

African Pangolin Working Group Chairman's Annual Report: March 2018 to February 2019

Highlights

Another year has passed and each year I seem to repeat how I opened my previous annual reports...the trade in South Africa has more than doubled and we have never been so busy! We have had 43 pangolin-related cases in 2018 in South Africa regarding live animals and just under 40 tons of pangolins scales were intercepted leaving Africa's shores, mostly destined for Asia. While it sometimes feels an impossible task and our heartbreak is often more prevalent than our joy and success, just to be in the company of this mystical, bewitching creature is one of my greatest joys and drives one on to just try and save one more.

I have attempted to capture some highlights of the year in this report but have omitted much as it was just too busy. It is often difficult to comprehend all the achievements of my Board and our close partners; Dr Karin, Penny, Michelle, Ashley and others of the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital – I am always in your debt and so grateful. While our Board has had two resignations this year, we are now much stronger in that all Board members play a very active role and they all make a substantial contribution to our success without simply appearing in name. It is my great pleasure to welcome Amanda Irving to our Board entering into the new financial year – Amanda bring a wealth of talent, energy and new ideas. To our long-standing Board members, Nicci and Alexis, we could not have saved so many without your complete dedication and support, thank you.

One of the highlights of the year was the launch of our K9 counter-poaching pangolin unit where Anika Verwey was appointed as project manager on the 1st of June in partnership with the Ichikowitz Foundation and the Paramount Group who donated our first dog, Havoc. We are very grateful to Hill's for the sponsorship of his dog food that is so important for a working dog to have a well-balanced, nutritious diet.

While the public often feel helpless and are desperate to help and contribute more to the conservation of Africa's pangolins, just your support on social media, spreading the word and donations go a very far way in turning the tide against the scourge that is pangolin poaching and trade in Africa. We are most grateful and you do not go unnoticed. I would also like to express my gratitude to the South African Police Service (in particular the wildlife crime, organised crime and covert units) as well as government Environmental Management Inspectorate for the close working relationship over the past year – teamwork is essential in this war, thank you.

In the rest of my report, I will try and summarise some of the most pertinent activities we have spent our energy on trying to curb the tide that is the scourge of the illicit underground pangolin trade.

Presentations, Interviews, Excursions, Events & Documentaries

1. Ray and Nicci presented a talk to the Midrand SANParks Honorary Rangers in the evening on Thursday 15th March at Siemens House, Midrand
2. Nicci was interviewed and a photo shoot undertaken by the Associated Press whilst walking pangolins on the 16th March
3. Ray and Dr Karin Lourens presented a talk to Onderstepoort veterinary students on the 2nd May
4. Nicci and Alexis presented on pangolins to a group from Creature Conserve - a community of international young artists and scientists who visited South Africa under the leadership of Lucy Spellman - at a workshop in Hoedspruit
5. Nicci, Alexis and Ray attended a fund-raising event organised by Amanda Urving and Alexis at Chaplain's Grill. Ray made a presentation and a silent auction of artwork was as well as raffle tickets for a weekend win on a private lodge was made. A total of R79,860.00 was raised directly as a result of this event.
6. Alexis, Nicci and Ray attended a donation ceremony on the 7th June at Wits University with the Chinese ambassador and a business delegation organised by HSI Africa. Ray made a brief presentation and 10 VHF transmitters to the value of R32k were handed over to the APWG
7. Ray, Nicci & Dr Karin met with the DEA in a meeting chaired by Frances Craigie to discuss an SOP for pangolin retrieval, rehabilitation and release. It was decided and agreed upon that no further will any pangolin retrieved out of the illegal trade be released without rehabilitation. A second follow-up meeting was held on the 17th September to finalise the SOP that would be passed on to government for approval
8. Ray, Nicci, Dr Karin & Penny presented to 50 delegates from SAPS, DEA, LEDET, MTPA & game reserves in a course held in Hoedspruit on the 20th July regarding the illegal wildlife trade in pangolins in Africa, pangolin retrieval, rehabilitation and release in South Africa.
9. Ray, Nicci, Penny, Alexis and Dr Karin presented a course to SAPS, EMI, DEA, LEDET and other private security organisation in Hoedspruit on the 20th July. The topic was on pangolin illegal wildlife trade in Africa with a focus on South Africa, pangolin transportation, rehabilitation and veterinary care as well as suitability of release sites and post release monitoring.
10. Sunday times interview by Alex Patrick was published on the 9th September
11. Ray, Nicci, Alexis and Dr Karin presented a course to Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Botswana Police Service and private vets at Mokolodi Wildlife Reserve (outside Gaborone) on the 30th October 2018. Similar to the course presented in Hoedspruit, the topic was on pangolin illegal wildlife trade in Africa with a focus on South Africa, pangolin transportation, rehabilitation and veterinary care as well as suitability of release sites and post release monitoring.
12. BBC Sky news interviewed Nicci and Dr K at the hospital and the program was aired on 31 December

