



Over the past two decades, the Eastern Cape has transformed in terms of land use from a primarily agricultural province to an internationally recognised wildlife area, with over a dozen game reserves as well as many other wildlife conservation areas. Apart from the obvious economic benefits, these areas also promote the sustainable management of the biologically diverse plant and animal species found in the Eastern Cape.

WildREACH is a young initiative aimed at exposing local youth to the game reserves and wild parks located in the Eastern Cape, with the hope of imparting the values of conservation through the advancement of biological, economic and social sustainability. We also aim to help local pupils develop or further any existing interest in wild areas, the natural environment and its importance. This is achieved through fun and exciting excursions such as educationally-focused and activity-filled weekends away at local nature reserves, museum visits, day trips to wildlife areas and various other activities.

The initiative is based at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. Since its establishment in 2011, WildREACH (Wildlife Outreach) has grown to become an exciting, progressive and active project. The initiative took off as a project under the umbrella of the



South East African Climate Consortium Student Forum (SEACC SF), one of the most progressive student organizations in South Africa. The successful development of WildREACH has largely been owing to the ongoing support of SEACC SF, the structural support provided by the Sustainable Seas Trust (SST) and financial support from the Wildlands Conservation Trust (WCT) as a CEPF MPAH small grants project from April 2012.

WildREACH excursions at a glance

<i>Group</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Destination</i>
2011		
Upstart	13	Addo Elephant National Park
Khula Project - Grade 10's	30	Traditional plant use workshop
Khanya Maths and Science Club - Grade 7's	36	miniSASS water health assessment Botany Gardens
Khula Project - Grade 10's	15	Amakhala Game Reserve
Ntsika Secondary School	22	SAMREC Marine Rehabilitation and Education Centre
Khula Project - Grade 11's	16	Kaba Conservancy - Woody Cape
Upstart	17	Kwantu Elephant Sanctuary
Khanya Maths and Science Club - Grades 7 to 11	44	Kwantu Elephant Sanctuary
2012		
Upstart	18	Addo Elephant National Park
Ntsika Secondary School	30	SAMREC Marine Rehabilitation and Education Centre
Khula Project - Grade 10's	22	Amakhala Game Reserve
Khula Project - Grade 11's	18	Kwantu Elephant Sanctuary
Graeme College Grade 10's	14	Mt Camdeboo
Nathaniel Nyaluza Grade 10's	25	Shamwari - Born Free centre
Khula Project - Grade 11's	14	Groendal Wilderness Area
Amasango	18	Mansfield Nature Reserve

<i>Group</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Destination</i>
2013		
Khula Project Grade 11's	16	St Francis Sustainable Seas Centre
Amasango	8	Sabre Renaissance and reptile centre
Khula Project Grade 10's	18	Amakhala Game Reserve
Mtaba Maria, Nombulelo High School, Nathan Nyaluza	23	Kaba Conservancy - Woody Cape
Khanya Maths and Science Club	32	Addo Elephant National Park
2014		
Mtaba Maria, Nombulelo High School, Nathan Nyaluza	20	Kenton rocky shore
Ntsika Secondary School	20	Amakhala Game Reserve
Ntsika Secondary School	30	SAMREC Marine Rehabilitation and Education Centre
Ntiska Secondary School	14	Kaba Conservancy
2015		
Ntiska Secondary School	28	Makana Green Fun Run
Ntsika Secondary School	14	Grahamstown SPCA
Mtaba Maria, Nombulelo High School	14	Kragga Kamma Game Park
Ntiska Secondary School	15	MiniSASS (Grahamstown)
Ntiska Secondary School	24	Insect Collection (Rhodes University)
Nombulelo High School	18	Elundini Backpackers
Ntiska Secondary School	13	Kenton rocky shore



WildREACH excursion stories

2012 started off with Addo National Elephant Park; the children were introduced not only to an array of medicinal flowers, but also to a local Golden Orb spider before the park had even been entered. With the elephant park approaching, we were informed that the park is the most biodiverse park in the world. With an array of unusual plants, and even more unusual animals, the children entered the park with anticipation proudly wearing their WildREACH t-shirts. As the flagship local Addo dung beetle was passed around the two busses, the journey of learning and appreciation of our delicate, beautiful environment began...



