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GROUP OF COMPANIES

DE BEERS FUNDS NEW PROJECT TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF ROADS ON OUR WILDLIFE

17th October 2014

Start

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) is excited to partner with the De Beers Group of Companies to address the impact of roads on wildlife in the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area (GMTFCA) in the Limpopo Province.

The EWT has previously conducted intensive surveys of wildlife killed on the roads traversing the (GMTFCA). This area was declared a World Heritage Site in 2003 and is recognised as an important area for conservation and cultural heritage.

"Over a 120-day period in 2012/13, I found approximately 1121 roadkill carcasses. This did not account for animals that crawled off the road to die after being hit or were scavenged by predators," explained Wendy Collinson, EWT's Wildlife and Roads Project Executive.

From these surveys in 2012/13, a major roadkill hotspot was identified on one section of the road in the GMTFCA. On days when large trucks were using the road, roadkill numbers also increased. Roadkill continues to be an 'eyesore' to visitors to the area as well as a threat to the wildlife, not to mention a potential danger to motorists when hitting larger species.

In June 2014, a female Leopard was killed on the road in the identified roadkill hotspot area, with a male Leopard killed by a truck six weeks later, 25km away on the original roadkill transect. The elusive and rarely seen Aardvark was also killed on the road in the hotspot area in July 2014, as was a Kudu, causing extensive damage to a vehicle as well as injuring the occupants.

This presented the EWT with an important opportunity to implement the use of signage and roadside fencing to direct wildlife to cross the road through existing culverts. This mitigation measure will be implemented in 2015 with support from De Beers in an attempt to reduce the number of roadkill on this road.

There is often conflict between development and conservation objectives in South Africa. South Africa's future economic development requires infrastructure and the construction of new transport routes is inevitable. It is now becoming widely accepted that roads affect many aspects of ecosystems. Roads and traffic are destructive in two ways to animal populations: directly, where roads impact wildlife via mortality (i.e. roadkill), and indirectly, by fragmenting a population's habitat, with this threat only becoming apparent over a period of time. Roads therefore pose a threat to not just the survival of individual animals but also to populations.

The GMTFCA is rich in species diversity which makes it an upcoming top destination for wildlife enthusiasts. Currently, of the mammals occurring in the area, six are listed as Endangered and 12 as Vulnerable. Southern Africa is considered to have the highest reptile diversity in Africa and 25% of these reptiles occur in the GMTFCA. Of the 858 species of birds that occur in South Africa, at least 50% of them are found in the GMTFCA.

South Africa is estimated to have the world's fifth-largest mining sector in terms of GDP (18%) and mining accounts for 50% of transportation volume. Mining, particularly diamond and coal mining, is the most significant contributor to the GDP of Limpopo Province with several areas in the GMTFCA currently being mined and many more ear-marked for exploration. This will see an increase in traffic and will impact on wildlife. With the GMTFCA having the potential to become a major tourist destination in southern Africa, tourist-borne traffic is also likely to increase.

"We commend De Beers in taking the lead to support conservation work in the GMTFCA." said Collinson.

The EWT's Wildlife and Roads Project is supported by Bridgestone SA and Arrow Bulk Logistics, with logistical support from Mopane Bush Lodge. For further information please contact Wendy Collinson on wendyc@ewt.org.za

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