



**June Newsletter – Parsons Nature Reserve**  
*Honouring Our Role as Custodians of Wild Beauty*

As winter casts a golden glow across the bushveld and the mornings grows crisp, we are once again reminded of the extraordinary privilege we share as members of Parsons Nature Reserve. To live amidst the roar of lions, the quiet tread of elephants, and the ceaseless songs of birds is not only a rare blessing, but also a profound responsibility.

Here, on the edge of the Greater Kruger, where wildlife roams freely and the rhythms of nature dictate the pace of life, we witness something remarkable: the coexistence of people and wild creatures, bound together by the land we call home. It is in this delicate balance that we find our purpose. Not just as residents, but as custodians of a living, breathing legacy.

Conservation is not only about protecting wildlife; it is about uplifting people. It is about creating opportunities, fostering employment, and ensuring that the surrounding communities benefit from the beauty and value of this reserve. When tourism supports families, when rangers protect ecosystems, when members actively engage in safeguarding biodiversity, we are all contributing to a sustainable future.

Every footprint left on this land, whether human or animal, tells a story. Let us ensure that the story we are writing is one of respect, resilience, and regeneration. As guardians of this incredible wilderness, we carry the torch for future generations, so that they too may walk beneath these ancient trees, hear the call of the wild, and understand the quiet power of nature protected.



**Thanks to Darren Walters for this great shot!**

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## Wardens Update



**Elephant Bull  
(Vera from the river)**

### RAINFALL

0.0mm rain recorded for the month. Total for the season (July 2024 to June 2025) –461mm. This is slightly less than the 484mm we have averaged over the previous three years.

### SECURITY/SAFETY

- Routine snare sweeps around houses and lodges.
- Regular radio tests done on Monday and Friday mornings.
- Parsons is an active member of Mica Farm Watch and does regular patrols
- Escorted EWT monitors checking on vulture nests.
- Escorted Eskom and EWT to site where a vulture had flown into overhead wires.
- Completed clearing vegetation around Eskom poles.

### ORIENTATIONS

- Contractors x2 teams and x1 member
- 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. Only a handful of members have done so to date.

### ROADS

- Dragged tyres/metal-frame  
Main Entrance Road x 3, Maseke boundary x1 – (doubles as fire break)



- Filled in some potholes on Parsons West and Balule River Road.

