

## AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          | <b>Reference:</b>              |                         | CA18/2/3/10641           |   |
| <b>Aircraft Registration</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | ZU-JBR                                                                                               | <b>Date of Accident</b>         | 26 February 2026         |                                | <b>Time of Accident</b> | 0518Z                    |   |
| <b>Type of Aircraft</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | ICP Savannah S                                                                                       |                                 | <b>Type of Operation</b> |                                | Private (Part 94)       |                          |   |
| <b>Pilot-in-command Licence Type</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Private Pilot Licence (PPL)                                                                          |                                 | <b>Age</b>               | 30                             | <b>Licence Valid</b>    | Yes                      |   |
| <b>Pilot-in-command Flying Experience</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Total Flying Hours</b>                                                                            |                                 | 350.7                    |                                | <b>Hours on Type</b>    | 158.5                    |   |
| <b>Last Point of Departure</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Hluhluwe Aerodrome (FAHL), KwaZulu-Natal Province                                                    |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <b>Next Point of Intended Landing</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Hluhluwe Aerodrome (FAHL), KwaZulu-Natal Province                                                    |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <b>Damage to Aircraft</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Substantial                                                                                          |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <b>Location of the accident site with reference to easily defined geographical points (GPS readings if possible)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| In a bushy terrain on the border of Thanda Game Reserve at Global Positioning System (GPS) co-ordinates determined to be 27°53'54" South 024°44'19" East, and at an elevation of 1 608 feet (ft)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <b>Meteorological Information</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Wind direction: 320° at 1 knot; Visibility: CAVOK; Temperature: 23°C; Dew point: 21°C; QNH: 1016 hPa |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <b>Number of People On-board</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1+1                                                                                                  | <b>Number of People Injured</b> | 2                        | <b>Number of People Killed</b> | 0                       | <b>Other (On Ground)</b> | 0 |
| <b>Synopsis</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <p>On Thursday, 26 February 2026, a pilot and a passenger on-board an ICP Savannah S aircraft registered ZU-JBR took off on a private flight from Hluhluwe Aerodrome (FAHL) in KwaZulu-Natal province with the intention to land back at the same aerodrome. The occupants were conducting a wildlife surveillance flight overhead Thanda Private Game Reserve. The flight was conducted under visual meteorological conditions (VMC) by day and under the provisions of Part 94 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, as amended.</p> <p>The pilot reported that no anomalies were identified during the pre-flight inspection, and the aircraft was considered airworthy at departure. About 48 minutes into the flight with his focus on the ground and the aircraft operated at low altitude, the pilot was not aware of the rising terrain ahead of the flight path. When he became aware, he pulled back on the aft control column to climb and clear the terrain, but the aircraft's right wing impacted a tree and, subsequently, more trees on its descent trajectory. It came to rest approximately 10 metres (m) from the game reserve's perimeter fence and road. The pilot sustained minor injuries, and the passenger sustained serious injuries. They were both transported to a hospital in Richards Bay. The aircraft was substantially damaged during the accident sequence.</p> <p>The investigation revealed that during a low-level flight, the aircraft impacted a tree whilst the pilot was trying to avert the rising terrain.</p> |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <b>Probable Cause</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| The aircraft's right wing impacted a tree during a low-level surveillance operation as there was insufficient time to avoid the rising terrain in the flight path.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <b>Contributing Factor</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| Low-altitude operation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                      |                                 |                          |                                |                         |                          |   |
| <b>SRP Date</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 8 September 2026                                                                                     |                                 | <b>Publication Date</b>  | 10 September 2026              |                         |                          |   |

## Occurrence Details

|                         |                                                        |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Reference Number        | : CA18/2/3/10641                                       |
| Occurrence Category     | : Accident (Category 2)                                |
| Type of Operation       | : Private (Part 94)                                    |
| Name of Operator        | : Project Rhino Alliance NPC                           |
| Aircraft Registration   | : ZU-JBR                                               |
| Aircraft Make and Model | : ICP Savannah S                                       |
| Nationality             | : South African                                        |
| Place                   | : On the border of Thanda Game Reserve                 |
| Date and Time           | : 26 February 2026 at 0518Z                            |
| Injuries                | : Serious injuries (passenger); minor injuries (pilot) |
| Damage                  | : Substantial                                          |

