Newsletter

September 2026



Image - MB

Here's what has happened in the last couple of months and what's to come!

As winter gives way to spring, the knobthorns are in blossom and the first frogs are calling from the dams.

In this edition we bring you news of the giraffe offtake and the new calves born on the estate, progress on bush thinning, fence repairs, our camera upgrade, and an update on contractor access and the new quarry path.

We also celebrate Pieter Makasuelela's fifteen years of service, look back on a lively River Braai, and ask for your support on speeding and riverbed use. Our nature pages feature the knobthorn, the frogs of Raptor's View and the summer migrants returning to the estate.

Please diarise the AGM on Saturday, 24 October 2026 at 10:00, The Radisson Safari Lodge

Raptors Team x

In this newsletter you can expect:

- Management Updates
- Ecology
- Statistics
- Nature Articles
- AGM
- Save the dates

Management Spotlight

Over the past couple of months, a considerable amount of work has taken place across Raptor's View, much of it focused on the practical and ongoing management of the estate and its natural environment. Bush clearing and thinning, erosion control and trail maintenance have continued, sections of the fenceline have been repaired and our surveillance cameras have been upgraded to provide more reliable monitoring.

At the same time, preparations for the coming fire season have moved forward, including the finalisation of the Fire Management SOP and the establishment and upcoming training of volunteer Fire Marshalls. Fire preparedness is not something that can be managed in isolation, and cooperation with neighbouring estates and properties will remain an important part of ensuring that we are better prepared should a fire occur.

Over the next few months, the focus will continue to be on maintaining what has already been done, completing the planned bush management and erosion work, strengthening fire readiness and monitoring the estate as the landscape responds to the summer rains. This is an ongoing process, and living in a wildlife estate means balancing the practical requirements of maintaining roads, trails, fences and infrastructure with the need to work with the natural rhythms of the bush and the wildlife that moves through it. The management update provides a look at some of this work and what residents can expect as we move further into the summer season.



RAPTOR'S View
Home Owners Association

Perimeter Fence & Camera Upgrade

Some 900 metres of the perimeter fence have been repaired following damage caused by giraffe fighting across the boundary with neighbouring properties. Giraffe bulls settle questions of rank by "necking", swinging their heavy heads into one another with considerable force. When rivals meet on opposite sides of a fence, the fence seldom survives the encounter. Read more about giraffe and their territorial battles on page 28.

Alongside the repairs, the fenceline cameras have been updated. They now connect via WiFi in place of mobile data uploads, giving us a far more stable connection with uninterrupted surveillance along the boundary of the estate.

Thank you to resident Fire Monitors and Marshals

We extend our sincere thanks to the residents who have volunteered their services as Fire Monitors and Fire Marshals. Their willingness to give time to the estate's safety is greatly appreciated.

In the interim, the Standard Operating Procedure has been finalised, so that every volunteer will work to the same clear set of roles and responsibilities. Training is the next step, and volunteers will be contacted directly once dates are confirmed.

Until the summer rains arrive, the fire risk remains with us. We ask all residents to keep an eye on the FDI boards at the gates and to report any smoke or fire immediately to Estate Management on 071 675 2525.



Road Update

As reported in the June newsletter, the road infrastructure planning process is ongoing, with the aim of finding a sustainable long-term solution that meets the estate's needs while preserving the bushveld character of Raptor's View.

Resident discussions and management assessments did not produce a final conclusion, but they did establish clear priorities. There is strong support for resolving the estate's drainage problems, with wide recognition that current maintenance methods are not a lasting answer. Equally clear was the wish to retain the natural character of the estate, with firm resistance to surfaces or solutions that would give our roads a more urban feel. Engineered gravel and hybrid options, which could offer greater durability, better drainage management and a more natural appearance, have attracted growing interest.

The next step follows directly from that feedback. Taking cost, traffic, durability, and the Estate's preference into account, further quotes and specialist expertise are now being sought to address drainage and the underlying road structure as a first phase. No commitments will be made until detailed costings have been assessed. Members will be kept informed, and further consultation will ensure that any improvements balance practicality, sustainability and financial responsibility with the character of the estate

Picnic Table

A new picnic table, received in early September, has been set up in the bush just off the Zebra Trail. The setting is a lovely one, with open views across the bushveld to the mountains of the escarpment. It offers residents a peaceful spot for a morning coffee, a family picnic or a quiet sundowner.



Security update

The WiFi upgrade to the fenceline cameras builds on the fibre network, WiFi infrastructure and AI monitoring system completed earlier this year. Together, these give the estate a considerably stronger surveillance capability than it had twelve months ago.

Contractor Access and Estate Rules

As a reminder, all contractors are permitted to only use the Contractor's Gate when entering Raptor's View. Contractors may not access the estate using a visitor PIN issued by a resident, and penalties may be issued where this occurs. Under the Contractor Rules, homeowners remain responsible for the conduct of the contractors they engage, so we ask for your support in upholding this procedure.

Before arrival

- Homeowners are responsible for contractors they contract
- Contractors must use the Raptor's Contractor's Gate
- Do not issue a visitor PIN for a contractor

Resident Checklist for Contractor

1. Complete the Registration Form and sign the Contractor Rules
2. Complete the Vehicle Permit Form
3. Payment is made upon collection
4. Obtain SAPs screening and access cards at Blue Swallow

