

THE NATAL PARKS BOARD
A Conservation Adventure

George Hughes



Occasional Publications of the Natal Society Foundation
PIETERMARITZBURG
2024



The Natal Parks Board: A Conservation Adventure
© George Hughes 2024

Published in 2024 in Pietermaritzburg by the Trustees of the Natal Society Foundation under the imprint 'Occasional Publications of the Natal Society Foundation'.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without reference to the publishers, the Trustees of the Natal Society Foundation, Pietermaritzburg.

This book is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike International licence. This licence permits anyone to download, copy, distribute, display, or adapt the text without asking for permission provided that the author(s) of the original text are given full credit. This licence also means that the future distribution of this book or its parts, such as individual chapters and images, is to be subject to the same licensing conditions. All uses of these materials should give proper attribution to their source in this book.

Natal Society Foundation website: <http://www.natalia.org.za/>

ISBN 978-0-7961-3527-8 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-7961-3528-5 (e-book)

Editor: Christopher Merrett

Design and layout: Jo Marwick

Proof reader: Catherine Munro

Cover: Jo Marwick

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Staff of the Natal Parks Board.
They made it happen.

CONTENTS

Illustrations

Abbreviations and acronyms

Acknowledgements

Foreword by Pat Goss

Preface

Section 1: Introduction

| | | |
|-----------|--|----|
| Chapter 1 | Origins | 1 |
| Chapter 2 | A Matter of Indiscipline | 15 |
| Chapter 3 | The Evolution of the Natal Parks Board | 26 |
| Chapter 4 | The Aftermath of the Petition | 46 |

Section 2: Evolution of and Influences on the Development of the Natal Parks Board Model

| | | |
|------------|---|-----|
| Chapter 5 | Selfless Service by Members of the Board | 57 |
| Chapter 6 | The Social Contract: Staff Empowerment | 68 |
| Chapter 7 | Natal becomes KwaZulu-Natal | 82 |
| Chapter 8 | The Mandela Influence | 97 |
| Chapter 9 | Agnes Takes us Forward! | 111 |
| Chapter 10 | Relations with Kenya | 117 |
| Chapter 11 | The Natal Parks Board Employment Policy | 136 |
| Chapter 12 | The Evolution of the Natal Parks Board <i>Annual Yearbook</i> | 145 |
| Chapter 13 | Communicate, Communicate, Communicate | 156 |
| Chapter 14 | The Marketing and Public Relations Division | 166 |
| Chapter 15 | The Administrative and Support Services | 187 |

Section 3: Goals and Objectives

A. Restore Natal's Lost and Almost Lost Biodiversity

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter 16 | The Return of the Game | 207 |
| Chapter 17 | The Scientific Division | 230 |
| Chapter 18 | The Best Laid Schemes of Mice and Men | 250 |

B. Promote the Development of a Viable Wildlife Industry to Demonstrate the Benefits of a Wildlife Economy

| | | |
|------------|----------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter 19 | The Natal Game Auctions | 267 |
| Chapter 20 | CITES and the Natal Parks Board. | 283 |

C. Create New Revenue Streams and Promote Ecotourism

| | | |
|------------|--|-----|
| Chapter 21 | The Board's Camping Grounds, Mountain Huts and Bush Lodges | 307 |
| Chapter 22 | The Huttred Camps and Lodges | 324 |
| Chapter 23 | The Completion of the Tourism Development Plan | 348 |
| Chapter 24 | The Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust | 366 |
| Chapter 25 | The Recreation Division | 384 |

D. Increase the Involvement of Private Citizens in Biodiversity Conservation

| | | |
|------------|-------------------|-----|
| Chapter 26 | The Zone Officers | 399 |
| Chapter 27 | The Shad Sheriffs | 416 |

E. Develop New Institutions and Instruments for the Management of Natural Resources from Protected Areas to Make Biodiversity Conservation Relevant to Neighbouring Communities

| | | |
|------------|--|-----|
| Chapter 28 | The Neighbour Relations Policy | 429 |
| Chapter 29 | Tshevu Lodge and the Pursuit of the Holy Grail | 453 |

Section 4: Drawing to a Close

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----|
| Chapter 30 | The Final Five Years | 469 |
| Selected bibliography | | 485 |

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Amangwane valley (Cathedral Peak) 450
- Baig, M.A.H. 42
- Bainbridge, Bill 244
- Balgowan 405
- bearded vulture 332, 333
- Bentley, Herman 48
- Bigalke, Rudi 231
- biodiversity 247
- Bourquin, Orty 49, 231
- British royal family 5
- Brooks, Martin 231
- Broome, J.J. 42
- Burke, Ted 422
- Buthlezi, M. 456
- Buthlezi, Mangosuthu 104
- Campbell, J. 42
- Cathedral Peak (Drakensberg) 351
- centenary stamps 105
- Champagne Castle, Monk's Cowl and Cathkin Peak (Drakensberg) unnumbered pp.
- coastal officers 425
- Coetzee, Mark 176
- Community Levy and Trust 458, 461
- conservancies 405, 407
- conservancy guards 406
- conservation and sustainable use 133, 228, 426, 441
- Conservation Trust 173, 366, 367, 375, 380, 381, 382
- Cook, Jeff 105
- Cooke, Mark 214
- Cox, Eddie 199
- Cox, Graham 473
- Crass, Bob 231
- Craven, Stan 32
- crayfish 424
- crocodiles 232, 255
- Demoina (cyclone) 317
- Densham, Drummond 52
- Dickson, Eric and Jenny 375
- Didima 356–358, 359, 360, 381
- Drakensberg, southern unnumbered pp.
- Dube, Welcome 181
- Dukuduku 87
- Eastern Triplet (Drakensberg) unnumbered pp.
- Eastman's Peak (Drakensberg) unnumbered pp.
- eland 220, 226, 381
- Evans, Phil 190
- Fannin, D.G. 42
- field days 78, 80
- game auctions 268, 272, 275, 276, 280
- game capture 16, 212, 213, 217, 218, 220, 225, 226, 227
- game guards 69, 78, 79
- Geddes Page, John 32, 79, 422, 481
- Giant's Castle unnumbered pp., 313, 314, 315, 326–327, 331, 332, 347, 380, 381, 477
- giraffe 225
- Goba, Sam 42, 178
- Goss, Pat 30, 42, 108, 322
- Grobler, Hans 244
- Grove, Herman 286
- Gumede, Simon 33
- Hancock, N.J. 42
- Hanks, John 231
- Harthoorn, Tony 212
- Hatari* (film) 215
- Heine, Rudi 42, 276
- Hill, Shirley 172
- hippos 255
- Hirst, W.A.E. 42
- Hlabisa, D.J. 456

- Hluhluwe unnumbered pp., 213, 321, 325, 334, 340, 341, 343
 honorary officers 413
 Horne, Ronel 174
 Houghting, Bruce 374
 Hughes, George 42, 51, 99, 104, 178, 179, 181, 272, 275, 276, 373, 481, [489]
 hunting 240
 impala 218
 Ingwavuma River 317
 inyoni kayiphumuli Zulu royal cattle 95
 Itala 113, 337
 Jackson, Garnet 40
 Joint Venture Scheme (JVS) 320
 Karkloof unnumbered pp.
 Kemp, Dallas 270
 Kenya 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134
 Khula Village 91
 Kotze, Gert 51
 Kruger Rand 105
 Kumleben, Mark 62
 leatherback turtles 234
 Levitt, Bob 30, 42, 58
 Lewis, Dylan 106, 376
 Leyden, Jock 370
 Loteni 329
 Luthuli, Paul 33, 42, 276
 mammals, near-extinction of 7
 Mandela, Nelson 99, 104, 106
 Maputaland unnumbered pp., 234
 marine resources 426
 Marshall, Colin 181
 Martin, Claude 105
 Masai 129, 130
 Mathias, Ivor 406
 Mchunu, M.L. 42
 McIntosh, Graham 42, 411
 Mdlalose, Frank 104
 Mdletshe, B.N. 42, 456
 Mdletshe, Simon 92
 Meiklejohn, Keith 270, 272
 Mentis, Mike 402
 Midmar 80, 389
 mining 256, 257
 Mitchell, Douglas 7, 13
 Mkhwanazi, M.M. 456
 Mont-aux-Sources Challenge 375
 Moor Park 402
 mountain biking 374
 Mulder, Pieter 286
 Natal Parks Board (NPB)
 aircraft 201, 219
 Annual Reports 175
 board 27, 31, 42
 Executive 174
 final projects 364
 finance 480
 induction courses 195, 196
 merit awards 176
 and National Parks Board 297
 and neighbours 138, 324, 440, 441, 445–446, 447, 448, 449
 policy 137, 162
 public participation in 414, 482
 scientific team 231, 243
 shoulder tabs 112
 staff liaison system 71
 strategic goals 478, 481
 training centre 197
 Yearbooks 146
 natural heritage sites 408
 Ndumu 317
 Neethling, Johan 286
 ngome dancing 78, 411
 Ngubane, Ben 91
 Ngubane, Nyanga 84, 177
 Ntshondwe *see* Itala
 Oelofse, Jan 215, 217
 Openshaw, Peter 477
 Parker, Dale 275
 Player, Ian 212

poaching 127, 424
 Pooley, Tony 232
 Porter, Roger 244, 261, 477
 Potter, Derek 477
 Potter, Peter 188
 Poynton, R.G. 42
 Prince Bernhard 373
 Prince Charles 91
 Prince Harry 91
 Prince Philip 179
 Raubenheimer, Lawrie 359, 381
 rhinoceros
 black 4, 220, 223
 maquettes and sculptures 107, 376
 white 5, 128, 212, 214, 222, 223,
 224, 276, 280
 Rock Art Centre *see* Didima
 Root, Peter 220
 Royal Natal National Park 5, 172, 375
 San 360
 Sandwith, Trevor 244
 Sani Pass (Drakensberg) 111
 Scheepers, Carol 477
 Scotcher, John 30
 sea turtles 234, 235
 Senogles, J.N. 42
 Shabangu, M. 456
 shad 417, 419
 shad sheriffs *see* coastal officers
 Sheppard, David 477
 Sinclair, Donald 32, 42
 Smuts, Butch 231
 Smuts, Jan 5
 St Lucia 254, 255, 262
 Stainbank, C. Dering 42, 51, 58
 Stewart, Don 58, 231
 Tewati *see* St Lucia
 thatch 440
 Thorpe, A.R. 42
 Thorsell, Jim 261
 Tippet, Ian 173
 tourism 142, 144, 324, 346, 479
 Treetops Hotel (Kenya) 126
 tsessebe 226
 Umfolozi 48, 212, 317, 322, 376
 Umgeni hatchery 400
 Van Heerden, B. 42
 Vincent, Jack 207, 481
 Vincent, John 167
 Vulamehlo Curio Shop (Umfolozi) 446
 Wagendrift Public Resort 411
 Walker, Clive 275
 Weenen Nature Reserve 406
 Wright, Charles 402, 406
 Yunnie, Don 30
 Zaloumis, Nolly 40, 42
 zone officers 399, 402, 403, 414
 Zulu, F.F. 456

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|---------|--|
| ADA | Assistant Director Administration |
| ADC | Assistant Director Conservation |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| CCW | Chief Conservator West |
| CEO | chief executive officer |
| CFO | chief financial officer |
| CITES | Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora |
| CLC | Community Law Centre |
| CMS | Convention on Migratory Species |
| COP | conference of the parties (CITES) |
| CROW | Centre for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife |
| CSIR | Council for Scientific and Industrial Research |
| D-G | Director-General |
| EIA | environmental impact assessment |
| EKZNW | Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife |
| ESPU | Endangered Species Unit (of SAPS) |
| EWI | Endangered Wildlife Trust |
| FEP | Functional Evaluation Programme |
| GIS | geographic information systems |
| HGR-UGR | Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Game Reserves |
| HSUS | Humane Society of the United States |
| ICC | International Convention Centre (Durban) |
| IFAW | International Fund for Animal Welfare |
| IFP | Inkatha Freedom Party |
| IUCN | International Union for Conservation of Nature |
| JVS | Joint Venture Scheme |
| KBNR | KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources |
| KWS | Kenya Wildlife Service |
| KZDNC | KwaZulu Department of Nature Conservation |
| KZN | KwaZulu-Natal |
| KZNNCS | KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service |
| MEC | member of the [provincial] executive committee |
| NAU | Natal Agricultural Union |

| | |
|----------|--|
| NEHAWU | National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union |
| NGO | non-government organisation |
| NP | National Party |
| NPA | Natal Provincial Administration |
| NPB | Natal Parks Board |
| ORI | Oceanographic Research Institute |
| PHASA | Professional Hunters Association of South Africa |
| RBM | Richards Bay Minerals |
| RNNP | Royal Natal National Park |
| SAAMBR | South African Association for Marine Biological Research |
| SACCAP | South African Council for Conservation and Anti-Pollution |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| SADF | South African Defence Force |
| SANParks | South African National Parks |
| SANF | South African Nature Foundation |
| SAPS | South African Police Service |
| SAR | South African Railways |
| SAS | Special Air Service |
| Satour | South African Tourism |
| SPCA | Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals |
| TANK | Tourism Association of Natal KwaZulu |
| TRC | Truth and Reconciliation Commission |
| UNEP | United Nations Environmental Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Education, Scientific and Conservation Organisation |
| UP | United Party |
| WESSA | Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa |
| WHS | World Heritage Site |
| WWF | World Wildlife Fund (later World Wide Fund for Nature) |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the outset it is appropriate that I acknowledge once again two leaders: Colonel Jack Vincent, the Natal Parks Board's first Director and John Geddes Page, its second Director, who, in a strange moment of synergy, decided together in 1960 to offer me a job in the NPB as a game ranger/fisheries officer. A long and exciting career started as a result of their generosity and I give thanks, with some humility, for the important role that they played in my working life. I am grateful to the Colonel for his discipline and forthright honesty and to John for his enthusiasm and adventurous spirit that nearly always responded positively to suggestions that promised better ways of achieving conservation goals. I also admired his willingness to participate in projects himself. No one could have asked for more talented mentors. In a book about the achievements and character of the NPB it must never be forgotten that these two men laid the foundations upon which those of us who followed found rock-solid inspiration and helped us emulate the sense of responsibility they fostered with so much pride.

It would also be fair to acknowledge the timely arrival of Covid-19, the presence of which triggered my long-held ambition to write this book about the NPB, its achievements and above all, its staff and board. The people of the NPB made the organisation work and they applied themselves tirelessly to make it do better. So much so, that the delay of nearly twenty years before I put pen to paper went by with my being unable to settle on an approach to a narrative that, with respect to the need for a suitable length, would be fair and would ensure recognition of the staff and board members who provided the oxygen for the organisation's achievement. I hope that I have done them justice, while realising, all too painfully, that it proved impossible to give every individual credit for his or her role. I beg forgiveness for this as I do for any errors that are uncovered by those who had a more direct role than I. Enthusiasm for one's calling and a joy of life is a gift for everyone around you, and the resulting success of conservation in Natal and KZN was attributable to the intense and widespread display of these characteristics shared by nearly all of the staff and board members.

Having sacrificed a great deal in the interests of my career, my family took the writing of the book in their stride by offering to act as editors. My good wife and lifetime partner, Lee, whose English skills have ever been a source of wonder, responded with glee as she had by then finished teaching at the

University of Natal (later KwaZulu-Natal). The results stand as proof of her patience, forbearance and love. Mitchell and Catherine, our children, who grew up deeply immersed in the culture and process of the NPB, must be fulsomely thanked for willingly reading the drafts and also for contributing their professionalism and their wisdom to my benefit over the years which helped me master the intricacies of the computer. I stand in awe of them both.

Having finally completed a draft, I turned to a selected few of my colleagues who shared the joy of working for the NPB over a long period. In recognition of the fact that one loses millions of brain cells each year I implored them to check the facts and circumstances of those parts of the NPB's story that covered their areas of expertise and experience. To Jeff Gaisford, Ron Physick, Drummond Densham, Tony Ward, Dave Cook, John Forrest and especially Roger Porter I owe thanks and appreciation for not only noting errors of accuracy but also adding guidance and additional detail, both of which have, I think, enriched the narrative. Friends of a lifetime, you are the salt of the earth.

For many years, the necessity of clear, unambiguous graphs and diagrams to illustrate important achievements of the NPB and its staff, has seen me depend on Diana Martin from the Design Studio. In this current work she has excelled and thrilled me.

To my last NPB Chairman, Pat Goss, goes my profuse gratitude for writing a foreword to the book which has added conviction to my belief that the Board and its staff deserve a place in history.

To state that I am grateful to the Natal Society Foundation Trust and its co-ordinator Christopher Merrett, for accepting the book for publication would be an understatement. Christopher has been patience personified, an empathetic editor who has encouraged me and worked hard to bring the publication to fruition. His positive view of the value of the record has been a reward in itself. It will also, I hope, provide praise to the unique group of people who coalesced into the NPB which viewed the conservation of the biodiversity and beauty of this province as an endeavour one could live for.

Finally, I should like once again to thank the board of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife for permission to consult their archives and photographic library.

Howick, 23 November 2023

FOREWORD

As I was raised on rural trading stations adjacent to the Pondoland sector of the Wild Coast, my consciousness soon developed a deep sense of place. So, much later, I enthusiastically accepted a nomination to the board of the Natal Parks Board (NPB), where I was to serve alongside eight noteworthy volunteers, all chosen from certain specific disciplines and walks of life and from a rainbow variety of cultures and creeds. During my ten-year tenure as a member of that board one couldn't help but be deeply impressed by the selfless dedication of those highly skilled volunteers to the worthy objectives of the NPB.

The reader will ultimately be left in little doubt as to the merits of appointing volunteer, as opposed to remunerated, members to a conservation board such as the NPB. Moreover, in my particular case, during a pre-selection interview by MECs Peter Miller and Tino Volker, it was made abundantly clear that either the performance of the hospitality component of the organisation should make a dramatic improvement or it would be confronted with an urgent need to award private concessions in the various reserves. In meticulous detail, George Hughes deals with the ambitious and very entrepreneurial programme, which was already under way by then, to address this matter. Needless to say, the numerous awards in this field and the personal recognition that the author received from Satour and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF International), among others, speaks volumes for the solid success that these endeavours achieved.

Our multilingual and extremely well-travelled author, also known as Dokotela by those who speak Zulu, has done yeoman work in chronicling every important milestone and achievement in the fifty-year life of the NPB. Since 1961, George has enjoyed a close, or direct, association with that celebrated institution. The title of his book sets the context of the narrative contained in this momentous reference work and personal career memoir.

George has deep Scottish roots but even deeper ones in South Africa and in what was formerly known as Natal. He also possesses the very rare qualities evident in internationally accredited scientists on the one hand and highly effective chief executive officers on the other. It was my privilege and honour to have shared a smidgen of the final ten years of George's career with the NPB. I grew to know him as a benevolent disciplinarian who made it his business to develop a deep understanding of people's needs and ambitions, while holding them accountable for their career responsibilities. Loyal to a

fault, deeply sensitive in the best sense of the word, incredibly hard-working and determined to make the organisation an innovative world leader in its field, George takes issue with those who may have had different agendas. He shares his assessment of certain occurrences in the life of the NPB with characteristic honesty while maintaining a sense of fairness in doing so.

His illustrious career spanned four decades with the NPB. Armed with a PhD in Zoology, George would be delegated to attend no less than four CITES conferences as part of Team SA, having already been a foundation member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Marine Turtle Specialist Group for twenty years. As a leading international marine turtle expert and wildlife manager, George has travelled extensively, both as a consultant to countries with sea turtles such as the Seychelles, the Islamic Republic of the Comores and Cabinda (part of Angola), and on lecturing tours and training in wildlife management. Appointment to commissions of investigation also took him to the Cayman Islands and Reunion on behalf of the IUCN and the French government respectively.

Among the many awards that have been bestowed upon the author, the most significant include the Edgar Brookes Award for Human Freedom and Endeavour; and Lifetime Achievement awards from the International Sea Turtle Society, the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

George's skilful writing and humorous anecdotes will have readers captivated as they emerge with a much better appreciation of the enormous contribution that the NPB made, both in the field of conservation and in the lives of all those engaged in the organisation, as well as to society in general. Readers are also reminded that the author's reminiscences are cast in the period between 1947, which marked the beginning of legislated apartheid, and 1998, the year before President Nelson Mandela was to hand over the reins to the next president, Thabo Mbeki. Much has changed since then.

During this period, the NPB successfully developed specialist techniques and skills to enable the original rhino survivors in the Umfolozi Game Reserve, whose numbers had multiplied several times, to be safely immobilised, handled and transported to other parts of the country and beyond our borders, in what became known as Operation Rhino. Besides these trailblazing achievements, the NPB pioneered myriad conservation innovations, with live game auctions as a welcome alternative to culling, the joint venture Bush Camp investment scheme, a private sector-led pension scheme for staff, leading edge turtle

research techniques, wilderness trails, and the establishment of a conservation trust.

At the personal level, both my wife Karin and I count the ten years of our very close association with this remarkable institution, as among the most pleasant and rewarding chapters in our very fortunate lives. It was a privilege and immense honour to be engaged alongside men and women of such impeccable integrity and dedication. We applaud their fifty-year commitment and extraordinary achievements.

For the officers and staff who gave valuable years of their lives to the NPB, it may well have been an adventurous endeavour, the eventual outcome of which is still unknown. Yet the time they spent there is considered also to have been sublime – with apologies to the author and Don Quixote. For me though, this manuscript is also something of an obituary to an exceptional organisation whose importance and impact we would do well to remember.

PAT GOSS

Last chairman of the NPB, 1992–1998, first appointed in 1987

PREFACE

Nature conservation, involving efforts to ensure the survival of biodiversity, is a practice started fewer than two hundred years ago. It is celebrated for the development of tools and practices such as the protection of landscapes and seascapes, and the setting of limits on exploitation of many species of plants and animals.

The United States first launched the concept of formal protected area systems with the declaration of Yosemite as a California state park, followed by the proclamation of Yellowstone National Park, the world's first national park, in 1872.

Globally, early protected areas were set aside, with the best of intentions, under the protection of the ruling authorities but without consideration for associated indigenous peoples or any consultation with them. The prevailing attitudes of the day saw protected areas as beneficial and concerns for, and by, indigenous and or other neighbouring peoples were ignored because of their small populations and political weakness.¹

In the wider world, the reputation of Africa south of the Sahara was that of a continent teeming with large animals, from aardvarks to elephants, as well as a magical plant kingdom comprising thousands of unknown and fascinating species. In the nineteenth century it attracted the attention of hunters, museum collectors, zoologists and botanists from Europe and America whose reports and papers enhanced its reputation.²

In southern Africa, at the end of the nineteenth century, settlement and development had progressed to the point that the exploitation of its natural resources had driven most large and useful indigenous animals to the point of extinction. In the British Colony of Natal, however, significant decisions were made in the nineteenth century that led to restrictions on the harvesting of large mammals. Hides, with other products such as ivory, formed a significant part of the Colony's exports and thus its economy. Wildlife held value for the citizens, which led to appeals for conservation action to be instituted. This was most dramatically illustrated in Natal. In 1895, the colonial government set aside large tracts of land in Zululand to safeguard the survival of the black rhinoceros (Hluhluwe Game Reserve), the southern race of the white rhinoceros (Umfolozi Game Reserve) and the hippopotamus (St Lucia Game Reserve).³

Formal conservation in the region thus shared this time in history with the

subjugation of the Zulu people and a pair of Anglo-Boer wars. It was relegated to a very minor role in government. Despite that, after the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the degree of protection given to our biodiversity began to increase. So, alas, did the human populations and industrialisation.

In South Africa conservation remained an important, under-funded and relative backwater of activity spanning the period of the two world wars. However, by 1944 the National Parks Board, ambitious to have all representative ecosystems under its protection and control, launched the first bid to the Natal Provincial Administration to take over the famous parks in Natal.⁴ This imperialistic move caused consternation and self-assessment by the Natal Provincial Council and led to the creation of a parastatal nature conservation agency named the Natal Parks Board. In the year following its establishment, the South African government ushered in the policy of apartheid. There were no exceptions and the new nature conservation body, in many respects, had to obey the rules of the land. As a province, Natal was not politically aligned, either in spirit nor practice, with official state policies and acted with some pragmatism. I think that the national government was relatively tolerant, however, and it excused the Natalians with the oft-heard statement: 'Natal is anders!' (Natal is different!).

The world at this time also realised that conservation in general needed help, in strategy, skills and finances, which prompted creative and important new conservation structures. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Biodiversity Convention, the Convention of Migratory Species, the RAMSAR convention on wetlands, and many other bodies were established.

From these conventions and enthusiasms emerged improvements to simple protected areas through the Man and the Biosphere programmes and others. South Africa as a whole took note of all of these endeavours and none were more enthusiastic and dedicated than the people who were associated with the new conservation body in Natal.⁵ In 2000 its successes culminated in the declaration by The United Nations Education, Scientific and Conservation Organisation (UNESCO)⁶ of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park as South Africa's first natural World Heritage Site.

Although this was a politically challenged period in South Africa, it should be remembered that the twentieth century saw the successful restoration of the country's large mammal populations, and much of the region's other biodiversity, by the country's conservation bodies. One of these bodies, the

Natal Parks Board (NPB), existed for fifty years and in that time received international recognition for innovation, progressive action and other achievements that made an invaluable contribution to nature conservation, a noble and successful endeavour.

This is the story of the NPB and the people, members of civil society and staff, who founded, influenced, sustained and promoted its work.

NOTES

- 1 This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that President Theodore Roosevelt, during his term in office, demonstrated his enthusiasm for wild places and conservation by reserving a total of some 600 000 square kilometres of the United States against settlement almost without consulting anybody.
- 2 An expedition to Africa, involving Theodore Roosevelt, trapped or killed 11 400 animals for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC and other museums such as the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and the American Museum of Natural History in New York.
- 3 In 1898, these visionary declarations were followed by the government of President Paul Kruger in the Republic of the Transvaal with the declaration of the Sabi Game Reserve (now Kruger National Park).
- 4 The National Parks Board was a state authority established in 1926.
- 5 Natal had become KwaZulu-Natal in 1994.
- 6 UNESCO is responsible for the World Heritage Convention.



Drakensberg: Giant's Castle Game Reserve



Drakensberg: Giant's Castle Game Reserve: winter scene



Drakensberg: Giant's Castle section: winter scene (courtesy Jake Alletson)



Drakensberg: Eastern Triplet



Drakensberg: Champagne Castle, Monk's Cowl and Cathkin Peak



Drakensberg: Eastman's Peak



Southern Drakensberg: the Rhino and sandstone sculpting



Midlands: Karkloof Range



Zululand: Hluhluwe Game Reserve



Maputaland Marine Reserve: beaches north of Mabibi



Maputaland Marine Reserve: coral reefs

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1

ORIGINS

‘We will go it alone, Mitchell!’

—William Power

FORGING a country is a challenge, and the establishment of a new state in an area still smarting from the anguish of the second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) was no easy task. The many delegates representing the wide spectrum of interests at the negotiation sessions for a reconciled South Africa appeared imbued, for the most part, with a conviction that every participant in the extensive meetings and debates would achieve what he or she felt was the optimum result possible. In many cases, agreement was achieved only after significant compromises were made and in 1910 the Union of South Africa was established.

A significant clause of great future import concerned the management of nature conservation. With apparently little difficulty, probably because it was then regarded to be of insignificant importance, the policy agreed upon was that other than activities involving national responsibility, nature conservation, with a high degree of autonomy, would be managed individually by the four new provinces of the Cape, Orange Free State, Transvaal and Natal. As an aside, Natal was unique among the coastal provinces because, when a colony, it had enjoyed full control of the fisheries accessed directly from the coastline and, by agreement, the status quo remained in the new province. The Cape lost control of all coastal marine resources; and neither province was any longer responsible for control of offshore industrial fisheries, the management of which was now to be centred in the envisaged national Department of Sea Fisheries to be established in Cape Town (South Africa, 1910). The new national department would be responsible for international fisheries agreements and offshore islands.

The leaders of the Colony of Natal delegation had, very unusually for politicians in 1910, quite strong views about conservation, and indeed the Colony had, for that time, an admirable record of noting the abuse of indigenous natural resources and taking steps to prevent it. As early as 1853, legislation was passed to protect forests, in 1878 attempts to control over-fishing were promulgated, and in 1884 Natal Law 23 took steps to protect game.

More importantly, the Colony of Natal had been the first part of South Africa to establish formal protected areas with the specific purpose of protecting individual large mammal species, which were clearly heading for extinction. The dire situation of the white rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum*, that may have numbered as few as thirty individuals, had led to the setting aside in 1895 of Umfolozi Game Reserve, formally gazetted in 1897.¹ At the same time, a similar number of black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* was the reason to establish Hluhluwe Game Reserve, and Lake St Lucia on account of its large population of hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius*.²



Southern White Rhinoceros: existed only in Natal in 1895 and in very low numbers



Black Rhinoceros: found only in Hluhluwe and Mkuzi game reserves in 1895 (EKZNW library)

Natal was also the first area in Africa to declare a national park. As early as 1896, the enthusiastic espousal of American policies of establishing national parks by a Natal colonial politician, Maurice Evans, promoted their benefits. In 1903 the Natal National Park was set aside, but it was only officially gazetted in 1917 following the Act of Union; thus, actually predating the establishment of the National Parks Board (now SA National Parks or SANParks) by nearly two decades. The addition of Royal to Natal National Park occurred in 1947 following a visit by the British Royal Family (Carruthers, 2013).

It is germane to note that the first protected area in Africa was declared in 1894 by Paul Kruger in the South African Republic. This was the Pongola



Royal Natal National Park: Amphitheatre

Game Reserve, which was later deproclaimed by the Transvaal in 1921 and then, after a period of some 73 years, following the resetting of provincial boundaries, it was reproclaimed by the NPB (supported by several neighbouring private owners) in 1994.³ Land purchased around the Jozini Dam was also included in the reserve when the dam had been completed (Carruthers, 1985).⁴ These were dramatic and visionary decisions, being the first real attempts to



*British Royal Family and Prime Minister Jan Smuts, Natal National Park, 1947
(EKZWN photo library)*

conserve what remained of the huge and extremely valuable wildlife resources that had, until the discovery of gold and diamonds, formed the backbone of the economy and ensured the survival of both the indigenous and settler peoples of southern Africa.

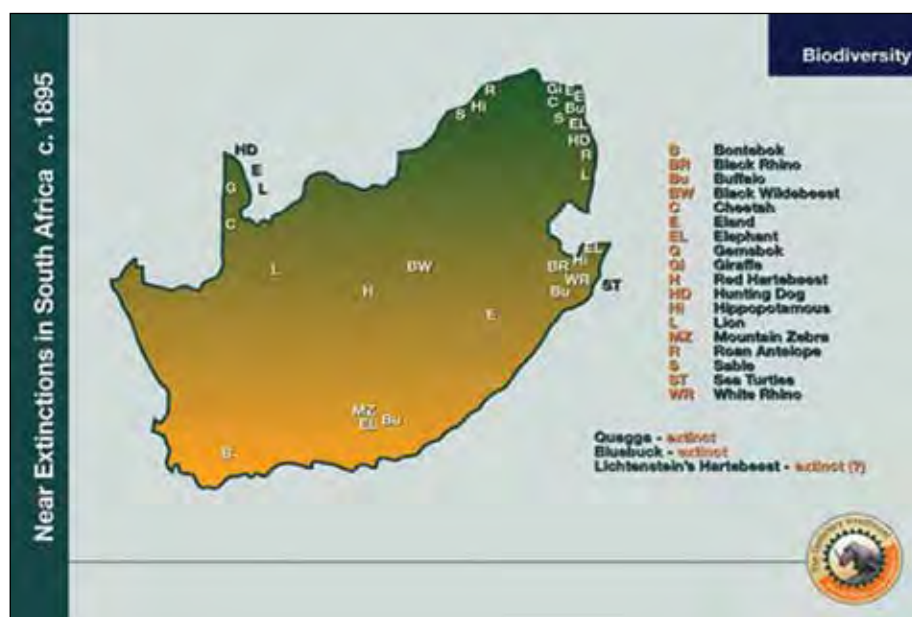
It was argued in later years (Pringle, Bond and Clark, 1982) that the loss of the majority of large mammal species had been fundamentally caused by hunters. The very title of Pringle's book *The Conservationists and the Killers* suggested that hunters were killers, thus setting a negative perception still encountered daily in the twenty-first century. There is often no distinction made, by the popular and social media, between a poacher (and worse still a commercial poacher) and a legal hunter or a landowner carrying out a normally accepted and justifiable task of hunting for the pot, given the mores in pre-industrial and mining times.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the shooting of wild animals for survival or commercial reasons was far more widespread than that of the occasional highly publicised, wealthy or aristocratic white European hunter/visitor such as William Cornwallis Harris (1839). For many hundreds of years ordinary South Africans, of all races, took every opportunity to go hunting to provide for their families or supplement business interests affected by seasonal problems (see, for example, Struthers, 1991). Such hunting activities were, therefore, probably far more harmful to the national herds of wildlife in that they were a daily occurrence. Subsistence hunters pursuing their daily fight for survival may have been a threat to wildlife populations, but, in my opinion, in most cases their activities did not merit their being classified as killers with all the attendant negative connotations.

The early scientists and collectors interested in gathering specimens for European museums and institutes probably killed more animals to feed their extensive accompanying staff than they did for their actual collections (Delegorgue, 1990). What is more, it appears to have missed many of the modern critics of hunting that, in the earlier years, such justifiably highly lauded cultural icons as Thomas Baines (Carruthers and Arnold, 1995) and Percy Fitzpatrick of *Jock of the Bushveld* fame (Fitzpatrick, 1907) devoted a not inconsiderable amount of their talents, while painting or writing, to hunting for game, the meat of which was so necessary for their survival and the consequent success of their adventures and travels. The same practices were followed in many parts of Africa (Hemingway, 1935).

The growth of the new mining economies in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did not make matters any easier for large wild mammal populations

as the additional demands to provide food for growing labour forces proved to be an almost intolerable burden. When South Africa moved into the twentieth century virtually every wild large mammal population had been reduced to the point of extinction and their economic role had diminished to virtually nothing. Voices of concern were being raised about the imminent disappearance of even the most common species, but this was not nationwide and even in the Colony of Natal there had been considerable local resistance to the establishment of formal protected areas in Zululand and Natal (for example, the establishment of Giant's Castle Game Reserve in 1903).



Nearly all large mammals in South Africa were either nearing extinction and had ceased to be an economic asset or attraction in South Africa, c.1895

Over the next 25 years there were many campaigns to deproclaim protected areas. However, in most cases both national and provincial government stood by its convictions and resisted demands for deproclamation. Most notable in Natal was the demand by Zululand farmers to deproclaim Umfolozi Game Reserve in order to remove the danger to their growing herds of cattle from tsetse fly (Ellis, 1975). In 1926, the politicians gave in to the demand, but in response to a more widespread civil objection to this negative action, the reserve was reproclaimed only months later.

Apart from looking after the white rhinoceros population, the role of the

province in managing Umfolozi was severely restricted as control effectively went to the Department of Veterinary Services, which focused its attention on the eventually successful removal of the tsetse fly (*Glossina* spp.). During the nagana campaign between 1942 and 1950, 70 000 animals were killed before the operation ended and in 1953 the NPB was given full control over this important game reserve (Vincent, 1988; Player, 1973).

These courageous and inspired decisions to create large formal protected areas saved all of the species selected for protection and essentially the credit for the existence in the twenty-first century of many large mammals goes to some hardy and far-sighted politicians throughout the country. Most certainly in the case of the white rhinoceros, this achievement was entirely due to actions of the colonial governors of Natal. Many members of civil society were calling for something to be done but it was the colonial politicians who actually acted and displayed amazing vision.

Until 1944 the four provinces pursued a diverse and growing set of goals involving wildlife, with each province building on the foundations left to them by the Act of Union. Assessments by each of the provinces of their respective large mammal species led to the creation of many new protected areas and these admirable steps were taken in parallel with some dubious actions such as the introduction and promotion of alien species (the northern hemisphere trout *Salmo* spp. for example, had already been introduced during the colonial days) and the intense persecution of many indigenous species such as jackal (*Canis mesomelas*), caracal lynx (*Felis caracal*) and even dassies or rock rabbits (*Procapra capensis*) (Hey, 1995). Essentially, however, what growth there was in the field of nature conservation was relatively modest, with slow increases in the number of protected areas, a fairly widespread low level of interest by politicians, and concomitantly meagre amounts of money allocated to the endeavour (Wilks, 1980). Nature conservation was also, for the most part, regarded with hostility by the rural sectors, both indigenous and settler, as it was seen to be depriving people of traditional access to natural resources, access to and use of which was strongly believed to be a right.

It has been suggested that nature conservation and the establishment of protected areas was a deliberate policy on the part of colonial state and provincial bodies to establish and demonstrate their domination and ultimate power over the indigenous peoples. Personally, I find this difficult to accept. That little or no attention was paid to the feelings, needs, or impacts of protected areas on the indigenous populations, would be a more accurate assessment of the sorry lot of the then subjugated indigenous populations. Certainly, I have

never seen any records that suggest that any nature conservation goals were associated or motivated by an urge to promote human subjugation. Only the need to try to safeguard threatened species of animals has been recorded, with few direct objections from members of the legislature.

Faced with the demands of a growing human population and pursuing economic growth in the agricultural, mining and industrial fields, conservation became a backwater activity staffed by poorly paid (Barnes, 2003) but immensely dedicated men and women, few of whom had any formal training in anything other than farming and/or experience in the military. Many were, however, imbued with a passion to save what wildlife remained and they normally focused on large mammals. It is thanks to these early rangers that there was a gradual increase in wildlife numbers in protected areas, an improvement in consciousness of the aesthetic values of the conservation of nature and, had they but realised it, they laid down the broad foundation of what was to become one of the greatest wildlife industries in the world. South Africa owes a great debt to the nature conservation staff of the early twentieth century.

It was inevitable that the national government and politics would begin to play a role in nature conservation. Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton, the dynamic and visionary warden of the Sabi Game Reserve in the Transvaal, conscious of the fact that there was little general interest in conservation and protected areas, had the brilliant idea of improving the security of his lowveld protected area. Shrewdly using the growing influence of Afrikaans politicians, he proposed that, like the United States, South Africa should have a semi-autonomous national parks system, funded by the central government with full national parliamentary protection and managed by a governing board of capable and interested citizens drawn from civil society (Pienaar, 2012). This persuasive master stroke ensured that the Sabi Game Reserve would become the first nationally protected area in South Africa and be named the Kruger National Park. It came into being in 1926 (Stevenson-Hamilton, 1956).

Over the next fifteen years the National Parks Board gradually expanded its influence and established additional national parks in three of South Africa's four provinces, the exception being Natal. The garden province as it was nicknamed, by then had ten areas set aside under formal protection (Page, 1987), including the original Zululand and Drakensberg reserves created prior to Union, and had shown scant interest in the role of the National Parks Board. The original establishment of the Sabi Game Reserve took place only in 1898, three years after the establishment of the great Zululand parks, so

there may even have been some self-satisfaction apparent in the attitudes of conservationists in Natal.

In addition, it is likely that as Natal, governed as it was by a primarily English-speaking community, and often jocularly referred to as the last outpost of the British Empire, may have held some antagonistic views of the National Parks Board by then dominated by Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. It is not surprising therefore that there had been a reluctance on the part of the National Parks Board to approach Natal formally, with a view to a proposed takeover of some of its valuable protected areas. In fact, it was not until April 1944, as World War Two was drawing to a close, that a strong delegation of board members and staff from the National Parks Board formally visited Natal with just that purpose. The delegation was made welcome at a meeting with political leaders from Natal in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve.

Natal, by this time, had established a growing reputation for being conservation conscious and had encouraged the participation of influential farmers and interest groups by establishing a series of committees to which members of civil society were invited to contribute. The invaluable input of the largest wildlife non-government organisation (NGO) the Wildlife Society (established in 1926) was also welcomed. This system of drawing on the skills and enthusiasm of civil society had proved its worth, especially in the Zululand Game Reserves and Parks Board. This was a regional committee under the chairmanship of William Power, a senior member of the Natal Provincial Council, and led to others dealing with riparian owners of trout waters in the Natal Midlands and Drakensberg foothills. It was clear that the Natal government was not going to be receptive to the loss of some of the province's primary protected areas – its conservation crown jewels (Page, 1987).

Fortuitously, leading the Natal government, in addition to the fiercely conservation-conscious William Power, was a determined, conservation minded politician who was convinced that Natal had a natural environment with real potential. He believed that the nature conservation structures catering for the people of Natal could be dramatically improved upon by adopting a more flexible approach to the endeavour than simply keeping conservation in a provincial department. His name was Douglas Mitchell.

Douglas Mitchell came from farming stock, having been born in Fascadale on the south coast of Natal and brought up on a sugarcane farm near Ramsgate. There was little in his early history that suggested he was developing a passion for nature conservation, but he clearly had a love of

wildlife and enjoyed outdoor sports such as hunting and fishing, typical of the rural farmers of the day. He was reportedly not a remarkable scholar. However, following military service in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) during World War One and after a period as a labour broker, he began at the age of 37 to take an interest in politics and was persuaded to stand as a representative for the South African Party. Gifted with a clear determination and air of conviction, he was elected in 1933 as a member of the Provincial Council and in November 1944 was appointed by General Jan Smuts as the Administrator of Natal. Conservation in Natal was to benefit dramatically from the enthusiasm and conviction of the rather diminutive, dark-haired and aggressive Douglas Mitchell (Wilks, 1980).



Honourable Douglas Mitchell
(EKZN library)

Mitchell and Power clearly saw merit in the structure of the National Parks Board established by the central government and were convinced that a similar semi-autonomous board of high quality could be easily found among the civil society of the province of Natal. Being a very astute politician, Mitchell's vision of a board, freed from the direct control of any political party and serving the conservation needs of the province, would also prove acceptable to the broader population. Mitchell was furthermore receptive to the idea that tourism facilities within the protected areas could, and would, help promote the general cause of nature conservation. Such opportunities for improvements in tourism as existed in Natal's protected areas should be investigated, developed and managed by the proposed new board. The essence of his vision was that the board would have considerable powers of its own and, while operating under the aegis of a new provincial ordinance and receiving funds from the provincial exchequer, would be perceived as an independent and much more flexible organisation. Mitchell was convinced that this structure would act in the best interest of the province's wildlife resources, which would benefit from committed staff not directly associated with the state apparatus. The board

would appoint its own staff, all of whom would be directly responsible to the board itself.

The critical difference between the conservation model of the national government and Douglas Mitchell's envisaged board was that the National Parks Board existed solely for declared national parks. What happened to wildlife outside the fences of national parks was beyond its legal competence and consequently of no great interest to the organisation or its staff. All other matters of concern involving nature conservation needs and problems would be handled by the provincial nature conservation authorities. Douglas Mitchell instinctively felt that this could be problematic as, for 34 years, all nature conservation activities in Natal and Zululand had been managed, albeit not all that constructively or efficiently, by various provincial departments.

This difference between these management approaches was quite critical because the vast majority of land in Natal, at that time some 96%, lay outside protected areas and belonged either to private landowners, companies or indigenous communities. The popular outdoor activities of hunting and fishing as well as the illegal and legal exploitation of many biodiversity resources demanded rational control and monitoring. What is more, these requirements were present not only on land but also along the shore. In Natal, the sea was regarded as an important source of recreation, which included fishing in all its diverse forms. Power and Mitchell were quick to conclude that dividing responsibilities for protected areas, and the care of biodiversity resources in general, held dangers for the cause of wildlife conservation. Natal already had cases of species, not included in protected areas, which had been exploited to extinction. For example, the ancient cycad *Encephalartos woodii* had already been reduced to one single male specimen from which three small offsets were translocated in 1903 from the Ngoye Forest in Zululand into the Durban Botanic Gardens (Durban Botanic Gardens, 1993).

Faced now with the appeal from the National Parks Board delegation to hand over control of Umfolozi, Hluhluwe and Giant's Castle game reserves to central government for declaration as national parks, the Natal representatives met in the evening following the formal delegation meeting and argued long and hard over whether or not to accept the Pretoria proposals. Douglas Mitchell and William Power passionately argued against the handover but ultimately the problem remained unresolved that evening, leaving them to go to bed with their collective advocacy unrewarded.

The following morning found the Hluhluwe rest camp swathed in a thick and cool mist which writhed and swirled among the *Albizia* trees along the

road. Douglas Mitchell, probably stimulated by his passionate and visionary belief in Natal's conservation destiny, had not slept well and, still in his pyjamas just after dawn, went for a walk through the camp. After but a few metres he encountered William Power, the senior member of the Provincial Council, who had listened with patient and intelligent enquiry to the long debates of the previous day and evening. After a brief greeting, with Mitchell turning to walk in parallel with Power, there was a long period of silence and suddenly Power paused in the mist and stated with conviction: 'We will go it alone, Mitchell! These are our reserves, and we will go it alone and make a success of them' (Page, 1987). Ultimately, the strong convictions of William Power and Douglas Mitchell carried the day.



Bust of Douglas Mitchell, Queen Elizabeth Park headquarters

At this stage of development, one has to acknowledge with thanks the influence of Jan Smuts who chose, in November 1944, to elevate Douglas Mitchell to the extremely powerful position of Administrator of Natal (Wilks, 1980), thus paving the way for Mitchell to champion and establish the powers and legislative foundation of the new conservation body. On 3 December 1947, the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board was formally gazetted into existence by Natal Ordinance 35 of 1947.

William Power became the first chairman of the NPB but passed away in 1951 during his second-term tenure as deputy chairman. Douglas Mitchell joined the board as a member in 1950 and, despite having become a parliamentarian, loyally served as its deputy chairman until 1974. He remained a passionate supporter of the NPB he had initiated until his death in 1998. In 1982 its headquarters in Pietermaritzburg was officially named the Douglas Mitchell Centre in deserved honour of this remarkable politician's lifetime passion and commitment to nature conservation and a fine bronze bust of Mitchell was unveiled in the foyer.⁵

NOTES

- 1 The spelling of the names of some protected areas has changed since the disappearance of the NPB in 1998. I have used the names as they existed during its lifetime.
- 2 Two other reserves were also declared: Umdhletshe and the Pongola-Mkuzi area, but these were later deproclaimed.
- 3 This incorporated into the new province of KwaZulu-Natal a large piece of territory between Natal and Swaziland that had been Transvaal land.
- 4 Michael Brett, pers. comm.
- 5 In 2002, immediately after my retirement as CEO of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the bust of Douglas Mitchell, placed in the foyer of the head office in Queen Elizabeth Park at the time of the naming of the Douglas Mitchell Centre, was hacksawed from its base and removed. This led to a massive public outcry, with harsh questions being asked in the provincial Legislative Assembly, resulting in its speedy replacement in the foyer where it remains at the time of writing.

2

A MATTER OF INDISCIPLINE

DURING the fifty years of the NPB's existence there was only one disturbing period of serious indiscipline (Vincent, 1988) that had lengthy, and in fact often fortunate, after effects.¹ Some of these, I am certain, helped conservation, and the organisation, to become far more effective.

Between the years of 1971 and 1973 there was a focused, vindictive and public attack on the management and policies of the NPB and its Director, John Geddes Page. The indiscipline emanated from a small coterie of NPB field officers in Hluhluwe and Umfolozi game reserves, supported by a close circle of Zululand field staff (the so-called Group of Twelve). These individuals who, dissatisfied with the direction in which the NPB appeared to be moving, attracted the misplaced but supportive attention of local newspapers in Natal, especially the *Daily News*, *Sunday Tribune* and *Natal Mercury*.

These officers also canvassed and obtained the broad support of several NGOs and their spokesmen. Among them were Keith Cooper, representing the Wildlife Protection Society of South Africa, Tim Condon, president of his South African Council for Conservation and Anti-Pollution (SACCAP) and A.P. Smith, president of the Natal Hunters and Game Conservation Society. The formal structure of the endeavour was presented as a Petition to the Administrator of Natal calling for a constituted commission of inquiry into the administration and management of the NPB.

In a political move, which could have been the campaign's undoing, attempts were made to obtain support from the main opposition political party in Natal, the National Party (NP), the members of which could not resist the opportunity to launch inflammatory attacks on the United Party (UP) under whose patronage and direction the NPB had thrived over the preceding 24 years. Finally, even within the UP itself, several backbenchers were canvassed and proved willing to offer their support to the disaffected staff.

Background

It must be honestly stated that a great deal of the positive publicity and public esteem enjoyed by the NPB at this time had been derived from the dramatic change from the mass culling programmes in the 1950s to the development of highly successful game capture techniques, the most spectacular and newsworthy being commonly associated with the capture and translocation of the white rhinoceros. The protected areas receiving most recognition for these excellent activities were the Umfolozi and Hluhluwe game reserves. The most prominent among the many officers involved were Ian Player (1952–1974), Nick Steele (1956–1983) and Gordon Bailey (1962–1975) who, having enjoyed extensive, and even global, acclaim for their work, appeared to be the source of the dissatisfaction.

There is no doubt that the rhino capture operations and the improvement of capture skills that involved almost every large mammal extant in the Zululand protected areas was an exciting, thrilling and demanding time for the staff involved. The operations carried a serious risk of bodily harm and demanded dedication and effort that went well beyond reasonable requirements at a time when the organisation was faced, because of its size and the distribution of its stations, with logistic delays in the supply of operational equipment. Supplies and services in support of these men were less than optimal and thus the *esprit de corps* of such a group, required to depend almost entirely upon themselves, reached a remarkable and admirable level (Player, 1973). The reputation of the NPB benefited greatly from such teams as well as others that were developing at the same time in completely dissimilar settings such as the coastal areas, the Drakensberg and, importantly, in the zone officer liaison between farming



Rhino capture was a dangerous activity...
(EKZNW library)



...and very hard on equipment
(EKZNW library)

communities and the NPB (Hughes, 2014).

Unfortunately, the dissatisfied Zululand group, supported by a small number of enthusiastic and dedicated young rangers, appeared to believe that the only truly professional game ranging operations took place in areas under their jurisdiction, and some felt that what they did in the protected areas of Zululand provided the NPB with proper policies and direction (Bailey, 2017). The acceptance of the romantic wilderness concept in 1957, the launching in 1959 of wilderness trails in Umfolozi and the formation of the Wilderness Leadership School by Ian Player added another fairly intense belief which began to dominate their attitudes and appeared to set them aside, and, from their viewpoint almost certainly above, colleagues throughout the NPB. It could be said that they began to emulate Icarus in that perhaps they started to fly too high.

At the same time, it would not be unfair to say that many other field officers, throughout the province, regarded head office, and by extension the senior staff and the NPB itself, as a distant and thus unimportant component of the organisation and one that could be criticised and/or ignored at will (Bailey, 2017; Henwood, 2013; Hughes, 2014; Nash, 2005; Root, 2005; Wels, 2015).

The wilderness concept

A prime objection of the Zululand group was that they believed the NPB should focus only on conservation areas and that these should be managed in a wilderness context with little or no tourism development (Linscott, 2013). This was at variance with the founding principles of the NPB, one of which was that it should use tourism, both domestic and foreign, as a means to generate income. Public or internal suggestions that tourist facilities did not fall within the legal competence of the NPB were viewed with concern and were simply not accepted either by the NPB or its senior staff.

One of the issues creating dissatisfaction appears to have been that John Geddes Page (1954–1988), having travelled to the United States in 1964 to attend the International Parks Seminar run by the US National Park Service and Parks Canada, had been more than impressed by the fact that these two bodies had historical, recreation and cultural sites falling well within their terms of reference.

John² extended his visit after the seminar to many other recreational sites such as Knott's Berry Farm in California (later to become a theme park, among many others such as Disneyland) where the farm's core attraction was a reconstructed ghost town of the old West. He returned to Natal inspired

by his experiences and persuaded the board that extending the vision of the NPB's interests beyond simply sites of nature conservation value, would enhance its effectiveness and image. He genuinely believed that developing centres of intense recreation at appropriate and suitable sites would provide outdoor opportunities for the people of Natal many of whose interests were not primarily focused on the protected areas of high or scientific biodiversity value. He thought that the lack of such alternative sites would ultimately result in undesirable and excessive visitor pressure that might damage the integrity of sensitive biodiversity areas.

As was usual with John Geddes Page, having secured the board's approval, he went for the new concept like a bull at a gate. Coincidentally and fortuitously, the board had been approached by the Department of Water Affairs with a proposal that the NPB should be responsible for the development and management of recreational and conservation opportunities on state-owned land around the new Midmar Dam being built near Howick. The Natal provincial government fully supported the Water Affairs proposal, and the result of this decision was a greatly increased budget to cater for the development of the Midmar Dam facilities.

Regrettably, it was perceived in Zululand that this resulted in a reduction in funds available for the biodiversity conservation functions of the NPB. Poor communication did not make clear, or the facts were discounted in the heat of the moment, that all such funds were in addition to the normal conservation budgets made available by the Natal Provincial Administration (NPA).

Proposed new professional structure

Another primary bone of contention included in the Petition was a complaint that many staff members of the NPB were not professionally qualified and this led to an unfortunate rumoured policy change that would see all senior posts reserved for staff with professional training and, preferably, university degrees.

It would appear that the NPB and senior management staff, including Colonel Jack Vincent, then serving as Assistant Director Conservation, had concluded that the NPB, possibly at John Geddes Page's urging following his visit to the United States where most senior positions were manned by professionally qualified staff, should attract more appropriately qualified personnel, hopefully to serve as leaders and supervisors of a new structure for the NPB's operations. These new ideas and directions undoubtedly engendered the frisson of discontent, and possibly the fear, that threatened to disrupt what

was clearly regarded as a hard fought for, successful regime, over which the locally experienced, but less formally qualified, field officers had enjoyed almost total control.

It must be borne in mind that at this stage of the NPB's history there were no academic institutions offering diplomas or higher qualifications in nature conservation and the game ranger staff were drawn from fields that were diverse, to put it mildly. Most of the early field staff had been drawn from military backgrounds but they were soon joined by recruits from the traffic police, state bureaucracies, various trades, sons of farmers, lifesavers and those with, at best, a matriculation or school senior certificate pass. The rules at that time stated that an applicant had to be 21 years old before qualifying for a field post. Many had practical skills, but some virtually none (see, for example, Hughes, 2014).

Until the 1960s, the few scientists who had been appointed to the NPB's staff were almost completely isolated in their professional disciplines. Bob Crass, stationed in head office, was a specialist entomologist focusing on food items for trout and, in Bob's own jocular view, he had been appointed in 1950 in order to 'ensure an improvement in size and quantity of trout for the benefit of Natal's political masters' (Crass, 1986). As Bob concentrated most of his earlier work in the Midlands of Natal and the Drakensberg foothills, where many resident field staff, this author included, took great joy from angling for trout (see Barnes, 2003 and Hughes, 2014), he posed no threat to the Zululand field staff.

Roddy Ward was appointed in 1953 on a contract to try to gain a better understanding of the ecology of the Hluhluwe Game Reserve and proved an incredibly dedicated scientist who gathered industrial quantities of data. His complete involvement in science and charming personality made him a fully accepted team man because he seldom interfered with the field managers. The Petition, in fact, among scores of other concerns, cited as a criticism the fact that, following Roddy's departure he had never written up his findings in a manner that might have proven beneficial to the management of the Zululand reserves.

As a result of the increase in game capture operations and the necessity for some professional veterinary control over the use and care of scheduled drugs, Mike Keep (1967–1989) was recruited and proved to be the first of a string of incredibly dedicated veterinarians whose skills accelerated the reputation of the NPB capture teams and undoubtedly helped reduce the mortality rates that were a feature of some earlier capture techniques.³

These halcyon days of the field staff began to change from the early 1960s as the NPB became aware of the necessity to acquire a more professional understanding of the ecology and biology of the protected areas under its control. Dr Rudi C. Bigalke was appointed in 1964 as the NPB's first chief professional officer in charge of research services. This new branch now grew and expanded its cadre of scientists, bringing new and improved skills to the organisation. It did not help that Rudi was not personally liked by the Zululand group (Dutton, 2017).

Poor communication

For the NPB this controversial period, during which communication was not one of its strong points, proved to be exciting and probably confusing for staff. With so many new directions being pursued the possibility that misunderstandings and fears would be generated was given scant attention by management. The board was made up of some people with political associations and, to be fair, there was an element of the old boys' club mentality in the appointment of its members. This specific criticism also featured in the Petition. Douglas Mitchell, for example, remained a board member from 1947 until 1974, when the period of disagreement came to an end. One could say that after 27 years his departure was long overdue no matter how grateful one might be for his commitment to the organisation that he worked so hard to create and in which he took such pride.

It was clear in the late 1960s that the first signs of discontent were not only treated with some disdain but also that any such concerns raised by staff involved in the field were given inadequate attention. This rudimentary shortcoming was probably as a result of some board members and senior staff developing an opinion that some of the field staff were interfering and criticising the work of the NPB as a whole.

At this stage there may certainly have been a view, held by some, that the growing publicity and attention being garnered by a small section of the field staff in Zululand was irksome and that the NPB itself was not getting the credit it deserved. After all, it supplied the salaries, equipment, logistic support and above all, the authority and encouragement, to undertake tasks such as developing techniques to translocate surplus animals.

Personal observations

At that time, I had resigned from the NPB having spent four years as a field officer at Giant's Castle Game Reserve and had returned to university to pursue a professional career in Zoology (Hughes, 2014). In pursuing my doctoral research at the Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI) in Durban, I too, like the Zululand rangers, developed and enjoyed a positive relationship with the local press and radio in Durban (Hughes, 2012).

Initially employed in 1965 by the NPB as a vacation student on the Tongaland (renamed Maputaland by KwaZulu in the 1980s) Sea Turtle Survey and becoming increasingly interested in the project I came eventually to be regarded as the scientific controller/supervisor of the sea turtle programme and had for nearly six years organised students, patrolling systems and research techniques for the NPB's programme (Hughes, 2014).

In 1970, I too was exposed to fairly serious public criticism from a NPB senior officer. He perceived (incorrectly, I hasten to add), first that the press was consulting me as a sea turtle authority rather than the NPB staff; second that I was claiming credit for the NPB's programme; and finally that I was tardy in presenting the NPB with the annual written assessments of the annual sea turtle programme in Tongaland.

This last criticism was quite a serious accusation as my doctoral research funding was provided by the South African Nature Foundation (now WWF-SA). Like most grants received by postgraduate students, this was not a king's ransom and I could not afford for it to be put at risk by unjustifiable claims of inefficiency or bad discipline. Following consultation with, and receiving the support of, my ORI Director Allan Heydorn, I immediately made an appointment with the Director of the NPB to clarify the issue and to make known my distress and concerns. I received a very sympathetic hearing from John Geddes Page, who agreed that the criticism levelled at me was unsubstantiated and I, in turn, accepted his word that the matter would be dealt with. John must have done so because all such criticisms ceased.

In 1971, while at ORI, I was surprised to receive a visit from one of the Zululand field officers who, it transpired later, was one of the disaffected staff supporting the Petition. At the time, I had no idea that there was a problem brewing in the NPB and was therefore surprised at being asked to make myself available to testify before a proposed commission of inquiry expected to be held by the NPA. He explained that there was a Petition being developed enumerating criticisms that the NPB was being badly managed, had adopted policies inimical to conservation and that it was necessary to pursue what

today would be called regime change. I was asked to attend the enquiry and to testify against the NPB, citing the problem that had necessitated the visit to John Geddes Page. I was somewhat shocked as I counted many friends in the staff of the NPB and had enjoyed, with the one minor exception, ten years of fruitful and rewarding association with a dynamic organisation.

I refused the invitation and was promptly met with the following observation: 'If you refuse, you do realise that if you are not with us, you are against us, and this will be held against you!' Replying rather brusquely, I warned the gentleman that I did not take threats lightly and he should leave my office. Within a week a provincial politician from the UP, who served on the council of the SAAMBR (South African Association for Marine Biological Research of which ORI was the scientific research branch), came to me to encourage me to give evidence against the NPB. I gave him the same answer that I had given to the Zululand field officer. It was clear that there was a Machiavellian hand firmly in place behind the troubles.

Despite my refusal to have anything to do with the proposed Petition I was surprised to find, in later years, when reading the Petition and its request for a formal commission, that others who had been badly treated by an unsympathetic NPB had decided to include me as a dissident. As I stated above, my complaint about the wrong assumptions of a senior officer had been included as one of the criticisms in the Petition despite my having made clear that the problem had been promptly dealt with by the Director.

In the Petition, moreover, was another complaint that the NPB had seriously affected my work by 'not providing me with a vehicle'. Such a suggestion had no contact with reality as I did not work for the NPB at the time and the shortage of a vehicle was a result of a policy decision made by the founder trustees of the South African Nature Foundation (SANF). I was one of the first researchers funded by the SANF and its board of trustees was determined to err on the conservative side when it came to grants and excluded the purchase of large capital items, including vehicles.

Another policy decision made by the SANF board was that a recipient had to have a recognised institution hosting and supervising the work of the recipient of funds. Not unnaturally, I had turned to the NPB with a request that they host me and accept responsibility for the management of the grant awarded me. The NPB responded with great sympathy to my request that they host me, but senior staff informed me, quite correctly, that because my project involved travel and research in foreign countries for which the Board had no mandate and expressed some regret that they could not accommodate

my request. Knowing that the NPB, for the same reason, could not supply me with a vehicle I had never asked them for one. The petitioners were, therefore, completely wrong to suggest the NPB had acted negligently towards my needs and wrong to have made such a claim part of their attack.

The provincial Executive Committee's reaction

The Natal Executive Committee, unimpressed by the wealth of hearsay, opinion and innuendo in the Petition, which was 200 pages long and contained literally dozens of questions, criticisms of staff attitudes and allegations of mismanagement, referred it to the provincial legislature. The consequent debate took place in the Natal Provincial Council.⁴

The NP representatives in the legislature saw political opportunities in many of the questions laid out in the Petition and started agitating from the opposition benches that the NPB should be taken over by the state-run National Parks Board and that charges be brought against members of the senior staff of the NPB. These accusations were noisily repeated ad nauseam by the three NGOs who had joined the clamour against the NPB. The inquiry duly took place after the atmosphere had already become toxic. Many personal attacks were launched on the NPB, its board members as individuals and senior staff through the Durban newspapers that were supportive of the Petition.

In the end the whole affair turned out to be a damp squib and ended without any form of retribution imposed on the NPB. The Provincial Council declined the Petition and declared its full support for the NPB. The few meagre points that had been raised suggesting criminal fault had been referred to the Attorney-General for consideration and, after some months, his office declined to proceed stating that such complaints as existed offered no prospect of successful prosecution.

The NP, in my opinion, killed the whole endeavour by its frantic pursuit of a takeover of the NPB by central government's National Parks Board. The possible threat of losing Natal's special and historic protected areas had been a persistent concern that had existed since the establishment of the National Parks Board in 1926. As a result, the entire province suddenly reverted to defending its own NPB, with the same newspapers, those that had been so sympathetic to the Zululand rebellion, closing ranks with the UP and opposing the move.

The Natal Parks Board reaction

The NPB had meanwhile reacted by transferring staff from the Zululand stations. Ian Player had been earlier transferred to head office in a promotion post to Assistant Director Interpretation, Public Relations and Special Projects. Nick Steele was posted to a conservator post near Greytown and Gordon Bailey was deployed to take over as Warden of Giant's Castle Game Reserve. Mark Astrup was sent to the newly established Weenen Nature Reserve and, with some other moves, the entire group of wilderness-supporting staff that Player himself referred to as the 'wilderness clique' (Linscott, 2013) was broken up and a new administrative structure for the NPB's conservation division was established.

Subsequent to this, numerous letters were sent to the press supporting the new policies of the NPB. This did not stop die-hard criticism from some of the petitioners, eventually provoking a letter in response signed by 41 members of the NPB serving as field and research staff stating that the revolt was not of their making and their loyalty lay with the NPB. Thus ended the most memorable and bitter period of the NPB's fifty-year history. It left many scars and resulted in Ian Player leaving the NPB to focus on his Wilderness Leadership School. A number of other members of the Zululand group resigned. Others accepted their transfers and most settled down quickly under different leadership and responsibilities and became exceptional officers.

Nick Steele, as will be seen later, made a significant contribution to conservation during the next ten years of service in the NPB but, unable to put the episode behind him, was driven by an almost fanatical desire to return to the control of Umfolozi Game Reserve, a move which was certainly not favoured by management or me as Assistant Director Conservation at that time.

Nick eventually requested a transfer to the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources (KBNR), the nature conservation authority established by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the self-governing territory of KwaZulu. It should be recorded that his departure generated a not inconsiderable amount of empathy and the NPB board endorsed a resolution that we should request the KwaZulu government to allow Nick to remain a member of the NPB Pension Fund. In addition, it was requested that his leave accumulation be honoured and his service recognised. As Nick was a close friend of Buthelezi, this very unusual and generous arrangement was indeed endorsed by him and honoured in full by both organisations until Nick passed away in 1997.

The aftermath

As is the case with many institutional perturbations there was no single cause of the problems that had arisen. There were few reasons for either side to be convinced that they were entirely in the right and nor would it be fair to say that improvements to NPB systems as a whole did not ensue from the fracas. Over the next few years there ensued a very considerable improvement to the structure of a more representative board of the NPB; in the recruitment of professionally qualified staff; in the spirit and morale of the research division with concomitant benefits of sound planning developed for the protected areas; in the involvement of special interest groups and individuals; and in communication skills when dealing both with staff of the organisation itself and with the public of Natal that it existed to serve.

NOTES

- 1 The title of this chapter uses Colonel Jack Vincent's conclusion regarding the episode of the Petition to the Provincial Council of Natal. As a just disciplinarian he viewed the event as being the result of a shortfall in staff behaviour.
- 2 As an aside, but worth recording, is a good example of how times have changed. John's wife, Stella, expressed a wish to visit the USA with him. There being no question that the NPB should fund her participation, Stella spent nearly an entire year prior to the trip working day and night as a taxi driver before earning enough to accompany John.
- 3 See Hughes (2014) for observations on private sector captures in the Orange Free State in the early 1960s.
- 4 *Debates and Proceedings of the Natal Provincial Council, 1972.*

3

THE EVOLUTION OF THE NATAL PARKS BOARD

DOUGLAS Mitchell had codified the essential requirements for appointment to the board of the NPB (in addition to the normal exclusionary failings of possible candidates) in the original Ordinance 35 of 1947 as follows: it had to consist of between nine and twelve members; the Natal Agricultural Union had to be represented; and members were appointed for a term of three years.

Political responsibility for the Natal Parks Board¹

From its inception the NPB portfolio was held by a member of the executive committee (MEC) in the provincial legislature. The longest-serving responsible MEC was, understandably, Mitchell, the NPB's founder and mentor until 1974. For long periods the board was chaired by political figures and prominent farmers. Some chairmen were both. After Mitchell retired, Dering Stainbank was given responsibility for the portfolio of the NPB and for 22 years. He took his duties seriously, representing the interests of nature conservation. Dering was a scion of an early Natal colonial sugar farming family, with an almost Victorian commitment to loyalty.

I hasten to add that this was not always without criticism, both from the public at large (and very often expressed during the Petition saga), but also from staff. During the time that I worked with Dering on the board I found him an extremely friendly, hospitable person who seldom faltered in defence of the NPB and its staff and with whom I worked very successfully. In 1986, when the NP gained control of Natal, Dering lost his position as an MEC and became the chairman of the board for six years, retiring in 1991.

Appointment of board members

Although Natal had a long tradition of involving interested citizens in conservation matters, the board of the NPB, after its establishment in 1947 and until 1972, consisted to a large degree of an old boy network of people with political links, as well as Zululand and Natal farmers, judges and prominent

political citizens associated with the traditional families of the province. Solid citizens indeed who, while taking their responsibilities seriously, were not often believed to be particularly well-informed about nature conservation.

The perceived lack of empathy for the trials and sacrifices of hard-working field staff during the early years, which helped fuel the 1971 Petition, was, in my view, not as a result of any malice but rather stemmed from the reality that an understanding of the science of nature conservation was beginning to test the limitations of the traditional board members. One of the criticisms in the Petition was that the board did not have enough people with conservation or scientific skills and it recommended that this problem should be rectified.

After the turmoil caused by the Petition, although the policy of the Provincial Council did change, it also became clear that the functions and purposes of the board were not necessarily fully served by having only members who were intimately involved in nature conservation or had professional qualifications in the natural sciences. Nature conservation, it was felt, would be better served by having members sourced from Natal society who had, through their



A meeting of board members accompanied by their wives, Hluhluwe c.1970, attended by virtually every regional field conservator in the NPB (EKZNW library)

personal interests and skills, demonstrated an interest in nature conservation and were prepared to use their personal expertise and influence to improve the organisation and its outcomes.

The NAU and farming representation

The Provincial Council remained convinced that there should always be a representative of the Natal Agricultural Union (NAU) on the board of the NPB to guide it in matters agricultural. This was a matter of debate, in my view, as the relationship between formal agricultural practices and biodiversity conservation actually became quite strained as the years went by, and biodiversity conservation practices and principles began to gain confidence and recognition. Even the basic timing of annual or regular veld burning was seen as a constraint by some early biodiversity managers, who felt that the rigid rules set by the Department of Agriculture did not take into account the needs for cycles of fire which occur naturally in grassland and savannah ecosystems and broad biodiversity goals. After all, the protected areas had not been set aside for productive grazing alone (see, for example, Hughes, 2014).

In retrospect, what the inclusion of formal, and often very influential, representatives of the NAU did, in due course, was to produce a far greater appreciation among the farming community of the value and work of the NPB. The contribution by members such as Don Sinclair (1971–1986), Boet Fourie (1986–1994), Roy Dumont (1989–1994), William Mullens (1991–1994) and Graham McIntosh (1995–1998) was invaluable and often expanded positive relationships in farming areas where the NPB had experienced limited success and effectiveness. When the conservancy movement began to expand, thanks to the enthusiastic efforts of the farming communities, a great deal of the credit may be laid at the door of those board members who were farmers in their own right and who promoted conservation with commitment and influence. Additional valuable contributions were made by John Campbell (1974–1986) and Nick Hancock (1976–1984) – but above all Don Sinclair.

He arrived as a board member having successfully participated in the Commission for the Incorporation of East Griqualand into the Province of Natal (the official date of incorporation was 1 April 1978). His skilful negotiations made the entire process acceptable to all concerned and provided a textbook example of a successful amalgamation. The fact that the NPB was specifically mentioned in the recommendations of the commission for its experience in managing montane habitat made the incorporation something special for those of us directly involved in the management of the Drakensberg. At that stage I

was Chief Conservator (West) and under my responsibilities at that time fell the NPB's Drakensberg protected areas. It was a halcyon period for me as I had, as guide and mentor, one of the legends of the Natal Drakensberg: Bill Barnes, who was born and brought up in Giant's Castle Game Reserve.

With the East Griqualand success to his credit, Don was a welcome addition to the board. His sound reputation was no exaggeration as he proved to be an outstanding character in every way with his enthusiasm for conservation matters gaining the NPB many friends. His efforts were recognised by the province and in 1975 Don was named as chairman of the board to widespread acclaim and the universal approval of staff. His term of office is remembered with enormous affection because seldom could the staff and organisation have expected and received more commitment and support than from this quiet, gentle, modest and efficient farmer from the Dargle district. Put simply, he loved the NPB and is the only serving board member who, when carrying out his last duty in June 1986, that of opening a community centre in Umhlanga Lagoon Nature Reserve, at the conclusion of his address started crying, overwhelmed by the emotion of having to step down as chairman. It was a moving experience.

The inclusion of legal minds

Happily, the decision by the Natal Provincial Council and Douglas Mitchell to include senior legal minds on the board from the 1950s was continued throughout its existence. The inclusion of earlier justices such as J.C. de Wet, Dennis Fannin and D.G. Broome had been wise decisions and these were replaced in due time by John Milne (1980–1983, during which he was promoted to judge-president of Natal), Mark Kumleben (1983–1991) and John Broome (1991–1998). All of these men rendered outstanding service to the NPB and the country and did much to raise the profile and reputation of the NPB. All took enormous pride in serving on the board.

The evolution accelerates

In the two years following the Petition, the province's Executive Council became far more selective: it endeavoured to broaden the skills and transparency of the board by including members with notable legal reputations who, in addition, as a result of their fields of influence and experience, had developed specialised interests in matters deemed to be of direct conservation importance.

An excellent example was Robert (Bob) E. Levitt (1974–1994) who was a lawyer of growing stature and, having been a diver in his youth, had for 25 years, pursued a special interest in marine research. He had also served on the council of the SAAMBR, of which he ultimately became chairman. Bob spent twenty years on the board during which he also served on separate occasions as deputy chairman and acting chairman.

Tony Thorpe (1974–1980) was another lawyer. His special interest was to represent the marine angling fraternity. This important focus of conservation was, in turn, represented by Don Currie (1980–1986), whose presence on the board was both gentle and gentlemanly, and finally Piet Jacobs (1983–1989). He was another lawyer with a particular interest in marine angling and, fortuitously, his advice on working with local indigenous communities proved invaluable.

In 1980, because of his prominence in political circles, senior staff were surprised to see Radcliffe Cadman appointed to the board. Rad (1980–1986) was another legal appointee with a successful practice, but also with extensive political and farming experience and a determined nature. Through serving as a board member Rad gained a sound understanding of the success of the NPB



Board Deputy Chairman Bob Levitt assisted by John Scotcher with board member Pat Goss and Warden Don Yunnies taking a break on four-day hike through Giant's Castle Game Reserve, 1988

and its, by then, considerable influence on the growing private sector wildlife industry. This would prove of great value when, in 1986, he was elevated to Administrator of Natal and left the board. Staff felt that we had a champion in the highest office of the province and our conviction was proved justified on more than one occasion (see, for example, his role in the Operation Lock saga and support for the Conservation Trust, Chapter 24).

Within a few years of the Petition saga the Provincial Council expanded the board by appointing the first representative of an NGO, Nolly Zaloumis (1976–1994). Nolly at the time was the president of the Natal branch of the Wildlife Society and he gave the board an invaluable eighteen years of service. The province thus modestly and selectively pursued its policy of appointing board members with an interest in fields associated with conservation.

During the debates on the Petition in the Natal Provincial Legislature it also became apparent that the NP opposition felt excluded from the work of the NPB, probably even more so when so much political criticism from UP



*The board with the first multiracial recreation and conservation committee, 1976
(EKZNW library)*

benches was levelled against them. Nevertheless, it was not long before the board received a member specifically recommended by the NP to represent the party's interests. Basil van Heerden (1974–1980) from Dundee became an immensely loyal and supportive board member whose presence did a great deal to improve relations between the two majority political parties in Natal, to the point where the NPB was eventually totally accepted and promoted by all. If that was a benefit hoped for by some, it was a great outcome of the Petition.

Greater proof of the growing bipartisan acceptance of the NPB's conservation achievements came following Basil's retirement in 1980 when he was replaced by another NP nomination, Jannie Moll (1980–1994) from Newcastle, who, rather surprisingly, was a UP senator, and a very proud and very widely respected Afrikaner. Jannie was supportive and enthusiastic and devoted immense time to the organisation. He was especially active in promoting staff benefits and conditions.

Improving the diversity of the board

At this stage of South Africa's development, it was unusual to have broad racial representation on state or provincial governing boards, so it was regarded as very progressive and very important, in 1979, to have Mangosuthu Buthelezi,



Chairman of the board Donald Sinclair (right) with (from left) John Page and Stan Craven of the Wildlife Society at the opening of a hide sponsored by the society, c.1980 (EKZNW library)

chief minister of the self-governing territory of KwaZulu, accept a request to nominate two members to represent the Zulu people on the NPB. Simon Gumede (1980–1986) of the Nibela community and Paul Luthuli (1980–1998), a businessman, were duly appointed and they made significant contributions during their tenure. By 1980, therefore, and it should be noted long before the apartheid government of South Africa would see such a move as normal or acceptable, the board was multiracial, its members appointed with care for their skills and knowledge.



Inkosi Simon Gumede of the Nibela
(EKZNW library)



Professor Paul Luthuli
(EKZNW library)

The appointment of Professor Luthuli and Inkosi Gumede in 1980 made a huge difference to the board. Not only did they take their role seriously, but they also brought a dimension to the board that had been missing in the context of apartheid South Africa: an overt understanding of black South African culture, both progressive and traditional, involving conservation and, indeed, day-to-day interactions.

One of my first tasks as Assistant Director Administration in 1980 was to present a six-monthly report on the division to the board. I was a bag of nerves because I was new to the job and, to be honest, terrified of the new position I had been given. Halfway through my presentation came the section of the report dealing with accidents over the previous six months. A lengthy schedule listed the NPB vehicles involved in accidents, accompanied by the name of

the driver of the vehicle at the time. Having read the schedule with care before presenting it, I had not internalised the fact that whenever a black staff member was involved it was simply noted that a 'Bantu driver' had been involved. All white officers were named with their rank and station. One can imagine my horror when Paul Luthuli interjected, as I read through the schedule, asking why this was the case, adding, 'Did not all the Bantu drivers have names?' With that simple question Paul Luthuli managed to change the attitude of the entire organisation to acknowledge the humanity and individual significance of the black staff. Thereafter every mention of a black staff member in a report recognised those involved by name.

As this was in 1980 the long-term benefits for the NPB and its reputation for good human relations was incalculable. The learning curve started by Paul and Simon was continued by Sam Goba (1989–1998), M. Lucas Mchunu (1995–1998) and Inkosi B.N. Mdletshe (1995–1998) and was still improving when the board was stood down in 1998.

A surprising appointment, recommended by the chief minister of KwaZulu, came after the retirement of Simon Gumedé in 1983. The province had anticipated another black South African but instead Buthelezi recommended Ed Gregory (1983–1989). Ed had served KwaZulu as the secretary of the self-governing territory, was a close friend and confidant of the chief minister and had a deep interest in nature conservation having worked closely with the KBNR created by the chief minister and managed at that time by Nick Steele.

I was personally a little concerned about the appointment as, in 1983, I had met Ed Gregory in the Director's office to try to resolve a dispute that had arisen between the KBNR and the NPB field staff. At the time there was a possibility that the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserves would be handed over to KwaZulu and, in a spirit of co-operation, it had been agreed that staff of the KBNR could attend NPB management meetings in the two reserves. Alas, the behaviour of their staff had become distracting and, following an appeal by NPB staff, I ruled that the bureau's presence would no longer be possible. Ed Gregory had been sent to try to change my mind and I was most willing to explain why I had instituted the change. To Ed's clear distress, John Geddes Page supported my position, so Ed and I had not parted on good terms, and he left giving the impression that he did not appear to think very highly of the NPB; nor, I might add, of my decision. As it turned out, our concerns about Ed as a board member were groundless, as within months of service he became one of the most positive members and used every opportunity he was offered

to visit field stations, consult staff and investigate matters of which his lengthy and successful administrative career made him an ideal executant.

The creation of the tricameral parliament in South Africa in 1983 furthermore ensured that citizens of Indian descent were included on the board with the appointment of P. Brijlal (1991–1995) followed by Malcolm A.H. Baig (1995–1998).

Around the same time the NPB's practice of supporting sustainable use was widely accepted in Natal, but there were signs that non-use of wildlife was gaining ground in the first world. We felt that every opportunity must be taken to familiarise board members and politicians who did not come from a conservation background with some fundamental principles of wildlife management; in particular, the concept of maintaining wildlife populations through sustainable use as opposed to seeing them purely as a resource to be exploited for recreation. To the NPB the necessity of removing animals whose growth in numbers threatened the habitat through overuse in the protected areas was simple to understand. Good conservation produced surplus animals, and these could be captured and relocated to areas wishing to have founder populations.

With such an idea in mind NPB staff organised a tour of Zululand for MECs. The route planned took us along the beach between Cape Vidal and Sodwana Bay and the convoy of vehicles came across a leatherback turtle nesting track on the beach, giving us the opportunity to stop and use the turtle track to familiarise the new members with the sea turtle programme that had been running for thirty years. This fell to my lot and I enthused about this conservation success. However, I noticed that one of the members appeared more interested in the fishing and as soon as possible I handed the baton over to one of my colleagues working on the coast, Mike Bouwer (1981–1998), who, gesticulating at the sea, explained that the area was a restricted wilderness zone, enabled four years previously by the NPB, where no fishing was allowed. The intention was to benefit the resident angling population.

Mike explained that the restriction had proved successful as annual sampling by NPB staff in partnership with the ORI in Durban, had shown without doubt that the numbers of fish had nearly doubled in a few years and the size of most species had increased in comparison with the open angling areas north and south of the closed zone. He was almost too enthusiastic.

One of the new MECs then burst out with a stunning statement and, obviously eager to show that the briefing that he had been given about the NPB had not been in vain, cried out to the gathering that he was aware that the board

was experiencing financial cuts from the province, and he had a solution. If there were so many fish in this part of the coast the NPB should immediately plan for an intense harvest of the fish and he, the MEC, would arrange for his business colleagues with interests in fresh marine fish to buy the entire catch. He looked so pleased about this obvious solution that not one member of the entire Provincial Council had the courage to point out the infamy of what he was suggesting. And most certainly not one of the staff was going to venture a comment in that august gathering.

On another occasion a familiarisation tour was arranged for a newly appointed MEC. The starting point was the Chelmsford Resort near Newcastle which had a successful combination of resort activities, such as freshwater angling and boating and, in the nature reserve section, an impressive collection of large and small mammals such as white rhinoceros, red hartebeest and oribi which could be approached quite closely. Having halted our tour vehicle in proximity to a fine white rhino, we staff were a little surprised to have the MEC suddenly turn to us and say: 'Right, you have shown me the animals, can you now show me the environment?'

May I hasten to add that this gentleman may have lacked environmental knowledge, but he did not lack courage. A few years later I asked him to chair a public meeting at Chatsworth, Durban where the board intended to float the idea of a marine angling licence.² He accepted without hesitation and addressed the issue as if it had been his personal idea and with convincing commitment. Alas, the suggestion went down like a lead balloon and there was a hostile crowd of placard waving anglers there to make the meeting interesting. We were both abused with some enthusiasm and the NPB was accused directly of being a racist organisation. This did not please either of us (the MEC was of Indian descent) and we challenged a vociferous angler who rather shocked me by saying that we clearly were and had demonstrated that on this very occasion. When I asked how this had been done, he pointed out, quite correctly, that all the NPB representatives in the meeting were white coastal officers and that outside, sitting on the backs of NPB vehicles, were all the black staff and game guards.

Thanking the angler for pointing this out, I immediately ordered the calling in of all staff. Thereafter it became normal practice to have all relevant staff represented at such gatherings. The chairman earned my appreciation for his behaviour and support and clearly gained confidence from there. The meeting ended in good spirits with a degree of acceptance of the NPB's role by the anglers. The proposal for the fishing licence received no such acceptance.

Broadening the interests represented on the board

By the late 1980s it became clear that, in addition to issues raised in the Petition of 1971, the requirements for a successful organisation had to include an understanding and appreciation of business skills and an enhancement and improvement of the success of the NPB's tourism assets. Board members with specialised tourism skills were thus appointed and with the addition of these proven business skills, the board became more effective as the years passed, providing an outstanding service to both nature conservation and the economic success of the province it served.

Ron McDonald (1984–1994), a well-known businessman from Pietermaritzburg, had a positive influence on the board and served nature conservation well. He became one of the board's most loyal and supportive members who never missed an opportunity to help the board or staff. No more convivial a colleague could have been found and he was highly valued and enjoyed being in the field, where we learnt that he could be depended upon to defend staff actions with real commitment. We also discovered Ron had a weakness for port wine.

Without doubt the most successful business appointment to the board came at a critical time in 1986 that corresponded, happily, with the time running up to my appointment as CEO. The NPB had already commenced a programme of new developments for tourism and an astute business brain was needed to ensure that the financial benefits were real and successful. The Administrator's choice fell on Pat Goss (1986–1998). It was inspired. Pat had a charming personality and was the owner of successful commercial businesses started initially by his parents in the Transkei many years before. Pat spoke fluent Xhosa, an attribute which would prove of great value during his tenure, and from what we had heard of him, his reputation was understated when it came to his wholehearted endorsement of conservation values and his appreciation of the achievements and value of conservation to the province and the country. Pat's business acumen led the board into its golden age, and he served out his association with it as chairman for two terms of three years ending only with the dissolution of the NPB in 1998.

The provincial Executive Committee now had the bit between its teeth regarding the necessity of good corporate governance and the desirability of additional business skills and continued to appoint board members with these goals in mind. Other invaluable members with business acumen were Rudi Heine (1991–1998) and W.A.E. Hirst (1991–1998).

