



The Endangered Wildlife Trust and Rainforest Trust join forces to save South Africa's rarest snake

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Start

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), in partnership with Rainforest Trust, has embarked on its first ever snake conservation initiative, and confirmed the continued existence of the diminutive Albany Adder, which, through human-induced habitat destruction and poaching, has possibly become the rarest snake species on the entire planet.

Albany Adders are endemic to a very small region in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. Since their initial discovery in the 1990s, only 12 individuals have ever been officially recorded. The snake species which was previously declared as the rarest in the world is the St. Lucia Racer from the Caribbean, with only 18–100 individuals estimated to still exist. Based on the current numbers then, the Albany Adder could quite easily have the dubious honour of being the world's rarest and most threatened snake!



The Albany Adder's natural habitat continues to be destroyed due to human activities such as cultivation, plantation forestry, urbanisation, and sand-mining for the cement industry. Albany Adders are also highly sought after by smugglers and poachers, who illegally remove them from the wild to feed the demand in the international pet trade. These factors have not only lead to the Albany Adder being listed as Critically

Endangered, but to the species being considered extinct in a number of areas where it used to occur.

It was due to these severe threats to the species that the EWT and the Rainforest Trust developed a pilot project with the primary aim of discovering whether or not the species was still in existence. The last official record of an Albany Adder being discovered was in 2007, so the possibility that it may already be too late to save these snakes existed when the team took to the field in the Eastern Cape to look for them. Happily, after six full days of searching for these tiny and exceptionally camouflaged snakes, a single female Albany Adder was found as she crossed the road. Later that evening, a young male snake was also discovered.



Due to the exciting discovery of these two individual Albany Adders, the team is now working on ways of securing additional funding in order to protect habitat to save this iconic reptile from extinction, and are hoping to develop a declared nature reserve for these snakes. If this were to happen, it would be the first protected area in Africa, if not the world, to be dedicated to the protection of a Critically Endangered snake.

In most provinces in South Africa it is illegal to capture, possess or transport any South African reptile species without a permit. Snakes such as these small adders are very difficult to keep in captivity and most will die within a few months of being removed from the wild. Reptile poachers who are caught face up to ten years jail time and/or a fine of up to R1.5 million. Anyone with information about any illegal reptile poaching activity should contact the EWT.

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