

THE STORY OF THE
CONSERVATION LAB 2016

HOW WE
FOUGHT
OUR WAY
BACK FOR
OUR FIRST
EDITION



CHAPTER ONE: A Recipe For Collaboration 06 // **CHAPTER TWO:**
How Conservation Got Its First Un-Conference 08 // **CHAPTER THREE:**
An Unconventional Line-Up 14 // **CHAPTER FOUR:** Lighting Sparks 16 //
CHAPTER FIVE: Discuss And Conquer 20 // **CHAPTER SIX:** What We
Learned 24 // **CHAPTER SEVEN:** Who Made It Happen 34 //
Get In Touch 46

OUR PARTNERS

A big THANK YOU to our 2016 partners, whose role in conservation, whether it be to promote or directly impact, does not go unnoticed.



CHAPTER ONE:

A Recipe For

COLLAB-ORATION

What does it take to build a bridge between travel and conservation?
Here are a few of the ingredients that went into making the first
Conservation Lab a success....

1 Oscar-nominated
Movie star
 6 Bonfires
 30 Group Discussions
 0 Egos
 200 Bottles of
Spier Wine
 1 Opera Singer
 85 Beanbags
 100 participants
 2 Prince
William Award
for Conservation
Winners
 50 conservationists
 50 Travel
experts