## Purpose of the Investigation

*In terms of Regulation 12.03.1 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, this report was compiled in the interest of the promotion of aviation safety and the reduction of the risk of aviation accidents or incidents and not to apportion blame or liability.*

*All times given in this report are Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC) and will be denoted by (Z). South African Standard Time is UTC plus 2 hours.*

## Investigation Process

The Accident and Incident Investigations Division (AIID) was notified of the occurrence involving an ICP Savannah S aircraft at the border of Thanda Private Game Reserve on 26 February 2026 at 0518Z. The occurrence was classified as an accident according to the CAR 2011 Part 12 and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) STD Annex 13 definitions.

The AIID has appointed an investigator-in-charge to conduct a full investigation. The investigator was dispatched to the site. Notifications were sent to the State of Registry, Operator, and Design and Manufacturer in accordance with the CAR 2011 Part 12 and the ICAO Annex 13 Chapter 4. The States did not appoint an accredited representative and/or advisor. The AIID will lead the investigation and issue the final report of this accident in accordance with the CAR 2011 Part 12 and the ICAO Annex 13.

The AIID reports are made available to the public at:

<https://www.caa.co.za/industry-information/accidents-and-incidents/>

### Notes:

- Whenever the following words are mentioned in this report, they shall mean the following:*  
*Accident — this investigated accident*  
*Aircraft — the ICP Savannah S aircraft involved in this accident*  
*Investigation — the investigation into the circumstances of this accident*  
*Pilot — the pilot involved in this accident*  
*Report — this accident report*
- Photos and figures used in this report were taken from various sources and may have been adjusted from the original for the sole purpose of improving clarity of the report. Modifications to images used in this report were limited to cropping, magnification, file compression; or enhancement of colour, brightness, contrast; or addition of text boxes, arrows, or lines.*

## Disclaimer

*This report is produced without prejudice to the rights of the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), which are reserved.*

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| Abbreviation | Description                                                        |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| °            | Degrees                                                            |
| °C           | Degrees Celsius                                                    |
| A/C          | Aircraft                                                           |
| ACCID        | Accident                                                           |
| AIID         | Accident and Incident Investigations Division                      |
| AOC          | Air Operating Certificate                                          |
| AP           | Approved Person                                                    |
| ATF          | Authority-to-Fly                                                   |
| CAA          | Civil Aviation Authority                                           |
| CAR          | Civil Aviation Regulations                                         |
| CAVOK        | Ceiling and Visibility OK                                          |
| C of R       | Certificate of Registration                                        |
| CRS          | Certificate of Release to Service                                  |
| FAHL         | Hluhluwe Aerodrome                                                 |
| FARB         | Richards Bay Airport                                               |
| ft           | Feet                                                               |
| GPS          | Global Positioning System                                          |
| hPa          | Hectopascal                                                        |
| IAW          | In Accordance With                                                 |
| IIC          | Investigator-in-Charge                                             |
| kts          | Knots                                                              |
| Litres       | Litres                                                             |
| m            | Metres                                                             |
| METAR        | Meteorological Aerodrome Report                                    |
| MHz          | Megahertz                                                          |
| MPI          | Mandatory Periodic Inspection                                      |
| nm           | Nautical Miles                                                     |
| POH          | Pilot's Operating Handbook                                         |
| QNH          | Altitude Above Mean Sea Level                                      |
| RPM          | Revolutions per Minute                                             |
| SACAA        | South African Civil Aviation Authority                             |
| SAWS         | South African Weather Service                                      |
| TBO          | Time Between Overhaul                                              |
| UTC          | Co-ordinated Universal Time                                        |
| VHF          | Very High Frequency                                                |
| VMC          | Visual Meteorological Conditions                                   |
| Z            | Zulu (Term for Universal Co-ordinated Time - Zero Hours Greenwich) |