Temporary Access

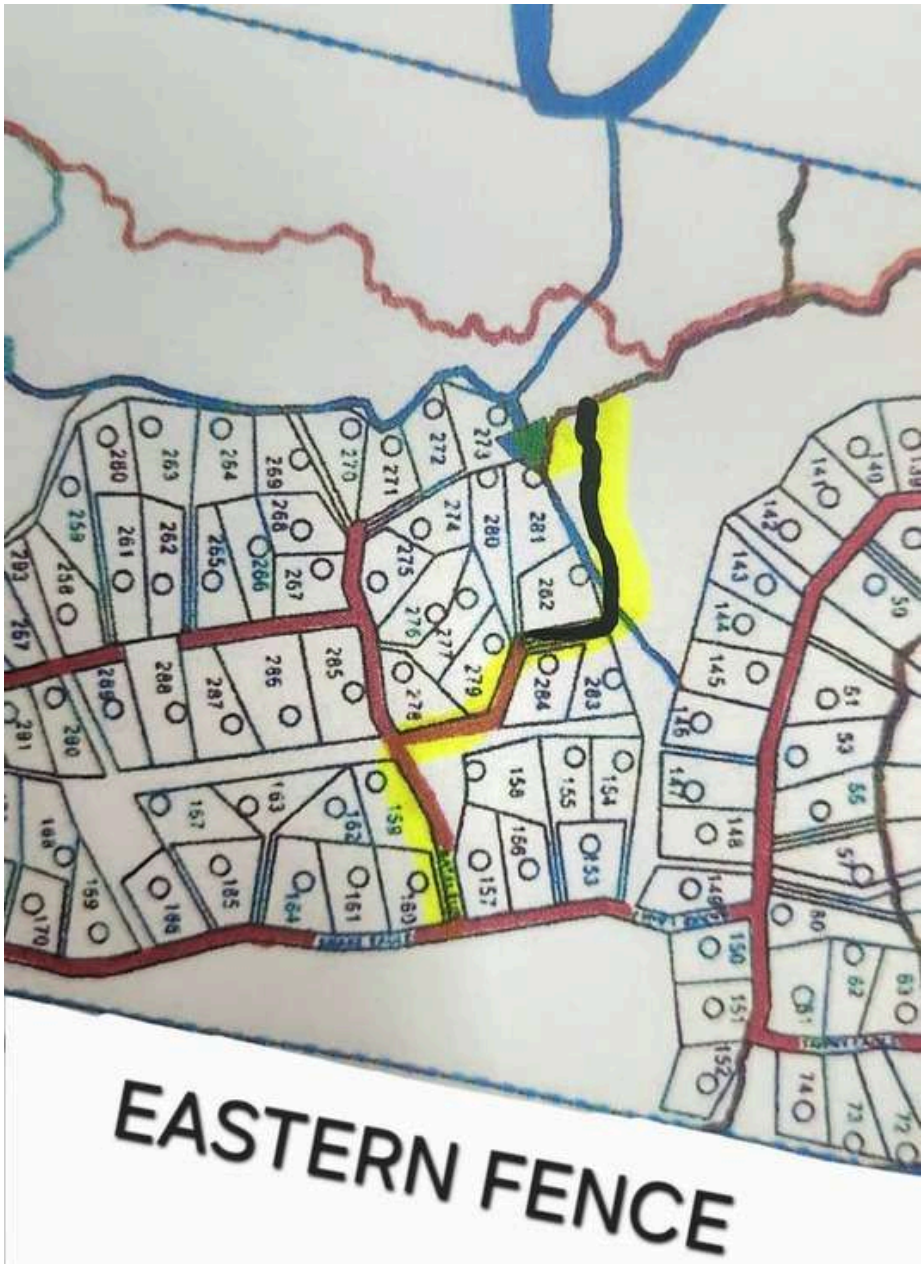
R 100	Per vehicle, per day rate
R 70	Per contractor, per day, with valid APS screening presented at the HOA office

RAPTOR'S View
Home Owners Association

RAPTOR'S View
Home Owners Association

Quarry Route

The path to the quarry has been changed to avoid intruding on the privacy of the residents of RV280 and RV281, whose homes are positioned close to the original route. The access point, previously on Bateleur, is now located between RV282 and RV283, as shown on the map below. We thank residents for using the new route and for keeping to the path.



Enjoying the Riverbed~Respecting Nature and Privacy

We have received several complaints from residents regarding extramural activities in the riverbed, where the area is being used for fishing, playing and picnicking.

Although the river is considered public open space, such use constitutes a breach of the Home Owners' Rules with regard to noise and nuisance.

5.6 **Noise Levels**

The volume of music, vehicles, electronic or musical instruments, entertainment and activity of persons, should be at such a level so as not to cause a nuisance to any other persons on the Estate. No noise will be permitted from 22h00 until 06h30 each day and power tools may only be used during the hours of 07:30 to 17:30 on Mondays to Fridays and 08:00 to 13:00 on Saturdays.

The riverbed is some of the most valuable habitat on Raptor's View. Its large riverine trees shelter nesting birds, bushbuck and nyala use it for cover, and many species depend on it for movement and water. Excessive noise and prolonged human activity have a direct, negative effect on the wildlife and birds that use the river and its surrounds. Several homes also look onto the riverbed, and their owners are entitled to the same quiet enjoyment of their properties as any other resident. We request that the riverbed areas are used responsibly, whilst respecting nature and home owners rules with regard to noise.



Speeding in the Estate: Thirty means 30

The RVHOA continues to regard speeding on the estate in a very serious light. Over the past year, a number of fines have been imposed, amounting to a total of R45,000 received. Behind that figure are drivers, whether residents, visitors, tenants or contractors, who chose to travel faster than 30 km/h on roads that are shared every day with children, cyclists, walkers and wildlife.

The reasons for the speed limit have been discussed in many previous issues of this newsletter, from the safety of pedestrians and wildlife to the effect of speed on dust, corrugations and the condition of our roads. Rather than repeat them, we would like to remind residents to adhere to the speed limit.

Speeding continues to be strictly monitored, and in addition to our existing measures, random manual speed controls are now being carried out at different times and locations across the estate. Fines increase quickly for repeat offences and homeowners remain responsible for any fines incurred by family members, guests, tenants and contractors visiting their property.

Riverbed Braai

On Saturday, 25 July, more than a hundred residents made their way down Black Harrier to the riverbed for our annual River Braai. It was one of those lovely Raptor's View afternoons when the usual pace of estate life slowed down and friends, families and neighbours gathered in the bush to enjoy good food, a few drinks and plenty of conversation.



