



CONSERVATION HAS TO BE INCLUSIVE IF AFRICA'S WILDLIFE IS TO SURVIVE



Rhino poaching has become a lucrative business. Earmarked by common prevailing conditions such as porous borders between communities and parks, economically marginalized communities and the lure of huge financial incentives from poaching and widespread corruption; there is little incentive for impoverished communities to protect rhino.

Soaring global prices for rhino horn have helped to drive this poaching frenzy where money is king. The escalation in prices of rhino horn has been dramatic over recent years. Where a kilogram of rhino horn cost around \$800-00 in the 1990's, reports indicate that the current price of rhino horn is pegged at around \$65 000-00 or more.

It is difficult to understand, or believe, that people pay these inflated prices for what is nothing more than keratin - the same material found in hair and fingernails - but which, in some countries, exceeds the price of hard drugs. Interestingly a rhino horn is not attached to the animal's skull but is actually a compacted mass of hairs that continues to grow throughout the animal's lifetime, just like our own hair and nails. These animals are however being killed every day because of the demand. Already on the world's critically endangered species list, rhino could soon be facing extinction unless much of the work being done to protect them starts paying off.

Although international trade in rhino horn has been banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 1977, demand remains high and continues to fuel rhino poaching in both Africa and Asia. This burgeoning trade in rhino horn has also spawned new links between notorious Asian and Eastern European organised crime networks and those in Africa. These groups are well funded, use high-powered weaponry and will not stop at any cost. The profits from wildlife trafficking unfortunately fuel corruption and weaken the co-opting critical state institutions such as the military, police and army. Criminal syndicates link the "killing fields", such as the Kruger National Park, which has been hardest hit by the rhino poaching scourge, through a whole series of transit points and smuggling channels on to the final destination in Asia.

While the full level of this wildlife trafficking surge can only be estimated, it is no longer solely a conservation issue. With dozens of African countries affected by the growing demand for these African products, wildlife trafficking has quickly grown into a serious regional and economical threat.

Coupled with this is the increase in youth becoming involved in poaching. This is not surprising given the economic incentives, which are luring many younger men into making a "quick", but extremely substantial, buck. Available jobs simply cannot compare with the so called "gold in the horn" and many youths living in communities in and around our Parks are willing to take the risk, knowing full well that they may be arrested or even lose their lives should they get caught poaching.

Economically depressed communities are unable to see the value in wildlife conservation as the returns do not immediately fill the pocket or the stomach. Embarking on an "adventure" to kill a rhino thus becomes more attractive than remaining idle in a community with few economic alternatives.

There is no doubt that if Africa's wildlife is to survive, conservation has to be inclusive where real benefits are felt by the communities living in and around our Parks. Shared natural resources need to be co-managed and conserved to foster economic and social development, tourism and regional integration for the benefit of communities and mankind at large. As such conservation strategies needs to embrace the active participation and involvement of local communities in the planning and decision making processes of natural resource management so that tangible benefits can be felt, which in turn impact poverty alleviation.

As part of its expanded scope of training, the College recognizes that in order to remain relevant in a dynamic sector, projects need to be developed in line with these needs and with key elements of the National Development Plan, which will in turn contribute to the goals and objectives of the National Biodiversity Economy Development Strategy and targets of Department of Environmental Affairs' Vision 2024.

Projects developed in partnership with, and funded by the Department of Environmental Affairs, the National Treasury's Jobs Fund and other Donors, are indicative of measures being put in place. With youths being trained, developed and employed within the sector, it is envisaged that the impacts will be far reaching.

JOBS FUND SCALE UP PROJECT - "UNLOCKING COMMUNITY BENEFITS THROUGH CONSERVATION" - APPROVED!

The SAWC is currently in the third and final year of its first Jobs Fund project titled "Community Rangers as Socio-economic Development Tool", which ends September 2015. The project has been viewed as extremely successful by the National Treasury's Jobs Fund, and is touted as one of its 'flagship' projects. On this basis the Jobs Fund provided the opportunity for SAWC to apply to expand the project. This new project has now been approved!