Pangolin retrieval & rehabilitation

1. Nicci and Dr Karin collected a very young female pangolin (Electra, 1.8 kg) from Thabazimbi in the evening of the 4th March, she was still on her mother's back who had been electrified on a game farm fence
2. Nicci and Dr Karin flew down to Hoedspruit on the 5th March to collect a large male pangolin (Soshangane, 14.8 kg) recovered in a string operation by Hammersbach
3. Nicci and Ray drove up to Pilansberg on 30th March to release Soshangane (large male) and to pass over Electra to Andrew Jackson for rehabilitation. Soshangane ripped his transmitter off on the 8th day following his release and we can no longer follow his progress. Electra did not survive her rehabilitation.

4. Silver was brought into the hospital on the 20th May following a sting operation by the SAPS in Silverton, Pretoria. He underwent rehabilitation when we made a request to the DEA on the 28th May for his release to be approved. We finally were given approval on the 6th June and Dr Karin Lourens and myself took him to the Waterberg and released him. He was located two days later dead. In the week we waited for DEA approval he had lost 10% of his body weight which contributed significantly to his demise.
5. Nicci & Penny facilitated a release of “Big Boy” in the Pilansberg after successful rehab after he had been dropped off by the flying squad at the Silverton NSPCA.
6. Ray flew over the Waterberg in a Robinson R44 helicopter sponsored by the Baterleurs in hope of finding “China’s” signal that we lost in June. He still could not be located.
7. Nicci facilitated the release of “Tumble” on the 11th July after his successful rehabilitation after being tossed out of a car travelling at 160 km/hr.
8. Nicci, Penny & Alexis facilitated the release of “Umqombuti” on the 18th July, the young female pangolin intercepted in Brumer, Johannesburg kept in a sorghum beer crate, into the eastern lowveld.
9. Ray facilitated a sting operation in Rustenberg on the 1st August assisted by Nicci, Alexis, and Anika with her pangolin detection dog ‘Havoc’. Two people were arrested and a large male pangolin retrieved, “Rampa”. Interestingly, this old pangolin survived very well in captivity but succumbed rapidly once released
10. Johannesburg flying squad retrieved a young female pangolin “Maya” out of Littleton on the 6th August and brought her to the hospital
11. Francois Meyer collected a young adult female pangolin “Kwarra” from a member of public in Musina on the 11th August, very likely an escapee from the trade. It was later determined that she was pregnant but we lost her signal to monitor the birth
12. A very young female pangolin “Aura” was retrieved out of the trade by the SAPS on the 17th August. A collaborative agreement was established with Rhino Revolution and their staff were trained to assist with the rehabilitation of this very young female
13. A large male pangolin “Khufu” was retrieved by the SAPS in Sinoville, Johannesburg on the 13 September and all pangolins now released were fitted with both VHF and Satellite telemetry as we have lost VHF signal from a number released. Penny assisted in transporting him and Maya to their far northern Limpopo release site
14. The SAPS retrieved a male pangolin “Kunja” out of Acornhoek and transported it to Rhino Revolution, following rehabilitation it was released into a conservation area in the eastern lowveld and as monitoring progressed over a few weeks, it was located dead, crushed by an elephant bull in musk
15. Mpumalanga parks retrieved a male “Mtete” pangolin on the 3 October and he was released into a new release program in Mpumalanga where pangolins have previously gone locally extinct. This is the first attempt to re-establish a viable pangolin population into such an area in the country
16. An additional 15 pangolin were retrieved up to the 1st December and I have shortened my report but any further information regarding these pangolin can be requested. Alexis, Nicci, Penny, Dr Karin Lourens and a number a volunteers at the hospital have literally spent 100’s of hours “walking’ pangolins so that they can forage on their natural food source. It astounds me how devoted these individuals are, spending hours and hours in the blistering heat, driving rain and well into the night just to make sure these compromised creatures are well fed for the day – incredible!

