

iNaturalist City Nature Challenge: my Skukuza Edition

Text by Esi Bossman



Some of the observations seen in the Skukuza village in Kruger by intern, Esi Bossman during the iNaturalist City Challenge.

iNaturalist began as a Master's project at UC Berkeley's School of Information in 2008. It is a citizen science biodiversity platform that connects naturalists to researchers and other naturalists from around the world. It allows people from all walks of life to contribute directly to science by taking pictures of fauna and flora around them and uploading these observations for identification and use in various research projects (publications produced from iNaturalist observations: <https://www.citynaturechallenge.org>).

The iNaturalist City Nature Challenge is a global BioBlitz, being one of the largest community science events in the world! The challenge requires people to make observations over a four-day period and compete with other naturalists, in their own cities or globally, by flooding the platform with new observations. In 2023,

I competed from Skukuza, Mpumalanga (between 28 April and 1 May). Unfortunately, Skukuza is not a registered city on iNaturalist, as it is only a village within the Kruger National Park. Therefore, I decided to compete globally!

Roughly 31 000 steps later, I reached 158 incredible observations from within the staff village! Globally, there were 1 870 763 observations, over 57 227 species and 66 394 participants from over 350 cities in this year's challenge (<https://www.citynaturechallenge.org/past-results>).

I encourage others from around the world to participate with me again next year, for some friendly competition! Stay curious and happy observing!

Aerial census of large herbivores in Golden Gate Highlands National Park

Text by Nkabeng Mzileni & Cathy Greaver



With the iconic Brandwag in the background, the Golden Gate Highlands census team consisted of SANParks pilot (Jack Greef, here in the helicopter), Regional ecologist: KNP (Cathy Greaver, left), Biotechnician: Arid (Lufuno Munyai, second from right), Regional ecologist: Arid (Nkabeng Mzileni, far right). The team is also accompanied here by Paddy Gordon, the Park Manager for Golden Gate Highlands National Park.

The Maluti-Drakensberg mountains of the 33 000 ha expanse of Golden Gate Highlands National Park are majestic. The towering peaks enfolded by clouds are both ominous and mesmerising. As a team assembled from Kruger and Kimberley, the rain fell gently, and the grey clouds held no promise of lifting. Here four seasons can be experienced in a day, and the first day set the tone for the remainder of the week: fly whenever the clouds lift and the wind recedes.

The team, dressed in thick warm jackets, gloves and beanies, was prepared for the freezing flying conditions with icy winds blowing into the Squirrel helicopter. When the weather was wet, cold and a safety risk for flying, the team relaxed or caught up on much-needed

sleep, but remained in high spirits and completed the task timeously.

When the flying conditions were ideal, the team was rewarded with sights of caracal with kittens, herds of running black wildebeest and mountain-climbing eland. Large herbivores in Golden Gate refers not only to wildlife but also to livestock owned by legal land claimants. Golden Gate is a good example of how 14,360 head of livestock and wildlife jointly use a landscape, with many implications of this for park management. Rare species such as oribi were not seen at all, or seen in very low numbers (i.e. mountain reedbuck) which raises questions around the drivers of the gradual but ongoing decline of these species.