

PRESS/MEDIA RELEASE

MAWANA ELEPHANTS

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Clearing the Path: In Defence of Truth and the Legacy of the Mawana Elephants.

By Leticia Cox - LensTraveller | Investigative Journalist and Conservation Reporter

The ancient lands of Mawana echo with the silent tread of giants—elephants whose lives have been etched into the soil of KwaZulu-Natal for generations. As conservationists and communities strive to preserve their fading footprints, the recent article published in Daily Maverick by Don Pinnock (21 May 2025) may perhaps add confusion rather than clarity to an already complex and emotionally charged conservation crisis.

After conducting my own field investigation and sitting down for a detailed interview with conservationist and co-founder of Loziba Wildlife Reserve, Grant Fowlds, it is critical that I set the record straight. The facts must not be clouded by personal vendettas or unsubstantiated allegations. This is not just about reputations—this is about the survival of elephants, the dignity of communities, and the future of conservation in South Africa.

Misrepresentation #1: One Voice, Not Many

Mr. Xolani Msimango's opinions, prominently featured in the Daily Maverick article, are presented as though they speak on behalf of a collective. They do not. Msimango represents the views of the Stedham community—one out of eight surrounding communities in the Loziba vision. His voice is a part of the chorus, but not the conductor.

According to Grant Fowlds, other communities—including Community Property Associations (CPAs)—have been working collaboratively with the Loziba initiative to identify unutilised land and private farms that can contribute toward a sustainable conservation and development model.

Painting this diverse landscape with a single brushstroke of contention is a liability to the many local stakeholders investing in a shared vision of ecological and economic renewal.

Misrepresentation #2: The Buthelezi Incident

The tragic accident of Mr. Buthelezi, who encountered the roaming elephants, was a deeply unfortunate and isolated event. To suggest otherwise is both inflammatory and irresponsible.

"Funds were raised in Mr Buthelezi's name with sincere intentions to support his family after the tragic incident. However, the distribution of those funds never reached him—not due to negligence or misuse by conservationists, but because of unresolved internal family matters and logistical hurdles beyond the organisers' control," said Mr Fowlds.

Misrepresentation #3: False Allegations of Land Grabbing and Exploitation

Msimango's allegations that Grant Fowlds is using the situation to "expand his" Loziba Game Reserve are not only factually incorrect but dangerous. Loziba is not "his." It is a collective vision, built on the idea of a community-owned reserve that bridges traditional conservation with socio-economic development. Fowlds is a co-founder and facilitator, not a land baron.

To further allege that he is unwelcome among communities or that he has manipulated land discussions undermines the countless hours he and his team have spent in dialogue with local leaders, CPAs, and private landowners willing to contribute to a long-term solution. These discussions are ongoing—and they are grounded in consent, transparency, and shared benefit.

Misrepresentation #4: Conservation vs. Community Safety - A False Dichotomy

Msimango's claim that Fowlds is neglecting local safety in favour of elephant advocacy is an emotional jab with no basis in fact. Fowlds has stepped in precisely because others failed to act swiftly.

In the absence of an organised elephant monitoring system, he coordinated efforts to track the herd. He sought international funding for essential infrastructure like fencing and security. Without these interventions, the situation may have spiralled further out of control.

"If conservation is to be sustainable, it must walk hand in hand with safety and community wellbeing. That balance is not just the goal of Loziba—it's its starting point," said Mr Fowlds.

Misrepresentation #5: A Personal Agenda?

Throughout this saga, what emerges starkly is a concerning pattern of personal animosity masquerading as public concern. Msimango's repeated, unfiltered messages in WhatsApp groups—often laced with defamatory remarks—have not only targeted Fowlds but also distracted from the urgent needs of both people and elephants.

Disagreement is natural. Dissent is healthy. But when it morphs into relentless defamation, it threatens the credibility of genuine dialogue and the future of collaborative conservation.

A Moment for Perspective

In my article, "Fading Footprints: The Devastating Fate of the Mawana Elephants", I detailed how years of mismanagement, lack of coordinated oversight, and encroaching human-wildlife conflict have placed these elephants in grave danger. The herd's future now hangs in a fragile balance—made more precarious by misinformation.

Now, more than ever, this moment calls for nuance, truth, and constructive unity, not division. We owe it to the elephants and to every child growing up in the shadows of these magnificent creatures to ground our stories in truth, not speculation. Allegations that tarnish reputations without evidence only stall the progress we so desperately need.

A Call to Refocus

Loziba Game Reserve is not the enemy. Neither are the communities. The true threat is fragmentation—of facts, of relationships, and of our shared purpose.

It's time to walk forward—together—toward a future where conservation is not a battleground but a bridge.

Sources:

<https://lenstraveller.net/fading-footprints-the-devastating-fate-of-the-mawana-elephants/>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-05-21-parliament-pushes-for-urgent-action-on-mawanas-roaming-elephant-herd/>

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