



THE
**LAPALALA
RESERVE
REPORT**

NEWS SNIPPETS FROM
AROUND THE RESERVE



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AUGUST - NOVEMBER 2025

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AVERAGE TEMPERATURES & RAINFALL

AUGUST

Rainfall = 12 mm
Min temp = 3 °C
Max temp = 33 °C

SEPTEMBER

Rainfall = 8.4 mm
Min temp = 11 °C
Max temp = 32 °C

OCTOBER

Rainfall = 72.25 mm
Min temp = 8 °C
Max temp = 36 °C

The 2025/2026 rainfall season is off to an above-average start, with a total of 93.15 mm of rain measured at Lapalala headquarters from July to October 2025.





HIGHS, LOWS AND EXCITING PROGRESS FOR OUR PREDATORS

By Wihan Pretorius

We observed this wild dog yearling feeding on a kudu kill at Mooimeisiesfontein.

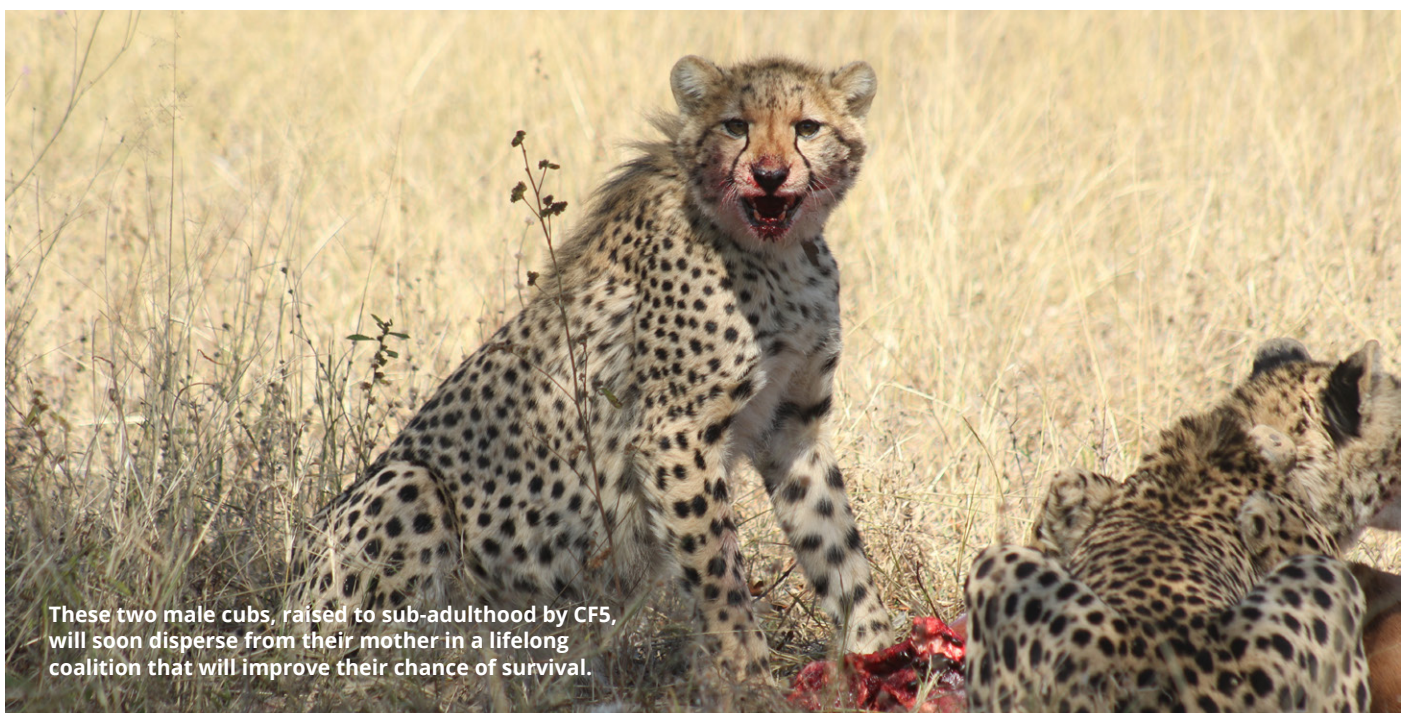
Nature doesn't always give us the outcomes we expect, but every moment – the good and the bad – is part of a bigger picture that we're incredibly proud to be a part of.