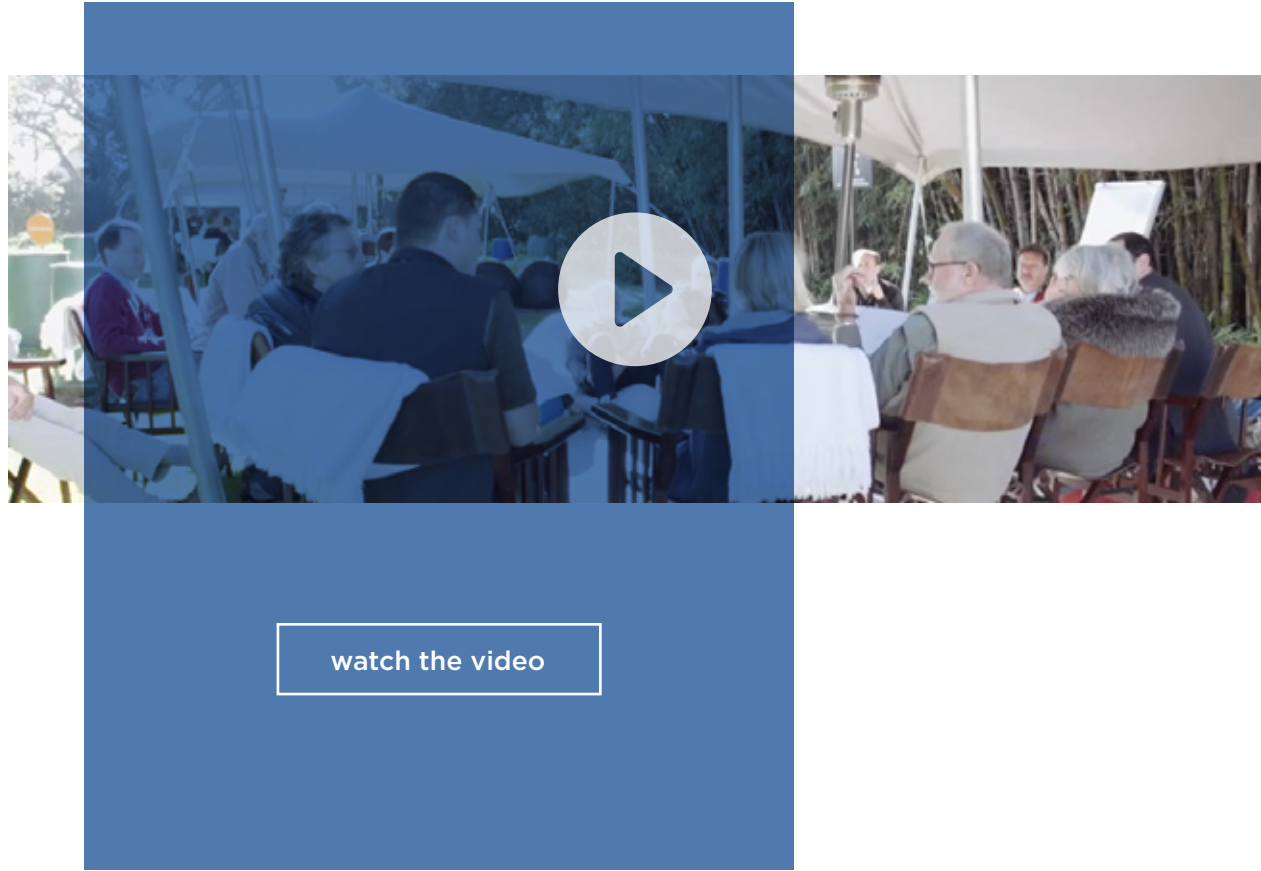


CHAPTER TWO:

How Conservation
Got Its First

UN- CONFERENCE

What is an un-conference, and why does conservation need one?
We explain why the Conservation Lab is more than just a talking shop.



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One of the greatest challenges facing conservation is how fragmented and siloed its greatest champions can be – both from each other and from the funds needed to translate ideas into action. We believe in travel as a for-profit conservation model, but in order for this to be more successful and effective than other models such as hunting or trade, stronger links need to be constructed between the worlds of travel and conservation.

Consequently, the Conservation Lab was conceived to bring together committed conservationists and travel industry leaders passionate about supporting sustainability, with the ambition of building bridges, uncovering insights and collectively brainstorming solutions to Africa’s conservation challenges.



As Beyond Luxury Media's CEO, Serge Dive, explains: "Imagine you're at a football match. In this game, Team Conservation is definitely 4-1 down at half-time. But we've got the players, we've got the skills - all we need is to come together as a team. Then, We Can Fight Our Way Back".

However, winning this fight demands a new approach - one that will fully engage participants, inspire creative thinking and reveal the hidden talents and expertise of those around us. Dive continues, "Creativity in conservation is important. We need fresh ideas, and we need to find them in a non-linear way. So that's what we're going to do - create accidental conversation".

Enter the un-conference format, designed to do just that. Across two days in May at Spier Wine Farm in Stellenbosch, some of the leading figures in conservation and travel gathered to swap existing ideas and generate new ones. In addition to informal networking over drinks, barbecues and late-night film screenings, three key un-conference elements were introduced to get the best out of participants: SPARK, DISCUSS and TEAMWORK.

SPARK talks are 15-slide presentations, automatically timed to 15 seconds per slide, in which participants were tasked to explain their big conservation idea in a short, sharp and succinct way. DISCUSS brought up to 30 collaborative discussions hosted in the Spier grounds, with participants signing up on the DISCUSS board to lead a session on a topic of their choosing. TEAMWORK challenged teams of five or six to decide how they would spend a huge grant on conservation, before presenting their solution to the group on the final night. Alongside this crowd-sourced content, big hitters General Johan Jooste and Virunga Park Director Emmanuel de Merode provided some context by describing their personal conservation battles.

What follows is the story of how this experiment unfolded for 2016. When it comes to changing the world,

WE THINK IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO START.

Across the weekend, the only
limitation was to follow our

~~UN-~~ RULES

1 —

Dress as cool
as you like.

2 —

No passive
participants.

3 —

Digital detox is
the new cool.

4 —

Overcome your
fear of public
speaking.

5 —

Leave your ego
at the door.

6 —

Don't suck the
oxygen out of
the room.

7 —

Avoid conflict.

8 —

Seek
collaboration.

9 —

Remember
that you are
the content.

10 —

Follow Chatham
House Rules.

11 —

Have fun!

CHAPTER THREE:

An UNCON- VENTIONAL LINE-UP

Camp-style debates, late-night screenings and timed team presentations: discover how the 2016 programme got participants' creativity flowing.

