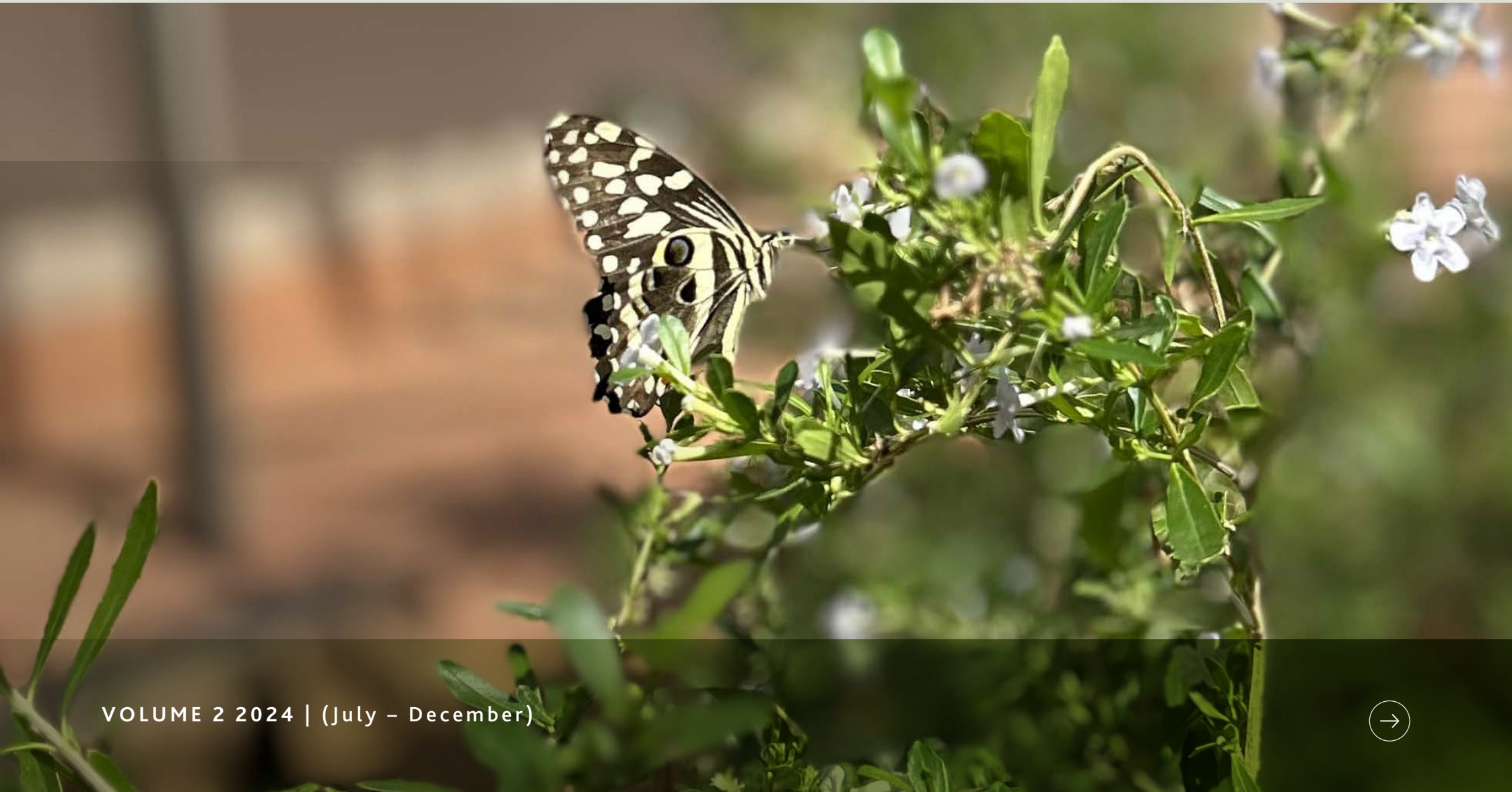


# LAPALALA WILDERNESS SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

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LAPALALA  
WILDERNESS SCHOOL



VOLUME 2 2024 | (July - December)



## LAPALALA WILDERNESS SCHOOL HONOURS ITS WOMEN

On 9 August, South Africa honoured the women of our country. The Lapalala Wilderness School (LWS) celebrated the women on our staff throughout the month of August.

The success of the school relies on the strength, resilience and dedication of women. They manage projects and finance, prepare nutritious food and implement our education programmes. The women on our team play a vital role in shaping the next generation of conservation champions.

“Women are the backbone of our society,” said school director, Mashudu Makhokha, “and we thank them for their unique contribution to our mission at the Lapalala Wilderness School.”