This couldn't be more true as we reflect on another eventful season for the wild dog, cheetah and lion on Lapalala Wilderness.

The wild dog pack has had a particularly good year. They have been spending most of their time in the mountains in the north, which offers excellent cover, hunting opportunities and denning spots. With the birth of nine energetic pups, the pack has grown to an impressive 17 individuals.

The pups are now exploring more confidently and occasionally joining the adults on short trips. The entire pack is looking strong and cohesive, which is a fantastic sign for such an endangered species. There is still plenty of work to do, along with some tough decisions that need to be taken. Look out for the next newsletter, which will reveal more news of the next steps for our wild dog.

The cheetah, on the other hand, have had a tougher season. The team was heartbroken to discover that CF4 had lost three of her four cubs. However, she continues to be an incredible mother with her remaining cub doing very well and growing stronger every week. We successfully fitted a new collar on CF6, which means we can continue to track her movements and collect valuable data. This is important as we suspect



These two male cubs, raised to sub-adulthood by CF5, will soon disperse from their mother in a lifelong coalition that will improve their chance of survival.

that she might be pregnant. We also celebrated the success of CF5, who is our first cheetah to raise two cubs to sub-adulthood. The cubs are both males, so they will form a lifelong coalition to improve their chance of survival after they disperse from their mother.

Our male cheetah have faced some dramatic challenges over the reporting period. We lost CM6, who suffered fatal injuries in a territorial fight. Fortunately, his brothers survived the clash, which also inflicted injuries on CM1 and CM2. We are relieved that these two males have recovered well after some expert treatment from Dr Kelsey. We were reminded of how vulnerable our young cheetah are when we discovered that CM9 was lost to another predator, shortly before he would have dispersed from his mother.

In happier news, our lion have given us many positive moments, both here on the reserve and beyond. We successfully relocated four male lion to support conservation efforts across South Africa. uMkhuze Game Reserve is now home to LM4 and LM5, who are settling in nicely, while LM6 and LM7 headed to Nyati Wilderness. As the offspring of LM2, these two males will contribute his valuable genetics to a new population on our neighbouring reserve.

Back on Lapalala Wilderness, LF6 has teased us with signs that she is raising cubs. She has chosen



We were treated to an impressive sighting of LM2, who visited the boma before the relocation of LM4 and LM5.

to den in an incredibly rugged and remote area, so it is almost impossible to find her and confirm her litter. We will give her the space she needs while we monitor the rest of the lion as they continue to move confidently across the reserve.

All in all, our predators have had an eventful season, which confirms how unpredictable true wilderness can be. As we celebrate the growth of our wild dog pack, we count some loss of our fragile, yet resilient, cheetah. And as our lion relocations contribute to national conservation efforts, we are reminded that wild spaces like Lapalala are so vitally important.

RHINO ORPHAN COMES FULL CIRCLE By Reletile Mokomane

Lapalala Wilderness is celebrating the return of a black rhino that was found orphaned on the reserve almost five years ago.

In May 2021, our rhino monitors discovered the lone tracks of a young black rhino in the thickets to the southwest of Selous Plains. The tracks seemed to be quite aimless, which alerted the monitors to the possibility that the calf had been orphaned. After two days of frantic searching, they located the rhino and identified her as a one-year-old female calf. It was later confirmed that her 32-year-old mother had died of age-related causes. The young black rhino was captured and relocated to the orphanage where she was reared and rewilded. Almost five years later, she has returned to Lapalala Wilderness to roam wild in the place of her birth.