A sincere thank you to everyone who helped make the event possible, from those involved in organising and setting up to the estate team, volunteers and everyone who helped with the clean-up afterwards. These occasions take a fair amount of work behind the scenes, and they are only successful because residents get involved and support them. Thank you, too, to everyone who joined us !

Giraffe Relocation and 8 New Arrivals

As part of the wildlife management programme, eight live giraffe have been sold to Balule. The reasons for this were explained in some detail in the June newsletter and remain an important part of managing the estate's giraffe population.

Browsing pressure on young Apple-leaf trees, which are a protected species, as well as on Tree Wisteria has increased, while the growing use of the trails by residents on foot and bicycle has also resulted in more frequent close encounters with giraffe. There is also the need to consider the longer-term wellbeing of the herd and the pressure that a large population could place on the available food resources should we experience another period of drought.



Darted Giraffe carefully being monitored by the vet and relocation team





Giraffe Relocation and 8 New Arrivals



Giraffe leaving the estate

The selection of the eight giraffe was carefully considered. No large bulls were included, and no cows with dependent calves were selected. This allows us to retain the core of the breeding herd while reducing the overall number of giraffe on the estate. Large bulls are also more challenging to capture and transport safely, while separating a cow from a young calf would create unnecessary stress. The objective has been to bring the population to a more sustainable level while maintaining a healthy and naturally functioning giraffe herd on Raptor's View.



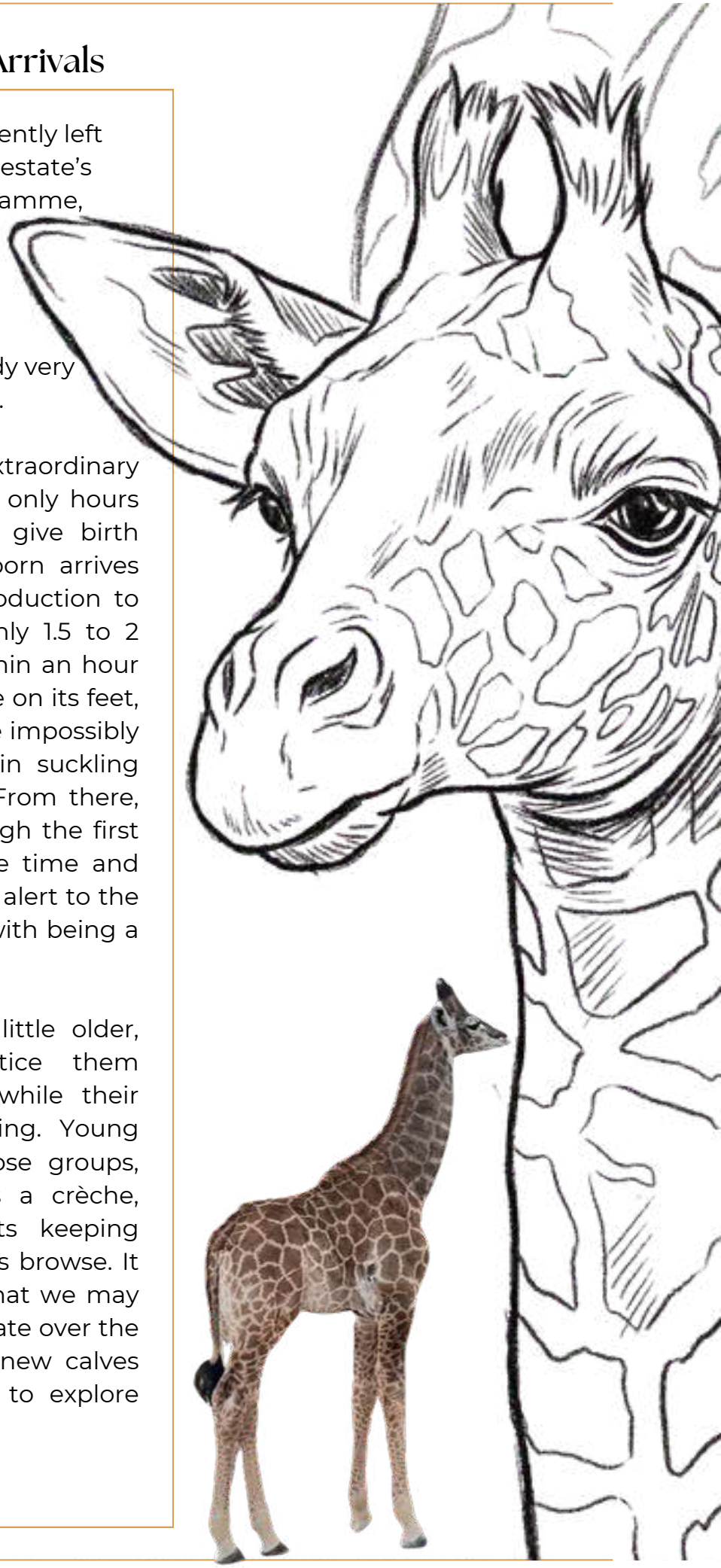


Welcome to the New Arrivals

While eight giraffe have recently left Raptor's View as part of the estate's wildlife management programme, we have also welcomed some new arrivals.
Several giraffe calves have been born on the estate in recent weeks and are already very much part of the landscape.

There is something quite extraordinary about seeing a giraffe calf only hours or days old. Giraffe cows give birth standing up, so the newborn arrives with a fairly dramatic introduction to the world, dropping roughly 1.5 to 2 metres to the ground. Within an hour or so, the calf will usually be on its feet, finding its balance on those impossibly long legs, and it will begin suckling within its first few hours. From there, the growth is rapid, although the first weeks remain a vulnerable time and the mother stays close and alert to the many dangers that come with being a young animal in the bush.