## 1. FACTUAL INFORMATION

### 1.1. History of Flight

- 1.1.1. On Thursday, 26 February 2026, a pilot and a passenger on-board an ICP Savannah S light aircraft registered ZU-JBR took off on a wildlife surveillance flight from Hluhluwe Aerodrome (FAHL) to Thanda Private Game Reserve, both in KwaZulu-Natal province, with the intention to land back at FAHL. The flight was conducted under visual meteorological conditions (VMC) by day and under the provisions of Part 94 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, as amended.
- 1.1.2. The pilot reported no anomalies during the pre-flight inspection. The aircraft had a total of 150 litres (L) of Motor Gasoline (Mogas) in the fuel tanks. Clear weather conditions prevailed at the time of take-off from FAHL at 0430Z. After take-off, the aircraft routed west towards Thanda Private Game Reserve. The aircraft was operated at low level along the fence on the southern boundary of the game reserve during the surveillance operation. Approximately 48 minutes into the flight and whilst focusing on surveying the grounds, the pilot did not notice the rising terrain ahead of the flight path. When he became aware of the rising terrain, he immediately applied the aft control column to climb and clear it, but the aircraft's right wing impacted a tree and then the terrain.
- 1.1.3. The passenger, who was seated on the left seat, stated that they departed on the morning of the accident to monitor rhinoceros, an operation by Project Rhino Savannah. She stated that the aircraft was flying over Ngweni (a section of Thanda Game Reserve) whilst they surveyed the area to locate a black rhinoceros and her calf. As the aircraft flew over the valley towards the crest of the mountain, she recalled it being flown at low height and was about to ask the pilot if the clearance was sufficient to fly over the mountain ridge. Before she could pose the question, the pilot abruptly manoeuvred the aircraft to avoid a tree. Shortly thereafter, the aircraft's right wing impacted a tree and, subsequently, more trees as well as the terrain. During the accident sequence, the passenger banged her head. She stated that she might have lost consciousness for several seconds. Upon regaining awareness, she saw the pilot releasing her safety harness.
- 1.1.4. A video footage recorded on a cellular phone by the passenger during the flight showed the aircraft flying low above the trees with the nose pitched up to clear the rising terrain (see Figure 1). Between 27 and 32 seconds into the recording after the pilot had cleared the terrain and levelled off, the aircraft's nose suddenly pitched up as the aircraft climbed (see Figure 2). At the same time, the aircraft banked abruptly to the right and the right wing struck a tree (*the propeller remained visibly in the video and was rotating during the accident sequence [see Figure 3]*); this

*indicated that the engine was producing power before impact with the tree. The propeller stopped rotating upon impact with the ground).*



**Figure 1:** A video footage still of the aircraft flying at a low altitude (left).

**Figure 2:** A video footage still showing an attempt to pitch the nose upwards (right).



**Figure 3:** A video footage still of the rotating propeller.

- 1.1.5. The aircraft descended into a bush-covered terrain, struck several other trees before it rested approximately 10 metres (m) from the road and the perimeter fence.
- 1.1.6. The passenger sustained serious injuries whilst the pilot suffered minor injuries. Both occupants were transported to a hospital in Richards Bay. The aircraft was substantially damaged during the accident sequence.
- 1.1.7. The accident occurred on a bushy terrain on the border of Thanda Private Game Reserve, approximately 12 nautical miles (nm) north-west of FAHL at Global Positioning System (GPS) co-ordinates determined to be 27°53'54" South 024°44'19" East, at an elevation of 1 608 feet (ft).