The two year project, which started in March 2015, is aimed at training and capacity building young people to help address skills shortages within the conservation sector whilst also creating jobs for 257 historically disadvantaged people living in marginalized areas. The project will expand its geographic focus from Mpumalanga to include Limpopo and KZN and will train 137 learners in Year 1 (2015/2016) – 120 Community Rangers, 10 female nature guides and 7 security guards; in Year 2 the focus will be on 120 field rangers. All 257 youth will be employed upon successful completion of their 12-month training programmes. Learner recruitment is currently in progress.

An exciting aspect of the project is that the SAWC will collaborate with employers as partners in delivering a high quality workplace learning experience, which should see these youth integrated into the workplace a lot more easily. In addition, the project has set a gender target of at least



Potential female recruits doing a 10 km walk with backpacks as part of the selection process.

38% females to be trained and employed. The project will also support the skills development efforts for communities who own their own game reserves (Mayibuye and Somkhanda Reserves in KwaZulu Natal) and enhance their capacity to manage these areas.

This project falls into the scope of the College's Protected Area Integrity Business Unit, which helps address field ranger and anti-poaching skills development. As such, the newly trained recruits will also be trained to assist in combatting wildlife crime within the protected wildlife areas in which they are employed and as such, will also help address the current rhino poaching crisis

In developing human capital through transfer of skills and competence as well as facilitating the participation of local communities in the conservation and tourism value chain, the SAWC is, with the support and input of conservation agencies across the region, constantly developing its scope of training to ensure an innovative and unified approach to the sustainable management of

natural resources, conservation areas and wildlife species.

As part of this new project, the South African government via the National Treasury's Jobs Fund will provide 80% of the required funding to support this training; with the College having to source the remaining 20% of the funding required for implementation.

Adequate training is vital if protected areas are to be sustained, and a high priority is also placed on Community-based Natural Resource Management, Poverty Reduction, Alternative Livelihoods and Biodiversity Economy strategies to contribute to biodiversity conservation, socio economic and tourism development.

Projects developed in partnership with, and funded by the National Treasury's Jobs Fund are an example of the College's strategy to help train and involve local communities in the wildlife economy through participation and benefit sharing.

SAWCT INVESTMENT STRATEGY DOVETAILS WITH COLLEGE'S EXPANDED SCOPE OF TRAINING, BOTH REFLECTING A HIGH LEVEL OF SUSTAINABILITY

THE Southern African Wildlife College Trust (SAWCT) continues to support and assist the independence and long-term viability of the College. The primary objective being the delivery of capital growth, within a framework that reflects a high level of sustainability and environmental integrity. The performance of the investments is key in meeting the aims of the Trust and to provide the highly sought-after scholarships, as well as much needed funding for pressing projects in conservation management.

Following on from the success of the SAWC's 2010 – 2014 business plan, the College continues to expand its relevance and reach in line with the training needs of the conservation sector. It has, with the support of partner organisations such as Peace Parks and WWF-SA who sit on the College Board, now developed its 2015 - 2020 business plan, taking deliberate strategic steps to ensure that it continues operating as effectively and efficiently as possible, moving forward in its quest to financial sustainability whilst staying true to its expanded vision and mission.

The College now focuses on providing courses that will not only develop and open up career opportunities for conservation personnel but will also help to transform the biodiversity economy of the region and open up southern Africa's ex-

isting protected area network and broader trans-frontier conservation areas (TFCAs). The College also recognizes that in order to remain relevant in a dynamic sector, there is a need to expand its training to include capacity building mechanisms that allow for the protection of the rights of ordinary people in buffer zones who are the ultimate stewards of land and natural resources.

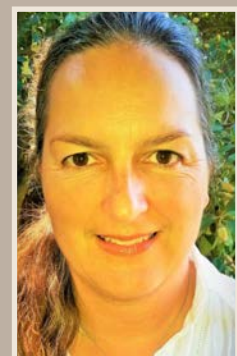
As such, the new Business Plan has also been developed in line with key elements of the National Development Plan and as such will contribute to the goals and objectives of the National Biodiversity Economy Development Strategy and targets of DEA's Vision 2024.