As the calves become a little older, residents may also notice them spending time together while their mothers are nearby feeding. Young giraffe will often form loose groups, sometimes referred to as a crèche, with one or more adults keeping watch while the other cows browse. It is a lovely sight and one that we may see more of around the estate over the coming months as these new calves grow stronger and begin to explore their surroundings.



Fifteen Years of Loyal Service : Pieter Makasualela



Gordon handing Pieter his Long Service Certificate

It is with great pleasure that we congratulate Pieter Makasuelela, a valued member of our ground staff, who has received an award in recognition of 15 years of loyal service to Raptor's View Wildlife Estate.

Fifteen years takes Pieter back to around 2011, when the estate was just ten years old and our long-term ecological monitoring programme was still in its early stages. In the years since, he has worked through wet seasons and prolonged droughts, through the floods of early 2026, and through every dry-season clean-up in between. So much of what residents enjoy without a second thought, from a drainage line cleared after a storm to a trail that remains safe and pleasant to walk, is the result of the quiet, steady work of our ground team, and Pieter has been an important part of that team for a decade and a half.

On behalf of the Board, management and all residents, thank you, Pieter, for your dedication and commitment to Raptor's View. We are proud to have you as part of the team.

Environmental and Ecological Update



Impala male and females

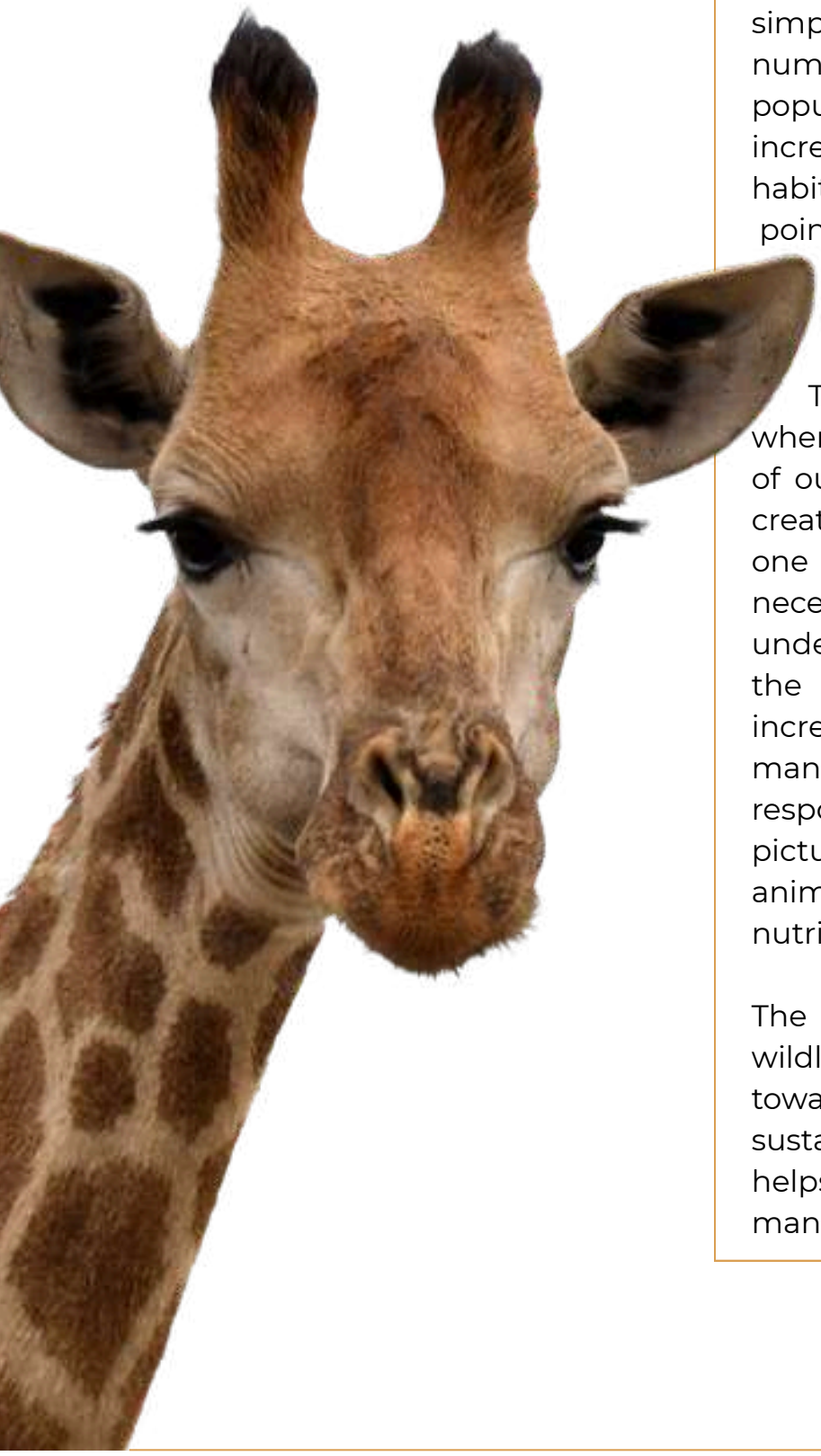
As we move into another spring season at Raptors View, our ecological management continues to focus on one central objective: building resilience in an ever-changing landscape.

Rather than responding only when problems become obvious, we are using monitoring, data and practical management interventions to understand where the ecosystem is heading and where necessary, influence that trajectory. The following are some of the key developments from the past quarter.

Wildlife Removals: Proactive Management

As part of our ongoing wildlife management programme, 8 giraffe and 40 impala were removed from the estate in the last quarter.

