



# KRUGER2CANYON

## NEWS

April 2024

The Farm House, R527, Zandspruit, Hoedspruit, Limpopo email: editor@kruger2canyon.co.za

## South Africa's conservation model: why expanding the use of biodiversity to generate money is a good idea



South Africa's new biodiversity economy strategy aims to make the benefits from biodiversity available to more people

Image: Canva Pro

Hayley Clements, Alta De Vos and Matthew Child

**South Africa's government is calling for public comments on an updated version of its existing biodiversity economy plan.**

The National Biodiversity Economy Strategy aims to conserve biodiversity while also contributing to job creation and economic growth. It proposes to do this by promot-

ing sustainable use of the country's natural resources.

The strategy is being revised so that the country's national policy is better aligned with recent international policy developments in the biodiversity sphere. The most important of these is the Convention on Biological Diversity's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

This requires countries to develop domes-

tic policies and regulations to ensure that they conserve more of their land in ways that are fair to the people on that land.

Not everyone is happy with the strategy and its proposed revisions. It's been criticised for monetising and exploiting biodiversity – in other words, using biodiversity to generate money. For example, the strategy lists using wildlife for fair-chase trophy hunting, meat hunting and wild meat sales.

It also lists fishing and harvesting indigenous plants (for example, for medicine and tea) and insects (for food).

But we think the strategy is a step in the right direction. We are conservation scientists who have conducted extensive research into the outcomes of different conservation strategies in southern Africa. Our work shows sustainable use of wildlife is an important strategy ... Cont. on page 3

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# From the editors desk



Hello fellow readers and citizens. Well, the time will soon be upon us (29<sup>th</sup> May) to cast our vote – for some a meaningless, fruitless endeavour.

But hear ye, hear ye .... voting is a right and a privilege (I think most rights should be earned) but here we have an opportunity to try and promote change – so not voting just puts you in bed with the powers that be. If you're like me, we often feel like idiots trudging the lines to mark 'x' in a box on a ballot, that probably won't be counted – but hey, let's enjoy the ride, nonetheless. So here it is: The idiot's guide to voting.

Attention all clueless citizens, lost souls, and bewildered bystanders! Are you about as politically savvy as a goldfish in a library? Well, fear not, because we've got the ultimate idiot's guide to voting—the crash course you never knew you needed.

First things first, dear readers: voting is not a spectator sport. You can't just sit on the side lines munching popcorn and expect change to magically happen. No, you've got to roll up your sleeves, dust off that brain (if you can find it) and get ready to participate in the greatest show on Earth—democracy!

Step one: you should have registered to vote. Yes, I know that was about as thrilling as watching paint dry, but trust me, it's a necessary evil. You should have logged to some platform, or gone into some IEC office or lean-to, and filled out some form. And no, you cannot register by writing "I vote for rugby and boerewors" on the form - that just won't cut it, no matter how much you love braaiing with the boys.

Now that you're officially in the system, it's time to educate yourself. No, scrolling through memes on Instagram, or watching Tiktok, or playing Fortnite, doesn't count as research. Take a break from cat videos and actually read up on the candidates and the issues. And remember, just because someone has a catchy slogan, or a snazzy tie, or a sexy car, or gives you a t-shirt and a sarmie, that doesn't mean they've got your best interests at heart. In fact, they probably haven't.

On election day, drag yourself out of bed (yes, even if it's raining or hot or cold) and head to the polls. Don't worry, they won't

ask you any trick questions (hopefully). Just follow the arrows, punch some holes, or tick some boxes—it's like a grown-up version of connect the dots!

And voilà, you've officially cast your vote! Give yourself a pat on the back and a gold star for not accidentally voting for the town drunk (again). Now sit back, relax, and watch democracy unfold like a very poorly scripted reality TV show.

So, there you have it, folks—the idiot's guide to voting. Remember, democracy is like riding a bike: it's confusing, terrifying, and occasionally ends in disaster, but it's the only way to get where you want to try and go. Now go forth and exercise your right to be gloriously clueless in the voting booth!

But let's get serious here – our only chance of making significant inroads to how this beautiful country is governed is to stand together and vote for change. Now IS the time to challenge governance, responsibility, accountability and put the governing bodies to the test. Let's do it with enthusiasm and rescue this country from the downward spiral of degradation that it is in. come on! Onward and upward!

Until next time, 'may the force be with you'.



Mark Bishop - Editor

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## Love the Hoed<sup>®</sup> titbits

### New protected areas declared in the region

Browsing through the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere newsletter, Romy Antrobus-Wuth reports that

South Africa and the rest of the world are working towards formally protecting 30% of natural areas by 2030, any new additions serve as a step closer to achieving this goal.

After a drawn-out process the exciting news is that Karongwe Game Reserve and neighbouring Makgokolo Private Nature Reserve have both recently been formally Gazetted as Nature Reserves under the Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003). These two areas add some 10 000 ha to the network of legally protected and managed land. They also add to key ecological corridors that connect the Greater Kruger with the Mpumalanga Drakensberg.

### Padel mania really hits the Hoed!

Seems that there is an ever-increasing flow of potential stars to the new padel courts. Work there on the full-blown sports bar (with many TV's), is progressing at a pace. The completion date is targeted to late May – exciting times! The two courts are in full swing and already 70 members have registered. Early bird membership lasts until 100 members are registered. Currently playing slots start at 07:00 and go through to the last slot at 17:00 – BUT once the facility is in full swing slots will be available from 05:00 – 21:00.

Memberships are as follows (early bird/ actual): Single R 2 000/2 500; Couples R 3 000/3 500; Family (two adults and two kids under 18) R 4 000/4 500.

Raquets can be bought at varying prices or hired for R 50/hr. You have to buy a sleeve of 3 balls for R 150 and court prices currently are R 250/hr but once the facility is

completed this will be R 400/hr unless you are a member in which case you get a 25% discount!

I feel we're in for a combination of padel playing and most certainly, rugby watching! Get down now and experience the mania!

### A potential world massage champion

Anneri Van Zyl was one of the latest entrants into the World Championship in Massage. She says she uses holistic therapy and different massage techniques and movements combined with Swedish, aroma, Shiatsu, pregnancy, infant, and sports massages to get the results that her clients require.

She says that she represents South Africa, but mostly Hoedspruit which made her into the person and therapist she is today, and Namaqualand where she is originally from. Good luck Anneri – bring it home!

### Cleaning the town

Thanks to all the volunteers that stepped up to join Ward Councillor Christine du Preez help clean our town. The Bavaria estate men were involved, as were many Hlokomela staff members, Sylvia Sussens, Raptors View staff – and of course a special thanks to Don Vieira from Maruleng Spares for the equipment to do the job.

What we need to do now is sort out all the billboards littering our streets – for the safari hub of South Africa, and so many tourists coming through our town its truly embarrassing to present this mishmash of so called 'advertising boards' to the public. There are other avenues to advertise – half of these quite frankly are just space junk!

### New restaurant is coming soon

Antojitos Hoedspruit will be opening in June. A touch of a Mexican Cantina with

a sky lounge overlooking the mountains - a huge emphasis on tapas and cocktails. It's promises to be a colourful and lively environment. Looking forward to another choice for our culinary 'menu' in town.




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# South Africa's conservation model: why expanding the use of biodiversity to generate money is a good idea

Cont. from page 1

Our work shows sustainable use of wildlife is an important strategy for expanding the area under wildlife conservation in ways that also benefit local people.

Like other southern African conservation scientists, we support the revisions to the strategy. They show that the government is planning to meet global biodiversity commitments in a way that benefits local people, wildlife, and ecosystems.

The strategy addresses gaps in South Africa's conservation model, such as the fact that it still largely excludes previously disadvantaged groups of people. It also aligns ambitious global goals for expanding protected areas with the country's pressing development needs.

In our view the revised strategy is an important step towards addressing these needs.

## Expanded remit

South Africa is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity. As such it's required to report against 23 targets. For example, Target 3 is to conserve 30% of all lands and seas by 2030. Target 9 is to manage wild species sustainably to benefit people.

More than its predecessors, the convention's latest framework recognises the need to conserve biodiversity as well as how biodiversity benefits people. Southern African countries such as South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe have long acknowledged the link between wildlife and nature's value to people through sustainable use conservation models.

Here are some examples.

South Africa's current model allows landholders to derive economic benefits from sustainably using wildlife on their lands. This is commonly done through ecotourism, recreational hunting and sales of live game and game meat.

This model results in many landholders opting for wildlife-based enterprises on their land, instead of other land uses like agriculture. The outcome is often biodiversity conservation beyond protected areas, because it benefits people.

This model has resulted in wildlife-based enterprises occurring across 14%-17% of the country's land. Wild herbivore numbers have increased tenfold since the 1960s.

The country's revised strategy aims to expand this model. It sets out ways in which people can derive livelihoods that ensure biodiversity's benefits – both monetary and non-monetary – reach previously disadvantaged groups.

Namibia and Zimbabwe have also allowed private landholders and communities to become custodians of the wildlife on their land by establishing conservancies. These offer ecotourism, trophy hunting or both. The result has been the recovery of wildlife populations and improved livelihoods for people.

But there's some push back on the concept of sustainable use, mostly from the global north. In particular, trophy hunting is opposed on moral grounds and perceptions that it threatens wildlife populations.

Our view, however, is that the market expansion potential of key wildlife economy activities shouldn't be diminished.

## Trophy hunting

South Africa's trophy hunting industry is

one of the pillars of its wildlife economy. The revised Biodiversity Economy Strategy aims to expand this activity to unlock conservation enterprises on community land.

