



South Africa Schools Booklet 2019
Gondwana Game Reserve

Contents

1. Study Area & Overall Research Aims	2
2. Itinerary	3
3. Research Objectives, Activities & Schedule at Gondwana Reserve	3
4. African Wildlife Management Course.....	8
5. Academic Benefits	10
6. Additional Reading	11

1. Study Area & Overall Research Aims

South Africa is the best place in the world if you want to learn about how to make wildlife conservation work financially. Income from game management and ecotourism revenue has meant that there is an ever-expanding network of game reserves that also benefit much other wildlife besides the game species. For the 2019 season there is the choice of options for school groups. This booklet will focus on the expedition involving two weeks helping with research in the fynbos reserve at Gondwana, in the Western Cape near Cape Town. Note there are other sites on the map of research sites in South Africa (Figure 1) where university students are helping with related studies in other reserves.

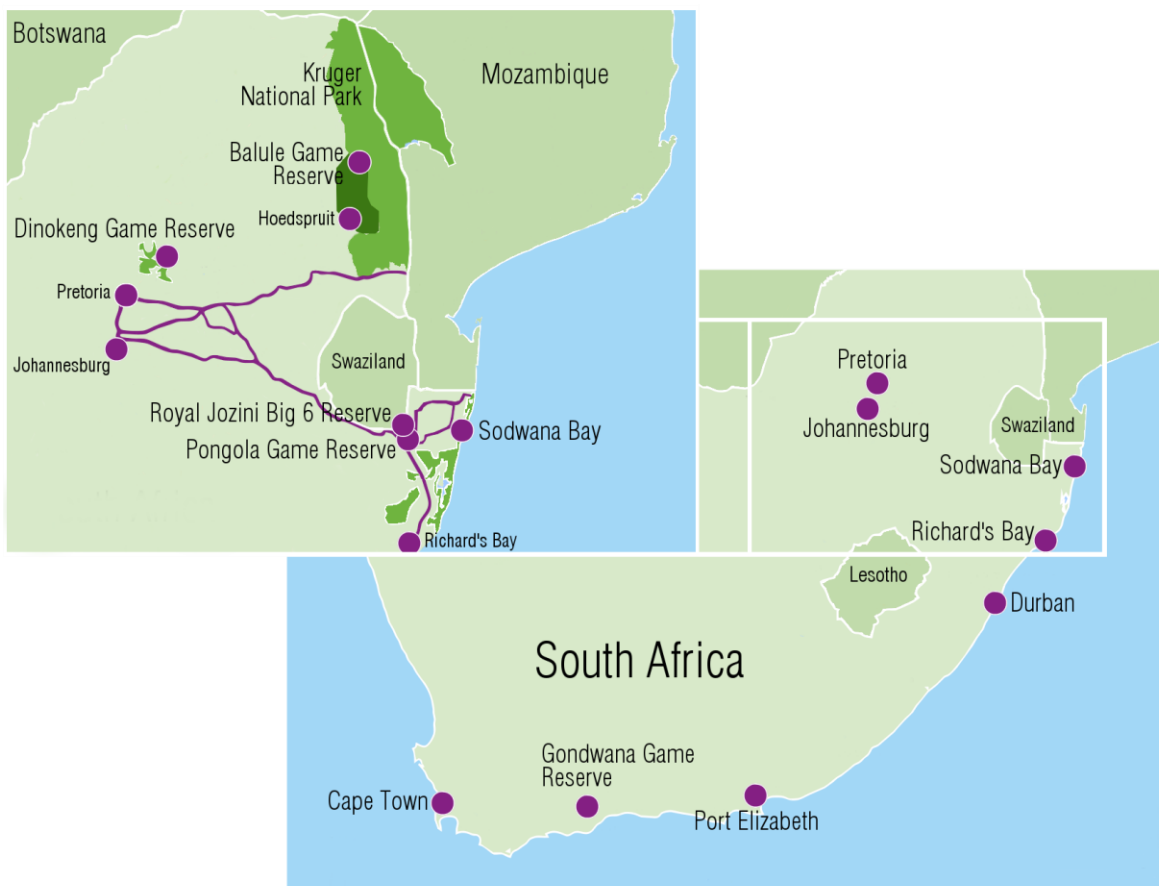


Figure 1. Location of the terrestrial sites – Balule, Dinokeng and Gondwana Game Reserves - and the marine camp – Sodwana Bay.

