CONSERVATION MATTERS

A WILD START TO 2019!

EXPOSING
SOUTH AFRICA'S PREDATOR PARK SCAMS

TACKLING
ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

ENDANGERED WILDLIFE TRUST
Protecting forever, together.
A word from the CEO

Much has been said recently about zoos, and the role that they play in society. Social media and a heightened public awareness around the welfare needs of wild animals have brought to the fore the issue of the lone elephant Laminnie at the Johannesburg Zoo, the welfare of the animals at the East London and Bloemfontein zoos, and the concerns around the wildlife trading that occurs behind the scenes of most private zoos in South Africa.

The war cry of zoos (private and state-owned) has, for generations, been their role in environmental education and conservation, with the World Association of Zoos and Aquaria having published a series of conservation strategies, which aim to enable their members to ‘redefine their mission of conservation’. The trouble is that it assumes that all their member institutions, as well as the thousands of non-member institutions, share this core mission. There is nothing that actually requires any zoo or captive wildlife facility to engage in conservation – or even education. So it is up to the visiting public to draw the distinction between those facilities that do engage in conservation or education and those that exist for commercial purposes only.

Zoos have been around for centuries with the oldest surviving zoo, having been established in 1752 in Vienna, Austria as a collection of animals or an ‘imperial menagerie’. Despite the London Zoo establishing itself as ‘the first zoo in the world founded for the scientific purpose of studying wildlife’ as far back as 1828, the majority of zoos globally have been and remain, repositories of wildlife specimens, for display, entertainment and commercial value. Environmental education, on the other hand, has its roots in the 1970s in the west, and in South Africa, was only formally recognised after 1994. So at what stage, globally or locally, did the role of zoological institutions morph into a meaningful tool to empower visitors to address the plight of endangered species and declining environmental health? And did the large numbers of privately owned predator, snake and wildlife parks that exist today, all get established to educate people about conservation in a meaningful and effective manner? Education is a tricky business and the world is full of experts who work tirelessly on improving the link between imparting information and developing minds; creating strategies to change behaviour and developing curricula that improve human conduct. All too often, captive wildlife facilities rely on the ‘education’ rhetoric to allow visitors to address the plight of endangered species and declining environmental health? And did the large numbers of privately owned predator, snake and wildlife parks that exist today, all get established to educate people about conservation in a meaningful and effective manner? Education is a tricky business and the world is full of experts who work tirelessly on improving the link between imparting information and developing minds; creating strategies to change behaviour and developing curricula that improve human conduct. All too often, captive wildlife facilities rely on the ‘education’ rhetoric to allow visitors to address the plight of endangered species and declining environmental health?

Where effective and meaningful conservation and/or education has occurred, we may see the weeding out of those facilities, which frankly should cease to exist, from those that actually benefit our wildlife. In the 250 years that have passed since Vienna opened their ‘zoo as a showplace’ to the public, the world has moved on in many ways, and the confinement of wild animals in situations that compromise their health and wellbeing, that provide no conservation value whatsoever, and that only exist for commercial opportunity, many, MANY do not. So the EWT urges the public to be cautious about their potential role in legitimising institutions which do NOT contribute to conservation by suggesting what you should look out for and what questions to ask, such as:

1. What credible, meaningful education programmes are in place at these facilities that serve to benefit the conservation of animals in the wild, along with their all-important habitats and ecosystems?
2. Is the conservation plan of the facility publicly available and does it state its conservation activities with its visitors?
3. How do the species on display in these facilities contribute meaningfully to the conservation of their counterparts in the wild?
4. Are the interests of these display animals put first or are they being exploited?
5. Is the facility accountable for where the animals come from, where they propagate go to; and to the visiting public as to the application of best practice (welfare, enrichment, husbandry and so on) for all their ‘exhibits’?
6. Do I, as a visitor, get the full value of a conservation education ‘lesson’ or am I paying purely for entertainment for myself or my children with no meaningful impact for the benefit of the species on display?

The list of questions is potentially much longer, but if the visiting public simply asked these questions and applied it as a test, answers, we may see the weeding out of those facilities, which frankly should cease to exist, from those that actually benefit our wildlife. In the 250 years that have passed since Vienna opened their ‘zoo as a showplace’ to the public, the world has moved on in many ways, and the confinement of wild animals in situations that compromise their health and wellbeing, that provide no conservation value whatsoever, and that only exist for commercial opportunity, many, MANY do not. So the EWT urges the public to be cautious about their potential role in legitimising institutions which do NOT contribute to conservation by suggesting what you should look out for and what questions to ask, such as:

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1. They often flout the visiting public into a false sense of comfort about the plight of the species. When people see large numbers of lions (for example), ‘safe and secure’ behind fences, they often believe that the species is not threatened with extinction and that these captive populations can simply be bred up and ‘put back’ into the wild in order to bolster numbers. This is fallacious reasoning and the result of specific institutions redefining their core purpose and moving away from the entertainment/commercial value. Environmental education on the other hand, has its roots in the 1970s in the west and in South Africa, was only formally recognised after 1994. So at what stage, globally or locally, did the role of zoological institutions morph into a meaningful tool to empower visitors to address the plight of endangered species and declining environmental health?

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14 May: Country Club Johannesburg Talk – Book launch
Life is like a Kudu Horn – Margret Jacobsohn

Namibian communities have played a leading role in stopping recent rhino poaching. How was a disheartening situation – two years of rhino deaths and no arrests – turned around in 2015? Margret Jacobsohn, author of life is like a Kudu Horn, is a specialist in community-based action who has spent the last 15 years living and working in remote parts of Namibia. At her book launch, she will discuss this and other issues relevant to modern communities – the ordinary public – can change the world. Politicians don’t lead communities – the ordinary public – can and should make a difference, only if they do their homework. For more information, visit http://www.jacobsohn.me/Event/14-May-

Conservation Matters

22 April: Earth Day
22 May: International Day for Biological Diversity

25-26 May & 1-2 June
Bezhoek Extreme

The organisers of the Bezhoek Extreme are proud to announce that the 2019 edition of the race will be in support of the critical conservation work undertaken by the EWT. For more information, visit https://www.bezhoekextreme.co.za/

Paul Tully
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This article originally appeared on Africa Geographic https://africageographic.com/blog/opinion-activist-exposes-south-africas-lion-park-scams/ and is the opinion of its author.

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Have you ever wondered why South Africa seems to have so many captive lion cubs, in what are known as ‘lion parks’?
The reason, in my opinion, is one that we all need to face up to: IT’S A SCAM.

The still-growing lion cub petting industry masks a sinister legal industry in South Africa. Playing with cute little lion cubs is the tip of the iceberg – it’s what you don’t see that defines this abusive industry.

When tourists and volunteers visit one of the numerous ‘lion parks’ in South Africa and enter the playpens of young orphaned cubs, their instinct is to question the situation. What? Why are so many lion cubs being orphaned? And, almost without exception, they are told a lie — that the cubs’ mothers died or abandoned them. This lie is repeated again and again — in marketing material, press releases and hashtags — so much so that even good, caring people repeat the mantra and become party to the lie, and the scam. You see, these lion cubs are the tip of the iceberg — it’s what you don’t see that defines this abusive industry.

