

The Rise of environmental education

by Nichelle Steyn



JC Strauss

Environmental education is vital to preserve biodiversity in South Africa. JC Strauss, director of education and training at Eco Academy, says it is essential to empower the youth with information that will enable them to determine their future by applying knowledge gained from the environment.

Strauss says that in spite of the lessons nature can teach the youth, there is currently a major absence in the public school curriculum. "I believe through environmental education we can create positive change to improve the future of the youth," he says.

Strauss can account for his belief with the testimonials of young adults who visited him on his farm. "Nature has its ways of changing a teenager's attitude and perspective on life." He explains further that environmental education is a powerful tool that can be used to guide teenagers in accepting responsibility for their decisions.

Historical background

According to Strauss, environmental education should also be integrated with cultural awareness. He says the beliefs of the African tribes that lived in South Africa before the 1800s can be of value to the youth today. He adds that these African tribes lived in harmony with their environment. "Their beliefs and society 'laws' were structured around a respect for nature," he explains.

He illustrates his point with one of their beliefs – if you pluck the flower





The Baobab has a special role in Africa. Elephants, monkeys and baboons depend on its fruit (the vitamin C content of one fruit is the equivalent of 4 oranges); bats pollinate them by crashing into the flowers while chasing insects; bush babies also spread the pollen; the pollen can be used as glue; the seeds are rich in protein, calcium, oil and phosphates.

of a baobab tree, you will be sad for the rest of your life. "The tribes believed this to be true and in believing it, they enabled the baobab to reproduce effectively."

He says prior to European colonisation, access to natural resources was controlled in various ways. "Resource use was influenced by religious beliefs and was affected by traditional healers."

Strauss wants to share the messages hidden in the history of conservation with the youth. "South Africa's nature conservation history is filled with lessons that the youth can benefit from. It is built on trials and tribulations. The Department of Water and Environmental Affairs relays this part of history on their website. In the early days, just after South Africa was discovered by the Europeans, natural resources were further exploited, as settlers explored the land."

One of the first initiatives to conserve some of the land came from Jan van Riebeeck, who gave instructions to regulate hunting in the Cape in 1656. "The Southern Cape forests were valuable to the British Navy and from 1811

measures were introduced to conserve the forests around Plettenberg Bay. By the 1830s, rapid deforestation in the British colonies in India, Africa and Mauritius led to increased conservation awareness," the website states.

According to Strauss, South Africans have come a long way in restoring the land that was plundered during the early colonial period. "Various political leaders such as President Paul Kruger and pioneers in conservation such as Dr Ian Player played an important role in establishing conservation in the wildlife industry," he says.

Player is well known as the initiator and team leader of an innovative project called Operation Rhino. This successful effort resulted in numerous independent research papers. He also initiated a number of documentaries on the rhino and established a successful antipoaching network in South African game reserves, which resulted in an impressive reduction in poaching and predation.





2013 *Eco Academy* students immersed in continuous learning - the campus offers students a unique and vast classroom. (Photo by Quintus Strauss)

Louis Strauss gaining intimate knowledge of the behaviour of dangerous game species.



"Conservation methods during the colonial period were born out of the value that South Africans place on wildlife," Strauss explains. "It is important to expose the younger generation to nature, so that they can carry on this legacy by adding the same value to wildlife."

Objectives

As part of his plan to promote environmental education, Strauss developed outcomes that specifically cater for the courses the youth can take at Eco Academy. One of the key objectives of such a course is to instil an awareness and appreciation of the natural environment in the youth. "Young people should understand biodiversity and correlate the lessons they learn in nature with the challenges they face in their lives."

Strauss says if one can teach the youth that their values will influence the way in which they interact with their biophysical, economic, social and political environment, the door will be open to drive conservation in the future.

At his academy, Strauss strives to equip participants with life skills that will empower them to make a meaningful contribution towards a better global environment. "These skills include observation, thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills that will come in handy when they are adults." He further explains that if one can help the youth to observe

nature on a deeper level, they will become more self-aware and in the process develop a strong awareness of other people's needs. "If teenagers can relate to the environment and alter their behaviour towards making more responsible decisions, they will enhance their learning experience and become more independent adults," he concludes.

