SOUTHERN AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE

The Bateleur

Private Bag X3015, Hoedspruit 1380, South Africa Telephone: +27 (0)15 793 7300 Fax: +27 (0)15 7937314 e-mail: info@sawc.org.za www.wildlifecollege.org.za

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SAWC CEO PRESENTS THE COLLEGE "STORY" AT GALA DINNER IN DALLAS

The SAWC CEO, Theresa Sowry, was invited to the Dallas Safari Convention in Texas during January 2017. Theresa presented the SAWC 'story' at a gala dinner supported by over 1000 people. The presentation covered not only a reflection on the financial support the SAWC receives from the Dallas Safari Club Foundation, but she was also requested to specifically address how the SAWC's training programmes have been adapted to address poaching, with inclusion of the College's K9 asset.

As a direct result of this trip to the USA, the SAWC was put in touch with Joe Braman, an elite Houndsman in Texas. See article on Joe and the amazing work he is doing with our K9 unit. A big thank you to the DSCF for sponsoring the trip to Texas, and enabling a number of strategic contacts to be made in the USA.

At the event, Theresa and Richard Sowry (right) met up with Ivan and Ashleigh Carter. Ivan who hails from Zimbabwe is a conservationist, professional guide, photographer and keen supporter of the College. He is also the host of Carter's W.A.R. a popular television series which helps peel back the complex layers of African human/wildlife conflict, including the rampant poaching of elephants and rhinos.

In Ivan's own words…"For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated with the wild. As a child it was learning the art of falconry, collecting butterflies and assisting wherever and whenever possible with field research in wild places. I see the show "Carter's WAR" as a way to help generate an understanding of the many complex issues that threaten the balance on our beautiful continent – I am hopeful that people will become emotionally engaged in the stories and help make a difference."

FRIENDS OF AFRICAN WILDLIFE SUPPORTERS, WALTER AND MONICA STEIGER AND MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT, GARY MILLER VISIT THE COLLEGE

The College recently welcomed Monica and Walter Steiger to the College. They spent an enjoyable few days interacting with the Wildlife Area Management students, learning more about the work of the College and its various projects whilst also having some fun out at a bush dinner and in the field with the K9 unit.

They were also able to take a short flight with Bruce McDonald the College's Pilot who flew them over the College and parts of the Greater Kruger National Park. On the way to the airport they visited one of the local rhino orphanages gaining first hand knowledge of the work being done to protect these young rhino that have lost their mothers to poaching.

It was a short visit but the College staff really enjoyed once again being able to personally show Friends of African Wildlife supporters around the College and to introduce them to some of the recipients who are benefitting from their support.

Management Consultant, Gary Miller who has over thirty years leadership experience in conservation and has worked in over 30 countries with WWF International and the Canadian Development Agency, was also recently at the College providing support in terms of staff development and team management.

This was Gary's second visit to the College during which time he was able to spend time with Ruben de Kock, who heads up the Protected Area Integrity business unit including African Field Ranger Training Services, the K9 Unit and the Bathawk project. Ruben benefitted enormously from Gary's input and experience in terms of his business and people management skills. Gary has now returned to his home in Switzerland but we hope to have him back with us again soon.

Having fun during a bush dinner are from left: Gary Miller, Dr Kevin Robertson who heads up the College's Sustainable Use and Field Guiding Department, Jeanné Poultney Executive Manager: Marketing and Fundraising, Walter and Monica Steiger and Catherine Robertson.

DEPARTMENT NAME CHANGE: ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

2017 certainly started with a great deal of enthusiasm which saw the department changing its name from Academic Compliance and Quality Management (ACQM) to Academic Support and Quality Assurance (ASQA)

The change from "compliance" to "support" more accurately portrays the inclusivity and contributory nature of the department towards the activities of the College and its various academic functions. The change from "management" to "assurance" shows with greater clarity the way in which the department ensures the highest possible quality performance of its duties as opposed to the previous implication of merely overseeing the functions and activities of the department.

We trust that this department will continue to lead by example and support our colleagues across all core functions, departments and training programmes.

Anelle Rautenbach
Head: Academic Support & Quality Assurance

APPLIED LEARNING UNIT

The Applied Learning Unit has been created to facilitate monitoring, evaluation, research and application in all departments at the College. Monitoring allows a department to collect information in a logical and robust way so that it can be properly evaluated. Research allows us to trial new techniques and or applications and or make changes to current methods and assess what impact these new or changed techniques have. As a training institution, we are in the fortunate position to be able to teach and engage with students on the lessons we learn during this process.

This will help us achieve our aim of making our teaching and curriculums applied rather than theoretical, with a focus on real issues faced by students and practitioners in their work. This is relevant to all sectors within the College but especially to the College's business units and core departments, which have the most direct links to the wildlife economy. The outcomes of this applied learning will be:

- Teaching in a relevant, current and applied work orientated way.
- Keeping up to date with relevant techniques in these fields.
- Being pioneers in the improvement of techniques in these fields.
- Publishing a peer reviewed article, or an article in a respected publication, per annum from each business unit, each unit having at least one by the end of 2018.
- Producing an Annual "Journal" with project and research results of all College departments, business units and core, starting 2017.
- Forging new and improved links with partners, other institutions and in the industry as a whole.

There are already some very exciting projects underway!

A new staff member joined the Applied Learning Unit at the end of February, Iuan Gray. This position has been funded, for a year, by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT). Iuan will utilise, train, and advise on appropriate data collection and analysis methods. This will allow more efficient data collection, analysis, use, and reporting, in the conservation sector generally, and more specifically, for anti-poaching/law enforcement operations.
Iuan will teach the use of standardised data collection tools (such as SMART, Cmore and others) to collect, analyse and report on data, to apply predictive modelling and patrol optimization algorithms. In addition Iuan will use the data generated from these, and other methodologies, to teach wildlife crime analysis with reference to protected areas. Iuan will have a close working relationships with staff at the SAWC, EWT, PPF, CSIR and the GKEPF and its member reserves.

