

The Sunday Tribune Game Changers series gives a voice to people who are making this world a better place for nature and people. E-mail your nominations to: tribunenews@inl.co.za

Passion for the wild inspires SA activist

A deep love for Africa has inspired activism in Nicola Gerrard, writes **Izzie Siemann** and **Fred Kockott**

GETTING charged by an elephant bull while learning to drive in the Kruger National Park is a moment Nicola Gerrard will never forget. Nor will her father, John Bishop, the well-known sports writer. "My Dad was thinking: 'Oh my god, we're gonna die!'" recalls Gerrard. In the driver's seat of the family's Toyota Venture, Nicola, then still a teen, battled to get the car into reverse. Once she did, it raced off backwards. The bull quit its chase, turning its attention to other approaching vehicles. Gerrard guesses the bull had to have been in musth – a period in a bull's life when testosterone levels can be up to six times the normal level. As an avid outdoor adventurer, Gerrard, now 33, has had her fair share of brushes with big fauna, including crashing into a buffalo crossing a highway and swimming beside hippos while trying to fix water lines in the Okavango Delta in Botswana. Then there was a more recent incident, also in the Okavango, when she stalled a boat and nearly bumped into a swimming elephant – but unlike a bull on musth, this old pachyderm was friendly. "I know it sounds ridiculous, but he was an old bull.

We saw a lot of him in the area. It was almost like he knew I had made a mistake," laughs Gerrard. These vivid memories are closely intertwined with a host of others related to Gerrard's love of diverse landscapes, people and wildlife – and for her late sister, Kim, who inspired the work that Gerrard does today. Gerrard is the founding managing director of loveAfrica Marketing, which aims to create awareness about key environmental issues and wildlife crime, and to get people to act for the better of the planet. "We cannot expect the public and other stakeholders to understand issues on the ground if there is no one telling the story," says Gerrard. "And conserving our environment is not just up to conservationists. It is up to all of us who are linked to it." Gerrard grew up in Pietermaritzburg, KZN. After matriculating from The Wykeham Collegiate, she took a gap year and went off to the bush. She worked as a reception manager at Mala Mala Game Reserve, in Sabi Sands, where she met her husband, Mark Gerrard, then working as a game guide. After completing an honours degree in marketing and communications at UKZN, Gerrard's tourism and lodge

experience continued to grow. She worked at five-star lodges in Singita, South Africa, and in the Okavango, where she and Mark were general managers with AndBeyond, a luxury travel company. They then moved to Durban – the couple now lives in Kloof – and e-worked for a lodge in Lesotho, handling its marketing and other operations online. Then, on March 19, 2012, Kim died in a car crash. She was 25 years old. "The ground just comes up from underneath you," recalls Gerrard. Kim was a teacher who "used to make incredible changes to young minds", says Gerrard, and Kim's death had a profound impact on Gerrard's vision for her own life. "She inspired in me to work in what you love and to create change. I saw there were incredible people doing incredible things, but without the tools or know-how to talk about it. I gained this unbelievable perspective and went from general tourism and travel marketing to working on projects that really matter," she says. That's how loveAfrica Marketing began in 2013 – and it has already made a change, working on a number of top environmental initiatives in South Africa. These include



Nicola Gerrard (bottom right) rates her work with the Blood Lions crew as the highlight of her career so far. From left (top): Jeremy Nathan, Bruce Young, Nick Chevallier, Pippa Hankinson, Ian Michler, Andrew Venter and Dave Cohen. Bottom: Lauren van Nijkerk.



