



5th ANNUAL DIAMOND ROUTE RESEARCH CONFERENCE

21-22 OCTOBER 2014

Johannesburg

The first four Diamond Route Research Conferences offered an amazing array of papers. The 5th Annual Diamond Route Research Conference will be no exception. Delegates will again be entertained by a wide variety of topics, ranging from why female lions are more attracted to black-maned than blond-maned males; the mysterious and threatened pangolin; maximising sustainable co-existence of humans and wildlife in urban areas; mopane worms as a valuable food source; concerns about the densities and losses in honey bee colonies; the status of leopards in Limpopo; and a wide arrange of bird related projects amongst others.

One of the highlights at this year's conference will be an address by world-renowned predator ecologist Dr Craig Packer, who began the Serengeti Lion Project in 1978 to study various historical questions about lions and their environment. He will offer answers to three questions: Why do lions live in groups, why do male lions have manes and how do other species cope with lions?

World-renowned Dr John Hanks, zoologist and leading figure in Southern Africa's conservation work for nearly five decades, will deliver the opening keynote address. He will look at the need to embrace ancillary considerations in strategies to reduce elephant and rhino poaching, considerations that often fall outside of the ambit of the professional conservationists. These include having the courage to speak out on corruption, stopping the developed world dictating to African countries on how to manage its wildlife, the growing impact of China in Africa and promoting conservation triage.

Launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Diamond Route is about biodiversity conservation, education and sustainability opportunities from the De Beers Group of Companies, E. Oppenheimer & Son and Ponahalo Investments, De Beers' Black Economic Empowerment partner. The Diamond Route shows that regardless of the industry, businesses need not impose any limits on their ambitions to contribute positively to the conservation, management and restoration of our natural capital base.

It currently comprises ten sites covering some 250 000 hectares and stretches from the Succulent Karoo of Namaqualand on South Africa's west coast to the Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve on South Africa's northern border, right up to the edge of the Makgadikgadi Pans in Botswana with the Orapa Game Park.

There are five dedicated research centers: at Venetia Limpopo, Tswalu Kalahari, Benfontein, Debshan and Telperion.

The Diamond Route Research Conference was established to create a platform to highlight some of the wide variety of research projects undertaken on the Diamond Route and other conservation properties owned by De Beers and E Oppenheimer & Son in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana. Hundreds of research projects have been conducted over the years, with some active for more than 30 years.

While the conference will offer a platform acknowledging the 'good that diamonds do', it will also offer a unique networking opportunity for conservationists, scientists, academics, students, activists and civil society.

Some of the research papers to be presented at the conference include:

- The **Molecular phylogeography of Temminck's Ground Pangolin populations in southern Africa**. Worldwide, pangolins are facing a multitude of threats. It is probably the most heavily trafficked mammal in the world – more so even than rhinos. It is a popular delicacy in south-east Asia, and locally it is sold by traditional healers as potent muti. However, little research has been done on this species as ground pangolins are typically nocturnal and occur at low densities. Darren Pietersen, University of Pretoria, and his extended team are trying to change this with their comprehensive study.
- **Impacts of large predators on ungulate species' foraging behaviour and habitat use**. This research project on the Tswalu Kalahari Reserve focuses on how sable foraging habits changes in reaction to wild dog introduction. Doug Makin, University of KwaZulu-Natal, explains how fear can influence the ecology of a system.
- **Promoting sustainable co-existence between humans and wildlife within the urban matrix of Gauteng**. Emily Taylor from the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Urban Conservation Project explains the progress that has been made in the promotion of positive interactions between people and wildlife in urban Gauteng.
- **Honey bee colony densities and losses: pollinator availability in the future**. This could have a major effect on particularly citrus and indigenous plants. Robin Crewe, University of Pretoria, addresses growing concerns and the realities. In view of the widespread perception that populations of honey bee colonies are in decline with a potentially significant impact on food security, colony densities at selected sites in South Africa and Europe have been explored in order to assess potential changes in population densities over time.
- **First observation of African tigerfish *Hydrocynus vittatus* predating on barn swallows *Hirundo rustica* in flight**. Francois Jacobs, University of Northwest, shares amazing video footage of this occurrence.
- Professor Mark Gibbons', University of the Western Cape, findings on **What can you find on the seabed off southern Namibia, and why?** Almost nothing has been published on the benthic fauna off southern Namibia. Diversity is at issue.

Phillip Barton, De Beers Consolidated Mines CEO and Chair of the Diamond Route Trustees, will open the conference with an overview of the ten Diamond Route properties. Nicky Oppenheimer, a Diamond Route Trustee, will give highlights from the two days and close the conference.

The conference will take place on 21 and 22 October 2014 at De Beers' corporate headquarters in Ormonde, Johannesburg.

Media wishing to attend the conference and/or arrange interviews regarding the conference, should contact:

Engela Slabber
engelajm@gmail.com
083 273 7002

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