

Ecology

Bush Management and Wildlife



Above: Blue Wildebeest noted at a Raptor's feeding site. Photo Credit: Gordon Breetzke.

The late rainfall and effects of the El Niño cycle have resulted in an unusually late winter with some days experiencing heat waves and temperatures up to 30 degrees. The bush as a result is much drier and the animals are feeling the effects.

There has been significant and heated debate regarding the welfare of the wildlife on Raptor's View the last while. This is obviously a topic close to all our hearts, otherwise we would not have decided to live here.

Over the years a protocol has been established to monitor and react to the wildlife's condition during the year. Below we will highlight some of the main topics of discussion and how they are dealt with.

These protocols and processes although always evolving, have served us well for many years even through the severe drought from 2017 to 2020.

However, it is important to make sure that we all ground our views in some degree of fact and reality. It is also important to remember that we are in the dry season and unfortunately the wildlife is going to be under some degree of stress regardless of what we do or do not do. It is not a new phenomenon in nature and more specifically in small, enclosed environments such as ours.

One of the concerns has been water. Raptor's View has had water sources available to the wildlife for many years. These consist of the school dam which currently still has water and almost never dries up, and the pumped water point at Osprey dam. These dams remain available to the wildlife even when the dams in the southern part of the estate dry up. In addition, there are approximately 250 swimming pools dotted around the estate most of which are accessible to the wildlife, as well as several hundred "bird baths". The wildlife uses these even in times of a plentiful water supply, as many of you can attest to. As part of the new ecological plan it has been recommended that a water point in the southern end of the estate would be of benefit and we are currently discussing this option with affected parties.

Another topic that has been of much debate is the availability of food. We have for many years had a monitoring program in place to check the health of the wildlife. This involves both physical observation by the management team, mainly by Gordon and Dirk as they are on the estate all day every day, and another is reports received from residents, which are then followed up by the team. In addition we use faecal samples which are taken at predetermined times during the course of the year so that we not only get the current result but can compare the results to the equivalent period in previous years. The next samples are due to be taken in the next few weeks. When the results are received we will evaluate them and take whatever decisions may be required.

In addition, we have 10 established feeding locations at various points around the estate that have been used for several years. These are also moved to enable rejuvenation of the surrounding area. We provide feed consisting of a grass and Lucerne mix at these points as required. For example, last winter due to the good summer rains limited feeding was required. This year we started feeding early in June, due to the poor summer rains. Initially we were feeding twice a week and as the winter period moved on, we increased this to 40 bales and 9 mineral blocks, three times a week. The feed is budgeted for and this year we provided for an increased budget in the expectation of a dry winter. We are actively monitoring the situation and will respond as required.

There have been stories doing the rounds of dead animals on the estate that have allegedly starved to death. Whenever management are made aware of a death they investigate. A few recent examples include:

- A Kudu bull near the school – this was found to be old and with no teeth, a natural phenomenon, resulting in it not being able to feed
- A Nyala found on one of the roads – this showed signs of being attacked by either a Leopard or Hyena
- A young Giraffe – on investigation it is believed to have had birth defects and was taken by Hyena

As we have already informed you, Raptor’s View was reported to the NSPCA by a group of members/residents. The unfortunate part is that none of the individuals felt it necessary to approach management with their concerns or to enquire what was being done before reporting the estate. We await the official report from the NSPCA. However, during the feedback meeting with Gordon at the end of the inspection only two observations were made. One being why do we not use troughs for feeding. We informed the inspector that we used to do this but found that some of the smaller animals, such as warthogs, struggled to feed and their condition declined. Another danger relating to using troughs are an animal’s horns or legs becoming entangled in the framework. The other was why we don’t provide water troughs at the feeding sites. We explained the water situation as highlighted earlier in this article to the inspector.

Non-Indigenous Plant Species



Above: Christ Thorn (*Euphorbia*). Photo Credits: Gordon Breetzke.

An exotic plant is starting to surface more and more on the estate, the ***Euphorbia milii*** more commonly known as the Crown of Thorns, Christ Plant or Christ Thorn.