**Figure 4:** An aerial view of the approximate accident site (yellow circle). (Source: Google Earth)

## 1.2. Injuries to Persons

| Injuries     | Pilot    | Crew     | Pass.    | Total On-board | Other    |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Fatal        | -        | -        | -        | -              | -        |
| Serious      | -        | -        | 1        | 1              | -        |
| Minor        | 1        | -        | -        | 1              | -        |
| None         | -        | -        | -        | -              | -        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>-</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b>       | <b>-</b> |

Note: Other means people on the ground.

### 1.3. Damage to Aircraft

1.3.1. The aircraft was substantially damaged during the accident sequence.



**Figure 5:** The aircraft at the accident site.

### 1.4. Other Damage

1.4.1. None.

### 1.5. Personnel Information

|                     |                             |               |      |     |    |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|------|-----|----|
| Nationality         | South African               | Gender        | Male | Age | 30 |
| Licence Type        | Private Pilot Licence (PPL) |               |      |     |    |
| Licence Valid       | Yes                         | Type Endorsed | Yes  |     |    |
| Ratings             | Night rating                |               |      |     |    |
| Medical Expiry Date | 31 March 2026               |               |      |     |    |

|                    |      |
|--------------------|------|
| Restrictions       | None |
| Previous Accidents | None |

Note: Previous accidents refer to past accidents the pilot was involved in, when relevant to this accident.

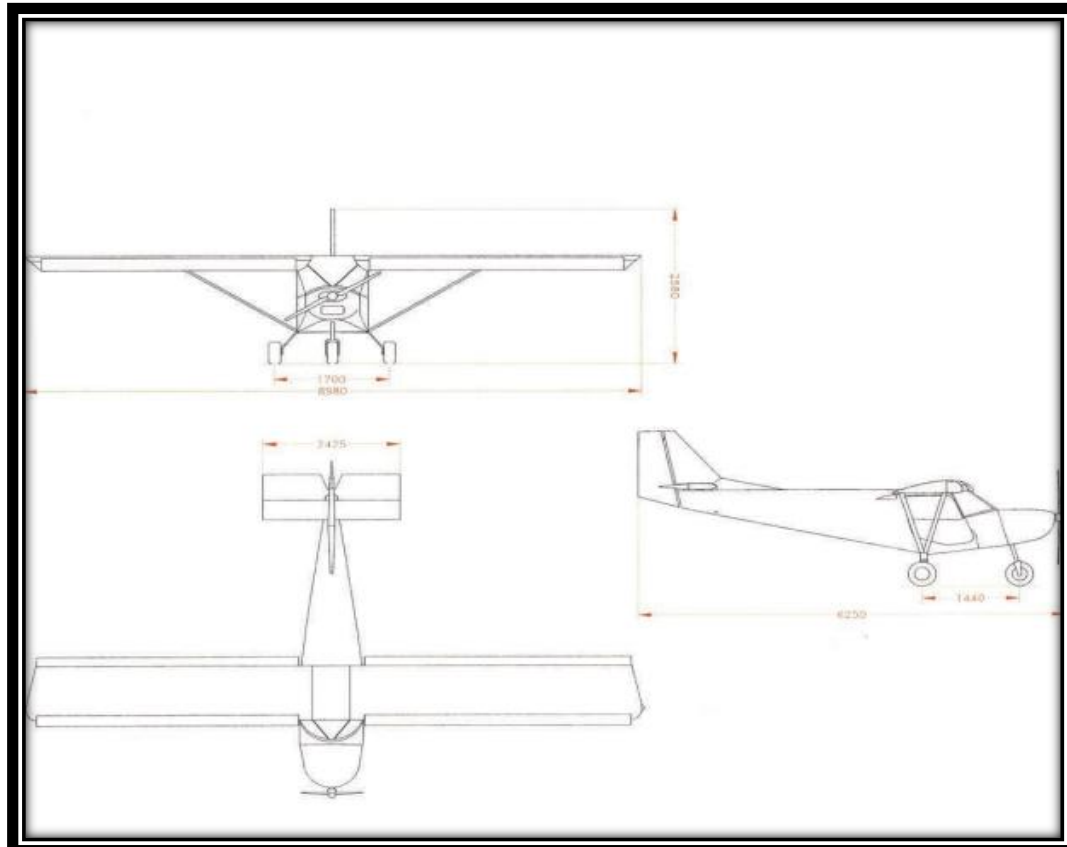
### Flying Experience:

