

Illegal Land Occupation Becomes Growing Concern in Maruleng



Local Correspondent

Illegal land occupation has become one of the most contentious issues facing the Maruleng Local Municipality, with residents, land-owners, conservation groups, water users and civic organisations warning that the problem is placing increasing pressure on public services, environmental resources and local governance.

The issue first gained widespread attention through the informal settlement known as Plastic View, situated in the heart of Hoedspruit. What began as a relatively small settlement expanded steadily over the years, becoming a symbol of the complex challenges surrounding housing shortages, migration to the area, municipal planning and the enforcement of land-use laws.

In November 2024, the Hoedspruit Concerned Ratepayers Association (HCRPA) approached the Limpopo High Court in Polokwane seeking relief regarding the unlawful occupation of the property occupied by Plastic View. In its application, the association highlighted what it described as a serious fire risk posed by the densely packed informal structures.

Those concerns were realised when a fire, reportedly started during an arson incident on 7th November 2025, spread rapidly through the settlement and destroyed most of the structures. Critics argue that despite repeated requests from various stakeholders, the municipality declined to declare a local disaster or emergency, a step that could have unlocked state funding and temporary emergency accommodation for displaced residents.

The consequences of the fire continue to be felt. While many former occupants dispersed to other areas, the issue remains unresolved, with the former market stalls in Buffel Street subsequently becoming occupied by informal residents.

It has been alleged that a significant portion of the current occupants are unemployed, raising questions about whether the occupation is linked primarily to employment opportunities in Hoedspruit. Residents have also raised concerns regarding the management of the site and have called on the municipality to provide clarity on whether rents, fees or other payments are being collected from occupants, and if so, by whom and under what authority.

Stalls at Jonkmanspruit Image supplied

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From the Editor

Editor email:
editor@kruger2canyon.co.za

Dear Editor

Residents and visitors to Hoedspruit are increasingly being subjected to loud, thumping music emanating from restaurants, bars, pubs and other entertainment venues, often continuing until the early hours of the morning on weekends.

While these establishments undoubtedly play an important role in the local economy and tourism sector, some appear to operate on the assumption that creating an atmosphere for patrons takes precedence over the rights of nearby residents. There seems to be a growing perception that because Hoedspruit is a tourism town, excessive noise is simply part of the package and that compliance with liquor licence conditions, zoning approvals, environmental regulations and municipal by-laws is optional.

The reality is that there is often little regard for the impact that excessive noise has on both the environment

and most residents who simply wish to enjoy the peaceful use of their homes.

As more establishments compete for customers, frustration among residents continues to grow. The concern is not music itself, but rather:

- Excessive volume levels.
- Low-frequency bass that can be heard and felt inside homes and over considerable distances.
- Music continuing late into the night and often into the early hours of the morning.
- Repeated disturbances every weekend, including noise generated by departing patrons.
- The apparent lack of effective enforcement by the municipality and SAPS.

In a town such as Hoedspruit, where residential properties are often situated near restaurants, bars and recreational facilities, a balance must

be struck between commercial interests and the rights of residents. The right to conduct business does not override the right of citizens to peace, quiet and reasonable enjoyment of their homes, particularly during nighttime hours.

The real question is whether the relevant authorities intend to actively enforce the new Maruleng Local Municipality Noise Control By-law, which came into effect on 5 June 2026. The by-law clearly defines nuisance noise and provides for significant penalties, including fines and the confiscation of amplifying equipment in cases of non-compliance.

Residents can only hope that the by-law proves to be more than words on paper and that meaningful enforcement will finally bring relief to those affected.

Hope springs eternal.

Yours faithfully,

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Locals only

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Rob and Monique of - Koti Services have been making other people's mess disappear for three years - and they're not done yet.

What does your business actually do - in one sentence, no jargon?

We make people's lives easier. Domestic services are the core of it, but we also service pools and offer a bush butler function - whatever the household needs, basically.

How long have you been operating in the Lowveld, and what brought you here originally?

Formally, three years - but we've been coming to this area for thirty. You can't beat the Bushveld lifestyle. It's genuinely unique, and once it's in you, nowhere else quite measures up.

What's the hardest part of operating here that businesses in larger

centres don't face?

Three things: the distances between houses on the estates, finding staff who are reliable and skilled, and the chronic transport problem - getting our people to and from Hoedspruit to where they need to be is a daily logistical puzzle.

What does the Lowveld economy get right that the rest of South Africa could learn from?

The balance between lifestyle and work, and the personal touch that goes with it. Service here still means something. People know each other, and that changes how you show up.

What are you watching closely in your sector right now?

Fuel prices, obviously - they hit a business like ours hard. And we're keeping a close eye on new housing developments and estate expansions. Where the houses go, the need follows.

What's the one thing you wish your customers understood better?

Scheduling is more complex than it looks. A last-minute cancellation or change doesn't just affect one booking - it cascades all the way down the line. A little notice goes a long way.

What does your business contribute to the Lowveld beyond the transaction?

We employ over 80 people. That means 80-plus families with a regular income. That's what we're most proud of - not the clean pools or the tidy houses, but what this business means to those households.

Koti Services operates across the region - from Canyon Reserve to Blyde Wildlife Estate, Moditlo, Elephant Rock, Ndlopfu, Ntsiri, and beyond. For enquiries, contact Rob and Monique directly: admin@kotiservices.co.za or 064 078 8408.



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COMING JUNE



Cont. from page 1

Ratepayers are privately funding weekly cleanups of the affected areas whilst authorities look the other way.

New Hotspots Emerging

A growing number of informal trading stalls and shack structures have appeared within the road reserve of the R527 at Jonkmanspruit, near the bridge crossing the Blyde River. Local organisations describe the situation as both a humanitarian and environmental disaster.

According to stakeholders, repeated requests by the Hoedspruit Farm Watch, Blyde River Water Users Association, SAPS, SANRAL and the HCRPA for intervention have yielded little action. Community leaders claim that undertakings were previously made to remove illegal structures from the road reserve, but that little progress has been visible on the ground.

Trying to Find a Solution

On 20 March 2026, representatives of the HCRPA met with officials from the Maruleng Local Municipality (MLM) and SANRAL to discuss the growing occupation of the R527 road reserve at Jonkmanspruit and in Hoedspruit. As the road reserve falls under SANRAL's jurisdiction, all parties acknowledged the need for a coordinated approach to address the situation.

During the meeting, it was agreed that the eight traders operating from the market stalls in Buffel Street, Hoedspruit, would be relocated and that structures erected within the road reserve would be removed. Municipal officials advised that the affected traders had already been notified of the proposed relocation.



In an effort to support the process, an HCRPA representative offered to fund gas stoves for the relocated traders to reduce fire risks associated with open-flame cooking and offered to provide a ticket office for the Great North Bus Company to improve facilities for commuters.

However, progress appears to have stalled. At a subsequent follow-up meeting, from which the HCRPA was excluded (after having been invited), SANRAL was reportedly informed that the Maruleng Local Municipality "does not want to ask SANRAL consent to approach the site."

The meaning and implications of this statement remain unclear, but stakeholders have questioned whether it reflects a reluctance by the municipality to become actively involved in resolving the issue. As a result, concerns remain that the occupation of the road reserve will continue to expand, despite earlier commitments made by the various parties.

Community organisations maintain that a practical solution remains possible if all stakeholders work together. They argue that lawful relocation of traders, protection of the road reserve, improved public transport facilities and the provision of alternative trading opportunities could address both the humanitarian needs of those affected and the legal and safety concerns associated with the current occupation.

Pressure on Services and Infrastructure

Residents argue that unmanaged land occupation is adding further strain to municipal infrastructure that is already under pressure.

The Hoedspruit area has experienced significant challenges relating to water supply, sanitation and



other essential services. Recent development restrictions and building moratoriums have highlighted the limitations of existing infrastructure capacity.

Critics contend that the failure to promptly address unlawful occupation has contributed to the growth of settlements that lack formal planning approval, environmental authorisation and adequate service provision. They warn that continued expansion could undermine future development planning and increase costs for ratepayers.

A Complex Humanitarian Challenge

While many residents support stronger enforcement of land-use laws, others point to the underlying socioeconomic realities driving the occupation of land.

Hoedspruit has experienced substantial population growth in recent years, fuelled by employment opportunities in tourism, conservation, agriculture and related industries. However, the supply of affordable housing has not kept pace with demand, leaving many workers and job seekers with limited accommodation options.

South African Law seeks to balance these competing interests. The Constitution protects the right to access housing, while the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land (PIE) Act regulates the removal of unlawful occupiers. Evictions may only take place through a court process after consideration of the circumstances of those affected.

Municipalities are therefore required to protect public land, enforce planning laws and manage service delivery while also respecting the rights and welfare of vulnerable residents.

Plastic View after the fire (far left), more shacks near Jonkmanspruit (middle) and shacks opposit Build It.

Housing Responsibility Under Scrutiny

The housing debate has also highlighted questions around government responsibilities.

While municipalities play a role in planning and facilitating development, the provision of subsidised housing falls primarily under the authority of the Provincial Department of Human Settlements.

The provincial authorities have so far not indicated any interest in assisting the local municipality to provide a long-term solution.

Community representatives note that many former Plastic View residents registered for housing assistance as far back as 2021 but remain without permanent solutions. At the same time, concerns have been raised about the municipality's continued promotion of a proposed "affordable housing" development on a site that has reportedly failed three successive applications for environmental authorisation.

Finding a Way Forward

Community organisations, business leaders and residents are increasingly calling for a coordinated response that addresses both enforcement and housing provision.

They argue that illegal land occupation cannot simply be viewed as either a law-enforcement issue or a housing issue. Without effective action to protect public land, coupled with realistic plans to provide lawful and sustainable housing opportunities, Hoedspruit risks becoming trapped in a cycle of informal settlement growth, infrastructure overload and social tension.

As the town continues to attract investment, tourism and new residents, many believe that resolving the land occupation crisis will be critical to securing Hoedspruit's future as one of Limpopo's fastest-growing economic centres.

For now, residents, businesses and civic organisations continue to wait for decisive action from the relevant authorities before the problem grows even larger.

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Kruger National Park Land Claim Finalised Through Legal Agreement

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After more than a decade of intense negotiations, historically land-dispossessed communities living around the Kruger National Park can finally put a painful chapter behind them, following a landmark agreement that recognises their economic and heritage rights to the land.

This follows the government's recent signing of the Beneficiation Scheme Framework Agreement with all claimant communities living around one of South Africa's most iconic national treasures, the Kruger National Park.

Addressing members of Parliament on the agreement on 9 June 2026, Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Willie Aucamp said at a time when the nation continues to grapple with poverty, inequality and unemployment, the agreement offers a powerful example of what can be achieved when government, communities and conservation institutions work together towards a common purpose.

"This agreement is far more than a legal document. It is far more than signatures on paper. It represents restoration. It represents empowerment.

"It advances transformation, promotes inclusion, strengthens participation, and opens pathways for meaningful economic opportunities.

"This agreement is not an endpoint; it is a foundation. A foundation upon which economic opportunities, skills development, enterprise participation, tourism benefits and long-term partnerships will grow," he said.

Through the Beneficiation Scheme, South African National Parks (SANParks) is enabling structured access to commercial and non-commercial opportunities for qualifying previously land-dispossessed communities through investment, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

These include shareholding and concessions, enterprise and supply development, a percentage of net revenue, a bursary fund, skills transfer, and long-term livelihood creation linked to the park economy.

The non-commercial opportunities include naming rights and access rights.

He emphasised that the true measure of success will not be found in the signing ceremony, but in the lives that are changed.