The role of the Administrators of Natal

An outcome that paralleled the positive changes to the board's membership, and meant much to me, emerged in 1990 when the last Administrator of Natal, Con Botha, insisted that he would hold the portfolio of the NPB himself. This was a final demonstration that acceptance of the value of the NPB to the province had at last risen above partisan political party lines, as Botha, during the era of the Petition had been, as a young member of the NP, one of the most aggressive and loudest critics of the NPB. Until my tenure as CEO the process of selection of board members by the Administrator and Natal Provincial Council had been a mystery to me. I had always assumed that such decisions were made mainly through the old boy network and the occasional recommendation made by my predecessors, approved by the Administrator and the members of the Executive Committee of the province. Botha changed that by inviting me down to his office and proposing an in-depth discussion on what I thought the board composition might be as well as what changes that I foresaw may be necessary to help address the future challenges facing the organisation. He had consulted with his colleagues on the Provincial Council and had a schedule of names which we went through in depth. During the ensuing discussions I was encouraged to make suggestions for changes to the board. I listed those members with exceptional lengths of service and pointed out what I considered to be shortcomings in representation. The Administrator also made it clear that there were to be some changes for political reasons.

Having established a final collection of names, he then dispatched me to visit each and every one of the proposed new candidates. He stressed to me that I should make it clear that this was not an invitation but an enquiry to establish whether any of those on the list displayed any negativity towards conservation, the NPB or flatly demonstrated their lack of interest in being nominated. Botha felt that those with a positive interest would have many questions which he hoped I would be able to answer and that these discussions might prove insightful as to the success of their potential tenure on the board. His plan was thereafter to lay a list of options before the Executive Committee, which would then make a final decision.

This was a most interesting, if time consuming, experience and for the most part was carried out without a problem. Many of the candidates interviewed simply would not consider appointment as there was no remuneration involved. One candidate expressed delight at being invited and then, despite having been carefully informed that the matter was highly confidential, promptly, within

days, announced during press interviews that she had been invited to serve on the board. The Administrator struck her off the list.

The 1992 board was the last that Botha would appoint. In many ways there were interesting circumstances and developments as it was a period of change in South Africa and the past policies of the province had prepared the NPB to participate positively and willingly in what would be expected of any public structure. My personal conclusion after working with Con Botha was that he was supportive and loyal to conservation. He never once abused his position to favour anyone or attempted to deflect justice out of loyalty to the NP.

A good example of this was when a prominent member of the NP was arrested for trafficking in cycads. Con phoned me and asked me to look into the matter as he had clearly been approached to get his colleague off the hook. He asked for my opinion and whether I considered the case justified. After due inspection, and discussion with the staff who had effected the arrest and laid the charges, I was satisfied that the case was more than justified and reported my opinion to Con who said simply, 'Many thanks, please pass my appreciation to your staff for their diligence.'

This, to me, contrasted stunningly with the behaviour of an earlier Administrator who engaged in a shouting match over the telephone with my good friend and colleague Orty Bourquin whose staff had charged a political friend of his. He demanded that the charges be withdrawn and threatened Orty with dismissal if his orders were not obeyed. Orty, I am proud to say, did not budge but courteously replied that if the Administrator wished to convey his request in writing to him, via the board, he would defend his staff's actions at a board meeting. He never heard from that Administrator again.

The other rather unexpected influence of Con Botha was his removal of members who had given exceptionally long service to the board. This led to the departure of Bob Levitt who, after twenty years, fortuitously had decided himself not to stand for re-election. Conscious of the value of having had such a competent legal mind on the board for so many years Botha chose a successor wisely, replacing Bob with Graham Cox (1991–1997) from Cox and Yeats, Durban. Graham was a man of great integrity and felt so strongly about the value of the contribution of NPB members over the past fifty years that, when he was shown the draft ordinance that would establish a new board after amalgamation with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation to form the KZN Nature Conservation Service, he pointed out that the proposed new board would lose its executive powers and resigned in protest.

Botha's decision also resulted in the departure of Nolly Zaloumis representing the Wildlife Society who, similar to Bob Levitt, had rendered eighteen years of service to the NPB. Nolly's departure was unexpected because he was a totally committed conservationist in his own right (he was a passionate and almost frantic photographer and lover of wildfowl and the sight of a dwarf goose could deflect his attention from any crisis). He had also been appointed, originally, because he was the Natal president of the Wildlife Society, and over the years he had relinquished that role and been replaced by others. I understood that this slight anomaly had been brought to the notice of Botha and he felt it only fair to resort to the original spirit of the 1970s which had seen the establishment of the position as created for a current and active representative of the Natal branch of the Wildlife Society.



Nolly Zaloumis leaning on Senior Ranger Garnet Jackson on a board tour to Ndumu Game Reserve, 1980

He felt, in discussion with me, that Nolly had made an enormous contribution to conservation as a board member and should be able to pursue his own interests freed of the demands on his time associated with board service. Indeed, I fully agreed with the Administrator because Nolly earned his living as dentist and, I hasten to add, had lost a great deal of income because he was aware that young scientists and game rangers, in the days of no private medical aid organisations and pitiful salaries, feared the necessity of a visit to a dentist because of the hole that the cost would tear in the fragile fabric of the household income.

Here I speak from very personal experience as when I was studying at the ORI in Durban, Nolly, over a period of many years, treated me often, along with many of my postgraduate student colleagues. I know for a fact that he generously did the same for NPB staff, treating probably dozens of young game rangers, both within dentists' clinic hours and, very often, well outside normal hours. For a thorough and effective service of our teeth we would receive an account the size of which bore little resemblance to the service rendered.

The first female board member

Following Nolly's departure, the Wildlife Society proposed Jean Senogles (1991–1998) as his replacement. She was the first female appointee to the board and proved to be a pleasure to work with, often serving an invaluable role as a negotiator when board policies appeared to conflict with her own society's principles. As I write Jean remains an enormous supporter of conservation and a person for whom staff have grateful admiration.

Conclusion

The most astonishing outcome of the Petition was a dramatic change in the reputation of the NPB. As the years passed, so the use of the derogatory description of the NPB by the Afrikaans-speaking community as 'die Natalse Varkeraad' (the Natal Pig-Board) began to disappear from the provincial lexicon. The sobriquet originated in the widespread belief in farming areas that the rules on game exploitation imposed by the NPB were a severe restriction on the rights of farmers to shoot whatever they liked on their property. This apparently unwelcome development in the province, when coupled with the fact that the NPB was dominated by English-speaking Natalians and played into the politics of the day, resulted in this rather offensive and vulgar name.

However, I should add at this point that the name's final departure took longer than I had expected. In 1995 I was giving an evening address on the work of the NPB, its policies and direction, to a mixed gathering in Greytown that included many local farmers. In the historical section I made reference, as I often did in my talks, to the reputation of the NPB in the 1950s and the fact that the organisation had been commonly referred to as 'die Natalse Varkeraad'. To my surprise, rather than the ripple of expected giggles, as commonly happened at such meetings, the comment evoked not a single laugh and suddenly a voice boomed out from the dark rear of the hall saying 'Ja, en dit bly nog steeds so' (Yes, and that hasn't changed). Now this brought a gale of laughter from the audience which, I hope, was appreciation of the wit of the interlocutor rather than agreement with him.

What was amazing to me was the fact that, as the NPB's reputation improved, a period of service as a member of its board became one of the most prestigious achievements to have on one's CV. An additional surprise to me, as I rose in the ranks and started to participate directly in board functions, was that the commitment of time expected from a member of the board was very considerable. It met regularly once a month eleven times a year and



NPB board, 1976: front row R.G. Poynton, C. Dering Stainbank MEC, D.C. Sinclair (chairman), Justice D.G. Fannin (deputy chairman), R.E. Levitt; back row J. Campbell, A.R. Thorpe, N.J. Hancock, B. van Heerden, Nolly Zaloumis



NPB board, 1998 (Graham McIntosh). Standing: Mr S. Goba, Mr G. McIntosh, Mr W.A.E. Hirst, Mr M.L. Mchunu, Dr G.R. Hughes (Chief Executive); seated: Mrs J.M. Senogles, Prof. P.C. Luthuli, Mr P.M. Goss (Chairman), Mr R. Heine, Justice J.J. Broome; inserts: Nkosi B.N. Mdletshe, Mr M.A.H. Baig.

involved additional time-consuming duties such as serving as chairperson and membership of board committees. In addition, members of the board were also asked on occasion to serve on the liaison committees established to broaden the input of interested and affected parties and quite often to participate in specific public gatherings depending on their particular profile. In addition, time was expected of members needing to go on field trips, both for individual research and developing an understanding of problems and to accompany special tours arranged for the politically influential, media representatives, overseas visitors, national Cabinet members and heads of national departments.

The naïve NGO/NPB Policy Liaison Committee

Of course, there were meetings with the public that would have required the skills and tolerance of the Angel Gabriel. Towards the end of the NPB's existence we, the board and staff, reached the conclusion that, in the interests of transparency, there should be a review of policy meeting with all NGOs. It was our belief that, despite some inevitable criticisms and disagreements with most environmental NGOs, 95% of the time we found common ground. The meeting would not be restricted to any specific NGOs but would welcome any that expressed interest following the notice sent out to as many NGOs as we had on our records. A number of board members came out of interest.

This turned out to involve a much broader range of interests than we expected and, as chairman of the day, I remember the occasion with some horror as whichever policy was discussed, responses were produced that spread over such a wide spectrum of attitudes that any form of consensus would have needed a miracle.

For example, when the NPB's policy on hunting arose, delegates from the hunting organisations, robust and large, gave forth in booming voices that we were not liberal enough and should allow their willing and enthusiastic members to go into the protected areas to help us hunt whichever animals required culling. Butter would not have melted in their mouths when it came to their descriptions of how disciplined and well-behaved their members would be. This suggestion was immediately rudely and viciously criticised by the representative of an animal rights NGO, who not limiting himself to the issue in question, proceeded to describe the hunters as murderers and sadists. Then he turned on the NPB, criticising it for even contemplating the killing of animals for any reason. He became quite evangelical and into his diatribe blended harmonically a softer and more gently modulated protest against hunting

for anything by two ladies from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). They were a matched pair who most closely resembled the well-known hypochondriac Aunt Vera from the cartoons of the famous Giles (Tory, 1993). I thought that they were immensely courageous because, deeply outraged, the hunting representatives stood up and abused the convictions of the anti-hunting lobby. Chaos reigned, especially promoted by some speakers without clear alliances with NGOs, but who probably represented the ethical and moral anarchists of the conservation world. Some were simply rude and uncouth. Thankfully we never attempted another such meeting and staff could never have persuaded the board members to attend another like it.

Such duties so willingly supported by members of the board could be extremely demanding, requiring days and, on occasion, weeks serving the many interests of conservation. It should never be forgotten that, apart from travelling expenses seldom claimed by most board members, the appointment as a member of the NPB carried no financial remuneration whatsoever. The people of this province, first Natal and later KwaZulu-Natal, should never overlook the fact that for over fifty years it drew on the skills and resources of volunteer men and women who generously gave their time and commitment for the love of nature conservation and its natural heritage.

NOTES

- 1 For the most part I restrict my observations, regarding both appointed members and the board's decisions, to the period following my return to its employ in 1974.
- 2 Chatsworth was a large community established by the apartheid government as an area restricted to people of Indian origin. It was densely inhabited by enthusiastic seashore anglers.

BOARD SUB-COMMITTEES

1. Conservation Committee
2. Visitor Facilities Committee
3. Finance Committee
4. Audit Committee
5. Legal Committee
6. Staff Committee
7. Communications Committee
8. Plans Committee
9. Hunters' Liaison Committee
10. Trout Fishing Liaison Committee
11. General Freshwater Liaison Committee
12. Conservancies Liaison Committee
13. Coastal Fishing Liaison Committee
14. Zululand Liaison Committee
15. Veterinary Liaison Committee
16. Hiking and Mountaineering Liaison Committee
17. Natal Yachting Liaison Committee
18. Military Liaison Committee
19. Tourism Liaison Committee
20. GSNP Liaison Committee
21. Pension Fund Trustees Committee

4

THE AFTERMATH OF THE PETITION

IAN Player resigned from the NPB in 1974 to pursue his interest in his Wilderness Leadership School and subsequently to promote the concept of wilderness on an international scale (Linscott, 2013). He had reached a senior position, the third most senior level in the NPB's service at that time, as Assistant Director Interpretation, Public Relations and Special Projects. Therefore, I believe it would be naïve to think that the failure of the Petition had nothing to do with his decision to leave. The Petition directly involving his close colleagues had caused severe and unjust reputational damage to the organisation and thus earned the serious enmity of both senior members of the staff and the UP.

Similarly, it is likely that he felt that he no longer had a future at the NPB and the organisation to which he had given much. I believe that this affected him a great deal. Ian had justifiably become a famous figure and history has demonstrated that he had a high opinion of his abilities (Linscott, 2013). His resignation must have been a cause for some disappointment, but I think that the frustration associated with the failure of the Petition had a much deeper effect on him.

Whatever the reasons behind his resignation, he then developed a lifelong Machiavellian role criticising and undermining the spirit, policies, and actions of the NPB. Having become used to using the press as an outlet, he started publicly criticising the NPB within a week of his resignation and this was to continue almost until he died. It surprised many staff of the organisation that, even after all the attacks aimed at it through the Petition, the NPB continued to give the Wilderness Leadership School unique, and privileged, access to Umfolozi Game Reserve to carry out its trails at peppercorn fees and, right until the time of writing this book, still hosts the headquarters of the Wilderness Leadership School at Kenneth Stainbank Nature Reserve in Yellowwood Park, Durban, at a minimal rental. It cannot be said that the NPB was mean-spirited towards the concept of wilderness and by extension the Wilderness School

in its reaction to the Petition and the attacks by wilderness-orientated staff it contained.

By the mid-1980s Ian's skilful lobbying, and use of the cocktail, business and political circuits, in which he was deeply involved because he had to raise, through donations, almost every cent required to keep the Wilderness Leadership School going, helped him to persuade the New Republic Party (NRP) to lobby the Provincial Council to appoint him to the board of the NPB.¹

This suggestion was not received with acclaim by the Director and other senior staff and the top six executives signed a letter to the Administrator of Natal objecting to the proposed appointment. Whether the missive was ever received by the Administrator and his political colleagues remains unknown to me as I never saw a response, nor even an acknowledgement. What I was aware of was the discomfort shown by Dering Stainbank whenever the subject was raised and it was clear that he was under enormous pressure from his colleagues, many of whom had been persuaded into a belief that Ian was too valuable a conservationist to be kept from serving on the board. The objection of the senior staff was a matter of principle. The appointment to the board of an ex-member of staff, who had left under a cloud, would place him in a position of power over senior staff with some of whom he had clashed. This was a very poorly considered way forward.

When Ian was in due course appointed in 1986, I raised the matter with him so he clearly understood that I did not agree with his appointment but assured him that my recognition of him as a board member would be no different to any other member. He served on the board for eight years and failed to gain reappointment in 1994 after he had publicly criticised the national Minister of Environment Affairs, Gert Kotze, for not having immediately condemned the proposed mining of the eastern shores of St Lucia.

There are a few other points that I wish to make. Ian regarded the Umfolozi Game Reserve as the spiritual centre of the concept of wilderness and it became almost an obsession with him and his colleagues of the era. The wilderness concept is purportedly noble in that it attempts to hold, in a form of stasis, a completely unspoiled and untransformed protected area within which no impact of humankind is obvious. It is an ambitious goal and perhaps even possible if one is dealing with, as has been shown in the United States, extensive protected areas many of which obviously reflect an insignificant presence of human activity. Alas, however, the concept is flawed because to allow them in fact to appreciate the wilderness, people are themselves permitted entry where locally they are normally guided in areas with dangerous game or, at their own

risk in less dangerous protected areas, to wander freely through the landscape. Furthermore, to whatever degree the visitor is permitted access, responsible biodiversity management and protection of the area are still required by the management authority. For planning and zoning purposes it would have been simpler to regard the Umfolozi Wilderness Area as a low tourist use zone, but the use of the term wilderness has proved far more romantic.

Ian deserves considerable praise and recognition, along with Jim Feely (1955–1960), for launching in 1958 the concept of wilderness trails in Umfolozi Game Reserve. Nearly one third of this protected area was zoned as a wilderness area (that is, a low tourist use zone) where the NPB agreed that there should be no permanent buildings or roads. Temporary sites were established where the visitors, guided and protected by skilled NPB staff, could walk through an untransformed landscape bringing the visitors into close contact with the wildlife of the reserve. In my view, wilderness trailing in protected areas in all its forms is an enjoyable experience in which participation is well worth the effort.² Most NPB staff took whatever opportunities became available to enjoy a trail. The shared experiences often proved to be effective bonding exercises for NPB staff and board members. Mutual memories of the trails have long and enjoyable benefits.

Wilderness trails became legendary, and some were famously popular with groups made up of female trailers only. Female NPB staff and wives formed regular trail groups, the memories of which have endured for decades. Such trails also proved to be great bonding exercises but led inevitably to many suggestive remarks involving the stamina and survival of younger male trails officers. Even without such exotic temptations, few participants will deny



Board and staff wilderness trail led by Warden Herman Bentley, Umfolozi, 1986

that any wilderness trail is and remains, a truly memorable experience.

From a management point of view, it mattered little that Ian and the Wilderness Leadership School staff created an aura of spiritual upliftment and other psychological benefits from the experience. The fact is that the creation of pure and restricted wilderness areas, wherever they were established, proved an expensive indulgence as trailer numbers were never large and trails were never considered the

source of a profitable return from the extensive section of land set aside to host them. In fact, the guided day trails, later introduced in many of the NPB's protected areas, served almost the same purpose but, of course, lacked the nocturnal 'noises around the fire' and extended opportunities for story-telling experiences of the guides.

The setting aside of such large areas for a fairly exclusive experience caused much debate among staff, as apart from some possible biodiversity gain, such as a reduction in human interaction with the environment, there did not appear to be many other benefits. In the relatively small, protected areas that existed in Natal and Zululand the prevention of more extensive access by a larger number of visitors became a matter of some discussion.

This led to a visit by one of the United States' most famous wilderness gurus, Roderick F. Nash, during which we were fortunate to have the opportunity of interacting with him in a most interesting seminar. NPB staff tried to explain to him the necessity of ensuring an adequate supply of tourism income and job creation for the benefit of local communities. The local situation could not be compared to the vast protected areas set aside in the American West and, to his credit, the questions asked caused him visible discomfort and he, memorably, appeared unable to respond with a solution to the problems faced by the NPB. Nash ended his justification rather lamely by saying: 'Wilderness is a very personal thing to many of us and it should be noted that we are not asking much, probably less than 5% of the protected areas available.'



*Orty Bourquin on 1986 wilderness trail
examining rock used for sharpening spears
by Zulus long before Umfolozi was declared a
protected area*

Nash's response did not satisfy many of us present and implied a form of conservation experience elitism with which it was not easy to identify. This being said, it would be impossible for me to criticise his appreciation of wilderness experience as being any different from the feelings that I and my trout angling colleagues experience when fishing alone or with a close friend on a sparkling trout stream in the Natal Drakensberg or on the magnificent Yellowstone River in Montana. I can also identify with the freeing of the imagination stimulated by beautiful or exciting exposure to areas not overrun by humanity's impacts.

On two occasions while angling in Drakensberg rivers I have found, in shallow pebble beds, ancient and water-worn hand axes from the Stone Age. I am sure that experiencing the wonder of holding artefacts created thousands of years ago by ancestors of a slightly different species, and trying to imagine the life they led, must equal in so many ways the wonder of listening to the roar of a nearby lion in the Umfolozi wilderness area.

The friction engendered by varying attitudes to the wilderness concept was not because of any disagreement about wilderness per se. Clive Walker, who also adopted wilderness as a positive philosophy, achieved great success and a lifelong relationship with NPB staff, by establishing, with the financial support of Dale Parker and his family, the private Lapalala Wilderness of 36 000 hectares in the Waterberg area, in what is now the province of Limpopo. It was an amazing and admirable achievement which allowed Clive, through the purchase of game from the NPB (and other conservation agencies) to inject millions of rands into the coffers of the NPB and conservation in general, making it a more viable economic activity. In due course, Clive established, within his wilderness area, a large and successful school for exposing disadvantaged young people from Soweto to the wonders of nature. At the same time, Clive built a popular and a profitable series of lodges attracting tourists from both South Africa and abroad (Walker, 2016). In many respects Clive's use of wilderness enabled the same visitor access as most conservation bodies, including a large community of private game reserves and ranches profitably run by South Africa's private sector. I should like to have seen more positive physical results (akin to that of Clive Walker's Lapalala Wilderness) from the more restricted wilderness concept promoted by Ian Player. Thanks to Clive, it can be seen that the concept of wilderness encompasses a broad church. In Europe, for example, land praised as wilderness would never be recognised as the same wilderness as defined in South Africa. Wilderness is truly in the mind of the beholder.

Ian's endorsement of the concept did, however, lead to the national Department of Forestry declaring four formal wilderness areas in the Natal Drakensberg in 1989. Bill Bainbridge (1988–1993), a great enthusiast of wilderness, was at that time active in the conservation planning wing of the national Department of Forestry which controlled large sections of the Drakensberg foothills in Natal. These declarations reflected Bill's passion for trying to ensure maximum conservation protection for the mountains he valued so

much. The wilderness concept as applied in the Drakensberg may have helped prevent undesirable developments in those areas, but happily today they are all now included in the Maloti-Drakensberg World Heritage Site (WHS). These wilderness areas currently receive day-to-day management identical to that of the non-wilderness portions of the WHS. Bill's endeavours nevertheless helped ensure the park's registration as a WHS and he remains much admired for that.

Since 1974 many books have been written, by NPB staff, about the period of discontent that led to the Petition, both by some who were closely allied with Ian Player, and others who resigned at more or less the same time. It is both interesting and valuable that they have done so, but only a few have stuck to their guns and believe that, apparently lacking the true wilderness convictions, nature conservation and the work of the NPB failed following the departure of Ian and his cohort. One of these is Gordon Bailey, a devoted supporter of the wilderness concept and close colleague of Ian from the 1960s. He resigned from the NPB in 1976. In the very final sentence in his book he writes: 'The saddest experience, for me and many others, was watching all the years of wonderfully successful effort slowly unravel' (Bailey, 2017).



Gert Kotze, Minister of Environmental Affairs and Forestry (left), Dering Stainbank, Chairman of the NPB board (right) and George Hughes, Highmoor Forest Reserve on the proclamation of new forestry wilderness areas, 19 May 1989 (Giant's Castle in the background)

In retrospect, I think we might have avoided a great deal of pain had the NPB recognised Ian's achievements in promoting the cause of wilderness. Had the NPB, and this includes me and my senior colleagues, seen fit to give him a public award (had the NPB awarded such things in those early days) the course of the relationship may have been changed for the better. Ian's wilderness passions did not preclude him from enjoying the limelight, from which the NPB might have benefited. Although some of us may have regarded the wilderness extremes with some cynicism there is little doubt that there is a global movement that has endorsed the concept with enthusiasm. Ian's wilderness trails certainly brought credit to the NPB and that should have been formally recognised.

Not many of the cohort of staff that left in the mid-1970s ever worked again in formal conservation structures as game rangers or field staff and the fact that the NPB thereafter achieved global recognition as one of the most innovative, dynamic and successful nature conservation bodies in the world was largely unacknowledged by them.



Drummond Densham, a passionate supporter of the wilderness concept
(EKZNW library)

There is always an exception to the rule and in Drummond Densham (1968–1998) the NPB found a dedicated staff member who throughout his long and invaluable career, ending as Deputy Director East Natal, never failed in his belief in the positive concept of wilderness. Drummond is recognised as an expert in the philosophy and has lectured widely on the subject while retaining total support and commitment to the policies and practices of the NPB.

Nature conservation is a field involving science, emotion, sound corporate governance and vision. Conservation can never be successful if one of those fields of endeavour becomes converted into an extreme form of itself and is recognised as the dominant tool, or worse still, the only tool to guide management. Some wilderness concept purists made a choice to adopt this approach, which is their right. However, to dedicate oneself to undermining

the organisation with which you are affiliated in pursuance of this concept is a matter of indiscipline. Personally, I find myself in broad agreement with the pragmatic Japanese attitude towards disloyalty, as depicted in the novel *Shōgun* (Clavell, 1975), and espoused by a character known as Toranaga, towards the consequences of, in his view, misguided and unjustifiable mutinous actions. Toranaga believed: 'There is only one justification for rebellion... if you win!'

NOTES

- 1 Ian Player, pers. comm.
- 2 Trails are now available as primitive trails where the visitor backpacks all his or her food and water throughout the trail; or standard trails for which all the necessities for survival are transported separately by donkeys to overnight sites thus allowing trailers to walk unencumbered by too much baggage.

SECTION 2
EVOLUTION OF AND INFLUENCES ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATAL PARKS
BOARD MODEL

5

SELFLESS SERVICE BY MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

IT is neither possible nor desirable to try to record every action of every board member through the period 1960 to 1998, the span of time that I had personal knowledge of the board's activities, and there were many occasions when board members went far beyond the call of duty. It is also fair to say there were some occasions when, in my opinion, the collective board could have acted with more determination, but this rare criticism was often a result of my passionate desire for a different outcome to deliberations, so as to protect something of immense biodiversity importance to me and other staff. Then, of course, there were occasions when things went slightly awry for specific board members, which resulted in surprising changes of direction.

Unexpected departures

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a good example of an unexpected change to the board was the sudden departure of Ian Player. Ian had become involved in the protests against the proposed heavy sand mining of the Eastern Shores Forest Reserve. He was an activist par excellence and adopted an aggressive and spirited defence of the sanctity of the Eastern Shores, becoming extremely outspoken against the government's plans to allow Richards Bay Minerals (RBM) to expand its mining operations north of the St Lucia estuary mouth.

In 1987, for the official opening of the Polela Biosphere Reserve near Himeville, following a request from its founders for a board member to launch the endeavour, Ian was formally asked by the chairman to be guest speaker. This task he accepted with alacrity, but on the day, to the horror of the staff present, instead of addressing the merits of what the local community had done in establishing the biosphere reserve for conservation purposes and expanding on the board's enthusiasm and support for this remarkable action, Ian launched a vitriolic attack on the national Minister of Environment Affairs Gert Kotze and the national Minister of Mines George Bartlett, for their intention to grant a mining licence to RBM to extend its operations north to the Eastern Shores

of Lake St Lucia.

The media present at that function, no doubt excited and stimulated by Ian's fiery criticism, reported on his speech and the criticism was taken very badly by the national Cabinet. The chairman of the board, Dering Stainbank, deputy chairman, Bob Levitt and I were called to Cape Town to meet two Cabinet ministers and explain why the board was attacking the government so viciously. Dering explained that there was no vendetta by the board and that Ian had spoken out of turn, given his role for the day. The discussion ended with a formal apology to the aggrieved ministers and Dering undertook to write an apology to the minister of environment affairs. Such a humiliation was unusual indeed for the board and fully explained why Ian was not reappointed in 1992.

Bob Levitt and the rhino horn saga

In the late 1970s the NPB came under widespread media attack for matters concerning rhinoceros horn and the board's rather relaxed approach to the possession and care of what was becoming to be understood as an immensely valuable and emotive material. In 1976 CITES had just placed all species of



Dering Stainbank MEC, Chairman of the board 1986–1992, holding the prospectus of the Joint Venture Scheme

rhinoceros on appendix I of the convention and thus supposedly banned all trade in rhinoceros.

It could be said that until this time to the NPB staff rhinoceros horn did not have any great value other than as decorative souvenirs in the home or in the camps in Zululand. It would not be an exaggeration to say that virtually every officer in the Zululand reserves had at least one door propped open by a fine specimen of horn. There were, it is true, no rigid protocols in place to ensure that every horn was securely stored, although horns had been sent to head office and kept until the NPB had the opportunity to sell them legally. The CITES ruling, which placed all rhinos on appendix I, and effectively banned all trade in the product, changed all that.

Someone tipped off the press that, given the global ban on trade, the control of horn by the NPB left much to be desired and reports were made, but never proved conclusively, that staff had been selling horn to eager buyers.¹ A young journalist, Kevin Davies, from the *Daily News/Sunday Tribune* was given the task of exposing the NPB's inefficiencies and a series of articles appeared in the media, which resulted in some discomfiture. A full report was called for and prepared by the Assistant Director of Conservation, Don Stewart. Don was immediately given the task, as a matter of urgency, of establishing a foolproof system to ensure rigid control over the registration and movement of rhinoceros horn within the organisation. Don was very efficient as in a remarkably short time he had cleaned up the board's act.

The journalist had gone, however, far beyond his remit and published just too much rumour and hearsay without justification, leading to the NPB taking the newspaper to the Press Council, charging it with exaggeration and the printing of untruths. The board had been deeply concerned about

Don Stewart, an incredibly diligent officer with unimpeachable integrity as Assistant Director Conservation, 1982 (EKZNW library)



the negative publicity and the chairman asked Bob Levitt, known as a member of the board to have a 'take no prisoners' negotiation technique in debate, to assume responsibility for mounting the board's defence. This was a serious request because Bob was a committed and diligent board member and could always be expected to have read his board papers thoroughly. In fact, all staff knew that if there were flaws to be found in any submission to the board, Bob was one of the members most likely to uncover them. He was held in enormous respect and once I heard him referred to by another member as the 'board's stormtrooper'.

Bob did an outstanding job of marshalling all the facts, interviewing staff named by the press and personally investigating on site some of the published insinuations and allegations. The case he put together was outstanding and, on submission to the Press Council, it was accepted as a genuine grievance and a date was set for a hearing before Justice Oscar Galgut and two assessors.

A small staff delegation duly arrived in Johannesburg for the hearing led by Bob and the chairman. Bob took over two large tables immediately in front of the bench and spread his enormous set of schedules and notes across two of them. We were astonished at his preparation as the papers were all colour coded, highlighted and enumerated boldly so that he could deal with any eventuality instantly. The staff were awestruck and even the defending editor and his journalist, Kevin Davies, looked impressed.

Galgut, we had been informed, was a judge of little patience, being extremely strict, and generally acted in a peremptory and blunt manner. This became even clearer after he had welcomed everyone to the hearing and then laid down the rules. First, he informed the gathering that everything that had been submitted to the Press Council, and placed before him and his assessors,



Bob Levitt taking a perilous interest in game capture operations, Umfolozi Game Reserve, 1986
(EKZNW Library)

had been thoroughly read and understood. He repeated that statement quite unequivocally and then asked Bob whether he had any additional matters to place in evidence before the court.

Bob stood up and, taking a deep breath, started a résumé of the complaint. Galgut stopped him at once in mid-sentence and, with some deliberation, repeated that the court was concerned only with new matters not contained in the original papers. Bob Levitt was not used to being interrupted and looked as if he had been struck in the face. He gave the judge a meaningful look, took a deep breath, glanced across his array of papers, and started again on a different subject.

Once again, after a few words, Galgut promptly stopped Bob in mid-sentence and repeated his ruling, this time adding that Bob was not doing his case any good by not following procedure. Bob had now gone a gentle red in colour and was showing obvious signs of impatience, his discomfiture and bewilderment being rather enjoyed by staff who, myself included, were always rather intimidated by him in board meetings. We thought then that we saw a beaten man; but no, Bob took a deep breath and then started to orate on a third subject, now glaring at the judge with a clear challenge to do his worst. Galgut stopped him after a half sentence, causing Bob to utter a slightly strangled sound which, fortunately, the judge believed fell short of overt contempt because he then reiterated the rules in a pedantic manner that sounded to us like a declaration of war. Bob, letting his eyes wander across the small sea of paper before him, lifted his eyes to the judge and took a deep breath. The tension in the room was palpable, as we staff, and I think our chairman, were anticipating that Bob would literally bawl out the judge in his rage at being treated as a somewhat disobedient child. The gods then intervened.

Suddenly, one of the assessors stood up with a bleeding nose that caught the attention of everyone as blood sprayed down his front while he frantically searched for something to staunch the flow. It was clear that he had neither handkerchief nor tissues and he began to look helpless. Keith Meiklejohn, then head of game capture at the NPB, leapt to his feet and ran up to the bench carrying an unfolding handkerchief the size of a dishcloth. The assessor grabbed it with urgency and, muttering excuses to the judge, fled the room. Galgut, rather unexpectedly, actually showed some sympathy and announced a pause in proceedings until the return of the bleeding assessor. The tension did not lessen in the ten minutes that followed.

When the assessor returned, looking a little more comfortable, albeit with signs of the haemorrhage clearly visible on his clothes, Galgut re-opened the

procedures, with a sympathetic acknowledgement to the assessor followed by a rather frosty repetition of the procedural rules clearly addressed at Bob. However, we had underestimated Bob and the pause had given him time to re-strategise. He stood up with a winning smile and requested the judge to permit him, under the circumstances, a modest allowance of injury time. It was so beautifully performed that even the judge smiled, leaned back in his chair, and told Bob that he had earned five minutes with that response, and he could have his say. Bob's immense effort on the board's behalf won the day. And, I am delighted to record, won the case. The newspapers had to publish an apology and a withdrawal notice.²

Justice Mark Kumleben and the Cape Vidal shacks

That the board's commitment to conservation influenced its members was perhaps best illustrated by Mark Kumleben. Mark's tenure on the board was remembered for his incredible attention to the justice and fairness of the actions of the board along with a wicked sense of humour that served on many occasions to break a deadlock of opinion and led to a fair and proper decision. Two examples of Mark's contribution are worth recording.

In 1986, the national Department of Forestry handed over the control of huge stretches of land originally allocated as state forest to, we thought,



Justice Mark Kumleben, an outstanding board member and great conservationist (EKZNW Library)

deserving provincial conservation bodies, to run as nature reserves. If the truth be known it was probably because the Department of Forestry had found that, after decades of trying, the use of many of their properties to grow plantations of commercially valuable trees was simply uneconomic. It thus seemed a good deal to Pretoria to get rid of the land (and the conservation staff of the department) to bodies like the NPB. A modest but probably inadequate budget to cover costs was added as a sweetener.

The NPB accepted this proposal with real enthusiasm and extensive areas of invaluable conservation habitat came to the province of Natal.

The montane areas along the Drakensberg, when consolidated with those of the NPB, eventually became the uKhahlamba Drakensberg World Heritage Site in 2001. Similarly, the acquisition of Maputaland forestry areas also led to St Lucia and its surrounds being declared as South Africa's first Natural World Heritage Site in 1999, the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park. This was later renamed the Isimangaliso Wetland Park.

However, one should also remember that there is no such thing as a free lunch and with the land and properties came some difficult problems. As is often the situation, if people were involved, the problem grew in leaps and bounds. A good case in point was Cape Vidal on the eastern shores of St Lucia. The NPB was thrilled to take control of this beautiful beach site and the entire eastern shores despite it being densely afforested with exotic trees such as pines and eucalyptus, but soon discovered that there was a far larger challenge.

Since the Department of Forestry had taken over the region and the fishing potential and beauty of the site became widely known, the resident staff were soon asked by regular and enthusiastic visitors whether it would not be possible for the campers to have a small shed in which to leave their basic supplies and spare petrol for their ski boats, to save them having to bring them up every weekend. At some stage a generous but naïve forester agreed to this without realising that he had a tiger by the tail. Over the years, the small shed had grown into a large village of sheds that varied in size from a single tin unit to cottages of three bedrooms of brick and mortar, which a cheerful cohort of connected influential families and dedicated coastal anglers came to regard as their homes away from home. The fact that this growing metropolis was firmly founded on state land and being used virtually free of charge (I was never able to establish whether there was a charge for anything) appeared never to have occurred to forestry management as being something out of the ordinary, let alone illegal.

If a senior forester had ever realised that the settlement was a growing problem, this conclusion might have helped grease the wheels of the idea to shed those forestry stations for which there appeared to be no economic future or which, with the later advent of the King Report on Corporate Governance, could constitute a serious embarrassment to the State. The NPB received the entire Eastern Shores State Forest without the benefit of a reference to any possible future problem.

With the NPB's new management in place, and steps having been taken to develop a new coastal camp at Cape Vidal, the full import of this up-market illegal camp was borne upon us and the very thought caused the board and

staff to shiver. When the problem was placed before the board it unanimously supported the idea that all the freeloaders would have to give up their weekend shacks and privileges and the first rumours of the proposed action soon made their way to the affected community. All hell broke loose.

The Provincial Council, the UP and individual NPB board members started to receive a torrent of abuse and pressure to leave things as they were. The passionate arguments of some of those concerned varied widely from cultural traditions to years of investment. Many were assisted in their frenzied lobbying by national Cabinet members and members of parliament, both regional and national. A number of our board members had in the past enjoyed guest status on fishing outings to Cape Vidal and some of their friends were using all their years of hospitality to persuade board members to kill the removal concept dead. It was probably the worst public relations challenge received by the NPB since the Petition of 1972. The Zululand public clearly saw this as a crisis and the local staff were attacked, in many cases vociferously. On many occasions they were threatened with dire consequences.

Staff were unanimously of the opinion that the restoration of order must take place, and this certainly included senior staff like me because the CEO was the accounting officer. With greater accountability at the time receiving widespread news coverage, this was not a situation that could endure. The means whereby the problem might be solved created spirited debates at board meetings and some members, obviously under huge pressure from their friends, began to waver.

Fully realising that to replace this conglomeration of shacks with a decent camping ground was going to be costly and time-consuming, some of the staff came up with a brilliant idea. During this era the board had agreed to a proposal that involved inviting the private sector and individual citizens to contribute towards the extension of NPB public facilities by paying for full development costs. The scheme, known as the Joint Venture Scheme (JVS), had been fully approved by the board because it had proved useful in creating new bush lodges.

This was an amazing departure from the norm, as for the full donation of the cost of a unit or camp the donors (or a syndicate of donors) would receive in return 30 to 45 days of free use of the facility per year for a period of ten to twenty years. The scheme had proved immensely successful, with a significant number of bush camps and camp buildings (such as the Tendele Lodge at Royal Natal National Park) being fully funded to the NPB's great advantage as

for the remaining 320 or more days of each year the letting of these facilities brought in much-needed revenue.

Those who had built structures at Cape Vidal far beyond the scale envisaged possible by the original foresters were identified, their buildings were assessed by the NPB technical staff, and the cost of altering them to NPB standards was calculated. It was then proposed to each owner, or person representing a group, that if they agreed to pay for the NPB's desired alterations, they would enjoy the benefits outlined in the JVS. The board felt that this course of action was less draconian than prompt eviction and gave those who had made considerable investments in both cash and kind some empathy because, quite frankly, many did love the area and could not be blamed for that. Those who refused the offer would be ejected along with all those others who had makeshift structures, made of almost anything, which were unacceptable for public use, and which the NPB intended simply to remove completely. The aim was to use the disturbed area to develop additional accommodation aimed at larger groups.

It is unnecessary to recount the battle for finality that went on for several years. Certainly, one of the board members who was in no doubt that our cause was just was Mark Kumleben. He gave the staff and their proposed solution his full support and the board firmly decided to implement the removal of all claims to the use of these illegal units. Those who had facilities capable of being altered and developed for public use would be written to and formally offered the opportunity to buy into the JVS.

The chairman of the day, Dering Stainbank, a politician who feared very negative public reaction, prevaricated and any newly received appeal would be debated at length, to my intense irritation and the disappointment of staff who were collecting criticism directly and daily from affected shack owners who were drawn from a diverse but influential group comprising sugar barons, politicians, university professors and local teachers. Almost all were going to resist come what may.

In 1984, a short while before this saga, the board had also been presented, via the Natal Provincial Council, with a political request from the KwaZulu government that the NPB hand over control of Ndumu Game Reserve and the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve to the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation. To the conservation staff of the NPB this was an appalling request, to be resisted at all costs, as both protected areas had been established by the NPA. They were, in staff opinion, invaluable conservation assets, rich in biodiversity value and reserves that were, quite simply, scenically beautiful.

The chairman and many board members appeared to accept this change as a matter of political necessity, without showing any apparent concern. Staff protests, both across the NPB and in board meetings, received short shrift, which did not improve the staff impression that the pleasing of the soon-to-be-displaced Cape Vidal illegal dwellers was being given much more focused, deeper concern and sympathetic attention than the loss of some of the conservation jewels in the NPB's crown.

Eventually, however, the board agreed that the requisite letters of offer to take part in the JVS or eviction should be prepared and sent to the Cape Vidal shack owners. The letter required approval by the board's legal department, so it was a month or so before the letters were presented to the board. However, when they were placed before the board for final approval, a member once again expressed his concern and launched a lengthy and passionate tale of discussions with a supposedly deserving group of shack dwellers. The awful prospect of yet another delay in action rose before my eyes like a red mist. I protested and, in my exasperation, I pointed out, perhaps a little too bitterly, the difference of intensity and time being allocated to this issue and the loss of some of our beloved protected areas. A babble of protests caused some consternation for the chairman who adopted a deer-in-the-headlights look.

Mark Kumleben entered the fray with conviction and said: 'I fully agree with staff, the matter has received enough attention and as stated, the decision to get on with an unpleasant job has been taken. While being aware that some noses are going to be out of joint, it is time to apply the Nixon doctrine.' Some board members and staff looked at him questioningly. He continued, 'We grab them by the balls and their hearts and minds will follow.'³ The remark, followed by a gale of laughter, promptly ended the debate and the letters were sent out within days. The net result was that within a year the entire problem had been solved and the shack saga was history.

Mark's influence on the board cemented the opinion that he was an invaluable and enthusiastic asset with a deep love of conservation. So impressive was he that his major contributions to nature conservation and conservation justice continued after his departure from the board, which he left with mutual sadness in 1991. His reputation as a legal mind and a conservationist had influence well beyond Natal and he was called upon by both the apartheid government and later the new democratic South African government to lead two significant commissions of inquiry in the 1990s.

The first was an investigation into the behaviour of the South African Defence Force during the Angolan civil war. Mark's commission, serving as chairman

and sole member, uncovered serious breaches of the law and trafficking in illegal wildlife products including ivory and rhino horn.⁴ The second was to head a board of investigation appointed by Minister of Environmental Affairs Pallo Jordan in March 1998 and his team included Stanley S. Sangweni and John A. Ledger.⁵ Following the publication in October 1998 of much useful analysis and sound recommendations, it proved a principal document used by the legal consultants appointed by the Department of Environmental Affairs during the Law Reform Process.⁶

Despite the odd hiccup from board members, it is my candid opinion that I could never have imagined a better structure for a carefully and rationally selected group of independent and voluntary private citizens to support and work for conservation. The collective loyalty of the board and the respect they showed the staff, who supported and enacted the aims and responsibilities of the organisation, seldom wavered. Over the fifty years of the NPB, even when things had perhaps gone a little wrong, as is inevitable, there was an empathy and understanding that made you believe that no province could have been better served than by the voluntary board members who so willingly gave their time and expertise for no financial benefit at all.

NOTES

- 1 Many years later, one ex-member of staff confessed privately to having sold a horn.
- 2 Kevin Davies in 1991 had joined the *Financial Mail* and was tasked by the editor to write a financial survey special issue on the NPB. Conscious of the fact that he had authored an attack on the Board's efficiency he asked NPB communications staff to obtain clearance for him to investigate and write the survey. Convinced that Kevin had acted out of conviction and had been probably vulnerable to misinformation regarding the rhino horn saga, we felt that if we were going to get a fair review then Kevin was likely to do it. He did a fine job (Davies, 1991).
- 3 Research for this quotation revealed that its origin lay with President Theodore Roosevelt.
- 4 Mark E. Kumleben, 1996 (chair). Commission of Inquiry into the Alleged Smuggling of and Illegal Trade in Ivory and Rhinoceros Horn in South Africa.
- 5 Mark E. Kumleben (chair), Stanley S. Sangweni and John A. Ledger, 1998. Board of Investigation into the Institutional Arrangements for Nature Conservation in South Africa.
- 6 Roger Porter, pers. comm. Recommendations were carried forward and included in two Acts; the National Environment Management Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 and the Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004.

6

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: STAFF EMPOWERMENT

DURING the troubling days of the apartheid era the NPB was little different from other civil service organisations in the country in that there was no formal avenue through which black staff were consulted, their opinions called for, or their reactions recorded. That there were extremely cordial relations between black and white staff in many areas goes without saying. I can honestly say that never in my full-time careers as a game ranger and fisheries inspector, a field scientist and a senior administrative officer (covering forty years) was I witness to any vicious racist altercations between staff of different ethnicities in the NPB. It was a matter of practice that white field officers had to be conversant in Zulu and the day-to-day business in protected areas and field stations was carried out in Zulu where required. This contrasted with nature conservation in the other provinces and in the National Parks Board where liaison was conducted predominantly in Afrikaans. I believe that the good *esprit de corps* in Natal was due, to a large extent, to the willingness of the NPB staff to communicate in Zulu. The same could be said of the farming communities in Natal, where the farmers were expected to, and most often did, speak Zulu of a high calibre

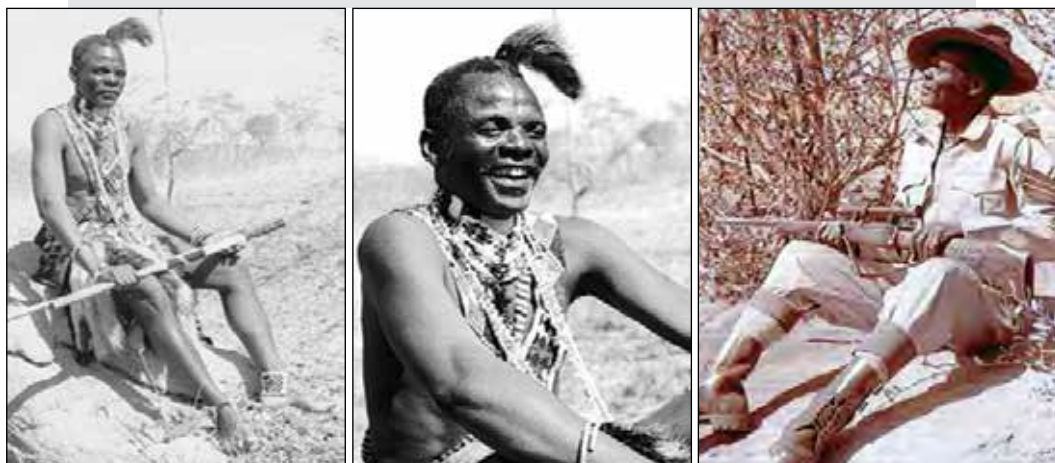
Colonel Jack Vincent, the first Director of the NPB, felt very strongly about language inclusivity and in later years, noting that the recruitment of white officers exposed a growing lack in their ability to speak Zulu, he instituted a programme whereby a successful formal effort to improve one's skills in the language was rewarded. Today, some might say that this practice and attitude was very colonial and patronising and has little to commend it, but, in my opinion, Vincent's aspiration was visionary. I believe that it was the reason for the excellent staff relations in the NPB. Might I add that despite the many provocations offered the black staff, and there must have been many that I did not encounter or observe, I found it a matter of some pleasure that the relationship on the whole between staff of all races was remarkably cordial.

Despite the fact that they occupied all the lower ranks of the organisation, mainly as a result of their skin colour, Indian, coloured or African staff did

not, during my career, ever overtly reflect bad human relations and the number of incredibly loyal black staff serving for many decades in their ranks was reflected in the very low staff turnover, especially game guards, recorded throughout the NPB's existence. For example, in 1992 staff were awarded 254 service bars representing 1 778 years of service (see Natal Parks Board Yearbooks, 1982–1998 and Chapter 15).

The other clear instance of discrimination that was obvious to anyone with an eye to see was that no staff of colour, other than those that attained officer

HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED ... FOR GAME SCOUT ALPHEUS MTHEMBU
Then and now ...



NPB game guards: their loyalty was legendary as shown by the remarkably long service provided by so many of them (EKZNW library)

status, were allowed to join the so-called staff association and few, if any, staff had challenged, or considered worthy of challenging, the fundamentally racist structure of the NPB. In fact, unbeknown to me at that stage, during the course of the Petition drama in 1972, one complaint/criticism raised involved the lack of representation of staff of colour or any means of formal communication with the black staff. When approached for his views on this fact the deputy chairman of the board, Douglas Mitchell, replied in a horrifying, shocking and badly expressed letter suggesting that this was totally unnecessary as 'all good black staff recognised the duty of white officers, and they were more than aware that their master was ready to help them.' (D. Mitchell, *in litt.*, 1972). It is entirely possible that what he was trying to say was that the staff were well looked after.

There is little doubt that my appointment was partly as a result of the 1972 staff troubles and the Petition in which it was stated that the NPB intended to seek out persons with higher academic qualifications to fill senior positions. This envisaged policy was certainly valid and put into practice shortly after the resolution of the Petition saga. John Vincent, son of Jack Vincent, was tasked with recruiting me back to the NPB. On a personal note, this move could not have come at a more propitious moment as my sea turtle study grant from the SANF, which supported my work at the ORI in Durban, had been rather abruptly cut off after I achieved my doctorate. I rejoined the NPB in October 1974 as a senior scientific officer while the new staff structure was being formalised through the board.

John Vincent, a professional wildlife biologist who had earned a MSc degree and was busy with a doctoral thesis, had already been appointed to a senior management position, as had Mike Keep, a field veterinarian with an excellent record. Mike was followed by me and then Orty Bourquin, with a MSc degree and busy on a doctoral thesis. My good fortune in having served as a game ranger and fisheries officer in Giant's Castle Game Reserve for four splendid years (Hughes, 2014) also clearly attracted positive support for my re-employment with the NPB. This had given me an understanding and empathy for field officers and staff. On completion of the restructuring exercise in April 1975, I applied for and was awarded the management post of Chief Conservator West (CCW), responsible for the supervision and management of conservation in the western half of Natal which included the Drakensberg, Weenen and Itala game reserves plus all the western zones (conservation districts served by officers promoting liaison between the farming and municipal communities and the NPB; see Chapters 26 and 27).

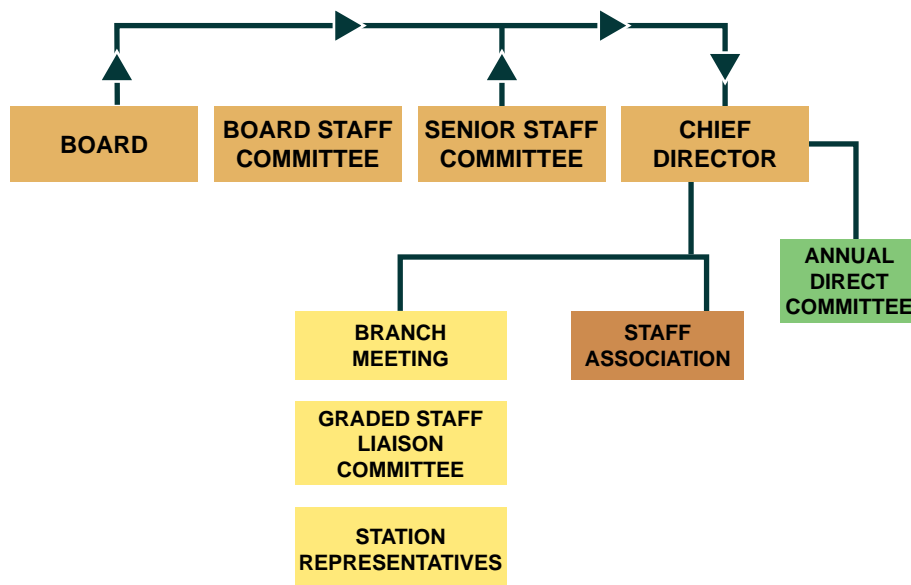
The trigger that launched the restructured staff changes was the retirement on 31 March 1975 of Jack Vincent, who had for some years been Assistant Director Conservation, responsible then for all conservation activities in the province.¹ He was replaced by Don Stewart who, in 1971, had joined the NPB as Chief Scientific Officer. Don was a very austere, dedicated, liberal-minded Englishman, recruited from Kenya, with an intense sense of duty and an almost fanatical determination to improve the systems of the NPB. He was a rather intimidating character with a shy nature, which was sometimes misinterpreted as arrogant, and did not seem to welcome close friends. He certainly did not tolerate fools gladly and his working format was strict, orderly and, in my opinion, overly adhered to. As an aside, when Don retired very unexpectedly in 1982, Dering Stainbank, MEC responsible for the NPB portfolio, was

requested to say a few words at Don's farewell function. After saying that he held Don in great respect and admired him enormously for what he had achieved during his time of service, Dering ended by saying: 'Of course, Don, I have to admit that our relationship was perhaps affected by the fact that I have always been shit-scared of you!!' Dering was not alone.

Don launched a series of reforms immediately upon taking office. These included a more formal but flexible approach to management planning, driven with a determination that these plans would be completed, approved by the board, and adhered to. He strengthened the research and planning departments and oversaw the development of both (see also Chapter 17).

Staff liaison committees

As mentioned above, Don was not a people person and did not focus much on the development of staff or social improvement and so it was that after a couple of years as CCW (still within the apartheid era) my thoughts turned to how we could improve the situation for black staff in a way that would enable the NPB to maximise the benefits and ideas that could be derived from long-serving and field-skilled black staff, none of whom enjoyed any formal recognition of a structured kind. This lack was clearly felt by many of the field



The staff liaison system started to give direct representation to all staff in the NPB's western region in 1977.

managers and after some discussion at Drakensberg management meetings we placed before Don a proposal that the black staff should have a formal platform for liaison with management staff. We proposed calling it the Staff Representative Committee, but the title morphed into the Black Staff Liaison Committee.

The general idea was that each NPB protected area would recognise, after discussion with all black staff ranks, two black members of staff (not necessarily according to rank and chosen by ballot by their peers) who would be appointed as staff representatives. They would be recognised by adding to their uniform a badge marking them clearly as such. Both would be given the opportunity to formally liaise monthly with the officer-in-charge of the station and, in addition, would become full members of management meetings.

Through the Staff Liaison Committee were channelled observations; requests for improvements to accommodation, personal equipment and uniforms; as well as requests for clarification on NPB policy, actions and decisions. Participation in such meetings was carefully structured and properly recorded and the officer-in-charge ensured that formal responses to requests and ideas were followed up. If requests were made that required an approach to senior staff or even the board, he or she should convey such requests to the CCW for consideration and, if necessary, forward these to the Director. When I tentatively placed the concept before Don Stewart, he was immediately enthusiastic and authorised the implementation of the concept in the region under my control. During 1977 all officers-in-charge of stations in the western region were given the go ahead to formalise the establishment of the staff liaison committees. The relevant staff were counselled in what was expected of them and trained in the logistics of selecting two representatives from among their colleagues.

This new direction was a rapid learning curve for many officers who had never given a second thought to what the lower ranks felt. Quite rightly all members of staff were now able to voice opinions about uniform issues, staff accommodation, allowances, and general needs such as training and equipment. What is more, when encouraged, staff were only too ready and willing to suggest improvements to work schedules, techniques and timing, which resulted in greater efficiency in daily operations. The formal representatives often proved of immense value in the understanding and resolving of staff crises and disciplinary problems, once they had consulted with the members of staff they represented.

After a relatively short time, staff agreed that the CCW should initiate, institute and chair a combined annual meeting for the western region of the staff representatives and the officers-in-charge of stations at which all matters of general and specific concern would be raised and discussed. It proved to be a successful management tool that promoted staff relations and, for the first time, gave a formal voice to staff across racial barriers at a level above that of their individual station.

It was soon discovered that the idea of these staff liaison committees was not universally acclaimed among senior staff of all the other sections and divisions of the NPB. In fact, one senior officer from Hluhluwe Game Reserve approached me in head office and baldly stated that he would never participate in such a thing, adding some unworthy comments to emphasise his point. Even years later, when staff liaison committees had become universal throughout the entire NPB system as a result of the success in the western region (and the growth of trade unions in the country was becoming more and more dramatic), this gentleman's successor as the officer-in-charge of Hluhluwe, Mark Cooke, took me aside one day and told me that he had been one of the Zululand management staff completely against the concept and had spoken out strongly against its implementation.²

It certainly gave me some pleasure therefore when, ten years after staff committees had been implemented throughout the NPB, Mark took an opportunity in Hluhluwe to acknowledge that it was the excellent relationship that had built up between management and staff through the staff liaison committees that resulted in the black staff rejecting approaches by the more militant trade unions to unionise them. This was one of the really rewarding results of an endeavour that started in the mid-1970s and endured until the end of the NPB.

The KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation was fully unionised when it amalgamated with the NPB in 1998 and, even before then, political pressure had ensured that the NPB had to recognise a trade union. In 1996, it signed a formal recognition agreement with the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) whose canvassing of staff had reached the figure stipulated for recognition – 1 000 members. This was not a marriage made in heaven and I could not help feeling proud that many members of the black staff did not join, but continued to provide their invaluable input through their staff liaison committee.

There were two later incidents worth recording in relation to the staff liaison committees. First, in the 1990s I had cause to research a decision made by the

board in the mid-1970s. When the board secretary, Kevin Tarr (1980–1998), had found and photocopied the relevant page of the minutes, there appeared, alongside the decision in which I had been interested, a section in which it was recorded that a board member expressed concern about the formation of the staff liaison committees in the western region, ending with a clear warning to John Geddes Page that ‘You must keep an eye on Hughes and further developments of this experiment.’ This was hardly a ringing endorsement of what I considered an important step towards the democratisation of the NPB, but John never bothered to convey this concern to me in person, so, in my entire career until the fortuitous finding in the early board minutes, I was blissfully unaware of the concern and the matter was never raised again. Once the board had appointed its first black members, to have raised such a concern would have been unthinkable.

Second, in 1988 when I was CEO it was considered desirable to expand the role and scope of the staff liaison committees and the NPB expected senior staff to attend a combined meeting to include representatives from across the entire organisation and province. This was to be held once per year with the CEO or the Deputy CEO in the chair with each divisional head present to ensure that there was complete transparency of discussion across regions and divisions. Even at this level the meetings proved productive and important for breaking down obstacles to democratic consultation and trust building. Every meeting produced a familiar range of subjects from uniform quality to housing adequacy and provided the opportunity for open and honest explanations why it was not possible to meet every request. (I should add at this point that the now apparently universal term demand had not reached the NPB liaison lexicon and I must record my appreciation of the courtesy and respect accorded these important meetings by staff and representatives.)

Of course, not every meeting was without its problems or passed benignly untouched by difficult and brisk discussions over one item or another. And, of course, there were some staff representatives who had achieved their positions by displaying an enthusiasm for expressing themselves rather forcefully at meetings. Happily, however, in my experience these were the exception rather than the rule. There was on the south coast liaison committee a very outspoken game guard whose very presence at the annual meeting was enough to increase the acid in my stomach. I had learnt full well that, if any contentious subjects or unreasonable requests were going to be raised, it was this gentleman who would do it. His character verged on the edge of being the sort of trade unionist

who operated in the most offensive manner possible, displaying neither trust in the organisation nor its senior representatives. How I misread him.

Eight years after I had retired from the NPB, I had cause to visit the Durban office in Congella and encountered a group of four game guards (now known as field rangers following the amalgamation of the NPB and the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation in 1998) one of whom was my old nemesis from the staff liaison committee. They all greeted me cordially as three of them had worked for the NPB or Ezemvelo³ during my period as CEO. Following my question as to how they felt things were going, and receiving a guarded assurance that all was well, my old colleague suddenly interjected and said 'godwa' (a very often used Zulu expression directly translated as 'but' that frequently presaged an alternative view). I waited with bated breath anticipating what I had become accustomed to – a trying tirade from him. Looking remarkably serious he then announced that there was a significant difference between serving today in Ezemvelo and service in the old NPB. Very earnestly he stated, 'Nobody respects us anymore.' This comment, which was obviously heartfelt, moved me deeply and he warmly responded to my spontaneous hug, a completely unexpected outcome to a cautious relationship that had endured for over thirteen years.

The arrival of NEHAWU

The values of the staff liaison committees were never better illustrated than when the NPB was negotiating a recognition agreement with NEHAWU, one of the most aggressive and powerful trade unions. Preliminary negotiations between staff, board members and the union's representatives had been reasonably courteous and restrained but eventually led to the point where an official signing of the recognition agreement was imminent. There suddenly appeared a glitch, the reasons for which were not entirely clear to me, but it prompted the union representatives to demand a meeting with the KZN Minister of Environment and Traditional Affairs, Inkosi Nyanga Ngubane, under whose jurisdiction fell the NPB.

This was arranged in Durban and we were told by the local union representatives that the gathering would be addressed by one of their senior leaders who would fly down from Johannesburg. In due course we met at a venue in Mayville and awaited the arrival of the senior unionist, who was late. He eventually arrived, took his seat without apology, drew out some papers and, after greeting Ngubane, who had come down to the meeting with me,

launched into a vicious tirade against the NPB, accusing us of exploiting and abusing black staff and in general representing apartheid in the foul manner that the black workers of this country had come to expect from the reactionary white civil service.

The NPB staff were appalled as this man had never come to any of the preliminary meetings and clearly had not been briefed or, if he had, had chosen to grandstand in front of the regional representatives of his union and the minister. His speech was so offensive to me and my colleagues that I stood up next to Ngubane and quietly informed him that I could not accept this speech as it was an insult to all of the staff of the NPB, and I would wait for him outside the room to take him home after the meeting was complete. He grabbed my hand and held on tight saying, 'Please don't leave Dokotela,⁴ this man does not know us!' I sat down again and immediately Ngubane rose and glared across the table at the unionist. The man was quite discomfited as the minister got up and spoke directly to him. Ngubane told him not to come here and talk such rubbish. He added that what had been said was all untrue as his Board had one of the best relationships between staff in the province and that he could see it in this room in front of him.

'There is no apartheid in my Board!' he thundered with real conviction. To say the unionist was stunned is an understatement. He, in turn, rose in reply to the minister and said, with a smile, that if the minister said that about the organisation, then he was thrilled, and it would make NEHAWU proud to have an agreement with the NPB. He was completely unabashed that his prepared speech denouncing the Board's labour practices was clearly an off-the-shelf affair that he had probably used in the past for more deserving organisations. Butter would not have melted in his mouth after Ngubane's response.

This did not improve my opinion of trade unions, and most certainly not of NEHAWU, but the minister's stout defence of *his* organisation had levelled the playing field and made our staff present, including several black officers, glow with appreciation and pride. I like to think that the efforts of staff, which began back in the 1970s to establish and nurture the staff liaison committees, had matured at last and justified their endeavours.

Coastal game guards investigation

At the same time as the Drakensberg staff were setting up their staff liaison committees the coastal staff under the leadership of Mike Brokensha (1957–1988), Chief Conservator Coast, had commissioned an opinion survey for

their extensive game guard team. The survey was carried out by a private sector company specialising in staff motivation. The results were a surprise as it emerged that there was, in general, a great deal of job satisfaction among the guards, along with a clear pride in being a uniformed game guard. There was, however, one serious source of dissatisfaction: the guards objected to being placed under the command of strangers and forced to accept orders from them. This caused some bewilderment among all the coastal staff officers as they did not know what was meant by this criticism.

Further enquiry brought to the fore that during periods of pressure coastal officers often called for help from the very extensive, predominantly white, honorary officer volunteers who would be asked to lead a cohort of game guards to patrol certain defined stretches of beach or to help man roadblocks. The fact that the formally employed coastal officers did not introduce the honorary officers to the guards was typical of the lack of courtesy and consideration shown by many white officers at that time. The distressed feelings generated by such a lack of courtesy was just not considered. To the great credit of the coastal officers there were apologies all round once this feedback was received and from that time on this criticism was never again brought to the notice of the NPB.

Staff field days

The gradual evolution and improvement of staff relations had been apparent over a period of some twenty years, and these were very visible in the creation of staff field days. Originally started in 1974 as the game guard competition, the event became an inter-station competition that involved a broad range of challenges for which there were certificates and trophies to be earned. Each station could enter teams or individuals in any of the fields offered and much would depend on the size of the reserve or station, which would dictate both the ability of a station to enter a team and fund the participation of staff.

At the peak of these biennial events, which lasted over a couple of days, there were drill competitions involving squads of eight game guards, shooting competitions, foot races, including long distance runs, football, and tug-of-war. My favourite event featured competing teams of traditional Zulu dancers. The ngome dancing competition drew groups from different parts of the province, each with their unique tempos, manoeuvres and instruments. These field days became enormous gatherings bringing together hundreds of staff, so space requirements dictated that they had to be held at stations with the facilities

to create a venue and house a staggering array of people. The intention of the NPB was to create an opportunity for field staff from all over the province to meet and interact. It was expected that staff would begin to better appreciate the size of the organisation and better understand that the field staff were part of a province-wide nature conservation effort.



The game guard competition started as a biennial event and developed into a field day with a wide variety of activities and participation by staff from every level



Ngome dancing became one of the most popular events at field days

All told from 1974 to 1986 six field days were held: two at Midmar Nature Reserve, one at Royal Natal National Park, two at Hluhluwe Game Reserve and one at St Lucia Game Reserve, the last held on the airstrip adjacent to the Crocodile Centre. In each case there were opportunities and experiences available to broaden the knowledge and understanding of conservation and areas across the province, as well as opportunities to make new friends and acquaintances in NPB uniform.

The costs of the field days were raised from sponsorships and invitations to attend were eagerly sought after. The event grew to be immensely popular. Board members were special guests and here, too, the sight of black board members in the guest tents must have come as a delightful surprise to many participants at that time, especially those from stations that were based in remote parts of the large parks or from the smaller reserves. At the end of proceedings, the NPB used the opportunity to recognise staff achievements, make special awards and competition awards, followed by long-service and bravery awards.⁵ The families of recipients were invited to attend. Posthumous awards to those staff who had tragically died in the course of duty were awarded to widows, often accompanied by their children, and were always presented by the CEO or a board member, along with a citation which was read out in Zulu to the gathering. The master of ceremonies position was normally allocated to Gillie Schutte (1964–1998) whose spoken Zulu was inspiring. These field days were very moving events.



John Geddes Page handing out awards and prizes at a game guard competition, Hluhluwe, 1982

Initially full participation in all events at field days was restricted to game guards, with other staff who had unique talents joining the football and dancing teams. By the time of the last field day, the atmosphere had changed dramatically with staff of all colours and sexes serving in the teams. Many wives, certainly including officers' wives, acted as cheerleaders for their stations. It became one of the happiest events of the NPB calendar and a moving reflection of the empowering non-racial spirit of the organisation.



A later field day at Midmar attended by literally hundreds of staff enjoying a wide variety of events (EKZNW library)

The head office concert

No better was NPB camaraderie emphasised than by a spontaneous movement that emerged from a group of head office staff who felt that there should also be an event involving staff members from the administrative centre of the NPB's activities. After some local discussion it was agreed with enthusiasm that there should be a concert held in the theatre at Queen Elizabeth Park (head office of the NPB in Pietermaritzburg) in which all staff were invited to participate.

The reaction was overwhelming and Hans Grobler (1983–1998), Deputy CEO who took responsibility for the event, in an enthusiastic verbal report to the board explained that staff of all colours prepared and presented their specialities including ngome dancing, traditional Indian dancing, humorous skits involving stand-up comedy and satirical mini-plays, choir singing and poetry readings. Staff of every shade of ethnicity made their contributions to the wild applause of a packed theatre devoid of standing room. Some of the

board members present enthusiastically suggested that the concert should go on tour. Hans said that he had never felt so proud to be part of the staff of the NPB. It was a triumph – but never went on tour.

As a result of the respect and friendship between the full diversity of the NPB's staff by the time the Board reached the point of amalgamation with the KwaZulu Directorate, I genuinely believe that the *esprit de corps* of the organisation had never been better and the nostalgic sadness that was felt throughout the staff was not for the oncoming amalgamation, but for the loss of identity and cohesion embraced by a totally inclusive NPB.

NOTES

- 1 Shortly before Vincent retired the first black ranger, Andrew Biyela, was appointed in Zululand.
- 2 Mark and many others lost that battle because, as time passed and I had progressed up the ranks ladder, one of the first tasks at each new level was to introduce the staff liaison committee system so that ultimately every section of the NPB's services adopted the practice.
- 3 After amalgamation, the organisation was first named the KZN Nature Conservation Service, which proved very unimaginative and generally unpopular. After the design of a new logo, and with the blessing of the minister, in 2001 it became Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and is today widely referred to as Ezemvelo.
- 4 The Zulu word for Doctor with reference to my doctorate in Zoology.
- 5 The NPB had a system of awards for bravery, which included a Purple Bar for serious risk to life and a bronze Lion's Head for bravery, with numerals indicating seizure of firearms. Awardees had the right to wear these awards as part of their daily uniform.

7

NATAL BECOMES KWAZULU-NATAL

THERE was a period of great change in the country following the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. The first democratic elections were held in April 1994. For much of 1993 there was therefore a great deal of concern across the country regarding what was going to happen after this date. All the efforts that the NPB had launched, to make progress on the anticipated amalgamation with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation, had been rebuffed with some hostility by the latter body. And so, the dawn of democracy in the province arrived with the two bodies firmly in possession of their old responsibilities. That the subject was a matter of no small political interest was emphasised by the rather unexpected arrival at head office in late 1993 of three politicians: Mike Tarr MPP (Inkatha Freedom Party, IFP), Maurice Mackenzie MPP (IFP) and Wessel Nel MPP (Democratic Party).

All three members of the provincial parliament had previously demonstrated their support for nature conservation, and they assured me that they would collectively protect the conservation successes of the NPB during what, they believed, would be a heated debate on both the structure and future policies of nature conservation in the province. It was with some pleasure that I reported on this assurance to the board at its next meeting and we were all, board members and staff, very appreciative of the endorsement of the provincial parliamentarians.

The first democratic election in 1994 resulted in a resounding provincial victory by the IFP led by Mangosuthu Buthelezi who had for several decades demonstrated a vocal and actual support for nature conservation and without whose endorsement the existence of the outstanding Tembe Game Reserve in Maputaland would never have seen the light of day. At this stage the former Natal province and the self-governing territory of KwaZulu became KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). We were all cautiously optimistic and awaited the announcement of the KZN Cabinet with interest.

At the end of April 1994, the IFP arranged a splendid occasion at the Legislative Building in Pietermaritzburg¹ at which all heads of departments, politicians and other influential citizens were invited to hear an address from the Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini and the announcement by the IFP leader of the KZN Cabinet members. It was a nervous evening.

The King, in an enthusiastic speech, appeared to imply that he was expected to assume the position of king of KZN and welcomed all present to the new order. A respectful silence followed his speech. The appointment of Frank Mdlalose as Premier of KZN was received with some acclaim and he, in turn, went through the list of appointed departmental ministers. Having been responsible for presenting an optimistic view of the future to the staff for some years I was absolutely delighted when he announced that Mike Tarr would become the Minister of Environment Affairs. I was thrilled to hear the news and confess that the remaining announcements were of little interest to me other than that of the proposed Minister of Local Government and Housing, Peter Miller. Peter had been a stalwart supporter of conservation while an MPP in the UP and then the New Republic Party.²

The initial ministerial appointments all looked promising until after the formal proceedings when everyone present hastened to the awaiting refreshments. My wife Lee and I met up with Mike Tarr and his wife Sue, both of whom I had known for many years. Both Mike and I were mutually excited about his appointment and were clearly showing our enthusiasm. Mike, I think, because he held the environment, and especially conservation, close to his heart; and I, because I was anticipating a professional agricultural economist, environmentalist and friend becoming responsible for the NPB in this transitional period. I really felt that the gods were favouring the NPB and its successes in the past, and that, whatever transpired in the future, the NPB model had a better than average chance of continuing to make a substantial contribution to wildlife management in the province. My cup was running over.

What actually happened was that my cup spilled over. Glancing across the room I noticed Arthur Konigkramer, the influential editor of *Ilanga*, the pro-IFP Zulu-language newspaper in Durban, and close confidant of Buthelezi, staring in our direction and, as it appeared to me, he was clearly displeased by the cordiality and excitement that Mike and I were sharing so obviously. This was a most disconcerting possibility and caused me immediate concern. The editor himself was the epitome of a curate's egg. He had a positive interest in nature conservation but, for many years, had criticised the NPB for what

he felt, very strongly, was our lack of support for a policy of sharing real benefits with local communities around our protected areas. In this belief, and with the power he wielded at *Ilanga*, NPB staff should have given his criticisms a great deal more attention. Staff generally believed that he was less than well-informed about what we had been doing for our neighbours. Critics seldom occupy popular positions and this one did not help by being vigorously controversial and often generally aggressive about it.

My concern on the night was not ill-founded, as come Wednesday the nominated ministers and deputy ministers dutifully and expectantly made their way to Natalia to be sworn in.³ Alas, one left disappointed and that was Mike Tarr. When he arrived, he was told that he was no longer to be the Minister of Environment Affairs and had been replaced by Nyanga Ngubane, who would serve also as the Minister of Traditional Affairs. When the news eventually reached the board, the general feeling was one of a complete reversal of fortunes. Ngubane was a senior Zulu traditional leader in his own right, very

closely allied to the leader of the IFP. He apparently, if the rumours were true, knew little of conservation and had trained in the medical field.

I surmised, perhaps unjustifiably, that the *Ilanga* editor had had a word with Buthelezi after deciding that somehow the original appointment of Mike would not necessarily advance the politics of the IFP. I admit to feeling quite bitter about this apparently naked political move, but realised that there was little one could do about the decision, and I was somewhat mollified by our board chairman Pat Goss, who adopted a very pragmatic position. He suggested we give Ngubane the benefit of the doubt and get



Inkosi Nyanga Ngubane, Minister of Environment and Traditional Affairs (EKZNW photo library)

to know him as, to Pat's knowledge, he had very little reason to be hostile towards the NPB and its work. Being so encouraged, we sent a letter of congratulation and invited him to head office for the next board meeting where he would be given a full overview of the NPB's activities.

Learning to adapt

Pat's reading of the situation was incredibly accurate as we were delighted to welcome a short, dapper, smiling and obviously friendly gentleman who stated forthwith that he knew little about conservation and expected the board members and staff to help him understand a field in which he had little experience. He spoke with such sincerity and eagerness that he completely removed any thoughts of his having been primed to engineer our downfall.

In fact, it took only a few months to realise, and be thankful for, the fact that Ngubane was one of the sincerest and committed politicians that we had ever had the joy of working with. He took to his responsibilities with real enthusiasm and, as his visits to the protected areas and field functions accelerated, he quite rapidly turned into one of the organisation's most supportive friends. He embraced nature conservation as a calling. Without in any way suggesting that the commitment and support of Mike Tarr would have been any less than that of Ngubane the challenges of working in a new paradigm of political alliances and powers soon convinced me that the choice had been a masterful one. We now had, as a political leader, a powerful person, widely respected and fully conscious of his role as a Zulu leader (see, for example, Buthelezi, 2010).

After his introduction to the organisation and having been taken through the full extent of its responsibilities and achievements, Ngubane was dumbstruck and openly admitted that he felt his ignorance of the NPB's work was a handicap. The board members, especially Sam Goba and Lucas Mchunu, were clearly so delighted to have him as our minister that their pride carried all with it and board meetings became characterised by a positive ambience and even more optimistic visions for the future. This was especially so following a few months in office when he described his portfolio as something he had never expected and was enjoying thoroughly. His attendance with the board at the NPB game auction and visits to game capture operations brought him enormous joy, wonder (caused by the prices paid for wild animals at the auction) and impressions, which he generously shared with us. Working with him in the field became a real pleasure for us all.

In 1995, the board invited Ngubane to officially open an international sea turtle conservation workshop that was being funded by the UNESCO

Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) at Sodwana Bay. The NPB was the host and delegates attended from all the countries on the eastern seaboard of Africa and from as far afield as Australia, the United States and France.

NPB staff did a wonderful job of organising a large tent, booking out the entire hutted camp of Sodwana and arranging all the functions and the catering. The NPB's design studio produced attractive T-shirts, brochures and gifts for all attendees. It was the first time that we had managed to attract Ngubane to the turtle beaches and the turtles did us proud. Come the opening address and Ngubane appeared with obvious good humour wearing the beautiful T-shirt created by Mark Coetzee which was emblazoned with emerging leatherback hatchlings. Never was a welcoming address more enthusiastically delivered. He told me afterwards that he had not been aware of the status of the NPB as a conservation organisation among other countries, nor of our reputation as a country that really looked after its turtle populations – a matter of enormous pride to the many staff who had served on the Maputaland sea turtle research and conservation programme since 1963.

To our surprise Ngubane said he so enjoyed meeting the other African delegates that he really wanted to spend more time at the workshop but asked for forgiveness for leaving early as he had other responsibilities to attend to. Apologies from ministers were not something that I had become accustomed to over the years and this truly emphasised how incredibly fortunate we were.

Ngubane remained as minister until 1998 and I had cause to believe that we became friends during that time as I used every opportunity possible to involve him in the efforts of the staff, and we together enjoyed many excursions and experiences. Some were, for me, somewhat more stressful than I had anticipated, but if proof was needed of his affection for conservation and commitment to our cause the visit to the Dukuduku Forest at St Lucia during an illegal invasion of refugees and others is a memory worth recording.

Attempting to save the Dukuduku Forest

During the period from 1985 until the national government's decision in 1993 not to permit dune mining on the Eastern Shores of St Lucia there was great uncertainty in the area. The national Department of Forestry had commenced the process of assigning a number of state forests to Natal, which would be handed to the NPB to control and manage. One of these was adjacent to St Lucia itself and known as the Dukuduku Forest. At that time, across the province there were many disadvantaged communities and a number of land invasions took place. Whenever such invasions occurred on those protected

areas managed by the NPB the invaders had been promptly dealt with and assisted to relocate to an official settlement area with as much help as could be given. The board had a proven commitment to effect this end in as humane a manner as possible.

In the latter days of the control by the Department of Forestry, a portion of the Dukuduku Forest was invaded by a diverse group of people, who set up homes in the deepest part of the forest and immediately started to clear vegetation for cultivation. From a biodiversity conservation perspective, the NPB had long had an interest in this largely unspoilt and invaluable stretch



Dukuduku Forest, 1994



Dukuduku Forest invaded section, 2018

of coastal forest. NPB staff, therefore, alerted the Forestry Department at Eshowe under whose jurisdiction the forest fell at that time and suggested that they take action. Most regrettably, the department chose not to do so, but followed a bureaucratic and futile procedure. This required them to post notices on trees in the forest saying that, if the invasion was not called off within a fortnight, action would be taken against the community. It should be honestly acknowledged that this was the correct legal procedure, but in the NPB's view delay would invite disaster.

The invaders paid no attention to the notices and no initial action was taken although the threat to the forest expanded daily. Within weeks of the inaction of the forestry staff, a surge of additional invaders arrived and penetrated the deeper parts of the forest where any action by authorities would have become a social and possibly violent disaster. As the first wave had involved something like fourteen families, who could have been promptly removed and resettled, the arrival of several hundred other people made the situation a massive political problem. In the years that followed, any number of KZN politicians became involved as the Department of Forestry speedily endeavoured to shed the responsibility for Dukuduku to the province.

A stretch of land north of the Mtubatuba-St Lucia road was identified as a possible site for a structured village for resettlement of these communities, which did eventuate with grants from central government. However, a hard core of invaders within the Dukuduku Forest, south of the road, refused to move. They became more and more aggressive and all normal channels seemed to see the problem as someone else's. NPB staff in the area did their best to persuade the remaining groups to move, but to no avail and the entire group became so hostile that it was considered too dangerous for staff to enter the forest.

In desperation it was agreed that Ngubane would be asked to intervene and a final effort would be made to encourage the invader families to move to the planned village. Not unnaturally, he asked me to take him to meet the leaders of the recalcitrant occupants and Gordon Forrest (1964–1998), the Warden at St Lucia, arranged the day for the meeting. It turned out to be one of those days which might best be described as harrowing. When we arrived at the meeting site we were faced with a seething, chanting gathering, clearly agitated, and waving traditional weapons with intent. To say they were abusive and aggressive would be an understatement and I was all for abandoning the meeting at speed. Among many of the unflattering comments being shouted in our direction was extreme criticism of the NPB and its staff and to my surprise

this seemed to really rattle Ngubane. He turned to me and, looking suddenly very angry, said 'This is not acceptable!' I was ready to head for the car having a similar view of the moment, but for a different reason. Instead, Ngubane grabbed my hand and said 'Come, Dokotela!'

Holding tightly to my hand he walked towards the angry gathering with determination. He was a small man, about 160 centimetres tall and I stood nearly a full head taller than he did, but he walked forward like Napoleon with me being nearly dragged along, speechless. When we had nearly reached the crowd and it was possible for me to see the whites of their eyes and judge the size and condition of various spearheads, knives and cane knives being waved at us, he stopped, drew himself upright and shouted 'Thula!' (Shut up or quiet – it sounded like the former to me).

To my utter astonishment the noise stopped dead – as did I. Ngubane took another stride forward (with me protecting his back) and literally bawled them out for their behaviour. He demanded that they acknowledge who he was and made quite certain they did by telling them exactly who he was and how disrespectfully they were treating him. Looking rather abashed and apologetic the leaders responded in a positive way, and I thought that this was a good time to move to safer ground near our staff and the local police. Again, to my surprise, Ngubane, still holding my hand, suddenly lifted it high and blasted the leaders for their outspoken criticism of the NPB. He continued by pointing out that the NPB was his responsibility and if they were critical of the board and its staff, including the CEO Dr Hughes (now having his hand waved to and fro with vigour), who had come with the minister to talk to them, he took it as a personal insult and if they did not change their attitude, he would ensure that they received no help at all and would be evicted by force.

If ever the NPB staff had questioned Ngubane's commitment to the board and conservation, his very courageous stance and determination that morning dispelled those fears forever. I thought that he was extremely brave. He would never know, alas, that as we walked back to the tent, the feeling towards him by the owner of the hand that he had held so tightly, had changed from tentative respect to admiration and a warm friendship.

Ngubane's speech brought the chaos under control and the aggression subsided. A more courteous meeting then took place in which the invaders' demands were so outrageous (they wanted full ownership of the Dukuduku Forest) that there was little hope of any resolution being reached. Someone tactfully reminded those present that the land remained under the ownership of the Department of Forestry and perhaps the national government might

consider meeting some of the demands. Ngubane must have taken the suggestion quite seriously and contacted the national Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Kader Asmal. It was not long before his office contacted me saying that the minister had arranged to meet community representatives at Mtubatuba in the near future and would I meet the minister at the Dukuduku airstrip and accompany him to the meeting.

Asmal had been appointed to the new position in 1994 and, since taking office, had gained a very considerable respect from those of us involved in environmental matters by embracing the Working for Water programme. The national government channelled millions of rands to fight invasive alien plants throughout the country and created many opportunities for employment in the process.⁴ He had not stinted in helping the NPB through the provision of significant funding to fight *Chromolaena* (Triffid Weed). As a result of this largesse our personal relationship had become very friendly.⁵

This particular visit, before the minister even arrived, had me morosely contemplating the forthcoming meeting with a strong feeling of déjà vu. When we were assembled in the hall at Mtubatuba I discreetly warned Asmal that the Dukuduku Forest intruders were not a particularly friendly group and no meeting to capture hearts and minds had so far proved successful. The minister gave me a confident smile and assured me that, for the first time in KZN, the African National Congress (ANC) government under President Nelson Mandela intended to take a positive role and this would prove that everyone was ready for a newer and brighter future.⁶ Being more familiar with this specific situation, I was not convinced.

A local official from Mtubatuba welcomed and introduced the minister and other office bearers and gave the floor to the minister. He gave a warmly pro-government and optimistic speech and then called upon the Dukuduku representative leader to outline the community's views. Up until now all speeches had been courteous and friendly with a very conciliatory tone, but that ended abruptly as the hall was subjected to an inflammatory tirade which was, thankfully, brief and ended with a string of ten demands, starting with the handing over of the entire forest to the community and a guarantee of development funds to follow.

Asmal had led a sheltered life for many years at Trinity College Dublin before returning to South Africa and this took him by surprise. He stood stock still and stunned. Showing a little nervousness, he responded gently and stated clearly that he wished to fully understand the situation so that he could advise the national Cabinet how best to assist. The Dukuduku group, now becoming

unruly, simply stood up as a body and shouted him down, proclaiming that they had come with their demands and unless the minister agreed immediately to these the meeting was over. Whatever the minister then attempted to say was drowned out by the throwing down of chairs and loud strings of abuse as the Dukuduku leaders led their group noisily from the hall. The minister was speechless. Asmal appeared genuinely hurt and, turning to me, he said, 'They can't do that to me, I am the minister from the ANC, the people that have freed South Africa! We are here to help them.' I tactfully reminded him of my earlier warning and, as the meeting was clearly at an end, we would have an early lunch and I would drive him back to his plane. It was a quiet lunch and he left disappointed.

In due course an agreement was reached through the establishment of the Khula Village. This included the building of schools and roads, as well as water and sewage systems, all of which were attractive only to a minor section of the invaders. It should be noted that the most resistant of the invaders were reputed to be illegal immigrants, many from Mozambique, who, perhaps, did not favour a formal settlement procedure. Despite this the Khula Village did indeed become a success and hosted Prince Charles and Prince Harry of the British Royal Family after their brief visit to Lake St Lucia in 1996.