|                            |       |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Total Hours                | 350.7 |
| Total Past 24 Hours        | 3.0   |
| Total Past 7 Days          | 9.5   |
| Total Past 90 Days         | 56.9  |
| Total on Type Past 90 Days | 56.9  |
| Total on Type              | 158.5 |

1.5.1. The pilot had a Private Pilot Licence (PPL) that was initially issued by the Regulator (SACAA) on 30 April 2019. The licence was reissued on 30 July 2024 with an expiry date of 31 July 2026. The aircraft type was endorsed in his licence.

1.5.2. The pilot had a Class 2 aviation medical certificate that was issued on 24 March 2021 with an expiry date of 31 March 2026. The pilot had no medical restrictions.

### 1.6. Aircraft Information



**Diagram 1:** The ICP Savannah S exterior dimensions. (Source: POH)

#### 1.6.1. Aircraft Description (Source: Pilot's Operating Handbook [POH])

*The ICP Savannah S is a single-engine, all-metal, high-wing, two-seat aeroplane with a fixed tricycle undercarriage. The aircraft is powered by a Rotax 912 ULS engine. It features a four-cylinder, four-stroke, horizontally opposed, spark ignition engine. The ULS designation indicates that the engine is a non-certified aircraft engine with a maximum engine power output of 73.5 kilowatts (kW) (98.6 Horsepower). A clockwise-rotating (when viewed from the cockpit) three-blade E-Prop ground-adjustable propeller was fitted, which was driven via a reduction gearbox.*

##### **Airframe:**

|                                            |                                         |                 |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Manufacturer/Model                         | Savannah Aircraft Africa/ICP Savannah S |                 |
| Serial Number                              | 23-03-54-0944                           |                 |
| Year of Manufacture                        | 2024                                    |                 |
| Total Airframe Hours (At Time of Accident) | 374.1                                   |                 |
| Last Annual Inspection (Date & Hours)      | 4 February 2026                         | 350.0           |
| Hours Since Last Inspection                | 24.1                                    |                 |
| CRS Issue Date                             | 4 December 2025                         |                 |
| ATF (Issue Date & Expiry Date)             | 22 December 2025                        | 14 January 2027 |
| C of R (Issue Date) (Present Owner)        | 6 December 2024                         |                 |
| Type of Fuel Used                          | Mogas                                   |                 |
| Operating Category                         | Part 94                                 |                 |
| Previous Accidents                         | None.                                   |                 |

Note: Previous accidents refer to past accidents the aircraft was involved in, when relevant to this accident.

##### **Engine:**

|                      |                                                             |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Manufacturer/Model   | Bombardier - Rotax GmbH / 912 ULS                           |
| Serial Number        | 10004090                                                    |
| Hours Since New      | 374.1                                                       |
| Hours Since Overhaul | Time Between Overhaul (TBO) is 2 000 hours. TBO not reached |

##### **Propeller:**

|                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Manufacturer/Model   | E Prop/Unknown           |
| Serial Number        | 253920 / 253921 / 253922 |
| Hours Since New      | 374.1                    |
| Hours Since Overhaul | TBO not reached          |

1.6.2. A review of the aircraft's maintenance documentation, including airframe, engine, propeller, flight folio and mandatory periodic inspection (MPI) reports, was conducted. The aircraft was maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's prescribed maintenance procedures, carried out by an approved person (AP).