"It will be found in the opportunities created for young people. It will be found in stronger communities, and it will be found in a conservation

model that delivers both ecological and social value.

"This agreement provides certainty. It confirms that claimant communities understand that the Kruger National Park will remain protected as a national conservation asset and that residential occupation within the park is not possible.

"At the same time, it formally establishes mechanisms through which communities can derive meaningful and lasting benefits from the park's success," Aucamp said.

The land claims associated with the Kruger National Park were lodged in the early 2000s.

By 2008, Cabinet had recognised the Kruger National Park as a strategic national asset and affirmed the need to balance the protection of this globally significant conservation area with the legitimate aspirations of claimant communities for redress and justice.

"Formal negotiations commenced in 2012, and today, 14 years later, we stand before this House proud to say that the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, together with SANParks, claimant communities and many dedicated stakeholders, have achieved a milestone that many once believed impossible.

"What matters is that we never



Minister Aucamp Image supplied

abandoned the process. What matters is that all parties remained committed to dialogue. What matters is that we remained focused on finding common ground. And today, that commitment has borne fruit," the Minister said.

He said the future of conservation in South Africa depends on communities seeing themselves not as spectators, but as partners and beneficiaries.

"As partners, they will also have the best interests of Kruger at heart. As one of the community leaders said to me, Minister, now that we will benefit from Kruger, our communities will go out of their way to protect Kruger," Aucamp said.



Northern Kruger Image: Canva





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KAMPERSRUS R 4 200 000
Bedrooms 5 | Bathrooms 3 | Floor size: 311 m²

Double-storey thatched home faces a green belt with mountain views. Main house has 3 bedrooms, open-plan living, and patio. Includes a renovated 2-bedroom income-generating cottage. Lapa with spa bath overlooks a pool and lush garden. Double carport and backup water. Sold partially furnished.
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Modern off-grid home with open plan living that flows onto covered patio with built-in braai. Quality finishes, aluminium windows, Chromadek roof, and free-standing gas stove. Powered by solar system with two lithium-ion batteries, 12 panels, and water tank with pressure pump. Pet-friendly, sustainable.
Calin Leppan - 082 824 9482 Ref: 2432359



ZANDSPRUIT BUSH & AERO ESTATE R 19 850 000
Beds 4 | Baths 4 | Floor: 358 m²

Immaculate, fully furnished turnkey home offers elevated bushveld and mountain views. Features a private master suite with a study, three en-suite bedrooms with indoor and outdoor showers, and ultra-modern kitchen with a walk-in cold room. Patio flows to a pool, deck, boma, and solar power.
Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2501034



SOLE MANDATE

LIVERPOOL, NEAR HOEDSPRUIT R 2 500 000
Land size: 21 hectares

Rare find - 21-hectares of untouched bushveld with magnificent variety of Lowveld trees. The property is fenced on three sides. No levies or restrictive reserve rules are applicable, offering new owners the freedom to design their dream bushveld home the way they would like.
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SOLE MANDATE

LISSATABA NATURE RESERVE R 4 850 000
Beds 3 | Baths 3 | Floor: 260 m²

Renovated home features four separate thatch buildings and a carport. Main living space boasts double-volume glass windows, flowing to a patio with a rock plunge pool and sweeping views. Three en-suite bedrooms with private decks, and outdoor showers. Includes an 8kVA inverter system.
Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2484473



RENTAL

MAIN ROAD, HOEDSPRUIT R 14 400 pm
COMMERCIAL OFFICE SPACE 70 m²

Available 1 July 2026 - Ideal for office-based professionals, this first floor office space has excellent visibility from the R527. Separate secure entrance with intercom, shared kitchen and bathroom facilities, water included, pre-paid electricity. Fibre connectivity is available.
Natasha van Nelson - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2499518



RENTAL

NEAR HOEDSPRUIT R 14 000 pm
Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 2 | Unfurnished

Available 1 July 2026 - Lovely farm cottage features a spacious open-plan living area, kitchen with scullery, and a covered patio. Privately fenced and away from the main house. Water and wifi included. Prepaid electricity. Not pet-friendly. Available for short-term only (max 6 months).
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Clearing Alien Invasive Plants to Protect Lowveld Water



Belvedere Catchment

Lauren Booth
Kruger to Canyons Biosphere

Why alien invasive plant clearing matters

Alien invasive plant (AIP) clearing is often spoken about as a conservation issue, but in the Blyde River Catchment, it is also a serious water issue. Since early 2025, the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere NPC (K2C) and its partners have cleared 12 000 hectares of priority grasslands of alien invasive plants, including all the grasslands within the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. This marks an important milestone in long-term

work to restore natural landscapes and protect the catchments that supply water to the Lowveld.

Exotic trees such as blue gums, wattles and pines may seem familiar in the landscape from forestry, but when they spread into natural grasslands, they begin to change how those systems function. They outcompete indigenous grassland plants, reduce biodiversity and significantly reduce the water availability in the catchment.

Water security in the Lowveld

In the Upper Blyde Catchment, this matters far beyond the moun-



tain slopes where the clearing takes place. This catchment ultimately feeds into the Blyde Dam, which provides water to agriculture, households and livelihoods across the Lowveld. If AIPs are left unchecked over the long term, they represent a direct threat to regional water security.

The amount of water used by alien trees is significant. It is estimated that one adult pine tree uses approximately 25 litres of water per day, while a single gum tree can use up to 250 litres per day. With thousands of trees spreading through large grassland areas, the impact quickly

becomes substantial.

Based on current estimates, the 12 000 hectares of AIPs cleared by K2C is expected to release an additional 2 million cubic metres of water into the Blyde Dam each year through this intervention alone. To put this into perspective, that is equivalent to half of the total domestic water users' allocation in Hoedspruit. That means this work is not only about distant mountain slopes or conservation targets - it is about water for farms, homes, businesses and communities. It is water for you and me.

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Passing the Baton: Preserving Family Wealth

There's an old saying "from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations". From survey results, 70% of affluent families will lose their wealth by the second generation and 90% by the third. How can wealthy families prepare for the smooth transfer of assets to their children to ensure their legacy continues? How involved should the next generation be in estate planning? What lessons and values should be conveyed between generations?

Given the daunting statistics that suggest most of the wealth from the generation that created it is lost by the third generation and in terms of latest research even by the second generation, we often experience 'resistance' on the part of the creator of the wealth to discuss his wealth with his children, which only contributes to the problem. Life strategists have said this resistance is often more due to 'ignorance' on the part of the parents' generation.

Parents are hesitant to talk about sex, and it's the same with money. We often encounter the view that if the kids know how much they'll inherit, they won't be driven to achieve their own goals and will become "trust babies". It is in fact more about wisdom and using the time to

coach the children, than ruling from the grave. So don't withhold information – rather use the opportunities to share wisdom and the value of money.

Family charter

One of the best ways of facilitating conversations between generations is through the development of a family charter. This document talks to what the traditions and values of the family are, their attitude to money, and the story of how the wealth was created. What should the wealth be used to do? How should the wealth be saved or spent? The whole family must be involved in developing the charter, from the oldest to the youngest – it shouldn't just be left to the decision-makers.

The word 'wealth' comes from a Welsh word meaning 'well-being'. It's about much more than just money. Family wealth stands on two legs: money, and people. So it's about fulfilment, relationships, social connections and development, dreams and aspirations – and this is what should frame the conversation.

A family charter is like a personal road map, and from there, families can develop an investment policy statement. People have more confidence when they've been pre-

pared, and very little of this type of thing is taught at school. You are the bow in life, and your kids are the arrow. As soon as you let that string go, they are on their own. So their participation is vital, and this also applies to spouses.

Business matters

A family business generating much of the family's wealth can complicate matters. Children often don't want to take over or be involved in the business, and the first generation needs to make peace with this. Again, a candid discussion is required to ascertain everyone's needs and desires.

Where one of the heirs does want to become involved in the family business, this needs to be handled sensitively to ensure the vision for the business remains a shared one. Although millennials are often seen as wanting instant gratification, they are also keen on collaborating, both with their own and with previous generations.

The crucial thing is not just passing on the baton, but knowing when to release it. Letting go is often the hardest thing to do for the first generation, who may have spent decades building up a business. Not trusting the children to do their own

thing can lead to much conflict.

It is vital that the family charter is shared with the family's wealth managers, portfolio managers, lawyers, accountants and tax advisers. These individuals can measure the structures the family has in place against the charter to ensure the family's interests are being served in the long-term.

Simplicity works best

With structures and tax efficiency simplicity works the best. You can't plan with taxes in mind and that should never be your goal, as tax laws change almost every year. Trusts are really for the benefit of the second and next generations, not the one creating the wealth.

The process of transferring wealth between generations can be fraught with complexities, with many variables that need to be taken into account. It's therefore always advisable to work with a fiduciary and tax expert who can look at all the options, and who can facilitate family indabas to discuss the 'nuts and bolts' of securing your family legacy. **Please email Marteen Michau at marteem@fidelisvox.co.za if you want assistance with your estate plan or if you have questions about any of the above.**



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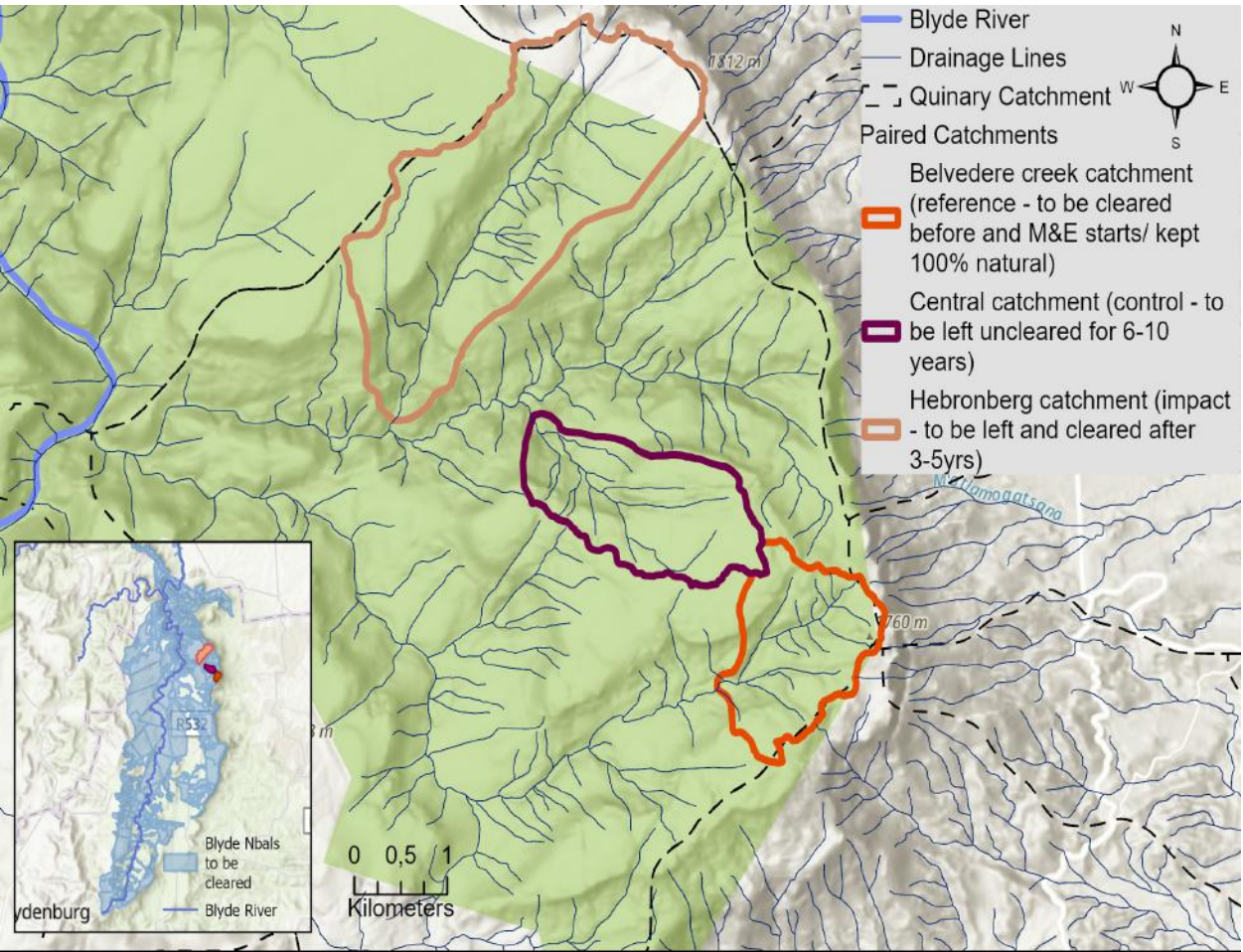
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Map showing the experimental Paired Catchments in the Blyde system (above left). High Angle Technical clearing team working to remove AIPs on steep slopes
Images supplied: K2C Biosphere