Princes Charles and Harry visiting Khula Village school are welcomed by Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Ben Ngubane and NPB staff, 1996

No state or provincial body could work up the enthusiasm needed for a series of forced removals and the Dukuduku Forest was eventually left to its own devices. It has sadly lost all chance of restoration to the valuable and beautiful coastal forest it once was. It was a salutary lesson to both Asmal and Ngubane, both of whom had the best of intentions, but were unable to mobilise the support necessary to solve the problem in the interests of conservation.

New board members

Shortly after the failure of the Dukuduku discussions, a place fell vacant on the board and Ngubane sent for me. I went down to Natalia to meet him. Without delay he told me that he intended appointing Inkosi B.N. Mdletshe (1995–1998), leader of the Mdletshe community on the northern boundary of Hluhluwe Game Reserve, as a replacement board member. I must have blanched as I protested vigorously, stating that, from my experience of Mdletshe, he hated the NPB, was hostile to conservation and was likely to contribute very little to the goals of the board. With little consideration of my feelings Ngubane bluntly said, ‘You are quite right, Dokotela, he is your enemy and now you must make him your friend!’ and that ended the meeting. The news was delivered kindly, not as an order, but as a challenge intended to serve

a well-considered strategy. I have no doubt that the success of the endeavour to make Mdletshe a friend of conservation was due not only to my efforts as a result of the challenge, or to the earnest support of the staff of Hluhluwe Game Reserve, but also to the welcome he received from his new colleagues on the board. Of course, the role of a fellow *inkosi* in Ngubane was never in doubt as he probably primed Mdletshe with a short exhortation very similar to that given to me.



Inkosi Simon Mdletshe, NPB board member, 1995–1998 (EKZNW photo library)

The staff and I were astonished at the positive response we received from Mdletshe and over the next few years he really did become a champion of conservation. He greatly assisted us in achieving a significant donation from the British consulate in Durban to build a craft market just inside the memorial gate of Hluhluwe Game Reserve for his local community to sell crafts. No fewer than fifty local women formed an association to run the endeavour and proved to be committed managers. Following the official opening of the Vukuzame curio market by Buthelezi in 1998, Mdletshe delivered a stirring speech on the value of conservation and the role of the protected area in bringing benefits to his community.

Ngubane had not yet finished his contribution to conservation or his tendency to put me on the spot. At another function in 1998, when the now amalgamated conservation body had become the KZN Nature Conservation Service, the new board officially opened the recently completed Nyalasi Gate, planned by the NPB as the preferred entrance to the renamed Hluhluwe–Umfolozi Park. Every traditional leader of communities adjacent to the park was there as a guest and a splendid occasion it was.

The Premier of KZN did the honours, but Ngubane had to have his turn to speak and, calling out to Mdletshe, he told the gathering that he was proud of the way that Mdletshe had become a conservation supporter since he was appointed to the board. He pointed out with a smile that it had been his idea and that he had spoken to Dr Hughes and asked for his opinion. He then retold, with commendable accuracy and detail, the tale of my horrified objections and finished by saying that he had emphasised to me ‘that Inkosi Mdletshe is your enemy, you must make him your friend!’ In the midst of a gale of laughter at this revelation he added that ‘he was proud of both of us’ and received an enthusiastic round of applause. I clapped a trifle timidly as I watched Mdletshe’s response with interest, but there was no hint that he had taken the revelations badly. He appeared to tolerate honesty with good humour.

From April 1998 I had been appointed acting CEO of the new organisation and, when opportune, intended to apply for the appointment to be made permanent. I was certain that this decision would be taken by the board of the new service, which differed considerably from the old NPB. As I felt I had some fairly determined enemies on the new board, I did not need a vengeful Mdletshe to add to their numbers if I had any hope that my application would be successful. Sometime later, after Ngubane’s departure as our minister,⁷ and I had served eighteen months as acting CEO after the official amalgamation, it was formally announced that I had been appointed as the CEO of the KZN

Nature Conservation Service. It had been a challenging period for me, having to compete with quite a bewildering array of other applicants, some genuinely conservation orientated, others with heavy political and very partisan support and some just political. The entire process was difficult and I was glad it had ended with my being appointed on a two-year contract during which time I had to mentor a possible successor. I admit that it was not the universally acclaimed result it might have been, but, as one says, a success is a success and it was in rather a sombre mood that I went down to the formal provincial function at the Imperial Hotel in Pietermaritzburg where the appointment was to be made official.

Walking into the hall I was surprised to find my hand grasped from behind in a warm grip and it was tucked under Ngubane's arm as he drew level with me and, holding me tightly, he walked with me right through the hall within sight of every guest. As we walked, he gave me a huge smile and said: 'I am so pleased that they have chosen you, we worked well together, didn't we?' The outcome of the long and trying interview and assessment process had come as a surprise to me and, with his remark, I immediately wondered whether the voice of this influential and respected traditional leader had not, perhaps, been the catalyst that had tipped the balance against the anticipated politically favoured and politically correct decision by the powers that were.

The Royal Inyoni kayiphumuli cattle

Indeed, since 1994 I had ruffled the feathers of the new IFP administration once or twice. First, apparently, by inviting President Mandela to Hluhluwe in 1994 (see Chapter 8); and then later as a result of the saga of the Zulu Royal Nguni cattle that follows.

During the 1980s the NPB was reassessing the value and purpose of the Midmar Resort near Pietermaritzburg and we were reminded of the resident herd of Zulu Royal Nguni cattle.⁸ The NPB had been responsible for looking after this herd since 1951. As the NPB was beginning to rationalise its fundamental responsibilities the question of the future of the Nguni herd came under discussion. Like many other aspects of this programme of rationalisation there were staff and board members both for and against their removal from the reserve and a compromise was reached. It was decided to keep the herd but to give thirty mature animals to King Zwelithini to whose family they had originally belonged. The NPB did not see this as anything special, just a gesture of friendship, and plans were eventually made to deliver them to Ulundi using the game capture vehicles.



Inyoni kayiphumuli Zulu royal cattle (EKZNW library)

The Chairman and I, plus a few other staff, met the trucks outside the entrance to the KwaZulu Parliament building and were surprised to find not only the King himself but Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and the entire KwaZulu Cabinet and senior heads of departments. It was a considerable crowd and totally unexpected.

We received a royal welcome and heard several rather emotional speeches, that of the Chief Minister being the most moving. In short, he announced that the NPB's gift was one of the most significant ever received by the Zulu nation. The King, and all the Zulu people, saw the thought and action as one of the first truly laudatory contributions in recognition of the value of the Zulu nation and its culture. The minister emphasised that these were the first *Inyoni kayiphumuli* cattle ever returned to the Royal House, which made the gift beyond price as a gesture of respect and great friendship and correcting the colonial wrongs of the past. It was very moving and our group agreed that this response was somewhat different from expectations. We were thrilled.

In the 1990s after the termination of the Midmar Historical Village (see Chapter 25) and as part of a re-evaluation of the future of the herd, the NPB again thought that it should be sold off completely as there were now a number of Nguni cattle breeders making a great success of re-establishing Nguni herds, with their spectacular range of colours and shapes that inspired almost fanatical support in cattle circles. But first the board thought that we should gift another thirty or so animals to the King in order to supplement his herd.

Ah! After 1994, the Provincial Council was now in the new South Africa led by the IFP and the Zulus and the gift to the King could not be simply a gift from the NPB. When we had completed the transfer and news of it reached the Premier and Cabinet the cry of outrage included a broad range of emotions one of which was that I, as CEO, had totally exceeded my terms of reference as I had not asked the Premier's permission. There was, apparently, serious debate over my deserving dismissal and once again Nyanga Ngubane emerged as the champion of the NPB and its minion. I received my second, and final, written censure from the Administration. It was a warning and indication that the executive power as enjoyed, encouraged, and appreciated by the NPB and its staff was likely to change in the future and few of us had taken note of this.

It was a privilege to have worked with Ngubane who, in my view, was the very best type of South African who entered our new democracy with a truly loyal and committed intention to make our country a better place to live for everyone. His friendship and support of all the staff of the amalgamating organisations made him a hugely respected and deserving hero of conservation.

Inkosi Nyanga Ngubane died in 2010.

NOTES

- 1 Pietermaritzburg eventually became accepted as the capital of KZN.
- 2 I foresaw no reason why Peter would change his long-held views as a new member of the IFP. Indeed, when he became KZN Minister of Finance in 1998 his help to conservation was invaluable and he facilitated the special grant that enabled the building of Didima Lodge at Cathedral Peak in the Drakensberg, an absolute jewel in the provincial crown (see Chapter 23).
- 3 Natalia was the provincial administrative headquarters in Pietermaritzburg.
- 4 The Working for Water programme recognised not only the danger to water resources posed by non-indigenous invading plants, but also the fact that many of the invading species outcompeted indigenous species and threatened our ecosystems.
- 5 I should add that Asmal, being a co-founder of the United Kingdom Anti-Apartheid Movement, and, having had a long and positive friendship with my brother Bob (Robert Hughes), the chairman of the movement until its demise in 1995, had helped establish our rapport very rapidly.
- 6 Following the first provincial elections, the ANC had performed poorly in comparison with the Zulu-dominated IFP.
- 7 Ngubane handed over responsibility for the nature conservation portfolio to Narend Singh when the amalgamation with the Directorate took place.
- 8 The name apparently means 'the bird that does not rest.' Our herd was one of the surviving few that I am aware of from the original Royal Zulu herd as most were confiscated and seized by the British after the battle of Ulundi in 1879. A small herd of these iconic white Nguni with black noses and ears, a colour pattern that could only be owned by the Zulu Royal House, had been saved by private farmers and some survivors were later handed to the NPB and based in Kamberg Nature Reserve under the care of a veterinarian, Felix Binns (Bob) Wright (1951–1972). The herd was later moved to Midmar where it did very well.

8

THE MANDELA INFLUENCE

THE year 1994 proved to be an exciting time for everyone in South Africa largely as a result of enthusiasm for President Nelson Mandela. He had on a number of occasions since his release from prison raised the matter of nature conservation and had shown an empathy for the wildlife resources of the country. The board was certainly enthusiastic about the change in leadership as were many of the staff as, at last, twelve years after defying the apartheid laws by opening our public facilities to all races, we were at last free of anxiety about the National Party government suddenly taking it upon itself to punish the board for its decision. This was quite a relief.

It was widely believed that an opportunity to meet the President, or invite him to visit the protected areas in our province, would be a step in the right direction. A perceived obstacle was that the provincial government of KZN was in the hands of the IFP. As there was considerable tension between the ANC and the IFP it was unlikely that an immediate invitation would be issued to the President. Indeed, as there were already in-province tensions within nature conservation, generated by the impending and fully anticipated demand that the NPB amalgamate with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation, there would seem to be little incentive for the IFP provincial government to invite ANC intervention in what was likely to be a strained situation.

Within weeks of President Mandela's inauguration, I received a call from the Department of Agriculture to inform me that Mandela had been invited to come to Weenen to open an agricultural project. The Director-General of the department felt that, as the NPB had a presence next to the agricultural scheme in the form of Weenen Nature Reserve, he thought that our participation would be a good idea. Absolutely delighted, I immediately contacted Noel Greeff (1977–1987), the Officer-in-Charge at Weenen and suggested that he join me and invite six of our deserving game guards in full uniform. I have mentioned before how incredibly proud the guards were of their uniforms and when the day came this team met all expectations.

Arriving at Weenen in advance of the scheduled time I met the staff and told them we were going to see President Mandela. Everyone was thrilled and they were voluble in their excitement over this unexpected occasion. As this was not an official function and because my role was uncertain, I had put on my NPB blazer and tie and not formal uniform. I had thought it highly likely that I was probably there to fill a space at worst and at best was a token guest, as had been suggested by the Director-General.

The NPB contingent was present in advance of the starting time, and it was just as well as Mandela's helicopter touched down punctually at the appointed hour. I scampered off to meet the official entourage with some of the agricultural staff. Everyone was bewildered and as it was a first for all of us, there was a degree of tension and uncertainty which made most of us a little nervous. The President was surrounded by bodyguards and the spectacle was quite forbidding. Once guided to my reserved seat, I stood patiently waiting for the President to take his and I sat down, watching him with interest. He looked totally relaxed in his open-necked shirt which, I confess, looked as though it had been bought from a trading store (a far cry from the elegant and sartorially splendid open-necked shirts that later became a hallmark of his public appearances during his presidency), and he studied the scene around him with interest. As our NPB blazer was bright green and adorned with our colourful old provincial NPB badge, I was a little discomfited to see him lean over from about ten seats away and obviously try to make out the badge. I was struck rigid and hardly heard a word of the formal speeches, the President's included.

When all was done and we stood up, to everyone's surprise Mandela left the deep protection of his bodyguards and started to mingle with the crowd in the open and friendly way that was to become so familiar in the future. He radiated warmth and received it in return, something which I had not expected as it was an IFP-dominated audience. In the general *mélée* I had not anticipated meeting him, so was stunned when he suddenly appeared next to me and said: 'Are those your chaps down there?', pointing to our Weenen team standing next to a restraining fence about 20 metres away. I stammered an agreement and he set off towards them saying: 'You are the Parks Board, then?' as I struggled to keep abreast of him, while being shouldered a bit by a bodyguard. Impressed, I watched with joy as he greeted the six guards and Noel, all of whom appeared to be floating a metre off the ground. They were smiling with the light of the truly converted as he shook their hands while speaking to them in English and

Zulu about their reserve, their work and their families. It was a deeply moving and awe-inspiring moment.¹

A moment of rashness

After a good ten minutes he turned to me saying that he needed to leave. We left behind an excited group, which I considered to consist of seven probable new recruits for the ANC.

The President engaged me in a splendid dialogue about conservation, adding that he thought I must be ‘very proud’ of my team. As we walked together towards the helicopter, and he was fast approaching the gaining of an eighth recruit for the ANC, I relaxed sufficiently to gather my thoughts. We were within a few metres of the helicopter when I blurted out that the NPB was about to



A fateful meeting with President Mandela, Weenen, April 1994 (Mike Matthewman)

donate twenty white rhinoceros to Kenya, and I thought it would be an excellent idea that he come along as the President and personally hand over the rhino as a gift from South Africa! He stopped dead and turned to me with a smile and said: ‘Tell me about it’. This I did at speed while the rest of the official party tried to get him to enter the helicopter. He was clearly intrigued and, rather abstractly, I thought that if I had spent 27 years in a cell on Robben Island such a trip would be a welcome change. He called an aide and told him to give me a card and whispered that I should write to him about it very

quickly. With his truly wonderful and sincere smile he leapt into the helicopter and was gone.

To say that I was excited would be an understatement. If the President did decide to accompany us, we would give him an exciting introduction to conservation in action involving living rhinoceros, a really munificent gift, with which his name would be associated forever. The occasion would never be forgotten by the President of Kenya and the staff of the Kenya Wildlife Service. In my fevered imagination the aura and reputation of the NPB would be enhanced by the association and our relationship with President Mandela cemented for life.

Those whom the gods intend to destroy they first make mad. First, I had no authority whatsoever to consider inviting South Africa's brand-new President to do anything, let alone ask him to participate in an official NPB occasion. The moment I got back to the office I telephoned the chairman suggesting that I had had a little rush of blood to the head. Pat Goss had one too and he was thrilled beyond words, telling me to get a written invitation to the President immediately. This went off within minutes. Not unnaturally I awaited a response with visible excitement and, as the departure date drew ever closer with no response, I began to lose heart; and with some justification as a courteous letter was received informing me that President Mandela was already committed to other activities, but that he would send the Minister of Environment Affairs, Dawie de Villiers, in his place. Somehow that did not meet the occasion and I was relieved within a day to receive a letter from De Villiers' office saying that he could not make it either.

Thanks to the generosity of Anton Rupert, who had graciously offered the NPB his private jet to travel to Kenya, and the funding of the entire exercise by Total (South Africa), who sent two representatives along, Pat Goss, the NPB Capture Team (led by Keith Meiklejohn) and I saw to the handing over of the twenty rhinoceros. The Masai people at the Masai Mara National Park were thrilled with the arrival of these rare animals. Their chief, Steven Ole Ntutu, presented Pat and me with traditional Masai spears and the entire endeavour was a triumph for the NPB (see also Chapter 10).

A second moment of rashness

Determined to maintain a link with the President, I wrote to him saying how disappointed the board and I were that he could not be present at the handover. Then, with a second rush of blood to my head, I asked the President whether he was aware that in April 1995 we were going to have an international gathering

in Zululand to celebrate the centenary of the declaration of three of the first protected areas in Africa: the Hluhluwe, Umfolozi and St Lucia game reserves, all set aside in 1895 by the Natal colonial government. I suggested that he might like to consider attending the celebrations. To my disappointment, within the week a reply came, thanking me for the thought, but the President would not be able to attend. And that, as they say, was that.

The year 1994 was very busy indeed and the flash-in-the-pan excitement of meeting the President was soon forgotten among other pressures. I went overseas to give a series of lectures on the work of the NPB, which had me criss-crossing the United States, and then came a CITES meeting at Fort Lauderdale (see Chapter 20) with all its concomitant politics and document preparation. The time flew by, and I forgot all about my suggestion to President Mandela. When I eventually returned to the office in early December there was a mountain of mail awaiting my attention.

Maxie Holder (1976–1996), my personal secretary, being a highly efficient woman had sorted the mail into what she considered to be descending matters of importance. Therefore, the first envelope to which she drew my attention was a letter from the President of South Africa. Somewhat surprised, I opened it first and found, to my delight, that Mandela had not forgotten my suggestion, which had obviously matured in his memory to the point that he ‘thanked me profusely for the invitation to attend the Centenary Celebrations as our Guest of Honour’.

It was at this point that the gods began their interference. First, at the beginning of the year Pat Goss and I had never told the other board members of the failed possibility that the President might come to Kenya. Second, the board never meets in December and thus I could not inform the members officially until its next meeting at the end of January. Despite this, after opening the letter, I told Pat, who was absolutely thrilled at the prospect of the President being our guest-of-honour. Neither of us gave a thought to telling the other board members immediately; nor, more importantly, the KwaZulu-Natal Premier and his ministers.

When the board met at the end of January, Pat and I formally informed it of this development. There was a collective sense of jubilation about the possibility of hosting President Mandela, and this was dutifully recorded in the minutes of the meeting. These minutes were, at the end of February, duly approved and, following normal procedures, copies sent to the Premier and the Minister of Environment and Traditional Affairs, Nyanga Ngubane.

At this point the gods escalated their mischievous campaign and all hell broke loose. I confess I had neglected to consider what the new government of KZN, led by Premier Frank Mdlalose, might think, as they pondered the significance of the board's correspondence with the President. This involved the CEO of the NPB inviting the President of South Africa, and of the ANC, to a major KZN event without even consulting the provincial authorities. The NPB had become so used to receiving support from the old South African political parties that we were as yet not attuned to the new order. The IFP, even with the odd ANC member on the provincial Cabinet, hit the roof.

As I heard from discreet sources, the suggested punishments for my gross lack of manners, let alone protocol (a word that became more frequently heard in future years), ranged from being fired immediately through a range of other dire lessons. I was apparently saved by the positive intervention of Ngubane (see Chapter 7) whose faith in the board and me enabled him to calm everyone down. The Cabinet eventually agreed that the Premier should write to me personally, censuring me rather bluntly and warning me that any future transgression of this nature would be dealt with severely. This letter has never appeared on my CV.

The board was duly slapped on the wrist, which I considered a little unfair, and then we applied ourselves to planning a successful event at Hluhluwe Game Reserve. Unbeknown to me, some members of the IFP were deeply offended, and a plot developed to disrupt the entire occasion and thus spoil the event for the President.

Retribution

Ngubane brought me the alarming news that a suitably outraged group of individuals, among other things, was planning to burn down the new Hilltop Camp at Hluhluwe, which had been opened officially in 1993 by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, then the head of the self-governing territory of KwaZulu. This was in protest for not inviting Buthelezi to be the guest-of-honour at the centenary celebrations and, in addition, also as a protest against President Mandela of the ANC being invited into the heartland of Zululand. The IFP Cabinet expressed their rejection of such a violent protest, but left it to Ngubane to try to stave off the disaster.

In March, Ngubane (who was genuinely horrified at this plan of which he had had no previous knowledge) and I, with local staff, visited the Mpukunyoni area (where the protest appeared to have originated) several times to meet the

leader of the protest group. Following his description of the extensive and heinous offences we had committed and the despicable actions for which the NPB was responsible, it was made clear that another rebellion was imminent. I was appalled at what was said, but necessity demanded my docile acceptance of all insults. His overtures convinced me that this youngish gentleman met all my criteria for a rabble-rouser; but despite this, during a series of meetings spread over the weeks prior to the celebrations, a *modus operandi* was established in order to resolve the situation.

This procedure was not without its moments of passion, as one of the various NPB staff present at all the meetings was a fine community extension officer, Paula Morrison (1992–1998). Born a Zululander, Paula spoke fluent Zulu and her educational extension work had made her a valued, indeed legendary, and popular person throughout the ten communities with whom she regularly engaged. When our tactless protagonist, in overstating his grievances, suggested that the NPB was disliked in the neighbouring communities because NPB staff never did anything for them, Paula lost her temper and, in the vernacular of his own language, thus earning her Ngubane's admiration for life, she dressed the agitator down calling him a liar and a disgrace to his tribe. Realising that he had overstepped the mark, the young firebrand apologised under pressure from the minister, and thereafter we worked together rather successfully and reached the following agreements:

1. The 'outraged' gathering would hold a demonstration at Hilltop Camp;
2. As there was a danger that a boisterous walk by the group, through lion prides and herds of elephants, might constitute a danger to the participants, NPB staff would meet them at the gate and provide suitable transport to convey them all to the venue;
3. The NPB would provide a suitable assembly point near Hilltop Camp where the protesters could decamp for a rest, get organised, march a short distance to the camp and protest for a defined period not exceeding 40 minutes;
4. The NPB would supply and prepare two buffalo for the post-protest luncheon;
5. After lunch NPB staff would then transport the protesters back out of the reserve;
6. Due courtesy and decorum would be observed.

It was going to be a rather a unique outraged protest.

The official commemoration

The centenary celebrations proved an immense success, with the President arriving by helicopter dead on time. He joined a wide range of invited guests including King Zwelithini of the Zulu, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the IFP, the Premier of KZN and his Cabinet, other members of the KZN legislature, Claude Martin, president of the International Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and many other guests who had given support, either as colleagues or donors, to the work of the NPB and the NPB Conservation Trust (see Chapter 24). The South African Post Office made a splendid contribution issuing a special large format stamp depicting white rhinoceros and a map of South Africa with KZN highlighted. The National Mint rose to the occasion, trucking down from Midrand and assembling a substantial minting press, using which a number of us were invited to strike a commemorative Kruger Rand. This Kruger Rand would be part of the Mint's Natura Series, being embossed with a white rhinoceros and made unique by being stamped with the date and place of minting: Hluhluwe Game Reserve. The Mint eventually struck 750 Kruger Rand coins on site.



Above left: President Mandela and Frank Mdlalose, Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, centenary celebrations, Hluhluwe, 1995; (Above right) President Mandela enjoying the centenary celebrations, Hluhluwe, 1995 ... ; (Right) ...as did Mangosuthu Buthelezi, president of the IFP (EKZNW photo library)



President of the Worldwide Fund of Nature (International) Claude Martin and Mrs Martin being given a tour of the Game Capture Centre by NPB Capture Officer, Jeff Cook, during the centenary celebrations, 1995



*Left: The centenary gold Kruger Rand
Right: Centenary stamps issued by the South African Post Office*

The board also hosted a young sculptor, Dylan Lewis, from Stellenbosch, who had laboured over the past year to create a life-size sculpture of a black rhinoceros. The preparatory model of the sculpture, which would be later cast in bronze, was unveiled by President Mandela at Hilltop Camp and named the Centenary Rhino. Dylan and I helped him unveil the rhino model, to our lasting joy.²



President Mandela congratulates Dylan Lewis after unveiling Dylan's sculpture of the black rhino, 1995 (courtesy Dylan Lewis Studio)

Mandela certainly did not display any concerns about appearing as a guest in Zululand and, as I had seen at Weenen, he simply wandered off and mixed with anyone he met, displaying an amazing generosity of time and effort. I had to dig him out of the kitchen before lunch, where I found him engaged in conversation with all the kitchen staff, discussing what they were preparing for the meal. He seemed indefatigable. At lunch, following a request from Dylan Lewis, I asked the President whether he would agree to have his name associated with the series of bronze maquettes³ that the NPB Conservation Trust would be selling to raise funds. After expressing his excitement at the request, he signed his name in a wax mould. Dylan did the same for me in recognition of the assistance I had given him since his first expressed ambition to sculpt a life-sized black rhino. Those who would eventually purchase maquettes would also receive an attached plaque engraved with the signatures of President Mandela and me. For me a signal honour.



*Above: Plaque for the rhino maquettes approved and signed by President Mandela
Right: The black rhino maquette of which 100 were cast*



The luncheon was excellent and prepared, with some enthusiasm and careful attention, as a donation to the celebrations by the Compass Group that managed the Hilltop Restaurant and Bar. I must confess that, in the excitement of the moment, I had forgotten about the anticipated protest by an enraged community and as the second course arrived a NPB staff member rushed up to me and said that the demonstration was underway just outside the Hilltop Centre and the spokesman was demanding my presence. At the word demonstration, Mandela leapt to his feet and said that if it was a protest, he would go out at once. It took some persuading to get him to sit down again. I told him it was a protest against the NPB and I would deal with it.

Somewhat timidly and accompanied by Tony Conway and Martin Schofield (both senior NPB managers) I leapt onto a convenient bale of hay which provided some height and faced about 80 people, many dressed in tribal apparel and armed with an array of lethal tools that has now gained the modern euphemism of traditional weapons. These were waved and whirled around with gay abandon in my direction. It was not a comforting sight.

This danger became secondary, however, as the now familiar spokesman, in full traditional Zulu regalia, ran towards me, pointing a shotgun at my stomach and using his now well-known hyperbole to excite his colleagues. It was clear that he had come prepared, as no fewer than 26 of his compatriots were waving placards some six of which bore criticisms against the NPB.⁴ However, the majority of the placards had unkind things to say about the ANC and the presence of President Mandela; and a few declared their loyal support for the IFP.

Some 40 minutes of chanting, dancing and gesticulation went by. This was distressing to me as the leader danced here and there, with regular rushes at me, the shotgun being constantly aimed at my stomach. To add emphasis, the weapon was thrust back and forth at me each time a complaint was raised. This is not to be recommended at a lunch.

Promptly, at the 40-minute mark, the leader called out and everyone went silent, and I responded with a number of comments including the privilege of having President Mandela doing KZN the honour of celebrating with us. A paper with a list of grievances was handed to me. I accepted it with a promise that I would deal with each matter raised and would report back to the leader. I then, on behalf of the NPB, thanked them for their presence and invited them to lunch. The crowd let out a cheer and turned away, walking down the road up which they had arrived in riotous assembly. The leader had more character than I had given him credit for as he shouldered the shotgun and walked over to me with a huge smile, reached up and shook hands saying: "Well, I think that went off very well!"⁵



*Pat Goss, Chairman of the NPB board
addresses the centenary celebrations
(EKZNW photo library)*

of which was the white rhinoceros which had been adopted as the logo of the NPB.

Personally, after the relief that followed what was in the end a relatively pain-free local protest, I was proud indeed of what had been achieved. I was

When I got back to the luncheon the meal was over and as a result of the very complimentary and politically courteous speeches given by a long series of speakers from far and wide the general ambience of the celebrations was exceptionally pleasant, with innumerable compliments being made about the function and what a wonderful gathering it had been. The board and staff were exhilarated. We felt that we had done justice to that amazing action of a century ago when a group of Natal colonial politicians had unwittingly started a trend for conservation that had resulted in the saving of many species from extinction, not the least

equally sure that all present felt intense emotion at the event and appreciated the value and significance of the occasion.

The media miss the point

There is always an exception that proves the rule, and it was a bitter disappointment to me to watch and overhear a CNN journalist reporting outside the Hilltop Restaurant. With the magnificent views from the patio spread out behind him, apart from stating the fact that he was in Hluhluwe Game Reserve, with a brief reference to its 100-year history, he spent the entire report focusing on IFP/ANC political rivalry and its impact on the lives of the people of KZN. He ended by stating that 'whilst these celebrations were underway the valleys and hills behind me are running with blood'.

The CNN report was poorly conceived, but the various items produced by the other media were a credit to the journalists' sense of occasion. The centenary outcomes were a credit also to all the board members and staff, who had committed everything they had to the occasion. Conservation will always be proud of them.

By mid-afternoon it was time for President Mandela to leave and after a dozen false starts, I managed to coax him into my car and drove him up the hill to our helipad where his helicopter awaited. As he climbed out of the vehicle, I staggered out behind him with the first of the bronze maquettes of the centenary rhinoceros the board and Dylan Lewis had presented to him as guest-of-honour. I became conscious of the presence of his now famous secretary, Zelda la Grange, who stepped in front of us and asked the President if he knew who my brother was. President Mandela said 'Who?' and Zelda replied: 'Bob Hughes, the chairman of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement'. Nelson Mandela stopped, turned, stretched out both his hands and clutched my arms in a firm and warm grip and with that wonderful smile inches from my face said: 'Thank you for a wonderful day and you have a very good brother.'

As I watched the helicopter rise with the door open, Mandela was sitting looking smilingly out towards us and clamped between his legs was the little centenary rhino. Completely overwhelmed, I had no idea who had taken it from me or how it had got there.

It was only later I realised that, despite all the problems involved on the day and the protocol oversights involved in having the State President present, the reputation and standing of the NPB had risen along with Mandela's obvious pleasure at being one with us in recognising the value of nature conservation to our new democracy.

NOTES

- 1 Nearly a year later, this event would result in unintended consequences that would lead to my coming close to being fired and fortunate to be only censured savagely by the IFP provincial leaders.
- 2 The NPB Conservation Trust bought the first of the five life-size bronzes and it stands today at the gate of the Centenary Capture Centre in Umfolozi Game Reserve.
- 3 Dylan had generously agreed to allow the NPB Conservation Trust to have cast 100 bronze maquettes (1/5th scale) of the centenary rhino for sale to the public. Each maquette would be engraved with a unique year, starting in 1895, and the series would end with a maquette engraved with the year 1994. Purchasers could, subject to availability, choose a year that had some personal or business association for them. All were sold, starting originally at R8 000 each, the sum rising as the numbers dwindled, to over R12 000. Eventually, the project raised nearly R750 000 for the trust. I confess to regretting sincerely the fact that I did not buy one, as in 2019 one was auctioned in Johannesburg for R250 000 followed by another auctioned in London in 2021 for R286 000.
- 4 Most of the posters objecting to the NPB were related to the employment of black officers. However, one had us completely bamboozled. It stated that the NPB had created Zulu chiefs and had no right to do so. The source of this complaint was completely lost on all of us including our black officers and we simply could not respond at all. A request to the gathering for an explanation was drowned out, so the matter was never sorted out that day. We found out some time later what had created this perception. Inkosi Mkhwanazi of the Mpukunyoni community, under whose jurisdiction the Eastern Shores of St Lucia had traditionally fallen, told me during a weekend visit by him and his indunas to Umfolozi Game Reserve that this great umbrage was a result of our apparently trying to get a local induna raised to the status of chief. All the NPB staff knew was that the Umbuyazi community had been living on the Eastern Shores before being forcibly removed by the Department of Forestry forty years before. In response to a request from the induna of the Umbuyazi community, which wished to apply for restitution, NPB staff had promised to obtain, for the induna, the papers required by the Land Restitution Board to be completed for the process. What the induna of the Umbuyazi community had written on those papers had absolutely nothing to do with the NPB but perhaps the induna had been a little romantic in his claims.
- 5 The leader of the protest group clearly felt he had established his bona fides as an organiser: a year or so later he applied for the advertised position of head of the Communications Division of the NPB. Happily, it was not my decision to consider him for the shortlist.

9

AGNES TAKES US FORWARD!

LITERALLY days after the new government had taken office in May 1994, news of difficulties over a boundary dispute with a local community near Sani Pass in the Drakensberg saw Ron Physick, Mark Astrup and me called to a meeting at the Sani Pass Hotel in case the problem affected any of the NPB's Drakensberg Park boundaries. With South Africa entering its new democratic phase the NPB anticipated a significant increase in such land ownership issues and we were under instruction to engage with the parties concerned and do our best to ensure that there was no erosion of the province's protected areas. As it turned out this particular issue was a storm in a teacup, but there was an unexpected and invaluable outcome that no one could have anticipated.



Sani Pass: the site of a fortuitous meeting with Minister Derek Hanekom

Unbeknown to us the newly appointed national Minister of Land Affairs, Derek Hanekom, had flown down from Pretoria to attend the meeting. Newspaper reports had made it clear that his personal approach to protected areas was ambivalent and he favoured the redistribution of land. He had also been reported as having implied that the conservation sacred cows of the old regime, even the Kruger National Park, were not sacrosanct and he was said to have commented that the people might be better served by turning the Kruger

Park into cattle ranches. Hanekom was one of the new national ministers to whom the board had suggested we should try to convey the benefits of nature conservation and the wider role that it served in South Africa.

Ron, Mark and I had arrived at the hotel long before most of the state officials and, not expecting the minister, were on the lawn outside the dining room enjoying a cup of tea. We were all in full meeting uniforms with shirts, ties, longs and bunny jackets – what was then known as the B uniform – with the green shoulder tabs normally worn by NPB staff. We were totally at ease when suddenly out of the door stepped Hanekom who, on seeing us, stopped abruptly and, looking as if he had just received a terrible fright, spun round and fled back into the hotel.



Shoulder tabs

Hanekom had spent three years in prison having originally been accused of treason and that was hardly likely to have been an experience easily forgotten. It occurred to us that his reaction might be due to our uniforms resembling those normally worn by the

Correctional Services of the old government who had, at some stage, adopted green shoulder tabs very similar to those worn by the NPB since 1947. The old apartheid state had not been tolerant of the ANC and its cadres and we all three expressed horror at the treatment he must have received during his incarceration. It was not a good start in our relations with an important, but apparently unimpressed, minister of the new democratic government.

The meeting got underway without further incident, and we were introduced in turn by the chairman. Hanekom looked vaguely relieved when we were introduced as members of the NPB. The discussions were very cordial, and the meeting ended with the provincial officials agreeing to launch an in-depth survey of the disputed boundary nearby.

The opportunity to open a dialogue with the minister was too good to miss and I engaged him in conversation, asking how often he had been in KZN and how well he was acquainted with the protected areas of the province. He warmed visibly and admitted that he was a very keen conservationist but had not spent much time in KZN and could not claim any real knowledge of the NPB's system of protected areas. Without hesitation I invited him to come and visit our parks and, giving him a card, suggested that when next he was likely to come down our way he should get in touch and depending on the time he had available we could take him on an introductory tour. To my

surprise he asked, rather timidly I thought, whether he could bring his wife. I was delighted as I knew that his wife was Patricia (Trish) Hanekom. Recently appointed to the Department of Environment Affairs in Gauteng, she was a biologist, so we had much in common and I assured him that it would be a pleasure to share her company.

A response was not anticipated from Hanekom in the immediate future, but I reported the meeting to the board, which approved the invitation and encouraged me to try to attract him to the province. Some weeks later I received a call from his office and was soon talking to the minister who informed me that he was planning a visit to KZN, which included a visit to St Lucia to meet Andrew Zaloumis. At that stage the NPB was unaware of the fact that Andrew was involved in promoting the idea of a consolidated protected area for the future St Lucia following the democratic government's decision not to allow the sand mining of the Eastern Shores.

Hanekom then told me that he and his wife intended driving back to Gauteng and asked whether they could fit in a visit to one of KZN's parks on the return trip. As the NPB had recently opened the fully international Ntshondwe Camp at our fast-developing Itala Game Reserve near Vryheid, I did not hesitate to



Itala Game Reserve: Ntshondwe Camp restaurant complex with conference centre in the background

suggest that they might enjoy a visit to this beautiful camp, in a reserve with spectacular scenery and plenty of game. After discussing possible dates, we agreed on a few days when, because the dates fell within school holidays, I could take with me my wife Lee, and our daughter Catherine, accompanied by Megan, a close friend of hers. I felt that the presence of family would allow a departure from officialdom and make the visit very relaxed. As they were our guests, I booked the Ntshondwe Lodge for the Hanekoms and a cottage for the family. The Itala Game Reserve Warden at the time was Peter Openshaw (1986–1998), who had recently married Ronel Horne (1990–1991), the former head of our Communications Division.

Peter had also been head of our game capture operations for a few years and was a widely experienced officer with a deep knowledge of the province. Suitably primed, Peter booked lecture rooms in the conference centre at Ntshondwe where I could give an in-depth presentation on the work of the NPB and also a tour vehicle to take the couple around the reserve. The stage was set for us to try to earn our visitors' trust and establish a working relationship with the minister.

What I did not do was ensure that the minister was aware of the distances and routes involved in getting from St Lucia to Itala and so was set the scene for an embarrassing beginning to the visit. Having previously posted the reserve literature on Itala Game Reserve to his office, I assumed that Hanekom would allocate plenty of time to get to the reserve and anticipated his arrival sometime after 17h00. Some weeks before the planned visit communications ceased and I heard no more from him or his staff. An element of uncertainty crept into proceedings. Even when we had arrived and booked into our cottage on the appointed day there was no word from Hanekom. Dinner time came and went and there was still no word of the Hanekoms. The camp manager, reminding me that the reserve was now closed, suggested that as it was now clear that our visitor was not coming, my family move into the lodge as it had been prepared for our guests. The lodge is a beautiful one in which we had not stayed as a family and I immediately agreed, thinking it a treat for Lee and the girls.

We had moved in and settled down and were extremely comfortable at about 22h30 when there was a banging on the door. I opened it and my heart sank as the camp manager was there and behind him stood the minister, looking somewhat harassed. I ushered him in at once and asked after Trish Hanekom, who had already moved into the cottage we had vacated. I tried to persuade Hanekom to move to the lodge and was already sending the girls and Lee to

pack up, but he would not hear of it and said that it was their fault that they were so very late and his wife was ready for bed. The manager took him back to the cottage, leaving me aghast, as I could not imagine a second faux pas within weeks with this important and influential minister.

The next morning, we were tense when we went down to breakfast and the Hanekoms did not arrive until we had just finished. We agreed that we would meet in the conference room at 11h00 by which time I would have set up the venue and prepared my presentation, armed with a bundle of suitable literature to leave with the minister to read at his leisure.

The Hanekoms were punctual but appeared to radiate tension as I formally welcomed them, thanked them for coming and gradually introduced the objectives of the presentation. Once I got going neither of them interjected and they gave me the fullest attention, listening with, I thought, a high degree of scepticism, especially with regard to the section on community outreach. When I had completed the presentation, they both started to ask quite penetrating questions. Noting the slight but clear tone of the questions that were clearly given in expectation of honest answers, I responded as fully and truthfully as I could and was comforted by the care with which the answers were received. I was uneasy, feeling that I had failed a serious test and was relieved when I noticed that we were approaching the time that I had agreed with Lee that we would meet for lunch. It had been a long meeting and as I rose to usher them out the minister suddenly and bluntly demanded: 'What do they call you? The staff, I mean'.

Somewhat startled, I responded that in Itala I was normally addressed as Dokotela or Mnumsane (the Zulu for Sir) but there were, I said jokingly, probably other names of which I was unaware. The Hanekoms did not even smile. The walk down to the restaurant was not filled with light banter and I felt that the visit was turning out to be a disaster. Once inside, we sat down at a table with Trish Hanekom placed on my left and Derek Hanekom next to her opposite Catherine and Megan. Lee was on my right, and I had my back to the entrance from the kitchen. The minister courteously but seriously engaged the two school-going girls in a sharp series of political questions, while Lee and I spoke to his wife. It was all rather stilted and not at all encouraging to me.

Since the construction and establishment of Ntshondwe Camp, I had spent many days in Itala and had found the staff, all of whom were recruited locally, a particularly happy group of people. I had established an excellent rapport with them partly, I am sure, because they found the working conditions very good as well as participatory, through the open seminars and staff liaison

committees in which they had always been obviously interested and involved – so much so that I had come to know many of the camp staff by their first names and had enjoyed a warm interaction with them. I had not realised quite how great a dividend these spontaneous relationships would produce.

The slightly awkward lunch proceeded and, concentrating hard on the situation, I had not noticed that the 13h00 change of staff was taking place – the morning shift being replaced by their colleagues for the afternoon shift. One of the afternoon shift ladies was habitually a very cheerful and voluble waitress with whom we had had many amicable interchanges during our occasional meetings. Her name was Agnes. She walked out of the kitchen away from which I was facing and passed me en route to the reception desk near the main entrance.

She glanced backwards at me, and her face lit up. She spun on her heels crying out for half of the dining room to hear, ‘Mnumsane!!!’, and, rushing the length of the table, to everyone’s astonishment, she hurled her arms around my neck, gave me a huge hug and admonished me for not telling the staff that I was visiting. I stood up and was promptly grabbed by the hand of the *maître d’*, who was also just coming on duty, and he also gave me a wholehearted, smiling welcome.

Derek Hanekom then stunned everyone by springing to his feet, and, walking around the table, he came up to me with a huge smile, grabbed my hands in both of his and, pumping them up and down, cried ‘Let me shake your hand!! You are the first CEO of any state department that I have seen that clearly has the affection and respect of the black staff!’ Agnes had saved the day.

That afternoon and on the evening drive with the Openshaws, the Hanekoms were completely different people – warm, interested, indeed voluble, enthusiastic, and demanding that the family call them Derek and Trish. We saw them off the next day as friends whose loyalty has never wavered, and Derek became a warm supporter of the NPB. Even when we jointly attended a British Overseas Development Policy Consultation in England in 1996, at which Derek was a special guest, with his portfolio including the National Parks Board, he went out of his way during his speeches to emphasise the independence of the Natal Parks Board and to praise the organisation’s achievements.

‘Ngiyabonga, Agnes!’

10

RELATIONS WITH KENYA

KENYA is a remarkable country. Stunningly beautiful, it is the darling of the international conservation world and especially of Europe and Britain. There are very good reasons for this, in that it was the country that exposed its fantastic wildlife assets through that part of the twentieth century – the period after World War Two – that coincided with a rise of awareness of the necessity of conservation.

The romantic appeal of Kenya and its wildlife had been placed before the world by the novels of Ernest Hemingway as well as a remarkable collection of memoirs by professional hunters describing the amazing range of large mammals that existed there in profusion. Kenya became the sweetheart of the world through the experiences of these professional hunters, and attracted the adventurous and famous, such as American President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's large collection of African wildlife specimens transported to the United States graces the halls of the Field Museum in Chicago even today.

Some of that inspiration could also be laid at the door of the rise of derring-do British and American films on Africa, mostly filmed in Kenya. Some of these were inspiring British productions, such as *Where No Vultures Fly* and Hollywood contributions such as *King Solomon's Mines*, *Something of Value* and *Out of Africa*. A direct benefit of *King Solomon's Mines* was the production of television documentaries such as the Armand and Michaela Denis series produced in the 1950s.¹ The Denis series, *Filming in Africa* and *On Safari*, became regular viewing throughout Britain. It was followed by the *Survival* series and then came David Attenborough. Kenya had it made.

South Africa's conservation reputation

Compared to those halcyon days in East Africa, conservation in South Africa was almost inconspicuous as a result of the appalling reduction in wildlife that, in its heyday, had made a similar impression on Victorians in the 1800s. South Africa in the nineteenth century had been no different from Kenya in the

1950s, and for similar reasons. Wildlife was then prolific, seemingly endless in numbers and variety. It was ruthlessly used without foresight by all, so that by the end of the century there was nothing left worth remarking upon.

However, by the 1950s South Africa's wildlife was slowly but gradually returning, to a much more advanced and widely settled country. Circumstances required the development of a different model of wildlife conservation. Human population numbers necessitated protected areas be secured by the construction of fences to restrain the growing numbers of large mammals that began to thrive in them. The Natal Parks Board was at this time in its early years and fast developed a policy of adaptive management, as South Africa and Natal no longer had the unsettled open spaces of the eighteenth century.

Kenya and South Africa's conservation endeavours therefore were not in harmony, each dealing with a different conservation paradigm separated by dissimilar conditions occurring over a period exceeding fifty years. That there were misunderstandings and misconceptions was inevitable. The NPB was drawn into the debates that followed as a result.

Areas of conflict

Many South African conservation authorities and particularly those practising sustainable use management policies such as the NPB, were often rather annoyed by the persistent criticism from Kenya-based expatriate biologists, especially those from Britain, that in South Africa virtually all of the protected areas were fenced and they therefore implied South Africa's conservation efforts were of a lower order than those of Kenya.²

By the 1960s, however, Kenya had become more unstable. There followed a massive onslaught on its wildlife populations that appeared to take everyone by surprise. The result was a catastrophic collapse of Kenya's rhinoceros population and a sharp drop in elephant numbers. The two threats played a significant role in the development of the CITES (see Chapter 20). Kenya, along with many other states, saw the convention as a panacea and put its faith in placing such species in appendices I and II of the convention stipulations, after it came into force in 1975. In 1974, Kenya stopped most forms of wildlife utilisation, including hunting and sales of wildlife products.

South Africa, by contrast, encouraged by the now fast rebound of its indigenous mammalian species, including rhinoceros, took the opposite decision: to encourage the rational management and sustainable use of wildlife. Following the launch of CITES the two countries became diametrically

opposed, as voting at the CITES conferences of the parties (COPs) became more focused on preventing any trade in wildlife products, thanks to the enthusiasm of Kenya, which believed, as many other countries did, that CITES was a sort of magic bullet that would stop trade or would at least lessen the state financial load incurred in trying to prevent further poaching.

Dr Richard Leakey enters conservation in Kenya

The Kenyan Wildlife and Management Department had lost much of its reputation during the peak of the poaching surge and in 1989 Richard Leakey was asked to take over leadership of the body. Richard saw the necessity of change and founded a new statutory authority to be known as the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).

Richard was not a professional conservationist of long standing but was a highly respected and successful paleoanthropologist, with a proven record of success, along with that of his famous mother and father, Mary and Louis Leakey. Richard had much in common with South Africa in his personal and family's pursuit of *Australopithecenes*, (early hominids) for which South Africa had become equally world renowned, thanks to Raymond Dart and others.³ Very rapidly Richard displayed a determination to save Africa's wildlife and became a staunch animal rights supporter and foremost critic of South Africa's position on trade in ivory and rhino horn. In addition, Richard was a gifted, provocative and controversial speaker. Nothing cheered him more than to provoke offence at protagonists of the sustainable use of wildlife and, in turn, received praise for his views from an adoring European, British and American media.

It was, however, a surprise when Richard, in 1989, having been attracted away from his position of 21 years as Director of the National Museums of Kenya, moved to head the KWS and suddenly became a champion of wildlife.

Richard arrives with guns blazing

Shortly after assuming this position, Richard was invited to South Africa by a local banking group to give a series of lectures on nature conservation. A brief interview on television allowed him to launch a critique of the South African model, to which he added that the days when protected areas would be managed or led by conservationists or biologists was past. His opinion was that in future, all such structures should be run as businesses, with senior managers being drawn more appropriately from the ranks of chartered accountants or

holders of a master's degree in Business Administration.

Richard's aggressive comments towards the running of South African protected areas and his views that those in charge of the numerous nature conservation authorities were neither necessary nor of merit caused a modest frisson of outrage from nearly every head of nature conservation agencies in the country. As a result, a group of us arrived en bloc to attend his first formal presentation in Johannesburg.

His reputation as a human anthropologist had preceded him and the media were there in numbers that far outweighed those of the professional conservationists who were present. He did not disappoint the audience and publicly espoused his then two pet themes of animal rights and the governance of protected area management authorities. Richard succeeded in his goal of provoking the establishment and he deeply offended the conservation heads of South Africa, all of whom were either seasoned field officers with years of experience in conservation, or highly qualified biologists who had a long association with practical wildlife management. The media, scenting a good debate, made much of Richard's views with only passing mention of some local opposing opinions.

The University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, seizing the opportunity, arranged for a sparring bout between the two of us at a symposium to be held in July 1992, where Richard could repeat his positions and I could place before the audience the views espoused by the NPB. Richard outdid himself and became almost evangelical in his criticisms from which it became clear that he was eagerly marshalling the financial power of the global animal rights movement to support the anti-utilisation thesis around protected areas. This was heady stuff, especially as he had not done much homework on the South African conservation agencies and it was not difficult to counter his accusations with firm facts, exposing the errors in his thesis. Now, thirty years later, I can honestly state that I disagreed with him then and would still disagree with him today.

As a committed supporter of our policy of sustainable use I was armed with the growth statistics of the numbers of game purchased at ever increasing prices by private sector buyers (at that stage the NPB alone had translocated and either sold or donated over 100 000 head of game since starting capture operations in 1960). This activity stimulated, along with the other nature conservation authorities in South Africa, a massive blossoming of private game ranches and private reserves. It was not difficult at that stage to convince the

mainly South African audience of the benefits of sustainable use as compared to the animal rights concept (Hughes, 1992).⁴

Richard's other position focused on the necessity of wildlife management to be overseen and guided by accountants and MBAs. This was not convincing as for such professions to make wildlife conservation acceptable and self-sustaining they would have to be blessed by incredibly philanthropic and altruistic financial support from governments. Richard's own endeavours to obtain donations from first world countries and NGOs to support KWS clearly suggested that state funding was declining and uncertain.⁵ When asked at the debate how he imagined that his conviction about accountants or MBAs as conservation leaders, as he was suggesting, could help guarantee the survival of Africa's wildlife, he could do no better than suggest that they were more efficient. It was pointed out by a member of the audience that these professions were more prominent in fields of endeavour most dominated by the profit-orientated private sector, and that this seemed a contradictory theory to espouse when his basic philosophy was animal rights, with neither sale nor trade in wildlife.

My own conviction is that in professions that embrace vocational endeavours and require commitment to a cause such as medicine, education and conservation, it is better to have leadership with the requisite qualifications in the objectives of the cause. Thus, I rejected Richard's thesis.

The need for financial efficiency

On the narrower question of financial efficiency, I fully agreed with Richard that formal conservation bodies had to do much better and that the employment of skilled and professional staff from the finance world, as important components of management structures, were now becoming obligatory in South Africa. The NPB had recently resolved to take a far more businesslike approach to financial management, and had, within two years, made this obligatory by formally and publicly accepting the tenets and recommendations of the first King Report on Corporate Governance (1993). In fact, the board was already in the throes of changing its traditional money-in-money-out state system of accounting to the more acceptable accrual accounting system commonly used in corporate organisations. To my knowledge the NPB was the only formal conservation body in South Africa to take this step openly, declaring its determination to handle its business and conservation finances in such a publicly accountable manner.

On the question of sustainable use, Richard surprised me when he implied that he, had he the responsibility for wildlife protection in South Africa, would support a sustainable use policy but, in his view, it was not possible to see such a policy being successful in Kenya.⁶ After all, in 1974 Kenya had declared a non-consumptive use policy that effectively stopped all commercial hunting and any other use of wildlife products for commercial gain.

At lunch Richard and I grabbed some food and retired under a tree on campus where we discussed all three subjects debated in the plenary. I fully agreed with Richard that the problems of establishing good neighbour relations, faced by protected areas everywhere, were a product of population growth, as human numbers today have expanded and encroached on protected areas that were created long before there were human neighbours to contest the use of them. The NPB had taken the challenge of pressure from neighbouring communities seriously and had recently created a Neighbour Relations Policy which was showing great results (see Natal Parks Board Policy Document and Chapter 28).

We ended what had become a very amicable and good-spirited discussion with Richard inviting me to visit Kenya. I accepted with alacrity and gratitude. There was a UNEP meeting on rhinoceros scheduled for 1993 in Nairobi and, after consultation with Richard, I agreed to come up several days earlier to visit KWS. The visit proved an eye-opener for me but was a bit of a disappointment in that I was not able to benefit from more dialogue with Richard.⁷

An invaluable visit to Kenya

Richard had planned a thorough programme and it started after I landed with a wonderfully welcoming and kind group of KWS staff seeing to my comforts. The following morning, they delivered me to a hangar at Nairobi airport in which was parked a surprising number of aircraft belonging to KWS. I was quite jealous as the NPB had never had more than one aircraft, a donated Cessna Cardinal that had served us well for many years.

Piled up against one wall in the hangar were the smashed remains of the plane flown by Richard that had crashed just a few days before. It was a rather disturbing sight as I walked past en route to a parked Cessna on the tarmac. Then my sangfroid took another blow as the pilot, a young Kenyan man, came towards me with a warm welcoming smile. This was totally unexpected and my nervous response at being flown by a black pilot goes to show what apartheid programming can do. It was a ridiculous and ungracious thought (perhaps

seeing Richard's crashed plane seconds before hadn't helped) as I spent the next four days admiring the skills and enthusiasm of a truly wonderful young man.⁸

Escorted throughout the visit by KWS staff officer, Anthony Ngugi, we first visited Nakuru Game Reserve, with its tens of thousands of lesser flamingos, impressive Defassa waterbuck and Rothschild's giraffes. I was unexpectedly thrilled to be asked by the Warden, Alfred Kisee, to review an honour guard of staff. Little did we know that in a year or so I would be back to repay them for their kindness and welcome. Alfred told me rather apologetically that there were, alas, only three white rhinoceros in the park. These three animals were rather lost among the more numerous black rhinoceros. I did note, however, that there appeared to be plenty of suitable grasslands available for white rhinoceros.

The fencing criticism revisited

The next step of the tour was the Aberdares National Park near Mount Kenya. This densely forested park is beautiful and worth a visit far exceeding the time I had available. The Warden, John Muhanga, was kindness personified and he went out of his way to make the best possible use of the two days I was able to stay. John took me well off the open tourist roads and within an hour had stunned me by driving up to the western boundary to show me the new fence that had been erected following a generous donation from the United States.

Given the criticism that had been levelled at South Africa for fencing its protected areas I was astonished, never having seen a game fence of such expense in all my years of working in southern Africa. The fence stretched out for dozens of kilometres and was 3 metres of high security diamond mesh construction of a standard one would not find outside an urban or industrial area in South Africa. It must have cost a fortune.

When I asked why it was there, the Warden explained that as KWS was experiencing more and more problems with elephants plundering crops outside the borders of the park it was felt necessary to erect a fence and the USA agreed to fund this. The fence was not electrified, and I explained that I thought that he would have problems with elephants breaking through it. Elephants have but limited tolerance to fences and even less for those not electrified. It was clear that reality had caught up with KWS and they had had to respond by fencing the animals into the park to reduce human/wildlife conflict, just as we in South Africa had been forced to do fifty years before.

Thus, I learnt that we had fencing in common, except that our fences in Natal would have been a great deal less expensive.

Problems with introductions of species for tourist benefits

While overnighing in that wonderful lodge, the Ark, I met a young South African scientist who had been in the Aberdares National Park for ten months in an endeavour to study the bongo (*Tragelaphus eurycerus*), one of the most striking and large of the forest antelopes. He had not seen one. It was his opinion that the bongo had nearly disappeared from the park. It was thought this was because of a rash decision to introduce lions. Apparently, in the past, lions had been recorded in the park, but appeared to be transient, passing through the area rather than being full-time residents in the dense forests. After the fence was completed, effectively sealing the lions into the park, their predation on bongo accelerated.

Kenya was apparently becoming aware of the law of unintended consequences, which we had learnt the hard way in South Africa from translocations we had not thought through carefully enough. The Warden rather reluctantly responded to my request to try to see a bongo and made it clear that any such search would be likely to turn out to be in vain. When I pressed him, he said he would take me to a remote section of the park after dark, but I should expect to be disappointed. The student just laughed.

An hour of driving through the forested tunnels of the park flushed out duiker, buffalo and bushbuck and, as we were turning to go back to the Ark, a huge bongo male stepped out into the road, and stood briefly, a blazing red giant of an animal covered with vertical white stripes along the body. After giving me another thrill of a lifetime, it tossed its head back and slipped silkily into the forest and out of sight. John was so delighted that he laughed the whole way back and said how incredibly lucky I had been as he hadn't seen such a bull in years. The student was shocked rigid when we reported to him in the pub.

Now here was a classic example of a policy decision that has to be faced by all responsible conservation bodies and one that we had wrestled with for years in South Africa. Is it acceptable for conservation to take action against natural threats to indigenous species that have limited suitable habitat, and whose future survival is put at risk by another indigenous species? We had experienced such problems in Natal in the 1960s.

As part of its protective activities in the Drakensberg, the NPB in the 1960s and 1970s had its own jackal-hunting packs of foxhounds which, at great expense, removed a number of black-backed jackal each year. This action was partly to mollify the farming community, which alleged that the NPB was responsible for protecting the jackal which emerged from the protected area to eat their livestock; but we were also concerned about the impact of jackal predation on the smaller antelope, especially the oribi. However, a study confirmed that the jackal was primarily surviving on rodents and fed only rarely on small antelope. Partly as a result of that study, but influenced by two other factors – an idealistic wilderness conviction that nature should be allowed to take its course and, more mundanely, the expense of maintaining large numbers of hounds – the NPB's jackal packs were disbanded in 1973.

Recent studies in the United States now suggest that we were correct to be worried as in that country there is concern over reintroduced wolves, which feed primarily on the very numerous elk populations in the Rockies. The wolves are well sustained by elk but, at the same time, are having a negative impact on the much less numerous mule deer in Yellowstone National Park (Kay, 2010).

Here, in the Aberdares in Kenya, was a classic example of an invaluable threatened species facing local extinction due to the introduction and containment of lion, which, in any case, is a species more familiarly recorded in open grassland savannah. I certainly supported the proposal that was being considered to remove the lions, which were plentiful elsewhere in East Africa.

Treetops Hotel: a lesson about keeping things natural

The Aberdares National Park achieved fame in the tourism sphere when the incomparable Treetops Lodge was opened in 1932. It was renowned for having hosted British Royalty as Princess Elizabeth was staying there the night she was told that her father King George VI had died. She departed the lodge as a Queen going to take over an empire. To visit Treetops was a must-see ambition of mine and the Warden, in a now extremely enthusiastic frame of mind, took me over the next morning.

Now this iconic venue did turn out to be a disappointment. When first built, exclusively of wood, Treetops rose 30 metres into the air, on wooden stilts cleverly blended with the large trunks of the trees that also supported it. At the time the hotel was situated adjacent to a limited open space near a small pan of water in what must once have been magnificent forest. Early photographs



Treetops Hotel in the Aberdares, Kenya, 1993

showed it to be a world beater as a wildlife experience with its reputation fully justified.

Treetops remains an impressive sight, but it is showing its age and it struck me as a serious fire hazard. What is even sadder is that it now stands clear of the forest that gave it its unique charm because, when it was being built, in order to guarantee the arrival in close proximity of elephant and black rhino, the managers had included a salt lick adjacent to the original pan. Over the years the salt has been widely distributed on the feet of rhino and elephant and has, sadly, poisoned the soil, killing off virtually all of the vegeta-

tion, including fully grown forest species of trees, leaving a few sad specimens supporting the lodge in the middle of an expanse of bare red earth.

This is one of the most potent examples of conservation managers having gone too far in their eagerness to guarantee tourists a large game experience. Such activity essentially creates an artificial experience through an ecologically damaging process. This is not an ill-meant criticism of Kenya and I fully understood that the damage was done in a past era. South African managers have made similar errors and in the 1960s I personally used to put out salt licks for eland in Giant's Castle Game Reserve in Natal. These sites, extensively bare of vegetation as a result, are still clearly visible today, although the practice was stopped in the late 1960s (Hughes, 2014). I saw another example of pleasing the tourist in 1964 when I visited Etosha Game Reserve in South West Africa (now Namibia) and was taken to a site where the rangers went out and shot zebra and used their carcasses to draw lions to a viewing site. Such practices have long been rejected in South African formal protected areas.

Tsavo National Park

My final destination on the tour was the Tsavo and Tsavo West national parks near Voi, where once again the KWS staff led me through their experiences, both good and bad, with commendable candour. I was shown the enormous heaps of elephant skulls collected during the recent poaching epidemic and we discussed the incredible die-off of elephants attributed to an overpopulation in the late 1950s, when the entire habitat of Tsavo was altered to the extent that elephants died in their hundreds.



Stockpile of rhino and elephant skulls from poaching, Tsavo National Park, Kenya

Tsavo's black rhinoceros too had been through a terrible poaching onslaught in the 1970s and 1980s and the few surviving in the park were now contained in a 32 square kilometre fenced-off block, deep within the park. The block is almost surrounded by camps manned by armed staff on 24-hour readiness. There was little peace for Tsavo and, although the rhinoceros were now intensively protected, the elephants are back and are once again becoming the target of a new poaching wave. In response to the Tsavo staff, I proudly explained that South Africa had not been subjected to mass poaching endeavours since the 1900s. Little did I then realise that I and many others suffered from the delusion that our rather romanticised position was a result of superior law enforcement practices.⁹

The Warden of Tsavo, Steven Gichangi, drove me through much of the park, where I was surprised to be a little disappointed in the numbers of game but was thrilled beyond belief to see species I had only read about, such as the dikdik, gerenuk and lesser kudu. A visit to the famous Mzima Springs is a memory that will never be forgotten by any visitor and here the hide is of such a remarkable character that it takes your breath away. It is built to allow you to go below the water level of this unexpected and beautiful lake, fed by clear volcanic water. One can view, apart from thousands of indigenous fish, both hippopotamus and Nile crocodiles, seeing, probably for the first and only time, the elegance of a hippo bounding gracefully along the bottom. It was one of the highlights of a wonderful experience, thanks to Richard and his staff.

The lack of white rhinoceros

Another feature of the Kenyan protected areas, in stark contrast to the Zululand protected areas, was the paucity of white rhinoceros. Not unnaturally, having seen habitat that white rhino should thrive in, I considered this a pity. Fortunately, just before my departure from Kenya in 1993, I was invited to dinner by Ted Goss and Willie Roberts, both active conservationists in Kenya. Also invited to the dinner was, to my surprise and pleasure,



*Delivery to Nakuru National Park, Kenya of part of a NPB donation
of 20 white rhino, 1994*

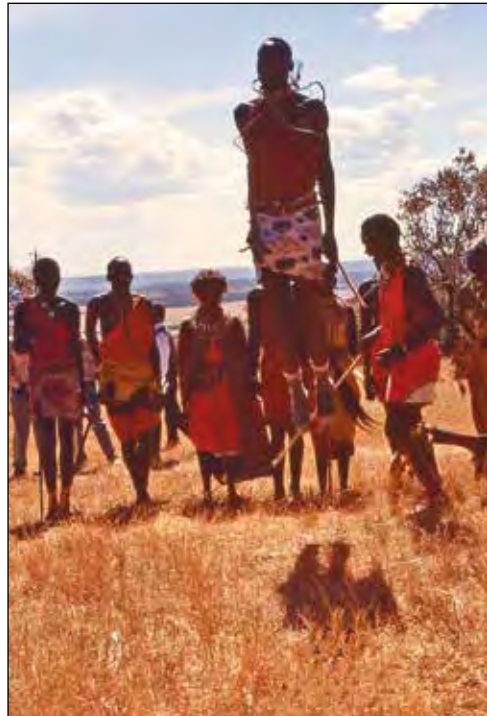
Steven Ole Ntutu, the son of the Masai chief controlling the Masai Mara Conservation Project. In discussion it was suggested that the Masai would deem it a rare privilege to be able to have white rhino in the Masai Mara National Park.

After some excited discussions it was agreed that I would raise the matter with our board on my return. At the first opportunity, the board was informed of the request, and I received its enthusiastic agreement to offer some white rhino to Kenya and, in turn, ascertain the willingness of KWS and the Kenyan government to accept such a donation. The Kenyans were delighted and it was agreed that the number of white rhinoceros to be donated by the NPB was twenty, ten of which would go to the Lake Nakuru National Park and the balance to the Masai Mara National Park.

When the NPB delivered the rhino in 1994 it was a splendid affair. Our capture staff had caught and boma-trained the consignment of white rhino and the costs of transport between Johannesburg and Nairobi were generously funded by Total. The then NPB chairman, Pat Goss and I flew up with the Total senior staff, in Anton Rupert's private jet from Lanseria to Nairobi. Awaiting our arrival was a Cessna Caravan in which David Western, the Director of KWS, escorted us, along with an official Kenyan government delegation including the Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs, to Lake Nakuru and later to the Masai Mara where the rhino had been trucked and were ready for release.¹⁰

We flew over the Rift Valley to the Masai Mara. This wonderful game reserve deserves every accolade possible. After the splendid release ceremony, Masai tribesmen and women in glorious traditional dress laid on an unforgettable welcoming celebration, which included their spectacular leaping dances. The local Chief

*Spectacular leaping dances of the
Masai people*



Ole Ntutu welcomed us and presented Pat and I with Masai spears, those formidable weapons that were commonly used in co-ordination with the huge Masai leather shields, to kill charging lions. It was a great honour and one that Pat and I will never forget.



The Masai made us welcome and appeared in gorgeous traditional dress

Then I spent a few nights at a private tented camp run by Willie Roberts. Here I unexpectedly met again Ted Goss, the director of a conservation NGO called the Eden Wildlife Trust and, incidentally, a relative of NPB board chairman Pat Goss. I was more than delighted to find in Willie's camp a friend and fellow conservationist, Holly Dublin, an authority on elephant and one of the stars of the IUCN Species Survival Commission. Holly has devoted a very busy life to promoting the survival of Africa's wildlife.

The highlights of that visit included a helicopter flight (thanks to Ted Goss and the Eden Wildlife Trust) over the bearded wildebeest migration, which is an experience that cannot be bettered anywhere in the world, and a game drive organised by Willie Roberts into the heart of the park with a picnic which met the exacting standards of traditional Kenyan safaris of the colonial days. Comfortable chairs and a set table covered with starched white linen were provided, together with an outstanding spread of food, accompanied by chilled French white wines. We overlooked the valley below which had, at a rough count, over 5 000 head of game: wildebeest, topi, Grant's and Thomson's

gazelles, zebra and elephant. Later a small herd of elephant decided to come up the hill to join us. This necessitated a hasty retreat into the vehicles for a speedy departure as the elephant took over the shade trees under which we had been relaxing.



A classic and enjoyable Masai Mara picnic



Magnificent wildebeest migrations, Kenya

The only negative observation that seriously disturbed me about the park was the apparent freedom of tourist minibuses to depart from the few roads available to get closer to the animals. When one was on the ground the damage being done to the grasslands was not immediately apparent, but from the advantage of height in the helicopter the visible damage was very extensive and definitely detrimental to the park. It is true to say that this was a very different policy to that practised in South Africa where tourists or tour vehicles are forbidden to leave the roads.



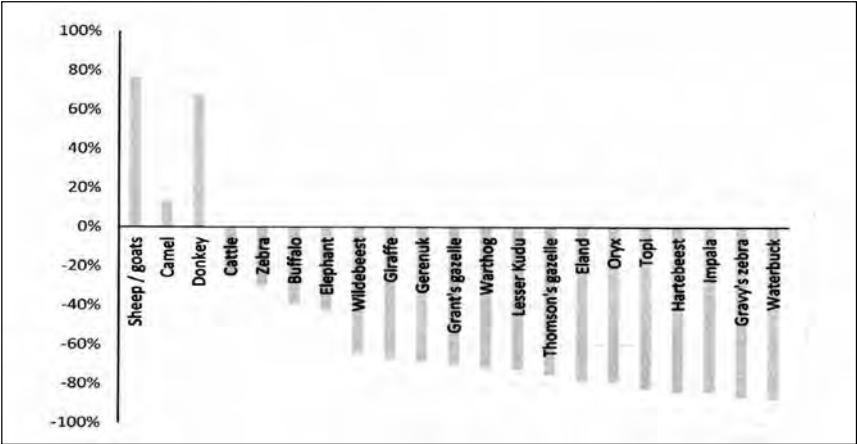
The negative practice of allowing tour buses to leave the roads in Kenyan national parks

The major difference in wildlife policy

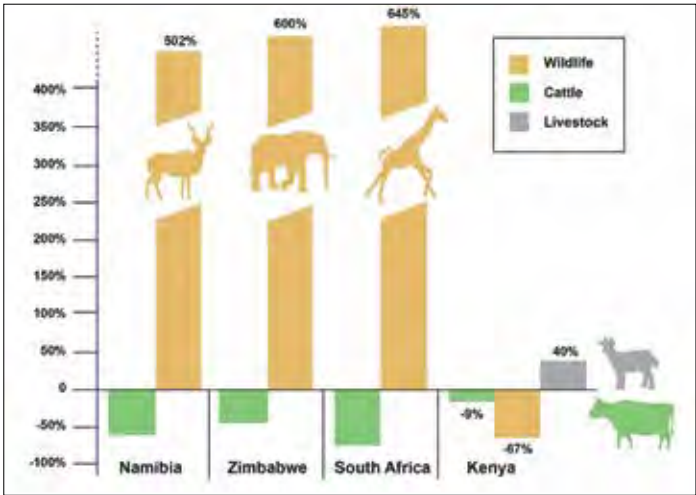
However, the primary debate involving the differences between Kenya's policies and those of South Africa on the issue of sustainable use are likely to be the most contentious ones for years to come. Kenya took a strong position in 1974 against the commercial use of wildlife while the NPB along with other conservation authorities in South Africa took the completely opposite view. The Kenyan decision has found favour with large NGOs in Europe and the United States who, as a result of their donations to KWS, have greatly expanded their influence in that beautiful and exciting country. Unfortunately, this has not necessarily been of benefit to Kenya's wildlife.

Why do I believe that to be the case? It has been estimated that around the time of those policy decisions, Kenya had an estimated 500 000 to two million head of large mammals and a guesstimate of South Africa's wildlife

herd at the same time, was of a similar order. Today, in 2021, it would appear that Kenya’s wildlife estate is under immense pressure as a result of human population expansion and there have been massive population declines in almost every species of note (Child, 2019, Ogutu et al., 2016). It would appear that, in the absence of any economic benefit to rural people through hunting, sale of live game or game products, the ownership of domestic stock, cattle, goats and sheep takes preference over wild indigenous animals, which are gradually disappearing from Kenya’s landscapes.



Wildlife numbers are declining sharply in Kenya



Kenya’s persistent objections to sustainable use do not appear justified as its full protection programme has not been as successful as those countries practising sustainable use

Under the policy of sustainable use, and the NPB's encouragement of the further development of private sector conservation interests in South Africa, the immensely successful growth of the wildlife industry reflects exactly the opposite of what has happened in Kenya. The most recent firm estimates of the gross wildlife numbers in South Africa are measured in the millions of head of game, and these numbers continue to expand (Taylor, Lindsey and Davies-Mostert, 2015). The future of wildlife in Africa as a whole is very uncertain, but it is a matter of joy to me that the conservation bodies of South Africa, including the NPB, very much respect the people of Kenya, its KWS and its magnificent, protected areas.



Public burning of wildlife products espoused by Richard Leakey (Guardian, 2017)

I stated earlier that I disagreed with Richard's Leakey's policies. I still do. However, I am glad that we could be helpful in restocking Kenya with the white rhinoceros. Some now thrive in the state-protected areas and others in those reserves currently run by the private sector. These donations represented our appreciation and respect for such a beautiful country, and gratitude for the hospitality and welcome given to the staff of the NPB during their many visits there.

NOTES

- 1 Michaela Denis had a role in *King Solomon's Mines* and was inspired by Kenya, where it was filmed. She and her husband settled in Nairobi, from where they launched their popular series.

- 2 David Western, pers. comm.
- 3 Given his pugnacious attitude towards South Africa, I can't help thinking that in the twenty-first century Richard must have been peeved when it claimed the Cradle of Humankind as a World Heritage Site and built a successful interpretation centre dedicated to it near Johannesburg. The first suggestions that Australopithecines were early contributors to the Hominid line in which humans have evolved came from South African paleoanthropologists.
- 4 The concept of animal rights, which is today, through its apparently inexhaustible support group of NGOs and becoming ever more interventionist in formal game management, based most often on single issue conservation philosophies founded upon very emotionally held personal beliefs. If the most extreme convictions, as espoused by many global NGOs, that it is not acceptable to kill or trade any wildlife for the benefit of humankind, is accepted as global policy, then we shall see the ultimate disappearance of all Africa's large mammal species. Consequent to this disaster will be the extinction of untold numbers of other species whose existence depends upon the presence of the larger mammals.
- 5 Not long after his visit to South Africa, in Kenya Richard started to burn, in public, massive resources in the form of ivory stockpiles, rhino horns, confiscated skins of poached antelopes and large cats. Richard clearly felt that such a public demonstration against sustainable utilisation of wildlife would attract financial grants. This strategy, it saddens me to record, worked very well for him in terms of raising funds. However, we shall never know the opportunity cost of not realising the true economic value of these resources. The sustainable use lobby, and most certainly the NPB, did not see such circuses as helpful or a sound basis on which to build self-sufficiency for the future.
- 6 Richard's disclosure prompted me to state, rather forcibly, that with that being the case, I disagreed with his passionate public tirades against sustainable use in general when it seemed, from his remarks, that he was convinced only that it would certainly never work in Kenya. Richard simply laughed saying that that was my problem and demonstrated that he seemed little concerned about other countries.
- 7 As an aside, Richard was not, alas, there to take me around himself as he had intended. While self-flying one of the KWS light aircraft, Richard had suffered serious injuries to his legs when the plane crashed and he had been sent to England for hospitalisation.
- 8 It was amusing to read some years later that Archbishop Desmond Tutu had had a similar moment of uncertainty when he became aware that the pilots of a commercial Nigerian Airways flight were black Nigerians.
- 9 The hammer blow of poaching that hit South Africa from 2008 onwards to the present day has seen the loss of over 8 000 rhinoceros and the poaching is ongoing. These losses have been a salutary warning against complacency.
- 10 Richard Leakey had resigned as Director of KWS in early 1994. He died in 2022.

11

THE NATAL PARKS BOARD EMPLOYMENT POLICY


AT a week-long African Wildlife Policy Consultation arranged in England by the British Council in 1996 (ODA, 1996), to which numerous African countries were invited to discuss the broad range of policies, actions and directions undertaken by their conservation authorities, I was rather surprised one evening to be approached by a Kenyan delegate, Isabella Ochola-Wilson, the Assistant Director of KWS Tourism Development, who asked me to join her delegation for dinner. This I did, and, when I had been welcomed and seated, she turned to me and bluntly asked ‘Why is South Africa undermining Kenya’s wildlife tourism industry?’ Somewhat bewildered by the forcefulness of the question, I took some time to think about the answer.

I have a real love of Kenya and its protected areas and have a personal appreciation of the problems that conservation faces in that beautiful country. It behoved me to try to reply most directly to the question that was put to me and answer quite simply that South Africa had neither policy, practice nor intention to undermine Kenya’s tourism or conservation efforts. There were, however, clear differences in the management styles and policies on which I felt I could elaborate for the KWS staff, who gave me their undivided attention.

Fortuitously, I had a short time previously spent some time with the KWS in Kenya, and this meeting created an opportunity to discuss my impressions of the service. For a start, I explained that one thing that struck me during my visit as I moved from protected area to protected area, was that the visibility of field staff of KWS was almost negligible, apart from those allocated to the task, much appreciated by myself, of looking after me. I saw almost nothing of KWS staff as I travelled round the parks. The lodges were all private-sector run and all of the tour vehicles carrying tourists were those of private operators. In this there was a huge difference between KWS and the NPB. We believed very strongly that the tourism business associated with our formal protected areas should and could be managed by the NPB itself and we were supported in this by the vision of the early politicians in what was then Natal. It was written into the legislation under which we operated.

The importance of employment in Africa

The NPB genuinely believed that, with necessary exceptions, people who worked within the protected areas should do so directly for the organisation. It would be clearly understood by the staff that there was personal benefit for them and their families in working for nature conservation. All staff were issued with the NPB uniform according to their position and all wore shoulder tabs indicating quite clearly that they were staff members. With respect to the officer classes there were field and office uniforms, but with no indication of rank. That discriminatory practice was tried once in the 1970s when the rank title would appear as a shoulder patch but was soon disposed of as unnecessary and unpopular. It was believed that anyone of rank should be clearly

| | | |
|--|--|--|
|  | <u>NATAL PARKS BOARD POLICY</u> |  |
| SUBJECT: ACCESS TO BOARD AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT | POLICY FILE NO: 2-ix | |
| DATE OF BOARD APPROVAL: 2 DECEMBER 1988 BOARD MINUTE: 5(F) | | |
| REVISED: | | |
| THE NATAL PARKS BOARD:- | | |
| BELIEVING that the conservation of the natural resources of Natal is important for the long term survival of man, | | |
| ACCEPTING that functions of the Natal Parks Board in the fields of nature conservation and related outdoor recreation fall under the jurisdiction of the Natal Provincial authorities as a general affair, | | |
| RECOGNISING that the success of the Board's endeavours is dependent on the support of all South Africans of whatever background, | | |
| SEES its responsibilities as serving all South Africans irrespective of sex, religion or race, | | |
| THEREFORE REAFFIRMS its policy of making available all of its services and facilities to all South Africans of whatever background, and | | |
| DECLARES its policy that subject to normal qualification requirements, positions or promotions within the ranks of the organisation shall be open to all, irrespective of sex, religion or race. | | |
|  <p>Assistant Director</p> <p>Communication Services</p> <p><small>Applications are invited from suitably qualified and experienced persons irrespective of race colour or sex for the above post in the Natal Parks Board.</small></p> | | |

The NPB drew skills from across the province and elsewhere



Communities surrounding protected areas were major beneficiaries from successful tourism developments

distinguished as a result of his or her earned merit and did not need to have it emblazoned on his or her clothing. NPB conservation personnel, scientists, road and building technicians, interpretation, communications and tourism staff were, therefore, clearly recognisable. The services provided to the visitors, and indeed to the politicians to whom we were ultimately answerable, was attributable to the NPB.

This was especially so in the tourism service where our camps provided full-time, pensionable jobs to tour guides, maintenance staff, gardening staff, reception staff, curio shop staff and supply chain managers. When a visitor arrived at the entrance gate he or she was greeted by uniformed staff and then, at every stage of their visit, their needs would be met by uniformed staff. If visitors needed help as a result of vehicle breakdown or medical crisis it was uniformed staff who came to the rescue and did their best to help. Even when there were clashes between visitors and field staff, and a problem was reported to camp reception, the reception staff were fully versed in the rules and could explain in detail to the aggrieved visitor the problem as seen through the eyes of the organisation.

Compare this with a similar problem being reported to a member of an independent staff employed separately by a large hotel chain. That person's loyalties would lie with his or her employer, which might be a distant head office. If complaints were received about something in the park, the response to the complainant would more likely be 'I shall talk to them' or 'I shall raise the matter with them'. The impression thus created of the NPB park managers would be engraved in the mind of the visitor as the law, with the same lack of charisma and disinterest as is sometimes equated with the behaviour of a traffic policeman. Such conclusions are unjustified, but do happen and are unfortunate as they could create an undesirable disconnect between the visitor and the protected area managers.

NPB management systems within its protected areas required regular staff meetings, which the senior staff of each activity, be it conservation, scientific, technical or tourist, had the opportunity to attend. All decisions taken at such meetings were the outcome of ownership being taken by every section present. The arrangement also meant that the camp staff could engage in depth with a visitor's enquiries because he or she was fully conversant with the actions and policies of the park as a whole and not just in one isolated sphere, which is often the case if camp management is outsourced.

The exception proves the rule

Of course, there are times when outsourcing of an activity is essential. It is my firm belief that government should avoid the direct provision of food services. It is a specialised service requiring expert knowledge of a complex and convoluted supply chain, which is too far removed from conservation.¹ In the past, the NPB used to employ cooks in a number of the camps, some of whom became outstanding chefs providing a range of cooking that covered nearly all the demands placed upon them. Visitors brought their own food to the camp and simply handed over what they required to be prepared to the cooks during the day. That rather unique form of catering service, although very popular with visitors, was somewhat colonial in practice and did not meet the demands of the modern market. It also attracted labour problems due to the rather erratic hours that were asked of the cooks. Some visitors who were used to the system took liberties with the times allocated for specific cooking functions and the system. Other guests, possibly being unaware of the cooking practices, arrived without provisions and went hungry. This certainly did not provide much in the way of good public relations. In the 1980s the system was done away with, except at the luxury bush lodges at which were stationed

dedicated chefs to cook for visitors who brought their own food. There was an additional staff member present to assist at dinner, but their primary function was to accompany the visitors on daily wilderness trails.

The difference between the Kenyan system and that of the NPB was that the presence of NPB staff was apparent everywhere. This advantage, coupled with the NPB's reputation for service, meant that the general public acceptance of the organisation and its mission was very high.

Discriminatory tariffs

Another practice of KWS with which the NPB policies differed was the entry charge. In Kenya, foreign visitors were always surcharged and this struck the NPB as a strange practice. Here were visitors spending a large amount of money visiting Kenya and they were victimised for it. This was perceived as a blunt and almost certainly unpopular instrument and the NPB saw the foreign visitor differently by providing a broad range of additional and optional services and encouraging foreign visitors to use as many as possible. As it turned out, no focused encouragement was necessary to extract more money out of the foreign visitor.

The average South African visitor to our protected areas liked to self-drive, was happy to stay at a campsite, hire an inexpensive rondavel without cooking facilities (and such were provided even in the modern camps), use communal kitchen facilities to cook the food they brought with them, bring their own choice of drinks; and, if the family was lucky, they would get treated to one expensive dinner at the restaurant. The NPB was always conscious that the protected areas were there to serve the South African taxpayer first and foremost and that tariffs and prices should be set at a level that was regarded as within reach of the purse of the average South African.

In contrast, the foreign visitor often arrived by bus or hire car, carried no food and was dependent on catered food in a restaurant providing a high standard of cuisine. They favoured the night-drive and day-drive services of the NPB and the available daily wilderness trails that were suited to short-term stays. When faced with a broad range of services, the foreign visitor tended to use them all. They ate in the restaurants, drank at the bar, went on NPB-guided drives and trails, and patronised the curio shops, buying extra food, liquor or fruit, franchised clothing, souvenir T-shirts, books and guides. The foreign visitor was the golden calf of tourism for the NPB as each would spend up to ten times the amount paid by local visitors and, thanks to the exchange rate of the rand, the overseas tourist felt that the visit was a bargain.²

And that, I believe, was the real reason that South African protected areas were drawing a growing number of foreign tourists. It was value for money.

Wilderness trails and special tours

The NPB provided other special attractions. The first on-foot wilderness trails in Africa were started in Umfolozi Game Reserve in 1959 by the NPB and since then a wide array of two- or three-day trails were available in most of the larger protected areas. Such walking trails serve only a small number of visitors per trail, are escorted by fully trained officers and support staff and have been a phenomenal success. Even the primitive trails, where the visitors had to bring their own equipment and food, carry it and cook for themselves, were booked up months in advance.

Boat tours were another special attraction. The most famous was the *Santa Lucia*, an 80-seat launch at Lake St Lucia, which proved so successful that the NPB recovered the cost in ten months. The fact that the staff on board opened a bar after departure helped pay the bills. Then during summer there were guided vehicle and walking tours along the Maputaland beaches to observe nesting loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles; while visits to the NPB's crocodile research facility at St Lucia were enormously popular. The NPB uniform made it clear that all these exciting or interesting opportunities were directly attributable to the organisation.

The range of these facilities and services that suited both the South African and overseas market were not overlooked by the private sector game lodges and game ranches, many managers of which recognised that an opportunity existed to attract the foreign tourist at a more luxurious and profitable level. This proved a major advance, even a triumph for conservation, as landowners converted from crop or livestock farming to private game reserves, developing a more sumptuous form of lodge providing services that included a much higher standard of comfort.³ Premium destinations included drives so well-guided and co-ordinated that the visitor might expect to see all the special animal or plant species that were native to the park.

The growth of such lodges in privately funded and managed game reserves and game ranches has become a phenomenal success in South Africa. One of the most successful has been Shamwari Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape which, over a thirty-year period, rose phoenix-like from the damaged landscape of former pineapple fields to become one of the country's most



NPB success in tourism development expanded enormously with private sector lodges and camps capturing a huge share of the opportunities from abundant wildlife (Mike Brett)

famous private game reserves. Partnering with the Born Free Foundation, the game reserve has won innumerable awards both nationally and internationally.

I hasten to add that these lodges have been the direct beneficiaries of the surplus game conserved, caught and distributed by the formal conservation bodies of South Africa, starting in the 1960s, and are a source of pride and achievement for the staff of the NPB who played such a prominent role in getting the industry going sixty years ago.

