

# Environment drives Andre the Nature Guy

ANDRE (the Nature Guy) Steenkamp has educated and exposed the community to the wonders of nature since 2001 and his love for the environment drives him to never stop spreading the word about conservation and education.

The 44-year-old Bluff man spends most of his time in nature, working side by side with environmental organisations and warriors such as WESSA and Sodurba to encourage and engender an interest, especially among the youth, for environmental awareness and conservation.

'Andre the Nature Guy' gave himself the name because it's a silly label that should stick in people's minds. "I actually 'borrowed' the idea from Bill Nye the Science Guy," he chuckled.

Andre has always harboured a deep interest in the natural environment since a very young age and started his formal involvement in 2001 as a nature guide near Eshowe. "I worked for WESSA from 2002 to 2008 where I enjoyed an incredible

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amount of experience (from working with up to 9,000 learners a year in any ecosystem to wildlife management lectures at DUT, while training community guides, managing invasive plant removal, conducting teacher workshops and facilitating environmental education courses for WESSA. This ignited my interest in environmental education," he said.

He then joined BirdLife SA from 2008 to 2013 as a part of the management team of their tourism and education centre in Wakkerstroom, Mpumalanga. He was involved in everything from environmental education for schools, various committees, supporting community projects and managing 114-ha of grassland adjoining the Wakkerstroom wetland for ecotourism.

"I love seeing the amazement on the faces of my guests when they learn something new about the incredible world right under our toes. My work is very diverse. I support Sodurba as a committee member,



Andre Steenkamp holds one of Earth's wildlife wonders.

manage the Pride of Stainbank environmental education programme for the Wilderness Leadership School and help to train future nature guides, give talks to various interest groups on anything from fungi to fish, do public night walks for Tidal Tao up in Ballito, awareness walks for the honorary officers at Beachwood Mangroves and the occasional free talk at old age homes," he added.

His goal in life is to preserve the environment and the only way to do that is through education, by arming children and people with knowledge of nature and its living organisms, as well as creating awareness around the dangers of pollution and destruction of natural habitat.

"Regardless of what we may be led to believe, our natural environment is our life support system and deserves more than lip service. A healthy community is everybody's responsibility. Concerning polluters - they know better and should step up too. Money doesn't give a quality of life, just hollow quantity," said Andre.

As a freelance environmental educator, he will keep knocking on as many doors as he can to teach communities about nature. "I would really like to get proper programmes going for adults and corporates, because they are the decision makers now. I don't believe we should pile our responsibilities toward our natural heritage on some future generation when we must act now," he said.

"Learning and teaching about nature is what I was born for. Oh! I also play the bagpipes, enjoy reading voraciously and I suppose I could be called an amateur photographer," he laughed. For more details about his talks and guided walks, call Andre on 078-963-5323.