With the above in mind, the Trust has taken similar steps to review its investment, fundraising and communication plan, to ensure it continues to operate successfully whilst supporting the needs of the College.

When the last fundraising contract came to an end (2014), SAWCT appointed the services of a new part-time fundraiser, Janet Wakelin, to work in conjunction with the fundraiser of the College to meet SAWCT's fundraising goals for 2015. Some weaknesses had crept into the Trust's systems, but fortunately, together with the support of WWF, they are being addressed and back-up

processes are being established to ensure that these systems can now operate more seamlessly.

SAWCT is grateful to its donors for their continuing and valued support towards the capital fund without which prudent investment would not be possible. Communication is however key and it is vital that donors receive relevant and requested documentation timeously. To this end, donors are to please kindly submit any corrections and/or updates to their contact details, at their earliest convenience to Janet Wakelin via her cell on +27 (0)82 924 3749 or by email at janet.wakelin@gmail.com



Janet Wakelin

RESEARCH CAMP LAUNCHED

During 2014 the SAWC's Research Camp started becoming a reality when funds provided by NORHED allowed building to commence. The construction and erection of the six safari tents, situated close to the southern border of the SAWC fence-line, was completed by the closing of December 2014 and fully furnished during the first few of months of 2015. The official launch of the tents was celebrated by senior management on 13 March, and the tents were then occupied with their first guests as of 15 March 2015. They are now fully operational and have a self-catering component that distinguishes this accommodation from

the rest of the College's accommodation and facilities. The camp facilities also include a boma and the use of a communal kitchen upon request.

The tents were built as a result of the need for a fully functional research unit with the long term vision of creating and developing environmental best practice. This will address the needs within the conservation and environmental sector, which in turn will reinforce the College's curriculum with the most up-to-date development and research information possible.

The College's sincere thanks is extended to NORHED for making the funds available for the infrastructure to be built and in essence investing in the long term vision and mission of the College. We would also like to thank our Executive Manager of Operations, Mr. Andre Cornelius and his maintenance department for working tirelessly to finish the building process, as well as everyone that helped to get the camp fully furnished. Thanks must also go to the Hospitality Department for assisting and taking up the management of the housekeeping side.



CBNRM MOTIVATION PIECE - DELIVERED BY MASIYE MASIYE (ADVANCED CERTIFICATE STUDENT)

Fellow excellencies, members of states and the world over;

There are three key issues we are gathered here to address and these are; radical Islam across a large part of Africa, crime in Africa's big cities and the frightening increase in poaching; especially of rhino and elephant.

World peace is potentially out of reach as people lose control yet learned men and women sit around conference tables with the intention of restoring world peace and establishing lasting solutions. The woes befalling the entire globe have however reached levels beyond any predictable scale. The root causes being radicalism and the uneven sharing and distribution of resources at local, community, national and international level.

The world today is dominated by greed at every level and scale with the globe's wealth being collected and amassed by a handful of individuals to the point of them being richer than some states. Many of these supposed leaders sponsor crime, recruit hand men and establish territories which do not benefit communities or the world at large but only serve their own interests. Many parts of the continent of Africa are characterized by violence and terrorism. As such, it would be true to say that the world is at the brink of submerging into crisis management.

The driving force of this scourge is abject poverty. Individuals, gangs and groups are being forced to live lawless lives to try and secure some form of income. All governments have laws and legislations in place trying to direct and enforce appropriate conduct and conformity to state stipulations and required standards for native and visitor communities, but all seems to fail because the question of poverty is left unattended. Rhino and elephant poaching is increasing beyond any manageable level and all measures to combat wildlife crime is providing void of any long term and lasting solutions. Individuals and groups of poachers are being shot and killed when found in the act, others are apprehended and depending on the law enforced, suitably punished or

imprisoned. This is however not enough of a deterrent as the rewards outweigh the risks. In addition, the agenda to accommodate rural and urban youth into innovative and responsible endeavours so as to meet their basic needs has also failed, hence the fact that they end up being used to perpetrate crimes rather than developing themselves and their communities.

