

African Pangolin Working Group Chairman's Annual Report: March 2020 to February 2021

Highlights

This past year has again been extremely busy for our small organisation and I get the strong sense that there is now a need for growth, primarily in the need for further staff to assist in our ongoing operations on the ground as well as for a base and infrastructure. This is all on the cards for the upcoming year and it comes with a sense of excitement. In saying this, I am extremely grateful to my Board members and our three field staff in carrying the burden of the workload over this past year.

Our formal staff component saw the appointment of Francois Meyer as Senior Field Manager of the Limpopo Region and Leno Sierra as Senior Field Manager of the KwaZulu Natal region. Glen Thomson remained in place as our K9 Counter-Poaching Manager but, unfortunately, we had to let Anika Verwey go due to lack of performance. Her position remains vacant but was advertised. Anika's dog, Havock, was returned to Paramount for redeployment and we purchased our own Belgian Malinois x Dutch Sheppard puppy, Raven, she is currently undergoing training with Glen on the scent of all four species of African pangolin. Raven was purchased through the very kind donation made from Hills Pet Food, who also sponsors her daily food rations.

As with all communities, organisations and companies around the world, we felt the large and immediate burden of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the impact of the pandemic on people as well as domestic and wild animals. With global lockdown restrictions enforced across all countries around the world, we witnessed an immediate collapse in the continental pangolin trade from Africa but an actual increase in the live pangolin trade in South Africa. The knock-on effect of job losses and desperation very likely played an immediate and significant impact on small-scale poaching for sustenance but also illegal wildlife trade. The drastic reduction in the trade of pangolins from Africa is likely more a result of the closure of ports, harbours and airports than any reduced harvest of pangolins from the wild. We expect this trade to increase once again once these ports reopen along with the free movement of people and goods. The source of the virus and the species 'responsible' for its transmission remains a heated debate with the majority of people and organisation singling out the natural host being a species of horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus* spp.) passing on a mutated form of the virus in unsanitary conditions to what was possibly a Sunda pangolin. The intermediate host species or 'smoking gun' remains 'at large' but is irrelevant as the misuse and abuse of wild animals by humans likely unleashed this virus. Again, the precise origins of this virus elude us.

Despite the restrictions placed on our movement during the various levels of lockdown imposed by the government, we were still able to present training workshops, appear in court to provide testimony in aggravation of sentencing for pangolin-related crimes, do media interviews and press statements, public lectures as well as being actively involved in intelligence-driven sting operations in retrieving pangolins out of the illegal wildlife trade.

Although our planned international pangolin conference to be held in September 2020 was unfortunately postponed, we are happy to announce that it will now (hopefully) take place in September 2021 in the Kruger National Park. A large component of our work over the past year has again seen the majority of pangolins rescued being released back into a wild environment - where we continue to monitor them in KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces. This is undoubtedly our greatest reward for the hardships we often experience dealing with the horror that is the illegal wildlife trade.

Through the pandemic we have gratefully remained financially secure, primarily through the extremely kind donations of the global public. Even small contributions amount to a significant amount in the end and this has enabled us, and our staff, to continue our efforts in trying to reduce the extinction threat hanging over these bewitching, charismatic, peaceful and beautiful mammals. Significant contributions were made through My School Card, Gone Outdoor, GivenGain (crowdfunding), Ichikowitz Foundation, Milkywire Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Network, Flowstone Gin, Hills Pet Food, Mammoth Safaris, Friends of Loskop, PayPal (collective) and individual large donations by Rachelle Furer, Robert Wang and Supreme Master Ching Hai. We are truly extremely grateful. Our organisations independent financial audit for the year March 2020 to February 2021 was undertaken by Alan Levitan & Associates Chartered Accountants. In short, income generated for this period amounted to R1 127 389, expenses were R496 470, with a nett profit of R425 383. For the first time, employee costs of R340 755 were our organisation largest expense and is indicative of changing times and evident of our growth. I have added our audited financial report to this annual report as we pride ourselves in remaining transparent to the public at large with the funds they have bestowed on us to carry on the conservation work on Africa's pangolins.