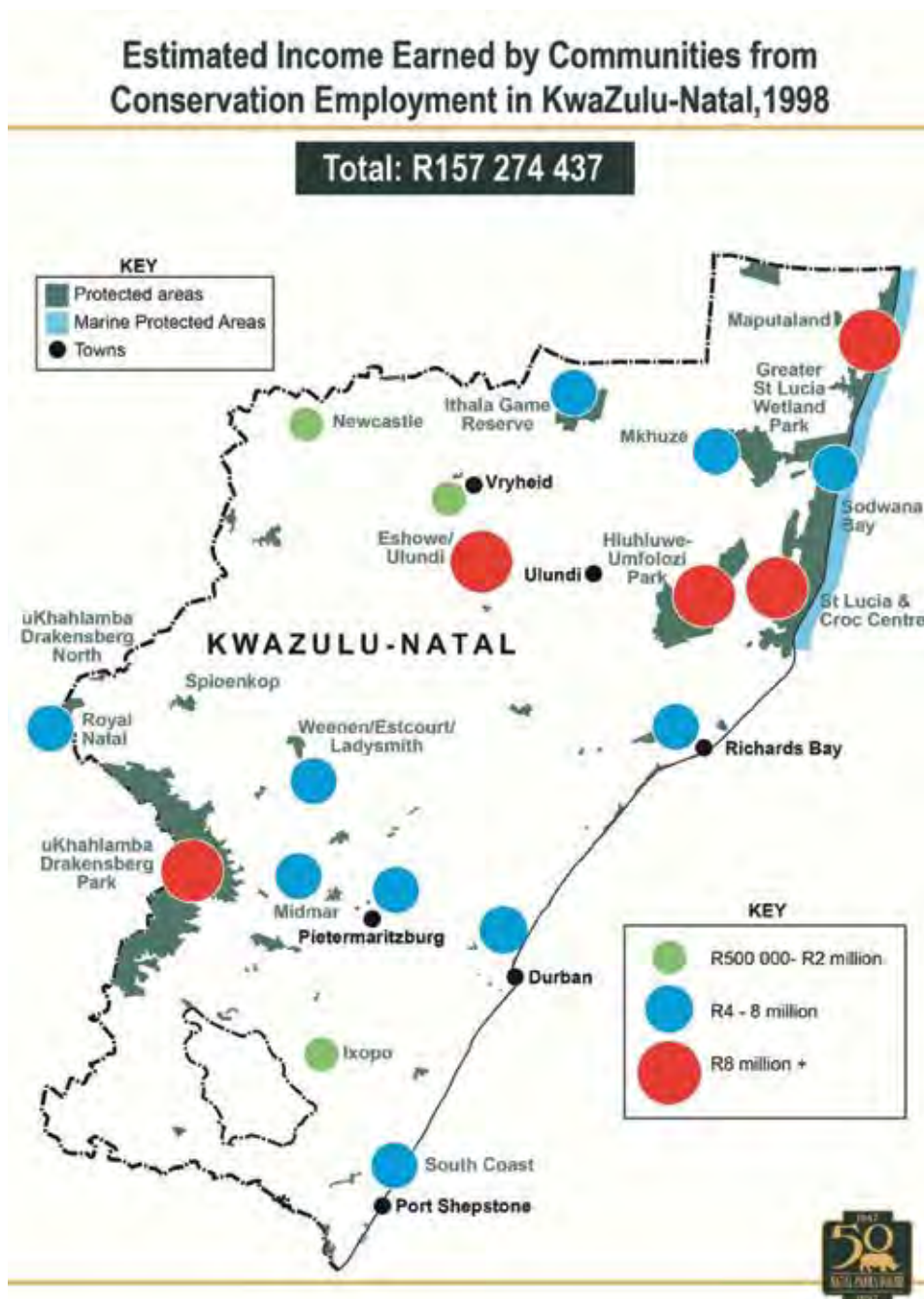
The conclusion to the discussion at the policy consultation

During the evening with KWS, its staff listened with great courtesy to my defence of South Africa's positions which differed from policies and practices in Kenya. What appeared to make a positive impression was that the NPB had seen it as a duty to create sustainable opportunities for employment in those areas of Natal that offered few alternatives. In many rural areas the NPB was not simply an employer, but was the only employer available. The Kenyans were similarly impressed with the conditions of service for NPB personnel, and the collaborative opportunities created by the consultation and liaison committees. The reputation of the NPB was attributable not only to its game rangers and scientists, but also to all those staff involved in its conservation and tourism activities.

The Kenyans made me welcome at dinner.

NOTES

- 1 In 1987 it was agreed that restaurants should be established at all large NPB park camps, and these should be run by private sector professional catering companies. If the camps were too small to carry such a service, then visitors should be able to self-cater, either in their own unit or an easily accessible communal kitchen. The system proved a great success and became a matter of policy across the province.
- 2 The NPB was also delighted to find that a significant section of South Africans welcomed the range of services as much as the foreign visitors and this brought added revenue to the NPB.
- 3 One famous private lodge, Mala-Mala, was so efficiently run that when a visitor made a second visit, he or she on arrival was greeted at the door with a complimentary glass of their favourite tipple.



In many parts of Natal/KZN conservation tourism investments were the largest and most successful employers of local people

12

THE EVOLUTION OF THE NATAL PARKS BOARD *ANNUAL YEARBOOK*

IN 1996 word reached the NPB that the Fifth World Parks Congress was to take place in 2002. Furthermore, rumour had it that the World Commission on Protected Areas was considering trying to find a first-time venue for the congress in Africa. Staff of the NPB were ecstatic and board members were keen that we should campaign for it to be held in Durban. There was no doubt in our minds, especially encouraged by Trevor Sandwith, Head of Planning at the NPB, that we should contact our friends in the commission and ask them to consider South Africa. And, with the recent opening of the stunning International Convention Centre (ICC) in Durban, we sincerely believed that South Africa had enough successful conservation agencies and NGOs as well as a suitable location to provide a lively and constructive meeting. We soon learnt that the National Parks Board was also extremely interested in the congress coming to South Africa. Officials from the city of Cape Town and the province of Gauteng were attracted as well by the idea of hosting the congress. Fortunately, the Durban ICC staff were fully supportive of our initiative and made their own motivational bid which was added to ours.

In 1998, the commission sent a delegation led by Adrian Phillips, the sitting chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas, to visit potential sites across Africa. Durban was the last site to be visited on their investigational tour. Trevor and I arranged to meet the delegation in Durban to give them an overview of the work of the NPB and conservation in Natal and then to accompany the delegation to view the ICC. That visit was highly successful as the ICC was very new and had been well planned, providing for every need of the congress. There was also an easily accessible range of hotels, all within walking distance of the sea. At the end of the visit to the ICC, Trevor and I took the members of the delegation to lunch during which we hoped to discuss matters in general and to try to get some indication of the responses of each of the delegates. There was little doubt that they had all reacted favourably to the Durban presentations, but it appeared that similar good impressions had been made by Gauteng and Cape Town.

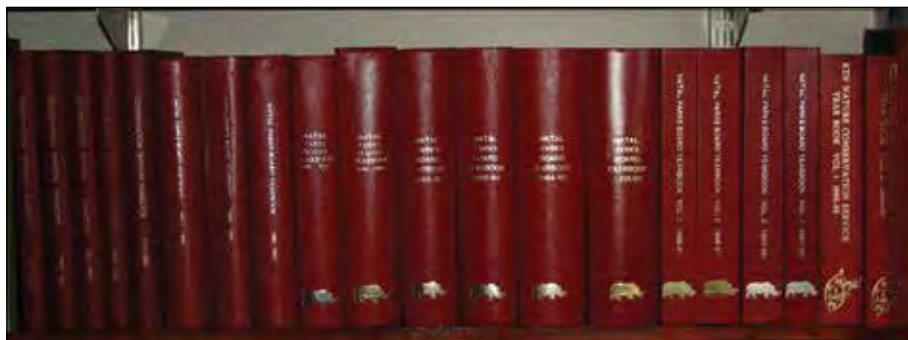
Trevor and I had been expecting the competition to be brisk and had brought with us, for the delegates, copies of many of the NPB's publications and annual reports. Created by the staff of the NPB's Design Studio, the most recent were outstanding products. In addition, we had a copy of the latest NPB *Yearbook*. The reports were passed around after lunch, receiving very favourable comment, but only when we presented a copy of the *Yearbook* to Adrian Phillips did we see the light of enthusiasm sparkle in his eyes. After perusing it quite thoroughly he looked up and said, 'This is an astonishing document and I have never seen such structured and valuable reporting by any conservation organisation.'

The delegation left Durban without commenting further, leaving us feeling that we had, along with Durban and ICC colleagues, done justice to our coastal city, our organisation and our cause. We did not have long to wait before we received notice from the World Parks Secretariat that the commission had agreed with the recommendation of Adrian and his colleagues that Durban would be the venue chosen for the Fifth World Parks Congress, the first to be held in Africa. Word reached us from friends within the Parks Commission headquarters in Switzerland that one factor that had helped seal the decision was the impression made by the NPB's *Yearbook*. We were delighted.

The evolution of the *Yearbook*

The NPB *Yearbook* was the culmination of 35 years of reporting history and had been evolving and improving in quality since its inception in 1982.

In 1949, immediately following Jack Vincent's appointment as Director of the NPB, he had launched what was to become an invaluable series of communication processes to ensure that there was a solid transfer of information



The NPB Yearbooks: a concise and invaluable archive as well as an irreplaceable planning tool

from the field to Head Office, starting with every field officer producing a daily report, submitted monthly to the Director's office. All monthly reports were submitted either in handwritten form or typewritten by those who had purchased typewriters. The latter must have been a rare boon to the readers at head office who had to struggle with the handwriting and odd papers used by field staff.

The roneo machine

Vincent made it his personal responsibility to ensure that the actual legislation, under which the NPB was founded, and which laid down the powers and responsibilities under which it could operate (Ordinance 35 of 1947), was made available to every officer. Any changes thereto and any further organisational rules and codes of conduct were regularly conveyed to staff in the field and every department in the form of regular board orders.

The only tool available to manage this system of knowledge transfer was the roneo machine. Staff had to type the page on a waxed master which was then placed in the machine and wrapped around a drum filled with ink. By revolving the drum by hand over sheets of clean paper the operator transferred the ink through the waxed master and printed as many copies as were required. This may sound simple to the modern reader in the days of computers, but it was time-consuming, hard physical work for the clerks, who appeared to be the most likely souls for such jobs. The procedure was fraught with danger as a buckled drum could tear the wax master sheet and one would have to start from scratch. Another major problem was that if there was a single sentence requiring amendment, the entire wax master page had to be retyped and the new amended page issued to those holding the files. Every officer was issued with board orders and literally thousands of pages were roneoed every month at Head Office and distributed by mail to every corner of Natal. It was a remarkably efficient system despite the crudeness of the equipment.

The *Officers' Lawbook* was a substantial document of more than 300 pages, in which were kept all the gazetted ordinances and regulations that applied to the NPB. Included in earlier editions were the operational rules and standards of behaviour expected from every officer. These covered broad issues such as how facial hair should be worn (if one got permission to grow it), which uniform had to be worn (and how), and at which occasion as well as what behaviour to adopt in almost any situation, including how to deal with a smoker in your vehicle without breaking a friendship. It was a remarkable and far-reaching document which ensured that no officer of the NPB had an excuse

for disorderly behaviour. It was the foundation of the discipline that became a hallmark of the NPB staff. This document was also maintained by use of the roneo machine. The development of the xerox photocopier was a godsend and at last we saw the end of the roneo process.

The six-monthly report

During my absence from the NPB between 1965 and 1974, when I was at university, I was unaware that under John Geddes Page there had been a waning of interest in the daily reports and that, with the growth in numbers of staff, such a monthly report to the Director's office had become difficult to cope with. The daily reports were still being written on the stations but their value as a medium through which Head Office could keep abreast of progress and morale within the organisation was no longer apparent. Personally, I felt that this was a pity as the encouragement that I had received for my writing in my game ranging days came from Vincent's feedback (Hughes, 2014).

The NPB, however, still wanted a staff report from the stations and by the end of 1975 it was receiving a six-monthly regional overview from each Chief Conservator. Thus, on taking on the role of CCW, which included the entire Drakensberg area and stretched as far north as the relatively new Itala Game Reserve near Louwsburg on the Transvaal border, it was one of my responsibilities to produce a six-monthly report.

Within a few years it was obvious that little effort was needed to produce this qualitative report because, as each six-monthly reporting time approached, every regional head pulled out the previous report and after roughly rewriting it with a few obvious and possibly necessary changes, submitted it with relief. It may or may not have been read and was forgotten by all. The extremely limited value of this report became clear to me only when I spent two years as Head of Administration and dutifully read the reports written by my colleagues in the Conservation and Recreation divisions. These reports were nice-to-read documents, but of no real value and were deservedly shelved.

Following the resignation of Don Stewart in late 1981 I applied for and obtained his position of Assistant Director Conservation (ADC) and was delighted indeed to be back in the conservation field. Within a few months I was faced with the unenviable task of extracting six-monthly reports from my regional heads and presenting them to the board. In perusing these reports it became clear that they were regarded by conservation staff as a nuisance. They appeared to have no value whatsoever to the staff who wrote them nor,

after reaching the board, did they have any lasting worth to its members or the organisation.

The management plan: a parallel development

The Research Division had started in 1964 with a new Head of Scientific Services, Rudi Bigalke (1964–1970), and he had begun to promote the relatively new field of management planning. The NPB had its first management plan written for Royal Natal National Park in 1964 by Greg Stewart (1963–1970).

The trouble with management plans, which started to multiply after that, was that they were often prepared by scientists and may not always have been practical. They were in turn distrusted by field managers, and it was not clear how they were to be used. Worse still was the requirement that the plans had to be published documents. That made sure that by the time an elegant document, produced at some expense, saw the light of day, it was already out of date. To make changes at irregular intervals was not practicable and the result was that everywhere in the province, as well as I might add, in virtually all conservation sites around the world, these expensively produced documents ended up gathering dust on shelves and were seldom used. While attending the North American International Parks Seminar in 1983, it was small comfort to me to find in Jasper National Park in Canada, a park superintendent who, on waving a hand dismissively at a pile of management plans on a bookshelf, said, ‘These things are a waste of money, and we never use them.’ That was probably a slight exaggeration as the improving structure of management plans contained useful historical information, which certainly did have value.

Concern over the value of our six-monthly reports and growing libraries of management plans was discussed during one of the first Conservation heads management meetings in 1982, where the necessity of making changes to the system was addressed, so that all the effort that went into creating these documents would have lasting significance for the NPB. Well-presented quantitative data would result in improved reports that would provide focused management guidance to field managers. Having the head of each station taking ownership of work to be carried out was a prime goal and, in addition, the reports would have archival value for the station and for the NPB as a whole.

Word processors: another parallel development

An important catalyst making such new ideas achievable had been the introduction of computerised word processing. During 1981, Philips produced the first word processing computers and the company invited me to its headquarters in Pinetown to see a demonstration. At the time we were looking for ways to improve the booking systems for our growing tourism developments across Natal and as the Assistant Director of Administration (ADA)¹ it fell within my brief to seek a computerised solution. The manual booking system had become chaotic, stressful and, although adequate, was so demanding that throughout the NPB it was commonly referred to as the 'Wailing Wall'. In the interest of recording this amazing phenomenon, readers will bear with an explanation.

The Wailing Wall at Head Office was a long wall in the bookings hall which ran the length of the room. Mounted at eye level between multi-grooved restraints was a large number of ruled sheets of 2mm hardboard on which were listed all hutted camp accommodation units and wilderness trails across the province. Data on every bookable tourist unit was repeated six times on separate boards, each with space for every day of the month, to cover the six-month periods that could be booked in advance by the public.

The wall was managed by at least six booking clerks, who, during busy periods, were a sight to behold as the (mainly) ladies, facing a battery of inter-connected telephones on a shelf below the boards, answered each phone enquiry. They became adept at calling for a board – for example, Loteni Camp for December – which was quickly found and literally fired by hand along the length of the wall. It slid freely in the grooved frames above and below which held the boards in place, to the person calling for it. The stressful problems arose when a caller wished to decide between two camps, two weekends or two or more different camps over a period of a week, which necessitated the poor clerk desperately running to consult perhaps two or more widely separated boards. The task was a trying one indeed and all staff prayed that a computerised system would come quickly. It did indeed follow the word processors the year after their arrival.

The word processors did not fit the bill for fixing the Wailing Wall problem but as I watched with growing wonder the skilful manoeuvres of five capable women, I had a Eureka moment. Here was the answer to the huge problem of the inflexible old model management plan. It would now be possible to amend, adjust and change plans on a daily basis if we used loose-leaf binders rather

than bound volumes. Adjustments to only a page or so would be needed. These could then be printed and inserted into the management plan file to replace the redundant page or section. Management plans could become documents for immediate and relevant use at last.

The Natal Parks Board *Yearbook*

Staff set to with a will to design a new reporting system that would not only form a permanent resource and create a more focused and quantitative approach to assessing challenges and goals, but would also act as a stimulus for the staff whose responsibility was management, planning and budgeting.² With regard to improving or replacing the six-monthly reports, the proposal that went to the board in July 1982 outlined the following:

- Six-monthly reports would be discontinued and replaced with an annual report to be called the *Conservation Yearbook*.
- Every conservation unit report covering a protected area (game or nature reserve) would have a format following the same order of contents set out in the formal structure of the management plan. Some variation would be necessary where differences in focus existed between specialist units, for example the work of zone officers (the NPB staff working on liaison with farmers, municipalities and the coastal zone), hunting staff, game capture staff, neighbour relations, and so on. Under each sub-heading describing the activity in each unit, the first order of action was to quantify every section to be addressed. For example, under the subject alien plants each manager would prepare maps to illustrate the extent of the problem and tables listing each species of alien invader, quantifying in hectares the extent of each invader for the year under review. The table would be expanded annually to document the situation as assessed each year, contain the changing position, as assessed each year, until it covered a period of at least four years, so that trends of achievement (or failure) could be assessed.
- The same format was applied to game counts, poaching encounters, staff changes, visitor numbers, revenue earned or indeed any management activity undertaken by the station. The manager was also expected to set objectives for the forthcoming financial year, providing reasons for his decisions. The manager would record the changes resulting from his management actions and had to complete each section in the report by setting goals for the following year. For example, this might be to improve

the game count procedures, burning methods, patrolling systems, anti-erosion techniques, building of more tourist accommodation, and so on.

- The main purpose of the report was to equip the staff with a full understanding of every detail of their duties and to budget and plan to achieve goals the following year. If objectives set by the managers themselves were not achieved, they were asked to provide a discussion on these.
- In addition, every regional head of the Conservation Division would have to prepare a contribution to the *Yearbook* from his region which would be, in effect, a compilation of information about all the conservation and specialist units under his jurisdiction. The regional head now had a greatly improved understanding of the work achieved by his managers and, even more importantly, clear recordings of what progress was being made with respect to management actions.
- For the Conservation Division each station now had a thorough and progressive archival product that in time would establish a regular, easily accessible and invaluable record of activities of that station.

Benefits of the Conservation *Yearbook*: management by objective

The success of the new management by objective procedures developed and formalised by the Conservation Division staff in the Conservation *Yearbook* provided added impetus to staff efficiency and resulted in many benefits. The *Yearbook* became a product that clearly recorded the achievements, enthusiasm and morale of station managers and greatly improved the efficiency and spirit of the NPB.

This innovation was useful for regional heads and indeed the board itself, in that it now became possible to observe the activities of each station and the performance of each manager. Where there was a clear and unusually positive achievement in, for example, wattle removal at station A as compared to station B, it would now prove possible to use manager A's input to provide reasons for the achievement, which could then be shared with other stations with similar work programmes.

What was even more rewarding was to see how some field managers, as a result of these innovations, became more familiar with the monitoring and measurement of their problems and responded remarkably positively when seeing that the goal they had set as a target was in fact eclipsed during the year. Even better to observe were the managers who saw that a problem could be

beaten within the foreseeable future, which added an additional stimulus for them to argue rationally for more funds or to obtain better equipment to speed up the process.

The *Yearbook* structure increased the regional head's management ability in that he could see whether the pooling of machinery or staff could rapidly reduce problems that, in the past, had developed an air of permanence. The realisation that borrowing and deploying six tractors to solve a problem, rather than just the one on station, was real staff empowerment and was put to excellent use. The potential unlocked by the *Yearbook* allowed for better decision making and attracted greater support from regional heads.

The *Yearbook* also ensured that when a new station manager took up his position, a work plan was in place with beneficial goals for achievement or completion of projects. This was of great benefit to the new manager who had immediate and planned tasks that when completed gave him or her the knowhow to begin the planning of new projects for the future. This saved the NPB tens of thousands of rands and almost guaranteed that budgets were not wasted by projects remaining incomplete or being abandoned.

The progress of the *Yearbook*

When the board addressed the subject of dropping the six-monthly reports and was asked for permission to replace them with an annual report, there was a brisk debate. Board members were accustomed to the old format, which had clearly seemed sufficient for their purposes.

However, it was made clear that considerable effort was involved in preparing reports and so it was imperative that the outcomes should have lasting benefits for the author and each field of endeavour. Above all, the results had to have permanent value for the NPB. The suggested change would be the start of a structured archive for posterity. Fortunately, many board members were professional people, including legal experts and Supreme Court justices, and the suggestion that this innovation would have sound archival value carried the day very promptly in the end.

It was quite surprising to me that the concept and format of the Conservation *Yearbook* was not enthusiastically adopted by other divisions of the NPB, but, as senior management positions were changed, more and more departments were encouraged (and, on at least one occasion, forced) to adopt the new format, the end result being the *Natal Parks Board Yearbook* which included

every aspect of the organisation's activities: The structure was outlined as follows:

Conservation Division incorporating

- the East Division (mainly the Zululand region, including specialist units, game capture operations, hunting and zone officers);
- the West Division (mainly the Drakensberg, including the hatcheries, specialist units and zone officers);
- the Coastal Division and zone officers.

Administration Division

- including specialist units of personnel, training, financial services, technical services, mechanical and structural services, legal and information services.

Marketing and Public Relations

- including specialist units of the reservations service, environmental education, library and archives.

Scientific Services

- including specialist units of biodiversity, ecological advice, planning, conservancies, horticultural services, tourism policy and ecotourism planning.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter I have no doubt whatsoever that the positive impression created by Adrian Phillips' perusal of the *Yearbook* was responsible for the delegation's choice of Durban as the site for the Fifth World Parks Congress (and the first in Africa). This decision was a tremendous honour for the NPB and brought the world to the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

At a more pragmatic level the *Yearbook* proved to be quite unlike the standard bureaucratic qualitative report, which is seldom satisfying and has limited shelf life. The new format was a tremendous morale builder for the staff of the NPB and it provided a tool that encouraged that pride in achievement which is so essential for an organisation to succeed.

A pragmatic outcome

Another very satisfying and valuable benefit of having the *Yearbook* on hand came in 1986 when the Director-General (D-G) of Treasury in the province called me to a meeting with a number of other provincial department heads. He rather surprised us by saying that he had several million rands to spare and expressed the wish to see some bids from each department for a share of the

funds. Two days later I made an appointment with him and arrived with a wish list for the purchase of some vehicles that the NPB needed. I took the latest *Yearbook* with me to prove that we would not be wasting the money, and that it would be well managed and used for the benefit of conservation.

The D-G glanced through the records kept for each and every vehicle in the NPB's service in which the Mechanical Division recorded monthly the fuel consumption, mileage travelled and cost per kilometre. The author of this remarkable section of the *Yearbook* report was Don Wheelwright (1980–1998). The D-G appeared impressed and said he would call a meeting with all department heads within a week or so to convey his final decision. When he did, he allocated the full amount of R2 million to the NPB, saying to my somewhat irritated and disappointed provincial colleagues from the other departments that our bid was the only one supported by ample and convincing proof that the special allocation was both necessary and would be efficiently used.

It must be recorded that the ultimate successor organisation to the NPB, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, did not continue the production of *Yearbooks* and nothing appears to have effectively replaced them. There are seventeen *Yearbooks* in existence, sixteen produced by the NPB and the final one being the first *Yearbook* of the interim KZN Nature Conservation Service. Each of these volumes contains a wealth of information, the quality of which improved progressively from 1982 to 1999.

NOTES

- 1 The NPB had promoted me to ADA in 1980 to provide me with experience in the logistic support services of the NPB. In 1982, I applied for the position of ADC and was fortunate to move back to my chosen field.
- 2 It would also guarantee the completion of programmes once launched. There had been in the past many occasions when a change in management staff resulted in the termination of an endeavour that had been close to the heart of the departing manager. For example, one officer may have devoted a great deal of time and money to working on the removal of alien vegetation and may have made real inroads into a long-time threat to biodiversity in a protected area only to leave his successor the option to take on a different project that really interested him, such as repairing erosion and maintaining footpaths. The proposed system would ensure that programmes once started, were monitored annually until completion.

13

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

IT is easy to feel discomfited or to criticise others when one has not been appraised of all the facts or circumstances surrounding a decision. It is also imperative that an organisation's staff should feel they are not alone. In fact, at some stage or another, almost all staff working in any organisation will experience the frustration of feeling inadequately informed. The NPB was certainly no exception and through much of my career I had the feeling that I was never fully au fait with the reasons why decisions covering a very wide range of actions were made.

Colonel Vincent was old school and he lived very much in an old school paradigm, keeping most reasons for action close to his chest. He was an excellent speaker and conveyed precisely and entertainingly what he felt one ought to know. His copious writings were either pure fact, backed by his personal views, and exemplified in the *Officers' Manual*, or simply invaluable instructions issued regularly in NPB orders.

John Geddes Page was also from a military background and shared much of Vincent's communication style. John also had an entertaining and somewhat racier speaking style but warmed to subjects and projects that had been completed rather than what was in the pipeline. John was immensely proud of the NPB, and it showed through much of his dialogue. In direct contrast to Vincent, however, he was a gregarious and voluble man, enjoying one-on-one discussions, his preferred way of conveying information, and also equally capable of publicly venting his dissatisfaction over something that had gone wrong. In the latter case his communication skills came to the fore in a manner most convincing. One knew when he was displeased.

The annual address on the state of the Natal Parks Board

I have mentioned elsewhere that I felt that the practice of submitting daily reports had fallen away to the NPB's disadvantage, and took steps, with the board's approval, to improve on the recording of information so that it could

prove of better and lasting value to the staff of the organisation. Directly linked to this was the need to open more lines of communication with the staff in general. The lack of a formal commitment to undertake regular addresses was, in my opinion, a weakness. I resolved in 1988 to ensure that staff received an annual 'State of the Board' report from the CEO in which the achievements of the NPB received attention and reasons were given for actions that were anticipated, underway or completed.

In my first address on 1 October 1988 the principles under which the NPB operated as set down by Vincent, and gently amended by his successor, were emphasised, and added to. I also included some of my own views of the future duties facing the staff, especially with the need to ensure that the organisation's goals embraced all the peoples of our province. Much of the speech was taken up by providing staff with encouragement and painting a positive picture of the NPB's deserved reputation and status in Natal, South Africa and abroad. The first and second annual addresses were well received and by the end of 1989 I was feeling quite satisfied that they were achieving their goals. Satisfaction is a dangerous indulgence, and this attitude was rudely and directly shattered in December 1989.

Every organisation has what, in the military, is known as the corporals' mess or sergeants' mess, in which those experienced staff nearer the coal face, fully convinced of their superiority in understanding and knowledge of purpose, often harangue their lesser colleagues with their views of where 'the people who have fitted carpets in their offices' are not getting things right or, more maliciously, 'are stuffing things up!'¹

More often than not, such observations are kept strictly within that sphere of influence, and I was deeply honoured, if not a little hurt, when approached by our Training Officer, who had a reputation for being a loyal activist in the corporals' mess, to be told, in a most secretive and confiding manner, that I was losing the support of the staff. In his view and from what he had been told (and what he undoubtedly propagated) the staff felt that they were being kept ignorant of the reasons for actions and plans. His disclosures caused me considerable discomfort, but eventually, after re-reading my first two addresses, this view began to make sense to me. At the first opportunity I raised these issues with my senior colleagues and after hearing their views and suggestions, all of us concluded that having a fully informed staff was essential.

The Director/CEO's seminar

It was decided that the annual address on the state of the NPB, the first two of which were delivered in the theatre in the Douglas Mitchell Centre, would be continued, but, realising that staff, spread throughout the province and many thus seriously disadvantaged in being unable to come to the main address, would be better served by having the CEO come to them.² To that end, the annual address was amended and redesigned to become a much more profusely illustrated and informative presentation. At the beginning of each calendar year, in addition to the annual Head Office address, dates would be set for six presentations at field stations around Natal. It was emphasised that as many staff as could be spared from duty, both in the reserve and from the area set by the chief conservators around that station, should attend the CEO's address.

From 1990 onwards Director's seminars were held at Head Office in Pietermaritzburg; Durban for coastal staff; the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex; Northern Natal at Itala Game Reserve; Giant's Castle Game Reserve for the Drakensberg staff; St Lucia for Maputaland staff; and Mpenjati for the south coast and coastal inland staff.

A major change in the character of field meetings was introduced. Now all staff were included, from the officer levels to the least skilled, and the seminar would be presented in English and Zulu. Fortunately, in the outreach staff of the time, the NPB had a growing source of talented and fully bilingual Zulu-speaking officers who would translate the presentation in tandem with the CEO. It would also be emphasised that all staff were free to ask questions and seek clarity on the policies, status of finances or plans presented, which, it was believed, would go a long way to improving their motivation through a better understanding of the NPB's goals.

One of the features of the seminar would be an illustrated review of the NPB's financial position and to that end the CEO's presentation team would include the Chief Conservator of the region and the Chief Accountant. Some special projects might necessitate the presence of an architect or members of the technical staff. The intention was to remove any anxiety among staff with regard to being unaware or uninformed. A specific goal involving the gauging of the staff's reactions to the NPB's traditional convictions concerning the values and success of, for example, the sustainable use policy and practice – from which much of its perceived success had been derived.

A special benefit of the seminars, therefore, was open discussion of NPB policies, which included consulting the staff on NPB proposals to be tabled at international conservation meetings such as CITES. If the NPB was proposing

to trade in horn from white rhinoceros, for instance, the objectives of this policy would be emphasised using suitable slides to illustrate the reasons and benefits of such a move. The matter was then opened to the floor. At the end of discussion, the staff were asked whether they would support the proposal to CITES or not. I genuinely believe that I must have been one of the few representatives who could report to CITES that a proposal emanating from the NPB was supported by the vast majority of the staff of the organisation.

Another benefit of the seminar came in the many expressions of appreciation received from staff at all levels when they were thanked for their work or given praise for committed service. Every staff member, head of a department, person that services chalets or mows the lawns, must believe that their job is as valuable, necessary and as important as that of the CEO. The value of the individual contribution, well executed, cannot ever be overstressed. Such an accepted understanding empowered the staff.

Of course, there are always those from the corporals' mess who will remain convinced that only in their own field does anything successful occur. Such a view was debunked at the St Lucia seminar of 1995. It had been a long seminar with many questions and appeared to have been fruitful. When it drew to a close, Gordon Forrest, then Regional Warden St Lucia, caught me on stage and asked me to go through a series of papers for approval. This took about ten minutes, while the other several hundred staff exited the hall to enjoy a light snack lunch prepared, as always, by an able and willing local group of staff.

As Gordon and I emerged onto the steps of the hall a loud voice stopped us dead. An embarrassed looking officer was being subjected to an affronted dressing down by a female officer with long service and a reputation for forthrightness, determination, and enthusiasm. She laid into him verbally, first by yelling out that he was a coward and questioning his obviously negative views of the seminar. Then she accused him of not using the opportunity to ask more telling questions, clearly showing that she did not agree with his view that the seminar had been misleading because it did not include information on something he considered important. Blushing, the complainant retreated, and it took all my willpower to stop myself from rushing to her and giving her a hug for her defence of the seminar and its transparency. The general ambience suggested that the majority of staff present agreed with her, and I was satisfied that our messages had been clearly communicated, providing the audience with every opportunity to participate and raise questions.

The withholding of information

One of the benefits to which I had given little thought until this time was my understanding of the old saying that knowledge is power. It is absolutely true, in my view, that knowledge is indeed power, but what I had not fully understood was that the withholding of knowledge is another powerful weapon for those who may wish to muddy the water or maintain the status quo of a project or policy.

One of the first fruits of the seminars was the fact that I was frequently asked directly why an idea, proposed by staff in the field, had been rejected by Head Office. One only has to read the personal memoirs, written by retired or departed NPB officers, to grasp fully the apparent frustration experienced by hard-pressed field staff wanting immediate approval from Head Office for what, to them, was a brilliant idea to solve an immediate problem. Many excellent ideas and suggestions have originated from field staff who at times were seriously disappointed by the fact that Head Office would not, or could not, deliver a positive and rapid response to their suggestions.

The seminar, through questions hurled at me, sometimes with a degree of bitterness, to provide reasons why a suggestion had been turned down, made it clear that the staff member who had brought the proposal to Head Office had not conveyed to those in the field, who had provided the suggestion, the true outcomes of the discussions at Head Office. All too often the idea had in fact been warmly received by Head Office staff, but there were gaps in the presentation of the proposal that required further thought or clarification and, most often, this was because insufficient attention had been given to the costs and benefits. In addition, it was our goal to ensure that whatever proposal was submitted received the full support of all relevant staff and that predicated a sound proposal covering all relevant aspects of a project.

Such understanding made it clear that the proponents, who in fact presented the idea, possibly being embarrassed at failing to secure the acceptance of a proposal, had taken an easy way out. Rather than admitting a lack of preparation or due diligence in support of the proposal, a much easier response to the field-based colleagues was simply to state that Head Office did not approve. Occasionally, the proposal may not have even been supported by the proponent.

The policy file

One or two of these instances convinced those of us at Head Office of the need to prepare a document, containing a formal policy format for the efficient preparation of a proposal, which required its author to address all the necessary components. Right at the beginning, the original proponent of a new idea, procedure or suggestion would be expected to consider and provide guidance on the perceived benefits. An important section of the document required the proponent to give thought to the disadvantages or possible negative impacts of change, because there is never a shortage of staff along the way who will immediately, and with great conviction, find fault with new concepts, innovations, or ideas.³

This train of thought allowed us to grasp that, through no fault of their own, many field and new staff did not have any understanding of the development of many NPB policies and rules. In fact, we were to discover that many of the senior staff, and indeed board members, shared similar ignorance of the understanding of the rules and reasons for actions carried out by the board and hence the staff.

The creation of a *Policy Statement* had been considered before my appointment as CEO but had been resisted by John Page because, I believe (as mentioned above), he was a verbal man and worried that written policy bound and restricted him, and staff, from reacting quickly in violation of the normal procedures if necessity demanded it. This was an unnecessary concern because the NPB had developed a visceral but unwritten policy of adaptive management. Change itself was not a problem but justification for change against a standard became imperative as one entered into an era requiring more transparency and the necessity for defensible corporate governance.

The suggestion made to the board was that a policy file of statements would reflect a record of decisions from board meeting minutes covering virtually every activity of the organisation. The reasons for each decision would form an important component of the policy structure and provide an archive that could be easily found and consulted when needed. This was immediately accepted by the board and it was agreed that the policy format would follow that of United Nations organisations such as CITES and UNEP:

- the subject would be clearly and simply stated;
- the reasons why it was deemed necessary to address the activity should be scheduled;

- the decision and thus the policy of the board would be stated clearly as ‘an undertaking’;
- the date of the decision should be clearly recorded in the appropriate board minutes with a reference to the place of the decision.

With changing times or circumstances, it might prove necessary or desirable to change the wording, format or even the principle of the original decision. By the above means it was made clear that a policy decision was not immutable and could be challenged or amended should there be rational and demonstrable justification. The value of stating the reasons for the original decision was that, if there was a doubt, those concerned could read through the reasons recorded and would have such reasons available to disprove or amend the information to suit an altered circumstance.

By the time the NPB merged with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation, the board had a packed *Policy File* containing no fewer than 120 written and reasoned policies. In addition, there was a series of appendices precisely describing the formats for submissions and important procedural steps

| | | |
|--|--|---|
|  | <u>NATAL PARKS BOARD POLICY</u> |  |
| Subject : RELEASE OF EXOTIC SPECIES | | POUCY FILE NO: 4-i |
| DATE OF BOARD APPROVAL: 29 JULY 1983 | | BOARD MINUTE: 8(h) (i) |
| REVISED | | |
| <p>RECOGNISING that the introduction of exotic species of alien plants or animals has proved detrimental, in some cases very seriously affecting indigenous ecosystems which has lead to some significant reduction in the biological diversity of our Province, the Board RULES that no exotic species of animal or plant may be released into, or planted in the wild, except under circumstances that are:</p> | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrably beneficial towards the economic prosperity of Natal or South Africa, subject to the proviso that there will be no adverse effects on any indigenous populations; b) demonstrably beneficial to the recreational resources of South Africa, subject to the proviso that there will be no adverse effects on any indigenous populations; c) demonstrably beneficial to Natal in terms of conservation. | | |

Example of an approved policy from the NPB Policy File

to be taken in the event of breaches in discipline. Faced with the increasing influence of legal challenges to such incidents it was imperative that careful records and reasons for actions were verifiable. Every station head was issued with a *Policy File* and the secretariat at Head Office was prompt and regular in ensuring that amendments or new policies were issued in a formal manner, requiring that any officer-in-charge, or other holder of the *Policy File*, should sign a document acknowledging receipt of the changes and that the relevant new pages had been inserted and the redundant pages removed from the file.

The advantage that the officer-in-charge of a station now had at his fingertips was an unambiguous reason for most of the decisions made by the board. This could be used both to explain the thinking to new staff or, should an enquiry be received from a member of the public, he or she could simply photocopy the policy for the consideration of all interested parties. The *Policy File* was an open document for general use. There were, during my period at the NPB, few if any real challenges to Board policies. I believe that the decision to create the NPB *Policy File* was a sound management improvement. In fact, to me, it was the culmination of a long series of endeavours to provide the staff with suitable and useful guidance to ensure conviction and confidence in their management environment.

The Technical Manual

An earlier attempt to have staff take ownership of their contributions for the benefit of others occurred in 1982. On assuming the position of ADC from Don Stewart, one of the first projects that was tackled was related to a shortcoming that had become glaringly obvious when I was working with an excellent team of officers throughout the Drakensberg. Most new managers in the field were faced with an almost constant and, on occasion, bewildering array of problems of which they (and I) had no personal experience of solving. Good officers, of which there were many, tried to research the problem and had often found effective solutions. Better officers soon managed to improve on the solutions offered, often adapting techniques to suit their local conditions.

Considering the time and effort required for every officer to try to gain knowledge through research and discussion, as access to either of these resources was often very difficult for one-man stations and those situated far from public libraries, it was suggested that we should try to create a suitable *Technical Manual*. In this way we could make use of the talents of staff who were employed because of their skills and training in a particular field (for example, veterinarians, game capture, fencing, and so on) or because of their

demonstrated learned expertise and sound common sense.

Pursuing the development of an in-house NPB *Technical Manual* had three obvious advantages. First, there was a sense of pride and ownership associated with it. Second, the fact that the author of each subject was an NPB officer made it both easy and useful for staff to be able to clarify confusions by a telephone call to someone known to the reader. Finally, the system was guaranteed to provide a regular review to keep up with new developments and materials. The Conservation and Research staff responded enthusiastically to the concept and no less than 34 members of staff volunteered to produce a much better than expected guide to staff for solving problems common to every field station. A sample of the sort of problems faced, areas of activity addressed, along with the names of their contributing authors is as follows:

| | |
|--|--|
| Wildlife Monitoring Techniques | Martin Brooks |
| Game Removal Operations | Drummond Densham and Keith Meiklejohn |
| Fire Management | John Scotcher |
| Alien Plant Control | Pieter le Roux |
| Care of Injured and Orphaned Animals | Mike Keep |
| Problem Animal Control | David Rowe-Rowe |
| Soil Reclamation and Stabilisation | Mark Astrup |
| Path Construction and Maintenance | Martin Schofield |
| Fencing | Peter Clark and Simon Pillinger |
| Casting of Concrete Strips | Ron Physick |
| Care of Firearms | Spud Ludbrook |
| Map Use as a Management Tool | Ian Colvin |
| Handling and the Care of Boats | Gordon Forrest |
| Procedure for the Assessment of the Impact of Proposed Development Projects | Roger Porter |
| Solid Waste Disposal | Susan Brownlie |

The first edition of the *Technical Manual* was issued in 1984. Each author undertook to review their contribution every year to bring the advice up to date as technical improvements were made, such as a new herbicide for controlling certain invasive species of plants. A full review of the manual took place in 1988.

The *Technical Manual* proved to be a relevant and useful communications tool that saved the NPB a great deal of money and solved some serious public relations difficulties. A good example of such outcomes was the use of concrete strips on the road to Tendele Hutted Camp at Royal Natal National

Park (RNNP). For years, since the post-war building of the camp on a site accessible only by a steep, narrow and winding track, it became difficult after a heavy drizzle in the summer for standard cars to complete the journey. Staff in charge of RNNP had to face a summer period of criticism from dissatisfied visitors who were stuck halfway up the road or had damaged their cars as a result of trying to extricate themselves from the mud. This annual problem also meant that the Camp Superintendent at Tendele had to be equipped with a large 4×4 vehicle, capable of safely pulling some expensive cars up the hill during inclement weather.

Ron Physick (1970–1998), the Warden of RNNP, decided that he would solve this problem and using whatever spare cash he had saved from other budgets, he started on the task of building broad concrete strips from the lower car park at the base of the hill to the camp, a distance of over a kilometre. With his first attempt – 60 metres of strips – he decreased the pressure on the Camp Superintendent greatly, reducing the numbers of vehicle rescues from 180 to 18 per year. So impressed were we with this achievement that we searched for underspent budgets and channelled a large sum to RNNP the following year, reducing the car rescue numbers to nil and allowing the NPB to replace the Camp Superintendent's vehicle with a small utility vehicle (bakkie) at a saving of tens of thousands of rands. Ron's pride and reputation for this achievement followed him throughout his career because it resulted in a huge improvement in visitor patronage of Tendele Camp and a massive reduction in complaints from a loyal and supportive clientele.

In the years that followed many stretches of concrete strips appeared along the Drakensberg and at other stations, proving that Ron had left a heritage of practical guidance equally as valuable as the effort that created the *Policy Manual* to ensure understanding and conviction for the policies and direction of the NPB at all levels of the organisation. The founding fathers of the NPB would have approved.

NOTES

- 1 Roy Jennings, pers. comm.
- 2 At this time the title of Director was replaced by CEO.
- 3 I cannot recommend enough the sage advice of Edward de Bono, fully described in his book *The Six Thinking Hats* (1985) where, when new ideas are being supported or opposed, one encourages the participants in the debate to reverse their convictions thus promoting real discourse and not just shallow opinionated conclusions. At this point I should acknowledge the debt I owe Don Stewart who, taking his responsibilities very seriously indeed, tried to induce in all his senior staff in the Conservation Division an interest in books on better management, such as those written by Peter Drucker and De Bono.

14

THE MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DIVISION

THE NPB, like so many organisations associated with government, did not immediately launch structured programmes to keep the public informed but depended to a large degree on the support of the local press to convey information. In this the Board was not disappointed and over many years *The Natal Witness* (which changed its name to *The Witness* in 1994) was an excellent purveyor of NPB news to the people of Natal and the newspapers from the Durban area began to take an increasing interest in conservation, with mixed results. Formal press releases were rather rare in the early days and news was garnered from the office of the Director by sharp reporters. As mentioned before, Colonel Vincent was not a publicity seeking man and expected everyone to ensure that the NPB's activities did not provoke criticism.

The *Daily News* in Durban persuaded Ian Player to write a column called 'Game Ranger's Notebook', which ran for many years and helped Ian to develop his skills in handling the press. The column was extremely popular and undoubtedly helped enhance the reputation of nature conservation as an activity. The breakthrough in methods of rhino capture focused more and more attention on the NPB's activities. Then came the problem years of the Petition and serious criticism from a very hostile section of the press emerged. Up until that point there was no strategic NPB approach to the media. When John Page took over as Director there began a conscious effort to make conservation a major attraction. Individual officers, such as Ian with his weekly column, and Bill Barnes, who started to give weekly slide shows to visitors at Giant's Castle (Hughes, 2014), encouraged public participation by improving the understanding of conservation goals. The NPB employed the occasional photographer, for example Digger Sinclair (1952–1959), and started a photographic collection, but progress was sporadic and disorganised.

In the early days in the 1960s and 1970s the NPB showed films with wildlife themes at Head Office at least once a week. One must remember that there was no television at the time and these film evenings were popular and deserved to be, because the staff who turned out to present them did so voluntarily. Staff did

not receive any overtime payment for these endeavours and that applied to all the excursions undertaken for the purpose of showing films or giving lectures to interested bodies and NGOs. Common to all these Head Office staff, and many others around the province, was a deep desire to improve conservation awareness and they saw the voluntary evening and weekend activities as tools to build trust and earn the support of the people of Natal. Alas, following the arrival of television in 1976 there was a sharp drop-off in attendance at film shows, which were then cut from two per month to one per month. It then began to be more effective to offer travelling film shows by arrangement with a sterling dedicated officer called Joan Kuyper (1976–1984).

With the structural reorganisation in 1974 came the progressive decision by the board to establish the Interpretation Division with the primary goal of bringing the work of the NPB to the attention of the world in a strategic and structured manner.¹ John Vincent (1965–1989) became the first Assistant Director of the Interpretation Division, and he established an information section with Reg Gush (1960–1990), an amateur photographer who had spent some exciting times in Zululand (Gush, 2000). John also employed the NPB's first Public Relations Officer, Mary Rose (1974–1978), a very dynamic, intelligent and influential woman who did much to put the NPB onto a much wider map. Mary was followed by Jane Baxter (1979–1982) and then June Vincent (née Payne, 1982–1991).



John Vincent, founding head of the Interpretation Division (EKZNW library)

Ranger naturalists

Recognising the valuable role that direct communication could play for visitors to the NPB's protected areas, John established in the Interpretation Division a new category of field officer, the ranger naturalist and stationed a number of these professional staff in reserves with high visitor numbers.

The ranger naturalists would give lectures and run guided tours through the reserves. These became popular and built reputations that persist to this day. At Giant's Castle, Paul Miles (1973–1994) became a legend. Roland Goetz (1978–1989) at RNNP provided a source of immense humour among his colleagues because, when he first started, there was apparently nothing that he thought he didn't know. Roland in fact surprised everyone as his commitment was total and he became extremely knowledgeable, and, in later life, he made his mark as a pioneering game ranger of great influence in Angola.

Jeff Gaisford (1974–1998) became a career-long credit to the division, eventually becoming the head of Media Liaison in the 1980s. Having started work in the St Lucia area, Jeff became one of the greatest fans of the sea turtles nesting in Maputaland and a firm favourite of the television teams that came from all over the world to film these wonderful animals. Apart from becoming a turtle expert and a local historian of the St Lucia area, Jeff was famous among his media guests for his evening excursions on the turtle beaches. He carried with him, in his bakkie, a specially built refreshment cabinet which he would bring out late at night, when pausing for a break in the drive, and serve up hot coffee or chocolate from what he named the Café de Muvon.

The Royal Show and Garden Show stands

One of the most admirable achievements of the early Interpretation Division was the creation of the NPB stand at the Royal Show² and, later, The Natal Witness Garden Show in Pietermaritzburg. John Vincent employed some incredibly talented artists and technicians who year after year erected award-winning stands using a different theme and always, at the Royal Show, included living animals such as white rhinoceros, smaller antelope and even crocodiles. With the stand being themed to a specific NPB activity our writers and artists produced a new and captivating display every year conveying our many activities and services on behalf of the province of Natal. There is little doubt that stands at the Royal Show, the Natal Witness Garden Show, the Wildlife Exposition in Durban, and other organised shows inspired several generations of Natalians. This, in turn, stimulated the beginnings of the fame of the Ketelfontein Studio, later replaced by the White House, (a separate building near Head Office), which accommodated a dynamic group of artistic and designer staff who produced displays, information pamphlets and booklets for distribution to the protected areas and to the zone officers.

By the 1980s the intensity of information, communications and public relations began to take on greater importance as a result of the expansion of

NPB activities, as well as demands from the public and the board itself for an improved quality and quantity of information.

Publications

In autumn 1987 the Interpretation Division produced the first issue of *Natal*, an eight-page high-quality quarterly newsletter in colour distributed to all staff, donors, huttet camps and NGOs. It was a great success as it conveyed information to a much wider audience than any other publication produced by the NPB and, as the years went by, there appeared articles in English, Afrikaans and Zulu. Each issue contained a catholic mix of existing policies, research programmes, policy aspirations and reports of general interest to the public and staff. New camps, camping grounds and the proclamation of new protected areas all received early attention so that the public were aware of developments as they happened. *Natal* ceased publication in 1998 following the amalgamation.

Another NPB publication was called the *Natal Parks Board Staff News*, later upgraded to become *The Rubbing Post*.³ This was the publication for staff personnel containing social snippets about marriages, promotions, singular achievements and awards. As with *Natal* it gradually evolved into a publication that was printed in Zulu and English and included articles and comment written by Zulu- and English-speaking staff.

In the 1990s the division produced an in-house publication called *From the Boardroom Table*. This informed staff throughout the NPB of specific issues that had come before the board at its last meeting and the decisions that it had made. It was a greatly appreciated communication that gave staff a much greater understanding of the board and brought it and its members much closer to being perceived as invaluable helpers who had the same interests and passions as the staff themselves.

The Interpretation Division also took over production of the NPB Annual Reports as, for many years, a standardised report had been produced that accurately reflected many of the NPB's activities to the NPA. It was a straightforward and up-to-date report meeting the standards demanded by law, but with a limited distribution. It was never perceived as having influence in places other than the NPA. However, it also proved useful as an exchange document with other provincial and national conservation bodies in South Africa. The traditional format was to change dramatically with the arrival of Ronel Horne (see below).

Writers

John Vincent soon found a talented writer to add his skills to those of June in the form of Bryan O'Donaghue (1978–1986), an Irish ex-Rhodesian with a commitment to conservation which made his writing style very relevant to the aims of the NPB. As Bryan was a great raconteur with a very Irish sense of humour, he proved a stimulating addition to the Interpretation Division.

At one stage, when Colonel Vincent returned from a period at IUCN in Switzerland,⁴ he occupied the post of NPB Historian and apparently gathered information on its history, much of which he must have used in his book written after retirement in 1975. The post was a useful one and when he was promoted to the position of Assistant Director Conservation, it was moved into the Interpretation Division. When the NPB took over the prefabricated buildings from the Department of Water Affairs at Spioenkop Dam there were exciting opportunities for a more active field historian, Gilbert Torlage (1978–1989). In 1980, Gilbert used some of the old administration buildings to create, along with the graphics skills of the White House, an outstanding exhibit on the Battle of Spioenkop and for many years it was probably the best historical exhibit in South Africa on the subject. After Gilbert's departure from the NPB the post of Historian fell away.

Environmental educationists

John Vincent was very keen to see the NPB establish a sound and rational environmental education programme and he was lucky to recruit Rob O'Donaghue (1984–1998), the son of Bryan, who over the years gradually improved his skills and ultimately gained a PhD in the subject. Rob was a fascinating character and became a leader in his field, making an enormous contribution to the growing science of environmental education by producing numerous books and guides in partnership, in many cases, with WESSA (originally the Wildlife Society of South Africa), an NGO that broadened its focus dramatically, becoming a leading institution in environmental education.

Rob was joined by Mba Manquela (1990–1995) one of the NPB's first black female education officers, who proved to be an incredibly dynamic and goal-orientated enthusiast. In 1995, for IUCN, Mba organised the first successful indigenous knowledge systems symposium at Midmar Resort and brought eagerly accepted skills and perceptions to an important component of the NPB's endeavours. A memorable guest speaker was the famous *sangoma* Credo Mutwa, the author of *Indaba, My Children* (Mutwa, 1964). Sadly, Mba

was lured away from the NPB shortly afterwards by what appeared to be a much more demanding position.

The symposium celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Natal Parks Board

In 1987, the Interpretation Division worked on the NPB's fortieth year celebrations, which included a two-day symposium to which were invited fellow provincial conservation organisations, represented by their chief directors, the National Parks Board, the Department of Environment Affairs and NGOs involved in conservation matters.

A programme was prepared that had staff deliver a series of presentations covering every aspect of the NPB's activities, after which the audiences were asked to comment or discuss the material. In addition, there were two scientists, Roy Siegfried from the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute in Cape Town, and Brian Huntley from the CSIR in Pretoria, who, on being requested, had agreed as a team to monitor the proceedings and produce a conservation audit of the NPB's efforts. I should add that this choice of leading biologists was not taken without some trepidation as Roy was a world-renowned scientist specialising in critical analysis and regarded no one as being beyond criticism.

Little did we know that this was going to set the gold standard for the NPB's presentations for years to come, as the quality of overhead slides in colour created by the White House was awesome and made almost every presentation a success. The result of the symposium was a ringing endorsement of the NPB's achievements and programmes with the glaring exception of work among neighbouring communities, an issue of which the board was conscious. This important issue was addressed with determination in the following few years.

Artists

Shirley Hill (1978–1988) whose talents ran to large exhibition paintings that were ideal for Royal Show stands and other exhibits at tourist-orientated gatherings, which the NPB was being more frequently requested to support, was a real find for the Ketelfontein Studio. Shirley was later joined by a hugely talented artist and sculptor in Ian Tippet (1984–1996). Ian was, like all true artists, mercurial in his enthusiasms and possessive of his creations, but ever willing to help with projects. He became a past master at creating overhead slides. As I had developed a determined interest in seeing the NPB's achievements get full credit and had long before decided – thanks to Bill

Barnes' example at Giant's Castle – to have colourful and clear images of our achievements always available and fully up to date. I depended heavily on Ian's skills. Ian's work was often interrupted when I needed updated or new overhead slides and he and I nearly came to blows one day when I suggested that, for emphasis, a few colour splashes should underlie the NPB's logo on the overheads. He did not approve of the superfluous colour base, and I eventually had to pull rank on him.



*Shirley Hill with her painting of the Amphitheatre at Royal Natal National Park
(EKZLNW library)*

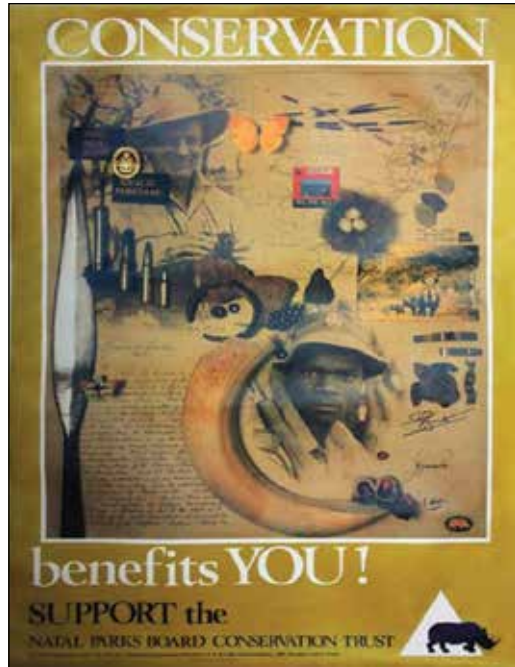
Such disagreement was happily a rare event as he was so willing to help the organisation and the Conservation Trust (see Chapter 24) that he often produced paintings, decorations and posters that had not been called for but were accepted with great appreciation. Once, he grew hot under the collar, having completed a beautiful NPB poster, originally in the form of a collage, which had at its centre a 35 mm transparency, still in the old Kodak cardboard frame. This distressed a board member, who, despite admiring the poster, objected strongly because Kodak had been one of the corporations publicly to reject investment in South Africa and to withdraw its operations from the country during the apartheid years. The frame was changed to a blank one and the poster was accepted by the board. It is perhaps worth noting that Kodak, did not stop sales of its excellent products in the country.

As a splendid example of Ian's commitment and talents, I must record the time I went to the National Geographic Offices in Washington DC to give their editors and photographers a presentation on the work of the NPB. This visit was an effort to convince the society that, with respect to an intended visit to South Africa to collect material for a planned article on the national parks of South Africa following our democratic changes in 1994, they should be aware that some of South Africa's finest conservation assets were not, in fact, national parks but were provincial ones. In South Africa, national parks are generally run by the

national government's SAN Parks (South African National Parks formerly the National Parks Board), and not a provincial body.

Ian Tippet, being aware of the visit, prepared for me, without my knowledge, a splendid and life-sized mock-up of a National Geographic magazine cover, which was as good a product as the society itself had ever published, with a fine set of images of white rhinoceros cleverly positioned within the famous golden frame of the magazine. Ian's intention was that I should display the mock-up to their staff in Washington in the hopes that the magazine might find inspiration in it.

When I produced it with a proud flourish at the presentation meeting, the National Geographic staff present had a collective cadenza and made me put it away immediately as the golden frame of the magazine is copyrighted in a hundred different ways and apparently the society's lawyers have a zero-tolerance policy towards those daring to imitate the treasured image. No amount of explaining appeared to have any effect and Ian's genius was, alas, wasted.



*Ian Tippet's excellent poster for the NPB
Conservation Trust*

A breath of fresh air: Ronel Horne and Joanne Hayes

In 1989, John Vincent, after 24 years' service, resigned from the NPB and took up a position as Director of Museum Services of the Natal Provincial Administration. His position was filled briefly by Chris Black (1986–1989) and then the board appointed its first female Assistant Director, Ronel Horne (1990–1991), a dynamic and extroverted dynamo who lived for public relations and marketing. Ronel was a revelation and, although somewhat intimidating, she brought with her a modern intuition and a vision that shook the organisation out of its comfort zone. One of the first tasks she set herself was to turn the annual reports into marketing and public relations tools. Believing that colour and excellent photography were prerequisites to success, Ronel started to expand the talents of both the photographic section and the White House artistic team. Unfortunately, being a blonde with the nickname of Goldilocks, it was not long before she married one of the NPB's more eligible bachelors, Peter Openshaw (1986–1998) and she moved into the field away from Head Office.

Almost immediately she was replaced by Joanne Hayes (1992–1993), yet another dynamic and imaginative young woman who quickly strengthened the team of writers and advertising staff. Joanne's many contributions included employing Anita Wong (1993–1998) as our Public Relations Officer and improving the NPB's advertising, which the costly development of Ntshondwe Camp in Itala necessitated. For Joanne, the NPB's annual reports were seen



Executive heads of the NPB when joined by Ronel Horne

as useful additional advertising vehicles and she gave the White House staff their heads to improve the reports, with astounding results.

The annual reports became the best ever produced, and they were very well received all around the country. One of the fortuitous events that contributed to this achievement, and many others, was the discovery that a young man named Roger de la Harpe (1982–1998), who had originally joined the NPB as a technician, was found to

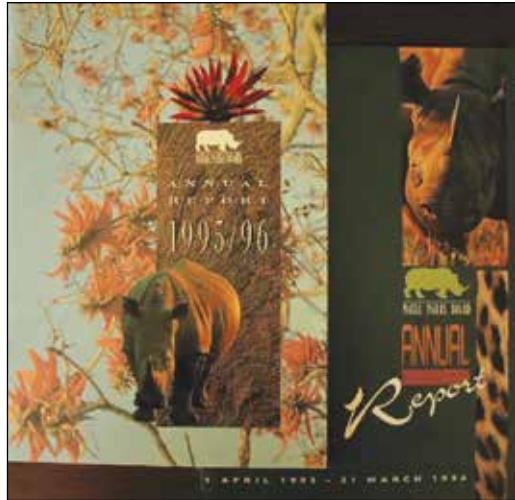
have a real talent for photography and was, happily, on hand to take the place of Reg Gush on his well-deserved retirement in 1990. Roger and his wife Patricia are now world-famous photographers, filmmakers, and authors, with a string of books and awards to their credit.

Roger was not shy, and he managed to attain a rather wider fame than I had given him credit for when he worked for the NPB. My wife Lee and I visited Anstruther in Scotland in the 1990s and spent some time in the Scottish Fisheries Museum where we saw the only surviving example of the unique Zulu fishing boats.⁵ Associated with the exhibition was an explanatory text dealing with the naming of the Zulu vessel and a video on the Zulu people. I was surprised to read at the end of the production that it was directed and produced by Roger.

The Design Studio

The White House, now filled with artists and graphic designers whose output was prodigious, was gaining an amazing reputation. It was subsequently blessed with even more talent. Shirley Hill's retirement led to the arrival of Mark Coetzee (1989–1998) followed later by Peter Stewart (1991–1995) and Diana Martin (1996–1998).

The White House became much more progressive during the NPB's last decade and the home of an inspirational and creative group of hard-working geniuses, with whom it was a pleasure to interact. In fact, conservation



NPB Annual Reports from 1993 and 1995



Mark Coetzee, head of the Design Studio and a talented cartoonist, celebrating NPB merit awards on behalf of fellow staff

and particularly the NPB, owed this group of staff far more than they ever received credit for. The constant production of outstanding artwork, writing and exhibitions endeared the group to all as they strove for the best they could do, irrespective of the field of endeavour. When the occupants wanted to redesignate their headquarters as the Design Studio, the suggestion was approved with enthusiasm.

Marketing of NPB tourist venues

With the expansion of quality and quantity in the NPB's tourism offerings, the division expanded its presence at both regional and overseas travel conventions. Equipped with excellent marketing material from the Design Studio, teams of staff attended tourism conventions at the annual Travel Indaba, of which Durban had made a great success, the Getaway Show in Cape Town and the World Holidays Travel Fair in Johannesburg. During the year

the NPB had exhibitions at the World Travel Market in London and the Berlin International Tourism Exchange. Invitations were received for staff to present the NPB's products in Mauritius and the Department of Foreign Affairs even requested NPB staff to attend international events such as the Swiss Indonesian Convention in Lausanne, which created further opportunities to market our products. This was a tremendous endorsement of the tourism achievements of the NPB and a credit to the division started by John Vincent in the 1970s.

The Conservation Awards

One of the shortcomings identified in staff discussions was the fact that the NPB did not have an award system recognising the achievements and endeavours of the citizens of the province. This was rectified in 1989 by staff presenting a proposal for an annual Conservation Award at which approved recipients would receive as a trophy a bronze sculpture of a white rhinoceros. As the NPB's official logo, the white rhinoceros was seen as a most appropriate acknowledgment and the idea was enthusiastically approved by the board.



*Inkosi Ngubane presenting awards at a conservation awards evening, 1998
(EKZNW library)*



Sam Goba accepting an award for eight years' service on the NPB board at the conservation awards evening, 1997 (EKZNW library)

The first of the annual Conservation Awards took place in 1990 and, as the board regarded these awards as prestigious, the ceremony was held at King's House, Durban, with an address by the Administrator of Natal and followed by entertainment from Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Attended by a full range of media, the awards proved a huge success. Worthy recipients included Cynthia Giddy, an authority on cycads whose contribution to conserving these ancient plants was prodigious; a courageous and visionary honorary officer, Raymond Ramachand, from Chatsworth; Karel Landman, a game rancher from the Pongola District, who successfully developed a hunting farm based on the policy of sustainable use;

and many others. The tradition of the NPB Conservation Awards ended shortly after the NPB ceased to exist.

Seeking new awards for the organisation

During the NPB's first forty years it had received numerous accolades for its work, many from hunting organisations in recognition of Operation Rhino, but in the last decade came a flood of really prestigious awards indicating that the NPB's reputation had gone global. With the first hint that an award might be possible, the division prepared and submitted suitable material to the agency involved. Coinciding with these developments, it was fortunate to obtain a new editor, William Charlton-Perkins (1993–1998), who drew the best from the staff, with memorable results.

It was at this crucial point that Microsoft PowerPoint had improved to a level that even those lacking computer skills, like me, could be trained to present

the fantastic achievements of the NPB through digitised images instead of overhead and/or photographic slides. The technology was a revelation to me, and the Design Studio took to digitisation like ducks to water.

Having had a long and positive relationship with the WWF and WWF-South Africa, the NPB looked forward to the arrival in South Africa of WWF International for its 1995 AGM. This became even more special when it was announced that it was intended to bestow gold medal awards on both the National Parks Board and the Natal Parks Board. This was the highest award possible from WWF and, apart from recognition of our progressive contribution to the restoration of South Africa's wildlife heritage,⁶ it was prescient of the fact that the NPB would be the source of no fewer than three of the directors of WWF-South Africa. John Hanks, the NPB's Chief Professional Officer in the early 1970s, the first of the three,⁷ undoubtedly put in a good word and helped create the basis for the recognition. Long-serving scientists held the memory of John's tenure in the organisation with both respect and affection.

Around the same time Dr Hans Grobler visited the offices of the Department of Environmental Affairs in Pretoria to accept on behalf of the NPB the recently established Conserva Award from the Director-General in recognition of the NPB's exceptional contribution to conservation in South Africa. In the same year, the NPB received the joint Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC/ASTA (the American Society of Travel Agents) Award for contributions



The author, on behalf of the NPB, accepting the WWF (International) Gold Conservation Award from HRH Prince Philip, president of WWF, 1995

to conservation and the travel industry. The new Hilltop Camp at Hluhluwe was the focus of the tourism component of the submission and the NPB's conservation achievements attracted the Smithsonian's attention. Critical items of the motivating documentation included the fact that Hluhluwe Game

Reserve was now one hundred years old, and an account of the appreciation shown, by many, of the job creation associated with the hutted camp as well as the benefits programmes in neighbouring Zulu tribal lands, led by the NPB's local Conservation Outreach Officer, Paula Morrison (1992–1998).⁸ This joint award became possible through a South African working in New York, Julian Harrison, who provided the initial motivation. Julian was a great supporter and admirer of the NPB and when he suggested that he would submit our case for consideration, he was supplied with all the justification materials by the Interpretation Division.

I am pleased to say that it fell to my lot to collect the award twice! The first time happened in Lisbon in its great conference centre where I was expected to address a gathering of 6 500 travel agents.⁹ It was an intimidating affair. The second prize-giving was held in The Castle, the magnificent building in Washington DC in which the Smithsonian Institution was founded in 1855.

It was a busy year as the NPB also won the Southern Region Award of British Airways' Tourism for Tomorrow campaign following an excellent submission on the Hilltop Camp development. The motivation was put together by Anita Wong and William Charlton-Perkins and the award resulted in an amazing benefit to the NPB, the image of which was lifted to new heights. On being informed by British Airways that the NPB was on the short-list for the awards I received an invitation to attend the ceremony in Lincoln's Inn Fields in London and was invited to bring one other person. We were to be flown business class, at the airline's expense, to and from London and stayed at the Royal Horse Guards' Hotel in Whitehall. Such a fantastic opportunity could not be ignored and, to the benefit of the *esprit de corps* of staff, Welcome Dube (1989–1998), was selected as my companion. Welcome was a tour guide at Hluhluwe Game Reserve. He spoke fluent English and had served the NPB and Hluhluwe well.

When it became clear from the invitation that the awards evening was a formal affair, Tony Conway (1983–1998), the Chief Conservator at Hluhluwe and his colleagues drove Welcome to Durban and had him properly fitted out with a hired black-tie outfit and then ensured that he had suitable clothes for the few days that we would spend in London – a chillier part of the world than Hluhluwe. What I did not realise at the time was the enthusiasm with which his colleagues at Hluhluwe had prepared Welcome for the trip. This opportunity created a surge of pleasure and pride for the Zulu game guard staff at Hluhluwe, who rallied to give all the help they could. Members of the board were delighted to have one of our black staff attending such an exciting affair. Welcome's response to the trip deserves a brief mention.

The two of us departed from Durban International Airport and, in those days, one had to walk to the plane to board. When Welcome saw the size of the British Airways jumbo jet he was stunned and needed some encouragement to believe that it could fly. Inside, in business class, Welcome's excitement nearly caused a riot and when he found that the champagne was free, I had some difficulty restraining him from overindulgence. He loved it as he had never tasted champagne and I believe he thought that it was a rather delectable lemonade.

In London we were met at the airport on a typically grey autumn day with low, uniform stratus cloud hanging over the city. The weather remained unchanged until after we had left. We were driven to the Royal Horse Guards Hotel. The next day was free from engagements and I took Welcome to the Houses of Parliament where my brother



Welcome Dube accepts the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow award from BA CEO Colin Marshall, London, 1996

Bob, a sitting Member of Parliament, took us through the House of Commons and the then newly revamped and repainted House of Lords, which was simply awe-inspiring in its golden glory. Bob introduced it to Welcome as the 'house of chiefs'. Welcome was enthralled, saying that he could never have imagined such a building. The rest of the day was taken up with a foot tour of London ending in a private visit to the Regent's Park Zoo, thanks to Alexandra Dixon, a zoologist colleague at the London Zoological Society. Behind the scenes in the working zone of the zoo, Welcome's face-to-face meeting with an enormous Lowland Gorilla shook him to the core.

The ceremony, which Bob attended with us as he served, as a shadow minister in parliament, on the board of British Airways, was truly memorable. A great fuss was made of Welcome who responded with gratifying pleasure and even received a hug (as I did) from Ali MacGraw (the star actress of *Love*

Story) who had been nominated for an award for her game farm in Kenya.

We were both overwhelmed by the dignity and history of the venue, Lincoln's Inn Fields, the traditional home of the legal and judicial professions. But when visiting Westminster Abbey, standing next to the sarcophagus of Edward the Confessor, and being told that it was built in 1269, Welcome found this hard to believe. London, as a whole, I thought, was almost too much for him to grasp and so, when we returned to Durban, and as he had shown so much excitement, I expected him to verbalise wildly about his experiences. But, when we emerged from customs into the reception hall, being met by an unexpectedly large contingent of fully uniformed and proud game guards from Hluhluwe demanding across the hall what their friend thought of overseas, Welcome's response was both unexpected and memorable:

'Ayeko ilanga!' he cried, 'There's no sun!'

Welcome and I remain good friends to this day. He is still serving conservation in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve with the NPB's successor, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

The final years

With the ending of the St Lucia saga in 1993 (see Chapter 17) Joanne Hayes resigned from the Interpretation Division, to be replaced by David Hibbs (1969–1997), who had been in charge of the NPB's booking services and, in 1983, had overseen the conversion from the original Wailing Wall to a modern fully computerised system then necessary to cope with the anticipated surge in demand as new camps were planned. In 1995, David played an invaluable role in the management of the Centenary Celebrations at Hluhluwe, which undoubtedly became one of the pivotal successes of the NPB. He retired in 1997 to be replaced by Gugu Masinga (1997–1998) who remained on the staff to carry the division into the new era. There is no doubt that the development of the division's duties and services was astounding and of the highest quality.

By 1998 the contributions, by the now renamed Marketing and Public Relations Division, to the *Yearbook* (1987–1998) recorded astonishing increases in publicity, in every field of endeavour, from the first days of quantitative reporting. Between 1992 and 1998 television appearances involving the NPB, its activities and staff rose from 18 to 87 per year, while press cuttings rose from 1 163 mentions of the Board per year to 2 348 per year, an average of 45 per week.

What was even more important was the fact that the analysis of the press cuttings revealed that the number of negative press articles had shown a steady

decline over the years and in 1998, only 11 out of the 2 348 press cuttings included any negative comments; a total of 0.45%. It is worth repeating here that the division reported all such comments to the CEO and gently made suggestions as to how they should be responded to.¹⁰

The lions and CROW

On occasions negative press articles were generated by one individual who had a personal motivation. One of the most trying was the outcome of a wilderness trail in Umfolozi during the course of which the NPB's trails officer had to shoot a charging lioness that attacked the group with serious intent. This event turned out to be the result of the lioness feeling that her two young cubs were threatened by the approaching hikers. Threatening charges by lions were rare, but not unknown, incidents. Our officer, Herman Bentley (1967–1998), was totally justified in his actions.

What happened next was not, in hindsight, justified by NPB policy. Herman was persuaded by the trails group not to despatch the two cubs but to let the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW) in Durban, take the orphans into its care. This was agreed to with a strict condition that the lions were the responsibility of the NPB and in due course, when they were older, they would be reintroduced into the wild. All was agreed to by the woman in charge of the centre who undertook to give the cubs her personal care. The NPB put out a warm and well-received press release describing the event and the subsequent arrangement.

As time went by, and CROW achieved a significant spike in its fund raising as the cubs' fame spread through Durban, contact between the manager and the NPB became more erratic. The Game Capture staff had been given the responsibility of relocating the lions, and in trying to arrange a date to pick them up at the centre they became more and more frustrated as a full gambit of excuses from the manager, from flu to overseas travel, kept postponing the day. The months passed by and as the capture season was fast approaching, Keith Meiklejohn, the Head of Game Capture, appealed to me to put some pressure on the centre. This I did not wish to do so I suggested they pick a day, set up the recipient of the cubs and tell the centre that they would arrive at a certain time to collect the lions. If the manager could not be there, then they would simply remove the animals. After setting a date and confirming it, the capture team duly arrived on time at 07h00.

What even they had forgotten was that twelve months had passed and, when the team arrived, they found two almost full-grown male lions being kept in large

pig-wire cages in the middle of Yellowwood Park in Durban. The manager had bonded with the lions with all the enthusiasm of Joy Adamson and was nearly hysterical with emotion at the thought of the NPB removing the two, admittedly splendid, beasts. She did not bid the staff welcome. The lions were sedated with Angel Dust (Phencyclidine), loaded into the NPB vehicle once they had succumbed and immediately driven off to their new home, a private game reserve in the Northern Cape.

Keith phoned me to tell me that they were on their way and that, I thought, was that. Alas, there is a problem with Phencyclidine and, from time to time, with cats of any size, fatalities occur when the sedated cat regurgitates some food some of which is accidentally breathed into the lungs. An acute pneumonia brings a rapid death. Keith and his colleague Rodney Henwood were driving through the Free State when he noticed that there was something amiss with one of the cats and on investigation found that it had died. Being conscious of how attached the manager of CROW had become to the cats, he immediately telephoned her to tell her, with regret, that the death had occurred and then drove on to their destination with the surviving cat. Both staff members were upset about the demise of the cat for any number of reasons; the capture team prided itself on the low loss rate of animals captured or handled.

The next morning, all hell broke loose as there appeared a spate of articles in the Durban dailies, reporting in hysterical fashion the death of the lion and adding that the NPB staff had arrived without warning, the accusations being nicely warmed by the suggestion that they had been drunk and abominably rude. According to the near inconsolable manager the death of the lion was clearly and simply a case of gross impudence, indifference, and incompetence, with the increasingly present hint that the staff were inebriated. We had not known that the manager's husband was a reporter for the *Natal Mercury* daily newspaper.

Dering Stainbank, the MEC with the NPB portfolio, was overwhelmed with criticism about the apparently callous NPB staff and the board ruled that the matter must be fully investigated. He appointed me to do the investigation. It took six months to pin down the manager of CROW and to hold face to face discussions with her. Staff had been consulted promptly, and there was not a hint of a suggestion that they had been drinking nor that they had acted irresponsibly. Independent veterinarians confirmed the dangers of Phencyclidine as explained to me by our own veterinarian. Eventually the manager acknowledged that she had been overcome with emotion by the lion's death (and I certainly had no criticism of that) and admitted further that perhaps

she may have over-reacted. I found the entire affair stressful, unnecessary, and very time consuming.

It was a singular lesson to the NPB that the organisation must in future decide promptly on the fate of potentially dangerous orphaned animals. While accepting that they had made the effort to resolve the issue of removal of the lions, capture staff were gently disciplined for allowing such a long period to pass before taking decisive action. Press releases are a double-edged sword, no matter how one earns them. In this case I did not agree with the famous saying that 'no publicity is bad publicity' but will be forever grateful for the talents and commitment of the staff of the Interpretation Division and the later renamed Public Relations and Marketing Division, which made such an admirable contribution to the reputation of the NPB. The division made us known to the world.

NOTES

- 1 Marketing and Public Relations was the final name of this division in 1998 having started as the Interpretation Division in 1974. The division progressed through a number of iterations and I have referred to each when relevant in the text.
- 2 The Royal Agricultural Show, now over 170 years old, is an annual event of long-standing since colonial days. Immensely popular, it is an eagerly awaited occasion for agriculture, commerce, agriculture and, of course, conservation, where the NPB was a regular winner of gold medals for its displays and live exhibits.
- 3 *The Rubbing Post* was named after the tree stumps used by rhinoceros as scratching posts after mud baths for removing ectoparasites. Popular gathering points for rhino, the stumps were eventually polished to a high shine through heavy usage.
- 4 The IUCN is a global think tank focusing the interest of nearly 16 000 professional conservationists through a series of specialist commissions such as the Species Survival Commission. Established in 1948, at the same time as the World Wildlife Fund, IUCN has its headquarters in Switzerland.
- 5 This new design fishing boat was designed in 1879 by Lossiemouth fisherman William Campbell. The Zulu boats were built according to the carvel method of planking. The shape gave the boats a longer deck and a shorter keel which greatly improved their manoeuvrability. The launch coincided with the height of the Anglo-Zulu war in the Colony of Natal. Perhaps Campbell did not approve of the colonial forces being used on a noble nation and named his vessel the *Zulu*.
- 6 When I accepted the award on behalf of the NPB from HRH Prince Philip, president of WWF International, being aware that I was born in Aberdeen, he drily commented to me, 'Not bad for an Aberdonian'.
- 7 The other two were Ian Macdonald and Morné du Plessis.
- 8 By 1998 the NPB's conservation outreach programmes had sixty full-time staff who had established 86 neighbours' forums in nearby communities and were running 150 projects, for which the team had raised R20 000 000.
- 9 In fact, in our session I had the privilege of speaking after Richard Branson from the UK and just before Mrs E.S. Dole, then president of the United States Red Cross and wife of the Republican Party senator and United States presidential nominee in 1996, Bob Dole.

- 10 May I end this section by saying that in my twenty-odd years of senior management there was only one occasion when I had to request a visitor not to return to visit a NPB protected area. This gentleman, from a legal background in Durban, was obviously a person of influence, but could not be allowed to return to offend our staff unjustifiably or make demands that did not appear in our terms of reference. He did not respond well, but thankfully did not sue.

15

THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

AMONG the many criticisms hurled at the Natal Parks Board by the Petition was the suggestion that all jobs should be undertaken by trained and professional individuals. This implied that many positions in the NPB were held by unqualified staff. There was a degree of truth in the allegations as in the first twenty years of the NPB's existence, training and academic interest in the spheres of field conservation were almost entirely absent. When the NPB was established in 1947 there were no diploma or degree programmes available that dealt with conservation and so most positions in the field were held by individuals who were attracted to the job from a wide variety of activities that bore little resemblance to conservation. Fortunately, many of these were good people with a personal passion for saving wildlife from extinction. These passions, coupled with Colonel Vincent's disciplinary control, laid the foundation for a successful start to the work of the NPB. Colonel Vincent had from the very beginning ensured that where qualifications were deemed necessary and available, appointments were made to ensure the highest level of efficiency and benefits.

Administration

By the 1960s the realisation that the NPB should strive for higher levels of education was being shared by the arrival of John Page (1954–1988) at Head Office. John at the time was, I think, quite ambitious, and as a hatchery manager, he had applied for the vacant position of Secretary in 1960. John had realised that considerable influence within the organisation, particularly concerning staff matters, was focused on the Secretary. It was a matter of some amusement to the staff in general that when John Page later became Director, he moved quickly to ensure that the influential power previously held by the Secretary went with him. From 1963, the role of Secretary to the Board was filled by Peter Potter (1949–1988) who, in 1970, became the first Assistant Director Administration. Thereafter the Board was served by a series of excellent



Peter Potter: as Assistant Director Administration he launched the invaluable and successful NPB pension scheme (EKZWN library)

secretaries starting with Bim Dowle (1961–1981), then Harry Sykes (1973–1998), Tony Ward (1972–1998) and Kevin Tarr (1980–1998).

Peter Potter took his new senior position seriously and structured and reorganised administration services into an invaluable component of the NPB. Its responsibilities included finance, general administration, staff, or human resources (including training), the two technical divisions and control of the NPB's aircraft. In later days Information Services was included in Administration and was initially led by Louise Toucher (1997–1998).

The personnel and administrative structure

As with many state and semi-government structures the NPB went through several reorganisations through its fifty years of existence but the most thorough, which saw it through the last ten years, was the Functional Evaluation Programme, better known as FEP. Fortunately, in late 1988, the NPB appointed an outsider as the new Deputy CEO who had both an interest in and enthusiasm for organisational structures. Dick Parris (1988–1994), a fellow graduate from the University of Natal with extensive experience in Botswana, came from the then Transvaal Nature Conservation Department. Dick threw himself with enthusiasm into reviewing the structures of the NPB in terms of the FEP proposals and completed the programme, carrying the majority of the staff along with him. It was an admirable achievement proving successful both in improving efficiency within the organisation and financially benefiting all personnel.

Dick became a real champion of the statutory structure of nature conservation and a committed and almost evangelical staff member of the NPB, on whom I came to rely heavily, when my duties carried me out of the country. It came as a traumatic shock when Dick announced to me that he had been head-hunted by the National Parks Board and offered a senior position in Pretoria. Dick's departure stunned me. However, I took comfort from the loss because when

I was made CEO in 1988, and before Dick's successful appointment, I had hoped that the head of the Conservation Division, Hans Grobler (1983–1998), would become the Deputy CEO. Hans was one of our most dedicated, loyal, and hard-working professionals and I thought deserving of the promotion. This was not to be on that occasion, but with Dick's departure Hans got his well-deserved opportunity and became a totally dependable half of the CEO's office, as we worked as a team, each ready to hold the fort for the other whenever circumstances demanded it.

It fell to the Administration staff to rearrange the NPB structures logically and set up the operational aspects of the FEP restructuring. Smooth administration is often taken for granted by the rest of an organisation but is an essential part of having an efficient and inspired staff and should never be forgotten. The NPB was especially gifted by its series of administrative officers, such as Vic Winterbach (1970–1984) and Tony Ward (1972–1998).

The Natal Parks Board Pension Fund

Among all the activities for which Peter Potter deserves credit was the introduction of insurance cover for the NPB's assets and, even more importantly, the start of its independent pension scheme for staff. Peter's commitment to the creation of a sound pension system started with a modest endowment scheme for officers, which developed into the Natal Parks Board Pension Fund. This embraced all officers (all mainly white at that stage as we were still deep within the apartheid era) and to it was later added a class B fund that included all staff who were not officers or professional staff. The class B pension fund required smaller contributions from staff, although all other features were equal for everyone. Following the wise decision of choosing Old Mutual as the investment manager of the pension fund, the fund grew most satisfactorily for many years and remains in surplus in 2021 as it continues to serve those staff that chose to remain as members.¹

During my short spell (1980–1982) as the Assistant Director Administration, Peter, promoted to Deputy Director Environment, started me off on my first day by giving me Old Mutual's actuarial report on the NPB Pension Fund. Let it be said that I was the classic example of a person with no training in his subject, being put into a job for which I had neither qualifications nor knowledge. When I read the report at home in preparation for the meeting the next morning, I nearly had a stroke as the only thing that I grasped from a bewildering array of figures was the apparent fact that the NPB was short of R760 000 on the balance sheet. I never said a word during the meeting but

gathered, with some relief, that the R 760 000 would be a debt only if every staff member decided to retire or withdraw from the pension fund on the same day. The Old Mutual staff were very patient and kind to me over the next two years and a fruitful partnership it turned out to be. Over the next eighteen years successful management of the NPB's funds saw the Pension Fund go from the deficit recorded in the 1980 report to a significant surplus that was put to good use.

Up until then I had had little to do with pension schemes. In 1974 when I was completing my doctoral studies at the Oceanographic Research Institute, SAAMBR had offered to the scientific staff membership of a pension fund. However, like many of my colleagues, being unlikely to become a lifetime member of the institute, I turned down the offer to join. To be clear, I did read the proposal thoroughly and what drew my attention was the fact that if I joined and then, at some stage, chose to leave the fund, I would receive my investment plus 4% simple interest on my contributions. As general interest rates in South Africa around that time were in the region of 8% per annum this did not appear attractive to me.

When I began to understand the details of the NPB Pension Fund and the rules made sense, I noticed that the withdrawal rules were similar to what had been offered by the SAAMBR Fund. If one withdrew prior to retirement, one

received one's money back at 8% simple interest. It became clear that this rather mean withdrawal scheme was intended to help the scheme to grow its capital to get to the stage where it could be self-sufficient and financially secure for its members.

Around 1980, the whole pension scheme industry was beginning to be questioned and the workings of the defined benefit system were under scrutiny. The NPB was determined that we should try to do better by our staff, and once the fund had achieved a decent surplus the Board insisted that we attempt to improve matters. Phil Evans (1982–1994) took over from me as Assistant Director Administration in 1982 and by



Phil Evans who handled the first financial borrowings of the NPB for new rest camps (EKZNW library)

then the NPB was insistent that significant improvements of benefits for staff on the Pension Fund should be made.