Dr Alan Gardiner

Dr Cleo Graf

Iuan Gray

COMMUNITY, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND ACCESS

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

The College welcomes the RSA Bridging Course Learners

The beginning of February saw 24 young people aged between 18 and 26, from various provinces across South Africa arriving at the College. Their objective to complete the Youth Access: Conservation and Environmental Bridging Programme. This course will enable them to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and solve environmental challenges in their respective areas. Since its inception in 2010, with the view to bridging learners from historically disadvantaged communities into the conservation and environmental sector, the course has grown steadfastly with the continued support of donors such as the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust (Managed by Nedbank Private Wealth), First Rand Foundation's Rand Merchant Bank Fund, Friends of African Wildlife, Bextrans and the Timbavati Foundation

On completion of the course the learners will receive a certificate in conservation and environmental education, NQF Level 2. Having also had the opportunity to complete an applied learning component as a field ranger, these learners will either go on to further study having now received the necessary credits or will go on to find gainful employment in the sector.

LEARNERSHIPS

Learners employed by the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) from the community adjacent to ECPTA Reserves, are now attending the learnership's third training block. Funded by CATHSSETA, the sector education and training authority, this ECPTA Resource Guardianship NQF level 2 Learnership programme started in August 2016 and will be completed by mid-June 2017. The training resumed in mid-January after the learners returned from their respective work places. The training is offered at the Thomas Baines Nature Reserve within the area covered by the ECPTA.

Trainer Barend Visser demonstrates how to use a compass.

WILDLIFE AREA MANAGEMENT

WILDLIFE AREA MANAGEMENT QUALIFICATIONS DEPARTMENT WELCOMES ITS STUDENTS

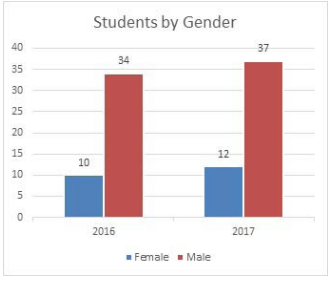
The College Christmas break is always one of mixed blessings for the Wildlife Area Management Qualifications department!

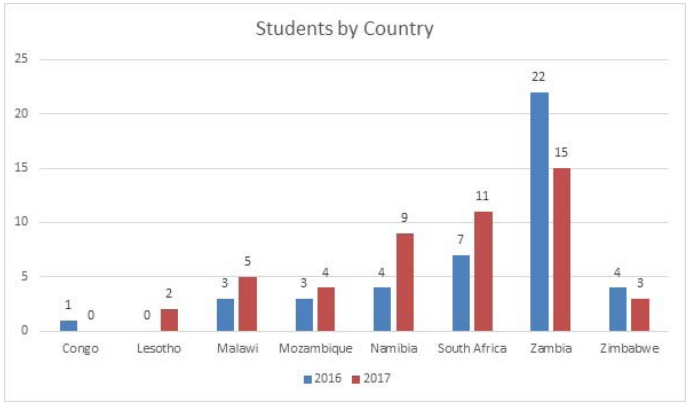
On the one hand it is a time to relax and reflect on the year just past, but it is also a time in which we anxiously await final confirmation of which students will arrive on site at the start of the first semester in the new year. This last holiday season I looked back with gratitude on the dedicated and disciplined student group I was privileged to manage, teach and mentor in 2016. I also looked forward to meeting the new student "intake" and mused as to the sorts of personalities and challenges that they would bring to 2017. My worries about the 2017 student intake were soon over as the first students began to arrive and the flurry of the new academic year was upon us.

It is always good to see returning students and this year we have a good number that have rolled over from the Higher Certificate to the Advanced Certificate. I believe in this strategy and support them as far as possible by motivating their return to employers. The benefits that they have gained over the previous year are built on consolidating their knowledge and skills. It is this that makes these students valuable assets to the conservation industry in sub-Saharan Africa.

Over the years the SAWC has developed tremendous ties with many African countries and continues to expand its reputation and influence in the region. Penetration of our training into African wildlife areas is ever-expanding. This year our students represent seven countries and seventeen different conservation organisations. The flags of South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Lesotho fly proudly today in our corner of the bushveld.

Women comprise roughly a quarter of our group this year which although not ideal, is good. Our student selection criteria are quite clear and every student is evaluated against them. We have no country, gender or other quotas to meet, so the figures shown here represent selection based on individual merit. As a percentage, we receive far fewer applications from women than men, but the individual applicant quality seems to be higher. Sourcing good female candidates is an ongoing challenge and one which will be closely looked at for the selection of 2018.





Gathering students together from such diverse destinations is also not without its challenges. Thanks to the sterling support of programme coordinator Fortunate Mathonsi, we managed to get them all together more or less simultaneously and the year is off to a good start. Many exciting field trips, practical excursions and other activities lie ahead for our students and lecturers in 2017 and I believe before long we will be reporting on the successes and triumphs of another dedicated group of SAWC conservation students.

Malcolm Douglas - Manager: Wildlife Area Management Qualifications

2017 STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL (SRC)

Representing the Higher and Advanced Certificate Programmes

CHAIRPERSON

President

- Jacob Colani Mdlovu - RSA - Advanced Class

Vice President

- Yolande Tembo - Zambia - Advanced Class

SRC SECRETARY

- Chengo Mubanga - Zambia - Advanced Class

FOOD-COMMITTEE

- Oscar Mwiya - Zambia - Higher Class
- Bochiwe Dhliwayo - Zimbabwe - Advanced Class

NEWS-EDITORS COMMITTEE

- Kelvin Mapulanga - Zambia - Higher Class
- Nothando Moyo - Zimbabwe - Advanced Class

ENVIRONMENTAL-COMMITTEE

- Jonathan Lottering - RSA - Higher Class
- Eugenio Peneve - Mozambique - Advanced Class

SOCIAL-COMMITTEE

- Kelvin Sikagoma - Zambia - Higher Class
- Elhardo Ellis Eiseb - Namibia - Advanced Class

CLASS / OHS-REPRESENTATIVES

- George Phiri - Zambia - Higher Class
- Charles Mbao - Zambia - Advanced Class

RURAL INITIATIVES FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT (RISE) UNIT

2017 has seen the addition of two new members to the Rural Initiatives for a Sustainable Environment (RISE) unit. In December the team was joined by the former Community, Youth Development and Access Coordinator Sboniso Phakathi. He has joined the team as the new RISE projects leader, tasked with working primarily on the unit's WWF funded projects, RESILIM and the Community based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) project funded by United by Wildlife supported by The Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry. The team also warmly welcomed Elna De beer, the unit's new mentor.

