A proud Blue Sky Society Trust Initiative

Humanitarian Projects

Conservation & Wildlife

ANNUAL REPORT | 2016

CONNECTING PEOPLE,
PROJECTS & THE PLANET

Blue sky
SOCIETY TRUST

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Blue Sky Society Trust is an independent NPO, working to create a community of like-minded, passionate individuals and connecting them through education and action to worthwhile projects, that help to preserve and improve life for people, animals and communities in need.

NOTE FROM THE FOUNDER - CARLA GEYSER

2016 was an amazing year and one filled with achievement and adventure. Blue Sky Society Trust began as a seed of an idea and it morphed into an incredible charity fund raising project. For me personally it entailed growth on many levels and also brought me a deep sense of fulfilment.

I have always been an adventurer at heart but I also had a passion to contribute towards projects that were helping to change lives. One of my main passions has always been animal conservation and in particular I have been shocked by the increasing statistics that show how our African Elephant populations are being decimated.

I knew that if I was to raise money it would be for a cause that would help save our mighty elephants. Africa is truly one of the last places where we are privileged to see wild animals in protected environments and in their natural habitat.

As our human population has expanded the African Elephant has come under fire from local communities who are only trying to protect their land and crops. Desperate poachers are tempted to kill these mighty beasts to earn a living from selling ivory tusks to syndicates in China and other foreign countries.

Our idea with the Elephant Ignite Expedition was to look at ways we could constructively contribute to those projects that offered solutions to the problem. Although the Elephant Ignite Expedition was our main conservation project in 2016 we also recognised and identified a few other humanitarian projects that needed our support.

- The 'Soul to Sole' Project
- The 'Big Sister' Project
- Umbimbilethu Crèche and Day Care Facility

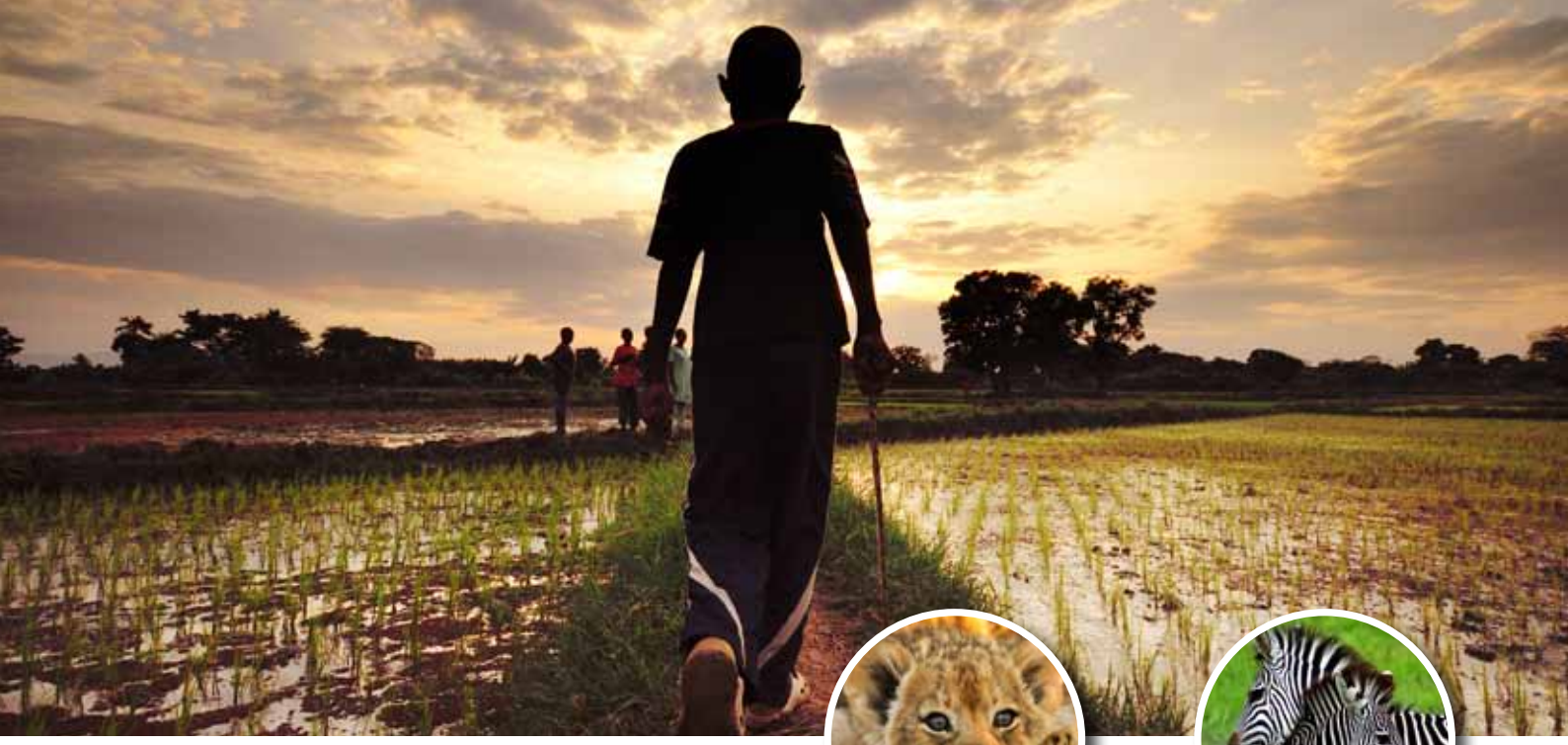
We were so glad to be involved in helping where we could make a difference. We helped put shoes on underpriviledged school children and we upgraded the facilities and donated clothing and toys to a needy crèche in a township near Umzumbe. We also helped make education accessible to teenage girls who often miss school due to their periods and lack of sanitary towels.

If anything I have realised the power of dreaming big (indeed the sky is the limit) and I have also realised that we all CAN make a difference in the lives of others.
I could not have done this alone and I have enjoyed the incredible support of the special men and women who shared my vision and who came on board to help.

Many of our funders have become friends and we at Blue Sky Society Trust are totally committed to moving into 2017 with the same enthusiasm and adventurous spirit. There will always be a need for people to step in and fill the gaps and we invite you to join us in whatever way possible – as individuals or as companies who share our vision to change lives.

We look forward to having you on board our ever growing Blue Sky Society Trust Family.