DAY ONE

- * **Check in**, meet your peers and claim a spot on the **DISCUSS** board
- * Team Talk from **General Johan Jooste**
- * **SPARK** talks from participants
- * **Film screenings** of Blood Lions and Virunga

DAY TWO

- * **TEAMWORK** Part One: Teams collectively tackled the challenge of how to spend a large sum of (imaginary) money on conservation
- * **DISCUSS**: Up to 30 discussions on ideas and challenges surrounding conservation (see p20 for examples)
- * **Team Talk** from **Emmanuel de Merode**, Director of Virunga National Park
- * **TEAMWORK** Part Two: Teams presented the solutions they had been working on throughout the weekend



EMMANUEL DE MERODE,
*DIRECTOR, VIRUNGA
NATIONAL PARK*



MAJOR GENERAL JOHAN JOOSTE,
HEAD OF SPECIAL PROJECTS, SANPARKS

—
CHAPTER FOUR:

LIGHTING SPARKS

15 participants; 15 ideas;
15 slides; 15 seconds per slide.

Our SPARK talk speakers stepped up to the plate to tell us their idea for fighting our way back in the conservation game – see a few examples of this year's SPARK talks over the following pages and [view more 2016 SPARK talks here](#).

"Everyone loves
a good story. One
specific example
can be a very powerful
vehicle for helping
tell a larger
conservation
story and making
it relatable."

watch her SPARK

Jen Murphy,
Freelance Journalist

"We don't have to
 hurt each other in.
 We don't have to
 keep each other tight.
 We can understand
 each other. We can
 work together. We
 can be constructive."

watch his SPARK

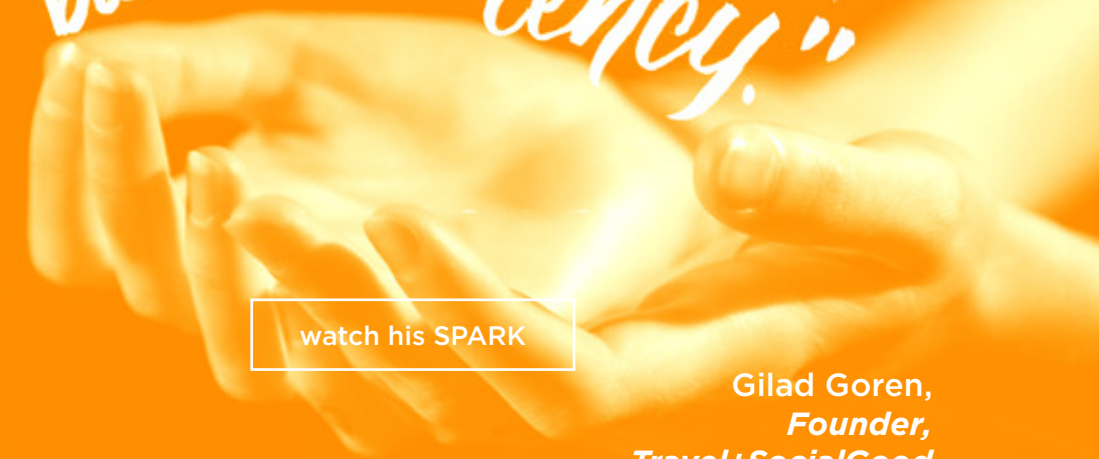
Les Carlisle,
 Group Conservation
 Manager, andBeyond



"What if we could
 take loyalty points
 and make them the
 incentive for making
 the right decision
 when you're shopping?
 We could make the
 world's first value-
 based currency."