Elna has a long standing association with the Southern African Wildlife College having trained the community conservation and CBNRM modules since 2002. She has an extensive career path as a stakeholder engagement specialists who understands that no one organization can do it all. Based on her wide ranging socio-cultural experiences, Elna has in the past designed and implemented community relations programmes tailored to particular areas' specific context for social performance management practices linked to conservation, mining and other related sectors.

Her specialisation is in stakeholder engagement in national and international projects, strategic and risk communication in sensitive stakeholder environments, as well as leading and developing or training teams to plan and undertake stakeholder engagement. It is this support that she will be bringing to the team.

In line with further academic development for the unit, Martha Themba, the unit's assistant CBNRM manager has recently enrolled in a Masters Degree with Stellenbosch University, with her studies being funded through the NORED project. She began this two-year undertaking in January 2017, and will be linking her research proposal to the CBNRM related work she is carrying out in the Mangalane communities in Mozambique.

Further to this, project partner and Sabie Game Park's community engagement lead, Ferdie Terblanche, has also undertaken this Master's programme through the NORED project. In line with further exposure for our team members, Candice Eb and Linda Hlengwa attended a week long Kinship Conservation Workshop which was held at the Nambiti Private Reserve in Kwa-Zulu-Natal in early January. This workshop was attended by industry leaders who work within the space of community governance and resource economics in line with exploring market based solutions to community conservation.

Community Based Natural Resource Management:

Our CBNRM work continues in the five Mangalane villages, in the Makuleke village as well as with the work carried out by the village police members. The latter have been retrained in the use of MOM's and SMART as accessory tools for members to utilise in the field. The aim of this retraining is to link the paper form sheet to the electronic handle-held tool, which is mostly linked to basic operations, game identification, recording incidents and mapping their patrols. The aim here is that this data will be easier to integrate into the College's SMART system.

On the governance aspect of our work, the focus has been utilising village meetings as a capacity tool for skills such as minute writing and the processes of election procedures. The team in conjunction with the communities has also been developing and introducing participatory community driven constitutions, and further developing procedures for managing community meetings.

The team is also currently undertaking a situation analysis of the five villages surrounding the Exxaro Tshikondeni mine; the team is led by Linda Hlengwa on a Situational Analysis, which aims to inform the status in these communities with a view to potential enterprise development.

Resource Economics:

In the resource economics stream of our work, Candice Eb has been providing her services in an economics advisory capacity in the Lowveld area through the Global Environment Facility project, which is in part currently being implemented by the Kruger to Canyons biosphere. The bulk of the resource economics work here is to understand the economic impact of protected areas, and that of the Protected Areas Network as a collective on the local economy.
Linked to our CBNRM longitudinal sites, and supporting the financial and economic feasibility of potential community reserves, whilst also linking locals into the potential economic value of natural resources and wildlife economies, Candice Eb is supporting the study for the communities surrounding the Sabie Game Park. This will help identify the means of linking the local economies into the private wildlife economy.

Further to this, Candice has also been investigating the potential role of the College in supporting the supply chain development and SMME's linked to the protected area sector in conjunction with other local stakeholders and partners in the area. There has also been a lot of excitement around the resource economics short course offering, specifically for provincial authorities at state-owned nature reserves and CPA members. We look forward to building further relations here which will contribute to further economic development of our rural areas.

The team wishes to acknowledge the support that is received from WWF-SA which is funded by the UK Government through the IWT Challenge Fund, its project partners Sabie Game Park, United for Wildlife and The Royal Foundation, and the SAWC Mnisi Community Alliance and Chemonics through the Resilim project. The ongoing support from all our partners allows the unit to deepen its working knowledge and experience by using the 'learning by doing' approach.

Sboniso Phakathi

MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS HIGHLIGHTS THE PROGRESS ON THE INTEGRATED STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF RHINOCEROS

The Minister of Environmental affairs, Mrs EdnaMolewa recently released a media statement, which in summary states that, "The 2016 statistics indicate that a decline in the number of rhino poached was registered, both for the country as a whole and for the Kruger National Park (KNP). A total of 1 054 rhino were poached in 2016, compared to 1 175 in the same period for 2015, representing a decline of 10.3%.

Specifically for the KNP, a total of 662 rhino carcasses were found in 2016 compared to 826 in 2015. This represents a reduction of 19.85% in 2016. This is despite a continued increase in the number of illegal incursions into the Kruger National Park.

For 2016 there were a staggering 2 883 instances of poaching-related activities (such as poaching camps, contacts, crossings, sightings, tracks and shots fired) in the Park, compared to 2 466 recorded in the same period in 2015. This is an increase of 16.9%. These criminal gangs are armed to the teeth, well-funded and part of transnational syndicates who will stop at nothing to get their hands on rhino horn.

The decrease in the number of rhino poached can be attributed to the efforts of our men and women on the ground, especially our rangers.

However, whilst there has been a decrease in the number of rhino killed for their horns in the Kruger National Park and Mpumalanga, the number of rhino poached unfortunately increased in some other provinces. This indicates that syndicates are feeling the pressure from the interventions being employed in the KNP. The government is therefore prioritising these pressure points through enforcement operations.

It is with concern that we report that in 2016, 46 elephants were poached in the Kruger National Park.

The interventions being implemented to counter rhino poaching are also used to respond to this emerging threat.
We are pleased to announce that in the period under review, there has been an increase in the number of arrests for poaching-related offences inside the Kruger National Park, the area hardest hit by poaching.

During 2016, the SAPS reported that a total of 680 poachers and traffickers were arrested for rhinorelated poaching offences nationally. This is a marked increase in arrests from 317 in 2015. Of this number, 417 were arrested both within and outside the Kruger National Park.

