

THE WILD BUNCH

A team of vets and scientists in South Africa are changing the rules of species preservation in the 21st century.

With rapid species decline, they know that conservation today can't wait for tomorrow. So they fast track the whole process, breaking the rules and putting together the best teams for each project.

Not only do they use cutting edge techniques and technology, they invent their own. This is the new species conservation and we have recorded it, for the first time, in our 13 x 24 min series, The Wild Bunch.

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EPISODE 1: 45 LIONS

Join a team of scientists and vets as they set five world firsts in this episode.

They are creating the world's largest database for the African lion, and we join them when they have the opportunity to obtain samples from 45 lions in three days – a new world record - if they achieve it.

The work is demanding and dangerous, and the hours are long, from first light to dusk and even into the night.

Discover how the team plans to help conserve the African lion across its range, where their population numbers have crashed from two hundred thousand to only about twenty thousand.

The Wild Bunch works to ensure we will hear the roars of lions in the wild for generations to come.





EPISODE 2: EVERY ELEPHANT COUNTS

We join the team as they use breakthrough technology and new techniques to help save both wild and captive bred elephants.

Two elephants are tested for TB, using new lung lavage methods, and two wild elephant bulls are immobilised and sterilised, so that they won't need to be culled in a reserve that has reached capacity for its elephant numbers.

Will the team manage to make every elephant count? Will their sterilisation process work, and prevent culling? Join the team on this hair raising adventure across South Africa, and find out.



EPISODE 3: OWNING THE SKY

The huge Cape Griffon Vulture, with a wingspan of over 2 metres, is endangered throughout southern Africa, and we join a team of dedicated specialists who are fighting to bring them back from the path towards extinction.

We visit these magnificent birds in their 2000 metre high home on the cliff-faces of a mountain. From this vast and beautiful viewpoint, we follow their lives from eggs, to hatchling and fledgling.

We track the birds as far as Namibia and Zimbabwe, and reveal new facts, and dispel old myths about them. We witness rehabilitated injured and poisoned birds being released to the open skies again, and learn how we can all help protect them a little more.



EPISODE 4: WILD DOGS AND PANGOLINS

We follow a pack of wild dogs early one morning as they rip an impala apart, and one of the dogs has its radio collar replaced. We also look at the conservation technique now used to help save this endangered species.

It's called meta-populations, and is a 'not all eggs in one basket' concept, where small, separate populations of wild dogs are managed in smaller reserves, so protecting them from mass die-outs if they were all part of one homogenous population.

Also, we track and follow one of Africa's most endangered armoured ant-eaters, the Pangolin.





EPISODE 5: DISCOVERING A NEW SPECIES

Join us as we travel to the high arid mountains of the Tankwa Karoo in search of a rumoured new species.

Here we find a small group of mountain goats that have been surviving in isolation for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years.



We follow a team of geneticists into the mountains, and into the labs, as they analyse the dna of this rare animal, and prove that it is a new species, unlike any other.

Still in semi-desert, we then set out to capture a female leopard with



EPISODE 6: RARE BIRD, CROCODILES AND HIPPOS

One of the world's rarest birds, dying crocodiles, and a hippo that needs a dentist, all feature in this episode.

We first wade through a vast wetland in an attempt to find one of the world's rarest, and probably most endangered birds, and then we speak with a pathologist who is trying to shed more light on why crocodiles are dying from pollution.



And finally, we record what happens when a team try to help a massive hippo that needs a dentist!



EPISODE 7: THE BRINGERS OF THUNDER

A team of specialists has been helping to conserve dwindling populations of Ground Hornbills in southern Africa, and we join them in their quest.

The Ground Hornbills are said to be bringers of rain, and have an important role in African mythology.



But their numbers are falling as man encroaches, and the team have to resort to stealing to help save these giant birds from extinction. Follow the story of a new Ground Hornbill family in the making.



EPISODE 8: CHEETAHS AND BUSHBABIES

Our quest first takes us to Namibia, where Spud the cheetah has had his leg almost severed from his body, and we follow his journey to recovery and his release into the wild once more, where he joins his siblings to hunt once again.