The NPB recognised that the longer a staff member had served before, for whatever reason, leaving its service prematurely, the more the fund retained from the NPB contributions that had been made for him or her. That was not ethical in the Board's view. The first request therefore was that, on withdrawal, simple interest on the sums paid for by the member would be replaced by compound interest. In addition, it was ruled that there should be a difference between someone withdrawing from the scheme after a short period and those who spent longer in the service of the NPB. The new rules read as follows: If a staff member withdrew from the Pension Fund, he, or she, would receive:

- a. Service from 1–5 years, all personal contributions plus one third of the NPB contributions with 8 % compound interest on the combined sum;
- b. Service from 6–10 years, all personal contributions plus two thirds of the NPB's contributions at 8% compound interest on the combined sum; and
- c. Service over and above 10 years, all personal contributions plus all the NPB's contributions at 8% compound interest on the combined sum.

This was a massive improvement to the benefits received on withdrawal and eventually to the actual pension of the staff. Later, it was agreed that the Fund, in the event of the death of the pensioner, should pay 60% of the pension to the surviving spouse. This was an improvement on the 50% limit in the original Fund rules.

The Pension Fund for all staff

In the early 1990s, a final improvement to the scheme was the decision to merge the class B fund into the original fund and include every staff member in one combined fund to which all staff should belong, pay the same contribution (8% of salary, with the NPB contributing three times that sum), and receive the same proportional benefits on withdrawal or reaching pensionable age.

The NPB for much of its lifetime had a low staff turnover at all levels of the organisation and was recognised for the extremely long service records of so many permanent staff. Every year, dozens of staff received, for every seven years of service, a printed certificate, and a long service bar badge to wear, and at 25 years received a special watch from the chairman of the board. Given that the NPB lasted only fifty years it is astonishing how many staff, male and female, black and white, had three green bars with two or three gold leaves, the latter boasting service exceeding 42 years. Loyalty and pride among staff

of all ranks were two of the strongest of the features that made the NPB the successful conservation body that it was.

There can be little doubt that awareness that the Pension Fund had a built-in discriminatory clause was the motivation behind the establishment of a more equitable system. What was not generally realised was that the funds used to incorporate and supplement the class B fund, thus providing equity to all the staff, came from funds invested by the officer classes over 25 years without a single objection raised by any member of staff.

It would not be amiss to state that much credit should go to the management skills of the Old Mutual staff who ran the fund so successfully. However, the decision to use the surplus funds to create a single unifying Pension Fund lay completely in the hands of the NPB. From then on all staff not classified as officers, when taking pensions, left with an income and benefits far in excess of what they might have expected when they first joined.

Pressure to change pension scheme models

Towards the end of the NPB's existence and after an agreement had been signed with NEHAWU, I was distressed to find that there was a change in the air regarding pensions. The traditional defined benefits funds were falling out of fashion, and it was clear that this generous system of rewarding one's staff for a lifetime of service was going to be replaced by the defined contribution fund. Simply put, instead of staff being able to withdraw a maximum of one third of their investment in cash, with the remainder invested to earn a steady pension and encourage financial security, the new fund model enabled staff to remove every cent belonging to them in the fund, to which would be added all the NPB's contributions plus the interest earned on the funds.

NEHAWU tried to insist that the pension fund should be removed from Old Mutual and invested in a company of their choice and that the NPB Pension Fund should be converted into a defined contribution fund. The board was appalled, as was I, and Sam Goba and Lucas Mchunu (both board members of long standing) and I protested vocally on the grounds that many of our staff were not financially astute and there was a grave danger that the money would be withdrawn totally and possibly misused to the detriment of the staff members who worked so hard to earn those benefits.

The board refused to agree to the NEHAWU demand, decided to canvass staff for their own preference, and instructed the Administration Division to provide all staff with details of the two options now available to them.

Employees could decide to remain with the NPB Pension Fund with its defined benefits or transfer to a defined contribution fund as proposed by the Union. Many senior staff endeavoured to interact with employees to ensure that the options available were fully understood and the advantages and disadvantages of each clearly illustrated. Only then were staff given the choice of which option they preferred.

May it be said that a satisfying number of staff decided to stay with the defined benefit scheme and even today in 2021 the old NPB Pension Fund, although closed to new entries in 1998, has continued to provide an excellent service to those who chose to remain with it.

The Preservation of Pension Rights Bill

It is interesting to note in hindsight that in 1980 there was a state move to introduce a Preservation of Pension Rights Bill that would have prevented the very widespread practice of workers resigning prematurely to collect their pension packages, spending the one third cash allowed, and then returning to work and starting again. This unfortunate practice had a hugely negative impact on a person's eventual pension on retirement. This proposed Bill certainly had my vote and I expected the whole country to support it without question. To my surprise, the Bill was successfully killed by the very people who would have benefited from it: the many members of numerous unions and insurance companies. The world is a strange place.

Financial services

The financial section of the NPB was the first to ensure that the organisation's Chief Accountant was always fully qualified. The first Accountant, Alan Eldridge (1951–1980) served the NPB well for many years when running the Finance Department with such precise efficiency that he was forever known as Cutworm.² In fact, throughout the lifetime of the NPB the Finance Department was served by professional accountants and supported later by auditors who maintained control over finances at the highest level. Throughout the fifty years of the NPB's lifespan no audit found financial irregularities in any of its activities.

This was largely to the credit of Alan Eldridge and his successors including Tom Mason (1976–1985), Gordon Baker (1985–1989), Keith Larsen (1978–1993), Brian Dinkelman (1979–1995) and Jody Hollis (1996–1998).

The forensic audit

A good example of this excellence was during the last decade, as the final move towards amalgamation with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation was initiated. The Auditor-General of KZN ruled that the NPB should undergo a full forensic audit and called a special team down from Pretoria to undertake it. Months went by as this team went through every nook and cranny of the NPB systems. The process ended in a meeting in the boardroom with senior staff and board members. The provincial Auditor-General addressed the meeting and congratulated the NPB and its staff on a first-class report. Emboldened by this I asked the Auditor-General whether his department was going to do a similar audit of the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation so that, on actual amalgamation, we could compare apples with apples. To our surprise he turned to me and said bluntly: 'Dr Hughes, the Natal Parks Board is a first-world organisation run by first-world professional staff and which maintains first-world recording and auditing standards. The same cannot be said of KwaZulu and, therefore, I have no intention of wasting the time of our staff trying to find efficiencies and systems where none exist.'

As an aside, in very few places are auditors greeted with joy on their arrival. In fact, Peter Potter, the NPB's Head of Administration for many years, never reconciled himself with the provincial auditors and once announced to me in anger, 'Auditors are rather like the soldiers who are sent onto the battlefield, after the battle, to kill the wounded.' Peter would have been delighted with this final forensic audit report on the NPB. It was justification of all the effort he put, throughout his career, into imposing efficiency on field officers in order to ensure they did not neglect their less romantic duties, such as record keeping, maintaining asset registers, and recording spent cartridges, broken tools, etc. Such chores were expected to be undertaken by the staff in charge of every branch of the NPB's service.

The personnel section

Falling within the responsibilities of the Administration Division was the Personnel Section, which was responsible for the supply chain management of a broad spectrum of activities from negotiating contracts and supplying uniforms to discipline and training. For many years there was a routine induction period during which new officer-class staff were formally introduced to the organisation and received training, based to a large extent in the early days on Colonel Vincent's *Officers' Lawbook*. For all non-professional staff the NPB

eventually established a series of training schools, the largest being at Orient Park at the Midmar Resort, which occupied modified tourist accommodation and other facilities which had proved redundant as a result of lack of interest by visitors after the opening to all communities of the entire Midmar Resort. There were several exemplary training officers involved in these programmes among whom were Roy Jennings (1982–1993), Neil Page (1972–1992) and Andy Melrose (1991–1998).

1982 INDUCTION COURSE



Back row: Ranger C.M. Coetzee, Ranger B.N.F. Ducasse, Ranger H.M. Maharaj, Ranger P. Singh, A/A D.C. Thornton-Dibb, Ranger D.J. Gordon-Bennett, Ranger M.J. Sa???

Centre row: Ranger F. Flowers, S/ Ranger K. Govender, Ranger/Nat. M.S. Harvey, Ranger K.A.R. Maggs, Ranger C.J. Hannocks, Ranger L.R.C Whyte, Arrison?? B. Sookdew, Ranger I.V. Patrick, Rech. C.F. Du Toit

Front row: AO (Training) R.J. Jennings, PRO Mrs R.J. Payn, CPO F.J.R. Junor, Director J.T. Geddes Page, SPO (O) Dr D.N. Johnson, Accountant G.P. Schutte, PO A.P. K????

Induction courses were always introduced by senior staff such as the Director or assistant directors to emphasise the value of new recruits (EKZNW library)

The training programme introduced by the division became a regularly held, two-week induction course that all new staff had to attend. Staff from all fields of the NPB's operations and rank positions could attend and these courses established friendships that lasted throughout many careers. In the NPB's latter years, the training centres delivered a vast range of training and educational opportunities, including literacy and languages.



*Induction course led by Assistant Director Administration Peter Potter, 1986
(EKZNW library)*

The technical divisions

A wise decision taken by the NPB in the 1960s was to establish its own structural and mechanical sections rather than depend on the services of the provincial Works Department to which it had had access for building and transport services since 1947. The reason for this was purely logistical. The provision of such services in a widely dispersed system of parks and nature reserves could never be dependably provided by a provincial department.

Rather surprisingly, there never appeared the anticipated shortage of highly competent and professional builders and mechanics willing to serve in the NPB's rather extended field of operations. It became a characteristic of the staff in these sections that they served willingly and well because they were happy that the NPB was in the business of nature conservation.

Eventually bases were established for both activities at Midmar with another mechanical workshop in the field at Hluhluwe Game Reserve. This ensured that both facilities and mechanics were relatively closely available to staff who required them. The road units were particularly valued as the predominantly dirt roads in the protected areas often required immediate attention after

| Some Examples of Training Offered at NPB Training Centre | |
|--|--|
| Management Skills | |
| Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter and memorandum writing • Telephone techniques • Public speaking - Zulu |
| Interpersonal Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with people • Transactional analysis • Counselling |
| Interviewing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection interviews • Performance appraisals |
| Game Guards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic • NCOs • Conservancy guards |
| Natural Sciences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of subjects: Trees; aloes; cycads; birds; marine; amphibia; reptiles etc. i). Identification of habitat requirements ii). System management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish farming • Veld management • Farming game • Crocodile handling. |
| Field Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem animal control • Cropping • Fencing • Spraying • Data collection • Soil identification • Reclamation and erosion control • Skinning • Alien plant control |
| Technical Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i). Repair and maintenance: Electrical appliances; gas equipment; vehicles; lawn mowers etc. ii). Scuba diving: Defensive diving; ski boat handling. iii). Computer Software: HRK etc. |
| Specific : Specialist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal Zone Officer • Environmental Impact Assessment Clerk • Reservations Staff • Accounts • Curio sales etc. |

The NPB Training Centre gradually expanded the courses made available to all staff

storms, and the road units could be expected to arrive timeously when needed. In the newer parks the road units were in constant demand for opening up new routes for both management and tourism.

The structural and mechanical functions were an integral feature of the NPB's services. The staff providing these were highly respected throughout the province and for very good reasons. There were very few emergencies in the NPB's activities that were not immediately responded to by these committed artisans and strange indeed were the jobs they were expected to attend to. These could range from repairing tornado damage in the camps to assisting when essential vehicles broke down while on special duties such as

the beach protection of the sea turtles during the nesting season or capture vehicles at the height of game capture operations. There was never time to go through bureaucratic procedures to obtain such support elsewhere and, as can be testified by so many, help was always to be found at the other end of a telephone, from staff who were as passionately committed to nature conservation as the game rangers and scientists they went out so willingly to assist.

The structural section

Royce Horner (1964–1981) was the first of the leaders of the structural team and was a testy character, but determined, competent and a good organiser. An incredible amount of building was undertaken in his era, and this embraced the standard housing units for staff, new hutted camps, more modern extensions to hutted camps and even some of the architect-designed special units such as the Giant's Castle and Tendele lodges and the larger visitor centres. The NPB gradually expanded its tourist facilities thanks to Royce and his team creating accommodation at prices that were probably below those of commercial builders at that time. The building section in general produced some of the most respected staff of the organisation, some of whom like George Bellars (1964–1980), John Cunningham (1970–1984) and Arnie Glasspoole (1986–1998) had long and enjoyable careers supporting the cause of conservation with their construction skills.

As the NPB began to become more ambitious in its tourist plant much greater use was made of commercial architects and building firms. Mike Arnott (1989–1998) as Chief Technical Officer, became in effect the NPB's Project Manager of such large schemes as Hilltop Camp at Hluhluwe, Ntshondwe Camp at Itala and Didima Camp at Cathedral Peak. These were massive projects by NPB standards and stand testimony to the incredibly valuable service provided by Mike and his team.

The mechanical section

In the early days of the NPB, local vehicle maintenance was often carried out by staff in the field with occasional visits to the nearest Natal Roads Department workshops for overhauls and services. At that time all vehicles were purchased and registered as Natal Provincial Administration vehicles with a clerical team of NPB staff maintaining the records of the fleet. As, however, the fleet started to expand and the organisation became more conscious of the need to establish a visible presence in Natal, the board decided to break links with the NPA,

probably to the relief of the Roads Department, and to take total control of its vehicles. The NPB also applied and was granted the right to register its own licensing identity and from the late 1960s all vehicles bore new number plates, starting with “NPB”. The Board also agreed on a new shade of green to be the universal colour for all its vehicles.

Over the next thirty years the fleet grew to over 700 vehicles varying from 30-tonne low-loaders to heavy machinery, bulldozers, buses, bakkies and sedans. The control and monitoring of the fleet involved an amalgamation of outstanding bookkeeping and amazing co-operation. An appreciative number of staff members held the central managers of the vehicle records in awe.

The first Chief Technical Officer was Eddie Cox (1965–1989) whose career was impressive. Eddie had trained as a mechanic prior to joining the NPB as a zone officer in the Coastal Division. A cheerful, ebullient and co-operative soul, by 1980 he had decided that his forte lay in management of vehicle fleets rather than being a shad sheriff (see Chapter 27) and his enthusiasm and reputation among users of the coastal vehicle fleet resulted in his obtaining the newly established post of Chief Technical Officer Mechanical in 1980.

During his tenure his skills expanded to cover road building, bridge building, dam building road maintenance, tarring experiments and expanding the workshops, providing an outstanding service to the field staff. Eddie also supervised the annual NPB auctions and made sure that all vehicles going on sale had been carefully vetted for parts that would be useful as spares for the workshops. Despite these cautionary removals, the prices achieved on the annual public sale at the Midmar garage complex were often above normal second-hand prices because of the NPB reputation for looking after its vehicle fleet.

There was a very sophisticated reminder system to ensure that all vehicles, no matter how deep in the bush they may be operating, were on servicing schedules. In between those appointments, a technical officer visited each station at least once a year to audit the state of the vehicles. It was quite a traditional affair, looked forward to by most of the field staff in the outer stations.



Eddie Cox, Chief Technical Officer Mechanical (EKZNW Library)

Eddie's career was, alas, brought to an abrupt end when, while he was inspecting some roadworks at Itala Game Reserve, an Acacia branch, covered in thorns, flicked through the vehicle window, and buried a thorn directly through the pupil of one of his eyes. It was excruciatingly painful for him while his colleagues rushed to get him to a hospital; and the after effects meant that Eddie had to take early retirement. It wasn't just the game rangers in the protected areas who took risks for conservation.

Many of the mechanics who were responsible for the workshops were also characters that should never be forgotten. Andy Wardell (1965–1998) started at Hluhluwe workshop during the early hectic years of game capture where he rendered a sterling service before moving to the Midmar workshops, and could be depended on to help at any time and for any reason. At Hluhluwe workshop, Jimmy Pattenden (1968–1995) was so committed to his work, with so little interest in financial reward, that he never claimed for overtime. This reluctance to claim was never shaken even when, on occasions, he would be out all night, bad weather notwithstanding, to help some researcher or field officer with a broken-down vehicle. Jimmy would work non-stop (often accompanying his labours with a stream of florid language) until repairs to the vehicle were satisfactorily completed. Eventually, under protest, he was forced to ask for overtime pay by his immediate supervisor. Jimmy argued that such money was of no interest to him, but obeyed instructions, which pleased the supervisor until he found out that Jimmy was gluing the uncashed cheques to the workshop walls! Jimmy was one of the NPB's greatest conservationists.

The NPB aircraft

The first of four NPB aircraft, a Cessna Cardinal, was purchased in 1961 as a result of the negotiation of a generous tender submitted by the Total Company for the supply of petroleum and oil products to the Board. Total was so determined to remain the NPB's main supplier that it consistently defended its tender with more generous discounts and a willingness to contribute towards conservation activities, one of which had been identified as a need to possess a light aircraft.

The second Cessna Cardinal, a four-seater (ZS-NPB) fixed wing, proved an enormous success and served the NPB for 22 years. It was piloted by Ginger Skinner (1970–1992), an Afrikaner born with the talent required to be a bush pilot. He was expected to fly in weather of all kinds and to land on some strips that did not seem to bother him but certainly had the passengers in a state of panic. During my career, I had cause on many occasions to praise



*Left: The NPB's second Cessna that served the NPB for 22 years
Right: ZS-KXZ was a popular and well-known aircraft that did sterling service in game counts and aerial surveys*

Ginger for getting me to places at speed, saving me hundreds of hours of driving time and, as a free but not always welcome service, for providing a straightforward and direct commentary on whatever the board and senior staff were doing at the time. Ginger's attention to detail and concern for his freight was such that few, if any, of us ever lost faith in his abilities. He was a simply wonderful pilot. There were probably few members of staff who had a broader understanding of the processes and directions of the NPB than Ginger, as he piloted various directors, senior staff, politicians, board members and guests around the province. His public relations with staff, senior or otherwise, were always cordial and supportive but every now and again he could surprise.

When Natal was ceded East Griqualand, Ginger flew the Director, John Page, and me down to Kokstad to view Mount Currie Nature Reserve and, having left Pietermaritzburg quite early, we called in for breakfast at a restaurant in the town. John's famously voracious appetite was obvious for all to see. Ginger was wide-eyed at the amount of food that John was consuming and surprised us all by suddenly remarking to John Page 'How come you have the appetite of a lion but look like a jackal?' John's reaction became a legend, as he stopped chewing and stared at Ginger for what felt like minutes. I am not sure whether Ginger ever realised how close he had come to being fired.

He wasn't though, being too valuable. He successfully piloted the NPB's third plane, a Cessna 182 (ZS-KXZ) and the fourth, also a Cessna 182 (ZS-MUP). It was a matter of tremendous sadness when, in 1992, Ginger was diagnosed with a heart murmur that necessitated his being medically boarded and the NPB lost a fantastic man and a friend of all he worked with.

His successor was Greg Nanni (1992–1998), charming, self-effacing, and an ideal replacement as he was in every way the equal of Ginger. Greg continues to fly over 700 hours a year for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, this combined career now some 29 years old. Greg claims that there are only two occasions when he has felt some danger in the aircraft, and both involved flights when I was a passenger.

The first was on the approach to the Dukuduku strip between Mtubatuba and St Lucia in a hired plane (we had too many guests from the Department of Fisheries headquarters in Cape Town for the NPB plane), when the bolt holding Greg's seat snapped as we were approaching the tarmac. He slid back onto my legs and lost sight of the runway. I had to do some mighty heaving, from a trapped position, to give him visibility again. There was momentary panic as we wobbled down towards the airstrip, which was greeted by us, as we stopped, with a few nervous laughs.

That was but a brief moment of alarm, but nothing compared with the other memorable flight that, strangely enough, also involved the Dukuduku strip. We had just taken off after a visit to St Lucia and Greg warned us that we had a powerful cold front coming up from Durban. The gale arrived as he was speaking, and we left the strip after a 50-metre taxi and bucketed upwards. It took us 35 minutes to get to Richards Bay (normally a ten-minute flight) with Greg saying he was going higher to try to get over the gale facing us. We rose as if in a balloon and after passing well above Richards Bay we started hurtling all over the sky. The higher we went the more intense became the terrifying winds that were blowing us from side to side and up and down. We then flew into an aerial spectacle that I had never experienced before, with green cliffs and valleys of cloud – some of which were sheer for thousands of metres if not more. In and out of these cloud canyons Greg was blown by winds, the gusts of which hit the plane like gunshots. For the first and only time I saw Greg's face register serious concern and after twenty minutes he shouted, 'We won't make it and I am turning back to Richards Bay.'

He turned and dived downwards into the clouds while the rest of us sat in brave silence because we were too terrified to speak. Within a short period of time, we burst into the clear over Richards Bay where we could see, beneath us, the wind sending tiles flying off the roofs of houses. Displaying commendable skill Greg negotiated us over the airfield and brought us down onto the tarmac with hardly a bounce, the plane shuddering but stopping after a few metres. This was the shortest but most welcome landing I have ever experienced. I think that the plane thought so too.

Conclusion

It has been mentioned before that field officers, particularly in the very early days, considered Head Office and the support services as an inefficient and costly waste of time. Although I have some sympathy for these early views, they did not take into consideration the logistics of the day and most certainly the difficulties facing the support staff with a constantly expanding number of bureaucratic hurdles to overcome before even ordering materials, let alone dispatching them.

What I conclude is that without this entire branch, the NPB would never have achieved the reputation and success that it did. The support services in every department, whether in the fields of training, legal services, building or transport would never have delivered the quality jobs that they did without the passion of belonging to a nature conservation body for a common cause everyone shared. It was a privilege to work with all of them throughout my time with the NPB.

And let it be said that the staff of the Administration Division were the means whereby the administrative communications of the entire NPB structure were kept prompt and efficient. Many female staff served willingly to contribute their professional skills and all manner of support and brought their efficiencies to the field on too many occasions to remember. A significant proportion of the reputation of the NPB was owed to many female staff for their voluntary services over and above the occupations for which they were paid. They were a joy to work with and, as CEO, they made me proud. In particular, no person could have been better served by personal assistants than me and my endeavours were improved dramatically by the guidance and patience provided by Maxie Holder (1976–1984), Pat Wilson (1984–1996) and Cecelia Sibeko (1996–1998).

When the board placed me into the Assistant Director Administration position in 1980, I did wonder whether the members had lost their minds, but in hindsight I have much to be thankful for. The often-unappreciated labours of those whose skills are so necessary for the smooth running of a successful organisation could not have been more valuable and, without doubt, the many branches of the Administration made as great a contribution to the reputation of nature conservation in Natal and KZN as any other branch of our endeavours.

NOTES

- 1 After amalgamation with the KZDNC to form Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife many NPB staff accepted the offer to convert to a provident fund, but certainly not all, and the NPB Pension Fund will endure until all its members have died.
- 2 Alan Eldridge having been a pilot in World War Two for many years stepped in as occasional pilot of the NPB's donated Cessna Cardinal.

SECTION 3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. RESTORE NATAL'S LOST AND ALMOST LOST BIODIVERSITY

16

THE RETURN OF THE GAME

IT must be said that the early years of the NPB passed with little comment. In 1947, the first Secretary, the name then common in the civil service for the administrative head of the NPB, was W.W. Williams, who, unable to take up office immediately, was deputised by an Acting Secretary, C.N. Ledward from the Provincial Secretary's office. Ledward served for four months and on retirement he received warm thanks from the board for his contribution. I am duly honoured and, I confess, pleased that Ledward can be recorded as having made a positive contribution to the newly constituted nature conservation body as he was a good man and an avid trout angler from whom, in 1966, I inherited some of the finest split cane rods it has been my privilege to own (Hughes, 2014). Neither of the first two secretaries was particularly well versed in conservation matters, being loyal civil servants of long standing. Regrettably, Williams died in 1949 to be replaced by H.C. Lake, the newly retired Provincial Accountant, as Acting Secretary until 1 October 1949.

Lake's successor Colonel Jack Vincent (1949–1975) was a momentous appointment, and an inspired choice by the province, which altered the trajectory of the NPB. Jack was a military man with an admirable history of service in World War Two. He was widely travelled, a dedicated naturalist and had an excellent record as a training officer (Vincent, 1988). The Colonel was short in stature, always impeccably dressed, a formidable disciplinarian and expressed determined views on efficiency and goals. His vision



Colonel Jack Vincent, the first Director of the Natal, Game and Fish Preservation Board, appointed in 1949 (EKZNW photo library)

was absolutely clear to all who met him – he intended the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board to become a successful conservation agency, which would greatly expand the formally conserved game and nature reserves of Natal, improve the survival status of the wildlife assets of the province, and ensure the protection of all species. Ultimately, he served the NPB as Director for fourteen years until 1963, and as its Historian for another four years after he returned from a spell at the IUCN in Switzerland, and, finally, as Assistant Director Conservation (ADC) until 31 March 1975.

It must be said that the Colonel's understanding of nature conservation both as a profession and a field of endeavour differed from that predominant in the twenty-first century, but it was absolutely correct for the middle of the twentieth century. When he took up his post the general state of the wildlife populations of the province was not healthy and the attitude of many of the serving politicians and the public at large could hardly be described as supportive. The Colonel's emphasis on limiting further damage and exercising legal controls over exploitation in a most uncompromising manner soon earned him the reputation of being a martinet.

The Colonel's strength lay in the fact that he had had a successful and valuable military career with wide experience in training and discipline. What also made him invaluable was the fact that he was a dedicated ornithologist with a proven history of interest in wildlife and especially in avifauna. It is not surprising therefore that one of his prime foci was on the protection of birds. He mounted a vigorous campaign in the early years of the NPB to get control of, and preferably to stamp out, any illicit trade in indigenous birds (Vincent, 1988).

This was a period of considerable confusion because in Zululand control of the Umfolozi Game Reserve was effectively in the hands of the Department of Veterinary Services. Mass shootings of all game other than white rhinoceros had taken place to reduce the prevalence of tsetse fly *Glossina spp.*, the carriers of African Animal *Trypanosomiasis* which caused severe anaemia in cattle. Corridor Disease or *Theileriosis* was another problem as buffalo were the dominant carriers and it was spread to cattle, with rapid and fatal results, by the brown ear tick. The cattle farming community in the area had steadily lobbied the Natal provincial government to deproclaim Umfolozi because of the strongly held belief that game was a necessary vector for the tsetse fly.

The provincial government held firm, and it was only in 1952, following a dramatic and successful campaign of aerial spraying of DDT to combat the tsetse fly by the Department of Veterinary Services, that the reserve was

handed over to the NPB to become a conservation asset. The Colonel used to recall that in those days there were hardly any ungulates left in Umfolozi and should he see a grey duiker he would doff his hat in salute. The unstable situation in the area meant that there were no real fixed boundaries for the protected area and a massive, and dangerous, period of poaching threats and park invasions promptly followed the handing over of management to the NPB. Staff were faced with numerous life-threatening poaching situations and full control over this important reserve was possible only after the fencing of the area was complete (Steele, 1971; Player, 1973; Bailey, 2017). Only the highest praise can be afforded the staff in that early and tense era, and the reward was a successful return of large numbers of savanna game. However, this thrust new problems upon the NPB.

First, by the mid-1950s the number of grassland species started to multiply exponentially and the only way possible at that stage to control their numbers was to cull or catch some of what were perceived to be excess animals. Quite literally, tens of thousands of animals were shot and distributed throughout Zululand as rations for NPB staff. So dependable was this ration that it was widely regarded as part of one's salary.¹ Eventually this led to complaints from other parts of the province where staff in areas less rich in game were denied access to a valuable protein resource distributed at no cost to Zululand staff. It should be noted that this game ration was distributed to all staff from labourer level up to officers and a generous ration was set aside for distribution to neighbouring *amakhosi*, the Zulu Royal House and for special occasions approved by the Board.²

The first ecologist appointed by the NPB, Roddy Ward, was posted to Hluhluwe to research the problem of excess animals and come up with solutions. It was not long before Roddy was recommending the reduction of standing stock of the more common species, which led to every new ranger having to spend some time culling game. This was not enjoyed by many recruits and led, in rare cases, to their leaving the NPB's service, feeling that they were doing exactly the opposite of what they had joined up for. There were senior staff in the field who also did not like the mass culling programme and were quite open about their resistance to this practice. Some even boasted about the fact that they ignored the recommendations of the ecologist on which NPB decisions were based, and simply did not carry out orders from above. The culling did not solve the difficulty because it was expensive, time consuming and created other problems.³

Game capture

In 1957 the Chief Conservator of Zululand was Peter Potter, son of Captain H.B. Potter who had been in charge of Hluhluwe since the 1920s and whom Peter had succeeded in 1950. It had become obvious to all that the population growth of impala in Mkuzi Game Reserve was reaching alarming levels. The practice of trying to shoot the populations down to acceptable levels was beginning to attract criticism and, as mentioned, was not popular with staff. Peter came to the conclusion that, very correctly as proven by future developments, an attempt should be made to persuade landowners in Natal to re-establish wildlife on their properties from which most species had been shot out. He launched a plan to catch impala by hand and offer them free to farmers and other landowners. The simple operation involved fitting a stripped-down Land Rover (this was very easy with the early models as it took only a matter of minutes to remove the top and the doors), filling it to capacity with staff, and driving full tilt at night into a large herd of impala, blinding the startled animals with a number of hand-held spotlights. The stunned animals would mill in confusion while staff leapt off the vehicle, ran into the herd and grabbed bewildered impala by whatever they came into contact with – neck, legs, tails or horns. It was a real *mélée*, but successful. The legs of the captured animals were trussed with nylon stockings and transported back to some crude pens prepared by staff. This was a known capture technique most often used for cattle and known as bulldogging (Henwood, 2013).⁴ The era of game capture had begun.

Distributing the captured animals to their private landowner destinations was not as straightforward as anticipated, but the spirit behind the plan was that the NPB would give the animals away with no attempt to try to commercialise operations. Such activity was approved because it served the purpose of protecting the habitat and was thus a management responsibility. Word was spread through the press and radio that numbers of impala were available, free of charge, from Mkuzi Game Reserve and that those persons interested should phone, book a group of animals and a time of collection, and come equipped with a suitable crate or cage affixed to their bakkie into which the animals could be loaded for safe transport to their destinations. It was emphasised that there would be no payment. No one came!

It was obvious to staff that the distrust of anything coming free from any government body, including the parastatal and vaguely disliked NPB, was suspect. As a result, after the next capture operation in 1962, staff introduced

a modest charge of R2 for each animal. This bargain price changed matters in the eyes of Natal's bemused private landowners and there was a sudden rush to collect impala and, small and hesitant as the effort was, it was the beginning of the application of NPB's policy of sustainable use. More significantly and importantly, it marked the implementation of South Africa's incredibly successful wildlife industry essentially based on that policy.

Not only were impala populations growing to pestilential levels but the nyala, which had been introduced in small numbers to Hluhluwe from Tongaland (now Maputaland), had found the habitat incredibly attractive. In consequence they multiplied in staggering numbers.⁵ Being browsers brought them into direct competition with the bushbuck which, it became clear, were clearly dropping in numbers as a result of the increase in nyala. For the first time staff began to take notice of the inter-relationships and ecological needs of each species for which they were responsible and the whole science of wildlife ecology began to gain traction in the NPB.

Operation Rhino

Undoubtedly the single management action that began to attract South Africa's interest in the work of the NPB was the successful translocation of white rhinoceros, followed logically in due course by the capture of black rhinoceros. The board formally approved the operation in 1959 after some skilful negotiation by Colonel Vincent, who contributed significantly to the success of the endeavour by recruiting a young Dutch veterinarian, Tony Harthoorn, who was busy in Uganda trying to find suitable drugs to use for game capture and was using the newly developed capture gun to launch appropriate projectiles containing the experimental drugs. Tony was a tall, gangly man of considerable enthusiasm and dedication and without his skills, efficient drugs and suitable techniques the operation would never have flowered into the success it was. In fact, Tony introduced himself to me at one of our game auctions in Zululand many years later by walking up and stating, to my bewilderment 'Hello, I'm Tony Harthoorn, the forgotten man!' Being a Drakensberg man when Tony had been active in Zululand, I had never come across him personally and he could not have made a truer observation. In the plethora of praise and popular adulation received by some of the characters involved in the outstanding Operation Rhino, Tony, regrettably, never received his fair share of the credit he merited. This technique of individual darting has become incredibly important around the world and is widely used in game capture operations in South Africa (Henwood, 2013).



*Tony Harthoorn and Ian Player on an early drugged white rhino
(EKZNW photo library)*



The first game capture centre, Umfolozi Game Reserve



Capture pens, Hluhluwe Game Reserve, used mainly to house antelope species

It must be said equally that, without the enthusiasm and commitment of the field staff of the day led by Ian Player in Zululand, that success might never have been achieved and, of course, it should never be forgotten that without the financial and logistical support provided so willingly by the NPB, the endeavour would not have been viable.

The rapid improvement of capture by drugs was necessary, both for the well-being of the staff involved in great capture operations of dangerous game and for the large animals that required capture. With the building of the Kariba Dam on the Zambezi in the 1950s, Africa had only recently seen amazing capture operations by Rupert Fothergill and his team in Southern Rhodesia. The early films of these teams from the Wildlife and National Parks of Southern Rhodesia catching animals stranded on islands created by the rising water levels of the dam are hair-raising to watch, as everything was done using men and ropes. How a great many staff were not seriously injured during Operation Noah is a miracle and their success says much for the fitness, agility and fleetness of foot of the personnel involved.

The same can be said of the NPB staff when the capture of game began in earnest. The 1960s were the twilight years of the Wild-West era of catching game with ropes and lasso from horseback. This endeavour was always

dangerous, whether it was pursuing eland in the Drakensberg, hartebeest calves in northern Cape Province or darted rhinoceros in Zululand as it was vital to ensure that, when the animal succumbed, it was not lost to sight by the capture team (Player, 1973; Hughes, 2014). Let it be recorded, however, that no ranger who participated in this form of game capture would ever forget it. At the time it represented the epitome of what game ranging represented as a career: excitement and thrills, certainly danger (although a successful capture almost entirely eliminated that as a concern) and, above all, one of the most romantic and rewarding memories of a ranger's life. It was a privilege forgotten by none who experienced it (Barnes, 2003; Hughes, 2014).



Mark Cooke with a fine female white rhino (EKZNW photo library)

As game capture was a fairly small, but iconic, activity it received a great deal of publicity and the small numbers of game made available to the public stimulated the desire of more and more private landowners to obtain animals from the NPB. Happily, as a result of the availability of game, the concept of game farming began with some ex-staff of the NPB, like Norman Deane (a very determined, capable and testy Warden of Hluhluwe Game Reserve, 1961–1965) teaming up with private-sector landowners like Ian Simpson and

Ian Scott-Barnes, to establish the first South African game ranches (Simpson, 2012).⁶

New blood and new ideas

Then came two fortuitous developments. The first occurred in 1964 with the employment of an incredibly talented but controversial ranger called Jan Oelofse. Jan had his own ideas and a casual approach to discipline and financial correctness, so it was just as well that Colonel Vincent had resigned and moved to IUCN in Switzerland.⁷ Jan was, to put it mildly, a character. I had fortuitously met him some years before in 1960 when I and a friend, Bill Jordan, were each independently hitchhiking back from Europe through Africa. Bill, a Southern Rhodesian, found me in Luxor, Egypt and we teamed up for the rest of the trip back to Salisbury (now Harare). Just after entering Tanganyika (now Tanzania) from Kenya, we were given a lift by the producer of the film *Hatari*. This featured game capture on location in Tanganyika with John Wayne as the heroic leader of operations. Much of the expertise that made it all possible was available on Willie de Beer's game farm near Arusha and the success of *Hatari* was almost certainly as a result of using De Beer (on whose achievements the film is roughly based) and Jan Oelofse as active consultants and advisers.⁸

The producer, en route to Arusha, called in at the De Beers headquarters where they were filming a leopard sitting in a tree.



Hatari, the film shot in Tanganyika where Jan Oelofse learned the skills that made him an invaluable NPB staff member

This activity provided my first disillusionment with the veracity of the film industry as the director and the cameramen insisted that the leopard have a platform constructed in the tree so that the subject of the filming would have a stable base. No doubt the leopard was bewildered but duly grateful. As bystanders, we made the acquaintance of Jan, who was having hysterics because there is no animal alive more stable in a tree than a leopard and the Americans could not understand why he was objecting. It was clear that Jan was completely at ease with wild animals and no doubt the chase and rope techniques being applied from stripped down Land Rovers used in the film must have been old hat to Jan, but it was a tremendous learning experience for the movie stars.

Shortly afterwards Tanganyika gained its independence from Britain and Jan felt that there would be little opportunity to practise his calling in Tanzania, so he departed for South Africa (Oelofse, 2010). This was Tanzania's loss and our gain. Jan arrived in Hluhluwe Game Reserve in January 1964 and joined the game capture team full of enthusiasm and bright ideas. He could not have arrived at a better time. By 1964 the NPB's interest in the sustainable use of wildlife was making real strides. The demand for live game was growing daily and the rhinoceros capture programme was attaining global fame.

The rhino capture team, left behind after Tony Harthoorn departed, was becoming more and more efficient and the improvement in drug effectiveness was such that many rhinoceros were being distributed far and wide with greater expediency (for more detail see Player, 1973). Jan soon had a stroke of genius. He believed that stampeding antelope and other game animals such as giraffe would not try to crash through what appeared to be a solid wall. So, in 1968, he designed a mobile system of *boma* capture, which proved a game-changer.⁹ He created a roughly funnel-shaped *boma* using poles along the tops of which were threaded strong lengths of smooth wire. From these, attached by large curtain rings, sheets of hessian (later replaced by more efficient plastic) hung from the wire to the ground. The entire *boma* could be divided up into ever smaller paddocks through which the game would enter, following a drive by staff on horseback or foot.

As each group of animals ran into a narrower part of the *boma* a hidden member of staff would sprint out, drawing, by means of the overhead wire connecting the two sides of the *boma*, another curtain of plastic across the width of the *boma*, securing it to the other side. This process was repeated three or four times until the animals were all trapped in the smallest of the *boma* chambers where they would be hand caught by staff and loaded into

trucks for transport to the Game Capture Centre. In time, subsequent capture teams modified the trucks so that they could be reversed against a ramp leading into the vehicle from the final enclosure and the captured game could be driven straight onto the truck without being touched by any staff. This was, of course, better for the animals that no longer had to suffer the stress of being handled. As orders for game grew so the capture teams' efficiency improved to the point where captures of game already ordered and paid for were so smooth that the game could be driven, captured, loaded and dispatched directly to the property of the new owner without having been touched by human hand. Henwood (2013) refers to this technique as 'plastic capture'.



Jan Oelofse developed the boma capture technique

Jan's technique proved a spectacular boost to the capture and removal of small and large antelope, and game sales and translocations rocketed, along with the reputation of the NPB as a leader in game capture. It is worth recording that in the Drakensberg stations we also attempted to capture blesbuck but used an open wire fence *boma* that did not prove all that successful (Hughes, 2014).

It is perhaps interesting to note that, brilliant as Jan's *boma* capture technique was, it was not original in concept. While attending the USA and Parks Canada International Seminar on Conservation in 1983 I visited the Blackfoot Native American Reservation adjacent to Glacier National Park in Montana,



Loading impala directly onto the capture trucks

where I bought a book on the history and culture of the Blackfoot. Imagine my surprise to find that the Blackfoot used a similar technique to drive herds of bison over a cliff. The bison was the native Americans' major source of food for pemmican (or dried meat, called jerky by modern Americans or biltong in South Africa), as well as valuable hides, tendons and other products. The Blackfoot erected a V-shaped funnel-like corral called a *Pis'kun*, which narrowed down towards the edge of the precipice. They hung bison pelts along the wood-

en or brush fence through which the bison, being driven by the tribesmen on horseback, would not attempt to break. The bison plunged over the cliff to their deaths (Grinnell, 1962).

Henwood (2013) describes three other techniques used in NPB capture operations. One was net capture, which basically involved hanging nets in carefully chosen sites and driving, by whatever means available, the game into the nets and sending in staff to catch the animals in the nets by hand. Hughes (2014) describes several net capture operations in the Midlands of Natal that illustrate the mixed success of the technique. It was most commonly used for warthog and oribi.¹⁰

Passive capture involved the building of a semi-permanent pen or stockade into which the target animals could be lured by a supply of suitable food. This was very effective during times of drought and grazing shortages and was put to excellent use to catch hippopotamus at Ndumu Game Reserve by the staff of the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation. They maintained a semi-permanent stockade in which over the years many hippopotami were caught. The NPB capture team used this technique often in later years. The

hippopotamus is notoriously difficult to catch by darting alone because of their tendency to retreat back into a river or lake before the drug has taken effect. Then, when the drug has taken effect, the animals have been known to drown.

On one occasion at St Lucia we arrived at dawn, spotting many hippos grazing a long distance from the lake and one was darted from the helicopter. Then, with everyone driving or running in front of the animal, we successfully prevented the darted animal from getting back to the lake. It must be said that in those early days the drugs were not reliable in the case of hippopotamus because staff were less skilled in judging accurately the weight of each animal.

The thick layer of fat under the skin of a hippopotamus was also a problem because, if the needle did not penetrate beyond the fatty layer but discharged into the fat its effect was nil. In the case of the animal that we darted that morning, it obviously received a full dose, but was regrettably too large as when the hippo eventually collapsed, with everyone who had been chasing in a state of very emotional exhaustion, it lay there for only a few moments and then died. It was the first time that I had seen some of the capture staff cry over a dead animal. Let it never be said that the staff regarded their endeavours as simply a job. Their hearts were truly in every capture operation, and they felt every loss very deeply.

Occasionally staff used a net gun when seeking an individual animal or a species difficult to catch by mass capture methods. The net gun had four barrels each of which fired a weight attached to the corner of a net which, when used from a helicopter, would spread out and ensnare the target. Henwood (2013) records that this was a dangerous technique and not used often in Natal.

The helicopter

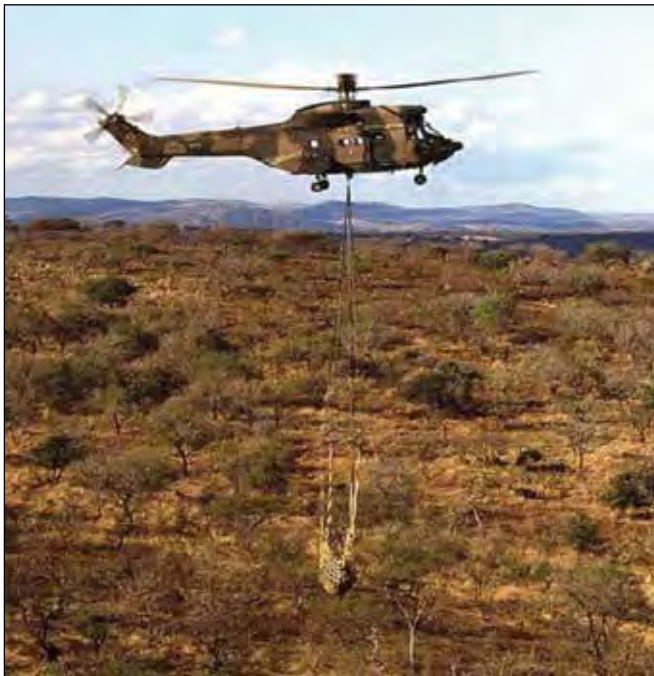
Another boost to the efficiency of game capture was the arrival of helicopters. Of course, this was also the death knell of the old game ranger era of chasing and capturing game animals from horseback using the old *vangstok* (a long stick attached to which was a noosed rope). Al-



ZS-KXZ was a popular and well-known aircraft that did sterling service in game counts and aerial surveys



In the early days, eland calves were caught from horseback: Peter Root from Loteni Nature Reserve with an eland calf (Bill Barnes)



SAAF lifting black rhino out of wilderness area (EKZNW photo library)

though expensive, these early helicopters revolutionised operational speed and efficiency and added another thrill to the career of game ranging.

The NPB could never afford to purchase a suitable helicopter and so, through the years, it rented machines and contracted pilots from a variety of sources. The most regular and skilled pilot was Vere van Heerden who, supported by his team, became both admired and popular. His skills continued to surprise over a period of more than fourteen years of work for the NPB and Vere has since continued his service with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

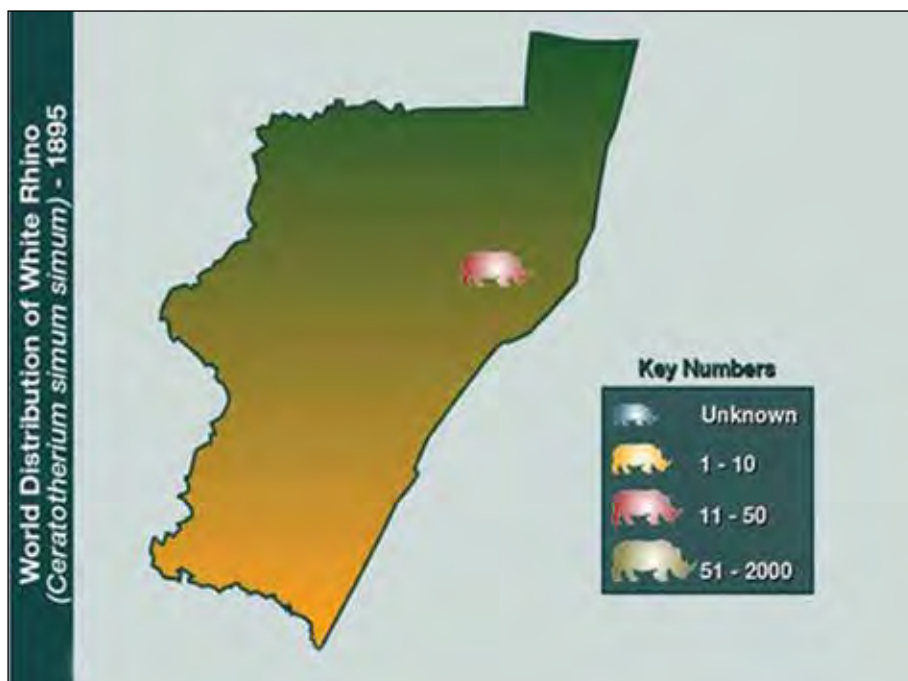
Helicopter pilots seem to be a very hardy and courageous breed. Many of those we hired were ex-military and one, a particularly daredevil character, came from New Zealand where he had learned his skills on dramatic and difficult programmes that involved the culling and capturing of invasive red deer in the mountains of South Island. One flight with him, dropping in and out of holes in the bush canopy, flushing drugged white rhino out from their hiding places by hovering a few metres above the ground and tilting the rotors to blast the hiding rhinos from under a tree, is a memory that will go with me to my grave. Exciting was not the word for it.

With the addition of the helicopter, the game capture programme improved its output and was soon capturing and translocating up to 4 000 head of game per season. In periods of stress such as a three-year drought, the programme once caught as many as 7 500 animals in a season. The concomitant publicity associated with every capture success resulted in wide public acceptance of the NPB policy of sustainable use of wildlife. This had taken some time to mature.

The benefits of a policy of adaptive management

The evolution of the NPB's policy on wildlife relocations is interesting and worth reviewing.¹¹ Initially, it approved the capture of game for translocation between its own protected areas, so it was effectively a self-serving approach. That, however, did not endure for long. As more and more large mammals, including white rhinoceros, became available so requests for game arrived from other conservation authorities in South Africa, from the bantustans set up by the NP government and finally from neighbouring countries. Wherever possible the NPB generously contributed animals, mostly free of charge, to fellow conservation bodies, provided travel expenses were covered. The most spectacular example of the local transfers was that of white rhinoceros to Kruger National Park, to which nearly 200 animals were donated. The result was remarkable in that the Kruger population rapidly grew to be the largest

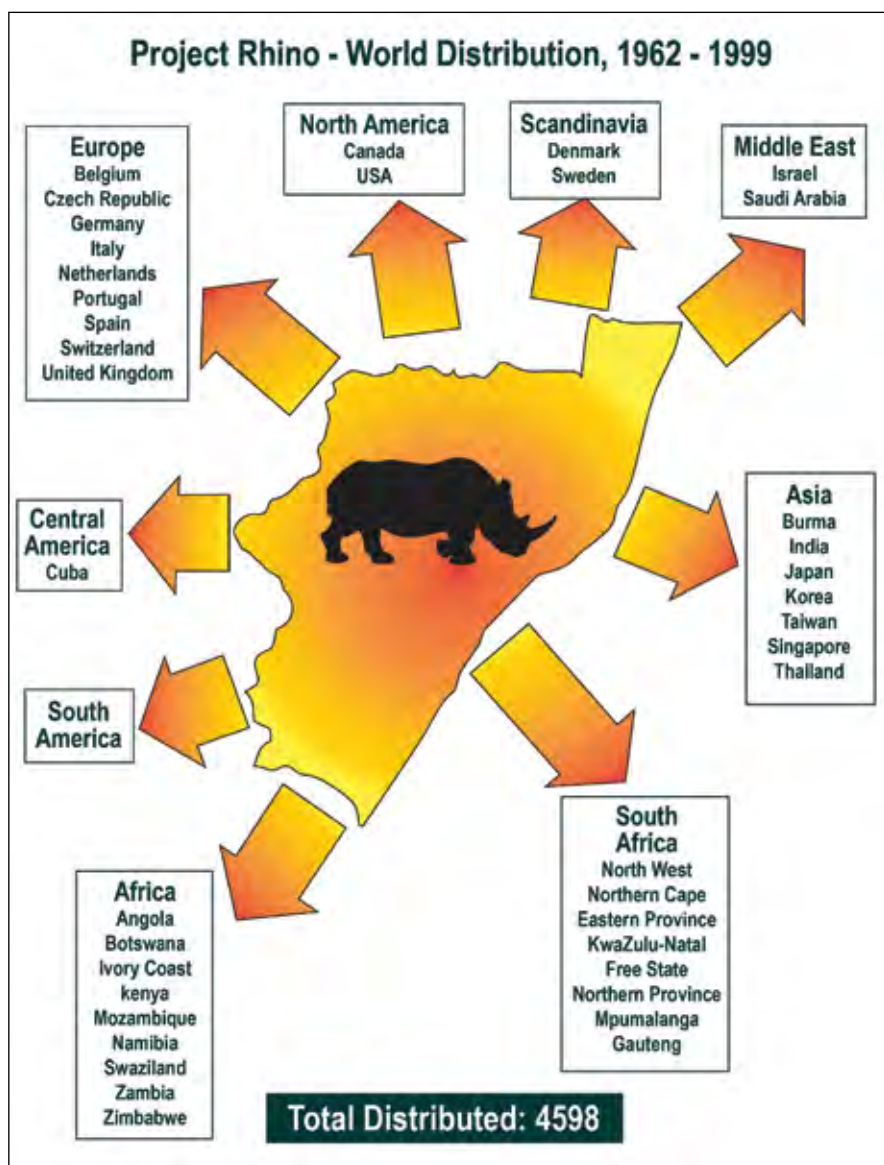
wild white rhinoceros population in the world. Today, in 2021, it is under severe threat and has the unenviable notoriety of being the population most seriously targeted during the most recent wave of rhino poaching in South Africa.



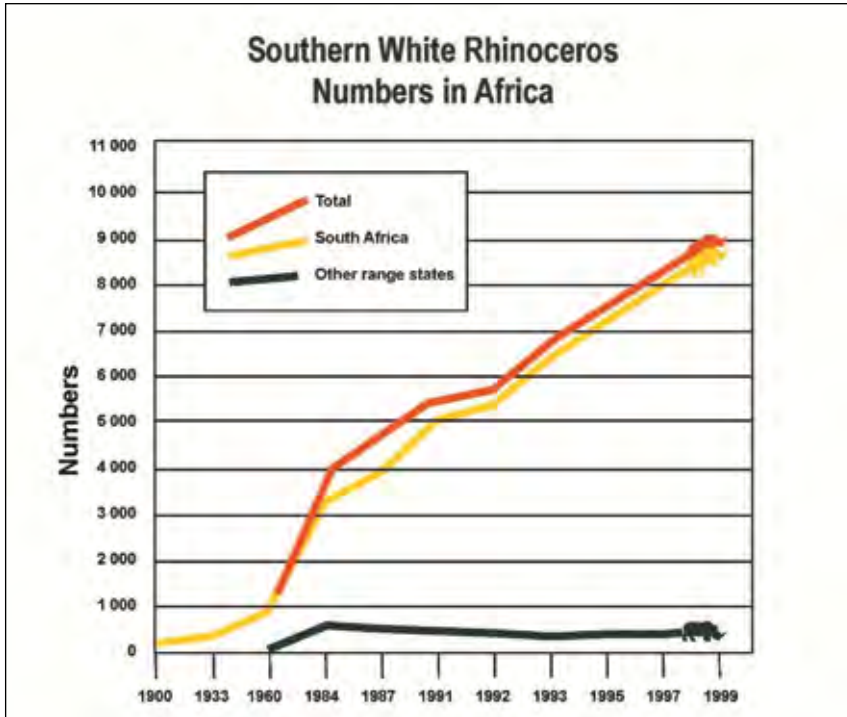
In 1895 there may have been as few as 30 extant southern white rhinoceros in the world, all in the area where the Umfolozi Game Reserve would be declared by the Colony of Natal

Requests for donated game came thick and fast. White rhinoceros and other game were leaving Natal in ever-increasing numbers and being transferred to other provinces, to neighbouring states and even overseas. Mozambique, for example, has the dubious distinction of being the one neighbouring country where the white rhinoceros has become extinct twice in the last century. The former Rhodesia received many white rhinoceros in the 1960s;¹² as did South West Africa (now Namibia). There is probably no country outside South Africa that has embraced the policy of sustainable use as fully and successfully as Namibia, which, following independence in 1980, has increased its wildlife populations beyond anything the NPB imagined when it donated white rhino sixty years ago.

It was also considered necessary at the time to contemplate the possibility that having a few populations of rhinoceros overseas would add to the security of the animals' survival. Over the following thirty years thousands of white rhinoceros were sold to zoos all over the world and to large privately held game farms in the United States.¹³



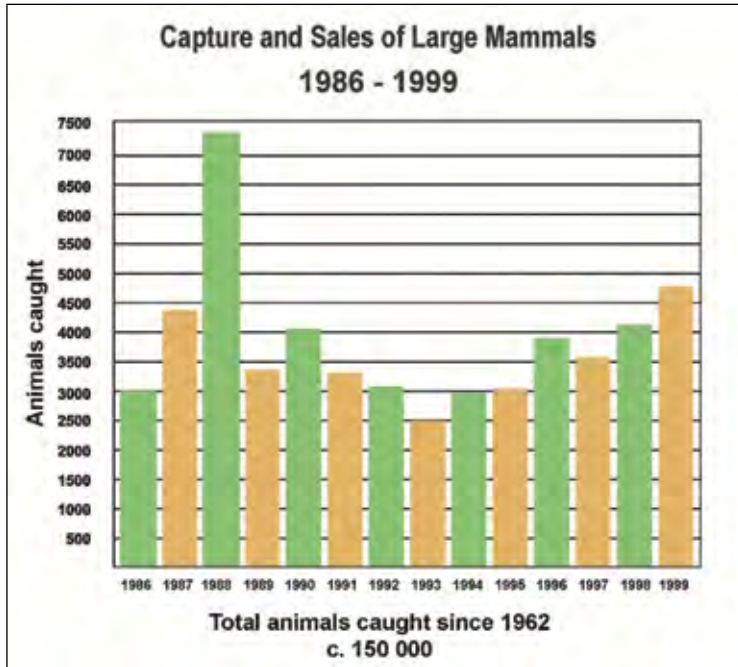
By 2000 the NPB had distributed 4 598 rhinoceros



The NPB led the recovery of the white rhinoceros from critically endangered to what was thought to be safe population levels

Early enthusiastic errors

The ability to translocate game was a spur to John Page who was Director of the NPB from 1963 to 1988. He was an enthusiast and decided to move game to places where, despite warnings from the NPB's scientists, they were never going to be successful. John's difficult-to-control ambition to expand game populations everywhere made for good press, but was not always good for the animals. A fine example was the transfer of giraffe to the small Kenneth Stainbank Nature Reserve in a suburb of Durban called Yellowwood Park. They looked really good there and in the early days following their arrival it was possible to get photographs of the giraffe peering with some bemusement at large cargo ships steaming in and out of Durban's harbour. Within a few years, however, the giraffe began to lose condition and eventually all of them died because the reserve was small, the coastal forest trees had probably never served as a permanent source of nutrition for giraffe, and to cap it all the reserve had been, prior to its generous donation to the NPB by the owner Kenneth



Annual game captures between 1986 and 1999: over 40 years the NPB captured and translocated over 150 000 head



Hundreds of giraffe were translocated after their introduction into Natal by the NPB

Stainbank, a sugar plantation, which had probably seen better days from an ecological perspective. Such errors were perhaps forgivable in the flush of confidence following the more and more successful game translocation skills of the NPB staff, but eventually even John began to accept that it was a good idea to have any translocations endorsed by the scientists before being put into practice.

A massive expansion across Natal

The Zululand reserves occupied pride of place for capture operations, but the capture teams had to venture all over the province as the demand for inland species grew; such as for eland in the Drakensberg. In addition, other species became available due to expanding numbers as a result of better protection in the newer NPB reserves. Protected areas such as Weenen and Itala rapidly became a source of surplus animals. Even the land set aside around the state dams for small nature reserves proved amazingly productive and their expanding populations of game also demanded attention from the capture teams.



Drakensberg eland were distributed widely by game capture



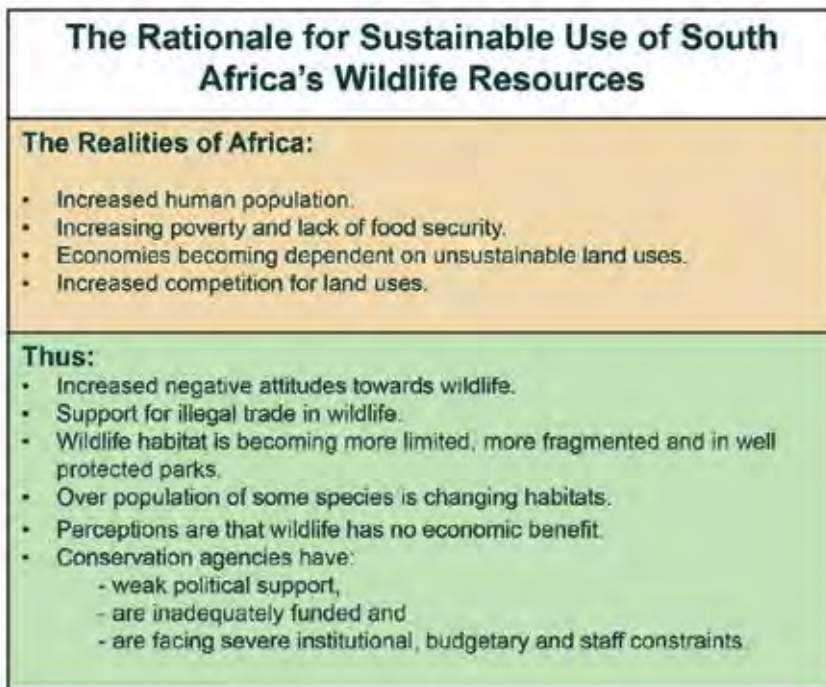
As with giraffe, tsessebe were also reintroduced to Natal by the NPB

| Species Captured | | |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Gemsbok | Kobus kob | Common reedbuck |
| Bontebok | Nyala | Mountain reedbuck |
| Buffalo | Oribi | Grey rhebuck |
| V. Afr. buffalo | Ostrich | White rhino |
| Indian buffalo | Springbuck | Black rhino |
| Bushbuck | Steenbok | Blue wildebeest |
| Blue duiker | Warthog | Black wildebeest |
| Red duiker | Waterbuck | Burchell's zebra |
| Grey duiker | Tsessebe | Mountain zebra |
| Klipspringer | Crocodile | Sable antelope |
| Giraffe | Elephant | Roan antelope |
| Red hartebeest | Bushpig | Vervet monkey |
| Bubal hartebeest | Lion | Samango monkey |
| Hippopotamus | Leopard | Chacma baboon |
| Impala | Cheetah | Wild cattle |
| Kudu | African wild dog | Fallow deer |
| Blesbok | Eland | |

The NPB Capture Team translocated a wide range of species both locally and abroad

Once they were guided by the Farm Game team, which consisted of a group of ecologists and field staff focusing on the ecological requirements of each species of game available for translocation, the errors made by capture operations declined year by year to the point where game losses, both during capture operations and following transfer to their new homes, dwindled away to a level that could be regarded as negligible. The NPB's reputation for having the best capture team in South Africa grew exponentially, undoubtedly helped by the inclusion of professional veterinarians.

Mike Keep was the first veterinarian to join the NPB in 1967, followed by the now legendary Jacques Flamand in 1980, whose guidance became more legally necessary as the State, for good reason (see Hughes, 2014), tightened up on the ever-growing practice of staff and private operators using narcotic drugs while not being professionally trained in their use. Mike and Jacques did yeoman work to bring the NPB's standards up to the highest level and personally participated in hundreds of capture operations before leaving the service. Jacques was replaced by Peter Rogers (fondly known as the beer-swilling vet) in 1987 and he was influential in further expanding the NPB's policy on wildlife sales to a level that vastly increased the NPB's global reputation. Before leaving an account of the veterinarians and their



The NPB endorsed sustainable use for conservation success because it was such a rational policy

contribution, it should be recorded that the last veterinarian recruited to the ranks of the NPB was David Cooper, who joined in 1995 and has since served conservation in the Board and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife for 25 years, becoming one of the most decorated and admired wildlife veterinarians in South Africa.

The success of the NPB Game Capture team was awe-inspiring. After the capture of 100 000 head of game, the provision of guidance and training to other provinces and countries (even travelling to the Ivory Coast and Togo to capture and restock game to newly created protected areas), and the appointment of the NPB's capture team as consultants to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) concerning the standards for animal transport in aircraft, the NPB capture team was well prepared for the next great challenge posed by the unprecedented growth of interest in the wildlife industry in South Africa.

NOTES

- 1 Roger Porter, pers. comm.
- 2 As an aside, the culling of game for distribution to staff, even in Zululand, came to an unpopular halt only in the late 1970s, when the far better use of surplus animals for live sales made it obvious that the cost was unsustainable and not without its critics as a dubious governance activity.
- 3 At one stage the NPB sold game direct to the public following culling, but a problem arose through a religious objection raised by a party insisting that they had to be present at the cull in order to immediately bleed the animal and render the meat halaal. Despite staff assuring them that they would bleed the animal, they were insistent on the religious rules and were eventually allowed to accompany the culling staff. At the first shot they leapt off the vehicle eagerly and executed the cultural act. After the second animal was shot, they jumped down en bloc only to have a lion beat them to the felled impala. The group retreated to the vehicle at speed and promptly abandoned direct involvement in the rite.
- 4 One of the more pleasurable tasks requested of all young rangers at the time was to collect nylon stockings from ladies (perhaps not always the correct categorisation) for the purpose of trussing antelope. This task was pursued with some enthusiasm only to find that the bearers were often reluctant, or not public spirited enough, to relinquish the stockings even after a grovelling but exhausting appeal (but see also Gush, 2000).
- 5 The removal of surplus animals from Ndumu, where nyala had reached plague proportions, was forbidden because Ndumu was behind the red line, the imaginary line bordering a region with foot and mouth disease from behind which neither live animals nor fresh meat could be moved. David Cook came up with the brilliant idea of developing a biltong factory there to process the meat. It was leased and operated successfully by a private sector company.
- 6 In September 1972 the NPB and the early game ranching pioneers recognised growing awareness of the important role of the game ranger through the establishment of the Game Rangers Association. The first chairman was Norman Deane and the first vice-chairman Peter Hitchins.
- 7 This was a move that perhaps did much credit to IUCN but not to the Colonel whose passion for real conservation action, engendered by the achievements with which he was associated in Natal, was frustrated by IUCN putting distance between him and hands-on contact with wildlife. He returned to the NPB a few short years later (Vincent, 1988).
- 8 The luscious presence of Elsa Martinelli and the delightful musical number by Henry Mancini, *Baby Elephant Walk*, may also have made modest contributions to its success.
- 9 An enclosure used for keeping livestock or for community gatherings.
- 10 Roger Porter, pers. comm.
- 11 A highly successful adaptation action was required when surplus rhinoceros needed to be moved from the wilderness area of Umfolozi as, in keeping with wilderness policy, no vehicle transport was allowed. The capture team persuaded the South African Airforce to bring in large helicopters for an exercise and would lift a drugged animal in a net suspended at the end of a cable. The helicopter then flew the animal out of the wilderness area to a waiting truck. This spectacular technique is now widely used by other organisations.
- 12 In 1965 Rhodesia could not afford the NPB's prices for rhino, so an agreement was made for the exchange of game.
- 13 Many NPB staff were trained and given the opportunity to accompany shipments of rhino to many exotic destinations when the animals were transported by sea. According to reports this was a most memorable experience.

CONSERVATION science at the NPB had a slow start. As mentioned before, the first scientist employed was Bob Crass (1950–1983), an entomologist with an interest in rivers which expanded into an encyclopaedic knowledge of the indigenous fish in the province (Crass, 1964). Bob was followed by Roddy Ward (1953–1963) at Hluhluwe Game Reserve and Greg Stewart (1963–1970) who, in 1966, produced the first management plan of a Board protected area at RNNP. Bob Crass had started to expand the fisheries research team, employing two scientists, Tom Pike (1965–1995) and Mike Coke (1963–1998), both of whom rendered sterling service to Natal for many years.

Scientists led a rather lonely life with little co-ordination until the 1960s when the NPB appointed Rudi Bigalke (1964–1970) as the Chief Professional Officer. Rudi was a biologist with a special interest in large mammals and really started to develop the NPB's expertise in this field, appointing Roger Grafton (1965–1968) in the first attempt to provide a service to the public that encouraged the restocking of farms with game and seeing game as a sustainable resource. Conservation began to attract other scientists and, to help matters along in the early sixties, the Board had begun to encourage serving game rangers to pursue professional qualifications. Many of those developed specialised interests as a result of their studies. Into this category fell Ken Tinley (1954–1960, 1975) who became an ecologist of note (see Tinley, 1985); Terry Oatley (1956–1980) who specialised in birds (see Oatley and Arnott, 1998); Peter Hitchins (1961–1973) – black rhinoceros; Orty Bourquin (1965–1989) – African quail and reptiles (see Boycott and Bourquin, 1988, 2000); David Rowe-Rowe (1966–1996) – large and small mammals (Rowe-Rowe, 1994); Tony Pooley (1957–1980) – crocodiles (see Pooley, 1992); and me (1961–1965, 1975–1998) – sea turtles (see Hughes, 1974, 2012). Some, as indicated, became widely recognised for their specialised fields and continued to conduct research despite taking on additional responsibilities.



Bob Crass



Rudi Bigalke



Don Stewart



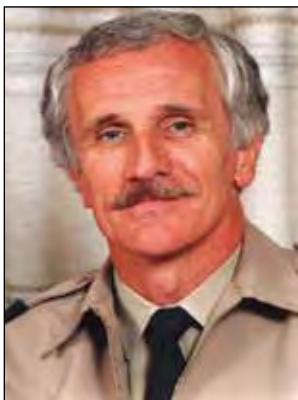
John Hanks



Butch Smuts



Orty Bourquin



Martin Brooks

The NPB owes a great deal of gratitude for the inspiration of a series of talented scientists who led the Scientific Services (EKZNW library)



Tony Pooley's work on crocodiles was internationally recognised: he started studying crocodiles in Ndumu Game Reserve and promoted the development of the Crocodile Centre in St Lucia, which opened in 1979
(EKZNW Library)

The Lammergeyer

A good measure of the growing interest in science was the creation in 1960 of the NPB's scientific journal *The Lammergeyer*.¹ As with virtually every development in the NPB it was a team achievement enthusiastically endorsed by the scientific staff. The NPB Secretary John Page volunteered to produce the cover illustration of a Bearded Vulture. Few people had realised before then that John had an artistic side, but he did, creating the cover image using the rather old-fashioned technique of scraperboard.² The journal was quite a catholic publication that welcomed research articles and extracts from field officers' reports and it became an inspirational asset, providing an outlet for those staff with an urge to record experiences and improve the knowledge and experience of Natal's wildlife.

It was perhaps fitting that Colonel Vincent ensured that the first issue of *The Lammergeyer* covered the large mammal that so greatly enhanced the image of the NPB – the white rhinoceros (Player and Feely, 1960). Subsequent issues, through a lifespan of 38 years, contain an immense amount of knowledge concerning the biology and ecology of the province of Natal and later KZN. They reflect the incredibly broad spectrum of subjects researched by NPB staff as well as the work of innumerable researchers from universities and institutes who have carried out work in protected areas. The final issue, no. 45, was published in 1998.

The surge in science

The arrival of Don Stewart (1971–1982) as Chief Professional Officer, followed by John Hanks (1975–1978) saw a surge in scientific staff, the expansion of goal-oriented research, the appointment of regional scientists and the clear recognition that the NPB should have an in-depth reserve of scientific expertise to advance and defend its activities. One of the criticisms of the Board during the 1972 Petition saga had been that there was a shortage of scientific expertise and Don was eager to accelerate the recruitment of scientific staff and expand the opportunities that the protected areas offered to the universities and colleges of the country.

Don was not impressed by the fact that on his arrival he was greeted with a serious long-term rift between research and management staff in Zululand. In the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Game Reserve (HGR-UGR) complex it was extreme: apparently, Nick Steele had ordered his staff not to visit the research offices at Hilltop. Don took immediate action and set up a meeting with Steele that improved the situation ending with the appointment of the first regional scientists responsible for liaison on conservation and management issues with the wardens of the reserves.³ In 1979, Don also helped establish the NPB-University of Natal Research Fund from which scholarships and field grants could be obtained for promising and enterprising postgraduate students. The growth in interest was phenomenal.

It was now abundantly clear that the NPB required an increased complement of scientists who could provide thorough and clear research to support the confident management of Natal's protected areas as well as provide trusted information to staff operating in the extension field. There was a rapid expansion of ecologists providing guidance on game-carrying capacities and veld conditions and specialised biologists studying many of the species both

occurring in the parks and becoming of interest to a general, increasingly engaged public.



A tagged loggerhead sea turtle in Maputaland: the number of nesting females has grown by a factor of five since 1963

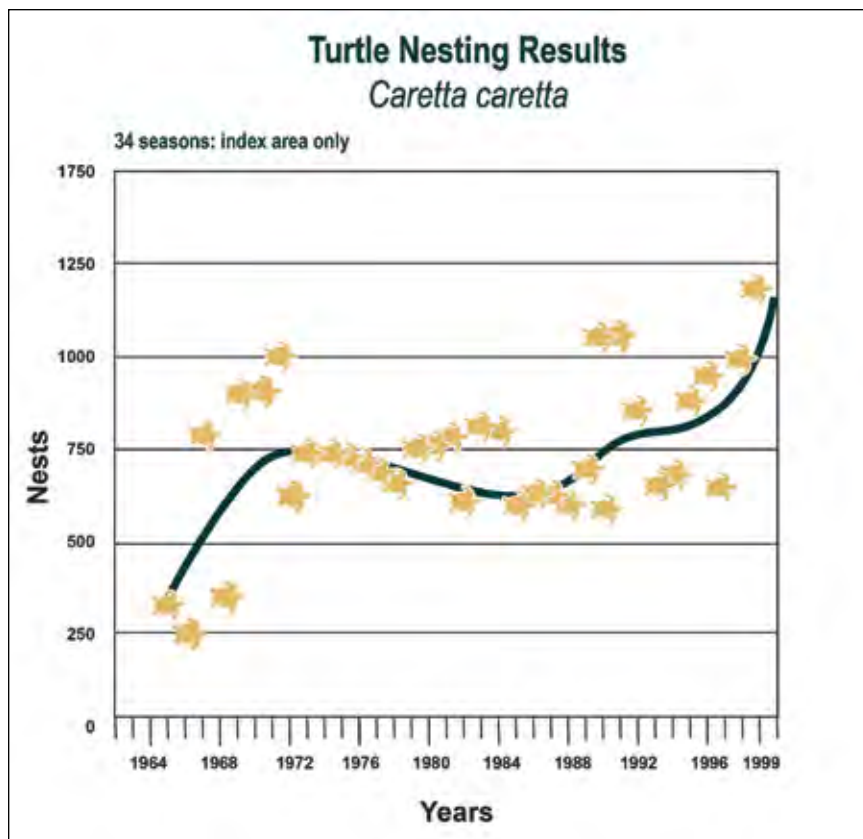


The Maputaland coast also hosts an annual nesting population of leatherback turtles; the world's southernmost nesting site for these giant reptiles

By 1980 the schedule of research projects carried out in NPB areas surpassed 100 per year, covering a vast range of subjects, and the Board went out of its way to help non-Board researchers derive maximum benefit from their activities. The NPB was supportive of the growing number of students enjoying their research and authorised the provision of logistic assistance at suitable sites in its protected areas. This resulted in many enthusiastic young people enjoying extended periods in the parks, where they became familiar with the objectives, policies and practices of the NPB. From this fruitful source were drawn suitable recruits for additional scientific posts and new fields of research.

The relationship between the universities and the NPB was a very warm one and, through the years, little friction and few unsolvable

problems were experienced. There was, however, one memorable incident involving a zoologist from Durban who, in his enthusiasm for research, became a bit demanding. It had been the policy of the NPB to do all it could to provide accommodation for temporary researchers and, in some parks, it provided rondavels and small camping grounds with a degree of privacy for researchers in the field. In many cases, the Board did not charge the research students for



The sea turtle survey has been both rewarding and successful for the research and conservation staff of the NPB and 2023 saw it reach its 60th year

their accommodation and helped to keep their probably limited budgets at a reasonable and tolerable level.

One policy, about which I felt very strongly, was that the building of permanent structures in a protected area for a single research project should not be allowed. I had good reason for this opinion because I had visited the Capricorn Islands in the Great Barrier Reef off Queensland and found that Heron Island had been occupied and built upon by a huge range of universities, completely transforming a significant proportion of this island gem into a suburb with widely varying buildings, from expensive and high-tech structures to rather cheap and undesirable hovels. All these intrusions required water, fuel and sanitation, thus putting considerable negative pressure on scarce resources. The presence of a hotel near that research complex simply added

to the demands on the island's ecology. It must be acknowledged that these undesirable developments had taken place in the pre- and post-World War Two era, and this is not a criticism of the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, which today manages Heron Island in an exemplary manner. Rather it is an opportunity to provide conservationists with a good example of an organisation being too generous to enthusiastic researchers.

Happily, the modern necessity of stringent environmental impact studies has reduced risks of this kind to almost nil, but there is always the odd scientist who feels that his research and convenience take precedent over policy. Such a case happened at Cape Vidal where a researcher demanded the right to store equipment in a permanent and secure building. He insisted that he and his department should be permitted to build one. When his demands were refused, he wrote to the press, involved the vice-chancellor of the university and in general turned aggressive and rude, necessitating a meeting between the NPB, represented by the CEO and the Head of Research, and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Natal. The meeting was very tense but the Vice-Chancellor, after the Board's policy had been courteously explained, ruled in our favour and, I am delighted to say, gave the offending researcher a flea in his ear.

Until this time it had been a proud boast of both Colonel Vincent and John Geddes Page that there was always a long waiting list for jobs as game rangers and other field officers at the NPB but, once the field of conservation science grew, the list expanded to include scientists, demonstrating the increasing aspirations of many young graduates.

The Natal Parks Board Research Symposium

The Natal Parks Board Research Symposium (now known as the Conservation Symposium), which was started in the early 1970s, has become, over the many years of its existence, one of the most respected among conservation symposia in South Africa, attracting students and experts from all over the globe. The original purpose of the symposium was to provide the opportunity for research staff and students to give oral presentations on their research findings and, in addition, to make suggestions for improving the efficacy of the NPB's management of its protected areas.

This inclusive approach to research contrasted with Colonel Vincent's very restrictive policies regarding plants and wildlife in Natal's protected areas in the early days of the NPB. Initially, the Colonel was very reluctant to allow the simple collection of animals and plants for taxonomic study by

outside bodies or institutions, preferring to give permits for such collections to staff. A notable example of this was the visit to Natal by the Smithsonian Institution from Washington DC during its epic African Mammal Project, which started in 1961 and in total lasted twelve years (see Schmidt, Ludwig and Carleton, 2008). Notwithstanding the fact that, during the Natal leg, the visiting Smithsonian scientists were accompanied by NPB staff, no permits were issued for the expedition to capture within Natal's protected areas even while the team was temporarily living in them. That rather restrictive policy changed in later years as the supervision of such studies could be efficiently managed by the presence of regional, or protected area based, NPB scientists.

The noteworthy change in direction in the 1970s was influenced by a widening of research objectives, which now began to reflect the NPB's policy of sustainable use of wildlife. From this time on every student, or postgraduate, research study final report had to contain, on submission, a detailed summary relating the results of the investigation to the efficacy of the Board's existing programmes. A presentation by the researcher was normally delivered at management meetings of the reserves where the research was carried out, and NPB research and management staff could ask questions of the researcher. It was the NPB's intention to derive as much benefit as possible from these endeavours for the practical management of the Board's protected areas and many positive benefits flowed from them. These programmes proved synergistic and benefited both NPB staff and researchers.

The expanding programme of management plans for every protected area necessitated the recruitment of researchers from museums and universities to provide species lists for as wide a range of biodiversity as possible. The NPB was never going to be able to have resident scientists specialising in every species, so it depended heavily on other institutions to fill certain gaps in essential knowledge.⁴ I was once publicly attacked by someone who believed the NPB did not have enough specialised scientists with adequate knowledge to protect everything in our parks. I replied that the NPB believed that in having protected areas extensive and well-managed enough to permit the natural survival of such large mammals as rhinoceros and elephant (the so-called umbrella species), it was reasonable to assume that a wide spectrum of animals and plants, even if not fully studied, would also receive adequate protection within this thriving ecosystem.

Research Communications

In the 1960s, as a result of the growth of scientific expertise in the NPB and the policy of encouraging the farming community of Natal to see wildlife, especially the larger mammals, as an economic asset, the research section began publishing a series of simple, roneoed, *Research Communications*, covering a wide variety of subjects from 'Guinea fowl on Natal farms' (Crass, 1972) and 'Stocking rates of game on private land in Natal (Mentis and Duke, 1974), to 'Reproduction in Zululand warthog' (Mason, 1976) as well as a large range of other subjects such as dam and fish management, vegetation types of Natal and the analysis of hunting success across the province. The main purpose of these papers was to provide sound and interesting material to the growing and ever-improving team of zone officers who, in turn, could distribute the *Communications* to farmers and influential members of the communities in which they operated. *Research Communications* served a vital function in that the targeted recipients received valuable, interesting and, in many cases, pragmatic advice from the NPB on aspects of wildlife about which many landowners wanted to increase their knowledge. They proved to be a most useful tool in building trust and respect among the people of Natal and, in total, 57 individual issues were distributed over a period of fourteen years.

The conservancy movement (see Chapter 26) that had burst upon the scene in 1977 included, quite literally, hundreds of property owners who enthusiastically adopted the concept. A rapidly expanding number of Natal citizens therefore needed guidance on how to best enhance or benefit from the presence of wildlife. The NPB encouraged the conservancy movement by providing yet another service from the research division. Help was given to individual conservancy wardens towards their writing of management plans or, indeed, writing management plans for them. Research staff, such as Rob Markham (1970–1998) and management staff such as Gary Davies (1981–1991) became adept at assisting conservancies with professional guidance.

Wildlife Management: Technical Guides for Farmers

In 1984 the NPB, taking note of the fact that the *Research Communications* had served a valuable purpose, upgraded them as a new series called *Wildlife Management: Technical Guides for Farmers*. Published in both English and Afrikaans, these useful papers reflected the growing interest of private landowners and others in the presence and economic value of wildlife on private land.

Over a period of seven years the research staff produced this focused publication, which was highly regarded. Most of the articles were indeed guidelines: for example, 'The Management of guineafowl on farmland' (Johnson, 1984); "Constructing dams for waterfowl" (Johnson, 1983); and 'Management of impala on farmland in Natal' (Marchant, 1988). Subjects of more general interest were also covered and being of relevance and informative to landowners, were much appreciated. For example, the *Guide* series was edited by David Rowe-Rowe (1966–1996) and David willingly contributed the results of his research on Natal's smaller mammals including 'Facts about otters' (Rowe-Rowe, 1985) and 'Why aren't all antelopes equally abundant?' (Rowe-Rowe, 1988). These were good examples of content responding to questions often asked of zone officers by landowners. In all, the NPB published 23 *Technical Guides*.

Professional hunting

The growing wildlife populations of South Africa following the efforts of nature conservation bodies across the country created an opportunity for the re-establishment of hunting, both as a sport and as an economic asset. The NPB felt that this growing field should be responsibly monitored and researched. Mike Mentis (1969–1979) and others had launched studies on guineafowl, waterfowl and other game birds and the NPB had produced a brochure on hunting in Natal appealing for data from the public, derived from the hunting of both game birds and larger mammals. In December 1979 the NPB, responding to public pressure to better regulate the now rapidly growing demand for hunting, engaged its research and extension services staff in an exercise to improve its knowledge and monitoring of an important field of operations within the concept of sustainable use.

The Research Division was fortunate to include J.V. (Spud) Ludbrook (1975–1991), a highly experienced research technician with both a passion for hunting and considerable knowledge in the field. Spud was given the responsibility of managing the new portfolio of Conservator (Sport Hunting), and a popular success he made of the endeavour. In this task he was greatly assisted by field staff. Tony Tomkinson (1970–1986) at Mkuzi Game Reserve became a massive contributor to the understanding of the practical aspects of hunting. Spud and his colleagues began monitoring the hunting fraternity, gathering statistics on frequency and ambitions. One of the first products of his research was the realisation that the game populations on private land were



*Hunting was recognised as a valuable conservation tool by the NPB
(EKZNW photo library)*

rebounding at speed and a growing number of entrepreneurs were setting themselves up as professional hunters.

The NPB was advised by Spud, anticipating the growing demand for professional and other hunting, to consider legislation for better control of the professional hunters operating in the province. The Research Division concluded that there was indeed a need to maintain high standards for professional hunting especially for individuals operating throughout South Africa. As a result, the NPB proposed to its sister provinces that it was necessary that a uniform approach in all provinces be developed. With Spud's enthusiastic input, in due course a full programme requiring both written and verbal examinations plus demonstrations of competence in the care, use and

knowledge of a range of weapons was agreed between the four provinces of South Africa. The first written examinations were offered in December 1981 and they were then held every two years. Practical field tests were launched in February 1983 and shortly afterwards an added series of standards was established by the NPB to ensure that the facilities offered by professional outfitters to their clients were of a justifiable and suitable standard. By the end of 1983, 83 professional hunters were licensed to operate in Natal and twenty ranches had had their facilities inspected and approved.⁵

In 1985, Spud expanded the research programme to include bow hunting, at which a small number of the staff became proficient, and by 1987, 25 bow hunting permits had been issued and the results analysed. Spud reported that the skilled bow hunters, pursuing a much more difficult and demanding hunting regime, attained successful strikes equal to those obtained by the more conventional rifle hunters and concluded that bow hunting was both ethical and challenging and merited equal attention.

Spud, prompted by suggestions from the zone officers of the NPB, also launched a programme whereby private landowners not directly associated with the formal hunting fraternity could register their properties, or parts of them, on an *Availability of Hunting List*. This created opportunities for hunters to find new areas to pursue their sport and brought the advantage that the NPB was able to assist landowners to derive some financial benefit from the larger mammals on their properties. The service was highly valued.

By 1986 Spud had become a famous figure in the hunting fraternity as the chairman of the Inter-Provincial Professional Hunting Committee, and he became the NPB's representative at meetings of the major hunting organisations in South Africa, such as the Professional Hunters Association of South Africa (PHASA) and the Natal Hunters and Conservation Association. The latter group had developed close liaison and co-operation with the NPB, and it was a fruitful association as numbered among its members was Ian Goss, a farmer and hunter from the Magut district. Ian made facilities available to develop a hunting academy on his farm, which was the result of a perfect public-private sector partnership for which the NPB was eternally grateful. Spud and other research staff provided a broad range of lectures to students of the academy. This programme did much to integrate the research component of the NPB with the conservation zone officers and protected area staff and undoubtedly contributed to the invaluable *esprit de corps* of the NPB.