watch his SPARK

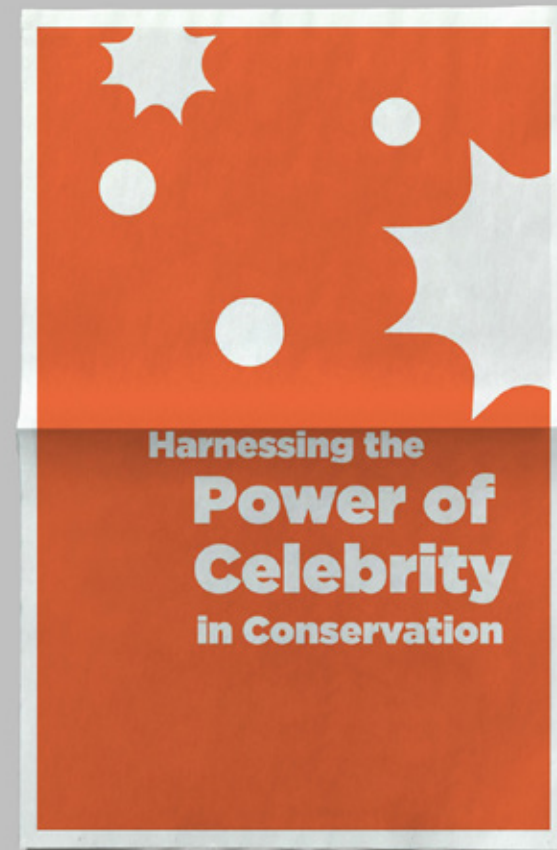
Gilad Goren,
 Founder,
 Travel+SocialGood



— CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSS & CONQUER

Up to 30 informal DISCUSS conversations took place under canopies in the grounds of Spier. Exactly what was said remains firmly off the record, but topics included:



**Playing The Game:
Involving
Generation Z**

**Is Ivory
Currency?**

**World
Heritage
Species: Making
Conservation
sexy**

The Plan:

**Swazi
Rhinos,
To Trade
Or Not
To Trade**

**50
SHADES OF GREY:
Animal Sanctions
& Interactions**

**NO CONSERVATION
without Communities**

Artificial Intelligence

**BIG
DATA**

Big Opportunities:

**How to leverage
the data generated
by travellers**

**What
Happened to
Campfire**

CHAPTER SIX:

What We

LEARNED

Several participants share some of the insights they gained from attending in 2016.

Read more 2016 reviews at

[weareafricatravel.com/
tag/conservation-lab/](http://weareafricatravel.com/tag/conservation-lab/)

A MINNOW IN THE CONSERVATION POND

HOW COLLECTIVE WORKING CREATES INSIGHT
AT BOTH ENDS OF THE CONSERVATION CHAIN

CAMILLA RHODES,
Zambia Programme Coordinator,
ABERCROMBIE & KENT

The notion of an 'un-conference' unsettled me slightly.

I'm a new fish in the conservation pond, a minnow really, and I was acutely aware that swimming around me were some of the most influential minds in conservation today. What could I offer that would be new? How could I answer some previously unanswerable question?

But that is where the 'un-conference' was different. It was broken down, unscripted and largely unformatted, each participant encouraged to contribute and question, and given plenty of opportunity to do so. With a guest list including agents, operators, conservationists, philanthropists, journalists and more, everyone had something to add and something to learn.

Game Plan topics were diverse, although sometimes I found a time clash in topics of interest. Whilst one could dash from 'Gorongosa' to 'Serengeti' with relative ease, it did mean possibly missing key parts of the dialogue taking place. I was most looking forward to discussions surrounding community engagement; not a new concept, in fact it is well entrenched in terms of understanding and achieving conservation success. Discussions were lively and engaging and I came away with a few key points, ideas and some further questions...



RESILIENCE

Africa let out a unified sigh last year as across the continent tourism plummeted. So what do you do when there is an Ebola outbreak, or a terrorism attack, and suddenly Africa is no longer top of the travel list? What happens to the initiatives that were dependent on funding from that tourism revenue? Community staff that no longer have work because the camps are empty?

The philanthropic/conservation initiatives that stem from tourism need to be modified and made more resilient and long-standing. Promises of financial incentives collapse when tourism struggles. Focus should be placed instead on education, health and developing sustainable enterprise.



AUTHENTICITY

Speaking generally and as someone newly within the travel philanthropy sector, I have observed huge disparity when it comes to authentic and responsible community engagement. The trend today is for each lodge or operator to have 'their village', a community they support where international guests can visit to satiate their desire to 'give back'. People are actively looking for avenues where they can make real tangible impacts, both for conservation and rural livelihoods. It is our responsibility as travel professionals, conservationists and philanthropists to create meaningful interactions for them that result in positive change, but do not exploit or promote unsustainable development. There are plenty of missed opportunities currently resulting in skin-deep interactions; travellers come but do not truly connect with the people and the challenges they face. A problem of today's social media



driven world where the online version of you is valued higher than the flesh and blood version. A smiling picture alongside some village children followed by #givingback is as deep as it goes in some places.

