



Wildlife Campus

20
YEARS
ANNIVERSARY

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Magazine

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By ASI

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WildlifeCampus Magazine - December 2020 - Volume 9 - FREE

WildlifeCampus

An inauspicious start to a career in guiding



WildlifeCampus CEO
Todd Kaplan

In the mid-1990s I was fortunate enough to secure a three-month research post with SanParks, based at Skukuza, Kruger National Park.

At the time there was a frequently overlooked “research village” nestled between the main camp and staff village. It consisted of a variety of ancient immobile caravans and dusty ex-army tents.

It was home to visiting academics and researchers on extended stays, a mix of variable trades, construction and infrastructure workers and a bewildering variety of a miscellaneous hangers-on who didn't seem to have any particular reason to be there. The people I chose to spend most of my free time with, however, were the Night-Drive Students.

The Night-Drive Students were an interesting bunch. Back then, students completing their three-year Technikon Diploma in Nature Conservation were sent to a National Park for their third year as a full year practical. Occasionally peppered with actual wildlife management experiences, game capture, invasive species eradication or block burning, mainly they took the three-hour Sundowner or Night drives.

With my stay in the Park covering December through to February, I got to know two different groups of these students. Those just completing their year and those just beginning theirs; and they could not be further apart. The latter deeply enthusiastic and idealistic, the culmination for many of their dreams come true, working in the KNP! The former, tired and disillusioned, a year's guiding under their belts, precious little actual wildlife management experience, and the understanding that SanParks would offer almost none of them any kind of continuing position. They were simply no longer needed, the fresh batch was arriving shortly.

These graduates would all seek and almost always find guiding positions with the private lodges, the year's guiding experience not wasted, but perhaps not what they had expected.

I was kitted out in the same way as the students, two Parks Board uniforms (boots not included), including the coveted kudu epaulets, a non-expiring voucher entitling the bearer to a 90% discount off all meals at the restaurant (R4.00 for breakfast, R6.00 for lunch and R12.00 for supper) and a monthly stipend of R700 / month (tax-free). So you could take all your meals in the restaurant and still come out with R40.00 at month-end (for laundry, toothpaste, cigarettes, beer, phone cards and other essentials).



WildlifeCampus

An inauspicious start to a career in guiding

Besides companionship, I had an ulterior motive for getting friendly with this group – the night-drives. At around 16h30 each afternoon, the three 23-seater game-drive trucks would assemble in the Skukuza parking lot to on-board all the night-drive tourists. Invariably the passenger seat in the cab would remain empty and I'd take it if no one else wanted it. You'd also have to be fairly perceptive to notice that I was not one of them, besides long hair in a ponytail tucked down my shirt and a small gold earring, I looked exactly like they did. Nobody appeared to mind and the drivers all welcomed me as I took on some of the guiding; it was in fact my first experience in guiding and in the beginning I was woefully unprepared for it and was not the only one.

About a week into the new batch, three vehicles, three night-drive students, 63 tourists and myself are all waiting in the parking lot. The students go into reception and collect a .458 Rifle each and five rounds of ammunition. Then the little pre-boarding ritual, all three load the internal magazine of the rifle, make it safe and return it to the rifle bag before inviting the guests onto the vehicle. They do this in sequence, almost like a military drill, and the guests love it! This minor pantomime is meant to reassure the tourists, conveying a sense of authority and competence. Also, anything with firearms is entertaining and interesting, a good way to begin game drive.



I'm standing in an informal cluster with the three armed guides as they begin the loading. I notice the student nearest me has some kind of problem with his weapon, unable to load the bullets and is getting flustered and anxious under the gaze of the eager crowd. Then he panics and without warning thrusts the rifle at me, the cartridges follow shortly afterwards.

On reflex I take custody of the weapon and bullets. One problem. This is the first time I'd ever held this particular type of rifle. While I had up to that point, years of experience with handguns, I can field strip a 9mm Browning HP blindfolded, the only rifle experience I had was with a Daisy pellet gun.