We then travel to the mountain forests of the Soutpansberg in South Africa, where a team are beginning a study on one of the world's least know families of apes – the bushbabies, or galagos.

These cute night-apes with the huge eyes show us some of their secrets in the forest night, and we get to find out some valuable information about them, to help conserve them into the future.



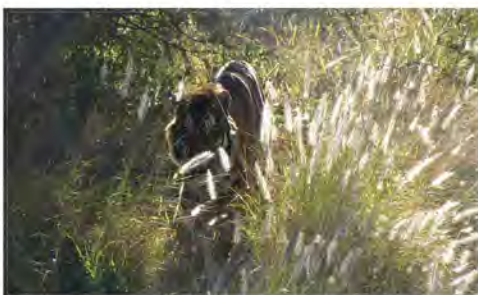
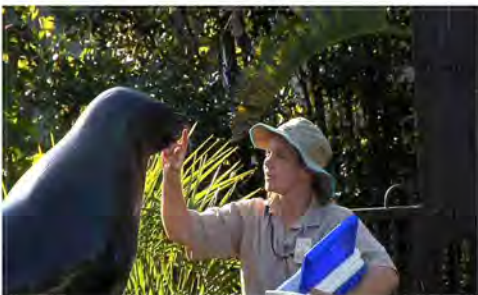
EPISODE 9: AFRICA'S REAL VAMPIRES

There is a real vampire in Africa, and it actually lives off the blood of its hosts. Yet this bird, the oxpecker, also saves wildlife and live-stock in Africa from parasites and disease.

Travelling with its buffalo, rhino, elephant and hippo hosts, to name a few, these birds feed on ticks and other parasites on the animals, as well as on open wounds.

They groom the animals while they feed, and so the relationship is mutually beneficial. We gain some insights into the vampire with an American scientist who has researched them for years.

Also, we are privileged to witness complex and successful eye surgery on a seal that was saved from illegal trafficking.



EPISODE 10: SABLE, HYAENA, BENGAL TIGER

Today's zoos are also playing an invaluable role in protecting and breeding species that have such low populations that they might die out in the wild.

By breeding these species in captivity, they protect the species, and ideally, help secure their place in the wild sometime in a more certain future.

We follow the action as scientists and vets deal with three completely different problems and species, focused on improving their quality of life, and conserving them all.





EPISODE 11: DRAGONS IN THE GRASS

In the high grasslands of the Free State, in South Africa, lives a dragon named Smaug. Yes, Smaug is the genus name of this dragon, or giant armoured lizard, commonly called a Sungazer.

The name is not surprising really, for the author of 'The Lord of the Rings', JRR Tolkien, was born in the Free State, and likely saw these fiercely armoured dragons in the grass when still a young boy. Perhaps they even inspired the dragon Smaug in his classic novel.

But these Sungazers are now about to be placed on the endangered list, as their habitat and their numbers are both reduced to small isolated pockets in its essential home.



EPISODE 12: BAR CODING WILDLIFE FOR THE FUTURE

We join scientists on a Google sponsored project, where they are bar coding all the species of African mammals, birds, and reptiles.

The main purpose of this far-reaching project is to help law enforcement identify, trace and track various species in cases of poaching, trafficking and illegal trade.

We join the action as a group of hunters stalk an African elephant – the difference is that this elephant will be giving back – its dna - in tissue, hair, blood and other samples, for the bar coding project.

We also follow the team as it samples rare crocodiles, snakes and other reptiles.



EPISODE 13: RHINOS AND HOT CATS

This final episode starts off with a bang, as a highly skilled team swings into action to save a 'hot cat' - a cheetah that is overheating in the African bush, after being immobilised for a medical procedure.

Then we tell the story of the pioneering team that literally helped save the southern white rhino from extinction in the 1950's. We witness some rare rhino behaviour, and hear some words of wisdom regarding rhino poaching today, from one of the original key team members.