We can all do the research. I’ve done it for five years, both as an animal advocate and consultant in the tourism industry. Spend 5 minutes on Instagram and see for yourself. There are thousands of images of young, motherless lion cubs (plus cheetahs and even tigers) and all of them are being interacted with by tourists and volunteers.

Paul Tully
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This article originally appeared on Africa Geographic https://africageographic.com/blog/opinion-activist-exposes-south-africas-lion-park-scams/ and is the opinion of its author.

EXPOSING SOUTH AFRICA’S PREDATOR PARK SCAMS

22 April: Earth Day
22 May: International Day for Biological Diversity

22 May: International Day for Biological Diversity

24 May
EWT Annual Golf Day

The Kremetart Cycling Race is the only one-day, four stage race in South Africa. The Soutpansberg Mountain Range offers a wonderful backdrop to the race, and is also home to the EWT’s Medike Nature Reserve and Soutpansberg Protected Area projects, so it made perfect sense that the EWT would be added as a beneficiary for this year’s event, which takes place on 8 June 2019.

For more information, visit http://www.kremetartcycling.co.za/
Entries close on 8 May 2019.

8 June
Kremetart Cycling Race

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These tiny cubs and the burgeoning canned lion hunting industry

TIME LINE AND ROLE PLAYERS: FROM PETTED TO HUNTED

• REMOVAL OF CUBS: This usually happens after only a few hours or days after birth, when the newborn lion cubs are forcibly removed by breeders from their mothers and sold or loaned to lion parks for exhibition and petting purposes. Volunteers have often described to me the days when newborn cubs arrive by the box-load. Again the reply to obvious questions is that the mothers died or rejected and abandoned their babies.

• PETTING: Each tiny cub, initially still with closed eyes, is petted by thousands of tourists keen to experience a close encounter with a cute and cuddly big cat cub. The cubs are handed from person to person and forced to pose for the all-important selfies.

• WALKING: Once the cubs reach the age of about six months, they become too big (and dangerous) to cuddle, and graduate to being walked with tourists, while a handler protects the tourists from being harmed by the adolescent and sometimes boisterous lions.

90% of lion park visitors polled were told the lie that the park’s lion cubs are orphaned or abandoned by their mothers.

• VOLUNTEER EMPLOYMENT: Local and international volunteers are tempted to South Africa, with the tantalising prospect of caring for these newly “orphaned” baby lion cubs. These naive volunteers pay for such work experience at lion parks, believing that the work they are doing is important conservation work – to ‘save’ orphaned cubs and help with ‘lion research’ and to ‘return the lions to the wild’

• TOURISM: Local and international tourists, in their thousands, pay around R100-R200 ($10-$20) for the opportunity to play with baby lion cubs and to walk with adolescent lions, usually at the same facility. These tourists are fed the same lie. At this stage, the lion parks wash their hands of their ‘orphaned’ lions.

• HUNTING: After two years of tourist petting and walking, the lion progresses to the second-last stage of its usefulness. The lion park facilities (that you are interacting with) came from the park’s lion cubs are forcibly removed by breeders from their mothers and sold or loaned to lion parks for exhibition and petting purposes. Volunteers have often described to me the days when newborn cubs arrive by the box-load. Again the reply to obvious questions is that the mothers died or rejected and abandoned their babies.

There have been several exposés on various lion parks around South Africa (CBS 60 Minutes, Carte Blanche, The Guardian, etc.), which have uncovered these sales and control over what happens after that. The lion parks will simply refuse to disclose the identities of the buyers or locations of the park’s lion cubs are forcibly removed by breeders from their mothers and sold or loaned to lion parks for exhibition and petting purposes. Volunteers have often described to me the days when newborn cubs arrive by the box-load. Again the reply to obvious questions is that the mothers died or rejected and abandoned their babies.

It is up to all of us to stamp out the wrongs that we see.
One of the key conservation challenges of our times is the limited capacity in single institutions to address the multiple threats to the environment that are emerging. This situation is critical to conservation in both rural and urban landscapes, protected and open areas, on public and private land.

The 2018 Global Wetlands Outlook states that 35% of all wetlands globally have been lost since 1970 and 25% or a quarter of wetland-dependent species are threatened with extinction. This is as a result of competing and incompatible activities encroaching on wetlands. Another illustration of the current conservation challenge is funding. A 2018 study by the Biodiversity Financing Initiative (BIOPIN) – a collaborative effort between the Zambian Government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), found that of all approved budgets for biodiversity related sectors the average releases are in the region of 40% over the past five years. This reality regarding conservation financing is probably typical of many developing countries. Conservation is important but there just isn’t the money to run it, especially protected areas as competing land uses perceived to be of more economic value are increasing.

The implications of this state of affairs for biodiversity conservation, especially when considered together with austerity measures being implemented by governments and governance challenges, are vast. Governance in this context is to be seen in its widest sense, ranging from low capacity, conflicting roles and poor stakeholder participation, to misapplication of funds and corruption. The 2018 Global Corruption Perception Study has revealed that corruption is affecting all countries in the world and all sectors including conservation. This compromises the implementation of policies, even good ones, of which there are many. Ultimately, high levels of environmental degradation manifesting in poor waste management and loss of biodiversity especially from demographic factors and socio-economic factors such as poaching and infrastructure development are the main drivers.

Many African governments have realised the consequences of not addressing this challenge and admitted the enormity of the situation. Zambia, for example, has approximately 30% of its total landmass dedicated to one form of conservation or the other. At 22,000 km², the Kafue National Park is larger than some countries! Even if we eliminated any wastage of resources and inefficiencies, and resolved all governance issues, the mandate of managing 30% of the country is simply too large and the competition for resources from the national treasury too high. Conservation partnerships are one of the fastest emerging solutions with positive results and many lessons to be shared.

Wildlife, forestry, fisheries and water legislation in Zambia now provide for different types of partnerships. Community partnerships to enhance legitimacy and uphold community rights are probably the easiest to promote but the most difficult to implement due to limited management skills and institutional weaknesses due to limited empowerment of the marginalised community partners.

Partnerships with the private sector are offering important successes and lessons including opportunities because of their institutional robustness, access to resources, skills and focus on performance. The number of conservation partnerships is growing both in numbers and diversity. These include private-public partnerships and community-private-public partnerships in protected area management, such as those being promoted by the African Parks Network involving 15 national parks in over ten African countries. There are also community-public initiatives such as through community forestry and community game ranching or community-private sector initiatives such as joint ventures. These are helping to overcome traditional barriers and biases such as lack of technical capacity or that communities are not interested in conserving the environment.

The Africa Crane Conservation Programme (ACCP) is using the approach of partnerships to help restore wetlands and populations of vulnerable and endangered crane species across the African continent. These partnerships are with the authorities in government, as well as with other relevant NGOs and communities. Some of them are formalised in legal instruments while others are ad hoc. Besides the practical wetland conservation benefit, our partnerships provide opportunities for our staff to gain field experience that broadens their vision and helps in designing unique and impactful conservation projects. Where important sites for Cranes are in protected areas, partnerships with allow government facilitate access and compliance with legal requirements.