The forestry gift, an unanticipated bonus for conservation and research

It has been mentioned earlier that the national Department of Forestry had decided to hand over large areas of state forest more suitable for conservation than commercial tree production to appropriate provincial authorities. In 1986, the NPB inherited not only extensive parts of the province but also the professional and career staff of the Natal component of the national Forestry Department. The addition of some of these staff to the NPB Scientific Services team was an unexpected but welcome development.

The N-Fog Line

The NPB was fortunate to benefit from an extensive planning programme aimed at adding conservation land to the Drakensberg protected areas in Natal. This major achievement was the brainchild of Bill Bainbridge (1988–1993), who persuaded the national Department of Forestry (for which he then worked) to adopt what he proposed would become the National Physiographic Catchment Boundary, or the N-Fog Line. Following approval by the Department of Forestry, Bill and his team researched the entire Drakensberg foothills identifying and marking the theoretical line and then defining an actual line dictated by pragmatic influences of topography and geology. It proved a massive planning and research operation.

The N-Fog Line delineated the altitudinal level of the main rainfall catchment area of the Natal Drakensberg above which no buildings or road networks could be established. The primary purpose was to protect the catchment from intrusive human settlement or agricultural-based activities which were known to damage the water-carrying capacity of the Natal Drakensberg escarpment. A larger footprint of this important catchment area was thus safeguarded for future generations, ensuring a more dependable water supply for Natal.

From its inception Bill ensured that the NPB and its staff were all involved in the planning of the N-Fog Line and, after the forestry staff joined the NPB, John Scotcher (1973–1993) completed the N-Fog Line project down into the former East Griqualand, both defining the line itself and negotiating the purchase of land where the N-Fog Line required it to be excised from farmers' properties. Regrettably, the Department of Forestry did not follow through with the finance to purchase the land in East Griqualand and hence the N-Fog Line remains incomplete along the Drakensberg foothills.

Despite this setback, Bill's endeavour in Natal was a gift to the NPB and conservation as all the new lands purchased within the N-Fog Line were

ultimately included in the Natal Drakensberg Park. Bill also worked with the NPB to expand the protected area even further by championing a trans-frontier expansion into Lesotho that resulted eventually in an expanded Maloti-Drakensberg World Heritage Site. This was accompanied by a generous grant from the Global Environmental Fund of \$18 million to help create the site.

The Planning Division

The responsibility for integrating all these additional lands into the databases of the NPB fell to the Planning Division of Research Services to which Bill Bainbridge added his skills and knowledge. Taking the place of Hans Grobler (1983–1998), who was promoted to Head of Conservation in 1988, Bill became the NPB's Head of Planning and held this position until he retired in 1993. Bill was replaced by Trevor Sandwith (1986–1998) whose passion for hard work and visionary systems lifted the division to a new level.

The combined protected area management plans formed the masterplan on which the NPB's management by objectives system was based. The Planning Division took over the writing and revisions of the NPB's management plans and



The scientific team, 1986 (EKZNW library)



Hans Grobler



Bill Bainbridge



Roger Porter



Trevor Sandwith

*The planners who co-ordinated science and practical field conservation
(some images from EKZNW library)*

maintained a schedule of the completed plans. The division became the go-to branch for information on the status of conserved land, numbers of conservancies, private game ranches, hunting statistics, biosphere reserves, natural heritage sites and sites of conservation significance, and the creation and auditing of environmental impact assessments (EIAs).

The division maintained the databases of almost every aspect of conservation and biodiversity research in Natal. This was where the data was organised, structured and made available for all major advances by the

NPB. Staff both wrote and commented upon EIAs sent to the division by the national or provincial departments of environmental affairs for analysis and official comment. The services provided to the province in this regard were highly valued, covering a vast array of EIAs and need and desirability reports covering mining, afforestation, tourism development, drydock development, residential development, offshore prospecting proposals and many others. Planners drew heavily on the expert knowledge of the scientists in the NPB when they prepared their response to the province.

To serve the growing needs of the Planning Division, the services of scientists and technicians skilled in geographic information systems (GIS) joined the team, and were not only willing to extend their knowledge, but rapidly learned to produce accurate maps and statistics that held most of us in awe. A brilliant young woman, Heidi Snyman (1986–1998) became one of the most legendary members of the scientific division for her ability to produce in map form information that had as much art in it as science.

As mentioned earlier, Scientific Services made but modest contributions when the NPB first started its existence in 1947, but as time passed the Board came to depend on this division's leadership and expertise for more and more direction in the case of critical crises and in furthering progressive development. Especial credit must go the embryonic Planning Section to which almost all staff turned as the NPB grew in status.

Noteworthy achievements

Some worthwhile achievements of the Planning Division staff in earlier days included the prevention of the loss of a large portion of the corridor between Hluhluwe and Umfolozi game reserves to KwaZulu as part of the 1973–1974 KwaZulu consolidation proposals. The national government had suggested that the entire protected area, comprising 100 000 ha of land, should be transferred. The NPB would be compensated for the loss by being allocated land of equivalent size north and west of Lake St Lucia. Roger Porter quickly provided evidence that the new proposed protected area would necessitate the displacement of 65 000 members of the Nibela community. This sank the suggestion without trace as the NPB refused to countenance association with such a massive translocation and disruption of local communities. The NPB research contributions in opposition to the proposals were more than adequate to prevent the loss of land and established livelihoods.⁶

Roger Porter became invaluable when important threats to conservation areas emerged, and when rapid research analyses were needed. An early outstanding study and report by Roger prevented the building of fourteen possible dams in the Umfolozi River catchment, five of which would have flooded back into the protected area while other dams would have had a devastating effect on thousands of rural neighbours of the park (Porter, 1981). Conservation owes scientists and planners like Roger an immense accolade.

One of the most successful outcomes for the Planning staff in the last years of the existence of the NPB was the preparation, by Roger and Trevor Sandwith, of the first South African proposal for submission to UNESCO to inscribe the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park on the World Heritage list. After approval by the national Department of Environmental Affairs, which had to formally make the request on behalf of South Africa, the submission was successful as was the nomination dossier (also compiled by Roger Porter) that followed shortly afterwards for the Maloti-Drakensberg Park to be inscribed as a WHS.

From 1980 to the end of the NPB's existence the demand for expertise, understanding, accountability and better management saw the Scientific Services expand exponentially. In 1982 there were thirty officers in Scientific Services under Orty Bourquin (1965–1989) and by 1998 the staff complement had risen to 98 under the guidance of Martin Brooks (1972–1998). In the last ten years of the NPB, the spectrum of necessary research fields had expanded to the point that Scientific Services could be honestly rated as a world-class facility.

No fewer than seventeen NPB staff were represented, often as chairmen, on fifteen international specialist committees, such as the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group, the Global Wetlands Economic Network, the Working Group on Transboundary Conservation Areas and the World Commission on Protected Areas.

In South Africa, 26 NPB scientists served on national committees and, at the provincial and municipal levels, 64 NPB staff provided input. These officers earned a reputation for making positive and valuable contributions to all these bodies. In addition to those staff in the Scientific Services Division, senior NPB management staff, active and knowledgeable in their fields of scientific interest, added to the total number of professional experts contributing to national and international forums. For example, I was a member of the IUCN Sea Turtle Specialist Group, the World Parks Commission, the Advisory Board of the Rock Art Research Institute of the University of Witwatersrand, the President's Council for the Environment, and the Advisory Board of the World

The Protection of Biodiversity in Natal

| | Number of Species Recorded in Natal | Number of Species Recorded NPB Areas | Percentage Biodiversity Conserved |
|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| Mammals - Terrestrial | 165 | 149 | 90% |
| Mammals - Marine** | 28 | 5 | All migratory |
| Birds | 693 | 687 | 99% |
| Crocodyles | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Lizards | 75 | 68 | 91% |
| Snakes | 78 | 74 | 95% |
| Terrapins | 4 | 4 | 100% |
| Tortoises | 4 | 4 | 100% |
| Turtles | 5 | 5 | 100% |
| Amphisbaenians | 2 | 2 | 100% |
| Amphibians | 75 | 67 | 89% |
| Freshwater Fish | 79 | 74 | 94% |
| Butterflies* | 382 | 285 | 75% |
| Cetoniid Beetles* | 81 | 49 | 60% |
| Dragonflies* | 121 | 103 | 85% |
| Trees | 708 | 685 | 97% |
| Cycads | 11 | 6 | 55% |
| Proteaceae | 17 | 14 | 82% |

* Survey incomplete

** Many species peripheral and migratory

The scientific staff analysed NPB conservation success and shortcomings

Wildlife Fund (South Africa). Dick Parris (1988–1994) and Hans Grobler (1983–1998), who both served as Deputy CEO in the Board's last ten years, also represented the NPB on the international stage at gatherings such as the RAMSAR Convention.⁷

Scientific Services now more than matched the expertise and value of the Board's protected area managers as well as the hugely important zone officers who operated throughout the province. In fact, as a resource, Scientific Services became full partners in every branch of the NPB's activities, being both providers of information and having a role in the researching of information dealing with requests to improve the services and knowledge of staff in other branches. It was integrated synergy at its best.

The structure of Scientific Services in the later years of the NPB was as follows:

1. The Ecological Advice Division

- A. Terrestrial Systems
- B. Marine and Estuarine Systems
- C. Veterinary Services

2. The Biodiversity Division

- A. Research Policy, Databases and GIS
- B. Genetics
- C. Species Diversity
- D. Community Diversity
- E. Landscape Diversity
- F. Resource Use
- G. Horticultural Services

3. The Planning Division

- A. Regional Conservation Planning
- B. Management Planning
- C. Integrated Environmental Management in Board Protected Areas
- D. Integrated Environmental Management outside Board Areas
- E. Tourism Policy and Ecotourism Planning
- F. Regional Land Use Planning
- G. Community Conservation Programmes
- H. Geographic Information Systems
- I. Resource Economics Programme
- J. Environmental and Nature Conservation Policy and Legislation
- K. Project Planning Co-ordination
- L. Divisional Activities, including Meetings and Symposia, Training Courses and Lectures

Research projects

Research projects by staff or by visiting researchers grew from 100 per year to over 200 by 1992 and reached nearly 250 in 1998. New projects launched each year grew from 35 per year in 1993 to 167 in 1998. Never had Scientific Services reached a more productive and valuable level of output and all the data collected eventually found its way into the central database of the Planning Division. Scientific Services brought the NPB to full maturity and they supported, without hesitation, all the excellent work carried out by the

conservation field divisions. The conservation benefits brought to the province and South Africa by the NPB would never have been as great without the outstanding contributions from the staff of Scientific Services.

NOTES

- 1 The lammergeyer or bearded vulture had only recently been photographed in Lesotho, to the great delight of Colonel Vincent, by NPB staff member Bill Barnes, the officer-in-charge of Giant's Castle Game Reserve.
- 2 Scraperboard is a very fine layer of kaolin spread onto a surface (either hardboard or paper) and coated with black ink. The image is created by using a fine tool to scrape off the upper layers to create the desired image. Quite a critical technique.
- 3 Roger Porter pers. comm. Roger was the first regional scientist appointed by the NPB.
- 4 In return, the NPB willingly shared the expertise of its own staff among whom could be found world authorities in many biodiversity fields: Angelo Lambiris (1984–1992) – Amphibia; Orty Bourquin (1965–1996) – Reptiles; George Hughes (1961–1998) – Sea turtles; Martin Brooks (1972–1998) – Rhinoceros; John Scotcher (1973–1993) – Drakensberg vegetation; Peter Goodman (1975–1998) – Grassland ecology; David Johnson (1981–1996) – Birds; Trevor Sandwith and Roger Porter (1971–1998) – Environmental studies and planning; Rob Scott-Shaw (1989) – Plants; Tony Pooley (1957–1984) – Crocodiles; David Rowe-Rowe (1966–1996) – Mammals; Richard Emslie – Rhinoceros; and others.
- 5 Numerous NPB staff took the professional hunting examinations and some, after leaving the NPB, became successful hunting outfitters.
- 6 Roger Porter, pers. comm.
- 7 The first successful nominations for South African RAMSAR sites, compiled by Roger Porter and submitted to the Department of Environmental Affairs, were the St Lucia System and the turtle beaches and coral reefs of Tongaland.

18

THE BEST LAID SCHEMES OF MICE AND MEN¹

QUITE apart from the ongoing interest of the National Parks Board in taking over some of Natal's finest protected areas (which, strangely enough, in 1944 had been the reason for the establishment of the NPB) as well as the thwarted attempt by NP politicians to score points off the UP during the era of the Petition in 1972, there have been regular attempts to restructure conservation in South Africa. These endeavours, either deliberately or accidentally, posed serious threats to the structure and even the existence of the NPB. At least one of these manoeuvres frustrated a major goal of the Board: to have a single unified conservation body for the entire province.

The President's Council

In 1989, following a request from the State President to his Environmental Council to investigate and make recommendations on a policy for a National Environmental Management System, the NPB was called upon to testify at several meetings at Parliament in Cape Town. We were expected to give a presentation on the NPB model, and the implication appeared to be that justification of the model was expected. The sittings in Cape Town were attended by the board Chairman, Dering Stainbank and Deputy Chairman Robert Levitt, who were accompanied by the CEO, George Hughes and Deputy CEO, Dick Parris.

The materials contributed to the NPB's presentations by Scientific Services, interspersed with splendid illustrations from the Design Studio and supported by stunning statistics from the Administration staff, earned the NPB a respected place in the hierarchy of conservation management authorities eventually recommended by the Environmental Council to the State President (South Africa. President's Council, 1991). In the Council's report, the NPB received special mention as follows: 'The Natal Parks Board merits special mention for the establishment and development of an outstanding system of parks in Natal which are exceptionally managed and a great public amenity.'

It is of interest to note that at that stage the National Parks Board, which also received special mention, did not have legal borrowing powers, meaning that the national body could not raise loans for land purchases or the upgrading of facilities. The final report included the recommendation that the National Parks Board be given similar powers of borrowing to those held by the NPB. We were thankful that such powers had been allocated to us in our founding Ordinance 35 of 1947. The fact that the borrowing powers had only recently been used was not emphasised in our presentation, but the use of borrowed capital for the creation of the Ntshondwe Lodge in Itala Game Reserve, in its new pristine state, made a very marked impression on the Environmental Council.

The report was duly submitted to the President, but was never acted upon and perhaps that was a good thing as there was a centralisation theme to the recommendations, one of which suggested that the provincial legislation be consolidated into a National Nature Conservation Act, the enforcement of which could be delegated to the provinces. Had this been enacted it could, quite possibly, have seen the loss of the NPB's independence.

The Council for the Environment

The Council for the Environment had numerous committees, on one of which I served as a member from 1988 until its dissolution in 1995. The Committee for Terrestrial and Fresh Water Systems was made up of a dynamic and interested group, and it endeavoured to sift through the copious recommendations in the President's Council report and make its own recommendations for a more formal and integrated structure for nature conservation in South Africa.

Personally, I welcomed the endeavour as it had always been the NPB's belief that its independence should remain inviolate and further that there were few reasons why the Board could not declare and manage parks that merited recognition as national parks. We envisaged a federal system, as is found in Australia, where the central Canberra government can declare national parks, provided they meet national standards and policies, irrespective of whether they are managed by the federal State or one of the states of Australia. The NPB felt quite strongly that the Natal Drakensberg Park and Greater St Lucia Wetland Park deserved to be recognised by central government as national parks under such a regime.

Following a series of meetings, one of which was chaired by me, a new nature conservation structure was recommended and accepted by the members

of the committee. It contained a clause, approved at a sub-committee meeting at which the National Parks Board was represented, which would have permitted the provincial conservation bodies to apply for certain parks to be recognised as national parks. I was amazed that the National Parks Board's representative at the meeting had been so enthusiastic about the proposal, and I had expected an outcry from their board chairman before the recommended report went off for publication. My concerns turned out to be well-founded because when the report was published by the Council for the Environment the clause had been, without authority, deleted.

The last discussion on the subject that I had with Robbie Robinson, CEO of the National Parks Board, was a challenging one. Robbie defended the decision to remove the clause as being due to the inexperience of the staff member he had sent to the final draft committee. I expressed the view that I respected his concerns but could not support his decision to change the approved report without bringing the matter back for further debate.

Once again, the support of Scientific Services had played an important role in the NPB's standing in the eyes of the members of the committee, even more than those of President's Council itself, because all members were professionally qualified and not politicians. The resultant report (South Africa. Council for the Environment, 1993) was published as South Africa transitioned into a young democracy and this process was lost from view, but not forgotten.

The Kumleben Commission

Following the establishment of a new Department of Environmental Affairs in 1994 it was not long before the subject of provincial powers was again raised as there were nine provinces in the new South Africa. Pallo Jordan, Minister of the Environment and Tourism, appointed a new commission to investigate the institutional arrangements for nature conservation in South Africa.

Under the chairmanship of Justice Mark Kumleben and supported by S.S. Sangweni and J.A. Ledger, this rapid investigation started on 13 March 1998. It called upon all provincial nature conservation bodies, SANParks, other statutory bodies and NGOs involved in nature conservation, to respond with a written submission by 20 April 1998. Following a series of public hearings held in the provinces, this commission submitted its final report (Kumleben, Sangweni and Ledger, 1998) on 1 October 1998. It was completed at remarkable speed which, in contrast with today's seemingly interminable commissions, most of which never appear to reach a conclusion, reflected well on the in-

depth understanding of, and empathy for, the field of nature conservation by all three members.

From the NPB point of view the report was highly satisfactory: the parastatal model, refined and honed into an effective instrument, was recommended by the commission as the model to be pursued by all nature conservation bodies. The NPB's sister parastatal, SANParks, received equal acclaim but its board must have been disappointed because the commissioners saw great value in the suggestion, floated previously to the Council for the Environment, that a competent and capable provincial authority should have the right to request that a protected area be considered and, if deemed worthy, should be declared by the State as a national park.

Response by those provinces not using the parastatal model was swift and positive. Before the report was published the Western Cape parliament had already invited the CEO of the NPB to come to Cape Town to give a presentation on the Board's structure and the reasons for its success. Not long afterwards Cape Nature was born and continues to run successfully at the time of writing. Other provinces established parastatal bodies with varying degrees of success. Alas, the recommendation about provincially managed national parks did not find fertile ground and had obviously been successfully opposed by SANParks.

The support provided, and value contributed, by the Scientific Services of the NPB during all three sets of critical negotiations that produced such positive results for our organisation, was astonishing. It proved without doubt that what had been the Cinderella section of the NPB in its early days had become highly respected and a credit to the province.

The dune mining saga of the Eastern Shores of St Lucia

By the late 1980s NPB's Scientific Services had grown to such a point that their value could hardly be improved upon. This, in my view, saved the Eastern Shores of St Lucia from suffering the horrors of open-cast mining. It was well known that the coastal dunes along the Zululand coast were rich in heavy minerals as had been shown by the granting of a mining lease to RBM between 1967 and 1976.

The resultant damage to the coastal cordon north of Richards Bay brought a sense of sadness and pain to all directly associated with nature conservation. The Department of Mineral Affairs had, however, extracted a price from the company as it was apparently agreed, at a meeting involving a broad spectrum

of stakeholders including the NPB, that the most northern stretch of the mining lease would exclude the magnificent high forested dunes up to and around the mouth of the Umfolozi River. This section was eventually entrusted to the NPB for management and became well known as Mapelane Nature Reserve.

RBM was, however, mindful of the need one day to expand their operations north and south. The company had set its sights on the Eastern Shores immediately north of St Lucia village, which then fell under the control of the Department of Forestry. The Department of Mineral Affairs must have felt satisfied that this was but a distant possibility and the company received assurances that a future mining licence in the area would be sympathetically considered. In fact, permits to prospect in three adjacent lease areas (the Kingsa/Tojan leases) were granted in phases between 1972 and 1976 and RBM applied for a mining lease for all three areas in 1989. However, times had changed. There had been additional conservation land added to St Lucia Game Reserve, the afforestation possibilities of the Eastern Shores had been demonstrated to be less profitable than envisaged, and in 1986 the Department of Forestry ceded management of most of its land surrounding Lake St Lucia to the NPB.



St Lucia Eastern Shores



Tewati wilderness area



St Lucia has one of the largest crocodile populations in South Africa



St Lucia's hippo population of over 1 000 is the largest in South Africa



Open-cast mining does huge ecological damage



Large slumps caused by mining were common



Committed efforts to minimise damage and rehabilitate dunes did not make mining acceptable to the NPB

Furthermore, the South African Defence Force (SADF) had withdrawn from Hell's Gates experimental site from where they had tested missiles, used the lake as a bombing range and field-tested new designs of cannon.² Following the departure of the SADF, the Sodwana State Forest was now under the control of the NPB. To make matters worse for the mining company, the entire area had been declared a protected area under the RAMSAR Convention, and two coastal marine reserves had been established. The St Lucia (1979) and, further north, the Maputaland (1986) marine reserves had attracted much positive support, tourism was growing in Zululand and the NPB's research base at St Lucia village had done sterling work. Almost the entire coast from Mapelane north to the Mozambique border was now called the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park.

Following public awareness of the possibility of the Eastern Shores being mined a massive public protest was launched, which rapidly drew in many activists, some of whom had little claim to being conservationists, but whose passion against mining made such fine distinctions irrelevant. RBM had already instigated studies to support an EIA to accompany their mining application because the mining of heavy minerals had proved profitable. The company expected little resistance as the value of the ore body had been estimated at \$1.5 billion.³ Even a negative response from the NPB seemed unexpected. However, faced with the damage inflicted at the original mining site it was unrealistic to expect a conservation body with a record like the NPB's simply to accept the status quo and endorse the application. The NPB promptly announced that it was against mining on the Eastern Shores.

The national government was quick to respond and dispatched the outgoing Minister of Mineral and Energy Affairs, Daniel Steyn, and his soon-to-be-appointed successor, George Bartlett, to negotiate with the NPB. It fell to my lot to accompany the two ministers to the Eastern Shores where all the financial positives of the new mining were explained to me on top of the high dunes overlooking Bokkie Valley. We had deliberately taken the visitors to this beautiful site, from which a splendid view of the sea and Lake St Lucia was presented before them. I warned them that mining would destroy it all. The outgoing minister appeared deeply moved. He was even more deeply moved when a red duiker male suddenly leapt out of a small thicket between the two ministers and nearly bowled over the elderly gentleman. He reacted with quite a start and appeared impressed when I suggested that this event was a premonition of how offended nature was at being given such little consideration. Minister-elect Bartlett, whose job was probably on the line, was

less convinced and said that everything that was disturbed during the mining would be put back and rehabilitated. We returned in silence to the cars.

With the widespread and growing resistance to the mining, RBM was now morally obliged to launch an even more thorough and transparent EIA. The NPB was asked by the Natal Executive Committee to lead the responses, which turned out to be a herculean task, as over thirty specialist and key issue reports followed by the preparation of an alternative conservation/tourism proposal by the NPB had to be dealt with by staff. The accumulated pile of reports eventually exceeded nearly a metre in height. Scientific Services directed their full range of expertise onto the reviews, with all senior staff joining the fray. Especial credit, however, should be given to Roger Porter and Susan Brownley, who shouldered much of the responsibility for preparing the response documents.

The NPB did, however, face a few internal problems, as many staff were incensed by the thought that their vision of a prospective World Heritage Site might be destroyed before we could even apply for recognition. At that time UNESCO, under whose auspices the World Heritage Convention fell, had yet to permit South Africa to ratify the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The NPB's long-held aspirational hopes to apply for recognition for this protected area, soon to reach its centenary, appeared stillborn.

As the NPB had been chosen as the official responder, the board made it clear to staff that joining activists in raucous public demonstrations or speaking out publicly in NPB uniform was not permitted. It was also indicated that staff were allowed to do such things in their private capacity. This decision was not viewed as popular by some of the younger scientists and field officers, but good corporate governance required that the NPB adopt a balanced position. It was emphasised to all staff that the people of Natal now looked to the NPB for a rational review of the situation. It was important to consider that 5% of the people probably wanted mining, 5% did not want the mining and the balance probably had no thoughts either way but expected their official conservation authority to provide them with relevant and scientific guidance to reach a correct, justifiable and defensible decision. The NPB, despite maintaining its own position that regarded the mining as undesirable, undertook to review the assessments as rigorously as possible.

Not unexpectedly, we experienced some problems with staff over-reaching themselves. One young staff member presented such an inflammatory objection to the mining – on the grounds that it would damage the nesting sea turtles along the Maputaland coast – that the *Pretoria Times* gave his interpretation

headline treatment. Unfortunately, the officer's enthusiasms overran his knowledge of sea turtle biology for his claims of negative mining impacts were so exaggerated that I, as a turtle specialist of long standing, had to bring him in to my office to tell him that he was wrong and that he was putting the NPB's integrity and reputation at stake.

Yet another, more seasoned, officer was found to be releasing copies of the review team's confidential reports to the board to a favoured NGO. Unfortunately, the NGO's recipient, Ian Player, one of the most visible and outspoken activists opposing the matter, neglected to at least restructure the easily recognisable comments in the reports before holding forth publicly with all the apparent wisdom typical of the noisiest campaigners. The seasoned officer, who should have known better, was told, quite simply, that if any more confidential documents were released, he could follow this action with his resignation.

The NPB's reviewing team went through the reports from the experts appointed by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and managed by Brian van Wilgen and found much valuable information, thus adding a considerable amount of knowledge to the NPB's already encyclopaedic knowledge of St Lucia Lake and its environs. Unfortunately, some submissions were demonstrably prejudiced against the NPB and their conclusions were seen to be offensive. All were responded to as responsibly as possible.

Invaluable to promoting the NPB's position was the knowledge held by Ricky Taylor (1976–1998) and other staff at St Lucia research station. The economic issues were addressed by our Resource Economist, Geert Creemers (1993–1998) and the NPB's team of ecotourism scientists. In fact, of all the protected areas with which the NPB had a long history, none had more scientific literature at its disposal than St Lucia (see Taylor, 1987). Demonstrating its commitment to providing a defensible conclusion to Justice Leon's review panel, the NPB delegation, led by board Chairman Pat Goss, testified that it could not support the mining of the Eastern Shores and thanks to the NPB's scientific database, provided excellent evidence and reasons for not doing so. There were many strange and unexpected incidents during the review process. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu, had cause to confide in me during a visit to Hluhluwe Game Reserve a short time before, that he and I had the most undesirable roles to play. In his own case he was under pressure to support the mining for socio-economic reasons, and he felt it necessary not to voice an opinion, although often pressed to do so. Buthelezi assured me that

many of his people wanted the mining while others were violently against it. When the review panel held its final public hearing at St Lucia, we had the confusing experience of listening to Nick Steele, Director of the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation, swearing blind that the Chief Minister opposed the mining application, followed by a senior KwaZulu Government administrator convincingly arguing that Buthelezi was in full support of it.

It would be nice to think that the rational, responsible, reasonable and extensive reasons put forward by the NPB to oppose the mining played a major influence in the review panel's conclusions to recommend against the granting of a mining licence (South Africa. Department of Environmental Affairs, 1993). However, there is little doubt that the activist noise, some of which was offensive and probably libellous, against a variety of interested parties, almost certainly played an influential role, helped by a major public petition against the mining. The fact that the petition was signed by Nelson Mandela, who was destined soon to lead the country, had the commendable influence of making the national government of President F.W. de Klerk hand the responsibility for the final decision to the incoming new democratic government.

Following the appointment of a ministerial committee of five members, Derek Hanekom was asked to have his Land and Agricultural Centre undertake five additional studies. In due course, after delay caused by these studies, the government very sensibly upheld the recommendations of the Leon review panel to accept the conservation/tourism alternative to mining.

The aftermath of the mining saga

Once the new South African democratic order was established in 1994 the NPB had to hand an enormous amount of data on what we now called the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park and, anticipating a rapid return of South Africa to membership of UNESCO, the Planning Division set to with a will to prepare a submission to have the park declared a WHS. Roger Porter created a meticulously thorough proposal and within the year the NPB had produced a stunning document and handed it to the newly appointed heads of the national Department of Environment Affairs. We anticipated a rapid movement to formal submission, but that was not to be. Delay followed delay as there were now other claims from sites in South Africa for recognition and one of the reasons given was that South Africa did not yet have any legislation covering World Heritage sites.

Following international standards, Roger had placed in the draft nomination dossier the hopeful clause that, despite the fact that South Africa would be awarded the WHS status, there would be no difficulty in devolving management of the site to a suitably qualified provincial body like the NPB. Following amendments and approval by the State and some cosmetic alterations made to the NPB's draft, the proposal was duly dispatched to UNESCO and in January 1998 the World Heritage Assessment team visited St Lucia to consider South Africa's proposal. The members gave it enthusiastic support and in 1999 South Africa's first Natural WHS was declared.



The World Heritage Site inspection team led by Jim Thorsell (third from left) next to Roger Porter who prepared the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park application for WHS status, January 1988

The board and staff were thrilled with the result after a huge amount of hard work but, alas, there was a fly in the ointment: the Leon review panel had made a strange and totally unexpected recommendation, which we had hoped would be forgotten. It had proposed that this unique conservation site was so special that it should be treated differently and given a higher level of recognition than

a provincial protected area, for example as a national park. The reason cited was 'because the local community overwhelmingly supported the mining and because they identify ecotourism with the Natal Parks Board, an organisation which they dislike because of its low salaries and the perception that it seizes people's land' (South Africa. Department of Environmental Affairs, 1993).

During the review panel process the NPB had argued long and hard about the conclusions of the specific report that contained these criticisms as we felt there was insufficient defensible data to support them. The NPB was not alone in this view because at a report-back meeting of all the consultants involved in the EIA held at the University of the Witwatersrand, this report was castigated by many of the consultants involved in the EIA for being an appalling piece of bad research and for coming to even worse conclusions.

Nearly a year after the inscription of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, the need for legislation was recognised and the reason for the totally unexpected recommendation by the review panel had emerged. This was because a suggestion had been made, by a Department of Environment Affairs staff member, that the control of the WHS should be independent of KwaZulu-Natal. Legislation was drafted and prepared by legal consultants and the result did not please the provinces. Roger Porter stepped up again to object to the draft legislation, willingly helping along what could be described only as a new, and relatively inexperienced, national department. The department did arrange for Roger to meet department staff and consultants in Pretoria that resulted in amendments, but left some of the worrisome clauses concerning management control in place.

All objections were to no avail, however. When the decision was later made to appoint an independent St Lucia Wetland Park Authority to manage the area the decision makers came to the bizarre conclusion that the authority would run the park, but that the conservation management should continue to be carried out by the NPB. The Board and its staff were not happy with this proposed development as it had always been their goal to see all conservation in the province managed by one conservation authority. Over the lifetime of the NPB, all the forestry conservation areas had come under its umbrella and, in the late 1990s, it was in the throes of amalgamating with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation, which would have completed the operation. We anticipated a change of name, but there would then have been only one nature conservation authority for the entire province. However, such a long-held ambition was not to be realised, and we suspected that there were political reasons for the decision.

Shortly after the amalgamation in 1998, and after Roger Porter had authored another submission to UNESCO, this time for what was to become the Maloti-Drakensberg WHS in 2000 (incidentally a mixed site acknowledging both its biodiversity and cultural assets and, at that stage, only the 23rd such heritage site in the world) the management of the park was handed to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the NPB's unified successor conservation body. The Minister of Environment Affairs at that stage was Valli Moosa, who confided in me during a visit to the Drakensberg, that had government been more acquainted with the work of the NPB at the time of the decision to create an authority 'there would never have been a new authority for St Lucia'.

NOTES

- 1 The seventh stanza of the poem *To a Mouse* by Robert Burns (1785) reads:

But Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' Mice and Men, Gang aft Agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy!

It illustrates well that not everything turns out as hoped, expected or planned for.

- 2 Kentron, the group that managed the Hell's Gates experimental site and village, also had a memorable pub in which they entertained their guests and visitors. NPB staff were always made welcome on our regular visits, which always started with the question, 'When are you leaving?' Not long before Kentron did leave, they redecorated their village pub using a large number of captured Russian firearms associated with their endeavours in Angola and suspended a number of Cactus missiles from the ceiling. These innovations were quite interesting and very macho. We noted that some of the AK-47 rifles had what appeared to be full magazines in place. When we remarked on this our host hurriedly explained that the rifles had been spiked and the ammunition rendered safe. To illustrate his point, he leapt onto the bar and triggered an AK-47. It went off with a bang. The bullet nearly forced the spike from the now expanded barrel. The silence that followed was deadly and one of us asked drily whether the Cactus missiles hanging above our heads had been similarly sanitised.
- 3 Roger Porter, pers. comm.

SECTION 3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

B. PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
VIALE WILDLIFE INDUSTRY TO DEMONSTRATE
THE BENEFITS OF A WILDLIFE ECONOMY

19

THE NATAL GAME AUCTIONS

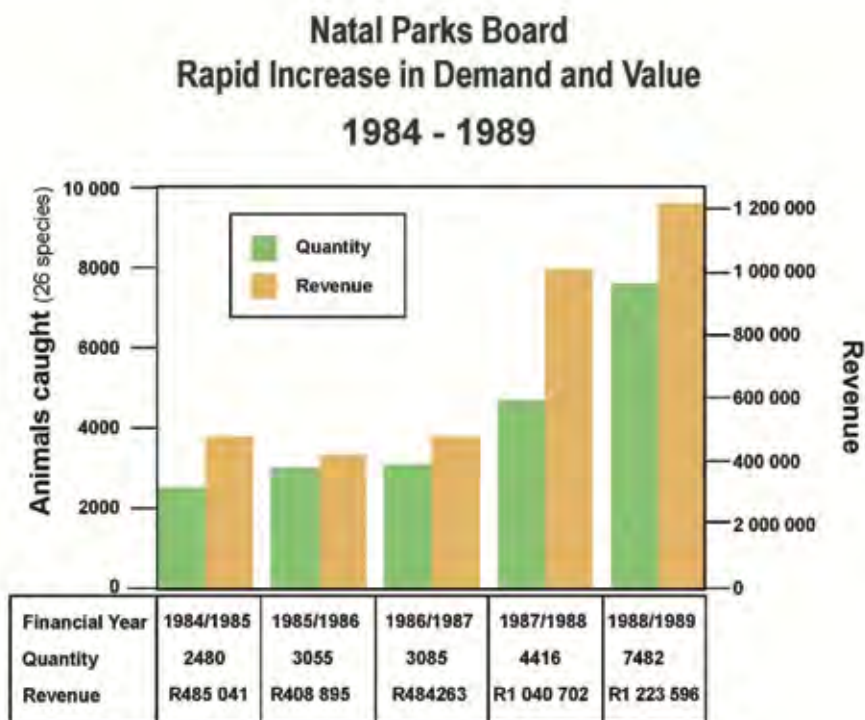
IN 1980, equipped with over twenty years of skills in the game capture and wildlife welfare sector, the NPB still held what was essentially a preservationist policy. This involved a purist view that the distribution of game to more widespread habitats was carried out in order to reduce the risk from poaching or disease and was thus essentially a nature conservation function. Even then the policy for sale to the private sector was to charge prices that would approximately cover the cost of capture alone. At that stage the NPB had translocated 80 000 individual animals of twenty-odd species, many to its own areas but considerably more to protected areas in other provinces and countries, including several thousand of the then-endangered white rhinoceros. The private sector had been a fairly limited participant in this rewarding activity. During the early stages of capture, the NPB established a Farm Game Team, to encourage private landowners to see game animals not just as a source of biltong or as simply an aesthetic addition to the property, but as an economic investment.

However, once the private sector had become increasingly involved in wildlife management in the early 1970s, the demand for live game started to accelerate to the point where the NPB's policy was amended to include sale at price levels that would now almost certainly cover the costs of capture and with possibly a slight but almost insignificant profit, which would contribute towards repair and renewal of the capture equipment and capture centre. The NPB remained firmly convinced that protecting the resilience of Natal's game populations, by sale, transfer and donation, was part of its mandate and an important one. It therefore intensified its endeavours to promote the re-introduction of game to areas where populations had been extirpated while remaining reluctant to view its game sales as a deliberately revenue earning activity.

After 1977, with the expansion of the conservancy system, bringing the promise of a much more aware and conservation conscious community, the

NPB sought to pursue its policy and encourage this concept by offering a 25% discount on first-time game purchases by registered conservancies. This move resulted in a surge in demand and a more rapid increase of wildlife in the private sector in Natal. The discount probably removed any profit that we may have made from game sales at that time.

As private sector populations of game increased, requests for hunting permits came in thick and fast and, as populations of white rhinoceros grew and their numbers started to multiply on private farms, requests were received for permits to hunt the odd excess male. The first white rhino to be hunted legally on Umbizane Game Ranch sold for R500 in 1972. This was warmly encouraged by the NPB and seen as proof that the effort of capture and translocation was more than worthwhile. An application in 1976 to the Second Conference of the Parties of CITES resulted in South Africa being able to allow the export of hunting trophies (Wijnstekers, 1988–1995). This change proved a massive boost to the hunting industry and brought a concomitant increase in demand for white rhinoceros.



Natal game auctions were stimulated by the rapid rise in the value of wildlife

Apart from the good intentions and financial naivety of the NPB's policy, it soon became apparent that there were private landowners who were capitalising on the Board's generosity. For example, the NPB would sell white rhinoceros for R1 000 each, only to discover that the landowner had already arranged for a hunter-outfitter to bring a client to shoot the animal for something in the region of R20 000. In turn, what the hunter paid to the hunter-outfitter was often seldom known, but the sum would have been seriously higher than that. This situation applied to a lesser extent to all the game species that were sold.

Game auctions debut in South Africa

In the early 1980s, the NPB game capture staff became aware that a private sector operator called Mike Englezakis was considering a game auction at Sun City in Bophuthatswana.¹ News reports later stated that it had been a success and Keith Meiklejohn, Head of Game Capture, requested permission to attend the next auction to assess the potential of the concept. In due course he reported back positively that he thought that it had great potential. He was asked to review the development of private auctions and recommend whether the NPB should dispatch game to an auction for sale on a future occasion.

It was evident that there was a brisk demand for the animals being auctioned, but Keith also noted, with concern, that the game holding facilities were very rough and ready. No standards appeared to be set for the care and welfare of the animals to be sold and, as result of rather slipshod transport, a number of animals arrived in poor condition; and, possibly as a result of the shabby holding pens, some died during the course of the auction. Keith and Rodney Henwood, the NPB's Chief Capture Officer, felt that it would not be in the interest of the Board, with its high standards of operation and reputation, to take part in these private sector auctions. Both officers were convinced, though, that with proper planning the NPB was in a position to operate its own game auctions.

At this stage I had taken over as ADC and was both an admirer and great supporter of the game capture operations of the NPB. After consultation with the board, it was agreed with Keith and Rodney that they should prepare a detailed report on what they considered necessary to launch an auction of our own, what species they felt could be handled safely and successfully sold at such an auction, and what costs would be required to get an auction underway.

It was made clear that the business plan had to clarify the costs and returns of such a venture. This was to be seen as a profit-earning endeavour and

realistic estimates were to be drawn up for consideration by the board. The pair of them departed the Conservation Committee meeting held to discuss this matter feeling extremely enthusiastic and committed. Eighteen months later, in 1986, they presented the first feasibility study and recommendations to the committee. The board agreed that the staff should go ahead with planning the first auction. The concept of public/private partnerships was just beginning to gain traction and the board enthusiastically agreed that the auction would be called the Natal Game Auction and co-managed with the Natal Game Ranchers' Association, of which the NPB became a member.

The sensible decision of the team to involve private-sector expertise in the form of Stockowners (Pty Ltd) as another partner in the enterprise was a wise one. The firm employed some of the most skilled and popular auctioneers in the province. Stockowners allocated two of its staff, Brian Hundley and their chief auctioneer Dallas Kemp,² to help NPB staff to introduce an appropriate businesslike approach to the new project. Keith and Rodney drew heavily on Dallas' skills in auctioneering as well as on his experience when planning the presentation, which covered the siting, basic structure and locality of such an auction.



Keith Meiklejohn, head of Game Capture, and Dallas Kemp, senior auctioneer Stockowners, after the first successful auction

This new strategy was a promising development, logically consistent with the NPB's endeavours to assist private landowners to re-establish game on their properties. An added incentive was the knowledge that the NPB's generosity in providing game to landowners at a very low price had previously been taken advantage of. Thus, the concept of an auction was warmly accepted by

many board members. It was clear that the auction could be a new step forward, and members were now clearly beginning to appreciate the necessity of operating game capture, as well as the NPB's now expanding and improving tourism facilities, at an acceptable profit. The board agreed to take the matter forward as a fully profit-making exercise based on free-market principles. This

was a major change to the board's policies and would bring great rewards to the NPB in both finances and reputation.

The following basic principles were agreed to:

1. The auctions were to be held in Zululand where the bulk of game capture took place and species captured in other parts of Natal should be trucked to the NPB's two game capture centres. The larger and more dangerous species would be held at the Umfolozi Capture Centre and the smaller and rarer game would be held in holding pens situated at the Hluhluwe Capture Centre.
2. Transactions would be limited to the game on view in the capture centres and therefore staff had to be committed to maintaining a high standard of public presentation.³ They also had to be on hand, with the addition of volunteers from other parts of the province, to interact with guests and prospective buyers. Furthermore, it was expected that some private sector lots of game would be held on their own properties where they could be viewed prior to the sale.
3. The auction would be managed by an experienced auctioneering group. On request the board agreed that the help, support and invaluable guidance of Stockowners Pty Ltd should be publicly acknowledged. As a gesture of appreciation, it was therefore agreed that Stockowners would propose an appropriate and acceptable auctioneering fee which, if the initial auction proved a success, would be applied for the following two auctions without tender procedures having to be followed. Then the NPB would have to call for open tenders as was standard procedure for services provided by the private sector.
4. The board agreed that in order to encourage private sector game ranchers in Natal, the auction be seen as a partnership or joint venture with the Natal Game Ranchers' Association.
5. Given that private-sector game ranching operations were growing in the Zululand area, it was noted by Keith and his team that this might be an opportunity for fencing and associated agricultural material suppliers to be allocated space to market their products. Their presence would give added support to the auction and enhance its attraction.
6. Most importantly, staff felt that it would be a good idea to demonstrate the NPB's appreciation of the two nearby towns, Hluhluwe and Mtubatuba, with whom the Board did much day-to-day business, by holding the auction at each of the towns, using them in alternate years. Staff were instructed

to pursue this suggestion by meeting the mayors and town councils of Hluhluwe and Mtubatuba to ascertain whether they were interested and whether they had suitable venues with either a hall or a large open space for the erection of a tent required for the auction as well as suitable parking sites and space for exhibitions for other interested parties. Both towns agreed enthusiastically.

7. It was also agreed that all registered buyers would enjoy free entrance to NPB areas and the private game ranches for three days; two days prior to the auction and the auction day itself. This was to facilitate access to the capture centres to view the animals on offer.
8. The board felt that a sponsored function to be called the Chairman's Welcome should be held at a suitable venue, such as Mtwazi Lodge in Hluhluwe, to which all prospective buyers would be invited, and staff would prepare a game braai to feed the guests.



Above: George Hughes and Keith Meiklejohn following the first auction (Ian Porter)

The first Natal Game Auction took place in the grounds of the Protea Hotel in Hluhluwe Village on 19 June 1989 and was universally acclaimed as being a great success. It sold 478 animals, including 24 white rhinoceros, earning a gross income of R1 979 270.



The crowd at the first Natal Game Auction

Black rhinoceros

The following year the auction was held as planned in Mtubatuba. It, too, was a resounding success for a very good reason; it was the first time in South Africa or anywhere, that a package of five black rhinoceros had been put up for sale by public auction. Keith Meiklejohn can claim the credit for this as he was the one person who saw the opportunity of enhancing the public's awareness of this endangered species. Being a very physical soul Keith nearly put my back out one day after the Hluhluwe auction in 1989 when he collared me in the passage of Head Office and asked whether I thought it was a good idea to auction some black rhinoceros. I wrestled mentally with the thought and was quickly convinced that it was worth motivating the concept to the board. When I replied 'Yes!' Keith put his arms around me and lifted me off the floor with enthusiasm. We both knew that we had a winner and it did not take long at the next board meeting to get the approval of members.

Naturally, when we first publicised the fact that we were going to auction black rhinoceros, a world first, the NPB drew both positive and negative comment. In those days of one television channel, if you had a television set you seldom missed the news and we were extremely grateful to SABC Afrikaans news anchor Riaan Cruywagen, who clearly had a weakness for conservation, when he announced with enthusiasm on the evening national news bulletin, the NPB's intention to add to the success of the first auction by selling black rhinoceros. He was moved to announce to his co-anchor with real admiration and delight: 'Maar daardie Natalse Parkeraad mense, hulle is altyd besig mets iets nuut en opwindend!' (But those Natal Parks Board people are always busy with something new and exciting!) To get an endorsement like that on national television was exciting indeed, so the communications staff sent him a note of thanks and a Golden Rhino, the NPB's free entry pass to all its protected areas and valid for a year. Thank you, Riaan, we have never forgotten your support.

In contrast we received a mail from the Endangered Wildlife Trust seriously questioning our decision and asking whether we had given due consideration to the genetics of the black rhinoceros. The trust did not think it was a good idea. 'What about the genetics?' we were asked. Our answer was fairly simple. We asked, in turn, what the trust thought we might do about the genetics. Black rhino populations in Africa had been reduced in the 1970s and 1980s to a pitiful fraction of their original sizes. It is widely reported that across the African rhinoceros range over 100 000 black rhinoceros were slaughtered in that era.

Our Natal population, although it had not suffered the same damage as the rest of the African populations at that time, was nevertheless limited, and had been derived from a relict population in 1900 of somewhere around fifty animals surviving in Hluhluwe and Mkuzi game reserves. Therefore, what we had was a very limited and impoverished genetic stock probably with little variability. A similar situation existed in all the other relict back rhino populations in South Africa and elsewhere. There was precisely nothing that we could do about the genetics.

The question was, however, well intended. Much concern had been generated a short while previously by some American conservation biologists who had postulated, extensively, the theory that there had to be a minimum number of mature animals in almost any large mammal population before it was likely to be doomed to perish as a result of genetic drift. It had been suggested, for example, that a population of ungulates required 50 000 breeding animals to be safe from drifting to extinction. As that figure represented probably half of what might have been the total number of black rhinoceros existing across the whole of Africa in its prime, we had not been enthralled by the conclusion.

So concerned were the NPB's scientists that we invited, with the aid of Brian Huntley from the CSIR, Mike Gilpin, one of the top American conservation biologists, to visit us for discussions.⁴ After a tour of Zululand, Gilpin sensibly suggested that we could only deal with what we had and offered us some suggestions for managing the South African population as a meta-population, including reintroducing a male from other parts of the country every ten years or so. He had responded warmly to the suggestion that we establish new populations and the NPB and its scientific team felt the decision to auction black rhinoceros to the private sector was justified.

The second auction held at Mtubatuba was a roaring success. The presence of black rhinoceros, along with fifty white rhinoceros, attracted enormous media attention and many local and international buyers. The auction tent reverberated with excitement. Keith left the package of black rhinoceros until the last lot, and not a soul had left the tent when bidding began. It had been agreed by the board that only landowners whose properties had been inspected and approved as suitable habitat for the species, were appropriately fenced to the highest standards, and were sufficiently well resourced to support and protect such a valuable species could bid for black rhinoceros.

It should also be noted that staff from other conservation authorities had been invited to attend the auctions and these staff, from each of the provinces of the Cape, Orange Free State and Transvaal, would give permission in

principle to prospective buyers to receive the animals if they were satisfied that whatever game being sought was compatible with the habitat of properties for which they were intended. The system worked to everyone's satisfaction and I am not aware of any problems resulting from this arrangement. Much credit must be given to these visiting staff from the other provinces who were always made welcome and whose co-operation was deeply appreciated by the board and its staff.

When the black rhinoceros came to be auctioned, Dallas Kemp explained that one animal, part of a group of five, would be offered for auction and the successful bidder would then have to take the entire group of five adults at a total cost of his successful bid multiplied by five. The bidding began, hesitantly at first, starting at about R20 000, then surprisingly rapidly rising to R30 000 a bid, then R40 000, then R50 000. By the time the final bids were being made, rising at R50 000 a bid, the crowd was screaming. There was a pause at R400 000 as one bidder fell out and Dallas, skilled auctioneer as he was, teased up the price, calling for another R10 000 per bid. The final hammer came down at R440 000, awarded to Dale Parker and Clive Walker of the Lapalala Wilderness in the Northern Transvaal. The cheers and applause nearly brought the tent down and with that uproar grew the reputation of the NPB. Including the sum of R2 200 000 raised by the group of black rhinoceros, total sales value that day was R4 246 325 that set a new record for game auctions in South Africa.

Another NPB first. We were all thrilled beyond measure as there were no fewer than eight different television crews present at the auction.

The following eight years saw the NPB hold what was widely regarded at that time as the finest and largest auctions of wildlife anywhere. The proof of this reputation can be measured by the



Dale Parker and Clive Walker being thanked by George Hughes after the purchase of the NPB's first group of black rhinoceros, 1989

steady rise in both the value of each species and the overall income derived at each auction. The first auction of nearly 500 animals brought in almost R1 980 000; the tenth auction with a similar number of animals and species earned R10 014 850. The average sum for each of the ten years was R4 822 833 for 500 head auctioned per year. The net percentage increase of annual income from 1989 to 1998 was a stunning 406%.⁵

The growing success and apparently endless demand for quality specimens of a wide range of species led the NPB and other conservation agencies to encourage game ranchers and others to take full responsibility for the management of the game on their properties and along with representatives of the game ranchers encouraged the State to change the laws governing the ownership of game.

The result was the Game Theft Act of 1991, which essentially gave property rights and ownership of game to registered landowners.

From then on, game management on private land entered a new era of expansion and the demand for game accelerated to meet the growing demand as the number of private game ranches in South Africa increased to 9 000 in 2015 and now stands in excess of 16 000. The ordinary landowner with only a secondary interest in the economic value of game continued to seek to reintroduce species that had once lived on their original property and spread the game populations more widely, enhancing the gross numbers of each species in South Africa.



Rudi Heine (board deputy chair), George Hughes and Paul Luthuli (board member) (Mike Matthewman)



White rhinoceros awaits sale in capture centre

Noteworthy auction events

By now Keith, Rodney, and his successor Mark Cooke, and the ever-invaluable veterinarians in the form of Peter Rogers followed by Dave Cooper, were gaining enormous plaudits for putting together such a widely appreciated series of events. The successful auctions were bringing great credit to the NPB and, judging by the prices received at each auction, the reputation for the care and condition of the animals soon indicated that the Natal Auction was widely perceived as the champagne auction of South Africa, producing animals in prime condition and receiving some of the highest prices for those species available in South Africa.

There is little doubt that the quality of the game was due to the insistence of the capture team that every animal sold by the NPB was guaranteed to have been held in captivity for at least one month; but, more likely, six weeks before the sale. By the time of the sale, all hint of stress had departed the animals, any incidental wounds had been treated and healed, and being very well fed, they had put on condition and generally looked magnificent. Any animal not judged to be in almost perfect condition was withdrawn from the sale, even at the last minute. One year, a package of giraffe fed accidentally on a consignment of sub-standard Teff fell ill the night before the auction and was immediately withdrawn.⁶ The animals recovered after treatment and were sold privately.

Animals that were well-settled and well-treated often responded in surprising ways to the presence of large numbers of humans wandering around the pens and staff soon learnt that a very responsive animal could nearly double its expected price at the auction. On one occasion a magnificent kudu male, truly one of Africa's most iconic and beloved antelope, developed a talent for coming up to the fence and licking the hand of a prospective buyer's wife. The response was stunning and the poor husband, the registered buyer, was expected to buy 'that one' on the auction. Staff estimated that we had gained 50% on the anticipated price of this fine kudu.

Beautiful or rarely seen animals like red duiker, which are truly among the most striking of any antelope species, could earn enormous prices. In 1992, a single red duiker male sold for R3 600, which was very unexpected as they only stand 43 cm tall and weigh less than 12 kg. That exquisite male went for R300/kg or, for those interested in such things, R0.30/gram! An eland bull at the same auction, actually the next lot for sale, weighed about 800 kg and went for R2 800 or R3.50/kg. Such low prices for this valuable antelope are unheard of today.

The Conservation Trust donations

Then, of course, there was the pair of white rhinoceros generously donated by the NPB each year to the NPB Conservation Trust (see Chapter 24) for sale at the auction. In the holding pens, the two rhinoceros were clearly marked and surrounded by trust posters. At least one of the trust staff was always on hand to talk to the buyers and as a result many cash donations were made. One impressed buyer enthusiastically purchased a giraffe on the auction and immediately donated it to the trust to be sold for trust funds. Such generosity was wildly acclaimed by the gathering and it was notable that the trust rhinoceros always went for prices somewhat higher than other similar animals and the generosity of the buyers received rounds of noisy applause.

A political hiccup

The successful sales and excellent public relations on these occasions made every auction an experience never to be forgotten by those who were in attendance. The towns of Hluhluwe and Mtubatuba created special events (fashion parades, for example) to make a visit to their town more attractive even to non-buying visitors and some of the most popular activities associated with the auction were craft markets, supported by dozens of local industries and artists, especially those focusing on the ever-expanding tourist trade. The attendance of an insurance brokerage for wildlife risks quickly became a feature, along with ancillary services for the growing wildlife industry.

The auctions became an annual highlight in Zululand. However, passions run high in towns with popular events that may benefit powerful vested interests. After the first three years of successful auctions staff had reverted, as requested by the board, and I might add, the necessity of good governance, to calling for tenders for the auctioneering service for the event. Stockowners continued for some years to win the tender but in 1996 they were outbid by a significant amount by another auction house situated in the Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo). The difference was such that the NPB had little option but to accept the bid from Vleissentraal, an auction house with a splendid reputation and whose chief auctioneer was Willie Roux. He had helped create the first private-sector game auctions and had, in fact, been the auctioneer selling the first game by auction in South Africa back in the 1970s.

The board and staff were faced with a real dilemma as we were accustomed to Stockowners excellent service and help, but following due process, the Vleissentraal bid was accepted. All hell broke loose as, in response and at the

last minute, Hluhluwe, whose turn it was to host the auction, suddenly and unexpectedly announced that they would not authorise the NPB to use their very popular and convenient rugby club grounds for the event. Rumour of this decision reached me almost immediately and I informed the Chairman of the board, Pat Goss. We phoned the mayor directly and asked him to allow the pair of us to call and discuss the matter with him. We flew up to Hluhluwe the next day, at a time stipulated by the mayor, to meet the entire town council. The NPB was rightly concerned that our auction, which had done much to put the two towns on the map, and thereby brought the NPB immense kudos and support from the surrounding communities, should not be jeopardised by some misunderstanding.

The problem did not, alas, turn out to be a misunderstanding. The town council did not approve of the appointment of Vleissentraal, domiciled in Louis Trichardt, and said so straight out. They demanded that we cancel the contract and reappoint our usual local auctioneers. No matter how Pat and I argued and despite pleading for the continuation of the auction for the benefit of Hluhluwe, the councillors were adamant.

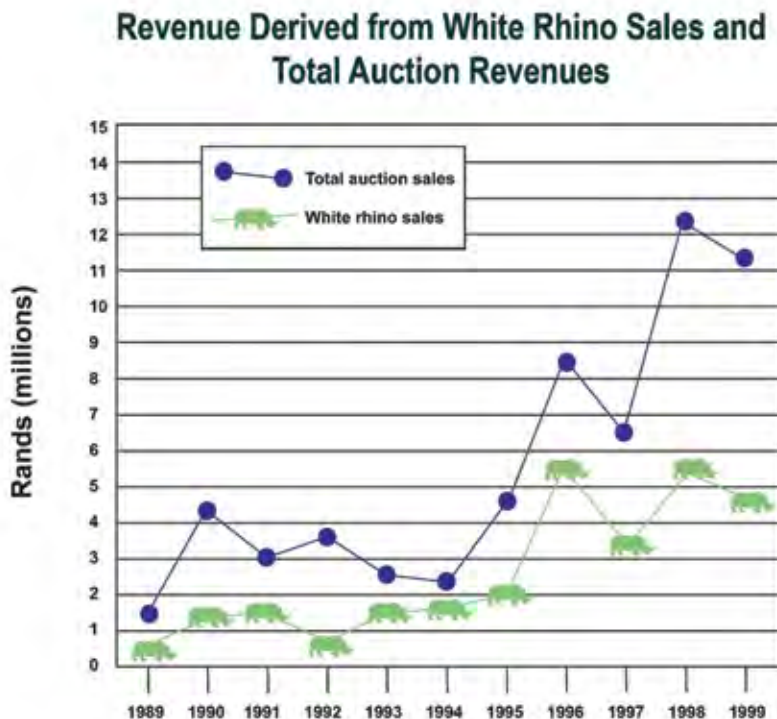
The decision caused Pat and I considerable discomfort and anguish, but to cancel a contract without due cause and then to accept a higher auction fee was really a non-starter. We told staff to relocate the auction to Hluhluwe Game Reserve, where the auction tent was raised on the parking lot adjacent to our recently opened Hilltop Camp Reception complex. Vleissentraal lived up their reputation and it was an incredibly successful auction, raising a gross income of R8 860 000.

Following the auction, two directors of Stockowners asked for a meeting with me to discuss their disappointment with our not accepting their bid after seven years of a really glorious partnership. At the meeting I said I thought that with their company's knowledge of the realities of the situation and their participation for seven years they could have submitted a more competitive bid, and I told them of the board's surprise and disappointment at the fact that the old team had not been appointed. To my delight both directors took the comment on the chin, smiled their thanks and departed with a final comment that 'this wouldn't happen again'. It didn't and that outstanding relationship was re-established the following year and continued unbroken for many years into the future after the NPB no longer existed.

The auctions were more than simply economic successes for the NPB. They represented a seismic shift in reputation and achievements for the tourism and game industries of South Africa. The NPB was the first formal conservation

body to auction publicly much of its surplus wildlife. The prices achieved for each species also guided the staff in the pricing and sale of animals outside the auction, the so-called out-of-hand sales. For the first time we were recognised as operating our game sales in the spirit of free enterprise. All the other provinces, and even the National Parks Board, soon followed the NPB's lead and established game auctions for their surplus game.

These were heady days indeed and they lifted the NPB's profile to new levels as more and more buyers came from other countries and often arrived accompanied by television teams and the media at large, all of which added to the lustre of each occasion. From a conservation point of view, we were seeing thousands of surplus animals going to new properties and new homes where they would thrive and the likelihood of the long-term survival of every species would be improved. Simultaneously, the NPB was making significant contributions to the rapidly expanding wildlife tourism industry, traditional and foreign hunting tourism, and South Africa's reputation as a world leader in conservation.



Overall auction results and the growth in value of white rhinoceros

What was even more pleasing for the NPB was that it had at last achieved a position where it was selling its surplus game at prices set by the free market, and it received nothing but praise from all and sundry for its contribution to the accelerated growth of the game industry. The NPB was also now firmly established as being part of the free market system. The board and staff were immensely proud of our Game Capture Team and our veterinarians who, through ingenuity, innovation and sheer hard work built a name acknowledged across the world for the successful capture and translocation of wildlife.⁷

NOTES

- 1 There had apparently been one or two earlier auctions promoted by Willie Roux of Vleissentraal, of which I became aware only recently.
- 2 Fortuitously, Dallas's brother, Brian Kemp, had been a serving officer of the NPB and there is little doubt in my mind that his total commitment to the project was influenced by Brian's participation in nature conservation.
- 3 This was changed in 1991 at the third auction and afterwards when, after the on-display sales were completed, many animals were put up on an ancillary catalogue sale which indicated when animals were likely to be caught for sale.
- 4 It is perhaps worth recording that we had originally invited Michael Soule, a primary source of the theory, but he was concerned about visiting South Africa because of the apartheid system. His concern led him to write to Archbishop Desmond Tutu for advice as to whether his acceptance of our invitation might be perceived as supporting apartheid. The good archbishop had sent a letter indicating that he would not advise against going but that Soule had to realise that an invitation from a nature conservation body linked to the State must be accepted as a risk.

When Brian told me of this I was distressed and tried to set up, in Cape Town, an appointment with the archbishop, a courageous and inspirational man whom I admired greatly. I felt very strongly that he was not aware of the NPB's reputation, that we were a semi-independent conservation body with a proven track record as non-racial and strongly anti-apartheid. I was determined to travel to Cape Town, if I could get an appointment, to give the archbishop a presentation on our work in the hope that he might become an ally in conservation, realising that what we were trying to do was help our indigenous species for South Africa.

This proved a challenge as it took two weeks of telephone calls before I could find anyone prepared to put me through to the archbishop. At last, I was put through to a brother who, after hearing my plea about the archbishop's letter to Soule and my desire to discuss the matter after giving a presentation to Archbishop Tutu, informed me that he was the archbishop's secretary and had no knowledge of any such a letter having been written. I then asked him please to consult the archbishop, emphasising the fact that I had no intention of being critical of what he had done but hoped that I might ensure that he gained a better understanding of what we were trying to achieve in South Africa. He said he would do so.

A fortnight later, after no word from the brother, I phoned again. No response, and it appeared that he was too busy to talk to me. Another fortnight passed and I called again, this time to have the brother, after some prevarication, announce that he had indeed spoken to the archbishop who denied ever having sent such a letter. He was quite convincing and, being what he was, I accepted his response at face value.

Some weeks later, on meeting Brian and Mike Gilpin in Hilton to discuss the genetics problem, I casually mentioned to Brian that the story of the archbishop's communication was incorrect because I had been assured by his secretary that no such letter had ever been written. With that, Brian smiled, and sticking his hand into his briefcase produced, with a flourish, the original letter itself, signed by Archbishop Tutu!

- 5 Two years after the amalgamation of the NPB with the KZDNC, the highest income recorded for the now KwaZulu-Natal Auctions was R22 000 000, a figure never again achieved in KZN.
- 6 *Eragrostis tef*, a popular annual grass originating in the Horn of Africa is now locally cultivated for sale.
- 7 It should be added that we were conscious of the possibility that, if successful, we might eventually experience a decline in demand for game and a reduction in the revenue derived from sales, even white rhinoceros. That would pose yet another challenge to formal conservation.

THE NPB's effective entry into the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) circuit was rather lower key than it might have been, primarily thanks to South Africa's political position in the world. Despite the country's pariah status, which was just beginning to build up steam, South Africa was a foundation participant and recognised the convention in 1973, ratifying it in 1975 (Wijnstekers, 1988–1995), but was reluctant to do anything but 'go with the flow', keep a low profile, and agree to anything that came up.

There also appeared to be considerable misunderstanding of the goals of the convention, as it was intended to control trade in wildlife species. However, many of the state participants, in agreement with the increasingly active, nature-focused NGO communities, appeared to perceive that it was a body established solely to deal with conservation matters in a peculiarly narrow sense. At the time the convention was set up, South Africa's formal state and provincial conservation bodies, beginning to record encouraging improvements in the field, were more than satisfied with the excellent statement in the CITES preamble that called upon contracting parties to recognise 'that peoples and states are and should be the best protectors of their own wild fauna and flora'.

The net result was that South Africa at state level, following limited consultation with its conservation authorities, and after even less effort in engaging with the detailed goals of the convention, rushed forth with schedules of South African species that should be added to the proposed working appendices of the convention. These stipulate as follows:

Appendix I

Includes species threatened with extinction and for which trade must be subject to particularly strict regulation and only authorised in exceptional cases.

Appendix II

Includes species not necessarily now threatened with extinction, but may become so unless trade is strictly regulated.

Appendix III

Contains species subject to regulation within the jurisdiction of a party and for which the co-operation of other parties is needed to prevent or restrict their exploitation.

South Africa, with input from the NPB, proposed a list of animals and plants to be placed in the CITES appendices. Some species were correctly placed in an appropriate appendix, but many other species were listed with no justification for being there at all because there was no international trade in them. Worldwide there appeared to be a rush of blood to the head as every country wanted to be seen as effective because they had a long schedule of species in Appendix I.

It is, to me, a great failing in the wording of the stipulations of the convention that it contains no clause concerning, or goals to assist, countries wishing to engage in legal trade; or to improve existing legal trade. There is no mention of anything that would facilitate the trade in species, as was implied in the title of the convention. What the body has done, and continues to do, is contrary to the correct observation inscribed in its preamble that people and states are and should be the best protectors of their own wild fauna and flora. In practice the convention appears to have evolved into a tool to prevent even successful and beneficial trade in wildlife species and has in effect penalised countries with conservation achievements based on sustainable and responsible sales of wildlife. This is especially regrettable because South Africa has focused its conservation policies on sustainable use and has even written such a policy into its democratic Constitution.

It would appear that the original authors of the articles of the convention focused only on poorly managed wildlife populations and did not envisage the possibility, in fact the reality, that sound conservation management should, and does in many cases, produce surplus animals and plants. In many cases such surpluses can impact negatively on their habitat and require numbers to be controlled either by live or dead removals. In the South African context, where the private wildlife industry has grown rapidly, this is more the norm and is indeed necessary as endless expanses of habitat untransformed by human interference no longer exist. CITES should have played a positive and supportive role in recognising this simple biological fact and should have helped successful countries facilitate international trade avenues by encouraging an understanding and an awareness of the value of their achievements. It should, furthermore, have made an attempt to build comprehension (in scientific,

regulatory and, most importantly, public circles) of the reality of the situation and paved the way for appropriate agreements between member states. It hasn't done any of this.

Reports emerging from the second and third meetings of the parties in Costa Rica and New Delhi were not encouraging. The number of NGOs (so-called observers) starting to show up at the gatherings were a warning of things to come as, even then, there were suggestions of many NGOs assisting the more naïve delegates from emerging countries to reach decisions on resolutions. By 1994, there were 110 party members but observers reached 160. In more recent years, observer numbers have probably exceeded party members at least twofold.

As only a member state had the legal right to make proposals, or vote on proposals, some NGOs took on the guise of advisors to state delegations and even committed funds to assist interested parties from emerging countries to attend conventions. What few onlookers noted in the beginning was that many NGOs had either no interest in trade or were strongly opposed to any trade in wildlife at all. The influence of such NGOs did not help the convention to address its responsibilities in a scientific manner. Anyone who wished to have the participants of the convention evaluate and facilitate trade in wildlife faced a large and politically vocal opposition working outside it.

The seventh Conference of the Parties (COP)

South Africa, I believe, showed no real effective interest in deliberations until COP 7 at Lausanne, Switzerland in 1989. This was the meeting at which a number of countries intended to propose that the African elephant, originally placed in Appendix II, should be moved to Appendix I.

It was the first convention for which three of the four provincial conservation bodies agreed that they would ask permission to attend as members of the delegation from South Africa. Let it not be said that representatives of the provincial bodies were welcomed with open arms by the national Department of Environmental Affairs. The Director-General agreed to our being there provided we carried all of our own expenses and arranged our own flights and hotel arrangements. The provincial delegation to COP 7 consisted of the leader Pieter Mulder, Director of Transvaal Fauna and Flora; Johan Neethling, Director of Cape Nature Conservation; Herman Grove, Chief Director in the Department of Environmental Affairs; and me as CEO of the NPB.



Pieter Mulder, Johan Neethling and Herman Grove, delegates to CITES COP 7, Lausanne, Switzerland

None of the provincial bodies had attended a CITES COP before, so we were green to the core and, after the disappearance of the NPB's white rhinoceros downlisting proposal,¹ the provincial members of the delegation were without any specifically prepared proposals for the meeting. This caused us to focus on our support for the position taken by the National Parks Board (which had attended independently as part of the state delegation) regarding elephants.

It was clear from the papers submitted prior to the convention that there was a strong bid from a number of countries to move the status of the African elephant from Appendix II to Appendix I, thus ending any trade in elephant or elephant products. South Africa had submitted an excellent document prepared by our colleague in the National Parks Board, Anthony Hall-Martin,² stating South Africa's intention to oppose the proposal.

In the event of the proposal being accepted South Africa intended to take out a reservation, which effectively meant that we were not bound by any decision taken by the parties and the South African elephant population would remain on Appendix II. The National Parks Board at that stage kept a careful and sensible watch on the numbers of elephant in Kruger National Park and maintained a steady population of some 7 500 animals. Every year excess

numbers of elephant were culled in a rational programme that oversaw the use of all the valuable products that could be derived from them and even ran a small canning factory to ensure the use of the meat. Almost nothing went to waste.³

The South African elephant submission to COP 7 received widespread acclamation for its unusually high quality. It thus came as a singular shock to realise the National Parks Board's case was in fact a doomed cause because the thrust of the meeting was focused on having the African elephant placed on Appendix I. The enormously influential United States delegation came along fully agreeing with the proposal to put elephants into Appendix I. The decision makers from US Fish and Wildlife were, no doubt, influenced by pressure placed on them by NGOs such as the American Humane Society and others, at least one of which had strung up ceiling high banners in the U.S. capital supporting the call to 'save' the elephant. One of these banners asked the President whether he wished to be remembered as the person responsible for supporting the extinction of the African elephant. As the United States is rather short of elephants such a challenge ensured that, as it didn't matter a great deal to the President or to members of Congress, they would take the populist route; which viewpoint would effectively set the course for CITES official attitudes to this day.

It became very apparent to our delegation that there was a great danger of wealthy international NGOs exerting goal-orientated interference in the procedures of the convention. To emphasise the intention of the international NGOs, the schoolchildren of Switzerland had been mobilised by Swiss NGOs and hundreds of them, carrying placards and singing sentimental, if well intended, songs about the elephants, were skilfully led into the formal proceedings, which they managed to disrupt for a considerable period of time. Outside the hall, lurid posters had been erected, adding extra pressure on delegates to support the proposal and, at every turn, documents and papers were distributed calling for an immediate ban on the use of elephants or elephant products, especially ivory.

The Zimbabwean delegation had arrived in rampant opposition to the proposal to move elephants to Appendix I and adopted an aggressive and uncompromising position which embarrassed even our delegation. Rowan Martin was their chief spokesman and to this day remains an aggressive and passionate speaker. When the proposal to uplift the status of the African elephant to Appendix I was voted on it was carried by 76 votes in favour to 11 against.

A bone was thrown to the southern African states by the Somalian delegation, which proposed that all elephant populations should go onto Appendix I, but that those countries with stable and well-managed populations could apply for a review by a panel of experts. South Africa was not satisfied with this and, voting against the proposal, lodged a reservation. The South African delegation did feel, however, that the proposal was quite sincere and South Africa was lured into believing that a rational and scientific argument would win the day. Thirty years later, we are still waiting for a fair deal.

To ensure further that the populist cause won the day a scurrilous attack was made on both the Secretary, Jacques Berney, and the Secretary-General, Eugene la Pointe, accusing them of being pro-sustainable use and the killing of elephants. Eugene lost his position shortly afterwards. What really shocked me and made me seriously doubt the role of CITES was the almost hysterical intensity of the NGOs for which there appeared to be no disciplinary code.

The Zimbabweans had in their delegation a number of leaders of rural communities who benefited from the hunting of elephants on their tribal land. These gentlemen had testified, in opposition to the proposed Appendix I listing, that the value of the elephant to their tribe was immense and emphasised how it benefited through the sustainable use programmes set by Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife. Later, while I was reading some posters of a French NGO named Robin du Bois (Robin Hood), two of the black Zimbabweans walked by. Two young female personnel of Robin du Bois ran over and spat on them. This did not impress our members and I was distressed and horrified at the actions of the two young women.

Things began to get very personal. On the Sunday rest day, our group took a trip by boat up Lake Geneva to Montreux. While standing on deck I was approached by a Swiss who very aggressively accused me of being totally immoral for wanting to kill elephant. He said he could not understand why people like us, who were supposed to be in the business of conservation, could even entertain such a thought.

My patience ran out and waving my arms at the vineyard covered hills on the edge of the lake on our left I asked him why I couldn't see any bears. The man looked at me as if I were mad. I continued by stating that, as a regular visitor to Switzerland, I had seen thousands of bears. The canton flag of Berne bore an image of a bear and, if one entered any curio shop on any tourist route, in any part of Switzerland, one found carved wooden bears by the hundreds, some standing as high as two metres. But despite going on overnight hikes in the Swiss mountains I had never seen a live bear. I asked him why. He

looked quite concerned, even bewildered, and, justifying the lack of bears, said that Switzerland was a small country, heavily transformed with a growing population and there was no chance of bears surviving.

I almost shouted at him that South Africa was a third world country, and quite highly transformed for agriculture and a growing human population, but it still had many elephants in the Kruger National Park where they were so well protected that they outgrew the ability of the habitat to carry them without impacting negatively on the many other species of animals and plants in the park. So yes, the National Parks Board culled elephant, and I explained that it was not for pleasure but a rational management tool. Such practices were a necessary management option that ensured the survival of healthy populations of elephants and guaranteed that the many other species of plants and animals that shared the Kruger National Park had an equal or better chance of survival as well. It was emphasised that this concern for maintaining balanced management was the accepted policy in South Africa. Somewhat stiffly, I suggested that I did not think that he, as a Swiss, had any moral right to pontificate to South Africans on the subject of wildlife management as we still had our African elephants while the Swiss had shot all their bears.⁴ Realising that I was deeply offended, he turned on his heel and walked off the deck without another word.

The Eighth Conference of the Parties

COP 8 was held from 2 to 13 March 1992 in Kyoto, Japan, and thanks to the Japanese hosts, proved to be less circus-like than the one in Lausanne as some control was exerted on overt NGO participation. However, their presence was as pervasive and influential as at the previous gathering. South Africa's delegation was made up of the same participants as COP 7 with the addition of George Barkhuizen, Director of the Orange Free State Department of Conservation. This time two South African NGOs were accredited: Howard Kelly from the S.A. Nile Crocodile Ranchers Association and Tony Ferrar of the Wildlife Society, who also represented the views of the Southern Africa Nature Foundation (now WWF-SA), the Endangered Wildlife Trust and the Rhino and Elephant Foundation.⁵

As expected, the two main proposals from South Africa concerned elephant and white rhinoceros. On arrival in Kyoto, Robbie Robinson, CEO of the National Parks Board, created a major furore by announcing publicly, several weeks after our national Cabinet had officially approved all the proposals to

be laid before the conference, that he personally no longer espoused the cause of selling ivory. This caused some distress to the Department of Environment Affairs and the national Cabinet, but more especially to the members of the delegation who were faced at every turn by other countries and especially anti-trade NGOs, who kept throwing Robbie's decision in our faces and demanding why we were asking for Appendix II status for our elephant when 'The head of your National Parks is against trade.'

Despite the fact that this was not exactly what Robbie had said, some of the NGOs exploited this statement and made it uncomfortable for those of us representing South Africa. Making the best of an unfortunate situation, the delegation, realising that there was huge opposition to the holding of our elephant populations on Appendix II, released a statement slightly modifying our proposal. I quote:

With reference to the South African proposal to hold its elephant population on Appendix II, South Africa wishes to bring to the attention of the delegates to this Conference of the Parties that, subject to the acceptance of the Proposal, and in recognition of the continued sincere concern over the possible negative effects of the ivory trade, South Africa will continue to forbid any import or export of ivory or ivory products until the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Despite the excellent supporting document by Anthony Hall-Martin submitted again by South Africa (this was openly acknowledged by members of the CITES secretariat as one of the finest documents ever to have been placed before CITES), numerous sincere speeches given by ministers from Zimbabwe, Namibia, Malawi and Botswana, and our own demonstration of flexibility (encouraged by Richard Leakey from Kenya who professed support for our decision) the downlisting proposal was again doomed from the start. A series of speeches were delivered against the southern Africa elephant proposals, led by Kenya, supported enthusiastically by France (which had put great pressure on the Francophone African countries to vote against all elephant downlisting proposals), the United Kingdom and the European Union. After discussion that stretched out over eight days, we decided to withdraw our elephant proposal and recommended to the Cabinet that we do not withdraw our reservation against listing South Africa's population on Appendix I.

South Africa's proposal to have the white rhinoceros downlisted to Appendix II

This time the proposal, written by the NPB, to downlist South Africa's white rhinoceros to Appendix II was not lost due a clerical error, as had happened at COP 7, and neither were the submissions from the other southern African states. In fact, our submission, prepared by Martin Brooks, was so appreciated by our colleagues from the other southern African states that Zimbabwe, scheduled to be the first to address the conference, to our surprise deferred to South Africa for the launching of the discussion. It fell to me to deliver our prepared address which, naïvely, I thought was well received. It led to a very vigorous and usefully spirited debate and was clearly supported by Martin Holdgate, the chairman of the session, who ended his positive comments on the South African proposal by severely criticising the media which had, en bloc, at the end of the elephant debate, literally deserted the hall thus demonstrating their preference for matters about elephant.

Once again Kenya led the contrary view, while giving South Africa some degree of praise for its achievements, as did the United States delegation, although it too was pointedly against the proposal. We insisted the matter go to the vote and the proposal was defeated by 60 against and 11 votes in support. There were 31 abstentions. This was perceived by us as progress, as there were obviously a number of countries that would have been expected to vote against the proposal that had studied the submission, given thought to it, felt that we had a convincing case and therefore simply abstained. In fact, some states were deeply distressed by the trend of populist pressure against the proposal and the Swiss delegation, to my amazement, chipped in by stating that it was not happy with procedures and remarked that 'it would appear that the Berne Criteria are required to be followed only by countries that lie south of the Zambesi'.⁶

With that result, all the other southern African states withdrew their proposals but joined us in proposing that trade in wildlife products could be beneficial. After a lively debate, a resolution was put forward and was recognised by the COP that commercial trade may be beneficial to the conservation of species and ecosystems when carried out at levels that are not detrimental to the survival of the species in question.

There were times when those members involved in the debates were quite stressed especially when faced with emotional arguments. There were serious criticisms of South Africa and its military which was accused of being

responsible for trafficking in poached ivory and rhino horn for the benefit of its personnel and also for raising funds for the support of Jonas Savimbi's UNITA movement, which was involved in a rebellion in Angola.⁷

The Ninth Conference of the Parties

By the time of COP 9, which was held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida during November 1994, the members of the delegation had already suffered a certain amount of trauma during their preparatory meetings. Robbie Robinson had experienced hostile approaches from international NGOs about the National Parks Board's elephant culling operations, as well as the board's proposal to sell ivory, and he was very sensitive about discussions on both issues. He was determined to go ahead with a renewed proposal, effectively similar to previous submissions once again suggesting that South Africa would not trade in any ivory until a CITES agreement on the global trading system had been finalised, but had amended the proposal as follows in summary:

International trade in elephant hides

The sale of elephant hides derived from animals culled during the management of Kruger National Park, had in the past contributed towards the income of the park. This represents a legitimate use of a natural resource. [There followed a detailed review of how hides were treated and to whom the hides would be sold.]

The amended proposal concluded by stating that if approved as amended, South Africa would withdraw its long-standing reservation on the Appendix I listing.

Prior to the selection of the South African delegation, the preparatory committee, chaired by the Department of Environment Affairs, met several times and having taken note of the presence of national ministers from several countries at COP 8, had decided to invite Dawie de Villiers, the current Minister of Environment Affairs, to accompany the delegation. It was thought that politicians were seeing CITES as a conference deserving attention.

The official delegation, led by De Villiers, would include Robbie Robinson (to present the elephant proposal), George Hughes (to present two proposals, the first written by Dave Blake of the NPB, to amend the resolution on the harvesting of South Africa's Nile crocodile population from a previously approved quota system to a ranching proposal, which posed no problems; and second, the proposal for the downlisting of white rhinoceros to Appendix II).

In committee the proposal to move the white rhinoceros to Appendix II had been amended, somewhat reluctantly, to match the submission by the National Parks Board, by adding a clause that stated: 'for trade in live animals and products other than horn.' Other members of the delegation were Pieter Mulder, Transvaal Nature Conservation, Johan Neethling, Cape Nature Conservation and Herman Grove from the Department of Environment Affairs.

Robbie Robinson continued to endear himself to the NPB by suggesting, at the final meeting with the minister, through whom we now sought Cabinet approval for the proposals from South Africa, that we should not submit the rhino proposal in case it jeopardised the National Parks elephant proposal, adding that if we insisted, he might withdraw from the delegation. That threw the cat among the pigeons, and the other members, certainly including me, took exception to this preposterous suggestion. At least one of us suggested that such a move might not be a bad idea, given the problems that he had caused the delegation in Kyoto. The minister entered the fray, calling for calm and stating that he supported all the proposals and that all would go to the Cabinet for approval, which was given.

The entire delegation anticipated a gathering of NGOs that would outmatch all previous conferences and indeed that proved to be the case. Fort Lauderdale was awash with NGOs, the majority of which were composed of single-issue conservationists; and of those, the wealthiest and most influential were anti-sustainable use lobbyists from the United States and Europe.

These groups shared a number of characteristics that made me and my colleagues very envious. They appeared to have enormous resources and brought large delegations, including full-time lawyers and spin doctors, who produced regular daily information sheets for their loyal supporters. The publications were very self-supporting and put forward statements that were colourful interpretations of the outcomes of committee debates. A friendly veterinarian was heard asking whether we had all attended the same committee. He had my full agreement and I assured him that he had better get used to the rather strange interpretations of the discussions that were made by many of these NGOs.

It cannot be assumed that all NGOs were ill-informed. Our delegation enjoyed several private meetings with the leaders of the Humane Society of the United States who were, in many cases, generous with their praise for the conservation achievements of South Africa. However, in a civilised and courteous manner they disagreed vehemently with our national policy of sustainable use and abhorred the idea that we would kill elephants for management purposes. The

innumerable and more frantic single-issue environmentalists did not have the same debating abilities as the larger groups, but were far more vocal, in one's face and emotional about their particular interests. It was a challenging two weeks.

A favourable surprise

Robbie's elephant proposal was the prime source of ire against South Africa and after a week of debates and quite disappointing discussions with representatives of other countries it seemed certain that the conference would not accept it. The white rhinoceros proposal appeared doomed to the same fate and our core group was quite despondent. Robbie spent little time with Johan, Herman, Pieter and me, but seemed to favour the presence of the minister.

A few days before the end of discussions and before the elephant proposal had come before the plenary for a vote, Robbie simply disappeared from the scene and, to the total bewilderment of the delegation, departed the conference. We only found out that he had gone when a member of the US delegation (which was huge and included no fewer than thirty legal advisers, including some delightful personages whom we got to know quite well as a result of seating logistics, as South Africa's team and that of the US were seated close together in the plenary hall) found our group and asked whether Robinson could come to the US headquarters room to speak to the US Secretary for the Interior, Bruce E. Babbitt.

Taken completely by surprise we suggested that perhaps our minister, Dawie de Villiers, would do. We soon discovered that he had also departed from the conference. The envoy insisted that the matter was important and, in the absence of the other two, it fell to my lot to visit the Secretary. Clutching a file containing South Africa's proposals, off I went at the appointed hour. I had no idea what the subject might be as I entered the palatial room. The Secretary was sitting at a huge desk with no fewer than twenty legal advisers standing around him. All this was somewhat intimidating.

Babbitt welcomed me warmly and after a few pleasantries, including high praise for South Africa's conservation achievements, he cut to the chase and announced that, despite the empathy of their delegation towards our elephant proposal, he regretted to inform me that the United States would not support it. He then added, I thought a little insensitively, that he knew that this meant the proposal would never pass and bade me farewell. That rather annoyed me. He seemed a little confused when I did not stand up and depart but instead asked

him to tell me why this was the case. After all, he had demonstrated admirable and unexpected courtesy personally to inform us of the decision and I felt that it was therefore desirable that I carry their reasons back to my colleagues and Cabinet.

He did not answer, so I threw caution away, and launched into an attack on the United States policy of banning all commercial use of wildlife. I found it astonishing that this was in such sharp contrast to South Africa's policy. As the US was a leader of free enterprise, I explained that I could not understand how it could possibly object to our policy. I took the opportunity to explain that South Africa had embarked on the use of wildlife as an economic asset and attracted literally hundreds of private landowners into a public/private partnership, creating one of the most progressive and successful wildlife industries in the world. In so doing the conservation agencies of South Africa had recreated the wealth of diversity of wildlife that had been almost entirely destroyed by the end of the nineteenth century, an almost direct parallel of the destruction of large mammals in North America. I concluded by stating that South Africa's wildlife achievements were not simply a product of emotionalism, but of a serious conviction that wildlife was an essential and growing asset to the well-being of our country. He heard me out in silence, but I noticed that I had the surprised attention of the entire room.

Babbit answered quietly that the decision had been made in Washington and he was sorry that it caused distress, but that was the end of the matter. I then stood up and asked him 'What about the rhinoceros proposal?' He replied that the answer was regrettably the same and again I asked what the reason was. What could the US possibly find objectionable in white rhinoceros being placed on Appendix II which would facilitate the export of surplus animals? I couldn't help emphasising that the existence of every southern white rhinoceros in the world was the result of our hard work and I found it hard to accept that the United States could not support our downlisting proposal.

