

You Are Paying. They Are Not Delivering. And They Know It.



Local Correspondent

Let me be direct. No diplomatic softening. No “we reached out to the municipality for comment” preamble that lets officials off the hook before the first paragraph is done. Just the facts , and the facts are an indictment.

Every month, residents and business owners in Hoedspruit pay rates and service tariffs to Maruleng Local Municipality and Mopani District Municipality. In return, they are entitled, legally, constitutionally entitled, to water supply, water purification and

sewage disposal that meets basic service standards. What they are receiving is infrastructure so overburdened and mismanaged that the municipality itself, in a formal council resolution passed on 8 September 2025, declared a 12-month moratorium on new development connections because the system can no longer cope.

Read that again. The municipality passed a resolution admitting its own infrastructure has hit the wall , and is still billing you in full for the services it cannot deliver. That is not a service delivery shortfall. Is that not institutionalised fraud against the

ratepayer?

Twenty-Two Years of Wasted Money and Broken Promises

Hoedspruit has never had its own independent bulk water and sanitation infrastructure. Since Mopani District Municipality came into existence in 2003, the town has been entirely dependent on the Drakensig Air Force Base facilities, military infrastructure never designed or dimensioned for a growing civilian population. That dependency was always supposed to be temporary. It was never fixed, never properly funded, and it was never honestly account-

ed for.

What MDM did instead was spend money, a great deal of money, on projects that went nowhere: in 2008, land was acquired and R62 million allocated for a wastewater treatment plant serving Hoedspruit and Kampersrus. It was never commissioned. After the 2012 floods, R20.2 million was spent on emergency boreholes, purification units and storage tanks. They were tested, signed off, and left to rust. In 2014 and 2015, a R20.4 million tender was awarded to install a water pipeline along the R527.

Cont. on page 3



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From the Editor

An Appeal to Hoedspruit's Millennials

Where are you millennials? Are you tied up with social commitments, or family responsibilities? Maybe its demanding work schedules, or sports and school commitments? You might be watching your children bathe in brown tap water, or hanging up washing stained by dirty water? Have you ended up buying bottled water from Amanzi or Oasis? Or wondering whether you need a second bond just to pay the ever-increasing rates bills?

Are you feeling excluded from decision-making, or feeling that leadership positions are dominated by older generations? Maybe you believe that the current systems resist reform and that participation changes nothing?

If so, it is understandable why so many of you younger residents feel they have little time or energy left for civic, community, and HOA meetings. But you're wrong!

It is precisely those meetings where the future of Hoedspruit is being shaped - where decisions are made about water, infrastructure, rates, development, security, and the long-term sustainability of our town and estates.

The reality is that if you as the younger generations do not participate, others will continue making decisions on your behalf. It is easy to criticise outcomes afterwards, but lasting change requires participation before the decisions are taken.

Hoedspruit needs fresh voices, new ideas, energy, and constructive involvement from the very generation that will inherit the consequences of today's decisions.

Please make a small space for community involvement. Attend a meeting, ask questions, volunteer where you can, and become part of shaping the future of your town, your estate, and your children's future.

Do not leave it all to the Baby Boomers and then complain about the outcomes. Hoedspruit's future belongs to all of us, and you have to get involved. Stand up and be counted!

And then Dust, Chrome and a Soft Serve on a Sunday Afternoon

It started with a soft serve - and turned into one of those Hoedspruit moments you don't forget.



I was standing at the garage, ice cream in hand, when three cars rolled in off the R527. Decal-covered, road-worn, dusty, insect ridden, magnificent. Classic machines - the kind that turn heads even when they're just parked. I wandered over, because of course I did.

Turns out these weren't just Sunday drivers. They're part of the **Trans Africa Rally 2026** - a six-country classic car odyssey that began at the Cape Winelands and ends on the Durban beachfront. Nineteen cars set off. The crews reckoned ten to fourteen would make it into Hoedspruit by nightfall.

That's the thing about a rally like this - it's not supposed to be easy.

The route reads like a Southern African bucket list: the crimson dunes of Sossusvlei, the ancient elephant herds of Etosha, Chobe in full flood-season glory, the thunder of Victoria Falls, a cruise on Lake Kariba. Then south through Harare, east to Mutare, down to Masvingo, across the border to Musina and into the Lowveld. Us. A petrol stop. Possibly a soft serve.

Of the three cars that pulled in, one was a Porsche - the crew flying the Greek flag, which felt entirely appropriate. Then a Mustang blew through so fast there wasn't even time to raise a camera. And then the jewel: a 1966 Volvo, carrying two absolute characters - Graham York and Richard Allen - who looked exactly like men who'd driven across half of Africa and were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

From here they cross into Eswatini - Summerfield, then Pinda - before the final run down to Durban, where the cars get shipped home and the crews start arguing about which rally to do next.



The rally is limited to 22 cars, all classic and meticulously prepared. This edition made one concession to modernity: 4x4s built after 1980 were also welcome. Which tells you everything about the spirit of the thing.

We were a fuel stop on a very long road. We hope Graham and Richard found the cold Zwakala that I had suggested, before they left. They'd earned it.

Want to know more about the Rallies - and there are many. Go to destination-rally.com.

Movements and Additions

To move with the times the Kruger2Canyon News is moving into the subscription world with the launch of K2C RAZOR. This is super exciting and we are working furiously to get this up and running. Details will be revealed so watch this space!

This month we also add to the Kruger2Canyon News offering with the inclusion of three new sections: Africa this Month and This is SA. Through these we broaden our horizons to the rest of the continent, focus on individuals or businesses that make our town tick and highlight happenings in other areas of South Africa. I hope that you enjoy reading those pieces, and that the "expansion" heightens interest in what we as a publication have to offer. Enjoy!

Once again I would like to thank the team that is behind this publication, and of course all our advertisers without whom this publication would not

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K2C RAZOR is for those who want to know what's not on the market, not in print, and not yet public.

COMING MAY

Cont. from page 1

The pipe was laid and never used. In 2017, the Hoedspruit Bulk Water Project was launched at a cost of R27 million. It was never completed.

The cumulative total spent by Mopani District Municipality on water and sanitation projects in Hoedspruit that are either unfinished or completely non-functional: R130 million. Not misallocated - not underfunded - spent - and gone, with nothing to show for it.

Meanwhile, the Drakensig facilities, still the only functioning water and sewage infrastructure serving Hoedspruit's civilian population, are now operating north of 130% of their designed capacity. And in what may be the single most brazen detail in this entire saga: Maruleng Municipality does not pay the South African National Defence Force for the bulk water and sewage services it uses from that base. It charges you for those services, but it does not pay for them itself.

The Sewage Problem Is Not Speculation and is on Criminal Record

The Leguan Street pump station has been a known failure point for nearly a decade. Residents in the surrounding area have logged complaints, written letters, attended meetings and been told the problem has been "noted". It has not been addressed.

In September 2023, the pump station failed catastrophically. An estimated 15 million litres of raw sewage flowed into Raptors View Wildlife Estate, contaminating wetlands, dams and watercourses, and placing the children at Southern Cross School at direct risk of pathogen exposure. The municipality was formally notified on 9 September 2023. It took twelve days to respond.

The Department of Water and Sanitation subsequently investigated and found the municipality had been operating sewage containment infrastructure without authorisation, in direct contravention of the National Water Act. Criminal charges were opened against four named MDM officials: the Municipal Manager, the Senior Manager of Technical Services, the Chief Financial Officer and the Senior Manager of Water and Sanitation. Hoedspruit SAPS initially refused to open the case and had to be compelled to do so. The pump station on Leguan Street is still in acute disrepair. The backup generator, critical to preventing repeat overflows, remains non-functional (two years after delivery), after the contractor tasked with repairing it stopped work, citing non-payment by the municipality.

Nothing has materially changed.

The Law Has Shifted, And the Municipality Should Be Worried

For years, ratepayers challenging municipal billing have faced a brutal legal reality: even when courts agreed that a municipality was acting unlawfully, they consistently protected municipal revenue on the grounds that councils had budgeted for it and could not absorb the shortfall. The municipality's fiscal interests trumped the ratepayer's rights almost every time.

That changed in March 2025.

On 24 March 2025, the Constitutional Court handed down a judgment that fundamentally altered the legal landscape for every ratepayer in South Africa. In Ekapa Minerals v Sol Plaatje Municipality, the court held that municipalities cannot levy irrational or unlawful rates, and that courts must weigh the ratepayer's rights and fi-

nancial prejudice equally against municipal fiscal interests, not subordinate them to it, as courts had routinely done before. The judgment was explicit: a municipality "cannot seriously argue that it is entitled to claim the spoils of unlawfully overcharging ratepayers". Those are the Constitutional Court's own words.

Weeks ago, the Western Cape High Court declared Cape Town's fixed water and sewage charges unconstitutional, ruling that the Municipal Systems Act requires tariffs to be equitable and linked to actual usage. You cannot charge full tariffs for services not delivered to standard.

Apply that principle to Hoedspruit. The municipality has acknowledged in its own council resolution that the water and sanitation infrastructure cannot deliver services adequately. The legal ground beneath Maruleng and MDM's billing model has shifted, considerably.

Apathy Has Been the Municipality's Greatest Asset

Hoedspruit is not short of intelligent, resourceful people who understand exactly what is happening here. What it has historically been short of is organised, sustained, collective pressure on the institutions failing it.

Individual complaints get filed. Individual letters get ignored. The municipality has learned, over twenty-two years, that Hoedspruit will absorb a great deal before it pushes back in any meaningful way. That calculus needs to change, and the only thing that changes it is community organisation with legal teeth.