Cont. from page 6

Difficult work in difficult terrain

The work itself is also far more difficult than many people realise. Clearing AIPs in the Blyde Catchment is labour-intensive, technical and often physically demanding. Trained teams work as professional units, moving through rugged mountainous terrain with chainsaws and equipment. In some areas, teams camp in the field for extended periods and some even use ropes to access steep cliff faces where alien plants have taken root.

This makes clearing expensive and slow, but also essential. To secure long-term support for this work, K2C and its partners need to show not only that AIP clearing is important, but also what measurable difference it makes in this specific landscape.

Measuring the impact

One of the key questions K2C is working to answer is: exactly how much water is being returned to the system when AIPs are removed?

While current estimates of water gains from AIP clearing are based on strong research, much of this has historically been carried out

in commercial plantation settings. Here trees are planted in neat, uniform rows and are easier to measure. In our mountains and grasslands, the situation is very different - AIPs do not spread evenly. They grow in patches, along drainage lines, up slopes and across difficult terrain, often more densely than in a plantation.

The Paired Catchment Experiment To build more accurate, locally relevant evidence, K2C has established a Paired Catchment Experiment in the upper reaches of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, in partnership with the Nature for Water Facility, the South African Environmental Observation Network and The Nature Conservancy. This long-term study is designed to measure how water availability changes before and after AIPs are cleared.

Three catchments have been selected because they are similar enough in terms of rainfall, altitude, size and landscape conditions to allow meaningful comparison. These include:

- an impact catchment, which is currently invaded by AIPs and will be cleared after three to four years of baseline monitoring;
- a control or comparison

catchment, which is also invaded and will be left uncleared for the duration of the experiment; and

- a reference catchment, which was cleared by K2C in 2025 and now represents a rehabilitated (near natural) system.

Across these three catchments, the K2C Catchment and Conservation Team is continuously monitoring rainfall and streamflow, among other indicators. This will help the team understand how water availability changes over time, both before and after clearing.

The experiment uses telemetry equipment, radio repeaters and a mountain-top data station to send information to cloud storage every hour. This is especially important because the monitoring sites are located in remote valleys where there is no cellular signal. Instead of relying only on occasional field visits, the team can build a continuous record of what is happening in the catchments over many years.

Long-term evidence for long-term restoration

Catchment restoration work takes time, so the Paired Catchment Experiment is expected to run for six to eight years. Once the AIPs are cleared, follow-up treatments are

needed, then enough time for the systems to recover and time to collect enough reliable data to understand what has changed.

This kind of patient monitoring is critical. It can help K2C and its partners make better decisions about where to focus future work, how to plan catchment management and how to strengthen proposals for future investment in water security. The evidence generated through this experiment will also support scientific modelling of future water gains linked to AIP clearing. This has value beyond our region, for restoration programmes elsewhere in South Africa dealing with similar problems resulting from alien invasive plants threatening water, biodiversity and livelihoods.

Clearing and restoring catchments is difficult, costly and long-term work. It takes patient fieldwork, follow-up treatment and years of monitoring to understand the full impact. Through this project, K2C is helping to build the local evidence needed to show that restoring catchments is not only conservation work, but a practical investment in the Lowveld's future water security.



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Pack Call for the Win: Painteddog.tv Takes Top Film Honour



Rebecca Christensen
Group Creative Director

Storytelling in conservation is a fickle friend. You have to balance hope against urgency. Bring people on board, even if that just means making them more aware of the wild world around them. Above all, you need your audience to question everything. And there is a lot of information in a conservation piece. It can drown you fast.

Painteddog.tv is based in Hoedspruit, and from the start we chose a different path. Most production companies in this space rely on fact after fact after fact. We find those facts endlessly interesting but stack them up and you end up preaching to the choir. Where is the sense in that?

So, we decided to connect with people the way people connect with each other: through raw emotion. Heart carries urgency further than any statistic ever could. Our films build characters, the people involved, yes, but more importantly the animals themselves. Get an audience to care about one animal, and they will care about the whole species. Humans connect through stories. Conservation is no different.

That is the ethos and we thought we'd give it a whirl. And the whirl came sooner than expected, when a story happened to us, instead of us going looking for one.

"Bucket: The Lion Cub"

This was a film we sat with for a long time, examining every frame and every decision with a fine-toothed comb. Usually, you want to leave an audience with questions, to send them out reflecting, maybe even acting. This time we did not.

Why? Because the film centres on a moral dilemma our team faced in the field.

Over three weeks in the Reitspruit Game Reserve, we followed a tiny lion cub and wrestled with one question: do we stay objective observers and leave a vulnerable cub to the fate nature dealt it, or do we act on what we know and try to give it a real chance in the wild?

Bucket had just been born, tucked safely in its mother's den. Then the curious cub wandered off and found itself trailing three powerful male lions, relatively new to the reserve. The situation turned complicated fast. Lion populations are declining across Africa. So, what was the right thing to do?

There was no easy answer, and we carried the weight of that choice long after the cameras stopped rolling. The film lays the whole thing bare, the decision, and everything that followed.

The International Tourism Film Festival

Armed with "Bucket: The Lion Cub" and another production, "Cheetahs: Race to Return", I arrived at the International Tourism Film Festival proud of what our team had pulled off. I also

knew we were up against some of the biggest names in wildlife and conservation storytelling. A pat on the back was all I really expected, and that alone would have left my cheeks rosy and my heart full.

The week that followed was a gift. I dug into new approaches to the craft, celebrated the Kruger National Park's birthday, and sat in on conversations about the sheer range a story can cover, from tourism campaigns and murder mysteries to influencer vlogs and, of course, wildlife and conservation films.

Awards Evening

Then awards evening arrived faster than a cold front.

There I sat, among peers, competitors, comrades, and some of our greatest and newest supporters. When "Cheetahs: Race to Return" took the Silver Award in the Documentary, TV and Web: Wildlife and Conservation category, I was stoked.

As I dropped back into my seat, award in hand and a grin slapped across my face, Painteddog.tv was called up again!

This time "Bucket: The Lion Cub" took - wait for it - Gold, same category!

And did I do a pack call on stage? Oh yes. Of course I did. And surely that was the end of Painteddog.tv's night. Surely?

I settled back to watch the Pinnacle Award, the festival's highest honour, handed to the best film overall, re-

gardless of category.

Can you hear the drumroll building? I looked around the room at all these extraordinary storytellers, mountains of the industry, and wondered whose work had cut the deepest. I had not even seen the winning film, so how was I going to track it down?

Then came the announcement - "Bucket: The Lion Cub" had won!

Walking up to accept it on behalf of the whole team, everyone who poured themselves into bringing the story to life, the effort, the long hours, the pain, the dilemma, the achievement of completion - I could almost hear our pack whooping us on from afar.

The pat on the back I had hoped for had arrived - except it felt less like a pat and more like a giant bear hug, from the storytelling community, and from every supporter who has stood with us over the years.

Now, the question everyone asks: where can they watch "Bucket: The Lion Cub"? If you are in Europe in January 2027, you will be able to catch it there. We have not locked in an African broadcaster - yet - but hold onto that word, "yet".

The moment we do, we will tell you exactly when to tune in.

For a documentary, a marketing film, a live event, a team-building production, or a quirky web series: Email rebecca@painteddog.tv or check out the website at: <https://www.painteddog.tv>



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For the love of Wildlife

AFRICA TODAY

Ebola Outbreak in the DRC: Four Reasons it Will be Hard to Contain



Jia B. Kangbai
Senior lecturer, Njala University

By the second week of the latest Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it was already clear that containing the spread of the haemorrhagic disease was proving to be difficult.

On 17 May 2026, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. This is its highest level of global health alert. It is mostly reserved for an extraordinary disease outbreak or event that is a public health risk to many countries through international spread and hence requires global coordinated efforts.

According to the WHO, as of 19 May 2026 the DRC had recorded more than 500 cases and 130 deaths, while its neighbour (Uganda) had recorded two cases and one death.

These statistics are huge considering that the current outbreak was only declared on 15 May. The largest Ebola outbreak was in west Africa from December 2013 to March 2016. It caused 28,652 infections resulting in 11,325 deaths in 10 countries; 99% of the fatalities were in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Infectious disease outbreaks are nothing new for the DRC, a central African country. Last year, while other parts of the world were shaking off the global mpox outbreak, the DRC was still struggling with it.

But the current Ebola outbreak in the DRC has potential to become huge and of long duration.

I am an infectious disease epidemiologist with experience of dealing with the Ebola outbreak in 2013-2016 in Sierra Leone.

In my view there are four reasons while this outbreak will be hard to contain:

- late detection and insecurity
- misdiagnosis
- cultural factors
- shortage of global health funds.

Late Detection

One of the challenges is the time between a person being infected and being diagnosed (identifying the disease in a laboratory). This de-

tection lag is a major problem because to control the spread of the disease, infected individuals need to be isolated. Ebola is highly contagious.

Late detection was responsible for the early deaths and increased number of Ebola cases in Sierra Leone during the 2013-2016 outbreak. Early cases went unnoticed there because Ebola was new in the country. Clinicians and laboratory scientists were totally unfamiliar with it.

The DRC is familiar with Ebola outbreaks and has witnessed more than any other country.

But in the DRC, late detection is fuelling the rapid spread of the disease and is primarily due to insecurity in the region.

The time it takes to identify an infectious pathogen in the laboratory depends on how long it takes for the pathogen to replicate to detectable level, the type of laboratory tests used, and (for some diseases) the development of antibodies. Ideally, for Ebola virus it varies between one and 32 days.

The first confirmed case was a resident of Goma, a town which lies on the border with Rwanda and is highly unstable. Fighting between DRC government forces and rebels (believed to be backed by Rwanda) has been going on around Goma for a long time.

The instability and volatility of the epicentre of the outbreak is having a major impact. Under those conditions, an infectious disease thrives and outbreaks mostly go unnoticed.

The number of Ebola cases and deaths that have been registered in the current Ebola outbreak in the DRC is difficult to place within the susceptible-infected-recovered (SIR) model, a tool used in epidemiology. Ebola's R0 (basic reproduction number, a measure of disease transmission) ranges between 1.5 and 2.5, which means within a susceptible Goma population, a single infected person can spread the virus to an average of 1.5-2.5 Goma residents.