In looking at solutions and using an approach such as Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) anarchy, rebelliousness and an outlaw society can be substantially reduced and minimised to a level far below than what Africa is currently experiencing. Communities are being deprived and denied access to the benefits provided by the natural resources found locally. Instead government officials are benefiting. As a result, communities are impoverished and with little means of changing the situation, they end up being used to perpetrate crimes such as poaching, robbery, dealing or transporting drugs or being recruited as war soldiers to revolt. Often not by choice, but compelled by poverty and the need to survive in a world where the cost of living is too high.

CBNRM is a mode or method by which marginalised and ostracised communities are given power, ownership, authority and responsibilities to conserve, manage, control and utilise these resources to positively benefit not only today but also to ensure the viability of these resources for generations to come. This ensures that local communities are given property rights and as such are able to sell, transfer, use the resources whilst also being able to exclude anyone likely to exploit these resources for their own benefit. Their decisions over the resource base are not subject to external influences by either government or any agents, instead the community themselves take decisions of their own on how to manage and use their resources. Youths can be contracted, engaged and get committed into meaningful employment for short and long term contracts as well as permanent ones, which can reduce big rural-urban migration of the youths in search of employment. It has become ap-

parent that cities get crowded by these large scale migrations and because of a lack of work, youths with nothing to do for a living form gangs often engineered by the ring leaders of crime. As a result crime such as commercial poaching and cross border trafficking thrive. In addition, some become war lords contracted to overthrow states in order to earn a living, and this despite being paid peanuts by those perpetrating these crimes. State management of natural resources is no longer politically and economically viable. By using paramilitary methods to enforce natural resource legislation instead of devolving authority to communities, the transactional cost of managing natural resources increases.

There is no doubt that CBNRM has some of its own challenges due to the fact that natural resources are limited and their supply not endless and, in instances of ecological disasters, everything can be lost. However, fewer individuals can take advantage of the illiterate or misappropriate funds at the expense of others. Expectations can sometimes also be too high with people wanting to benefit before production can meet demand. Communities are also in many cases financially unable to facilitate the necessary initiatives which hampers their ability to be self supportive. In turn they may need to rely on external entities which can overrule the community. The other most challenging factor to CBNRM is high human population increase, which exerts high pressure on the resources as the level and number of users increase. In the face of this pressure the eco-system is negatively impacted and the production level of the natural system falls below average and this factor threatens life on the face of the earth. Despite these challenges, CBNRM is the only hope for the future because it teaches responsible public behaviour through good governance practices. It also facilitates a change in moral code ensuring a respect for nature and its life support systems. In addition, it teaches society to refrain from being wasteful and reckless users and converts people to belong to a global community that cares about tomorrow and the future.

RESOURCE CENTRE RECEIVES BOOK DONATION

The Bat Conservation Africa (B.C.A.) and the Harrison Institute have been awarded a grant from The Rufford Foundation to enable full sets of Mammals of Africa to be purchased and distributed to selected research institutions in Africa. The purpose of the grant is to enable institutions that are unable to afford to buy their own set of Mammals of Africa (6 volumes) to benefit from this valuable research resource.

The College was nominated as a recipient and the recommendation was supported by a judging panel.

On 26 February 2015, the full set was received after months of anticipation from our lecturers and students.



From left front: Sunel Lindeque (SAWC), Ms. Melina Maanje (Zambia), Mr. Nicaise Ngoulou (Congo), Mr. Francis Chitsa (Zimbabwe), Mr. Stener Masiye (Malawi), Mr. Jealous Henry Mdaka (SA), Annelize Steyn (SAWC), From right back: Ms. Mukwa Sikwana (Namibia), Mr. Pintos Chauque (Mozambique), Mr. David Mohapi (Lesotho), Mr. Habte Tadesse (Ethiopia)

WILDLIFE AREA MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

I can scarcely believe that as I write this, the Higher and Advanced Certificate students are already quietly studying for their first semester exams! Although it seems as if the year has only just begun, a lot has happened in a very short period of time, but then this is the way that things work in our "long courses" department.