The documented evidence of failure is overwhelming. The financial trail of R130 million in wasted projects is on public record. The municipality's

own resolution confirms infrastructure collapse. Criminal charges are active. Two major court precedents now back the ratepayer. The September 2026 moratorium deadline is approaching with no credible plan in sight.

What has been missing is the organised community voice to drive this forward, consistently, legally, and loudly enough that the municipality can no longer simply wait it out.

The **Hoedspruit Concerned Ratepayers Association** exists for exactly this moment. It is not a social club or a petition-writing exercise. It is the organised vehicle through which residents and business owners of this town can pursue legal, coordinated and sustained accountability against two municipalities that have spent over two decades treating Hoedspruit as a revenue source while systematically failing to deliver what that revenue is supposed to fund.

If you own property here, run a business here, employ people here, or intend to still be here in five years, then you need to be part of this.

Eds comment: This was a letter received from a 'Concerned Resident'. We believed it worthy of a lead article. This newspaper will be watching the September 2026 deadline. The question is whether the municipality faces it alone or faces a community that has finally had enough.

You can contact the Hoedspruit Concerned Ratepayers Association (HCRPA): hoedspruitcrpa@gmail.com

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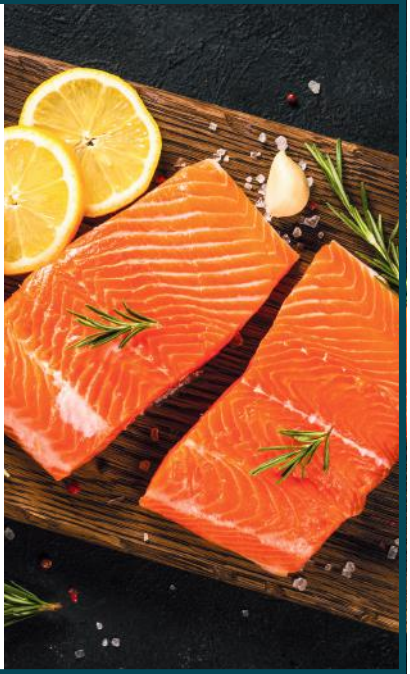
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Biosphere in Action: Carbon Funding Drives Community Change



Beautiful crafts (top left), image Emma Gatland. Craftswomen (above), images supplied and craftswoman above, image Victoria Marques

The TASC Foundation, together with Kruger to Canyons (K2C), is supporting climate change in a way that directly benefits local communities. By investing funding from TASC's carbon mitigation projects into practical, community-led initiatives, the Foundation is helping to improve livelihoods, build resilience and support sustainability across the TASC cookstove catchment areas.

Our goal is to drive positive change through both the environment and communities, fostering a sustainable future for everyone. Working closely with community stakeholders and partners, the TASC Foundation has successfully implemented a range of transformative projects.

Digital Hubs Open Up New Opportunities

The Digital Hub Project was designed to establish digital infrastructure and manage Wi-Fi access points across the Sand River Catchment

area, thereby empowering local communities by improving internet access to information, education and opportunities. With support from K2C and Zenza Africa, three digital hubs have been established, each offering geospecific content so local users can find opportunities relevant to their area.

Since their launch, the hubs have become valuable community spaces, with local users actively using the sites for proposal writing, application submissions, and information gathering. In Phiring, the hub has attracted interest from small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) seeking market opportunities for their goods, as well as support for job applications and business development.

Phalakubeni Farmers Gain Market Access

In Phalakubeni, the Foundation is working with the African Conservation Trust (ACT) to help farming co-

operatives access better markets within the Kruger to Canyon Biosphere. By supporting the Gingirkani and Rixaka agricultural cooperatives, the project is tackling some of the biggest barriers farmers have faced by installing solar-powered, insulated shipping containers for on-site cold storage and acquiring refrigerated vehicles to maintain produce during transport.

These interventions ensure consistent market access and improve profitability for cooperatives and other small-scale farmers in surrounding villages. Over time, the aim is for these cooperatives to become more independent and self-sustaining, providing long-term income and employment opportunities for the wider community.

Kulani-in-a-Box Reaches New Markets

Led by the Kulani Collective NPC, the Kulani-in-a-Box initiative is a community-driven project that em-

powers local artists and crafters by improving their access to high-quality markets for tourists and hospitality. It responds to challenges such as limited market access and training opportunities, as well as fluctuating seasonal demands.

Building on existing operations at the Orpen Hub, this initiative continues to transform the space into a centralised collection point for products, supported by a dedicated delivery vehicle to improve logistics. Thus far, the project has enabled 29 SMME arts and crafts practitioners to identify market gaps, refine product offerings and improve their designs.

To read more about our projects, head to: <https://tasc.je/our-foundation/>







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Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2479925



KAMPERSRUS COMMERCIAL R 12 900 000
Beds 14 | Baths 14 | Floor: 1.484m²
This popular lodge can sleep 28 guests. Main area has a bar, pool, and dining area. Multiple self-catering units (cabins, tents, chalets). Includes staff quarters, storage, and cycads. Approved plans/and COC's done. Sold furnished as going concern via share transfer. Financials on request.
Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821 Ref: 2486485



ZANDSPRUIT VALLEY, HOEDSPRUIT R 2 530 000
Beds 2 | Baths 2 | Floor: 110 m²
Newly built, neat home offering comfort, security and strong rental income potential. Spacious open-plan lounge and kitchen, private pet-friendly fenced garden, motorised gate and double covered carport. Ideal lock-up-and-go or investment opportunity with low monthly levies.
Carika Fox - 071 911 9940 Ref: 2472134



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.
Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2495456



HOEDSPRUIT WILDLIFE ESTATE R 7 950 000
Beds 4 | Baths 4 | Floor: 266 m²
COMMERCIAL - Fully certified with four en-suite bedrooms, staff quarters, open-plan lounge, dining area, kitchen, guest toilet, utility room, covered patio, pool, boma firepit, solar power, and backup water. Furnished and operational; all approvals in place. Sale excludes VAT.
Calin Leppan - 082 824 9482 Ref: 2466286



NDLOVUMZI NATURE RESERVE R 4 500 000
Beds 6 | Baths 4 | Floor: 270 m²
Five thatched units offer six bedrooms and a central lounge with a bar. Features a pool deck overlooking a waterhole, a boma, and a sundowner mountain-view deck. Includes a borehole, employee housing, carports, and secure fencing. Up to four dogs permitted. Sold unfurnished.
Jason Jones - 083 267 4794 Ref: 2494744



LISSATABA NATURE RESERVE R 5 850 000
Beds 5 | Baths 5 | Floor: 358 m²
Well-maintained bush home on the banks of the Olifants River, offering privacy and breathtaking river and mountain views. Open-plan living, newly fitted kitchen, TV room, and deck with plunge pool overlooking the river. River boma with built-in braai and fire pit. Located in 2 500 hectare reserve.
Rob Severin - 083 469 3820 Ref: 2462283



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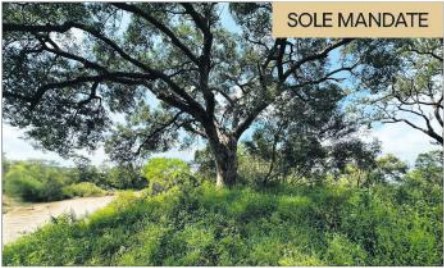
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UMFULA ESTATE, HIPPO POOLS R 25 000 pm
Beds 3 | Baths 3 | Furnished
Available 1 Jun 2026 - Double-storey home featuring expansive windows with breathtaking river views. Open-plan living flows to a patio, splash pool, and boma. Includes 3 air-conditioned en-suite bedrooms and double carport. Borehole water and abundant wildlife. Electricity excluded.
Natasha van Nelson - 071 652 9140 Ref: 2476034



ZANDSPRUIT VALLEY R 15 000 pm
Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 2 | Unfurnished
Available immediately - Secure townhouse featuring open-plan living with stacking doors opening to a covered patio and private garden. Includes a gas-equipped kitchen, 2 bedrooms with ceiling fans, 2 bathrooms (1 en-suite), and a double carport. Water, electricity, and wifi excluded.
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From Dominoes to Digital Thinking

How numiknow® is turning simple game pieces into tools for coding and preparation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Thias Taute

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is changing the way the world works. Computers, robotics, artificial intelligence, automation and digital systems are becoming part of everyday life. Children growing up today will enter a world where coding and problem-solving will be as important as reading and writing. But how do we prepare learners in rural South Africa for this future when most schools have no or limited access to expensive technology? The answer may be lying inside a simple domino box.

For years, numiknow® has used dominoes to develop mathematical proficiency through games that strengthen number sense, strategic thinking, reasoning and problem-solving. Now the same dominoes are being used to introduce learners to the foundations of coding and robotics - without other tools or computers. The idea is surprisingly simple.

In the coding activity, each domino becomes a "command". The left side of the domino gives the instruction, while the right side gives the number of movements or repetitions to execute. Learners place dominoes in a sequence to create a "code or a program" that guides a token across an obstacle course.

A learner may place a domino that means: "Turn right and move forward three blocks." Another may mean:

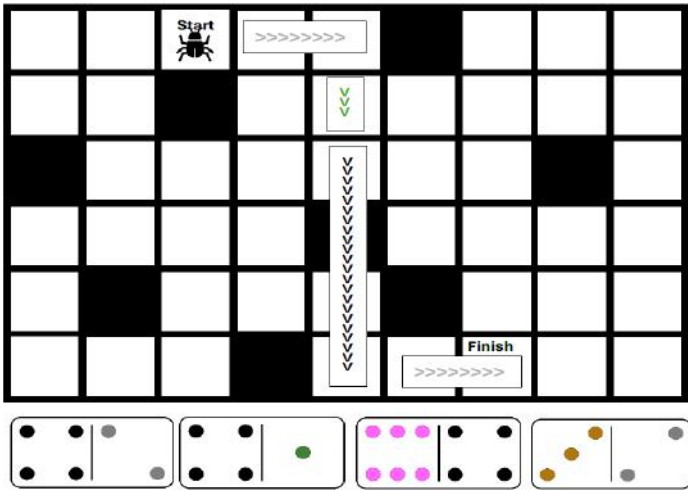
"Jump over any obstacle in the next five blocks." The learner must think ahead, predict outcomes, test solutions and fix mistakes - the same logical thinking used in real computer programming.

