

Kruger and the complex history of conservation

Don Pinnock, Environmental journalist, Part 1 of 2 articles

Humans have hunted Africa's animals since the dawn of time, but the arrival of European guns in the 17th Century changed the scale of predation. It also reduced the risks, allowing adventurers and colonisers to kill for pleasure. This would prove a disaster for the continent's abundant wildlife.

There were some among the new arrivals – amateur naturalists and scientifically minded travellers – who worried about the problems that would follow. While their countrymen hacked, hunted and impoverished the soil with their alien flocks and food crops, they complained about the disappearance of plants, animals, reptiles and birds. But few had the vision to see where it might end.

The Swedish botanist Anders Sparrman did. Faced with the almost hysterical slaughter of 'vermin' around the Cape, he pleaded for an understanding of the balance of nature. Predators, he wrote in 1772, "serve, in conjunction with mankind, to keep in a just equilibrium, the increase of the animal kingdom, so that it may not exceed the supplies afforded it by the vegetable part of creation [and] lay it waste."

The idea of a balance of nature was taken up some years later by the English naturalist William Burchell, who travelled in South Africa from 1810. "Nothing more bespeaks a littleness of mind and a narrowness of ideas," he wrote, "than the admiring of a production of Nature merely for its magnitude or the despising of one merely for its minuteness.

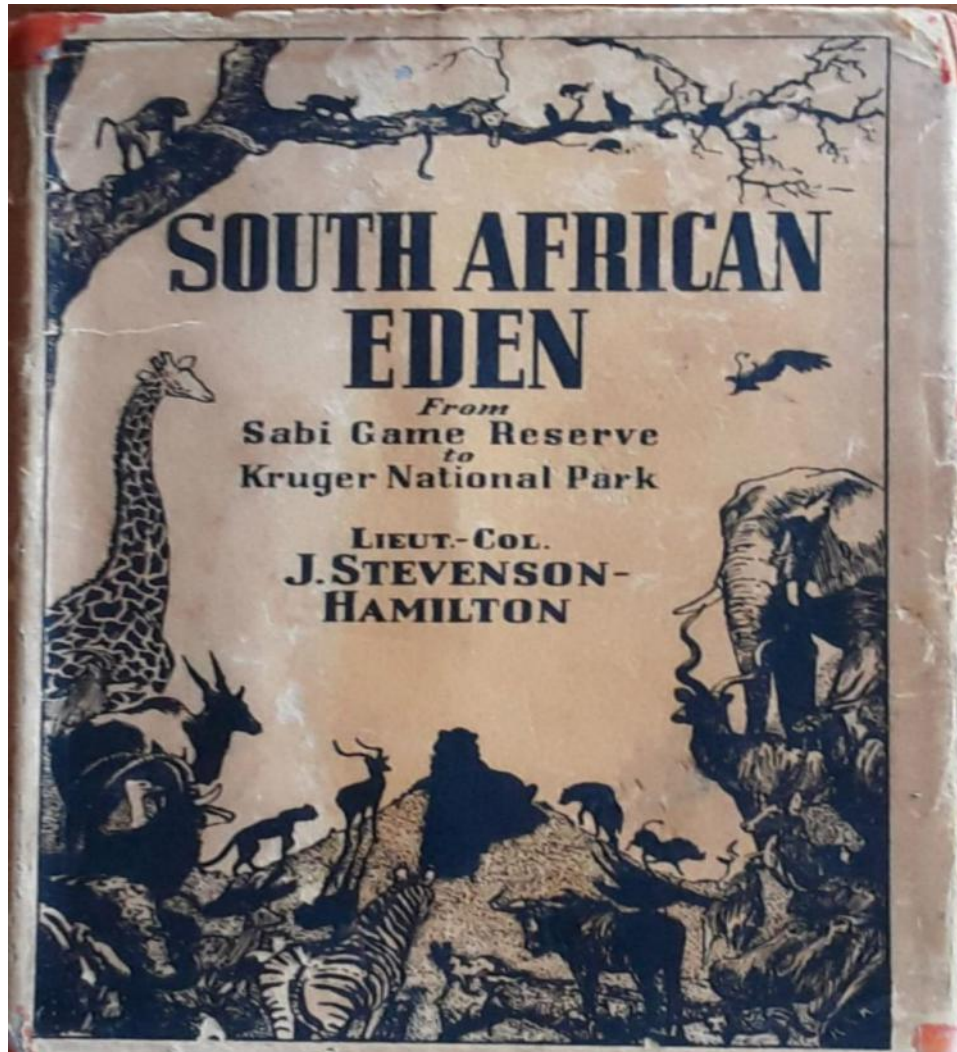
Nothing is superfluous. Each has its peculiar part to perform, conducive to the well-being of all."

The early views of men such as Sparrmann and Burchell were, however, isolated shouts in the dusty avalanche of colonial expansion. Hunting and game protection laws passed to curb the slaughter of wildlife, first in the Cape, then in the Transvaal and Natal, were simply ignored. The great herds evaporated in gunsmoke and any predators that competed were declared vermin, and shot on sight. Lions took a liking to horses, caracals and jackals to sheep. Lions were too conspicuous to survive for long on the open plains, and by the mid 19th century they'd disappeared from the Cape, as had Cape hunting dogs. Jackals, leopards and caracals proved far wiler, so war was declared, and a price put on their heads.

In the Transvaal, they fared little better. By the end of the 19th-century, sport and subsistence hunting were in full swing. Landowners refused to accept self-discipline in wildlife exploitation, and any measures of enforcement were simply ignored. At the end of the 1890s rinderpest reduced still further, what was left of the great herds.

This alarmed hunters running out of game. In 1898 the Volksraad – prodded into concern by members from the Lowveld, and aware that the area was a malarial death trap for humans and not good for farming – proclaimed a hunting reserve in the Sabi area.

The idea was to preserve game animals by curbing poaching – and shooting all predators. The proclamation, however, was acted on only in 1898, when



funds were allocated for the employment of a Warden.

Then the Anglo Boer War intervened. In 1902, amid post-war turbulence and an over-abundance of lawless guns, a Scot named Colonel James Stevenson-Hamilton was appointed to the post.

In his book, South African Eden, he records his moment of arrival; "It is the afternoon of July 25, 1902. On the edge of the last escarpment of the Drakensberg, overlooking the huddled welter

of bush-clad ravines and rocky terraces which compose the foothills, my little caravan has come to a halt, that I may for a while absorb the wonderful panorama of mountain and forest which has disclosed itself. Francolins are calling all around, and from a nearby donga comes the sudden clatter of a guinea fowl. Bush babblers are chatting among the trees It is the voice of Africa, and with it comes a sense of boundless peace and contentment."

Heir to large estates near Glasgow, educated at Rugby and Sandhurst, Stevenson-Hamilton was a man sure of his abilities, and as tough as they come. He was, furthermore, intelligent, unmarried, administratively efficient and loved the wilderness. He also had two Celtic qualities that were to serve the future Kruger National Park well; gritty tenacity and charm.

His first battle was against hunters. "There were no

hunting ethics whatever," he was to observe. "Their main consideration was the largest number [of animals] shot in the shortest time." His parallel action was to be equally controversial: shooting all predators to 'bring up' the antelope herds – an action he was later to regret – and the removal of indigenous human inhabitants from the new reserve.

Inevitably, Stevenson-Hamilton soon looked to the vast, empty areas to the north of the little Sabi reserve, and began to dream; a park from Komatiport to the Limpopo River – was it possible? Taking time off from the bush, he made the rounds of all the land-owning companies with property between the Letaba and Pafuri rivers, and extracted agreements to hand over control of their areas for five years, adding 10 000 square kilometres to the reserve. This northern section became the Shingwedi Game Reserve and was eventually incorporated into the Kruger Park.

With these inclusions came exclusions. In his book Safari Nation, Jacob Dlamini notes that "thousands of black African people were forcibly removed from the lands that were designated for the park and suffered enduring harms from this displacement, from mistreatment by park officials and wildlife attacks."

At the time Stevenson-Hamilton became Sabi Warden, between 2000 and 3000 local people were living within its borders. There was also a military regiment with white and black soldiers.

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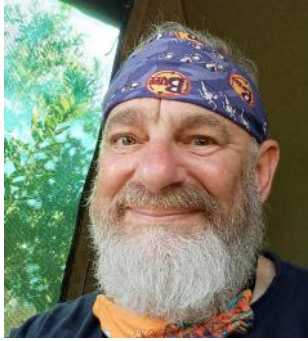
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Mission Impossible ...



From the editor

Hoedspruit is abuzz with the news that Tom Cruise is in town to shoot part of the next Mission Impossible. A franchise that began in 2000 and is set to continue

until at least 2024, or probably the deciding factor is when Tom decides that his body is too old to take the pounding that it has endured to date.