66 people are now looking at me quite expectantly, waiting for me to load the gun, a competency I would only learn some years later. I give a half turn concealing the rifle from the crowd, slip the cartridges into a pocket, scrutinise the open breech and mutter something about the firing-pin and walked briskly back to reception without much more of a plan.

To my immense relief I soon find one of the previous year's graduates who I had come to know and all but throw the rifle at her explaining that I needed it loaded and made safe without delay or questions. To her everlasting credit, a minute later I'm back at the remaining vehicle, the other two not waiting for the conclusion to this little drama. The guide has by now boarded all the guests and, with rifle in hand, I jump into the cab and we're off.

Now on this particular drive ... **To be continued in our January 2021 issue.**

Todd



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Discover our NEW course!

Front of House Lodge Operations Course



This course discusses every detail involved in running successful FOH operations. We learn about understanding other departments, presentation and etiquette, what to do before guests arrive, when they arrive and how to host the most memorable experiences at your lodge or venue. This course includes a component on Food and Beverage (F&B) which highlights the importance of knowing your guests diet requirements and what they mean.

This course is perfect for owners, managers and staff at lodges, hotels, restaurants, cafés, cruise ships/yachts, bars, airlines, catering/event venues, resorts or clubs. If you are looking to enter the hospitality industry, brush up your current and/or staff skills or merely have an interest in the subject, this course is for you!

This online course is available now for the introductory price of R 1,300.00

MEET THE RINKHALS



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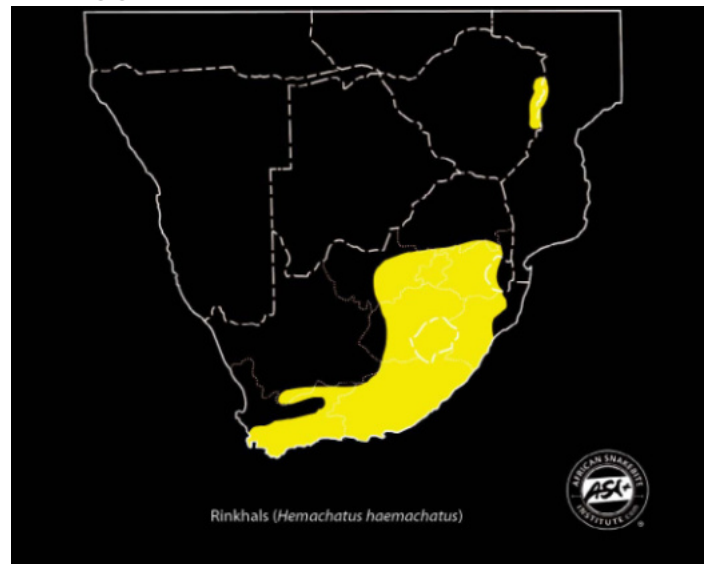
The Rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*) is endemic to Southern Africa and found only in South Africa, eSwatini, Lesotho and eastern Zimbabwe. Although they resemble cobras (they spread an impressive hood and are able to spit their venom) they are in a monotypic genus of their own. Unlike the cobras of the genus *Naja*, Rinkhals have keeled body scales, they lack solid teeth on the upper jaw and they produce live young.

Averaging around 80 cm – 1 m in length, Rinkhals vary quite dramatically in colouration based on their location.

The Highveld specimens are usually grey to blackish in colour with a shiny black belly and two or three white bars on the chest. These colours are common throughout most of the Free State but as one gets to Clarens they are more banded, often with bright orange. Those in the KZN Midlands, and the Cape Provinces are usually fully banded. Occasionally, pitch black individuals are found with no cross bars on the throat.

The keeled scales give these snakes a rough appearance, unlike the shiny scales of cobras.