The three terrestrial sites offer slightly different insights into African conservation as they were all developed in slightly different ways leading to different management challenges. Dinokeng Game Reserve was formed through the donation of land from multiple small and large landowners in the area, many of whom still live within the reserve in fenced homesteads. The animals can roam freely around the individual properties within the reserve, which means the reserve offers a novel model for future South African conservation.

Balule Reserve is an example of where private landowners adjacent to an existing successful National Park (Kruger National Park) have dropped their fences to allow animals to move freely between these areas. This gives an extended range for the animals, but also enhances the tourism value of the privately-owned

reserves. Gondwana Reserve is an example of where adjacent cattle and game ranchers put together a potential reserve, fenced it and introduced game. Funding comes from setting aside 2 X 50ha areas within the reserve where individuals can buy a 1ha plot, build a house/lodge for their own use and have traversing rights across the whole reserve.

Given all this investment in wildlife management in enclosed reserves in South Africa, a whole series of management practices have grown up on which decisions are made. Some of these approaches seem to be making assumptions that are not borne out in practice. Examples include:

- Fynbos vegetation has zero carrying capacity for herbivores.
- Setting stocking rates for herbivores based on look-up tables linked to rainfall levels or using a computer programme to calculate amount of foliage based on standard tree shapes, gives accurate stocking levels. In practice developing techniques to measure the amount of foliage available for browsers for individual reserves may give more accurate data.
- Elephants damage vegetation and massively reduce the availability of forage for other species so should be stocked at no more than 0.35 animals per km². In practice, they may keep the savannah from converting to woodland where most of the forage is then out of reach of the other herbivores and by knocking over trees make additional forage available to those species only feeding below 2m height.
- Direct counts by helicopter are necessary to get accurate counts of game numbers, whereas DISTANCE based transect surveys provide a much more cost-effective method and allow species that cannot be counted from the air, such as Nyala, to also be estimated.

The overall objective of the Opwall surveys in South Africa, which are run in conjunction with WEI, is to develop a manual of best practices for wildlife conservation reserve managers based on the latest scientific data and the results of some of these research projects across the high veld, low veld and fynbos vegetation communities.

2. Itinerary

Two weeks in Gondwana Reserve in the Western Cape (see section 3 for details). This expedition will start and finish at hotel accommodation in Cape Town. International flights will need to be arranged into Cape Town airport by Friday before 1400hrs and out of Cape Town airport on Friday after 2000hrs. This will be by far the cheapest option for internal travel since it will only require a transfer from the airport to the hotel in Cape Town and back again. On this option the students will complete an African Wildlife Management course (see section 4) in the first week.

3. Research Objectives, Activities & Schedule at Gondwana Reserve

The Gondwana Game Reserve in the Western Cape province was created in 2010 by combining cattle and game ranches into a single fenced reserve of 11500ha. This reserve has a very different vegetation to that of the normal game reserves in high or low veld areas, and lies within the Cape Floral Kingdom which has the most diverse flora of any region in the world. Before the area was settled by man this vegetation community supported Elephant, Rhinos, Lions and Antelope species such as Eland, Blesbok, Bontebok and Springbok. The main natural vegetation communities in this region are Fynbos and Renosterveld. Fynbos grows on acid nutrient-poor soils and is characterised by Proteas (the South African national flower), Ericas, Pincushions, Cape Reeds, Pelargoniums and geophytes and is the most species diverse floral community in the world. However, this important vegetation community is under threat from

introduced species and human development, with some flower species already having become extinct. Renosterveld grows on deeper more alkaline soils and is characterised by low growing Renosterbos bushes. Renosterveld vegetation has mainly been ploughed up and only around 3% still remains.