The activity also introduces one of the most important ideas in coding: debugging. In programming, debugging means finding and fixing errors in code. In the numiknow® version, a team can intentionally change part of a correct domino sequence or 'code' and challenge another team to identify and correct the mistake. Without realising it, learners are practising algorithmic thinking, sequencing, logic, pattern recognition and problem-solving - all core skills for coding and robotics at a later stage.

The obstacle course itself adds excitement and movement to the learning experience. Learners physically create instructions or 'code' that moves the token across a path from "Start" to "Finish". The activity becomes part mathematics lesson, part coding challenge and part strategy game. Importantly, this approach makes coding accessible.

Many schools cannot afford coding tools, robotics kits, coding software or high-end devices. Dominoes, however, are inexpensive, durable and familiar. Teachers and facilitators can introduce coding principles using resources already available in many classrooms and numiknow® clubs.

The educational value reaches even further. Coding is not only about computers. At its heart, coding teaches learners how to think clearly, solve problems step-by-step, test ideas and adapt when things go wrong. These



Caption: The row of four dominoes code the path on the obstacle course from Start to Finish.

are the same skills needed in mathematics, science, engineering, many future careers and life as we know it.

This is where numiknow® fits naturally into the 4IR conversation. By combining physical play with logical thinking, learners build confidence in mathematical and computational thinking long before they touch a

robot or computer screen.

In a world increasingly shaped by technology, the humble domino may become one of the most powerful learning tools in a rural or any other classroom. Because sometimes the road to robotics starts with a simple game.

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

Left number	Command to be executed first (Direction-determining token)	Right number	Command to be executed second
OBSTACLE COURSE – Start / Check point / Finish (1-1 to 9-9 dominoes)			
1	Move forward	1-9	Number of blocks
2	Move backwards	1-9	Number of blocks
3	Turn left 90° and move forward	1-9	Number of blocks
4	Turn right 90° and move forward	1-9	Number of blocks
5	Turn 180° and move forward	1-9	Number of blocks
6	Jump up, stay in air, move forward and land	1-9	After number of blocks
7	Jump up, stay in air, move backwards and land	1-9	After number of blocks
8	Turn left 90° and move backward	1-9	Stop at the end of the row
9	Turn right 90° and move backward	1-9	Stop at the end of the row

Estate Planning Top of Mind in 2026

2026 arrived and is now almost half-way through. We are by now well on our way to our fitness goals for the year, have enjoyed a well-deserved break over Easter after a fast paced and eventful first quarter of the year, and we are at the point where we must clarify our goals for the rest of the year.

One of your objectives should be to review your estate plan. Are you thinking differently about your long-term objectives in a volatile environment? Have the goal posts shifted? Do some of your family members, close friends, or preferential charities find themselves under financial strain? Are you in a position to assist them in any way? Are your children/grandchildren or godchildren planning to leave school with eyes set on further studies for which they may need financial assistance next year? Do you have an elderly parent who is now alone as his/her life partner passed away, and who needs additional love and care?

If you have not considered the above and the following in your estate plan, you may want to do so now.

Marital regime

Marriage is dissolved not only by divorce, but also by death. If you are married out of community of property with inclusion of the accrual system, your spouse may have an accrual claim against your estate on your death, which is settled before bequests can be paid to your heirs. A spouse may receive the accrual claim, and bequests to them in your will. Your other heirs may receive less than intended by you, because of an accrual claim to be paid first.

Assets outside South Africa

Where your assets are situated and the different laws applicable to them as a result thereof, can pose practical problems in your estate, if not carefully planned for. Succession laws differ between countries. Some countries have forced heirship rules, with the laws dictating who inherits the assets and not your will. The assets may go to unintended persons with possible negative estate tax consequences. For example, if you wanted to bequeath your house in Portugal to your spouse (no estate duty consequences in SA where you are tax resident) it may now have to go to your spouse and children in terms hereof,

with estate duty in SA on the portion going to your children. Some offshore institutions require probate to transfer assets to heirs, and then a separate offshore will is often required to simplify the administration process and avoid unnecessary delays.

Children outside South Africa

Children living and being tax resident in other countries may be unable to externalize the inheritance from you if they have not placed their tax non residency on record with SARS in South Africa. They may also be taxed heavily in their country of tax residency on distributions from a SA trust. Such distributions may also be taxed at higher rates in the SA trust in South Africa.

Minor children

Bequests of assets outside South Africa to a SA testamentary trust for the benefit of minors may have to be repatriated to South Africa for the trust to be able to hold it in terms of exchange control regulations in South Africa. You should nominate guardians to your minor children in your will.

Liquidity in your estate and for your heirs

Administration costs, income taxes (including capital gains tax) and estate duty can cause liquidity issues in a deceased estate, with the effect that assets must be sold or heirs burdened with having to pay cash into the estate to cover for cash shortages, if not planned for.

Delays are experienced in deceased estates in South Africa at present, with approvals required from the Master of the High Court and clearances needed from SARS. You must plan for your heirs to have funds available for their monthly expenses while the estate is being wound up.

Other considerations

Family members with income requirements and needs can be provided for in your will or with nominating them as beneficiaries on assurance or retirement products.

You can provide for the needs of elderly family members with dementia or of family members with special needs in your will as well.

Please email Marteen Michau at marteen@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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Water Crisis - Close to R19bn Lost That Could Have Brought Water into Homes

SA WATER CRISIS

Key Financial Facts | Auditor-General Report 2023/24

TOTAL LOST TO WATER LEAKS

R14.89
BILLION

in 2023/24

PROVINCES WITH HIGHEST WATER LOSSES

- **Gauteng:** R6.9-billion lost
- **KwaZulu-Natal:** R3.45-billion lost
- **Combined:** More than 70% of total national water losses

WATER TANKER EXPENDITURE

- Total spend (59 municipalities):
R2.32-billion
- Identified as irregular expenditure:
R419.49-million

SEVEN WATER BOARDS — COMBINED BUDGET

- Estimated combined expenditure budget:
R223-billion

FINANCIAL IRREGULARITIES

- 55 material irregularities with direct financial impact:
R1.76-billion

Source: Auditor-General of South Africa Report 2023/24 | kruger2canyon.co.za

Lerato Mutsila

Ageing infrastructure, weak governance and poor oversight drive major water losses nationwide, at great cost to taxpayers.

In every corner of South Africa (SA), people have become familiar with the nation's deepening water crisis – from burst pipes, dwindling dams and reservoirs that just don't seem able to keep up with demand to widespread contamination of the valuable natural resource. In many areas, going days on end without water has become the norm.

But the crisis has moved beyond a problem of scarcity caused by drought and unpredictable rainfall to one spurred by infrastructure and governance collapse – and it cost taxpayers R18.98-billion in the 2023/24 financial year alone.

This is according to Auditor-General Tsakani Maluleke's latest report on SA's entire water value chain, which details a severe water crisis characterised by decaying infrastructure, poor governance and a lack of accountability.

Biggest Offenders in Almost R19bn Leak

Unsurprisingly, water losses to leaks, illegal connections and billing failures have cost taxpayers the most money. The latest Green Drop, Blue Drop and No Drop reports released in March by the Department of Water and Sanitation found that roughly 47% of SA's treated water is lost before reaching customers, well above the international average of 30%. In rand amounts, the water losses added up to R14.89-billion in the 2023/24 financial year.

More than half the nation's audited water service authorities have blown past the 30% "acceptable loss" threshold. Leading the charge is Gauteng, with water worth R6.9-billion lost, closely followed by KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) with R3.45-billion. Together, the two provinces accounted for R10.35-billion in losses, representing more than 70% of the national total. In KZN, 92% of its water authorities (12 out of 13) are failing to meet the basic 30% efficiency benchmark.

The anatomy of this collapse isn't found in a lack of rain, but in a chronic lack of care. The Auditor-General's report identified the "four horsemen" of municipal mismanagement that are causing these losses:

- Inadequate maintenance of ageing infrastructure;
- The complete absence of leak detection programmes;
- Broken meters that fail to track consumption; and
- A crippling shortage of qualified technical staff to steer the ship

'Water Tanker Mafia' Crisis – Billions Flow Through Broken System

The South African Human Rights Commission warns that the country's deepening water crisis is no longer just a constitutional failure; it is fueling a shadow economy. At its centre are the so-called water tanker mafia, described by the commission as informal, exploitative networks thriving off communities left without a reliable supply.

What began as an emergency intervention – municipalities outsourcing water delivery to private tankers – has, in many areas, spiralled into a system vulnerable to corruption and

abuse. Criminal syndicates are alleged to secure lucrative contracts through irregular procurement, sabotage infrastructure to prolong demand and, in some cases, charge residents for water that is meant to be supplied at no cost.

The scale of the problem is stark. In the 59 water service authorities, spending on tanker services has ballooned to R2.32-billion, with nearly R420-million flagged as irregular expenditure. Weak oversight and poor internal controls have allowed payments to be made without any proof that services were delivered.

In Limpopo, the Mogalakwena Local Municipality paid R11.36-million for tanker services in 2020/21 without evidence that the water was ever supplied, a scandal that ultimately led to the dismissal of a senior official. Meanwhile, in the Northern Cape, Sol Plaatje Local Municipality's tanker bill doubled to R1.66-million in 2023/24, driven in part by the absence of a proper water services development plan.