For example, through partnership with Conservation International, our East Africa team has been trained in the use of Conservation Agreements to promote community stewardship. Conservation Agreements are voluntary negotiated agreements that outline conservation actions that communities will undertake to reduce threats to the environment, and the benefits that will be provided in return for those actions. This model has worked well across our projects sites in East Africa. Two important sites for cranes in Zambia where the ACCP is active are managed by a community-private-public partnership. In both sites, wildlife populations are increasing, and tourism development has commenced and is proving to be a workable model for achieving conservation outcomes.

Our experience is that developing partnerships is critical to addressing wetland degradation, which is driven by a myriad of factors that cannot be addressed by a single organisation. Some of the drivers of wetland degradation are, for instance, linked to human health and to resolve these we need to work with organisations in the health sector. Besides, developing partnerships has enabled us to use limited resources to implement impactful conservation interventions across Africa. In our quest to restore wetland ecosystems and stabilise crane populations across Africa, partnerships remain the tool of choice, although we acknowledge that they cannot solve all problems or apply to every situation.

Partnerships are indeed not the answer to everything and may also be impossible in some circumstances. They can also be difficult to negotiate and even when concluded, partnerships may be negatively affected by lack of transparency and lack of equity among partners. Partnerships too can have serious governance challenges especially in legitimacy, benefit sharing and upholding a rights-based approach. Most private sector partnerships, for instance, appreciate the importance of community engagement but do not always take it seriously and, sometimes, do not invest in developing their own capacity to deal with effective community engagement.

Moreover, adequate time and resources have to be invested in the partnership process, as the process is usually as good as the product. Vision sharing, transparency and goodwill are essential and, as George Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, says in his autobiography, above everything else friendship is always a good ingredient!

The second most important site for Grey Crowned Crane and Blue Wildebeest in Zambia is Luipa National Park Management under a community-private-public partnership. A three way long term agreement has been signed by the partners – Government through the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, African Parks Network as the mandated managing partner and the African Parks Royal Establishment.
ROCKLANDS: CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN ADVENTURE-BASED TOURISM

Alex Weiss, alexw032@gmail.com

The Cederberg, in the northern reaches of the Cape Fold Mountains, is one of South Africa’s premiere holiday destinations. It offers shady campsites, sumptuous rock pools and walls of rock canvassed with centuries old rock art.

There is an array of hiking trails, coursing among some elaborate rock formations such as the Wolfberg Cracks, Maltese Cross and Wolfberg Arch. In the last two decades however, Rocklands and the Pakhuis Valley has become the most notorious playground in the region, attracting climbers from across the world.

Outdoor recreational activities that contain an element of risk and adventure have gained in popularity across the world over the past three decades, and rock-climbing is no exception. Bouldering is a type of rock climbing on boulders or overhangs that are small enough so that ropes and other gear are not required. A boulderer requires minimal equipment, usually only climbing shoes, a chalk bag (containing magnesium carbonate dust) and a crash pad (or bouldering mat).

Rocklands, 35km north-east of Clanwilliam, is a world-renowned bouldering site. Bouldering, as with any outdoor sport, has an impact on the biophysical environment and since 2005, bouldering in the region has grown in extent and numbers, signalling rising concern for conservation and management of the area.

Bouldering began in Rocklands with a handful of individuals in the early 2000s on the Pakhuis Pass. Around 2005, new areas for bouldering were being explored in the valley below it and as word-of-mouth spread, bouldering in the region snowballed. Over this period, climbing spread from being exclusively on Cederberg Wilderness Area onto a mosaic of privately-owned plots. The combination of exponential growth of the sport and multiple-land use and ownership has created a challenge to managing the impacts of the sport and conservation of the area.

The mainstream media, in 2011, indicated that climbing generated between R4m – R5m to the economy of Rocklands/Clanwilliam.

The rate of the growth of the sport exceeded the landowners’ expectations. In 2011, there were approximately 600 climbers throughout the climbing season, with numbers peaking in 2017 at around 2,500. Until recently, the impact of the sport was not extreme and no concerted intervention was implemented. The 2017 climbing season, however, saw an increase in impacts on the environment, particularly that of human waste disposal and widening staging areas at boulders but also an isolated incident of an indigenous Yellowwood (Podocarpus latifolius) being damaged during the opening of a new climbing route.

Impacts associated with climbing depend not so much on the total number of climbers, but rather on the spatial and temporal concentration of climbers in particular areas. In this vein, whilst most climbers have not noticed a big impact on the area, the scale of these issues is not vast as Rocklands contains multiple areas, and climbers are indeed spread out. Nevertheless, individual boulders were identified as being particularly affected in popular areas.

Landowners and climbers generally are concerned about the ecological impacts, although overwhelmingly it is deemed important to recognise the scale of impacts relative to other conservation versus the amount of people venturing through the area spanning primarily a four-month window (May – August).
Enhanced communication and engagement with the climbing area was closed off by landowners who were disgruntled with thus will not solve the problem. In another event, a climbing that they are misplaced for the practicalities of climbing and sites – at parking lots of trailheads. However, climbers suggest disposal. In response to this issue, toilets were built at two community. One example of this is the issue of human waste. To ensure the success of conservation interventions they climbers will support programmes that protect natural environment and infrastructure development.

Climbing intrinsically relies on a healthy environment and climbers will support programmes that protect natural resources as well as these with historic and cultural values. To ensure the success of conservation interventions they should include and be backed up by outreach to the climbing community. One example of this is the issue of human waste disposal. In response to this issue, toilets were built at two sites – at parking lots of trailheads. However, climbers suggest that they are misplaced for the practicalities of climbing and thus will not solve the problem. In another event, a climbing area was closed off by landowners who were disgruntled with persistent disregard for the area (such as littering and graffiti). Enhanced communication and engagement with the climbing community as well as information dissemination is one aspect that would assist in more effective management.

There are multiple facets to ecological conservation and climbing management of the area including permits and access management, monitoring, and information dissemination. Currently substantive coordination exists between climbing organisations, individuals, and stakeholders, and plans are being formulated and implemented to enhance conservation and climbing management. Stronger relationships, more conscientious engagement and coherent structures and guidelines between local climbers, climbing organisations and land managers are integral for successful sustainable management of bouldering in the adventure-niche based tourism context, so that it is ecologically, economically and ethically responsible. This case study suggests that communication and coordination between stakeholder groups that involves adventure-tourists is vital to the success of conservation programs. Climbers in this case are furthermore integral to the relationship between the different landowners as they through participating in the sport, monitor the environment.

In an increasingly globalised, digitally connected world, potential strategies for communicating with visitors are diverse, via a variety of multimedia platforms from social media and websites to strategically located signboards. Monitoring and access management can be enhanced with technology, on websites and mobile applications. These methods, however, rely on building on essential traditional forms of coordination and programmes such as formalised committees, forums and environmental management plans (EMPs) that respond adaptively to the dynamic changes in tourist demographics. Such interventions are beginning to take place.