Asante Sane
Carla Geyser



BSST OVERVIEW

The Blue Sky Society Trust is more than an organisation dedicated to helping people and animals in need. For us and our supporters it's a way of thinking and a way of acting. The concept - blue sky – has many connotations and modern interpretations – but for most of us the vast blue sky above us is a symbol of infinite possibility. No clouds, no storms and a panoramic view to the left and right.

In Africa we are very lucky to see the endless skies stretching above us. We can see that we have many opportunities to impact on others and make a meaningful difference. For some people in our society - the challenges that face ordinary people who live in a diverse culture like ours, can make them simply become like tortoises. They pull their head into their shell and ignore what is happening outside.

Ignoring problems and becoming insular and indifferent to the suffering of others is a common defence mechanism. Quite often the underlying emotion is – FEAR.

People often think ... I don't know what to do. We believe that with enough heads together we can all find solutions. Choosing to face our fears head on is empowering and making a difference is incredibly rewarding.

Those of us who believe in the "Blue Sky Society Trust philosophy" – believe that together we can make things happen. We also believe that every small contribution can make a huge difference! Just by thinking positively and being proactive, we are contributing to change for the better.

We have big ideas and huge fundraising prospects, but ultimately the ripple of change begins with you and me getting involved. The sky's the limit for what we can achieve. Our vision is to identify and manage various projects where people can give of their time, expertise, ideas and funds to existing and new charities and support the valuable work they do.

We want to connect you with causes you are passionate about and together make a genuine difference in this beautiful place we call 'Mamma Afrika'. Blue Sky Society Trust has chosen projects that involve the conservation of animals like the mighty elephants, but we are not only conservation oriented.

Man and animal must co-exist and we believe there are many humanitarian causes out there that are worthy of our attention. This past year we have strived to offer proactive solutions to elephant killing supporting those charities that are at the coalface.

We have also improved the development conditions of children in the less fortunate communities by raising funds for various projects. Participation, support and community involvement is crucial to our success. Our desire is to change the world one small piece at a time.

Do not let what you cannot do ... tear from your hands what you can. ~ Ashanti Proverb

BSST OVERVIEW

Every ship needs a crew to steer it towards the horizon in search of a destination. The crew contributes their expertise and also gives advice on how to attain goals and negotiate challenges. The Blue Sky Society Trust trustees and patrons are all passionate about the environment and also more importantly making a difference.

Carla Geyser -
Founder & Trustee

I was born and raised in Pietermaritzburg where I had a loving family environment. My love for animals started at an early age and growing up I was fortunate to have my own pony and horse, so I spent much time outdoors. I remember at high school being fascinated by Green Peace and wanting to join them to help save the whales. I studied public relations after school but have always been semi-involved in the hospitality industry. I am a fun loving, down to earth person who loves adventure and travel. I'm blessed to have created a lifestyle where I can invest in those passions. My positive attitude and boundless energy has helped me make things happen.

Nicky Rutherfoord - Trustee

"Luckily for me I was born and bred in Northern Zululand with a passion for travel, people and the bush. I have been fortunate enough to have experienced many adventures both in Africa and internationally.

My diverse career has embraced both hospitality and recruitment and my personal belief is that it is our responsibility to honour our earth, and all with whom we share it with, four and two legged so that all can walk in balance and beauty."

Andre Liebenberg - Trustee

I graduated from the University of Stellenbosch in 1994 and after completing my articles with a Durban firm I was admitted as an attorney in 1997.

From 1999 I practised as a Commercial Litigation Director with Peacock Liebenberg & Dickinson Inc until I joined Garlicke & Bousfield in 2012. I have extensive experience in commercial litigation, property law, contract law and dispute resolution, I am also a qualified mediator.
I served as the President of Business Networking International Ukhozi Chapter from 2008 to 2010, I am currently Captain of the Industrial Commercial Golf League and Chairman of the Lower Cowies Hill Neighbourhood Watch. I am passionate about nature and an avid golfer. It was a priviledge to become part of the vision for Blue Sky Society Trust.

Bronwyn Laing- Trustee

I am a passionate Durbanite who loves travel, wildlife and helping others. I have worked and traveled with Carla for many years and we have very similar outlooks on life.

I have worked in both the corporate and hospitably worlds and I am now planning to start my own Project Management Consulting business. I was educated in Natal and spent 3 years working in the Sabie Sands and the Okavango Delta, whereafter I persued a successful career in Pharmaceutical Sales. In 2014 I left the corporate world to follow my conservation passion and undertook a full time Masters Degree on Rhino Poaching. I graduated in April 2016 and then joined the Elephant Ignite team as a full expedition member and threw myself into assisting with fundraising and planning of the expedition.

The past 6 months have passed in a blur with the life changing adventure, Elephant Ignite and then spending three months in the Serengeti managing Grumeti Tented Lodge. This time in the bush has allowed me to grow and reflect and I am excited to return to Durban and start on a new path.

Gareth Du Cler - Trustee

Gareth boasts a wealth of knowledge, which he has gained over the years and can offer to his clients.

Qualifying in 2006 as a Chartered Accountant, Gareth worked as a Financial Manager for a global group of energy and petrochemical companies and also assisted in the start up of a successful accounting firm prior to Finance Spec. Gareth is an avid sports and family man. His motto is simple: Everything at a fast pace, lift your game, keep up and stick with us!

PATRONS

Francoise Malby-Anthony - Patron

I am the French born Executive Director of Thula Thula Exclusive Private Game Reserve, in Zululand. I was fortunate to be married to Lawrence Anthony, the best-selling author, conservationist, humanitarian & founder of The Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization. We met in London in 1987 and I moved to South Africa with Lawrence in 1987. I developed the hospitality side of Thula Thula after we bought it and it became a four star Elephant Safari Lodge. We employ many local villagers from local village of Buchanana.

Lawrence Anthony my beloved husband died in 2012 and I committed myself to keeping the Thula Thula legacy alive and to promote Lawrence's books.

Hayley De Marigny - Patron

Since 2009 I have been working with wildlife, filming it, documenting it and creating films on it. I have a passion for capturing the beauty and essence of Africa through the lens of a camera, and making the many stories it has to tell come to life in the form of film.