A total of 148 firearms were seized inside the Park in 2016, and 6 just outside the Park.

In order to successfully tackle the illicit trade in rhino horn, it is key that we detect and prevent incidents of smuggling, working with our colleagues in neighbouring countries.

We are pleased to inform you that the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development has decided to open the Skukuza Regional Court with effect from 7th March 2017. Currently, high profile cases are being transferred to the Skukuza Regional Court. The decision to open this as a Regional Court will ensure that case turnaround times are expedited." (Excerpts taken from Minister Molewa's media statement)

THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGE AND ITS PARTNERS

The College's approach to anti poaching training underpins the work being done by National Government and our partners, namely the IUCN, WWF South Africa, Peace Parks Foundation, the Southern African Wildlife College Trust, the Game Rangers Association of Africa, SANParks Honorory Rangers, the JPZ including the Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Foundation, Unite Against Poaching, Unitrans, Our Horn is Not Medicine, the WWF Nedbank Green Trust and the various public and private consevation organisations and NGO's in combatting rhino poaching.

Minister Edna Molewa's mention of all four pillars in the College's approach to this pandemic namely a well-trained field ranger training component, an aerial and K-9 capability as well as the need for greater community involvement, bears testimony to the work being done by the College.

Training being the College's mandate, we will continue to offer training at the highest level, which cuts across our learning-by-doing approach. This helps ensure that people employed in the field are able to take the knowledge and skills acquired at the College and apply these in the workplace, be they protected area managers, wildlife guardians, field rangers, environmental officers, law enforcement officers, environmental educators, environmental monitors, bush pilots, researchers or dog handlers.

The College's four-tiered approach to anti poaching

JOBS FUND PROJECT MAKES HISTORY WITH SIMULTANEOUS GRADUATION OF 119 FIELD RANGERS

The Southern African Wildlife College's recent Field Ranger graduation ceremony was remarkable for two reasons; it was the biggest in South African history with 119 National Certificates in Nature Conservation: Resource Guardianship being awarded, with half the recipients being female.

The ceremony marked the culmination of a 12-month intensive training programme which was part of a large-scale two-year project by the National Treasury's Job Fund aimed at bringing about significant change whilst impacting the creation of alternative livelihoods, poverty reduction and socio economic development,

The project objectives were two-fold; to train 257 unemployed people from historically disadvantaged communities as field rangers and to create employment opportunities within the conservation sector to help address the skills shortage largely created by the rhino poaching crisis. Over the course of the two-year initiative 257 jobs were created with the support of five employer organisations including Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Limpopo Department of Economic Development Environment and Tourism (LEDET), South African National Parks, The Lawrence Anthony Earth Organisation and Wildlands Conservation Trust.

The learners, from Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and North West provinces were selected through an interview process and a physical selection course that was facilitated by the SAWC's African Field Ranger Training division who also conducted the training. It was a mentally and physically demanding programme, but well worth it according to Year-2 graduate, 27 year old Thabiso Mongale: "I am proud of what I have accomplished this year. I am excited- no, beyond excited! I am ready to do this very important job."

Fellow graduate, 27 year old Glander Tshabalala echoed his sentiments, adding "We will do everything we can to protect the environment and to educate others. It is our duty to make sure we look after Nature for future generations."

Guest speaker Phumelele Ngcobo, Project Manager for the Jobs Fund, was very moved by the certification ceremony which included a 'passing out' parade by all 119 students who graduated, and who followed in the footsteps of the 136 field rangers and guides who graduated from the project last year. "The impressive display by such a large contingent of field rangers showcased the students' teamwork, discipline and attitude and showed just how far these students had come in terms of their own personal growth, their employability and in their commitment to conservation, she said. "The National Treasury's Jobs Fund is proud to have been part of such a well-run project which has delivered on its mandate," she added.

The College would also like to extend its sincere thanks to the donors who assisted us in meeting the 20% matched funding requirement for the project namely; the Dioraphte Foundation, United for Wildlife supported by the The Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, Friends of African Wildlife and My Planet Rhino Fund. Without their valued support, the College would not have been able to implement this successful project.

The 2017 Jobs Fund students during the passing out parade held at the Southern African Wildlife College

Phumelele Ngcobo, Project Manager of the National Treasury's Jobs Fund Project implemented by the Southern African Wildlife College, is seen congratulating one of the students on her achievements.

The graduands demonstrating their drill formation and celebrating their achievement.

GOOD PROGRESS IS BEING MADE BY THE SAWC'S K9 UNIT

The K9 Unit have been working with Counter Insurgency Tracker Training (CITT), which trains rangers in the art of visual combat tracking. Together we are experimenting on how to incorporate the K9 team into the combat tracking team, which will
make the combat tracking team even more effective.

The SAWC K9 Unit worked at the Houtbosrand section in the Kruger National Park for a week. The purpose was to get the dogs accustomed to working in new areas and to test them in real life scenarios. The dogs took two days to adjust and to run efficiently again. Unfortunately there was no real life tracks to try the dogs on in that week. This proves that the presence of dogs might also help to deter poachers from entering a section. The week provided good exposure for the K9 Unit and proved that it is very important to change the areas where the dogs are trained.

Joe Braman, a well-known hounds man in Texas was also recently at the College. Given his experience, Joe has provided immense value to the K9 Unit whilst working the pack dogs and deploying them into the Kruger National Park. There has been a vast improvement in the application of the dogs but genetics can also impact the overall working capability of the dogs and he is of the opinion that we may need to consider bringing in a specific genetic line to enable optimum performance.