One change that was made early on this year was the renaming of the department from Higher Education and Training to Wildlife Area Management Qualifications (WAMQ). It was felt that the HET designation means little to anyone in conservation, whereas the WAMQ does. I confess to not being very fond of the name to start with but it does make sense and has been growing on me.

Over the last three months, I have been privileged to have been led and guided by Annelize Steyn in running the WAMQ department. Her dedication and efforts in the department over the last few years has created working systems and methods that facilitated a very easy transition for me from full time lecturing into managing the department. I still find myself under her wing and know that help or support is but a step away.

I must also mention how supportive our course co-ordinator Auswell Machabe has been. With his "can do" attitude Auswell simply gets the job done. Not only is he invaluable in the day to day running of the courses, but his natural gregarious personality makes him an excellent link and connection between the students and the College.

No article about the WAMQ department would be complete without mentioning the incredible fundraising efforts put in behind the scenes by Jeanné Poultney and Theresa Sowry. Thank you Mesdames your efforts help ensure that our students can, through donor funding, complete their studies and go on to contribute to conservation efforts across the region.

Of course our students have made all our efforts at the College worthwhile and we wish them the very best of luck with the exams and for a speedy and safe return to their workplaces to join their friends and families once more. This practical phase of their learning is one of the most important, in that it gives them the opportunity to show what they have learned and to put into practice the skills and knowledge they have garnered in the last few months. It will also be a telling time for them. Few conservation organisations in Africa have the resources and equipment that best practises may dictate they use. At the College, we try to provide our students with alternative methods of getting good conservation results.

The hard reality of the workplace will test them and their creativity so that in the second semester they will come back with a long list of questions and queries about how best to solve or overcome this problem or that. I look forward to taking up the challenge again in August after the students return from their workplaces having completed various practical assignments and assessments.

Malcolm Douglas: Manager: Wildlife Area Management Qualifications

ACADEMIC COMPLIANCE AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT

This semester has been a very busy period with compliance issues regarding both FET and HET programmes.

Due to a couple of processes happening simultaneously, I thought it a good idea to explain some of the processes to our students and stakeholders, in order for you to understand some of the complexities of the compliance regulations of an education institution, and to inform you of our current status.

The Higher Education Act, 1997, makes it a requirement for a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) offering higher education to register with the Department of Education (DoE). The registration of a PHEI, in accordance with the Act, applies only to institutions that offer learning programmes that result in the awarding of whole qualifications such as certificates, diplomas or degrees at levels 5 – 8 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Registration, as required by the Act, means that an institution is granted the legal authority to offer accredited higher education programmes and qualifications.

The aim of this registration is to ensure that all registered PHE Institutions offer an acceptable quality of education; that current and prospective students receive higher education from institutions that have the resources, capacity and/or expertise to deliver quality programmes and the students obtain qualifications that are aligned to the NQF. Registration can thus be seen as a means of protecting the integrity of the higher education system and the interests of the students.

The College's provisional registration as a PHEI in terms of the Higher Education Act expired 31 December 2014. In addition, the provisional accreditation by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) to offer our two approved higher education programmes (Higher and Advanced Certificates) also expired on 31 December 2014. The College was scheduled for a re-accreditation review by the HEQC (CHE) in 2014, given that our accreditation was due to expire. Due to the fact that the re-accreditation review process of the PHEI's by the HEQC (CHE) was not completed by December 2014, and in order to accommodate for the finalisation of this accreditation review process, the HEQC has extended the duration of the College's registration cycle from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2016, pending the outcome of the re-accreditation review. This re-accreditation application was duly submitted in February 2015. The re-accreditation is a process of reflecting on challenges and improvements made by the institution since its initial accreditation or as part of a second cycle of approval.

After a period of provisional registration, an institution may apply for conversion of its provisional registration. Therefore, simultaneously, with the above mentioned processes at the end of 2014, the College submitted an application for conversion of its provisional registration status. In determining an application for conversion, the Registrar of PHE Institutions takes into consideration the performance of the applicant in the course of its provisional registration period. The following main requirements are contemplated:

The applicant must provide proof that its income is or will be sufficient to sustain the programmes in an acceptable manner, and that it maintains its financial surety or guarantees to meet its obligations to its enrolled students. The application must also be supported by an application for institutional and programme re-accreditation by the HEQC, which we have done.