Turning round, Babbit called over one of the lawyers, who had always been extremely friendly in sessions, and asked him whether it would be possible to give consideration to my request. The lawyer smiled and asked if I had a copy of our submission, which I smartly handed over to him. He promised he would review it that evening and discuss his conclusions with the Secretary. I was ushered out with smiles all round. This was a relief after my outburst and even more so that evening when our US legal colleague came over at dinner and said that if we withdrew the elephant proposal, the United States would back our proposal to have white rhinoceros placed on Appendix II for the purposes

of live sale. The next morning, our core group drafted a statement for the plenary session withdrawing Robbie's elephant proposal. At the appropriate time I stood up and read out the statement, which was worded as follows:

Mr Chairman, at this point South Africa sees no advantage in pursuing this debate. We are convinced of the fears for elephant of our fellow African states and do not wish to aggravate these further. Our proposal was made for the best possible reasons and in full compliance with the terms of this convention.

We are grateful indeed for the recognition of the endeavours of our conservation agencies and appreciate the support and understanding shown by colleagues from fellow parties and many non-government organisations. We thank them.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to our fellow African states who, although disagreeing with our proposal, have similarly listened with courtesy and friendship. It is our intention to make every effort to improve understanding and communications with states to the North of us.

For our delegation it has been a privilege and honour to serve our new and democratic country and, in the spirit of participation advocated by our President, Nelson Mandela, South Africa withdraws its proposal (Hughes, 1995b).

As I concluded, the entire hall, 92 country delegations and NGOs, several hundred people, all rose as one, cheering and applauding our statement. Our new President, Nelson Mandela, I hope would have forgiven me for calling him into the debate because that emotional moment nearly overwhelmed our team as we bathed in the mass approval of the world at CITES.

The US delegation spokesman rose immediately and endorsed our statement with almost equally emotional praise for South Africa's conservation achievements and ended by saying that in view of these achievements the US delegation would be endorsing the South African proposal on white rhinoceros. When a vote was called for, South Africa carried the rhinoceros downlisting proposal by a landslide. As we reflected on the irony that Robbie's desire to have the rhino proposal withdrawn in the interest of the elephant proposal actually resulted in the NPB's proposal being accepted, someone asked where Robbie and the minister were. Both had disappeared without a trace or remark to any other member of the delegation.

A blast from the past

It was only when we arrived home weeks later that we realised that there had been yet another attempt to wrest some of Natal's best protected areas from the care of the NPB and transfer them to that of the National Parks Board. I am delighted to record that the KwaZulu-Natal press did not hesitate to express its opinion of that attempt and it was best summed up by Napier Nunn, cartoonist of the *Natal Mercury*. The attempt failed again.



The Natal press rallied to support the NPB when the National Parks Board suggested once again that it would be prepared to take control of some of Natal's protected areas and declare them as national parks

All in all, the delegation returned in an optimistic spirit, feeling that our defence of, and appeal for, support for the policy of sustainable use was making progress against the tide of animal rights activism. My personal opinion of the effectiveness of the CITES Convention was ambivalent at best and this view caused me to express some concerns (Hughes, 1995a) as to whether CITES had been a helpful tool or in fact a weapon being used to destroy sustainable use as a wildlife conservation strategy to the detriment of global wildlife resilience.

The Tenth Conference of the Parties

Encouraged as we were by the sympathetic showing at COP 9, there was a surge of interest in preparations for COP 10 to be held in Harare, Zimbabwe from 9 to 20 June 1997.

In 1995, a major gathering of scientists and professional conservationists from the formal sector, private sector rhino owners and representatives of the private wildlife industry, IUCN, South African environmental NGOs and the South African Police Service (SAPS), in the form of the Endangered Species Unit (ESPU), met to discuss the matter of sustainable use of wildlife with a focus on the use of ivory and also horn from white rhinoceros. It was unanimously agreed that the delegation would promote sustainable use as the declared policy of South Africa and this intention was accepted by Pallo Jordan, Minister of Environment and Tourism, as such an understanding had been written into the national Constitution.

These developments were encouraging as we had become aware that two of the internationally active animal rights bodies fiercely contesting any wildlife trade, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) had quickly started lobbying the new South African government. Both had established local representatives and begun to frequent the ministerial offices of the new politicians. It was matter of concern that these NGOs had started to offer significant sums of money to influential bodies concerned with the wellbeing of wildlife in South Africa, such as the National Parks Board and the ESPU of SAPS. To our horror, the local CEO of IFAW ended up serving as a trustee on the board of the ESPU Trust.

An alarming warning of what was to come was perceived when every CEO of state and provincial conservation bodies was called to Parliament in Cape Town to discuss the policy of sustainable use. We found the IFAW representative sitting with the newly formed Parliamentary Committee on the Environment. What appalled me was that the IFAW representative obviously had the ear of the chairperson of the meeting and was allowed to fire rather aggressive questions directly at my colleagues and me, with no apparent regard for the protocol of parliamentary meetings. He had every right to appear as an observer but should not have been permitted to enter the debate, so I objected and was dressed down by the chairperson for daring to question her rights.

Late in 1995, another meeting, which included fourteen organisations with an interest in sustainable use, was held at the headquarters of the National Parks Board in Pretoria. Each of them had been asked in writing by the Department

of Environment Affairs to express their opinion on proposed submissions to the forthcoming CITES COP 10. With one exception all agreed that South Africa should go forward with its intention to, once again, propose full downlisting of South Africa's white rhinoceros and elephant populations.

To my disappointment, Anthony Hall-Martin, the representative of the newly renamed SANParks, officially opted out of support for any approach to CITES, announcing that the policy of the new SANParks board did not support sustainable use and that his organisation would not attend the CITES COP. This was a totally unexpected change in direction for SANParks. The more cynical among us recognised this development as a possible consequence of a rumour that the board had accepted a large financial grant from IFAW. The CITES preparatory meeting, however, agreed that there should be four submissions to CITES COP 10:

- The downlisting of South Africa's elephant population to Appendix II with a zero quota on ivory;
- Alteration of the annotation on South Africa's Appendix II listing for its population of white rhinoceros. The purpose of this was to make known South Africa's intention to investigate the possibility of re-establishing a legal trade in products derived from rhinoceros
- Two other downlisting proposals involving floral species that should never have been scheduled on Appendix I because there was no trade in these species (both were moved to Appendix II).

The new proposal for white rhinoceros

Having received encouragement from the preparatory committee, the NPB was eager to resubmit a revised proposal to downlist the white rhinoceros to Appendix II without qualification. Martin Brooks and I carefully rewrote and updated the previous submission adding a codicil that we were seeking the downlisting in order to trade internationally in products derived from rhinoceros, including rhino horn (Hughes and Brooks, 1996). Knowing that we were faced with a problem with respect to finding suitable (if eager) buyers of horn we added to the motivation that, if the proposal was approved at CITES, South Africa would not trade in rhino horn for a period of two years. By the time of COP 11 in 1999, we expected to have made progress in negotiations with prospective buying countries and would bring a proposed trading system to the next COP for their consideration.

The fact was that we were on the horns of a dilemma. As far as trade in rhinoceros products was concerned, all rhinoceros remained on Appendix I and there was significant resistance to any form of trade in rhino horn. Thus, there was a public relations problem facing any country that might be open to trade in such products. It was felt, in order to open doors to negotiation, approval of the downlisting proposal would signal that CITES members approved the possibility of trade and this would impart a degree of confidence to those countries wishing to enter into exploratory negotiations.

The elephant proposal

Shortly before the CITES meeting Minister of Environment Affairs, Pallo Jordan, withdrew the elephant submission. The plans to do that may have led to the resignation of Robbie Robinson as CEO of SANParks in 1996. The withdrawal of the proposal did not go down well with the SADC countries,⁸ many of which were preparing submissions to downlist their elephant populations. This move came as a shock to the delegation and to me, but not as much of a shock as the fact that the delegation was going to be greatly expanded to eighteen. In addition to this increase no fewer than six South African NGOs received accreditation. The head of delegation would be Peter Mokaba, the Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. It was a little worrying not only that I was the sole survivor of the South African delegations at the previous three COPs who had stood together and fought for our sustainable use proposals, but also that now we had as head of delegation, a fiery politician whose main claim to fame was, from 1993, his use of the slogan 'Kill the boer, kill the farmer'.⁹

My attendance at CITES COP 10 will be remembered for two significant misjudgements, the first of which was my belief that the appointment of Mokaba, as the head of delegation, was not going to turn out well for us. However, when we all gathered in Harare, we found that he had read and fully grasped the import of all the papers prepared for the meeting.

Furthermore, he was absolutely determined that we would get the rhino proposal passed. He organised meetings every morning and saw to it that each and every member of the delegation took responsibility for lobbying other delegations, ensuring that the aim of the proposal was fully understood, and that each delegation lobbied should indicate whether they would support or oppose the proposal. Peter himself committed his time to working on the African delegations. He brought the spice of a newly appointed ANC Cabinet

member to the political mix and demonstrated a passion that could barely be matched by many of us. He was also committed to ensuring that the entire delegation, including the South African accredited NGOs, acted as a team, organising a number of informal gatherings where he engineered a mutually supportive group. It was a refreshing and exciting time for us all. To a large degree all the effort was successful as his support for the rhinoceros proposal was clearly evident and understood at all the committee meetings.

We became more and more optimistic as the time for the important plenary session approached. At this stage we had amassed an impressive list of responses to the rhinoceros proposal and were very comfortable with the support indicated. The Department of Environmental Affairs had prepared excellent papers and pamphlets and had given well-attended presentations which, in the main, received positive responses.

It fell to Peter and me to address the plenary session for the final vote and here I confess to the second error made at COP 10. We knew from all our lobbying that the United States delegation was not going to support the rhino proposal but that they were not hostile to it.¹⁰ Other main objectors appeared to be the European Union, Hungary and Australia, the last country displaying a superior and sanctimonious rejection of a national policy on sustainable use. This was appalling to us as most of the Australian delegation were, as individuals, very supportive of the proposal and it had been Australians who had managed to achieve acceptance of the concept of crocodile farming at past COPs.

When the time came to vote, Peter asked me whether we should ask for a secret vote. Our expectations of support stood at 95 delegations, which far exceeded the required number of votes to carry the day. Naïvely we believed that a vote promised from a delegation would be a vote honoured and we agreed that a secret ballot was not necessary. The chairman of the plenary put it to the vote. The atmosphere in the hall was electric as the hands went up and were counted by staff of CITES. This procedure was of concern to us as it was poorly executed and somewhat shambolic. It took far too much time and some delegations who appeared to be supporting our proposal pulled their hands down during the process, causing more uncertainty as to whether their votes had been counted. The proposal was endorsed by 60 countries, 32 were against and there were 14 abstentions. We sat there stunned as the supportive votes required to amend an appendix listing must reach 66% of votes registered by members and this totalled 65.2%.

The logic of this sort of vote boggles the mind because if one adds the 60 yes votes to the 14 abstentions (that were clearly not rabidly against the proposal), we received both the real, and at worst perhaps the indifferent support of 74 countries out of 92, or 80%. Peter Mokaba and I sat shocked rigid at having lost. Neither of us could believe what had happened. Then we became angry as we had been promised so much. I fixed my eyes on the nearby Tanzanian head of delegation, a SADC member, who voted no, in spite of having personally promised Tanzania's unswerving support to both Peter and me. I rose and walked over to him. As I walked past a European country delegation (committed by agreement to support the European Union's collective pre-COP decision to oppose our proposal) the leader said to me 'George, you bloody fool, why didn't you call for a secret vote, we would have supported you.'

During my long career I can think of few occasions on which I have better earned that title. When I consider what has happened to Africa's rhinoceros populations since then, when, thanks to the animal rights activists, we are today, in 2021, even further removed from the possibility of establishing a legal trade, I feel devastated. It was one of the darkest moments in my life and I can do little else but apologise for a disgraceful failure of judgement.¹¹ South Africa has since that time lost nearly 10 000 rhinoceros to poaching, their horns still feeding the illegal trade at great cost to South Africa and those private partners that have invested so much passion and finance into helping South Africa reach unheard of heights of success in rhino conservation. Before this most recent poaching disaster struck, South Africa had reached a total of 22 000 living southern white rhinoceros from a starting population of fewer than 100 in 1900.

South Africa had restocked Africa with white rhinoceros and since watched helplessly as, under CITES rules, three sub-species of rhino were poached to extinction. South Africa, despite this onslaught, now has over 90% of the world's surviving rhino, our private wildlife farmers hosting nearly 60% of that total. The world has rewarded those of us who believe in the sustainable use of South Africa's wildlife with rejection and abuse.¹² In addition, the CITES secretariat has demonstrated its bias. Recently, the Director-General of CITES attended, and enjoyed, a public burning of rhino horn and ivory in Europe.¹³ This involved the wasting of a rich resource that, sensibly managed, could have been responsibly used to support conservation efforts throughout the world.

I deeply regret, southern Africa, that CITES, a convention intended to help conservation of wildlife has morphed into a less than trustworthy international

movement. CITES is, in my opinion, deeply flawed, with a secretariat that has created a bureaucratic nightmare which has probably doomed much of the world's, and especially Africa's, wonderful wildlife to an ignominious death. In the face of an overwhelming growth in human population, Africa has been denied the economic benefit and value of its wildlife resources. CITES requires a complete overhaul as conditions have been added over the years that make it almost an impossibility to change the appendix listing of species to allow for trade. The convention has done little to prove that its foundation statement that 'peoples and states are and should be the best protectors of their own wild fauna and flora' has any value or sincerity.

NOTES

- 1 The NPB had proposed that the white rhinoceros should be rescheduled to Appendix II to permit trade in products such as horn, but the submitted documents 'were received too late for inclusion as a result of a clerical error' (Jacques Berney, pers. comm.).
- 2 Anthony was an excellent biologist, an authority on elephant and a close friend, having studied and graduated together in 1967 at the University of Natal. During my sea turtle research travels I had the good fortune to visit him at Kazungu Game Reserve in Malawi where he had developed a passionate love of elephants. His enthusiasm for these magnificent pachyderms vibrated from every utterance he made. By 1989 Anthony was back in South Africa, a member of the National Parks Board staff and a founder member of the Elephant and Rhino Foundation, an NGO with a balanced conservation approach to wildlife in general.
- 3 From the early 1980s all small elephants captured alive during the culls and referred to as orphans were made available for translocation to other conservation bodies like the NPB and in 1982, we received our first group.
- 4 At a conservation conference in KZN in 2017 a European environmental lawyer, while discussing the legal status of wildlife in the European Union, told the gathering about the introductions of large mammals back into European states from which they had been extirpated. I told him about the Swiss bears and asked whether they were being reintroduced to Switzerland. He told us that they had been introduced, but had all been shot by Swiss farmers within two years. So much for morality. There are still no bears in Switzerland whereas we now have far too many elephants.
- 5 It is worth noting that all the NGOs that Tony represented were pro-sustainable use and Tony's function was to garner support for the South African proposals. At the time of writing, every one of these NGOs has shifted their stances to oppose, or appear indifferent to, trade in wildlife products. It would appear that the now unpopular view of supporting sustainable use has had a proven negative impact on fund raising and this has influenced their attitude on the issue.
- 6 The Berne Criteria refers to the rules that science and rational reasoning should underlie proposals to CITES to change listings on the appendices. South Africa's proposals have always met those criteria.
- 7 This did sting the South African government, which initiated a special commission of inquiry carried out by Justice Mark Kumleben. (see Chapter 5).
- 8 SADC is a regional economic community comprising sixteen member states mainly in southern Africa.

- 9 An inflammatory chant used before South Africa's first democratic elections to indicate disapproval of white South Africans who had descended from the original Dutch settlers and farmers.
- 10 The US delegation was now much more sympathetic to South Africa's policies, and this helped to soundly defeat a proposal by some African states to lift South Africa's elephant listing on Appendix II to Appendix I.
- 11 Some years after COP 10, I accompanied Pallo Jordan to a lunch in Canberra hosted by the Australian Minister of the Environment. As the meal finished, and as I was still very bitter about losing the rhinoceros proposal, I asked the Australian minister why federal policy on wildlife use differed so markedly from that practised by the Australian states such as New South Wales and Queensland, where thousands of red kangaroos are culled every year, their meat exported for dog food and their leather for football boots. This led to a very brisk discussion, which was just beginning to warm up, but Pallo Jordan probably prevented an international incident by telling me to back off. I should add that New Zealand also voted against our proposal at COP 10 and, to this day, I don't know how they can look a South African in the eye as New Zealand exports to China and other Asian countries, every year, tons of deer penises, a supposed aphrodisiac, from culled deer of various types. Since 1994 New Zealand has exported 1 700 tons of deer pizzlies earning \$68 million (Newshub.co.nz, 7 September 2021). It is worth noting that, despite ongoing claims from the righteous that using rhinoceros horn as an aphrodisiac in China was immoral, it has long been established that the Chinese do not, in fact, use it as such, but rather as an important component of traditional medicine.
- 12 Truth is a stranger to the lexicon of the extreme animal rightist and the worst of such behaviour is best illustrated by a Durban lawyer. When the NPB announced its intention to seek approval to investigate trade in rhinoceros products, a human rights lawyer announced her objection in the foulest terms by telling the SABC, in an eagerly sought public interview, that what the NPB was trying to do in selling horn was the equivalent of 'using soap made from the bodies of the Nazi holocaust victims' (Gowans, 1997). Such a comparison is simply obscene. To add to this gem, the lawyer in the same interview accused me of refusing to disclose the exact number of rhino horns (most of which were collected from animals who had died in the wild) in the NPB stockpile. She claimed that BBC Channel 4 investigators had established that the NPB held 60 000 horns (Gowans, 1997). This was a surprise to those of us responsible for the stockpile and, as leading authorities on rhino conservation, we would have to admit that, at two horns per rhino, it is unlikely that 30 000 rhinoceros had existed in total in southern Africa during the preceding century. The stockpile in 1996 was, in fact, 1 708 horns (Hughes and Brooks, 1996).
- 13 This burning of stockpiles of poached ivory, rhino horn and other valuable artefacts such as lion and leopard hides, to the applause of the animal rights brigade, was started by Richard Leakey in Kenya as a 'spontaneous rejection of any trade in wildlife products'. This always televised circus act which he has encouraged in numerous African and European countries; and has attended as the sort of accordion player (described by Churchill) who adds his consistently false tune to the occasion. Most recently Richard, in a strange warp of logic, has claimed that poaching of rhino in southern Africa is happening because South Africa wishes to trade in rhino horn.

SECTION 3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

C. CREATE NEW REVENUE STREAMS
AND PROMOTE ECOTOURISM

21

THE BOARD'S CAMPING GROUNDS, MOUNTAIN HUTS AND BUSH LODGES

NOT long after my retirement I was delighted to read a World Bank document that laid emphasis on KwaZulu-Natal. I was surprised to read the following:

It has been said that the Province of KwaZulu-Natal has a vibrant and diverse tourism industry. Zululand offers a tourism product that focuses primarily on nature. In part, this is as a result of the natural endowment of the area and its relative remoteness from the industrial centres of Durban and Gauteng. But it is also a reflection of the strong land management and conservation ethos that characterized the Natal Parks Board, the provincial parastatal that was formed in 1947 to manage the protected area system (Aylward and Lutz, 2003).

While it was very rewarding to read such remarks in a World Bank publication, the statement contained two wrong assumptions. First, it concentrated on Zululand and overlooked the bulk of the province, thus excluding the Drakensberg range and the coastline, both of which are major attractions for domestic and international tourism; and, second, it gave no hint of the drama and evolution that went into creating the NPB's tourism assets. This is a story worth recording.

Camping grounds

In the early years of the NPB little interest was shown in the development of camping grounds as such intrusions were not thought to be appropriate in the major Zululand reserves. There was a legendary tale of Colonel Vincent successfully resisting any idea of building a camping ground in Hluhluwe and Umfolozi until the day he retired in 1975.¹ As I write, his shade must be very comforted by the fact that even today there are no camping grounds in either of those reserves. Eventually, in the 1990s, a valiant attempt was made to create a camping complex near the Nyalasi Gate. Trevor Hornby (1974–1998) produced an admirable design, which received positive support, but a drought

at that time and the concomitant problems of guaranteeing a water supply kept putting the development on the backburner, where it remains today.

The domestic tourism market in Natal, however, soon ensured the development elsewhere in Zululand of significant camping grounds at Ndumu Game Reserve, Sodwana Bay, Mkuzi Game Reserve and Kosi Bay Nature Reserve. At St Lucia, camping developed into an industry as a result of its popularity as a fishing venue and the St Lucia Game Reserve eventually included a string of smaller camping grounds around the lake at Charters Creek, False Bay, Fanies Island and Cape Vidal.

The coast of Zululand provided some smaller and equally valuable camping sites that stretched from Kosi Bay Nature Reserve, Bhanga Nek, Mabibi, Mapelane, Richards Bay and Mlalazi Nature Reserves, all the way down the Natal coast as far as Port Edward. In the 1990s, a planned development included the more recently proclaimed protected area of Impenjati Nature Reserve. Just inland from the coast, Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve had a beautiful, but small, camping site.

In 1955, when it was run by Commander Tony Drower DSC (1953–1978) and his wife Pauline, I enjoyed, as a schoolboy from Estcourt High School, a fortnight participating in the then Wildlife Society's annual field naturalists' trip. This was a wonderful adventure for a group of budding naturalists, made memorable by being led by the today famous and late lamented Ian Garland, whose mad enthusiasm for nature I have already recorded (Hughes, 2012). Ian has a great deal to answer for as he was the inspiration that drove many game rangers and scientists into the NPB.

Most of the camping grounds had started as small sites normally accessed by locals, but as the demand increased and patrons were drawn from further afield, they grew in sophistication and price. When the NPB inherited former Department of Forestry lands in 1986, it added more camping grounds and found opportunities for the development of additional sites. Cape Vidal was already a popular destination (see Chapter 5) but was upgraded and expanded.

When, in 1971, the Department of Water Affairs decided to give the NPB responsibility for developing recreation opportunities around state dams, the Recreation Division was established, and it created extensive camping grounds around Midmar Dam at Howick, Albert Falls Dam, Wagendrift Dam near Estcourt, Spioenkop Dam near Ladysmith, Chelmsford Dam near Newcastle and Hazelmere Dam just north of Durban. The NPB also accepted other dams such as the Vryheid Dam, Pongola Dam, Woodstock Dam and Eshowe Dam, but never developed them extensively because the management of the dams by

Water Affairs resulted in massive fluctuations in water levels, making the dams unattractive to visitors. The Board also considered that the development of the necessary infrastructure was too expensive and too risky.

There is no doubt that the development of camping grounds made a significant contribution to the NPB's reputation and gave access to some beautiful pieces of unspoilt South Africa. Excluding wilderness trail camps, 29 camping sites were in existence in 1998, with many upgraded to include power points, laid-on potable water, access to storage deep freezers and other services.

The Drakensberg protected areas

The NPB's protected areas along the Drakensberg gained camping areas as well. Starting in the north of the mountain chain, the Mahai camping site at Natal National Park (long before it earned the Royal prefix), is certainly one of the most persistently popular and today this park contains another camping site in the Rugged Glen section. Further south more were added: Cathedral Peak, Culfargie, Monks Cowl, Injasuti and Hillside in Giant's Castle, Highmoor, Kamberg, Loteni, Vergelegen, Cobham, Himeville, Bushman's Nek and Coleford nature reserves. The extensive public access provided by these camping facilities made a significant contribution to the Drakensberg's eventual recognition as a World Heritage Site.

As new protected areas were established, camping sites were automatically planned for construction and were developed at Weenen Nature Reserve and Itala Game Reserve. The latter location proved a challenge as more and larger caravans began to arrive. The entrance road via Louwsburg, untarred in the beginning, proved too steep for comfort and caused many headaches, necessitating campers to access from the western boundary via the original dirt road.

The Drakensberg, for obvious reasons, attracted the more vigorous walkers of the population, such as those belonging to the mountain clubs, hiking and rambling clubs and other outdoor groups. In general, these visitors were disciplined, courteous, well behaved and loyal. Generations of campers have enjoyed the Mahai site at RNNP and the Mountain Club of South Africa had, and still has, a July camp to which mountaineers come from across the country and overseas. These wonderful camps are permitted to use a specially chosen site well away from the normal camping grounds. The July camps have been organised with love by such Mountain Club stalwarts as Kay Nixon and Rikki Abbott.

The July camp is an institution which I remember with gratitude and affection, despite the odd confrontation, as spirited mountaineers, such as Sherman Ripley, often found fault with the NPB's contribution and (always) aggressively informed local staff and Head Office of his displeasure. Sherman was a slight man, an excellent leader and a lifetime friend from my days as a ranger at Giant's Castle where he and his colleagues would invade my home at the gate of the reserve on Friday evenings. Despite some lively exchanges of opinion our personal relationship never suffered.

Sherman was also an active member of the mountain rescue group with which the NPB worked closely. The NPB staff's enthusiasm for the work of the rescue teams risking their lives also led to a little-remembered NPB contribution to the well-being of outdoor enthusiasts, especially those visiting the Drakensberg. Conscious of the costs involved in mountain rescue or other unfortunate events, the NPB introduced the special insurance levy, which all climbers and hikers paid. The moneys paid were invested in a unique fund that could be drawn upon by visitors who experienced an unfortunate, and all-too-often, very expensive accident. All participants were thus protected from the costs of having to be rescued by a helicopter. In 2013, at a celebratory dinner for the golden anniversary of the mountain rescue agreement between the Mountain Club of South Africa and the South African Air Force Helicopter Squadron, the guest speaker drew the gathering's attention to the fact that only in KZN was there such an insurance fund. The NPB officer whose determination gave rise to this achievement was the Chief Conservator of the Drakensberg, Mark Astrup (1966–1998).

Tales of Sodwana

To all the staff who built, supervised and managed the camping grounds around the province, I believe that those demonstrating the most impressive patience and tolerance must be those who managed St Lucia and Sodwana Bay. In the early days these coastal camping sites were primitive in the extreme, often merely a hole slashed out of the bush, and they attracted large families from the Transvaal and Orange Free State provinces often making their first excursion to the sea.

The most famous tale I remember hearing about in the 1960s was of a family who arrived in a lorry at Sodwana Bay to camp for the first time. The entire family was on the lorry, including the grandparents, the children, the servants (considered as part of the family but without direct benefits), a couple

of friends and several sheep, whose unhappy lot was to serve as food during the holiday. The tarpaulin, once off the lorry, served as the tent for everyone, including the sheep. The staff in those days had a torrid time trying to explain rules to visitors who were still mentally fighting the Boer War and, quite likely as an outcome of it, had virtually no money at all. The order of the day expected intense flexibility and tolerance from staff.

One of the best raconteurs of the early developing days of Sodwana Bay was John Daniel (1960–1994) who spent many wonderful years there as Warden and can be credited with the development of the camping grounds to a standard of which the NPB became immensely proud. This site eventually developed into one of the biggest money spinners in the NPB's camping chain. I was always surprised that John and his wife Pam survived to John's retirement in 1994.

Among a host of John's tales, I shall recount only two. The first was on a hot summer's day when John, walking through the very extensive camping ground, was passed by his own motorcar being driven by a camper. John raced after it and eventually found it parked in a small campsite. When he accosted the thief with some irritation, the miscreant calmly informed him, with a slightly hurt air, that it was hot, he had been at the store and had bought groceries, he was tired, and it was a long walk back to his campsite. And so, he explained, when he passed John's private garage and noted that the car's keys were in the ignition, he felt more than justified in 'just borrowing' the car. After that John made sure that staff removed the keys from all vehicles as a matter of principle.

The other tale started with piercing screams echoing through the campsite as a panting camper arrived at John's headquarters to inform him that a lady had been bitten by a black mamba. Driving to the scene John found the lady standing near one of the many pit toilets that served the camp in the early days, screaming blue murder and shouting that she was going to die. John rushed to her side and tried, without success, to calm her down, while at the same time asking where she had been bitten. By now half the camp had gathered around the screaming woman and had formed a substantial audience. In response she pointed to her backside and shouted 'There!!' John bent over but could see nothing on her robust legs and said so, prompting the woman to spin around, lifting her voluminous dress to expose what appeared to be several acres of pure white, naked backside to the stunned but appreciative crowd. John told me that it was not a pretty sight. Gathering his courage, he bent over and discerned a large red weal on one cheek of the backside. It did look painful.

John asked where the snake was. The near-hysterical woman pointed to the pit toilet and John rushed over, drawing his revolver as he gingerly opened the door. Peering around, John found no snake obviously in residence, so looked down into the pit and there, lying stone dead, on top of a significant heap of ordure was a mamba, well beyond any interest in biting backsides. Glancing again at the wooden seat of the toilet he noted that it sported a significant crack, and so the story was told.

As the lady had lowered her sizable bulk onto the seat, undoubtedly with a gentle sigh so common to all of us, the crack, reacting immediately to the added strain, had closed at high speed, catching a significant amount of flesh in a vice-like, and exceedingly painful, grip. The screaming had started as she leapt up in pain, looked past the toilet seat into the hole and saw the dead black mamba. It later transpired that it had been shot earlier that morning by a staff member who had flung the body into the pit toilet.

After fetching a first aid kit and, to the approval of the crowd, delicately treating the red weal with great circumspection and care, John saw the positive side of things and thanked the still-shuddering lady for bringing to his notice that it was time to empty the pit, which was routinely done using the local honeysucker. John was a very practical and pragmatic officer with a well-honed, indeed hilarious sense of humour.

During the NPB's fifty-year span, it developed no fewer than 29 formal camping and caravanning grounds, offering over 600 actual sites and having a total camping visitor capacity of 5 000 plus campers per day during peak season. Few other conservation agencies in South Africa achieved this intense level of camping provision and the popularity of the camping system did much to enhance the NPB's reputation for efficient and friendly service.

To tell the truth some strange letters of complaint were received from the coastal campsites. As CEO I received one directly from an outraged husband who claimed that his wife had been assaulted by a bull nyala on the front mudguard of his bakkie. This conjured up some startling images, which certainly made life interesting that morning. An apology was sent promptly.

It should be said that after 1990, when NPB policies were altered to ensure that any public service involving leisure time had to be run at no cost to the Board, a number of sites were closed down or transferred to the local municipality, if one existed nearby.

Mountain huts

All the mountain huts built and managed by the NPB were to be found in Giant's Castle Game Reserve.² Bill Barnes built the first mountain hut in 1956, soon to be named appropriately as Bill's Barn. It was a wood and iron, windowless, four-bed facility built under the main Giant's Castle massif (Barnes, 2003). Following its disappearance in a tornado in the late 1960s it was replaced with the stone and thatch Giant's Castle Hut (eight beds+) by Bill and Keith Meiklejohn. It had proved a popular and well-used facility for over thirty years until it was burned down. It has not been replaced.

Bill Barnes also built the Meander Log Cabin overlooking Meander Valley and after the original wood and thatch structure near the Pines was destroyed by fire it was replaced in the 1970s by the second Meander Hut of block and thatch. This rather lovely hut, built during Martin Schofield's tenure at Giant's Castle, was once again burned down, also after the NPB's day, and has not been replaced.

The Bannerman stone and thatch hut (eight beds+) remains today beneath Bannerman Face, which gives the hut a magnificent back-



Giant's Castle: Bill's Barn, 1960



Giant's Castle: mountain hut, 1968



Giant's Castle: original log and thatch meander hut, 1968



Giant's Castle: second meander hut, 1978

drop. This site was chosen by Bill and me and the hut was opened in April 1965. It remains today a popular destination for hikers and climbers but over the years has been seriously damaged on many occasions by raiding Basotho shepherds and poachers.



Giant's Castle: Bannerman hut, 1964

The Centenary Hut (eight beds+) was built of stone and iron with funding enthusiastically raised by Mervyn Gans and others, who were all members of the Natal branch of the Mountain Club of South Africa. The hut was erected to commemorate the club's centenary and was officially opened in September 1994. Sadly, it too was burned down after 1998.

To complete a rather sad tale of the buildings at the contour path level (2 000–2 500 metres) of the park it is worth recording that the Injasuti Cottage (burned down in 2018), built by Ranger Peter Hewson (1954–1978) in the late 1950s as an outpost overlooking the Injasuti Valley was occupied by a series of game rangers, including me in 1964 (Hughes, 2014), and eventually, after 1998, became available as a mountain hut.³ The NPB also inherited an old cottage (eight beds+) at the top of Mike's Pass, when it took over the management of the Cathedral Peak Forest Station. The house has since seen service as a mountain hut.

The oldest mountain hut of all was the Mont-aux-Sources hut on top of the Amphitheatre at RNNP. Funded and built by the Natal section of the Mountain Club and hence known as the Natal Mountain Club Hut (Pearse, 1989), it was heavily used for forty years or more following its opening in 1930. Over the years the depredations of the local Basotho rendered the hut unusable until the

NPB restored it in 1984 and protected it by making it a game guard outpost. Unfortunately, many years later, it is now a ruin.

Bush lodges

The first three bush lodges built by the NPB were all in Umfolozi Game Reserve thanks to the Warden, John Forrest (1963–1994), who had a brainwave. Umfolozi's original eight-bed camp with A-frame thatched units, Mdindini, had been built to serve as the launching base for wilderness trails. It was quite high maintenance and not particularly attractive. In 1976, John thought it could be improved by having a comfortable lounge in which the newly arrived trailers could socialise before heading out on a wilderness trail. Having access to some spare fencing poles, reeds and thatch, John built a quite splendid wood and thatch lounge overlooking the White Umfolozi River. It proved popular with the trailers arriving for their first night.

The success of the Mdindini lounge stimulated John to turn his mind to developing a bush lodge, a concept new to the NPB.⁴ A site to test the idea was found on a prominent bend in the White Umfolozi River, not far from the Cengeni Gate, the entrance to Umfolozi from Ulundi, in the far west of the reserve. Arguing that he needed another game guard outpost in the area, and again turning to the availability of some materials from other projects, such as poles from a completed fence and leftover cement, he proposed to David Cook (1963–1993), Chief Conservator North, that he should build a six-bed facility, with a small lounge and a kitchen, at Nhlolokhasana. A suitable level site overlooking the river and flanked by some modest white cliffs was chosen. It had stunning views upriver. Staff quarters would also be built for the guards and John thought that if visitors wanted to go for walks, one of the resident guards would accompany them, doing the job of a wilderness trail guide.

Nhlolokhasana proved a great success and not long after, in 1982, John thought of building a dedicated, and more discreet, public bush lodge in an isolated place. He envisaged a simpler structure than a hutted camp. The unit should be able to be hired on its own and the tariffs would be less expensive than those of the normal hutted camp. After again consulting David Cook, and getting the green light, John and some of his staff created, at very low cost, the first six-bed bush lodge. Once again, John and his team mustered materials close to hand, all local: wood, reeds and thatch. He built a winner. When I first saw the lodge, I was delighted with the structure and thought that the site on the heavily forested bend in the Black Umfolozi River, called Enselweni, was beautiful. John named it the Enselweni Bush Lodge. Alas, it



Umfolozzi Game Reserve: original Enselweni bush lodge, 1983

was to have a rather brief lifetime because the Demoina floods, which arrived with a vengeance in late January 1984, simply swept the entire bend in the river clean and removed every vestige of the bush lodge.⁵

The same fate befell the Mdindini Camp as the Demoina flood removed almost all trace of it. The only surviving remnant of that camp was part of the outdoor toilet, just the ceramic toilet base, embedded in a cement base over the pit. This scoured and cleaned white ceramic unit, standing alone, was quite a spectacle, stripped of its enclosure, seat, cistern, toilet rolls and all, on a site of total devastation. The remains were exposed on an open plain from which all the vegetation had been swept away and, up and down the river from the site, the floods had created an even greater tragedy by removing one of the most beautiful gallery forests of wild fig trees in any protected area in Zululand.



Ingwavuma River outside Ndumu Game Reserve showing massive damage from cyclone Demoina, 1984 (the normal river bed, just a few metres wide, can be seen to the lower right of the photograph)

Nhlolokhozana suffered the same fate, having been a popular venue and valued by visiting staff, who appreciated the beauty of the site, its wild atmosphere and remoteness from the hutted camp. It became a favourite among the scientists and on the day of the Demoina flood, Martin Brooks from the NPB's Research Section arrived in a brand-new sedan and parked it at the end of the road near a large donga leading down to the White Umfolozi River. One of the features of the camp was that you had to leave your vehicle some distance away and walk through the donga to reach the camp. Although the parking area was well above the normal level of the river, the Demoina flood water rose above the level of the donga to the parking area. Martin's new car was totally submerged for a couple of days, half filled with the fine silt carried by the river. It was a complete write-off. Martin, becoming aware of the rising flood water, fled the camp on foot, climbing the hill above it to safe ground while below him the now raging water wiped away all trace of the camp. The site was never used again.

Developing bush lodges

In one fell swoop all the NPB's bush lodges were wiped out and much of the staff's attention was devoted to cleaning up the mess caused by Demoina. However, once a degree of normality returned, thoughts began to focus once again on creating another bush lodge. Board members had become supportive of this concept but felt that if new bush lodges were to be built then they should be of an acceptable standard for public use. Of course, there arose the problem of financing the structures to a planned and acceptable safety standard, with all the safeguards required for public accommodation. These would cost considerably more than the modest structures that John and his team had built.

Once the board had decided that we should replace Enselweni Bush Lodge, a new site was found on the south bank of the Black Umfolozi River, a few kilometres upstream of the old and now bare site of the original. The NPB draughtsmen designed, in consultation with field staff, a new lodge, taking cognisance of the flood danger. Not only was a site chosen that was elevated above the river, but to make certain of the safety of users, each accommodation unit was built on stilts, raising the structures at least two metres above the ground. The new Enselweni Lodge would cater for eight guests and would have a free-standing lounge and kitchen with a viewing terrace. The terrace would also be built on stilts projecting over a high bank near the river, giving

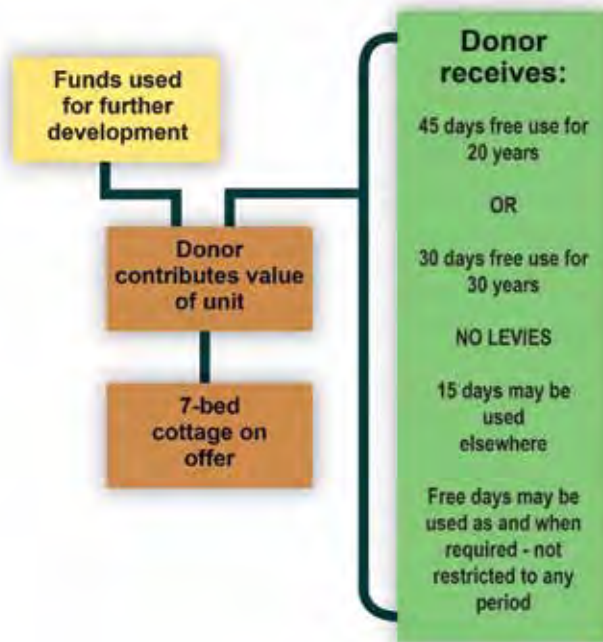
excellent views up and down the Black Umfolozi. Staff accommodation would be built away from the units and would host two staff members, one to assist in the catering for the visitors, who would have to bring all their own food and drink, and the other would serve as a wilderness trail guide available to take the visitors on day walks. The only problem following all this planning was the price of the new lodge, which was estimated at about R650 000, as the units had to be comfortably furnished with a fully equipped kitchen. The board felt that this model would attract family and friend groups ready to pay a slightly higher premium for the privilege of having a dedicated cook and trails officer at their disposal.

John Forrest mentioned this to a regular visitor and passionate lover of Umfolozi Game Reserve who, happily, was quite wealthy and the CEO of a company in Durban. He expressed interest in making a donation and, after arranging a meeting in Durban, David Cook and I went down to discuss the possibility with him. We were not optimistic about having the full cost donated. Happily, though, he was very enthusiastic, so much so that when we showed him the plans for the new lodge, he became very eager to explore the possibility of deriving some benefit for his family and friends. As a result of a vigorous and exciting discussion, a germ of a plan emerged. After further discussion with staff at Head Office we eventually came up with a proposal called the Joint Venture Scheme (JVS).

The Joint Venture Scheme

The scheme would accept a donation meeting the full construction value of a bush lodge development from either a single donor, or a group of donors, and in return would offer several options, one of which would permit the donor(s):

1. To use the camp free of charge for either thirty days per year for thirty years or,
2. To make use of the camp for 45 days per year for twenty years.
3. To make bookings in advance of the normal six-month lead time afforded to all other bookings for hutted camps.
4. To book the camp for whatever periods of time desired, subject to availability.
5. At the end of the selected period the donor would be given a preferential offer to renew the Joint Venture for a similar repeat donation.
6. The bookings were not transferable between lodges without the approval of the NPB.



NPB Joint Venture Scheme, which raised millions of rands for investment in facilities from 1982

Not surprisingly, the offer was snapped up by the Umfolozi enthusiast as he and his family or friends would have a lodge at their disposal over some 900 days into the future. They were undoubtedly pleased with the bargain as the price of renting the bush lodge would certainly escalate several times in the years ahead.

The proposal went to the board and was approved. Subsequently, by 1998, twenty six- or eight-bed lodges had been built, providing the NPB with well in excess of 120 paying tourist beds per day across the province. Not only were all these lodges built at no cost to the NPB, thus saving R16 000 000, but the JVS was useful in attracting funding, on the same conditions, for the luxury Tendele Lodge at RNNP. In fact, a major expansion of the Tendele Hutted Camp was entirely funded through the JVS. It also proved invaluable in solving a critical public relations problem in the fisherman's camp at Cape Vidal (see Chapter 5) and proved useful when the board decided to provide blocks of fully serviced and electrified camping sites at Sodwana Bay and elsewhere.

One of the most energetic supporters of the JVS was Andrew Ewing, a conservation-minded investment manager who, eager to support the NPB and help improve its income, encouraged some of his clients to donate towards the building of bush lodges. Many did and made full use of the well-earned booking allocations enabled through their donations by allowing their friends and relatives to benefit from the donor days.

Every silver lining has a cloud

One elderly and conservative donor, however, insisted that the guests to her donated camp make a list of every minor problem and small criticism of equipment or staff. This activity, in my view, was taken to extremes and became very irritating as the list of complaints were always mailed to Head Office for my personal attention. When this constant flow of slight dissatisfactions grew bothersome, I wrote to her asking her to stop or the board would buy the camp back. The complaints stopped forthwith, but a grieved response necessitated a personal visit to calm a few ruffled feathers.

All this effort was worthwhile as the bush lodges have hosted many thousands of overseas visitors as well as domestic tourists and by 1998 had



Hluhluwe Game Reserve: Munyawani bush lodge donated by Kate Sanderson



Umfolozi Game Reserve: Pat Goss (board chairman) and staff at opening of Hlathikhulu bush lodge, 1995

made a significant financial contribution to the rapid rise in the NPB's revenue stream. The bush lodges were also of immense value to the Board as public relations assets when visiting donors and businessmen were inspired to donate cash or services. John Forrest and Dave Cook's contribution to the success of the NPB went far beyond what they had expected at the time of the first small improvement to Mdindini and the first Enselenweni Bush Lodge. Their enthusiasm was catching.

NOTES

- 1 Colonel Vincent showed considerable concern for the safety of visitors and was not impressed by some Zululand rangers clandestinely smuggling lionesses into Umfolozi.
- 2 Mountain huts or refuge are commonly found in isolated spots where there are hiking and climbing activities. Normally they are very basic structures with little convenience. Scottish huts in the Grampians are known as bothies and in the 1950s had absolutely nothing inside them but shelter and, given the normal inclement weather, for that they were invaluable.
- 3 In 1979, a very promising and likeable young ranger, Jonathan C. Clark, was tragically killed just outside the Injasuti cottage, along with his girlfriend and dog. They were struck by a bolt of lightning while waving goodbye to some friends who had spent the weekend with them. Jonathan had been a ranger for only six months.
- 4 John Page, Director of the NPB, was at the time not in favour of the idea of bush lodges and found out about the unauthorised developments only when he arrived with some guests and was invited to have tea at Mdindini. The guests all congratulated John Page on a brilliant development while enjoying the view of the White Umfolozi River from the new thatch

and wood lounge. The experience and the guests changed his mind. John Forrest was very relieved at this turn of events because he feared for his future having been told some months before to forget the whole idea (John Forrest, pers. comm.)

- 5 Demoina was an astonishing cyclone that swept through Madagascar, southern Mozambique and eastern South Africa in early 1984. Over three days the cyclone, while weakening, deposited 950 mm of rain on Natal and some rivers recorded unbelievable quantities of water. One record of stream flow in the Pongola River indicated an estimated 16 000 cubic metres/second. A momentous phenomenon, it was rated as three times the volume described as a hundred-year event. Not surprisingly, the damage that ensued was staggering with bridges being swept away from nineteen river systems. NPB staff were busy for weeks afterwards using boats to rescue local communities, visitors to Board areas and other stranded people. Ginger Skinner flew two of us to Ndumu in the NPB's Cessna 180 and the flood plain from St Lucia all the way across Maputaland to Ndumu Game Reserve was one huge lake of water. The Pongola River filled the newly constructed Jozini Dam to 87% and, so quickly did the water rise, that the Department of Water Affairs opened all the water sluices because they feared for the stability of the wall.

WHEN those drafting the original legislation to set up the NPB considered what its responsibilities should be, they definitely foresaw the value of the protected areas as tourist attractions and the role of tourism in promoting conservation. However, they could not have grasped in detail what would happen in the longer term.



Value of tourism for conservation and communities

In 1947, the only protected area in Natal that contained anything resembling a camp was Hluhluwe Game Reserve and this consisted of two simple cottages constructed in 1933, similar to those built in Kruger National Park at the same time. These were some of the earliest accommodation units ever built

in a protected area in South Africa. In 1934, to these cottages was added an unpretentious row of ten concrete thatched rondavels with a communal kitchen.¹ Hluhluwe therefore hosted the first huttet camp in Natal. Another ten rondavels were added in 1950 (Charlton-Perkins and De la Harpe, 1995) and this simple collective facility served a loyal group of Natalians and early adventurist tourists for sixty years, almost without change. From 1993, following renewal and upgrading, it continues to do so.

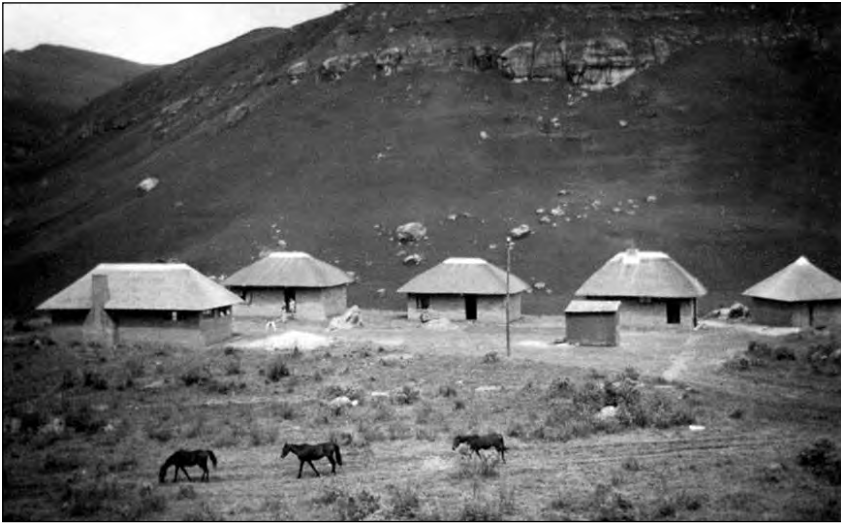


Hluhluwe Game Reserve: rest huts, 1950 (EKZNW photo library)

The first phase: simple and cheap

There was initially no real strategic thought given to tourist development, but soon after the launch of the NPB the first steps were taken to place some overnight accommodation on suitable sites. This strategy, as a result of very limited budgets, more or less set the mould of a small number of thatched rondavels or ‘squaredavels’ being built wherever the officer-in-charge felt there was a reachable site. The first endeavours did not have any strategic financial goals, but were seen rather as camps where the local taxpayers might gain access to their protected areas at very little cost. The objectives were, without doubt, seen as a public service and a public relations exercise to make taxpayers feel that they were getting a return on the NPB’s costs. The early camps were invaluable in building the reputation of the NPB and were enjoyed

at incredibly cheap prices by any standard. Each unit was simply furnished and had access to a communal kitchen and outdoor barbecue or *braaiplek*, so visitors could have the use in beautiful sites, of accommodation that was able to cater for entire families. The amount charged in the 1960s in the Drakensberg parks was 50 cents/person/night, with children under twelve staying free, and the services of a cook.



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: start of hutted camp, c.1950 (B. Fitzsimmons)



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: camp, 1955 (Bill Barnes)



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: camp, 1966



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: camp extension, 1997



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: camp, 2018

The theme of simple accommodation and public service continued for many years as small, hutted camps were built at Tendele in RNNP, Kamberg, Loteni, Coleford, Vergelegen, Oribi Gorge, Ndumu, Umfolozi, Mkuzi and a number of sites around Lake St Lucia. During the apartheid years a small camp was built at Masinda in Umfolozi, purportedly for people of colour, but it was never successful for that purpose due to a lack of demand and it was eventually simply added without qualification to the schedule of camps. After 1982, when the NPB decided to ignore apartheid rules, such a concern did not matter anymore.

Apart from the early suggestion by Douglas Mitchell that tourism could generate revenue for the NPB, the idea of profit did not appear to feature much in anyone's thinking. The contents of the small curio shops were limited to minimal quantities of books, maps and postcards. Colonel Vincent was against the stocking of any form of food or drink. He felt that this would lead to conflict, as some visitors would probably come ill-prepared and might become demanding. If you forgot the beer, you were out of luck unless you trekked back to the nearest town. And, in those days, the roads leading to the protected areas anywhere in South Africa were generally not an invitation to travel. If one came to the NPB's protected areas one had to bring everything that was needed or do without.

A possible additional reason for the lack of lucrative opportunities was the appointment, as camp managers, of ageing and retired staff who were hospitable to a fault, but not necessarily skilled in the stocking of goods or price setting. Some staff, however, like Ken and Sue Tinley (1955–1973) at Giant's Castle, and W.R. (Fluffy) and Eve Trauseld (1954–1976) and Duro and Dalmae Thole (1966–1985) all at Tendele, RNNP proved to be gifted gardeners and laboured passionately to turn the bare, inhospitable sites into areas of great beauty. These endeavours were often taken for granted.

From 1963, following the departure of Colonel Vincent for Switzerland, John Geddes Page introduced a slight change in policy as John felt that the NPB should provide for families requiring a bit more privacy and sophistication. He invited a very conservation-conscious architect and artist, Gordon Cunningham, from a local Pietermaritzburg architectural firm, Franklin, Garland and Gibson, to give thought to designing some family units with a larger and perhaps more adventurist format.

Gordon was talented indeed and was fiercely possessive of his designs. Starting from his first engagement, he designed buildings suitable and appropriate for each site. He set to with enthusiasm and produced some

lovely cottages for Loteni Nature Reserve, kitchens and all. These units were individually planned and of a scale and impact that were entirely suitable for the large open spaces of Loteni. They fitted the environment perfectly, being set somewhat apart from the original little ‘squaredavel’ camp. John Page, with a character that had a hint of the artist, declared himself very satisfied with Gordon’s work.²



Loteni camp, 1955 (Peter Hewson)



Loteni camp complex, 2020

Then the trouble began. A few years later John decided that some large cottages should be added to the Giant's Castle camp. In order to save money, he instructed the NPB's Chief Technical Officer (Building) Royce Horner (1964–1981), to find a suitable site, on which one of the Loteni designs was constructed. Gordon Cunningham, when he found out about John's actions, was justifiably furious as, in his opinion, this design was suitable for Loteni but not for the Giant's Castle camp, which was set in a much more mountainous environment. A serious and vociferous argument took place, to the distress of all, as Gordon had earned great admiration and the NPB did not wish to lose his services. However, a compromise was reached and a second unit with a flat, projecting, grass-covered roof was erected, which was much more adventurous in design. Gordon's intention was to create for the visitors a view from the lounge that would imitate what might be seen from a San rock shelter. The flat grassed roof, at the same time, reduced the impact of the building on the site itself.

The new units differed remarkably from the existing buildings and once built, they were promptly named the Cave and the Cathedral. Gordon never fully forgave John for his presumption in jumping the gun without discussing his intentions. Happily, as time passed, the encroaching vegetation in the area managed to reduce the new units' initial impact on the environment. John made the same mistake at Tendele Camp in RNNP, but this time placed the two new Loteni-style cottages at a slight distance from the old camp and on more suitable sites.

Giant's Castle Lodge

In 1975 came a watershed moment, as the Administrator and Executive Committee of Natal, having become aware of the building of a VIP guest unit at Skukuza in the Kruger National Park, decided that there was no way that Natal should not match that achievement, and approved the colossal sum of R200 000 to build a luxury lodge at Giant's Castle.

The site chosen was the original picnic area, at a slightly higher elevation than the camp, with a stunning view of the Giant's Castle massif. Gordon was again chosen as the architect and his design extended the cave concept, with a flat grass-covered roof, but the entire building was on a much greater scale. The lodge had three en suite bedrooms and lacked nothing, having a spacious lounge, and raised dining room, complete with a wine cellar, and accommodation for a resident cook. Gordon had carefully designed the building to incorporate large living rocks of sandstone as part of the internal

walls, creating an atmosphere not unlike that of a genuine sandstone cave. Eventually no expense was spared. All the artworks were original and the furniture was custom made of indigenous woods. It would be a magnificent achievement.



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: lodge designed by Gordon Cunningham



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: lodge interior

At that stage I had returned to the service of the NPB and was Chief Conservator West, in charge of the region that included the Drakensberg protected areas, and this piece of extravaganza brought a series of stressful altercations between John Page and me as he embraced with enthusiasm the thought of the Board having a truly impressive lodge. The local staff were less enthusiastic as very few of us had, at that time, begun to appreciate the need to plan for periods of financial stress in the future. Neither were we paying any real attention to the camps as revenue spinners. The Board had created the Recreation Division for this purpose but we pure and noble biodiversity conservationists were above caring about money.

The combination of natural stone and masonry involved in the construction of the Giant's Lodge stretched the imagination and skills of Royce Horner and his team. They started badly by not laying a section of the foundation correctly. Royce came over to the field staff and borrowed the tractor as well as the station's first and newly acquired Quicky, an early front-end loader attachment which, as it transpired, was not all that strong and warped badly as a result of trying to lift the concrete foundation. Harsh words were exchanged. All this was reported and discussed at a conservation management meeting where the staff, suffering at that time from severe cash shortages and rationed fuel supplies, protested vigorously about the expenditure on the lodge and criticised the whole idea of building a structure of this size. The end point of the discussion came when I agreed to write a letter to the Director expressing our concerns. This I did on returning to Head Office. John's reaction was immediate. I was sent for and appeared before him, receiving a dressing down of memorable magnitude. He asked me if I had written the letter, a superfluous question given that it bore my signature, and then said: 'Right! You will go back to your office and have your secretary collect all the copies of the



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: bearded vulture hide designed by Gordon Cunningham

letter to which you will add this original copy and you will personally burn them all!’³ He then said that I should never act so stupidly again as the lodge was not financed by money from the NPB budget, but a special project funded entirely from the province’s coffers. The Board had no control of the money at all. He also added that one day I would be grateful for this gift from the province, and I would probably love it. He was right.



Giant’s Castle Game Reserve: bearded vulture

Royce and his team did create Gordon Cunningham’s masterpiece and it was officially opened by the Administrator Ben Havemann on 6 October 1978. And so, Giant’s Castle became home to one of the most famous lodges in the country. It proved invaluable when it came to hosting state presidents, special visitors and local dignitaries. In due course the rules for use changed, as the NPB had to budget for the maintenance and upkeep of the lodge. It eventually became a public facility, which has been enjoyed, rather expensively, by many of the wealthier visitors to Giant’s Castle. My secretary of the day, Maxie Holder (1976–1996), joined in the enthusiasm and painted some of the natural rock sections of the lounge with facsimiles of San rock art paintings which remain there to this day.

Gordon Cunningham’s talents were strongly influenced by an American architect, Ian McHarg, who wrote a book called *Design with Nature* in 1969. Giant’s Castle Huttet Camp stands today as one of the finest examples of what McHarg envisioned. To his eternal credit Gordon also designed the final version of the Giant’s Castle Lammergeyer hide, which has brought so much reward to bird enthusiasts.⁴

Opportunities for expansion

The Giant’s Lodge attracted a great deal of attention and Gordon received a contract from a Texan (who else?) several years after its completion, to build another one in Texas. No one ever had the gall to ask him what he earned for that little transaction, but the NPB was soon asking him to design a similar lodge at Tendele Camp in RNNP. This was partly inspired by the interest of a



Hluhluwe Game Reserve: Mtwazi lodge, c.1950 (EKZNW photo library)

board member who suggested he would contribute to its cost under the JVS. This would allow the donor to have access to the lodge for a period of ten years or more. The offer was accepted by the board and Gordon, given carte blanche to design the new lodge, with a somewhat smaller footprint, produced a superb building.

The Tendele Lodge proved so successful that the NPB ensured that wherever possible a new lodge should be included in as many reserves as possible. Opportunities to convert and upgrade old farmsteads on acquired land should also be considered. From that thought came the Thurlow House Lodge at Midmar and the Mtwazi Lodge at Hluhluwe, the latter being the original home built by the Warden of Hluhluwe, Captain H.B. Potter (1929–1950).

Another lodge was created during the dramatic years of the Natal Indaba when the NPA was in full pursuit of the friendship and co-operation of the Chief Minister of KwaZulu, Mangosuthu Buthelezi. Someone in the Natal Provincial Council had the bright idea of creating a lodge in Umfolozi Game Reserve specifically for the use of Buthelezi and a significant amount of money was voted for its construction. More or less taking control of the project, the province appointed one of their own young architects, M. Mackintyre, to design the lodge and supervise its construction. The building was undertaken by the NPB's Royce Horner and his team.

A great fuss was made of the concept and Buthelezi was apparently approached for his agreement, which he gave. He was then given details of the plans and concept for his approval. At all stages of construction, he was

kept abreast of progress as he was probably keenly aware of the fact that it was going to be built adjacent to the small Masinda Camp, which had been reserved for people of colour. By the time it was completed enthusiasm for the Indaba had diminished and this, coupled with the fact that it was in close proximity to the Masinda Camp, apparently led Buthelezi to perceive it as a product of apartheid thinking and, to my knowledge, he never used it. Such was the changeable world of politics in Natal at the time. Nevertheless, the NPB was thrilled with the finished product and the really beautiful Masinda Lodge was officially opened in 1980.

This did not prevent Buthelezi from developing a real fondness for Mtwazi Lodge at Hluhluwe and he became a great fan of the converted staff home once occupied by Captain Potter, the long-time Warden of Hluhluwe Game Reserve. The house was shaded beautifully by fig trees planted many years before by staff. Buthelezi loved his regular visits there as a guest in later years. His visits were nearly always on his own and he frequently invited me to join him for tea. We established a memorable rapport. He loved the peace and quiet of Mtwazi and appreciated having a retreat away from politics.

With its thatch and natural stone, Masinda Lodge in Umfolozi was a welcome addition to the growing number of lodges on the NPB's books. As a matter of interest, among the most enthusiastic visitors to the lodge during its construction was a local troop of baboons. After the wooden roof trees, on which the thatch roof would rest, had been placed on the walls, the baboons clearly decided that the frail wooden structures were the beginnings of what today would be categorised as a gym, for their pleasure. Swinging wildly from roof tree to roof tree on their first evening, they brought half of the struts down with a crash, necessitating the attendance of a full-time guard to try to keep them at bay until the structure was stable. I saw them at full swing only once, but it was an inspiring sight. They were full of joy, their behaviour giving the lie to anyone who says that baboons don't have a sense of exuberance.

Masinda Lodge had a political origin, and it was political influence that helped the board make the decision to take into consideration the many demands that had been made since the 1970s for a more modern camp with catering facilities. Satisfying this need would broaden the spectrum of visitors to include foreign tourists who, in general, did not like self-catering.

The development of Itala Game Reserve

Itala Game Reserve was legislated into existence in 1973 and, situated as it was in the north-western region of Natal, that in days of yore had included virtually

all of the Boer Vryheid Republic, it had a high density of Afrikaans (and NP) residents. The success of the lodges, and the creation of one for Mangosuthu Buthelezi, had an impact on the NP, who promptly complained to the board, through its representative member, Senator Jannie Moll (1980–1994), that it had done nothing for the northern part of Natal at all. This was not quite true as the NPB had put a considerable amount of effort into developing Chelmsford Dam near Newcastle, but one had to agree with Oom Jannie, a gentlemanly, courteous and friendly man, that this was not the same as having a decent hutted camp at Itala.

John Page leapt at the idea and his first impulse was to find an elevated site, overlooking the magnificent hills and valleys of Itala, on which a hutted camp could be built. On the southern border of the reserve, immediately below the high plateau of Louwsburg Hill not far from the village of Louwsburg, John found a broad ledge fifty metres below the top of the escarpment, upon which he envisaged building a hutted camp of some magnificence, with a view second to none. Using his impressive talents for getting the province to become involved in the development, he persuaded the Roads Department, then under a conservation minded Director-General, Roy Hindle, to organise a team, at provincial expense, to cut a road down the face of the escarpment to the ledge.

This was not an easy task. In fact, it was very intimidating indeed and, as things turned out, very expensive. The endeavour proved almost impossible as, due to the instability of the rock face itself, soon after the road had been cut for a short distance the slope above the road collapsed. A great deal of time was needed to clear the debris by pushing it over the edge of the road. The scree slope below the road left behind by this endeavour is today one of the few obvious signs that anything had happened there at all and from the roads lower down in the reserve only the trained eye can pick up the scar. These problems meant that the expense involved in the road construction drew more and more criticism from the staff and the Roads Department. After several months of work the roadworks were abandoned just fifty metres from the ledge, when a member of the Roads Department staff died in a tragic accident. He was standing next to the outer edge of the road, when a small rock, squeezed by the track of the passing heavy bulldozer, shot out like a missile, and struck the unfortunate labourer in the midriff, killing him instantly.

Quite rightly this event halted the whole project. John Page relinquished the task and asked staff to seek a new site for a future camp. This idea made us much happier. Orty Bourquin, with the Officer-in-Charge, Graham Root, apparently deserved credit for finding the site eventually chosen (Root, 2005).



Itala Game Reserve: Ntshondwe camp, 1989



Itala Game Reserve: Ntshondwe restaurant complex, 2003

Ably assisted by the resident scientist Roger Porter, they started a thorough and scientific search for a site. Orty thoroughly enjoyed the task and eventually came up with five sites that met the criteria of the matrix he had designed. It was probably the best-ever-researched site for a camp. The board was delighted and encouraged all its members to join staff to visit the five promising sites. After a long day all agreed that the most suitable site was the one in a sheltered hollow, filled with large fig trees and *Euphorbia ingens*, immediately below the Louwsburg mountain. The thorough planning and design of Ntshondwe Camp could begin.

After going to tender, a project manager, Gareth Singleton, was chosen. He presented the board with plans drawn up by an architectural firm of his choice and in 1984 a start was made. The drilling of boreholes had established that water could be found in quantities sufficient to supply the envisaged camp. The NPB wished to ensure that local companies and people would benefit from the injection of money into this very rural part of Natal and a Vryheid-based construction company was awarded the contract to build the camp. Gareth, in co-operation with Mike Arnott, the NPB's Chief Technical Officer, managed the development with great skill and hard work.

Ntshondwe Camp was the first hutted camp built by the NPB to modern accepted standards and it included 210 beds in 36 separate units, providing a wide range of opportunities for visitors. The most expensive unit was the Ntshondwe Lodge, which was very luxurious and even had a private swimming pool. It was set in a notch under the Ntshondwe Hill and offered a magnificent view over the lower reserve. In the main camp itself there were self-catering six-bed, four-bed and two-bed units, all built using red brick and thatch. The units were situated with exquisite care by Gareth and linked by sinuous red brick roads and foot trails through the densely vegetated site, thus avoiding the felling of any of the larger *Ficus*, *Erythrina* and *Euphorbia* trees. Ntshondwe Camp, like Giant's Castle, met all the criteria of McHarg's 'Design with Nature' criteria. The overnight units swept around a newly created dam with an adjacent bird hide. Rich in birds and enough open lawns to attract even rhinoceros, the entire endeavour was a triumph.

A secluded and very attractive swimming pool was built above the camp and, nestling among some large boulders, this proved a great attraction to all. A possible exception was an occasion involving a German tourist who came down to the office to ask whether the crocodile that was sharing the pool with him was safe to swim with. Assuring the incredibly calm German that it wasn't, staff scampered up and removed the fortunately small animal from the

deep end of the pool. We had introduced a few young crocodiles into the dam below the restaurant for viewing purposes, never believing that the reptiles would be adventurous enough to wander up the hill through the camp to the swimming pool.

Once again breaking with tradition in order to broaden the spectrum of visitors, the board wanted a full-scale restaurant and associated bar, a take-away facility, and a curio shop with a limited range of groceries and liquor for sale. A somewhat more-risky venture was the addition of a conference centre that could serve as a venue for weddings and private functions as well as business purposes, providing suitable breakaway rooms. Of course, the centre proved invaluable for NPB-organised meetings, including inter-provincial and national. Following the official opening of Ntshondwe in 1989, the entire concept was a great success and by 1998 had won numerous awards for the NPB.

The development blended in beautifully with the environment and, to my delight, a visiting scientist, colleague and friend from Kenya, and a world authority in his field of rhino and elephant conservation, Esmond Bradley-Martin, described Ntshondwe as the most beautiful camp he had ever seen.

A major change in policy

Ntshondwe was not only the most ambitious camp built by the NPB, but it was the first for which the Board had managed to get permission from the NPA to fund through taking a loan. In 1947, the ability to borrow money had been written into the NPB's legislation, but lending institutions had been loath to advance sums unless the province guaranteed the transaction. Traditionally the provincial authorities had been equally reluctant to do so. Partly because the development of Itala Game Reserve was the result of some political pressure, the provincial treasury proved surprisingly sympathetic and, undoubtedly having taken note with some pleasure of the NPB's fast-expanding income from all the other developments around the province, for the first time agreed without hesitation to sign as surety for a loan. The entire camp, including the tarring of the access road from Louwsburg, a twenty-kilometre scenic viewing road through the reserve and a bitumen airstrip, cost R22 million. Most of the project was funded from NPB resources and Phil Evans (Assistant Director Administration, 1982–1994) negotiated a loan of R10 million from the Development Bank of South Africa to cover the shortfall. This loan was repaid at R500 000 per six-month period, with interest of 12.5% on the balance remaining. It was a matter of some relief that the NPB settled all debts on time.

The course of progress is seldom smooth and problem free and it also proved difficult to relinquish control of anything to the private sector, but the board had agreed that the catering should be leased out to private operators. However, waxing clever, it was believed that, in order to ensure that the NPB received credit for creating considerable employment opportunities, aside from the managerial team, the restaurant staff should all be employed by the Board.

This was a huge mistake as the Compass Group, which had been awarded the catering contract, did not like the arrangement and simply debited the NPB for staff costs, food, catering and extras. For the first year, despite an excellent income, the catering side ran at a significant loss to the NPB as a result of trying to keep control of an important and essential component of this service. Phil promptly negotiated a new contract with the company giving them full control of the restaurant staff and the catering component recorded a profit of over R800 000 the following financial year.

It certainly became a mantra of mine that you should never let government, even arms-length government like the NPB, near food. I am happy to record that the National Parks Board took much longer to learn this than we did, but they too eventually changed to using private sector caterers. My favourite example of appalling state catering took place at Etosha National Park in Namibia in 1995 at an IUCN Elephant Range State meeting. On arrival for



Hluhluwe Game Reserve: Hilltop camp centre, 1995

breakfast and, being a very keen fried egg enthusiast, eagerly looking forward to enjoying one of nature's greatest gifts, I was offered the unappetising and horrifying sight of a bundle of fried eggs, clearly cooked long before and hurled en bloc into the bottom of a deep pan on the stove. It was like looking into the ovarian equivalent of Dante's Inferno.

Hilltop Camp

Happily, the board had learned from the Ntshondwe experience so there was no debate about having private-sector caterers at the redesigned camp at Hluhluwe, which was to be called Hilltop Camp. Once again, Franklin, Garland and Gibson were given responsibility for the complete restructuring of the old camp and the design of the new, much-expanded camp, complete with a curio shop, restaurant and large reception complex.

The architects were given carte blanche to come up with proposals for the design and the dispensation of buildings. On receipt of their first layout plan, we saw that the majority of new buildings would be better situated than were those of the old camp, with most buildings, including the main reception and restaurant complex, having magnificent views over Hluhluwe Game Reserve. From the first draft plan, however, it was noticed with alarm by many of the staff, that they proposed demolishing the entire historical camp, including the two 1930s cottages that had provided Trojan service but were literally falling down as a result of hard use.

The board had no argument with the latter suggestion concerning the demolition of the old cottages, but a number of us were appalled at the thought of the historical rondavels being destroyed. Some brisk arguments ensued. Staff reasoning for wanting to keep



Hluhluwe Game Reserve: Hilltop camp four-bed unit, 1993

the rondavels was essentially to ensure that the self-catering facilities offered to the less-affluent visitors who, after all, had been loyal supporters for over forty years, should remain as a cheaper option for overnight stays. After a stressful meeting it was agreed that the rondavels would remain but be completely renovated and modified to include not only showers and simple self-catering facilities, but would also provide access to a new and large communal kitchen unit. All existing structures would be repainted to match the colour schemes envisaged by the architects. A degree of calm followed the approval of the designs and the builders, Group 5, started working on the site preparation agreeing to build immediately a small unit to illustrate the design features and colours.

A board tour followed the unit's completion and when all the members and their wives were gathered around the test unit, the colour of the walls, a red ochre, caused a sensation as it was so completely at odds with anything the NPB had built before. It was a striking shade and there were mumbled negative reactions to its brightness. Happily, the Chairman's wife, Karin Goss, leapt to the fore, pronounced it attractive and waxed lyrical as to how beautiful it would look once the vegetation had grown out. Karin saw in her mind's eye stately green cycads with bulging orange fruits standing guard on the units, and the day was carried.

Hilltop Camp was completed on time with only our Chief Technical Officer, Mike Arnott (1988–1998), sporting more grey hairs. There was a minor argument with the contractors over the provision of thatch for the camp roofs. I never forgave the company for hitting the NPB for an extra R2 million. This was as a result of an unfortunate shortage of thatch which, regrettably, the NPB had agreed to supply from our own resources in order to keep the price of the entire development at an acceptable level. Building had proceeded faster than anticipated and had used up the very large stocks of thatch that we had stored before it was possible to start the new thatch-cutting season in the Drakensberg protected areas. By sheer mischance, a large thatched private-sector lodge in Botswana burnt down and in a huge thatch purchasing spree the owners involved emptied the shelves of the South African stockists. The NPB staff could not find any thatch anywhere to keep up with the contractors who contended they had reached a critical stage of development. They sued the NPB for breaking the contract, with associated costs.⁵

Despite this crisis, the result was a magnificent new facility that received accolades from all. Martin Schofield (1965–1998), Chief Conservator Zululand, was so proud of it that one would have thought that he had built it himself. The

Hilltop Camp was officially opened by Mangosuthu Buthelezi on 7 August 1993. The total cost of the development was R25 million, which included the creation of a tarred road, the route of which was recommended and monitored by NPB ecologist and planner Roger Porter (1971–1998), to link Hluhluwe to Umfolozi through the Corridor. The Corridor road proved a huge success and was much appreciated by many smaller private sector companies from around Hluhluwe and St Lucia that brought their tourists in open vehicles to visit the protected area. After some successful negotiations with the private operators, the NPB agreed standards for such vehicles, and this massive Zululand asset acquired a tourist use and fame beyond anything that had been envisaged by the Natal colonial founders in 1895.

The competition

As an aside the NPB did have competition. For many years there had been not insignificant criticism of the NPB for building and maintaining overnight accommodation for tourists. The critics were mainly private sector companies that catered for the tourist trade, and they envied the camps in the protected areas because they saw themselves as able to do a better and more efficient (and undoubtedly a more profitable) job of catering for the tourists they attracted. The NPB had been openly criticised because, to the private sector, this was unfair competition, being funded by provincial subsidies. Once the NPB started to borrow money to build new camps, however, the attitude of the private sector changed dramatically as, it was said, the Board was now playing



Hluhluwe sunset

on the same field and was prepared to take risks by investing with borrowed money.

To illustrate this change of heart, the NPB, in 1991, was publicly recognised by the Tourism Association of Natal KwaZulu (TANK) and was given an award for 'the best corporate contribution to tourism in Natal'. This was followed later, in 1995, by the Chairman's Award from SATOUR for Hilltop Camp. A stream of other tourism awards followed.

The Santa Lucia

All these accolades were welcome indeed, but those that really mattered were those from the hearts of our hospitality colleagues. After the launching of the eighty-seat *Santa Lucia* tour vessel on Lake St Lucia, George Mennie, the owner of one of numerous small family tourism businesses in the area, came to me and asked me to thank the board for investing in the lake cruiser as his tourists now spent two or three days with him and had doubled his income. That really counted as a special day for me and for Gordon Forrest (1964–1998), the Conservator at St Lucia, who had spent many years trying to get the board to invest in such a vessel and, when given the go-ahead, designed the boat and supervised its construction and operations systems.

The launch caused a sensation and the accolades published in Natal newspapers were generous. Our public was told in an encouraging article that 'The excellent and enterprising Natal Parks Board has done it again!' Gordon's patience was well rewarded. The loan was repaid in less than a year and the enterprise spurred the development of a small fleet of private sector boat tours.

The other very satisfying reward resulted from an invited visit by Ron Stringfellow, CEO of the Southern Sun Hotel group, to the just-completed Hilltop Camp. Ron and his CFO arrived by air, landing at Hluhluwe airstrip, and we collected them and took them for a game drive through the reserve, terminating at Hilltop camp. After walking around the camp, with its fast-growing gardens worked on so hard by Cathy Galli (1994–1997), we sat down to lunch in the restaurant and Ron turned to me, pulled a cheque book from his jacket pocket and said: 'How much do you want for it?' The NPB had gained acceptance from its peers.

Making the most of opportunities

From the late 1980s all camps that had not run at a profit were upgraded and new facilities were added to Loteni and Tendele (52 new beds in 1992).

Mantuma Camp at Mkuzi was expanded, new tented camps were added to Mantuma and Mpila Camps at Umfolozi and stunning additional bush lodges at Mbiso and Mahlangeni were built in Itala by Noel Greeff (1977–1987). Thanks to Drummond Densham (1968–1998) yet another bush lodge was built on the banks of Lake Banghasi near Cape Vidal; and on the western shores of St Lucia, Dick Nash (1969–1998) built the Dugandhlovu bush lodge. New camps of wooden log cabins were erected at Sodwana Bay Resort, and Cape Vidal and Mapelane Nature Reserves. All new developments, and upgrading of older camps, were always preceded by a thorough EIA with recommendations made to avoid or minimise damage to the environment.

Inspired by the support and recognition received and the necessity to increase our gross income because we feared additional cuts to our subsidy from the province, the board had taken steps to convert all revenue-earning opportunities in the NPB system to a point where they would make a profit. Until 1998, shops and services that could not run with at least no loss to the organisation were abandoned. The restaurant facilities archaically created at Midmar for ‘other races’ in the 1960s were never popular and, in the years following the NPB’s defiance of the apartheid rules by opening of all facilities to all races in 1982, were closed down and the buildings converted into an upgraded training centre for staff and conservancy guards. At Vryheid, the entire resort on Klipfontein Dam was handed over to the municipality.

Injasuti Camp

A special achievement in improving the NPB’s tourism offering was persuading Tiny Harries to sell to the Board his farm Solitude, deep inside the Injasuti Valley, adjacent to the northern end of Giant’s Castle Game reserve in the Drakensberg. Tiny, working with a shoestring budget, had opened a road up the valley as far as Solitude in 1964 and started his Injasuti camp in the 1970s on a levelled site with an unparalleled view up the valley to Monks Cowl and Champagne Castle.

To say Tiny was an entrepreneur of note would be an understatement. I have seldom met anyone with so many ideas and the eagerness to pursue them. There are many examples of Tiny showing enterprise and imagination to complete the camp, but one, in particular, will be of interest to those members of the public who have stayed at Injasuti and wondered why the vinyl floor tiles appeared in bizarre colours and unstructured patterns. They might like to know that Tiny was never overburdened with money and as he was building the camp, whenever he had to go down to Estcourt or Pietermaritzburg, he would



*Economic value of tourism to South Africa, KZN
and local investment by NPB*

seek out new homes nearing completion and would pop in and chat to the builder, asking if there were any flooring tiles left over. He was frequently successful in his enquiries and would pay the builder in cash for a box or more of surplus tiles, coming home with a few cartons of variable colours and designs. These he would hand to his staff to lay as they emerged from the boxes and gradually Tiny's uniquely hued flooring schemes reached completion.

Tiny and Pat Harries were a wonderful family with real pioneering spirit. Hospitable to a fault, and always enthusiastic, Tiny decided to sell Solitude and the Injasuti camp to the NPB which, in 1980, purchased the property for R750 000. At the time Bill Barnes and I did most of the negotiation and I know that he sold with deep reluctance as the family loved the Drakensberg. Whenever we met in later years, he never missed the opportunity to greet me with the statement that the NPB had cheated him out of Solitude. That pattern never changed as, shortly before Tiny passed away in 2017, I visited him when he turned 90. As I entered his front door, he cried out: 'You and Barnes cheated me out of Solitude!!' He may have been right, but the NPB certainly regarded the acquisition of this beautifully sited camp as a major achievement and a fitting testimony to the beauty of the valley. It continues to serve a loyal and appreciative local clientele and adventurous foreign tourists.

As 1998 approached, the NPB was on a roll, providing local and foreign tourists with outstanding new facilities at a level of service equal to that found anywhere in the world and certainly far superior to anything that it had envisaged in the past. The vision of the staff and board was as yet far from complete, and planning went forward despite the approach of the envisaged amalgamation of the NPB with the Directorate of KwaZulu Department of Nature Conservation.

NOTES

- 1 A rondavel in Africa is a simple one-room circular cement block or brick building which was traditionally thatched. It was modelled by early colonials on the traditional house of many indigenous peoples. Hence the rather quaint name of huted camps used by the NPB.
- 2 Being both a gifted artist and sculptor, Gordon began to provide artistic support to the NPB free of charge, sketching animal and plant motifs for advertising material and Christmas cards. Gordon could never, or would never, say no and endeared himself to the board and staff. When it was agreed by Total that they would fund an appropriate sculpture for the entrance to the new Head Office at Queen Elizabeth Park, John turned immediately to Gordon, who produced a pair of beautiful klipspringers on a rock. The work was unveiled in the 1960s.
- 3 In those days three copies of all mail were kept and filed carefully in appropriate folders.
- 4 Lammergeyer was one of the early common names of the bearded vulture, but has now fallen into disuse except among old conservative bird lovers.
- 5 To this day, I do not believe that the claim was either necessary or justified and in 2020 (when the contractors experienced serious financial difficulties) I could not help a wry smile.

BY 1996, the fact that the NPB was going to be amalgamated with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation was accepted by all. However, this did not in any way affect the board's plan to develop more and better tourism facilities for the future. A great deal of thought went into envisaging the ongoing development of the tourist component of its operations and by the time Hluluwe's Hilltop Camp had begun to show a platinum financial result, staff were providing the board with suggestions for new hutted camps. That the current board knew that it might never see the final products other than on the drawing table did not dampen its enthusiasm in the slightest.

Giant's Castle hutted camp

The next hutted camp that was believed to require an overhaul and upgrade was Giant's Castle. It was one of the most beautiful camps in the Drakensberg and following two small upgrades in the 1960s and 1970s, it had limped along but seldom made the financial contribution that it might have because it did not have a restaurant and was not of optimum size. The architects, Carter-Brown and Baillon, were given the job of planning for better use of the site. They were given the go-ahead in 1998, following which they produced an excellent plan for doubling the bed capacity of the camp and developing a central catering and reception building appropriate to the site.

By this time, the NPB had at its service a staff applying its imagination to aspects of tourism that had not been considered before and tourism scientists, planners and creative artists from its Design Studio combined to create an inspirational team that was probably without equal in any nature conservation agency in the country.¹

These advances led to evolving reactions in the more conservative circles of the organisation. One of these was Bill Barnes (1947–1993) who had spent virtually his entire life at Giant's Castle having been born there. He was now retired and living just outside the gate of the reserve (Barnes, 2003;

Hughes, 2014) and he and his wife Leila were horrified by the suggestion of expanding the camp and foretold doom for this beautiful facility. The concern, out of respect for Bill, was noted by the more progressive staff who looked for the means by which the development might make the proposed camp more acceptable to them, or even endorsed by them. As a result, the concept of theming the camp was born. It was suggested and eagerly accepted by the board that the camp should be themed to represent the enormous and beautiful floral richness of the Drakensberg. Bill, being a great lover of flowers, was marginally mollified. Leila was not.

Mark Coetzee (1989–1998) and his colleagues at the Design Studio were consulted, and they provided the means to achieve this objective. Mark brought the gifted botanist Elsa Pooley into the planning team. Elsa, as a world expert on the flora of Natal and the Drakensberg (see Pooley, 1998 and 2003) responded with excitement and suggested that she recruit a team of botanical artists, of which the province had an embarrassment of riches. They would be mandated to create a series of artworks to decorate the entire renovated camp. It was decided that every unit should be named after a family of flowers, with the artists each accepting responsibility for up to three units and undertaking to provide each with at least three paintings of members of the appropriate floral family. The choice of the floral species would be theirs, subject to there being no replication.

Eager to take part in the exciting prospect of a theme focusing on their personal passions, the nineteen artists, all of them female, most of mature years and many of them famous, became part of the magic of Giant's Castle and contributed ideas and suggestions with real fervour. Capitalising on this goodwill, Elsa and Mark persuaded the artists to accept a fixed payment based on the size of each painting required and to sign a contract. With nearly 140 original works needed and, recognising the magnitude of such a richness of art, both in quality and cost, the Conservation Trust was asked to make a financial contribution. It did better than that. The trust found sufficient sponsors and attracted donations to finance not only the work of the artists but also the framing of the paintings and the creation of the carved wooden signs that, mounted on each unit, would identify the floral family after which the unit would be named.

In addition, the Conservation Trust, recognising that an increase in visitors could be expected to add pressure to the San rock art exhibit in the Main Caves not far from the camp, donated a significant sum to enhance the visitor experience and, more importantly, to provide adequate protection for the caves



Giant's Castle Game Reserve: flower themes for units

and the magnificent paintings that they housed. This project was completed before the official opening of the upgraded Giant's Camp.

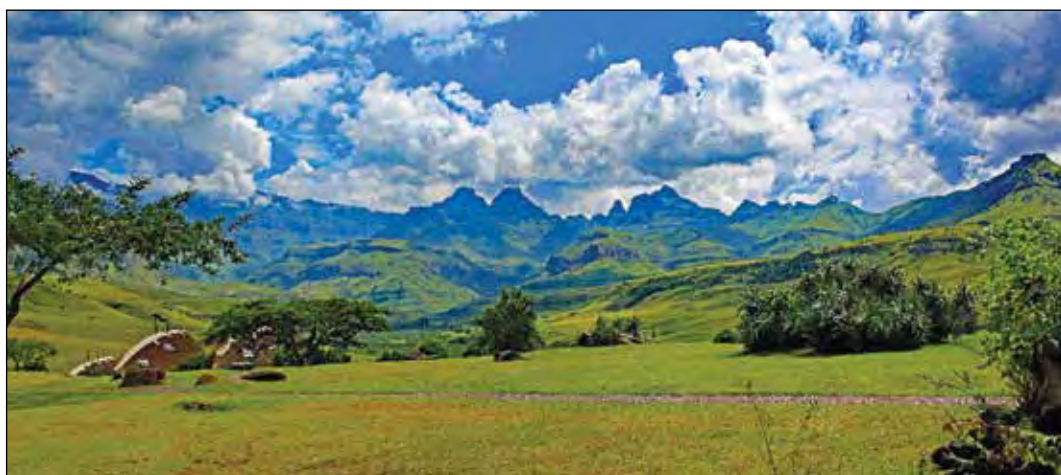
The national Minister of Environmental Affairs, Valli Moosa, opened the redeveloped camp on 17 March 2001 to the delight of everyone, most certainly including Bill and Leila Barnes, who generously acknowledged to me that they had been wrong to criticise the redevelopment at its birth. Bill and Leila above all, displayed warm acceptance of the Drakensberg flower theme as something he wished that they had thought of. No better endorsement could have been received.

