There has recently been a spate of manuscripts submitted to *South African Journal of Wildlife Research* that have lacked animal ethics approvals. Clearly this is a serious concern – not only from the chance that unethical research practices have occurred but also that there are no checks and balances to ensure this is the case. In several of those cases, the manuscript has been prepared based on animals (including threatened or protected species) that were apparently fitted with tracking collars in order to increase tourist sightings for ecotourism ventures, but for which there were not ethical and/or permitting approvals. Thus, there appears to be a lack of regulation or enforcement within the ecotourism industry regarding the welfare of the fauna they are reaping profits from. This note aims to highlight the problem and identify ways to ensure animal welfare concerns are addressed prior to a study being undertaken.

Animal welfare legislation is designed to minimize the impact of invasive practices on animals. For example, in South Africa, this is regulated by a number of Acts – primarily the Animals Protection Act (Act No. 71 of 1962) and the Performing Animals Protection Act (Act No. 24 of 1935). A third Act, the Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (Act No. 169 of 1993) governs the organization and management of animal welfare associations. For the use of animals in research, the South African National Standard for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purpose (SANS 10386:2008), which is outlined in the Standards Act, No. 8 2008, sets the national standard for ‘The care and use of animals for scientific purposes’. Furthermore, for certain Threatened or Protected Species (TOPS), the TOPS regulations in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (Act 10 of 2004) need to be adhered to if any listed species are captured. The usual procedure when using wild animals for research is to apply for the relevant ethics clearance through the institute that hosts the research and also to get the relevant permits through the relevant governmental bodies.

In South Africa, the act of chemically immobilizing and/or anaesthetizing an animal is regarded as restricted to veterinary professionals, which is legislated in the Veterinary and Paraveterinary Professions Act (Act No. 19 of 1982) and is restricted to recognized veterinarians (under the Act) that are registered with the South African Veterinary Council (SAVC). In addition, immobilization and anaesthesia are usually induced using drugs regulated as Schedule 5 or Schedule 6 substances. The acquisition and possession of such substances are regulated by the Medicines and Related Substances Control Act (Act No. 101 of 1965). This Act specifies by whom such drugs may be dispensed, acquired and possessed (e.g. by medical practitioners, dentists, and veterinarians), and also stipulates that the identified professional may only prescribe such Schedule 5 and 6 substances for the purposes for which they are qualified. Only a veterinarian may prescribe such substances for use in animals. However, rule 10(1) a of the SAVC professional rules for veterinarians stipulates that the veterinary professional that prescribes the administering of a restricted substance must ‘...satisfy himself [sic] that the administering thereof is justified with due allowance for the benefits and risks which that medicine may hold for: (a) the animal to which it is administered;...’. This statement is typically not met for the capture of wild animals unless the veterinary professional is physically present at the location of the capture. Therefore, a veterinarian may apply for a qualified person to get a discretionary authorization from the SAVC to chemically immobilize or anaesthetize animals without him or her being physically present. Such authorizations are given under
There are also research institutions that lack animal ethics bodies (e.g. University of Swaziland). Non-government conservation organizations that regularly perform research and management may also lack such bodies. Researchers from these organizations routinely publish papers without animal ethics approvals by simply stating that the procedures they used have been accepted by animal ethics boards elsewhere, follow accepted practices (Sikes & Gannon 2011) or, in the case of conservation organizations, are based on routine management procedures. A better solution would be to establish a relationship between institutions that follow the SANS 10386:2008 or implement the system themselves so as to allow animal ethics standards for research. If the data are used for science post management, the relevant permits should be provided and an ethics clearance applied for post-hoc.

South African animal ethics approvals are not needed beyond the country’s borders and ethics approvals are left to local regulators, if a permit is required (e.g. no ethics approvals are required outside national parks in Madagascar). Despite this, we stress that animal ethics approvals are required for all research published in the South African Journal of Wildlife Research.

A further benefit to these relationships is that data collection protocols may be designed by a suitably qualified ecologist to allow for later analysis and publication. Often, when tourism is the main endeavour, data are not collected in a systematic, unbiased and independent way and may be of little value for science.

To conclude, we make the following points:

- We reiterate the importance of animal welfare to the South African Journal of Wildlife Research and its overarching body SAWMA. We will not accept manuscripts for consideration for publication that lack the appropriate animal ethics board approvals and permits required by law.
- Conservation managers should ensure that all necessary approvals are gained prior to invasively interfering with wildlife.
- Qualified and experienced wildlife researchers should be involved at the earliest possible stage to ensure approvals are obtained and the monitoring occurs in a robust, scientific manner.
- Veterinarians undertaking collaring for tourism purposes must take responsibility for the outcomes beyond simply the capture.
- For conservation organizations with no connections to tertiary institutions but who are publish-
ing data collected from management, links should be sought between institutions to ensure animal welfare approvals are obtainable where such boards are absent or internal animal ethics boards should be created. Where data from a specific project have already been collected, perhaps a period of grace could be given during which manuscripts will be considered for data collected up until the end of 2013. Data collected historically and archived are obviously not of concern here. Research is a fundamental way of ensuring effective wildlife management, but due process must be practiced to ensure the animals we seek to manage are not overly impacted by the invasive practices that are forced upon them. This will also ensure researchers avert a public relations nightmare that could arise if unethical/unapproved research reaches the public eye. This is particularly relevant to non-government organizations or ecotourism ventures that rely on public goodwill for financial support or customers.

Reference