However, the current Ebola incidence and deaths in the DRC exceed the expected number of secondary infections based on Ebola's basic reproduction number. As of 21 May there were over 136 suspected deaths, 35 confirmed cases, and more than 600 suspected cases caused by the Bundibugyo strain in

the ongoing outbreak in the DRC.

Misdiagnosis

The delay in diagnosis may also have been due to subtle early Ebola symptoms that can be misdiagnosed. Both malaria and typhoid have identical fever symptoms.

During the early days of the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, many nurses working at the Kenema Government Hospital and the Lassa Fever Hospital lost their lives because they misdiagnosed the disease as Lassa fever. Ebola and Lassa fever belong to the same class of viral haemorrhagic fever diseases since patients present with similar symptoms and pathophysiologies (what the disease does to the body).

The other challenge with diagnosis in this outbreak is that it is a different virus to the one treated in the most recent Ebola outbreaks. Bundibugyo virus was first identified in Uganda in 2007. Unlike Zaire Ebola virus disease, which was discovered decades ago, the relative newness of Bundibugyo Ebola virus disease means it's less researched, especially in terms of vaccine and medicine development.

Cultural Factors

Other factors affecting the spread are cultural practices such as ritual burials. Ritual burials are common in many African countries, like Sierra Leone and the DRC. These are ceremonies born out of the belief that death is a sacred passage to another world or ancestral realm. Mostly it starts with communal grieving and wake keeping, followed by the ceremonial preparation of the body.

In Sierra Leone a ritual burial of a high priest who died of Ebola in the southern town of Moyamba during the 2013-2016 Ebola outbreaks led to the death of scores of people who took part in ceremonial preparation of his body. It is not surprising to learn of relatives setting Ebola hospital tents on fire simply because they were prevented from handling the corpse of their loved one.

Shortage of Global Health Funds

The cuts in global health funds and the ending of many projects through the dissolution of the United States

Agency for International Development (USAID) is greatly affecting the operations and effectiveness of public health activities around the world.

Most global health security projects aimed to prepare for and mitigate any future disease outbreak.

Sierra Leone and other countries affected by the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreaks benefited immensely from international donor (including USAID) support during that outbreak.

Unfortunately, the DRC will have less international support to help fight this outbreak. The country has long experience in tackling disease outbreaks (especially Ebola) but the lack of experts and logistics on site implies an extended delay in managing this situation. The DRC has the people and the necessary labs and facilities. The major challenge with the current outbreak is that it started in an insecure environment where access to testing facilities are scarce, hence the late detection.

Additionally, the country is about the size of western Europe (including France, Germany, Spain, the UK and Italy). This vast size, coupled with insecurity, will make it difficult to channel logistics across the affected regions.

What's Needed

Tackling the current Ebola outbreak in the DRC requires a rapid, multi-tiered response. It should focus on rapid case detection, multinational support, swift collaborative surveillance and community engagement.

Over the past years the DRC has served as a scientific base for major international research institutions that work on infectious diseases and medical microbiology.

In the absence of a vaccine or medication, the health authorities should embark on community engagement to raise awareness and sensitisation. They must also enforce public health laws, especially those targeting cultures that promote unsafe burials and elevate the risk of Ebola infection. This is to prevent human transmission as many people might still be out there undetected.

This article was previously published in The Conversation.

From Learning to Earning: How numiknow® Could Reward Real Numeracy Improvement

Thias Taute

A pilot involving Hoedspruit Hub, Greater Stellenbosch Trust, Yoma Impacts Exchange, IXO, UNICEF and international partners is exploring a new idea in our area: rewarding young facilitators not simply for running numiknow® clubs, but for helping learners achieve real, measurable improvements in numeracy.

When Adelaide Palane first started facilitating numiknow® sessions, her goal was simple: "To get the children to understand the required mathematical concepts as quickly as possible." Her goal quickly shifted from speed to substance: she wanted to ensure the learners truly grasped and fully understood the concepts, prioritizing deep learning over simply checking off boxes.

The breakthrough came when the learners realized that numeracy could be approached through engaging games and they got hooked by our short and lively game names. For many, fear was replaced by fun, and their participation became lively and enthusiastic. However, it was a mixed bag; while some were just happy to be in a supportive environment, a few were still held back by a deep-seated fear of failure and continued to avoid the sessions.

One of the questions being explored through the partnerships is: What if that work could be measured, verified and recognised in a way that helps facilitators build a future career?

For many years, community proj-

ects have faced the same challenge: how do you prove that a programme has made a real difference? Counting attendance is easy. Proving that children improved their numeracy skills is much harder.

Yoma

Yoma is a digital marketplace designed to help young people move from learning to earning. It creates opportunities for young people to learn skills, complete community projects, build a digital record of their achievements and receive rewards for verified work.

Each participant receives a digital identity called a YoID. Think of it as a secure online portfolio where achievements, skills and certificates can be stored and shared with future employers or training providers.

Behind Yoma is a technology called blockchain. Although the word sounds complicated, the idea is simple. A blockchain is a highly secure digital record book. Once information has been verified and recorded, it becomes extremely difficult to alter. This helps create trust between young people, organisations and funders.

For numiknow®, the proposed process starts with young facilitators applying to become numiknow® agents. After training and certification, each facilitator starts to work with a small group of learners.

But before the program starts, learners complete a numeracy assessment. Facilitators then run numiknow® sessions over several weeks, playing domino-based games and activities designed to strengthen number sense and

mathematical proficiency. At the end of the programme, learners complete another numeracy assessment. The difference between the first and second assessment provides evidence of learners' numeracy improvement.

The exciting possibility is that facilitators may eventually be rewarded for attendance or hours worked, and for verified impact.

Evidence such as attendance registers, assessment results and numiknow® app data can be reviewed before incentives are approved. This means rewards are linked to real outcomes rather than simply participation.

Imagine a facilitator working with ten learners. If several learners improve by one or more grade levels in numeracy, that improvement can be independently verified. The facilitator could then receive a digital credential recognising the impact they achieved. A digital credential is like an online certificate, but with one important difference: it is linked to verified evidence. This makes it more valuable as proof of experience and capability and is the foundation for possible remuneration of the facilitator as described in a smart contract before the process started.

The proposed numiknow® Learning Impact Certificate goes even further. Instead of reporting only activities completed, it records verified learning gains while protecting the privacy of learners. No learner names or personal information appear on the certificate.

For funders, this provides confi-

dence that support is producing measurable outcomes. For facilitators, it creates a portable record of achievement and a possible job or career path. For learners, it means access to better numeracy skills and in some cases, better mathematics marks.

The long-term vision is ambitious but simple: create a pathway where young people can learn, serve their communities, build skills, earn rewards and a living, and create a measurable educational impact at the same time.

As Adelaide explains: "We aren't just teaching a school subject; we are changing their approach to life, sending their life path in a much brighter, more successful direction. By blending education with a career opportunity for us, we show these kids that no problem is unsolvable, whether it's on a domino tile or in real life."

For communities in Acornhoek and Ga-Sekororo, that future may already be starting to take shape.

Online references:

- Yoma. Digital marketplace connecting young people from learning to earning. <https://yoma.world>
- Yoma Impacts Ecosystem Platform Report. <https://impacts.ixx.world/yoma-impacts-ecosystem-platform-2/>

For more information, visit <https://numiknow.com>, try the games at <https://play.numiknow.com> or contact Thias Taute at thias@hoedspruithub.com.

THIS IS S.A.

Neesa Moodley

Expect an uptick in fake messaging regarding your personal income tax dues, payments and even refunds.

Tax season is creeping closer, which means two things are likely to land in your inbox: real messages from the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and fake ones wearing a convincing little taxman disguise.

Thalia Pillay, cofounder and CEO of Orca Fraud, says public awareness is critical because SARS-related scams are becoming harder to spot. "Check your SMS inbox or email inbox. There's a good chance a message claiming to be from SARS is already waiting for you, whether it's a tax refund you never filed for or an urgent settlement demand designed to trigger panic."

She warns that tax season usually brings a spike in messages pretending to be from SARS. Most South Africans with a smartphone are likely to receive at least one of these scams this year.

The danger is that SARS has indeed moved most of its communication online, so an email or SMS does not necessarily look suspi-

cious any more. Scammers know this. They use official-sounding language, fake refund amounts, urgent deadlines and links that look almost legitimate.

Pillay identifies four SARS scams that taxpayers should watch out for:

Fake settlement notice

This one usually arrives as an email or SMS saying you owe SARS a certain amount. It may include a payment deadline, bank account number and reference number.

The message is designed to make you panic and pay before you think. But SARS will not send its bank account details via email or SMS. It will also not ask for your banking details in this way. Genuine tax payments have to be made through eFiling or the SARS payment portal.

A real SARS message should include your taxpayer number, ID number and name. If these details are missing, step away from the trapdoor.

Fake refund SMS

This scam tells you that SARS owes you money. That may be a lovely message to receive, except you may never have filed a return or claimed a refund. The SMS may say a specific refund amount is wait-

ing and ask you to click on a link to verify your details or link your credit card.

SARS will never ask for your credit card details. Refunds are paid into the bank account already registered on your eFiling profile. There is no ritual to link cards, no links to click on, no digital treasure hunt.

Pillay notes that one scam circulating uses the domain "sarsdue.xyz". Real links for SARS should go to sars.gov.za.

Fake letter of demand

This may say SARS has issued a letter of demand, that a court summons is coming or that you may be blacklisted. The aim is to push you to click on a link or open an attachment. This link may lead to a phishing site designed to steal your personal information.

SARS has flagged this type of scam before. It does not send hyperlinks to other websites for legal notices, banking or debt demands. If SARS has issued genuine legal correspondence, you should be able to see it by logging into your eFiling profile directly.

The fake auto-assessment notice

This one looks helpful. It may tell you to confirm your compliance status, update your banking details

or complete your auto-assessment by clicking a link. The link may take you to a fake website that looks like eFiling. Once you type in your details, the scammers have what they need.

SARS does not send links to external websites for compliance checks or banking updates. Go directly to sars.gov.za and log in yourself.

Pillay says taxpayers should also remember that SARS keeps a live scam log with hundreds of documented examples on its website. If you are unsure about a message, check it against the scam alerts or contact SARS directly.

Suspicious messages can be reported to phishing@sars.gov.za. You can also call the Fraud and Anti-Corruption Hotline on 0800 00 2870.

The safest rule is boring but effective: don't click, don't panic, don't pay from a message. Go straight to SARS through the official website and check your profile there.

This story first appeared in our weekly DM168 newspaper, available countrywide for R35. This article appeared in the Daily Maverick/Business Maverick/Tax Invasion.

Scammers Turn up the Heat as SARS Season Nears

UN Launches Unprecedented El Niño ‘Anticipatory Appeal’ as ‘Godzilla’ Fears Mount



Ed Stoddard

The appeal speaks to the fact that this has been the most anticipated El Niño event in history against the backdrop of improved forecasts that increasingly see it becoming one of the most intense ever, and growing awareness about its impacts.

The UN’s World Food Programme and Food and Agriculture Organisation have launched an unprecedented appeal for donations to prepare in advance for the consequences expected to arise if the current El Niño strengthens alarmingly into a “Godzilla” event.

“This joint appeal marks a shift from reacting to crises to financing action before they happen on an unprecedented scale,” the agencies said in a statement.

The first ever “Joint Anticipatory Action Appeal” aims to secure “\$202-million to protect nearly nine million people from the potential impact of a strong El Niño weather pattern across 22 high-risk priority countries”.

