

FIRST PANGOLIN PUP IN DECADES BORN AT &BEYOND PHINDA PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

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&Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve has welcomed the birth of a pangolin pup, the first of this endangered species to be born in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province in many decades. The pup was born to a female Temminck's pangolin confiscated from the illegal wildlife trade and translocated to &Beyond Phinda as part of an ambitious conservation project aimed at bringing the species back to the area, where it had gone locally extinct.

"We are very excited about the birth, which is a great indicator of the success of our project and testifies to how comfortable the pangolins have become in their new habitat," says Simon Naylor, Conservation Manager at &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve.

The birth is the result of a project run by &Beyond in conjunction with the African Pangolin Working Group (APWG), the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital and the Humane Society International (HSI) Africa. Launched in mid-2019, the initiative has seen the release of a number of pangolin retrieved from poachers or illegal wildlife traffickers across South Africa in operations undertaken by the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the APWG at &Beyond Phinda. Each pangolin retrieved from the illegal wildlife trade is assessed, treated and rehabilitated by qualified personnel, who conduct appropriate health checks and ensure the animal is in good condition for its reintroduction into the wild.

"In the second half of 2020, we received a female pangolin who had been confiscated from the trade and was found to be pregnant, although we were unsure how far along in the pregnancy she was," explains Naylor.

All the pangolin released Phinda go through a careful reintroduction process, which involves close monitoring until the reserve's conservation team is satisfied that the individual has settled well, is displaying natural foraging behaviour, is gaining weight and is comfortable in the release area. Monitoring continues after the initial period, although it takes a less "hands-on" approach, with daily location information collected only through the use of SAT and VHF tags, which are each fitted to one of the pangolin's scales.

"In the course of monitoring the pregnant female, we noticed that her weight had dropped slightly and her mammary glands were swollen," says Naylor. "Suspecting that she may have given birth, we set up a camera trap to confirm the good news. The camera uses a covert back flash, so we were confident that we wouldn't disturb the animals."

Footage from the camera has confirmed the birth of the pangolin pup, which is now estimated to be about eight weeks old. The reserve's conservation team is continuing to monitor its progress from afar, using the mother's tags and the remote camera trap to keep tabs on the new arrival.

With one of the aims of the pangolin reintroduction project at &Beyond Phinda being the establishment of a breeding nucleus from which to create future generations of pangolin, the successful birth of a pup is a significant milestone.

"While KwaZulu-Natal was once home to a healthy population, pangolin are thought to have gone locally extinct in the area generations ago," explains Naylor. "The fact that the first pup has been born at &Beyond Phinda after decades offers us an opportunity to change that. We can't wait to see more of our reintroduced pangolins breeding and are looking forward to seeing this success replicated at the other release sites that have now been chosen in the surrounding reserves."

The world's most intensively poached and trafficked mammal, the pangolin is on the verge of extinction around the world. A near insatiable demand for their scales, which are used in traditional medicine in the Far East, has left all four of Asia's pangolin species facing extinction. The four remaining African species have increasingly become targeted, with 68 tons of scales representing an estimated 120 000 African pangolin intercepted by law enforcement agencies and customs officials at ports in both Africa and Asia in 2019 alone. Since 2016, more than 174 tons of scales have been intercepted, representing more than 300 000 African pangolins. In Africa, over and above the huge losses due to poaching, the additional pressures of habitat loss, the bush meat trade and their traditional use in African tribal dress and medicine have seen the numbers of pangolin decline dramatically.

In the build-up to World Pangolin Day in February, &Beyond will be hosting two online events to help bring awareness to the plight of this endangered species. Click [here](#) to find out more about the topics to be explored by a line-up of top conservation experts.

ISSUED BY: *media@andBeyond.com*

T +27 11 809 4300 | F +27 11 809 4511

www.andBeyond.com

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