Wildlife removals are an important part of maintaining a sustainable balance between animal numbers and the resources available to them. Raptors View is a relatively small, enclosed system and unlike a large open conservation landscape, animals cannot simply move elsewhere when conditions change. Furthermore, predator numbers are limited on the estate and their impact is not significant enough to keep all populations in check



Our management decisions are therefore based on a combination of wildlife numbers (annual census), animal condition, vegetation assessments, available forage and longer-term ecological trends. The objective is not simply to reduce animal numbers, but to prevent the population from placing increasing pressure on the habitat and ultimately reaching a point where animals themselves begin to suffer from declining resources.

This is particularly important when considering the variability of our climate. Good rainfall can create an abundance of forage in one season, but that does not necessarily mean that the underlying carrying capacity of the system has permanently increased. Proactive management allows us to respond to the longer-term picture rather than waiting for animals to show signs of nutritional stress.

The revenue generated through wildlife removals also contributes towards the broader financial sustainability of the estate and helps support ongoing ecological management.

Annual Game Census: Measuring Where We Stand

Our 2026 annual game census has been completed and we are currently awaiting the final results.

The annual census provides an important snapshot of wildlife numbers across the estate and forms part of a much larger monitoring process. The value of the census is therefore not simply knowing how many animals we have. It is about understanding how those numbers are changing over time and what that means for the ecosystem.

Once the final results are available, they will help inform our ongoing wildlife management decisions and provide another important piece of the ecological picture

Supplementary Feeding: Monitoring Before Intervening

Despite the challenges associated with managing wildlife in an enclosed system, no supplementary feeding has been necessary so far this season.

The exceptionally good rainfall experienced over the past season and previous wildlife off takes has resulted in strong vegetation growth and improved forage availability. This has provided favourable conditions for wildlife, but we continue to monitor the situation closely.

Supplementary feeding is not something we want to introduce unnecessarily. While it can be an important management tool during periods of nutritional stress, it comes at a financial cost to the estate while prolonging pressure on natural grazing capacity that ultimately lead to deteriorating veld condition.

Our approach is therefore to monitor animal condition and available forage and intervene when there is an ecological justification to do so. At present, the indicators do not require supplementary feeding



Sunset Spot: Now Open for Bookings

The new Sunset Spot is now open for bookings, providing residents with another opportunity to enjoy the Raptors View landscape.

The location was selected to create a simple space where members can pause, spend time outdoors and experience the changing light and atmosphere of the bushveld towards the end of the day.

While our ecological management work often focuses on data, vegetation, wildlife numbers and long-term trends, places such as the Sunset Spot remind us of why we manage this landscape in the first place.

The value of Raptors View is not only found in the animals we see or the vegetation we measure. It is also in the opportunity to spend time in a functioning natural landscape, to observe it closely and to develop a deeper connection with the place we call home



Environmental Monitors: More Eyes on the Landscape

Our Environmental Monitoring programme is also continuing to grow, with 30 Raptors View Environmental Monitors now contributing observations through the EarthRanger application. Members are recording a range of ecological observations, including animal condition, species age and sex ratios, mortalities, unusual sightings and more.

The strength of this programme lies in the accumulation of data over time. An individual observation may provide only a small piece of information, but hundreds of observations begin to reveal patterns. By recording where and when observations occur, we can build a much more detailed picture of how wildlife and the broader environment are changing across the estate.

This information complements our formal vegetation surveys and annual game census, providing something that those surveys cannot: a continuous stream of observations from people who are regularly out in the landscape. The programme is also a wonderful opportunity for members to become directly involved in the ecological management of Raptors View. Thirty monitors gives us a strong foundation and the value of the dataset will continue to grow as more observations are collected over time.

Looking Ahead

The common thread running through all of these initiatives is proactive management. Wildlife removals, vegetation management, environmental monitoring and ecological surveys are not isolated activities. They are different tools that help us understand and influence an ecosystem that is constantly changing.

Our aim is not to control every aspect of the environment - that would neither be possible nor desirable. Instead, we are trying to recognise where the system is becoming less resilient, understand the reasons behind those changes and make considered interventions where they can have the greatest benefit.

A resilient ecosystem is not one that never changes. It is one that is able to absorb change, recover from disturbance and continue functioning over the long term. That remains the guiding principle behind our ecological management at Raptors View

Bush Thinning: 139 Hectares Completed

Bush thinning remains one of our most significant ongoing ecological interventions.

Raptors View is a savanna system, but some of the natural processes that historically helped maintain the balance between grass and woody vegetation - particularly regular fire and the influence of large herbivores such as elephants - are absent from the estate. Over time, this can result in increasing woody density and a gradual shift towards a more closed, bush-dominated system. Furthermore, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels have reached ~426 parts per million (ppm). According to the NOAA Global Monitoring Laboratory, this reflects an ongoing annual increase of roughly 2 to 3 ppm driven primarily by fossil fuel combustion. This surging concentration acts as an atmospheric fertiliser that directly accelerates woody plant growth, allowing trees and shrubs to assimilate carbon more efficiently through enhanced photosynthesis. As a result, this carbon surplus is a primary driver behind global bush encroachment, fundamentally transforming open grasslands and savanna into dense woody ecosystems over time.

Our vegetation mapping and ecological assessments identified 442 hectares of Dense Woodland as a priority for thinning. A total of 139 hectares have been completed so far this year with a further 47 scheduled in the near future.

The objective is not to remove trees indiscriminately. Thinning is targeted according to vegetation type, ecological priorities and the condition of the surrounding veld. The cut material is also strategically brush-packed rather than simply removed, helping protect exposed soil, reduce erosion and create conditions favourable for grass establishment.

Importantly, successful bush thinning is about more than the number of hectares treated. The quality of the intervention matters. We are aiming for effective control of targeted woody species while avoiding unnecessary disturbance to the soil and surrounding vegetation.

The work therefore forms part of a longer-term process of gradually shifting the landscape towards greater ecological resilience rather than attempting to achieve a once-off transformation.