Apart from completing these processes, in addition, the SAWC's provisional registration as a private FET College also expired on 31 December 2014. Institutions offering qualifications that are on Occupational Qualifications Framework (OQF) and are accredited by QCTO will in future no longer be required to be registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training, but may still proceed with offering of qualifications and programmes on the OQF, provided that the quality is maintained through the mandate of QCTO and CATHS-SETA, the sector education and training authority.

The DHET, together with its watchdog, the HEQC (CHE) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) have shown in the last couple of years that they are really trying to uplift the whole education system, and are working much closer together in their pursuit of quality. This does not make for an easy process but certainly remains a necessity!

In the next couple of Bateleur issues, I will explain a bit more on the mandate of each of these bodies...

Annelize Steyn: Head: Academic Compliance and Quality Management

SAWC ADVANCED CLASS HOME-STAY WITH MAKULEKE VILLAGE, NORTHERN KRUGER NATIONAL PARK FOR CBNRM MODULE

Authors: Memory Misozi, Prisca Chirozva, Nathaniel M. Simayumbula, Stener Masiye, Mukwa Sikwana, Nyambe Kalaluka, Mandla Lubusi, and Harvey Simpemba

We, a group of 24 Advanced Certificate students visited Makuleke Community as part of our community conservation training to gain more knowledge and understanding of CBNRM.

The Makulekes were forcefully removed from their ancestral land in Kruger National Park in 1969. Post 1994 the Makuleke formed a Common Property Association (CPA), in terms of Section 2(1)(a) of the Communal Property Association Act, 1996 (Act no. 28 of 1996) and claimed back their land. The Makuleke land claim was finalized in 1998 with a settlement agreement with Kruger National Park, and a Joint Management Board was formed.

On our field trip we learnt a lot about the Makuleke governance model and how they manage their resources. In general, we were so overwhelmed by how organized the Makuleke Traditional Authority and executive committee of the CPA are. They seem very keen and dedicated as a community striving to develop a true and working CBNRM module. One thing for sure that comes in everyone's mind is the question "is their current model a true working model?"

The community has now adopted an adaptive management approach using a working tool called the Governance Dashboard, which has been introduced to them by Southern African Wildlife College trainings through the CBNRM module. The Governance Dashboard is an instrument which is utilised by the CPA to measure their own performance and to improve their CBNRM. The instrument works as an indicator to show if the CPA CBNRM is working well or not and highlights areas for improvement.

Questionnaires were developed during the training and used to interview people in the three villages of Makuleke: Makulekes, Qaza (Mabiligwe) and Makahlule" so that the CPA's members can share their views regarding their resources and benefits. There were three colours used (colours of traffic lights) that indicated results presented back to the community, these were green, yellow/amber and red. When the results are red this indicates that "things are not well" and indicates where there is a need for adaptive management, yellow/amber means "caution" something has to be done as soon as possible to avoid problems and green gives an indication that "things are going well".

The instrument provides clear indication whether there is transparency in governance of the CPA, accountability, and if the CPA is reactive in terms of solving problems and if the CPA follows the rule of law. Results from the interviewed people pointed out both positive and negative aspects.

The Makuleke Community entertained us with their cultural dances and songs which have meanings attached. We were also fortunate to visit the lodges partnering with the CPA based in Makuleke's protected area, namely Outpost and two others which are under construction on the Levuvu River, one which was Wilderness Safaris Camp and later sold to Elsmo Investment and a small camp under the trade name called Return Africa.

The photo below shows the "role play" by the Makuleke. The role play took place at Makuleke Cultural Centre and Bed and Breakfast and demonstrated the forceful removal from their ancestral land to where there are now.



Students interviewing Makuleke village member for dashboard: Photo taken by SAWC Students

The story was interesting and heartfelt, with many sad emotions felt by the students. This Cultural Centre and Bed and Breakfast was established in 2007 as a cultural hub for the community and a home-stay for guests, researchers, students, stakeholders and "friends of the Makuleke".