This is a species of flowering plant in the spurge family ***Euphorbiaceae*** which is native to Madagascar. The plant is loose in form, spiny and irregularly shaped, with thick black spines. Often it is planted in pots and used as a house plant. Outside in the ground it grows fast and spreads quickly. Even though it contains the white milky latex, it has a low severity poison. The poison can cause blistering of the skin and affects the eyes with temporary blindness and too much can cause permanent cornea damage. Should you find any of these on your properties, please remove them and please do not plant these into the bush.

Sewage

A team of workers from Mopani District Municipality were on site at the sewage pump station, during July 2024. A leaking suction pipe was repaired and the sewage pond emptied. At a later stage, officials were once again engaged in trying to resolve a problem that resulted in the tank almost reaching overflow. This was once again repaired and no subsequent incidents have been reported.

Estate Management

Workshop Build Completion

The workshops are nearing completion and the move across is finalised with shelves and tool racks installed and materials currently being sorted and packed. The work bench has also moved across. The Tractor will also have covered parking at the new premises.

Estate Administration

2023/4 Financial year end and Audit

The RV audit commenced towards the end of June and throughout the month of July with the 1st draft of the Annual Financial Statements in final stages for the approval of the Finance Committee and Board. As previously notified, we have engaged the services of Ferreira, Venter, Laws and Nel to perform a full audit of the books of RVHOA.

A resolution will shortly be drawn up for distribution to members to consider additional capital appropriations required for this and future financial years.

Virtual AGM 2024

As you are all aware there has over the last couple of years been a call by members to amend the MOI to allow for electronic meetings to be held. We would like to thank those members for being very supportive and bringing this issue to members attention and advocating for the change. Following the passing of the recent special resolution (96% in favour) allowing for electronic meetings to take place we are now in a position to accommodate the request of members for electronic meetings.

The Board has therefore made the decision to hold the upcoming AGM electronically on the 28th September 2024 . We are currently in the process of contracting with a service provider who specializes in running virtual meetings for HOA's and body corporates. We are excited about the benefits this will bring to members, particularly for the majority that have previously been excluded from participating as they could not be physically present.

In the past attendance of the AGM has been restricted to those members who live here permanently or are prepared to travel specifically for a meeting, for many this was not possible or practical. In the past we were lucky if we had 100 (33%) members attend the physical meeting. The new format will make it possible for all 304 (100%) members to participate and vote in person if they so wish. A far more democratic and fair approach. In the modern world virtual meetings are becoming more and more the norm and have proven to be effective in allowing for a more inclusive platform to exist. One of our neighbouring estates which also has a high percentage of non-resident members has been holding very successful virtual AGM's for several years already.

There are several additional benefits that will not only improve the governance and independence of the AGM but will address many of the concerns raised by members, these include:

- Attendance will be electronically controlled with only eligible members being granted access to the meeting. Every eligible member will receive a unique password that can only be used once.
- The minutes will be recorded and transcribed by the service provider.
- All questions and responses will be electronically recorded.
- Members who have indicated to Board members that they are unwilling to attend members meetings as they feel unsafe or threatened by other members will be able to attend in an environment that they find less threatening.

- In the event of any inappropriate behavior by a member the service provider will be able to control the situation.
- All voting will be controlled by the service provider, thus ensuring independence of voting results.
- There will be a legally compliant audit trail for all votes cast.

The Board is aware that this is a change and whilst most members are already comfortable participating in virtual meetings, some members may be a little unsure how the system will operate. The service provider has confirmed that they have a guide to assist people as well as a help desk that members will be able to contact for assistance.

In addition, we plan to hold a virtual meeting for members prior to the AGM so that members can have an opportunity to use and familiarize themselves with the system and resolve any issues that they may have prior to the AGM.

In addition, if there are any members that are physically located in Hoedspruit and are unable or uncomfortable participating electronically, we will provide a physical venue where members will be able to see and hear the AGM. They will also be able to ask questions and vote from the location. The location details will be provided in the AGM pack that will be distributed shortly.