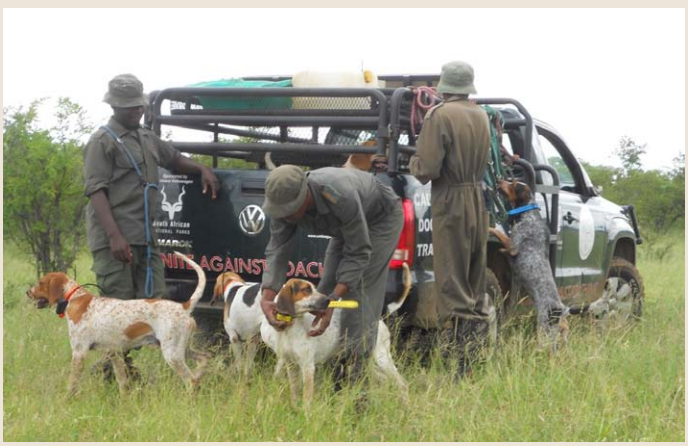
Wisdom Makhubele's training as a dog trainer is an ongoing process. He distinguished himself as a good tracker dog trainer and handler and he is in the process of learning how to train/handle detection dogs. Once Wisdom accomplishes this he will be a certified trainer/handler. Johan van Straaten the Dog Master will also be doing his Assessor qualification and once completed, the SAWC K9 Unit will be able to broaden its services to assist other external dog units.

Good progress has been made with the high speed tracking dogs since November 2016. With the puppies running now, the College has four packs and three individual dogs running as high speed tracking dogs. The packs are named by their pack leader: The Bytvas pack consists of 6 dogs, the Buster pack three dogs, the Rhino pack three dogs and the Benji pack two dogs. We are still working on building the stamina and concentration of the dogs on longer tracks, while aging the tracks to get up to the standard of real life scenarios. Adding to that we are working on control of the dogs.

This includes walking them off leash; to come when they are called, game proofing, casting and searching for human tracks. We are also socializing all the dogs together so that any of the hounds can work together without fighting. This will give us the advantage of building a pack of dogs which ultimately works together as a pack and when a dog has to be replaced, means we can use any of the dogs which are in the reserve pack.

It will also allow us to add young dogs with existing packs to give them more experience. We are looking at training the hounds to bay at the poachers when they catch them. Baying means that the dogs corner their prey and keep on barking at the prey, keeping the prey cornered and busy till the backup team arrives. We are now in the process of ascertaining whether our dogs have the right genetics for bay work.

Johan van Straaten
K9 Unit: Dog Master



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.

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

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

Joe Braman with the College's pack Hounds

AN AMBITIOUS APPLIED LEARNING RESEARCH PROJECT BEING CONDUCTED BY THE SUSTAINABLE USE & FIELD GUIDING BUSINESS UNIT

The philosophy taught by the Sustainable Use and Field Guiding business unit (SUFG), is that the use of Africa's wildlife resources has to benefit local communities and is vital to conservation. This use has to however be both ethical and sustainable. To be successful, the 'sustainability' concept needs to stand on three pillars. This use must be ecologically sustainable, it must financially sustainable and it must be genetically sustainable. More recently the third pillar to the sustainability concept – namely the question of genetic sustainability - is undergoing further scrutiny.

There can be no denying the fact that hunting, if not done correctly or ethically, is not sustainable. Yet with trophy hunting, the biggest, the best and the most impressive looking specimens are the ones which are deliberately and selectively targeted. If such individuals are hunted before or while they are still of breeding age, their 'superior' genes are essentially eliminated from the gene pool before they have had the chance or been given the opportunity to be passed on. Without competition, 'inferior' specimens take advantage of the situation and breed – passing their poorer genes on in the process. Over extended periods of time the inevitable result of such scenarios is the gradual drop in the population's overall quality.

Syncerus cafer cafer, the Cape or more correctly termed Southern buffalo has long been Africa's most popular dangerous game animal from a hunting perspective – and to this day there is a steady demand for the opportunity to pursue these formidable black bovines. The vast majority of those who get such opportunities quite understandably want to secure a 'record book' specimen and herein lies the problem. What is currently perceived to be a 'trophy specimen' in the eyes of the record books is invariably a prime breeding individual – the equivalent to a cattle ranchers stud bull or a sheep breeders prized ram! It's simply not sustainable to remove such individuals from the gene pool while they are still breeders. It is my belief that the fault in such cases lies not with the trophy hunter, but with the record books.

There is mounting evidence that the trophy quality of some sport hunted buffalo populations, even those in large, free-ranging areas is, as a result of what is mentioned above, dropping. With the SAWC adopting an applied learning approach where each business unit is now required to initiate a research orientated project, it is the decision of the SUFG business unit to investigate the long-term influence of trophy hunting of sexually mature buffalo bull age distribution and trophy quality.

Thanks to the wonders of modern-day aerial photography and high quality, full frame digital cameras, it is now possible to sex whole buffalo herds from such photographs. And it is also possible to age and assess all the sexually mature bulls identified in such herds. What an important management tool this exciting new development has the potential to become.

Carefully managed hunting operations contribute significantly to many publically and privately owned wildlife reserves' annual running costs. Buffalo are the species responsible for the largest slice of this income generating pie.

It is now becoming evident that what was once thought to be sustainable from a buffalo trophy hunting / trophy quality perspective is not. In fact there is mounting evidence to demonstrate that the overall trophy quality amongst the 8000 odd buffalo in the area being researched is dropping. With this in mind a research proposal has been submitted by the SUFG business unit to conduct a comparative survey between the sexually mature buffalo bulls in the research area and a similar sized sample in the Kruger National Park where hunting is not permitted. From high quality aerial photographs it is hoped that all the sexually mature bulls in the researh area will be identified, aged and assessed. And as a comparison, a similar sample size of KNP buffalo bulls will also be analysed. As I'm sure it can be imagined, this will no doubt be an extensive and costly exercise. To photograph a similar sample size in the KNP may well require the same sized area to be flown.

Analysing such a massive amount of data will undoubtedly be a massive task – but there is hope on the horizon in this regard. An Oxford University master's student – Eli Walker is of the opinion that modern-day 'artificial intelligence' software can be used to train computers to do this laborious task. When 'taught' , the computer will do this time-consuming analysis. This will be the topic of Eli's master's degree. Already a suitably large sample of these aerial photographs have been sent at Oxford to kick-start this exciting new development. According to Oxford University's computer boffins, if the human brain can identify from an aerial photograph a buffalo bull from within a herd of buffalo and then age and assess it, a modern-day computer with the right software and 'instruction' can be trained to do the same. It sure will be an interesting exercise to see if this prediction is possible. Only time will tell. We sure hope it is. Eli Walker plans to spend a couple of months with this business unit soon – learning the buffalo identification, aging and assessment process. He'll then start training his computer. Interesting stuff indeed and exciting times ahead for us all here in the SUFG business unit.