Documenting the relocation of rhinos comes with the type of work that Nicola Gerrard is involved in. PICTURE: NICOLA GERRARD



Nicola Gerrard at work in her favourite place: the African bushveld. PICTURE: MARK GERRARD

Only This Much – a project by WildOceans to raise awareness that only 0.4% of South Africa's oceans are protected – and the documentary exposé, *Blood Lions*, which sparked international outrage over canned lion hunting. "There are about 9 000 lions

in captivity in facilities across South Africa," says Gerrard. "These form part of the canned hunting, predator breeding, cub petting and lion bone industries. Some are knowingly supported by paying tourists and volunteers. The *Blood Lions* campaign shines a light on this dark industry and creates awareness across the globe," says Gerrard. "Awareness is the key and through understanding and education, change is possible," says Gerrard, who has also worked with Wildlife Act and Project Rhino in monitoring

threatened species, including wild dogs, and on rhino darting operations that concern relocations and tracking. "This work requires constant and consistent messaging. We need conservationists to work together with a common vision and for the public to understand the impact that our way of life has on the planet and on other people around them," says Gerrard. She singles out her role as digital marketing manager of *Blood Lions* as the highlight of her career to date. So far, the documentary has been viewed by several hundred thousand people in more than 180 countries, and the *Blood Lions* campaign has reached millions of people, says Gerrard. The standing ovation that it received at its official premiere at the Durban International Film Festival in 2015 still makes Gerrard's blood tingle – almost as much it did on the day she battled to get her family's Toyota Venture into reverse in the face of a charging elephant on musth. Izzie Siemann is a McGill University environmental science and English literature honours graduate enrolled on a Roving Reporters' environmental journalism training programme directed by Fred Kockott, in association with the Sunday Tribune.

Concerns prompt public hearings on captive lion breeding industry

FRED KOCKOTT

SOUTH Africa's captive lion breeding industry comes under the spotlight in Parliament this week. Titled "Captive Lion Breeding for Hunting in South Africa: Harming or Promoting the Conservation Image of the Country", the two-day hearing, open to the public, has been organised by the portfolio committee on environmental affairs. It starts on Tuesday and will give key stakeholders an opportunity to present arguments. This will include Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) experts, the Professional Hunters' Association of SA, the South African Predators' Association, the World Wild Fund for Nature South Africa, the Born-Free Foundation, the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, SANParks, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), Brand South Africa and the EMR Foundation, a welfare organisation focused on children, elderly persons and wild animals. Committee chairperson Mhlopi Mapulane said he hoped the presentations and associated panel discussions would facilitate constructive engagement around an issue adversely affecting South Africa's standing internationally. "We cannot allow (captive lion breeding) to blemish our internationally-acclaimed wildlife and conservation record," said Mapulane. He said the committee wanted "to better understand the different views that exist"

before deciding on whether to review or amend legislation. The hearing comes amid concern over the possible impact of captive lion breeding on South Africa's wild lion populations, and the DEA's decision, on 16 July this year, to increase the lion skeleton export quota from 800 to 1 500. Lion bones are mostly sold to Asian markets to make "lion bone cake". According to the Campaign Against Canned Hunting, lion bones fetch millions of dollars and the industry is growing despite the fact that there is no medicinal value in them. Dr Kelly Marnewick, a senior officer in EWT's Wildlife in Trade Programme, also reckons that the poaching of wild lions for body parts has escalated in recent years. "We cannot rule out a link to the market created for lion bones from captive breeding institutions," said Marnewick. Ian Michler, a leading member of the Blood Lions campaign which exposes the link between canned lion hunts and "walking with lions" and "cub petting" enterprises, is among a growing number of wildlife activists calling for an outright ban on all non-conservation breeding of predators. "We have been here before," said Michler. "A previous minister attempted to end the twin horrors of predator breeding and canned hunting, but failed through carelessness. "One can only hope that 13 years on, and after a significant growth in these industries, Parliament is truly beginning to understand the damage the predator breeding industry and all its



Lions cubs reared in captive breeding facilities often become fodder for canned lion hunts, and ultimately fuel the macabre trade in lion bones, say growing numbers of wildlife activists.