Interesting Statistics July-September 2026



Pending new property transfers homes and stands 2 — 5



Properties registered — 0



New tenant rental agreements — 29



Existing leases extended — 5



New builds in progress — 1

Pending due to hold on building — 4



Applications for peg moves — 0



Renovations currently underway — 6

Living with Bats: OUR AMAZING NOCTURNAL NEIGHBOURS

Sharing our Lowveld region with bats can sometimes feel challenging, but these incredible creatures are some of the best neighbours we could ask for. By understanding them better, we can protect our homes while keeping our local ecosystem thriving.



Fruit Bat *Image supplied*

Did you know?

Local Stronghold:
Our area is critical for species like the Angolan, Little, and Midas Free-tailed bats, as well as House and Pipistrelle bats.

Natural Pest Control:
One bat can eat up to 600 mosquito-sized insects an hour, reducing health risks like malaria. University of Venda research shows that around Limpopo macadamia farms, bats eat 100 tonnes of insects per year, protecting local agriculture.

The Rabies Myth:
South African bats have zero reported cases of classical rabies. Only two domestic human deaths in 40 years involved a rare bat virus; unvaccinated pets pose a much higher risk.

Bat Populations are Facing a Steep, Quiet Decline

Ten years ago, our rehabilitation facility cared for around 20 orphaned Free-tailed bat pups each breeding season; since 2020, that dropped to three, and this season, it was zero. This disturbing data shows bat numbers are plummeting.



Slow to Recover: Bats live a long time and reproduce very slowly. Once a colony is lost, it takes years to recover.

Nowhere to Go: As traditional wild habitats disappear, bats rely heavily on man-made roofs for shelter.

The Risk of Extinction: Without care, species can disappear entirely—much like the Common pipistrelle on Christmas Island, which went extinct before anyone realized it was too late.

Fruit Bat in daylight
Image supplied

Managing Bats in your Roof Safely

Many Lowveld conservation-minded homeowners share their roofs with bats in exchange for free, 24/7 pest control, recognizing it as a contribution worth making. Coexistence is highly manageable with basic home maintenance:

1. **Guano and Odour:** Laying plastic sheeting on ceiling boards catches guano for quick clean-outs (and it serves as excellent garden fertiliser!). Regular clean-outs are highly effective, and safe ceiling products can also reduce odour.
2. **Noise:** Simple soundproofing insulation between your roof and ceiling easily dampens sounds.

The Law: Poisoning and Trapping

1. **Poisoning is Illegal:** Using fumigation (like Fumitabs), chemical sprays (like Doom), chlorine, Jeyes Fluid, or mothballs is cruel and illegal under South African wildlife legislation.
2. **Poisoning Doesn't Work:** Unless the roof is sealed, surviving bats or a new colony will simply move in.
3. **Sealing at Dusk is Fatal:** Sealing a roof can trap bats inside, as they do not all leave at once or every night. This is especially true in cooler weather when they enter torpor, and during the birthing season. Trapped bats face a slow death from dehydration.



Tiny baby *Image supplied*

The Reality of Bat Exclusion

Installing one-way exit devices was seen as the humane way to remove bats from roofs. While far better than illegal poisoning, recent data shows that exclusion still harms bat populations and rarely solves the problem for the entire neighborhood.

How It Works

Exclusion must take place in August or September (outside breeding season). One-way valves let bats exit at dusk but block their return. The devices are left in place for several nights to ensure all bats have left before the roof is permanently sealed. Although seamless looking, this method creates severe challenges:

1. **Predation and Exhaustion:** Free-tailed bats return together at dawn. Finding their roost blocked causes panic. Exhausted bats often land on flat ground where they cannot take off again, leaving them vulnerable to dehydration or predators.
2. **Population Collapse:** The stress of displacement significantly reduces reproduction in the following breeding season, causing colonies to fragment and die out.
3. **Neighborhood Displacement:** Bats seek what they know—another roof. Exclusion simply moves the problem to a neighbor, continuing the conflict cycle.
4. **Bat Houses:** Displaced bats rarely move straight into bat houses because the structures are unfamiliar. While well-designed bat houses might help future colonies, poorly constructed ones can overheat and become death traps.

Be a Bat Guardian and Ambassador

1. **Choose Tolerance:** Consider sharing your roof space and enjoying a free, 24/7 pest control service.
2. **Advocate for Them:** Educate neighbors about the vital role bats play in the Lowveld.
3. ·**Get Expert Advice:** Before taking steps to remove bats, chat with us! Many companies claim to use ethical practices, when the reality is far from it.
4. **Providing Bat Houses:** Before you build or buy, check with us to ensure it is safe and effective!

We are here to help – contact us!

We understand there are situations where bats simply cannot remain, such as structural repairs or renovations. If you are struggling with a colony, please reach out. We offer a judgment-free space to help you find practical, legal, and safe solutions that protect both your home and reduce impact on the animals.

THE KNOBTHORN

A Few Weeks of Flowers



Magnificent Knobthorn in flower *Image:MB*

For the past few weeks, the knobthorns around Raptor's View have been difficult to miss. Some were already flowering in August, their otherwise bare branches covered in creamy-white flower spikes that almost give the trees the appearance of having been dusted with snow. Stand beneath one on a warm afternoon and the flowers have another story to tell: they are scented, and the branches can be surprisingly busy with tiny insects moving from flower to flower.

The knobthorn, Senegalia nigrescens, formerly Acacia nigrescens, is one of the characteristic trees of the warmer Lowveld. It is a deciduous species and its flowering generally takes place towards the end of the dry season, often before the new leaves appear. The timing varies between trees and from year to year, and an individual tree may be in flower for only two or three weeks. So what we see across the estate is a relatively short window in the life of the tree.

The flowers are an important seasonal food source, and the most obvious visitor is often the giraffe. Watching one feed in a flowering knobthorn is impressive; it can strip flowers from the branches with remarkable efficiency. Research in Kruger National Park found that giraffe consumed approximately 85% of the flowers within their reach during the study period.

