

# Revolutionising the safari experience

 By Cari Van Wyk

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Through combining the concept of crowdsourcing and social media, Kruger enthusiast Nadav Ossendryver has created an app that has revolutionised the way tourist and wildlife lovers interact and participate in game-viewing. Including the [Latest Sightings app](#), a [YouTube channel](#) and [the website](#), no-one will have to miss out on the latest wild sightings while on a safari.

We spoke to Ossendryver about his passion and his Latest Sightings.



Nadav Ossendryver

## **Tell us about Latest Sightings.**

**Nadav Ossendryver:** Latest Sightings is a platform for visitors who are currently in the Kruger National Park, be they rangers or tourists, to report the animals and events that they are seeing live. They report their location, time and sighting to Latest Sightings, which in turn broadcasts these 'tings' (a reported sighting) over the various media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and smartphone apps). The Latest Sightings community has 450 000+ members.

This project meets many needs:

1. Enhances the safari experience by enabling visitors to go directly to interesting sightings.

2. Contributes toward research projects, such as the Wild Dog Project, the Ground Hornbill project, the Leopard Identification project, Pangolin and Bat projects. I also contribute towards EWT special projects, like roadkill awareness, etc.
3. Contributes towards wildlife conservation. When I receive a report of a snared animal or suspicious activity, I report it immediately to the authorities that I am in touch with. So far, Latest Sightings has saved rhinos (which we do not report seeing due to poaching), hyenas, wild dogs and lions who have been injured by poachers.
4. Educates my followers about the correct behaviour acceptable in the bush. Each morning, the first posts on all the media are about "bush etiquette" and how to report poaching and suspicious behaviour.
5. Communicates with wildlife enthusiasts who have become addicted followers of the sightings. Many South Africans living overseas report how they are living vicariously in Kruger by following the sightings, and many have been motivated to come visit Kruger.
6. Promotes South African tourism!

### ▀ *Can you elaborate on the technology itself?*

**Ossendryver:** We've developed a native smartphone app that is built specifically for the special conditions in wildlife areas, for example, the app works offline, people can share sightings with no signal. The app takes your geolocation so that your positioning is right to within 5m.

The app has also been built to entertain people, not only in the park but around the world, by allowing users to follow active people and soon, to be able to view sightings according to which are most trending. We have also built in push notifications to allow people to simply get alerted when a sighting of interest is near, and so there is no need for people to be on their phone the whole drive.

### ▀ *How do you think the app will transform safaris and general wildlife-related tourism?*

**Ossendryver:** People who are spending lots of money to come to the park and have limited time want to maximise their safari by seeing the most in the limited time that they have. So knowing that a lion was spotted 3km from one's current location is a powerful tool to enable more great experiences in the park.

We also share photos and videos that end up reaching millions of people throughout the world, and so the fact that we are teaching people who might not know so much about wildlife is a great game-changer for South Africa and its wildlife. Just

on Youtube alone, Latest Sightings receives 13 million views a month. These views are also leading to booking at safaris that are active in our community, so not only is it helping visitors to the park, but also helping businesses around these game parks.

▣ ***Can the app be applied in other ways?***

**Ossendryver:** We have been approached to use our technology in similar aspects, for example, to report fires in real time. However, we are still working extremely hard on optimising our technology, and so we have felt that it's premature for us to expand into other fields, but we are more than open to expansion.

▣ ***What was the biggest challenge to getting Latest Sightings off the ground?***

**Ossendryver:** When I was 15, I had a quiet trip to Kruger, with not so many animals around. But I knew that in a park as big as Kruger, someone at that moment was seeing something interesting, and it wasn't me. So my initial idea was to find ways for people to share sightings, so that people in the park might see more wildlife. I thought that the biggest challenge was to find people, as I honestly thought I was the only person obsessed with Kruger.

However, I was so pleasantly shocked to find out that there are thousands of Kruger enthusiasts, and I used Twitter and Instagram to find these Kruger lovers. I contacted them directly and the response was great. The biggest challenge to date is the building of the app to be used in an area with no signal, as this makes technology very complex.

▣ ***What has been the biggest highlights of the Latest Sightings journey?***

**Ossendryver:** The biggest highlight for me has been the fact that I'm getting to visit game parks so much more often now, since going to game reserves is actually work! I love meeting members of the community wherever I go, as so many are so supportive. When I meet these members we have hour-long conversations about their sightings and people who know me, know that I can talk about that all day.

But a few people that I have had the honour to meet through being the leader of this community, were people like President Barak Obama, Prince Harry and probably the one that stands out for me, is Kingsley Holgate. I wrote about him as my hero in a grade 4 project, and little did I know that I would end up going on an expedition with him. Kingsley was also instrumental in me being chosen to go to Vietnam, in November 2015, to help educate the public there about rhino poaching and how to use social media to combat illegal wildlife trade. This was definitely a huge highlight in my Latest Sightings career.

Staying on the topic of wildlife trade, more highlights have been each and every instance of an animal that has been saved. We often, unfortunately, get reports of animals that have been injured due to human intervention, for example, snares. These sightings get reported within minutes to the relevant people, vets and rangers who are then able to respond and save the animal immediately.

■ ***I assume you have the app? What has been your favourite latest sighting?***

**Ossendryver:** Yes, I have the app and I am addicted. I love going on to see amazing sightings every day. So choosing one is pretty hard, but highlights have been: a python in a person's car bonnet, tiny baby elephant chasing birds, lions making a kudu kill right on the road, a buffalo bursting a person's tyre and using that to chase away lions (I know the buffalo didn't do it on purpose, but it is a clever strategy), and seeing lion and leopard interactions are always interesting. Many of these sightings have been publicised in newspapers worldwide and were seen by millions.

## ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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