Having returned to Lapalala Wilderness as a sub-adult, the female black rhino is rewarding our staff and guests with regular sightings. Photo credit: Brendan Vorster



RHINO RELOCATION TO BENEFIT NEIGHBOURING RESERVE

By Reletile Mokomane

Teams from Nyati and Lapalala Wilderness embarked on the joint operation to capture three black rhino bulls.

Three black rhino bulls from Lapalala Wilderness are settling in well on Nyati Wilderness. The animals were purchased by our neighbouring reserve with the aim of establishing a black rhino population on Nyati.

The relocation required extensive effort, despite the proximity of the two reserves. In preparation for the capture, the monitoring and anti-poaching teams had to track, locate and keep close tabs on the identified rhino bulls. It was vital that we did not lose them in the vast wilderness of Lapalala. Months of planning came to fruition when two of the bulls were captured on 22 October. The third bull was captured on 6 November.

All three rhino were successfully released following the short journey to Nyati Wilderness. We have been informed that the animals have settled well, with frequent sightings of one of the bulls. The relocation presented Lapalala Wilderness with a good opportunity to remove excess male rhino and help maintain genetic diversity. We were delighted to support Nyati Wilderness as they establish a new space for black rhino in the Waterberg. Congratulations and best wishes to them as they build on these efforts!



Safely in the crate, this rhino bull prepares for the short drive to Nyati Wilderness.



ALWAYS ON THE RIGHT TRACK

By Andrew Delaney
(General Manager, Lepogo Lodges)



Lepogo Lodges' dedicated tracker, David Modise, works tirelessly – often behind the scenes – to ensure the success of our guiding team and the phenomenal feedback we receive from our guests.

“Good morning all stations, this is Dave; Lepogo Lodges going mobile from Melote House.”

So begins David Modise's day as the radio crackles to life before the sunlight touches the mountains. It's an early start for our legendary tracker who has the unenviable task of finding what often does not want to be found! For David, there is nothing more satisfying than spotting the animals he knows so well, and seeing the joy on our guests' faces as they arrive at the sighting.

David was born in March 1987, just a stone's throw from Founders Main Road. As a child, he and his friends would spend hours exploring the area. He has vivid memories of swimming in the pools along Dragonfly Loop. Little did he know that he was laying the foundation for a career in tracking and guiding. In 2019, David joined Lepogo Lodges as a night porter, where he was responsible for escorting our guests to their rooms after dark. Within two months, he had so impressed the team with his knowledge and skills that he was appointed as our tracker.

While his task is not an easy one, David's in-depth knowledge of our challenging terrain is a great asset. He considers modern technology to be a valuable tracking tool, especially for guests with limited time to make a lifelong memory or a bucket list sighting. Ideally, he enjoys using technology as a starting point before following physical clues, intuition and traditional tracking techniques to achieve results. His dedication, commitment and sheer hard work allow us all to thrive.

We are delighted to see Dave's journey unfold as he pursues his dream of becoming a guide. We are eagerly waiting for the day when he responds to a sighting instead of calling it in! Until then, our game drives will conclude with an echo down the radio:

“Thank you for the help, Dave, we are all good for now.”



LAPALALA WELCOMES NEW HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER

By Bridgitte Phillips



Dalene Pitout joined the Lapalala Wilderness management team on 6 October 2025 as our newly appointed health and safety officer.

The Lapalala Wilderness management team is delighted to welcome Dalene Pitout as our newly appointed health and safety officer. Dalene's appointment marks an exciting step forward in strengthening our commitment to creating a safe and sustainable environment for staff, guests, and wildlife.

Dalene brings a wealth of experience spanning nearly two decades in occupational health and safety. Her career has a strong foundation in high-risk industries such as mining and construction. She has led safety initiatives for major mining operations, implemented ISO 45001-compliant systems, and ensured compliance with South Africa's Occupational Health and Safety Act. She is also a registered member of the South African Institute for Occupational Health and Safety, underscoring her dedication to professional excellence.

