



Parsons Nature Reserve Newsletter – March 2025 Edition

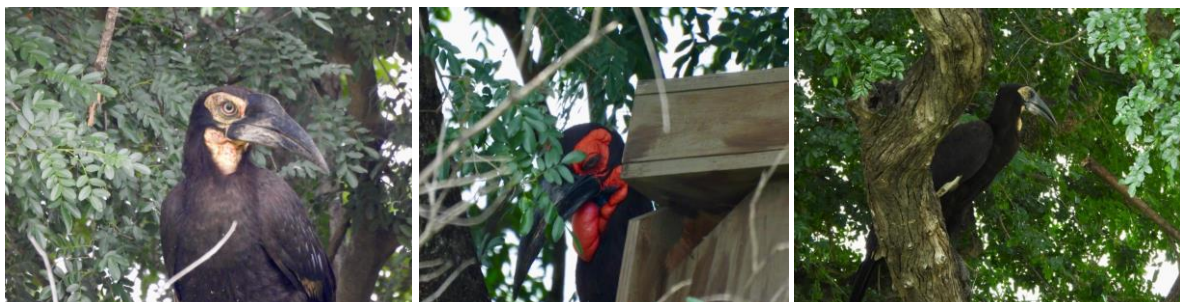
Dear valued members

As the golden hues of the African sun spill over the wilderness of Parsons Nature Reserve, we are once again reminded of the privilege we share in being custodians of this breathtaking land. From the deep, echoing roars of lions at dusk to the delicate dance of countless butterfly species flitting through the bushveld, every moment here is a testament to nature's boundless wonder. This past month has been a celebration of life—elephants gracing the riverbanks, leopards slipping silently through the thickets, and an explosion of vibrant butterflies transforming the reserve into a living canvas of colour. We are profoundly grateful to each of you, our fellow nature lovers, for your passion and commitment to protecting this remarkable sanctuary. Here's to another month of unforgettable wildlife encounters and shared appreciation for this untamed paradise!



Beyond the visible beauty of the reserve, critical ecosystem services such as clean air, fresh water, carbon sequestration, and pollination underpin both human well-being and biodiversity conservation. Protecting these services is essential for resilience against environmental threats. At the same time, we must champion sustainable development initiatives that create meaningful economic opportunities for local communities. By fostering eco-tourism, conservation-based employment, and sustainable land-use practices, we can ensure that the benefits of protecting this land extend beyond its boundaries, strengthening local economies while deepening the commitment to conservation.

Together, through dedicated conservation efforts and a shared vision for a sustainable future, we can safeguard the unparalleled beauty and biodiversity of Parsons Nature Reserve. With your ongoing support, we will continue to protect this remarkable wilderness for generations to come.





Latest sightings

🌿 🐾 Wildlife Sightings – Monthly Update 🐾 🌿

The African bushveld never ceases to amaze, and this past month has been filled with remarkable wildlife encounters. From apex predators to fascinating birds and lesser-seen reptiles, nature has once again put on a spectacular show. Here's a look at some of the other exciting sightings:

Exciting News: Ground Hornbills Inspect Nesting Site!

A remarkable sighting on the northeastern side of Parsons Nature Reserve saw **Southern Ground Hornbills** (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*) inspecting one of our newly installed artificial nesting sites! With breeding season approaching, we're hopeful they'll use it to raise their next chick.

These striking birds are **slow breeders**, producing just **one chick every 7–10 years**, and natural nest sites—large tree cavities or cliffs—are increasingly rare due to habitat loss. Classified as **Vulnerable**, their numbers are declining, making artificial nest boxes **crucial for their survival**.

Providing safe nesting sites has **proven to boost breeding success**, helping restore their fragile populations. Fingers crossed that this group settles in—we may witness a new generation of these incredible birds right here in Parsons!

Hyena on the Prowl (*Crocuta crocuta*) – An early morning sighting of a spotted hyena, moving with purpose through the golden light. These intelligent and highly social carnivores have one of the strongest bite forces of any mammal, capable of crunching through bone with ease!