The town seems divided as to whether he should be lauded for coming here, or just treated like another tourist. But how many tourists to our fair town arrive in their own helicopter with not one, but two bi-planes on a trailer!?

I have been trying to get an interview with him for the paper, but given his security detail, storming The Capital in Washington was

easier. Welcome Tom, I hope that your stay will be a memorable one, and you will become a brand ambassador for Hoedspruit and its people.

On another topic altogether - Valentine's Day has come and gone and, thanks to Antonia at The Farm House, a special dinner was enjoyed by our competition winner Cara-mary Ford and her partner, Omar. Many thanks to all the readers that entered, but were not successful. This was only the first competition of the year, and there will be other opportunities.

It seems that COVID has not quite left yet, and now there is talk of a 5th Wave that will arrive at some point in the not too distant future. Does this mean more vaccinations? More boosters? Or more importantly, how long will this uncertainty continue to make life unsettling? So many questions, but not many answers.

Much like South Africa became the NEW South Africa in 1994, has the entire planet become the NEW planet post-2020?

There are aspects of the pandemic that have been positive though, and we

have learned to come to terms with the limitations and the strain that it has placed on both businesses and relationships. But we are a resilient nation and we can overcome most obstacles given the time and the motivation.

I am aware that the travel industry is still taking strain, and it is my fervent wish that the industry will return to pre-March 2020 figures sooner than later. (Perhaps we can prevail on Tom to

spread the word?)

In a world that is filled with so much negativity, could we not ask our town and its 'mense' to become warriors for positivity? I would like to hear from readers what they have done to change a negative situation into a positive one.

Drop me an email at editor@kruger2canyon.co.za, and we will publish the best replies next month.

Until next time, stay well and stay healthy.

David Batzofin

Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor – February 2022



Dear Editor,

I really cannot understand all the hype around the arrival of Mission Impossible star Tom Cruise. What has he done for our town aside from posing for pictures from afar? I believe that there is also a German film crew here currently filming a series of "I'm a celebrity, get me out of here", but we have heard nothing about those celebrities. At the end of the day, if Hoedspruit DOES feature

prominently in either movie, that would be great; but I fear that those watching will have to wait for the credits to roll before knowing where it was shot.

Lest I be accused of being a grumpy old man, let me say a big Hoedspruit welcome to all involved in these productions.

Thanks, Bruce. We here at the newspaper will continue to try and obtain an interview with Mr Cruise to find out what he feels about the time he spent in our town. Ed

Dear Editor,

I am not sure how many people have tried going to the police station recently, to get documents certified.

There are times when you get lucky, but sometimes the queues are long, and service can be slow. I am not complaining at all, but it is a mere observation.

However, at one point earlier this year I realised I needed to have some papers done by the next day and I had forgotten to go, so I went through at about 9 pm, with my Wife suggesting they would be closed. Not at all, the office was empty apart from the one police lady who welcomed me through the doors, stamped my various documents and I was gone again in a flash.

What a pleasure. "Hats off" SAPS for being available 24/7, and my advice to everyone is, if you don't want to queue

wait until after hours and go when others are watching TV after dinner!

Dear Sir,

Why is it that the roads departments between Hoedspruit and Dullstroom cannot seem to work together to fix the potholes along the R36? Will it take someone dying before they are fixed correctly?

I drive that road regularly, and although I see workmen who appear to be busy with repairs, after the first rains post repair, the potholes return, bigger than before. They are a danger and an eyesore, along a route that is frequently used by international travellers to get to

the multitude of game lodges in the area, and they cannot make a good impression. Please can you follow up on this and report back? Susan

Susan, this is brought to my attention every month, and try as I might I have not been able to get an answer from the various departments concerned. For now, all I can suggest is that all road users travel carefully, and become aware of the dangers, and try not to travel in the dark. One suggestion that was made, is that a circle is sprayed around the potholes in reflective paint, with a painted arrow giving warning of the danger ahead. But who is going to do that?

Ed

Rogue Riddles

1 There is a word in the English language in which the first two letters signify a male, the first three letters signify a female, the first four signify a great man, and the whole word, a great woman. What is the word?

2 A seed with three letters in my name. Take away two and I still sound the same. What am I?

3 I am the beginning of everything, the end of everywhere. I'm the beginning of eternity, the end of time and space. What am I?

4 I can wave my hands at you, but I never say goodbye. You are always cool when with me, even more so when I am high! What am I?

5 If you have me, you want to share me. If you share me, you haven't got me. What am I?

6 My life can be measured in hours, I serve by being devoured. Thin, I am quick. Fat, I am slow. Wind is my foe. What am I?

excluding blacks, though they were included by degrees. As Dlamini writes, initially maids were permitted to accompany families and the park's staff were mainly African. The Bantustan 'homeland' system widened the gap. For the 'independence' of these puppet states to be accepted, their citizens had to be treated as international visitors. And they came.

Dlamini suggests this was one of the reasons the government under Mandela supported the Kruger Park as part of its vision of democratic and inclusive conservation. Today nearly half of the park's visitors are not European. But the legacy of exclusion has consequences.

"Entering the Transvaal Lowveld for the first time, a Scot named James Stevenson-Hamilton had a vision: he would build one of the finest wildlife parks in the world. But people living there didn't fit the dream".

Kruger and the complex history of conservation

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Within a year he had disarmed and expelled the African families and driven out the regiment. That earned him the nickname Skukuza, which means 'the destroyer.' That history has become part of today's community land claims.

It's difficult today to imagine the incomprehension with which Stevenson-Hamilton's attitude to wildlife was regarded among all sections of the population. While in Pretoria, someone exclaimed that they envied him for the wonderful shooting he must be having down in Sabi. When he replied that neither he nor his staff ever shot an animal, the man stared at him, speechless, for a moment, then blurted out, "Why? Can't you hit them?"

One of his African attendants once remarked to somebody: "Never have I travelled with such a white man; when he saw a zebra standing so close that I could hit it with a stone, he only looked at it. Truly, he is quite mad!"

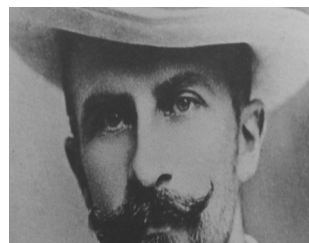
Painfully slowly, Stevenson-Hamilton's iron control of the reserve, together with his non-hunting approach bore fruit. He argued for and obtained

control over all policemen and border officials in the park area, in this way adding to his anti-poaching force. When he caught several white policemen from Komatipoort poaching, he refused to let it pass and prosecuted them, creating an outcry in the district but making a powerful point about wildlife protection.

For a while, Stevenson-Hamilton was to be vilified by many Lowvelders, who objected to this 'foreigner' throwing his weight around. Local papers bristled with anonymous letters about 'pampered officials', and claimed the park was merely a government breeding ground for lions, crocodiles and wild dogs. There were calls for him to be fired. His response was characteristic. "I began to develop," he wrote, "a certain hitherto unsuspected strain of obstinacy."

The fracas got him thinking, though. Why waste all this time and money simply to build up a future hunting reserve? Why not, instead, turn it into a national park, held in trust for perpetuity? Was there possibly a future in that?

The seed had been sown. Stevenson-Hamilton began to agitate, something he proved



Stevenson-Hamilton Image supplied

remarkably good at. "I would talk at great length about national parks – when I could get anyone to listen to me."

When a railway line was routed through the park in 1912, he got trains to stop for a bush lunch, so passengers could admire the wildlife. It proved a runaway success with tourists. In 1916 a commission was appointed to assess the future of the reserves, and its members were taken on a tour by Stevenson-Hamilton. They were bowled over by the beauty of the Lowveld. "The Spirit of the Wild is quick to assert her supremacy," he would write, "every member of the commission soon became a confirmed game protectionist."

In its report the commission insisted that the park should be more than a preservation of fauna – "it should become a wilderness for all to enjoy."

The seed had taken root, though 'all' did not include everyone.

As the legislative wheels began to turn, slowly as ever, Stevenson-Hamilton and his friend, the South African Railways publicity officer Stratford Caldecott, hit on an idea that was pure marketing. As an act of conciliation by the British Administration, why not call it the Kruger National Park? And that, in 1926 when the National Parks Act was passed, is what it became.

This was a politically delicate manoeuvre at a time when Afrikaner nationalism was growing, and British colonial sentiments retreating. The national park – together with naming it after Paul Kruger, an Afrikaner hero – was an exercise to bring together the two white communities in South Africa in a common project. In that exercise, the views of communities that had lived there for many generations were disregarded.

The name was purely political. The Volksraad minutes clearly show that President Kruger had never given much support to wildlife protection and, Stevenson-Hamilton wrote, never in his life thought of wild animals except as biltong. "I wonder what he would say

could he see himself depicted as the Saviour of the South African Game?"