I have also been privileged enough to be involved in rehabilitating wildlife. I am addicted to Africa and its unparalleled wildlife, its amazing people and the spirit that is deep within this somewhat moody continent. I cannot wait to continue on this journey with the Blue Sky Society to give back to a continent I love so dearly, warts and all. I want to make a difference, even if just a small one, so that one day I can die saying I left my legacy.

Yolande Kruger - Patron

Born and raised in Nelspruit the gateway to the Lowveld I was blessed to have Kruger National Park and a range of other nature reserves right on my doorstep. I grew to love the outdoors and of course wildlife.

I started my working career at the Faculty of Veterinary Science at Onderstepoort in the early '80's and was incredibly blessed to work with some of the most brilliant minds in the scientific community. Fast forward twenty years, and I now manage my own marketing consulting business focussed on strategic marketing support services. Still extremely passionate about Africa and wildlife, I support worthy social responsibility projects and apply my skills set to branding, marketing and fund-raising to help them reach their full potential.

ELEPHANT IGNITE EXPEDITION

Most of us take elephants for granted….

It is the largest land mammal on earth and a key part of the Big Five. We often get to marvel at their beauty on African wildlife postcards or admire them while watching National Geographic documentaries. Most people think it's the rhino that is the only animal under threat BUT sadly Elephants are right up there along side them!

These magnificent lumbering giants are steadily being butchered at an alarming rate. Elephants are one of the major casualties of a poaching war against wildlife that has spiralled out of control. If you live in Africa and have had contact with the wildlife it is hard not to have the urge to protect them fiercely. But what can we all do about it?

The Elephant Ignite Expedition was conceived as a way to raise money for elephant conservation projects. Carla Geyser's idea was to bring a group of passionate and skilled women to see first-hand what the threats were against these mighty creatures. To harness their talents and to find solutions.

This epic expedition was a means to highlight in the world-wide media what is happening to these animals on a grand scale. The expedition was plotted over 15 787 kilometres in the period of 100 days.

This dynamic all-female crew left Durban on Women's Day, 9 August 2016 and proceeded to visit 10 different countries, visiting 37 projects that work tirelessly to save the dwindling elephant populations. The ladies self-funded their participation costs and all funds raised were channelled to the nominated beneficiaries.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To increase public awareness for the current spiralling wildlife crisis.
- To help reduce human - elephant conflict challenges through education.
- To visit rural communities with educational messages about poaching and wildlife.
- To gain youth perspectives on illegal poaching, wildlife crime, demand-reduction and the economic value of endangered species.
- To visit and encourage the various conservation organisations that are fighting to keep our wildlife safe and to document and share their stories with the world.
- To link the conservation organisations and initiatives throughout the Southern African region strengthening networking capabilities.
- To deliver funds and sponsored equipment to the various nominated charities and conservation organisations.
- To raise funds through this expedition as our message is spread.

More than two thousand people followed their journey on facebook and watched their amazing interactions with people and projects. The inspiring film footage shot during the expedition will be shown on various media and television outlets to keep the support ongoing.

The Elephant Ignite Expedition will be released in a six part online series "On the Road with Elephant Ignite." This moving and inspirational series will reveal how much this expedition has contributed to saving the elephants and also how much is still to be done to save this iconic species.

ELEPHANT IGNITE EXPEDITION CREW

CARLA GEYSER – EXPEDITION LEADER

"Elephants have always been one of my passion's – they seem to embody everything that is good about Africa and family. Elephants are wise old souls and they are deeply intelligent. The herd is managed by a matriarch. There are things that we as a species can learn from the matriarch .

She leads her herd with great strength and confidence, secure in any decisions she needs to make but at the same time leading with a gentle hand. Elephants are full of compassion and empathy, and they are not shy to show their emotions. Most of all a matriarch relies on her network . She does nothing alone and has her family and all the other elephants to lean on. As a combined unit they achieve a whole lot more than as individuals. "
This basically summed up what our all female expedition was about. It was about collectively harnessing a group of women and together sharing our skills in a powerful way – together making a difference.

YOLANDÉ KRUGER

"I started off with a veterinary science background and moved into marketing. I am a freelance Marketing Consultant with over 14 years experience in strategic marketing and training management. I have many different types of clients but I love any opportunity to work with a good cause. I am passionate about conservation and the environment. I support NPO projects and use my skills on the branding, marketing and fund-raising side.

Elephants are a truly iconic species and their intelligence, capacity for emotion and sheer, majestic beauty make them a firm favorite of mine. Elephant Ignite is a brand that I am proud to be associated with and help build. The projects involved provide tangible benefits to communities and the environment and if I can use my skills set to help drive it, then that is my mission moving forward."

PENNY PARKER

"I am a self-confessed bush girl and conservationist at heart - most comfortable in khakis with binoculars across my chest. I've studied Business Science, qualified as a FGASA Field Guide, worked in Phinda and been involved in numerous expeditions and conservation humanitarian projects including exploring with the Kingsley Holgate Foundation. I hope to add value to this passionate team, in any way I can, as we do our bit to save an iconic species and one very close to my heart."

BRONWYN LAING

"I am a born and bred, 30 something year old Durbanite who is passionate about the bush, conservation and this beautiful continent of ours – Mamma Afrika. I have recently completed a Masters Degree in Rhino Conservation and look forward to this next exciting chapter raising awareness regarding the plight of our elephants. Travelling through Africa is a dream come true and I was proud to be part of this amazing team."

SHANNON SAUNDERS

"I am a free spirited sporty outdoorsy female from Cape Town who moved to Durban 5 years ago. Although I am working as a qualified physiotherapist I am always seeking ways to follow my heart to help with purpose whenever, wherever possible!! I live day by day and love adventure most of all! I have an absolute passion for culture, people (especially children) and the bush. I earnestly believe that together we can really make a difference to educate those around us and help the knowledgeable to conserve the future of our Beloved African wildlife."

ISABEL WOLF-GILLESPIE

"I am a qualified nurse from Germany and the managing owner of the horse training & adventure business 'In the Company of Horses'. My other passion and dedication lies with wildlife and nature conservation. Elephant Ignite was my third major expedition for a cause and I am always up to something 'out of the ordinary' to reach people worldwide! I firmly believe in education of the young and see Elephant Ignite as a catalyst, making an impact on society to create long lasting change for Elephants and other wildlife! "

YVETTE TAYLOR

"I am a keen conservationist and a qualified Town and Regional planner. For the last 8 years I have been the Executive Director of The Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization, carrying out environmental conservation work. This includes public lectures, radio and TV. Additionally I raise funds for rhino conservation which includes helicopter protection in Zululand as an affiliate of Project Rhino and the construction and management of the first purpose build rhino orphanage in KZN."

