

Wild Shots partner with Elephants Alive

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Article and photo by Mike Kendrick

An exciting new partnership has been forged between Wild Shots Educational Outreach and Elephants Alive, with the support of Sefapane Lodge. To promote harmonious co-existence between elephants and humans, Elephants Alive run innovative education programmes in the Maseke and Mashishimale rural communities west of Kruger, in a region where poaching is unfortunately increasing. Wild Shots Educational Outreach aims to engage previously disadvantaged young people in nature and conservation through photography and the partnership between these two organisations was a natural one.

Eight children, aged 12 to 14, from Maseke Primary school in the Maseke community, spent an inspirational three days in the bush at Sefapane Camp, near Phalaborwa. The first two days were spent learning about digital photography with Wild Shots Educational Outreach's Mike Kendrick. Each day began and ended with a game drive where learners could practice their new photographic skills. For some of the young learners this was their first time ever seeing big game, including a magical close encounter with an elephant bull.

A highlight of the course was the third day, when learners had a unique opportunity to photograph three elephant collaring operations. Phalaborwa Mine is bordered by Klaserie and Balule Associated Private Nature Reserves and the Kruger National Park. Although the mine is fenced, elephants have broken through the barriers in the past, a potential danger for both the mine, its staff and the elephants themselves. By collaring three elephants, Elephants Alive will collect crucial information about the animals' movements to understand better why they are attracted to the mine and identify potential hotspots to mitigate human-animal conflict.

The collaring operations were exciting for everyone involved. As soon as the elephants were tranquilised, the young learners were able to watch and photograph the collaring from close quarters. Within 20 minutes, each new collar was in place, biological samples were collected, and the children retreated to the safety of the vehicle to watch the elephant stand up, recover and go on its way. An exciting and exhilarating morning for everybody! ■



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