



MEDIA RELEASE

**ISSUED BY: THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE (with pics)
NOVEMBER 2014**

YOUTH GIVEN ACCESS TO CAREER IN CONSERVATION

Twenty four youth from seven different provinces across South Africa as well as from Zambia recently graduated from the Youth Access: Conservation and Environmental Education bridging programme offered by the Southern African Wildlife College. This training will allow these students, who previously had little access to development opportunities, to pursue a career in the conservation sector or go on to further their studies having gained the necessary credits.

The programme, which was started in 2010 as a pilot project to bridge historically disadvantaged school leavers into conservation-based careers whilst also impacting the communities in which they live, has from the outset been facilitated through the WESSA and WWF eco-school's programme. Initially supported by funding from the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust (Managed by Nedbank Private Wealth), other donors such as Old Mutual, the Timbavati Foundation, First Rand Foundation's Rand Merchant Bank Fund and Friends of African Wildlife have also now come on board.

The training includes a four month contact session at the Wildlife College where learners complete various training modules including environmental leadership, environmental education, first aid, reptile handling and an unarmed field ranger training component in preparation for their two-months experiential work-placement in state-owned nature reserves. As part of their training the learners were involved in a range of activities from field ranger related activities to permaculture gardening, environmental presentations at schools and engagement with communities neighbouring reserves.

Interestingly during their workplace experiential learning, students came across a group of poachers. Fortunately, as a result of the training received from African Field Ranger Training Services - a division of the Southern African Wildlife College - the students were equipped to handle the encounter under the supervision of their mentors on the reserve.

The graduation ceremony was attended by key stakeholders such as: Limpopo Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET), Mpumalanga Tourism Parks Agency, Mnisi Tribal Authority, and of course proud family and friends of the graduates who had come to celebrate the achievements of these students.

Modjadji Nature Reserve manager and student mentor, Mr John Mhlongo of LEDET congratulated the students on their success mentioning that they were products of a fruitful stakeholder relationship and that the learners should "now lead by example and plough back into the community and conservation what they had learnt whilst on the the course."

These students, many of whom had little hope for a bright future or even employment, have come a long way. Since 2010, 86% of the students on this programme have found employment or have gone on to further their studies. Two of this year's students who hail from the local community in Welverdiend have, on completion of the programme, been accepted to complete a year long National Certificate in Conservation: Resource Guardianship. This follows a strict selection process, which saw applicants being whittled down from 200 to 30. These 30 students' studies and practical training at the College will be funded through the DBSA Jobs Fund and they will then go on to fill positions within the Kruger National Park.

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Issued on behalf of the Southern African Wildlife College: 5 November 2014

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



(1) One of the students completes her Environmental Education Training Module Assessment



(2) It was a proud moment for the students when they graduated from the Youth Access: Environmental Education and Conservation Bridging Programme offered by the Southern African Wildlife College to bridge students into a career in conservation.



(3) Student graduate, Ms Khulisa Mncube, seen accepting her certificate and award for the “Most Promising Conservationist” from Walter Mokganya of LEDET.