The creation of the Gondwana Reserve on modified areas of former Renosterveld and Fynbos vegetation provides an opportunity to protect some additional protected areas of these communities. However, the browsing and grazing value of both Fynbos and Renosterveld is low and management of the vegetation on the former cattle and game farms by frequent burning had created some areas of grassland within the reserve which provide much of the food for the grazers and foraging species introduced. It is the presence of the Big 5 in the Reserve which is the main attraction for visitors and investors, and the carrying capacity of the reserve for these game species is primarily influenced by the amount of non-Fynbos and Renosterveld vegetation available. On the other hand, the reserve management wants to maintain as much of the floristic and faunal diversity of the Fynbos and Renosterveld areas as possible and this also provides an attraction for visitors to the reserve.

Burning is how Fynbos vegetation is renewed naturally, although the natural fire frequency is at fairly long intervals. After a fire the vegetation begins to re-establish but how long does it take for the climax Protea communities to become established? Immediately after a fire, grasses and edible herbs grow within the burned sections and these provide valuable grazing for the large mammals on which the reserve relies for its income. As the Fynbos recovers the percentage of edible grasses and herbs declines to be replaced with non-palatable woody species. So from a conservation viewpoint the argument has always been to maintain long burning cycles whilst from a grazing viewpoint the shorter the burning cycle the better.

The management of the reserve is currently using a compromise position of burning on a 10-year rotation. The purpose of the Opwall/WEI research programme is to determine how this burning rotation affects the floristic and faunal diversity of the Fynbos communities and the carrying capacity for the large game species to determine if the 10-year cycle is the best compromise position or whether modifications to the strategy are required. To complicate the argument further, the assertion that Fynbos has zero forage and grazing value for game species is incorrect. Elephants and other species such as Eland within the reserve are feeding on the Fynbos areas. Observational data are needed to determine what plant species are being consumed and what percentage of the diet this comprises. Note if Fynbos provides a significant contribution to grazing and browsing resources available then this could increase the carrying capacity of the reserve.

So in summary the following questions are being addressed by the Opwall/WEI research programme:

- 1) What is the optimum fire regime for allowing herbivore grazing but also maintaining floristic diversity of the Fynbos?
- 2) How does fire management affect bird diversity in a Fynbos habitat?
- 3) Which mammal species feed on Fynbos?
- 4) How do elephants utilise Fynbos for foraging?

Over the course of the week, the students will complete bush skills training alongside helping with the biodiversity research surveys needed to answer these research questions.

Questions 1-4 are all related to looking at the effects of fire on Fynbos habitat. Currently, burning occurs at two times of year (April and September), and each section of the reserve is burned approximately once every ten years. Since we have access to different habitat types (Fynbos, grassland etc) that contain within

them areas burned at various times in the past, the rate of biodiversity regeneration following fire for a number of different indicator taxa can be assessed.

Two aspects of biodiversity will be studied: floral and avifaunal. The study sites for each of these will be the same, the exact number and locations of which will be determined based upon the vegetation map provided by reserve management. The study plots will be located using GPS and several pieces of data collection performed in a single visit. Firstly, a bird point count will be performed at the centre of the study plot (question 2). Then a detailed vegetation survey will be carried out. This will include using quadrats to estimate the percentage cover of each floral family and identification of grass species present at specific points along a transect moving outwards from the central point (question 1).