NICOLA RUTHERFOORD

"Luckily for me I was born and bred in Northern Zululand with a passion for travel, people and the bush. I have been fortunate enough to have experience many adventures both in Africa and internationally. My diverse career has embraced both hospitality and recruitment and my personal belief is that it is our responsibility to honour our earth, and all with whom we share it with, four and two legged so that all can walk in balance and beauty."

GLENDA THOMPSON

"I am a PR consultant, photo journalist, fitness fanatic, proud Mum and Granny, and lover of the African bush in general. I joined the Elephant Ignite expedition at places along the expedition and my aim was to write articles for international magazines and publications to highlight the projects that the team is raising awareness and funding for. I come from Zimbabwe and have lived in Swaziland and Zambia. "

NIKKI WILLIAMSON
"I have a deeply profound connection with elephants, based on my 2 years within Addo Elephant Park. These elephants were incredibly relaxed and serene. A herd would walk a metre away from my car with a peace and tranquillity that was palpable. I recall the innate sense of oneness that I felt with them as we observed our surroundings; looking into each other's eyes and reaching into each other's souls; and so began a lifelong love for these gentle giants. It was a privilege to be on the Elephant Ignite Expedition."

NATALIE DUMBRILL
"I am a HR professional and social media manager. I believe I can use the modern network of social media tools to share the word about what is happening to these gentle giants. It is a critical time to galvanise people to support them. I had never seen an elephant in the wild but their souls move my soul deeply and I want to use what moves me to move others. Elephants stand for community, compassion and sentience and these are qualities I hoped I shared on this expedition."

ILDIKO BISCHOT
"I was born in Holland but my soul is African. I am an events manager with a passion for conservation and a hunger to make a difference. I have travelled and worked in different countries, but always Africa comes out as my favourite place. EIE is an amazing initiative by powerful women to take further steps in saving the elephant from extinction. It was a dream to be able to actively raise awareness of the beauty of Africa and its incredible wildlife."

KENNEDY ZAKEER
"I am an advertising executive. My greatest source of inspiration, purpose and sense of belonging comes from the African bush. My experiences at the Fundimvelo Thula Thula Rhino Orphanage invigorated my enthusiasm to fight for the greater good of heavily threatened wildlife. EIE will bolster a collective effort to protect what so many of us cherish. I was excited to be part of something bigger and more focussed and what was most important was telling the Elephant's story."

ELEPHANT IGNITE EXPEDITION - PROJECTS

The Elephant Ignite Expedition route was researched in advance and allowed the team to do site visits with various elephant conservationists who have dedicated their lives to protect and study the African elephant. The crew delivered sponsored goods to support their programmes and video interviews were done so we could broadcast their projects and raise awareness.

Below are the projects that were visited in no specific order.

Country: Kenya/ Project:
The Elephants and Bees Project

This is an innovative study using an in-depth understanding of elephant behaviour to reduce damage from crop-raiding elephants. Elephants are not fond of bees and therefore they avoid areas where there are bee hives.

By strategically placing beehives around their villages and fields, this acts as a deterrent to elephants that would typically raid their vegetable gardens and crops. It also provides the local communities a form of income generation when they harvest the honey.

Dr Lucy King spearheads this brilliant, yet deceptively simple project to help mitigate human elephant conflict. The Elephants and Bees research centre in Mwakoma village helps local farmers erect bee hive fences to protect crops from elephants. This project has taken off throughout Africa and the benefits are huge. Protection from elephants, income from honey, a boost for new bee populations and increased crop yield from pollination from the bees.

EIE sponsored bee hives to set up two farmers Phelicia and Joshia and got to visit and see how their farm areas have been set up.

Country: Botswana/ Project: Eco-exist Trust

The Eco-exist Trust was registered in 2013 and their team began to investigate and research the common causes Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) since 2008. Ecoexist's long-term aim is to advise and create policies that allow humans and elephants to co-exist.

They have four key objectives, all designed to address both the immediate conflicts between people and elephants and tackling the major underlying causes of the conflict.

- Introducing existing and developing new innovative mitigation techniques to reduce crop raiding by elephants.
- Alleviating land use conflicts and elephant corridor protection through informing and facilitating appropriate land use planning, facilitating new agricultural practice and innovation to improve food security.
- Increasing benefit generation linked to elephants through tourism development and other elephant themed product enterprises.
- Improving our knowledge about elephant movements, ecology and drivers of conflict through an interdisciplinary research programme.

The EIE crew spent time with Ecoexist and saw the incredible work they are doing. They are using Chilli fences and Chilli bombs/ Bricks as well as 'Cluster farming' methods as a form of elephant mitigation. There is also work being done in their surrounding communities whereby they offer a "Living with Elephants" tour. We witnessed a 'Kgotla' meeting with the chief and community in Eretsha village to talk about safety around elephants. Ecoexist help run these "workshops" and provide educational flyers to help reinforce the message.

Country: South Africa / Project: Elephants Alive

This project started in 2003 as Save the Elephants. They have collected vital information over the last two decades.Their research contributes towards the long-term survival of the African elephant, thereby maintaining the vital diversity of our world. If elephants are to survive, we need scientific knowledge and an intimate understanding of their movements and needs.

Elephants Alive deliver research solutions which acknowledge elephants as an integral part of the eco-system they occupy. They work towards achieving a greater understanding of the complex relationships that elephants have with each other and their surroundings, including the people with whom they share their world.

EIE were involved in collaring an elephant cow called 'Ignite' when they visited and interacted with Elephants Alive. This will hopefully solve the mystery why the Elephants in the Phalaborwa Copper area are heading into the mines there. The area is busy with People all the time and is a potential for Human Elephant Conflict.

Country: Zambia / Project: Game Rangers International

This NGO was founded in 2008 with the aim to protect the wildlife and support sustainable management of natural resources in Kafue National Park. GRI takes a holistic approach to conservation and development. They believe that the key to sustainable, long term utilisation of Zambia's natural wealth is best achieved by ensuring that the ordinary Zambians participate in managing their internationally important ecosystems. This is achieved by education projects and ongoing outreach to communities.

