



ABOVE: Mother Nandi and aunt Induna keep the baby well protected.

LEFT: Proud dad Mabula stays between guests and baby Themba.

PICTURES KIM MCLEOD

Themba a symbol of hope to tuskiers

TANYA WATERWORTH

THEMBA is the new baby elephant at Thula Thula Private Reserve – thanks to names sent in by our readers.

This week, managing director Francoise Malby Anthony confirmed the name for their latest arrival, saying, “his name will be Themba as per the suggestions from some of your readers. It means ‘trust and hope’, which seems perfectly suitable”.

She added that his mother, Thandi, has continued to bring her new baby to show off to guests during game drives, while proud father, Mabula, competes for attention with a variety of antics while still keeping a sharp eye on his young offspring.

Themba was born a couple of weeks ago at the reserve much to the delight of both staff and guests.

And his name is fitting as the herd at Thula Thula was saved through the slow process of building trust between the



traumatised pachyderms and resort founder, the late Lawrence Anthony.

The original herd of seven arrived at the reserve in 1999, after Anthony had been contacted by a conservation organisation which said the elephants were out of control, escaping from every enclosure they were kept in, and considered to be highly dangerous.

Malby Anthony takes over, recounting the days that followed: “When the herd arrived they were to stay in the boma for about 12 days to make them accustomed to their new Thula Thula home, but they escaped 24 hours later.

“After a long week of searching, we got them back

in the boma and that’s where Lawrence started his special relationship with them, talking and singing to them, and feeding them.”

The herd was released into the game reserve and 12 days later the elephants arrived at the Anthony’s main house.

“It was an amazing encounter, they all arrived at our house as unexpected visitors, all seven of them. We had no electric fencing at the house, so they all stepped happily into our garden.

“After a moment of total panic, trying to lock up our barking dogs, reacting wildly to these giant intruders inside the house, Nana came right in front of the veranda, ob-

viously unaware of her power and strength, in a very gentle manner and softly trying to enter the house.

“We would have ended with a demolished house if Lawrence had not spoken to her, speaking softly to her and calling her ‘Baba’ and begging her not to come in, while I stood bewildered next to Lawrence during his little ‘chat’ with this magnificent 4-ton ‘baba’.

“That was an amazing moment to experience in a lifetime. These previously wild ‘escape artists’ and ‘problem’ elephants were coming to visit and say hello, peacefully walking around the garden, in total serenity and confidence.”

The original herd of seven has now grown to 30 and according to Malby Anthony, each has a unique personality and story.

She added that little Themba sends a message of hope in that elephants can survive and flourish if they are respected and protected by and from poachers as well as exploitation in captivity.

Anthony’s book, *The Elephant Whisperer*, published in 2009, details his – and the elephants’ – journey to and in Thula Thula.