Originally intended as a short-term fix, using water tanks has hardened into a costly, entrenched system, one that drains public funds and risks deepening the very crisis it was meant to alleviate.

Billions Lost, Irregularities Deepen Water Crisis

The audit also revealed the staggering cost of mismanagement in SA's water sector, with 55 material irregularities alone accounting for confirmed financial losses of R1.76-billion. These losses stem from systemic failures, including unbilled revenue, payments for undelivered services, poorly protected infrastructure and mounting penalties from late payments.

In total, 131 water-related material irregularities were identified between April 2019 and late 2024, yet only one in five had been resolved at the time of reporting – a sign of deep-rooted dysfunction and weak accountability across municipalities.

Beyond financial losses, the human and environmental toll is severe. At least 76 of these irregularities caused significant harm to communities, largely through the pollution of rivers and groundwater linked to mismanaged landfill sites and failing wastewater systems.

Among the worst cases, the City of Tshwane's Rooiwal wastewater treatment plant has been operating beyond capacity for more than a decade, releasing effluent into the Apies River and Leeuwkop Dam.

In the Eastern Cape, repeated warnings about dam safety at Mthatha were ignored by the water trading entity, culminating in a near-total collapse of local water supply.

In eThekweni, untreated sewage from the Umbilo wastewater works flowed into the Umbilo River, with officials failing to act even after being alerted – prompting the matter's referral to the Department of Water and Sanitation in April 2025.

Where municipalities failed to respond, the Auditor-General escalated interventions, taking remedial action in eMalahleni (Mpumalanga) and Ngwathe (Free State), initiating debt recovery processes in Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality (North West) and referring 51 cases to external authorities.

Given that 8.5 million people have no access to basic water services at all, and some communities face considerable challenges daily and must walk great distances just to get water, the almost R19-billion waste is inconceivable. The Auditor-General found that this poor quality of spending and weak revenue management drains essential capital that could otherwise be used to fix the crisis.

Politicisation of Water Crisis

With local government elections approaching, water is set to be a big deciding factor at the polls. Parties have already begun politicising the water crisis, particularly in Johannesburg, where the DA's Helen Zille has hinged her mayoral campaign on the city's water woes, using highly effective visual tactics like swimming in water-filled potholes, canoeing in flooded streets and joining protests across the city.

As the national water crisis deepens and the amount of money lost to it gets bigger, all eyes are on the newly minted National Water Crisis Committee. In his February State of the Nation Address (Sona), President Cyril Ramaphosa made a move that signalled the gravity of the country's water shortages. He announced the establishment of the committee, a high-level body modelled directly on the National Energy Crisis Committee, which was tasked with ending load shedding and, by all accounts, succeeded.

The National Water Crisis Committee's mandate is a three-pronged strategy designed to bypass the bureaucratic gridlock that has paralysed local government service delivery. The strategy includes:

Coordinated intervention: acting as a "single coordinating body", the committee is empowered to deploy technical experts and resources from the national government directly into municipalities where systems have collapsed.

Legislative teeth: it is tasked with fast-tracking the Water Services Amendment Bill, which would allow the government to strip failing municipalities of their status as water service providers.

Infrastructure investment: the committee oversees the roll-out of the R54-billion performance-linked reform grant, ensuring that water revenue in metros is ring-fenced for repairs rather than being diverted to other municipal expenses.

Cont. on page 9

Fetching Water in South Africa

The distance & time burden for households without piped water at home

73.7%
can fetch water in under 30 minutes
(round trip)

18.4%
spend 31 to 60 minutes daily fetching water

Provincial Breakdown

- **Western Cape:** 100% of households fetch water in under 30 minutes
- **Limpopo:** Only 62% can fetch water within 30 minutes – worst in SA

These figures apply to households without piped water inside their dwelling or yard - forced to collect water from an external source daily.

In Sudan, a Migrant Community Reveals a Resistance to Malaria: The Genetic Study Helping Shape Medicine



David Comas and Laura Vilà Valls

Sudan lies at the crossroads of Africa and the Middle East. It has played a key role in human demographic movements, reflected in the diversity of its cultures and languages. Although much of the country is arid, the Nile River has long acted as a corridor for trade, facilitating human migration through the region for thousands of years.

This makes Sudan a valuable place to study human genetic diversity and evolutionary history, which has important implications for understanding population-specific adaptation and health.

The Copts are a population that migrated from Egypt from the 7th century and mixed with populations in neighbouring regions, but also remained somewhat isolated. Copts are historically distinguished by their Christian faith and their language. In Sudan their numbers are estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands.

As a group of evolutionary biologists, we conducted a genomic study to understand the complex demographic history and identify signals of adaptive selection among Sudanese people. Our research is the first whole-genome sequencing study carried out in Sudan. This is a method scientists use to read and analyse a person's complete DNA, the full set

of genetic instructions, to understand traits, ancestry and disease risk.

Our research covered a total of 125 individuals from five population groups, defined by their language and cultural identity, known as ethnicity.

We found that Sudanese Copts showed unusually high resistance to *Plasmodium vivax*, the most geographically widespread malaria-causing parasite. This protection comes from a genetic variant they acquired after mixing with local Nilo-Saharan people.

Similar examples of recent adaptation to malaria after population mixing have previously been reported in Madagascar, Cabo Verde and Pakistan. But this is the first time such a process has been documented within mainland Africa itself.

The selection signal observed in Sudanese Copts is among the strongest ever detected in humans.

These findings show that strong natural selection can reshape the human genome very rapidly and that recent demographic history is crucial for understanding present-day genetic patterns. These can help explain differences in disease susceptibility across populations, informing medical research and public health strategies.

Human Migrations in the Region

The expansion of Arabic-speaking

people in north Africa started in 639 CE in Egypt and gradually moved southward. It intensified between the 10th and 11th centuries with the migration of Bedouin groups into north Africa and Nubia. By the 16th century, the spread of Arab culture and Islamic faith contributed to the collapse of the last Christian kingdoms in the region.

But some populations remained in more isolated areas and preserved their own languages and cultural traditions. These include Nilo-Saharan-speaking groups in Darfur, around the Jebel Marra mountains, and Kordofanian speakers from the Nuba Mountains.

These mountainous regions also acted as partial genetic barriers. They limited interactions with surrounding populations. Today these populations show little or no genetic influence from the Arab expansion.

Our study confirms this pattern reported in previous studies. With the use of whole-genome sequencing data, our findings further strengthen this insight.

Adaptive Selection to Malaria Protection

Our study indicates that around 1,000-1,500 years ago, the ancestors of Sudanese Copts intermarried with local Nilo-Saharan groups. The geographical barrier is not applied for all Nilo-Saharan speaking groups, only for those from Darfur. Copts could have admixed with other groups with a Nilo-Saharan origin but living in a more accessible area. The individuals from Darfur are the group in our dataset that better represent these ancestors, but that does not mean they are their direct ancestors. Through this mixing, they acquired the Duffy-null allele. This is a genetic variant (one of the different versions of a gene) that is widespread in Africa south of the Sahara.

This allele is a classic example of natural selection in humans, showing strong geographic differentiation between African populations and the rest of the world. The Duffy-null allele prevents the expression of the ACKR1 receptor, a protein found on red blood cells, used by *P. vivax* to enter and infect these cells.

Individuals who have inherited the allele lack this receptor and are therefore protected against this form of malaria.

Because the Duffy-null allele is rare among north African and Middle Eastern groups, it would not be expected to be prevalent in Copts. However, our findings show that about 89% of Sudanese Copts

carry it.

Our study shows that after admixture with local populations; the variant was introduced into the Coptic population. Natural selection meant it was passed down through generations and became more common.

Having the allele gave people a survival advantage in a malaria area. Sudan reported over half million cases of *P. vivax* malaria in 2017. There is little or no information on regional variation, but the presence of the adaptive variant in Darfur does not necessarily mean adaptation occurred there.

This provides a clear example of a genetic population adapting to disease, occurring within the past 1,500 years.

Fixing Africa's Under-Representation

Our study also identified more than one million previously unknown genetic variants, over 1,500 of which may affect genes and their functions. This highlights a major gap in global genomic databases. These are still heavily biased towards people of European ancestry, although Africa harbours the greatest genetic diversity. North Africa, in particular, has often been overlooked.

It's important to know more about the genetic heritage of different populations because, as the Coptic resistance to malaria shows, it can guide medical research and help understand human evolution better.

Although whole-genome sequencing has transformed the study of human health and disease, truly global representation remains essential. Africa, as the birthplace of modern humans, harbours the greatest genetic diversity on Earth and should therefore be a top priority for genomic research.

This study fills important gaps in our understanding of Sudan's and Africa's demographic histories and increases diversity in global genetic datasets. It also shows the importance of including recently mixed populations to obtain a fuller picture of human evolution.

This article was previously published in The Conversation.

David Comas is a Full Professor, Universitat Pompeu Fabra; Laura Vilà Valls is a Researcher, Universitat Pompeu Fabra; both are from the Institut de Biologia Evolutiva (IBE - CSIC - UPF).

Hisham Y. Hassan was a co-author on the article

Cont. from page 8

The committee's "commissioners" are a mix of political veterans: Ramaphosa (chairperson); Minister Pemmy Majodina (Water and Sanitation); Minister Khumbudzo Ntshavheni (Presidency); and Minister Velenkosini Hlabisa (Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs).

'Missing' Plans and Information Requests

Despite the high-stakes launch, the committee is already facing a storm of scepticism about whether it will be successful. ActionSA and the

MK party labelled the committee an "empty promise" and a reactive measure rather than a proactive solution. Other critics highlighted that this committee follows previous failed water task teams, including one led by Deputy President Paul Mashatile, raising doubts about its effectiveness.