Trophy hunting is estimated to contribute US\$250 million per year to the economy and support 17,000 jobs, mostly in rural areas. Currently, it largely takes place on extensive private game ranches.

We think trophy hunting and other sustainable use activities like meat hunting and meat sales are important tools for including communities in conservation.

Firstly, hunting has lower barriers to entry than ecotourism. It can also take place in less accessible and less scenic places, meaning it can help support conservation and livelihoods where ecotourism cannot.

Secondly, undertaking several activities on a piece of land, including trophy and meat hunting, increases the resilience of the enterprise. Such resilience will be critical for including communities in conservation efforts.

But relying too heavily on trophy hunting to sustain conservation would be a mistake. It should be used as just one tool in a diversified biodiversity economy toolkit.

This is what the government's revised Biodiversity Economy Strategy seeks to do. It includes trophy hunting as one of many biodiversity-based economic activities the country can invest in, particularly in multi-use conservation landscapes which include protected areas and working landscapes. These working lands include both private and community land.

The revision also includes a renewed focus on ecotourism and game meat. Additionally, it lists activities like live sales of game, bioprospecting (searching for and

commercialising nature products) and fishing.

A common concern of sustainable use on communal land is that it can become a "free for all". This assumption is a dangerous oversimplification. However, good governance is needed. Investment into wildlife-based enterprises on community land should require a governing body, business and management plans, benefit-sharing agreements, and monitoring protocols.

## Looking ahead

South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe are some examples of African countries that have committed to policies aimed at unlocking well-governed, multi-use landscapes that support diverse livelihood strategies and link people to nature's values.

The evidence shows that such landscapes can support the recovery of wildlife populations, the restoration of ecosystems, the improvement of rural livelihoods and rural innovation and resilience.

## Hayley Clements

Senior Researcher, African Wildlife Economy Institute and Centre for Sustainability Transitions, Stellenbosch University

## Alta De Vos

Associate Professor, Centre for Sustainability Transitions, Stellenbosch University

## Matthew Child

PhD candidate, University of Pretoria

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## The heart of a field guide

Louise Pavid

**What's in a field guide? What leads someone to forsake conventional norms, pack their bags, and venture into a remote, rustic landscape? Is it a deep-seated love for wildlife and nature? Perhaps it's a desire to escape the materialistic trappings of urban life? Or, could it be a calling for a greater, more meaningful purpose?**

The beauty of these questions lies in their lack of a definitive answer. Each guide's journey is unique, shaped by personal truths and motivations. While there's no universal formula, common threads weave through their narratives: a passion for wildlife and nature, a respect for natural environments and their sustainability, and a yearning to enlighten and educate others.

Guiding transcends the notion of a typical job; it's a lifestyle - a commitment that demands unwavering dedication and sacrifices. It's an ongoing journey of growth, many hours of learning, practice, and patience. Patience more especially with clients, managing expectations of every person/client that they come into contact with – often giving those people a life changing experience.

Guiding isn't just about encountering

animals; it's about curating unforgettable experiences in the wilderness for those who entrust you with their exploration. It involves not only observing lions in their natural habitat but also tending to guests' needs, from carrying luggage to ensuring comfort. Guiding is a blend of many hours of hospitality, tourism, and national PR, where human interaction is as crucial as wildlife encounters.

Many are familiar with the adage attributed to the renowned American singer Marc Anthony: "Do what you love, and you'll never work a day in your life." This simple yet profound statement encapsulates why many choose the path of guiding. However, transitioning from an aspiration to a career requires more than passion - it demands perseverance and a relentless pursuit of excellence. Behind the picturesque imagery of khakis and captivating tales, lie years of experience, education, and honed skills.

Field guiding is a labour of love - an ongoing journey rather than a destination. Ask any seasoned guide if they'd trade their profession for anything else, and the resounding answer often is, "No. Look around - this is my office." They point to the vast expanse of untamed wilderness that fuels their passion and purpose. Being

a field guide means embracing a lifestyle that prioritizes continuous learning, from spending hours on foot to mastering shooting skills under the sun, and delving into scientific literature instead of indulging in leisurely pursuits.

Success as a field guide isn't measured by material wealth but by the intangible rewards of fulfilment and personal growth. While guiding may not lead to a spot on the Forbes 500 list, its value lies in the profound connections forged with nature and fellow explorers. Nature serves as the ultimate teacher, offering lessons in resilience, humility, and self-discovery. Guides navigate this intricate relationship, guiding others on a transformative journey of exploration and understanding.

Field guiding isn't a career for everyone, but for those who embrace it wholeheartedly, it's a gateway to a lifetime of wonder, fulfilment, and purpose - a journey where the true richness lies in the experiences shared, and the knowledge gained along the way. It's about fostering a deep connection with the environment, understanding the delicate balance of ecosystems, and instilling a sense of responsibility toward conservation and preservation.

In the realm of guiding, every day is an opportunity for discovery, every encoun-

ter a chance to inspire. It's not just about showcasing the beauty of nature, but also about imparting a sense of wonder and reverence. Guides serve as ambassadors of the wilderness, bridging the gap between humans and the natural world. They play a crucial role in environmental education, raising awareness about the importance of conservation and sustainable practices.

The life of a field guide is multifaceted and dynamic, filled with moments of awe and challenges to overcome. It requires adaptability, empathy, and a deep understanding of both human nature and the natural world. From interpreting animal behaviour to sharing insights on local culture and history, guides wear many hats, each adding depth and richness to the experience they offer.

Ultimately, field guiding is about fostering connections, nurturing a sense of wonder, and leaving a positive impact on both individuals and the environment. It's a calling that requires dedication, passion, and a profound love for the wild places that inspire us all.

**Ed note: watch out for the Safari Guide of the Year 2024 competition reveal coming soon!**





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# Other SEF components and more numiknow™ stories!



The vegetable garden project is yielding a good harvest

Images supplied

Thias Taute

The Social Employment Fun (SEF) project, as detailed in the February 2024 issue of the Kruger2Canyon News, is a testament to the power of collective action. With between 300 - 320 participants dedicating an average of two days per week 'for the greater good', the project spans various communities from Acornhoek to Sekororo, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

Mathematical proficiency development through numiknow™ clubs, as described in the previous issues, is one component

of the project. It also works to develop mathematical proficiency in creches and Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres through the numiknow R-Games. Adults are involved in mathematical proficiency development through the numiknow™ F-Game – a board game based on presenting numbers through basic operations, and solving problems with answers, once more presented through dominoes.

Environmental awareness in the communities is promoted through clubs in primary and secondary schools, where curriculum-related topics are introduced practically to increase understanding. The huge task of environmental monitoring, including water

quality, waste management, sand mining, etc., is also a crucial part of the project in supporting the great work the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Reserve is doing, and assisting awareness in the communities.

The last component of the SEF project was the development and support of vegetable gardens at schools and in the communities, to assist feeding schemes in preparing more nutritious meals for the learners. A variety of vegetables were planted in January 2024. As some of the vegetables are now being harvested, the participants realised that a successful gardener demands a lot of 'tender love and care' to produce a good harvest and that nature, the heat, drought and lack or access of water, are all variables that need a good amount of management to produce good yields. The goal of the project is to provide, in total, 1 500 kg of different kinds of vegetable to the feeding schemes, including, spinach, beetroot, cabbage, tomatoes, peppers, and chillies to the value of about R75 000.

Back to numiknow™ and some interesting turns to introducing mathematical proficiency in the communities.

After the Dinkwanyane Water Smart project, a feedback meeting was held in Phiring village. It was here that the parents, witnessing the transformative effects of the numiknow™ club on their children, were inspired to request its continuation. This proactive stance led to the forming of a volunteer committee, in collaboration with Hoedspruit Hub, to drive numeracy development in the village, sparking hope for a brighter educational future.

At German S Chiloane Secondary School in Brooklyn, Acornhoek, the parents of Grade 8 and 9 learners participating in the afternoon, Saturday and holiday activities, were invited to demonstrate the various numiknow™ games. They participated and

thoroughly enjoyed the experience. This led them to request more opportunities for their own development, culminating in forming a weekly parents club.

Another numiknow™ competition ended on 31 March 2024. This competition was launched for the learners who previously participated in a competition between Thorometsane and Matlabong Primary Schools in November 2024. The general achievement of the winning team was lower than 55% and so it was decided to set a specific minimum requirement for them to achieve by 31 March 2024. The first person who successfully achieved the goal could win R1 000 and two sets of dominoes for the school.

On the school's closing date on 20 March 2024, there were still no entries! The facilitators told us that some learners were preparing and would use the holiday to practice more!

The outcome was that three learners put up their hands to be assessed, of whom one was evaluated twice. The improvement was impressive, and although no one won the R 1 000 cash, Kgotlelelo Mgiba from Matlabong in the Malaeneng village, was awarded a set of dominoes worth R 1 000 for her perseverance and commitment and achieving more than 90% of the set goals! It proved that external motivation through rewards does have a definite role in improving mathematical proficiency.

In the next edition, we will have a good idea if the results of this project lead to another SEF project being awarded to us from July 2024 to April 2025, to continue the great work done by the community participants.

**To contact Thias Taute about numiknow™ you can do so through the Hoedspruit Hub: 079 502 4727 or on email thias@hoedspruithub.com**

## How to develop effective study habits in high school for future university success

One of the most important skills to develop in high school is learning how to study effectively, with future higher education success in mind, an education expert says.

"For many high school students, the focus is almost exclusively on doing well in their next exam by trying to master their work in whichever way possible. While it is, of course, important to try and perform optimally during exams, the more fundamental skill to master during your high school years is the ability to study effectively while the workload is still relatively contained," says Dr Linda Meyer, MD of IIE Rosebank College.

