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Investigation Report – Pilanesberg Elephant Incident

The Field Guides Association of Southern Africa (FGASA) has received a finalised report on the widely circulated videos of the elephant bull incident in Pilanesberg National Park. The investigation into this incident has been conducted with the relevant authorities and this process is now concluded. The individuals spoken to include the guide driving (who will not be named), his Head Guide and his Operations Manager.

Upon the conclusion of this investigation the following information was revealed:

1. The guide driving the vehicle followed protocol by remaining with his guests in the vehicle while others stepped off to visit the hide and to use the restrooms.
2. As his guests and others from different tour groups, lodges and private drivers began to exit the hide and return to their vehicles the bull elephant approached the guests on foot with an aggressive demeanour.
3. It was determined that the bull elephant was in musth, a state of heightened sexual arousal that can contribute to more aggressive behaviours in bull elephants.
4. The guide in question noticed the bull elephant approaching the guests on foot and started the engine of his vehicle attempting to reposition it to block the bull elephant from further approaching the guests on foot. The guide shouted for the guests to return to the safety of the hide while also banging the door of his vehicle and shouting at the elephant bull, attempting to stop it.
5. The elephant however was undeterred by the actions of the guide and proceeded towards the vehicle, once within range the elephant lifted the vehicle up and pushed it backwards on two occasions. During this, the clutch of the vehicle became incapacitated making it impossible for the guide to change gears and move the vehicle.
6. Once the incident was over the elephant bull then walked around the outside of the parking lot and proceeded towards the guests and tourists on the walkway to the hide.

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Executive Committee: Isaiah Banda (Waterberg), Ashwell Glasson, Neil Whyte (Sabi Sand Western Sector), Richard Pearse (Eastern Cape), Andrew Khosa (Northern Mpumalanga), Nic Knott-Craig (Gauteng), Jonathan Wightman (Madikwe), Bennet de Klerk (North West), Alan Taylor (Kwa-Zulu Natal), Joslin Abrahams (Western Cape), Armin Junkuhn (Namibia)

7. Eventually all guests and tourists were able to safely make it back to their game viewers and private vehicles. There were no injuries to guests or to the guide, nor was there damage to private vehicles parked in the vicinity.

The results of this investigation indicate that the guide acted in good faith in a situation that required a rapid response and very quick decision making. His actions ensured the safety and well-being of all guests within the vicinity, preventing injuries and damage to private vehicles.

It is important to note that if you were not there as a witness to the incident it is very important to understand that you do not know the full context of the situation. Videos and images may only reveal so much information and while they provide some context, they do not provide the full context. In this case, the videos did not show guests on foot near the elephant bull. The results of this investigation are final and hopefully as a community of guides, passionate nature lovers and wildlife enthusiasts we can all learn from this incident and carry this knowledge forward in creating and enjoying immersive experiences in nature.

- The FGASA Team

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