



## SRA 2025 Update

2025 has been a year of settling the SRA into a smooth operation. The baboon management program is delivering good results, the security camera program has been completed, and we have some exciting new developments on beach safety. The verge maintenance and alien vegetation team have spruced up the Valley in preparation for the festive season, and we look forward to welcoming everyone for a wonderful holiday. Thank you to all who have worked so diligently this year to make it so successful.

The SRA will report back to residents at the joint NVRA/NVSRA AGM to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> December. Rob Nichol, James Martin and Paul Richards were re-appointed Directors at last year's AGM for a period of two years. We ask any property owners who would like to put forward nominations for further directors to please submit these for consideration prior to the AGM.

## Project Update

### Baboon Management

The troop has been quite scarce in the Valley for much of this year as they merged with the Covie Troop and spent much of their time in the forest between Natures Valley and Covie. This gave us some respite in the Village and there were far fewer incursions reported on the Chat Group. However, the merger has given rise to a whole batch of new babies which has increased the size of the troop considerably.

The NVT implemented a waste management program during 2025 placing specially designed green baboon proof bins in the public picnic sites and repairing all the bins in the SANParks Campsite. Once the baboons realised that there was no access to the waste, they moved out of the area looking for alternative sources of food. This together with the ongoing merger activity with the Covie Troop created a new problem for the NVT Research Team as they suddenly had no subjects to research within easy reach.

I am sure that with season just around the corner, the troop will be back foraging from campers' food tents and bins that are not properly secured, but hopefully this will be a better season for the campsite who were terrorised by raiding baboon last Christmas.

### *Baboon Perspectives – by Nicholas Marais, NVT Intern*

For the past year we have been fortunate to have the services of Nicolas Marais serving an internship with the NVT. Nicolas focussed on studying our baboon Troop, gathering information on their feeding habits, their movements, and their interaction with humans and other baboon troops. Nic has been posting regular Baboon Reports since March this year which will shortly be accessible on the NVSRA website and provide lots of very interesting information on the movements and habits of our troop. Nic recently posted some very insightful comments on the Baboon Alert Group that I have included below. Thank you for your contribution Nic and good luck for 2026 as you move on to new things.

*I'd like to offer my perspective as someone who has been following and studying these baboons for over a year.*

*One thing that is very important, is that the baboons absolutely still fear humans. They do, however, distinguish between different types of people. All the baboons remain wary—if not openly fearful—of the monitors. They recognise the monitors by their vests and bikes and seem to understand their role well enough to alter their behaviour around them, sometimes even changing their travel routes when monitors are present, whether paintball guns are used or not. And this is great because that is the way we want them to recognize and respond to the monitors.*

*Our goal as researchers, on the other hand, is to be more neutral so that we can observe what the baboons are doing and learn about where they go, what they're eating, and why they might come toward the village in the first place. Baboons perceive researchers more as neutral elements of the environment— and again this is the goal. We want them to be comfortable around us and show us their real behaviour, and this technique is one that is used successfully with many baboon groups and other species like baboons. This doesn't mean they are tame or overly habituated; it simply means they do not associate us with either reward or punishment.*

*Regarding the village, the baboons treat it exactly as many wildlife species do: a risk-reward scenario. They do not spend all their time around the village and will enter only when the perceived reward outweighs the risk. The great news about the approach that we've been taking is that it has been successful in helping to shape the baboons' behaviour: compared to two or more years ago, the number of baboons entering the village has dropped significantly. Incidents of large groups entering homes no longer occur. Now, the typical number is one to three individuals. In these ways, we've been very successful compared to other programs trying to achieve the same goals.*

*Crucially, when human food is not involved, these baboons are not aggressive. When problems do happen, it almost always stems from people—mostly tourists—feeding them, or from easy access to food via unsecured bins, cars, or homes. Once they successfully obtain human food, their behaviour changes for several weeks as they actively seek more. This reinforces patterns that are difficult to break. Again though, the good news about this is that we've demonstrated success in breaking their patterns: when the bins near the picnic areas that used to be open and provide easy access to trash for the baboons were replaced with improved wildlife-proof bins, the baboons eventually gave up even trying to get into them.*

*Based on our observations of the group and our team's individual identification of baboons over time, there is no evidence of a "rogue" or wandering male. Additionally, as a clarification after a comment in the valley chat, since we regularly monitor the health of every one of the baboons in our local troop, we can confidently say that none of the baboons exhibit any signs of rabies.*

*Baboons are exceptionally intelligent animals with strong pattern-recognition abilities. They learned how to exploit the old seesaw bins, recognized the monitors' schedules, and even targeted specific houses where they previously obtained food. Our project monthly reports (posted on NVT's Instagram account monthly) clearly show that while baboons do enter the village, they do so only on a handful of days each month—not continuously or randomly.*