Rinkhals are essentially grassland inhabitants but are also found in fynbos in the Western Cape. They are fond of wetlands and are partial to toads, hence their preference for wetlands, but they will also feed on rodents, lizards, birds, their eggs and other snakes.



Water features or an abundance of toads on a property will provide ideal conditions for these snakes. They are active during the day and are fond of basking, usually close to a hole. They are shy and retiring snakes and are quick to disappear down the closest hole when startled, but when cornered they lift up to half of the body off the ground and form a hood. They are quick to spit, flicking the head forward when doing so. The spitting action is effective, and some venom invariably gets into the eyes, causing immediate pain and severe irritation.

This usually gives the snake time to flee.



For venom in the eyes, immediately wash the eyes out by keeping them under a gently running tap or hosepipe. Once spat in the eyes the venom immediately does superficial damage to the cornea and inflames the eye lids. By rinsing the eyes with water, any excess venom may be flushed away. Forget about milk, bland liquids or urine – water works best. Then get the person to a doctor (or a pet to a vet) so that the eyes can be examined for corneal damage and treated with local anesthetic as well as antibiotic cream. This first aid/treatment is highly successful and recovery is usually within 2 – 3 days.

Rinkhals (and a variety of other snakes) are well known for shamming death (this is called thanatosis). When threatened and escape is not possible, the snake may turn limp and unresponsive, often with the head and part of the body upside down and the mouth agape.



It will appear to be dead, and the strategy is to wait for the danger to clear off, before the snake quickly moves to safety. Should you try and pick the snake up it may strike out quickly.

If all else fails the snake will bite, and although bites on humans are few and far between, a large number of dogs get bitten by this snake. The venom of the Rinkhals is both cytotoxic and neurotoxic, usually causing pain, swelling, blistering and tissue damage. In severe cases of envenomation the victim may also experience difficulty with breathing.



Polyvalent antivenom (manufactured by the South African Vaccine Producers in Johannesburg) is effective against the venom of this snake. Victims should be taken to the nearest hospital (pets to the nearest vet) quickly and safely for the correct medical treatment. Do not apply any bandages, cut or try and suck out the venom – go straight to hospital. As already mentioned, bites from this snake are quite rare and although considered potentially lethal, there have been no deaths in more than 30 years.

Course Update

Coming soon

Anti-Poaching

New course update coming soon – including new information on pangolin poaching by KaiNav Conservation Foundation.

Our anti-poaching course is based upon extensive direct counter-poaching experience. It provides a theoretical, detailed background to the prevention of poaching, theft and mutilation of game animals, from a game reserve perspective.

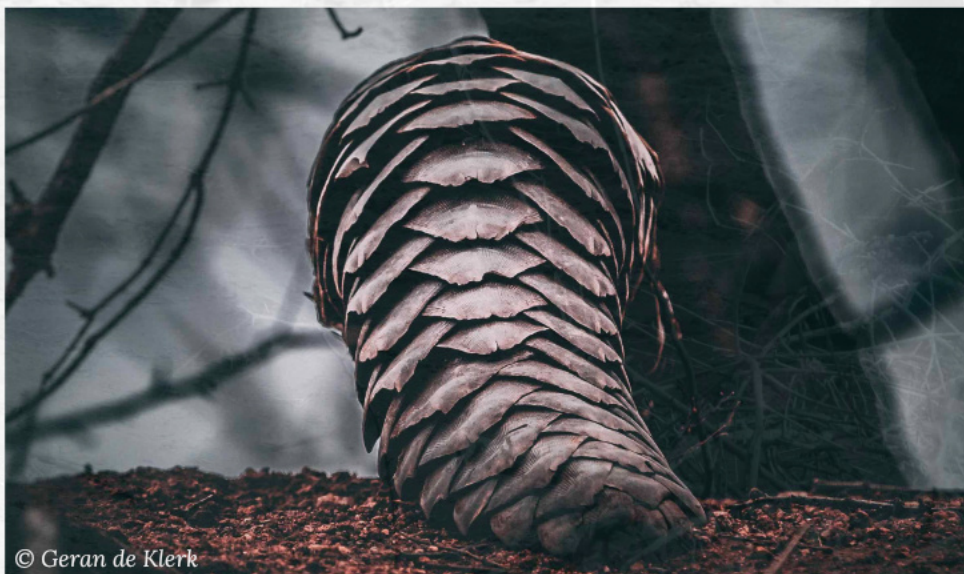
We explore what poaching and anti-poaching are and the 3 levels of poaching. We discuss the anti-poaching unit, how to set one up and the two main options to counter poaching: active and passive prevention. We also examine poaching methods and the economics of poaching, anti-poaching equipment and the various anti-poaching action plans together with the legalities of anti-poaching.