Dalene describes her proactive approach to safety as a way of life. She emphasises the importance of risk assessments, toolbox talks, and emergency preparedness – all tailored to the unique challenges of a Big Five reserve. Her strategies include improving communication in high-risk areas, ensuring compliance with environmental regulations, and fostering a culture where safety is second nature.

Dalene holds a National Diploma and B-Tech in Safety Risk Management, advanced training from WITS University, and certification as a registered facilitator and assessor. Beyond her technical expertise, she is known for her leadership, problem-solving skills, and unwavering commitment to teamwork.

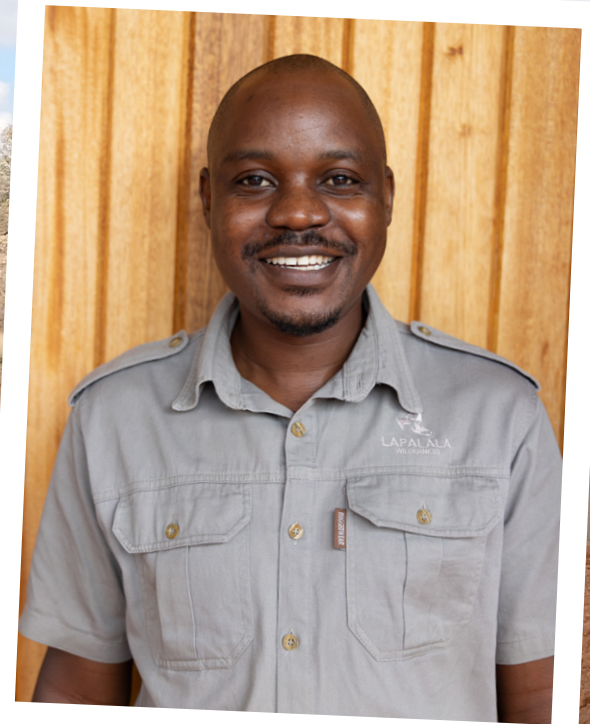
As Lapalala continues to evolve as a leading conservation area, Dalene's role will be pivotal in ensuring compliance with health, safety, and environmental standards. From conducting audits and inspections to developing emergency response plans and training programmes, she will help us maintain the highest safety standards across the reserve.

We extend a warm welcome to Dalene as she joins the Lapalala family. We look forward to working together to make our reserve not only a sanctuary for wildlife but also a haven for everyone who calls it home.



ASSISTANT INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGER JOINS THE LAPALALA TEAM

By Bridgitte Phillips



Lapalala Wilderness bids a warm welcome to Matimba Mahani, who joins us as our assistant infrastructure manager.

We are excited to announce that Matimba Mahani has joined the Lapalala Wilderness team as our assistant infrastructure manager. His appointment strengthens our ability to maintain and enhance the reserve's critical infrastructure while ensuring environmental compliance and sustainability.

Matimba brings over six years of hands-on experience in nature conservation and infrastructure management across some of South Africa's most respected reserves. Most recently, he served as infrastructure coordinator at Sanbona Wildlife Reserve, a Big Five reserve spanning 68,000 hectares. In this role, he managed everything from road and fencing maintenance to water resource infrastructure, boma upkeep, and Earth Ranger data analysis – skills that will be invaluable at Lapalala.

Before Sanbona, Matimba was nature reserve manager at Drie Kuilen Nature Reserve, where he oversaw conservation projects, infrastructure upgrades, and staff development. His career also includes experience in game breeding and wildlife management at Thaba Tholo Game Farm, giving him a deep understanding of the operational and ecological needs of large reserves.

Matimba holds a National Diploma in Nature Conservation from Tshwane University of Technology and is currently pursuing a BA in Environmental Management through UNISA. His technical expertise is complemented by strong leadership, multitasking, and communication skills, making him an ideal fit for this dynamic role.