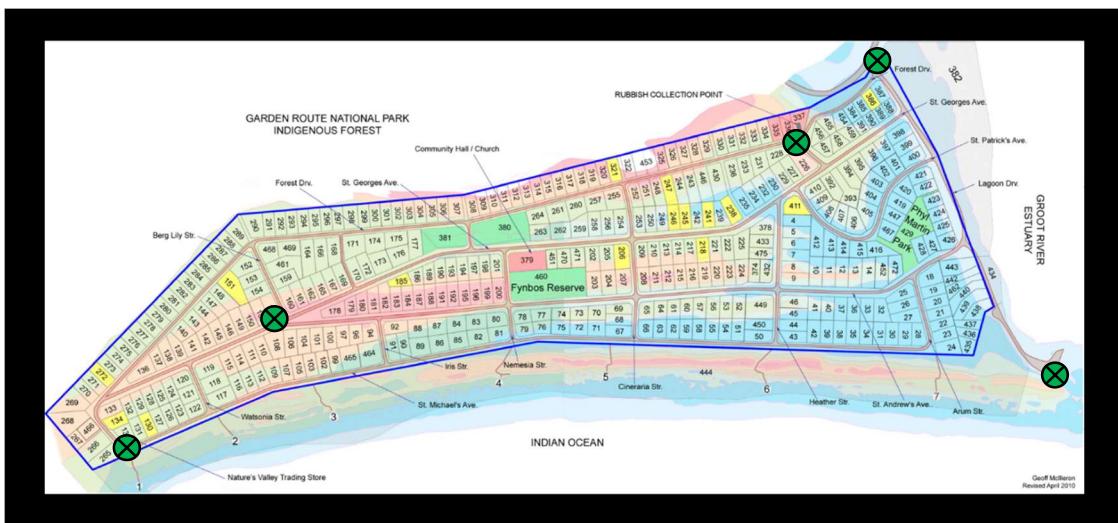
*Encountering a baboon can be intimidating for any of us. That is why understanding baboon behaviour is so important. Behaviours like tooth-bearing can signal aggression, but it is often a signal of fear and an expression that you are very likely to see just before they run away from you. There are proven techniques to encourage a baboon to back down without escalating the encounter.*

Finally, even though getting rid of the baboons may seem like a fast and permanent fix, it often comes with unintended and temporary consequences. Beyond the fact that these animals play a critical role in helping to restore indigenous forest by spreading seeds, getting rid of this group could easily open space for a bigger and more difficult-to-handle group to move into the territory. The long-term, sustainable solution to improved coexistence between baboons and humans lies in understanding why these conflicts occur and taking steps to prevent them—precisely what the Nature's Valley Baboon Project and the Monitor Program together aim to do.

## Safety and Security Program

All the security camera installations have now been completed and are being monitored by Smart Security via their Plett-based control room. We also have access to the cameras and the historic footage in case we need to review incidents that occur in the Valley. The diagram below once again shows the location of all our security camera positions.

**Natures Valley Camera Location Sites**



### Camera Locations

The camera network has increased our security capabilities significantly which can be seen by the extremely low incidence of crime in the Valley. However, I remind residents and visitors to be vigilant during the holiday season as there are often people looking for opportunities to snatch anything left lying around in gardens or motor vehicles when the Valley is busy. Please report anything suspicious on the Security Alert Group.

## Beach and Lagoon Safety – NSRI & Lifesavers

There have been some significant changes on this front as you will all see on the beach this season. Through the generous donations from residents, and with significant infrastructure backing from NSRI Station 14 in Plett, we have now acquired an NSRI Jetrib exclusively for the use of Natures Valley. Spirit of Pilatus, our new rescue boat will be skippered by a Coxswain supplied by NSRI Plett who will also train our lifesaving team to act as rescue swimmers from the boat. This will be a game changer for sea rescues in the Valley as it shortens the response time from Plett Station 14 considerably and allows quick access to difficult to reach spots in what can be rough seas and strong currents along our beach.

During the year some large storm surges washed the dunes away at beach 4 necessitating the removal of the life savers hut and making access to beach 4 very steep. NSRI Plett has stepped in to provide a fully equipped container complete with an emergency medical treatment room and lifeguard tower on top which will be placed at beach 2. Lifeguards will place the swimming flags where the water conditions are safest each day and have a mobile tower to assist with swimmer visibility.

As many will know, we have an ATV (All-Terrain Vehicle) for NSRI Rescue Services permanently stationed in the Valley. During holiday season this alongside the NSRI Rescue Jetrib will be deployed onto the swimming beach with the Coxswain and lifesavers. The ATV is fully equipped with all the necessary rescue medical equipment to facilitate any medical emergencies.

Finally, we now have a team of 7 “NSRI Coastwatcher First Responders” in the Valley to act as backup to all NSRI efforts – Raymond Steyn, Meyer van Rooyen, Rob Nichol, Marco Barnardo, Bobby Schuiling, Graham Blanckenberg and Dr Joanne Blanckenberg. NSRI Station 14 has provided First Responder training, medical supplies, rescue equipment, storage containers and infrastructure to put this in place and we are very appreciative of all their efforts and the enormous financial investment that they have made. Thanks to Jaco Kruger and his management team at Station 14 for everything that they have done to make this incredible rescue facility available to us.

**CANOE OWNERS PLEASE NOTE** It is compulsory to lock your canoes to the rails provided when not in use to prevent a repeat of the tragic accident that occurred in October last year. Any canoes found loose in the lagoon area OR not locked to the poles provided will be removed from the lagoon area for safety reasons.

### Verge & Alien Vegetation Clearing

The Verge Clearing Team, headed by Marvin Kettledas, has once again been hard at work during the year cutting back the overgrown bushes alongside our roads, mowing the lawns and tidying up the public open spaces. Thank you to Marvin and the verge clearing team.

Giorgio Lombardi, from the NVT, has been working tirelessly to improve the alien vegetation infestation in the Valley. Please make use of his services to inspect your premises and advise on any alien vegetation issues you may have.

Finally, we thank everyone for the support and assistance in bringing the NVSRA into being and wish you all a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year!!

RA Nichol

NVSRA Chairman

1<sup>st</sup> December 2025