This research project highlights the value of qualitative studies in understanding the effectiveness, legitimacy and acceptability of conservation initiatives. Additionally, it suggests that effective conservation requires coordination amongst stakeholder groups and continuous adaptation and monitoring. Qualitative research has a vital role to play in conservation as it can be used rapidly to determine social and ecological statuses for planning as well as monitoring purposes. Findings from this research provide a glimpse of insight and clarity into understanding an aspect of mountaineers in the adventure tourism context, thereby enhancing the integration of tourist preferences and perspectives into conservation management, which have been generally underestimated within broader policy and management frameworks. The results from this study can be used to guide and improve current management actions and socio-ecological outcomes. The ability of this, however, cannot be overstated and to go beyond understanding perceptions and execute a shift towards realising adaptive management, these findings will be best served in furthering cross-stakeholder deliberations which can enhance the sustainable management of the sport and environment simultaneously, whilst also generating long-term socio-economic development.
TACKLING ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

Ashleigh Dore,
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Over the last year, the EWT’s Wildlife in Trade Programme has been working with other conservation NGOs to develop a programme of research aimed at better understanding illegal wildlife trade in and around the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation area (GLTFCA). Together with our research partners, TRAFFIC (the wildlife trade monitoring network) and the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF SA), with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the EWT is embarking on a study to identify trade routes for illegal wildlife trade out of the GLTFCA. The GLTFCA is an area of very high biodiversity and is a critical region for the conservation of charismatic species impacted by wildlife crime and, as a result, faces a disproportionately high threat from organised wildlife criminals.

The focus species for our work will be rhinos and elephants, which are both facing severe and increasing threats from poaching, and the main output of the research will be empirical information indicating when, where and how illegal products from these species move around the GLTFCA region. We will share this information with relevant law enforcement authorities, including the South African Police Service, Department of Environmental Affairs, National Prosecuting Authority and South African Revenue Services, to assist them in targeting wildlife crime as effectively as possible. Accurate information is vital for successful enforcement of wildlife crime, and it is the intention of this project to provide this.

The EWT held its first Valentine’s Day Dinner at Possums in Johannesburg on 14 February 2019. Guests shared their love not only with their partners, but with the EWT as well, through their generous support. Although the rain poured down, and power cuts struck, this did nothing to dampen the mood, and perhaps even added to the romance of the occasion, as Thomas Dancer mesmerised the guests with his skillful saxophone playing. Love was definitely in the air, as this wonderful event raised in excess of R325,000 for our conservation work.

Guests were not only treated to the most incredible meal and fabulous wine, sponsored by Painted Wolf Wines, but also to a talk by Grant Beverley, EWT Carnivore Conservation Programme Lowveld Regional Coordinator, about his decade-long love affair with Wild Dogs. A day with him in the field was one of the hotly contested auction prizes. Many thanks to all of our wonderful auction and raffle prize sponsors, as well as Possums for hosting us, Sharry Banner for her assistance in organising the event, and our fabulous guests for showing their love and support!

WAYS TO GIVE

Donating is now as easy as snapping your fingers... or your phone!

Supporters can now donate to the EWT quickly and safely, using SnapScan. All you need to do is:

1. Download the SnapScan application on your smartphone
2. Register with your details – this should take no more than a few minutes
3. Scan our EWT barcode to make your donation in the amount of your choice (be sure to choose donation rather than e-shop from the dropdown menu) – you’ll be asked to enter your PIN so you know the transaction is secure. It’s as easy as one-two-three!

Once you’ve made your donation via SnapScan, you’ll get an SMS confirming the transaction, and the EWT will be notified via SMS too. Supporting Conservation in Action couldn’t be simpler.
A PLACE OF CONNECTEDNESS AND BIODIVERSITY WITHIN A CITY
– TABLE MOUNTAIN’S FRESH WATER ECOSYSTEMS AND THE ELUSIVE GHOST FROG

Joshua Weeber
EWT Threatened Amphibian Programme Table Mountain Project Intern
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Table Mountain rises above a bustling metropolis, a rocky beacon suffocated on one side by concrete office blocks and frantic train stations, and hemmed in on the other by the icy shores of the Atlantic ocean. This towering geological wonder stands isolated and disconnected, separated from its sandstone relatives the Hottentot Holland Mountains to the east by the vast dune system of the Cape Flats. Although this ancient isolation has led to the emergence of a variety of incredible flora and fauna restricted to the mountain, it has also made this unique system susceptible to change. As the city continues to grow, human activity now threatens to disrupt this isolated mountain ecosystem and the unique organisms that call it home, in particular the sensitive freshwater streams that meander down the mountain.

In light of this, and thanks to funding from the Table Mountain Fund, a three-year project was launched in January 2019, dedicated to improving the freshwater ecosystems on Table Mountain. Lead by the EWT, in partnership with the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), the project aims to implement long-term monitoring protocols to assess trends in stream health, establish baseline data on key target species, and implement conservation interventions to directly improve stream health.

These streams are home to a variety of other endemic range-restricted species such as the undescribed freshwater fish (Galaxias sp) and the possibly extinct Elusive Skimmer (Orthetrum rubens). The population of Rose’s Mountain Toadlet (Capensibufo rosei) on Table Mountain has also disappeared, almost certainly a result of anthropogenic influences. However, fully understanding the issues these freshwater ecosystems face and correctly identifying measures to address them is no easy task. This project aims to provide a solid foundation on which long-term conservation actions can be built, and cultivate partnerships and synergies to coordinate and strengthen these actions. It is time we learnt more about these complex systems and initiate actions that will ensure their survival for future generations to come.

PROJECT PARTNERS: Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), the Table Mountain Fund (TMF), South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), South African National Parks (SANParks), Cape Nature (CN), the City of Cape Town (CCT), the University of Cape Town (UCT), Stellenbosch University (SU), the South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON) and the Freshwater Research Centre (FRC).

KEY CONTRIBUTORS: Joshua Weeber (EWT), Dr Jeanne Tarrant (EWT), Prof. Krystal Tolley (SANBI), Dr Jessica da Silva (SANBI), Dr Ian Little (EWT), Assoc. Prof. Res Altwegg (UCT), Nick Telford (SANBI).

Typical Table Mountain Ghost Frog habitat

These tadpoles have large mouths which they use to suck onto cobbles - Photo credit Nick Telford

Table Mountain Ghost Frog - Photo credit Nick Telford

Field work has begun!

Heleophryne rosei, a unique amphibian, Red Listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN.
A WILD START TO 2019

Cole du Plessis,
EWT Carnivore Conservation Programme,
Wild Dog Expansion Project Coordinator
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On 26 January, a pack of 13 Wild Dogs was successfully relocated into Karingani Game Reserve – the newest addition to the Wild Dog Expansion Project.

Karingani Game Reserve is located in southwestern Mozambique at the junction of the Kruger National Park in South Africa and the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, and forms part of the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area.

The property is currently under restoration and expands over 150,000 ha. Due to its size, ecology, and management efforts made to keep the area protected, it has been identified as an ideal Wild Dog reintroduction site and will form part of the Wild Dog Expansion Project that is coordinated by the South African Wild Dog Advisory Group.

Without other resident packs existing in the area anymore, the dispersal groups of Wild Dogs that have previously passed through have never settled, and Karingani Game Reserve has thereby contributed as a corridor but never a place of permanent refuge for Wild Dogs. By introducing a stable pack onto the property, the hope is to promote an increasing population in the surrounding area.

On the eve of the Wild Dog relocation, the team congregated at the temporary holding facility (a transition zone needed for the international relocation) to review the capture strategies, check through the equipment and do the final checks before the relocation. The following morning, at first light, the team was underway with immobilising the Wild Dogs. Once that was complete, we fitted the tracking collars, applied the necessary vaccinations, drew samples and once complete, loaded the Wild Dogs into their designated crates.