We have received a number of requests from Members to conduct the AGM on a different date to that originally proposed, being Saturday 28 September 2024, as they will be out of town, however with the meeting being virtual with an option to attend at a physical location, the physical location of members during the meeting is far less limiting than in the past. The Board is however looking into the viability of alternative dates although each request received has proposed different dates. Members will be notified if any change is made.

Board Secretary

We are pleased to announce that Liesl Erasmus has kindly offered her services as secretary to the board and her involvement in this role is most appreciated.

Communication

Certain estate residents particularly those who reside in a cul-de-sac on the estate, have brought to estate management's attention an increase in the volume of 'lost visitors' requesting directions. Be this by driving up their drive to the carport or on foot, whether walkers, runners or lost contractors who have been noted on security cameras, if the resident is not home.

Residents are reminded of the rules concerning the rights to privacy and to organise and inform their tenants, children, visitors and contractors accordingly as house numbers at the entrances to driveways are clearly visible.

Fibre Installation

The HOA receives a number of enquires relating to Internet and Fibre installations. While the estate is not involved in this process, the requirement would be that an application would need to be submitted to OpenServe first.

The contact numbers for this purpose would be 081 556 4343 or 081 400 0896. The cost of trenching and laying the trunking, should the existing Telkom trunking be unusable due to blockages, etc. would be for the home owner's account.

An annexure attached provides a recent circular that may be of interest in this regard. Should you have any further queries please contact Wilna Mew regarding contractor access to the estate.



Above: Jones' Girdled Lizard. Photo Credit: Steve Benbow.

General News & Developments

Property Values and Sales on Raptor's View

You may be aware of rumours that property values in Raptor's View are falling and that the number of sales has dramatically increased over the last year because of an apparent poor reputation. So here is a fact check.

It is very difficult if not impossible to benchmark the movement of property prices and sales with other estates in the area due to the significant differences in their nature. Some have big five, some allow commercial activities such as lodges and holiday rentals, some allow pets and different roof types, some have tarred roads, some have private schools on the estate etc. and these differences have the effect of attracting different buyers.

However, the statistics below make interesting reading and will hopefully provide some factual data for members. These statistics are taken from the official Raptor's View register of property transfers.

	Jul 22 / Jun 23	Total Value	Average Value	Jul 23 / Jun 24	Total Value	Average Value	YOY % Inc.
Stands sold	10	12 780 000	1 278 000	4	7 700 000	1 925 000	51,0
Houses Sold	29	120 800 000	4 165 517	10	48 350 000	4 835 000	16,1
Total	39	133 580 000	3 425 128	14	56 050 000	4 003 571	16,9

It is interesting to note that in the last 12 months we have had vacant stands selling for more than R2 000 000 for the first time.

In the 2022/23 year 55% of houses sold with a price less than R4 000 000, in the 2023/24 this reduced to 30%. In the 2022/23 year 17% of the houses sold with a price in excess of R5 500 000, in the 2023/24 this increased to 40%.

RVHOA Management – Team Social



Above: Vanessa Berlein; Dirk Lourens; Michelle Pike; Wilna Mew; James Cary and Gordon Breetzke.

The RVHOA management had a much needed get together on Friday, 17 August and although to most no introductions may be needed, for those that are not aware, the Raptor's Management Team is: James Cary, General Manager assisted by Gordon Breetzke and Dirk Lourens with the estate management.

On the office side Vanessa Berlein, is responsible for all administration and finance related matters assisted by Michelle Pike on a temporary basis who has proved an invaluable source of upliftment and motivation to the general team and moral.

Lastly and certainly not least, Wilna Mew is responsible for contractor access to the estate and professionally addresses these related issues and queries. Wilna is also recognised by many for her role in the beautiful HOA gardens and lovely entrance to Raptor's View Wildlife Estate.

Hoedspruit Farm Watch

Quarterly Report as at 30 June 2024 is attached for your information.