"High School is a phase filled with advanced subjects, increased independence, and personal accountability. This is the time to establish strong study habits, not just for high school success but as a foundation for future academic endeavours, especially in university."

Dr Meyer explains that high school should be viewed as a stepping stone that prepares students for the challenges of higher education and, ultimately, a successful career. This is the time to develop those skills and habits that will stand you in good stead for the rest of your life, she says.

"The shift from a structured high school environment to the more independent and self-directed university world can be a game-changer. This is where the study habits you developed in high school come into play, helping you meet the higher expectations and increased learning demands of university life."

Dr Meyer says there are several foundations which support effective study habits, and parents and teachers should assist students in developing these. They include:

### Introspection and adaptability

Understanding one's learning preferences and needs is the cornerstone of effective study habits. High school students should self-assess or seek support to identify their learning style, whether auditory, visual, or kinaesthetic. Tailoring study methods to these personal inclinations can significantly boost comprehension and retention. It is also well worth the investment to attend a good study methods workshop early in one's high school career.

### Mastering time management

Effective time management is pivotal in the high school setting and beyond. It involves prioritising academic tasks, set-

ting achievable goals, and crafting a balanced schedule accommodating studies and personal time. The discipline of managing time efficiently in high school sets the stage for success in the more unstructured university environment.

### Engagement and interaction

Active engagement with study material through summarisation, questioning, and peer teaching enhances understanding and memory. High school students should be encouraged to explore beyond passive reading and engage in interactive and dynamic study practices.

### Collaborative learning

Recognising the value of seeking assistance and engaging in group study can greatly enrich learning. Collaboration with peers introduces multiple perspectives and problem-solving approaches, enriching the educational experience.

### Routine review

Consistent, daily revision and practice reinforce learning and prevent the need for last-minute cramming. Establishing a habit of regular review in high school aids in the long-term retention of information, a practice that proves invaluable in university studies.

"Implementing effective study habits involves a commitment to gradual change and flexibility. High school students might start by setting specific goals for each study session or experimenting with various learning strategies to discover what works best. Continuous self-reflection on the effectiveness of these strategies is critical to ongoing improvement," Dr Meyer says.

"Good study habits established in high school do more than prepare students for academic success in university; they equip students with skills applicable to various aspects of life, including professional and personal challenges. These habits foster a mindset of lifelong learning and adaptability, which are essential for success in a world where the future is unpredictable."

Dr Meyer says this is why high school presents a pivotal opportunity for students to build and refine their study habits, setting a solid foundation for university and beyond.

"By recognising the value of this period and actively working to improve their learning techniques, students can ensure a smoother transition to higher education and set themselves up for a successful academic and professional future."

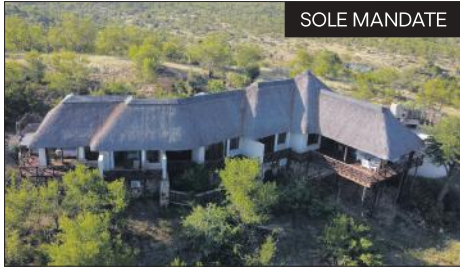
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SOLE MANDATE

**OLIFANTS GAME RESERVE, R 5 900 000**  
BIG 5 Beds 4 | Bath 4.5 | Traverse: 9,000 ha

**50% Share** in a beautiful bush home within Greater Kruger. This share is inclusive of a Land Rover game viewer. An open plan kitchen leads to a lounge and dining area, opening onto a large covered deck. An open boma and braai area allows for many a night under the African skies.

**Yvette Thompson - 083 655 7176** Ref: 2203910



SOLE MANDATE

**RAPTOR'S VIEW WILDLIFE R 4 900 000**  
ESTATE Beds 3 | Baths 3 | Floor size: 360 m<sup>2</sup>

This spacious home is located in a quiet area. The living area has an open plan lounge and kitchen with a loft. The neat scullery has ample storage. The dining area and guest bathroom is set to the side of the living area. The main patio overlooks an attractive rocky outcrop, pool and boma area.

**Rob Severin - 083 469 3820** Ref: 2218613



SOLE MANDATE

**NDLOVUMZI NATURE R 4 458 000**  
RESERVE Beds 4 | Baths 4 | Floor size: 300 m<sup>2</sup>

This tranquil home is situated overlooking the Olifants River and is surrounded by large riverine trees and rocky outcrops. The open plan living, dining and newly fitted kitchen are all under high vaulted ceilings that make this home light and bright, which makes the home appealing.

**Jason Jones - 083 267 4794** Ref: 2152063



SOLE MANDATE

**APARTMENT IN HOEDSPRUIT R 650 000**  
Bedroom 1 | Bathroom 1 | Floor: 69 m<sup>2</sup>

This apartment is a great investment property, with a reliable tenant in place. It has an open plan living area and kitchen, as well as bathroom on the lower level and an upstairs bedroom. Municipal water supply and pre-paid electricity. Communal pool and braai facilities.

**Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821** Ref: 2156206



SOLE MANDATE

**RAPTOR'S LODGE R 2 800 000**  
Bedrooms 2 | Bathrooms 2 | Floor size: 84 m<sup>2</sup>

This unit is currently rented out on a self-catering, short-term basis, and has an established monthly income. It has an open plan lounge, well equipped, renovated kitchen with pantry and linen cupboard, and a covered patio with built in braai. The bedrooms have en-suite bathrooms with outdoor showers.

**Michelle Severin - 083 468 3821** Ref: 2232710



SOLE MANDATE

**HOEDSPRUIT WILDLIFE R 4 550 000**  
ESTATE Beds 3 | Baths 2.5 | Floor: 240 m<sup>2</sup>

This home features a double volume, open plan kitchen with lounge and loft. The covered patio looks out onto the fenced garden and pool. There is a double garage with staff bathroom and two store rooms. The estate offers secure living with state-of-the-art access control.

**Yvette Thompson - 083 655 7176** Ref: 2209653



SOLE MANDATE

**OLIFANTS GAME RESERVE, R 6 800 000**  
BIG 5 Beds 4 | Baths 4 | Traverse: 9,000 ha

**50% share** in a furnished bush home with full ownership of a Land Cruiser. Spacious lounge and living area leading to covered patio deck with phenomenal views! Braai and boma area set off the deck. A well-designed kitchen with a breakfast nook also enjoys the views. Excellent condition!

**Rob Severin - 083 469 3820** Ref: 2211900



SOLE MANDATE

**GUESTHOUSE IN LIVERPOOL R 3 800 000**  
Beds 6 | Baths 3 | Floor: 289 m<sup>2</sup> | Land size: 21 ha

This property is now commercially rezoned and operational presenting an array of possibilities. The property boasts a prime location, with the guesthouse overlooking a perennial water source attracting wildlife, complemented by a tranquil garden with expansive lawns and large trees.

**Jason Jones - 083 267 4794** Ref: 2206695



SOLE MANDATE

**MODITLO ESTATE, BIG 4 R 8 990 000**  
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3.5 | Floor size: 420 m<sup>2</sup>

Fully furnished house with modern open-plan kitchen, dining room and lounge. Outdoor entertainment area with a covered patio, pool and boma overlooking the riverbed. The triple garage, two carports, back up power and Harvey tiled roof adds practicality and durability to the property.

**Yvette Thompson - 083 655 7176** Ref: 2232056



SOLE MANDATE

**RAPTOR'S VIEW WILDLIFE R 4 950 000**  
ESTATE Beds 3 | Baths 3.5 | Floor: 396 m<sup>2</sup>

Architect-designed home boasting unique character not typically found in Raptors View. Notable features include a new thatch roof, fresh paint, updated light fixtures, and a rentable cottage complete with a bedroom, kitchenette, and bathroom. VAT inclusive, no transfer duty applicable.

**Rob Severin - 083 469 3820** Ref: 2194742



SOLE MANDATE

**BLYDE WILDLIFE ESTATE R 4 324 000**  
Bedrooms 3 | Bathrooms 3 | Floor size: 360 m<sup>2</sup>

This home is privately situated and overlooks the wilderness area. The layout includes an open plan kitchen, living and dining room as well as a separate scullery and a separate laundry. The living area and bedrooms all lead out to the large, covered patio with pool and elevated views.

**Jason Jones - 083 267 4794** Ref: 2143428



SOLE MANDATE

**BLYDE WILDLIFE ESTATE R 5 200 000**  
Bedrooms 4 | Bathrooms 3 | Floor size: 310 m<sup>2</sup>

This property has a main house and separate 1-bedroom cottage. The main house has an open plan living area with lounge, kitchen and loft. A covered patio, pool, built in braai area, laundry and covered parking area complete the property.

**Michelle Severin - 083 469 3821** Ref: 2238263



RENTAL

**RAPTOR'S VIEW WILDLIFE R 23 000pm**  
ESTATE Beds 3 | Baths 2 | Floor: 230 m<sup>2</sup>

**Furnished rental, available from 1 April 2024 to 30 Nov 2024, not pet friendly** - This home features a large and comfortable open plan living room, dining area and kitchen with scullery. The spacious covered patio and deck area overlooks the wilderness area.

**Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140** Ref: 2139348



RENTAL

**ESCARPIA ECO ESTATE, R 20 000pm**  
KAMPERSRUS Beds 3 | Baths 2 | Floor: 209 m<sup>2</sup>

**Available from 1 April 2024, not pet friendly** - The house consists of an open-plan lounge, dining room and kitchen, which has plenty of storage and a breakfast nook. Wrap-around patios, one with a built-in braai allow for a wonderful year-round outdoor lifestyle.