Post Script: This new technology has already had an influence on the most recent version of the Greater KNP's hunting protocol, where as it now stands, trophy quality buffalo may only be hunted when they are 12 years old or older. Poorer quality bulls are now regarded as 'management' ones – with the encouragement that they be hunted before breeding age to help ensure the quality and longevity of the herd.

Dr. Kevin Robertson - Business Unit Manager: Sustainable Use and Field Guiding

Such is the quality of the aerial photographs that the difference between bulls and cows can easily be distinguished.

The bull in the lower left corner is eight years old. His horn spread fits into the low 30 inch bracket – this puts him into the 'management bull' class. The bull in the top right hand corner is in his ninth year. His horn spread is better – he fits into the mid 30 inch class. Despite this, he too would be regarded as a management bull.

Photographed from the air these two bulls are aged nine and ten years old respectively. The older bull is lying down. His horn spread is in the mid 30 inch range. The standing bull has a spread which will fit into the high 30's range.

NEWS FROM THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE TRUST

The Southern African Wildlife College Trust (SAWCT), established and administered by WWF SA, enjoyed a busy yet extremely rewarding past year in avid support of education in nature conservation at the College.

We were thrilled to learn that we were one of three recipients selected to receive the sought-after "Greener Tomorrow" funding award from Emirates Airline. A "World Ranger Day" campaign was held mid-year, the day aims to commemorate rangers killed or injured in the line of duty and celebrates the work rangers do to protect our natural resource.

Our donors and supporters in the Western Cape enjoyed an elegant event generously hosted by our Founder Trustee, the Countess Labia, at the exquisite Casa Labia Cultural Centre. Theresa Sowry, the CEO of SAWC, had us enthralled at this event with the developments and vital work being done by the College. The publicity for both the Trust and the College as a result, in both the press and on social media, was appreciated.

Meetings with WWF, the Trust's administrator, resulted in a revised service level agreement and the year continued from strength to strength. An additional benefit and "double dose of green peace-of-mind" for donors of our progressive Trust is the investment of its Fund in the WWF supported Prescient Living Plant Fund. Over the year the Prescient Fund continued to integrate environmentally sustainable investment principles into the investment portfolio to improve its relative environmental footprint. Not only do donations to the Trust support education in nature conservation, they are also invested in a fund aware of the importance of its environmental foot print!

November culminated in the graduation of the Higher Education and Training, Wildlife Area Management students at the College. This included the student dinner and hearing from our successful and very grateful scholarship and bursary recipients, as well as a tour of the latest developments at the College. We urge you to attend this annual event and experience the incredible work being done at the College, made possible only with your support.

SAWCT Scholarship and Bursary recipients 2016: from left: Dirk Pienaar from !Ai!Ae Heritage Park, Kgalagadi TFCA (South Africa), Sambiana Limbani from Mosi-o-Tunya (Zambia), Armstrong Chinga from Liuwa Plain National Park (Zambia), Francis Chitsa from Lake Chivero Recreational Park (Zimbabwe) and Nothando Moyo from Marongora Field Station (Zimbabwe).

SAWCT 2017 Scholarship Recipients from left: Bochiwe Dhliwayo from Chinhoyi Recreational Park (Zimbabwe), Nothando Rosslyn Moyo from Marongora Field Station (Zimbabwe) and Richard Mahlangu from Mushandike Sanctuary (Zimbabwe) pictured with SAWCT Trustees: Kathy Bergs and Charles de Villiers.

The year came to a close, posting out our annual report with a letter of thanks to you, our valued donors. Should you not be receiving our communications, or should you prefer to receive the annual report via email, please contact Janet Wakelin via email address SAWCTfundraiser@sawc.org.za.
A reminder that 18A tax certificates will be sent to our individual donors after the tax year end.

With over R1.6 million raised in the current financial year, as at the end of January 2017, we would like to express our most sincere thanks and acknowledge the ongoing and generous support of these donors, as well as those who wish to remain anonymous:

- Ambassador and Mrs Cabras
- Coronation Asset Management
- Countess Labia
- David Graaff Foundation
- Dish Food/Cucina Labia
- Dr Surandar Singh
- Emirates Airline – A Greener Tomorrow Award
- F C Carter Charitable Trust
- Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust
- Joan St Leger Lindbergh Charitable Trust
- Mr Chester Emery
- Mr Edward Saunders
- Mr JJM van Zyl
- Mr John & Mrs Marina Brewster
- Mrs Annette Keaney
- Mrs Carolyn Prades
- Mrs Lorna Ramsden
- Ms Lesley Richardson
- Rallen (Pty) Ltd
- Sentinel International Trust Company (Pty) Ltd
- The RWJ Hetherington Trust (via Community Chest)

In addition, we would like to acknowledge and express our heartfelt thanks to those donors who have indicated that they have included the Trust in their legacies. Investing in conservation in perpetuity via the Trust, provides future generations with the opportunity to enjoy our beautiful and uniquely rich natural heritage. A living legacy well worth considering. In 2017, with your help, we aim to take our support of nature conservation to new heights!

Janet Wakelin
Fundraiser: Southern African Wildlfe College Trust

THE BEST WAY NOT TO FEEL HOPELESS IS TO GET UP AND DO SOMETHING

- Fanual Nleya – Volunteer

My name is Fanuel Nleya, I am from Zimbabwe where I am employed by Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. I have been with the Authority for 13 years and have risen through the ranks to Officer Level. My set of skills and experience in the academic field is diverse and I do hope the College will be able to put this to maximum use. I started volunteering at the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) towards the end of January 2017, and will be with the College until the end of the year.