Shortly after that, we were en route to Karingani Game Reserve. Overall, the trip went well except for a four-hour delay as Mozambican customs officials were hesitant to allow the Wild Dogs into the country. Being an experienced team, we were able to manage the situation and ensure the Wild Dogs’ wellbeing throughout this delay.

The team, in the five-vehicle convoy, arrived at Karingani Game Reserve at midnight. We drove the crates straight into the boma, offloaded them, and on the count of three, everyone opened the crate doors and watched on as the newly formed pack had touched down on the turf of their new home. As part of the reintroduction process, the Karingani Pack will stay in the boma for several weeks before being released onto the reserve. This will give them time to strengthen their bond as a newly formed pack, and allow time for them to adapt to their new home environment.

Large refuge sites such as these give hope to Wild Dog conservation – a species that needs space to grow. With the feasibility assessment done prior to the reintroduction, we anticipate that the reserve has a carrying capacity of 50 Wild Dogs, and with the 150,000 ha for these Wild Dogs to roam, Karingani Game Reserve is of high priority in Wild Dog conservation.

This addition of space to the Wild Dog Expansion Project has increased our total safe space to over 1,200,000 ha, which will allow for Wild Dog numbers to grow and the genetic diversity to increase. Such work is only made possible by organisations collaborating, and that’s what makes the Wild Dog Advisory Group a true success. In saying that, a special mention must be made to our partners for making this Wild Dog reintroduction possible:

Karingani Game Reserve; ANAC; Saving the Survivors; Wildlife ACT; Dr Pete Goodman and the National Zoological Gardens.
The EWT’s Drylands Conservation Programme is based out of Loxton, in the Nama Karoo. We focus on the conservation of Endangered dryland species, and the Critically Endangered Riverine Rabbit (Bunolagus monticularis) is the programme’s flagship species.

One of our main initiatives is promoting sustainable land management practices in drylands, with a view to conserving habitat and supporting livelihoods. The EWT engages with farmers, including commercial farmers, commonage farmers and land reform beneficiaries, who farm with livestock on properties which are home to Riverine Rabbits. We also work with farmers operating under, often difficult, land tenureship systems, such as commonages, to explore models to find solutions to some of the challenges they face.

In 2017, the EWT invited Conservation South Africa’s Senior Coordinator for Agriculture: Land Reform and Rural Development (Western- and Northern Cape) and CSA.

The knowledge exchange was deemed a success by EWT Soutpansberg Protected Area Water Conservation Project Coordinator, Oldrich van Schalkwyk. EWT Soutpansberg Protected Area Manager, Medike van Schalkwyk.

The journey to Kamiesberg was made possible through a collaborative effort between the EWT and the Department of Agriculture: Land Reform and Rural Development (Western- and Northern Cape) and CSA.

The knowledge exchange highlighted the following key lessons:

1. Collaboration is vital and can leverage benefits that working in isolation cannot achieve.
2. Livestock improvement is key to farming efficiency in terms of production.
3. Conservation and agriculture can be successfully integrated through the Contractual Stewardship approach.

Following the visit, emerging farmer, Paul Vorster, said: “I experienced and saw for myself what these farmers have achieved by working together, even though there was conflict, they managed to move forward from strength to strength. I realise now that I had to come here to learn this.”

Feedback from both the Loxton group, as well as the stewardship farmers of the Kamiesberg, was that the knowledge exchange was a success and a valuable platform for sharing information. It provided an opportunity for both parties to gain knowledge on communal farming, the benefits and challenges of land reform, as well as the process of farmers organising themselves into formal structures.

The knowledge exchange concept proved to be a valuable tool to amplify the benefits of conservation stewardship and learning from peers about the various conditions of farming and organisational structures. We believe this concept is an important component in changing mindsets towards sustainable land management. Seeing other farmers with similar (or even fewer) resources available, reaping the benefits sustainable land management. Seeing other farmers with similar (or even fewer) resources available, reaping the benefits they faced in doing so. The structure under which the Loxton farmers operate is somewhat dysfunctional. Interpersonal conflict amongst the farmers themselves, and a feeling of isolation in terms of support available to them as small-scale farmers, are all challenges they currently face. We hoped that the visit to other farmers, who had found solutions to some of these issues, would be beneficial.

The EWT’s Drylands Conservation Programme

The knowledge exchange was deemed a success by Bonnie Schumann, EWT Drylands Conservation Programme Nama Karoo Coordinator, and Cobus Theron EWT Drylands Conservation Programme Manager.

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In 2018, Bonnie Schumann, Nama Karoo Coordinator for the EWT Drylands Conservation Programme, approached Conservation South Africa (CSAI) regarding the possibility of an exchange visit between our Karoo farmers and their Kamiesberg counterparts. The purpose of the proposed technical knowledge exchange was to facilitate a peer-to-peer learning visit in support of sustainable land management and agricultural-centred livelihoods in the rural Karoo landscape. The Kamiesberg farmers shared their experiences of establishing organisational structures and the challenges they faced in doing so. The structure under which the Loxton farmers operate is somewhat dysfunctional. Interpersonal conflict amongst the farmers themselves, and a feeling of isolation in terms of support available to them as small-scale farmers, are all challenges they currently face. We hoped that the visit to other farmers, who had found solutions to some of these issues, would be beneficial.

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There is also a lot of routine maintenance work that happens on a regular basis, which includes maintaining roads and trails, as well as the water pipe infrastructure. Our SPA Rangers, who have quite a task on their hands keeping Medike well maintained, take all this on. These team members were employed from the local community, and it is wonderful to see them gaining valuable reserve management skills, while Medike provides work security for members from local rural tribal villages. In this way, the EWT is already contributing towards socio-economic upliftment in the region.

ANTI-POACHING PROGRAMME – SNARES AND PATROLS

In addition to routine maintenance undertaken by the rangers, their main function on Medike is to undertake the anti-poaching programme. The rangers go on regular patrols across the reserve, as well as onto neighbouring properties. They specifically sweep for snares as well as look for fish traps in the Sand River. The Rangers remove these so that they do not pose a threat to wildlife. The SPA Rangers also centrepiece people entering the property without permission, often escorting them off the property.

The SPA Rangers Anti-poaching Unit also does extension work in the neighbouring communal properties, and assists these properties by sweeping for snares on them. This helps out the Ndoxhada community, and assists in our work on eliminating poaching in the area.

In total, the Rangers have removed over 173 snares from Medike, 63 snares from neighbouring Ndoxhada property, and ten snares from the neighbouring Moss and Gawsworth properties. Sixteen fishing nets and seven fish traps were also removed from the river, between Medike and the neighbouring properties.

RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION

As part of the regular patrols undertaken by the SPA Rangers, they are collecting wildlife mortality data on the 3.7 km section of railway line that passes through Medike. These data contribute towards one of the EWT’s other projects, the Wildlife and Transport Programme, where they are investigating wildlife and rail interactions.

