



Parsons Nature Reserve Newsletter – January 2026 Edition

As we step into the new year, our hearts are heavy as we reflect on the flooding that affected Parsons Nature Reserve and the surrounding areas. The relentless rains have taken a toll on our community, and our thoughts are especially with those members and lodges who have been affected.

At the same time, we are reminded of the complex and often difficult truths of the natural world. While flooding can be devastating for us as people, it also plays a vital role in the life of the bush, replenishing soils, reshaping waterways, and quietly laying the foundations for renewed biodiversity. In this way, it acts as nature's own reset, essential to the long-term health of the ecosystems we strive to protect.

Even in this moment of hardship, the African bush continues to teach us about resilience. After the fiercest storms, life returns slowly, persistently, and beautifully and with it, a renewed sense of hope for the seasons ahead.

We would like to extend our deepest and most sincere thanks to everyone who kept the reserve informed and connected throughout this historic rainy period. From sharing updates and assessments to checking in on neighbours and offering practical help and reassurance, the spirit of unity shown by members has been nothing short of remarkable. In moments of crisis, Parsons revealed not only its natural strength, but its human heart.

A special word of thanks must go to our Warden and his dedicated team, who have done a truly stellar job under exceptionally challenging conditions. Their tireless efforts in repairing and maintaining damaged roads, reopening critical access routes, and gradually bringing the game drive network back online have been nothing short of extraordinary. Their commitment has ensured safety, connectivity, and hope, often working behind the scenes, but with an impact felt by everyone.

These early days of the year also find the wider world standing on uneasy ground. Geopolitical tension, economic uncertainty, and a constant stream of troubling news can weigh heavily on the spirit. In times like these, it becomes essential to protect our inner balance: to step back from the noise, to focus on what we can control, to support one another, and to find grounding in nature. Here at Parsons, time still has a way of standing still. The bush reminds us to breathe, to listen, and to remember our place in something far greater than ourselves. Its vastness heals tired souls, restores perspective, and gently reawakens hope.



Photo courtesy of Lee Gutteridge (Broad-billed Roller)

January Wildlife Sightings

January arrived wrapped in thunder, water, and renewal. After the intense, historic rains, Parsons is alive in that unmistakable way when the bush exhales, greens deepen, and life returns stronger, louder, and more defiant than before.

One of the month's most intimate moments came from a **female leopard** (*Panthera pardus*) captured on camera trap near a member's waterhole, moving stealthily through the night with her cubs. Leopards are the ultimate symbols of resilience: solitary, adaptable, and fiercely protective mothers. As if the moment needed more magic, she was followed shortly after by a pair of **honey badgers** (*Mellivora capensis*), bold, fearless, and completely unapologetic. What a treat indeed.

The birding has been nothing short of spectacular, with the saturated bush glowing with colour and sound. From the cryptic **Harlequin Quail** (*Coturnix delegorguei*) to the blisteringly fast **Peregrine Falcon** (*Falco peregrinus*), the skies and trees have been alive. Migrants like the **Red-backed Shrike** (*Lanius collurio*) and **European Roller** (*Coracias garrulus*) remind us of the vast connections that pass-through Parsons, while cuckoos — **Diedrick, Jacobins, and Klaas's** (*Chrysococcyx caprius*, *Clamator jacobinus*, *Chrysococcyx klaas*) — call out the heart of summer. Add to that **Paradise Whydah, Red-headed Weaver, Sabota and Dusky Larks, Spotted Flycatcher, Wattled Starling, Broad-billed Roller**, and both **Red- and Yellow-billed Hornbills**, and you have a birder's dream. Don't miss the chance to expand your bird list this summer season, it's on fire!



Photos courtesy of Lee Gutteridge (Diederik Cuckoo and Brown-hooded Kingfisher)



The iconic elephant bull **Ezulwini** has been sighted several times around members' properties. He clearly has a deep affection for Parsons, and we feel it's mutual. Powerful, elusive, and endlessly captivating.

We also witnessed a worrying but ultimately hopeful moment: a **young elephant** (*Loxodonta africana*) seen lying down, stumbling, and appearing unwell. Nature can be harsh, but it can also surprise us, the youngster recovered and moved off, reminding us of both the fragility and strength of nature.

A camera trap capture at No.57 revealed a **pride of lions** (*Panthera leo*) with several subadults moving through the area, a reminder of the true wildness that defines Parsons.

Along **Elephant Alley**, a **young male leopard** (*Panthera pardus*) was spotted. Gorgeous, confident, and pure power personified.



Photo courtesy of Cayde (Blue Wildebeest)

And finally, a quiet salute to our lone **Blue Wildebeest** (*Connochaetes taurinus*), still surviving and thriving on Parsons. A symbol of endurance against the odds. Here's hoping that one day, this resilient soul gets the chance to pass on those hard-won genes.

January has reminded us: after the rains, after the chaos, the wild rises, stronger, richer, and more alive than ever.



Photo courtesy of Cayde

Wardens Report



The power of community and a Land Cruiser!