As assistant infrastructure manager, Matimba will work closely with the departmental manager, Michael Gardiner, to oversee road rehabilitation, fence upgrades, borehole and water reticulation systems, and compliance with the Environmental Management Programme (EMPr). He will also play a key role in managing staff, ensuring safety standards, and supporting Lapalala's long-term infrastructure strategy.

Please join us in welcoming Matimba to the Lapalala family. His passion for conservation and proven track record in infrastructure management will help us maintain the reserve as a world-class sanctuary for wildlife and people alike.

SECURE NEIGHBOURS EQUAL A SECURE RESERVE

By JP Viljoen

Our neighbouring villages are seeing the benefits of a Lapalala Wilderness project to improve safety and security beyond the boundaries of the reserve.

This initiative is managed by our wilderness protection unit (WPU) as one aspect of our overall area integrity strategy. Our WPU teams conduct weekly patrols of our neighbouring villages to help address the problems of stock theft and petty crime. The team also engages with the residents of the villages, particularly the elders, to share information and communicate how best to prevent stock theft in the area. This project is conducted at no cost to the residents.

Results suggest a decrease in crime and a significant reduction in livestock theft around Lapalala Wilderness. These results benefit our surrounding communities, which are home to many of our staff members and their families. By helping to secure our neighbours, we help to secure our reserve.



Our K9 unit visits our neighbouring villages to demonstrate their work, raise awareness, share information and conduct security patrols.



Out on patrol, our WPU team members take time to answer questions from curious young residents.

LAPALALA TO BENEFIT FROM CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY

By Jacques Viljoen

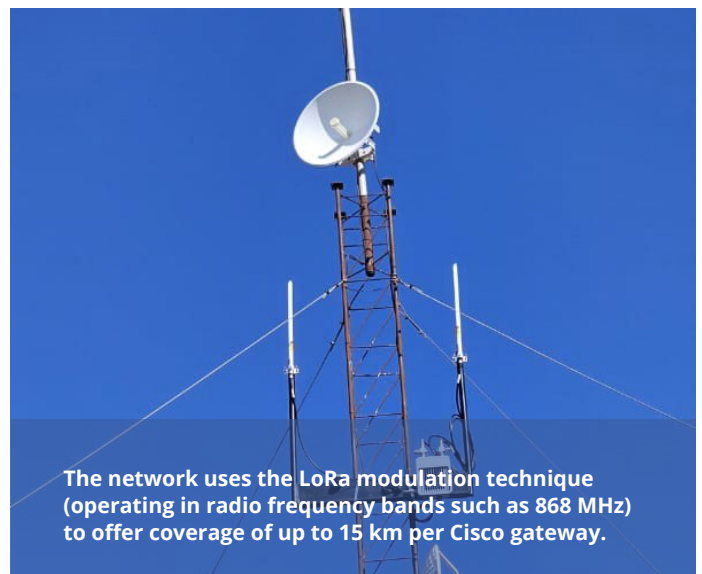
Lapalala Wilderness is set to benefit from a new tracking and monitoring network, thanks to a generous donation from the Connected Conservation Foundation (CCF) and Cisco.

The long-range wide area network (LoRaWAN) is a networking protocol that connects a range of sensors, enabling real-time monitoring, response and planning. It is designed to allow Internet of Things (IoT) devices to communicate wirelessly over long distances, while consuming very little power. LoRaWAN technology is ideal for devices that are powered by batteries for years on end. In addition to the donation of the network, CCF has also provided significant funding for the purchase of sensors: field team tracking, wildlife tracking, vehicle tracking and a multitude of asset and system monitoring sensors.

In preparation for the installation of the LoRaWAN, the Lapalala team has spent the past few months erecting

Cisco gateways that cover all corners of the reserve. They have been assisted by Quin Clarke, the local technical project manager for CCF.

The LoRaWAN opens up a world of tracking and monitoring possibilities at significantly lower cost. We are deeply grateful for this donation and look forward to realising the full potential of this cutting-edge technology.



The network uses the LoRa modulation technique (operating in radio frequency bands such as 868 MHz) to offer coverage of up to 15 km per Cisco gateway.