It is very important for management of Fynbos game reserves to understand which game animals utilise Fynbos for grazing (question 5). Currently, when carrying capacities are calculated, Fynbos is not included as having any grazing capacity. However, local guides have observed several game species feeding on Fynbos suggesting it can help support the game populations in Gondwana reserve. By understanding these feeding patterns better, a more appropriate carrying capacity and thus management plan can be developed. The first step towards this is calculating the relative proportion of time that game is spending in Fynbos compared to other habitats. This can be done using game transects and DISTANCE sampling. Multiple 10km transects will be established throughout the reserve. During transect surveys, any mammals that are sighted are recorded along with their numbers, GPS location of the vehicle, distance from vehicle to animal and compass bearing from vehicle to animal. Combining this data with the vegetation map, the density of each mammal species present in each habitat type can be calculated.

The large mammal transect data can then be combined with more detailed data collected on the feeding habits of each species found in Fynbos. When game animals are observed grazing in Fynbos, specific individuals of interest will be selected and their feeding behaviour recorded. The type of vegetation being eaten (Fynbos, grasses etc) will be recorded continuously for up to an hour per individual, or until the individual goes out of sight. Every time the activity of the animal changes, the time will be recorded so that a proportion of time spent grazing on each vegetation type can be calculated. When the animal is in sight but not actively eating, the time will be recorded as “not foraging”. The collection of this data should be spread over all species that utilise the Fynbos.

The game transect data will give information on how much time game species spend in Fynbos, while the foraging data will show what proportion of this time is actually spent feeding on Fynbos species. By combining these two, the relative contribution of Fynbos species to diets of game species can be estimated. This information can then feed into future carrying capacity calculations for the reserve to greater assist reserve management planning.

During the first week, the volunteers will be divided up into groups of a maximum of nine and each will spend half of each day in the base camp having briefings and lectures. The other half of each day will be spent in the bush in vehicles or on foot in groups of nine with an armed guard and a FGASA qualified guide for each group. Thus some of the students will spend the morning in camp with briefings and lectures followed by the afternoon in the bush, whilst the rest will spend the morning in the bush and the afternoon on briefings and lectures, alternating each day. During the second week there is then time for the students to work full days in the field.

Table 3. Indicative timetable for the 2 week at Gondwana Reserve. Note there may be changes depending on fitness of students, group sizes and numbers, weather conditions or operational problems.

Day	Group 1	Group 2
Fri eve	Welcome to Gondwana and initial health and safety briefing	Welcome to Gondwana and initial health and safety briefing
Sat am	Vehicle based field visit with briefings about species encountered and safety when encountering these animals	First field trek with armed guard to learn about safety issues and approaching game species.
Sat pm	First field trek with armed guard to learn about safety issues and approaching game species.	Vehicle based field visit with briefings about species encountered and safety when encountering these animals
Sat eve	Lecture on small and potentially dangerous species – spiders, snakes and scorpions	Lecture on small and potentially dangerous species – spiders, snakes and scorpions
Sun am	Lecture 1 – An introduction to Africa's Biodiversity Workshop 1 – Effects of fire on biodiversity	Fynbos vegetation surveys
Sun pm	Large mammal transect surveys	Lecture 1 – An introduction to Africa's Biodiversity Workshop 1 – Effects of fire on biodiversity
Mon am	Lecture 2 – South African Birds Workshop 2 – Bird identification and practical survey skills	Bird point counts
Mon pm	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals	Lecture 2 – South African Birds Workshop 2 – Bird identification and practical survey skills
Mon eve	Debate on local conservation issues	Debate on local conservation issues
Tue am	Large mammal transect surveys	Lecture 3 – The herbivores of South Africa Workshop 3 – Calculating density estimates and carrying capacities
Tue pm	Lecture 3 – The herbivores of South Africa Workshop 3 – Calculating density estimates and carrying capacities	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals
Wed am	Bird point counts	Lecture 4 – The predators of South Africa Workshop 4 – Problems with managing closed populations
Wed pm	Lecture 4 – The predators of South Africa Workshop 4 – Problems with managing closed populations	Fynbos vegetation surveys
Wed eve	Stars talk	Stars talk
Thu am	Lecture 5 – The elephant Workshop 5 – Reducing human-animal conflict	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals

Thu pm	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals	Lecture 5 – The elephant Workshop 5 – Reducing human-animal conflict
Fri am	Large mammal transect surveys	Lecture 6 – African conservation and wildlife management Workshop 6 – Consumptive vs non-consumptive reserve management
Fri pm	Lecture 6 – African conservation and wildlife management Workshop 6 – Consumptive vs non-consumptive reserve management	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals
Fri eve	Campfire	Campfire
Sat am	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals	Bird point counts
Sat pm	Large mammal transect surveys	Fynbos vegetation surveys
Sun am	Bird point counts	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals
Sun pm	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals	Large mammal transect surveys
Mon am	Large mammal transect surveys	Fynbos vegetation surveys
Mon pm	Fynbos vegetation surveys	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals
Tue am	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals	Bird point counts
Tue pm	Large mammal transect surveys	Fynbos vegetation surveys
Wed am	Fynbos vegetation surveys	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals
Wed pm	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals	Large mammal transect surveys
Thu am	Bird point counts	Fynbos vegetation surveys
Thu pm	Fynbos vegetation surveys	Focal fynbos feeding surveys of elephants and other large mammals
Fri	Transfer to Cape Town airport via Betty's Bay Penguin Colony for international flights home	Transfer to Cape Town airport via Betty's Bay Penguin Colony for international flights home

Accommodation will be in large shared tents in a fenced compound. There will be hot showers and toilets on site and electrical power each evening.

4. African Wildlife Management Course

During the time in camp during the first week, the students will be completing an African Wildlife Management Course that will have direct relevance to the research they are helping with in the field. Each session starts with a 40 – 45-minute lecture and the rest of the time is then spent on a workshop aimed at reinforcing elements of the lectures and applying the knowledge to practical South African examples.

Lecture 1 – An introduction to Africa’s biodiversity

This lecture will outline the term ‘biodiversity’ and what this can mean in different situations to different groups of people. Students will also learn about the biodiversity of Africa and how humans, latitude and other gradients affect biodiversity.

Workshop 1 – Effects of fire on biodiversity

Different fire regime case studies will be presented to the students which they will discuss and compare best method. The practical activity will be an exercise where students are given example vegetation data from savannah plots and asked to determine for each data set, which herbivores would be utilising the grazing/browsing, the fire loads and whether burning would be beneficial.

Keywords

- Biodiversity
- Biogeography
- Fire
- Succession

Lecture 2 – South African birds: how we name, identify and survey their numbers and distribution

This lecture briefly looks at the importance of taxonomy and its role in conservation. It then looks in more detail at the identification of local birds and how survey work is carried out.

Workshop 2 – Students will learn 10 of the commonest bird calls likely to be encountered on the surveys.

In addition, they will be taught how to use a GPS to plot routes and range finders to estimate distances will be demonstrated and the students will have to complete a test course using only GPS and estimating distances of target objects.

Keywords

- Classification; Taxonomy; Binomial system; Dichotomous Keys
- Identification

Lecture 3 – Adaptation: the herbivores of South Africa

This lecture will give an overview of Africa’s main ecosystems and how herbivores are adapted for survival. There will also be a brief description of Kruger National Park and its importance in conservation. The lecture will concentrate on the mammalian herbivores and their ecology, behaviour and identification.

Workshop 3 - The requirements in terms of browse or grazing amounts, minimum herd sizes and distance from water that each of the species routinely feeds will be discussed for each of the main ruminant (buffalo, impala, kudu, wildebeest, nyala, giraffe and other antelope species) and non-ruminant (zebra, elephant, rhino, hippo, bush pig, warthog) herbivore species. Students will be given stock density data

and asked to estimate what percentage of the browse and grazing capacity was being utilised and what mix of additional browsers and grazers could be added to the reserve.