Double-banded Sandgrouse (*Pterocles bicinctus*) – A pair of these beautifully patterned birds was spotted, blending perfectly with their surroundings. Sandgrouse are known for their remarkable ability to carry water in their belly feathers to their chicks—an incredible adaptation to dry environments!



Elephant Bulls Patrolling the Olifants River (*Loxodonta africana*) – Several massive bulls were seen along the riverbanks, taking advantage of the cool water and lush vegetation. Elephants are known to be ecosystem engineers, shaping their environment by uprooting trees, creating pathways, and even digging for water in dry riverbeds.

Waterbuck Along the River (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*) – Their distinctive white "toilet-seat" markings on the rump make them easy to identify, and they were seen grazing near the water's edge. Waterbucks have an oily, musky-smelling coat that helps repel water—perfect for their semi-aquatic lifestyle.



The Orion Lion Pride at the Tower (*Panthera leo*) – The dominant lions of the area made their presence known, resting near the tower on Parsons Main. Lions are the only truly social big cats, living in prides where females do most of the hunting while males defend the territory.

Hippos Playing in the River (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) – A playful display of dominance and fun, as these heavyweight champions splashed and jostled in the Olifants River. Despite their stocky build, hippos can run up to 35 km/h on land and hold their breath underwater for up to five minutes!

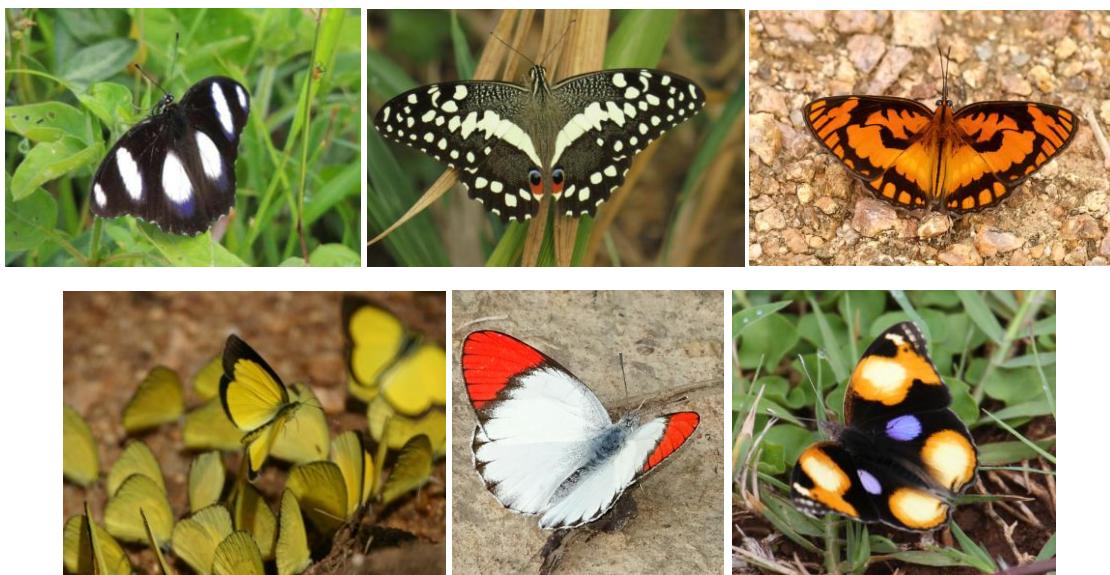
Dagga Boy Grazing Along the River (*Syncerus caffer*) – A lone old buffalo bull, commonly called a "Dagga Boy," was spotted enjoying the lush grasses along the riverbank. These solitary bulls are known for their unpredictable temperament and are among the most dangerous animals to encounter on foot in the wild.

Reticulated Centipede Eater Spotted (*Aparallactus lunulatus*) – A rare and fascinating sighting of this small, secretive snake. As its name suggests, it specializes in feeding on centipedes, using mild venom to subdue its prey. Completely harmless to humans, it is a true specialist in its ecological niche.

Wild Dogs Near Properties 57 and 58 (*Lycaon pictus*) – What a treat! Africa's most endangered carnivore made an appearance, delighting lucky onlookers. Wild dogs have around an 80% hunting success rate - one of the highest of any predator - thanks to their incredible teamwork and stamina.

