



Dear valued members

As October sweeps across the bushveld, the landscape at Parsons Nature Reserve awakens with the vibrant energy of spring. We have finally experienced our first bit of rain for the season. Although the earth still feels parched, this welcome drizzle has brought a glimmer of hope, and we're optimistic that it marks the beginning of the rainy season. Wildflowers dare to bloom, while resilient green shoots emerge among the knob thorn and marula trees, hinting at the promise of growth.

The bush is abuzz with anticipation. You can almost feel the heartbeat of the wilderness quicken as animals, big and small, revel in the changing season. From the delicate flutter of a butterfly's wings to the rumble of elephants in the distance, the reserve is filled with the whispers and roars of life awakening. It's a season of promise, of new beginnings, and of pure, untamed beauty.

We invite you to share in the wonder of spring at Parsons. Whether it's the thrill of a predator's stealthy hunt, the playful antics of young calves and cubs, or the tranquil moment of a sunset painting the sky in gold, this is a time to reconnect with nature and witness its endless cycle of rebirth. We hope you'll find inspiration, joy, and a deeper appreciation for the wild world that thrives all around us.

Welcome to October at Parsons Nature Reserve – where nature's magic unfolds.



Latest sightings

Wildlife Wonders Unfolding

Cats Everywhere! This month has been extraordinary for cat sightings, with lions and leopards making regular appearances throughout the reserve. Lions have been especially active; a dramatic encounter unfolded when they brought down a baby hippo opposite Maninghi Lodge. For a while, the Orion pride temporarily split, with the male, two females, and two cubs spending nearly a week together and frequently seen by guests on game drives. Now, the pride has regrouped, and we're thrilled to report that all four females and six cubs are back together. Their latest feast? A giraffe kill, spotted recently by a lucky group of visitors.

Amid all the lion activity, the elusive leopards have made their presence known. For the first time, we caught sight of a leopardess with her cub—believed to be around 10 months old. He's still under his mother's care and will likely stay with her for another year before becoming independent. Our resident male, "Question Mark," also made a few appearances, and a female leopard was seen lounging right in front of one of the lodges, indulging in a long, four-hour nap before moving off into the night.



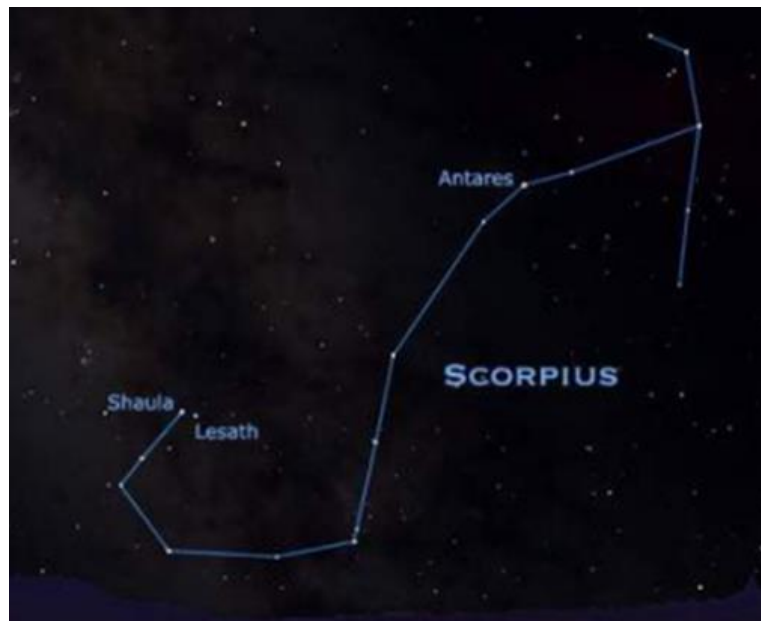
Beyond the thrill of the big cats, there have been plenty of other wildlife encounters to marvel at. Warthogs have been out and about, and elephants have been getting up close and personal, strolling through some members' properties with their usual calm authority. Matabele ants were spotted on the hunt, raiding termite mounds, while giraffes, impalas, and more have added to the vibrant spring atmosphere that makes this season at Parsons so special.

It's been an incredible month for wildlife sightings, and we look forward to more exciting encounters as the bush continues to spring to life.

Night Skies

The night skies are such an important part of a bush experience and the sheer number of stars that can be viewed from the Southern Hemisphere on a dark night, away from city lights, is simply astounding! During the Winter months, Scorpio is the dominant constellation but as summer approaches, its reign over the night sky draws to a close and Orion starts to crest the horizon at sunset. Read on to find out more about the fact and the fiction behind these two seasonal giants.

The Constellation of Scorpio the Scorpion



Scorpio is visible from May to November. It is one of the largest constellations and is one of the few that looks like the name it bears. The most prominent star in this constellation is Antares. It is the 15th brightest star and represents the body of the Scorpion. Antares is a Supergiant Red Star and is one of a pair of stars. The other can only be seen when using a powerful telescope. Scorpio's pincers are made up of 3 stars - Jabbah, Graffias and Omega 1. Marking the tip of the curved tail are Shaula and Lesath both of which mean 'sting'. The constellation was first catalogued by the Greek astronomer Ptolemy in the 2nd century. It is located near the center of the Milky Way and is the 33rd largest in size occupying an area of 497 square degrees.

