



Parsons Nature Reserve Newsletter – April 2026 Edition

Why does the wilderness move us so deeply? It is a question that reaches into both mind and body, touching something ancient and not easily explained. At Parsons Nature Reserve, this quiet inquiry into the essence of wilderness has shaped something far more than a destination. It has given rise to a living, breathing experience that is felt long before it is understood.

The Parsons experience cannot be reduced to a checklist of activities or fleeting highlights. It exists in the gentle layering of moments. The first light spilling over the bush. The focused stillness of tracking. The golden hush of dusk. The warmth of a fire beneath a sky full of stars. Parsons is, at its heart, a space of relationship. Over time, deep connections have taken root between the land, its wildlife, and the people who move within it. This ongoing care is not simply stewardship. It is an act of reverence. There is a quiet sacredness here, intangible yet undeniable, like stepping into a place that holds memory, presence, and meaning all at once.

We have seen the subtle yet profound ways in which this environment touches those who spend time here. The outside world begins to soften and fall away. Perspectives shift. A sense of wonder returns. There is laughter, reflection, and a reconnection to nature, to others, and often to oneself. Stories unfold naturally, friendships deepen, and time spent together in the bush becomes something lasting.

Parsons has weathered change, as all wild places do, yet it remains deeply rooted in its essence, guided by the rhythms of the natural world and the strength of its community. The relationship between members, family, friends, guests, and their guides is shaped over countless shared moments in the bush, where observation, intuition, and mutual respect deepen connections not only to the land, but to one another. There is a quiet understanding that everything here is interconnected, each element contributing to a greater harmony.

From a distance, one might say Parsons is defined by its remarkable wildlife or its place within the greater Balule wilderness. And while that is true, it only tells part of the story. What truly defines Parsons cannot be fully captured in words or descriptions.

Like wilderness itself, it resists being pinned down. It is something you sense. Something that stays with you. We do not attempt to define it.

We simply know it as... The Parsons Experience.



Photo: Isambane Camp

April Wildlife Sightings / The Bush in Full Voice

April on Parsons Nature Reserve has been nothing short of spellbinding, a vivid reminder that no two days or game drives are ever the same. Each day writes its own story. Each turn in the road holds possibility. This is the grand adventure, where nature performs without rehearsal and never repeats a scene.

Lions, *Panthera leo*, have delivered their usual mix of drama and tenderness. Watching them at play one moment and the quiet authority of a lioness on the move the next is a lesson in balance. Lions may sleep for up to twenty hours a day, which seems rather indulgent until you witness the explosive energy of a hunt.



Photos: Isambane Camp

Among the breeding herds and solitary giants, the **African Elephant**, *Loxodonta africana*, continues to captivate. The herds move with deep familial bonds, led by wise matriarchs who remember ancient pathways. And then there are the lone bulls, often seen wandering with a calm confidence, occasionally pausing as if to admire the view just as much as we do.

Birdlife has been exceptional. The rare sighting of the **Greater Painted Snipe**, *Rostratula benghalensis*, along a quiet stream was a true treasure. In this species it is the female who takes the spotlight with brighter plumage and a bold nature, leaving the male to handle incubation duties. A refreshing twist in the bird world.



Photo: Vera Bower

Photo: Paul Slyer (G. Painted Snipe)



The charismatic **Bearded Scrub Robin**, *Cercotrichas quadringata*, has been flitting through the undergrowth, always curious and never quite still. **Southern Ground Hornbills**, *Bucorvus leadbeateri*, have marched across the landscape with their prehistoric presence, reminding us that they can live for decades and require vast territories to thrive. Meanwhile the lively calls of **Trumpeter Hornbills**, *Bycanistes bucinator*, echo through the trees, their resonant notes carrying far and wide.

The delicate **White Browed Robin Chat**, *Cossypha heuglini*, has provided a soundtrack to many early mornings, while the **Spectacled Weaver**, *Ploceus ocularis*, has been hard at work crafting intricate nests with remarkable precision. Each thread placed with purpose, each structure a small masterpiece.

On quieter moments, the seldom seen **Scrub Hare**, *Lepus saxatilis*, has made brief appearances. And then, as if conjured from nowhere, the **Flap-necked Chameleon**, *Chamaeleo dilepis*, has reminded us to slow down. Their independently moving eyes and gentle, deliberate steps are a lesson in patience.



