



Parsons Nature Reserve Newsletter – February 2025 Edition

Dear valued members

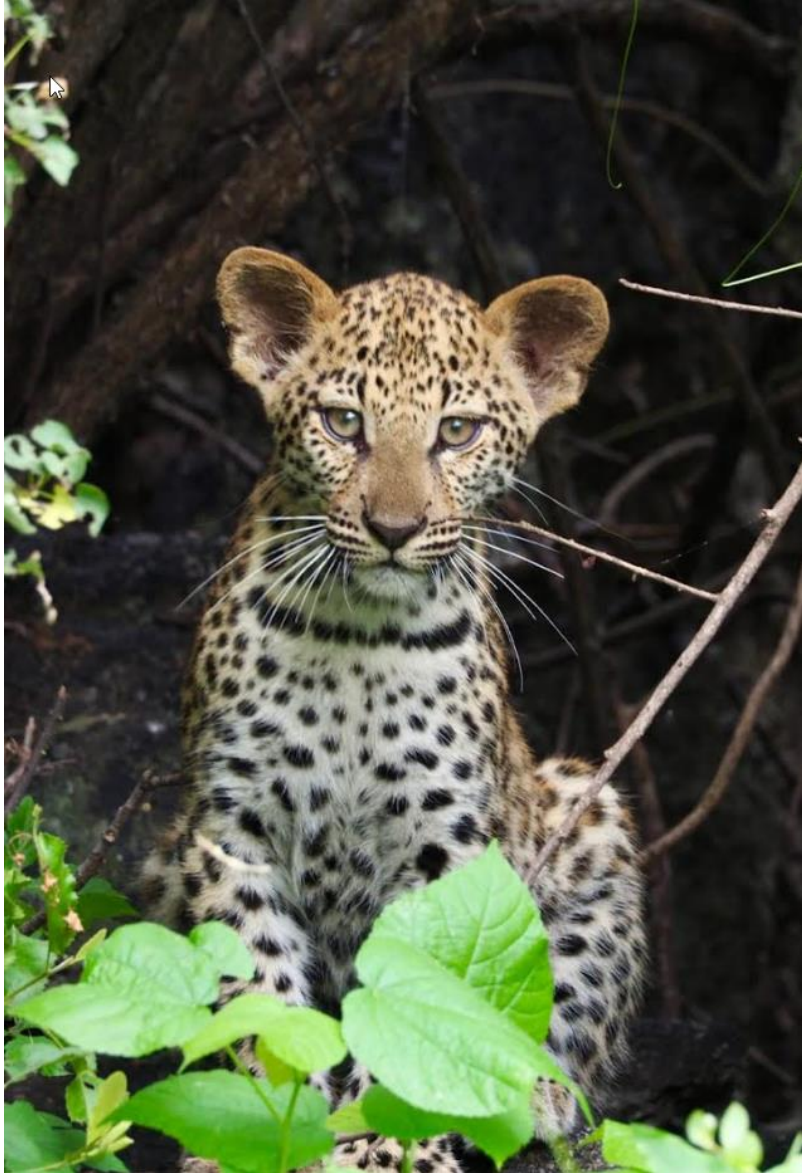
As the land drinks deeply from the gift of rain, life stirs with newfound energy. The bush bursts into a tapestry of green, rivers weave their way through the wilderness with steady purpose, and wallows glisten under the sun's gaze. The air is alive - the song of birds rings through the trees, insects buzz in a rhythmic chorus, and the earth itself seems to hum with quiet gratitude. In moments like these, we are reminded of our fortune - to stand as witnesses and guardians of this wild sanctuary, where Parsons Nature Reserve moves to its own timeless rhythm, unbridled and free.



In this time of renewal, we have come to realise that an original way need not be complicated. In fact, it is in its simplicity that its beauty lies. Nature does not demand from us; it simply invites us in. It calls us to remember the old ways, to awaken the part of us that longs for adventure, for true connection, for a life in harmony with the rhythms of the earth.