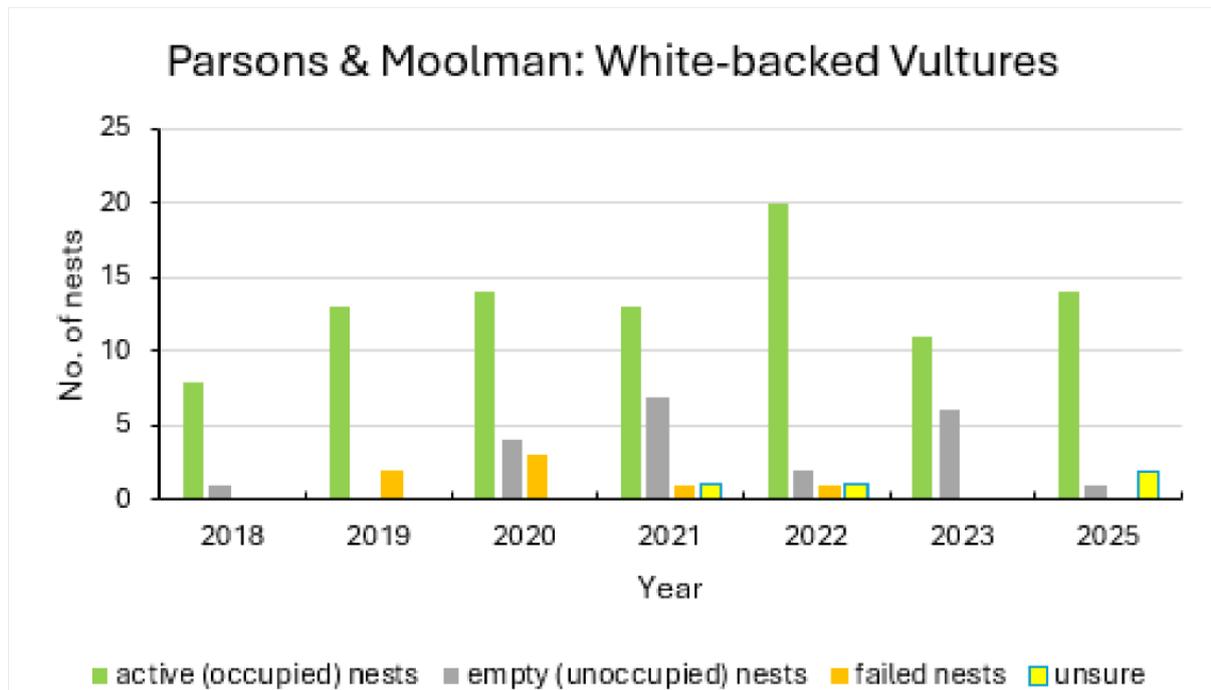
**GENERAL**

**EWT INFORMATION UPDATE ON PARSONS VULTURE NESTS**

**White-backed Vultures:**

EWT began monitoring White-backed Vulture nests on Parsons & Moolman in 2018. In 2018, they found an Egyptian Goose incubating in a White-backed Vulture nest! This is not uncommon; large birds will sometimes use nests that other species built. Given the serious threats faced by vultures in the Greater Kruger (mostly poisoning), they are relieved to see the number of active (occupied) nests this year is roughly consistent with previous years. White-backed Vultures are critically endangered, so it is very special to have them nesting on Parsons. They start breeding in April, and chicks should leave the nest (fledge) in October, although these dates might vary slightly. The start of the breeding season is a very sensitive time, when birds may abandon the nest, or even their egg, if there is disturbance. Similarly, the end of the breeding season, when big chicks are almost ready to leave the nest, because if chicks are disturbed, they might try to jump from their nests before they are ready to fly, injuring themselves.

(You will see there are no data for 2024, this is because no monitoring was done in 2024).



**Hooded Vultures:**

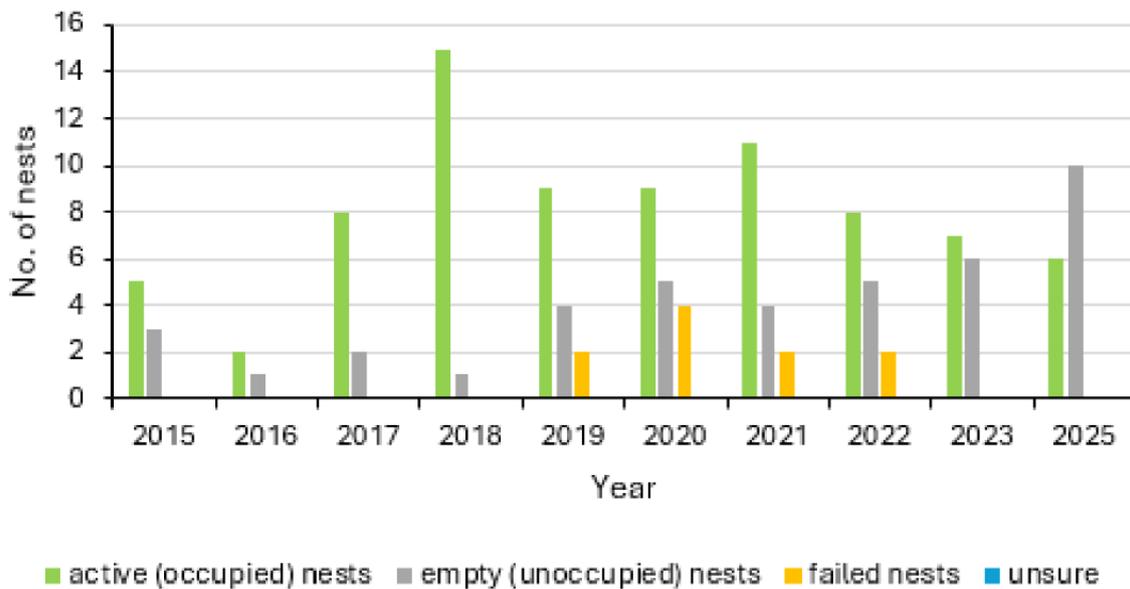
EWT began monitoring Hooded Vulture nests on Parsons & Moolman in 2015. The number of active nests increased from 5 in 2015, to 15 in 2018. Since then, the number of active nests has decreased steadily, and in the first check of the breeding season for 2025, they only found 6 active Hooded Vulture nests. This is the first year that there are emptier (inactive) nests than occupied (active) nests. EWT has been seeing a decline in the number of Hooded Vulture nests at most of the properties they monitor along the Olifants River. Despite this decrease, Parsons and Moolman



remain one of the Hooded Vulture strongholds along the Olifants River. EWT is grateful to the landowners and the management team for conserving these special birds.

(There are no data for 2024, because no monitoring was done that year).