For our next exciting trip, the WildREACH team and 30 high school students from around Grahamstown had the privilege of travelling to SAMREC in Port Elizabeth for another unforgettable journey. We began our adventure with a presentation, teaching the students what it means to reach out and start appreciating our wildlife and environment. After the WildREACH team had given their presentations, the students had filled their notepads up with new ways to reduce, reuse and recycle to help change their habits at home. They also received an informative talk on job opportunities and potential tertiary education paths within the animal conservation and environmental spectrum. In the end we found they had learned a lot more than just facts, they had found a greater appreciation for our oceans and the majestic creatures that call the sea their home.

In May 2012, WildREACH visited the magnificent Amakhala Game reserve for the second time. Highlights included cheetah and rhino sightings, a game drive and walk, interactive feedback presentations by the kids and games around the fire.

Kwantu treated us to an incredible feeding session with four African elephants while we were also introduced to five Bengal tigers and some rare white lions.



Having the privilege to delve into luxury, Mount Camdeboo proved to truly be a journey that would stay in the children's hearts forever. After viewing a white rhino family - which included a bull, cow and calf- up close, we were treated to a game of paintball. The team at Mt. Camdeboo took us around

the beautiful Camdeboo ridges on a game viewing experience that would rank as one of the best WildREACH trips to date.



Shamwari Born Free Centre was an incredibly educational and practical introduction to the bush for most of the children. With a rare spotting of a leopard strolling across the road, the children were ecstatic and expressed their gratitude and wonder for the natural wonders of the African bush.

Groendal Wilderness Area offered us a truly breath-taking experience of one of the best-kept secrets in the Eastern Cape. In this pristine environment we went on a beautiful hike to a secluded mountain stream, all the while learning about native fauna and flora such as the spekboom, boer-bean and the intricate workings of a termite colony.

Mansfield Private Game Reserve introduced us to an extraordinary array of animals, such as the tame giraffe called Gambit, Burchell's zebra and lots of blesbok. A hike down the Kowie River exposed barnacles, crabs and a number of polychaete worms that the children found fascinating.

February 2013 brought on a much anticipated trip St. Francis bay. Unlike prior trips, this one focussed solely on coastal and marine systems and exposed a whole new world to the fortunate youngsters. A boat trip was completely new to the group, and will be looked back to with much fondness. The survey in the intertidal also taught the pupils how to apply scientific techniques that was learned in the class room to a real life situation.





The Sabre renaissance and reptile centre just outside of Grahamstown offered a group of scholars the chance to learn about local snakes and history as well as work out some of their energy on the obstacle course at the centre. Everyone had fun hearing about the owner’s many pets, including a guard crocodile and various types of snakes.

Kaba Conservancy offered a group of 23 scholars an opportunity to experience game drives, nature scavenger hunts and a dune walk all in one weekend.



On the last trip of year to Addo Elephant National Park, the scholars were treated to both a lion and bat eared fox sighting. Although no elephants were seen, they watched a presentation on the history of elephants in the park.

2013 was also when our WildLIFE Clubs began in collaboration with the Rhodes University Entomology Department. These weekly clubs at Ntsika Secondary School offer WildREACH volunteers the opportunity to becoming a more self-sustaining organisation. The WildLIFE clubs allow WildREACH to not only teach a fixed group of scholars or ‘cubs’ about the environment but also as a mentoring platform. The students in the club have been described as “role models” to the rest

of the scholars by the headmistress of the school Mrs. Madeleine Schoeman. The youth of today are said to be the most important in human history, and are those that can exact the most change. Our motto “Conservation Through Knowledge” encapsulates the need to cultivate an interest in the environment by high school students.



With the dedication of the WildREACH task team, volunteers and of course the enthusiasm of the learners, 2014 and 2015 proved to be another example of how much WildREACH can achieve.

2014 started off with a trip to Kenton-on-Sea to explore the rocky shores. The scholars were given cameras to find and photograph plants and animals. At first these were difficult to find in rock pools, but with the help of booklets and the volunteers from SST, the scholars were encouraged to have a closer look and identify a different, smaller form of wildlife.

Amakhala Game Reserve once again treated a group of scholars to a wonderful weekend trip at their magnificent reserve in May 2014. 20 scholars from Ntsika Secondary School were welcomed to the environment centre with a much needed cup of warm coco. As everyone waited for the specially prepared potjie to finish simmering, a campfire was lit and the learners filled the air with spontaneous singing. The learners livened up the rest of the evening by recounting what they had learnt during the day in form of skits and song. It was some of the most animated and creative performances that the team has seen.