In the years which followed, as almost exclusively white people streamed into the new park, Stevenson-Hamilton watched in wonder, as what he called his Cinderella became a princess and part of the country's national identity. In 1927, the year it was opened to the public, only 10 carloads braved it, but by 1935 some 26000 people had made the pilgrimage.

Today the number, pre-Covid, has been around a million a year. Stevenson-Hamilton retired in 1946, after nearly half a century as park warden and settled down to pen his memoirs. "Nature, left entirely alone," he would write, "manages her own affairs. Predatory creatures, great and small, and whether of the earth, air or water, have their full place in nature, just as much as the animals on which they are accustomed to prey, and are entitled to equal respect." Understand this, he said, and nature will transform you. "Ignore it and she will return armed with a pitchfork."

Interestingly, the park did not follow the standard apartheid dictum of

Blazing saddles: On the trail with a conservation champion

Mieneke Muller

Also published by the Daily Maverick

Conservation and efforts to tackle the endangered wildlife trade begin at home, says an Mpumalanga man, who is determined to practise what he preaches. Mieneke Muller reports.

As a herd boy, caring for his Grandfather's cattle in Zanghoma, a village near Tzaneen, Vusi Tshabalala seldom gave hunger or thirst a second thought. He was too busy having fun in the veld. "It was only when we entered the back into the gates of our yard that I would remember that ... 'actually I haven't eaten today, I'm quite hungry,'" says Tshabalala.

Two decades on, Tshabalala is still sustained by a boundless flow of energy. He channels it into sharing with others a love of South Africa's open spaces and an appreciation for its wildlife. But he has deep concerns, rooted in his exposure to wildlife trafficking.

We meet Tshabalala at his stables in Acornhoek, a village just south of the Mpumalanga-Limpopo boundary and a few kilometres west of the Greater Kruger – the National Park itself and the patchwork of private reserves bordering it.

He leaps up to greet me, with a bounce in his step and wearing a vivacious smile. Tshabalala tells me he settled Acornhoek because it's near the Kruger. "I saved up enough money and with the help of my community leaders, I managed to secure 4 hectares on the edge of my community" says Tshabalala. He had also met a local woman, Splendor, who he later married. The couple have two girls and one boy.

Nature buff

The decided nature buff first got to know about animals herding his Grandfather's animals. "I grew up loving horses, and dreamed of owning some one day, the most beautiful animals ever," he says beaming. With a place of his own in Acornhoek, here was a chance to keep some of his own. He started with two semi-wild mares, Queen and Nyeleti (Star), along with their yearlings, Prince and Moon.

"The horses were much wilder than I'd realised and it took me five weeks to tame them. Every day before and after work I'd spend time with them, talking to them."

But he knew others in Acorn-



Vusi Tshabalala with Queen, cool off in a stream in Acornhoek. While fresh, river water is readily available in the area, Tshabalala is concerned that people are dumping trash in rivers, polluting these vital water sources. Sand mining has also started up alongside the main road bordering his smallholding.
Photo: Warren Ngobeni

hoek might not see things the same way. Few of his neighbours had encountered horses in the flesh, and many were afraid of the animals. How could anyone appreciate the natural world, he wondered, if they've never really interacted with it? And if that's true for domestic animals, like horses, it would apply to wildlife too.

This realisation proved to be one of those light-bulb moments. "As a conservationist specialising in education for sustainable development, I have always struggled to find ways in which our young people can interact with wildlife – only a lucky few get the opportunity to go on a trip to Kruger National Park," he says.

Here was an opportunity to change things for the better. Soon Tshabalala's horses had become famous in Acornhoek, and now on those endlessly hot Lowveld summer days, he takes local children for rides to swim in the nearby river.

Crisis

At 31, Tshabalala has spent much of his adult life working on environmental and conservation projects involving communities. He sees his little farm very much as part of this work. It lies a few kilometers from the Orpen Gate, just off the R40, which roughly skirts Greater Kruger's western boundary. Across the road and on the other side of a closely monitored

game fence, the park is battling to prevent poaching of endangered animals.

There have been large declines in certain species, particularly rhino. According to recent statistics, the rhino population in Kruger has decreased by 60% since 2013. Only 3,529 white rhinos and 268 black rhinos remain in the park. Other animals, notably pangolins, lappet-faced vultures and African wild dogs are under threat too – either poached directly or caught in snares intended for other animals.

How to tackle the scourge of poaching and the illegal wildlife trade remains a vexing question. Anti-poaching patrols and other security measures have enjoyed success, but it's an expensive undertaking, distracts park managers and sucks up financial and other resources needed for important conservation work.

Private reserves in the Greater Kruger spend huge amounts on security with no financial assistance from the Government. According to an article published by Conservation Frontlines (April 2020) the 2020-21 operational budget for the upmarket Timbavati Private Nature Reserve alone was just over R22 million (US\$ 1,26), with security getting the biggest share of R9,9 million (45%). That's aside from millions spent on combating rhino poaching,

trying to stop the bushmeat trade was also costly.

"Until recently, you would often see people around here walking about with wheelbarrows of meat to sell," says Tshabalala. People were regularly poaching in neighbouring reserves – at least once a fortnight. So the owners combined security, formed Farm Watch and installed cameras along the Orpen Road, says Tshabalala. "Now when a person is sighted going into a reserve, each owner sends out a vehicle with rangers in it, so a guy ends up with as many as 17 vehicles looking for him," says Tshabalala.

Then there is the conflict between wildlife and people, arguably the biggest threat to South Africa's protected areas.

Amid all this, there is a feeling among some commentators that people living near parks like Kruger have been sidelined. Critics charge that many of the park's nearest neighbours are deprived of access to its resources; are often the first to suffer when wildlife breaks out, threatening people or destroying crops; and point out that in some cases these are descendants of people that have been forcibly removed from the park over the course of more than a century.

Mending fences

Since he settled in Acornhoek in 2011, Tshabalala has been doing his bit, helping to mend fences, as it were. In a certain sense, it's with his own good interests in mind. In the 13 years since he began his studies in Nature Conservation at Tshwane University of Technology, Tshabalala has developed a very hands-on love for animals and biodiversity at large, one which he suspects raises eyebrows among his neighbours.

"I started preaching conservation and I had to come up with solutions to environmental challenges to make my community accept me. Participating in snake wrangling and crocodile breeding, I would have easily been mistaken for a witch, but coming through the lens of conservation first, meant they understood me and how passionate I'm about animals," he says.

The word "preaching" is apt here. Tshabalala's father was a Reverend in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and he and his family often moved in the course of his work. Tshabalala Jnr, as a consequence, attended many schools and can now speak nine of South Africa's official languages. Time spent in the Netherlands as an

exchange student, added to his rapport with people from many different cultures and walks of life. It's also part of the reason for his easy fluency in Afrikaans. Eco-friendly church

He has followed in his father's footsteps too. When not preaching conservation, Tshabalala Jnr is a Pastor for the Church of Love Ministries. But it's not really one thing or the other. He says he brings all aspects of his beliefs into his projects and vice versa. So when he began work on a church building, he took pains to make it eco-friendly. Recycled glass and tin have been pressed into service and 2-litre plastic bottles are used to make what are called eco-bricks.

At first, not everyone saw the light. "There were a lot of doubts about this building at first, people were saying, 'It's not going to work', but slowly they came around, realising it works, it's cheap and it uses waste. Now my congregants want to incorporate this style into their own homes."

So how did the son of a preacher man, admittedly one who loved the bush as a boy, end up doing environmental work? Tshabalala speaks with great affection for his childhood which included long stays at his grandparents' home in the countryside, where he first nurtured his love for animals. "Having spent so much time with animals, I also created a big bond with them. I enjoyed that time so much, I couldn't wait for the school holidays to go visit," he recalls.

Family phobia

It took a while though, for this to translate into a career choice. "I never thought of going into conservation, until I saw animal abuse. Even when I began studying nature conservation, I knew I wanted to tend to human-wildlife conflict issues," he says.

His family thought otherwise though, and did their best to dissuade him from studying conservation, but Tshabalala remained steadfast. "Everyone in my family has a phobia of animals. My mother even took me to psychologists to try to find other options. So to do conservation I really had to go against the wishes of my family." His studies led to a series of jobs. To name a few, Tshabalala has worked as a zoo-keeper, in anti-poaching and game capture.

Community projects
"I came to this area (Acornhoek) in 2011. Every opportunity was linked to one another.

Eventually I became a supervisor for a not-for-profit, Nourish, on a community-based project that educates local schools and communities about the environment and South Africa's wildlife."

It all proved great preparation for his current role as a Manager of the Environmental Monitors Programme at the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere. The not-for-profit company works with communities to promote a balanced and sustainable relationship between socio-economic development, conserving biodiversity and the use of natural resources on which people's livelihoods depend.

Poaching

Tshabalala now works on 86 different community projects, meaning that he's often in talks with local chiefs and their people, including discussing how poaching affects them. He has come to understand the complicated feelings many communities have towards protected areas and conservation.