The appeal speaks to the fact that this has been the most anticipated El Niño event in history against the backdrop of improved forecasts that increasingly see it becoming one of the most intense ever, and growing awareness about its impacts.

In southern Africa, El Niño usually heralds drought, while elsewhere its impact includes torrential rains in East Africa.

Two weeks ago, the Japanese Meteorological Agency was the first major global forecaster to call the onset of El Niño, triggered by a warming of surface sea temperatures in the tropical Pacific.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Noaa) has since confirmed that finding and significantly raised the prospects of it becoming “very strong” from 30% in its initial forecasts to 63%.

“Noaa declares an El Niño has formed when temperatures in the equatorial Pacific are 0.5°C above average for several consecutive months,” the agency said.

“Forecasters predict a 63% chance of sea

surface temperatures exceeding 2.0°C in the Nino-monitored region of the Pacific. If this threshold is surpassed, Noaa considers the event a ‘very strong’ El Niño.”

Forecasting models on this front have also advanced significantly – the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is one arm of the US government that has not been put through the woodchipper under Trump 2.0 – providing the agency with enhanced confidence regarding its predictions.

In February this year, the agency adopted a new tool – the Relative Oceanic Nino Index – for forecasting El Niño and La Niña events. The previous index used a static 30-year period to assess variants from average ocean temperatures, while Roni evolves and recalculates from month to month.

So, when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says there is a 63% chance of a very strong El Niño, it ain’t no thumb suck.

Improved monitoring and forecasting in turn enables readiness – and the UN’s appeal in anticipation of potential catastrophe fits this mould.

“We cannot afford the fallout of another food crisis,” said World Food Programme Acting Executive Director Carl Skau. “With El Niño on the horizon, we have a narrow window to act so families are not forced into impossible choices later.

“With the right resources, we can act faster, reduce costs, and reach people before the crisis escalates.”

“We now have the tools to anticipate these events; what matters is how we act with that knowledge. Early action keeps food on the table and protects those at most risk. With the right resources, we can act faster, reduce costs, and reach people before the crisis escalates.”

Among the 22 countries targeted in the appeal, three are in the southern African region: Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. At a time when violent xenophobia is once again menacing South Africa’s fraught so-

cial landscape, one potential fallout from El Niño could be a renewed surge in migrants from these countries.

SA at least is seen as food secure before any drought that El Niño may unleash in the summer rainfall regions.

The latest estimate from the government’s Crop Estimates Committee is that SA’s maize production for 2025/26 will be a record 17.1 million tonnes. This includes 9.2 million tonnes of the staple white maize that effectively feeds Mzansi.

SA’s annual maize consumption is about 12 million tonnes, so there should be ample carry-over stocks in the event of a stunted harvest next year – with some additional stocks to export to neighbouring countries if they experience shortages.

One way to prepare for El Niño is to have a commercial farming sector that utilises the latest technology to boost yields and get more grain from rain.

Social assistance

But the South African government may find that it needs to boost social assistance if El Niño-triggered droughts drive maize prices and overall food inflation significantly higher, and poor households experience increased hunger as a result.

Its ability to do so is hampered by its limited fiscal space and budget pressures as it strives to stabilise and reduce SA’s mounting debt burden. The spectre and costs of State Capture continue to haunt the economy.

The UN appeal also comes in the face of evaporating funds for such efforts. Donor fatigue is pronounced and aid budgets among wealthy countries, notably but not exclusively in the US, have been slashed.

The UN’s food and farm agencies may want to get ahead of the curve on this El Niño. But they may not get the funding they need to address the challenge in advance.

This article was previously published in the Daily Maverick/Business Maverick/Diaster Planning



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Orbital Overload

Ben Coley
Celestial Events SA

Last week, during an event at Moholoholo Mountain Lodge, our guests witnessed a parade of uniformly moving pinpricks of light in the sky. Despite the inevitable excitement of alien spacecraft and impending invasion, what we actually witnessed was a recent SpaceX satellite launch.

To reduce launch costs, multiple satellites are carried into orbit aboard a single Falcon 9 rocket. Once deployed into a parking orbit, they gradually spread out into their operational positions. This phenomenon is known as a *satellite train*, and it is becoming an increasingly common sight as space technology expands and costs continue to fall.

As of June 2026, there are more than 15,700 satellites actively orbiting the Earth. The number of satellites has increased more in the last 6 years, than in the previous 60, and the glut of manmade objects orbiting the Earth is forecast to grow exponentially. Alongside US companies like SpaceX and Amazon; China, Europe and many other emerging nations are entering the technological space race. Many sources suggest that by 2030, there will be in excess of 100,000 active satellites circling the Earth.

In typical human fashion, we are

doing thing in excess, with little foresight into the knock-on effects that this technological explosion will have on the Earth and our lives.

The Kessler Effect

With Earth's orbit becoming a traffic jam of metallic objects, collisions are inevitable. Satellites move at high speeds. For a Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite to remain aloft, it must be travelling around 30,000km/h - that's fast enough to orbit the planet in under 90mins. This forward momentum means it is moving fast enough to continuously 'fall' around the curvature of the Earth. By comparison, a .458 Lott rifle propels its bullet at around 3000km/h, 10x **slower** than a LEO satellite.

When a satellite is destroyed, it shatters into thousands of pieces of razor sharp, hypersonic projectiles. This makes every satellite a potentially lethal cluster-bomb, capable of destroying tens or hundreds of other satellites! This very real phenomenon is called the Kessler Effect. Before we know it, the Earth could be surrounded by a ring of supersonic shrapnel, rendering future space passage impossible for decades.

Light Pollution

Satellites are visible from Earth not because they emit light, but because they reflect sunlight. Large

'constellations' of satellites, and their sheer number, will ultimately cause a skyglow effect, visibly lightening the night sky. This will have a long-term effect on nocturnal wildlife behaviour and navigation, cultural and traditional stargazing practices, and play havoc with the growing astrotourism industry.

Research and Astrophotography Disruption

As an avid photographer of the night sky, the increase in satellites is irritatingly obvious to me. When photographing distant and faint objects, I take multiple long exposures that are then stacked together to produce a result. It is now quite normal for me to have to discard images due to white stripes caused by satellites moving across the field of view. Whilst this is an annoyance for me, those doing cutting edge research are facing similar issues, on a much larger scale. Even the mighty space observatories like Hubble and JWST are not immune to satellite photobombs, and NASA projects that in the future, over 40% of their frames will be affected by these trails!

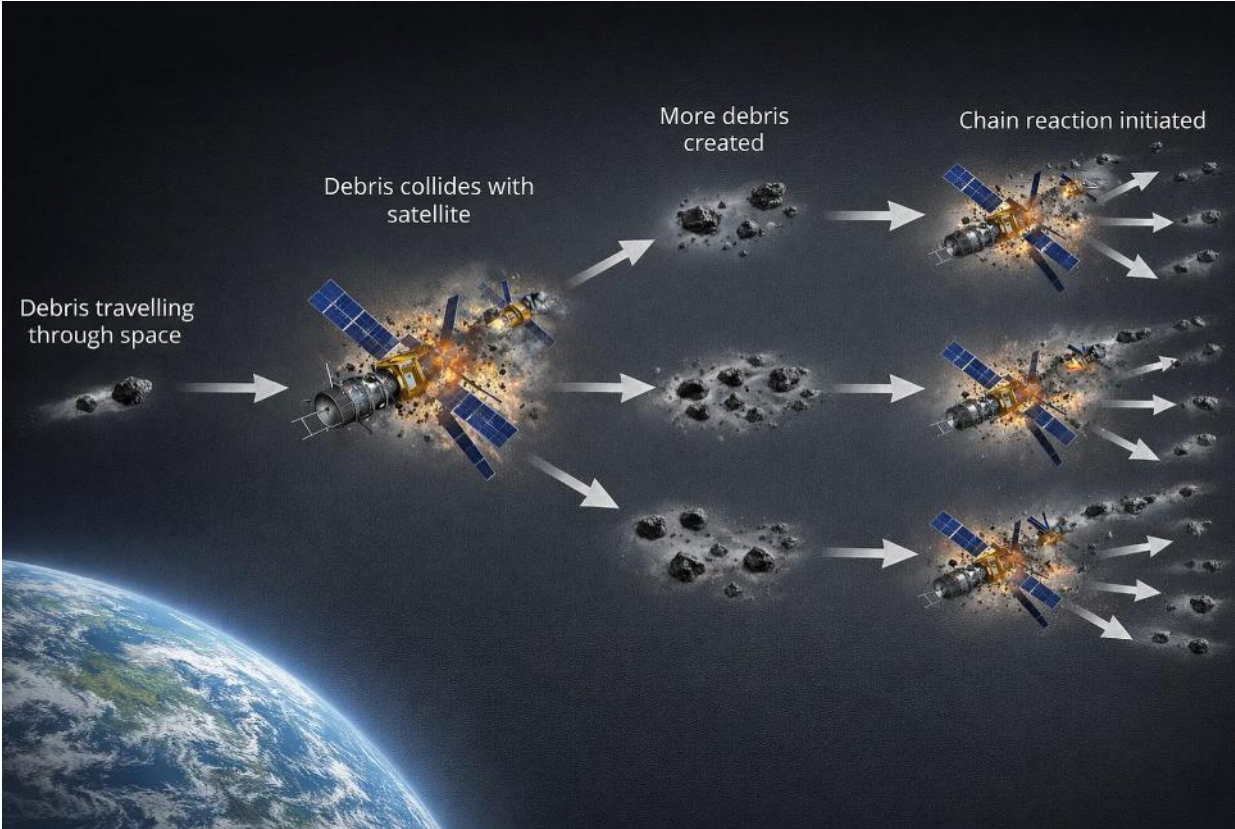
Ozone Damage

What comes up, must come down. When a satellite comes to the end of its life, it is often allowed to drop down from its orbit until it burns up in

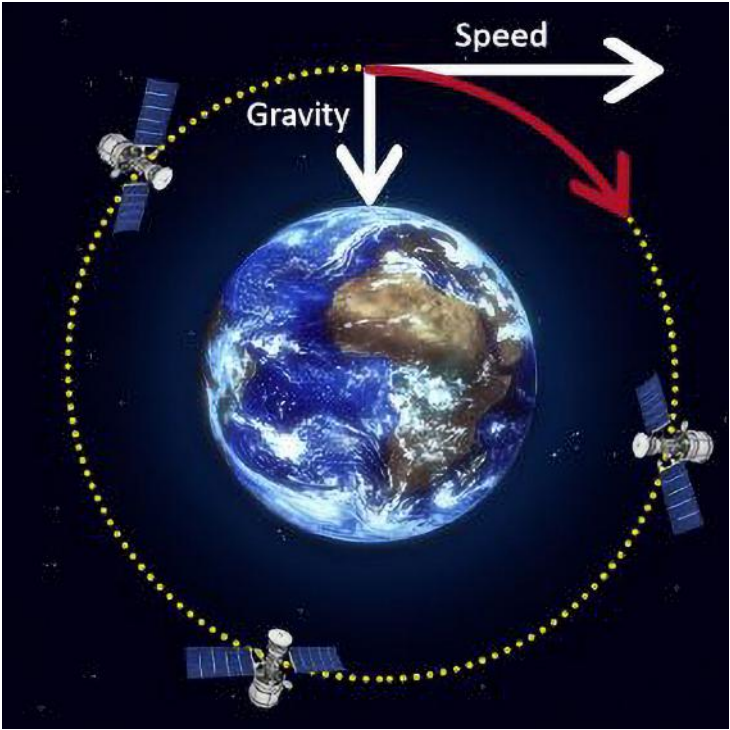
the atmosphere. This is a great way to avoid unnecessary space junk from accumulating, but as more and more satellites are cremated in our airspace, we risk doing irreparable damage to our own life support system. When satellites burn up, they release a chemical cocktail of vapourised metals into the atmosphere that could degrade our already fragile ozone layer.