**Michelle Herb - 071 652 9140** Ref: 2222189

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Rental Agent (Candidate Property Practitioner)



# African wild dogs will soon have their own sperm bank – how artificial breeding will help them survive



Four African wild dog pups standing in a reserve. A hybrid breeding approach has the potential to accelerate genetic diversity and help produce disease-resistant pups every year  
Image: Adobe Stock

Damien Boyd Bertrand Paul Paris

Scientists from the Institute for Breeding Rare and Endangered African Mammals have been working in southern Africa for over 15 years to protect endangered African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*). They've now decided to freeze sperm from as many genetically diverse male African wild dogs as possible and use this to artificially inseminate female African wild dogs for the first time. Reproductive and molecular biologist Damien Paris explains why artificial breeding is the best and most economical way to ensure that genetically diverse wild dogs live on.

## Is the African wild dog in danger?

Wild dogs are a native species to sub-Saharan Africa. They are highly efficient pack hunters but need large home ranges to survive and avoid competitors like lions. The problem is that most of the remaining habitats are so small and fragmented that they can't support large populations anymore. Usually, when wild dogs are sub-adults (around two years old) they move far away and form their own pack. But being stuck in small reserves, they cannot do this. Instead, they interbreed, reducing their genetic diversity.

Human encroachment makes habitats smaller and smaller for almost every species, pushing many reserves to the limit of their carrying capacity. Today, wild dogs occupy only 7% of their former range. According to our best estimates, there are about 550 dogs remaining in South Africa scattered across 14 highly fragmented populations.

## How can genetic diversity help the African wild dog survive?

It helps build resilience to disease. Outbreaks of rabies and canine distemper virus are frequent – either spread from domestic dogs nearby, or from existing virus already present in reserves. Those diseases can

spread rapidly among wild dogs and decimate a pack, which is about five to 20 dogs. In 2017, canine distemper virus completely wiped out 21 out of 22 packs of wild dogs in Laikipia County, Kenya in less than four weeks.

We plan to use sperm freezing and artificial insemination to help distribute genetic diversity between isolated populations. This will give wild dogs a better chance of surviving disease. We can take sperm from dogs in a region with resistance to canine distemper virus and mix those valuable genes into many other packs quickly. The next time there is a disease outbreak, a large number of their offspring will survive. We predict that this can make a big impact quite quickly.

## What conservation methods have been used before?

To increase genetic diversity, African wild dogs have been translocated (moved) across South Africa since 1998. Young dogs that are ready to leave their pack are artificially grouped in a boma (temporary enclosure in the wild) with dogs of the opposite sex from a different part of the country. Over several weeks, they form a new genetically mixed pack that is released into the wild.

But the drawback to this method is that the new pack is junior and only able to colonise the limited habitat on the periphery of an established pack's territory. So it can take about 150 generations (about 300 years) for genes from the new pack to spread through the existing population via the formation of subsequent packs and natural breeding. It's also not possible to simply introduce a genetically valuable dog directly into an established pack to breed – it'd be killed due to the pack's complex social hierarchy.

We can't afford to wait that long. Most of the challenges facing wild dogs have occurred in the last 200 years. A whole population of wild dogs could be lost with the next disease outbreak.

## How will sperm freezing and artificial insemination help?



Damien Paris assessing the quality of the sperm after thawing (above) Image: D Paris



Natural breeding alone is not fast enough to overcome the loss of genetic diversity in African wild dogs  
Image: Femke Van den Berghe

Natural breeding alone is not fast enough to overcome the loss of genetic diversity in African wild dogs. Courtesy Femke Van den Berghe

Our research shows that a hybrid approach combining natural and artificial breeding during translocation will bring in new genes much faster. We could even directly introduce valuable genes into established packs by moving sperm rather than animals. To do this, we plan to monitor the alpha female for signs she is in heat, while the pack is housed in the translocation boma. We can then artificially inseminate her with frozen sperm from a valuable male. This has the potential to produce new, genetically diverse, disease-resistant pups every year.

Our back-up plan against disease outbreaks is to create a bank of African wild dog sperm from multiple males. Sperm frozen in liquid nitrogen tanks at very cold temperatures can last 50 or 100 years and still produce offspring. This method is very successful in livestock breeding. We were not able to do this until now because African wild dog sperm only lived for 30 minutes after it was thawed, but to inseminate a female dog, the sperm has to survive for at least four to six hours. We recently improved the freezing technique so African wild dog sperm are now able to swim and survive for eight hours after being thawed.

We can now set up an African wild dog sperm bank for the first time. The frozen sperm will be taken into the field in portable liquid nitrogen tanks. Our partners, the

University of Pretoria Mammal Research Institute and Embryo Plus, will help develop the sperm bank. We plan to build a consortium so that we can have multiple sperm banks throughout South Africa as back-ups.

## Will this be very expensive?

The hybrid approach is actually a cheaper way of maintaining genetic diversity in African wild dogs. Some recent modelling in other species found that the hybrid approach was between seven and 84 times cheaper than the natural breeding approach. This is because it needed 13-100 times fewer animals to maintain 90% genetic diversity in the population over a 100-year period.

With fewer animals needed, the total cost to conserve the species (including costs for animal and reserve management, sperm banking and artificial insemination) is lower. This hybrid approach could save money and alleviate the carrying capacity of reserves without reducing genetic diversity of wild dogs – something most wildlife managers and politicians will greatly appreciate. To learn more and support this initiative visit the project website.

**Damien Boyd Bertrand Paul Paris, Associate Professor and Head of the Gamete and Embryology (GAME) Laboratory, James Cook University**

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## April trivia questions – for T&M!

1. What Pope started the papal inquisition in 1231?
2. Ecuador was named after who or what?
3. Liza Minelli played what character in Cabaret?
4. What European language is unrelated to any other language?
5. In the 1973 The Bahamas gained independence from who?
6. In what country did bongo drums originate?
7. Stewart Goddard changed his name to become what pop idol?
8. What's the main feature of a cheongsam dress?
9. The Davis Strait lies between Canada and where?
10. Henri Charrière is better known by what nickname?
11. What fashion designer is credited with popularising the bob hairstyle?
12. Melba sauce is made from what fruit?
13. Who was with Macbeth when he met the witches?
14. A lion and a sword appear on what countries flag?
15. A carbonnade is a beef dish that must contain what?
16. What company owns Rolls Royce motors?
17. What was Oscar Wilde's only novel?
18. Who is the Greek primordial sky god that was succeeded by Zeus?
19. Collective nouns - a dule of what?
20. The pharaoh hound is the only dog that does what?
21. Fallstaff first appears in what Shakespeare play?
22. A vestiphobe is afraid of what?
23. In what film would you find the Orgasmatron?
24. What was racing driver James Hunt's nickname?

# Dante Galic – off the wall artist with ‘Goya’ish artistic presentation



Dante's 'The mad hatter' (above), 'For whom the bell tolls' (top right) and the painting for Serolo Safaris here in Hoedspruit Images : Sup-

Mark Bishop

**I was invited to interview and watch a Bosnian painter at work in the bushveld at Serolo Safaris. What I was about to experience was nothing short of amazing.**

Not being an artist myself, I am always in awe of people that can create art - be it paintings, drawings, photographs, music, sculpture, prose or whatever. I arrived on a hot Lowveld afternoon and was presented with the image of an artist, easel stationed near the pool facing out into the bushveld, short pants, paint-stained t-shirt, and smoking a cigarette. He was much younger than I had thought he was, somewhat scruffy (as most painters are), as he enthusiastically bounded around the pool to come and greet me.

And this was Dante Galic, a 27-year-old, who had been brought out to South Africa by Kaj Hørdum – owner of Serolo Safaris. The idea was for Dante to experience the bush life and get some inspiration to paint a piece, whilst here on a refreshing, productive sabbatical - of sorts.

Kaj had been to Dante's studio in Odense where he was amazed at what he saw, and immediately he invited Dante, and Line Nijenkamp from Galleri Nijenkamp (who represents Dante) to come to South Africa.

At first Dante did not really believe that it could be arranged, as he has a very busy schedule including exhibitions and art fairs. But 10 days were squeezed out for the trip in March 2024, where the group got to see and experience some of the great parts of

our country, including the bushveld.

Born in Odense, Denmark, Dante has been painting since he was 6 years old. He is what you would call an autodidact artist (self-taught) with a love and passion for neo grotesque style. He was actually denied entry into the art academy in Berlin, but from middle school he had a teacher that devoted time and energy to teach him all the required techniques. Sadly that teacher passed away a couple of years ago, and so Dante moved his focus to the old masters to continuing evolving his painting skills and style. Dante considers Goya as being the first modern story teller, and as such is a great inspiration for him. But he also gets inspiration from other old masters like Caravaggio and Bosch. His paintings are a combination of surrealism and a fascination with comics.

Despite being relatively young, Dante is already considered a very successful artist. From the age of 18, his art has become a part of some of the largest Danish art collections. "I love art, I'm passionate about it, and I work and paint 7 days a week – it helps me maintain my sanity", says Dante.

Dante is also very environmentally conscious, and as such is one of the first artists in the world to 'go green' with all his materials. The pigments are all mixed by himself, the canvases are made of organic linen or hemp, the watercolour paper is recycled, and the wood for clamping is from Europe. Some of the used frames for his watercolours are 100% up-cycle and made of boat wood from Indonesia. His art can be classified as Ecological Art or "Eco Art".



This is a contemporary form of environmental art, created by artists who are concerned about local and global environmental situations. Ecological art is an artistic practice or discipline proposing paradigms sustainable with the lifeforms and resources of our planet. It creates awareness, stimulates dialogue, changes human behaviour towards other species, and encourages the long-term respect for the natural systems within which we coexist.

