



Alf Rewin
CONSERVATION

Scholarship

My name is **Thato Mashigo**, but you can call me Pluto. I am from a small village called Shangaanhill in the lowveld province of Mpumalanga, South Africa. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude as the first scholarship recipient of the Alf Rewin Conservation Fund. It is remarkable to me that, even though I never had the opportunity to meet Alf, I feel as if I have caught a glimpse of his incredible spirit as reflected through his impact on the Project and Dr Kemp's account of him, and it is an immense honour to be part of his legacy.

From an early age, my heart danced to a different beat. While other kids played with dolls, I was rescuing stray animals and caring for our chickens at home. My mother could share endless stories of how I would find and every opportunity to bring home every stray I met, each time needing her gentle persuasion to leave them behind. Despite the challenges, she never stifled my passion but encouraged it with unwavering support.

Whilst I always knew I wanted to conserve animals, I did not yet have the words to describe this passion, nor did I understand how to turn it into a career. I was fortunate however to pursue tertiary education in the field of Biological Sciences through my

pursuit and completion of a Bachelor's degree in Molecular and Life Sciences, an Honors in Zoology, and a Master's in Wildlife Management Engineering.

I have been fortunate to work as an Environmental Education Officer with the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) which equipped and exposed me to many aspects of conservation and working in the environmental sector, and for that I am forever grateful for the opportunity. It is through that opportunity that I was opportune to encounter the Mabula Ground Hornbill Project.



An organisation that I had only read and heard about but never thought I would one day be so fortunate to be a part of, yet here we are. I stand on the threshold of my dream, working as a research intern with the Mabula Ground Hornbill Project and have hopes of contributing towards the conservation of the endangered Southern Ground-Hornbill in my current and future academic and professional pursuits.

I believe through this scholarship; I am that much closer towards those pursuits. Because this scholarship represents more than just financial assistance; it is a lifeline — a chance to continue my journey without the burden of financial anxiety. It would enable me to obtain valuable skills and experiences that will equip me to become an asset to the Project, empowering me to transform my dreams into reality.

In closing, I am deeply grateful to the Alf Rewin Conservation Fund for having awarded me this scholarship. With your support, I can turn the page to a new chapter, one where I can inspire others to chase their dreams, no matter how distant they may seem, in this manner I hope Alf's legacy will continue.

Thank you for believing in the potential of youth like me.

With heartfelt gratitude – Ms Mashigo Thato

