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Above: Dronfield landscape

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Ezemvelo hosts The Diamond Route Committee workshop

The Diamond Route Committee recently held a workshop to develop strategic imperatives spanning the next three years. The workshop took place at the **Ezemvelo Nature Reserve**, thus affording committee members the opportunity to enjoy one of the precious jewels they hold in such high regard.



From left: Teddy Blecher, Sibuyi Sibiyi, Maya Govind, Tom Tweedy, Natasha O' Connor, Duncan MacFadyen, Richard Peycke, Rob Smart and Patti Wickens (missing from picture: Kalim Rajab)

The secret world of Saber-toothed Sausages

"I raised the sand-caked door of the day's last trap, to be greeted by the familiar toothsome grin of a Damaraland mole-rat, busy demolishing the sweet potato bait that I had set just an hour before. Having verified her identity and taken a range of measurements, I returned her to the burrow system and headed back to camp, pondering the lives of these remarkable creatures."



Dr Andrew Young

These sabre-toothed sausages live in some of the most complex societies known, with a breeding system similar to that of the ants and bees, in which a single dominant female monopolises reproduction while a host of subordinates help to rear her young. Dr Andrew Young and his team have been following the fates of thirty such extended families in the red sands of Tswalu for the past three years, work that is now beginning to yield valuable new insights into the evolution and dynamics of cooperative societies.

Most exciting is evidence that, the bodies of dominant female Damaraland mole-rats are also specialized for their privileged breeding role within society - a phenomenon described only once previously outside the insects.

Fast Facts

The Diamond Route has:

- 350 000 hectares of land under conservation
- 550 of Southern Africa's 890 bird species
- 90 mammal species
- 7 Red Data species being protected at Ezemvelo alone



Tswalu welcomes bouncing baby 'Badger'



The rescued honey badger eloquently named... 'Badger'

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At Tswalu, they aim to restore natural processes to ensure that the ecosystem is robust and healthy and can respond to changing environmental conditions. Part of this process is for us as humans to distance ourselves from these natural processes and allow "nature to take its course".

Occasionally however, a situation arises which requires that we do get intimately involved and also reminds us that we have a responsibility to our fellow occupants of the planet.

The "FREE ME" Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre is an organisation in Johannesburg which helps wildlife

that have been caught or injured get back into the wild wherever possible. They do an incredible job rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing a diversity of wildlife, most of which have suffered as a direct cause of man's activities.

In the evening of 9th April, a vehicle struck a honey badger (also called a Ratel) about 150km west of Johannesburg. The mother was killed but early the next morning a motorist who stopped to look at the road kill, heard a noise and realized that her cub was still alive in the roadside vegetation. The cub was taken to Free Me and for the past two months had been expertly raised by Nicci Wright. Honey badgers have a fearsome reputation and need lots of space. Nicci, realising that the badger would soon outgrow facilities at FreeMe, approached Tswalu and asked if they would take over the responsibility of raising and then releasing the little male cub.

Dylan (Conservation Projects Manager) and Theresa (Executive Chef) stepped forward and "volunteered" themselves as surrogate parents and their home as a honey badger den. They have a big job on their hands. They will need to ensure that the badger gets a varied and nutritious diet and also, plenty of opportunity to make regular forays into the veld. He will need to learn where to find food and how to dig it up. Honey badgers eat almost

anything, including reptiles, scorpions, birds and insects and, as their name suggests, they love honey! Like their cousins the otters, honey badgers are regarded as intelligent animals and he will no doubt soon learn that digging in the fridge might be easier than digging in the Kalahari sand.

Honey badgers develop slowly and stay with their mother for over a year. This badger will thus be with Dylan and Theresa until next winter at least. We all look forward to seeing the cub grow and develop and hopefully return successfully to the wild.



Dylan Smith with Badger

Saber-toothed Sausage (continued from page 1)

Further, the dominant's distinctive body shape appears to arise not from a pre-existing difference between females that become dominant and those that do not, but from a marked change in a female's growth trajectory on dominance acquisition.

These findings, recently published in the journal *Evolution*, reveal that such 'morphological specialisation' is more widespread among vertebrates than previously supposed, and highlight new depth to the remarkable parallels between insect and mammalian societies.



Damaraland mole-rat

A profile on Dr Young

Dr Andrew Young is a Research Fellow at the University of Exeter's Centre for Ecology & Conservation, and has been working in the Kalahari for over a decade studying cooperation and conflict in the societies of meerkats, mole-rats and white-browed sparrow weavers.

His long-term research at Tswalu is supported by the Royal Society and the Natural Environment Research Council.



The Big Hole wins prestigious award

The Big Hole, Kimberley recently won the annual PMR.africa Northern Cape East Region Leaders and Achievers Award.

The purpose of the annual survey conducted by PMR.africa is to, among

other things: profile the Northern Cape East Region as a growth point and potential investment area for foreign and local developers and investors and to measure companies, institutions, government entities and individuals

on their contribution to the economic growth and development of the region, levels of management expertise and implementation of corporate governance.

Diamond Route provides perfect setting for world of insects book



A Landscape of Insects and other Invertebrates is a stepping stone in the process of documenting and conserving South Africa's huge diversity of insect life. The images in this volume have all been photographed on the Diamond Route properties.

Celebrating South Africa's wondrous landscapes and ecology, this book is a must for tourists, nature lovers, students, farmers and conservation agencies visiting the region.

All will find something of interest and beauty here. Retail price: R295.

For orders call 011 628 3200 or email: sales@jacana.co.za

Diamond Route icons

Icons have been used in this publication to assist the reader in differentiating the nature of the articles. The individual destinations that make up the Diamond Route have been used to identify story locations, while additional icons, such as those alongside, indicate a particular story focus.



Facts



Literature



Events

First annual Diamond Route Research Conference in November

The 1st Annual Diamond Route Research Conference will be taking place in Johannesburg, De Beers's Campus from 9th to 10th November 2010. The conference will be hosted in partnership by De Beers Consolidated Mines and E Oppenheimer & Son.

The conference aims to provide a platform for the research and researchers to; share the outcomes of various research projects that have taken place across the Diamond Route properties and other sites within the De Beers Family of Companies and E Oppenheimer & Son, provide a networking opportunity for researchers and to guide future research.



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