<u>GRI is working with the following areas:</u>

- Animal welfare- rescue, rehabilitation and release of elephants.
- The Elephant Orphanage – they have 13 orphaned elephants that require special care and rehabilitation before being released back into the wild.

- Their Wildlife Veterinary Project cares for various wildlife that has been injured through human activities
- They also run the Zambia Primate Project which rescues and releases illegally held vervet monkeys and baboons.

Country: Malawi/ Project: The Kasungu Elephant Foundation

They contribute to the protection and conservation of animals and vegetation in Kasungu National Park, Malawi. Their main commitment lies within the protection of the remaining African elephants in the national park. Poaching and ivory trade are a serious threat to the survival of the elephants in Kasungu National Park. If this negative trend continues, the elephant's fate will be the same as that of the rhinos and vultures, which have already become extinct in Kasungu National Park.

An absolute highlight was our visit to Kasungu National Park where we witnessed the difference our fundraising efforts have made first hand. The expedition donated funds to install a borehole and water pump in Mndanka village, a community bordering on the reserve where human-elephant conflict has been rife. Remke Lasance from the Kasungu Elephant Foundation runs the most amazing community upliftment project.
In just a couple of months the team has upskilled the community to grow their own oyster mushrooms as the first step in a permaculture initiative and installed beehive fences to help keep the elephants at bay. Before the community had access to water from the borehole and pump the women used to enter the reserve to collect water, putting them at risk with elephants. The indigenous oyster mushrooms were also harvested inside the reserve during the growing season, where now they can cultivate the mushrooms all year round under controlled conditions.

Country: Tanzania/ Project: The Wildlife Connection

This dedicated team has been working in the village communities outside Ruaha National Park since 2008, to meaningfully engage local people in elephant conservation.

<u>They achieve this by:</u>
- Creating experiential and monetary benefits to people of living with elephants.
- Reducing elephant crop-raiding behaviour.
- Offering both formal and informal educational opportunities for people of all ages to learn about the elephant poaching crisis and the importance of protecting elephants locally.

They are aiming to reach virtually every person in these communities, to create a sense of ownership and personal investment in elephant conservation that will be the foundation for sustainable co-existence between elephants and local people for years to come.

Elephant Ignite has helped Wildlife Connection to continue important work to promote human-elephant coexistence. We work in the village communities surrounding Ruaha National Park, Tanzania to meaningfully engage local people in elephant conservation. Elephant Ignite has helped to provide support for two projects:

The Park Visitation Program provides the opportunity to local people to visit Ruaha National Park, to appreciate the wildlife in a way they have never been able to before. People live in close proximity to the park and only ever experience animals in a negative context. This program helps to promote conservation, particularly of elephants and improve attitudes towards wildlife. Elephant Ignite has helped with funding to provide increased trips.

The Film Project provides conservation to local people through environmental films. The films inform on the importance of protecting wildlife and the value of wildlife to the local people. Films explore subjects such as elephant conservation and the elephant-poaching crisis in Tanzania; films often attract more than 200 viewers. Elephant Ignite has helped Wildlife Connection by providing all the funds needed for four separate film showings, giving us the means to expand our reach to even more people.

Country: Zambia/ Project: The South Luangwa Canine Unit

Formed as part of the South Luangwa Conservation Society (SLCS), they started officially in 2014 in partnership with the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA).

The purpose of the Canine Unit is to provide additional wildlife contraband, illegal firearm and ammunition detection capabilities to the local police and anti-poaching teams. These dogs have proven themselves irreplaceable across conservation and law enforcement disciplines in numerous countries. The South Luangwa Canine Unit dogs are typically deployed for roadblock, village and camp searches where information suggests there is illegal poaching evidence. They can also sniff out firearms and ammunition, ivory and elephant meat.

Since the middle of November 2014, dogs have been deployed on operations including national park gate-checks, snap roadblocks, multiple day roadblocks, monitoring fishing camps, and night operations based on intelligence gathering.

Their invaluable work has resulted in the arrest of multiple suspects and the confiscation of illegal weapons. Elephant products are extremely easy for the dogs to detect and they have had great successes in this area. Over the next year, the aim is to train the dogs to detect a wider matrix of other wildlife species including leopard, lion and other cat species parts.

HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS

Big Sister Project

For many young girls from disadvantaged backgrounds the onset of puberty marks a sharp drop off in school attendance which results in declining grades and sometime leads to them dropping out of school completely.

One of the reasons for this high drop-out rate is the lack of sanitary protection and lack of knowledge and education around puberty and hygiene. Each child in South Africa has the right to a basic education. Without an education, these girls will not be able to compete for jobs and will be dependent on someone else for survival.

Because the girls can't afford sanitary protection and underwear at the age of menstruation, and because they don't understand what is happening to their transforming bodies, what should be a celebration into womanhood becomes a time of shame and embarrassment, with terrible consequences for the girls education and their foreseen futures.

The Big Sister Project launched on 22 of June 2016 at Hlengimpilo Primary School in Inanda, KZN in the hopes of igniting an initiative to bring about positive change throughout the province. Blue Sky Society in partnership with Comfitex , a sanitary pad manufacturer has implemented a "Big Sister" campaign in schools across KZN. The information and education was gratefully received by the young girls.

HLENGIMPILO PRIMARY SCHOOL

Big Sister Pack 400 distributed:
- 6 x months' supply of Teens pads
- 1 x packet of panties
- 1 x A5 Educational flyer
- 1 x pink string bag
- Video & Pictures

"I raise up my voice-not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard...we cannot succeed when half of us are held back."
- Malala Yousafzai

Soul 2 Sole

In South Africa there are over 7 million children who have never owned or worn a pair of brand new school shoes. These children have become accustomed to walking barefoot through our rough Africa terrain.

But ideally they should have a pair of shoes to protect them from thorny ground or hot tar. For most western children a pair of shoes is not a luxury, children grow up accustomed to having many pairs of shoes.

The essence of the Soul 2 Sole project is to provide a pair of shoes to as many of these children as possible. This small gesture can make a profound impact on the dignity of the child and also give them hope for the future. The Soul 2 Sole project works to connect individuals and groups with underprivileged schools to provide footwear, funds or other resources needed by the school and its community.

On 29 January 2016 our teams arrived to an excited buzz of energy at Matabetulu Primary School in iNanda by the Shembe village Ebuhleni. Over 288 school pupils were on their tiptoes awaiting the first glimpse of their shiny new shoes.

