

# Sharing the benefits of elephant dung with traditional healers

Text by Louise Swemmer, Tommy Mogakane, Lin-Mari De Klerk-Lorist, Greg Bond, Lucas Nyathi & Canny Rikhotso  
 Photos by Louise Swemmer

**ELEPHANT DUNG HARVESTED FROM KRUGER IS DISTRIBUTED TO TRADITIONAL HEALERS LIVING ADJACENT TO THE PARK TO SHARE BENEFITS AND TO BUILD POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS. ELEPHANT DUNG IS A POPULAR INGREDIENT OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE, HEALING A VARIETY OF AILMENTS**

Elephant dung is widely used in Southern Africa to treat headaches, nose bleeds and assist young mothers-to-be during childbirth. The Kruger National Park is home to over 30 000 elephants, each of which poops about 100 kg of dung...EVERY DAY...so we have a lot to go around. In April 2022, Kruger implemented a pilot project to explore the feasibility and impact of sharing elephant dung with traditional healers living next to the park.

Conservation has not always been about people, with the early days seeing people forcibly removed from protected areas to “make way for conservation” and controlling access to and manipulating who could benefit from parks and how. A recent diversity of inclusive approaches aim to reconnect people with the natural and cultural resources in parks, such as providing access to sustainably harvested natural resources.

Our 20 km dung-collection road trip involved 42 stops and delivered 116 kg of wet elephant dung. Guided by the state veterinarians in Skukuza and with the support of the local section ranger, Greg Bond and his team, the dung was broken up and dried in the sun for 2 weeks to manage disease risk. SANParks branded paper bags, each containing 400 g of dried dung were packed and distributed to 104 traditional healers in the



Elephant dung for traditional healers next to the Kruger Park, is collected off tar roads, weighed and dried before distribution.

“Elephant dung is very important medicine, elephants eat many different plants [and this means that] we use it to cure lots of diseases” – Traditional healer from Rolle Village.

Orpen Gate area. Dung in exchange for long lasting positive impacts on relationships, a win for everyone.

Is this sustainable? Most certainly. There are in the region of 3000 traditional healers living near Kruger. If we harvested 0,000005% of the elephant dung in the park, we would be able to meet their annual needs of 2 kg of elephant dung each, while still leaving enough for the dung beetles.

*Traditional healers receive elephant dung harvested from the Kruger National Park, for use as medication to cure headaches, nose bleeds and to assist in childbirth.*