If you are a reserve owner, conservancy, wildlife or game farm manager; game ranger, game guide, game guard, trails guide, field guide, armed response unit or merely have an interest in this field, this course is for you.

[More information on this course?](#)

Email: info@wildlifecampus.com

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Holiday season Gift Idea



WildlifeCampus

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Gift voucher

The value of R 1 300,00

OR

1 Online course
FOH Lodge Operations

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The fascinating world Of Scorpions

Derived from our Field Guiding course



Parabuthus transvaalicus

Scorpions are among the hardiest creatures on Earth. Some can survive immersion in water for periods of up to two days. This is an adaptation to a fossorial way of life. When the burrows of these species get flooded, there is no need to surface and unnecessarily expose themselves to predators.

It is said that they can survive nuclear radiation of an intensity that would easily kill a human. They can also survive being frozen for a couple of days, and then thaw out with no apparent adverse effects.

South Africa has amongst the largest species of scorpions in the world. Some species of the Hadogenes genus can attain a length of 210 mm (8.3 inches).

Scorpions may be divided very roughly (non-scientifically) into five groups based on their chosen habitat.

The first of these groups comprise the burrowing scorpions. Members of this group excavate their own burrows. These burrows are made in soils varying from soft to extremely hard. The entrance to a scorpion burrow has a characteristic oval shape. There are no known species in this group that can kill a human, although all have a very painful sting.

The rupicolous scorpions are free-living and shelter beneath whatever cover they can find

Some 2000 species of scorpions are known around the world. They are found in widely diverse habitats from temperate areas to deserts and rainforests. Of all these species, only some 3% are potentially lethal.

at the time. Many species exhibit negative geotaxis which means that they respond negatively to the pull of gravity. Thus, they are often found clinging upside-down beneath flowerpots, firewood etc. Many stings are inflicted in this way when unwary people pick up these objects. These are the scorpions most likely to enter homes and buildings.



Parabuthus transvaalicus

The very dangerous Buthidae family of scorpions belongs to this group.

The rock scorpions are specially adapted crevice dwellers. Their stings are often exceptionally long, which allows them to sting around their body rather than over the back as in "typical" scorpion fashion. This also allows them to capture prey in the very narrow crevices in which they live. Their bodies are extremely flattened as a similar adaptation. There are no dangerous scorpions in this group - they are usually of a very gentle nature and will allow themselves to be handled without retaliating.

The arboreal scorpions are tree-dwelling species. They live under the bark and in fissures in the wood.

The fascinating world Of Scorpions

Derived from our Field Guiding course

The cavernicolous scorpions are adapted to living in caves. The group is further subdivided into two sub-groups; troglodyte and troglophilic species. The former species are entirely restricted to cave dwelling, whereas the latter like to live in caves, but they are not restricted to this habitat.

Characteristics



All species have stinging apparatus at the end of their tail, also known as the telson. All have a pair of eyes at the top of the cephalothorax, and several pairs of simple eyes on the front edge of the head. The further back on the head that the large eyes are placed, the better the indication of the hardness of the ground in which the species lives. The harder the ground, the further back the eyes are positioned.