Dante's "After the Flood" exhibition was produced with Eco-friendly, and sustainably harvested pigments from around the world. They contain no added fillers, additives, preservatives, stabilisers, or heavy metals. Mixed with refined walnut oil these pair perfectly to make a smooth, rich, luxurious oil paint. All paintings are painted on organic linen canvases. Flax, the plant from which linen is made, is resilient and can grow in poor soil, using far less water than cotton. Eco Gesso is used to smooth the surface of canvases. It is eco-friendly, non-toxic, and vegan. Gesso is made with French marble

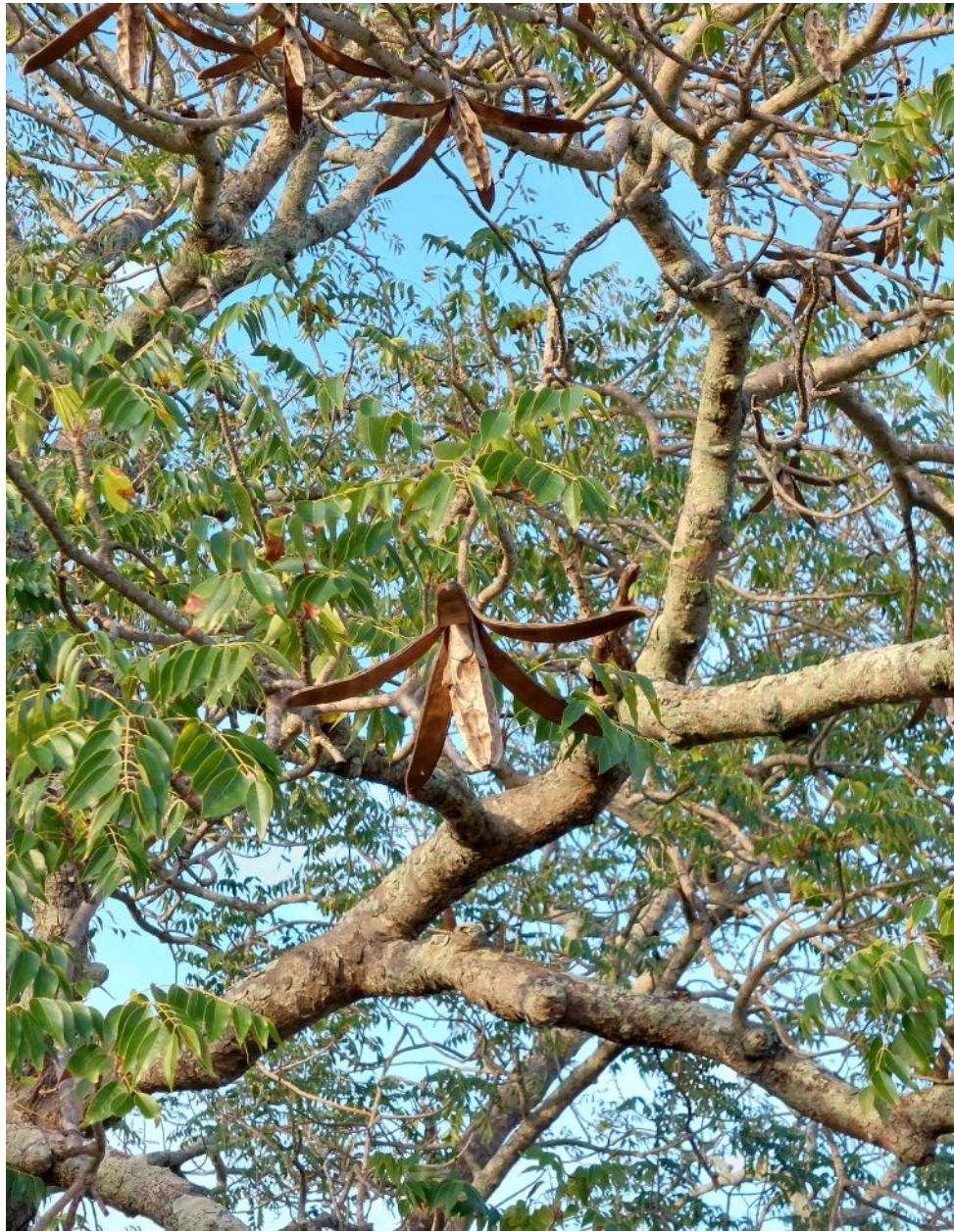
dust, limestone powder, titanium dioxide pigment and plant-based binders. As a final touch on the finished paintings a non-toxic natural varnish is applied. This is made with a proprietary blend of plant-based, archival ingredients, using time-tested recipes from the Renaissance.

Currently Dante and his team from the Galleri Nijenkamp are working very hard on connecting with other established galleries around the world to expose Dante's art. In the week 26-28<sup>th</sup> April, Dante's art will be presented at an art fair in Cologne in Germany.

Dante has been awarded some prestigious accolades: he was winner of 2021 award "Kolonien kunstnere 2021" Herzegovina, and he was a finalist in the 2021 "Global Art Awards: 2021 Tokyo Edition".

**If you want to view Dante's work and take in an unusual feast of colour and the unexpected, go to [www.dantegalic.com](http://www.dantegalic.com), or go to the galley website [www.gallerinijenkamp.dk](http://www.gallerinijenkamp.dk)**

# The very interesting mountain mahogany or wooden banana tree - *Entandrophragma cauda-*



Nature correspondent

**The wooden banana, a native South African wonder, is more than just a name. This stunning semi-deciduous to deciduous tree can reach heights of 20 meters and boasts a dense crown of glossy, dark green leaves. But it's true marvels lie in its unique flowers and fruit.**

During autumn and winter, the wooden banana comes alive with fragrant white to yellowish flowers, boasting a furry exterior. These eventually transform into the tree's namesake - woody fruit capsules. These green capsules take the shape of a cigar or club, and when mature, the five valves split open to resemble a half-peeled banana, complete with a central seed column. When the fruit is dry this central seed column releases the large paper-thin winged seeds, to be dispersed some distance from the tree by the wind.

The smooth-edged leaflets are dark green above and lighter below, narrowing from the base in to long, thin tips.

Found in river valleys, open woodlands, and rocky slopes, the wooden banana thrives in the South African landscape. The Lebombo Mountains, bordering Mozambique, are a known habitat for this tree. Younger branches have smooth, light brown-grey bark, while older branches develop a characteristic spotted appearance due to peeling.

The wooden banana plays its role in the ecosystem. The fruit attracts elephants for a green fruit feast, while kudu and grey duiker enjoy the seeds. It provides much-needed shelter for animals and birds, especially during the harsh summer heat.

Beyond its ecological significance, the wooden banana boasts practical uses. Traditionally,

its wood found a place in furniture making, and the bark and sap were used for dyeing and tanning. Today, dry fruits are prized by local and international florists for their unique appearance in floral arrangements.

Interestingly, the wooden banana held cultural significance in western Zambia, where it was known as the royal tree of Barotseland. Its strong wood was used for crafting barges for the supreme chief, solidifying its regal status.

So, the next time you see a banana that seems a little too firm, remember the wooden banana - a beautiful South African tree with a story to tell.



The wooden banana tree with open fruit (left) and a pod and an open pod (above) Images supplied

## How do elephants sleep & why do elephants flap their ears?

Contrary to popular belief, elephants can and do lie down of their own free will. They can doze lightly while on their feet, but they lie down in order to sleep soundly for a few hours every night. Some individuals are prone to bouts of snoring and dreaming during which they may make vocalisations. They will also often my down for an hour or two, singly or in groups, in the heat of the day. Calls often lie in the shade caused by the mother and other herd members. In the Chobe, I have observed exhausted carves do this after a trek from inland feeding. Large elephants may make use of slight inclines such as earth banks or termite mounds when lying down, perhaps making it more comfortable in easier to get up and down, especially for bulls with tusks that are long or have a wide spread. They are not, however, dependent on slopes for this activity with flat ground being entirely suitable. The four or five hours spent sleeping every night are not continuous, being broken by bouts of feeding and ablutions. An elephant on its side

is, therefore, no reason to call the vet.

**Rather than indicating anger or aggressive motives, elephants primarily flap their ears to cool the body and rid themselves of irritating insects.**

An animal of this size, with no sweat glands and a dark body colour, can easily overheat in African conditions. Besides their natural cooling mechanisms of standing in the shade, resting at midday and coating the body with mud, soil or water, elephants have another trick. The ears are richly supplied with blood in an extensive venous network that dilates in hot weather. The skin of the ears is relatively thin, and the total surface area of both years could account for as much as 20% of the entire body surface area. The blood flowing rapidly through the veins and capillaries is enough to allow heat to dissipate, but heat loss and blood cooling are significantly enhanced by the flapping, which causes cooling currents of air to pass over

the veins. The cooled blood helps to lower the body core temperature. The wind caused by the flapping also helps chase away biting flies, many of which can and do draw blood from areas of thin skin, such as the inside of the legs, back of the ears and the genital area. The ears may also sometimes be held out in swayed gently to shade the eyes from direct sunlight.

Elephants that are aggressive or startled may give a sudden head shake resulting in the ears 'slapping' the side of the head, often in a cloud of dust, but this is not rhythmic flapping. Musth elephant bulls may sometimes 'swagger' during the 'musth walk' with their ears held out and flapping while they advance at a fast walk with the head bobbing and the trunk swinging - a sign that they are looking for a challenge.

