

All-women conservation expedition to 'journey with purpose' across southern Africa

Headed by KwaZulu-Natal adventurer and humanitarian Carla Geyser, this September will see an all-women South African expedition set out on a conservation mission to raise awareness about human-wildlife conflict. Dubbed Journeys with Purpose: Rise of the Matriarch, the expedition will see the crew traversing 9000km across South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe over 50 days.



KZN adventurer and conservationist, Carla Geyser, is putting the finishing touches to an all-women SA-led expedition across four countries.

Geyser, the founder of the NPO Blue Sky Society Trust, has been involved in conservation and community upliftment initiatives since 2012. "I firmly believe that one person can make a difference in this world and I want to be that person," she says.

Conservation trailblazer

The 45-year-old Durban resident earned a solid reputation as a conservation trailblazer in 2016 when she led South Africa's first all-female expedition from South Africa to Kenya to help stem the tide of poaching. The Journeys with Purpose: Elephant Ignite Expedition brought together 13 women who embarked on a 100-day journey to Kenya, raising funds and awareness among communities along the way. The team returned home triumphant, having covered more than 15,000km, visited 37 wildlife organisations, distributed 20,000 educational booklets to children, and raised nearly R300,000 for various conservation projects.



Carla Geyser of Blue Sky Society Trust led South Africa's first all-women expedition from South Africa to Kenya in 2016. The Journeys with Purpose: Elephant Ignite Expedition brought together 13 women who embarked on a 100-day journey to Kenya, raising funds for anti-poaching efforts. The team is pictured here with children at Linyangwa School in Malawi.

Replicating this magic formula, Geyser now plans on taking her conservation message across South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe on a nearly two-month 4x4 journey that will combine adventure travel with ecotourism fundraising. The team will engage with local communities especially children on the human-wildlife issue and distribute 30,000 educational booklets, connect with anti-poaching groups, visit conservation groups and schools, and meet with women who are doing remarkable things at a grassroots level to assist in conservation efforts. Funds raised during the expedition will benefit four causes, namely Elephants Alive (South Africa), Rare and Endangered Species Trust (Namibia), Eco-Exist Project (Botswana) and the Soft Foot Alliance Trust (Zimbabwe).

For Lungile Dimba, education administrator at WESSA (Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa), the opportunity to join the expedition is a dream come true. "This is not just a once in a lifetime opportunity, it is a rare opportunity. It is so rare to be deemed as fit to actually represent something, to work in great projects and to be chosen to do a job bigger than yourself!" The 24-year old ecotourism management graduate is determined to use the opportunity to her fullest.



Lungile Dimba, education administrator at WESSA (Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa), is joining the all-women conservation expedition in September.

“I love the act of caring for the Earth and the Rise of the Matriarch expedition represents exactly that,” says Dimba. “I hope to create lasting networks. I look forward to educating and being educated. I look forward to hearing stories of change and to be part of the team that will be raising funds for great causes.”

Blue Sky Society Trust’s volunteer and part-time employee Celokuhle "Smax" Biyela has always been a firm champion of conservation efforts. “I have seen the work that we humans have done to destroy our surroundings. I’ve heard people say things without facts and I haven’t used my voice enough to educate those without them. I always feel like I never do enough and can never do enough but I’m hoping that I can help to make a difference.” The Tanglewood Foundation, an environment advocacy and conservation group based in New Zealand, has generously sponsored Dimba and Smax allowing the two women to join the expedition team.

Excitement aside, Geyser acknowledges that a journey of this nature requires more than meticulous planning and a dedicated crew. “It’s a daily emotional rollercoaster: setting up camp, driving long distances, cooking and cleaning chores, dealing with the impact of hearing devastating stories about wildlife failures and the adrenaline of listening to those that speak of successes. I have to make sure that every woman joining us is aware of this. There’s more to the planning phase than individuals sourcing sponsors, it’s about heading out with the correct mindset and being open to all that Mama Africa

throws our way.”



Blue Sky Society Trust founder Carla Geyser with her mentor Kingsley Holgate.

While the Rise of the Matriarch team is preparing to leave in September, it's not too late for business, organisations or individuals to get involved. "This is an excellent opportunity for citizens and corporates to make a meaningful difference," explains Geyser.

"The expedition is more than a project that's fuelled by passion, it's an initiative by an all-women conservation team of conservation 'she-roes' who are determined to do our bit to help save our piece of the planet. As noble as this undertaking is, we can't do it alone. We need support."

For more information, go to www.blueskysociety.org.

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