So, let us lay aside the distractions of modern life, if only for a moment, and listen...truly listen, to what nature is whispering to us. If you feel the pull to be in the wild, whether alone, with family, or with kindred spirits, answer that call. Wherever you are, in whatever way you can, seek out the old new ways. Allow yourself to be cared for by nature's embrace. Eat nourishing food, breathe deeply under the vast African sky and sit beneath the wise shade of ancient trees. Strip away the barriers between yourself and the wilderness. Gather around the warmth of a fire, speak of your lineage, your journey and share your spirit with wild generosity.

Here, in this sacred place, we are not just visitors, we are part of something greater. We are custodians, protectors, and most importantly, we are human beings deeply connected to the land. Let us celebrate this blessing, cherish it and carry its wisdom with us in our hearts.



Latest sightings

🌿 🐾 Wildlife Sightings – Monthly Update 🐾 🌿

This month has been nothing short of spectacular, with thrilling encounters and nature's finest on display!

A New Generation Begins: Some sightings are so rare, so extraordinary, that they deserve to stand alone. This month, that moment arrived, a **leopard cub** was spotted in the reserve, a tiny yet powerful symbol of hope for the future.

Leopard cubs face **immense survival challenges**, with only **30-50% making it to adulthood**. Born helpless, they rely entirely on their mother's skill to keep them hidden from predators and rival males. Each day this cub survives is a victory against the odds.



This sighting is more than just beautiful, it proves our ecosystem is thriving. If this little one makes it, it will grow into a powerful predator, shaping the wild for years to come. For now, we celebrate this fragile, precious life, knowing it deserves the spotlight.

Painted Wolves on the Prowl (*Lycaon pictus*)

A pack of five inquisitive African wild dogs were around No. 57 and later reappeared near Sangasava. These highly social and strategic hunters are known for their incredible stamina, capable of chasing prey for several kilometers without breaking pace!

The Great Marula Heist (*Loxodonta africana*)

With marula season in full swing, elephants have been sneaking into lodges, unable to resist the sweet golden fruit. These gentle giants have a strong memory and can recall marula trees' locations year after year!

The Orion Pride King on Patrol (*Panthera leo*)

The dominant Orion Pride male was seen marking his territory, reinforcing his claim over his vast kingdom. Lions' scent markings can last for days, warning rivals to steer clear!



Ezulwini, the Iconic Tusker (*Loxodonta africana*)

The legendary Ezulwini was seen in all his majesty along the mighty Olifants River, his towering tusks a reminder of Africa's great giants. With fewer large tuskers left in the wild, each sighting is a humbling privilege.

The Watchful Guardian (*Panthera pardus*)

The ever-present "Question Mark" male leopard was spotted overseeing his domain with his signature stealth and poise. Leopards rely on their exceptional night vision, which is seven times better than humans, making them formidable nocturnal hunters.

The One-Tusked Titan in Musth (*Loxodonta africana*)

A powerful bull elephant in musth made his rounds, asserting dominance with heightened aggression. During musth, testosterone levels can be up to 60 times higher, making these bulls unpredictable and more likely to charge!

Graceful Giants Browsing the Canopy (*Giraffa camelopardalis*)

Giraffes were seen stretching their necks to pluck the juiciest leaves from towering trees. Did you know their prehensile tongues are up to 50 cm long and covered in tough papillae to protect them from thorny branches?



More Wild Dog Wonders!

Another incredible sight of wild dogs at Balule Junction, proving how fortunate we are to witness these rare predators. With less than 6,000 left in the wild, every sighting is a special one!

Raindrop-Kissed Webs of the Garden Orb Spider (*Argiope spp.*)

These skilled weavers were seen hanging from their silk masterpieces, glistening after the welcome rains. Their webs can be over a meter wide and are often rebuilt daily for efficiency!

The Hairy Hunter: Jumping Spider (*Salticidae family*)

This tiny yet fascinating arachnid was spotted with its keen eyesight—one of the best among all spiders. Jumping spiders don't use webs to catch prey; instead, they leap up to 50 times their body length to ambush unsuspecting insects!



A Rare Glimpse: Cut-Throat Finch (*Amadina fasciata*)

A seldom-seen Cut-Throat Finch made a brief but exciting appearance. These birds get their name from the dramatic red band on males' throats, a striking contrast to their otherwise subtle plumage!

An Underground Predator: Rough Burrower Scorpion (*Opisthophthalmus spp.*)

This remarkable scorpion, adapted for burrowing, was seen emerging from its sandy hideout. Their sting packs a punch, but their real power lies in their strong pincers, often used more than their venom to subdue prey.