This led researchers to ask a fascinating question: could giraffe actually be pollinating the trees as they moved from one flowering knobthorn to another? Their faces, heads and ossicones move directly through the flowers, so pollen transfer certainly seems possible.

The answer, however, appears to be more complicated. When researchers looked at fruit production, they found that fruit set was significantly lower at heights accessible to giraffe and higher above their browsing range. Their conclusion was that, during the period studied, giraffe were acting primarily as flower predators rather than effective pollinators.

The real pollination story may be happening almost unnoticed beneath the giraffe's long neck. Studies of knobthorn flowers in Kruger recorded large numbers of insects visiting them, particularly wasps, flies and solitary bees. These small visitors appear to be important pollinators, moving between the numerous tiny flowers packed into each flower spike.

There is another interesting detail here. Knobthorn flowers contain almost three times as much condensed tannin as the tree's leaves, yet giraffe still consume them in large quantities. Tannins are part of a plant's chemical defence against herbivory, so the willingness of giraffe to feed heavily on the flowers is a reminder that the relationship between plants and herbivores is rarely straightforward.



Look at the trunk

The flowers may have caught our attention this year, but the trunk is what gives the knobthorn its name.
Young trees are particularly distinctive, with swollen woody knobs on the trunk and branches, each associated with short, dark, hooked prickles. As the tree matures, the bark becomes heavier, darker and more deeply fissured, and those characteristic knobs become much less obvious.

This is one of the things worth looking for around Raptor's View. A young knobthorn can look almost completely different from a mature tree, despite being the same species.

The tree has plenty more going on beneath the surface. Its leaves, flowers and pods are used by a variety of herbivores, while the tree provides habitat for insects, butterflies and birds. The dusky charaxes uses knobthorn as a larval host plant, and older trees can provide useful nesting and cavity habitat for birds. Its exceptionally hard, termite-resistant wood has also made it valuable to people, historically being used for fence posts and mine props.

For now, the flowers are beginning to disappear and the trees will soon change again as new leaves emerge and we move closer to the summer rains.

So if you pass one of the flowering knobthorns, take another look before the display is over. Look into the flowers rather than only at them, and you may notice the tiny pollinators doing their work. Look down at the trunk and compare a young tree with an older one. And if there is a giraffe nearby, watch what happens when it reaches into the branches. There is considerably more happening in a flowering knobthorn than first meets the eye.



DID YOU KNOW?



The bark of a mature knobthorn tree *Image:MB*

🌼 The flowering window is short. Knobthorns generally flower between August and November, but an individual tree may flower for only two to three weeks.

🦒 Giraffe can consume most of the flowers within reach. A Kruger study recorded giraffe consuming about 85% of the flowers available within their browsing height.

🐝 The important pollinators may be tiny. Wasps, flies and solitary bees were among the most numerous visitors recorded on knobthorn flowers.

🌿 The flowers are chemically defended. Knobthorn flowers contain almost three times as much condensed tannin as the leaves, yet giraffe still feed heavily on them.

🦋 It is a butterfly food plant. The larvae of the dusky charaxes use knobthorn as a host plant.

🌳 Young and mature trees look surprisingly different. The prominent woody knobs are particularly noticeable on young trees, while older trunks develop heavier, darker and more deeply fissured bark.

WHEN GIRAFFE BULLS MEET AT THE FENCE

Neck and neck

The 900 metres of fenceline recently repaired at Raptor's View tells an interesting story. Much of the damage was caused by giraffe bulls, and while it is tempting to describe this as a territorial battle, that is not quite what is happening.

Giraffe bulls do not defend territories in the way that, for example, a leopard or a hippo may defend an area. Their social lives are considerably more fluid. Bulls move through the landscape, encounter other males and establish their position in the hierarchy through a series of interactions that can range from gentle neck rubbing and pushing to some remarkably powerful bouts of fighting. Ultimately, higher-ranking bulls have greater access to females that are receptive to mating.

And when two determined bulls meet, things can become very physical.



GIraffe necking in the Kruger National Park *Image:Rainervon Brandis Canva*

From sparring to serious business

A giraffe fight rarely begins with two animals immediately swinging their heads at one another. There is usually a period of assessment first. Bulls may approach, rub their necks against one another, push or stand alongside each other before the interaction develops into more vigorous sparring.
Then the necks start moving.

The bulls stand alongside each other and swing their long necks in wide arcs, using the weight of the skull and the ossicones as weapons. A well-placed blow can land against the opponent's neck, shoulder, flank or hindquarters with considerable force. Research has shown that young males may use sparring as practice, developing the skills they will need as adults, while these encounters also help establish and maintain the male hierarchy without every interaction escalating into a serious fight.

Not every contest becomes violent. Many are relatively controlled displays of strength and position. But when two well-matched or determined bulls refuse to give way, the intensity can increase dramatically.

There are rules to the madness

What is particularly fascinating is how structured these contests can be. Studies of male giraffe sparring have documented bulls positioning themselves side by side, sometimes head-to-head and sometimes head-to-tail, before delivering blows. The position matters because it allows the animals to swing their necks and strike while maintaining their balance.

Recent research on South African bulls has gone further, showing that individual giraffes can even have a preferred side from which they swing their necks. In one study of 118 sparring bouts, researchers found evidence of consistent individual “laterality” — effectively, some bulls favouring the left and others the right when delivering their blows.

The contests are therefore not quite the chaotic brawls they first appear to be.
There is positioning. There is timing. There is practice. And there is a point at which one bull decides that continuing is no longer worth the cost and moves away.

Interestingly, the dominant bull in the South African study was never observed sparring, but he frequently interrupted the contests of other males. This suggests that established social rank can itself influence how much a bull needs to fight.

Built for battle

A mature giraffe bull is remarkably well equipped for this kind of contest.
The skull becomes heavier with age, the ossicones become more substantial and additional bony structures develop on the skull. Mature bulls also have thicker necks and greater body mass, all of which contribute to their ability to deliver and withstand powerful blows. Researchers studying male giraffe sparring classify mature bulls partly by body size, neck girth, ossicone development, skull growths and coat colour.