Photo: Vera Bower

Kudu, giraffe, waterbuck and impala have painted the landscape with movement and grace, ever alert, ever present. Above it all, the skies of April have been a show in themselves. Sunsets that linger, colours that deepen, and nights that dazzle with stars scattered like stories waiting to be told.

From the golden light to the chorus of birdsong, from fleeting sightings to lingering encounters, Parsons in April has drawn us once more into a place of pure presence. Into the beating heart of the wild, where every moment matters and every experience is entirely, beautifully unique.



Photo: Heidi (Western River Loop)

Wardens Report



Photo: Martin Steyn

RAINFALL

- 43.9mm rain recorded for the month in 4 rainfall events. Total for the season (July 2025 to June 2026) –1158mm. Since 2012 the next highest seasons were 2021-22 with 809mm, 2022-23 768mm and 2012-13 722mm.

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 ESKOM meter readers and EWT when they came to monitor vulture nests along the river.

ORIENTATIONS

- PNR Members - No 60 x2 and No19 x2.
- Contractors- No38
- 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

- GRADED- extensive grading has been done on the main access road with mitre drains also being constructed. Members are asked to be patient during this time and to allow for an extra 15mins travelling time when entering or leaving the reserve.
- DRAGGED TYRES/ METAL FRAME – all main internal access roads x1, Internal Access Road from first cement strips to sliding gate and External Access Road multiple times.
- Constructed rock gabions on GDE in a donga caused by the recent rains.

GATE HOUSE

- The project is progressing quite well, and the gate staff will be moving into their new quarters this coming month.

RIDE OF SHAME

- Vehicle tracks were observed driving up the Sedumoni this past week on Game Drive A. This is against Parsons Game Drive Rules and can cause damage to fragile ecosystems in the sand. Please report the vehicle doing this if you come across it.



FLOOD DAMAGE

- Certain roads on the reserve are still 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.
 - The roads currently inaccessible due to heavy underground seepage are –
 - Game Drive A - Sedumoni crossing
 - Game Drive B - Shongololo
 - Lower end of Tawny Eagle and Roller Road on Game Drive D

Fabulous Frogs of Parsons

Plain Grass Frog



Foam Nest Frog



Painted Reed Frog



Photo: Vera Bower

There is little in this world as stirring as the African bush on a summer night. Sound rises in layers, a living chorus that fills the darkness, and within it the frogs call most curiously to the heart. Their bright, almost electric notes pulse through the air, small voices carrying far across the land.

With the rains, they return in abundance. The earth softens, water gathers, and life begins again. Ponds and puddles become nurseries where tadpoles drift in quiet multitude. All around Parsons Nature Reserve, after a downpour, frogs seem to appear as if summoned by the rain itself.

In Balule, three are most often seen. The grey foam nest tree frog, a quiet dweller of branches, reveals its wonder in devotion, where a living cradle of foam is shaped above water and life begins suspended before falling into the pool below. When the land dries, it endures in stillness, waiting for rain.

The bushveld rain frog belongs to the earth. Round, hidden, and seldom seen, it rises only after heavy rain, its curious courtship binding male and female together as they burrow and leave behind fully formed young.

The painted reed frog brings colour and clarity to the night, its sharp whistling call ringing from reeds and branches as it draws life back to the water's edge.

Alongside them are other familiar voices of the season. The guttural toad with its vibrant, rattling snore that has been compared to the sound of a dropped ping-pong ball bouncing on a hard surface. The delicate grass frog moving softly through the margins. The distinct, low-pitched "whoomp" or deep bellow that lasts about one second of the African bullfrog after heavy rains, deep and ancient in its sound. Each adds its note to the tapestry, each a thread in the great weaving of night.

Though small and easily overlooked, the frogs of Parsons carry the pulse of the bush within them. In their calls, their rituals, and their quiet resilience, they give voice to the land itself, alive, breathing, and endlessly renewed. Frogs are vital to the health of the Parsons Nature Reserve. They help control insect populations and serve as an important food source for many animals, linking different levels of the food web.



Because their skin is sensitive and they rely on both land and water, frogs are excellent indicators of environmental health. Changes in their numbers can signal problems with water quality, habitat, or climate.

They are also closely tied to rainfall, helping move nutrients through the ecosystem during their breeding cycles. In this way, frogs play a key role in keeping the bush balanced and thriving.

Regional Wildlife Wisdom

"The elephant never abandons his tusks on the road; however heavy they may be."

Meaning: A person must never give up on their responsibilities or their identity, no matter how difficult the burden becomes.

With heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes,

Parsons Nature Reserve

