

Glasgow & Strathclyde University Royal Naval Unit, South Africa Expedition Report

This being the first time that a University Royal Naval Unit (URNU) student group has been away on a conservation and community focussed trip we had set ourselves high standards and a broad range aims to fulfil in a short two week window.

We had a clear strategy to focus on three main aims;

Conservation of wildlife and the environment within the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

Community engagement and empowerment.

Education of the attending students to open their eyes to some of the humanitarian issues along with the man-made pressures facing the wildlife and wild places of South Africa.

I am very pleased to say that we definitely achieved our aims. Below I will attempt to summarise the key activities and achievements of this group.

Conservation

Given the links the expedition leaders have with key players in Eastern Cape conservation, we were lucky enough to be able to organise a lion procedure for this student group on Sibuya Private Game Reserve. The reserves pride of lions (1 male, 2 females and 3 cubs) was due to be relocated to a much larger area of the reserve recently acquired. Before doing this it was imperative from an ecological and security standpoint to tag the lions with trackers. The group, through their fundraising, was able to sponsor a state of the art telemetry chip for the male lion. These new chips sit under the skin similar to a microchip and so differ to the conventional collars which are very visible and not as good for an ecotourism reserve. The students played an active role in this procedure, helping to lift and move the lions to a safe area where the vet could insert the implants before waking them up. According to many of the students this was one of the best experiences of their lives - it's not everyday you get to touch a wild lion!

Community

With the remainder of the fundraised money the students supported two different community projects.

The first of these was a community outreach in a township called Kilfontein, organised by the Kareiga Foundation. We attended to help provide advice, veterinary treatment such as flea and worm treatments and rabies vaccines to over 80 cats and dogs. The students saw firsthand how teaching people to improve animal welfare helps by lowering zoonotic disease risk but also to prevent inter-species transmission of diseases such as rabies between domestic animals, wildlife and people.

The second project we worked on was to help improve a local soup kitchen in a larger township called Marselle - an area where 95% of children don't graduate from school and some as young as 6 years old get sucked into drugs, gangs and prostitution to scrape a living. The aim of the soup kitchen is to provide a safe haven where children can get help with schooling, join sports teams and receive one square meal per day.

Education

During the two weeks the students received a variety of lectures from guest speakers as well as watching pertinent documentaries on subjects such as wildlife poaching. All of this was an attempt to paint a picture of the conservation and community initiatives happening in the Eastern Cape from a huge number of dedicated people and organisations. Some of our guest speakers included;

Nick Fox - GM & owner of Sibuya Game Reserve - History and future of the reserve.

Dr William Fowlds - Wildlife Vet - The Rhino Horn Poaching Crisis.

Shane Preller - Marine Guide Instructor - Plastic Pollution and Climate Change.

Schalk Pretorius - Owner of Ulovane Environmental Training - SA's Biodiversity & Climate.

Shaun Marais - Sibuya Wilderness Experience facilitator - Estuarine Conservation.

Sibuya Game Reserve Anti-poaching Rangers - Track & attack dog demo & chat.

Dr Danielle Jackson - Expedition leader - Veterinary Procedures & Game Capture.

Jake Dove - Expedition leader - History of conservation on the African continent.

On top of all of these inspirational and informative talks we had our fantastic guides Pablo & Scott who taught the students plenty when out on game drives each day.

Conclusion

Overall the trip was a fantastic success and we would just like to thank SES for championing our expedition and hope it isn't the last one!

Report compiled by Expedition leaders Jake Dove & Dr Danielle Jackson.