"There are two types of poachers that we usually see, depending on the community they come from. In some, they are considered heroes and whatever profits they make from poaching, they give back to their community. Then there are those who act as individuals and simply get richer for their own sake."

He says many communities protect poachers, knowing they provide for them in ways nobody else can or will. Some younger people look up to poachers. They understand jobs are scarce and poaching a single rhino horn could set them up financially. In some villages and settlements near Kruger, people have few interactions with the park and its animals, so can hardly be expected to appreciate these, says Tshabalala. But by the same token, there has been a push back against poaching.

"There is a small settlement on the northern banks of the Olifants River called 'The Oaks' that had a lot of bush meat poachers. The surrounding reserves wouldn't hire anyone from that village, fearing that whoever they hired, would give out information that would put their reserve at risk. Soon enough, the village understood they were missing out on employment opportunities, and how poaching was affecting their community."

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The Mirantha Youth Development Project

Special Correspondant

Staff members from the Imbali Safari Lodges in the Kruger Park, recently spent some time in one of the neighbouring communities of Acornhoek.

The key objective was to initiate a donation drive that would benefit the most vulnerable community members, including many 'child-headed' families. The lodges donated linen, towels and other homeware, which was much appreciated by the community members.

The event was arranged by Happiness Lubisi, of the Mirantha Youth Development Project, that supports 120 kids. Many are orphans (80 in total) or are from vulnerable families in the Acornhoek area.

Her initiatives include supplying the kids with food parcels, clothing, or to assist in ensuring they receive child support grants, which, as she explains, are always a challenge. She also offers them emotional relief and support.

Left without the guidance, financial support, and protection of parents, the "forgotten children" are disproportionately exposed to poverty, abuse, crime, and extortion. Most of the children have dropped out of school due to a variety of socio-economic reasons, with the resultant poor literacy, the inability to find jobs due to lack of skills, and the inability to integrate well in their community.

Several members of our Mluwati Concession team and their families hail from

the town of Acornhoek, which lies just outside of the Kruger National Park. The survival of the surrounding communities of the park are directly reliant on the business, investment and employment that comes from the presence of ecotourism activities in the area. To secure the stability and prosperity of these communities, the empowerment and protection of their youth is a fundamental requisite.

A 'child-headed' family means that the children do not have parents, and one of them is looking after his/her siblings, or children. A vulnerable family means that they are all unemployed, and may be solely reliant on a child grant, if they are able to get it.

This was an eye-opening



Young women from the project

Image supplied

experience, the struggles that these families face are heart-breaking. This was truly a wonderful opportunity for the Imbali team to continue in their endeavour to support the communities around the Kruger Park.

Rogue Riddles answers

- 1 Heroine
- 2 A pea
- 3 The letter "e"
- 4 An electric fan
- 5 A Secret
- 6 A candle

Boosting learning potential

Correspondent

One of the world's leading supplementary educators provides learning programmes designed to help students from Grade R to Grade 12 reach their full learning potential. This is evident from the amount of children that have struggled at school, and been successfully helped through the Kip McGrath system.

The Kip McGrath Education Centres business were established over 40 years ago in Australia, and are now world leaders in supplementary education, with a network of over 7000 franchises in 20 countries.

The Kip McGrath Education Centre individualised tutoring system, is designed to help children who are struggling with English, Afrikaans and

Mathematics. There are short courses in Study Skills, School Readiness, Essay Writing and English as a Second Language. It is believed that every child can be helped to achieve with continuous motivation and a healthy boost of their self-confidence.

Every child is tested free of charge, to ascertain where his or her problems lie. The children who enroll are placed on a programme designed at a level that ensures they are able to cope. A qualified teacher leads them through this graded program, and then step-by-step through more complex work, until the child has reached the level of their present grade.

The Kip McGrath system helps the child at the root of the problem, and is founded on individualised attention and personal care. The program

brings peace-of-mind to many concerned parents. Parents who bring their children to the Kip McGrath Education Centres are grateful to have found someone who can help solve their child's problems.

My daughter attended Kip in Grade 7. It took her 18 months to bridge the gap from a 'C' to an 'A' aggregate in Maths. Once she left Kip, she was able to maintain her 'A' throughout her High School. She is in Matric this year and is still getting 'A's' in Math. She says 'Kip puts it in my head!' She couldn't be more right. (Mrs Manickchund -2014)

One of our successful Study Skills courses starts in the Winter Holidays right here in Hoedspruit. For a free assessment, call one of our centres or look us up on www.kipmcgrath.co.za.

Valentine's Day prize winners

Cara-May Ford

I was so excited to hear that I had won this amazing Valentine's gift. I feel very blessed. My partner Omar, was so excited for me as I had been speaking him and friends of ours about entering this. I looked forward to our healthy food options and enjoying the outing together. It was also time to just remember the importance of believing, and even though enjoying time together is scarce - we should never forget how important it is, even with caring for a small baby.

Our evening was wonderful. The best part was that we could take Marco with us, and he was able to play in the playground close to where we were seated. Judging from the noise emanating

from there, he too had a fun time. There was a beautiful ambience and Antonia greeted us and her guests. Our choices were for me, a prawn starter and vegan curry main, followed by a decadent chocolate dessert. Omar chose a vegan Caprese salad as his starter and his main was a T-bone steak and potatoes. Then then had the mango dessert option.

Our dinner was scrumptious and the overall feeling was a romantic Valentine's couples evening (even though our young son was with us!). We will be making time to go and enjoy a vegan gluten-free pizza at The Farm House soon.

Thanks to the Kruger2 Canyon News and The Farm House Restaurant for a memorable evening.



Cara-May & Omar at The Farmhouse

Image supplied

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The Balule Outreach Trust: Good deeds and goodwill making for better lives

Susan Harwood



Established in February 2012, the Balule Trust was tasked with raising funds and engaging in community development programs in the Hoedspruit and Phalaborwa communities, of Limpopo Province in South Africa.

The Trust is registered as a non-profit organisation with the Department of Social Development and with the South African Revenue Service, as a Public Benefit Organisation.

John Anderson, founder and Chairman of the Balule Outreach Trust, outlined that, "From small beginnings, in 2013 we had established a firm relationship over several years with our two major beneficiaries Southern Cross School in Hoedspruit and South African Medical Expeditions (SAME) through their After School Child Care Centre in Sigagule Village".

Chantel (keft) and Malebo (above)

In addition to SAME, we support Nourish, an NPO operating in Sigagule, with funds for making masks, and the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Maseke Community with funds for food parcels - both of whom operate in communities within the area.

The Balule Outreach Trust has contributed to the construction of two new classrooms, a clinic and toilet facilities and towards the end of 2020, Sigagule was blessed with an additional new classroom, that will be predominantly used for health and environmental education.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have made monthly grants to enable the NGO to purchase carefully selected food, vegetables and fruit to make up food parcels for destitute people, directly impacted through the loss of jobs and loss of financial support.

The Trust requires that the beneficiaries report regularly, and in the case of food parcels, insist on

monthly financial reports supported by copies of purchase invoices. In the case of our bursars, Southern Cross Schools provides regular term reports.

The Trust is a registered non-profit, and holds a tax-exempt status as a public benefit organisation with the South African Revenue Service. This importantly, enables it to issue Section 18A tax receipts to donors who are South African taxpayers. Grants and donations from foreign sources are acknowledged by way of a formal receipt.

In December 2021, the Trust supported the Nourish Graduation and Christmas party. One hundred and twenty children and their families were treated to games, jumping castles, sweets, refreshments and a delicious warm meal. They were all extremely proud of the 13 children who graduated to primary school in 2022. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trust supported Nourish with masks and food parcels.

In recent years, the Trust moved from providing financial support for a teacher upgrade programme run by the school, to granting bursaries for deserving, disadvantaged learners.

The bursary programme has consistently produced excellent results, our two IEB matriculants, Chantal Mnisi and Malebo Sekame both achieved university passes, and we wish them well for the future. In 2022 we have continued our support of five learners in partnership with another local NGO, Eco Children Klaserie.

The three Grade 6 learners sponsored by the Trust, namely Vusi Chiloane, Appreciate Magabe and Emmanuel Theko, all had a very good year in 2021, and were promoted to Grade 7. We agreed to continue their sponsorship and, as co-sponsors with Eco Children, also agreed to sponsor a further two very promising grade 7 learners, Perseverance Mashaba and Lesibo Legodi.

Eco Children sponsor 50% of the tuition fees and 75%

of their boarding fees. The Balule Outreach Trust provides the balance of 50% of the tuition fees and 12.5% of the boarding fees, leaving the balance of 12.5% for the school's account.

The Trust benefits from grants from Olifants North Game Reserve and its members. Olifants North, which falls into the BaPhalaborwa local council, borders on Maseke Game Reserve. The Maseke Drop in Centre, located in the Phalaborwa district, operates a food parcel service for disadvantaged and unemployed people in their local community. We make monthly contributions to the costs of the food parcels.