*Excerpts from 'Beat about the Bush - Mammals and Birds' by Trevor Carnaby, Published by Jacana Media, Second Edition reprint 2018*



An elephant with its ears held out Image: Canva Donvanstaden

## Trivia answers

- |   |                                |                                    |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Pope Gregory IX                      | 10. Papillion - the butterfly  | 19. Doves and/or turtledoves       |
| 2. The equator                          | 11. Chanel                     | 20. Blushes - nose and ears redden |
| 3. Sally Bowles                         | 12. Raspberries                | 21. Henry IV Part 1                |
| 4. Basque                               | 13. Banquo                     | 22. Fear of clothing               |
| 5. The United Kingdom                   | 14. Sri Lanka                  | 23. Woody Allen's 'Sleeper'        |
| 6. Eastern Cuba                         | 15. Beer                       | 24. Hunt the Shunt                 |
| 7. Adam Ant                             | 16. BMW                        |                                    |
| 8. High side slits above the knee level | 17. The picture of Dorian Grey |                                    |
| 9. Greenland                            | 18. Uranus                     |                                    |



## Violin spiders - *Loxosceles* sp.



Tim Baynham  
Wildlife Safety Solutions

**In this month's feature we will delve into the world of spiders and more specifically the violin spiders.**

I think it is more than justified to suggest that spiders are perhaps one of the most, if not the most persecuted group of creatures on the planet. A reputation perpetuated and enhanced by sensationalistic and often highly inaccurate media reporting. The negative perception of spiders is further fortified through long held cultural beliefs and popular urban myths. And Hollywood has done little to avail this adverse reputation, with movies such as "Arachnophobia" further damaging their already compromised character.

If one takes the time to sift through all the

misinformation and utter nonsense, then truth will soon reveal a very different picture. In reality, spiders are incredibly diverse and fascinating creatures. They occupy just about every ecological niche on the earth, and can be found from mountain peaks to the forest floor, playing a crucial role in maintaining healthy and sustainable ecosystems.

The vast majority of spider species worldwide are completely and totally harmless to people. Southern Africa is home to well over 2 200 species of spider and only a handful of species are considered to be of any medical significance.

One such spider is the violin spider of the genus *Loxosceles*. Violin spiders are fairly common in parts of South Africa, particularly in the far north. They are free ranging or free-living spiders that do not build webs and are found naturally in caves, un-

der logs and rocks. They are also found in houses, garages, and other buildings. Being shy creatures they are quick to scurry away if disturbed.

The common name is derived from the violin-shaped marking found on the cephalothorax, similar to the well-known brown recluse spiders of North America. Violin spiders are usually grey-brown to reddish brown in colour with darker markings on the body, and measure between 30 mm and 40 mm in size. Being delicately built, they are often confused with and mistaken for the so-called harmless and prolific daddy-long-legs spiders.

This species possess cytotoxic venom and bites may result in tissue damage, potentially forming a necrotic lesion. There is no antivenom, and bites are treated symptomatically - but no deaths have been recorded from these spiders. Treatment focuses on

preventing and treating secondary infection using local antiseptics and systemic prophylactic antibiotics. It is important to note that bites are initially painless, and as a result the offending spider is very seldom seen or accurately identified.

Violin spiders are nocturnal and actively wander in search of suitable prey. Consequently, they occasionally end up finding their way into clothing, shoes, towels, and bedding. It is always advisable to thoroughly check bedding and shake out clothes and shoes before use.

**For more information on venomous animals, awareness training and talks, as well as a professional 24hrs problem snake rescue service, contact the author at Wildlife Safety Solutions: 073 934 6156; info@wildlifesafetysolutions.co.za; www.wildlifesafetysolutions.co.za, FB Wildlife Safety Solutions, Instagram wildlife\_safety\_solutions**

## Boulenger's garter snake - *Elapsoidea boulengeri*

Luke Kemp  
African Snakebite Institute

The Boulenger's garter snake - *Elapsoidea boulengeri* - also called the Zambezi garter snake, is a stocky snake in the same family as the cobras and mambas (Elapidae). It is a smallish snake, seldom exceeding 60 cm but may reach up to 77 cm in length. This snake is glossy black or dark brown in colour, sometimes with a white belly which may extend slightly up the lower sides of the body. The scales on the body are large and the head is chunky and very similar to a cobra in its proportions - having bulging cheeks where venom glands are located. Juveniles are vastly different from the adults having a series of 12-17 white to grey bands across the body and a unique pale pattern on the head. As these snakes age, the bands will fade and subadult snakes may show thin pale stripes on the outer edges of where the bands used to occur.

This is largely a fossorial snake, which spends most of its time underground, down holes and burrows or under logs and rocks. They may emerge at night, especially warm nights, after or during decent rainstorms. They feed on a variety of animals including frogs and rodents but are partial to lizards and small snakes. They are secretive snakes and sightings are not common although the greater Hoedspruit and Kruger National Park area are probably the best regions to have a sighting of one of these snakes in South Africa.

Little is known of their reproduction as they are so secretive, but captive females have dropped 2 - 8 eggs in early summer. The banded juveniles hatch around mid-summer when there are ample juvenile frogs and lizards around.

It is a slow-moving snake that is inoffensive. It may move in jerky movements if harassed and will flatten the body. Bites are very rare and are usually to young snake enthusiasts who handle the snake, or to people accidentally standing on these snakes at night. Although being related to the cobras and mambas, the venom is not nearly as potent. Symptoms usually present as some mild swelling and pain. Neurological symptoms such as tingling sensations in the fingers, sensitivity to light and light-headed feelings, as well as nausea have been recorded. It appears to be quite similar to the symptoms associated with low blood sugar. Symptoms usually last for a day or two and then fade. Although not highly venomous, these bites should be avoided, and caution must be taken with small children as a large garter snake may be capable of inflicting a serious bite.

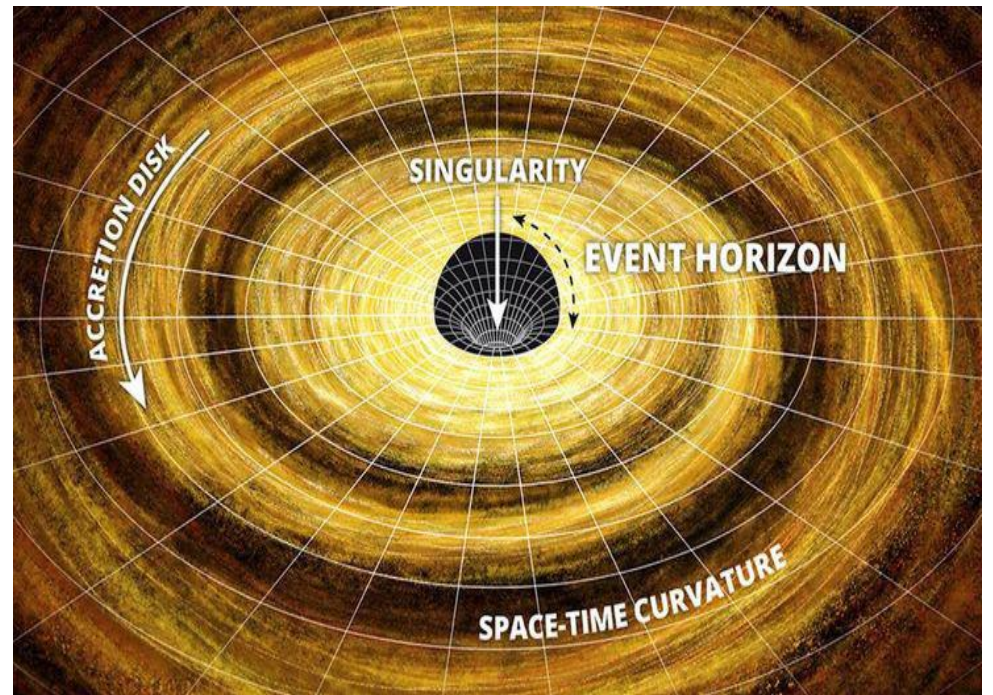
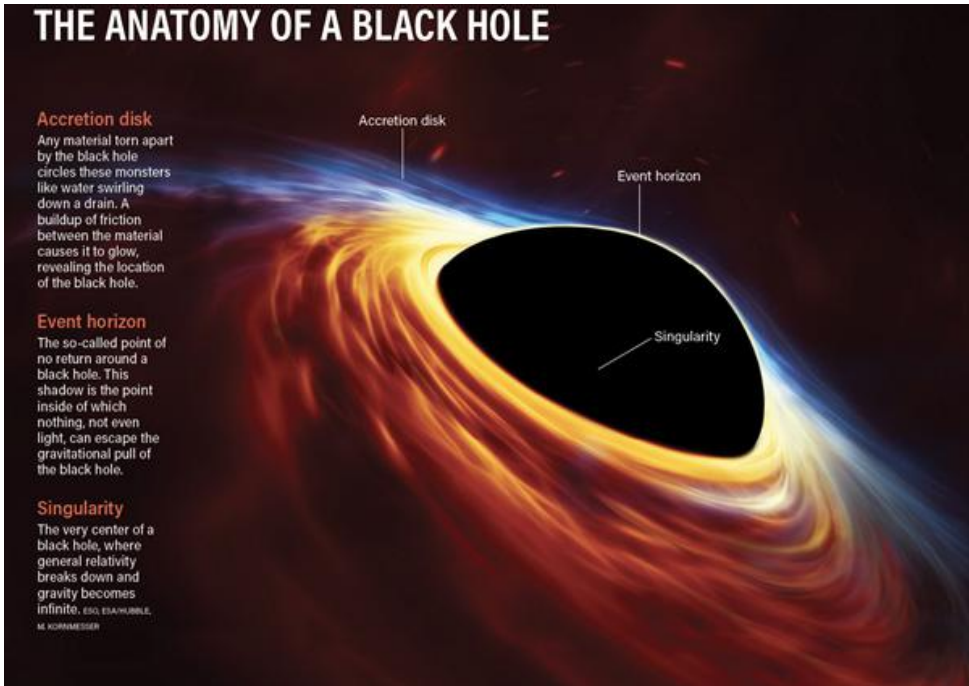
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**Boulenger's Garter Snake (top right) and a juvenile (right)**

Image: Johan Marais



# Black Holes suck! Or do they.....?



Black hole anatomy(above), event horizon (top right and right), Sagittarius (below) and the life cycle of a star (bottom)

Images supplied: Ben Coley

Ben Coley

Space is chocked full of weird and often terrifying objects, but perhaps the most infamous of them all is the “Black Hole”. These shadowy chasms of mystery have incited fear and wonder for decades. Humans intrinsically fear that which cannot be seen or understood. Take horror movies as an example: nowadays they are generally special effects extravaganzas, brimming with a kaleidoscopic of visuals and unnecessary gratuitous gore. But most movie buffs will tell you that the best way to build tension, suspense and fear, is to allow our boundless imagination to do the work for us. The Omen, Alien and The Shining are all seen as classics for a reason!