Every month brings new surprises in Parsons Nature Reserve, and we can't wait to see what the next few weeks have in store. Keep your eyes open and your cameras ready, nature always has something incredible to share!

Butterflies of Parsons



From left to right: Common Diadem (*Hypolimnas misippus*); Citrus Swallowtail (*Papilio demodocus*); Spotted Joker (*Byblia ilithyia*); Broad Bordered Grass Yellow (*Eurema brigitta brigitta*); Scarlet Tip (*Colotis annae*); Yellow Pansy (*Junonia hierta*)



A Fluttering Spectacle:

The Greater Kruger and adjacent private reserves are home to a rich diversity of butterfly species, with over 219 species of butterflies and skippers recorded in the area.

Summer in the Lowveld is a time of transformation, bursting with life, colour, and movement. One of the most enchanting sights during this season is the abundance of butterflies, flitting gracefully across the landscape. At Parsons Nature Reserve, these delicate creatures are not just beautiful—they play an essential role in maintaining the health of our ecosystem.

Seasonal Variations

Many butterflies in the region exhibit seasonal polymorphism—meaning their colours and markings change between the wet and dry seasons to improve camouflage and survival.

Mimicry and Defence Mechanisms

- Some species, like the Diadem Butterfly (*Hypolimnys misippus*), mimic toxic butterflies to deter predators.
- Others, such as the Common Blue (*Leptotes pirithous*), use false eyespots to confuse attackers.

Vital Pollinators

Butterflies help pollinate various native plants, ensuring biodiversity and ecosystem stability. Species like the Citrus Swallowtail (*Papilio demodocus*) are particularly important for pollination.

Incredible Migration

Some butterflies, like the African Migrant (*Catopsilia florella*), undertake long-distance migrations, moving in large numbers across the savanna in response to seasonal changes.

Short but Impactful Lives

While many species live only 2–4 weeks, some migratory butterflies can survive several months. Their entire lifecycle, from egg to caterpillar to adult, plays a crucial role in the ecosystem.

Butterflies as Bioindicators

Butterflies are sensitive to environmental changes, making them excellent indicators of habitat health. A decline in butterfly populations can signal habitat degradation or climate change effects.

These fascinating insects contribute greatly to Parson's biodiversity, ensuring the survival of many plants and providing food for birds, reptiles, and mammals. 🦋

As summer slowly begins to fade, the lush greenery will transition to golden hues, marking the shift toward autumn. But for now, the bushveld is alive with colour, movement, and the delicate dance of butterflies, making the most of the season's final flourish.

Flap-Neck Chameleon

A master of disguise and a mood ring on legs, the Flap-neck chameleon is a favourite to find on safaris, especially during the night drives! It seems like they shine like little lanterns under the



spotlight. When resting on a branch at night, their camouflage changes to a very pale colour making them much easier to spot.

This quirky little reptile changes colour, not mainly for camouflage as you may believe, but for showing off its mood. The colours shift to communicate with rivals, potential mates and nosy humans. When relaxed it usually stays a leafy green colour to blend in with its environment, but once threatened or annoyed, it darkens to a deep green with striking patterns to say, "back off!"

With its zygodactyl feet (fancy talk for "super grabby toes") and a prehensile tail that acts like a fifth limb, it expertly navigates the treetops like a slow-motion acrobat. But the real showstopper? Its ballistic tongue, which can shoot out at an incredible speed, snatching unsuspecting insects with impeccable accuracy.

So the next times you're out on a night safari, be sure to keep an eye on the trees, you may see a little pale friend hanging out.



Proverb: "Not everyone who chased the zebra caught it, but he who caught it chased it" encapsulates the idea that while trying doesn't guarantee success, you can't achieve success without putting in the effort.

The proverb's meaning:

The proverb emphasises the importance of perseverance and action. It highlights that simply attempting something, or "chasing the zebra," is not enough to guarantee success. However, without even trying, there's no chance of achieving the desired outcome.

With heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes,

Parsons Nature Reserve