The LWS embraced the national theme for the 2024 women’s month celebrations: “Celebrating 30 years of democracy towards women’s development”. As we reflect on our journey to empower women, we are committed to implementing policies that promote gender equality, and prevent discrimination and harassment.



*During the month of August, the Lapalala Wilderness School took to social media to highlight the unique role of women in every aspect of the school.*

## NURTURING FUTURE CONSERVATION CHAMPIONS

July to September were busy months at the LWS as we operated at full capacity. We were delighted to welcome 1,261 learners from local community schools, 475 learners from fee-paying schools, and 313 students from various tertiary institutions. Each young visitor has the potential to leave with a new appreciation for our natural world.



*Our young visitors engaged in wilderness walks, environmental programmes and the practical components of their conservation-related curricula.*



# SCHOOL VEGETABLE GARDENS COMPETE FOR TOP AWARD

Congratulations to the winners of the Gardens of Hope project who were announced at an award ceremony at Marken Primary School. A total of 16 schools entered the schools' gardening competition, which ran from February to October. The initiative was launched by the Lapalala Wilderness Foundation, in collaboration with Waterberg Rhino UK and the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve.

Each school had to submit evidence that their garden was productive enough to sustain the school and its surrounding community. They used detailed reports, photographs and videos to record the variety of plants in their gardens, as well as the abundance of their monthly harvest. The entrants were keen to share their journey of sustainable practice, environmental education and stewardship.

## WINNERS

**1st place** (Daniel Mashasha Garden of Excellence award for best garden overall) **Nelly Primary School**

**2nd place** (most improved garden)

**Sebiloane Primary and Monala Primary School**

**3rd place** (biggest variety of produce)

**Monare Volunteer Project**

- Best sustainable practice: **Vaalwater Youth Network**
- Best lunch ladies: **Leubaneng Primary School**
- Best tree or orchard: **Leubaneng Primary School**

The winning schools were awarded cash prizes to benefit their gardens. Ultimately, every school is a winner as they contribute to food security and sustainability within their communities.



*Nelly Primary School was named the best overall garden, winning the Daniel Mashasha Garden of Excellence award and first prize of R20,500.*



*Children help to harvest fresh produce that is used to create healthy school lunches and feed their communities. Congratulations to all the schools who entered the Gardens of Hope project!*



## DONATED BOOKS HELP TO PROMOTE READING

The LWS outreach programme was pleased to deliver a collection of donated books to a rural school in Limpopo.

Textbooks, study guides and fiction books are often in short supply, especially in remote areas where schools have limited access to libraries. The donation of appealing, interesting books will help teachers to encourage a reading lifestyle. This is desperately needed in South Africa where studies show that an alarming percentage of children struggle to read for meaning.

The LWS outreach programme has identified a need to improve and promote literacy in our local schools. Thank you to the donors who generously help us to put books into the hands of these children.



*The LWS outreach programme is grateful to facilitate the donation of books to our local schools.*

## BURNER STOVES DELIVER MULTIPLE BENEFITS

The Melkrivier community and school received a donation of burner stoves from the LWS outreach team.

The gift of stoves, tripod stands and 70-litre cooking pots was made possible by a partnership between the LWS and Lepogo Lodges. The burner stoves offer a highly efficient alternative to woodfires: they take less time to reach higher temperatures; cook faster and burn cleaner (producing less smoke and pollutants); are portable and easy to transport.

The stoves also have environmental benefits. Traditional wood stoves can deplete the surrounding forests as people collect natural vegetation to burn. The burner stoves reduce the reliance on these trees and protect against habitat loss.



*The LWS outreach team was pleased to hand over several burner stoves to the Melkrivier community and school.*



# TERTIARY STUDENTS GAIN PRACTICAL SKILLS IN NATURE MANAGEMENT

The Lapalala Wilderness Foundation welcomed 59 students from the NewBridge Graduate Institute for the practical component of their Diploma in Nature Management. The students joined us in August for a week of hands-on learning and skills development.

They were required to master advanced veld management techniques such as fire ecology, invasive species management, and ecosystem restoration. They learned how brush packing works to restore the ground and replace nutrients, while also engaging in selective bush clearing and erosion control.

The group spent time with the predator monitoring team, honing their tracking skills and learning about the practical realities of predator management. They learned how to monitor and maintain the fences that contain animals within the safety of the reserve and protect them from poaching. A game drive informed the students about effective road placement on the reserve. They were inspired by a discussion about environmental education, and left with the ability to identify parasites in impala dung!

The students were enriched with skills and insights that will benefit them as they prepare for a future in nature management. We wish them all the best for their studies.