It is our job to educate travellers and give them the information and means to make informed decisions about who and how they support, and how to recognise those who aren't doing it correctly. We both want the same thing after all; impact and results, transparent & efficient use of funding, initiatives that achieve desired goals & outcomes.

OWNERSHIP

...ownership is key...Organisations must implement initiatives with the community and not for them.

THE 'HONEY POT EFFECT'

There is a fine line to tread with community-led conservation. The impacts to communities need to be tangible and the understanding of benefits from protected areas and their wildlife inherent. But with development comes attraction, leading to the subsequent dilution of benefits and inevitably more strain on the very thing under protection. These kinds of quandaries keep my brain up at night. As stakeholders and facilitators of conservation and community development, we should ensure understanding within the partner communities – understanding of needs to protect wilderness and wildlife, understanding of potential benefits to be reaped from a positive partnership and understanding of negative outcomes from unsustainable growth and development. Once again it is for the community to 'own' this.

DISPERSAL OF INVESTMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

As each organisation largely works independently, peddling their own proverbial wheel towards a symbiosis of community and conservation, it's possible this serves to create greater disparity. Communities proximate to protected areas and their wildlife may receive varying levels of support and engagement based on accessibility, necessity and who is engaging with them. This leads to a widening gap in perceived community benefits from protected areas, tourism ventures and ultimately wildlife too.

If we came together, pooling resources and expertise, casting our collective nets wider, could we ensure mutualistic community-conservation relationships with a more inclusive reach that do not compromise on depth of impact?

There is, undoubtedly, huge potential for tourism to drive positive change. Indeed, it is already happening, and the Conservation Lab was a great stage to bring together stakeholders in the industry to try to formulate and streamline a way forward. I have come away with a solid foundation of the road ahead. Admittedly, I do need to think a little more about the vehicle to use on such a road to ensure safe arrival at my conservation destination. However, the core ideas taken from this gathering, honed to my specific needs, will form the building blocks for such a vehicle and the framework will be a solid partnership and collaboration with other stakeholders. We must unite in our future efforts. It is time to move beyond selfish gains and marketing promotions, to forget about brand image for a second and work collectively. Perhaps if this approach had been taken 20 years ago our road ahead might not have quite so many hurdles?

OPEN LIKE THE SERENGETI

DIVING IN THE DEEP END AND EMERGING WITH A NEW MINDSET

BRENT STAPELKAMP,
Hwange Lion Research Project

Having been home now for about a fortnight or so since the Conservation Lab, I am still catching up with the great contacts that I made on that beautiful estate in Stellenbosch. I must admit that the so-called “un-conference” format left me wondering what I was heading into as I arrived at the Spier Hotel, but then again, I had recently emerged from underneath a rock (so to speak) and I had only been to one conference before this anyway! I was excited to say the least and knew if nothing else it would be a great networking trip.

We arrived early and so spent some time on the loungers outside. Immediately, from the diverse backgrounds of the people in our newly introduced circle, I found the process very stimulating. Conservation is evolving much faster than its traditional subjects and within an hour of arriving I had discussed drones, apps and social media, and all from a conservation perspective! My notebook started filling up with scrawls and diagrams and we had not even registered yet!

We were told very early on in the introduction part of the event that this was a participatory conference (or un-conference, sorry) and so I tried to follow that. Small groups with an open agenda as it were. People started the conversations along the themes that they proposed and then it followed its own course naturally. In some tents or “national parks” as they were labelled, the conversations had to be brought back from their exciting tangents but that was fine because after the allotted time there were five key points on the flip-chart. I’d fill my pockets with roasted nuts between talks and then rush to the next one with a few minutes to introduce myself to some of my conservation heroes and then it would start again.

All in all it is a great way of doing things to get away from “death by PowerPoint” as someone called it. You could choose what you wanted to listen to and decide on the depth of your involvement.