The Constellation of Orion the Hunter



Orion is visible from November to May in the Southern Hemisphere. It is one of the best-known constellations probably due to ease of finding it in the night sky with prominent 'belt'. The Belt of Orion is made up of three stars - Mintaka, Alnilam and Alnitak. The leg stars - Rigel represents the western knee of the hunter. It is the seventh brightest star and is 900 light years away from Earth. The eastern knee is represented by Saiph. There are three more stars on a slight diagonal, higher in the sky than the Belt that represent the 'sword'. Of these the faint central star - the Great Nebula of Orion - is in fact a small gas cloud that can be seen with the naked eye. Although Betelgeuse is positioned as the shoulder star of Orion, the name means 'the armpit of the giant'. It is the 12th brightest star in our sky. It is a Red Giant, noticeably warmer in colour than our Sun and thousands of times larger. Three dim stars make up the head of Orion - Meissa, Phi 1 and 2. Orion has been known since ancient times. It is the 26th constellation in size, occupying an area of 594 square degrees and it lies on the celestial equator.

The Myth of Scorpio and Orion

In Greek mythology, Scorpio and Orion are separated in the night sky due to an epic battle. Orion, a great hunter, boasted to the goddess Artemis that he could kill every animal on Earth. This angered Gaia, the Earth goddess, who created a powerful scorpion to challenge him. The two clashed fiercely, causing destruction across the land. When their fight neared the city of Crete, the people begged Zeus for help. Answering their pleas, Zeus intervened, separating the rivals by casting Scorpio into the western sky and Orion into the east. To this day, they chase each other across the heavens, forever apart.

Winter is Coming: The Migration Begins

As winter sets in and food becomes scarce, birds from across South-Central Europe, Asia Minor, Russia, and Iran prepare for migration. Among them are European Rollers, which gather to journey to South Africa's lowveld, arriving by mid-December. With their vivid blue plumage and habit of catching large grasshoppers, they are a delight to watch.

These Rollers are just one of an estimated 185 bird species migrating between Africa, Asia, and Europe. Our lowveld summer draws a global array of birds, filling the bush with colour and song. Excitement peaks with the iconic call of the Woodland Kingfisher, signalling the start of summer—so much so that guides and birders even place bets on its arrival date!

But how do these birds navigate such vast distances? **Astrocytes**, a type of glial cell in the brain, play an important, though indirect, role. They support neurons by providing nutrients, maintaining the chemical environment, and aiding in tissue repair. This is crucial for processing and communication in the brain, enabling birds to navigate by interpreting sensory information like the position of the sun and stars, Earth's magnetic fields, and landmarks.

Astrocytes also contribute to brain plasticity, helping birds learn and remember migratory routes, allowing species like Wahlberg's Eagle to return to the same nest year after year. By maintaining neuron health and function, astrocytes help sustain the internal compass that guides birds on their epic journeys—a phenomenon that continues to astound and inspire.

Some birds we can look forward to welcoming to Parsons Nature Reserve this summer:

European Roller / Woodland Kingfisher / European Bee-eater



Fun Facts!

- **Lions' Hunting Challenges:** Did you know that even when hunting in groups, lions are only successful about 30% of the time? When a lone lion hunts, that rate drops to just 17%. They're most successful on dark nights, in dense cover, and when targeting a single prey animal. But many hunts fail because lions often ignore wind direction, approaching from



upwind and alerting their prey too soon. During the day, larger animals like buffalo can even chase them off!

- **Honey Badger Cubs:** Honey badger cubs are born blind and hairless in a den prepared by their mother. She moves them to a new den every 2 to 5 days, carrying them gently in her mouth. The cubs' eyes only open after two months, and at three months, they start exploring outside with their mom, sporting their adult colours. They stay with her for at least 14 months, learning to climb, dig, and hunt before becoming independent.
- **Praying Mantis Magic:** Did you know the praying mantis is the only insect that can turn its head 180 degrees? Thanks to a flexible joint between its head and prothorax, it can swivel its head to scan the surroundings using its two large compound eyes and three smaller simple eyes in between.

Orientation Session on Revised Game Drive Route & New Protocols

We are pleased to invite all members to an important orientation session with Joe. This session will cover the following key topics:

Game Drive Route - Familiarise yourself with the routes to ensure a seamless and enjoyable experience.

Newly Implemented Fining Protocol - Understand the new rules and regulations, as well as the fining system now in place.

Overall Conduct and Best Practices - Gain a better vision of other important aspects related to conduct and etiquette while enjoying our piece of paradise.

This orientation is designed to ensure that all members are well-informed and aligned with the recent updates, helping us maintain a safe and harmonious environment for everyone. Your attendance will also provide an opportunity to ask questions and address any concerns.

Please contact Joe to set up a meeting either via WhatsApp or email at warden.parsons@gmail.com

Proverb: *“Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.”*

Explanation:

This African proverb highlights the importance of perspective in storytelling and history. In the context of the African bush, it speaks to the idea that narratives are often shaped by those in power—in this case, the hunters—while the voices of the prey, like the lion, go unheard.

In the wild, lions are majestic and powerful creatures, often symbolizing strength and courage. However, the proverb suggests that their stories and experiences may be overlooked or misrepresented if only the hunters (humans) get to tell the tale. It emphasizes the need for diverse voices and perspectives, reminding us that every creature has its own story worth telling.



This proverb also resonates with the broader themes of conservation and coexistence in the African bush. It serves as a call to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all species and the importance of respecting and protecting the natural world. By appreciating the stories of both hunters and the hunted, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ecosystem and the intricate balance that sustains it.

Thank you for your continued support and passion for our shared paradise.

Warm regards

Your Parsons Nature Reserve Management Committee