Although Makuleke is working hard towards a successful CBNRM model they also have challenges. These include the income, which they generate from eco-tourism projects that is not enough to reach their large membership (roughly 15 000 people). There is thus a need to improve their eco-tourism projects so that the CPA can generate more income and in so doing be more effective in reaching members. Other challenges include high expectations from members

and increasingly low turn up of members in general meetings.

The visit to Makuleke has really enlightened the Advanced Certificate class of 2015 about CBNRM. "We have learnt a lot from the community of Makuleke and how their culture is preserved through CBNRM, how they welcome visitors with open hearts and how best they care for their natural resources in their contractual park which is proudly done through community based conservation." said one of the students.

Special thanks must go to SAWC management for making conservation education a reality across SADC and Africa at large, lecturers Mrs. Sandy du Plessis and Mr. Bongani Baloyi for the training of the governance dashboard; SAWC Driver Mr. Willis Zita as well as to the entire group of students for their effort in making this trip successful. Finally, our sincere thanks is extended to the Makuleke community for the warm welcome and many lessons we received.



The Makuleke community performing a role play about their rich history: Photo taken by SAWC Students

SUSTAINABLE USE AND FIELD GUIDING DEPARTMENT



Every elephant herd encountered during the Marula season has numerous new-born calves at foot.

Elephants and the Marula Season

During the months of January and February (and into the first week of March as well this year), the ripening fruits of the Marula tree (*Sclerocarya birrea*) attracted hordes of elephant to the Wildlife College's training area. The usual cow elephant breeding herds and an influx of bulls spoil us with training opportunities.

Especially interesting was the number of bulls very obviously in musth which were observed during this 'time of plenty'. Most of the younger bulls (those in the 15-20 year age bracket) and just about every one of the big old gentlemen aged to be in their mid forties and which were encountered, showed signs of being in musth.

Musth is a period of elevated testosterone levels in sexually mature bulls. It causes them to dribble urine continually. To us humans they smell offensively at this time, while their temporal glands also swell and exude more fluid than normal. It is also not uncommon for bulls in musth to become belligerent and potentially aggressive while they search for receptive cows in this hormonally pumped-up state.

The elephant oestrus cycle lasts 14 to 16 weeks. What makes this period unusual when compared to other animals is that there are two surges of luteinizing hormone during the 4 to 6 week long follicular. It is speculated that the reason for this is to change a cow's body odour, and this is what stimulates bulls to come into musth.

Another interesting observation was the sheer number of newborn baby elephants seen during this time as well. The elephant gestation period is approximately 22 months in duration. This would suggest that the cows with young calves at foot at this time were mated with during the same season two years previously.

Although baby elephants appear to be born throughout the year, there is no doubt the nutritional benefit of the marula season means it's the preferred mating season as well, and this is why most of the bulls observed were in musth.

The marula season was also a time of plenty for the Sustainable Use and Field Guiding Department. On occasions, our students experienced

multiple approaches on up to four different bull elephants in a single afternoon!

In turn each student tracked, stalked, approached, and then extracted his 'client' from the close proximity of the bulls, often without disturbing them. They also interacted with some of the bulls to familiarise themselves with the body language of these massive creatures, and their response to the close proximity of *Homo sapiens*.

The skill and confidence of the students grew exponentially while working with elephants over this period. These unique training opportunities are enabling the Southern African Wildlife College to produce well-trained learner Professional Hunters and Guides and we feel confident that they will be snapped up by the ethical, conservation orientated outfitters within the safari industry.

Dr. Kevin Robertson



Some Marula trees are incredibly productive!



Up close and personal encounters with bull elephants over this time provided fantastic training opportunities for the PH students.

Gawie's Field News

As the sun sets after another blistering hot day, the last rays of sunlight catch the tops of tall grass stalks turning them a brilliant gold. A cloud of dust is churned up all around a herd of buffalo hastily making their way to the waterhole to quench a desperate thirst. As you wipe the sweat off your brow and contemplate the dust smear it left on the back of your hand; it's difficult to imagine that we are already entering the month of April.