The Orion Cubs Growing Strong

The Orion Pride's cubs are growing fast and were seen playfully tumbling along the main road, honing their hunting skills through mock battles.

Stay tuned for next month's update, and may your own adventures bring you face-to-face with nature's wonders!

Giant Velvet Mite



Did you know that the giant velvet mite only appears after rainfall? These bright red arachnids seem almost out of place as they scatter across the damp ground like tiny, living ornaments. As the largest mites in the world, they are fierce predators, primarily hunting termites. Interestingly, they have no known natural enemies, perhaps because their vivid coloration serves as a clear warning: *Do not eat!*

For the love of research, one curious researcher put this to the test, bravely tasting a velvet mite. The result? A tough, rubbery texture and an intensely bitter, spicy flavour that lingered on the tongue for nearly an hour... definitely not a delicacy!

Despite their widespread presence on every continent except Antarctica, much about these fascinating creatures remains a mystery. So next time it rains, take a moment to look outside, you might just spot a giant velvet mite making its rare and fleeting appearance.





Frogs of Balule: The Tiny Giants of the Bush

When people think of the Balule Game Reserve, their minds often jump to the Big Five—majestic lions, elusive leopards, and towering elephants. But hidden within the reserve's wetlands, seasonal pans, and riverbanks lies a fascinating world of amphibians, creatures just as ancient and important as the giants of the savanna.

Masters of Adaptation

Balule's frog species are highly adapted to the region's extreme climate, thriving in the rainy season and disappearing underground or into deep crevices during the dry months. Many frogs in the reserve rely on temporary water sources for breeding, emerging en masse after summer storms to call, mate, and lay their eggs.

Some Notable Amphibians of Balule

- **Foam Nest Tree Frog (*Chiromantis xerampelina*)** – Often seen in trees overhanging water, these frogs construct foamy nests where their eggs develop safely before hatching into tadpoles that drop into the water below.
- **Banded Rubber Frog (*Phrynomantis bifasciatus*)** – A striking black-and-red frog that secretes toxic skin chemicals, warning predators to stay away. Despite its small size, it's a formidable survivor in Balule's ecosystem.
- **African Bullfrog (*Pyxicephalus adspersus*)** – One of the largest frog species in Africa, this amphibian is a true warrior, capable of burrowing underground to escape the harsh dry season. The males fiercely guard their tadpoles, even digging channels to keep them in water as pools dry up.
- **Painted Reed Frog (*Hyperolius marmoratus*)** – These tiny, beautifully patterned frogs often cling to reeds and emit high-pitched calls at night, filling the reserve with their melodic chorus.

Why Frogs Matter

Frogs are an essential part of Balule's ecosystem, acting as both predators and prey. They keep insect populations in check, serve as food for birds and reptiles, and indicate the health of water systems. Their presence (or absence) can reveal vital clues about environmental changes, making them valuable bioindicators.

So, take a moment to appreciate these small but mighty creatures. Their calls may not be as thunderous as a lion's roar, but in the grand symphony of the wild, they play a crucial role.

Share Your Best Wildlife Photo for the 2026 Parsons Desk Calendar

We are exploring the idea of creating a **2026 Parsons Desk Calendar** featuring 12 of the best wildlife photos taken within Parsons by our members. Thanks to Vera for coming up with this exciting idea. This will be a wonderful way to showcase the incredible biodiversity of our reserve while also giving back to PNR.

If you'd like to participate, we invite you to submit one wildlife photo for consideration. Keeping it to one photo per member will help simplify the selection process.

Once printed, lodges would have the opportunity to sell the calendar directly to their guests, with all proceeds going back into Parsons Nature Reserve.



Please send your photo submission to martin@isambanecamp.com

- I am happy to sponsor the printing of the calendars once the best 12 photos are chosen.

We look forward to seeing your stunning wildlife captures!

Proverb: *"When the spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion."*

This proverb emphasises the power of unity and collective effort. Even small or seemingly weak individuals can achieve great things when they work together. It highlights the importance of cooperation, teamwork, and solidarity in overcoming challenges.

With heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes,

Parsons Nature Reserve