During the Sona debate, Ntshavheni promised that a comprehensive water action plan would be finalised by mid-March. However, as April progresses, the plan remains incomplete.

On 2 April, the DA filed a Promotion of Access to Information Act request to the Presidency. The party's spokesperson, Stephen Moore, alleged that parliamentary inquiries had revealed

the committee had not even met by the time the plan was supposed to be finished. The DA's legal move seeks to force the government to "play open cards", demanding the release of the committee's internal minutes, attendance registers and elusive action plan.

All eyes now turn to the scheduled 30 April meeting, where the committee must prove it has a plan that is more than just paper, but actual water in the pipes.

This article was previously published in Daily Maverick/Maverick News/ WATER CRISIS SPECIAL REPORT, and first appeared in the weekly DM168

newspaper.

Editors Comment: The referred to April 30 Extended PCC meeting has since taken place. It was big on theatre and short on substance. Ramaphosa's five principles are sound - accountability, ring-fenced revenue, technical capacity, consequence management, cooperative governance - but principles without deadlines are just good intentions. The sceptics who called this committee an empty promise when it launched have not yet been proven wrong. The political will speech was strong. The measurable commitments were thin. South Africa has been here before.

Alien Invasion

Ben Coley
Celestial Events SA

The recent Ebola outbreak in East Africa is another reminder that pathogens do not need to be highly advanced to be devastating. They simply need access to a population that is unprepared for them.

Once introduced into a new environment, organisms can spread rapidly, overwhelm systems, and leave long-term consequences behind. Biology is full of these moments - not because nature is malicious, but because life is opportunistic.

Across Earth, invasive 'alien' species have shown how destructive they can be when organisms arrive in ecosystems with no evolved defence against them. As humanity prepares for deeper space exploration, scientists are increasingly asking a difficult question: what happens if we accidentally introduce Earth life to another world?

Spacecraft travelling to Mars, Europa, and Titan are not just machines, they are also potential biological carriers. Even with strict sterilisation procedures, complete cleanliness is almost impossible. Life is extraordinarily resilient. Some organisms, like tardigrades, can survive radiation, freezing temperatures, vacuum conditions, and years of dormancy. Even a complex life like lichen has proved it can survive the harsh con-

ditions of deep space. If even a few organisms survive the journey, they may not need much more than the right conditions to spread. On Earth, we already know how badly these introductions can go.

South Africa has numerous examples of alien invasives causing ecological chaos. Water hyacinth, originally introduced as an ornamental plant, now clogs rivers and dams across the country. Thick mats of vegetation block sunlight, reduce oxygen levels in the water, and disrupt entire wetland ecosystems.

Invasive trees such as black wattle and lantana spread aggressively through natural environments, out-competing indigenous vegetation and consuming vast quantities of water. In some regions, invasive alien plants have transformed entire landscapes with devastating effects on biodiversity. These issues are not just related to plants: introduced European house sparrows and common mynas, also compete with native bird species for food and nesting sites.

The pattern is consistent: when a well-adapted organism enters an environment that has not evolved alongside it, disruption follows. With our increasing forays into the solar system and beyond, we must now apply these lessons to space.

Mars may appear barren, but it is not necessarily biologically dead. If microbial life ever evolved there,

traces of it may still survive underground or trapped within ice deposits. Europa and Enceladus, moons of Jupiter and Saturn respectively, contain vast subsurface oceans beneath their icy crusts, isolated for billions of years.

If Earth microbes were introduced into such places, the consequences could be enormous. Terrestrial organisms might outcompete native microbial life before we even discover it. Contamination could also confuse future scientific investigations, making it impossible to determine whether detected life originated on another world or came from Earth, aboard a spacecraft. Human exploration complicates things even further. Humans are ecosystems themselves, carrying trillions of microorganisms on and inside their bodies. Wherever humans go, Earth biology goes too.

As access to space increases, humanity will need to decide whether other worlds should simply become extensions of human activity, or whether they deserve protection as untouched scientific environments. Agencies such as NASA and ESA already spend enormous effort in their 'Planetary Protection' department, developing contamination controls for missions destined for potentially habitable environments, and rightly so.

The irony is striking. We are searching for alien life with unprecedented

sophistication, while simultaneously risking the accidental export of our own.

The recent Ebola outbreak demonstrates how destructive biological spread can be here on Earth. Invasive species across South Africa show how difficult ecological damage is to reverse once it begins, and space exploration may soon force us to confront the same lesson on a planetary, or even galactic scale.

History has shown that ecosystems rarely survive untouched after an alien biological arrival. Perhaps the first life to conquer another world will not be astronauts, robots, or intelligent aliens - but a handful of microscopic Earth bacteria hitching a ride across the Solar System.

Humanity dreams of finding life beyond Earth, but the uncomfortable possibility is that we may destroy it simply by showing up.

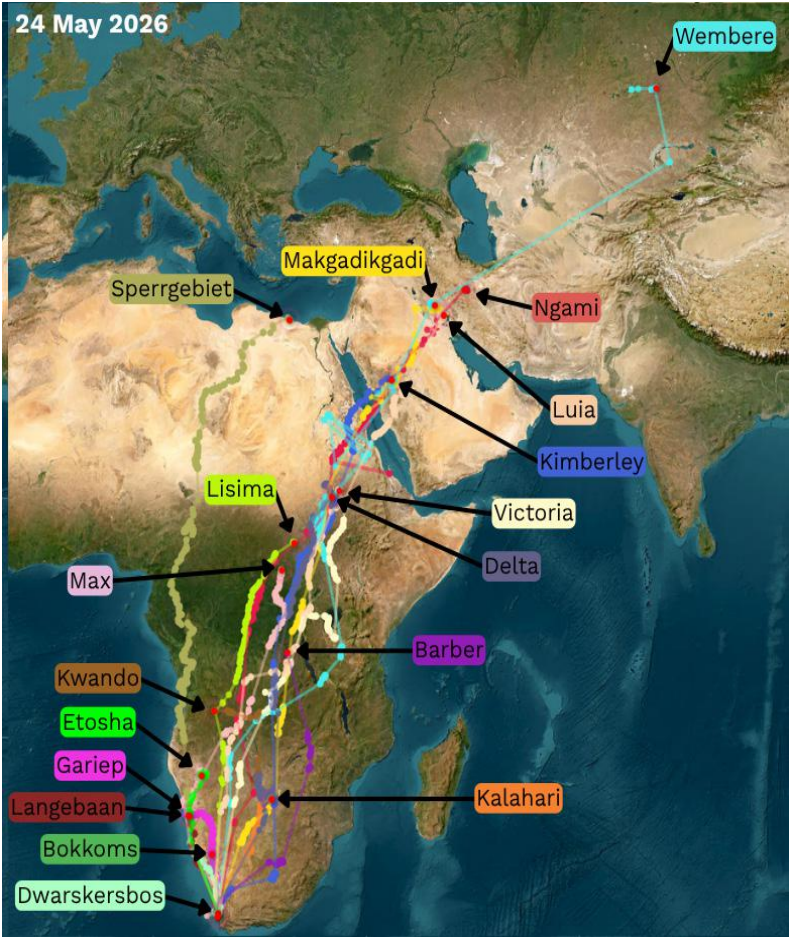
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Water Hyacinth - Wikipedia (above), Planetary Protection - NASA (below left) and Tardigrade - Britannia (below right).



Following the Flyway: Tracking Curlew Sandpipers and Grey Plovers



Curlew Sandpipers and Grey Plovers tracking project data (left), Fieldwork team at work (above) Images Mark Brown

Jessica Wilmot
BirdLife South Africa Flyway and Migrants Project Manager

The Subaru Forester is packed to the roof. Somewhere between bird-ringing equipment, holding pens, field clothes and emergency snacks, we have just enough space left for ourselves. Coffee in hand, we begin the 1,463-kilometre drive to Velddrift on South Africa's West Coast with one objective: to launch BirdLife South Africa's new tracking project on Curlew Sandpipers and Grey Plovers, supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Ecological Restoration Fund (ERF).

Recent Red List assessments classify Curlew Sandpipers as Vulnerable globally and regionally, while Grey Plovers are Near Threatened regionally. Understanding their movements is critical for protecting the wetlands they rely on throughout their lifecycle - from Arctic breeding grounds, across migration routes, to their non-breeding habitats in southern Africa.

From the outset, I knew the project's success would depend on assembling the right team. Colleagues Ward Hagemeijer from Wetlands International, and Bart Kempnaers, Eunbi Kwon and Mihai Valcu from the Department of Ornithology at the Max Planck Institute of Biological Intelligence in Seewiesen, Germany, immediately embraced the collaboration. Deploying tracking devices on long-distance migratory waders is a specialised craft — one largely lacking in southern Africa - and the ethical considerations of trapping, handling and fitting tiny devices to long-distance migrants are significant. An equally experienced group of local researchers completed the team: father-and-son duo Mark and Jesse Brown from Conserve Eden; BirdLife South Africa colleagues Cassie Carstens, Alan Lee and Giselle Murison; and Joel Radue and Robert Thomson from the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town.

After months of planning and more

than a few sleepless nights, the end of February 2026 finally arrived — the first project of its kind in southern Africa. I still remember my third meeting with Ward, during which he patiently walked me through the long list of technical and ethical considerations involved in trapping and tagging migratory waders. By the end of the call, I was equally inspired and quietly panicked. I am grateful that a random email address found on the International Wader Study Group website connected us. Sometimes the most important collaborations start with a slightly hopeful "Hello, my name is Jess, and I work for BirdLife South Africa."