The second day was filled with as much excitement and the learners were awake before sunrise. The group was taken on a guided walk on predator-free property where they could view zebras and

antelopes and learn about the many South African endemic plants. The learners were sad to leave, and many expressed that this was the best experience that they had ever had.



Later in the year, the grade 10's and 11's from Ntsika Secondary School were treated to a trip to SAMREC Marine Rehabilitation and Education Centre as a part of WildREACH's WildLIFE Clubs program. This trip occurred after a lesson on penguins in one of our weekly afternoon sessions. The Centre took the scholars and a group of Rhodes University students on a tour, explaining what it is they do, followed by getting to know some of the rehabilitating penguins as they were fed, a lively question and answer session and lunch.

WildREACH was invited back to Kaba Game Reserve for a weekend trip in November 2014. The scholars learnt about how animals may be identified simply through their droppings, taken on game drives and game walks to spot some of the giraffes, buffalos, zebras and jackals present on the farm. On the second day there was an exhausting but rewarding climb up sand dunes to reach the ocean where no one hesitated to swim.

2015 has included 7 exciting trips so far, including those organised as a part of the Wildlife Clubs program with Ntsika Secondary School.

It began with inviting learners from Ntsika Secondary School to participate in the Makana Green Fun Run at Rhodes University with the WildREACH task team.



In March, a grade 10 group from Ntsika went on an afternoon trip to the Grahamstown SPCA after a session about pets where they learnt not only about the pets cared for by the SPCA but animals that require no care – African Emperor Caterpillars.

In April, learners from Ntaba Maria and Nombulelo schools were taken to Kragga Kamma Game Park. This trip was centred on the debates surrounding animals bred or kept in captivity, and the value of game parks such as this one. The question and answers sessions held with both the guide and the task team that went were extremely beneficial and showed the keenness of the interested learners to participate.



The Grade 10s and 11s from Ntsika were also taken on a trip in Grahamstown in April to conduct a miniSASS

on river health. Insect collection was done in May with the same scholars after three weeks' worth of

learning about insects and their importance. This was done with the aid of Rhodes University volunteers, as will the pinning of the insects.

A trip to Hogsback was conducted in May 2015 and learners from Nombulelo High School were taken on guided forest walks by a representative from the Wild Bird Trust. These learners learnt about the vital importance of indigenous vegetation and the Cape Parrot Project (bird rehabilitation project). Most recently (June 2015), a trip to Kenton-On-Sea saw the learners being taught about intertidal zones, estuaries and tides. A hands on activity of searching for different life forms in the intertidal zones was hugely beneficial to these learners



In June 2015, WildREACH went again to Kenton to explore the rocky shore with a group of scholars from the weekly Wildlife Clubs. When they got to the beach, they were briefed about estuaries, tides and the different life forms that can be found in the intertidal zones.

Then the scholars were sent to search and identify the different life forms that are found in the intertidal zones. After a quick swim, the scholars were sad to leave.





WildREACH looking to the future

WildREACH's vision for the future is to work towards making the program a self-sustaining body that continues to inspire young minds. Our next set of dedicated and carefully selected committee members for 2015-2016 will be tasked with raising and investing capital into a trust fund that will be managed through SST our loyal partner since WildREACH's inception in 2011. Having the core fund will ensure that WildREACH's fundamental principle of "Conservation Through Knowledge" remains at the forefront of the program, teaching underprivileged scholars about the environment by taking them on trips within the Eastern Cape. WildREACH's extension (WildLIFE clubs since August 2013) into provision of education and skills training, as an extra-mural activity on a weekly basis at Ntsika secondary school, is projected to continue its growth. Our Aims for the WildLIFE club is to extend the program to incorporate the grade 8's and 9's by the end of 2016 and to have extended the program to 5 more schools by the year 2018. This will be achieved by establishing links with the Rhodes University Community Engagement office and the Rhodes University Department of Education. These links will guarantee that there will be a constant supply of teaching volunteers and qualified syllabus development.

Since 2011, WildREACH has hosted 32 excursions, giving over 650 non-affluent school children a first-hand experience of nature. We could not have accomplished this without the continued financial support from WCT as a CEPF MPAH small grants project and the structural support provided by SST.

WildREACH on the Web:

<https://www.facebook.com/wildreachproject>

<https://wildreachght.wordpress.com/>

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