- 1.6.3. The aircraft had a valid Authority-to-Fly (ATF) Certificate that was initially issued by the Regulator on 22 December 2025. The ATF Certificate was renewed on 22 December 2025 with an expiry date of 14 January 2027.
- 1.6.4. The last 100-hour MPI was conducted and certified on 4 December 2025 at 350.0 airframe hours. The AP who conducted maintenance had an AP Certificate that was issued by the Regulator on 25 July 2024 with an expiry date of 24 July 2026.
- 1.6.5. The aircraft's Certificate of Release to Service (CRS) was issued on 4 December 2025 at 350.0 airframe hours with an expiry date of 4 December 2026 or at 397.6 airframe hours, whichever comes first.

## 1.7. Meteorological Information

- 1.7.1. The weather information below was obtained from the Meteorological Aerodrome Report (METAR) that was issued by the South African Weather Service (SAWS), recorded at Richards Bay Aerodrome (FARB) on 26 February 2026 at 0500Z. The accident site was approximately 50 nautical miles (nm) south-east of FARB.

FARB 260500Z 32001KT CAVOK 23/21 Q1016=

|                |      |             |          |            |       |
|----------------|------|-------------|----------|------------|-------|
| Wind Direction | 320° | Wind Speed  | 01 kt    | Visibility | 10 km |
| Temperature    | 23°C | Cloud Cover | CAVOK    | Cloud Base | CAVOK |
| Dew Point      | 21°C | QNH         | 1016 hPa |            |       |

- 1.7.2. Visibility was greater than 10 kilometres (km) with ceiling and visibility OK (CAVOK) conditions; this indicated the absence of significant weather phenomena such as thunderstorms, gust fronts and low-level turbulence. The wind was recorded at 1 knot (kts). Additionally, the temperature, dew point and pressure values were within the normal ranges with no indication of atmospheric instability or convective activity.

## 1.8. Aids to Navigation

- 1.8.1. The aircraft was equipped with standard navigational equipment as approved by the Regulator (SACAA). There were no records indicating that the navigational equipment was unserviceable prior to the flight.

## **1.9. Communication**

- 1.9.1. The aircraft was equipped with a standard communication system as approved by the Regulator. There were no recorded defects with the communication system prior to the flight.

## **1.10. Aerodrome Information**

- 1.10.1. The accident occurred in a bushy terrain on the border of Thanda Private Game Reserve, approximately 12nm north-west of FAHL at GPS co-ordinates determined to be 27°53'54" South 024°44'19" East, and at an elevation of 1 608ft.

## **1.11. Flight Recorders**

- 1.11.1. The aircraft was neither equipped with a flight data recorder (FDR) or a cockpit voice recorder (CVR), nor was it required by regulation to be fitted to the aircraft type.

## **1.12. Wreckage and Impact Information**



**Figure 6:** The substantially damaged aircraft.

- 1.12.1. During the initial impact, the aircraft's right wing impacted a tree and the aircraft descended on to a terrain covered with thorn trees, further impacting trees before it crashed hard on the ground with the nose gear first. The severity of the impact resulted in the separation of the nose landing

gear from the aircraft. The aircraft rested facing south-east. The damage was substantial and included lower engine cowling, empennage and fuselage, as well as deformed propeller blades.



**Figure 7:** The fractured and separated propeller blade roots.

- 1.12.2. The propeller blades had fractured and separated during the accident sequence. The nature of damage, including the blade fractures and the associated impact signatures, was consistent with the propeller rotating under power at the time of the initial impact with the tree. Such damage is typically indicative of significant rotational energy being transmitted through the propeller system, supporting the submitted video footage that the engine was producing significant power and had not ceased operating before the initial impact.
- 1.12.3. There was fuel in the aircraft's tanks; however, the exact quantity on-board at the time of impact could not be determined. There was no evidence of any pre-impact mechanical failure or anomaly. All structural fractures and component failures were consistent with forces sustained during ground impact. All major airframe components and flight control surfaces were accounted for at the accident site.



**Figure 8:** The resting position of the aircraft.

### **1.13. Medical and Pathological Information**

1.13.1. The pilot sustained minor injuries, and the passenger was seriously injured; they were taken to the hospital after the accident.