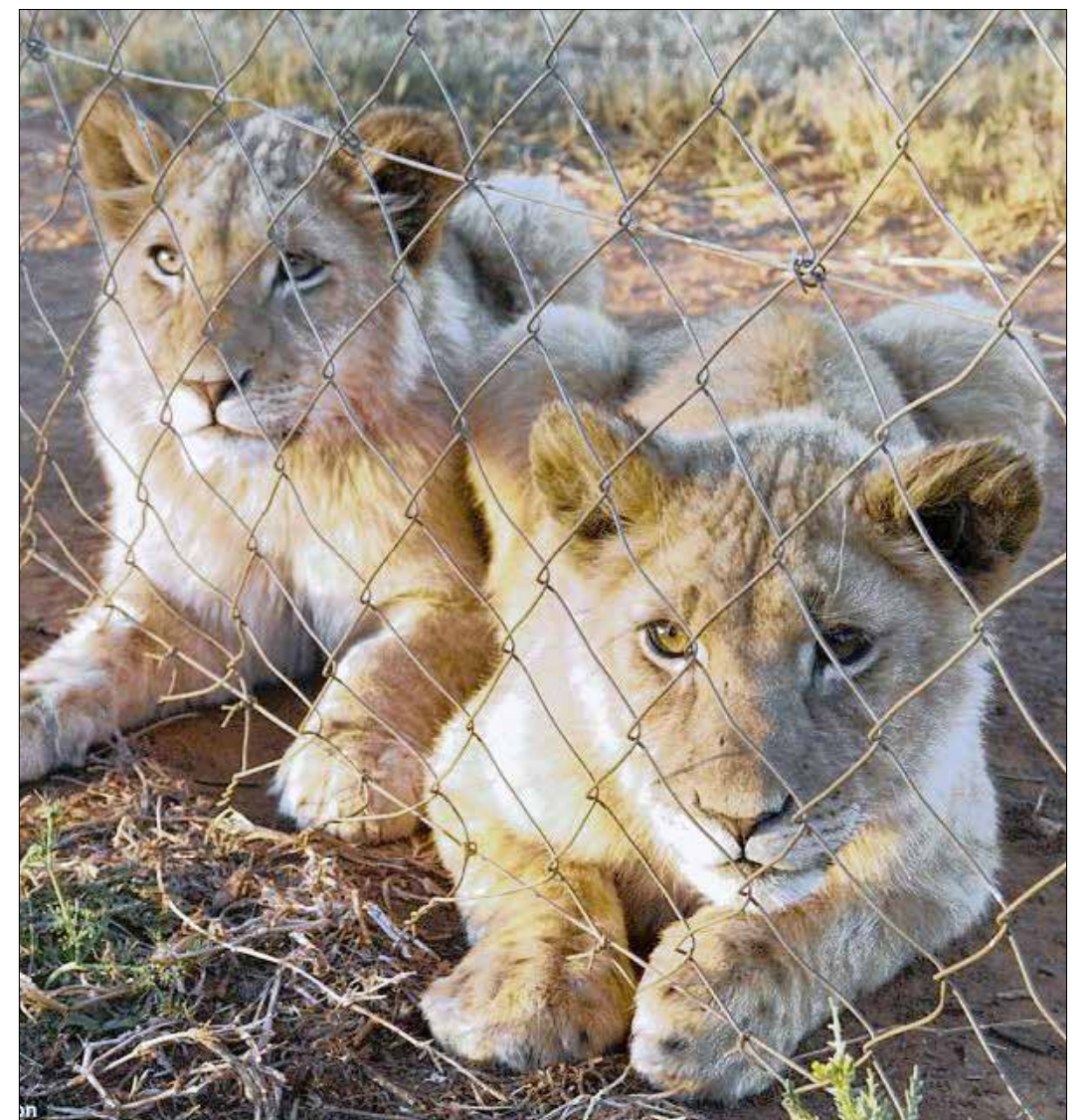


Photo: Audrey Helsing

related exploitative activities are doing to South Africa's conservation and ecotourism sectors," he said. "If this event is a failure,

expect the opposition to gather momentum." Michler's sentiments are shared by the director of Humane Society International

(Africa), Audrey Delsink. "The DEA has ignored the world's leading lion and conservation experts who categorically state that captive

breeding has no conservation benefit; even the hunting fraternity has shunned the practice," said Delsink. She said it was outrageous

that South Africa had doubled the quota to 1 500 skeletons, when demand reduction was being encouraged globally. "The DEA can no longer justify

an industry that only benefits the pockets of breeders and traders and seriously damages South Africa's ecotourism sector," said Delsink.