

African WILDLIFE & ENVIRONMENT

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**The uMzimkhulu
OUR LAST FREE FLOWING RIVER**

**Rhino Poaching
THE NEGOTIATION**

**An Ecological Perspective on Locusts
CURSE OR BLESSING?**

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ENVIRONMENT SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA



WESSA

PEOPLE CARING FOR THE EARTH

CONTENTS

The content below is hyperlinked to the article
Just click and read

1 [Editorial](#)

2 [Good reads](#)

FWF Newsletter

7 [Ford Wildlife Foundation Newsletter 2 \(2022\)](#)

Conservation

11 [The uMzimkhulu - our last free flowing river](#)

15 [Rhino poaching - the negotiation](#)

18 [New life at Inverdoorn](#)

Fauna, Flora & Wildlife

20 [Marula stories](#)

26 [Marula, the tree that gives so much](#)

29 [An ecological perspective on locusts: curse or blessing?](#)

32 [The importance of private game reserves](#)

Gardening for Biodiversity

39 [Pig's Ears - a no-nonsense plant](#)

Destinations

46 [Kruger National Park, Satara Camp](#)

Birding

52 [Southern White-faced Owl](#)

Eco Hero

57 [Professor E.O Wilson](#)

Special Book Review

62 [Montane to Mangrove Framework of the Gorongosa Ecosystem](#)

Nature Notes

70 [Kid's Corner with Candice](#)

74 [Forests big and small](#)

Subscriptions / General

88 [WESSA membership](#)

89 [Leaving a legacy](#)

90 [Region, area office, branch & centre contacts](#)

91 [Publication details](#)



Rhino poaching - the negotiation



Marula stories



Pig's Ears - a no-nonsense plant



Kruger National Park, Satara Camp



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Cover photograph: John Wesson

EDITORIAL

In this issue of your magazine we examine the state of South Africa's last free-flowing river, touch on rhino poaching, learn a lot about marula trees, locusts, private game reserves, and the Pig's Ears plants for your garden. We visit Satara Camp in the Kruger National Park, learn about the Southern White-faced Owl, then zip across into Mozambique to meet our world-famous Eco Hero who was astounded by the biodiversity of the Gorongosa National Park and the work being done to restore it after years of civil war. We read about the remarkable Dr Ken Tinley, who studied Gorongosa for five years, then put together a ground-breaking DSc thesis that explains in great detail how the kaleidoscope of geology, vegetation, climate and animals come together to create the amazing ecosystems of the park. Finally, in Kid's Corner, we revisit some of the wonderful educational material from past issues of WESSA's publications that are still very relevant today.

The slaughter of our rhinos continues unabated, and veteran conservationist John Varty makes the thought-provoking suggestion that we need some kind of mediation between the warring parties, brokered by one or more of our NGOs. This would be amazing if it could happen, but I have little hope of that. This is because the prime villains in the rhino war are the criminal syndicates that control the poaching business, as well as other activities around the country's national parks and nature reserves.

These syndicates will never reveal their true identities. Not only are they guilty of numerous crimes, but they also know the government officials that participate in this whole sordid business. The corrupt state employees in the protected areas themselves, the police who turn a blind eye in return for money, and people in high government positions would be exposed, and this would not do at all. The state security department must know exactly who is involved in the rhino poaching syndicates. One day the truth will come out – probably too late for the rhinos. It is a dreadful situation. Dr Ian Player must be turning in his grave.

We are truly fortunate to have Professor Anthony Turton as a regular contributor to our magazine. His wide knowledge and communication skills bring new understanding of complex topics to our readers. In this issue he tells us about the threats to the uMzimkhulu, our last free-flowing river. It is a tale of

Dr John Ledger

bad decisions, lack of understanding of how hydraulic systems work, and illegal activities such as sand-mining. We can but hope that his article will be read by some of those responsible for decision-making in this matter.

The Marula is a well-loved and commercially important tree in southern Africa. Professor Eugene Moll gives us a full lecture on this iconic member of the Mango family. Sandy Roberts adds some medicinal uses for marula bark, and a recipe for marula syrup, which sounds delicious! Eugene comes back to our pages with insights on the ecological role of locusts, which should give many readers some pause for thought.