In 2021, we also financed field ranger training at the South African Wildlife College.

The Trustees wish to thank our many donors and supporters, some of whom are regular annual contributors to our funding base.

This month, the Balule Outreach Trust celebrates 10 years since registration.

Wild harvesting of the Lemon Bush

Dimakatso Nonyane,
Resilient Waters Project
Manager

The Kruger to Canyons Biosphere is about collaboration, and taking every opportunity to further create an impact throughout the landscape.

For that reason, we saw an opportunity in collaborating with the Hoedspruit Hub (Anri Manderson), in support of her essential oil production project. This project will empower 20 women

in the Arthur's seat community, where they will be harvesting *Lippia javanica* and selling it to her at R4.00 per kg.

For those who are unaware of what this plant is, you might know it by a variety of other names; *Lippia javanica*, Fever tea, lemon bush, koorsbossie, beukesbossie, lemoenbossie, mutswane, umsutane, inzinziniba, um-suzwane, umswazi, musukudu, or bokhukhwane.

The area for this production is next to the Lekete

High School, and was of high interest because it is isolated with no possibility of the plants being affected by chemicals, such as pesticides and herbicides. This is critical because the plants used to make these essential oils need to be 100% pure and organic.

On the 25th of November 2021 the Resilient Waters Project Manager, Spring of Hope Project Coordinator together with the Kruger to Canyons Office Manager, met with the Principal of

the Lekete High School. The aim was to come up with a way forward regarding the use of the space and what the harvesting entails.

The Principal was happy, and welcomed the project as it will improve the lives of the women in that community and will also be beneficial for the school. Before harvesting can take place the Kruger to Canyons personnel will conduct a clean-up campaign, which will remove all the litter that is in the school surroundings

and will look into removing the alien invasive species to make room for the *Lippia* to flourish.

It was a nice day out of the office as we got to walk the school's perimeter to establish the exact area with the potential of being harvested. At this stage, the immediate value of the exercise was to establish relationships with the school and organisations that believe in giving back to communities, through women empowerment projects. The poten-



tial value will be about the upliftment of lives, developing a new set of skills, enabling women to know that they can start their co-operatives or SMME's in the bioprospecting sector, and strengthen the relationships with newly formed and existing stakeholders.

"When you lift up women, you lift up humanity"
Melinda Gates

Blazing saddles: On the trail with a community conservation champion

Cont. from page 3

This led to discussions between Tshabalala and the people of The Oaks. Now many from the settlement, work for canine anti-poaching units, putting their tracking skills to good use.

Radio

Such is Tshabalala's energetic personality, wide set of skills and life experience, that he's continually drawn into projects and undertakings. In his leisure time (if that can be the right word) he's even turned to presenting community-nature programmes on a local radio station, RFM, and in 2019 represented South Africa at the 40th UNESCO youth forum. The forum brought together young leaders in conservation to join efforts and ideas to help

solve biodiversity issues globally.

"There's a big diversity in the projects I'm working on. Some are community-enrichment, animal rehabilitation, environmental education, monitoring ecological issues and human-wildlife conflict within the biosphere of the Kruger, which is the most challenging project. It's such a diverse and complex issue that's not just for our landscape and our nation, but it's a global problem," he says.

Towards the end of our conversation, I ask him what ordinary South Africans could do to aid conservation. It begins at home and it calls for unified action, says Tshabalala, and it matters not whether that's an eco-friendly smallholding near Greater Kruger or an urban

flat.

"Before you want to join any organisation, any movement, it starts with how you recycle your own waste at your own home, how you preserve water. What's making the world more sustainable and green is people coming together, be it in the form of an institution or organisation, because they see a gap and craft a solution to close that gap."

Mieneke Muller is a content writer. She is enrolled in the *Khetha Journalism Project*. Supported by USAID, the joint WWF-SA, WESSA and Roving Reporters initiative assists aspiring journalists report on the complexities of illegal wildlife trade in and around Greater Kruger.



Vusi Tshabalala first got to know about animals herding his grandfather's animals as a young boy. More than twenty years on, he could write a book not dissimilar to Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals*, obviously not set on the Greek island of Corfu, but in Acornhoek on the fringe of Kruger National Park. Here is tending to his geese. Photos: Warren Ngobeni

The mad scramble to ensure life!



Bokmakierie
Image supplied

Mike Meidlinger

As summer wains onwards and the rains seem to subside (if only for a few days at a time), we find ourselves over the peak of the displaying, seducing, courting and breeding period, at least for this particular solar rotation. Almost all species remain vocal, active and despite responding less, are in fact quite easily seen, as now its time to graft. Parents are raising hungry chicks everywhere, well, for the Intra-African migrants and the residents at least.

Palaearctic non-breeders, for the most part, have no involvement in what happens next, and remain blissfully ignorant to the pandemonium around them. Rather, they continue taking advantage of the bounty of food to be found almost everywhere. Where there are hungry chicks there are abundances, emergences and propagations of food to exploit, especially during a wet year like the 2021/2022 season is proving to be. Insects, arachnids, plants and grasses are all in a maxed out state of abundance at this point.

Hosts of brood parasites

have to be on high alert now, but for many it is too late. For species that don't know the pangs of parasitism, its all about keeping their clutches alive and well fed. In other words, pairs of all levels of experience, are locked in a tightrope-like act of surviving themselves, but also skilfully avoiding and overcoming all the challenges any food chain poses to the survival of their progeny.

For many, perhaps even the majority of hatchlings life will be a short one. However, despite this unavoidable loss, there are many strategies parent birds employ to ensure the best chances for their chicks. It's not only behaviourally that this an interesting month in terms of nesting, but young birds often pose an identification loophole, that has snagged many a newcomer birder or unwary member of the public.

In general, juvenile birds may be similar in shape to adults, but have washed out or faded plumage that often has white tips to wing feathers, or chevron markings on the breast and or belly. Some classic examples include members of

the thrush, flycatcher, chat and robin families. In some, first year plumage is distinctive but quite different from that of adults, such as in the Bokmakierie. In many passerine species young juveniles have a yellow gape patch that was previously used to indicate to parents where to shove food, but is now redundant and thus is lost over time. Waders and shorebirds have adults that tend to look a little more drab and less crisp than brand spanking new juveniles. This is due to the fact that those same adults, have spent a frantic 90 day summer providing for the first-time plumage wearing, and later arriving youngsters.

Behaviourally, feeding is the order of the day, and in terms of diet, all the gloves come off. Normally granivorous or grain-eating species suddenly start to dine on a smorgasbord of arthropods. This live prey is stocked full of protein, and is therefore ideal for helpless but growing chicks. Most species are to some extent or other monogamous, and share the parental load, with at least one parent visiting the nest every few minutes



Juvenile Cape Robin Chat (above)

Image: Stellenbosch Birds - Brian Radford



Juvenile Bokmakierie

Image: Tom Ennis

with some morsel of food. This is true for small passerines like warblers, cisticolas and bulbuls - but for larger birds, like raptors, the wait between meals can be substantially longer.

It is perhaps for this reason that, in many raptor species, like the forest-dwelling Crowned Eagle, two eggs are laid with each breeding attempt. In most cases, the first chick to hatch usually smothers the second to death, by demanding absolutely all of the parents deliveries. What was once a miniscule advantage of only a day or some hours, becomes a vast change with one strong healthy offspring, and another which simply starves to death - and all under the watchful eye of the parents.

This may seem cruel, but in the real world energy is in short supply, especially at these dizzying heights of

the food chain. Ultimately, the chances of both chicks surviving is small, even under normal conditions. The second egg only serves as insurance for the first, in case it is sterile. Only in extremely good years, or with great parenting, do both chicks survive to adulthood.

The sheer variety of factors to consider when approaching a species and its breeding behaviour, can be truly astounding. For example, some species are single brooded, only attempting to breed once each year. Others are multi-brooded, where, if successful, pairs will raise two, three or even more clutches. Single-brooders generally refrain from attempting a second time if an entire clutch is lost, but there are exceptions. Some species are precocial, others altricial, and so the variations continue on and on.

The number of strategies for coping with the threats and challenges that face blossoming families is dumfounding. African Jacana fathers grab their brood under their wings and run away with them at the first sign of danger, dangling feet and all. Pairs of Egyptian Goose generate high numbers of chicks, most of which are doomed from the start. Several local Hornbill species wall up their females, and then their offspring, in tree cavities that are cemented shut with mud until they fledge - talk about the ultimate grounding. Each of these examples is a showcase of how individual species have their own uniquely blended style, for trying to get their young to adulthood.

This month, be aware of the discrete signs that hard graft is being put in, and being put in by hundreds and thousands of avian parents. Despite some beginning to show a bit of wear in the plumage, the rare sighting of a freshly fledged juvenile, of any kind, is a sure sign of the successes of some, in the mad scramble that is life.