Medike has implemented our own surveys on invasive alien plants within Medike, which are predominantly found on the banks of the Sand River. This is not that surprising, as rivers are known to be pathways for invasive species to move into new areas. These data are being used to inform a management plan, where invasive species will be targeted for management as part of Medike’s Biodiversity Management Programme.

The reserve now has two resident volunteers, Ryan van Huyssteen and Melissa Petford, from the Soutpansberg Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation (SCBC). Ryan and Melissa are instrumental in documenting the biodiversity of the reserve, sampling extensively and compiling species lists. This is part of a wider project they are involved with, documenting biodiversity across the Soutpansberg. It has been a real asset having them on board with this important work.

Medike has also welcomed additional researchers, including Ruth Miller of Ditsong National Museum of Natural History, as well as Daniel Bartsch of the Natural History Museum in Stuttgart, Germany. They were out sampling for Tenebrionidae specimens, a rare beetle that has yet to be described.

They were also on the hunt for clearing moths, Sesidae, where they successfully caught five specimens. Two of these species are as yet undescribed, and Daniel will go about the process of classifying these new species from Medike.

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AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

As part of this, we will also look at other income generating activities that we could do on the mountain. For example, we could establish a small ecotourism operation, including hiking trails across the mountain. We are also looking into the potential of developing Medike as an ecotourism destination. These plans are already well underway with a number of researchers already visiting us. We are currently in discussions with a well-known UK university to potentially become a field site for them.

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Here the rangers spent their time planting indigenous trees at the schools and gave talks on careers in conservation and tourism to the learners.

We also assisted an inspiring young man, Malamvhi Liwuka ‘Lula’, 11, in his efforts on snake conservation and provides his services to the community by catching unwanted snakes and releasing them back into the wild. He received further snake handling training as well as snake handling equipment and ID books. This was done with the assistance of our partners, Soutpansberg Centre for Biodiversity Conservatvi.

As part of Medike’s outreach programme, the EWT delivered much needed baby clothes, baby blankets, reusable cloth diapers, feeding chair etc., sponsored by EWT’s Shelley Lizzio and children’s chairs sponsored by the Underhay family, to Tswelopele Pre-school and Crèche. Tswelopele is situated in an underdeveloped village. Tswelopele was founded in 2008 by Pastor Fredericca Ralephata, with six children and has grown to taking care of 195 children, five days a week. Fredericca is supported by 14 staff members (previously unemployed), who work for a small salary as caregivers and teachers. The staff are quite creative with very little financial and other resources to provide care and education for the children. Tswelopele gives two meals a day and transportation to and from the creche.

SPA Rangers joined a group of twelve volunteers from the EarthWatch Institute and three researchers from Durham University’s Primate and Predator Project (PPP), on a community outreach excursion. We did a snare sweep on the Ndoxhuda’s communal land neighbouring Medike. The aim wasn’t just to reduce the risk these snares pose to wildlife, but also to the community’s livestock. Thirty-six snares and one fish trap were removed. The local community is extremely grateful for the EWT’s support. It felt a bit like we have come full circle, as Phil and Sue Roberts whose generous donation made the purchase of Medike possible, first came to the Soutpansberg as EarthWatch volunteers in 2011.

From left to right: SPA Field Ranger Khathu Mukhumeni removing a hyrax snare. SPA Field Ranger Khathu Mukhumeni removing a hyrax snare. SPA Field Ranger Khathu Mukhumeni removing a hyrax snare. From left to right: SPA Field Ranger Khathu Mukhumeni removing a hyrax snare. Medike is home to amazing biodiversity such as the rare Giant Carrion Flower. EWT staff baby clothing donation at Tswelopele Creche.
Sharry Banner grew up in Tzaneen, where she was always surrounded by animals. Between the family dogs, feral cats, a very large assortment of wild birds that were fed by her father twice a day or, of course, a vast number of snakes and other critters, be they domestic or not, they were never far away!

Living in Tzaneen also enabled the family to visit the Kruger National Park on most of their holidays and so her love for the bush and its wildlife started from a very early age.

For many years, she supported various animal welfare organisations by way of donations but felt a need to become more involved and to see what the donors’ money was being spent on. In 1999, she became a volunteer at the Society for Animals in Distress (SAID) and has since played a large part in organising their fundraising events, as well as being a member of their Executive Committee. Along with her dear friend Elizabeth v Straaten, she has also organised fundraising events for sterilisation projects for animal welfare organisations across Southern Africa. The EWT is, however, the first ‘conservation’ organisation that she has assisted with fundraising in the form of a golf day and two fundraising dinners.

What has been the highlight of this work so far? Being involved in the implementation of various projects and seeing the positive response and huge difference they can make has been extremely rewarding. In particular, the impact that the SAID education programmes have had on responsible animal ownership in informal settlements and disadvantaged areas.

What’s the best gift you’ve ever received? Naturally, our beautiful daughter as well as a child of a disadvantaged area.

What’s your favourite place to travel? Responsible animal ownership in informal settlements and seeing the positive response and huge difference they can make has been extremely rewarding. In particular, the impact that the SAID education programmes have had on responsible animal ownership in informal settlements and disadvantaged areas.

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What’s the last book you read? The Choice by Edith Eger – A true story of hope.

In order to organise that first Giant’s Cup, he and Matt Goede needed to form an event company and that’s how Running Man Adventures came to be.

What prompted you to make the link between trail running and conservation? The World Heritage Site is the location and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is the custodian of all the events we do and, without such a pristine wilderness, these events would simply not be viable. There are therefore several reasons to link trail running and conservation. Practically, you are conserving the very resource that allows you to stage such beautiful events, and morally, you cannot but help to assist with the conservation of these areas when you are confronted with them daily and, via the events, you now have a platform to do something about it.

What has been your most challenging adventure to date? Ha, I don’t have as many adventures as I’d like but I guess scouting the course of the Hundred Mile for Ultra Trail Drakensberg up in Lesotho could be classified as an adventure. It involved days on end wandering around at 3,000 m, on my own, following cattle paths that vanish into thin air and trying to find 70 km of course that might be suitable for a trail run.

What’s the last book you read? Mortality – Christopher Hitchens

What’s your advice for people who are inspired to make a difference but aren’t sure how to do so? You can’t adopt the world. Don’t become overwhelmed and paralysed by the flood of depressing news on the environment. Don’t try and save the Polar Bear. Rather find one small thing that you can do yourself on a local, practical and sustainable level that can make a positive difference to the environment. If every person did this one small thing, we would change the world.

What’s the best gift you’ve ever received? I don’t like gifts. I guess my three children, if they qualify. When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grow up? I honestly had no idea. When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grow up? I honestly had no idea.
In this feature, we’ll be sharing tips on how we can all make a difference to the environment in our daily lives. We’d love you to share some of your tips too! Please tell us how you make a difference by emailing your tips to Mwitu@ewt.org.za, and we could feature them in a future issue of the magazine.

In this edition, we’re sharing a few tips on how to save electricity.