Fieldwork proved intense. Afternoons were spent setting metres of mist nets along the berms of salt pans near the mouth of the Berg River estuary, timed around the new moon when nights would be at their darkest. Using thermal binoculars, we scanned the darkness for birds that might have flown into the nets, conducting checks every thirty minutes - everything done without lights to minimise disturbance. The theory was straightforward: high tides would push birds off their usual roost sites, forcing them to seek refuge at the salt works where they feed during the day. Some nights, the plan worked beautifully. Other nights, we were left wondering where the birds had gone. On a few occasions we stayed awake until dawn trying to capitalise on shifting tides - the Curlew Sandpipers invariably appearing at sunrise, just as we were getting ready for bed, while the Grey Plovers called from the mudflats next to where we were taking down the nets. A cruel joke, one might say.

The rewards, though, were real. For those of us arriving from the glow of Johannesburg, the night sky felt vast and impossibly clear, flamingos and pelicans passing overhead at dusk so close you could hear the swooshing of their wings. And then there was the moment of holding a Curlew Sandpiper for the first time - a bird weighing barely 65g, delicate, alert, and built for journeys spanning

continents. Under the soft glow of a headlamp, measurements taken, early breeding plumage admired, a metal ring fitted and a tiny tracking device carefully secured. After a period in the holding pen to confirm its wellbeing, the bird is released back into the darkness over the salt pans, carrying with it the beginning of a story we hope to follow across the African-Eurasian Flyway.

By the end of ten days, 20 Curlew Sandpipers and three Grey Plovers had been fitted with satellite or GSM tags. Almost immediately, the birds began revealing new information: two Curlew Sandpipers moved south to Langebaan, where they remain; another began travelling northeast through Africa days after tagging and is currently in the Sudd marshes of South Sudan. At the time of writing, five Curlew Sandpipers are on the move, while all three Grey Plovers remain around Velddrift, regularly commuting between the De Plaat mudflats and the commercial salt pans.

Like the European Roller tracking project, this work is about more than science - it is about storytelling, using the movements of individual birds to reveal the extraordinary importance of inland and coastal wetlands and inspiring others to help protect them. By the time fieldwork ended, complete strangers had become friends, bonded by a shared commitment to protecting the delicate, interconnected web of the natural world.

Somewhere out there tonight, the birds we tagged are resting along the West Coast mudflats, preparing for journeys that will carry them thousands of kilometres across continents and oceans. As we begin our own long drive home - the Subaru considerably dirtier, its occupants a little quieter - those journeys have already begun to unfold, one data point at a time.

This project would not have been possible without the dedication of all our collaborators, and we are deeply grateful to Cape Salts for allowing us access to their properties.



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Five Guides. One Calling. No Ordinary Story.



Samantha Snodgrass



Phumzile Kepe



Otto Scribante



Jordan Davidson



Sarah Barrett

They came from Manchester, Pretoria, Johannesburg, Uitenhage and the open sea. What brought them all to the same place - and to the finals of Safari Guide of the Year 2026 - is anything but a straight road.

There's a question that get asked at every guide of the year competition, in every format, in every language. It sounds simple. It isn't. The five finalists of Safari Guide of the Year 2026 each have an answer. None of them are the same. All of them are true.

Sarah Barrett didn't get here the conventional way. She came from Manchester on a two-week volunteer placement, armed with a degree in Government and Politics and the very sensible intention of padding her CV. Crompton House had produced many things. A bush guide was not supposed to be one of them.

But Sarah was always the kid in front of the television, wide-eyed at Africa. The kid who already knew the names of all the animals while her classmates were still figuring out the difference between a cheetah and a leopard. The politics degree made sense in theory - she'd convinced herself that conservation's battles were won in committee rooms.

Then a lion mock-charged her on foot. Looked at her. And walked away.

"The lion viewed me as part of the ecosystem," she says. That was it. The penny didn't so much drop as crater. She never went home.

She's been in the bush ever since and is currently at Thornybush Game Reserve, and if you ask her for a single wildlife moment that still catches her off guard, she'll tell you about the fireflies. She'd stayed behind to pack up sundowner drinks in a valley with a stream running through it. The guests had left. The other guide had left. She doused the fire with a bucket of water and braced for darkness.

Instead, the bush lit up. Hundreds - thousands - of fireflies, suddenly visible now that the fire was out. She stood there alone in the middle of it. "It was like a fairy tale," she says.

Her worst moment as a rookie? A friend came to visit and Sarah talked the powers-that-be into letting her take them on a drive. New vehicle. Timber shelter. Excitement. The front door wasn't properly latched. She reversed, the door swung wide, and a timber pole took it clean off. "All I could hear was the crumpling of metal," she says. She switched off the engine, sat in silence for five minutes, and then got out to face the music.

She'd choose to be an elephant if she had to pick (from lion, leopard or elephant) - long life, no worries, total dominance. Though she'll quietly admit she'd actually choose a hyena. She didn't explain why.

If not a guide, she'd be a field ranger. And the bush has taught her, simply, that we are part of nature. Not separate from it.

Otto Scribante grew up in Langebaan, went to school at Curro, and was the child who brought home bugs, snakes and scorpions. His mother was not impressed.

He didn't go straight to the bush. He went to sea instead - becoming a professional sailor, and cruising internationally for years. It was a life. A good one, even. Until Ireland had other ideas and ejected him, somewhat unceremoniously, and he came home, took everything he owned, and signed up for guiding school at Ecotraining.

He'd always known he wanted the bush. That was actually the problem. "It was his greatest passion," he explains, "and he was afraid to lose it." Sometimes the things that matter most are the ones you put off the longest. Ireland just forced the issue.

He's been at Singita for the past two years, and the encounter that defines his guiding life so far involves a honey badger and a python in southern Kruger. A honey badger was spotted but spooked by vehicles and retreated into the thicket. Other cars left. Otto and his guests stayed. The honey badger came back out, started digging at a sandy mound - that produced a large python. What followed was a full wrestling match - the kind that had everyone convinced the badger was finished. It wasn't. It grabbed the python just below the head, dragged it off into the thicket, followed by a second honey badger.

His rookie mistake he's keeping for the competition stage. Fair enough.

If he had to be one of the big three, he'd be a leopard - for the agility, the nimbleness, the ability to move through the world entirely on his own terms, without interference.

Sundowners alone over a rowdy campfire. Every time. And the question that exhausts him most is the one he hears constantly: Is this one of the Big Five? No? Then why are we looking at it? If there's a phrase that makes a guide's soul leave his body quietly, that's probably the one.

Not a guide? Mechanical engineer, most likely.

The bush has taught him that everything left alone is perfect, and that everything - and everyone - has its place.

Samantha Snodgrass was born in Johannesburg but grew up in Nairobi. Her grandparents lived in Nelspruit and handed her a bird book when she was four. By the time she got to Randpark High, she already knew the animals. The Kruger was a fixture of every holiday. The bush wasn't an escape for Samantha - it was just where she went and wanted to go.

After school she moved straight into studying wild dog behaviour, then spent time at a rhino orphanage where the fork in the road presented itself: veterinary route or guiding route? It was the guests at the orphanage who made the decision for her. Interacting with the humans who

came to see the rhinos was genuinely hard. She decided if she was going to do this anyway, she was going to do it properly. She went into guiding.

At 27, she's been at Shamwari in the Eastern Cape for a year and a half. The moment that confirmed everything wasn't a dramatic predator sighting. It was a honey badger on a trail in Venetia. Three days of tracking lions. Nothing. Then a honey badger appeared and simply didn't care that they were there - ate, scavenged, lived its best life, completely unbothered by the people sitting watching it for thirty minutes. "That was the best feeling in the world," she says. "To be ignored by a wild animal." To be irrelevant. To just be present. That's the whole thing, right there.

Her rookie mistake is a classic: drove into black cotton soil, got stuck, refused to call for help because she wasn't going to be the confident female guide who needed rescuing. Spent hours getting out of a situation that a single radio call would have resolved. "Pride does not work in the bush," she says. Lesson learned the hard way and retained permanently.

Lion if she had to choose - not for the power, but for the commitment. The social structure, the fierce protection of family, the soft side that exists alongside the ferocity.

Sundowners over a campfire, no hesitation. And the AI-influenced questions are killing her slowly - the giraffe one in particular. Is that giraffe going to pull me out of the vehicle and eat me? Asked more than once. By different people.

If not a guide, she'd be a tracker. And the bush has taught her that there is safety in respect - that if mutual respect exists, a safe outcome usually follows. She believes in that bush juju.

Jordan Davidson is 41, grew up in Swaziland, went to St Albans in Pretoria, and has been at Sanbona for nine years. He is, by most measures, the most seasoned guide in this final.

He studied Tourism and Tourism Operations, then went to France and spent years sailing yachts around the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. He came back to South Africa, took two years at Ulovane in the Eastern Cape, and the bush bit.

What made guiding real for him wasn't a single moment - it was the cumulative experience of creating situations for guests. Of showing people his world and watching them see it for the first time. "The bush is always amazing," he says. "I love teaching people about it."

His most extraordinary encounter is the kind of thing that sounds made up until you hear the way he tells it. A zebra, mid-chase, launched itself over the bonnet of his vehicle - with a lion clamped to its rump. The lion held on. They nearly came into the car. They landed on the other side. The lion then killed the zebra right next to him.

His rookie error was roads. Specifically, roads marked closed that he drove

down anyway. Got deeply stuck in the wet. Had to call the very people who'd told him the roads were closed to come and pull him out. He might still do that!

Elephant, if he's choosing. He comes from a family of six kids and the elephant's social bonds, the way they treat each other, the structure of the family - he understands that from the inside.

Sundowners, hundred and fifty percent. And the question that still makes him want to quietly disappear into the treeline: Do elephants eat meat? Is that why they're so big?