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Plant of the month – The Impala Lily – *Adenium multiflorum*



Impala Lily

Photo supplied

Michael Anderson,
EcoTraining Instructor

This rather unassuming looking succulent has no leaves or flowers for most of its life – and it's dormant in the summer! But when the flowers eventually show, it becomes one

of the most stunning of all succulents to be found natively. This striking plant then becomes the envy of all others, especially for its tendency to flower in dry times when other plants are looking drab. The impala lily catches one's eye from great distances. This

special adaptation and beautifully colourful pink and white flowers, serve to allow it to become a hub for pollinators, maximising its reproductive success. It also tends to grow in arid areas, lending it the often used common name of 'desert rose'.

The plant is toxic, but seems in some areas to be browsed extensively. It mostly grows around rocky outcrops, where it can be protected from the heaviest of attentions. Most of the time this is a handsome shrub, with various growth forms and a twist-

ing appearance. However, where it is fully protected, it can attain a large size and becomes a gloriously colourful tree reaching 3m in height. Most of its range in South Africa falls within the Kruger National Park, and is considered threatened on the IUCN Red List. Its main threats are the horticultural trade for its ornamental beauty, as well as for the medicinal and toxic properties associated with it. Some animals like baboons and elephants, will dig up whole plants to get to the succulent roots that store the water, that allows this plant to survive long periods of drought.

The latex is milky and toxic enough that it has been used in the past as one of the constituents in the production of arrow poisons used in hunting. The specific chemicals called alkaloids found inside the latex, can be collected from all parts of the trunk and stem, including the bark. Though they are powerful, the toxins were usually mixed with others to make a potent cocktail, that can

bring the largest antelope down in the shortest time, allowing the hunter to use his stamina to run the prey down before exhaustion sets in. In other arid parts of the world, such as Oman, drier Kenya and Somalia, the isolated latex has been dried and powdered and used as an effective insect repellent and pesticide.

The plant can be extremely long-lived, and slow-growing, because it grows in nutrient-poor sandy soils, and has adapted to life in very low rainfall areas. Some records state that this tree can live for hundreds of years, and initially can take 4-5 years to flower for the first time. Its ease of germination and initial quick growth, settling into long dormant periods, make this plant an ideal specimen for development into bonsai, achieving fantastic results in as little as 5 years.

Wherever you may find this plant, it will certainly be one of the most interesting and beautiful around, so take the time to look closely and marvel at this true wonder of nature.

Canis Major - Constellation of the month

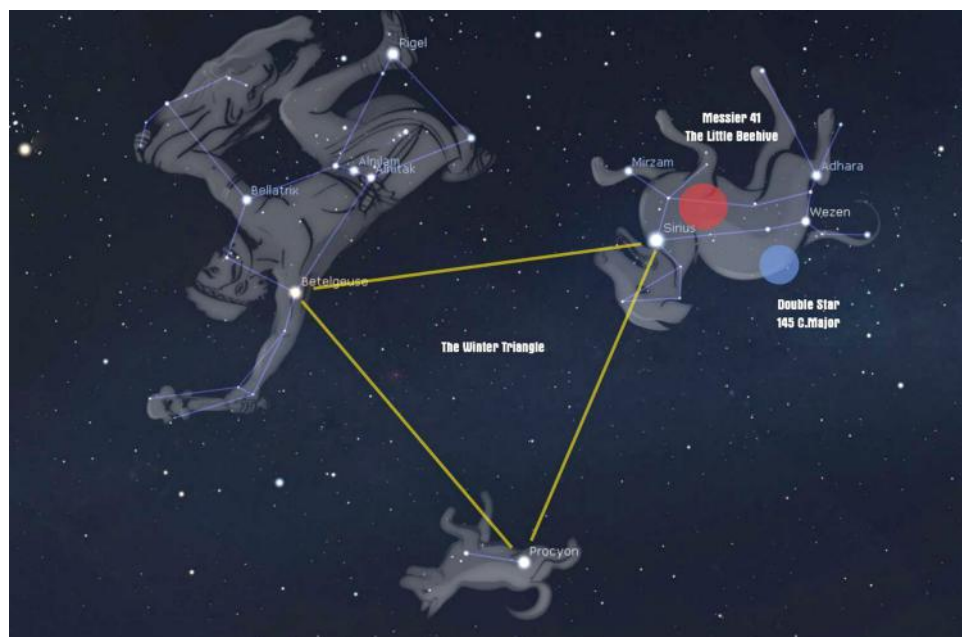
Ben Coley

Canis Major is positioned in the sky next to Orion and represents the larger of his two hunting dogs. Many see the dog chasing Lepus (The Hare) and aiding Orion in his attempts to capture the mighty bull of Taurus.

Canis Major however has its mythology, linked to Canis Minor, the second hunting dog. According to some traditions, Canis Major represents a creature named Laelaps, a dog so fast that it could catch any prey. Canis Minor on the other hand depicts the Teumessian Fox, an animal that could not be caught.

The fox was terrorizing Thebes and thus Laelaps was called upon to rid the city of the menace. The irony was that here was a dog that could catch anything chasing a fox that could never be caught, and so it was up to Zeus to intervene, who turned them both to stone, before placing them in the stars for eternity to honour the epic chase.

Canis Major is home to the brightest star in the sky, Sirius. Sirius means 'scorching' - no doubt for its bright appearance in the sky, but also due to it being visible just before sunrise in the middle of summer in the northern hemisphere. Ancient people watched for



the 'rising' of certain stars to help them tell the time of year and Sirius's rising coincided with the hottest days of summer.

It is also known as the 'Dog Star', coinciding

with the hottest days of the year that were known as 'Dog Days'. This well-used phrase also originates from Sirius's (and Canis Major's) heliacal rising in June/July.

M41 is an open cluster situated over 2000 light-years away. All the stars within it were born from the same dust cloud and are thus related, and travelling through space together.

Canis Major

Image supplied by
Celestial Events

To find M41 with binoculars, simply look a little to the south of Canis Major's brightest star, Sirius.

Ben Coley is the owner of Celestial Events SA, an Astro-tourism company based in the Lowveld. They specialise in Night Sky Safaris (visual and telescopic tours of the African skies), Astrophotography and Astronomy training for the safari industry. Call Ben to arrange on 0795750900

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A true story of cheetah survival



Mandleve's piercing stare with his son beside him

Image: Emma Jenkins

K2C News Correspondent

The Greater Makalali Private Game Reserve (GMPGR) is big cat territory. Home to three prides of lions and several lone males, they are a formidable presence in the reserve. But lion are not the only apex predator with a strong hold in this wilderness area.

Makalali has also made a marked contribution to-

wards cheetah conservation, and it is not unusual to spot one of these distinctive cats when out on a game drive. Cheetahs are listed as "Vulnerable" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and are on the Red List of Threatened Species.

With increased pressure from climate change, habitat loss, and human activities, their numbers have dropped drastical-

ly. The GMPGR is part of the Cheetah Metapopulation Project, coordinated by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), which contributes towards the management of approximately 478 Cheetahs on 67 reserves in southern Africa. The principal goal of this project is to maintain the genetic and demographic integrity of the metapopulation, and to increase the resident range of cheetah in southern

Africa.

With this in mind, the Warden at the GMPGR, Antony Collett, has recently introduced two lion-savvy male cheetah onto the reserve - a father and son team who have quite a tale of survival to tell.

The older of the two, a 10 year old known by the trackers as Mandleve, (Xitsonga for "ears", because his ears are badly damaged), was one of two cubs born at a

large private game reserve in the Western Cape. Here he and his brother formed a coalition before being separated when his brother was severely injured by lions and sent to a sanctuary.

Mandleve was moved to a reserve in the Limpopo, where he successfully fathered several cubs of his own, but sadly was attacked and injured by his own adult sons. Following this altercation, Mandleve, was relo-

cated to Mountain Zebra National Park (MZNP), an open system in the Eastern Cape, where he thrived and was again father to several cubs.

Sadly his mate and mother to his cubs was attacked and killed by lions. Unusually though, rather than abandoning his offspring which is typical in the cheetah world, he stayed and raised his sub-adult son and daughter to independence, and went on to form a coalition with his son which endures to this day.

This charismatic duo have now found a new home together at the Greater Makalali Private Game Reserve, thanks to the generous support of Anne Bobillier, a Swiss donor and friend, who is determined to assist with the plight of this vulnerable species.

The cheetah have quickly settled into their new surroundings and they are often seen sunning themselves together on the dirt roads, or hunting in unison throughout the reserve.

If you would like to support any upcoming wildlife intervention, please contact Antony Collett on wardengmpgr@rawifi.co.za.