The chelicerae are the chewing mouthparts of scorpions and are situated at the front edge of the head. The pedipalps, which are greatly enlarged sections of the mouthparts, form the pincers. These are used in handling and killing prey.

The pre-abdomen has seven segments. The third to sixth bear the spiracles that lead to the book lungs.

The post-abdomen has five segments and ends in the Telson, or sting. The last segment on the post-abdomen bears the anus. Venom is produced in a pair of glands situated at the

base of the sting. These glands are joined by a common duct through which the venom is forced when muscles surrounding the glands are squeezed. Some species can squirt this venom for short distances when irritated.

The venom produced by scorpions is mostly of a neurotoxic type (nerve acting) and all cause considerable pain to human victims. Only a few are potentially lethal to humans. In Southern Africa, only the *Parabuthus* and *Hottentotus* genera contain dangerous species. *Uroplectes* species (the name incidentally means "stinging punishment") are responsible for most stinging incidents in South Africa.

Stridulation (scraping / hissing noises) is achieved by rasping the sting against rough sections on the dorsal surface of the tail, or by rasping bristles on the chelicerae against the carapace. These sounds are created as warnings to predators.

As a rule, scorpions with a thin sting and large pincers are not dangerous. Those with thick stings and feeble pincers are potentially dangerous.

Situated on the ventral surface of scorpions is a pair of gill-like structures called pectines. These act as sensory organs and are used in locating prey and for the detection of enemies. Besides the pectines, the pedipalps bear fine sensory hairs that allow scorpions to detect the smallest movements from up to 50 cm (± 20 inches).



It's just a step To the left

By David Batzofin



It is usual for guests, both local and international, to seek out South African game reserves that offer the opportunity to see the **Big 5** when they visit. For those who don't know, the 5 are; lion, leopard, buffalo, rhino, and Elephant. If the reserve has cheetah and wild dog, then you can claim to have seen the **Magnificent 7**.

A new duo seems to have rocketed up the Top 10 species list, somewhat unexpectedly I might add. Zebra and Giraffe are now a must-see species for many visitors. Although zebra offers spectacular photo opportunities, being the tallest land mammal (6m), the giraffe has captured the attention and the hearts of many who set foot on African soil. Compare that to the long-necked extinct plant-eater, **Sauroposeidon proteles** that stood more than 17m tall!

If what had transpired with my giraffe interactions had occurred with something that was 2.5 times their height, my story might have had a totally different outcome.



Although an elephant might weigh twice what a giraffe does, the latter can be almost 2m taller than an elephant and thus make an imposing sight as they stride across the open African plains or when approached on foot.

Are you aware that a giraffe can kick backward, forward, and even sideways? I did not until I was taught this lesson by a huge male giraffe at a reserve near Johannesburg.

A giraffe can be inquisitive and when I have come across them in the bush on previous occasions, I observed that they will often approach out of curiosity.

Like all good stories, perhaps I should begin this one with "Once upon a time"? Or perhaps not...

My first interaction with this particular individual took place early in the morning, and I suppose that if I had taken heed of what occurred then, the second encounter might not have happened. But often we humans have to learn from our mistakes and my day was filled with mistakes.

I had been visiting this reserve for more than 40 years and I knew this male giraffe very well, or so I believed.

It was early as I headed out on foot for a photographic excursion to take advantage of the morning light. I had seated myself in an open space where I could keep an eye out for zebra, springbok, wildebeest as well as the aforementioned giraffe who is the dominant male at this reserve.

Settling in and concentrating on the plains game in front of me, I did not see the giraffe approach me from behind until it was almost too late.

It's just a step

To the left

By David Batzofin

"Never run" is the mantra that every field guide had taught me and I decided to remain where I was, thinking that the giraffe would veer off once he noticed me.

