



MEDIA RELEASE

ISSUED BY: THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE

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### **WILDLIFE COLLEGE HELPS BRIDGE THE GAP FOR ASPIRING CONSERVATIONISTS**

The Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) recently bade farewell to the Conservation and Environmental Education bridging programme class of 2016. Their victory over this challenging six month course was marked by songs of celebration which filled the air as the 23 learners left the parade ground after their final drill.

This year's course attracted youth from five provinces namely; Limpopo, Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and Western Cape. In gaining entrance into a career in Nature Conservation and or Environmental Education, the learners spent four months at the College during which time they attended first aid, snake handling, environmental education, environmental leadership and unarmed field ranger training. This then also prepared them for their two months experiential work placement in state owned nature reserves. The learners were involved in activities ranging from general conservation guardianship, identification of fauna and flora, fence patrols, tracking and apprehending small game poachers, environmental education with schools, and engagement with communities neighbouring their reserves/ workplaces.

Attended by local stakeholders such as the Kruger 2 Canyon biosphere, Limpopo Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET), the Timbavati Foundation, Mnisi Tribal Authority, Klaserie Children's eco-training (KCET) and of course proud family and friends of the graduates, the graduation ceremony started with a passing out parade led by the SAWC's African Field Ranger Training Services instructor, Mishack Sithole.

The learners were all lined on the parade ground and led by the instructor they proceeded to demonstrate their drill formations. The Community, Youth Development and Access business unit manager Christopher Kafoteka opened the programme with a word of welcome to the guests. Student representative and Klaserie Children's eco-training (KCET) schools coordinator Queen Manyike delivered a speech about the group's collective learning experience and spoke about how the course has opened the door to their future careers or further training whilst also upgrading their skills so they can better serve their communities and local schools. Xolani Mongwe, a previous learner on the programme who is currently under the employ of LEDET then addressed the guests as one of the learner mentors in Manombe Reserve where the learners were work placed. He echoed the importance of this programme in terms of providing opportunities for the learners as future conservationists and went on to drive home the significance of living a passionate life and giving back to the community.

Sboniso Phakathi, the Project Coordinator, thanked the funders for their commitment to providing South Africa's youth with access to training opportunities. The programme's supporters include the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust who has funded the course since its inception in 2010, Swiss-based 'Friends of African Wildlife', the Timbavati Foundation, as well as the Rand Merchant Bank Fund who provided a three-year commitment to the programme.

"Aimed at bridging the gap for school leavers from historically disadvantaged communities who want to follow a career in conservation but do not have the necessary credits, tools or funding to do so, this programme has become an integral part of the College's curriculum," said Phakathi. "For the first time this year, the course will also be offered to learners from the SADC region as an additional programme funded by United for Wildlife through the support of The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry," he added.

Ends

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**The primary objective of the Southern African Wildlife College, which is located 10km west of the Orpen Gate to the Kruger National Park, is to provide people from Africa with the required motivation and the relevant skills to manage and conserve their protected areas and associated flora and fauna on a sustainable basis in cooperation with local communities. In doing so, the College aims to ensure that the region's rich biological diversity, and its threatened species are conserved and that the parks, if well managed, become focal points for rural development and economic growth thereby breaking the poverty cycle and making a substantial contribution to the economic activity in the region.**

**CAPTIONS: SOUTHERN AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE 2016 BRIDGING COURSE GRADUATION  
(Included are three visuals)**



(1) The Youth Access Conservation and Environmental Education learners demonstrate their drill formations.



(2) The learners show their excitement before the graduation ceremony



(3) The deserving learners are congratulated by family members and mentors.