Upon arrival, the team received a warm welcome from pupils, teachers and parents alike with the children bursting into song filling the air with a sense of excitement.

The proceedings of the day started off with a welcome from the Deputy Principal, a poem read by two scholars and then followed by a prayer from one of the parents. It was very humbling to see how such a poor community can be so appreciative.

MATABETULA PRIMARY SCHOOL
- 290 pairs of school shoes distributed
- 290 units of Lion Match shoe polish distributed
- 290 string bags distributed
- Educational toys for Grade R pupils
- Lion Match Sign board
- Video & Pictures

"It's great to be noticed for your shoes, but better to be noticed for your soul!" - Anon

Umbimbilethu Crèche and Day Care Centre

The Umbimbilethu Day Care Centre is located within the Msazazane Location near Umzumbe which is about an hour's drive from Durban. This crèche was started by Mrs Gumede in October 2013, with 12 children from 'child-mothers' and orphaned little ones whose parents had died from Aids.

The centre offers a VERY basic facility whereby the children are nursed by four local ladies from the community that help out as 'care-givers'. The need is ever growing as the number of children increases.

Many young mothers who don't have access to birth control end up have children in their early teens and are ill-equipped to look after them. Today the number of toddlers that attend the crèche and day care facility has risen to 77. Mrs Gumede is dedicated to her mission to serve these young children but at times the task has become overwhelming.

In 2016 the Lion Match Company Cherubs brand came on board to assist the Blue Sky Society Trust with a much needed facility upgrade and to establish an outdoor play area. It is an ongoing project and Blue Sky Society Trust hopes that these renovations and improvements will add immeasurable value to the children's lives. The priorities have been assessed and Blue Sky Society Trust hopes to help the crèche develop and improve in stages.

The main goals are to provide each child with a nutritious meal once a day. To help them start a vegetable garden. To source and supply the crèche with educational toys and games. It is also essential to train and reward the caregivers for their dedication by investing in their development.

UMBIMBILETHU CRÈCHE AND DAY CARE PROJECT

- 2 renovated classrooms – painted and plastered inside and out
- Refurbished sleeping or "nap" area with beds for the younger learners
- An outside covered play area
- Cherub products
- Installation of Two JoJo Tanks
- Educational Toys for children
- Waste2Toys Educational Workshop for Carers
- Supply plastic cups, plates and containers for the children
- Painted educational wall murals
- Planting of a sustainable vegetable garden
- Umbimbilethu Crèche / Cherubs sign board
- Video & Pictures
- Clearing the septic tank

"It's the children the world almost breaks who grow up to save it." — Frank Warren

FEEDBACK FROM PROJECTS

Elephants and Bees
The Elephant Ignite team visited the project in early November to meet the farmers whose lives they have impacted tremendously. The team also inspired local schoolchildren with their talks Elephant Conservation booklets and crayons which the kids were overjoyed to receive. Thanks to their kindness we were able to employ Esther Serem to help our project – Dr Lucy King

Conservation South Luangwa
The Elephant Ignite team of adventurous ladies who visited CSL's programs were a pleasure to have. We feel extremely grateful that they chose us as one of the projects to visit and South Luangwa, Zambia's premiere national park. The Luangwa Valley is home to Zambia's largest elephant population and like all elephants they are under fire. Any attention brought to our elephants helps our work in conserving them.

School children booklets and crayons donated by Elephant Ignite have been donated to a school that is largely under supported, in an area that faces large human elephant conflict issues. – Rachel Robb

Elephants Alive
Elephants Alive was privileged to host the Elephant Ignite Expedition and collar three elephants at Phalaborwa Copper Mine on 15 August 2016. Although this wonderful team of adventurous women sponsored only one of the collars we deployed, their sponsorship helped us deploy two other collars. We always try to deploy at least three collars with each collaring operation as this cuts down on the overall helicopter and veterinary fees per elephant. Also, their sponsorship enabled us to test new tracking devices developed by Savannah Tracking (Ltd).

The film prepared by Earth Touch on this collaring expedition has lead to an increase in our media exposure. We are most grateful to the Elephant Ignite Expedition for their friendship, passion and continued support.
– Michelle Henley

EcoExist
The Elephant Ignite Expedition was a stunning initiative and we benefitted from their visit and their enthusiasm for our cause. They contributed to our education pamphlets and we will be able to share our conservation message to more people. - Dr Anna Songhurst

Wildlife Connection
Elephant Ignite helped Wildlife Connection to continue doing our important work to promote peaceful human and animal co-existence. We work in the village communities around the Ruaha National Park, as the villagers live close to the animals there are times they compete for resources. EIE helped us and gave us tools to do more.
- Hanna Shaw

Game Rangers International
The Elephant Ignite expedition made an amazing impact. We were privledged to be included in their itinerary. They helped us with vital education pamphlets to share with people living near the National Parks and they have contributed to our Orphaned elephant Awareness campaign.
– Rachael Murton

Matabetula Primary (Soul to Sole)
"Thank you very much to Blue Sky Society Trust and Lion Match Group for the gift they have given to our children. It is very rare for us to receive gifts such as these. We are a very poor school and 50% of our children are orphans. Thank you very much, and our only wish is that one-day we can do as you have done to another school. Thank you for everything." - Principle Simon Gugu Mqadi

Hlengimpilo Primary School (Big Sister Project)
"Lion Match Group and Blue Sky Society Trust, we are so grateful and we thank you for the teachings and thank you for the love that you have given to our children.
We are so happy." - Deputy Principle Nduli

Umbimbilethu Crèche & Daycare
"The people from Lion match and Blue Sky have changed the lives of these children. They are happier and they enjoy coming to school. It is also a better place for the caregivers to work. We are very grateful for the love and support " – Mrs Gumede

SUMMARY OF DONATIONS AND WORK

The Blue Sky Society Trust is an umbrella organisation that raises funds for worthy projects that have been carefully researched and identified. In the first year since its inception it has been able to make an enormous difference.

Carla Geyser and the team managed to get donations from corporate sponsors and other generous individuals for funds for their projects.

