



STEVE SMIT - IN MEMORIAM

Steve Smit, a beloved member of the Wildlife Animal Protection Forum South Africa (WAPFSA) also affectionately known as KwaZulu-Natal's famous "Monkey Man," passed away on Wednesday, 12 August 2026, after a brave, well-fought battle with cancer.

His passing has left the global conservation, and KwaZulu Natal communities deeply heartbroken, we collectively mourn a legendary champion for wildlife. Over a span of thirty years, he dedicated his entire life to the protection, rescue, and rehabilitation of urban wildlife, leaving behind an unforgettable legacy as a fierce voice for the voiceless.

Conceptualized in 2017, WAPFSA took shape as a collaborative network in 2018 before gaining full formalization in 2019. However, founding members Michele Pickover, Executive Director of the EMS Foundation, and Steve Smit shared a close professional alliance that extends all the way back to 2003.

Michele Pickover interviewed Steve Smit in 2003 as part of her [research](#) report titled: The Environmental Movement in South Africa – An Analysis of Animal Based Issues, Campaigns and Organisations. On page 365 of her report she stated that there were no animal rights organisations in South Africa. Five years later, on the 8 March 2008, Animal Rights Africa (ARA) was officially launched marking an unprecedented milestone in African animal rights advocacy. The two key figures and co-founders of Animal Rights Africa were of course, Steve Smit and Michele Pickover.

Steve Smit and Carol Booth founded the [Monkey Helpline](#) in 1995. A dedicated non-profit organisation responding to thousands of rescue call-outs annually across KwaZulu-Natal. The [EMS Foundation](#) has played a pivotal role in supporting this successful wildlife rescue and rehabilitation operation by providing substantial financial backing to the [Monkey Helpline Rehabilitation and Sanctuary Centre](#) to ensure the long-term survival of rescued Vervet monkeys in South Africa.

Steve Smit was also an important member of the WAPFSA Primate Working Group. This group focuses on the welfare, ethical management, and protection of indigenous primates in South Africa including amongst other, the chacma baboon. Over the past few years Steve Smit has been particularly outspoken against the current chacma baboon management policies adopted on the Cape Peninsula and the Overstrand regions of the Western Cape.

WAPFSA honours the incredible life and profound legacy of our dear friend and colleague Steve Smit. Steve was a legendary, tireless champion, a fierce voice for the voiceless, and a true pillar of ethical conservation in South Africa. While we deeply mourn this monumental loss, his fierce spirit, unwavering dedication, and decades of compassionate activism will forever guide our collective mission to protect the wild. Rest in peace, Steve; your vital work continues through the endless lives you saved and the network you helped build.