



Parsons Nature Reserve Newsletter – February 2026 Edition

There's something I wish I could bottle and hand to every person who visits Parsons Nature Reserve, that exact moment when the wild stops being a place on a map and becomes something you feel in your chest.

This February, I watched it happen again.

We had rounded a bend in the road when the vehicle slowed. No one said anything at first. Then we saw him, a big male lion resting in the long grass, draped in sunlight. He raised his huge head and with his amber eyes, steady and impossibly calm, pierced us to our very soul.

And then it happened.

The excitement faded. Cameras lowered. The air seemed to press in around us. I could hear a guest's breathing shift, quicker now. They later told me their heart was pounding so loudly they were sure everyone else could hear it. But what struck them most was not fear. It was the silence. A deep, enveloping silence that felt almost sacred.

In that stillness, something changed.

"It suddenly felt fragile," they said to me afterwards. "Not the lion. This place. Parsons. All of it."

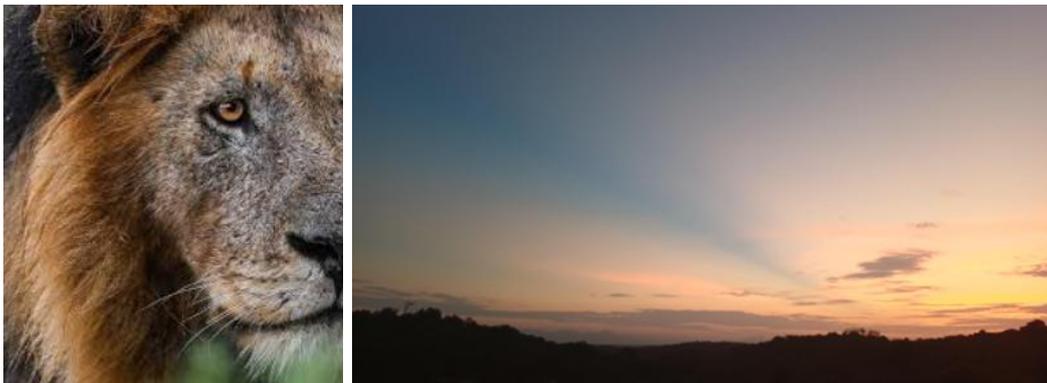
That realization is the quiet gift of Parsons. Lions are powerful but they exist because everything else does. Because the summer rains fall. Because the grasses grow. Because their prey moves as they have for generations. Because this land remains protected, connected, and respected.

When you sit before a lion or lionesses with cubs like that, you understand how finely balanced it all is. This is not a staged wilderness. It is real, dynamic and vulnerable. The cub hidden in the grass depends on a healthy habitat and pride. The male who watches us depends on space. Space to roam, hunt, and lead. And that space depends on people who care enough to safeguard it.

That afternoon, as we quietly drove away, no one rushed to speak. The moment lingered. And I was reminded, once again, why stewardship is not an abstract idea, it is a shared responsibility born from experiences like this.

If you have felt your heart race in the presence of lions on Parsons, you know what I mean. And if you haven't yet, I hope one day you will.

Because once you feel that silence you understand that protecting this wild land is not optional. It is personal.



Magnificent Parsons Nature Reserve

February Wildlife Sightings

After the flooding February on Parsons Nature Reserve has bounced back where every turn of the road offers a story... and sometimes, a traffic jam of the wild kind.

A rather cheeky, one-metre **Nile crocodile** (*Crocodylus niloticus*) was seen luxuriating in a stream flowing gently across the road near the river. At just a metre long, he's still a youngster. These ancient reptiles can grow over five metres in length and live for more than 60 years. For now, though, he seemed perfectly content playing "toll gate attendant," basking in that timeless crocodile way. Unhurried. Unbothered. Jurassic.



Out on the plains near Sangasava, herds of **African elephant** (*Loxodonta africana*) moved through the landscape like living grey poetry. Elephants can communicate through low-frequency rumbles that travel kilometres through the ground. Watching the matriarch lead with quiet authority, calves tucked safely between towering legs, you can't help but feel the deep intelligence and emotion within these gentle giants.

Speaking of giants, we were treated to the most extraordinary sighting of **Southern ground hornbill** (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*) nesting in a cavity of a sycamore fig along the Olifants River. These striking birds, with their bold red facial skin and theatrical eyelashes, are cooperative breeders. The whole family helps raise a single chick. They need large, old trees for nesting, making sightings like this incredibly special. Ancient tree, ancient bird, ancient river... magic.



Photo courtesy of Sangasava



Photo courtesy of Taj (Kurhula)

In a quieter moment, a **Pearl-spotted owl** (*Glaucidium perlatum*) was caught on video bathing in a birdbath on a member's property. Yes, bathing. These small but fearless daytime hunters are known to mob much larger birds. All 60-100 grams of them! Seeing one fluffing and splashing in the water felt like being let in on a secret.

Between Taj (Kurhula) and Parsons River camp, the bush exploded with the raw power of **Lion** (*Panthera leo*) clashing and vocalising. The roars carried far, primal and bone-vibrating. Lions can be heard up to 8 kilometres away. It's not just sound; it's a declaration.

And then, in true soap-opera fashion, a big male and lioness were seen mating repeatedly over several days, crossing back and forth between Maseke and Parsons. When lions mate, they can do so every 15 – 30 minutes for up to five days. A strategy to ensure successful ovulation. It's exhausting just thinking about it. Dedication to the dynasty!



