



CALLING ALL CHURCHGOERS TO JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST RHINO POACHING!

23 July 2014

Start

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) in partnership with A Rocha South Africa, Timbavati Foundation and the Responsible Tourism (RT) Foundation, recently held the *Church Leaders Against Rhino Poaching Workshop*, which aimed to raise awareness and impart knowledge about the plight of the rhino among church leaders from communities on the periphery of the Manyeleti Game Reserve and the Timbavati Private Nature Reserve in Bushbuckridge.

The workshop was held at the Timbavati Bush School in Hoedspruit. Over 14 churches and denominations representing over 3000 members were present at the workshop. The church in South Africa has a massive following and immense influence amongst communities impacted by rhino poaching. Churches operating in Protected Areas in the Lowveld have a particularly powerful voice amongst their flock and offer a place for regular gatherings and conversations around matters affecting members of the community.

Said Reverend Jeffrey Silinda, one of the workshop participants, "The workshop was excellent. I have read the Bible many times and I have never thought it could be read in terms of the issues related to wildlife conservation and my reading of the Bible has definitely changed. When I saw the video about the poached rhinos in the workshop I was crying. The church has not talked about this issue for a long time. We used to think that it is not for us, but now it has come to my attention that we need to take action. We must come together as Christians and take action and pray and work together with communities. We can still serve and save the animals that remain."

Pastor Lindiwe Mkhonto, who was one of the only pastors present who had preached on rhino poaching before attending the workshop, shared a story about two individuals who attended one of her services and eventually confessed their involvement in rhino poaching as a result of her sermon. Mkhonto stated, "Beginning the conversation about rhino poaching will help members of our congregations who may have family members or friends involved in poaching come forward and seek assistance for their loved ones."

Pastor Andries Sihlangu added, "The crime of poaching is something we will all suffer from because so many of our members work within the tourism industry and a decrease in the number of tourists visiting our parks will likely mean a loss of jobs and income."

Church leaders agreed:

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

NPO Number: 015-502, **PBO number:** 930 001 777, **Member of IUCN** - The International Union for Conservation of Nature
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- to develop sermons focused on the issue of poaching which will also be turned into a published booklet that will be distributed to other parishes across the country;
- to partner with the EWT, A Rocha South Africa, Timbavati Foundation and the Responsible Tourism Foundation and encourage colleagues and peers to attend similar workshops that will be conducted throughout the Bushbuckridge area; and
- to commit to seeking out and engaging in different ways of fighting poaching in their communities and bringing an end to the plight of the rhino.

“We learnt a great deal at this awesome workshop and I am looking forward to coming together again as church leaders to share ideas and see how we can support each other in putting together Gospel messages about rhino poaching,” concluded Reverend Mavis Ngobeni.

For more information about future workshops please contact, Manager of the EWT’s Rhino Project on kirstyb@ewt.org.za and Rest Kanju, the EWT’s Expert Community Advisor and CEO of RT Foundation on rest@rtfoundation.org.za.

A Rocha is a Christian nature conservation organisation. The name comes from the Portuguese for “the Rock,” as the first initiative was a field study centre in Portugal. A Rocha projects are frequently cross-cultural in character, and share a community emphasis. We focus on science and research and we encourage and inspire people to do practical conservation and conservation education to restore creation and live sustainably.

End.

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