ELEPHANT IGNITE EXPEDITION

Elephants and Bees Project

- Two full beehive fences for two rural farming families next to Tsavo National Park.
- Beehive fences consisted of 30 Langstroth beehives and honey super boxes.
- 1.2 acres of land protected for each of the beehive fence families.
- Two full bee suits and tools for maintaining the hives
- Contribution to vehicle expenses for beehive fence construction and maintenance.
- Support towards salary for a woman Kenyan Project Officer.
- 1000 EIE educational booklets for schoolchildren.
- 4 boxes of crayons for schoolchildren
- 50 copies of educational posters for schoolchildren.

Elephants Alive Project

- Paying for a satellite collar as part of a programme to minimise elephant/human conflict.
- This enabled us to test satellite tracking devices
- We created a film on the collaring operation which increased awareness.
- Provided 1500 Ignite Elephant booklets for education.
- 2000 flyers and 100 educational posters distributed.

Greater Mapungubwe Elephant Aerial Count

- We gave R12k financial assistance to this project to help them with their ongoing project.

Wildlife Connection

- A donation of R10k for 16 people to attend their Park Visit Programme to Ruaha National Park
- Funds towards completion of their four films to promote conservation efforts.
- These films cover a broad range of subjects including elephant poaching and conservation. The films attract more than 200 viewers.

EcoExist

Money was spent on the following to support EcoExist:

- 200 Ecoexist branded T-shirts (100 green long sleeve and 100 black short sleeve)
- 5000 Ecoexist information/promotional flyers
- 4 boxes of EIE educational booklets and 4 boxes of crayons
- 3 boxes of EIE educational flyers
- 50 EIE educational posters
- 7 guests on the “Life with Elephants” tour
- A donation of R10k – which we plan to contribute to the “Life with Elephants” tour group to fund a new donkey cart.

Game Rangers International

Elephant Ignite supported GAME RANGERS INTERNATIONAL in 2016 with:

- 500 of EIE educational booklets which were distributed amongst the schools we work with around Kafue National Park
- R10, 000 pending – which we plan to contribute towards the Orphaned Elephant Awareness Campaign, to improve relationships with people co-habiting with wildlife and encourage active reporting of orphaned elephants and illegal activity.

Kasungu Elephant Foundation

- Elephant Ignite witnessed the difference our fundraising efforts made first hand. The expedition donated funds to install a borehole and waterpump in Mndanka village. We donated R42K towards this vital pump for the community.
- The village community borders on the reserve where human-elephant conflict has been rife.
- The team has been using the borehole water to help with their community upliftment project where they grow oyster mushrooms.

BLUE SKY SOCIETY HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS

Lion Match donated a total of R300 000 to each of our three humanitarian projects. R100 000 for the Big Sister Project, R100 000 for the Umbimbilethu Crèche and Day Care Facility and R100 000 to the Soul to Sole Project. We were given an additional R12.5K from Simplicity e-Gaming.

Soul 2 Sole – Matabetula Primary School

- 290 pairs of school shoes distributed
- 290 units of shoe polish distributed
- 290 string bags distributed
- Educational toys for Grade R pupils
- Lion Match Sign board
- Video & Pictures

Big Sister Project – Hlenggimpilo Primary School

Big Sister distributed:

- 6 x months' supply of Teens pads for 400 girls
- 1 x packet of panties for 400 girls
- 1 x A5 Educational flyer
- 400 x pink string bag
- Video & Pictures

Umbimbilethu Creche and Day Care

- 2 renovated classrooms – painted and plastered inside and out
- Refurbished sleeping or "nap" area with beds for the younger learners
- An outside covered play area
- Cherub products
- Installation of Two JoJo Tanks
- Educational Toys for children
- Waste2Toys Educational Workshop for Carers
- Supply plastic cups, plates and containers for the children
- Painted educational wall murals
- Planting of a sustainable vegetable garden
- Umbimbilethu Crèche / Cherubs sign board
- Video & Pictures
- Clearing the septic tank

*** Blue Sky Society Trust deducts a 10 percent fee for management of funds donated. A full audited financial report will be available on the Blue Sky Society Trust website. The management fund is used for the administration and logistics costs.

All the crew on the Elephant Ignite Expedition paid for their own travel expenses.

THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

We could do nothing without the trust, faith and support of those who have encouraged us in our endeavours. Blue Sky Society Trust would like to offer a sincere and heartfelt thank you to the wonderful people and companies who saw our vision and who threw their weight behind us. Many have donated financially to the projects and others with their time, knowledge or skills:

BE BOLD CONSULTING - Be BOLD Consulting offer tailor-made marketing management services to support sales objectives and drive businesses forward. Primarily targeted at businesses who don't have seasoned in-house marketing professionals, Be BOLD Consulting simplifies the marketing processes and assists with research, planning and implementation of strategic marketing campaigns.

FINANCESPEC - Financespec offers a wide range of accounting, auditing & consulting services to assist you and/or your organisation with its business & financial needs. We pride ourselves on a personal & innovative approach to accounting, one that adds value to your company.

WHITEHART- Whitehart is an online oriented, full service agency that can help your business grow across the board; from developing your brand strategy, graphic design, website development to online marketing, we can do it all. You can find us online at www.whitehart.co.za

LION MATCH COMPANY - LION MATCH GROUP - Established over 100 years ago, The Lion Match Company (Pty) Ltd has developed some of South Africa's favourite personal care, home-care and lifestyle brands. From our iconic and nationally cherished Lion Safety Matches we manufacture an impressive array of brand names and products.

SIMPLICITY - Simplicit-e Gaming Solutions is a privately owned company based in Johannesburg, South Africa that supplies gaming products to Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands. Founded in November 2009, the company focuses on supplying a range of industry-leading products that are simpler, more efficient and provide better return on investments to our customers than any competing products in the market.

GALLOPING NAARTJIE:- Established in 2007, Galloping Naartjie is a young and vibrant printing company for the interior and signage markets. They can cater for all forms of signage requirements. From vehicle wraps to the new rage boat wraps, billboards to stickers, light boxes to posters, banners to chromadek signs, flags to pop-up banners and just about anything really!

WILD HD - Video Editing, Graphic Design, Web Design

AVIS 4X4 SAFARI RENTAL | OVERLAND 360 Specialist safari vehicles rental agency with vehicles that have so many features they can be compared to an overlanding version of the swiss army knife. Built for rugged terrain, these vehicles allow adventureres to journey through the wildest landscapes of Southern Africa, making every trip an unforgettable experience.

