

# JULIA GUNTHER

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## **The Black Mambas**

South Africa, 2015 - 2018

The Black Mambas are an almost only female anti-poaching unit of 32 women and 1 man, which operates, unarmed, in Balule Nature Reserve, near Kruger National Park, in north-eastern South Africa. Trained in anti-poaching and survival skills, the Black Mambas are taught to identify and track humans and animals, how to blend in with their surroundings and how to avoid confrontations. Their training is crucial as the animals they track are wild, and poachers shoot to kill.

Their anti-poaching strategy includes 'visual policing' through daily foot patrols along the parks boundaries at dawn and by vehicle at dusk, manning observation and listening posts stationed in critical areas such as known entry and exit points, and monitoring popular waterholes for signs of poisoning. The Black Mambas also live in a series of compounds inside the reserve, which affords them a constant presence in the park.

Awarded with the UN's top environmental award, "Champions of the Earth", the Black Mambas act as role models in their own communities (where many of the poachers live). As women and mothers, they command a kind of respect that the heavily armed, most male anti-poaching units, do not.