Don't get me wrong - satellite technology and its implementation is doing wonderful things for millions of people across the world. I just hope that, for once, the relevant authorities, have the foresight to regulate their use in order to protect our home. It reminds me of a line from Jurassic Park, where Ian Malcolm succinctly states "... your scientists were so preoccupied with whether they could, that they didn't stop to think if they should ..."

Ben Coley / Celestial Events SA can be contacted on 079 575 0900



Kessler effect (above left), satellite train (above right -Marco Langbroek), satellite orbits (below right-ESA) and satellite trails (below- Dark SKy International)



Unlocking the Dawn Chorus: A Beginner's Guide to Understanding Bird Song

John Kinghorn
Avitourism Project Manager: BirdLife South Africa

Long before humans spoke their first words, birds were communicating through song. For millions of years, forests, grasslands, wetlands, and deserts across the globe have been filled with whistles, trills, warbles, and an array of complex songs, creating one of the most sophisticated communication systems in the natural world.

Learning birdsong can completely transform the way you experience nature. Suddenly, a morning walk is no longer just about what you can see. It becomes about what you can hear. Hidden birds reveal their presence, behaviours become easier to interpret, and entire landscapes seem to come alive as we become witness to conversations.

Yet for many people, the true intricacies of birdsong remain overlooked, enjoyed only as a pleasant backdrop to everyday life rather than actively listened to and understood. The good news is that understanding it is not something exclusively reserved for those more experienced among us. Like learning a new language, it begins simply by listening.

Why Do Birds Sing?

At its core, birdsong is communication. Every song serves a purpose, conveying information to other birds. While different species use sound in different ways, most songs revolve around two fundamentally important messages: "This territory is occupied" and "I'm looking for a mate."

During breeding season, male birds are often at their most vocal. A strong territory with abundant food and nesting opportunities can make the difference between reproductive success and failure. Singing allows a bird to advertise ownership of that territory without constantly engaging in physical conflict.

At the same time, a song can serve as an advertisement to potential mates. In many species, females are thought to assess male quality partly based on their singing ability. Complex songs, large repertoires, and consistent performance may all point toward a healthy, experienced individual; precisely the genes she would want in her chicks!

However, birds don't only sing for romance and rivalry. Many species use vocalisations to maintain contact with partners and family members, coordinate movements within flocks, warn of predators or danger, and to strengthen social bonds. Some species even have distinct alarm calls that communicate different types of threats.

One of the best-known examples of this is the Grey Go-away Bird, a species with an extensive repertoire of vocalisations for an array of potential threats, some more urgent than others. Aerial predators such as raptors may trigger one response, while ground predators such as lions, leopards, or snakes will elicit another.

The more researchers study bird-



African Rock Pipit

Image: Jandr  Verster

song, the more sophisticated we realise it is.

Song and Calls: Not Quite the Same Thing

One of the first distinctions birders learn is the difference between songs and calls.

Songs are typically longer, more elaborate, complex vocalisations associated with breeding and territorial behaviour. Calls tend to be generally shorter, simpler sounds used for everyday communication. These can be further separated into contact calls (calls between individuals to convey a message; also made in flight), distress calls (calls made when a bird is clearly distressed), alarm calls (to signal the presence of danger), and begging calls (calls between young and adults to elicit feeding behaviour from the parent).

Think of a song as an elaborate public announcement or musical performance, while a call functions more like a quick text message; short, sharp, and to the point. Understanding both is valuable. In fact, many birders identify more birds by sound than by sight, particularly in dense habitats where visibility may be suboptimal.

Nature's Most Remarkable Musical Instrument

Birds do not produce sound in the same way we as humans do. Instead of a larynx or voice box, birds possess a specialised organ called a syrinx, located where the windpipe divides before entering the lungs.

The syrinx is one of the most extraordinary sound-producing structures documented in the animal kingdom, for without it, birdsong as we know it would not exist. What makes the syrinx unique is that birds can control both the left and right sides independently, effectively allowing them to produce two separate notes simultaneously! This contributes to the

rich complexity heard in many bird songs and results in astonishing versatility. Birds can whistle, trill, click, buzz, rattle, mimic, and harmonise with a precision that often surpasses human vocal capabilities.

The Magic of the Dawn Chorus

If birds sing throughout the day, why do they seem especially vocal in the early morning?

The answer lies in one of nature's greatest spectacles: the dawn chorus. As darkness fades and the first rays of sunlight pierce the horizon, birds begin to sing, often with extraordinary intensity. For many species, this is the most important time of day. Scientists believe several factors contribute to this phenomenon. Early morning air is generally cooler and calmer, allowing sound to travel further and more clearly. Light levels may also be too low for efficient foraging, creating an ideal opportunity for communication before feeding begins in earnest.

There is also an element of competition. Dawn is when territories are proclaimed, rivals are challenged, and potential mates can begin to be serenaded. A bird capable of delivering a vigorous dawn performance may be demonstrating its fitness and resilience.

Birds Learn Songs Much Like Humans Learn Language

Perhaps one of the most fascinating discoveries about birdsong is that many species must actively spend time learning their songs. Young birds are not always born knowing exactly what to sing. Instead, they undergo a learning process surprisingly similar to human language acquisition.

Nestlings and fledglings listen carefully to adult birds around them. They then begin practicing, often producing imperfect versions of songs before gradually refining them through repeti-

tion. Researchers sometimes refer to this stage as "subsong", which is the avian equivalent of a baby babbling. Over time, these rough attempts will ultimately become polished performances.

The Great Mimics of the Bird World

While all birdsong is impressive, some species take vocal learning to extraordinary levels. Among the most celebrated is the Marsh Warbler, a species capable of mimicking the songs of more than 70 different bird species between its breeding grounds in Europe and its non-breeding grounds in Africa. During migration, it listens to birds across multiple countries and incorporates these into its own unique, astonishingly diverse repertoire. A single Marsh Warbler can sound like an entire avian soundscape performing at once!

These mimicry specialists remind us that birds are not simply producing instinctive noises, but that they are also actively listening, learning, remembering, and adapting to what is around them.

Learning to Listen

Many newcomers assume birdsong is too complicated to learn, when in reality, the biggest challenge is often not the birdsong itself but slowing down long enough to listen.

Rather than trying to memorise dozens of species at once, try focusing on a handful of common birds that occur in your local area or back garden. Listen repeatedly. Watch the bird while it sings whenever possible. Begin associating specific sounds with specific species – learning through association.

Many birders develop personal memory aids. A song may remind one person of a whistle, another of a squeaky wheel, and someone else of a familiar phrase. There is no single correct method, and ultimately, you should find whatever works for you. What does matter is building a connection between the sound that you're hearing and the species that is making it. Eventually, something remarkable happens. Over time, what once sounded like a chaotic chorus will begin to separate into individual voices.

So, the next time you step outside at dawn, pause for a moment before reaching for your binoculars. Close your eyes and let the sounds rush into your ears. Somewhere in that chorus are territorial disputes, declarations of love, endearing family conversations, and warnings of danger, all being shared through songs that have been passed down through generations.

 BirdLife
SOUTH AFRICA

Giving Conservation Wings

Slow Variables

Andrew Paterson
Philosafaris.com

Incrementally Imperceptible Change

There is a particularly large Marula tree (*Sclerocarya birrea*) in the Timbavati that I have often passed on walking safaris through that stretch of bush over almost a decade. Each time, it looks the same: coarse, weathered bark, it towers over the landscape arranged around it. But its days are numbered. Borers have been working the heartwood where the protective bark has been damaged. The sapwood is thinning. From outside, the tree looks indestructible. Inside, something is quietly, incrementally shifting - and one fateful storm season that great, familiar giant will fall.

This is the nature of slow variables. They are the controls you cannot easily see, the dials turning so gradually that no single day's observation reveals the trend. And yet they are, according to Brian Walker, among the most critical of all his attributes of Social-Ecological Resilience - because they govern the thresholds, and thresholds are where systems break.

What Slow Variables Actually Are

Walker's framework distinguishes between the fast, visible events of a system - the wildlife, the weather, the fires - and the slow background conditions that determine how that system will respond when those events arrive. In a savannah, the fast variables make the news: a drought, a disease outbreak, a locust swarm. But the slow variables set the stage: soil carbon content, the depth of the water table, the density of woody cover accumulated over decades, the thinning concentration of palatable grasses after years of cumulative grazing pressure.

These slow movers are hard to track precisely because they change so gradually. An agricultural savannah that has been quietly losing topsoil depth for thirty years does not announce itself. The grass still grows. The cattle still graze. The farmer still turns a profit, or near enough. But the system has been drifting towards a threshold - and when drought arrives, or a particularly hot fire season, the landscape crosses a line it cannot easily step back over. Bare ground replaces grass. Erosion accelerates. Shrubs fill the gaps, out-competing the struggling grasses. Recovery, if it comes at all, takes generations.

Walker draws from his years of research at Nylsvlei and across African rangelands to make a deceptively simple observation: by the time the fast variables signal crisis, the slow variables have often already determined the outcome. The visible catastrophe is downstream of an invisible drift.

The Rule of Hand

Walker offers a practical guide for navigating complexity here - what he calls the "rule of hand": at any one scale, no more than three to five slow variables are controlling the system you care about. This is his mentor, Buzz Holling's call for requisite simplicity. You cannot monitor everything. The skill is in identifying the handful of foundational variables that actually govern your system's proximity to its thresholds - and watching those.

In a semi-arid savannah, those controlling variables might be: the ratio of perennial to annual grasses, depth of topsoil, woody cover density, average wet-season groundwater recharge, and fire return interval. Monitor those five, and you have a working map of how far the system sits from the thresholds that matter. Ignore them in favour of yield data and grazer weight, and you may be optimising a system that is simultaneously degrading its own foundations. This is not a counsel for paralysis or endless monitoring. It is advice for watching the right things.

The Rangeland That Never Looked Sick

I think of a communal rangeland I know in the northeastern lowveld where the headman managed his cattle with great pride. The grass was short-cropped, yes - but it was green through summer, and the cattle were fat. What nobody was watching was the proportion of palatable perennial grasses declining each year, slowly being replaced by unpalatable annuals and bare patches that opened for encroaching thornbush. The soil between the remaining grass clumps was beginning to seal - a thin biological crust of algae and fine silt, invisible underfoot, that dramatically reduced infiltration during rain events.

When the three-year drought struck, the system collapsed within a single dry season. The remaining perennial grasses died back and didn't regenerate. The compacted, sealed soil couldn't absorb what little rain fell. Livestock losses were catastrophic. The management, by any conventional measure, had looked perfectly reasonable right up until it wasn't. The slow variables had crossed their thresholds. The fast variables simply made the crossing visible.

The Stoics and the Slow Erosion of Character

The Stoics understood slow variables intimately, though they didn't use that language. What Seneca (4 - 65 AD/CE) and Marcus Aurelius (121 - 180 AD/CE) were most vigilant about was not the acute blow - the sudden loss, the public humiliation, the physical injury but - the gradual, quiet erosion of their own foundations. The slow drift of character.

Seneca wrote repeatedly about the danger of assenting to small com-

promises. Each one, taken in isolation, means nothing. But the cumulative drift - the slow variable of moral integrity - moves the self towards a threshold. The person who gradually assents to dishonesty, to cruelty, to avoidance of discomfort, does not notice the change day by day. They simply find, one day, that they are no longer who they intended to be, and that reversing the drift is far harder than it would have been to hold the line.