In the last few years of above average rainfall, with slight to severe floods being the norm rather than the exception, we have become used to seeing the bush a lush tropical green. This year however, come the end of March we had only received about half the average rainfall for the season. The result is that the larger pans never filled to the brim, the Timbavati River was never more than just a trickle and even that is all but gone. The rainy season is however not over, and there is still hope. Looking back at the rainfall for April in the last few years it shows that although April is at the end of the rainy season it has been rather wet in most of the years. In 2013 for example we received a whopping 100 mm during the Easter weekend alone. Let's hold thumbs because if we don't get good rains soon, this dry season is going to be a tough one.

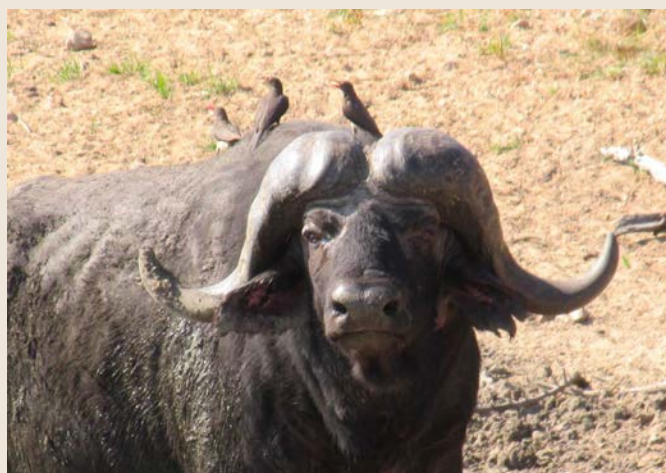
Game viewing has been sporadic in the last few weeks. The Marula season produced some fantastic elephant sightings with both bull and cow herds forming part of most afternoon outings with the PH students. Making use of the agreement between ourselves and Ngala we go out at 13:00 every afternoon and usually head straight for the Timbavati River. This has proved a great way to track down and find those elusive old buffalo bulls and we have managed to see quite a number of good bulls almost every afternoon. Big herds are still scarce this side of the world but if the dry weather continues that might change. We live in hope. That said, we have managed to encounter some lion that also inhabit the area. So far the lions have behaved themselves even when bumped into on foot. A couple of leopard sightings on the main entrance road have also been reported by various staff members as they arrive for work.

I haven't noticed the usual influx of zebra and wildebeest this year and only speculate as to why. I put this down to the lack of good rains and the lack of surface water. The mating season of impala still seem to be on track though with the roaring of rutting males that can be heard whenever you venture outdoors.

As for other general game, kudu seems to be doing well with number of small family herds spotted regularly as well as few groups of good mature bulls ghosting through the thick bush. Giraffe make a frequent turn around the College along with the resident warthogs.

This time of year is also marked with an increase in snake activity, especially puff adders. It is mating season and also the last chance to build up some fat reserves before winter. Almost not a day goes by that I do not get called out to remove a snake of some sort from someone's house or room with no less than three separate puff adders in one day. A small Mozambican spitting cobra also caused a slight traffic jam on the pathway after lunch one afternoon. He was lazily crossing over the pathway until he was confronted by a group of students returning from class. Typical of youthful bravado he curled up in a corner and refused to let the students pass until I gently showed him a safer and more peaceful way to spend his day.

Well that's all for now. I will keep you posted as to how the dry season is progressing.



With Compliments

Southern African Wildlife College

Private Bag X3015, Hoedspruit, 1380, South Africa.

Tel: +27 (15) 793-7300

Fax: +27 (15) 793-7314

e-mail: info@sawc.org.za

www.wildlifecollege.org.za



Directors: Dr. I.B. Mkhize (Chairman), Mr. I. Goodwin, Countess. S. Labia, Mrs. L.M. Lynch, Mr. O.E. Mokganedi, Mr. W. Myburgh, Dr. G. Raven, Prof. B.K. Reilly, Dr. B. Soto (Mozambique), Mrs. T. Sowry.