Keywords

- Ecology; Habitat; Niche; Abiotic; Biotic
- Biome; Ecosystems;
- Adaptation
- Populations; Competition; Interspecific; Intraspecific; Predator Prey; density dependent; independent.
- Behaviour / nutrition

Lecture 4 –_Adaption: the predators of South Africa.

This lecture will look at the role of the main predators and how they are adapted for survival. In particular it will focus on the ecology of lions, cheetah and leopards will be looked at in detail.

Workshop 4 – A film on hunting techniques in a savannah environment will be shown. Why reserves are fenced in South Africa and the problems associated with managing closed populations. Determining how many and what types of predators (lion, cheetah, hyena, leopard etc) should be introduced to control the growth of populations.

Keywords

- Ecology; Habitat; Niche; Abiotic; Biotic
- Biome; Ecosystems;
- Adaptation
- Populations; Competition; Interspecific; Intraspecific; Predator Prey; density dependent; independent.
- Behaviour

Lecture 5 – Africa's iconic animal: The Elephant

This lecture looks at the ecology and behaviour of the world's largest land mammal. It also considers the role of this iconic animal in tourism and other problems such as the ivory trade and control of elephant populations.

Workshop 5 - How do we define a damage causing animal and who should take responsibility? A hypothetical example will be given of a human wildlife conflict situation and the students will be asked how to best reduce the impacts.

Keywords

- Conservation, Sustainability
- Tourism, trophy hunting, population control, poaching, CITES
- Damage-causing; compensation
- Behaviour

Lecture 6 - African conservation and wildlife management

This lecture compares the consumptive use of game and non-consumptive use of game on game reserves through ecotourism. This lecture will include case studies on the sustainability of hunting and intensive breeding industries.

Workshop 6 – A film discussing intensive breeding and hunting (legal) in conservation will be shown. Students will be asked to justify the role of private land owners in the conservation of rare (sable and roan) and endangered (lion, cheetah, wild dog and rhino) large mammals in South Africa in the context of consumptive and non-consumptive ecotourism.

Keywords

- Ecotourism
- Hunting
- Game breeding
- Conservation

5. Academic Benefits

Apart from the most obvious values of going on an expedition such as contributing towards conservation, the physical challenge and adventurous travel, the experience can also benefit a student by increasing their chances of gaining entry to university or being successful in a job application and impressing at interview. This can be achieved in many ways but it will often depend upon which country and educational system a learner is from. Common to most countries the experience will:

Enhance their understanding of course syllabuses

Allow learners to gain specific qualifications such as:

Research Qualifications e.g. Extended Essays for IB and UK EPQs

University Course Credits in US

Creativity, Action and Service (CAS) for IB

Universities Award from ASDAN

IRPs or Individual Research Projects

In the last few years an increasing number of students joining our research programmes take this opportunity to undertake **IRPs**. These research projects take many different forms, but what they all have in common is the need to pose and answer a research question. Examples of these include **Extended Project Qualification** (EPQ), **Extended Essay** (EE) for IB, as well as many different projects specific to many education systems worldwide.

We can support the **dissertation essay style** research question; however individual scientific investigations (in which students design and collect their own data) are more difficult to facilitate given the short amount of time students are present on-site.

It is a fantastic opportunity for a student to witness first-hand many of the aspects of their research question and, in many cases, they will have access to samples of past datasets for their project. Students may also have the opportunity to talk with the actual scientists involved which will give them a convincing 'slant' to

the way in which they answer their research question.

Much of the research they will be able to get involved with is specific to their expedition location. The projects that students will encounter range from students helping to collect data through to working and learning alongside the scientists where primary data collection by school students is less practical or more difficult.

For success with IRPs, careful planning is needed by the student and a lot of the work will be done prior to their expedition. They will need close guidance from their school supervisor and the scientists in the field need to be briefed so that support can be provided where they can. We have now developed an application system to ensure that the student will be able to realistically undertake such a project, that their choice of topic is appropriate to their expedition site, the science staff 'on-site' are aware of the project and where practical can assist in a constructive way before, during and after their expedition.