Marcus Aurelius's Meditations are, in one reading, an obsessive slow-variable monitoring practice. He returns, daily, to the same foundational questions: Am I still acting from reason rather than reaction? Are my values intact or eroding? Is my capacity for equanimity increasing or diminishing? He does not ask these questions because today's crisis demands them. He asks them because he knows the threat of slow drift is always there, and that without daily attention, the foundations will shift without his noticing. This is premeditation, not of adversity, but of entropy. Not rehearsing what might go wrong externally - but watching what tends to go wrong internally, slowly, invisibly, if unattended.

Slow variables in the operator

In the special force's community, the culture is engineered around acute demands: the mission, the debrief, the next mission, the immediate fitness metric. This is appropriate - acute demands require acute responses. But it creates a structural blind spot for slow variables.

Those slow variables are well-documented in the research, even if rarely named as such: cumulative sleep deprivation across deployment cycles, the slow degradation of intimate relationships under sustained operational pressure, the incremental erosion of meaning and purpose as missions blur into each other, the quiet hardening of emotional range - what psychology calls alexithymia, the gradual loss of access to one's own emotional life. None of these announce themselves. Each day of operations, the soldier functions. Each month, the metrics look acceptable. But the system's proximity to its threshold - the point at which some acute stressor triggers a collapse that seems sudden but has been years in the making - has been drawing closer without anyone noticing it.

Walker's rule of hand applies here as precisely as it does to the savannah. The operator, or the team leader attending to operator welfare, need not attempt to monitor every dimension of psychological health. They need to identify the three to five slow variables that actually govern threshold proximity for their particular system: the quality of sleep over sustained periods; the condition of the primary attachment relationship; the degree to which soldiering still carries meaning; the gradual narrow-

ing or widening of emotional range; the slow accumulation of unprocessed moral weight. Watch those. Not once, but habitually, as part of a daily or weekly practice of honest self-assessment. Notice trends, not just today's reading.

The threshold you cannot see from this side

One of the most important insights from Walker's slow-variable thinking is that thresholds are often invisible until crossed, and that they are frequently irreversible - or at least very costly to reverse - from the other side. Degraded soil does not rapidly rebuild. A bush-encroached landscape resists re-opening. The relationship that eroded through years of inattention doesn't reconstitute itself in a season of good intentions.

This is not pessimism. It is the case for early investment. A savannah managed with careful attention to slow variables - grazing pressure, fire return intervals, the condition of perennial grass cover - rarely crosses its thresholds dramatically. It bends, adapts, recovers. The management interventions required remain modest and effective. The same logic applies to the operator, to the team, and to anyone navigating a complex, demanding life. The work of tending slow variables is unglamorous. It doesn't produce dramatic results this week. It doesn't lend itself to the stories we tell about ourselves. But it is the work that keeps the system in the zone where recovery is possible - where disturbance can be absorbed rather than triggering cascade failure.

Walk-On

Heading back through the last hour of light, the Marula's bark catches the low angle of the sun, each crease and bulge thrown into relief. What looks solid often isn't. What looks stable often isn't. The work of resilience is not simply responding well to crises - that is merely the test. The work of resilience is tending the slow variables so carefully, so consistently, that when the real test arrives, the foundations hold.

Next month, we turn to the fifth attribute of Social-Ecological Resilience: Tight Feedbacks - and why the signals we ignore today become the crises we can't manage tomorrow.

If you want to get hold of Andrew you can email ecostoic@philosafaris.com - Safaris to the Wisdom of Nature - Philosophy means "love of wisdom" in ancient Greek, Safari means "journey" in Swahili.



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The 2026 Football World Cup Sealed on the 9th June. Opened Today.

Three of us, a long table, a drink or two, and the entire 2026 World Cup called before a single ball was kicked. No editing, no excuses. Score us yourself.

Picture three men, one table, and the unshakeable confidence of people who don't have to be right until July. That was us on the 9th of June - Bra Pelé, Bra Lucas and Bra Thierry - two days before a ball was kicked, solving the entire World Cup between rounds. Forty-eight teams. One bar tab. No crystal ball, no inside information, no shame whatsoever.

We argued. We agreed. We changed our minds twice and a third time when the next round arrived. Then we sealed the lot, dated it, and handed it to the Editor of the Kruger2Canyon News with a single instruction: don't let us anywhere near it again.

So whatever has happened in the groups by the time you read this - the heartbreak, the daylight robbery, the team nobody rated suddenly sitting top of the pile - we didn't know. We guessed in a calculated sort of way. Three grown men and a long evening. Mark us against reality and tell us how the fools did.

Here's the catch that makes it fun: the group stage is behind us now, by the time you read this. But the knockouts aren't. So half of this you can already laugh at. The other half is still up for grabs. Read on, and bet alongside us.

Bafana first, because of course

South Africa opened the whole tournament against Mexico in front of 80,000 hosts. First World Cup since we hosted it ourselves in 2010. We didn't pick them to win the group - Mexico and South Korea were always the two we had going through. But we called Bafana to scrap their way to one of the eight best third-place spots and sneak into the Round of 32 anyway. If that came off, you already know. If it didn't, we'll own it. Either way, they were there, and that alone was worth staying up for.

The groups, called blind

Brazil and Morocco out of Group C - and we'll come back to Morocco, because that's where the real money is. Spain and Uruguay from H. France and Norway from I, with Senegal the third-placed side we'd least want to draw. Argentina and Austria. Portugal and Colombia. England and Croatia, because England always survive the easy part.

The hosts? USA through. Mexico through. Canada we had scraping second behind Switzerland. Home advantage is a real thing and three nations had it.

The ones we expected to go home early and quietly: Haiti, Curacao, New Caledonia's neighbours, the makeweights of a bloated 48-team format that gave us more football than any human needs.

The bet of the tournament

Morocco to reach the final. Not the semis - the FINAL!

They made the last four in 2022 and everyone called it a fairy tale. It wasn't. It was a very good football team that defends like a fortress and counters like a knife. Give them a kind bracket and they frighten anyone. The odds will be long because the world refuses to back an African side that far. That's the whole point. That's where the value lives.

Stake only what you'd happily set alight. But stake it.

Through to the end

Quarter-finals, the usual suspects: Argentina, Spain, France, England, Brazil, Portugal, Belgium, Netherlands. Germany would have been there too, but the draw threw them straight at France in the last 16 - one of them had to fall early, and it was the Germans.

Semis: Spain past France. Argentina past England.

Final: Spain versus Argentina.

Winner: Spain. Deepest squad on the planet, Lamine Yamal in his pomp, a team that peaked at Euro 2024 and simply never came back down. Argentina run them ragged in what is surely Messi's last dance, and a neutral's heart wants the send-off. But the head says Spain's engine room wins it.

We had the gap between the top six measured in millimetres. England

in a semi was us being kinder than they deserve. If one of our picks has already crashed out by the time you're reading this, that's the tax you pay for calling it blind.

The individual silverware

Golden Boot: Kylian Mbappé. France go deep, he takes the penalties and the headlines, and he's hunting history.

Golden Ball, player of the tournament: Lamine Yamal. If Spain lift the trophy, the kid is the face of the whole show. Barely out of his teens, already the best winger alive.

Golden Glove: Emiliano Martínez. Argentina go far, and that man is a shootout nightmare dressed as a goalkeeper.

Best Young Player: Yamal again, unless Brazil's Endrick steals it with one moment of magic off the bench.

Now go check

That's it. Sealed on the 9th June - opened today. No hedging, no editing, no quiet deletions under the table.

Football is the one thing on earth that makes fools of everyone who's certain. The three of us were certain. Tell us how wrong (or right) we were - and let's see if the back half still comes good.

Called by Bra Pelé, Bra Lucas and Bra Thierry over a drink or two (or three!) on 9th June 2026. Untouched since.



Springboks - 2026 Test Fixtures

Full schedule · verified June 2026 · all dates subject to final confirmation by SA Rugby

DATE	FIXTURE	VENUE	CITY / COUNTRY
20 Jun	South Africa v Barbarians	Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium	Gqeberha
4 Jul	South Africa v England	Ellis Park	Johannesburg
11 Jul	South Africa v Scotland	Loftus Versfeld	Pretoria
18 Jul	South Africa v Wales	Kings Park	Durban
8 Aug	Argentina v South Africa	Estadio José Amalfitani	Buenos Aires, ARG
22 Aug	South Africa v New Zealand	Ellis Park	Johannesburg
29 Aug	South Africa v New Zealand	Cape Town Stadium	Cape Town
5 Sep	South Africa v New Zealand	FNB Stadium	Johannesburg
12 Sep	New Zealand v South Africa	M&T Bank Stadium	Baltimore, USA
27 Sep	Australia v South Africa	Optus Stadium	Perth, AUS
Nov (TBC)	Italy v South Africa	Venue TBC	Italy
13 Nov	France v South Africa	Stade de France	Paris, FRA
21 Nov	Ireland v South Africa	Aviva Stadium	Dublin, IRL
27–29 Nov	Nations Championship Finals Weekend	Allianz Stadium (Twickenham)	London, ENG



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Lady Godiva’s July Forecast: Nowhere to Hide



July shines a light on things that have been quietly developing beneath the surface. Effort becomes visible. Talent gets noticed. Weaknesses become harder to disguise. The truth is that most people want results, but few are comfortable being seen while they pursue them. This month rewards action over intention. Plans, ideas and promises to mean very little unless they're accompanied by movement. The good news is that genuine progress attracts attention. The bad news is that excuses do too.

July asks one question of everyone: If someone looked closely at your life right now, what would they see? Fortunately, there's still plenty of time to improve the answer.

Cancer (21 June - 22 July)

You've spent enough time reflecting; now comes the opportunity to act. Something you've been considering for months deserves a decision. Confidence grows once movement begins, not before. Trust yourself more than your fears this month.

Leo (23 July - 22 August)

This is your kind of month, but not for the reasons you might think. The spotlight finds you naturally, yet substance matters far more than attention now. People are interested in what you can deliver, not simply what you can inspire. Lead by example and you'll earn lasting respect.

Virgo (23 August - 22 September)

The details matter, but not at the expense of progress. You may discover that something is already good enough to move forward. Waiting for perfection risks missing an opportunity entirely. Trust the work you've already done and release it into the world.

Libra (23 September - 22 October)

Relationships and partnerships come into sharper focus. What feels balanced becomes stronger; what feels one-sided becomes difficult to ignore. An honest conversation could change the course of something important. Speak with clarity and let the outcome unfold naturally.

Scorpio (23 October - 21 November)

Your patience begins to pay dividends this month. Others may finally recognise effort you've been making behind the scenes. There's no need to force recognition or chase validation. Quiet confidence remains one of your greatest strengths.

Sagittarius (22 November - 21 December)

Adventure calls, but this month asks for purpose rather than escape. A new opportunity may appear where you least expect it. The key is to commit fully once you've recognised it. Momentum favours those willing to take ownership of their choices.

Capricorn (22 December - 19 January)

Results continue to build steadily around you. Others may only now be noticing work you've been doing for months. Resist the urge to accelerate simply because attention arrives. The same discipline that got you here will take you further.

Aquarius (20 January - 18 February)

An idea you've been carrying could attract unexpected interest. The challenge will be turning inspiration into practical action. People are more willing to support you than you realise. Make it easy for them to understand your vision.

Pisces (19 February - 20 March)

Your intuition remains sharp, but July requires more than observation. You already know where change is needed. What matters now is acting on that knowledge instead of waiting for certainty. Trust the direction and begin the journey.

