



**ENDANGERED
WILDLIFE TRUST**
Protecting forever, together.

6 February 2018

Putting our money where our mouth is!

Announcing the first EWT owned and managed nature reserve

Start

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), Africa's conservation leader, is proud to announce the transfer of the Medike Nature Reserve in Limpopo, into the EWT's name, as its first ever land purchase. Medike comprises some 1,400 ha of priority and unique mountain habitat in the Soutpansberg Mountains, and was bought through the generosity of the Roberts Family Trust in Australia. This is the first step in a long-term project to realise the dream of establishing the Soutpansberg Protected Area (SPA), which will ultimately span in excess of 23,000 ha and will connect the existing Happy Rest Nature Reserve in the east and Luvhondo Private Nature Reserve in the west.

This special place is South Africa's most northern mountain range, and is home to thousands of species of insects, plants, birds and mammals, many of which are found nowhere else on earth. The EWT has identified this region as being in urgent need of protection due to the high number of threatened species, its extraordinary variety of important and unique habitat types, its crucial role in water production, and its value as a centre of cultural heritage for many communities. Despite the significance of the region, the Soutpansberg Mountains currently receive little conservation support, with less than one percent of the area being formally conserved in nature reserves.

By embarking on this journey to protect the area, and purchasing this special tract of land in the western Soutpansberg's Sand River Gorge, the EWT is about to change all that. Medike Nature Reserve will serve as the catalyst for an ambitious project that will bring in neighbouring properties into the larger Soutpansberg Protected Area, which will safeguard the future of hundreds of threatened species and support the development of sustainable livelihoods in the western Soutpansberg Mountains. "In essence, we will work with existing landowners and local communities to make this one large protected area with the aim of saving species and habitats, providing critical ecosystem services, such as clean water, and developing climate change resilience," says Oldrich van Schalkwyk, the EWT SPA Manager.

Environmental threats in the area include illegal killing of wildlife, such as Leopards, for the local bush meat and skin industry, and pangolins, for export trade; illegal and unsustainable harvesting of medicinal plants, as well as the uncontrolled collection of firewood; ongoing illegal sand mining in the Sand River;

and illegal clearing of indigenous forest, among others. Many of these threats stem from a lack of socio-economic development in the area, and the EWT's far-reaching vision for this region will result not only in the conservation of its unique biodiversity and the sustained integrity of its water resources, but in sustainable livelihood options for the local communities too. Much of the work will revolve around addressing human-wildlife conflict, and supporting the local communities to farm in an environmentally friendly manner. The EWT will also promote the establishment of a long-lasting conservation-based green economy, linked to innovative local micro-enterprises.

The Roberts family fell in love with this magical mountain when they visited it 2014 and their generosity has allowed the EWT to secure the Medike Nature Reserve and catalyse a bigger conservation vision for the area. The proposed SPA will result in protected area expansion, water security, socio-economic development, 'green' job creation and threatened species conservation in the western Soutpansberg. This vision has subsequently leveraged further support from major donors including Rainforest Trust and the Nedbank Green Trust, allowing this dream to approach reality.

Said Yolán Friedmann, EWT CEO: "The purchase of Medike signals a new era for the EWT, as we embark on one of the most exciting projects in our history: that of a private landowner and conservator, as well as driver of community stewardship and socio-economic development as a both neighbour and a supporting partner. We remain forever grateful to our investors in conservation, the Roberts Family Trust, as well as Rainforest Trust and the Nedbank Green Trust, for taking this vision forward. We also thank Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr for their enormous support in all the work of the EWT."

The SPA will act as a demonstration project for the expansion of this work throughout the Vhembe Biosphere Reserve and other Man and Biosphere Reserves across the country and continent. We welcome contributions and partnerships from other NGOs and corporates to grow this dream and to establish this unique area as a conservation icon.

End

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