The biggest lessons for me were about technology and its varied use in conservation circles, from the latest and most sophisticated drones tracking poachers to an app used to educate young Chinese about the real way that ivory is obtained from elephants. Technology is not necessarily only about liquid crystal and WiFi either; it can be about adapting the African culture of storytelling or using exposure to wildlife as a means of recruiting the next generation of conservationists. A big thing for me is the drive to see the lion listed or defined as a World Heritage species, and in our discussion we spoke about a “lion levy”

where companies using lion images to sell products should pay for those image rights; much like you would if David Beckham was on your t-shirts! Someone mentioned getting rural Africans to sign the petition for a World Heritage species and not just the first world! Lots of things to think about and seeds planted (as my wife always says). And how will these lessons shape my future conservation efforts? I feel that I have long-since abandoned the idea that I know everything...I am continually looking for people and ideas that challenge me and mine and so I’d say that my lessons learnt at the Conservation Lab will do their bit to “knock the edges off” and play their part in a much more evolved and fluid mindset about the future of Africa’s wildlife and wild places. I am open like the Serengeti...



WHEN TOURISM MET CONSERVATION

WHY WE CAN'T JUST LEAVE CONSERVATION TO THE CONSERVATIONISTS

BEKS NDLOVU,
CEO,
AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS

In the lead-up to the event, I must confess that there was so much else going on, including other shows and my personal travel schedule, but I knew at the back of my mind that this was no doubt one of the most important, because it spoke very closely to my operating principles and is a subject that I think every travel company should be paying close attention to. When I knew there was an opportunity to speak and present, I immediately put together my presentation and ideas, which I was thankful were accepted for presentation.

Despite the fact that public speaking is not at the top of my most favourite pastimes, I felt important enough to put myself out. I have never done an “un-conference” type of event and so had no idea what to expect, but I could clearly see that it had been well thought through and most importantly, was based on participation and not being a spectator. Hence the actual experience was new and captivating and if anything, there were a number of debates I wished I had seen, but one could not do it all.

3

After two days of the un-conference, I was able to walk away with key ideas, some of which were merely confirmation of some of my opinions, but some of which were new:

Conservation awareness should not only be amongst industry people who largely already know the issues, but every single citizen of this world. It cannot be assumed that the average urban person is disinterested; for the most part, they simply do not know what is at stake.

4

Government policy is the key to enabling better success for the private sector to win the fight on conservation. It is of utmost importance that government is on board and influenced to come up with strong policies that allow for the protection of wilderness areas and the wildlife within.

5

There is no conservation without rural community, and there are no rural communities without conservation.

The aims and goals of my organisation are to challenge the industry and travellers to Africa to be more conscious in their thinking and ways of doing things, and how their choices impact their footprint on this planet. Tourism and conservation are not two different industries, but one wholesome practice that cannot do without the other. We are in a time of crisis with our wildlife and such times call for radical changes in our thinking and ways of doing things. Despite our best intentions thus far, in conserving our wildlife we are falling behind and there is no better time than now to start acting differently. However, we cannot do it divided.

1

One size does not fit all.

The success stories of Kenya may not be adapted by Botswana. Neither can Zambia's be adapted to Zimbabwe's. Each country is spectacularly different and requires a different approach and thinking.

2

There is a **clear need for the industry at large to be more coordinated** in our efforts to tackle the conservation issues that plague not only Africa, but the world at large. Without cohesive and well coordinated attitudes, we are in for a hiding and a great loss.

A SHAPESHIFTING EVENT

DISCOVERING REAL DIALOGUE WITH CONSERVATION HEROES

LES CARLISLE,
Group Conservation Manager,
ANDBEYOND

When I was asked to meet Ryan and Serge at our office in Johannesburg, as our CEO couldn't make the meeting, I was really intrigued to hear what they were planning. I had never heard of an 'un-conference' before and was very sceptical of the new format's ability to facilitate real dialogue. From this first meeting, Ryan and Serge displayed a commitment to get real and meaningful dialogue going, and that was exactly what was achieved. It has been a real privilege to be part of a real shapeshifting conference.

