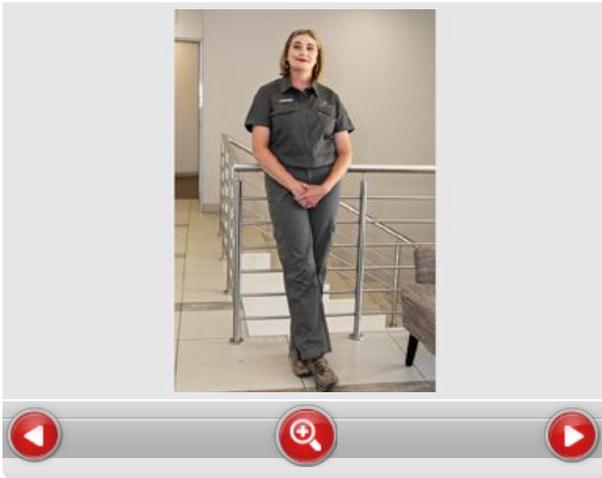


How a CA(SA) and Honorary Ranger is doggedly working to prevent poaching

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CA(SA) Leonie Meyer is a reporting strategist at GreymatterFinch, as well as an active member of the SANParks Honorary Rangers (SHR), where she assists in SANPARKS conservation objectives as the K9 national project treasurer, where she oversees all anti-poaching canine activities from a management level. The role suits this animal-loving books-balancer to a T, but how exactly does one end up in a career that also stokes your passion of protecting the natural environment? Leonie explains...



“My childhood dream was to become a game ranger. When it was time to select my high school subjects, I approached the matter of my chosen career path with my father. It was still the era of the printed newspaper, so he asked me to circle all the job opportunities available for game rangers. I couldn’t circle any. He then asked me to circle all the job opportunities available to chartered accountants, and my fate was sealed – becoming a CA(SA) was already on the cards for me.”

It may have been a no-brainer study path, but Leonie makes it clear that going the CA route is not easy. All her focus went into qualifying, but as soon as she did so, she made good use of her spare time in volunteering at an urban wildlife rescue centre.

Fortuitously, Leonie was also exposed to the elephant and rhino relocation project, then sponsored by KPMG, where she was working at the time.

Leonie says that while it was heartbreaking learning about the complexities of poaching, it was also exhilarating to be involved on the ground. So she decided to join the SHR to get more in-field experience in conservation.

That’s exactly what she did. The SHR is both an NGO and registered PBO, which exists to support SANParks in developing, managing and promoting sustainable national parks that represent our biodiversity and heritage assets. Leonie explains that as the official volunteer organisation to support SANParks, the SHR is mandated by a memorandum of understanding to raise funds, create public awareness and perform duty where needed, in terms of approved duty protocols. This allows volunteers to become actively involved in day-to-day SANParks activities.

In February 2016, Leonie was approached to become the National Executive Committee (NEC) Treasurer for the SHR, now the national board. She says it was a daunting task at first, as it involved managing VAT registration, writing new financial policies, setting up finance task teams, managing a chart of account and bookkeeper change, and also assisting on the NGO re-engineering project. Luckily, her CA(SA) training prepared her well for the role.

Crunching numbers and poaching efforts alike for SANParks

It was during her term as NEC Treasurer that Leonie did her first ‘K9 duty’, which is where the SHR assists in the day-to-day care of anti-poaching dogs deployed in the Kruger National Park.

Leonie says it was humbling to see how much these canines are willing to offer, and the massive impact they have in the field. She enjoyed the experience so much that when her term on the NEC ended in September 2018, she opted not to make herself available for re-election, and instead focused her attentions on K9, which was recently made a National

Project.

Leonie explains that National Projects are not aimed at park-specific level like Kruger, but rather at all national parks in South Africa where similar needs exist. For K9, this focus is on parks where endangered species under poaching risk are supported by anti-poaching canine units. Through a 'wish-list' protocol, SHRs purchase specific items such as trained dogs, equipment, kennels and veterinary supplies, to assist in the canine units running smoothly.

Leonie says the 'canine heroes' have vast abilities:

- Explosives – The canines assist in finding explosives and ammunition. They serve as a great deterrent for poachers trying to smuggle in firearms and ammunition, and are excellent at finding evidence, such as spent cartridges at crime scenes in the veld.
- Detection – The canines are trained to identify specific endangered species' substances, such as rhino horns, pangolin scales, elephant tusks and abalone.
- Protection – The canines specialise in the apprehension of suspects attempting to flee incursions.
- Tracking – The canines have an exceptional sense of smell. They are able to track the spoor of poachers and/or wounded animals for many kilometers, in difficult terrain and weather. These unique noses can follow a spoor as old as 16 hours after its discovery.

These canines' presence is a visible and effective counterstrike to daily incursion attempts by poachers, and finding the much-needed evidence to be used in a court of law assists in increased conviction rates of poachers.

The biodiversity boost of unlocking blue and green economies

Speaking as a CA(SA), Leonie says, "In my heart I am a game ranger, but being a CA(SA) has furnished me with the know-how to provide capabilities to an NPO industry that's heavily dependent on its members and on managing scarce financial resources.

As CA(SA)s, we are provided with vast and extensive exposure during our articles. Our skills, experience and code of conduct prepare us to deliver extensive value-add in areas of consulting, financial management, taxation, risk management, combined assurance and strategy, regardless of industry."

In addition, Leonie feels two South African components make application of the CA(SA) skill set ideal: On the negative side, we have one of the highest unemployment rates worldwide – currently at 29%, while on the positive side, she feels we have the best biodiversity and cultural assets globally.

That's why she says that unlocking the potential of green and blue economies around national parks we will not only assist in job creation, but also create education opportunities, wealth and appreciation for the need to work towards a sustainable future.

How accountants can still save the world

Leonie's proud to say she's not the only CA(SA) contributing to their shared passion for conservation at SHR, each in their own area of interest, but she'd like more CA(SA)s to consider how their individual experience can contribute to the United Nations' (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 14 and 15, of life below water and on land specifically, or indeed any other SDG linking to a personal higher purpose and sense of fulfillment.

If you're not sure where to get started, follow Leonie's example. She says it all starts with a choice to be different and ignoring the sometimes sombre global outlook, which implies we won't be able to stop planetary boundaries being exceeded. It starts as small as purchasing an eco-friendly product that may costs more, simply spreading the word or even attending a fundraising event of a cause close to your heart.

After all, as Peter Bakker said in his [Rio+20](#) 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development address: “Accountants would save the world.”

CPD – Inform yourself

About SHR: <https://www.sanparksvolunteers.org/about-us/reports/>

SASSI list: <http://wwfsassi.co.za/sassi-list/>

Mammal red list: <https://www.ewt.org.za/resources/resources-mammal-red-list/>

SDGs: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

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