However, he was enjoying the scenery as much as I was and really did not see me or he wanted me out of his 'territory' and was going to force a showdown.

I think that we both realised at roughly the same moment that we were on a collision course and that it would be prudent for me to "get out of Dodge" rather than try to get the giraffe to change his chosen path. Giraffe 1 - Humans 0.

As I slunk off to have breakfast I was certain that the giraffe had a smirk on his face knowing that he had got the better of me.

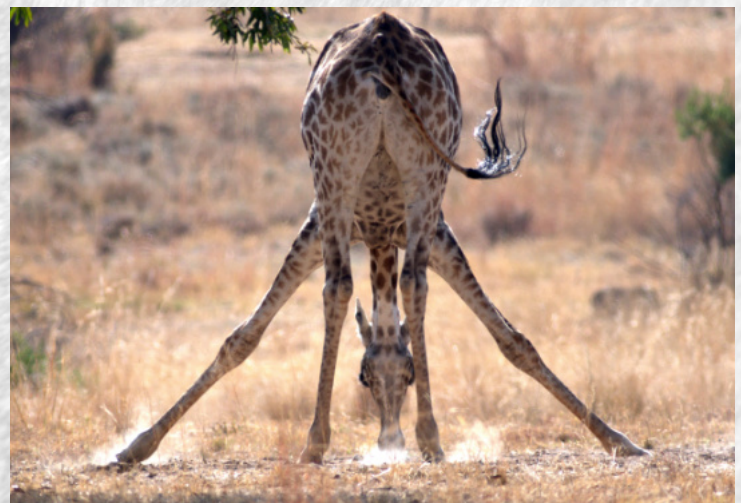
It was while tucking into my Full English that I took time to think about this particular male giraffe.

He had been born on this reserve and having lived there all of his life he was habituated to being around guests. Either allowing them to stand close for photographs or in some instances, visitors would be allowed to feed him. He also had an unnerving habit of sticking his head through an open car window of unsuspecting new arrivals to the reserve. Aside from interacting with the guests, he had a love for the thatch grass on the roofs of the chalets, and, I am certain, that the owners had a thatcher on speed dial for as quickly as they would repair the thatch he would be tucking into the new roof with gusto. Even though he had lived and interacted with people his entire life, he was still a wild animal at heart, and as such he harboured a dark side. And it was when he unexpectedly unleashed that side that everyone, including the staff, had to be wary. (as an aside, if he took a dislike to a particular staff member when they encountered each

other, they would be relentlessly chased around the chalets). He had good days and bad and in his defense, knowing him as I thought I did, I could usually judge his mood by looking into his eyes, which would warn me if I could approach or needed to stay clear.

Had I followed my own advice and looked into his eyes at the first encounter, I would have quickly realised that this day had all the hallmarks of not being a good one. Well, for him and me anyway! Guests were interacting with him, and he seemed to be relaxed as I approached him where he was being fed by the staff. In his defense, I was approaching from behind with no warning (stupid, I know), and so what happened should not have come as a surprise. As I passed his back leg, it shot out sideways! Not backward, as I would have expected. Luckily for me, I had been savvy enough to give the animal a reasonably wide birth, and his leg merely grazed mine without inflicting any damage. The only injury was to my pride as it occurred in front of guests and staff and the loud expletive that escaped my lips was a reflex action over which I had no control.

Giraffe 2- Humans 0 and lesson learned!



Cheers to 2020

Welcome to a positive 2021!

By Eloise Acx



As 2020 draws to a close, I believe many of us are left asking the question, “what was that?”

A rollercoaster ride does not even begin to describe what this year truly felt like. With much uncertainty, uncomfortable adaptations and some major changes, we were faced with what seemed the impossible.

After almost 9 months in lockdown and feeling rather alienated from what used to be “the norm”, we are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel (and as my dad used to say, it is not always another train). As we head towards a new phase in this ever-changing process, we have a renewed sense of hope that we can come together and connect as we could before.