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 for this support and it does not go unnoticed. I would also like to express my gratitude to the South African Police Service (in particular the wildlife crime stock theft units, organised crime and covert units) as well as government Environmental Management Inspectorate (EMI) 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

Virtual presentations and interviews

26 November 2020, a data sharing meeting and agreement was reached with TRAFFIC international based in London, UK.

9 December 2020, Launch of Fauna beer in the UK featuring pangolins.

16 February 2021, USAid VukaNow World Pangolin Day global event.

18 February 2021, &Beyond live: A pangolins journey from rescue to release.

19 February 2021, "Scales of injustice", book webinar hosted by Penguin Random House.

Presentations

22 September 2020, an in person presentation by Ray to SA Hunters Association at the Rietvlei Nature Reserve on pangolin trade and conservation in Africa.

27 November 2020, an in person presentation by Ray to the Grade 9 girls at St Stithians Girls College on pangolin trade and conservation in Africa.

Workshops & training

5 August 2020: Veterinary training and pangolin handling in Kenya – virtual workshop.

3 February 2021: Hosted a workshop at Witsand Nature Research in the Northern Cape Province. Delegates included members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) Stock Theft & Endangered Species Unit, SAPS Crime Intelligence, SAPS Directorate of Priority Crimes Investigations (HAWKS), three local veterinary surgeons and staff, local farmers, Provincial Department of Nature Conservation and other interested parties.

Dr Mark Ofua, a veterinary surgeon from Nigeria and a friend of the African Pangolin Working Group, secured funding from the Pangolin Crisis Fund to attend a variety of training exercises with us related to pangolin welfare, rehabilitation and release. He spent a week at the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital and then he joined us for the Witsand training workshop we presented. Following which he spent a few days at our K9 counter-poaching facility with Glen Thompson and finally a few days with Francois Meyer at our Limpopo Province rehabilitation and release program in the Limpopo Valley. It was wonderful to have Mark join us and seal a closer friendship with him and Nigeria.

Court proceedings (in providing expert testimony in aggravation of sentencing)