And then there is the colour.

The dark, almost charcoal coats of some older bulls have traditionally been thought simply to indicate age. Research on wild giraffe in Namibia suggests that there is more to it. A 12-year study of 66 male giraffe at Etosha found that males did not all darken at the same rate or to the same degree. Darker males were more likely to be solitary and were associated with behaviour consistent with higher social status, suggesting that coat colour may function as a social signal as well as changing with age.

So, when you see a very dark old bull moving through the bush, you may be looking at more than simply an older giraffe. His appearance may also be giving other bulls information about who they are dealing with.

What happens when the opponent is on the other side of a fence?

This is where things become particularly relevant to Raptor's View. A giraffe bull approaching another bull at a boundary fence does not necessarily understand the fence as the management structure that we do. If the two animals can see and reach one another, the social interaction can still take place — but the fence changes the physical mechanics of the contest.

The bulls cannot move around each other in the normal way. They cannot easily line up, swing freely, reposition themselves or simply walk away in the same manner as they would in open veld. Instead, the fence becomes part of the encounter, absorbing blows and sometimes taking considerable strain.

There are documented examples of this happening elsewhere. In December 2025, a particularly dramatic incident occurred at Bisley Nature Reserve near Pietermaritzburg. Two bulls were fighting near a slope when one was knocked down, broke through and flattened part of the boundary fence, and became trapped against a tree with a hind leg caught in a fork. The incident required a coordinated rescue response. The Friends of Bisley Nature Reserve also linked the incident to concerns about the reserve's giraffe population and overcrowding.

The point is not that every giraffe fight damages a fence. Most obviously do not. But when two large bulls are determined to continue a contest at a boundary, a fence can become the unfortunate third participant.

Why it matters here

For Raptor's View, this is not simply an interesting piece of giraffe behaviour. We are managing a relatively small wildlife estate within a much larger Lowveld landscape, and the movement and behaviour of individual animals inevitably interact with the boundaries we have created. Giraffe are particularly interesting in this respect because bulls can cover considerable distances and may encounter animals on neighbouring properties.

The recent repair of approximately 900 metres of fenceline is therefore part of the practical reality of managing the estate's wildlife population.

It also connects directly to the recent giraffe offtake. Reducing the number of giraffe on the estate was not about one single issue. Browsing pressure, the availability of food during difficult seasons, resident safety and the management of a healthy population all form part of the broader picture. Reducing the population also reduces some of the pressure associated with a high density of bulls competing within and around a relatively confined area. That does not mean we will no longer see giraffe battles. We almost certainly will.

It simply means that understanding what is happening gives us a better appreciation of why wildlife management sometimes involves decisions that are not immediately obvious when viewed from a single perspective.



READING A GIRAFFE *Contest*

The next time you see two bulls together, there are a few things worth watching for.

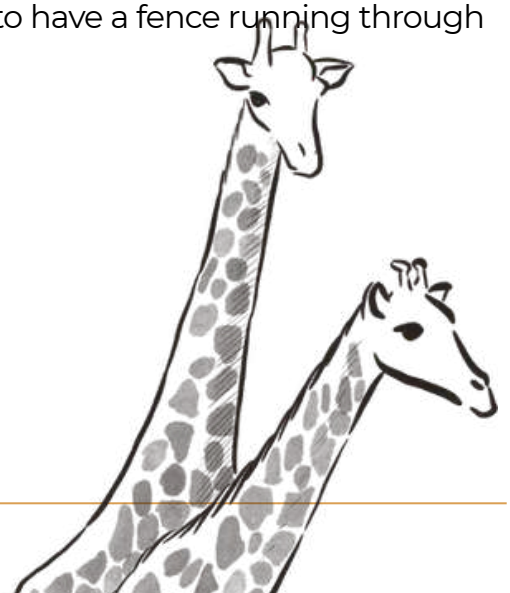
- Look at the approach. Are they simply feeding together, or are they becoming interested in one another? Neck rubbing, pushing and standing close together can precede more vigorous sparring.

- Watch their position. Bulls may stand side by side and adopt a head-to-head or head-to-tail position before the blows begin. The way they position themselves is part of the contest and allows them to swing those remarkably long necks while maintaining their balance.

- Look at the neck. A tense, arched neck and deliberate positioning are very different from relaxed feeding behaviour. Once the swinging begins, watch how the bulls use the whole length and weight of the neck to deliver their blows.

- Watch who walks away. A contest does not necessarily end with a dramatic knockdown. Often the most important moment is when one bull decides not to continue. In giraffe society, knowing when to give way is as much part of the hierarchy as winning a fight.

If you see two bulls involved in a serious contest close to a trail or fenceline, give them plenty of space. A giraffe may look slow and peaceful when it is feeding, but a mature bull in a dominance contest is an exceptionally powerful wild animal. Residents should never position themselves between competing animals or attempt to approach them. For all their height and apparent awkwardness, giraffe bulls have developed a remarkably sophisticated way of sorting out who stands where in their society. Sometimes, here at Raptor's View, we simply happen to have a fence running through the middle of the conversation.



SCORPION Night Walk



Join Jonathan Leeming for a scorpion night walk at Raptors View Wildlife Estate on Saturday the 3rd October from 6:30pm to 8pm. The walk will consist of an exploration in search of scorpions within the estate with opportunities to stop and discuss various scorpion and scorpion sting topics. The walk will be short, easy and suitable for children.

Bookings are online at the following link or by scanning the QR Code. Please note that this walk is for the residents of Raptors View Wildlife Estate and limited to 30 participants.

Save these dates

EVENING SCORPION WALK

03.10.26

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

24.10.26

BIRDING MORNING WALK

08.11.26

note new date

CHRISTMAS NIGHT MARKET

COMING SOON

Safari Junction lawns near RVHOA office