Court proceedings

1. Ray attended the court proceedings in the Ga-rankuwa magistrates court on the 4th May to oppose bail for the Winterveld pangolin poacher arrested in a sting near Soshanguwe
2. Francois represented the APWG in Bochum Magistrates Court (Alldays CAs 27/05/2017) on the 28th May 2018; the accused was sentenced to three years imprisonment without the opportunity of a fine.

3. Francois represented the APWG in Musina Magistrates Court on the 20th June, the accused was sentenced to 4 years imprisonment without the opportunity of a fine.
4. Ray provided testimony in aggravation of sentencing against Walter Joseph in the Pretoria Magistrates court.
5. Ray provided testimony against two Zimbabwean accused in the Tzaneen magistrate court on the 18th October 2018. They were both issued with a 7 year jail sentence.
6. Ray provided testimony in aggravation in the Ga-rankuwa magistrate's court on the 29th November 2018 against the Winterveld pangolin poacher arrested in a sting near Soshanguwe.
7. Ray provided testimony in aggravation in the Middleburg magistrates court on the 22 February 2019 against a Zimbabwe nation, he was sentenced to a six year prison term

Pangolin trade in Africa

The illegal trade in African pangolin scales dipped slightly in 2018 compared to 2017 and sat at 39.7 tonnes compared to the 46.8 tonnes for the previous year (see attached Appendix for African trade). Bear in mind that this is only the amount of scales intercepted which represents only approximately 10% of the actual trade.

Pangolin trade in South Africa 2018

The illegal trade in pangolins in South Africa breached all previous records and sat at 42 individuals of which 37 came to the APWG for hospitalisation, rehabilitation and release (followed by extensive post release monitoring). I am not sure if the trade has sampling increased or if it as a result of increased efforts from us attending each court proceeding and delivering training workshops to magistrates, prosecutors, the South African police Service and EMI's that increase awareness and, as a result, intercept more pangolins in these wildlife trade syndicates. (see attached Appendix for South African trade)

I would like to thank the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital for their continued support and collaboration, without which we would not have had so much success in increasing the survival rate of the retrieved pangolins.

Research

Students

Abimbola Bayewu published the outcomes of her research master's investigating the traditional use of pangolins amongst rural tribal communities in South Africa into an accredited journal (see below), and we wish her well on all her future endeavours.

Francois Meyer registered for his MSc degree with the University of Venda (UNIVEN) under my supervision where he will be investigating the distribution, habitat use and survival of Temminck's ground pangolin that have been retrieved from the illegal wildlife trade and have been rehabilitated by us. We are extremely excited about this study as no study has comprehensively investigated post-release monitoring of these compromised pangolins pulled out of the trade.

Thando Radebe is finalising her master's degree investigating the association with pangolins and ectoparasites with a focus on African pangolins.

Zelda du Toit is finalising her PhD investigating the evolutionary genetic relationships between the four African pangolin species.

Publications

Baiyewo, AO, Boakye, MK, Kotze, Dalton, D & **Jansen**, R. (2018). Ethnozoological survey of the traditional uses of Temminck's ground pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*) within South African tribal communities. *Journal of Society & Animals* 26(3): 306-325

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Only one paper was published in 2018 but we have a number under review.



Ray Jansen
Chairman: African Pangolin Working Group

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