## Parsons & Moolman: Hooded Vulture nests



EWT hopes to do a second nest check in the next few weeks and will send another update after that.

### How you can contribute to the vulture monitoring on Parsons & Moolman:

- **Contributing data:** Nest monitoring on Parsons & Moolman is done by Lindy Thompson at the EWT together with Doctor from Parsons. If you see vulture nests (either on your property or elsewhere), please send Lindy a Pindrop or GPS co-ords. of the nest, and let her know what you see in the nest (e.g. is there an adult vulture incubating or standing on the nest? Are birds mating on the nest? Do you see a chick? Or does the nest seem to be empty?). She will then add the information to their vulture breeding database and send updates to Joe. The more information they have, the more accurate their understanding of how many pairs try to breed, and how many nests successfully fledge a chick. Lindy's email is [LindyT@ewt.org](mailto:LindyT@ewt.org) and you can also WhatsApp her on 0722 414 611.
- **Minimising disturbance:** White-backed Vultures usually start breeding in April, and Hooded Vultures around June, this is a very sensitive time when birds may abandon the nest if disturbed. Similarly, when chicks should leave the nest (fledge) in October/November. So please try to minimise disturbance (walking, shouting, talking loudly, playing loud music) close to vulture nests during the breeding season.

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Winter Sunset (Lee Gutteridge)



White-Crested Helmetshrikes (Brendan Marsay)

## Latest sightings

### Parsons Wildlife Sightings – June Update

Winter may be tightening her chilly grip, but the bush has been ablaze with life, drama, and the occasional bit of mischief. Here's your powerful (and slightly cheeky) roundup of the wild wonders spotted across the reserve this month.

#### **Raptor Royalty: The African Hawk-Eagle (*Aquila spilogaster*)**

First up, a fierce feathered predator made a commanding appearance on the banks of the mighty Olifants River. The African Hawk-Eagle, usually seen hunting in monogamous pairs, was spotted alone this time, but still looked every bit the rapacious raptor it is. These eagles are known for their clever hunting technique: one flushes out the prey while the other ambushes it. Talk about tag-team terror!

#### **Strutting with Swagger: The Sable Antelope (*Hippotragus niger*)**

A rare and regal Sable Antelope decided to grace us with his presence, strutting with the kind of swagger that said, "I own this place." And frankly, who could argue? Don't let his calm demeanour fool you, Sable bulls may appear composed during confrontations but can fight with savage precision using their scimitar-shaped horns. Elegance, with a warning label.

#### **Busted! The Jameson's Firefinch (*Lagonosticta rhodopareia*)**

Well, well, well... Someone's got some explaining to do. A cheeky Jameson's Firefinch was caught red-feathered helping itself to a member's cat food right in the kitchen! In its panicked escape attempt, it stunned itself against a window. Don't worry, it recovered just fine, with only its pride bruised. These tiny opportunists often follow larger animals like warthogs, picking off the insects they disturb. Survival by sneakiness!

#### **Triple Trouble: The Leopard Trio (*Panthera pardus*)**

One of the month's most unforgettable sightings was a female leopard and her two cubs, first spotted quenching their thirst at the waterhole of No. 57 under a soft dusk sky. Not content with a single appearance, the trio reappeared at No. 37, basking and playing in the sun, a picture of feline finesse. Fun fact: leopard cubs are born with their eyes closed and start climbing trees before they can even run properly. Vertical learners from the start!

#### **Mirror, Mirror: Retz's Helmetshrikes (*Prionops retzii*)**

A band of lively Retz's Helmetshrikes as well as their relatives, the White-Crested Helmetshrikes, was seen completely fascinated by their reflection in a camera lens. Narcissism? Curiosity? Confusion?



Who knows, but it was pure entertainment either way. These birds live in tightly knit family groups and even babysit each other's chicks. Think of them as the bushveld's feathered village.

### **The Kings Take the Road: Pride of Lions (*Panthera leo*)**

In true royal fashion, a pride of lions claimed the main axis road, transforming it into their personal catwalk. And of course, no one complained. Lion prides are matriarchal by nature, the lionesses run the show, while the males mostly roar, strut, and look menacing. Sound familiar?

### **Crimson Royalty: Southern Ground-Hornbills (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*)**

A rare and goosebump-inducing encounter with Southern Ground-Hornbills took place on a member's property. Their booming calls can echo across the landscape, with the sound carrying up to 3km. These birds can live up to 60 years. They typically breed once every 3-6 years, with the dominant pair in a social group being the only ones to reproduce. After fledging, the young birds are dependent on their parents and helpers for an extended period, sometimes up to 3 years.