My fears were allayed to some extent when the details were announced and we were all asked to pitch our SPARK talks, 15 slides of 15 seconds each. I do a fair amount of public speaking for *andBeyond*, and am very comfortable with our story. I am comfortable to speak for 20 minutes or 2 hours on the subject without much notice. I couldn't believe how much planning it took to prepare a 4-minute presentation – which still needed to make an impact! I thought the SPARK talks were an excellent idea because it meant that everybody had the same platform and time to get their own point across. Often at these conferences, if you are the last speaker in the session, you have to reduce your talk from 45 minutes to 20 minutes because the previous speakers just don't keep to the time allocated.

The introduction and welcome and dinner were all absolutely fantastic, as was the fact that there were a great deal of authentic conservation practitioners in the group. One of my problems with conservation tourism is that the tourism industry often sees the issues differently to the conservation practitioners. We had General Jooste provide the overview of the security issues that the state conservation agencies are facing in a frank and realistic way. This keynote really gave context to the Southern African conservation issues.

“What a coup to have the absolute doyens of community conservation (and my heroes) at the conference, participating meaningfully as they always do. The insight that Garth Owen Smith from Namibia and Clive Stockhill from Zimbabwe brought to the GAME PLAN discussions were a real win.”

The presentation and selection of the SPARKS was well done in that it covered a range of the issues and potential solutions that were on the table. Most importantly, the rules of engagement set by Serge facilitated the ability to present different opinions without disagreement. A real winner, and an essential part of the dialogue.

The concurrent sessions during the DISCUSS were insightful and a really great way to engage. What a coup to have the absolute doyens of community conservation (and my heroes) at the conference, participating meaningfully as they always do. The insight that Garth Owen Smith from Namibia and Clive Stockhill from Zimbabwe brought to the DISCUSS discussions were a real win. My only complaint of the whole Lab was that I couldn't get to the DISCUSS presentations that I so desperately wanted to, as there were too many discussions on relevant

and topical issues scheduled at the same time. This is a fantastic compliment to the Conservation Lab, as during the concurrent sessions normally people just network and the sessions are only partially attended. The Conservation Lab format really created great opportunity for taking advice, gleaning ideas and getting different views on potential solutions. The final evening's TEAMWORK presentations were great fun, with creative thought applied to the real issue of conservation funding. This was an extremely topical subject for the moment, as it is increasingly clear – if we cannot dramatically increase the funding for conservation security, we cannot stop the local extinctions of species in the wild.

Once again, congratulations on revolutionising the traditional conference with this ground-breaking 'un-conference' format. Certainly for me, it achieved real networking engagement and dialogue opportunities. Well done to all involved.

Read more 2016 reviews at

weareafricatravel.com/tag/conservation-lab/

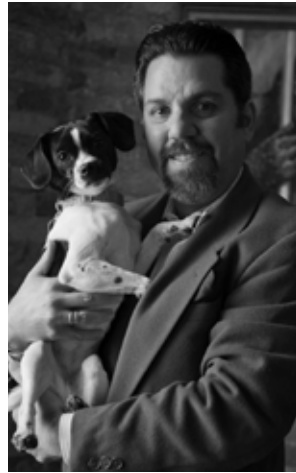
WHO MADE

IT

—
CHAPTER SEVEN:

Meet the pioneering conservationists
and travel industry experts who made
our first edition sing.

HAPPEN



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BORN FREE USA AND BORN
FREE FOUNDATION**



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SOUTH AFRICAN
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**CLIVE STOCKIL, TOUR
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SAFARI LODGE**



**COLIN BELL, CEO,
AFRICA'S FINEST**



**CRAIG BEECH,
INFORMATION SYSTEMS
MANAGER, PEACE PARKS
FOUNDATION - SMART**



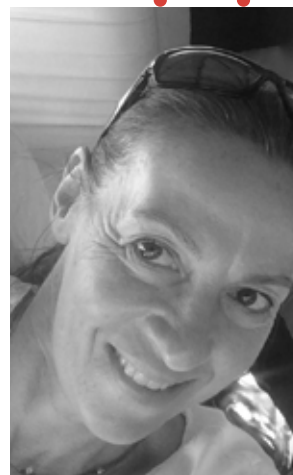
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VUUREN, CEO, N/A'AN
KU SÉ FOUNDATION**