If not a guide, conservation ranger. And the bush has taught him to always be prepared, and to expect the unexpected.

Phumzile Patrick Kepe grew up in Uitenhage, went to school in Dispatch, and came to the bush the way many great guides do - through the back door. He didn't grow up knowing the names of all the animals. He grew up glued to National Geographic every Sunday. He visited his uncle at Shamwari for three weeks. He didn't go back home.

That was thirteen years ago. He's been at Shamwari ever since, and the moment that set the course was watching another guide pick out a rhino at extraordinary distance. Patrick asked how. The guide tapped his eyes: "Ranger's eyes". From that day on, that's what he wanted. The ability to see what others couldn't.

His most emotional encounter was a newborn elephant - still blood-stained, barely minutes old, deep in a thicket surrounded by the herd. Then a rumble. The elephants parted. The mother walked the calf out of the thicket towards him, stopping about two metres from where he was parked. Held the moment. Then turned and walked back. "It was as if she was introducing the calf to me," he says.

His rookie error follows a familiar template: drove somewhere he shouldn't have, got stuck, fifteen minutes from the lodge, with honeymooners on the back expecting the world. They were collected. The drive did not continue. The honeymooners were understanding, or weren't - either way, the lesson stuck.

Elephant again, if choosing - for the family, the intellect, the resilience. He believes elephants are the true kings of the jungle.

Here's where Patrick breaks from the group, though: he'd choose the rowdy campfire over the solitary sundowner. He needs the energy of guests.

The question that finishes him is deceptively simple. After a sighting - any sighting - guests ask again - and again. What was that? The same animal. Same question.

If not a guide, he'd be a lawyer. And the bush has taught him that for everything, there is a reason for existence.

Five finalists. Five roads in. One competition. Safari Guide of the Year 2026 - watch this space.

Boundaries that Preserve the Whole



Andrew Paterson
Philosafaris.com

Every year, nearly two million wild herbivores cycle through the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem spanning Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa on the greatest terrestrial migration on earth. This isn't one undifferentiated river of life. It's a sequence - a modular procession of species, each occupying a distinct role. Zebra are the first to move, cropping the tall upper inflorescences of the grasses. Wildebeest follow days later, grazing the mid-level leaves exposed by the zebra's work. Thomson's gazelle trail behind, selecting the short, protein-rich regrowth and low-growing forbs revealed by both preceding waves. Each species processes the grassland differently, and the temporal separation between them creates boundaries - modules within the migration - that prevent direct competition from collapsing the system.

This is modularity in action: Brian Walker's third attribute of Social-Ecological Resilience. Where diversity asks *what elements* exist in a system, and variability asks *how those elements respond* to changing conditions, modularity asks *how those elements are connected* - and, critically, where the boundaries between them lie. In Walker's framework, resilient systems consist of modular components: sufficiently connected to function as a whole, yet sufficiently partitioned that failure in one part doesn't cause the entire system to collapse.

In Nature, in special forces teams, and in our own lives, the question is never simply whether we're connected - it's whether we're connected in ways that contain damage or conduct it.

The Fire Mosaic and the Nylsvlei Floodplain

The Kruger National Park in the Eastern Lowveld of South Africa offers one of the most vivid illustrations of modularity's power. Since 2002, Kruger's fire management has moved away from the old rotational block-burning approach - that treated the landscape as a single uniform system to be managed on fixed schedules - toward patch-mosaic burning. Section rangers now set early-season fires that break the veld into a patchwork of burned and unburned areas. The result is a landscape of modules: recently burned patches offering min-

eral-rich ash and nutritious regrowth sit alongside unburned refugia where cover-dependent species shelter and tall-grass specialists the likes of Tsessebe, Roan and Sable antelope breed. Rocky ridges, riverine thickets, and drainage lines act as natural fire-breaks, containing each burn within its patch.

This modular architecture is the landscape's resilience. When a late-season wildfire - driven by lightning or wind - tears through the park, it encounters a mosaic rather than a continuous fuel load. It burns hot through one patch and dies at the boundary of another already burned earlier in the season. The disturbance is absorbed locally rather than cascading across the whole. Without those internal boundaries, a single ignition under the wrong conditions could consume everything.

Walker's early research at Nylsvlei in the then-Transvaal, documented in *An African Savanna* - co-authored with Robert Scholes - revealed modularity operating at a finer scale. The Nylsvlei floodplain is not a homogeneous wetland but a mosaic of distinct vegetation communities - broad-leaved savannah, fine-leaved Acacia savannah, and seasonally inundated grassland - each responding differently to grazing pressure, fire, and flooding. These vegetation modules function as semi-independent units. Overgrazing in the Acacia savannah doesn't immediately degrade the broad-leaved community. A flood that swamps one grassland zone leaves adjacent higher ground intact. The system's internal partitioning allows it to absorb disturbance piecemeal rather than in totality.

Walker emphasises the danger at both extremes. An over-connected system - where every component is intensely linked to every other - transmits disturbance everywhere at once. But an under-connected system fragments into isolated units that can't share resources or learning. Resilience lies in the balance: connected enough to communicate, partitioned enough to contain disturbance.

The Stoic Architecture of the Mind

The Stoics, characteristically, understood modularity as an internal discipline. Epictetus (4 - 65 AD/CE), born into slavery and intimately familiar with circumstances beyond his command, built his entire philosophy around a fundamental boundary - the *Dichotomy of Control*: the distinction between what is up to us (within our control) and what not up to us (beyond our control). This wasn't mere intellectual categorisation - it was psychological modularity. By maintaining a clear partition between the domain of his own judgements, choices, and responses on one side, and the domain of external events, other people's actions, and fortune's whims on the other, Epictetus ensured that disturbance in one domain would not cascade through the other.

"Make the best use of what is in your power," he taught, "and take the rest as it happens." This is compartmentalisation with purpose - not rigid disconnection, but a deliberate architectural choice about where the firebreaks in one's psyche should lie.

Marcus Aurelius (121 - 180 AD/CE) practised the same principle under vastly different circumstances. As Roman Emperor, he faced pressures from every direction - military campaigns, political intrigue, plague, personal grief. *Meditations*, his private diaries, reveal a man who survived by maintaining internal boundaries. He could grieve the loss of his children without allowing that grief to paralyse his capacity for governance of the empire. He could acknowledge the corruption of those around him without allowing cynicism to corrode his commitment to justice. Each psychological domain remained connected to the others - he was no dissociated automaton - but the boundaries between them were sufficiently robust that strain in one area didn't collapse his whole self.

Modularity in Special Forces Teams

In the special operations community, modularity operates at two critical levels: the structural and the psychological.

At the team level, small units are inherently modular by design. Deep reconnaissance missions usually operate in pairs or a stick of four, each capable of independent action whilst remaining part of the larger element. This structural modularity ensures that if one individual or pair is compromised, pinned down, or separated, the remainder can continue to function. Typically, a team is comprised of specialists: team leader with HF radio, a medic - sometimes even a doctor, machine gunner, and an expert tracker; but each member is thoroughly trained in every element. The team doesn't collapse because one component is under strain. Crucially, this also applies to emotional contagion: conflict, fatigue, or strain within one module does not automatically contaminate the entire unit. Operators cultivate norms that allow private processing, compartmentalised debriefs, and temporary withdrawal without stigma. A team in which every member's emotional state is immediately transmitted to every other member is as dangerously over-connected as a savannah without firebreaks - one person's bad day becomes everyone's crisis.

Within the individual, modularity becomes even more critical. Operators must maintain distinct cognitive and emotional spaces - separating operational identity from family identity, mission focus from personal concerns, professional role from private self. The operator who cannot draw these internal boundaries, who allows a difficult inter-personal relationship to affect tactical decision-making, or who

lets mission outcomes define personal worth, is vulnerable to precisely the cascading failure that modularity is designed to prevent. Mental resilience improves when an individual can recognise: *this part of me is strained, but my system still functions as a whole*.

The danger lies in extremes. Hyper-modularity - psychological compartments so rigid that nothing passes between them - creates its own pathology. Soldiers who wall off their combat experiences so completely that they become inaccessible to reflection or relationship risk dissociation and identity fragmentation. They function, but they don't integrate. They survive operations, but they can't process them.

What resilient operators develop is better described as *flexible compartmentalisation*: the ability to create temporary boundaries that protect critical functions whilst maintaining pathways for integration and holistic processing when it's safe to do so. The firebreak holds during the blaze, but once the fire passes, the landscape reconnects.

A Mosaic, Not a Monoculture

Walking through the African bush, you experience modularity instinctively. The landscape isn't uniform - it's a mosaic. Dense riverine forest gives way to open grassland, which yields to rocky hillside, which transitions to mopane woodland. Each zone has its own character, its own inhabitants, its own rules of engagement. You adjust as you move between them. Your attention shifts. Your pace changes. Your risk assessment recalibrates. This is how resilient systems are structured. Not as seamless, borderless wholes where everything affects everything else simultaneously, but as connected yet bounded components where disturbance can be absorbed, contained, and processed without overwhelming the entirety.

Walker's third attribute asks a deceptively simple question of any system: *Is this becoming more fully connected, or are there parts that are becoming too isolated, or too loosely linked?* The answer matters enormously - because a system without boundaries is a system without resilience. And a system with boundaries too rigid is a system that cannot learn.

The Serengeti migration works not because all grazers move as one, but because each occupies its own module within the whole - connected by the grassland they share, separated by the timing and manner in which they move through it. The savannah burns in patches, not in totality. The mind that endures does the same. Next month, the fourth attribute of Social-Ecological Resilience: Slow Variables.