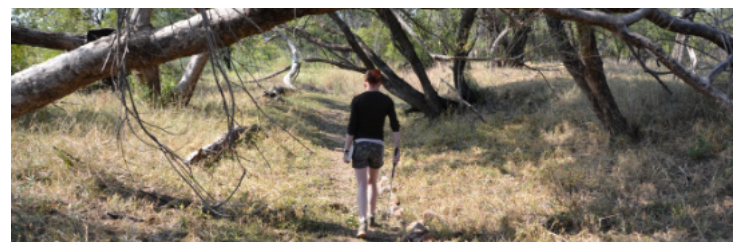
We also head towards the holidays and, usually, this is the time we reflect on the year gone by and what we plan for the next. We come to realise that while so many things are changing, there are always those things that stay the same. The consistent things that keep us feeling safe. We do not know what 2021 will bring, or how long it will be before we can go back to “the way things were”, but what we do know is that we are surrounded by opportunities! Perhaps not always in the way we want or expect them. They may even take you by surprise, but anything you can do to better yourself is an opportunity.

This season, do not only look back at what was likely the craziest year you have experienced ever but also take the time to look forward. Ask yourself, “what can I actively do to improve myself to take on 2021 and make it my best year yet?”

If you are looking to find work, try taking a course, learning a new skill or working on improving your CV. There are excellent online resources available to help you with this. If you already have a job, find ways to sharpen

your skills and how you can work better or more efficiently. No matter what your position, read, discover, EXPLORE and share your knowledge with others.

There is always something to teach and always something to learn!



“You’ve done it before and you can do it now. See the positive possibilities. Redirect the substantial energy of your frustration and turn it into positive, effective, unstoppable determination.”

-Ralph Marston

Our plans going forward

In 2021, the WildlifeCampus Team will continue developing new course content as well as updating the current courses. Our work in the field will resume as we actively continue supporting conservation-related training programmes such as anti-poaching and wildlife-related field training.

We look forward to welcoming all our new and previous students, as we continue to grow the WildlifeCampus community!

Cheers to 2020

Welcome to a positive 2021!

By Eloise Acx

Thank you all so very much

I would like to take this opportunity to thank WildlifeCampus CEO Todd Kaplan for all the support and backing in our projects and what we do.

The WildlifeCampus Team

Maggel Els for your lovely photos, taking such great care of the students and assistance with all course updates.

Jonathan Acx for your stunning design and photography work.

Our partner and affiliates



- Isabella and Lourens van Coppenhagen, Sydney Zeeman, Angelique Van Coppenhagen Kieser, Jacqueline Van Coppenhagen Smit, Markus Kieser, Simeon Smit and The GameWays Team, Students and Staff for the amazing work you do in the field of anti-poaching. It is always an honour to visit the training facility and we always appreciate the warm hospitality;
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- Hayley Cooper of Wild Dreams Hospitality for authoring an excellent new course;

- Johan Marais, Ashley Kemp and The African Snakebite Institute Team for sharing your knowledge and regular articles for our magazine;
- Dr Ian Firth, John Firth, Adrian Baillie-Stewart, Lana Baillie-Stewart, Piet Botma and the Hillcrest Game Estates Team for your continued support;
- Kailen Padayachee and the KaiNav Conservation Africa Team for your contribution to conservation and education;
- The Ocean's Research Team for sharing your knowledge, images and for the work you do to protect our oceans;
- Dave Southwood and Nico Van Zyl of Safari Staff for your continued support.

We thank you all for the valuable contributions you bring to WildlifeCampus and our students.

Then last, but not least, we thank YOU. Without our students, WildlifeCampus would not be possible. We thank you for your continued support and we wish you all the very best for the upcoming new year.

***Stay safe, cherish your loved ones
and enjoy the festive season!***

WildlifeCampus COO
Eloise Acx