

Women conservation warriors back home again

Larry Bentley

AFTER 50 days and travelling 11 235km through four countries, South African humanitarian and eco-warrior, Carla Geysler, has returned from leading a successful international all-women conservation mission into southern Africa.

Geysler's 'Journeys with Purpose: The Rise of the Matriarch' expedition linked South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia to 12 women from around the world.

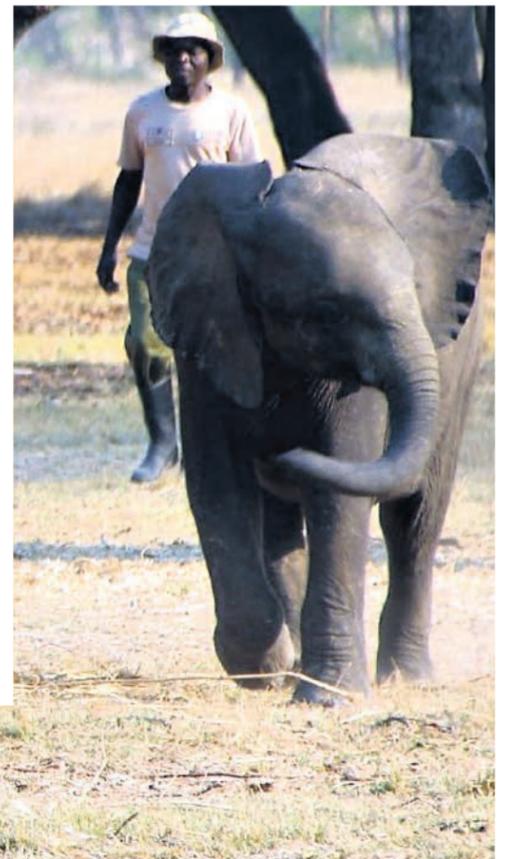
The journey kicked off on 16 September under the banner of Geysler's non-profit organisation, Blue Sky Society Trust.

The mission had four goals - raise global awareness about the contentious human-wildlife conflict issue, to educate the youth about conservation, to support local empowerment efforts targeting young women from localised, rural communities, and to raise funds for four wildlife conservation bodies.

These beneficiaries were Elephants Alive (South Africa), Rare and Endangered Species Trust (Namibia), Eco-Exist Project (Botswana) and the Soft Foot Alliance Trust (Zimbabwe).

Beautiful, brutal landscape

Reflecting on the journey, Geysler says, 'Mama Africa takes your breath away with her magnificent sunsets and sunrises, leaves you speechless at her amazing wildlife and her boundless energy, and reawakens emotions that you thought had long since disappeared.'



One of the highlights for the team was interacting with rescued elephants at the Wild Is Life sanctuary in Harare, Zimbabwe

'Yet, amidst all this splendour, there is a sad, ugly reality - a festering wound of poaching, over-population, poverty and human-wildlife conflict.'

'The figures are alarming, with poachers killing approximately two rangers every week in Africa.'

'They also kill on average three rhinos, 98 elephants and countless pangolin every single day.'

It is this harsh, cold reality that spurred Geysler into action.

Educational focus

In the seven weeks that followed,

Geysler and her crew distributed 30 000 educational booklets, visited 13 on-the-ground conservation projects and met 16 phenomenal women who are doing incredible conservation work at a grassroots level.

'So many lifelong memories were made on the journey,' said Geysler, 'but a few stand out more than others.'

'Meeting the world famous Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit here in SA was one of my favourites', says Geysler.

'Spending time with the Eco-Exist educators and community officers in rural schools in the eastern panhandle of Botswana to learn about their daily challenges with

elephants that raid crops and subsequent injuries and deaths of local community members, was also memorable.'

Animals up close

KZN's Celokuhle 'Smax' Biyela said, 'I learnt so much on my trip, starting with our visit to Wild Is Life and meeting Roxy Danckwerts and Angela Loubser where I got to see my first elephant, giraffe, lion and pangolin.'

The conservation mission wrapped up on 28 October.

For Geysler, being back home means time to reflect and then plan the next 'Journey with Purpose'.



Expedition members Emily Scott, Tommi Wolfe, Carla Geysler and Jennifer Palmer with Vera Praet, Ronny Makukule and Robin Cook from the Elephants Alive project in South Africa

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