*Students from the NewBridge Graduate Institute were immersed in a week of hands-on nature management.*



*The bush clearing team helped the students to put the theory of veld management into practice.*



*Students learned how to construct effective gabions in gull-eroded areas.*



## ARBOR WEEK BRINGS TREES TO SCHOOLS AND VILLAGES

The LWS partnered with the Sustainable Schools Programme to green the grounds of some of our local schools and villages during Arbor Week.

The first week in September is an annual event that highlights the beauty and importance of trees. Arbor Week encourages people to plant, nurture and value trees for their many benefits. Trees improve air quality, provide shade, prevent soil erosion, and provide a habitat for wildlife.

The LWS joined the team from the Sustainable Schools Programme as they spent the week visiting schools and villages around the Waterberg. They organised tree planting events to raise awareness of trees and foster a deeper appreciation for our local forests. The theme for the school visits – *the importance of trees in our environment* – highlighted our connection with nature and its role in creating a healthier environment for everyone.



*The LWS visited Leubaneng Primary School and Langalibalele Secondary School to plant trees around the school grounds.*



## MUD-WALLOWING IN THE WATERBERG

A visit to the LWS is not complete before one is covered in mud from head to toe!

The school has completed the 'construction' of its new mud pit. Here, learners can engage in a slippery battle to remain upright as they wrestle their opponents! A mud fight is a form of recreational wrestling that provides thrilling entertainment for both spectators and competitors. The mud pit is sure to become one of the favourite features of our new school facility.



*The new mud pit is a thrilling arena for the spills that accompany a mud-wrestling match.*

## MEETING THE HEALTH NEEDS OF OUR NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES

The LWS outreach team collaborated with the nursing department of the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) to assess the healthcare needs of our neighbouring villages.

The residents of Thekwane, Uitspan and Daggakraal face serious challenges in accessing health services due to their remote location, poor roads and a lack of transport. The nursing team collected data on the incidence of disease, health conditions and risk factors in the population. The data will be analysed to identify priority health needs, and develop targeted interventions.



*A team of nurses visited homes in our nearby villages to conduct a comprehensive health needs assessment.*



## SCHOOL HOSTS FRIENDS OF THE BUSHVELD EVENT

In September, the LWS hosted the Friends of the Bushveld Vaalwater for their monthly get-together.

The 'Friends' is a regular gathering of people who have an interest in the business and tourism industry of Vaalwater and its surrounds. The event allows business owners to meet and share information about their various activities and operations.

Guest speaker, Richard Wadley, spoke about why the Waterberg is such a beautiful place in which to live and visit. He described the many attractions for tourists, thanks to its beauty and rich biodiversity.

After the talk, the visitors had a guided tour of the LWS, discovering how the school operates and the importance of environmental education. The evening ended with refreshments and the chance to network with members of the LWS team.



*The director of the LWS, Mashudu Makhokha, welcomed the guests before introducing guest speaker, Richard Wadley.*



*The school provided an ideal setting for guests to connect and forge strong networks around a shared interest in the area.*

## CAMERA TRAPS RECORD NOCTURNAL WILDLIFE

Camera traps have captured photographs of some interesting night-time visitors along our school fence.

The LWS installed the camera traps along the fence and near the site of the Bushman paintings. The photographs provide evidence of animals that are not easily seen, particularly nocturnal animals such as bushpig, genet, porcupine and aardvark. They can also record unusual behaviour and help to identify individual animals.



*The camera traps captured photographs of elusive leopard, bushpig and aardvark.*





## SCHOOL CHILDREN RAISE THEIR VOICES FOR RHINO

A record number of 124 learners from 55 schools raised their voices against rhino poaching in the annual LWS public speaking and poster competition.

The competition coincides with World Rhino Day on 28 September. Now in its 11th year, the event is a highlight on the Waterberg calendar, fostering environmental awareness and a love for our magnificent rhinos.

This year's competition attracted 114 learners from Grade 10, and 10 learners from Grade 12. Grade 10 learners designed a poster and delivered a speech (of three to five minutes) about the social, economic, political and environmental impact of rhino poaching. The Grade 12 learners submitted essays on the topic. Learners had to think critically about the issues that lead to poaching, such as cultural and social beliefs, weak law enforcement, corruption among officials and inadequate anti-poaching laws. They were also encouraged to propose solutions to the challenges. The participants impressed us with their knowledge, passion and eloquence.

A total of 18 prizes were awarded to the Grade 10 entrants, including laptops and printers, electronic tablets, and vouchers towards school uniforms, study aids and stationery.

The top two learners in Grade 12 were awarded bursaries of R90,000 each from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE). This is a life-changing opportunity to complete a degree in conservation/environmental studies, followed by a two-year internship with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.