16 March 2020 Pretoria Central Magistrates Court

12 July 2020 Tzaneen Magistrates Court (virtual testimony)

16 July 2020 Pretoria Central Magistrates Court

29 July 2020 Pretoria North Magistrates Court

6 August 2020 Krugersdorp Magistrates Court

17 August 2020 Tzaneen Magistrates Court

30 September 2020 Polokwane Magistrates Court

23 February 2021 Pretoria Central Magistrates Court

Press and Media

Radio

SA FM: Sunday 16 February 2020

Television

eNCA Africa News: 09:30, 7 March 2020

Carte Blanche (M Net) 19 September 2020

Expresso Morning Show, SABC 3, 23 September 2020

CBS morning news, 1 December 2020

CNN, Going Green, 18 December 2020

Media

Saturday Star, May 11 2020

Mongabay, June 10 2020

The Daily Maverick, June 12 2020

Oxpeckers, June 12 2020

Saturday Star, June 13 2020

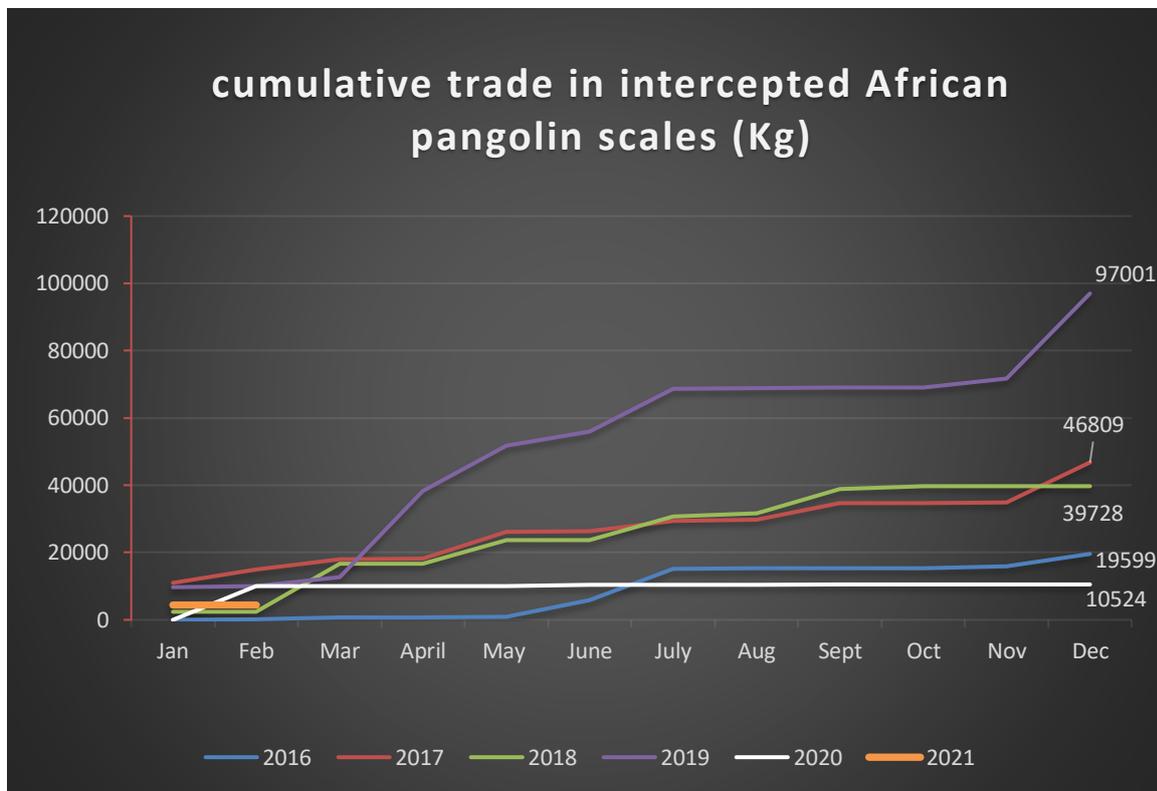
Mongabay, June 23 2020

Saturday Star, August 8 2020

Mongabay, 29 August 2020
 Biznews, 31 August 2020
 The Independent (UK), 30 & 31 August 2020
 Mongabay, 21 September 2020
 Africanews.com, 4 November 2020
 Mail & Guardian, 5 November 2020

Pangolin trade in Africa 2020

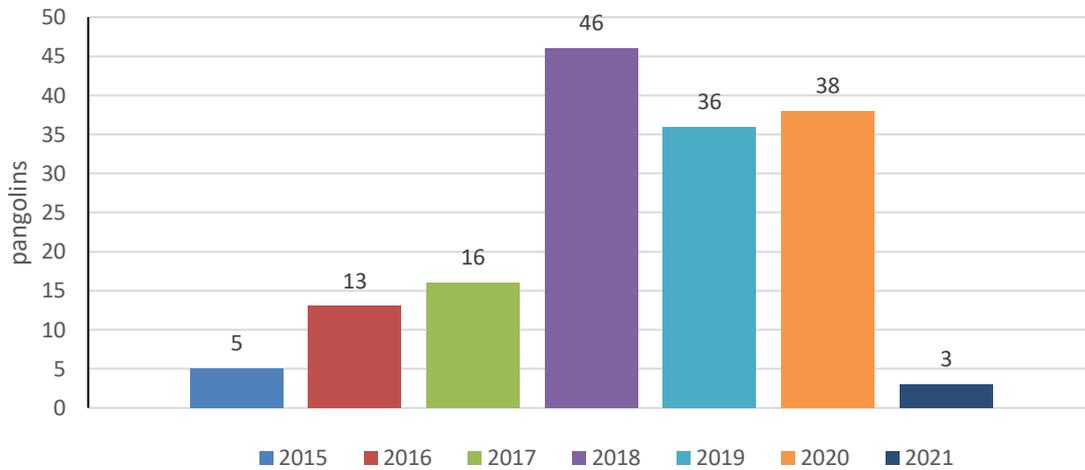
The illegal trade in African pangolin scales reached the highest proportions ever experienced in December 2019 at 97 tons of scales. During this reporting year, 2020, the trade collapsed to just over 10.5 tonnes and remained low into February 2021.