### **1.14. Fire**

1.14.1. There was no evidence of a pre- or post-impact fire.

### **1.15. Survival Aspects**

1.15.1. The accident was considered survivable because the cockpit absorbed most of the impact forces. Moreover, the pilot and the passenger were properly harnessed to their seats.

### **1.16. Tests and Research**

1.16.1. The aircraft and engine were inspected by an AP on 1 July 2026 in East London, Eastern Cape province. A comprehensive engine stoppage inspection was conducted to identify any pre-existing defects, mechanical failures or system abnormalities that could have contributed to the accident. The inspection included an examination of the engine, propeller, airframe and associated systems. No evidence of mechanical malfunction, abnormal wear or visible damage was identified. The inspection did not reveal any defects or faults that could have adversely affected the aircraft's airworthiness or engine performance.

## 1.17. Organisational and Management Information

1.17.1. The aircraft was operated privately under the provisions of Part 94 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, as amended.

1.17.2. The aircraft was maintained by an AP with an AP Certificate that was issued by the Regulator on 25 July 2024 with an expiry date of 24 July 2026.

## 1.18. Additional Information

1.18.1. Extract from the Savannah S POH:

*Avoid low-level flight and always respect aircraft limits. If possible, plan to cruise at an altitude that permits selecting an appropriate area to perform an emergency landing. Always avoid weather conditions that compromise flight safety.*

1.18.2. Flight Planning Based on Terrain (Source: International Civil Aviation Organisation [ICAO] Document 8168 Volume III- Air Operating Procedures)

*SA-CAR 91.06.32 Minimum Heights*

*(1) Except when necessary for taking off, or landing, or except with prior written approval of the Director, no aircraft –*

*(a) shall be flown over congested areas or over an open-air assembly of persons at a height less than 1000 feet above the highest obstacle, within a radius of 2 000 feet from the aircraft;*

*(b) when flown elsewhere than specified in paragraph;*

*(a), shall be flown at a height less than 500 feet above the ground or water, unless the flight can be made without hazard or nuisance to persons or property on the ground or water and the PIC operates at a height and in a manner that allows safe operation in the event of an engine failure; and*

*(c) shall circle over or do repeated overflights over an open-air assembly of persons at a height less than 3 000 feet above the surface.*

## 1.19. Useful or Effective Investigation Techniques

1.19.1. None.

## **2. ANALYSIS**

### **2.1. General**

From the available evidence, the following analysis was made with respect to this accident. This shall not be read as apportioning blame or liability to any organisation or individual.

### **2.2. Analysis**

#### **Pilot**

2.2.1. The pilot had a Private Pilot Licence (PPL) and a Night rating for the aircraft type. The aircraft type was endorsed in his licence and logbook. The pilot met the regulatory requirements to undertake the flight in accordance with the South African Civil Aviation Technical Standards (SA-CATS) 61.25.2.

2.2.2. The pilot had a Class 2 aviation medical certificate and was medically fit to conduct the flight.

#### **Aircraft**

2.2.3. A review of the aircraft records indicated that the scheduled inspections were completed in accordance with the manufacturer's requirements prescribed in the Savannah S Maintenance Manual. The aircraft was airworthy.

2.2.4. There was no evidence to suggest a lapse in certification status or regulatory non-compliance relating to the aircraft's airworthiness or registration as the aircraft had a valid Authority-to-Fly (ATF) Certificate and the owner of the aircraft had a Certificate of Registration (C of R), both issued by the Regulator.

2.2.5. Based on the engine inspection, there was no evidence of a mechanical, fuel-related or control system failure that would have contributed to the accident.