Our knowledge of space is vast, but black holes remain an enigma. During my stargazing evenings, it is normal to receive a barrage of questions pertaining to these calliginous cosmic curiosities. Where do they come from? What is inside them? How can we find them? The greatest minds on the planet are still trying to unravel these mysteries, so my answers are usually somewhat simple! That being said, as technology evolves, so does our understanding. Here is what we do know:

First, let us dispel one of the most common myths surrounding black holes. They do not suck. Nor do they maraud through space eating everything in their path like some sort of apocalyptic Pacman! There is an overwhelming opinion that black holes drift through space hoovering up everything in their path like a giant vacuum cleaner. This is simply not the case. In fact, if we replaced our Sun with a black hole of the same mass (very important!), absolutely nothing in our solar system would change - except that it would be pitch black, freezing and incapable of harbouring life. The mass of an object, and the way in which its gravity warps space and time, is the key.

So, what then is a black hole? In simple terms, it is an object that has such an enormous amount of mass and gravity, that nothing, not even light, can escape its grasp. The more massive the black hole, the wider its sphere of influence. Anything crossing this plane will never be seen again. This boundary, the point at which gravity permits light to escape, is known as the *event horizon*. It is worth noting that we tend to think of these objects as 2-dimensional and flat, but they are 3-dimensional, their influence spreading out from its centre like a bubble. Perhaps ‘black sphere’ would be a better term?

But what is at the centre of a black hole? We just do not know. If light cannot escape, nothing can, and that includes information. Beneath the event horizon lies a void that is the very epitome of the unknown; a true heart of darkness. Relativity and quantum

physics have theories, but nothing can be tested, let alone proved. Black holes feed on material, and that material falls towards its centre. Akin to passing through a giant oesophagus, it is stretched out as the gravity increases, until it all occupies the same tiny space at the black hole’s core. This core is known as the *singularity*. The more it feeds, the more the mass increases, and the wider its event horizon spreads.

We do know that there are various types of black holes, based on their size and gravity.

Stellar Mass Black Holes are the smallest category and are formed when the cores of supergiant stars collapse, or when two neutron stars collide and merge. Their mass ranges from a few solar masses to around 50 times the mass of our Sun, with an event horizon radiating only a few 100kms.

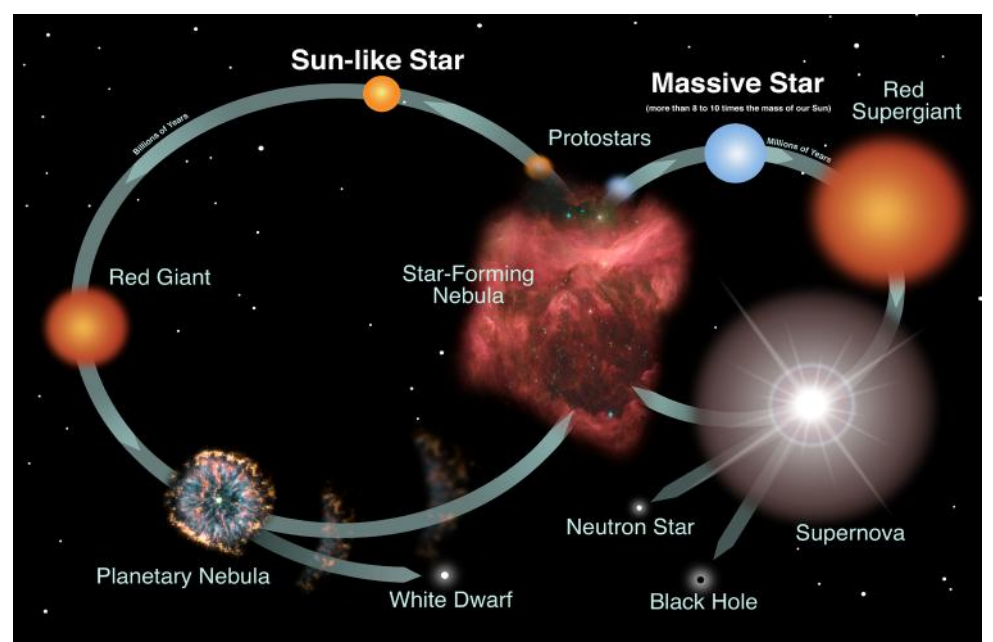
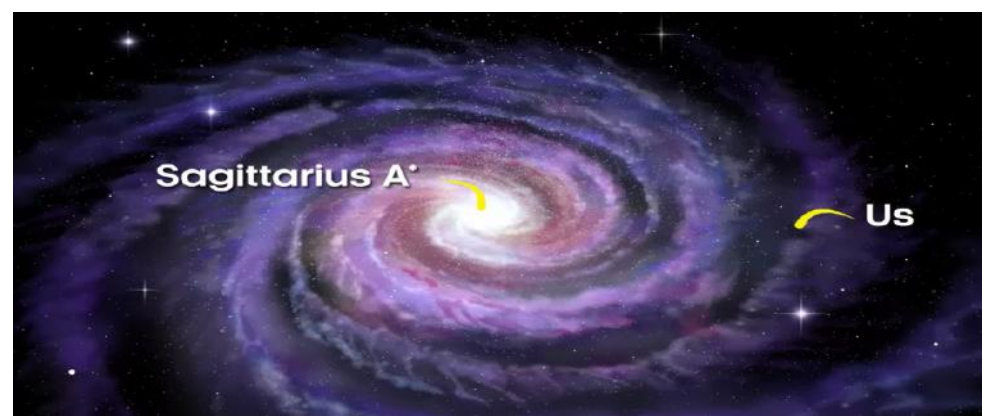
Intermediate Sized Black Holes are rare but can be found at the centre of some globular star clusters. They range from 50 – 50 000 times the mass of our Sun and are thought to form when stars in a cluster rapidly collapse in a devastating chain reaction, ultimately merging together.

Super Massive Black Holes can be found at the heart of almost all galaxies, including our own. As their name suggests, they are enormous, containing the mass of billions of Suns, their influence spreading out over billions of kilometres, some even larger than the entirety of our solar system! Their formation is poorly understood but they are possibly the result of multiple stellar mass black holes merging, or even the rapid collapse of giant dust clouds in the early Universe.

You might wonder how we can study these mysterious phenomena at all, bearing mind they are invisible. The idea of black holes was originally theorised by the great Albert Einstein based on his General Theory of Relativity. The first one to be discovered was in 1964, but it took 30 years of scientific study and debate between Stephen Hawking and Kip Thorne before it was officially declared.

Since then, our technology has improved dramatically, and we have identified over 50 stellar mass black holes in the Milky Way alone. We can infer their existence by monitoring their affect on nearby stars. We understand the laws of gravity very well – we slingshot spacecraft around planets, and NASA’s recent ‘DART’ mission even managed to fire a fridge-sized object into a tiny asteroid billions of kilometres away! We can look at the orbital path of stars and work out the size and mass of the object they are orbiting. Something so small and but so massive, can only be a black hole.

Recently, the first photograph of a super massive black hole was taken. It may seem counter-intuitive to photograph an object that does not emit any light, but surrounding the event horizon is a huge melting pot of radiation and energy being created by the objects about to be swallowed, as they whirl



around the periphery at almost the speed of light. Their death throws create highly charged particles which can be seen, and captured by a large enough radio telescope. Unfortunately such an instrument does not exist, but sometimes the sum of its parts is greater than the whole.

After years of planning, in 2017, radio telescopes from eight sites around the world trained their dishes at the centre of a galaxy in the constellation of Virgo, known as M87. The combined power of the ‘Event Horizon Telescope’, translated to a resolution more than 4 000 times that which is capable by Hubble. Four days and 5 000 terabytes later, this astronomical amount of data was processed, and the first photograph of a black hole, or more precisely, its silhouette was revealed in 2019. Since then, the data has been

reprocessed and in 2023, a clearer photo was produced. To some, it may not look like much, but this achievement should be heralded as a red-letter day in astronomy. It was the day that the unseen became seen, and marked the start of a new era of discovery that could hold the very key to unravelling the fabric of the Universe.

What secrets these incredible objects might reveal remains to be seen. Whether or not they can rip holes in the space-time continuum, forming wormholes between points in space, or even parallel universes, is confined to the realm of science fiction movies - for now at least. Who knows what else we will discover? I for one cannot wait to see where these inky rabbit holes may lead, and what wonderlands might reside in their murky depths.

# The secrets in cooking cracking French fries

How many times have you been to somebody's home or a restaurant and the fries are just not up to speed? Plenty. Well here are four tricks to ensure the next time you make them, they are going to be knock-out favourite!