Pangolin trade in South Africa 2020

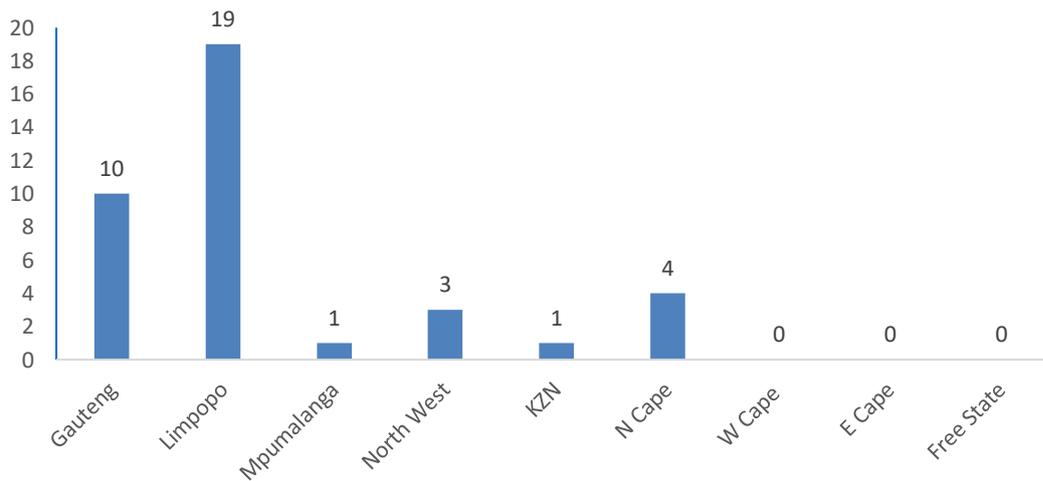
There were 79 people arrested in 2020 for being in the illegal possession of a pangolin in South Africa, up two from the previous year. The total number of pangolins retrieved during 2020 were 38, also up two from the previous year.

South African pangolin trade



One again, Limpopo Province served as the province with the most pangolins retrieved, followed by Gauteng Province in South Africa.

Pangolin trade per province in 2020



I would like to thank the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital for their continued support and collaboration in being the primary port where the pangolins receive initial emergency attention and care. Without which we would not have had so much success in increasing the survival rate of the retrieved pangolins.

Research

Students

Francois Meyer submitted his MSc dissertation in late 2020 and graduated from the University of Venda in early 2021. We are extremely proud of Francois achievement and all the new discoveries he has made with his focus on the survival, distribution and habitat use of Temminck's pangolin released after being retrieved out of the illegal wildlife trade. His dissertation is available for download as a PDF from our web site. Francois has now registered for his PhD at the University of Pretoria. He now extends this same focus but with a more fine-scale investigation into the lives of these released pangolins investigating their

behavioural patterns, foraging ecology, physiology and habitat use of this illusive shy creatures.

Thando Radebe also submitted and graduated with her Master's dissertation registered at the Tshwane University of Technology where her focus was on the novel association of 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.

Lauren Offered initiated her MSc at Tshwane University of Technology on the description of the macro reproductive tract for both male and female Temminck's pangolins. This study will be undertaken in associated with the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Veterinary Science located at Onderstepoort.

Publications

Zelda du Toit , Desiré L. Dalton, Morné du Plessis, Raymond **Jansen**, Paul J. Grobler, Antoinette Kotzé (2020). Isolation and characterization of 30 Short Tandem Repeats (STRs) for Temminck's ground pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*) and potential for cross amplification in other African species. *Journal of Genetics* 99:20

A last word

It has been my honour and absolute privilege to have been working hands-on with Africa's pangolins over the past 12 years. They are truly mystical magical creatures and I have been truly blessed. I remember every one we retrieved from the 'trade' and they will be forever with me. I am extremely proud of what our small non-profit organisation has achieved in the last decade since its inception back in 2011. I would never have thought we would have achieved so much and I am so grateful to my Board and field staff for their complete and utter commitment and absolute dedication. I have also been most fortunate to meet incredible pangolin conservationists across the world and bore witness to the amazing strides that have been made in global pangolin conservation, a truly amazing and incredible achievement from passionate people. However, the time has come that I make space for change and for me to revert back to my academia. I am so grateful for all the Government organisations, private NPOs, law enforcement and the general public at large for all you have contributed and urge you to please continue to help conserve Africa's pangolins and reverse their extinction threat.



Prof Ray Jansen
Chairman: African Pangolin Working Group