For more information and course schedules, contact JC on africa@ecoranger.co.za or visit www.ecoranger.co.za. Eco Ranger Conservation Services (ERCS) is a proud member of WRSA.



Game Rangers and Field Rangers are the principal guardians of the world's premier natural and cultural protected environments. JC's approach to education equips young adults with the skills to become future leaders as Area Integrity Managers.



Antipoaching ranger qualification re-engineered

The International Anti-Poaching Foundation (IAPF) and Eco Ranger Conservation Services (ERCS) have recently circulated an application to participate in a collaborative, industry-wide initiative. This project will adequately address the levels of training and operational support that rangers require to defend high-target species from poachers.

Applications are now open for the 35 most relevant antipoaching instructors and managers from the public and private sectors across Africa to attend the initiative for up to seven days on 18-25 April 2013 at Eco Academy in Hoedspruit.

The outcome of the project will see the completion of a new qualification and national certificate: antipoaching ranger. The standardised training and operational materials developed will be co-owned by stakeholders who participate in the process and will be regulated by a committee established during the project. The workshops, material development team, qualification registration and facilitators will be sponsored and administered by the IAPF.

Successful antipoaching requires a unique and different skill-set to area management, guiding, security, wildlife studies, tourism and hospitality. The antipoaching ranger qualification will complement existing studies, but provide the niche capabilities to deploy, operate and command on today's wildlife battlefield.

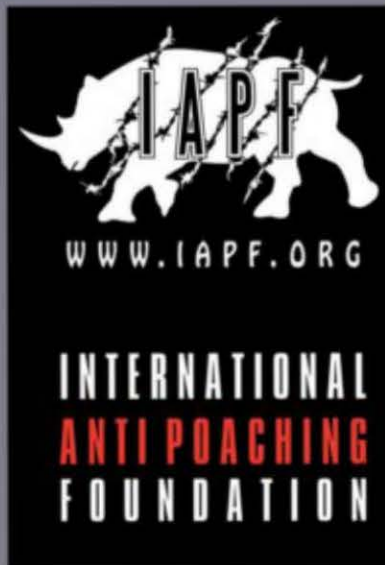
"Knowledge should not remain tucked away in our heads. This

drastically limits education when it is desperately needed. Our grouped expertise should be able to be packaged up easily. We need fluid systems to deliver our knowledge and encourage its distribution. These training systems should be more readily available, more sophisticated, easier to use and more effective than anything else available," states the IAPF's chief executive officer, Damien Mander.

The outlined process does not aim to replace the role of trainers or training organisations. It is simply developing another tool to be used and a network to be a part of.

All of us in the field of wildlife conservation, to which we have dedicated our lives, will naturally disagree on many aspects. Game rangers are by nature individuals and have their own strong opinions. Wildlife conservation is constantly changing and the threats grow worse every year. I believe the one thing we all have in common is the need to improve the training standards of the game rangers who are in the front line in the fight for wildlife conservation. Damien Mander has come up with a model I believe deserves serious consideration by all of us because it will enable us to move forward on a common platform. It is important that we all combine to develop new standards embracing new technology. The devastating scourge of rhino and elephant poaching in Africa has highlighted how desperate the situation is becoming. We all have to work together in this monumental fight.

Dr Ian Payer – World renowned conservationist




I have no interest, concern or time for politics and rivalry. Those who see benefit will come along or be left behind.

Pelham Jones – chairman: Private Rhino Owners Association

As long as demand for rhino horn persists and the price remains so extraordinarily high, we will face this serious poaching problem and rhinos will need to be protected physically. Their best short-term chance for survival depends critically on early detection and interception of poaching gangs before they even get to the rhinos. A strong and well-networked anti-poaching system is probably the best investment rhino conservationists can make at this time.

Michael 't Sas-Rolfes – Industry Leading Conservation Economist

If you would like more information, please send an e-mail to info@iapf.org. 

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