Protecting wildlife with the LoRa WAN network

Mark Bishop

Tracking wildlife has always been a challenge for anyone in this sphere of operation, from rangers to conservationists to vets. Telemetric monitoring has been the conventional go-to, but struggles in terms of cost (around R12 500 per year), longevity (about 2 years) and accuracy of location of the animal.

Siyafunda Conservation has been collaborating with Lucas Schefer of Volunteering Africa for the past 5 years, in developing a revolutionary tracking system utilising the LoRa WAN network in conjunction with Earth Ranger, a free application through the Vulcan institute. Our research has as yet not been able to establish

if there are any current LoRa WAN network tracking systems in operation - so this could well be a first!

The collaboration aims at protecting the wildlife on the Greater Makalali Private Game Reserve, as well as diversifying into the park management of vehicle movements, power output on fences, gate accessibility, pump operations, lighting management, etc..

LoRa is a special radio communication operation through sensors that transmit over long distances with minimal energy usage. This is achieved through the ability to program the device. It can be programmed to emit a standard number of reports per day or can be requested at any time to report. If there is no connection to an antenna

due to a 'dead spot', the system simply 'sleeps' and does not emit a signal until such time as it links to one.

This ingenious development allows the battery to last longer (projected to be 4-5 years lowering the cost per year to about R 6 250)), which is vitally important when tracking animals such as rhino. The challenge with rhino is that unlike elephants for example, where the device can be large and it fitted around the neck, rhino transmitters have to be small and are positioned around the ankle of the animal, thereby restricting communication possibilities because of its proximity to the ground.

The hope is that the devices will achieve longer battery life, which will in turn reduce the amount of times they

have to be replaced, thus reducing the number of times the animal has to be immobilized. This then clearly reduces the stress levels for the animals.


All communication is encrypted and is therefore very secure. The signals are received by so-called gateways (antenna) and sent to a server on the Internet where the animals can be tracked live, 24/7. All reports on the system are decrypted and processed, so that a map, with the position of the animals can be viewed (in real time) on a mobile phone or on a computer.

This technology is often used in agriculture but also for Smart City projects and increasingly for IoT (Internet of Things) projects in built up urban areas.



Tracking device and Gateway | Images supplied



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The Siyafunda Slog



SIYAFUNDA



Wildlife and Conservation

Mark Bishop

There are crazy people around us. Sometimes determination can be seen as crazy. Never say anything is impossible, and dreams are born out of trying!

For Mike Job, training for the Comrades Marathon in 2020 was a non-negotiable and time-consuming focus of his. His strict training regime kept him on track for the finish line. But unexpectedly (for all of us), the dreaded Covid struck and everything was locked down and put on hold. What Covid made us realize is that we are all vulnerable to global events, and by supporting various conservation organisations, we could make a difference in this sector.

Not to be deterred and to busy himself in this time, he decided to come up with a plan to raise money for conservation efforts whilst all tourism had been suspended. Considering the challenges (mental and physical) and the hard work anti-poaching teams have to go through on a daily basis, to cover the vast area of the Greater Makalali Private Game Reserve (25 000ha), the idea of walking the perimeter of the Makalali Reserve was born.

To add to the challenge it was decided to do it under 24 hours of sunlight, over two days, on or close to the Comrades dates. As it happens this also falls very close to the shortest day of the year!

The first 'slog' was in 2020 – Mike and a friend, raising R 70 000 that was all donated to the Rhino Protection Trust, the Game Rangers Association of Africa and a domestic animal charity in Hoedspruit.

As 2021 came around the 'slog' yet again raised its head. This time there were 15 intrepid participants of which only 9 completed the hike. However a handsome sum of R 150 000 was raised and distributed.

And so it is in 2022 – yet again the 'slog' is on the cards - this time with a difference. The Siyafunda Slog will take place over the 17/18th June 2022. The distance will be about 95 km with groups of 4 participants plus a qualified trails guide, walking from six in the morning until about five thirty in the evening. Water drops will be supplied (two per day) and the night of the 17th will be spent out in the bush under the stars! Dinner will be supplied on both nights. An emergency service will be on hand for unforeseen circum-

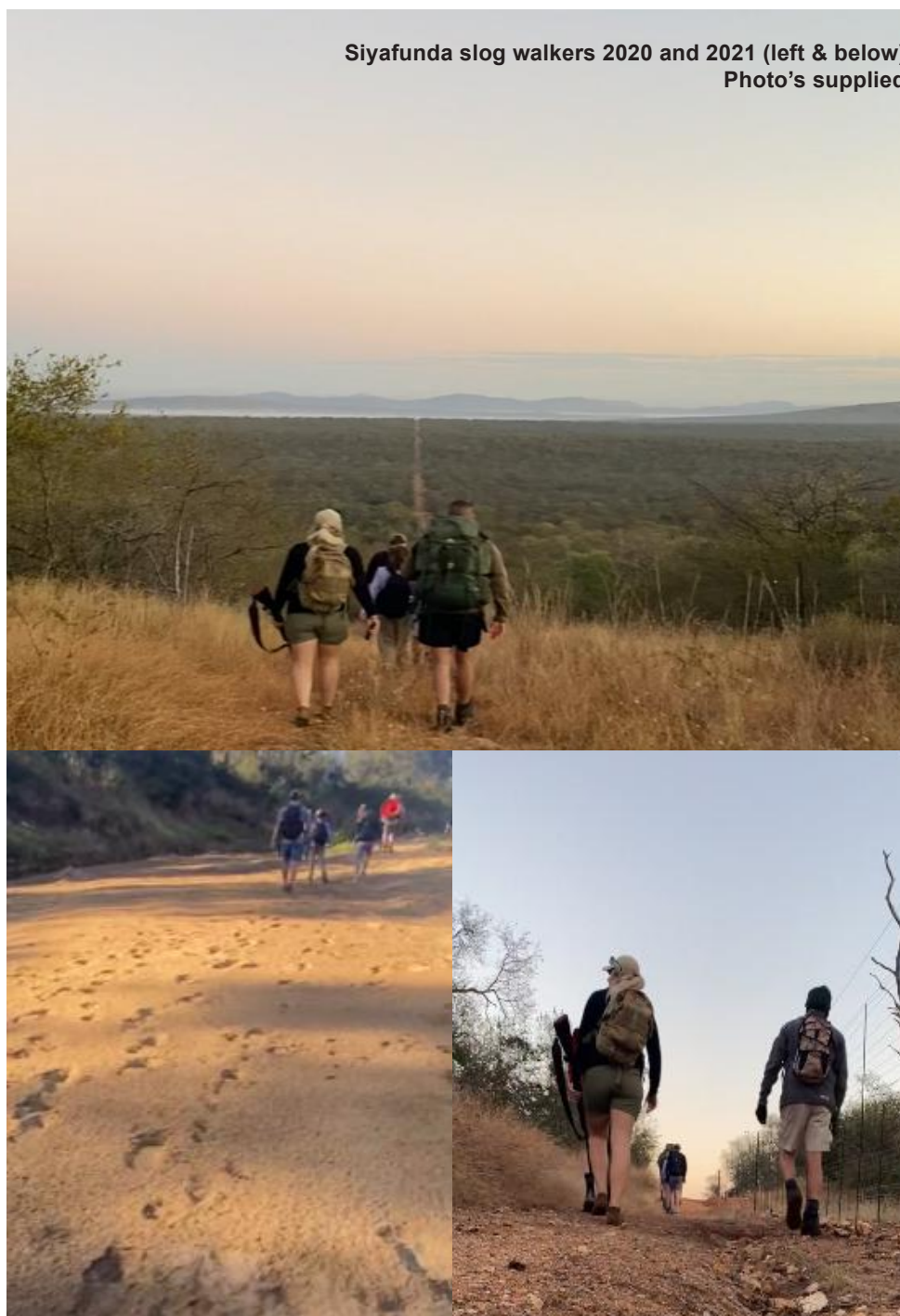
stances, and all other T's & C's like kit, medical requirements and food, can be obtained from Mike at the contacts below.

To enter, a registration fee of R 1000 is payable, a short fitness CV needs to be submitted (to place people in teams of like ability) and the participants must be able to raise money for the beneficiaries of the 'slog', or a wildlife beneficiary of their choice. Places are limited to 20.

Contact Mike: mike@siyafundaconservation.com, WhatsApp +27827818394 #rhinos, #siyafunda, #charity, #hikeGreater. Beneficiaries: The Rhino Protection Trust: www.rhinoprotectiontrust.com, Game Rangers Association of Africa, K9 Conservation and the Makalali Land and Wildlife Trust.

The Greater Makalali Private Game Reserve was founded in 1994. Originally covering an area of 7500ha, it has grown to 25000ha. It's been a Big Five reserve since 2019. It has close to 100 species of trees and 300 species of birds. It also boasts the longest running elephant contraception program in the world.

Siyafunda slog walkers 2020 and 2021 (left & below) Photo's supplied



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The courage to publish your own photo book!

