Town Watch members, ably assisted by the Hoedspruit Traffic police.

This is a community effort, from the (now famous) Haenertsburg breakfast, to the delicious home-made boerewors hand-made by local farmers wives, and the juicy orange slices and water along the way.

At last, the beautiful striped

zebra cycle shirts designed for our 2019 tour came into their own and could be made and worn for the July 2022 Tour. The sight of 120 striped jerseys showing the yellow Rotary Wheel coming over the horizon created a shock of realization, that we were back on the road again after two years of Covid inactivity.

At the end of the tour each rider received a certificate confirming that they had completed 100 kms of grueling riding in this very exciting and prestigious 'limited rider' event. A small token of Rotaries appreciation in the form of a 'dinkie' wooden keyring, will remind the riders in years to come, of their momentous achievement, and perhaps jog them to join us again in July 2023.

The end of the ride was generously supported by the Buco team, and the unexpected coolers of iced beers and cool drinks were most welcome.

The details of our next tour will be made available shortly, so make sure that you start planning now for the 2023 tour by getting your own peloton group together.

The organisers ensure the utmost safety precautions, and with exciting encounters in the wild and the best tour fare, this is an event not to be missed. "This was the best boerewors roll I have ever eaten. May I please have another one?" was heard again and again at the Hlokomela lunch point.

And we will do it all again! Until next year.



The Rotary K2C Cycle Tour 2022 route (above left)  
Cyclists en route (top)  
Short rest for the cyclists at the refreshment stop (above)

Images supplied.



## 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 EXCISION AND SUBDIVISION OF AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS FOR THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF RESIDENTIAL STANDS

SITE LOCATION: Holding 27, Ptn 1 and Holding 28 of Kampersrus Agricultural Holdings, Registration Division KT in the Maruleng Local Municipality, Mopani District, Limpopo Province. SG codes TOKT00040000002700001 and TOKT00040000002800000.

**LISTED ACTIVITIES:**

Activities 24, 27 and 28 of Listing Notice 1, and Activities 4, 12 and 15 of Listing Notice 3, published in Government Notices 327 and 324 on 7 April 2017.

APPLICANT: Blunden Admin - Ms. C Blunden.

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 29 July 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 30 August 2022.

## NOTICE OF BASIC ASSESSMENT AND WATER USE LICENCE APPLICATION PROCESSES

Notice is hereby given of the intent to carry out the following activities:

- The submission of an application to Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism 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, for:

THE PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF AN 8-BED VILLA LISTED ACTIVITIES:

Activity 12 and 14 of Listing Notice 3, published in Notice 985 of 4 December 2014, as amended on 7 April 2017.

- The submission of a Water Use Licence Application to the Department of Water and Sanitation in terms of Section 40 and 41 of the National Water Act, 1998 (Act 36 of 1998) and the Procedural Requirements Regulations for Water Use Licence Applications and Appeals (Notice No 267 of 24 March 2017).

**WATER USE:**

Section 21 (a), Section 21 (c), Section 21 (g) and Section 21 (i).

SITE LOCATION: Portion 4 of the farm Cambridge 184 KT in the Maruleng Local Municipality, Mopani District, Limpopo Province. SG code TOKT00000000018400004.

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: Canyon Sands Investments (Pty) Ltd. - Mr. Thorge Heuer.

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 29 July 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 30 August 2022.