We accompany John Wesson to the Kruger National Park, to stay at Satara Camp and explore the surrounding areas. John is a talented photographer, and it is wonderful to have him as the leader of the editorial team, because when we need a particular image, John is sure to provide one.

Our Eco Hero is the late Professor Edward O Wilson, world-famous entomologist, prolific author and renowned academic from Harvard University, who was captivated by the Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique and did field work there as well as inspiring and mentoring students.

When Greg Carr secured a 20-year contract with the Mozambique government for the restoration of Gorongosa, he came across Dr Ken Tinley's seminal study of the park. This thesis contained astonishing details of the 'framework of the Gorongosa ecosystem', and is regarded as one of the most important studies of its kind. Tinley's thesis has now been published as a beautifully illustrated book, an electronic version of which is generously available as a free download.

On page 67 of your magazine is a poignant photograph of the 86 year-old Dr Ken Tinley sharing his knowledge and experience with Dominique Gonçalves, a young Mozambican woman who is the manager of elephant ecology in Gorongosa. 'Passing the baton' does not get much better than this!

Dr John Ledger

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New life at INVERDOORN

Following the tragic poaching incident at Inverdoorn Private Game Reserve in December 2021, a crime that left four rhinos dead and a fifth pregnant cow badly injured, Aquila Collection owner, Searl Derman, was excited to make an announcement on 02 May 2022.

“I am elated to announce that, not only were arrests made within days of the incident back in December, but the surviving pregnant rhino gave birth to a healthy baby rhino boy on 30 April.”

The Inverdoorn anti-poaching team came across the horrific scene of rhino poaching on their 10,000 hectare Western Cape private game reserve on 8 December 2021. The four dead rhinos had their horns brutally removed while an injured female rhino was missing and had to be tracked. A specialist team was immediately assembled to firstly find her, and then look after her safety while guiding her through recovery.

SENT ON BEHALF OF AQUILA COLLECTION BY:

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“Under the guidance and supervision of specialist and renowned veterinarian Douw Grobler, the injured female was constantly monitored, and finally stabilized enough to perform a series of reconstructive procedures to reassemble parts of her face that had been badly injured by a close range rifle bullet,” explained Derman. “During those first few days following the despicable crime, several arrests were also made by the SAPS (South African Police Service) supported by Cape Nature, and the private investigative teams that were deployed minutes after confirmation of the incident.”

In a miraculous turnaround of events, on Saturday 30 April, one of the Inverdoorn rangers, out on an early morning game drive, spotted a new-born White Rhinoceros struggling in an aardvark hole. The anti-poaching team and management were immediately notified and the Aquila 24 Hour Rapid Rhino Response Team (a privately funded and managed unit that was established to locate, rescue and rehabilitate

any orphaned rhinos from private game reserves throughout South Africa) was activated.

“The onsite team managed to pull the animal free from the hole without any injury, and identified it as a baby male rhino calling for his mother,” said Derman.

Tears of joy from the management and reserve teams followed as they managed to reunite him with his mother who was then identified as the surviving rhino from the horrendous poaching incident that took place at Inverdoorn in December 2021.

“The judicial system is currently in control of the process to bring justice to the lost rhino lives, and we once again thank all the role-players and stakeholders that supported my teams and myself back in December 2021. The miraculous birth of this baby rhino is a joyous moment and celebrated



Searl Derman at the scene



throughout wildlife circles and the global rhino conservation community. Just a few short months ago, we were under immense pressure to save the mother’s life, now we see the miracle of an added life,” said Derman.

For the safety of the rhino, and the survival of the calf, the baby and mother will be monitored over the upcoming days by the 24-hour Rapid Rhino Response Team to ensure the baby and mother bond. Thereafter, guests visiting Inverdoorn Private Game Reserve just outside of Cape Town, might just have the bucket-list privilege to spot the mother and baby on a magnificent game drive experience.

No expense was spared in the investigative processes as well as the survival of the rhino. All funds received by the generous donors to the multi-

award winning and internationally recognised Saving Private Rhino organization is spent solely on the ongoing investigative costs and medical bills of the December 2021 incident, and the public may still pledge their support via SavingPrivateRhino.org or its Facebook page.

Media Queries

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