Chad Cocking

As an aspiring photographer, it can be a most humbling moment, to read or hear a person suggest that ones' images are so spectacular that it would be fantastic to see them in a book one day. It is easier to brush off these comments as flattery, than it is to entertain the thought of sitting down and creating a book; after all, aren't books only for professional photographers? The truth is that today anyone can publish a book, and if one has a collection of images worth sharing, considering publishing a book should not be seen as merely a pipe dream.

The most affordable avenue to pursue this is to go with one of the online photo book printers that are available both locally (such as Rapid Studio or MyPhotoBook) and internationally (Blurb, Snapfish and Shutterstock are some of the bigger names). These platforms allow the user to download the layout software packages, that are filled with an array of templates and alternatives to create more customizable spreads. Images are imported into the software, laid out as desired, and then sent off to the company for printing. A few weeks later, a gorgeous hard-covered coffee-table book will be arriving at the door. Simple, quick and of high-quality, it makes this a great option for those looking for a photo book that won't break the bank. That being said, one can still expect to pay in the region of R1 500 for a 100-page hard-cover book of 30cmx27cm.

If one would like to print many books that can be sold to potential clients, then this print-on-demand model is a costly option, and one should consider working through a publisher. Very few photographers are at a level that they will have publishers knocking on the door looking to work with them, but most publishers are open to clients that wish to self-publish their works. Costs vary widely depending upon the book size, the number of pages and the number of books being printed. But the final unit cost per book comes out at

around 15-20% of the cost of a single print-on-demand book – as low as R200 per book when printing a run of 1 000 books.

This price sounds great, but to attain these low unit prices, one must print a large run of books to reap the benefits of the economies of scale, and a massive hurdle to this approach are the large up-front printing costs that could exceed R200 000. The benefit, is that with the low printing cost, the photographer can sell these books and recover the printing costs whilst turning a healthy profit.

As big a decision as choosing a publishing route maybe, this could turn out to be one of the simpler decisions the photographer has to make in the book creation process! A major conundrum for any photographer is how on earth to whittle down a catalogue of hundreds of thousands of images, to a manageable number (around 130-200 images, depending upon the books' page count), for inclusion within the book. Having a clear idea about the narrative of the book before the image selection begins, will help to streamline the process of weeding out those images that are not linked to the theme of the book. This is no easy feat, as each image is singularly beautiful, and likely has some emotional connection to the photographer; however, one must be brutal and eradicate the "fillers", keeping only the "killers"!

Good photo books are about more than simply a collection of beautiful photos. The book needs to have a theme that connects all the images, and gives the book a pleasing flow as the reader pages through it. As creative as a photographers' eye may be for a pleasing composition, this does not always translate into them having a keen eye for a good layout! One can get a great deal of inspiration from looking at the works of other photographers that have published books, and taking ideas from these layouts and designs, and shaping them to fit the story that ones' book is telling. Employing an experienced layout artist is most helpful, not only for getting the design elements right, but



Contrast images : Chad Cocking



is also essential if going through a publisher, as they will be needed to get the digital files print-ready before they can be sent off to the printers.

I have just self-published my second book – Contrasts – and over two years took on almost all aspects of its creation, from the image selection, to the final layout and design; from the text (although I did use a copy editor to check for errors), to the colour correction - and it was a wonderful

learning experience.

Having taken photos in the Greater Kruger for the past 15 years, it was quite a challenge to limit my selection to a couple of hundred! After much thought and having a primary desire to illustrate the differences between the dry and wet seasons, the notion of showcasing the contrasts that exist in this beautiful environment came to the fore – from the differences between black and white rhinos, to the contrast of tawny and white lions, and so much

more. With this in mind, I could then match my image selection to the narrative of the book, and after countless hours spent mulling over which images went where, and how opposing images should be matched, the final product slowly emerged.

With the page spreads double and triple-checked, the time arrives to sign off on the book. Once the digital files have been sent, there is no going back! That final click starts a long and impatient wait for the first copy to arrive.

Rest assured though, that when the doorbell rings and the courier hands over the package, all those long and often-frustrating hours of working on the book, become well worth it as the glossy cover of the book pops out of the packaging. What you have spent so long staring at on a computer screen, suddenly comes to life in a physical form, and in that very moment it all becomes worth every effort as you realise just what you have made!

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SOUTHERN CROSS SCHOOLS COLLEGE – SMALL BUT MIGHTY!

Correspondent

Elite athletes exhibit unique traits and strong, admirable characteristics that help them succeed in their sport.

At the Hoedspruit Inter-High Athletics meeting held on Tuesday, 8 February, Southern Cross Schools College athletes demonstrated self-confidence, self-discipline, humility and passion. What a great day it was for the College.

Having an athletics meeting below the majestic Mariepskop, is in itself a unique experience. Being able to participate with three other schools after the long suspension of school sporting activities, reminded us just how fortunate we are, to be able to compete in

a much-anticipated athletics event.

The Hoedspruit Inter-High Athletics meeting marked one of the first inter-school sporting events to take place since March 2020. Local high school talent was on display and the Southern Cross Schools College team certainly stepped up to the challenge.

Even though the College was the smallest team on the day, and were outnumbered by the other more sizeable teams at the event, the athletes were excited to be contenders and competitors once again. The Southern Cross College team proved that they were multi-event athletes who could ably compete in multiple events. The sportsmanship off the field was equally commendable.

Congratulations to Mfundo Mkhonto, Elby Murambinda and Duncan Mwale. Mfundo was awarded the Junior Victor Ludorum, Elby the Junior Victor Ludorum and Duncan the Senior Victor Ludorum. The College bagged a total of 13 gold, 17 silver and 20 bronze medals and new records were set. Congratulations to Aurette Ferreira in the Shotput Under 15 Girls, Sherisma Snyman in the Javelin Under 15 Girls, Jordan Prinsloo in the Hurdles 90m Under 15 Girls, Diego Canas in the Javelin Under 17 Boys and Jorja Harwood in the 800m Under 17 Girls and the 1500m Under 17 Girls.

Overall Southern Cross Schools College was placed second out of the four schools - a commendable achievement



SCS athletes Images supplied



ment considering their small numbers. This result was not achieved by the medal winners only, but by every athlete who participated and gave of their best. The loud applause and

cheerleading from the enthusiastic supporters in the stands went a long way to encourage and motivate those participating in the various events.

We congratulate and

celebrate all the athletes on an outstanding performance. It was a fantastic day and the College looks forward to hosting the Hoedspruit Inter-High Athletics meeting in 2023.

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Name change
I Riyaz Uddin humbly request your honourable offices, to please change my children's surname to Uddin. The name and surname my daughter should reflect AANI FATIMA UDDIN and for my son, HYDER RIYAZ UDDIN. I will highly appreciate your kind assistance. Thanking you in advance. RIYAZ UDDIN



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Contact : Arise Monareng (HR Manager)
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Junior FGASA & Kids In The Wild

Spotlight Animal: Hippopotamus

On February 15th we celebrated World Hippopotamus Day and in honour of these wonderful animals this month's page is dedicated to all things Hippo.

When I get territorial, I open my _____ wide and show off my teeth.

A baby hippo is called a _____

I like to spend most of my time in _____

You will often find what bird near me _____

I can hold my breath underwater for _____ minutes.

In the wild I can live up to _____ years.

I am _____

I sleep all day in the water and come out at night to eat.

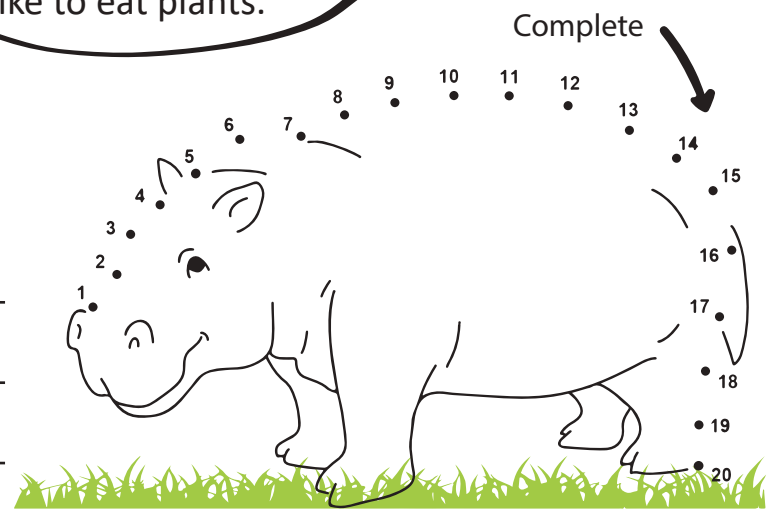
I live in a large group called a _____

I am a _____ I like to eat plants.

Colour me in

Answers: Mouth, Calif, Water, Five, Forty, Herbivore, Herd, Nocturnal, Cattle Egret

Write down Six more facts about the Hippo:



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