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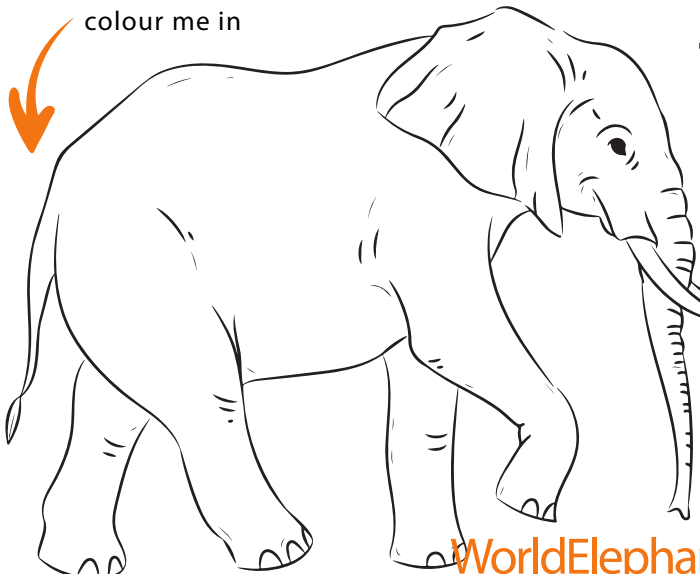
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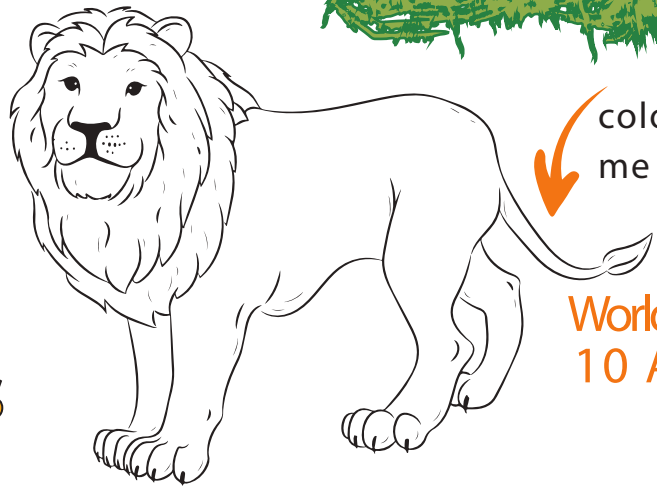


# Junior FGASA & Kids In The Wild

August is the month of World Elephant Day and World Lion Day! Wow, what a wonderful month it is! Let's celebrate these wonderful animals with some awesome activities.



## The month of Elephants & Lions



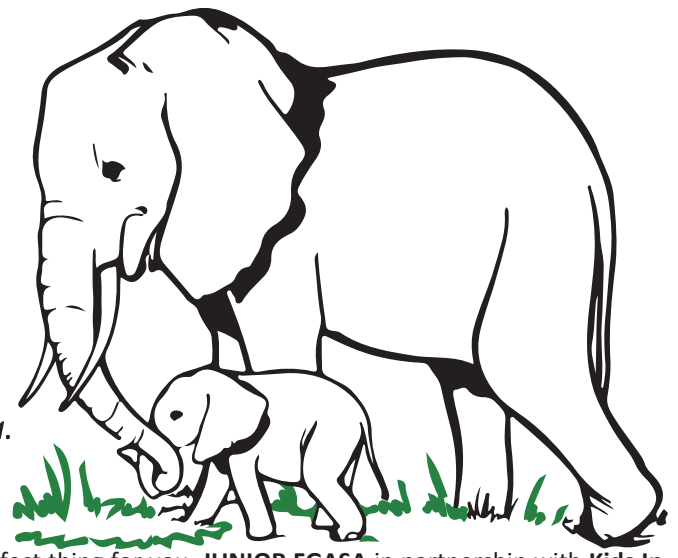
WorldElephantDay12August

WorldLionDay 10 August



## Elephant Facts

1. Elephants are the world's largest land animal.
2. Their tusks are actually teeth.
3. Elephants are constantly eating.
4. They communicate through vibrations.
5. There are three different species and you can tell the three species apart by their ears.



**L**ions are the second largest of the big cats. Tigers being the largest.  
**I**n Africa, they are the largest cat, then follows the leopard and cheetah.  
**O**nly male lions have a mane, this is for display, protection and dominance.  
**N**othing beats the roar of a lion! Roaring is a special characteristic of *Panthera*.  
**S**ocially lions form groups called prides.



If you love the wilderness, and are passionate about conservation, then we have the perfect thing for you. **JUNIOR FGASA** 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. Kids In The Wild will also 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.  
[www.fgasa.co.za](http://www.fgasa.co.za) | +27 (0) 11 886 8245 | [admin@fgasa.org.za](mailto:admin@fgasa.org.za) | [www.kidsinthewild.co.za](http://www.kidsinthewild.co.za) | +27 (0) 66 485 1956 | [info@kidsinthewild.co.za](mailto:info@kidsinthewild.co.za)



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