DONOR / SPONSOR LIST FOR 2016 (EITHER DONATED PRODUCTS OR CASH)

Africa Parks
Alexander Stamatiou
Alison Barber
Amazing Tanzania (Colin & Laura)
Andre & Belinda Liebenberg
Andre Williamson
Andries Geyser
Anduvo
Angela Whittle
Ant & Linda Williamson
Antalis South Africa
Anthony Performance
Art Printers
Ash and the Rich Family
Ashleigh
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Carol Wilson
Catherine Mugnier
Charlotte Ridley
Charly Smith
Chick Flack
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Clicks (Janet Visagie)
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Digital Media Operations
Dugald Thomson
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Glenda Thompson
Graeme Madsen
Graham Dyer
Griffths
Hakuna Matata
Hamish Dowell and Dawdy Brown
Hamish MacKay
Harvey Stabbe
Hatari Lodge
Hayfields Kwikspar
Heather Makepeace
Henwood & Katz Real Estate
Holger Morhart

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KZN Travel & Social Club
Lawrence Truter
Lilian Westlin
Lilongwe Wildlife Trust
Linda Harrington
Lindel Coulter
Lise Madsen
Livingstone Camp
Lion Match Group (LM Shoe Polish / Cherubs / Comfitex)
Louise Hosking
Luke & Erin Ford
Maizey Plastics
Malilangwe Trust (Mark Saunders & Shelley Cox)
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Matt Collins
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Mvuu Lodge
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Save the Elephants - Samburu (David Daballen)
SBK Eyewear
Scott Yu
Shannon Saunders
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The Elephant Embassy
The Spar Group
Thomas Loubser
Thula Thula Game Reserve
Tim Kinsey
Total - Gateway
Tracks for Africa
Trurays Quality Cars
Tygan Digital - Jhb
Umngazi River Bungalows
Valerie Egan
Venter Tours (Caspar & Katja Venter)
Vicky Storie
Victoria Falls Waterfront Lodge (SAFPAR)
VIVO Energy Botswana
Webmetrics (Willie)
Website Brothers
Wendy Smith
Westville Veterinary Hospital
Wildlife works (Rob & Lore Dobson, Jamie)
Yolande Kruger
Yvette Taylor

FUTURE PLANS FOR BLUE SKY SOCIETY

In our inaugural year we went on an amazing expedition to highlight the plight of the African Elephant. Our Elephant Ignite Expedition was an enormous success and we plan to build on this by continuing to fight for our elephants and the need to protect them.

The Elephant Ignite Expedition will become an ongoing yearly conservation expedition renamed “Journeys with Purpose”. Inspiring people by taking them to experience the incredible work done by conservationists is so important. We achieved so much and I am aiming to achieve more. We will expand to include other endangered species and highlight their plight.

In a world troubled where people are filled with a growing sense of apathy, the time is right for us to get out there and make a difference in this amazing continent. No matter how rich or poor what makes the difference is the willingness to try.

I also want to teach our children that everyone can make a difference. Typical hand-outs can lead to dependency and this is not what we strive for – our vision is to plant seeds so people can become self-sufficient.

We will continue to support our existing humanitarian projects and this year (2017) we will support new projects. “Bringing Light to Homes” – an amazing project that supplies destitute children with lap desks and candles, to try help them learn in the darkness.

“Swap Shop” is an environmental education project that teaches children to collect rubbish and recycle and they are paid for the waste which is weighed and converted to points that they can ‘swap” for goods in an impromptu shop.

In 2016 I learnt two things – it pays to dream big and hard work always pays off. Humans can be such a cruel and destructive race but there are many good people out there that are doing sensational work and we need to support and encourage them.

I urge everyone to get involved – volunteer, spread the word and donate. Our team at Blue Sky Society Trust will continue to make change happen - one person one animal at a time ...

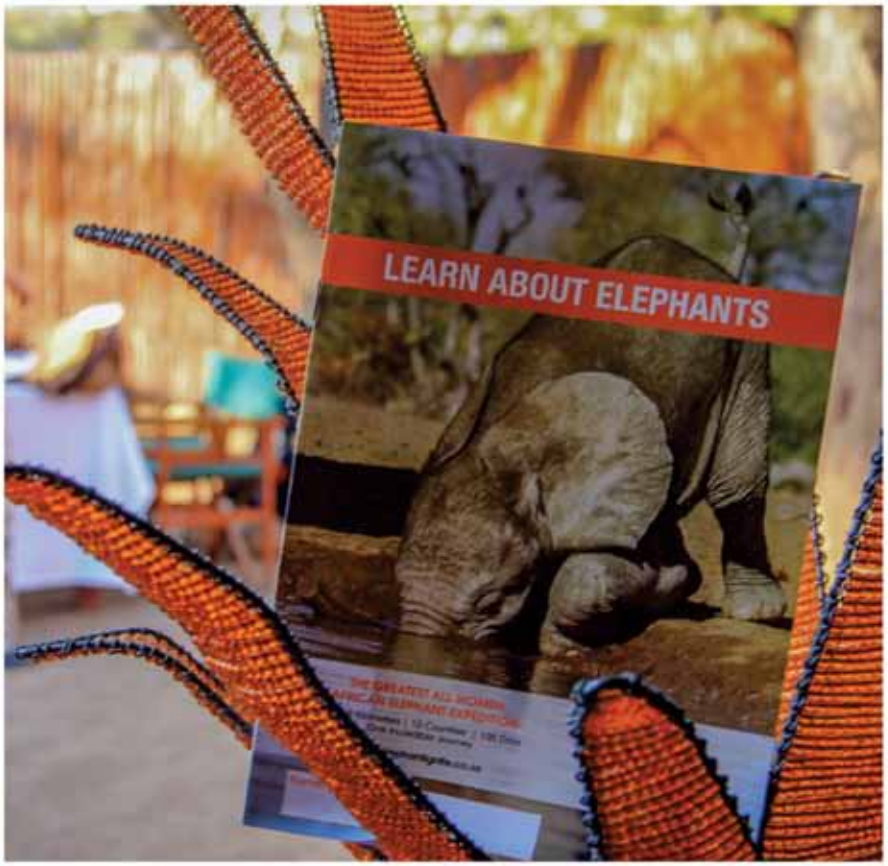
Carla Geyser

FOUNDER
Blue Sky Society Trust

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

- Henry Ford

A proud Blue Sky Society Trust Initiative



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