Magnificent bull elephants have been criss-crossing the reserve from the river to the northern reaches, purposeful and independent. Bulls often roam alone or form loose bachelor groups, and watching them stride across the landscape is to witness quiet, self-assured power.

Down by the river, regal **Greater kudu** (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*) bulls gathered, their spiralled horns catching the light. Those elegant twists can grow over a metre long. They move like shadows with style, all grace, no rush.

A pair of **Double-banded sandgrouse** (*Pterocles bicinctus*) delighted guests on game drive. These remarkable birds can fly vast distances to water, and males soak their belly feathers to carry water back to their chicks. Practical. Ingenious. Devoted dads of the desert air.



Photo courtesy of Brendan Marsay (The Flying Ninja)

Leopards (*Panthera pardus*) have also been seen from time to time. Fleeting, elusive, always leaving us wanting more. A shadow in the thicket. A flick of a tail. Gone again.

Hyenas, those misunderstood marvels, have been hanging around some lodges. The **Spotted hyena** (*Crocuta crocuta*) is led by powerful females and boasts one of the strongest bite forces in Africa. Their whoops at night? Pure bushveld soundtrack.

And the birding this month? Nothing short of brilliant. Vultures circling high on thermals, raptors scanning with laser focus, cuckoos calling in layered rhythm, kingfishers flashing electric blues, coucals skulking in



the bushes, black-headed orioles, finches fussing in the thickets. February has been a celebration of feathers.

On a sadder note, two nocturnal bird species were reported dead on the road, allegedly struck by a vehicle. Perhaps killed by a nocturnal predator. Whatever the exact cause, it's a sobering reminder that this reserve is first and foremost a living, breathing wilderness. Please be mindful when driving, day and night. All living creatures have the right of way. The wild crosses our roads far more often than we realise.

Here's to February. To roaring lions, splashing owlets, wandering giants, and the privilege of witnessing it all. The bush is alive, and we are so lucky to call it home. ❤️

Wardens Report



Parsons Paradise!

RAINFALL

18,4mm rain recorded for the month in 4 rainfall events. Total for the season (July 2025 to June 2026) – 1044.9mm.

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.
- Escorted Eskom meter readers and Estate Agent PNR52.

ORIENTATIONS

- PNR Mpala x1 management/guide, Hilltop x2 new guides.
- Emhosheni – 1x tracker
- PNR Member and driver– No23 refresher.
- Contractors – No24 and No18



- 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

- GRADED– Access Road R40 to Elephant Alley, Half of Elephant Alley x1, Sopies Hoogte to black Sliding Gate, Sopies to Umfula, Game Drive D Francolin drive, Game Drive F and External, portions of Platklip. Parsons East and Balule River Road.
- DRAGGED TYRES/A-FRAME – Elephant Alley to Main Gate x4, Game Drive A East and Elephant Alley to No57
- SIGNS – Checked and reslashed 50% of signs.
- Branches – Cut overhanging branches Game drive E.
- Game Drive A East rerouted and lengthened.

BUILDING / CONSTRUCTION

- GATE: Staff accommodation – The installers attended to the snag list.
- We will continue with the project in-house with smaller items as soon as time allows.
- Gabions – on hold.

FLOOD DAMAGE

Certain roads on the reserve have been closed to prevent vehicles getting stuck or further damaging the road structure which could be costly to repair. Please take careful note of the maps that are sent out and observe where branches have been placed across the road to prevent access. We recently had vehicles stuck for 3 days on a road that was closed.

The roads currently inaccessible due to heavy underground seepage are:

- Lower end of Granite
- Upper end of Parsons East
- Tawny Eagle and Roller Road on Game Drive D
- Maseke cutline and Sedumoni crossing on Game Drive A





The Quiet Architects of the Wild

Under the vast skies of Parsons Nature Reserve, one of the bushveld's most powerful creatures doesn't roar, it hums.



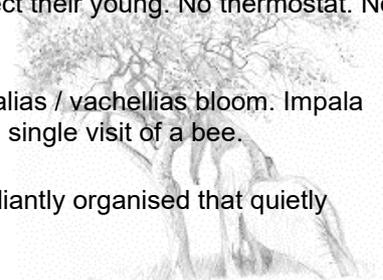
High in a marula tree, a colony of African Honey Bees (*Apis mellifera scutellata*) works with extraordinary precision. These diurnal navigators rise with the sun, using it as a compass while memorising landmarks, hills, river lines, and scattered knob-thorns to trace invisible highways across the Lowveld in search of nectar.

When a bee discovers a rich food source, she returns to the hive and performs the remarkable waggle dance. A precise figure-eight that communicates direction, distance, and quality through movement alone. Coordinates delivered through choreography.

Inside the hive, unity ensures survival. On cooler days they cluster to generate warmth; in the height of summer they fan their wings in unison to regulate temperature and protect their young. No thermostat. No engineer. Only instinct and cooperation.

Because of their tireless labour, trees fruit, wildflowers seed, and senegalias / vachellias bloom. Impala graze. Elephants feed on heavy pods. Birds feast on berries born from a single visit of a bee.

The lion may command attention, but it is the bee. Small, fierce, and brilliantly organised that quietly safeguards the future of the wild. One flower and one hum at a time.



On Wisdom

“Not everyone who chased the zebra caught it, but he who caught it chased it”.

Trying does not guarantee success but you can never achieve success if you don't try.

With heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes,

Parsons Nature Reserve