At this stage I want to express my sincere gratitude to the College's Management team for affording me the opportunity to serve as volunteer. I am so grateful to have been chosen for this opportunity, as the work I am doing here can only encourage my career development. I will ensure that I perform to the best of my abilities in serving the College.

Within a few weeks of being at the College, I have already gained valuable insight into conservation academic training, and I can already say with certainty that my experience in the coming months will far exceed my expectations. I really foresee myself going back home carrying unique knowledge and experience.

An international volunteering opportunity is not just merely an opportunity for working diligently for an organisation, but an opportunity to acquire wisdom, new knowledge, culture, and experience from abroad that hones your skills and broadens your perspectives of global issues and the world.

Courtesy of the Game Rangers Association of Africa supporting Africa's Field Rangers, I am not a stranger to the College. I have received three short course training opportunities from the College that I have added to my portfolio. What attracted me to the SAWC was its outstanding reputation as one of SADC's leading higher learning institutions in the exciting and unique field of conservation. I am fascinated by the opportunity to be part of the family working to achieve this vision. By contributing my skills and experience to creating an active community of conservation leaders who are well prepared for living, learning, leading and prospering in today's world is very exciting.

Upon my arrival at the College, I was attached to the Academic Support and Quality Assurance Department. In no time I quickly felt integrated and immediately had to perform different tasks that became enriching.

I have now been offered the opportunity to tutor and help with homework and assignments, and to assist with English Literacy and Computer Literacy classes to students in the Advanced and Higher Certificate programmes. Through this experience, and what is to my mind key to my experience, is that I have learnt a lot from the students who are a unique and diverse clique with vast knowledge.

The Academic Support and Quality Assurance Department has offered me an environment where I feel like I am able to make a contribution, knowing that it is actually considered and appreciated. Besides the work done with students, I have also been contributing to the daily dynamic and demanding tasks required in the Resource Centre, the hub of the institution.

This is my first experience working for an international non-profit organisation, an academic and training institution in particular, so this is a chance to learn new things, share experiences and apply concepts learned in my journey as a conservationist and student. I feel confident that my experiences in the different departments and in the tutoring role will enable me to effectively add value to the College as it seeks to ensure unique conservation training in the region.

At the College, I have met lots of interesting people from all over Africa who, through their stories and shared experiences, have consistently enriched me. I feel real pleasure in working with a dynamic, confident and multi faceted team, who also push you to give the best of yourself without constraints. The College staff are extremely welcoming and helpful, providing terrific career advice.

Lastly, with March 3 having been World Wildlife Day, I find it imperative to express my appreciation for the good work that is done by SAWC in developing conservation leaders for Africa. I feel injected with enthusiasm and inspiration to contribute towards ensuring that we are not blamed by future generations for failing to conserve our wildlife heritage on their behalf.

To current students, conservationists of Africa both present and future please remember:
"The best way not to feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you (or around you). If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, and you will fill yourself with hope." — Barack Obama

VOLUNTEERING AT SAWC

- Emily Nicklin, Silke Brandt and Susan Clarke, University of Cape Town

Volunteering at the SAWC has been a privilege and a truly memorable experience. Every day was packed with new and exciting activities from tracking buffalo in the bush to flying over parts of the Kruger National Park in a Bathawk aircraft.

Everyone working at the SAWC is completely dedicated and passionate about their work, which inspired us to feel the same way. We have learnt so much from the experts in their fields who have willingly shared their boundless knowledge with us.

Malcolm Douglas took us on evening game drives and enlightened us about so many things ranging from the influences of geology on the ecosystem to the individual calls of every bird. We were fortunate enough to see multiple sightings of wild dogs, elephants, rhinos and buffalo. The best part of the day was during the evening when we could lie under the stars and listen to the sounds of cackling hyenas and other animals just beyond the perimeter of the campus fence.

Every day we had the opportunity to hike through the College's training area with Dr Kevin Robertson, Pieter Nel, Gawie Lindeque and the Sustainable Use and Field Guiding department's students. During this time, they taught us so much about tracking animals and working to sustain the intricate balance of the environment. Their immense respect for their surroundings was inspiring and roused a deep fascination for every aspect of nature that the reserve has to offer.

On one particularly special day we were each treated with a flight over the College and the Greater Kruger in a Bathawk aircraft. Bruce McDonald, the pilot, has the most flying hours in this type of aircraft in the entire world. The journey from take-off to landing was unbelievable. The tallest giraffe or the largest elephant appeared small from our bird's eye view. This experience showed the land from a completely new perspective and it was absolutely breath-taking. It truly was an experience of a lifetime.

We were also introduced to Johan van Straaten and his team at the K9 Unit located next to the field ranger training base. Johan demonstrated how the dogs are trained to track poachers and sniff out firearms. His immense passion for his work was especially remarkable, and it made the experience all the more fulfilling as he showed us the incredible work that the dogs are trained for. It was particularly exciting to be allowed to follow the dogs through the bush and observe as they instinctively followed the invisible scent track for 1.5 kilometres.

In the mornings we helped out in the resource centre, developing lesson plans for the Wildlife Area Management Qualification students, designing pamphlets and posters for the department and doing admin with Mercy for the field ranger base. We found the work very stimulating and it taught us many invaluable skills which has given us confidence to conquer other related tasks.

We have hugely benefited from our experience at the SAWC and look forward to returning for a longer period of time. We have really appreciated being surrounded by all these extraordinary people in such a wonderful environment.