### Cut Them Right

Ensure that you cut your fries about ½ cm thick. Trick 1: keep all pieces as close to the same size as possible for even cooking.

### Soak Them

Trick 2: soak the cut fries in cold water for at least an hour, or overnight. This removes extra starch, making them crispier. Dry them well before continuing.

### Adding vinegar

Trick 3: before frying, boil your fries in a mixture of water and a little vinegar (1 tablespoon of vinegar per litre of water) for 10 minutes. This helps them stay firm and get even crispier later.

### Double frying

Trick 4: frying them twice is key: First fry: fry at a low temp (160°C) for about 4-5 minutes. They cook inside but won't brown.

Second fry: Increase the oil temp to 190°C. Fry them again until they're golden and crispy, about 2-3 minutes.

### Pick the right oil

Choose high-heat oil like peanut or canola. It doesn't

burn easily and keeps your fries tasting great.

### Season while hot

Sprinkle a bit of salt on your hot fries. Add garlic powder, paprika or herbs if you like more flavours.

### What sauces go well with French fries?

Several sauces go great with French fries, offering a range of flavours from classic to creative. Here are some popular choices:

- **Tomato sauce:** A classic and simple choice that's loved worldwide.
- **Mayonnaise:** Creamy and rich, popular in many European countries.
- **Aioli:** A garlicky mayo-based sauce, perfect for those who love garlic.
- **Honey mustard:** Sweet and tangy, it's a delicious alternative.
- **Barbecue Sauce:** Smoky and sweet, it adds a bold flavour.
- **Cheese Sauce:** Warm and gooey, ideal for cheese lovers.
- **Tartar Sauce:** Unusual but tasty, especially with thicker fries.
- **Sriracha or hot sauce:** For those who like it spicy.

Mix and match to find your favourite flavour combination with French fries. So there you have it – four simple tricks that will make sure the family or friends will be coming back for more!



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# Electric cars: A glimpse into tomorrow's roads

AI perspective 'correspondent'

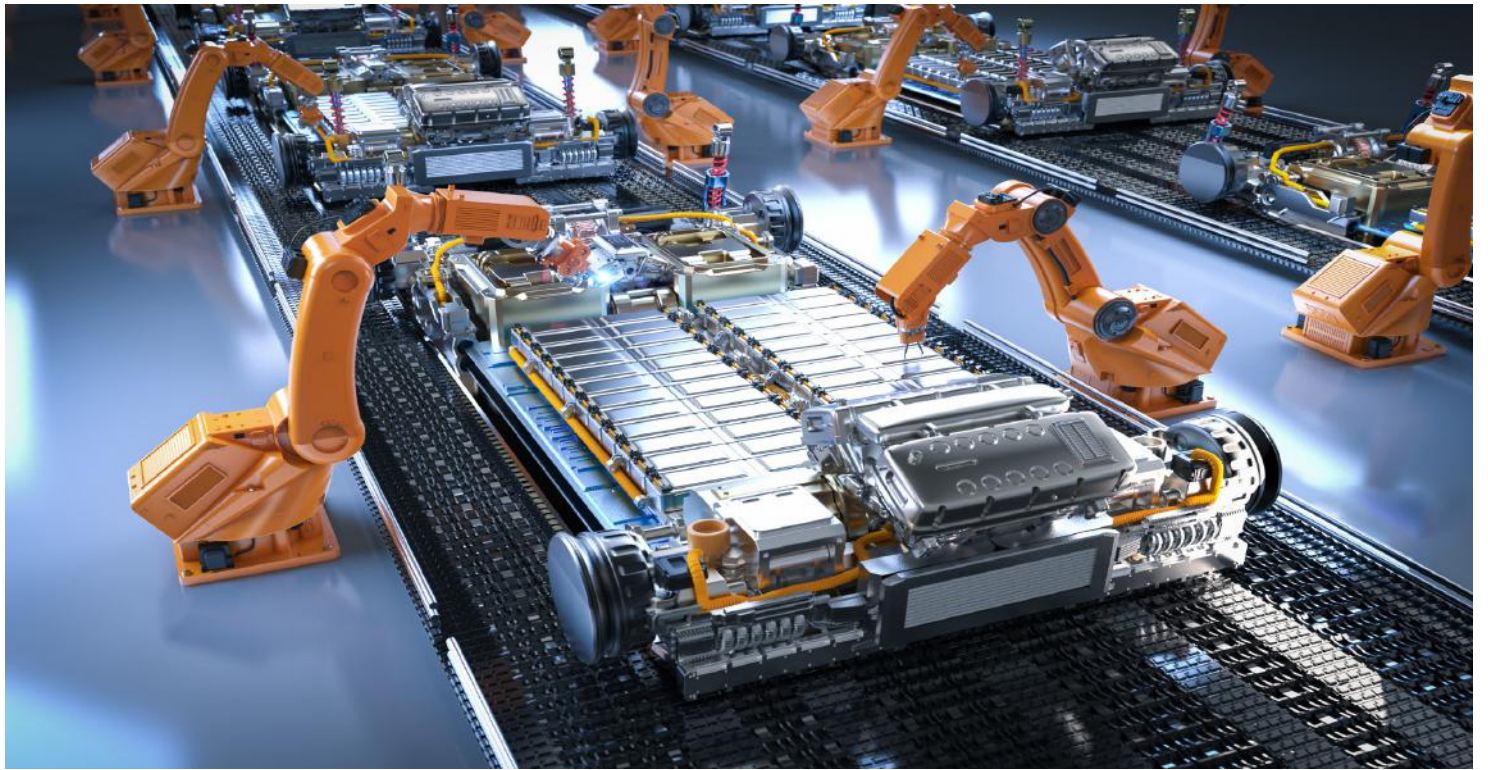
The landscape of transportation is on the brink of a profound transformation, with electric vehicles (EVs) leading the charge into a cleaner and more sustainable future. As technological advancements continue to accelerate and environmental concerns grow more pressing, the future of electric cars appears increasingly promising.

One of the key drivers propelling the rise of EVs is the urgent need to mitigate climate change. With traditional internal combustion engine vehicles being a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, governments and consumers alike are turning to electric alternatives as a solution. EVs produce zero tailpipe emissions, making them a crucial tool in reducing air pollution and combating climate change. As environmental regulations tighten and public awareness of the ecological impact of transportation grows, the demand for electric cars is expected to surge in the coming years.

Advancements in battery technology are playing a pivotal role in shaping the future of electric mobility. As battery costs continue to decline and energy densities increase, EVs are becoming more affordable and capable. Range anxiety, once a significant barrier to adoption, is gradually fading into obscurity as EVs boast longer driving ranges and faster charging times. The emergence of solid-state batteries, with their potential for even greater energy density and improved safety, promises to further revolutionize the electric car industry in the near future.

Furthermore, the electrification of transportation is not limited to personal vehicles. From buses and trucks to bicycles and scooters, electric mobility solutions are proliferating across a wide range of transportation modes. The electrification of public transit, in particular, holds immense promise for reducing emissions and improving air quality in urban areas.

However, challenges remain on the path to widespread EV adoption. Building out a comprehensive charging infrastructure network is essential to support the growing fleet of electric vehicles. Governments and private stakeholders must collaborate to invest in charging infrastructure deployment, ensuring that EV drivers have convenient access to charging stations wherever they go.



Automation automobile factory concept image with 3D rendering robot assembly line with electric car battery cells module on platform  
Image: Canva Pro Jirasukhanont

nient access to charging stations wherever they go.

In conclusion, the future of electric cars is bright, with technology, policy, and consumer preferences aligning to drive the transition towards sustainable transportation. As EVs become increasingly ubiquitous on roads around the world, the vision of a cleaner, greener future powered by electricity is within reach.

### The dark side of electric cars

While electric cars have been hailed as the eco-friendly solution to transportation, a closer look into the future unveils a darker side to this seemingly bright prospect. As the world races towards electrification, concerns emerge regarding the environmental impact, resource depletion, and societal implications associated with the widespread adoption of electric vehicles (EVs).

One of the primary concerns revolves around the environmental footprint of EVs. While they produce zero emissions on the road, their overall environmental impact

extends beyond just driving. The production of batteries, a crucial component of electric vehicles, involves the extraction of rare earth metals like lithium and cobalt, often mined under hazardous conditions with significant ecological consequences. Additionally, the energy-intensive manufacturing processes of batteries contribute to carbon emissions, offsetting some of the environmental benefits touted by EV proponents.

Moreover, the surge in demand for EVs could lead to resource scarcity, particularly for essential minerals used in battery production. As countries compete for access to these finite resources, geopolitical tensions may escalate, potentially triggering conflicts over resource-rich regions.

Furthermore, the transition to electric mobility raises concerns about the equitable distribution of infrastructure and accessibility. Rural and low-income communities may face challenges in accessing charging stations and affording electric vehicles, exacerbating existing disparities in transportation options.

Another pressing issue is the strain on the power grid. The widespread adoption of EVs could overload existing electricity infrastructure, leading to blackouts and disruptions in service. Upgrading the grid to accommodate the increased demand for electricity would require substantial investments and time, posing a significant logistical challenge.

In light of these challenges, it becomes evident that the transition to electric cars necessitates a holistic approach that addresses not only emissions reduction but also the broader environmental, social, and infrastructural implications. Policymakers, industry leaders, and stakeholders must collaborate to develop sustainable solutions that mitigate the downsides of electric vehicles while maximizing their potential to drive positive change in the transportation sector. Failure to do so risks trading one set of environmental problems for another, undermining the very goal of creating a cleaner, greener future.

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