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The Watchers of the Woods: Architecture for the Conservation of South Africa's Wildlife

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Abstract

Through increased urbanisation and industrialisation, the human species has become separated from the natural world, valuing the environment only as far as it is useful to us. Society has become used to living through a human-centric view that places humans above all other natural beings. The destructive nature of this perspective is visible to us in the rapid depletion of our natural resources and, perhaps most alarmingly, the increasing amount of species driven to extinction and endangerment by the destruction of natural habitats. As we are now beginning to see the harmful effect this view has had on the natural world, it is necessary for society to change the way we interact with the natural world. We need to begin to act not only for the good of ourselves, but with the good of all living beings in mind. A shift in perspective is needed that places the human species into the natural world as an equal part of the system rather than a being of superior importance. In order to achieve this shift, we must understand our role as an integrated part of our surrounding natural ecosystems. The Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Centre for Conservation is proposed as a centre devoted to conservation biology research placed within the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi National Park in order to promote the easy access of researchers, South African and international, to this rich natural ecosystem. Its aim is to enable researchers to make use of the unique opportunities this protected environment offers in understanding the rise and fall of plant and animal species and thus to further understand how to increase and protect the biodiversity of this country. As well as this, the Centre for Conservation aims to showcase a method of building that is in no way harmful to the surrounding sensitive landscape and that functions as a part of the ecosystem, thus displaying to visitors how humans can interact with their natural environment in a symbiotic relationship and promoting a deeper care and respect for the natural world.