RAINFALL

589mm rain recorded for the month in 15 rainfall events. Over the four main rain days this month we had the equivalent of our annual rainfall. Total for the season (July 2025 to June 2026) –1026mm.

SECURITY/SAFETY

- Routine snare sweeps around houses and lodges.
- Regular radio tests done on Monday and Friday mornings.
- Parsons is still an active member of Mica Farm Watch and does regular patrols. The Farm
- Watch members in general were very active over this rainy period.

ORIENTATIONS

- Mpala - one new guide
- Emhosheni - tracker
- Members are asked to contact Joe when they are next down to do a refresher orientation so that they are aware of the new rules that were adopted at the 2024 AGM. Not everyone has done so to date.

ROADS

- Maseke graded the External Access Road from R40 to Black Sliding Gate as per verbal agreement with Parsons cleaning Mitre drains.
- Parsons graded Internal Access Road – Sopies Hoogte to Emhosheni, Elephant Alley x1 PNR24/25/26 river crossing, portions of Platklip, Game Drive D, Game Drive E and External Access at Gabion.
- Dragged tyres/metal-frame. Elephant Alley to Main Gate x1.
- Mitre drains - opened drains before, during and after the four major rain days on majority of main access roads and External Access roads.



GENERAL

BUILDING / CONSTRUCTION

- GATE: Staff accommodation – the installers will come attend to a relatively small snag list. We will continue with the project in-house as soon as time allows.

PARSONS MAP

A map showing the approved game drive route and new official road names was sent to all members pre-AGM. Please use the new names to avoid confusion. The map works on the **AVENZA** map app and gives your current position without needing to be linked to any network or satellite. Please observe **NO ENTRY** signs unless the owner of that property invited you. If you are unsure about a particular road, please contact Joe or Dirk direct, they can also assist with setting up **AVENZA** on your cell phone.

FLOOD DAMAGE

Besides the road network that took a beating – Parsons East is still inaccessible as well as some of the game drive routes while we wait for the ground to dry so repairs can continue. We will advise as these become drivable. We fortunately had no loss of life but are aware of four boreholes and damage/flooding to at least seven properties affecting buildings.



When the Rivers Remember

For days on end, the rain did not stop. It arrived in sheets and settled in, drumming on roofs, soaking the earth until the bush could hold no more. Under a heavy sky, days blurred together and the Parsons Nature Reserve fell quiet, waiting.

Then the rivers rose.



Dry sand channels became powerful, moving water almost overnight. The Sabie, Olifants and Letaba pushed beyond their banks, reclaiming ancient paths. Roads disappeared, crossings closed, and those living in the bush adjusted quickly rerouting journeys, protecting homes, listening to the sound of water in the dark. It was a reminder, humbling and unmistakable, that here, nature sets the terms.

Yet while the rains disrupted human routines, the land responded with certainty.

The foliage exploded. Riverbanks reshaped themselves, carrying rich silt downstream. Trees drank deeply. Birds arrived in numbers, fish moved into newly flowing channels, and wildlife spread out into a landscape suddenly generous again. What felt extreme to us was, to the ecosystem, a long-awaited renewal.

As the rain eased and the rivers began to retreat, they left behind a bush transformed, greener, fuller, alive with promise. This is the rhythm of the Greater Kruger: dramatic, resilient, and perfectly tuned to recovery.

The floods remind us that these landscapes are not fragile. They are designed for moments like this. And when the waters recede, the bush rises, renewed, rebalanced, and ready for the season ahead.



Mozambique Tilapia or Blue Kurper

Beneath the Surface: The Fish That Hold the Olifants River Together

The Olifants River in the Greater Kruger supports a surprisingly rich fish community that forms the living foundation of the river's ecology. Iconic tigerfish dominate the deeper channels, acting as apex predators that regulate smaller fish populations and reflect good water quality and strong flows. Largemouth and smallmouth yellowfish migrate and feed over rocky substrates, redistributing nutrients and linking aquatic insects to higher levels of the food web. Sharptooth catfish thrive in pools and floodplains, breaking down organic matter and recycling nutrients that fuel productivity throughout the system. Mozambique tilapia, silver barb, and other small species feed on algae and detritus, converting sunlight and plant growth into energy available to birds, reptiles, and mammals.

The untold story is that these fish quietly hold the river together. They stabilise food webs, influence water clarity, and sustain species far beyond the water's edge, from fish eagles to crocodiles and otters. Because fish respond quickly to pollution, altered flows, and rising temperatures, their presence or absence is an early signal of the river's health. In this way, the fish of the Olifants are not just inhabitants of the river, they are its messengers, carrying the story of the ecosystem's balance, or imbalance, beneath the surface.



On Action

“Even the best cooking pot will not produce food.”



Protected land, good intentions, and beautiful plans mean little without action. Conservation lives in daily choices: how we manage resources, wildlife, and people. Stewardship is not what we own, it is what we do.

With heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes,

Parsons Nature Reserve