### **Gentle Giants: African Elephants (*Loxodonta africana*)**

Herds and lone bulls have been seen casually crisscrossing the reserve, as if to remind us all: "Yes, this is our land." And honestly, they're right. It is said that elephants possess an extraordinary ability to detect rainstorms from over 200km away, a built-in weather app with a trunk!

### **Buffalo Brigade: African Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*)**

A seldom-seen large breeding herd of buffalo was spotted heading east along the main road, a thundering wall of horn, hide, and attitude. These formidable animals have remarkable memories and are known to ambush predators that have attacked them in the past. Revenge of the ruminants, indeed.

### **Master of Disguise: Sharpe's Grysbok (*Raphicerus sharpei*)**

In a blink-and-you'll-miss-it moment, a secretive Sharpe's Grysbok was glimpsed near the river before vanishing back into the underbrush as if by magic. These shy antelope are surprisingly tidy creatures; they dig and reuse their own toilet pits. Even in the wild, some appreciate a bit of privacy.

### **And finally... Those Sunsets**

While winter's touch may chill the bones, it certainly doesn't dampen the drama in the skies. The sunsets this month have been nothing short of cinematic painting the horizon in fiery hues and reminding us that no matter what the day held, the bush will always close with a flourish.

Until next month, stay wild, stay curious, and keep those binos ready, you never know who's watching you from the thicket...



## Matabele Ants – Nature’s Fierce Little Warriors

Named after the formidable Zulu tribe, Matabele ants live up to their legacy. These tiny soldiers wage war not against humans, but termites, launching lightning raids with military precision. A single scout may walk the equivalent of dozens of kilometres to find a target. Once located, hundreds of ants surge out in under a minute, storming the termite mound to seize precious larvae.

But the real marvel lies in what happens next: battlefield rescue and first aid. Wounded ants are carried home by comrades and treated by nurse ants who clean their wounds to prevent deadly infection, a breakthrough in animal medicine. Those too injured to survive refuse care; the rest often return to fight another day.

Together, Matabele ants function as a superorganism, a living, breathing army guided by simple rules and extraordinary cooperation. Scientists now look to them for inspiration in robotics, self-healing materials, even traffic systems.

In the unseen world beneath our feet, a mighty force is at work, fierce, selfless, and endlessly fascinating. Be sure not to drive over them when you see them crossing the road!



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## The Knob-thorn's Tale

**Senegalia nigrescens** – *A silent giant of the savanna*

If you’ve ever stood beneath the wide skies of the Lowveld and felt the stillness of the African bush wrap around you, chances are a **knob-thorn** tree was somewhere nearby, watching, weathered, and wise.

These trees don’t grow in a rush. They take their time, rising slowly from sandy soils, year by patient year, until they stand like sentinels above the grasslands. Some have stood for over **two centuries**, quietly observing the comings and goings of countless seasons, wildfires, rains, and migrations.



Look closely at their trunks, and you'll see the **dark, cracked bark** littered with large, hard **knobs**, nature's own armour. These wooden bulges give the tree its name but also serve as a reminder: this is no ordinary tree. It's built for survival.



In the **dry spring months**, long before many other trees have even stirred from their winter slumber, the knob-thorn bursts into delicate, creamy-white flowers. And who's the first to notice? The giraffes. With long, purposeful tongues, they browse the blossoms, delicately nibbling what other browsers can't reach. And the tree, in turn, lets them. After all, they've evolved together.

Its roots run deep, tapping into water reserves far below. Its leaves are feathery and sparse, conserving every drop of precious moisture. And beneath the soil, a quiet miracle happens tiny bacteria on its roots help **fix nitrogen**, enriching the earth around it, and giving life a boost in a place where nutrients are often hard to come by.

Insects hum in and out of its flowers, birds perch in its branches, and elephants, despite the tree's rugged bark, still try their luck, stripping off pieces as they wander through the veld. And when summer storms finally roll in, the knob-thorn releases its flat, papery pods to the wind, letting the next generation take its chances.

The **Senegalia nigrescens** doesn't clamour for attention. It doesn't dazzle like a baobab or sprawl like a marula. But it holds the heart of Parsons Nature Reserve in its bark and branches. It's a tree that tells the story of **resilience**, of deep time, and of intricate partnerships between flora and fauna.

So next time you're walking beneath its crown or resting in its shade, take a moment. Place your hand on its rough bark. You're touching history, a living piece of wild Africa.

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**Proverb:** "Birds sing, not because they have answers, but because they have songs."

– African proverb

**Meaning:** Discuss and listen to each other's views.

With heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes,

Parsons Nature Reserve