If you want to get hold of Andrew you can email him on 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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						1		3
		2					4	
	8	6		9	4			
		9		6	2			
5	2							
	3			2	6	5		
4		5	1		3			
	7		9					1

1	9	3	5	4	6	8	7	2
2	6	8	3	7	1	5	9	4
4	7	5	9	2	8	1	3	6
6	3	6	8	1	7	4	2	5
8	5	4	2	9	3	6	1	7
7	1	2	4	6	5	9	8	3
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Lady Godiva's June Forecast: Results Don't Lie



June is a month of outcomes. What's been building over the past few months begins to show - in work, relationships, finances, and personal direction. This isn't about judgement. It's about evidence. Where you committed and followed through, there's progress. Where you hesitated or avoided, things feel stuck or exposed. The key in June is not to react emotionally to what shows up. Treat everything as information. Results - good or bad - are simply feedback pointing you toward what needs to be adjusted.

There's power in this kind of clarity. Once you see what's working and what isn't, your next move becomes far more effective.

Taurus (20 April – 20 May)

Financial or practical realities come into sharper focus this month. What felt manageable before now needs a more deliberate structure. When you face things directly and make the necessary adjustments, stability begins to return. Avoiding it only prolongs the pressure.

Gemini (21 May – 20 June)

Follow-through becomes visible - both to you and to others. Where you stayed consistent, things begin to move; where you didn't, the gaps show. This is an opportunity to tighten your approach rather than start over. Credibility builds from what you complete, not what you start.

Cancer (21 June – 22 July)

Emotional decisions made earlier now reveal their impact. You may find yourself reassessing how much you've taken on or tolerated. Clarity comes when you separate what's yours from what isn't. Stronger boundaries restore balance.

Leo (23 July – 22 August)

Recognition begins to follow responsibility. Where you've stepped up, it shows - and so does anything you've avoided. This is a moment to own both the wins and the gaps without defensiveness. Growth comes from honesty, not image.

Virgo (23 August – 22 September)

The systems you've put in place are now being tested. What works will prove itself; what doesn't will need refining. This isn't failure - it's useful data. Small, precise adjustments will have a big impact.

Libra (23 September – 22 October)

Decisions made recently start to settle, bringing either relief or clarity. If something still feels unresolved, it likely hasn't been fully addressed. There's an opportunity to correct course without overcomplicating things. Simplicity restores your sense of balance.

Scorpio (23 October – 21 November)

Your influence strengthens quietly as outcomes begin to align. What you've handled with patience now starts to pay off. There's no need to force anything - the results speak for themselves. Continue to move with precision.

Sagittarius (22 November – 21 December)

Freedom starts to look different once responsibility is applied. Where

you've committed, doors begin to open in a more grounded way. If something feels limited, it may require a more structured approach. Discipline expands your options.

Capricorn (22 December – 19 January)

Long-term effort begins to show tangible results. Even if progress feels slow, it's real and sustainable. There's a quiet confidence that comes from knowing your work is paying off. Stay consistent - you're building something solid.

Aquarius (20 January – 18 February)

Ideas meet reality this month. What works gains traction; what doesn't needs refining or releasing. This is not a setback - it's clarity. Grounding your vision makes it far more powerful.

Pisces (19 February – 20 March)

Your intuition proves accurate in ways that are hard to ignore. Situations begin to confirm what you already sensed. There's strength in trusting yourself without needing external validation. Act on what you know, not what you hope.

Aries (21 March – 19 April)

You're seeing the outcome of recent decisions, and some of them may not have landed as expected. Instead of reacting quickly, take a step back and assess what actually worked and what didn't. There's strength in adjusting your approach rather than pushing harder in the same direction. When you respond with clarity instead of impulse, your momentum returns quickly.

Hot Tips for June

Results are feedback - not judgement. Own what shows up, without excuses. Adjust quickly, don't over-react. Clarity is more valuable than comfort

Lady Godiva

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My 5 Sent

Oupa Bobbili

Vadersdag se beurt die maand. As ek terug dink aan my jare saam met my "Dad" dan mis ek hom erg vandag. Mis sy stilte en sy hinkel, mis sy reuk van Blue Stratos en Old Spice, en sy lag. Mis die tye wat hy my geleer het van sport en katterkwad, en om respek te hê vir 'n vrou.

My skiet, selfverdediging en hoe om te bestuur geleer. Van jag tot slag, en my voorberei vir diensplig. Kan baie bladsye vol skryf van die dinge wat hy my geleer het, en my self laat leer het, deur ervaringe. Hy het gehinkel, sodoende was hy 'n man van min woorde gewees. Het sy voordele en sy nadele gehad. Die een nadeel was as hy my pakslae gegee het moes ek self besluit waarom dit gegaan het. Teen die tyd wat hy verduidelik het was ons al twee al ouer gewees.

Een van die dinge wat hy my geleer het wat ek nooit sal vergeet nie, is wie God is en wie die mens is. Wat het jy van jou pa geleer? Waar staan jou pa in jou siels lewe? Maklik beweeg ons weg van ons ouers af en dink hulle was nie goed vir ons nie. Maklik praat ons nonsens van hulle. Maklik vergeet ons hulle rolle in ons lewens.

Kom die dag wat hulle asems breek dan tjank ons die ogies so rooi soos 'n stopstraat teken. My ouers is nie meer met ons nie. Hulle word daaglik ge-

mis, maar ek lag lekker daaroor want ek weet hulle is veilig. Jou Vader se rol is groter as wat ons besef. Hulle wys liefde, hulle bied liefde en hulle beskerm deur liefde. Hulle tugtig as gevolg van liefde en glimlag omdat jy groei in liefde.

Jy moet kan sterk en sag wees op die dieselfde tyd. Jy moet kan hard en ferm wees terwyl jy glimlag. Jy moet karakter bou en leiers eienskappe toon terwyl jy nog steeds self-leer om die beste weergawe van jouself te wees. Jy moet weet wanneer om kwaad te toon en wanneer om rustig te wees. Jy moet al die goed kan doen terwyl jy self binne in wil breuk van moegheid en stres, net omdat jy jouself op die spel plaas.

Daar is 'n mite wat sê "cowboys don't cry" en dit is absolute nonsens. My Pa het my geleer hoe om te lag en hoe om te huil. Kennis, wysheid en insig is die driepoot van emosionele intelligensie en Vaders het daardie een bemeester. Sonder enige pa sou geen vrou ooit die titel van ma kon kry nie. Wees dankbaar vir jou pa. Hy is die enigste een wat jou as kind kon moontlik maak.

As ek kon sou ek nog net een dag saam my "Dad" wou spandeer. Al is dit net om vir hom te kan sê ek is trots om sy seun te wees. Wees lief vir jou pa en geniet sy wysheid, kennis en insig. Groete.

EcoTraining Wins Innovation Award



Brett Heasman, General Manager

EcoTraining, Africa's pioneer in field guide and wildlife education, scooped the Innovation Award at Africa's Travel Indaba in Durban last week.

The recognition in Indaba's Inspirational Awards rounds off a landmark 12 months for the EcoTraining team. In the past year, EcoTraining became the first and only field guide training provider in South Africa to offer university-level NQF5 qualifications accredited by the Council on Higher Education. In September, it was named Best Edu-

cation Study Abroad Provider at the 2025 Global Youth Travel Awards in Lisbon.

Now, South African Tourism has recognised the organisation for innovation in conservation education through its Inspirational Awards.

Bringing the bush to a global audience

Over 33 years, EcoTraining has trained more than 17,000 people from 33 countries at its immersive, unfenced camps in South Africa, Botswana and Kenya. Its graduates lead safaris across the continent. Close to a thousand have come from China alone, returning home as guides and guardians of the African wilderness.

The Indaba judges recognised the way EcoTraining is opening the world of conservation to people who can't always reach the bush. In 2023, it launched the Online Field & Trails Guide Programme, making FGASA-accredited training available anywhere through virtual classrooms, live lectures and field videos, with the option to follow up with an immersive in-camp practical.

Other online courses, including the newly launched *Inside the Pride*, which explores the evolution, ecology and

behaviour of lions, allow guides, wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists to broaden their knowledge and safeguard Africa's vulnerable species and natural heritage - alongside courses in ecology, wildlife photography, birding and tracking, designed for travellers who want to add more onto a traditional Big-5 safari.

Recognition with a wider message

The Indaba Inspirational Awards honour innovation, inspiration, empowerment, and excellence across African tourism, and the recognition means a great deal to the entire team.

"Three achievements in a single year tell us something bigger is happening," says EcoTraining's MD, Anton Lategan. "People want travel that means something. They want to understand the places they visit and leave them better than they found them. Our job is to keep building the courses, camps, guides and advocates that make that possible."

EcoTraining has delivered guide training in eight countries over the last year and is honoured to train the safari guides of A&K Sanctuary, Londolozi, Great Plains Botswana, the Female Nature Guide Training Programme of



Anton Lategan, Managing Director
EcoTraining
Images supplied

African Bush Camps Foundation, and many other top safari organisations. Alongside this, EcoTraining's wider course range continues to grow, with career courses for school leavers, guides, career-changers, gap year students, mature learners and lifelong conservationists, online and in the bush.

Ecotraining's contact details are: +27 (0)13 752 2532 or email to enquiries@ecotraining.co.za



WAGTERS Fees 2026

BOSVELD VILLAGE, R40

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



5 SEPTEMBER 2026

ARTIST LINE-UP & EXPERIENCES

- **Martin Bester** from Jacaranda FM
- **Rugby on Big Screen** (Springboks vs. All Blacks)
- **Ross Learmonth** (former lead singer of Prime Circle)
- **Jakkals Vibes** performance live on stage

Fundraising Auction, Artisans, Crafters, Food Vendors, Kids Entertainment, Beer Tent, DJ, Shuttle Service, Wagters Market

Camping chairs and cooler boxes allowed

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