For more information visit the Opwall website - <http://opwall.com/sixth-form-high-school/independent-research-projects/>

Relevance of their expedition to the syllabus

Specific specifications for Biology, Geography and Environmental Studies have been reviewed for over 10 examination boards from around the world to see how relevant a student's expedition experiences will be when related to what they learn in their classroom. The tables in the appendix section show how this matching works although not all topics are relevant to all sites so have been grey-out.

6. Additional Reading

Allsopp N , Jonathan F Colville , G Anthony Verboom , **Fynbos (2016): Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation of a Megadiverse Region**, Oxford University Press ISBN-13: 9780198777762

Apps P, (2012) **Smither's Mammals Southern Africa** Random House Struick ISBN-13: 9781770079137

Branch, B. (1998) **Field Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles in Southern Africa**. Struik Publishers, Capetown.www.struik.co.za. ISBN 1 86872 040 3

Briggs P, Lizzie Williams (2009) **The AA Guide to South Africa** AA Publishing. *Excellent summary at the start of history and politics*. ISBN-10: 0749562366

Carruthers, V. (2008) **The Wildlife of Southern Africa - a field guide to the animals and plants of the region**. Struik Publishers - ISBN-13: 9781770077041

Cillie B, (2009) **The Mammal guide of Southern Africa** Briza Publications ISBN: 1875093451

Esler KJ, Shirley M Pierce , Charl de Villiers (2015) **Fynbos: Ecology and Management** Briza Publications ISBN-13: 9781920217372

King D, Valda Frase (2014) **The Reef Guide: East and South Coasts of Southern Africa** Random House Struick ISBN-13: 9781775840183

Manning J, Colin Paterson-Jones (2008) **Field Guide to Fynbos**, SASOL First Field Guides ISBN-13: 9781770072657

Marais, J (2004) **A complete Guide to the snakes of Southern Africa** New Holland Publishers ISBN: 186872932X

Newmann KB, Faansie Peacock, Vanessa Newman Ralph Boettger (2010) **Newman's Birds of Southern Africa** Random House Struick ISBN-13: 9781770078765

Palgrave K, Meg Palgrave (2001) **Everyone's Guide to Trees of South Africa** Random House Struick ISBN: 1868724891

Paterson-Jones C, John Manning (2007) **Ecoguide: Fynbos** Briza Publications ISBN-13: 9781875093663

Rovero F, Fridolin Zimmermann (2016) **Camera Trapping for Wildlife Research** Pelagic Publishing ISBN-13: 9781784270483

Sinclair, I, Phil AR Hocke, Warwick Tarboton, Peter G Ryan, Norman Arlott, Peter Hayman (2011) **SASOL Birds of Southern Africa** Random House Struick ISBN-13: 9781770079274

Van Wyck, B, Van Wyck, P & Van Wyck, B. E (2000) **Photographic Guide to Trees of Southern Africa**. Briza Publications, Pretoria.

Walker, C. (1996) **Signs of the Wild - a field guide to the spoor and signs of the mammals of southern Africa**. Struik Publishers, Capetown. www.struik.co.za. ISBN 1 86825 896 3.

Whyte, I. & Chittenden, H. (2008) **Roberts Bird Guide: Kruger National Park and Adjacent Lowveld: A Guide to More than 420 Birds in the Region**. Jacana Media. ISBN-13: 9781770096387

Electronic media

BBC Last Chance to See, Episode 3: Northern White Rhino. Available online at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00mvbbx>

BBC Life of Mammals, Episode 4: Plant Eaters

BBC Life of Mammals, Episode 5: Meat Eaters

BBC Planet Earth, Episode 7: Great Plains

The Secret Life of Elephants. BBC Video. Available from NHBS - www.nhbs.com/

BBC's Africa Documentary