#### **Environment**

2.2.6. The flight was conducted in a mountainous terrain with rising ground, dense vegetation and limited space to manoeuvre at low-level flying. The Savannah S POH cautions pilots to avoid low-level flights and to select a cruise altitude that allows for a suitable emergency landing area if needed. The CAR 91.06.32 permit flights below 500ft above ground level only if a flight can be conducted without creating a hazard or nuisance and if the aircraft is operated in an environment where safe action can be implemented in the event of an engine failure. Although

the weather was suitable for a visual flight, the aircraft was flown at low altitude in a valley where the rising terrain and trees reduced both terrain and obstacle clearances. This left the pilot with inadequate time and distance to recognise the developing hazard, assess a safe route and take effective corrective action. After clearing the rising terrain, the aircraft remained at low level and was unable to clear a tree, resulting in the aircraft's right wing striking it. The selected flight path and altitude, therefore, did not provide an adequate safety margin for terrain avoidance, obstacle clearance or recovery.

### 3. CONCLUSION

#### 3.1. General

From the available evidence, the following findings, causes and contributing factors were made with respect to this accident. These shall not be read as apportioning blame or liability to any organisation or individual.

To serve the objective of this investigation, the following sections are included in the conclusion heading:

- **Findings** — are statements of all significant conditions, events, or circumstances in this accident. The findings are significant steps in this accident sequence, but they are not always causal or indicate deficiencies.
- **Causes** — are actions, omissions, events, conditions, or a combination thereof, which led to this accident.
- **Contributing factors** — are actions, omissions, events, conditions or a combination thereof, which, if eliminated, avoided or absent, would have reduced the probability of the accident occurring, or would have mitigated the severity of the consequences of the accident. The identification of contributing factors does not imply the assignment of fault or the determination of administrative, civil, or criminal liability.

#### 3.2. Findings

- 3.2.1. The pilot had a Private Pilot Licence (PPL) that was initially issued on 30 April 2019. The licence was revalidated on 30 July 2024 with an expiry date of 31 July 2026.
- 3.2.2. The pilot had a Class 2 aviation medical certificate that was issued on 24 March 2021 with an expiry date of 31 March 2026 with no medical restrictions.
- 3.2.3. The Certificate of Registration was issued to the current owner on 6 December 2024.
- 3.2.4. The Authority-to-Fly (ATF) Certificate was initially issued on 15 January 2025. It was renewed on 22 December 2025 with an expiry date of 14 January 2027.

- 3.2.5. The approved person (AP) who maintained the aircraft had an AP Certificate that was issued by the Regulator on 25 July 2024 with an expiry date of 24 July 2026.
- 3.2.6. The last 50-hour inspection of the aircraft was conducted on 4 December 2025 at 350.0 hours after which a Certificate of Release to Service (CRS) was issued with an expiry date of 4 December 2026 or at 397.6 hours, whichever occurs first. The aircraft was flown a further 24.1 hours after the stated inspection.
- 3.2.7. The engine inspection found no evidence of mechanical, fuel-related or control system failures that would have contributed to the accident.
- 3.2.8. The aircraft was operated at low altitude in a mountainous area with rising terrain, dense vegetation and limited manoeuvring space which reduced options for terrain and obstacle clearance.
- 3.2.9. The selected flight path and altitude did not allow for adequate clearance. This was inconsistent with the Savannah S POH which cautioned pilots to avoid low-level flight and did not provide the safety margin recommended by the CAR 91.06.32.

### **3.3. Probable Cause/s**

- 3.3.1. The aircraft's right wing impacted a tree during a low-level surveillance operation as there was insufficient time to avoid the rising terrain in the flight path.

### **3.4. Contributory Factor/s**

- 3.4.1. Low-altitude operation.

## **4. SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1. General**

The safety recommendations listed in this report are proposed according to paragraph 6.8 of Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation and are based on the conclusions listed in heading 3 of this report. The AIID expects that all safety issues identified by the investigation are addressed by the receiving States and organisations.

### **4.2. Safety Recommendation/s**

- 4.2.1. None.

## **5. APPENDICES**

5.1. None.

**This report is issued by:**

**Accident and Incident Investigations Division  
South African Civil Aviation Authority  
Republic of South Africa**