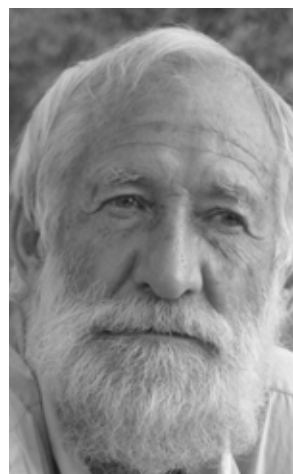
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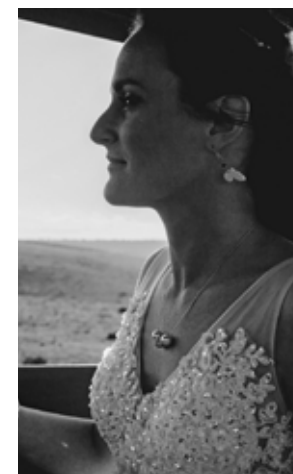
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JENNIFER MURPHY,
WRITER, FREELANCE
JOURNALIST



JENS KOZANY,
GENERAL MANAGER,
SEGERA



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SUPPLIES**



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**JOHN PETERSEN,
CHAIRMAN, AIR SHEPHERD
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FOUNDATION**



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OWNER, THIKA TRAVEL**



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**JULIE WILLIAMS, TOURISM
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NATIONAL PARK**



**JUSTIN WATERIDGE,
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STEPPES TRAVEL**



**KAREN ZULAUF, DIRECTOR,
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OPEN



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ANTI-POACHING UNIT /
TRANSFRONTIER AFRICA**



**LES CARLISLE, GROUP
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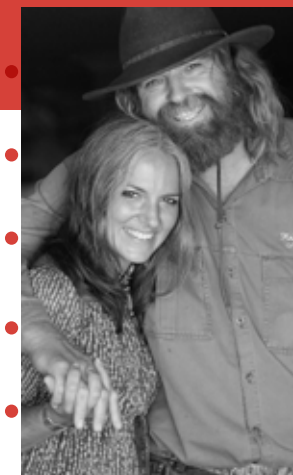
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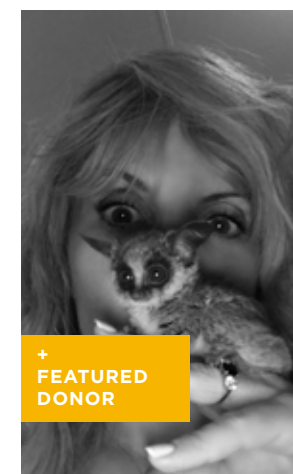
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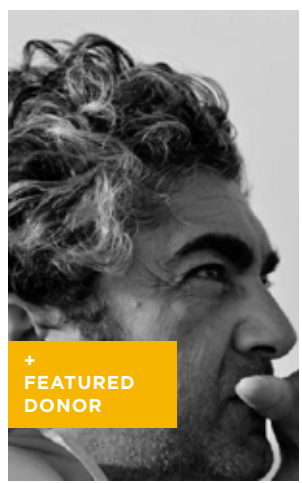
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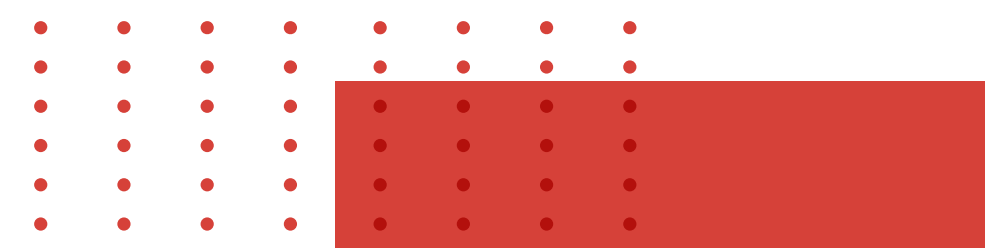


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