• Set your electrical geyser’s thermostat between 55° C and 60° C. To save energy, make sure the geyser and all hot water steel pipes in the roof are well insulated.
• Use lower light bulbs with higher wattages. For instance, one 100 watt bulb produces the same light as two 60 watt bulbs.
• When buying a dishwasher, look for energy saving features like a short wash cycle.
• Tumble dryers that operate with an electronic humidity control are the most efficient as they automatically shut off the drying cycle when clothes are dry. Even better, use a washing line outside!
• Match pots and pans to stove plates. Small pots on large plates waste electricity.
• When you defrost food, leave it in the fridge overnight. You’ll use less electricity than defrosting food in the microwave.
• Paint the walls of your home in a light colour. Dark colours tend to absorb light, requiring you to use more energy from light bulbs to achieve the same effect.

In 1981, seven Cheetahs were released and this population did so well that, by the end of the decade, the park had 15 individuals and by the 2000s, there were almost 20 Cheetahs. Unexpectedly, by the mid-2000s, the population crashed – presumably due to a decline in preferred prey species (such as Impala) and a steadily increasing Lion population. Sadly, the once common Pilanesberg Cheetahs were thought to be locally extinct.

As fate would have it, in 2012 a coalition of two male Cheetahs managed to enter the park – possibly through a weak point in the park’s fencing. In 2014, a young female Cheetah was captured on neighbouring farmlands near Madikwe Game Reserve. She was released into Pilanesberg with the hope that she could provide an opportunity to re-establish the once thriving Pilanesberg Cheetah population. This female Cheetah affectionately became known as “Rain” and by the end of 2014, Pilanesberg had four new Cheetah cubs – the first born in the park for almost a decade. The Pilanesberg population was once again on the rise. Three of these cubs reached independence at the age of 3 years old. In 2016, Rain had another litter of four – of which three reached independence. By this stage, the Pilanesberg population had reached nine. In October 2017, Rain had another litter of four – however, only one young male reached independence, but was sadly killed in January 2019. The population reached a peak of 13 individuals after 3 and a half years. In an unfortunate turn of events, in April 2018, the three males from the first litter killed their father(s), and were subsequently removed and relocated to two other reserves. In late 2018, two male Cheetahs were reintroduced from Dinoekeng into Pilanesberg to introduce new genetics, and one of the Pilanesberg’s young females was moved to another reserve. Both Cheetah movements were facilitated by the EWT’s Cheetah Metapopulation Project.

The population in Pilanesberg is thought to be currently made up of Rain, the two newly reintroduced Dinoekeng males, and a young female from one of Rain’s previous litters. While the population has fluctuated in the last few years, the future of the Pilanesberg Cheetah population is looking promising.

This would not have been possible without the North West Provincial Government (Department of Rural, Environment and Agricultural Development), who reintroduced and monitored Rain, the trailblazing efforts of the Pilanesberg National Park management, and the supportive sponsors of the EWT’s Cheetah Metapopulation Project. The EWT will continue to ensure Cheetah populations thrive and increase in Cheetah reserves around the country.

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF LARGE MAMMALS ON WOODEN ELECTRICAL DISTRIBUTION POLES IN THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA.

Over the course of the last 22 years, there have been numerous instances of conflict between business and biodiversity for the Eskom/EWT Strategic Partnership, and this is particularly noticeable with animals having negative interactions with electrical infrastructure. One such example was observed in the Kruger National Park, where the electrocution of animals does occur sporadically due to wooden pole damage. Large mammals damage these wooden poles by rubbing up against them, causing the poles to 'tooth-pick' and become extremely unstable. Therefore, a method of mitigation was needed to prevent any further mortalities. Steel poles could not be used, as this would ‘earth’ the pole, making the structure dangerous to any perching bird species.

By using camera traps placed at the tops of the poles, we began a study to determine which species were using the poles as a scratching post and to trial four possible mitigation methods over a 16-month period. These four mitigation methods protect the poles against rubbing worn a steel sleeve, a Polefix industrial cast a grating box and a VB Rhino. Results from the camera traps showed that the culprit species included Cape Buffalo, White and Black Rhinoceros, and African Elephant. The results of the mitigation trials, along with a cost-benefit study, showed that protecting the poles against rubbing proved to be cost-effective, and the most appropriate mitigation method was the grating box (C in the accompanying photographs). This would prevent any direct contact with the pole thereby allowing the pole to retain its stability.

This solution would overall improve the stability and longevity of wooden poles in the Kruger National Park and prevent large mammal electrocutions.

The four mitigation products tested to limit/prevent the contact between wildlife and poles in the Kruger National Park: A) Steel pole sleeve; B) Polefix industrial cast; C) FRP Grating box; D) VB Rhino.
**Serval**  
*Leptailurus serval.*

Conservation status: Near Threatened  
Due to their colouring and spotted coats, this beautiful and elusive cat is often confused with Cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) although they are considerably smaller and lack the distinctive tear marks on their face. Serval are wetland specialists and feed on small mammals (typically rodents) and birds. While Serval are not confined to protected areas, it is expected that the Serval population is still declining due to loss of habitat, direct persecution from farmers and mortalities on roads. Did you know that by the 1980s the Serval became regionally extinct in both the Eastern Cape and most of the Western Cape provinces? However, they have been successfully reintroduced in several Eastern Cape protected areas in the early 2000s and, although rare, are now regularly seen throughout the provinces.

**Blue Duiker**  
*Philantomba monticola.*

Conservation status: Vulnerable  
When viewed in a certain light, the Blue Duiker has a bluish sheen to its coat, which is how they got their name. Further, the name duiker is derived from the Afrikaans word "duik," which means to dive, which is in reference to the jumping and “diving for cover” behaviour they display when threatened. Blue Duikers are found in the forest and thicket habitats along the coast from the iMfolozi River in northern KwaZulu-Natal, southwards to the eastern parts of the Western Cape. These habitats are becomingly increasingly threatened by farming, particularly sugar cane and plantation forestry, as well as expanding human development. Habitat loss and degradation are the main threats to this species and sadly the Blue Duiker population is declining and is therefore listed as Vulnerable.

**Cape Porcupine**  
*Hystrix africaeaustralis.*

Conservation status: Least Concern  
The Cape Porcupine is distributed across South Africa and is found in a variety of habitats. Porcupines of the genus *Hystrix* are the largest African rodents, with a mass of up to 20 kg! Did you know that porcupines are considered important ecosystem engineers? An ecosystem engineer is an animal that significantly modifies a habitat, and porcupines play a valuable role in ecosystems by enriching the soil that they dig, resulting in a much healthier landscape. The population is thought to be fairly stable, and while there are no major threats to the species at present, bushmeat hunting and persecution may be causing local declines or even extinctions in some areas. Sadly, porcupines are persecuted because their digging can damage crops, trees and fences. They are also threatened by the illegal muthi trade and the quill trade. You can play a role in porcupine conservation by avoiding quill décor items unless the product is shown to be from sustainably harvested sources.
Oscar Mohale, Senior Field Officer, Wildlife and Energy Programme

We recently chatted to Oscar Mohale, a Senior Field Officer with the EWT’s Wildlife and Energy Programme. Oscar studied BSc Entomology at the University of Pretoria, and drifted between agriculture and ecology streams. He then joined the Conservation Ecology Research Unit, and studied BSc Hons and MSc, all in Zoology/Ecology, focusing on different aspects of ecological restoration of mined dune forests for about six years. During his studies, he mostly gained skills in numerical ecology, community ecology, writing, and statistics. At the end of his MSc, he noted the disconnect between science studies and day-to-day people’s struggles, and joined the EWT, where he initially worked in the Source to Sea Programme, supporting the field, research and administration elements of our work with water. During this 2-year stint, he improved his skills in project management and working with communities.