Aries (21 March - 19 April)

Your energy returns strongly this month, but so does scrutiny from others. People are paying closer attention to what you're doing and whether you're delivering on your promises. Fortunately, you're at your best when challenged to prove yourself. Focus on consistent action rather than dramatic gestures and you'll come out ahead.

Taurus (20 April - 20 May)

Something you've been building quietly begins to gain traction. You may find that recognition arrives later than expected, but it arrives, nonetheless. The temptation will be to retreat into familiar routines when things start moving quickly. Trust the foundation you've already built and allow yourself to grow beyond it.

Gemini (21 May - 20 June)

July rewards clear communication and punishes mixed messages. People need to know where you stand, what you're offering and where you're headed. The more direct you are, the easier everything becomes. Trying to keep every option open may ultimately leave you with none.

Hot Tips for July

Visibility reveals what effort conceals. Action speaks louder than intention. Progress attracts attention - be ready for it. Stop preparing and start participating. What you do this month matters more than what you plan.

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Fruitful Living	015 793 3703
Hoedies Fish Market	082 771 3173
Kruger2Canyon News	082 330 6060
Koti Services	064 078 8408
Suzuki Hoedspruit	010 825 9927
SPAR Hoedspruit	015 793 2305
Tops @ SPAR	015 793 2069
Vehicle License Department	015 793 0838
Vision Fitness	082 040 1137

SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

Drakensig Laerskool	015 793 3756
Drakensig Pre-primer	015 793 2401
Hoedspruit Christian School	015 793 2067
Lowveld Academy	015 793 3750
Mariepskop Laerskool	079 529 6071
Mariepskop Pre-primer	082 880 7069
Perspective Training College	082 787 4471
Southern Cross Schools	015 793 0590

REAL ESTATE & PROPERTY

Century 21	015 793 1534
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MEDICAL & VETERINARY SERVICES

Ronelle Joubert	082 787 4471
Dr J Blignaut	083 410 0190
Dr Ndlovu	015 793 1257
Dr A Polley	015 793 0606
Dr Shivambu	082 465 8114
Dr van Berge	079 531 6582
Dr Dubrowski	081 061 0313
Dr Kirstein	071 746 1059
Dr D. Coertzen (Orthodontist)	072 490 7869

Ophthalmologists:

Dr Jacques Potgieter & Dr Charl Meyer

	012 644 5000
Dr du Toit (Pediatrician)	082 655 4738
Lowveld Dental (Dentist)	073 597 5174
Dr L van Vuren (Dentist)	015 793 0845
Hlokomela	087 550 0387
Hoedspruit Clinic	015 793 9000
Hoeds Wildlife Est Pharmacy	015 793 1427
Lowveld Pharmacy	072 404 6142
HSP Pharmacy	015 793 2318
Kyk Oogkundiges (Optometrist)	060 548 5387
Hoedspruit Animal Hospital	015 793 0797
Wildlife Safety Solutions	073 934 6156

EMERGENCY – HELP LINES

After Hours Emergency Doctors	084 770 1741
Air Force Base Hoedspruit	015 799 2911
Africa Safe -T	087 095 8911
HSP Ambulance	015 383 0650/0215
Med OSH Consulting	078 672

Alcoholics Narcotics Anonymous	082 258 4602
Ambulance Airforce Base	015 799 2065
Ambulance Services Limpopo	015 793 1581
Ambulance Tintswalwal Hospital	101 77
Ambulance Services Swift	060 528 2784
Farm watch/ Plaaswag	072 310 0032
Fire Brigade AFB	015 799 2172
Fire Brigade Maruleng	015 793 0536
Fire Dpt Hoedspruit	015 793 0728
GKEPF Greater Kruger Enviro Protection Foundation	065 743 2224
Hoedspruit Clinic	015 793 2342
Hoedspruit Medical Rescue	072 170 0864
Hoedspruit Paws	078 431 3161
Hoedspruit Town Watc	072 812 2172

Hoedspruit Farm Watch	072 310 0032
Hospital Hoedspruit Pvt Hospital	012 000 1111/2/3
Hospital Emergency	012 000 1254
Hospital Nelspruit Mediclinic	013 759 0645
Hospital Tintswalo	013 795 5000
Hospital Sekororo Gvt-The Oaks	015 383 9400
Hospital Tzaneen Mediclinic	015 305 8536
Maruleng Municipality	015 793 2409
Medical Rescue	072 170 0864
Med Centre Emergency No	084 770 1743
Protrack	015 793 2585
SAPS Station Commander	082 565 8253
SAPS General	101 111
SAPS	015 799 4000
SPCA Phalaborwa	071 519 7044
Victim Support Unit	082 940 0651

CONSTRUCTION & INDUSTRIAL

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Mopane Group	015 781 1571
On Tap Plumbing & Bathrooms	065 559 0157
Discon	083 415 3186

TOURISM & THINGS TO DO

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K2C Biosphere Region	015 817 1838
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Southern Cross SCHOOLS

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Oupa Bobbili

Verstaan my nie verkeerd nie, dit is 'n absolute voorreg om oud te word. Dit is nie vir almal beskore nie. Sien baie jong mense, en kindertjies wat nie gesond is nie en dan gaan hulle op 'n vroeë ouderdom. Van ons wat nog baie werk het om te doen ons moet taai word vir die ouderdom. Glo my jy moet taai wees, hare op die vals tande groei.

Ek se nou een dag vir 'n maat van my, ek was agter op die bakkie en toe spring ek af. Jislaaik dit was nie 'n slim plan gewees nie. Jou brein sê jy het dit al baie gedoen jy kan weer. Jou liggaam stem nie met daai besluite saam nie, en dan straf hy jou met pyne. En glo my dit is pyne op plekke wat jy nie van geleer het in biologie nie.

Die voorregte wat ons het is ons kan ons kleinkinders sien groot word. Ons sien die wêreld deur fases gaan en groei saam met nuwe dinge van die lewe. Ja ons stem nie altyd saam nie, maar weet ook die nuwe generasies baat daarby. Ander voorregte wat ons het, is om wysheid te kan uitdeel. Nie altyd maklik nie, maar ons druk deur.

Ons kan nog steeds nonsens aan-
jaag, net stadiger. Ons kan nog
steeds dans, sing, jubel en juig.
Ons kan steeds stap, van ons draf,
oefen, is nog seksueel aktief, bestu-
ur nog ons eie karre. Ons doen alles
net stadiger. Ons waardeur dinge
meer, ons verstaan dinge meer, en
ons leer nog steeds meer. Van ons
werk nog, van ons is in ouetehuse,
en van ons verken die wêreld, maar
stil sit gebeur nie sommer nie.

Die katterakke val die oë aan, suiker is ons vyand, tyd is te vinnig, die ore is te lui om te luister en soms bewe die hande bietjie baie. Die blaas is ontydig, en die metabolisme is stadiger as 'n stadsraads werker, maar elke dag daag ons op, glimlag en lewe voluit.

As niks ons kon onder kry in ons jong lewens nie, moet jy weet ons staan terug vir niks nie. Die ou man se hande kan werk, slaat en in gebed saamvou. Die ou man se voete het paaie geloop, wat die GPS sal laat verdwaal. Die ou tannie se hande het al kos gekook wat geen kookboek ooit sal sien nie. Haar hande is op hulle sterkste as hulle in gebed is vir haar kinders.

Respekteer jou ouderdom. Jy was nog nooit so oud soos wat jy nou is nie, en dit is ook die jongste wat jy ooit weer sal wees. Geniet jouself. Groei. Leer en leer ander. Geniet jou geloof dit is al wat jy eendag sal kan saamvat. Glo my oud word is nie vir "sissies" nie.

Groete

Al Correspondent

The story begins underground. In healthy soil – including the red, iron-rich earth of Limpopo – there lives a genus of bacteria called *Streptomyces*. These are ancient organisms, present on Earth for over 400 million years, long before the first dinosaur took a breath. They are the quiet engineers of healthy soil, producing natural antibiotics, breaking down organic matter, and performing chemistry so complex it took scientists decades to decode. And when they die, they release a molecule called geosmin.

Geosmin. The word comes from the Greek - geo, meaning earth, and osme, meaning smell. It is a small, bicyclic alcohol molecule, and it is the primary chemical compound responsible for what scientists formally call petrichor - that distinctive scent of rain on dry earth. The word petrichor itself was only coined in 1964, by two Australian researchers, Isa-

bel Joy Bear and Richard Thomas, who published their findings in the journal *Nature*. They chose *petra* – stone – and *ichor* – the golden blood of the gods in Greek mythology. The smell of rain, they were saying, is the blood of the earth. They were more right than they knew.

Here is the fact that stops people cold. The human nose can detect geosmin at a concentration of just 5 parts per trillion. A shark can smell blood in seawater at one part per million. That means the human nose is 200,000 times more sensitive to geosmin than a shark's nose is to blood. Read that again. You - standing in your garden in Hoedspruit as the first summer storm builds over the Drakensberg escarpment - are running a more finely calibrated detection instrument in your face than the most famous predatory nose in nature.

To put that concentration in perspective: 5 parts per trillion is the equivalent of one drop of water in a full Olympic-sized swimming pool. Or a single teaspoon distributed across 200 of them. That is what your nose is finding in the air. That is what makes you look up.

But why? Why would humans evolve such extreme sensitivity to a compound released by dying soil bacteria? The most compelling hypothesis is survival: the sensitivity may have helped early humans locate water sources or identify fertile ground. In an era before maps, before wells,

before municipal supply, the ability to smell rain - genuinely smell it, kilometres before it arrived - was potentially the difference between finding water and dying of thirst. The Lowveld's own landscape makes this viscerally easy to understand. In the dry season, when the bush is brown and the riverbeds are sand, the arrival of that smell is still, even now, something the body responds to before the mind does.

The relationship between geosmin and the natural world turns out to be older and stranger than anyone suspected. Research published in *Nature Microbiology* revealed that the symbiosis between *Streptomyces* bacteria and tiny six-legged arthropods called springtails is likely hundreds of millions of years old. *Streptomyces* produces geosmin specifically to attract springtails, which feed on the bacteria. In return, the springtails spread the bacteria's spores through their bodies and droppings. The smell of rain, in other words, is not a byproduct or an accident. It is a communication signal - a chemical conversation between organisms so ancient that the continents were in different positions when it began. Humans simply evolved sensitive enough noses to eavesdrop on it.

Geosmin is not only in your soil. It is responsible for the earthy taste of beetroot. It causes the muddy flavour sometimes found in farmed fish. It appears in some wines and in the

occasional off-note in drinking water - and it is so resistant to standard water treatment processes that municipalities around the world struggle to remove it. When your water tastes faintly of earth, you are tasting the same molecule that draws your eyes to the sky before a storm.

There is one more layer to this, and it is the one that perhaps matters most to those of us who live close to the land. Research has shown that smelling geosmin induces measurable psychophysiological states of relaxation - even in the absence of any other sensory cues associated with rain. The molecule itself, at concentrations your nose can barely register, changes your body's stress response. The calm you feel when rain is coming is not nostalgia or sentimentality. It is chemistry. Ancient, precise, and written into your biology over hundreds of thousands of years.

The Lowveld's first summer rains carry something the scientists in their laboratories have spent decades trying to fully explain. *Streptomyces* has been making that smell since before the first mammals existed. Your nose has been hunting for it since before you were born. And every season, when the clouds stack up over the escarpment and the air shifts and that smell arrives - something in you recognises it at a level far deeper than memory.

Now you know what it is.

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