*Congratulations to our young conservation champions who each won a prize in the LWS public speaking and poster competition!*

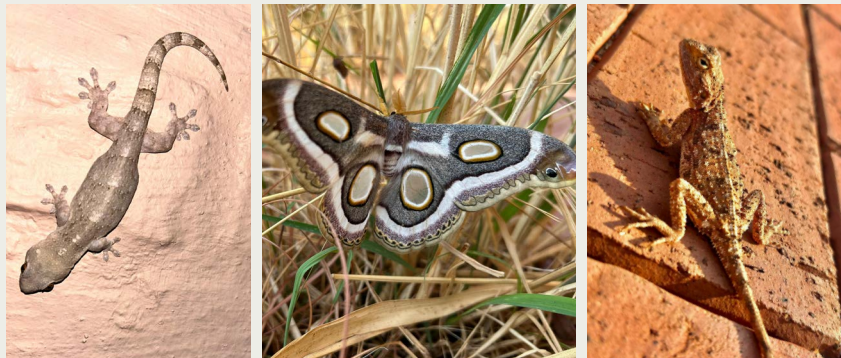


## GARDENS BURSTING WITH LIFE



The warmer, wet weather brings a season of renewal, particularly for the butterflies that feed on the nectar of flowering trees and plants.

The Waterberg is home to lime butterflies (*Papilio demoleus*) and green-banded swallowtail butterflies (*Papilio nireus lyaeus*) that are commonly spotted in the gardens at the LWS. These butterflies are known for their striking colouration and are often found near citrus plants, where their larvae feed on the leaves. With the arrival of the first rains, the plants burst with green shoots and budding flowers. The adult butterflies are drawn to the nectar in the flowers, so they are a common sight in our gardens, where they play an important role in pollination.



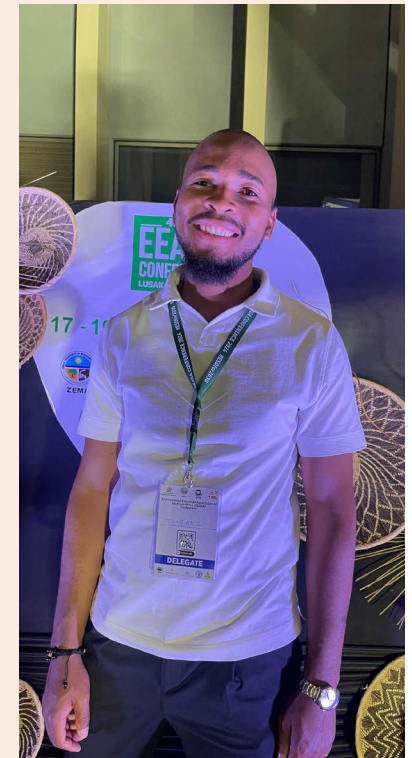
*With the arrival of warmer, wet weather, we have been treated to more frequent sightings of rock agama, Japanese gecko and scorpions, amongst a colourful array of butterflies.*

## INSPIRING BEST PRACTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The LWS was delighted to play a part in the annual conference of the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA). One of our environmental educators, Tendani Mavhila, attended the 42nd conference of the EEASA, which took place from 17 to 19 September 2024, at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre in Lusaka, Zambia.

Tendani presented two papers, titled *Student Engagement and Activism at the Lapalala Wilderness School* and *Lapalala Wilderness School – An Ethical Approach to Teaching and Learning Education for Sustainable Development*.

The conference focused on the themes of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and transitioning to equitable and sustainable economies. This is in keeping with government's support for sustainable consumption and production as a critical component of a circular economy. The conference provided a forum for environmental education (EE) practitioners and learners to share their experiences and participate in the development of best practice.



*Tendani Mavhila attended the conference of the EEASA where he was invited to share some of our best practices at the LWS.*



## IN CLOSING

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### FESTIVE SEASON GREETINGS!

The holiday season is upon us and, as we reflect on the past year, there is no better time to express our thanks and sincere appreciation for all those who have contributed to the success of the Lapalala Wilderness School in 2024.

To our numerous donors, your generous contributions and continued support have allowed our staff to focus on our mission and reach new heights.

To our board members, your leadership, mentorship and guidance continue to shape our team and ensure the organisation can grow from strength to strength. For the immense time and energy you dedicate voluntarily, we at the LWS are extremely grateful.

To our devoted staff at the LWS, the school and its unique culture are because of the effort, dedication and skills you bring to the school each day. We hope you take this time off to rest and reflect on your achievements for this year, and are proud of what we have, collectively, accomplished.

We wish you all a safe festive season with loved ones. See you in 2025!

**M. MAKHOKHA**

Mashudu Makhokha  
Director: Lapalala Wilderness School



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