



MEDIA RELEASE

ISSUED BY: THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE

MARCH 2016

Leader of the Packs

Poacher Alert! American houndsman extraordinaire Joe Braman is bringing his crime-fighting, dog-training expertise to the Southern African Wildlife College.

When Joe Braman met SANPark's Section Ranger Richard Sowry via a mutual friend and houndsman Wade Ruddock, Braman had no idea he'd soon be spending a month at the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) in the Greater Kruger National Park helping to take the K9 programme to the next level.

"When I found out what is really going on in South Africa - how serious the rhino poaching crisis is - I thought, if I can do something to help, I'm going to do it!" said the larger-than-life Texan.

With 35 years of experience as an expert houndsman in Texas, Braman is uniquely qualified to help shape the College's K9 programme.

Currently, the dogs are trained to track poachers on a leash with their handlers. The programme has been getting good results and garnering both local and international attention, but "we knew if we could get the dogs to track freely as a pack, they would be even more successful," says Johan van Straaten, the programme's Dog Master. In packs, dogs fitted with GPS collars, would be able to find the suspects faster, and hold them at bay until the helicopters and law enforcement teams arrive at the scene to make arrests.

When he understood what a difference he could make in tackling South Africa's rhino poaching crisis, Braman agreed to spend a month at the Southern African Wildlife College working with van Straaten and his team whilst also drawing on Sowry's experience in the field to evaluate the dogs and the College's K9 programme.

"Johan has done a great job teaching these dogs to track poachers. The breeds being trained now (Malinois and Fox Hound) have the nose to track, but what is apparent is that they don't have the aggression to hold the suspect at the end. For a free running pack, we need a breed that wants to and is able to apprehend at the end," notes Braman.

The new dogs will be a cross between Black and Tan and Redbone breeds. These dogs have been bred for nearly a century in the United States to track humans for law enforcement purposes. Twenty three of these puppies were born recently, and Braman plans to bring them to South Africa as soon as possible. Once these packs are introduced to the anti-poaching arsenal, Braman anticipates the pack will increase the apprehension rate to between 50-60%.

The dogs will track for 30 to 40 kilometres, and then use whatever force is necessary to hold the suspects once they've caught up to them. If the suspect fights, the dogs will too. "But if the person stops fighting, the dogs will become passive.

"Running a pack is like coaching a football team. After 35 years, I know how to coach a team," says Braman, who believes that these new "players" might just be the ones to help change the game.

"Using pack dogs will change the nature of the whole programme," confirms Johan. "We're so excited about the possibilities and the fact that Jo has come on board in such a big way!"

Braman is equally excited to be part of this initiative. "This is one of the most rewarding things I've done in my life," he said.

The establishment of the SAWC K9 Training Unit is a necessary link in the anti-poaching tool kit. "To bolster anti-poaching efforts, the SAWC now uses a four-tiered approach to anti-poaching training and implementation," says SAWC CEO, Theresa Sowry. "Step 1: We need to have well-trained and equipped rangers; Step 2: To have aerial surveillance to plot and monitor rhino movements and, during an operation to try and suppress poachers so they do not break cover; Step 3: To have a K9 capability by adding tracker dogs to the field ranger teams. This is primarily as a result of dogs being able to track at speeds much faster than people, and in terrain where the best human trackers would lose spoor and; Step 4: Community involvement where we are trying to ensure community beneficiation and support via governance structures through the development of the wildlife economy.

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The Southern African Wildlife College, which is located 10km west of the Kruger National Park in South Africa, is a non-profit organization delivering conservation education as well as training and skills development programmes to help ensure the region's rich biological diversity and ensure that its threatened species are conserved and protected. In doing so, the College provide tomorrow's conservation leaders, field rangers and the community with the skills needed to become partners in saving the continent's natural heritage.

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CAPTIONS: Southern African Wildlife College:-

(Included are 3 visuals –all available in high res)

Below: American houndsman extraordinaire Joe Braman heads out into the field with members of the Southern African Wildlife College’s K9 unit.



Below: Wisdom Makhubele, Dog Handler and Johan van Straaten, Dog Master of the SAWC K9 unit, (left) with Joe Braman (right) during a training session.



Below: Joe Braman with the SAWC pack Hounds