GAWIE'S FIELD NEWS

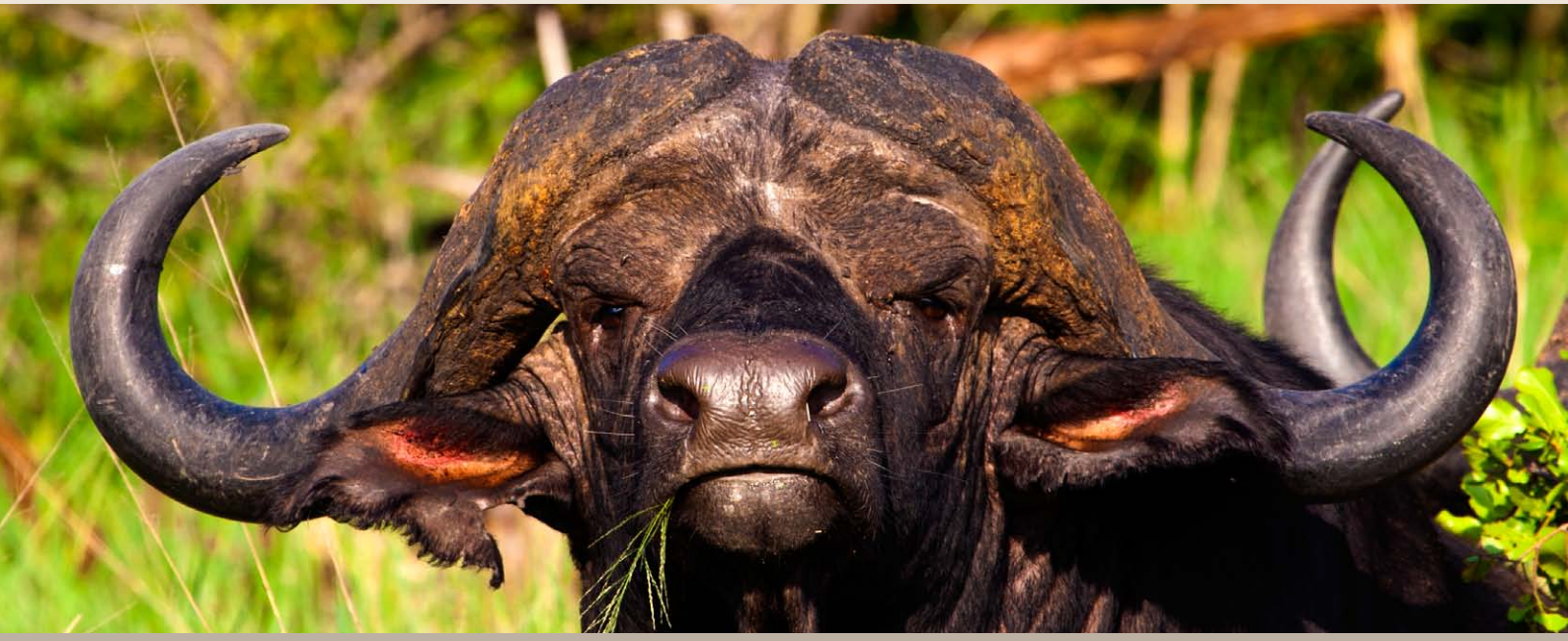
A wonderful transformation has been taking place around the College in the last few weeks. Good rains have finally started falling since December pushing our seasonal total to around 250mm. It is still a long way off from the seasonal average so we are definitely not out of the woods yet. Most of the rain we received was soft drenching rain that did not cause a lot of run off, good news for the soil and plants but not such good news for the pans and rivers. Most of the pans have filled up somewhat but are not brimming yet and hippo quarry remains but a muddy puddle as my 5 year old daughter would describe it. The vegetation has however taken full advantage of the soaked soil and responded with vigour. Lush green grass once again covers the plains and the trees are heavy with leaves. To the utmost delight of our Sustainable Use and Field Guiding students the sour plums have produced a bumper crop of delicious fruit that seems to last forever. Even the Marula trees are producing a good crop this year, although the ones on campus are definitely better off than the ones outside. This is creating a bit of a problem with the local baboons but they are finding it more difficult to cross the new fence.

Better rains have fallen in the surrounding areas so I assume that the Marula harvest is better there as we haven't had the massive influx of elephants we normally have around this time of year. We are however seeing the occasional bull and a few small herds of elephant typically feeding from Marula tree to Marula tree opening up a network of paths between the trees. It is amazing to note the number of bulls in musth that we encounter. There seem to be a link between this phenomena and the Marula harvest. The high nutritional value of the Marulas is causing the cows to come on heat which in turn triggers the bulls to come into musth. Definitely a time to be cautious around elephant, the last thing you want is to get yourself mixed up with a premenstrual elephant cow and a bull in musth.

The buffalo also seem to be preparing for the mating season. The last couple of breeding herds we have encountered did not contain one bull of breeding age. All the prime breeding bulls are currently in "training camps". We find them in small groups lounging around waterholes and mud wallows. Heightened testosterone levels are causing them to bulk up in a spectacular fashion. These bulls will join the herds as soon as the cows are ready to be served, but for now there is no reason for these bulls to waste precious energy following the herds around. The same is happening with the impala who are preparing for the rutting season. Already the rams are strutting around dividing the country side into territories and checking out the females with a renewed interest.

Predator sightings around the training area have been rather good so far this year with a good number of lion sightings. The highlight must be the high number of wild dog sightings we have had since January. The best of them all was experienced by Doctor Kevin Robertson who heads up the Sustainable Use and Field Guiding Business Unit. He was out with his wife on a late afternoon game drive in early January when they found a pack of 17 wild dogs resting next to the main entrance road. The dogs started to wake up and trotted off in the direction of hippo quarry. Dr Robertson decided to drive around to hippo quarry hoping to find them at the water. When they arrived at hippo quarry they found a large herd of impala. In a blink of an eye the wild dogs were on the scene and started hunting the impala. They managed to kill three impala in a matter of minutes. During the confusion one big male impala ran over the cliff on the north eastern face of the quarry and was immediately caught and killed by the dogs almost as soon as he hit the bottom. This was certainly a scene to behold.

Along with the wild dog sightings we have also managed to spot at least three big male lions in the training area lately as well as females with cubs, the best of these was four lionesses with a total of nine cubs. We will try and keep an eye on them and keep you posted on their development.



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. B. Soto (Chairperson/Mozambique), Mr. S. Abrahams, Mr. P.K. Bewsher, Mr. S. Keswa, Countess. S. Labia, Mrs. L.M. Lynch, Mr. O.E. Mokganedi, Mr. W. Myburgh, Dr. G. Raven, Prof. B.K. Reilly, Mrs. T. Sowry.