His current role sees him helping to make electrical infrastructure safe. He works with incident reporters [EWT field officers, Eskom staff, the public, and other organisations] and Eskom to mitigate electrical infrastructure where negative wildlife incidents have occurred.

Most of his days are spent liaising with Eskom officials and other stakeholders on wildlife incidents and infrastructure mitigation, and coordinating the Central Incidents Database that houses wildlife incidents.

What excites you about this position?
To me, the most exciting thing about this post is the contribution that it makes towards making power lines animal-friendly. I get to show, with data, where the lines are not safe and need to be mitigated to prevent electrocutions and collisions by the utility. This position also allows me to work with people from diverse levels – landowners, environmental officers, and managers, as well as senior managers.

What are you passionate about?
I am passionate about people and nature, development and conservation. Despite many debates about whether these can coexist, I think they can. If, as conservationists, we do not work from top-down but bottom-up and hear the people’s needs, our efforts can really be supported by our different stakeholders and make an impact. I am passionate about working together, partnerships, getting everyone on board to make sure development does not harm the environment, and showing evidence (data) i.e. telling evidence-based stories but also staying empathetic about stakeholder situations.

What are you passionate about?
Everyone should believe that they can achieve great things in life, regardless of their background, education, culture etc. If I had to get stuck in a lift with anyone, who would it be and why?
I would say Pastor Chris Mathebula, very weird, one might think. It is not about his position as a pastor but the way he sees life. Chris sees the bigger picture of life and does not focus on minute things that waste human time. He believed, I believe, and everyone should believe that they can achieve great things in life, regardless of their background, education, culture etc.

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received and who did it come from?
I was once told that holding a resentment is like swallowing poison and waiting for the other person to die. Life is too short to hold grudges, so just forgive those that have done you wrong and move on to live your best life.

What are you passionate about?
My family, my boyfriend Tim, my friends, animals (especially fluffy four-legged ones) and saying no to single use plastics!

If you had to get stuck in a lift with anyone, who would it be and why?
It’s so difficult to choose only one so I have to name three amazing people - Oskar Schindler (a hero), Emma Watson (a feminist) and Sir David Attenborough (a legend).

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received and who did it come from?
I was once told that holding a resentment is like swallowing poison and waiting for the other person to die. Life is too short to hold grudges, so just forgive those that have done you wrong and move on to live your best life.

Megan Murison, Programme Officer, National Biodiversity and Business Network

Born and bred in Joburg, Megan ended up doing her (seven year!) university stint at Rhodes University. As she has always been passionate about animals, she obtained an MSc in Zoology.

Megan loves to travel and has seen most of eastern Europe and South East Asia. As she turns 30 this year, she is ticking off a big bucket list item, and walking the Great Wall of China. She also has an amazing younger brother who means the world to her.

What are you passionate about?
Megan’s role is a little different from many of her colleagues, as she hardly ever works with animals. Instead, she works with businesses around South Africa to assist them with mainstreaming, or integrating, biodiversity into their business strategies and goals.
Conservation Science unit to take up a new and exciting role as the African Lion Database Coordinator.  

As the title suggests, her primary role is to create a database for lion distribution and population numbers across the continent. Currently, the status, population trends and distribution for the species in many African countries is not well known.

This can be largely attributed to the fact that there is a lack of a single repository for this kind of data. So her role is to create that database and work with many different country representatives and lion researchers to consolidate that data. The more we know about a species the better we can conserve them!

What excites you about this position?  
This project falls within a sphere of work I have always been very passionate about – carnivore conservation. It is generally a very exciting field, and I get to work with many different people from various backgrounds. It’s also really great knowing that what I am working on is going to feed into a much bigger picture and ultimately aid in the conservation of this iconic species.

What are you passionate about?  
I love to travel – especially with my hubby, Bryan. We have been fortunate enough to travel to many countries – with my favourite country being Croatia and my best city being London.  
If you had to get stuck in a lift with anyone, who would it be and why?  
I think my answer is probably going to be the same as many conservationists/biologists – David Attenborough. He has led an incredibly fascinating life and I would love to hear his stories first hand.  
What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received and who did it come from?  
“Never regret anything that made you smile.” To be honest I can’t remember where I heard it from, but it’s just a saying that has stuck with me since high school. It also gives me the justification to not feel guilty about that holiday, any naughty shenanigans, having an extra chocolate, reading a Harry Potter book for the millionth time or that extra G&T!

What’s your favourite country being?  
My favourite country being Croatia and my best city being London.

Samantha Page-Nicholson,  
African Lion Database Coordinator, Conservation Science Unit.

Samantha studied her undergraduate degree at Rhodes University where she majored in Zoology and Environmental Science. Her Honours degree was in Zoology with a specific focus on African Vertebrate Zoology and in 2014, she graduated with distinction with her Master’s degree in Zoology. At the end of 2014, she started at the EWT as a Conservation Science Intern. She got to work on a number of projects, like the Mammal Red List, and help out with cleaning and standardising some of the EWT programme datasets.

Late in 2015, she became a Senior Science Officer in the Wildlife and Energy Programme, where her main responsibility was to manage a database which recorded all wildlife mortalities on Eskom power infrastructure. Here she was also involved in providing mitigation recommendations to the relevant Eskom teams.

In October 2018, she moved back to the

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Conservation Matters | Issue 12: The Connected Edition
PUPS’ PLACE

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE! Can you find six differences in these photos?
Circle the differences and take a photo/scan the page and send it to Mwitu@ewt.org.za, and you could be in for a treat!

IN CLOSING:
MWTU’S MISSIVE

Dear Readers

Much like my fellow Wild Dogs, who have strong social bonds and are such successful hunters because of the strength of our packs, we all need connections in order to thrive. I hope you have enjoyed this issue, with its focus on the collaborations and partnerships that make conservation work more impactful. Of course, the EWT’s most important partnership is with our supporters, who undoubtedly make the work we do possible. Thank you for being part of the pack!

In our quest to ensure that our pack is connected, we’ve developed a brand new website, with the generous help of pack members, Artifact Advertising. We hope that the new site will offer you a far simpler way to find all the information you need about our work, and how you can get involved. Head over to www.ewt.org.za and let us know what you think! You can share your feedback on the new site, or any other topic, by emailing me at Mwitu@ewt.org.za

Lastly, congratulations to the winners of our Wildlife on your doorstep photography and drawing competition! They are

- 1st place photography – John Todd, for his beautiful Spotted Eagle Owl photos, taken in St Helena Bay
- 2nd place photography – Claudio Pizzio, for his lovely Crested Barbet image, taken in Edenvale
- 1st place drawing – Achumilo Mdalo, age 5-10 years, for a fantastic drawing of Barn Owl
- 1st place drawing – Asibonge Mdalo, for a gorgeous picture of a Lilac Breasted Roller

‘Til next time
Mwitu

P.S. If you don’t already receive our electronic newsletter, ChitterChatter, which goes out in alternate months from Conservation Matters, and you’d like to subscribe, please email me (Mwitu@ewt.org.za) and we’ll add you to the mailing list.

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