

## ROB SOUTTER

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Consultant on Environmental NGO Development and Conservation

Born in northern England in 1956, Rob spent much of his life in South Africa, where he attended the University of Cape Town then trained as a teacher and environmental journalist before joining WWF-South Africa in 1983 to run the conservation programme. His passion was, and remains, environmental education, to help people live within the limits of their environment, and pass on a world which remains healthy and full of the beauty, wonder and diversity of life. Rob led teams to produce the *We Care* set of lesson plans to introduce environmental issues into teaching across the syllabus in all South Africa's middle schools, and the *EnviroFacts* – a set of 60 factsheets on conservation and environment issues produced with a consortium of SA NGOs and conservation agencies, and the support of SA supermarket chain Pick 'n Pay which printed and distributed over 20 million *Envirofacts* for more than 15 years.

In addition to the creation of university chairs to promote conservation and sustainable development such as the Chair in Environmental Education at Rhodes University, Rob also launched a legacy programme for WWF-South Africa which has since resulted in more than SAR350 million received for nature conservation.

Across southern Africa, Rob helped in the creation of several protected areas, including South Africa's Prince Edward Islands and coastal/marine national parks in Mocambique. To improve communications outreach, Rob created and edited over 30 editions of the quarterly newspaper *Our Living World* which was published in all South African weekend newspapers for several years.

Rob moved to Switzerland in 1991 as Executive Assistant to the WWF International Director General, where he helped plan and run WWF Annual Conferences, was focal point for a major revision of this global organisation's governance, set up WWF's Prince Bernhard Scholarships for Nature Conservation providing over 400 scholarships to deserving young conservationists from over 60 countries in the developing world, and ran a 2-year CHF25 million major donor initiative called the WWF Conservation Leadership Fund.

In 1998, he took over direction of WWF's Living Planet Campaign, which promoted achievement of big conservation wins using mechanisms such as high level events and *Gifts to the Earth* awards, and helped secure major protected area gains in over 70 countries. A particular highlight was a major initiative in 2000 with the world's faiths, the Journey to Kathmandu, where WWF worked with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) to bring together 11 of the world's major faiths to pledge substantive conservation commitments. Rob headed up WWF's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 2011, and edited the "*For a Living World*" book summarising WWF's conservation highlights in 50 cameo stories since 1961. Rob worked closely with WWF teams in priority areas to help escalate their conservation achievement. These world-wide efforts were exemplified by a high level event at the 2014 World Parks Congress in Sydney, where WWF facilitated announcements by 12 countries of more than 140 million ha of protected area achieved or committed - an area twice the size of France - and funding totalling more than US\$500 million for effective protected area management.

He believes strongly in communicating conservation successes to inspire others, and initiated WWF's *Conservation Highlights*, published twice annually to profile WWF's conservation partnerships, the successes and challenges, and recent major conservation achievements.

Rob retired from WWF in 2016, and as an independent consultant now helps contribute to NGO development in South Africa, and more widely in support of achieving global conservation priorities.

On volunteering to help the Botanical Society, Rob was invited by Prof Charles Stirton to join BotSoc's Fundraising Committee in 2022, and was co-opted onto the BotSoc Council earlier this year. He has worked closely with BotSoc's head office team to develop fundraising initiatives including a bequest programme and communications products.

Rob is committed to help BotSoc build long term financial viability and, on top of this, to ensure BotSoc can effectively take up the growing challenge to achieve the protection and sustainable use of South Africa's outstanding but threatened indigenous flora.