Almost immediately following the opening of the camp came a plea from Elsa Pooley that a collective visit should be arranged for all the artists to view the completed project. Unobserved and unrealised by all of us involved in the development, each artist, having chosen and executed her artistic contributions, handed her paintings over to Mark who then had them framed and later hung in the unit for which they had been designed. What was not appreciated by the organisers was that with possible exceptions, each artist had seen none of the artworks other than their own. Therefore, agreeing that their request to remedy such a situation was most reasonable, we arranged an overnight stay for all of them. They arrived in an excited and eager state of mind. The morning gathering was a sight to behold, as all these talented women milled in front of the main centre equipped with cameras and enthusiasm. They, with a few exceptions, sported carefully coiffed blue rinses. As they set off on the tour of the camp they appeared, perhaps appropriately, rather a like a mobile bed of hydrangeas in full bloom.

As some of the units had been booked by uninvolved members of the public, the accompanying staff explained that it might not be possible to access each unit but, if not, the artist involved with that unit would be requested to give a short talk on her work to her colleagues. One lady was overheard to murmur, 'Not on your life'. When we approached a unit inhabited by a member of the public, the poor occupant on opening the door was confronted by an intimidating hoard crying for entrance and on each occasion was swept aside by a blue avalanche. The NPB could not have been more grateful for the support so willingly given by this wonderful group of talented women.

Didima Camp

Of all the Drakensberg sites that the NPB had taken over from the Department of Forestry, the one that inspired most joy was Cathedral Peak Forest Station. The Cathedral Peak montane vistas are among the most beautiful in the world; and added to that is the nearby Didima Gorge in which, distributed in seventeen shelters flanking the sides of this beautiful and unspoilt valley, is found the finest concentration of rock art in southern Africa. The gorge was made famous by Harald Pager, who spent several years researching and making reproductions of the superb San rock art (Pager, 1971). The NPB was ecstatic over this addition to its treasured protected areas because its inclusion in what the Board would name as the Natal Drakensberg Park, significantly improved its chances of achieving World Heritage Site status for this now greatly expanded protected area.



Cathedral Peak range, 2003

There was never any doubt in the minds of both Drakensberg staff and the board that an opportunity existed for a new hatted camp at Cathedral Peak. Once the Giant's Castle planned improvements were underway, all minds turned to Cathedral Peak. There was universal acceptance of the suggestion that the theme of the camp should be San rock art, with emphasis on those wonderful sites in and around Didima Gorge.

All were agreed that it should be a large facility, with at least 200 beds, and Geert Creemers and the tourist research staff were asked to estimate what might be economically feasible, including a ballpark figure for the costs of the camp, levels of occupancy that could be anticipated, various combinations of unit sizes, and charges that might be levied in order to attract willing tourists. Geert and the team prepared a truly impressive business plan, which concluded with the opinion that a positive return on investment could be expected. When presented to the board it was approved unanimously and planning development commenced immediately.

Ron Physick, Trevor Sandwith and his team, as well as the Technical Director, Mike Arnott, and I went up to the station and we searched for a suitable site on which to build the camp. The site inspection group wandered all around the area above the former forestry offices and staff village. The site that had my vote was on a broad ledge just below the cave sandstone from which views were exquisite, with the Cathedral Peak ridge dominating the horizon. At just short of 2 000 metres above sea level, the site I liked was at the same level as that originally chosen for Giant's Castle Camp and Tendele Camp at RNNP.

Alas, my enthusiasm was quickly extinguished as the more sober-minded of the staff pointed out that the site was in the landslide zone in which the building of tourist accommodation was forbidden by the Drakensberg Policy Statement of Natal's Town and Regional Planning Commission (Phelan, 1976) and the Forestry Department's N-Fog (National Physiographic Catchment Boundary) Line.² This later led to some heated discussions, which ended only when members of the KZN Provincial Council, gathered at Cathedral Peak offices to consider the site options, were unmoved by my arguments in favour of breaking the rules and flatly refused to allow the NPB even to consider the site. Life can be a real challenge on occasions.

Having accepted that the site with the best view was out of the question, it was not difficult to turn one's attention to a large enough area below the landslide zone, in the so-called threshold zone, that offered plenty of land if we completely removed an old and motley collection of evergreen trees

planted by ambitious and ultimately disappointed forestry officials in the vain hope that some would show promise for extensive planting in the future. The site had been very badly neglected, was overrun with brambles and had the advantage of being an ecological mess, the clearing of which would bring a desirable improvement to the landscape and ecosystem. It must be confessed that to categorise the site as fully within the threshold zone was marginally stretching the rules, but the necessity to fell the old plantation site made the decision tolerable to the puritans.

Well, some of them. Outside the NPB and provincial service were the environmental NGOs, the most important in Natal at the time being the Wildlife Society with some influence from the Wilderness Leadership School. Expressing a new addition to a changeable set of evangelical environmental policies, these NGOs had arrived at the conviction that no protected area should have tourism developments within its boundaries at all.

Jean Senogles (1992–1998) was at that time both the NPB's first woman board member and the official representative of the KZN Branch of the Wildlife Society. Jean cheerfully agreed to chair a meeting between the society's influential members and the board to discuss their point of view. The meeting was somewhat tense, especially for Jean, who had taken board policies to heart and supported its goals. The main speaker from the Wildlife Society was Keith Cooper, who had been one of the activists involved in the 1972 Petition (see Chapter 2), and once again found himself an opponent of NPB policy. He adopted the extreme view that no protected area should have overnight tourist accommodation facilities built within its boundaries. On being asked for his reasons for this, Keith's rather lame, in my view, argument was that all South African protected areas were so small that any development would threaten their biodiversity conservation integrity.

NPB staff and board members first asked where the Wildlife Society felt the camp should be built and received the astonishing reply that it should be built in Winterton, a small village over fifty kilometres from the park, and almost completely surrounded by enormous and flat fields of maize, presenting what might be charitably described as monocultural vistas. The NPB pointed out that this did not marry well with local tourists' image of what a visit to the Drakensberg should be, let alone those lured from overseas. The NPB, rejecting the society's thesis, pointed out that the purpose of the camp embraced many aspects, to which the society had clearly not given consideration. First, the camp should provide a view of the mountains that would satisfy the most fastidious visitors. Second, the camp had to be a financial success as the NPB

would be borrowing the money for its development. Third, the camp would create well over 100 permanent jobs for the local Amangwane people in an area where there were as yet few opportunities to earn money.

In fact, for many years, NPB policy had been that successful camps were anything but threats to a protected area. Rather, the camps were a string of fortresses providing good reasons to the local communities for why they should rise to the defence of the park should it ever be threatened. Full-time and fair employment gave employees ownership and pride in their protected area and camps.

Finally, aiming for UNESCO World Heritage Site recognition for natural and cultural heritage, the NPB envisaged that the camp would provide a window to the incredible treasure left to us by long-departed inhabitants: the culture, history and rock art of the San First People. We also revealed that the Conservation Trust had agreed to find sponsorship for a world-class rock art centre to promote understanding of what is believed to be some of the finest rock art in the world. None of these aspirations could be achieved if the camp was to be built fifty kilometres away from the park. The NPB's arguments carried the day, and that was the last we heard of this strange concept.

To clinch the argument, we emphasised that the camp proposal had already been thoroughly discussed with the Amangwane people and Inkosi Hlongwane and his indunas were 100% in support of the camp being built. It should be added that the negotiations had been cordial as the NPB recently, and mutually beneficially, negotiated a swap of land with the Amangwane that added to their easily accessible grazing areas and gave the NPB some much higher, more scenically beautiful and better conservation land at the cave sandstone level. Another positive element of the discussions with the community was a significant cash donation, obtained from a Swiss donor and facilitated by the NPB, to build the first-ever high school in the upper reaches of the Amangwane tribal land, not far from the border of the protected area. A largely neglected community, the Amangwane were thrilled by the donation which meant a great deal to them. When the school was officially opened, Hlongwane, in addressing the gathered community, expressed his appreciation to the NPB for sourcing the funds to build the school and then addressed the parents, exhorting them to take a deep interest in the education of their children. He ended his speech by imploring them to take collective action against teachers who did not meet acceptable standards. He added an unusual, and hopefully never executed, instruction that when teachers arrived drunk at the school, they should take them out and kill them.

NPB policy also required that there should be consultation with members of the San community for their views on the rock art theme of the camp and the proposed Rock Art Centre, dedicated to the genius and talent of the early Drakensberg San. It was hoped that these surviving First People would view the concept favourably and provide us with their ideas and opinions. Roger Porter and I had met the Secretary of the San Council at a community conference in Gauteng and, having contacted his office, I later flew to Upington and took a three-hour-long drive to a distant farm not far from the Namibian border to present the NPB's proposals to a full San Council meeting.

Just as I stepped onto the stage to deliver a PowerPoint presentation, the farm experienced an unfortunate power cut, thus robbing the gathering of a thoroughly prepared and beautifully illustrated explanatory talk. As a result, for an hour I walked around among the San councillors waving my laptop, so the prepared slides could be seen. To my surprise, I received warm and enthusiastic appreciation for my efforts. The San people present were all from the western and drier parts of South Africa and they had never visited, and I think quite frankly, had never imagined the glory of the Drakensberg mountains. Until then they probably had little understanding of the enormous and invaluable heritage that their fellow First People had left behind in the rock shelters of Natal and Lesotho. The wait outside, while the council discussed the NPB proposal, was worth every minute of tension because when the council emerged, the chairman and members officially, enthusiastically and unanimously gave their blessing to the building of the camp and the Rock Art Centre. When the time came some years later, the chairman of the San Council and his wife were warmly welcomed at the opening of Didima Camp and brought a physical and spiritual gift of beadwork with them from the San people which today greets visitors on their arrival at the Rock Art Centre.

The board also insisted that we consult appropriate anthropological experts, and this had some unanticipated results. Frans Prins, a Natal-based rock art anthropologist, brought to the panel of interested and affected parties the astonishing news that he had traced numerous descendants of Drakensberg San people who were living in communities along the Drakensberg. The staff of the Rock Art Research Institute from the University of the Witwatersrand were greatly interested in the development and provided valuable insights into the research and understanding of rock art. In addition, the institute is the curator of Harald Pager's original copies of the Didima Gorge paintings and was extremely helpful in providing additional information on Pager's brilliant endeavour (see Pager, 1971).

The architectural competition

The board also decided that this was a camp that should draw input from wider South African society. Through the KZN Institute for Architecture, interested architectural firms in South Africa were invited to put forward designs and layouts for the camp. The institute helped develop the criteria for the competition, which required the completed camp to reflect the spirit and culture of the First People of the Drakensberg. The board appointed member Justice John Broome (1994–1998) to lead the selection panel and the interest in the development was staggering. Mike Arnott set a date for interested parties to attend a meeting on site at Cathedral Peak so that they fully understood the criteria involved, the board's goals for the development and the dimensions of the site. No fewer than 101 architectural firms participated in the gathering, many of the attendees showing great enthusiasm.

The presentations took place at Midmar on 5 May 1998. Broome and the other two adjudicators, Rodney Harber (president of the KZN Institute for Architecture) and E. Tolman (architect) led the board's team to consider the entries. Ultimately, 36 architectural firms submitted a dazzling array of plans and designs. However, after the first review, only one firm captured the imagination of all, Clarke and Thomas from Durban. Their team had clearly done considerable research into the traditions and culture of the San. Individual units were designed to have the shape of an eland's hoof and the



Didima Camp, Cathedral section



Didima Camp: chapel and conference centre



Didima Camp: typical cave-like unit



Didima Camp: a place of peace

representations of these were so carefully distributed over the site plan that it looked as if a herd of eland had walked over it. The architects acknowledged the important physical and spiritual relationship between the First People and the eland. Even today in Botswana and Namibia, to the San people the eland remains the most desirable reward of a hunt because it provides plenty of high-quality meat, along with hides and sinews suitable for arrow strings and clothing.³

The architect with the most input to the design of the camp was Derek Thomas. The main features that he accentuated were that every unit should have a direct view of the Cathedral Peak range, and that the unit itself should be designed so that the view would replicate that seen from the mouth of a cave. Derek had even drawn inspiration from an awareness of the San people's reverence for small retreats that they enjoyed for solitude. They call them places of peace. Where the brick footpaths eventually wandered through the camp and it was necessary to place an electrical or plumbing installation, the entire service unit was buried in a facsimile of a rocky outcrop and small cave that contained rock paintings. The inner walls of all the camp buildings were adorned with facsimiles of rock art and the light fittings too were suitably decorated. The entire camp eventually presented a magnificent display. The design was one of the best responses to a desired result that we had ever seen.

The Rock Art Centre

The board did not hesitate to request Derek to design the Rock Art Centre also, which he did in consultation with Lawrie Raubenheimer, a Hilton-based artist then working with rock art in KZN. Together these two produced a world-class exhibition centre a little distance from the Didima Camp.

True to the inspiration provided by Harald Pager's illustrations, one of the caves, called Botha's Shelter, in the Didima Gorge was chosen as the best representative collection of paintings. Lawrie was asked to recreate it as the main feature of the centre. Inside the structure designed by Derek Thomas, over several months Lawrie recreated the rock art shelter including the wall shapes, the colour of the sandstone and even the dark brown stains normally left as a result of rock rabbits (rock hyraxes) defecating and urinating repeatedly in the same spot.⁴ The entire replica measured forty metres in length by fifteen metres in height and he used 95 tonnes of cement encasing two kilometres of steel reinforcing in its construction (Hughes, 2004). Then, from sketches and photographs diligently taken of the original cave walls, he reconstructed the wonderful art and ambience of Botha's Shelter. It is a masterwork.



Didima Camp: Lawrie Raubenheimer constructing the cave in the Rock Art Centre



Didima Camp: the chairman of the South African San Council and his wife at the opening

Thanks to Mark Coetzee and the NPB's Design Studio, the remainder of the centre was filled with colourful and interesting exhibits on San history and cultural beliefs. A section gave credit to the early researchers of the story of the San. Large eland sculptures were commissioned from another local artist, A. Des Clayes, to emphasise the critical role of the eland in the lives of the San people.

Derek had included a curio outlet for the local Amangwane community to market their handicrafts and I considered this a genuine contribution to maintaining the skills once practised extensively by the people in this area. As recently as the 1960s, the Amangwane valleys were noted for their beautifully constructed and decorated thatch homesteads. These today are almost all gone, replaced by concrete and tin roof structures.



*Above left: Didima Camp: entrance to the Rock Art Centre
Right: Didima Camp: symbol of peace from local survivors of the San people*

It was a sadness to me that most members of the NPB and many of the staff who contributed to the fulfilment of this glorious vision were no longer part of the conservation administration of KZN when Didima Camp and the Rock Art Centre were officially opened on 23 September 2003 by Valli Moosa, Minister of Environment Affairs. The entire complex received universal acclaim.

Final visions; alas, never realised

Royal Natal National Park Hotel

One of the first hotels ever built in the Drakensberg was the Natal National Park Hotel and it served the visiting public with distinction from 1926. The hotel was an immensely popular facility, associated as it was with a spectacular section of Drakensberg dominated by the magnificent and iconic mountain spectacle, the Amphitheatre. The hotel achieved lasting fame when it was visited by the British Royal Family in 1947, hosted by Jan Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa. Thereafter the park carried the royal title and became the Royal Natal National Park.

The hotel had always been run by the private sector and was permitted to do so for a very reasonable fee by the NPA. When the NPB came into being in 1947, the system did not change and for many years a series of private entrepreneurs managed the hotel, starting with the Zunckel family and followed for twenty years by Rupert Waite. During the 1970s, the board felt that the lessees had enjoyed a privileged rental for long enough and decided to increase the monthly payment.

Under the lease terms the lessee was responsible for maintenance and upkeep but, to be fair, I believe that costs of trying to bring a sixty-year-old facility up to modern standards proved too much of a challenge. The hotel fell into state of decrepitude that reflected little credit either on the private lessees or the NPB. The board decided that it would end the practice of leasing the hotel until a complete overhaul of the hotel could be undertaken.

In 1997, a decision was made to redesign the layout of the hotel and build a new and more suitable entrance along with a far better situated reception area and a restaurant with a magnificent view of the Amphitheatre. Many of the now substandard rondavel-type facilities would also be replaced with units better suited to the modern market. The original main building would be renovated and the historic 'royal row' where the Royal Family had stayed would be retained, but appropriately updated.

Suitable plans were prepared by the Planning Division of the NPB, with outstanding input by Trevor Hornby (1974–1998), and, offering a lease of at least thirty years, the project was put out to tender as it was hoped that such an opportunity would not be missed by a booming hotel business in South Africa. There was considerable interest. However, the hotel group that won the tender defaulted, after a period of some disappointing years of no action, following the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, which resulted in their American investors withdrawing, and the project died there.

The NPB staff, ramblers, mountaineers and other visitors who, for so many years, had enjoyed the hotel and its amenities have never got over the disappointment of this inaction and I live in hope that one day the present administration will find someone to restore the majestic asset that the hotel deserves to be.

The gateway to the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park

The NPB was in full creative mood during the mid-1980s and, in parallel with Giant's Castle and Didima, there were plans for a completely new camp in Umfolozi Game Reserve to be called Ntshevu Camp (see Chapter 29).

But there was another much more ambitious scheme, building from the synergistic success and enthusiasm created by a supportive and influential board and NPB staff. Both had a clear vision of what nature conservation could bring to a province in which many underprivileged and disadvantaged communities needed help. The opportunity to develop these ideas presented itself after the State's final decision not to allow the mining of the Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia. Starting in 1996, the NPB and its outreach staff had established working relationships with no fewer than thirteen local stakeholder forums around what was then known as the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park. The Eco-Partners Programme was created and was partly funded by the Green Trust, a WWF South Africa initiative.

The Lake St Lucia project was started in 1997 and continued in the year following the amalgamation of the NPB and the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation on 1 April 1998. The NPB's interest had developed after its outreach staff had reached the sad conclusion that the Dukuduku Forest (see Chapter 7) was so negatively affected by land invasions that it was unlikely ever to regain ecological status worthy of conservation. The NPB resolved, therefore, to help the Dukuduku community in as many ways as possible. A propitious first step was to try to create job opportunities, one of which was the production of charcoal from the many thousands of non-indigenous *Casuarina*

trees being felled by the NPB around the mouth of the St Lucia Estuary. This project proved successful but was of limited duration.⁵

NPB staff then developed an initiative intended to provide a sustainable tourism-based source of income that if achieved would provide a robust annual income to Khula Village in Dukuduku North. The proposal was eagerly accepted by community leaders and the NPB provided a detailed plan for its approval, prepared by Trevor Hornby and the Planning Division. Essentially, it envisaged a hutted camp on land immediately adjacent to the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park main access road near the village of St Lucia. The camp would consist of 238 beds (some of which would be in tented units), a restaurant and a cultural village. The anticipated cost was R53 500 000 (\$8 million). The primary market was intended to be foreign tourists who would travel by bus.

Busy as the NPB was with other projects at the time, there was no way it could borrow the estimated cost of the project. However, with South Africa in its first flush of post-apartheid freedom and status as a new democracy, many European Union countries were donating large sums to the country. The NPB saw this as an opportunity. If an interest-free loan could be secured, the Board itself was very willing to contribute its expertise and local experience to help build the camp and to dedicate skilled staff to get it up and running. To this end, the NPB applied to several countries, of which Germany showed the most interest. As a result, I visited Frankfurt and presented the whole project to a rather intimidating group of German officials.

In essence, what the NPB asked for was either a donation or an interest-free loan with generous repayment options. It would then undertake to build the whole camp, operating it within its tourism structures, and providing a booking service at no cost. The Board undertook to create employment for as many members of the Dukuduku community as possible and to use the profits from the camp to offer focused education and training to recruits from the Dukuduku school so that eventually all positions in the camp would be held by Dukuduku people. As these plans included the need to send ambitious and promising youths to local technical colleges and universities for specialised training (accountancy, for example), a project period of twenty years was envisaged at the end of which the NPB would withdraw from the camp and hand it over in its entirety to the Dukuduku community.

This was a challenging and courageous offer and would provide jobs and a sustainable facility that would serve the community for years. The German officials asked many questions, all of which were answered, and the leader of the committee showed real enthusiasm for the project assuring me that

the NPB would be informed of their decision. In due course a sympathetic appreciation letter was received by the new board of the KZN Conservation Services, but it included neither a donation nor the offer of a loan. After the advent of the politically created iSimangaliso Wetland Park that effectively ruled out the nature conservation body being involved in any new tourism development around St Lucia, this exciting project was shelved by the new administration and no replacement was ever proposed.

It should never be said that the NPB reached its end in a pessimistic frame of mind. This ambitious proposal for St Lucia clearly displayed an optimistic

The Centenary Projects Enhancing the Image of South Africa

DIDIMA
CATHEDRAL PEAK
**The San Rock Art Heritage Centre
Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Park
Cost: R8 800 000**



**The Centenary Game Capture Centre
Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park
Cost: R25 000 000**



*Important projects launched by the NPB prior to amalgamation with the
KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation*

faith in the future of South Africa as well as the Board's determination to marshal its skills and enterprise to promote progress for the province and prosperity for its previously disadvantaged people.

NOTES

- 1 Around this time traditional auditing firms were adopting a policy of expanding their activities by offering business advisory services. This became a global trend and did not always go well. An example was Arthur Andersen in the United States. I was surprised, in 1995, to receive a visit from one of our most famous auditing firms, whose representative suggested we engage them in an advisory capacity for our future tourism developments. Knowing for a fact that the firm had no obvious background in the field, I asked them for an indication of their qualifications. Noticing some hesitancy on his part, I suggested that some of their staff should come and spend a week with our development team and if both they and our team recommended benefits from the relationship, the NPB might take the matter further. One week later to the day, the firm's representative came to me and reported that he and his colleagues had enjoyed a wonderful experience, and, in their collective opinion, we had the best tourism planning team in the country and thus no need of their services.
- 2 Bill Bainbridge, when working for the Forestry Department and establishing the N-Fog Line, once, in his evangelical enthusiasm, suggested that the Giant's Castle and Tendele camps should be knocked down and all trace of them removed. Bill and NPB staff nearly came to blows over his super-wilderness philosophy. After he had been seconded to the employ of the NPB in 1986, along with 21 other members of his staff, who were far better conservation men than foresters, he modified his philosophy and became a valued planner.
- 3 Eland meat is very highly valued because it contains fat rare in venison.
- 4 These practices can accumulate into a thick sticky material known as *Hyraceum* used as a popular traditional medicine for abdominal problems by the early Boer trekkers.
- 5 Casuarina trees, originally planted along the Zululand coast in the 1950s to prevent beach erosion, had been recognised as a restraint preventing the natural movement and structure of the beaches around the St Lucia Estuary mouth. The NPB had received scientific advice that the trees should be removed.

DURING the mid-1980s it was clear that the enthusiasm and, indeed, dynamism of the staff of the NPB was beginning to exceed available funding both in terms of routine demands as well as their ambitious new ideas. The prospect of regular financial shortfalls becoming the norm alarmed my colleagues and me in the Conservation Division. We were convinced that additional financial resources would have to be sought through avenues not associated with the NPA.

At this time the NPB was aware that increasing numbers of non-governmental conservation organisations were emerging throughout the country. These covered virtually every conservation field of endeavour, such as saving endangered species (Endangered Wildlife Trust or EWT), rhino and elephant protection (Rhino and Elephant Foundation) as well as environmental awareness and education (the Wildlife Society). The Wilderness Foundation promoted greater conservation awareness through walking wilderness experiences, especially for the youth but also including the business community. Some were geared to giving additional support to species such as the vervet monkey (Vervet Monkey Foundation). I personally felt that this latter species was in little need of help, given that its members are such successful survivors, and it was clearly extending its range, both in Natal and the other provinces. This expansion of range continues today.

A relatively rapid research effort produced the rather astonishing figure of 122 NGOs or charities in South Africa that were raising money from the public purse to pursue the broad cause of nature conservation. In addition to these registered organisations, some highly dubious fundraising activities were commonly practised at supermarkets by small groups wearing apparel vaguely similar to that of the staff of formal conservation bodies. Such questionable endeavours often coincided with times of greater public awareness of major poaching activities such as the great onslaught on black rhino and elephant, which occurred across Africa north of the Limpopo during the mid-1980s. The occasional appearance of such fraudsters still continues when such

crises develop. Since 2007, with the resurgence of rhino poaching in South Africa, there has been a concomitant increase in such activity and the national Minister of Environment Affairs now demands verification and registration of such fundraising endeavours. Miscreants face prosecution.

The majority of genuine NGO endeavours were led, in most cases, by extremely enthusiastic and dedicated individuals with a particular interest in a single species or clearly defined cause. Almost none had land holdings dedicated to conservation use and practice and depended to a greater or lesser degree on the protected areas managed by the formal conservation bodies. An exception to this was the Wildlife Society, known today as WESSA, which, taking a very courageous step, had decided in 1976 to buy an additional large piece of land near Howick as a base for environmental education. At that stage it already owned the Ben Lavin Nature Reserve, in the Transvaal, but the Umgeni Valley Ranch became, and remains, its flagship endeavour in land ownership.

Excellent conservation work has been carried out over the years by the legitimate NGOs. They have been, for the most part, stout and immensely helpful colleagues. However, as the NPB was directly responsible for a large part of South Africa's wildlife estate and enjoyed an expanding reputation for good governance and progressive conservation management, we felt that at least a part of civil society would tolerate and support a fund that was associated directly with the NPB, and which was specifically designed to further safeguard the formally protected resources in which they had an interest.

An added incentive was the fact that in 1986 Anton Rupert had established the National Parks Board Trust, initially as a result of two substantial donations from a visiting Arab sheikh. These were promptly matched, and afterwards regularly added to, by generous largesse provided from central government, a source not available to provincial conservation bodies.

In 1985, convinced that the NPB should have its own trust, and emboldened by the knowledge that Douglas Mitchell's long-approved vision of autonomy had allowed for the receipt of donations by the NPB, staff formally submitted a proposal to the board for the establishment of the Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust. It was envisaged that the trust would operate in the following manner:

1. The trust would be independently registered and managed by a board of trustees, which would include some members of the NPB board, the CEO of the NPB and additional trustees drawn from civil society.

2. The board of trustees would be responsible for the management of all matters associated with the running of the trust and this included the appointment and pay scales of any staff it employed.
3. The main purpose would be to create a Conservation Fund into which all donations and/or bequests received would be deposited.
4. The fund would be operated along the lines of an endowment fund with monies invested and managed by suitably selected investment managers.
5. No more than 10% of the accumulated funds would be withdrawn for use in any one year to support conservation objectives proposed by staff and approved by the trustees.
6. The trust would promote a membership drive using a share valued at R10 as the basic minimum contribution. It was anticipated that with an annual growth in membership and a loyalty programme, a regular and growing annual contribution could be gathered.¹

The board gave its full support to the concept and requested Robert (Bob) E. Levitt, a long-serving and very dedicated board member with an extensive legal background, to write a constitution for the proposed trust. Bob immediately set to work with his usual generous commitment of time and at no cost to the board. However, he soon ran into some legal problems. When the provincial government legal advisors were approached for comment, they irritatingly pointed out that although the Ordinance allowed for the acceptance of donations and bequests, it did not actually empower either the board or NPB staff to canvass for, or solicit, donations. Amendments to the Ordinance were called for, prepared and submitted for approval, but all of this took time. Occasionally, one had the impression that there were some civil servants in the provincial administration who were less than enthusiastic about the NPB establishing such a trust. Objections were raised, which led to further delays being experienced as negotiations took place. Bob made unavoidable amendments to the trust's constitution, often accompanied by some virulent verbal observations, for which he was quite famous. All in all, it took well over two years before the blessings of the province, the full approval of the constitution by the NPB and permission to register and legally establish the trust were obtained. The Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust became a legal entity and was formally launched in the theatre of the Douglas Mitchell Centre in Queen Elizabeth Park on 22 February 1989.

An iconic logo, suitable marketing material, promotional literature, reward certificates and bumper stickers were all voluntarily produced by staff of the

NPB Design Studio, who also persuaded suppliers to contribute to the initial costs of setting up the launch. At this function, attended by appropriate and interested senior provincial politicians and dignitaries, a wide range of regular business and commercial associates, supportive NGOs and members of the general public, the newly appointed chairman and members of the board of trustees were introduced.

The first chairman was Der-ing Stainbank (Natal MEC and Chairman of the board) with Bob Levitt as deputy chairman. Other founder members of the board of trustees were Pat Goss and Ron McDonald of the NPB, along with A.M. Hyatt and A.J. Ardington. They were supported by me as CEO of the NPB. The first marketing executive was Lorraine Ralfe, followed in 1990 by John Howard Sprake and then Raoul du Toit, who introduced a more commercial spirit, selling franchised clothing and other items all carrying the trust logo. Raoul proved to be very entrepreneurial, and sales were very successful, adding considerable sums to the Conservation Fund. He was followed by James Lind-Holmes who, becoming aware of the vision of the trust, developed an ambition to lead it. Much of the success of the trust can also be attributed to the immense work of Christine Bateson (1972–1998) and Debbie Farley (1989–1998), backed up by a cascade of willing helpers, who served the trust for nearly 25 years and whose dedication and commitment were the stuff of legend.



NPB Conservation Trust: first bumper sticker



NPB Conservation Trust: starting material created by the Design Studio

Fundraising

The trust launch in 1989 was a tremendous success, attracting extensive media comment, some of which was rather amusing in retrospect. A particularly fine cartoon was drawn by Jock Leyden, cartoonist for the *Daily News*, showing an NPB staff member accepting a cheque for R250 000 from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). The central figure, representing WWF International, announces the reason for the award as being 'For services over and above the call of duty—the Distinguished Crossed Cheque', and is applauded by a mixed gathering of enthusiastic wild animals. Jock Leyden was a great fan and friend of the NPB but he, like many others, had been misled. The money donated was actually in payment for a clandestine handing over of fifty rhino horns to an undercover operation now widely known as Operation Lock as I shall now explain.



NPB Conservation Trust: Jock Leyden's supportive cartoon for the launch

During 1988 I had been approached by Frans Stroebel from Anton Rupert's office to donate fifty horns to Operation Lock, which was being funded, as we later discovered, mainly by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. Rupert was the founder of the original South African Nature Foundation (now WWF-SA) in 1968 and a close friend of Prince Bernhard. The purpose of the operation, to be led by Ian Crooke of British SAS fame, was to use the horns to entice, entrap and uncover the traders, ringleaders and/or syndicates associated with the illegal rhino horn trade in southern Africa (Hanks, 2015). Almost total secrecy was called for, so neither the NPB itself (other than the Chairman, Dering Stainbank) nor the majority of the staff of the NPB were privy to the decision to become involved. And even then, Dering Stainbank and I felt we needed the blessing of the Administrator of Natal, Radclyffe Cadman. After hearing us out, he immediately, in our presence, telephoned Adriaan Vlok, the Minister of Police, who agreed that the province and the NPB should assist Operation Lock. Minister Vlok had given his blessing to the operation in South Africa and had promised South African Police backing for the endeavour.

Much to Frans Stroebel's distress I told him at the outset that if I obtained appropriate permission to participate, I would not consider handing over the horns free of charge. I explained my position by saying that, in such cases in the past, when things had gone wrong it was always the willing nature conservation bodies that emerged the total losers having forfeited the considerable value of the horns. He was less than pleased when I stated that if I could arrange the transaction, I would set the price of each horn, irrespective of size, at R5 000 each. The fifty horns would cost R250 000, a significant amount of money in 1987.

The Administrator and Chairman supported my view and when this news was conveyed to Stroebel he consulted his principals, who eventually agreed to the payment. However, both the Administrator and Dering Stainbank were concerned about potential speculation arising from the sudden arrival of such a large sum of money in case it would provoke investigative enquiries from the press. After some discussion I proposed that it might be fortuitous that we were going to launch the Conservation Trust in the near future and here was an opportunity to receive the money publicly via our new venture. After a brief discussion, all agreed that the funds could be accepted as a donation from WWF (South Africa) to the new Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust.

The cheque was handed over at the trust launch by Allan Heydorn, the newly appointed director of WWF (South Africa), who, being an old friend, both of mine and of the NPB, was more than delighted to be the deliverer of

such a significant amount of money. In later years when he discovered that the cash represented a payment for horns to be used by Operation Lock, he was deeply aggrieved to have found out that he had been an innocent party to a conspiracy. Allan has always been, and remains today, a conservationist of impeccable integrity and honesty, and was never involved in Operation Lock.

The story of the Operation Lock stratagem has been extensively covered by John Hanks (Hanks, 2015). I have little desire to add to it other than to say that I eventually washed my hands of the entire affair, so unimpressed was I with the operation's progress, achievements and security. I personally considered it a failure, but John has made a case for some successes. I was aware of only one and that was a sting operation in which an American citizen was successfully induced into purchasing a horn. Afterwards, Piet Lategan of the SAPS Endangered Species Unit (ESPU) arrived in my office one day and handed me a large roll of notes saying that this was the money derived from the entrapment sale of one of the NPB horns and he felt it should come to us. I deposited what turned out to be R10 000 into the Conservation Trust in keeping with the spirit of the original agreement with the Administrator. Some years later I was somewhat amused to hear a second-hand account of the sting by a journalist who had been allowed to witness the operation. The journalist recorded that the price of the horn had been set at R12 000, which had been duly paid by the American before he was arrested. It struck me that a handling fee of generous proportions had been deducted by the ESPU.

Before leaving discussion of Operation Lock, I should record that, after the collapse of the scheme, a great scandal broke out in Europe and Prince Bernhard and others were castigated in the press for their part in it. Prince Bernhard took a great deal of the criticism because much of the operating funding came from his resources (Hanks, 2015). In 1997, while on an official visit to the Netherlands, I was taken to the royal palace in Amersfoort by Siegfried Woldhek, director of WWF Netherlands (incidentally then the wealthiest branch of WWF in the world) to meet Prince Bernhard. I considered this a great privilege and thoroughly enjoyed the hour we were allocated to talk about conservation in South Africa.

As we were about to leave, and conscious of the criticism that Prince Bernhard had received in the press following the collapse of Operation Lock, I thought it appropriate to thank him for his contribution to the Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust. He reacted immediately by stating bluntly that he had never made such a contribution. I agreed that he had not done so intentionally but had, in fact, contributed through Operation Lock. At the



George Hughes in conversation with Prince Bernhard, Amersfoort Palace, Netherlands, 1997 (Siegfried Woldhek)

mention of the operation, he reacted strongly, stating that he did not want to talk about that endeavour, and he stood up from his desk, quite agitated and clearly angry. I quickly explained how R250 000 had been paid for the rhino horns and this sum was donated to the trust. I assured him that the money was still totally held in trust, had generated additional funds for conservation and would continue to do so indefinitely. I explained that I thought that he would like to know that not all of his investment in Operation Lock had gone astray. After a few seconds his expression altered, and he said that this was the only positive report that he had ever received about the scheme. He was smiling when we left.

NPB staff come to the fore

The Conservation Trust has proved to be a remarkable success. For the most part, the staff of the NPB took its establishment to heart, realising that the extra funds generated would serve not simply as a source of new reserves, but would also constitute a sort of insurance policy against a catastrophic decline in state financing.

Over the next few years, a surge in income was experienced as staff came up with more and more new initiatives to promote the trust. John Scotcher (1973–1993), Chief Conservator of the Drakensberg team, along with a passionate mountain bike enthusiast, Bruce Houghting (1994–1998) from the NPB's Technical Division, had a brainwave when they established the 75-kilometre Giant's Castle Mountain Bike Challenge. Eric Dickson (1978–1998), Warden of the RNNP and his wife Jenny came up with another project: the Mont-aux-Sources Challenge, a fifty-kilometre trail run. The course stretched from the Visitor Centre (1500 metres) to the top of the Drakensberg peak, the Sentinel (nearly 3 000 metres above sea level) and back again. This initiative also proved to be an incredibly successful fundraiser. In fact, all over the province, staff members came up with their own programmes, some associated with iconic events such as the Midmar Mile and the Comrades Marathon, which during the next decade made the trust famous and brought in millions of rands. Notably, in a tiny little NPB station, Charter's Creek, John and Jane Hoepfl (1974–1996), followed by Charlotte and Peter Pitt (1990–1998), each sold ten thousand R10 shares to camp visitors by actively promoting the trust to a degree far beyond the call of duty.



Above left: Bruce Houghting, one of the brains behind the Giant's Castle Mountain Bike Challenge

Right: An intrepid group of mountain bikers on top of the Little Berg with Popple's Peak in the background



The Mont-aux-Sources Challenge, started by Eric and Jenny Dickson, required participants to run from the visitor centre at RNNP to the top of Sentinel Peak (on the right) in the Amphitheatre and back again



The Mont-aux-Sources Challenge attracted hundreds of runners each year raising tens of thousands of rands for the NPB Conservation Trust

Public support for the Conservation Trust

The fund's trustees launched art sales and special events attracting such luminaries as Edmund Hillary, Clem Sunter and the famous elephant enthusiast and artist David Shepherd as guest speakers. The capital fund grew exponentially. In addition to David, other artists such as Paul Rose and Jeanette Stead, along with sculptors, including Dylan Lewis and Billy Lawrence, donated valuable works for auction.

In truth, the trust's success is synonymous with that of Dylan Lewis because the board assisted Dylan in his ambition to create life-size bronze sculptures of the 'big five'. Dylan produced the Centenary Rhino, a life-size black rhino bronze unveiled in 1995 by President Nelson Mandela at the centenary celebrations of the first game reserves in Natal (see Chapter 8). It now stands at the Centenary Game Capture Centre in Umfolozi Game Reserve. With permission, the trust produced 100 maquettes or miniatures of the Centenary Rhino, each marked with a date from 1895 to 1994 representing each year of the century of conservation. The sculpture was known fondly as Ronnie to those of us selling the maquettes. Some R750 000 flowed into the trust's coffers from their sales.² At the centenary celebrations in Hluhluwe in 1995, Mandela was given the first maquette in appreciation of his honouring the celebrations with his presence.



Above left: Dylan Lewis, a generous donor, working on the centenary black rhino sculpture, Umfolozi Game Reserve (Dylan Lewis Studios)

Right: Dylan Lewis's full-size white rhino sculpture at the International Convention Centre, Durban (names of NPB Conservation Trust donors are inscribed around the base)

The trust later purchased, thanks to Dylan and his marketing manager Lynn Ascham, a life-size white rhino bronze at a special price, and funded the costs through public subscription. The rhino was placed outside the International Convention Centre in Durban to commemorate the holding of the first World Parks Congress in Africa in 2004. These life-size bronzes, both still owned by the trust, are today valued in excess of R5 million each, which places in perspective the generosity of artists such as Dylan Lewis.

The trust received many substantial donations, but one of the most memorable was that from the Lady Usher Estate. Lady Usher was a prominent

character in the Nottingham Road farming community, and she passed away rather suddenly in 1991. One of our admirable zone officers, Doug Burden (1978–1995), called in to see me and suggested that I might care to have a bid for some funds from the estate. He had been led to believe that the estate, after meeting the many specific disbursements in Lady Usher's will, had some significant unallocated funds. At speed, I was accommodated by John Bates, Lady Usher's long-serving manager on her farm Forduin, who arranged for me to give a presentation to the estate's board of trustees at the farm. They were cordial and friendly and thanked me for the presentation on the Conservation Trust saying that they would let me know.

While I was in a meeting in my office several months later, the door suddenly burst open to the surprise of a guest; and to my irritation, as unwanted interruptions were a particular hate of mine and I considered them discourteous to any visitors present. The intruder was Raoul du Toit, the dynamic CEO of the NPB Conservation Trust who, waving a letter, cried out 'that must have been one hell of a presentation'. Raoul thrust the letter at me and in a brief communication we were informed that the Lady Usher Estate had decided to donate R3.5 million to the Conservation Trust. My guest was very understanding about the interruption while I asked Raoul to phone the estate's secretary to establish that there had not been a typing error. There hadn't been.

The Director's Draw

At a much more modest level, NPB staff from the most unlikely divisions made singular contributions through a raffle known as the Director's Draw. In general, as with many large organisations, it was customary for the NPB to receive corporate gifts from service providers. The CEO's office was no exception and during the course of the year it received many beautiful and useful gifts, such as colourful calendars, glasses and bottles of wine and spirits. In my own case, as CEO, I felt that the success of my office was dependent on the hard work and dedication of the staff in general and so I instituted a system whereby all corporate gifts were handed into a central pool managed by the trust. Towards Christmas, a schedule of the gifts was circulated to all staff who, for a small contribution of R1 per ticket (with no limit on the numbers of tickets purchased), had the opportunity to win one or more of these splendid items. A bottle of Chivas Regal for a rand was a real bargain. Alas, I never won one.

All corporate gift donors were written to and thanked for their contributions and told that their gift would be entered into the Director's Draw, giving the staff the possibility of enjoying their generosity. For a good number of years, the Director's Draw raised hundreds of rands for the trust (thanks to the hard work of Christine Bateson) but it became noticeable towards the end that the number of gifts was declining to the point where a raffle was not worth the effort involved. I often wonder why this was the case. Did our service providers really feel that they were only trying to keep the procurement staff, and for that matter me, sweet? I hope not.

In a way I was sad to see the passing of the Director's Draw but on the other hand it brought to an end the incredible bad luck that I personally experienced over its last three years, winning only the same, rather awful, red ochre clay hippo in a red ochre clay bowl. After each win I re-donated the prize to the draw only to have it re-emerge as my prize the following year. I am certain that it lies somewhere in the office today unwanted and deservedly neglected.

A disappointment

It is said that one should never look a gift horse in the mouth, but in the case of one donation to the trust I learned that gift horses are occasionally the exact opposite. In 1995, I received a letter from a retired American businessman in the United States, stating that he had once been a senior executive in a large company in Natal, had loved visiting NPB areas and wished to donate a significant number of shares, worth in excess of R5 million, to the Board. There was only one caveat. He would appreciate getting a tax benefit from the donation. In the United States this was a 501(c) tax certificate to which we had no access.

At the same time, at the request of the founder, I had been assisting with the preparation of a constitution for a trust that was being launched in the United States. When the caveat regarding the tax certificate became known, it was suggested that once the United States trust was registered, the funds could be donated to it. In turn, the money would be conveyed onwards to our trust. Being blindly naïve, I agreed to this without even telling the board and in due course was somewhat distressed to find that once the donation had been made to the US trust, and the donor had been given his 501(c) certificate, all contact with me by the newly registered trust was severed.

No other staff member has ever experienced the joy of entering the NPB boardroom and informing the Chairman and board that he/she had lost for

our trust, a donation, as it turned out, of R5.25 million. I was in favour of a legal challenge to the newly established trust, but wiser heads prevailed and Graham Cox, an outstanding board member with immense legal expertise and a wonderful sense of humour, pointed out that not only would such a challenge cost a small fortune, but we would definitely lose, as all US legal requirements had been met. An appeal to the original donor for some help fell on deaf ears (according to his lawyer) as, indeed, did a *cri de coeur* from me to the South African Ambassador who was one of the Washington-based trustees of the new US trust. With the understanding and sympathy of the board members who were encouraging me, I gave up, abandoned the donation and to this day still seethe gently, even as I write this.

A benefit that emerged from this unhappy experience came some years later when the NPB Secretary came to me in a state of nervous tension saying that he had made a bad mistake with the board minutes and was terrified of telling the Chairman, Pat Goss, what he had done. Comforting my anguished colleague, I said that the board was indeed a forgiving one and little harm would come to him. I explained that the board had forgiven me, a far too trusting soul, for losing R5.25 million, so Pat was likely to forgive him his error. He fled the room aquiver with gratitude. Such little homilies are often valuable for staff relations.

Another consolation came at one of our NPB game auctions when I learnt that the board of trustees of this American trust had insisted (partly, I was later led to believe, as a result of my emotional appeals for justice to the ambassadorial trustee during a meeting with him in his Johannesburg office) that the money should be spent in KZN, as it was clear from the benefactor's terms of donation that Natal wildlife ought to benefit from the money. A large proportion of the donation was used to purchase a game farm in KZN. I suppose that all's well that ends well.

Opposition and complaints

Occasionally there were complaints expressed about the establishment of the Conservation Trust which were a source of unexpected surprise. One senior environmental NGO saw fit to publish some acrimonious remarks about the NPB entering into the field of fundraising for conservation, suggesting that this was the bailiwick of the NGO world. Apart from my fundamental disagreement with this view, the constitution of our Conservation Trust demonstrated clearly that it was, in effect, an NGO, and has subsequently become even more so.

At the local level rumour reached me one day, fairly early in the life of the trust, that there were NPB staff not responding positively to my appeals to encourage visitors and colleagues to contribute to the trust. It was claimed by one member of staff that the trust was ‘the brainchild of the CEO aimed at providing a good pension for himself on retirement’. The only explanation that I could come up with for such a ridiculous allegation was that in addressing a staff meeting one day I had stated that I was very keen on the trust because I felt that it offered some financial stability when we might need it. In addition, and perhaps adding to the misunderstanding, I had anecdotally admitted that I would be pleased that, if the trust was successful, it could provide the organisation with the equivalent, or more, of all the cash that had been paid to me as a salary through my forty odd years of service. I would have, in effect, been instrumental in repaying all the money I had earned and would have worked for free. Given the joy and satisfaction I had derived from my career, I stated that this would be of some comfort to me in my retirement.



The NPB Conservation Trust's donation at Giant's Castle Game Reserve main caves allows comfortable access for visitors and prevents direct contact with the rock face



Above left: The NPB Conservation Trust's donation at Giant's Castle Game Reserve main caves is one of its most visible funding projects

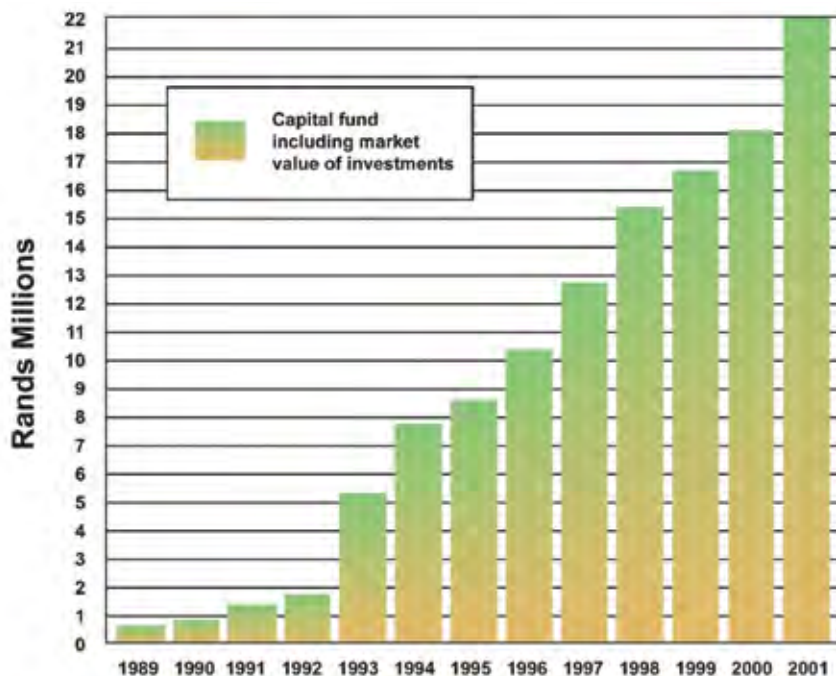
Right: Didima Camp: Rock Art Centre, a project of the NPB Conservation Trust



Didima Camp: Rock Art Centre cave wall paintings by Lawrie Raubenheimer



Didima Camp: Rock Art Centre: eland at the entrance



The NPB Conservation Trust proved highly successful

The benefits of the Conservation Trust

It is worth recording at this stage that from its establishment in 1989, until the effects of the amalgamation of the NPB with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation settled down, the trust (which changed its name in 1998 from the Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust to the KwaZulu-Natal or KZN Conservation Trust) grew its endowment-type Conservation Fund to R23 million and, during the same period, contributed no less than R14 million to the programmes of the NPB and the newly formed KZN Nature Conservation Service. By any standard, the success of the trust is beyond question and great credit must go to the many NPB staff, trustees and donors who made the success possible. (Annual Reports of the Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust and the KZN Conservation Trust, 1990–2004).³

May I end by saying that the above sums are somewhat more substantial than the total salary and associated costs borne by the NPB for having employed me, including the odd R5 million donated from the United States and lost through unethical behaviour by some US trust beneficiaries.

NOTES

- 1 Our initial, and very optimistic, goal was to have one million members at R10 each per year. This need not have been in single shares. For example, if a donor bought R10 000 worth of shares this would represent the equivalent of 1 000 single donors. Viewed in this light the goal did not seem outrageous, at least not to the author.
- 2 The trust started selling the maquettes at R8 000 each but later raised the price to R14 000, a bargain when one considers that on 21 March 2021 one of them, dated 1989, was sold for R286 000.
- 3 In 2005, the KZN Conservation Trust (successor to the Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust) and the Wildlands Trust amalgamated to form the Wildlands Conservation Trust. More recently, with the addition of a major marine conservation arm, the trust has again changed its name to WildTrust. A condition of the agreement for this amalgamation was that the Conservation Fund should remain inviolate and would be built upon. The new trust, until recently under the leadership of Andrew Venter, grew into a massive NGO and the staff and trustees remained true to their mandate. The Conservation Fund in 2020 stood at R80.8 million and is helping support extensive conservation activities not only for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, but for a much wider group of beneficiaries than was ever originally envisaged.

UNTIL 1964 the NPB and its policies had focused primarily on combating illegal hunting and fishing within provincial game and nature reserves and exercising more control over the exploitation of natural resources. The very rudimentary tourism facilities did, however, receive some attention and hutted camps, at they became known, were planned in the reserves that had never previously offered overnight accommodation beyond camping.

The furore involving the submission of the Petition (see Chapter 2) resulted in the NPB establishing a greatly improved system for communication with the public. Specialist liaison committees were developed, on which interested and affected members of the public would be invited to serve. However, the suggestion from the petitioners to the NPA that a completely new organisation, totally separate from the NPB, should be established to handle activities with more of an emphasis on recreation, was rejected out of hand. In 1972, the NPB, in apparent response to the proposal that recreation facilities were different from mainline conservation, established a Recreation Division in a proposed new NPB structure. The Recreation Division was intended to create a different class of service, catering for mass visitor activities and mainly domestic tourism with facilities having a capacity far in excess of those camps built in the main biodiversity reserves. Howard Alker (1965–1987) had the longest service as head of the Recreation Division.

Proclamation of the Midmar Dam Public Resort near Howick in 1968 was the catalyst that enabled the realisation of a Recreation Division. The resort was officially opened in 1974. As the new dam progressed towards completion, the NPA, in full support of the NPB, provided significant sums of money and technical expertise to build a recreational infrastructure that would do justice to this beautiful dam. History has subsequently demonstrated that the results of this investment were something of a curate's egg.

Being such a beautiful year-round clear water dam, Midmar attracted visitor numbers that grew exponentially as tens of thousands of Natalian and other South African residents flocked to use the outdoor amenities. These were

provided in support of yachting, boating, fishing (following the intensive stocking of the dam with suitable angling species like black bass from the United States) and simple outdoor relaxation. The NPB made every effort to provide infrastructure and services to these new and much larger visitor installations and it must be said that, at that time, all the hard work and expense was worthwhile and successful.

The NPB, as part of the development of visitor facilities at Midmar, which was also funded by the special grant from the Natal provincial government, had begun to give consideration to what might represent the full potential and demographics of Natal. An early and admirable step was to create a committee involving all communities that would assist in ensuring that all people in the region were welcome. The Midmar development was zoned to create a decent-sized and suitable nature reserve and game viewing area. It included a large arm of the dam from which all water activities were forbidden so as not to disturb the game and create a peaceful setting for nature tourism.

Under the apartheid laws of the day the main zone in the area most suited to development was reserved for whites only, being on the northern bank not far from the dam wall and overlooking Morgenson Bay. Developments included an attractive hutted camp, a separate and much cheaper zone of smaller huts and several large and very beautifully selected and designed camping grounds. Anticipating great demand for the resort, the provincial architects designed facilities for the newly formed Midmar-Henley Yacht Club and a large block of rentable lockers for hire as storage units for enthusiastic water sportsmen. Built into that complex was a restaurant site.

As demand did increase, along with exciting uses of the dam area itself, such as the Midmar Mile, new camping grounds were developed, and they covered much of the northern banks as far as the point where the Umgeni River discharges into the dam. Services included the restaurant (leased out to the private sector), shops to cater for the speed-boating and yachting fraternities (also leased out to the private sector), and sites for special interest groups.

Given segregation, it was certainly unique that the large section named as Orient Park, on the eastern side of the dam, was opened to provide recreational opportunities, especially fishing, to the black communities of the region (it was mainly used by Indian and coloured people). This included public facilities such as accommodation, camping, picnic sites and a restaurant. As this initiative was the first of its kind, catering to communities other than white, the NPB attracted a great deal of positive reaction and for the first time its facilities began to be appreciated by the wider public, as literally hundreds

of people from these groups made Midmar Dam their recreation site of choice. This situation lasted for many years and, it should be said, continues for anglers to this day. Later, with the establishment of the Midmar Mile, an exciting annual swimming event that today attracts annually nearly 20 000 eager swimmers drawn from all over South Africa and abroad, the fame of Midmar Dam became international.

Fortuitously then, the developments at Midmar Dam provided the anchor project for the Recreation Division and the resort was expected to generate large amounts of money, much of which was envisioned to be profit, from which the conservation reserves would benefit. Regrettably, that ultimately never happened and although the intention was sincere, the anticipated surplus revenues became a generally accepted home-grown myth.

Expansion to more dams and to other sites

The Department of Water Affairs soon extended its request to the NPB to manage state-owned land surrounding other bulk-water dams. The recreation responsibilities of the NPB rapidly increased and any budget surplus was absorbed by new development. The NPB ultimately constructed facilities, both for recreation and conservation, at the Wagendrift, Chelmsford, Albert Falls, Spioenkop, Vryheid and Hazelmere dams. In much later years when dams like Woodstock near Bergville were built, the NPB's interest in such sites eventually fell away because these dams experienced severe fluctuations in water levels that nullified the recreation associated with water sports.

It is beyond doubt that the new division met its mandate with enthusiasm in the early 1970s. It became obvious to many staff that John Page had hitched his wagon to its success and therefore took steps to ensure that its viability was going to be certain. John persuaded the NPB that St Lucia, Mapelane Camp and Sodwana Bay should be added to the Recreation Division stable. Given their size and direct association with important biodiversity sites, this move was generally not viewed positively by many. It generated the first concern within the staff of the Conservation Division. This trend of bias toward the Recreation Division continued for the next twenty years and, I believe, in an attempt to enhance its potential, led to newly declared protected areas of some importance for their biodiversity, such as Trafalgar Beach, being placed under its control. However, these moves further expanded the gradual development of partition between the staff of the two divisions. John Page developed a very distressing inclination to appear to promote higher budgets for the

Recreation Division and to allocate its surplus funds from the NPB budget. He also favoured purchasing with such surplus, or with unspent funds, fleets of vehicles that were allocated to the Recreation Division.

It must be acknowledged that John Page's conviction produced a fine team of men who worked immensely hard to make the recreation stations a success. One must remember that the driving concept was that these stations would generate sufficient funds to assist the important protected biodiversity areas with additional funds to ensure their survival. As there were seldom any obvious benefits from this intended role as a conservation benefactor, in my opinion a slightly negative attitude towards the division was inculcated within the ranks of those staff involved in direct conservation activities.

For the first twenty years of the Recreation Division's existence, it benefited, as had the Conservation Division, from the generous funding largesse of the provincial treasury. The rules of the provincial funding section, of course, were seldom appreciated by anyone other than the very senior staff and the board members whose good relations with the political masters of the province helped ensure a substantial increase in the NPB's budget every year.

One founding principle proved of immense financial value and was started almost from the day the NPB was founded in 1947. I have no doubt that the guiding hand of Douglas Mitchell was behind the policy, but I am equally certain that the enthusiasm and drive of Colonel Vincent, followed by John Page's starry-eyed enthusiasm and ability to get blood from a stone, and finally, the excellent relationship between the UP and conservation all contributed to the positive financial structure that lasted for forty years.

The secret was this. Whenever a new protected area was approved and established, a generous budget was approved for its establishment, development and maintenance. There were many such areas in the early days thanks to Colonel Vincent's constant drive to see that most, if not all, of Natal's important biodiversity assets should be protected. Not unnaturally, it was ensured that, whenever possible, all these needs were covered by a sum that erred on the generous side. In some cases, at least adequate funds for housing of staff and road development were envisaged.

Following this initial injection of funds into the NPB's budget the board assumed, and treasury obviously agreed, that the original sum should become the basic budget for each new station with due adjustments for inflation. As a result the NPB's budget grew steadily and it was not surprising that its endeavours were perceived by the public of Natal as admirable. The positive financial position in due course permitted the Recreation Division to expand

its operations, creating what might be called, in today's terminology, a stock market bubble that began to attract attention.

The Historical Village

John Page's response to the perceived success of the Recreation Division was to promote the creation of a historical village at Midmar. It would represent a typical Natal Midlands village as it would have appeared around the end of the nineteenth century. He persuaded the board and the province that such a project would require special funding and being well placed between Johannesburg and Durban, it would provide a dynamic historical attraction for tourists.

The concept was generally endorsed by the NPB and the authorities. Architects from the provincial Works Department were engaged to draw up a master plan that was ultimately approved by the board and recommended to the Provincial Council. In retrospect what the project clearly lacked was a business plan, but John's enthusiasm successfully masked this shortcoming, and the province approved a ten-year funding programme of R1 million per year.

In the early 1980s, the provincial authorities had begun to demand far more critical assessment of proposals coming from the NPB and, for the first time, began to lay down conditions framing the funding. In the case of the planned village, a noteworthy codicil required that, at the end of ten years, the project would have to be self-sustaining as that would be the definite limit of provincial funding for this project. This proved a defining moment and should have been recognised for what it was, a Damocles Sword that required a carefully structured business plan to ensure that at the end of ten years the condition would be met. It was not.

As the village was to fall under the jurisdiction of the Recreation Division, a recruitment programme for suitable staff was launched, while at the same time John Page used his forceful talent for fundraising. Private sector donors were encouraged to contribute the costs of some of the planned buildings. The publicity attached to the concept included appeals to the general public to donate or lend items of the appropriate vintage to the project and a flood of such valuable artefacts flowed into the Midmar complex. It was immediately obvious that such donations required housing and, more importantly, restoration. A very great deal of money was expended on off-site surplus buildings and workshops for this purpose.

When South African Railways (SAR) donated some rolling stock, which was to be installed adjacent to the proposed vintage railway station, yet more money was spent on a workshop and recruiting the personnel to meet the restoration demands accompanying the arrival of the engines and carriages. Let it be said that enormous enthusiasm and commitment were generated in the initial stages of the project, and these eventually led to some wonderful developments that initially attracted a lot of public attention and approval. To facilitate the arrival of the rolling stock, NPB staff, alongside their colleagues from SAR, built a new railway line to connect with the main Durban-Johannesburg line. At the appropriate moment, it was linked to the main system and the donated locomotives and carriages were diverted to the Midmar station site. Apart from being an exciting event, this it was also a costly one as the connecting line had required the purchase and installation of rails and sleepers, all of which were later removed. A small-scale railway system primarily restored, maintained and operated by volunteers was a great attraction. It proved a valuable demonstration of the apparent success of the project to the politicians who enjoyed many a day in the spotlight riding around the circuit especially built to house it.



Midmar: the railway station in the historical village (EKZNW photo library)

As the entire project began to take shape and restored artefacts were placed on display there was a great deal of positive support. There was even talk of having some vintage houses built, which would be leased to pensioners who, at very reasonable cost, would be granted occupancy provided they devoted part of their time to dressing in suitable era costumes and acting as guides and interpreters. This latter concept was one practised with great success at the Colonial Williamsburg project in Virginia in the United States. Essentially, the Midmar Historical Village was going to be one of South Africa's first theme parks and was officially opened on 15 November 1983. As the years passed, and the day-to-day costs continued to escalate, the number of visitors did not. After a promising beginning there was a gradual decline in visitor numbers, and it became clear to the staff that the chances of the facility ever being self-sustaining after ten years were becoming remote.

Meanwhile, the other divisions of the NPB were busy with their own goals and they spent minimum time worrying about or showing much interest in the development. In general, however, I believe that many staff had a positive attitude towards the village and certainly admired the skills and achievements of the village staff. Many Conservation Division zone officers made their contributions by finding vintage artefacts on farms and facilitating their donation to the village. Indeed, there were many deep friendships between staff of the Recreation and the Conservation divisions from where, in the early era of the Recreation Division, many senior staff had been drawn because of their skills.

At about year six of the programme even John Page's optimistic enthusiasm began to wane, and he made some decisions which unfortunately sounded the death knell of the project. He began to accept almost any old artefact that was offered to the NPB, and this started to erode the fundamental concept of the village. Although interesting from a logistical point of view, two of the most bizarre acquisitions included a retired tugboat from Durban harbour and a retired Avro Shackleton bomber from the South African Air Force.

The great expense of collecting, transporting and installing them at the site generated among NPB staff, even some members of the Recreation Division itself, severe criticism of such items as being both inappropriate for the village and, as the province was tightening its money belt, wasteful expenditure. In addition, the mistake was made that some of the completed halls, intended to house restored exhibits of a turn-of-the-century lifestyle, were used to house motor vehicles (free of charge), both those of vintage provenance and also far more recent motor cars owned by members of vintage car clubs. These

exhibits were regarded by many as totally inappropriate for Midmar Historical Village.

Cultural changes

The Recreation Division management had, in parallel, made some other decisions that did not sit well with NPB staff in other divisions. First, it appeared that the section began to view itself as being different from the other divisions and able to operate by another set of rules. Recreation vehicles were all marked with an identification sticker which differentiated them from other divisional vehicles. What this achieved was to make it obvious that there appeared to be a surfeit of vehicles available to the Recreation Division in comparison to those of the Conservation Division.

In addition, in times of crisis, such as when staff were sent to conservation stations to assist in the fighting of wildfires, the assistance of the Recreation staff would be costed, including vehicle expenses and staff time, and then a charge would be made to the conservation station that received the help. This was perceived as an affront to the Conservation Division staff who, being more exposed to the dangers of runaway or arson fires, had a traditional practice of sending voluntary help to anyone, be they the Department of Forestry or neighbouring private farmers, and no charge was ever made. Staff knew that their turn would come and they would benefit from the help of their neighbours.

Finally, it became known that at sites such as Midmar, where weekends could bring huge numbers of visitors, any increase in pressure resulted in extra staff being employed full-time to cater for the maximum number of visitors expected. This resulted in these staff being underused during weekday periods when sites like Midmar were virtually devoid of visitors. The suggestion that times of visitor stress should be catered for using volunteers or temporary staff to reduce the pressure on permanent staff was not accepted as policy, and the practice added further costs that were seldom covered by a concomitant rise in visitor income to the station. Furthermore, a series of droughts, which saw water levels in the dams fall to such levels that visitor numbers dropped catastrophically, did not help the cause or the budget of the Recreation Division.

The gradual incremental dissatisfaction associated with the Recreation Division came to a head in 1988 when the provincial grant supporting the Historical Village was terminated. A clear message was sent that there was no possibility of the allocation of more funds. Given the huge investment made

in the project and the massive infrastructure that had been built and staffed to support it, several alternative options were explored.

The first was to try to attract more visitors to Midmar as a whole. The news that the private sector was interested in finding a site for a new hotel and casino seemed to be a promising avenue to follow. It was felt that having a popular hotel adjacent to the Historical Village would bring long-hoped-for regular visitors to the site. A large daily presence of visitors, it was thought, would provide the additional funds to make the project viable. Despite the fact that there was a beautiful site for a hotel immediately adjacent to the Historical Village, this opportunity disappeared in a cloud of conspiracy as the Department of Water Affairs suddenly reappeared and made it clear that any such hotel development would fall under their jurisdiction. The resultant long series of meetings led to a spat between the Natal provincial authorities and the national Department of Water Affairs. The investors, quite sensibly, sought another site and ended up building the Golden Horse Hotel and Casino in Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg.

The NPB then agreed to open negotiations with members of the private sector who had shown an interest in the village and were very willing to take over the site on a lease, convinced that they could make the project a success. They did not and after two years withdrew at, I believe, a not inconsiderable loss. This was, in the view of many of us staff, a great pity, as the Historical Village was not an ill-conceived, frivolous project but a genuine and sincere endeavour to provide an insightful window into the life of an early and important period of Natal Midlands history. Over its brief lifetime it did bring a great deal of pleasure to many people in the province, but it failed because it did not have a structured business plan that was rigorously adhered to. To this was added the problem that tight control was not maintained over expenditure.

The NPB eventually decided to terminate the project and instructed staff to honour the undertaking that it had made to the donors of items of historical value to return them should the project fail. This project was successfully managed over two years by Ron Physick and his team and thereafter all remaining items were put up for auction. Even the Shackleton bomber was successfully sold. The buildings remaining on site have been converted into staff facilities and today serve as the uKhahlamba (Drakensberg) regional office of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

Financial realities

In 1988, following a thorough audit of the finances of the Recreation Division and especially those of Midmar, it was established that the station was costing the NPB R1 million per year. The optimistic hope that it would provide funds for conservation, upon which the division had been established, was exposed as unfounded. This was partly a result of the fact that the recreational practices of visitors had changed over the years and seemed unlikely to revert to the golden years of Midmar in the 1970s. As a result, in 1989 the Recreation Division was disbanded and all staff reverted to being what was originally intended; simply members of the NPB. All stations were incorporated into new regional divisions. A rationalisation programme involving staff numbers on every station was carried out, eventually leading to a far more balanced financial structure. Soon the financial losses on most former Recreation Division stations were brought under control and, remarkably, the integration of the two staff components into the unified NPB, was both smooth and almost pain-free for the staff, who displayed an admirable and positive attitude towards the process.

Conclusion

In my view, it had been an unfortunate mistake to create the Recreation Division. The division of resources proved to be inequitable and without rational principles, which led eventually to divisions between staff when none were necessary. The immense success of the NPB's policies and practices in the last decade of the NPB's existence was proof that the original concept of a single organisation was indeed the most effective. It is perhaps worth remembering that the Petition of the early seventies had recommended that another organisation for mass recreation, separate from the NPB, should be established by the province, an idea that was rejected by the NPB and Natal province. In retrospect I must agree that this was the correct judgement. Both recreation and conservation functions could be, and were in the long run, shown to be managed successfully by a single unified structure with the single policy of conservation.

A man of great heart

It has been mentioned many times that the Recreation Division was John Page's brainchild, but it is not fair to imply that its eventual demise was his fault. I was always impressed by John's enthusiasm and his intentions were

anything but frivolous. John also received a great deal of encouragement from the provincial authorities and the board at the time of the division's original establishment.

What really impressed me and still makes me believe that, perhaps, he suffered a degree of pressure from politicians, was his reaction, after his retirement, to the NPB's killing of what everyone regarded as his sacred cows: the Recreation Division and the Midmar Historical Village. It was commonly expected that John would storm Head Office and deliver a blistering criticism of the NPB's actions. Being the CEO, and in willing agreement that this decision would improve the NPB's finances and increase our income streams, I expected most of the blistering reaction to be directed at me. To my surprise, months went by and there was no public reaction from John.

A year after these fairly dramatic developments, John and I visited Stellenbosch together to attend a meeting of the WWF-South Africa advisory committee of which John had been chairman for many years and for which he had been deservedly awarded a gold medal by the WWF. He had flown down before me, so it had been agreed that when we flew back to Durban, I would give him a lift back from there to Pietermaritzburg. I saw this as an opportunity to thank him for having allowed me to execute my job without any public criticism, which, I rather nervously suggested, I had been expecting.

John's reaction was startling. He almost shouted, 'It hasn't been bloody easy'. Somewhat timorously, I replied that I could understand that, but I wished to thank him anyway. He replied sharply: 'Don't thank me, thank Mona' (Mona was John's wife of long standing and a good friend of mine during the many years that both the Pages had worked for the NPB). He continued, 'There were a number of occasions when I learned of your decisions and rose from my seat to come up to the office and tear a strip off you, but every time Mona heard me shout, she would rush through to wherever I was and push me back into my chair, telling me that it wasn't my job anymore, it was yours, and then she would bring me a beer.'

Those comments were followed by a long period of pregnant silence as we progressed towards Pietermaritzburg and I feared that I should have let sleeping dogs lie. Suddenly John announced, 'But, I must tell you that I have never been more proud of the Natal Parks Board, than I am now'. And that was John Page. A thoroughly good man who devoted his life with passion to serving conservation and the province of Natal. Although he would argue quite vociferously and publicly on occasions, he never bore a grudge and could even accept jocular criticism with good humour. My own career with the NPB owes

much to the support and encouragement that he willingly gave me, as well as the lessons I learned from his 25 years in charge.¹ It should never be forgotten that the eventual success of the NPB was based on the strong foundations built by its first two directors. It was a deeply sad day for me when John died, for we had enjoyed 45 years of friendship despite some unpromising encounters early in my career (see Hughes, 2014).

NOTES

- 1 One piece of advice for which I am eternally grateful came spontaneously from John immediately before we were informed that a new and positive salary adjustment was about to be implemented. John and I were travelling to Kamberg Nature Reserve when he told me about the possible salary enhancement, and he surprised me by telling me not to use it as an immediate resource. Being far down the totem pole in the way of salary I must have looked at him as if he was mental. With some forbearance he explained that he imagined that Lee and I were managing all right on my present salary and suggested that I divert the entire increase to a high yielding investment, attach an obligatory increase each year thereafter and let compound interest do its wonders. After discussion with Lee, we decided to do that and the net result is that in retirement I regularly thank the spirit of John for such outstanding advice.

SECTION 3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

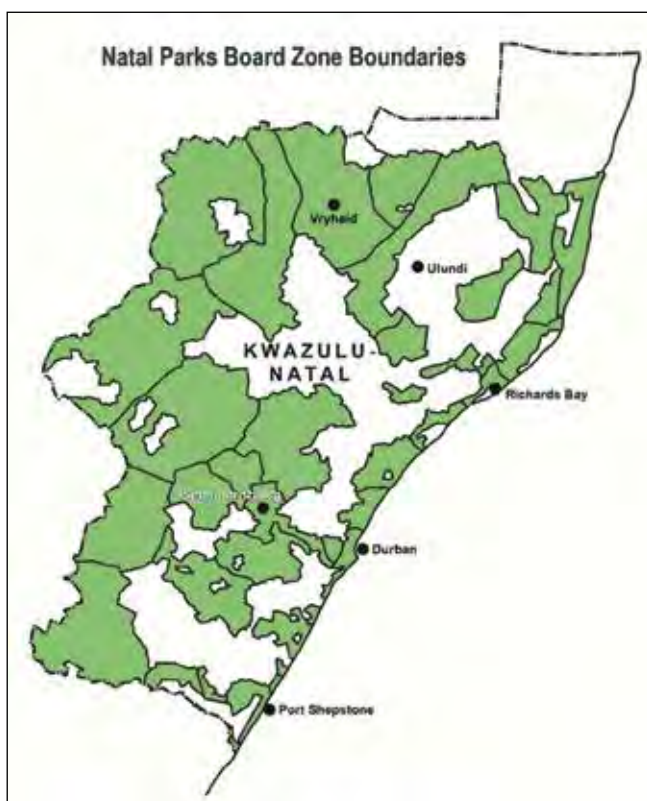
D. INCREASE THE INVOLVEMENT OF
PRIVATE CITIZENS IN
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

26

THE ZONE OFFICERS

IN 1947, the NPB inherited, from the provincial administration of Natal, a system of fisheries officers along the coast and a very sparse collection of inland field staff who were employed to pursue law enforcement controls aimed mainly at hunting and fishing activities. These duties included the prosecution of offences such as illegal hunting methods and hunting without licences and also, more importantly in my view, fishing offences of the same ilk, especially transgressions against the noble art of trout fishing, where using spinners instead of artificial flies is a heinous crime. Colonel Vincent, when he became the Director in 1949, also had a penchant for persecuting those involved in illegal trapping and trafficking of indigenous birds.

The staff component therefore was thinly populated and the NPB managed to get around this problem by appointing most of the staff who worked in the terrestrial protected areas as game rangers and also as fisheries officers. In the early days this created



NPB zone officers carried conservation in the province

opportunities for a certain amount of interchangeability, given that there were so few personnel in the field at the time. There were some very colourful and thoroughly dedicated officers who became for the most part the only link between the NPB and the community at large. However, in most districts, the fact that they were essentially law enforcement officers did not always serve as a public relations tool. Despite this shortcoming, some of these early fisheries officers such as Alf Jones from the Estcourt District (1948–1965) and Vincent Ball in the Dundee District (1951–1980) became legends in their time and are remembered with great affection.¹

This situation was to evolve rapidly from the 1950s as the NPB began to expand its service function and to encourage the people of the province to play a greater and more positive role in the use of wildlife, at first with a focus on fish. Demand from the trout angling community saw the development of trout hatcheries at Underberg, RNNP and even as late as 1978, a large hatchery at Kamberg Nature Reserve. At Nagle Dam near Durban, in response to the public's interest in angling fish other than trout, the NPB built a sizeable freshwater fish hatchery from where countless black bass, smallmouth bass and other exotics such as bluegill sunfish made their way into the dams of Natal and, alas, inadvertently, into some of the rivers.



Umgeni warm water hatchery near Nagle Dam

These hatcheries also created the opportunity for the NPB to build a team of well-informed and useful fisheries staff who became experts in providing advice and guidance to those wishing to introduce suitable angling fish and/or showed interest in entering the field of fish farming. The NPB's leading trout authority, Bob Crass (1950–1993), became famous for his trout studies and skills at fly fishing (although he was often out-fished by his determined and skilled wife, Joan). Tom Pike (1965–1995) and Meyer Oosthuizen (1959–1987) became highly respected sources of information on non-indigenous angling fish and many other staff spent time at Nagle Dam where their services provided highly valued guidance to Natal citizens.

A dramatic change to the focus of conservation involving the farming communities took place in the 1960s with the advent of game capture and game translocation. The inland force of zone officers, as they came to be called in the 1970s, expanded rapidly. Added to their duties was the responsibility to try to persuade a fairly uninterested farming community to look at large mammals as a prospective asset; and, for those showing interest, to act as promoters, learning to provide information on transport and husbandry of game animals. This duty was accepted with real enthusiasm as it lifted these staff members out of the field of law enforcement and into the furthering of conservation with a purpose. Some officers, such as Charles Wright (1956–1992) became almost evangelical in their commitment and even when Charles retired in 1992 he was still informing all new NPB officers that the only real conservation staff in the Board were the zone officers because they had the broadest responsibilities and had to operate throughout 90% of the province. Charles made it clear to everyone that the zone officer was as essential to the successful restoration of Natal's much-depleted wildlife resources as any game ranger in a protected area. To prove it, Charles launched a programme to ensure every zone officer obtained a computer and arranged for suitable training to ensure their computer literacy. In reviewing these events, I am much more inclined to believe Charles' thesis than I used to be. The NPB managed to complicate his life, however, by adding to his workload and making him the Officer-in-Charge at Moor Park Nature Reserve, where he served with great distinction and was much admired right up to his retirement.

As a matter of fact, many of the smaller protected areas of the province were managed by zone officers, in addition to all their other duties. In a way this was of great benefit to the NPB because it created a home base for the zone officer and his family and a convenient centre of focus with which the local public could interact. With the expansion of the zone officers' role and influence came



Moor Park Nature Reserve near Estcourt: Charles Wright, exemplary zone officer and officer-in-charge.



Moor Park Nature Reserve: interpretive display designed and built by Charles Wright in conversation with Mike Mentis, ecologist serving the NPB farm game section

the need to collaborate with the fast-expanding NPB scientific team, which now included those interested in promoting the sustainable use of wildlife. Scientists such as Roger Grafton (1965–1968), Mike Mentis (1969–1979) and Roger Collinson (1975–1982) greatly increased the utilisation of the district and rural expertise of the zone officers. The combined forces led to far more focused attention being given to hunting and the rationality of the old game hunting schedules. They also led to the eventual recognition that the NPB should better control and regulate hunting, while at the same time passing far more responsibility to those landowners wishing to pursue game ranching as a profitable enterprise.



Zone officers provided a wide range of services to landowners

The expansion of the scientific team brought greater and greater interaction with the zone officers as they became the go-to staff for scientists seeking more information or direction to aid their research in many disparate fields, from the distribution of the larger mammals to the presence of rare birds and plants.

The Zone Officers' Manual

The zone staff, therefore, became ever more valuable for the furthering of NPB goals. By 1982 there were 29 zones in Natal and the great increase in staff numbers and the range of their activities necessitated the creation of the

Zone Officers' Manual (1983), which set out the goals of a zone officer and provided detailed guidance about how to achieve those goals. The three most important aspects of their work were:

1. To provide advice and encouragement (an extension service) to landowners and other members of the public and to act as the NPB's local representative.
2. To enforce the laws contained in Chapters 3–12 of the Nature Conservation Ordinance.
3. To collect information relevant to the general conservation activities of the NPB.

Each specific field of endeavour had its own detailed guidelines as well as appendices of instructions about how to deal with almost every aspect of a zone officer's duties: strict law enforcement, court procedures, interaction with herbalists, monitoring hunting, collecting farm file information, licensing and public relations, promoting and co-operating with conservancies, dealing with poisons, and so on. The *Manual* was a remarkable document and was willingly contributed to by the NPB's specialists and scientists. In fact, some zone officers became recognised experts in the field they championed. An example was Tim Snow (1981–1998) who became an authority on the use and misuse of poisons.

The conservancy system

Another surge in the value of the zone officer came in the 1970s with the sudden appearance of the conservancy concept. In fact, it might be said that the origin of the concept was a result of zone officer activity. In 1974, Nick Steele (1956–1983) was stationed as Conservator Midlands in the Sevenoaks region near Greytown, where his responsibilities included, through his zone officers, a great deal of liaison with the farming community. The restoration of wildlife on private land was not yet progressing as rapidly as expected and many were the complaints received about snaring and poaching, which, claimed the farmers, were the main reason for the lack of game on private farms. Giving thought to this, Nick and his staff came up with a Farm Patrol Plan. Essentially, Nick proposed that farmers should employ more field security staff, who should be equated with the NPB's game guards, the backbone of the conservation effort in the province.

With approval from the board itself and vociferous support from Orty Bourquin (1975–1994), Chief Conservator South, under whose jurisdiction Nick's

team fell, Nick started his programme to try to persuade farmers in the Midlands of Natal to spend money on conservation security. In 1977, some farmers in the Balgowan district took the NPB by surprise by doing even better than expected. Two enterprising and visionary farmers, Peter Francis and Tony Kerr, persuaded a small number of neighbouring farmers to join together into a larger block of farms and create what they would call the Balgowan Conservancy.



Balgowan: logo of the first conservancy in Natal

Each member would be expected to pay an annual fee for membership of the conservancy, which, combined, would be used to employ staff as game guards who would be housed within the conservancy and would patrol throughout the now common properties every day. A warden of the conservancy, usually a volunteer, would accept responsibility for the training of the guards as well as the setting of parameters for patrols and other duties expected of them. The Balgowan Conservancy quickly decided to model the uniform of the conservancy guards on those worn by the game guards of the NPB.

The Board was thrilled by this development but did not expect the avalanche of conservancies that resulted. An association was soon formed, which added stimulus to the movement, and at their first gathering the Natal Conservancies Association adopted the guineafowl as the universal conservancy logo. Soon the association started publishing a newsletter of the same name.

Impressed by the success of the first conservancies, the NPB responded by adding some incentives to encourage this remarkable conservation endeavour, such as offering guidance on how to structure management plans for conservancies, a specialised service provided by the scientific staff, one of the most prolific and hardworking of whom was Rob Markham (1970–1990). Later, the NPB added another incentive to conservancies by offering a 25% discount on first-time direct purchases of large mammals from the NPB and in turn at the annual game sales. Yet another incentive from the NPB came in the form of a special school for conservancy guards at the Weenen Nature Reserve. Conservancies were encouraged to support this school by paying a break-even fee for this service.

Not surprisingly Charles Wright and Ivor Mathias (1967–1993), were the promoters of the idea of the school at Weenen. Charles, especially, used his influence and respect to attract local sponsorship from the private sector in order to help Ivor create suitable facilities to accommodate a set number of guards per course. Ivor Mathias supported by his wife Lynn, was a very dedicated



*Above left: Graduation, Conservancy Guard School, Weenen Nature Reserve
(Ron Physick)*

*Right: Presentation of graduation papers to conservancy guards by Ivor Mathias
with Charles Wright in background (Ron Physick)*

NPB officer with extensive experience and one of the most committed field officers in the Board.²

The services of the guard school multiplied at a speed that was completely unpredicted and it began to include staff from conservancies created in the Orange Free State, Transvaal and Cape Province. Then, to the NPB's delight, the reputation of the conservancy movement spread to other countries and has since reached respectable and admirable numbers and sizes in Namibia (with 84 huge conservancies in 2020), Zimbabwe and even as far away as Kenya. From its very humble beginning in Balgowan, with the help and encouragement of the zone officers there were eventually 266 conservancies in Natal comprising hundreds of landowners and covering over 2 924 362 hectares of the terrestrial surface of the province by 1998.

What is even more rewarding is that, in 2017, the IUCN embraced conservancies and, at the same time, private game reserves and game ranches, as being sufficiently successful in making serious contributions to the restoration and survival of indigenous fauna and flora as to be formally approved. To this end IUCN then added a category to its conservation categories called other effective conservation measures (OECM). These are described as follows: 'A geographically defined area, other than a protected area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long term outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values' (IUCN, 2017).

In my view, this acknowledgement was long overdue, given that the NPB recognised the value of such voluntary endeavours by private landowners in the 1970s. The extent (2 924 362 hectares) of all the conservancies in Natal in 1998, added very considerably to the size of the conserved land in the province, which at 7 299 750 hectares was then recorded as being 7.92% of its surface area. Conservancies alone added 28.6% to the province's conservation estate. This would also contribute to South Africa's targets under the IUCN Convention on Biodiversity.

Before leaving the subject of conservancies, it might be noted that Nick Steele felt, perhaps justifiably, that he did not receive the accolades that he believed his original Farm Patrol Plan deserved. Reacting to widespread claims about the success of the concept, Nick once commented to me with a trace of bitterness that 'A success has many fathers, and a failure has none'. For what it is worth, I believe that he did in fact attract well-deserved credit for the original idea, but no more than was due to the visionary farmers who saw the opportunities inherent in his first blueprint, supported by the NPB and its zone officers, scientific management and media staff across the province. A useful report on the conservancy movement was published by Kotze (1993) and a more scholarly, and, may I add, somewhat romantic work was produced by Wels (2015).



Urban conservancy in Pietermaritzburg: title board

What is more, the concept expanded and evolved embracing city precincts, industrial suburbs and coastal conservancies, where conservation benefits became more visible in the eyes of the beholders. In addition, birds, plants and less charismatic creatures received protection in regions already almost abandoned as areas undeserving of conservation benefits. Such is the power of an inspired idea coupled with enthusiasm.

Natural Heritage Sites

These were not the only endeavours encouraging the citizens of the province to take conservation seriously. Around 1980 the national government had become concerned and frustrated because UNESCO, under which was administered the global programme responsible for the recognition of deserving areas as World Heritage Sites, simply refused, as part of its commitment to fighting apartheid, to recognise South Africa as a member. This distressed not only the NPB but also all the other conservation bodies in South Africa, all of whom had expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of recognition for so many of South Africa's biodiversity and cultural sites and successes.

In response, the national Department of Environmental Affairs created a programme known as Natural Heritage Sites and a process was established through which private or community entities could register proposals to meet qualifying criteria set by the department. The suitability of sites applying for recognition was assessed and monitored by the formal provincial nature conservation bodies, such as the NPB. If the application was successful, a rather fine bronze plaque was awarded, to mount on a suitable base at the site, along with a framed certificate signed by the State President. This initiative was certainly a stout effort on the part of the Department of Environmental Affairs. The NPB endorsed the programme with enthusiasm and responsibility for its implementation fell under the Planning Division.



Bronze plaque awarded to natural heritage sites recognised by the NPB and the national Department of Environmental Affairs

Once again, it fell to the zone officers, supported by staff from the Planning Division to publicise and implement the new programme and by 1998 the NPB had helped promote the recognition of 105 Natural Heritage Sites, altogether adding another 76 396 hectares to KZN's conservation estate, the largest number and greatest extent of land in any single province up to that point, a fact

that was recognised by the Department of Environmental Affairs. I believe that the record still stands, for what it is worth, as the programme was ultimately disbanded.

Sites of Conservation Significance

While adjudicating all the applications for Natural Heritage Sites, staff of the NPB became concerned about the number of sites not being recognised by the Department of Environmental Affairs. There was little doubt about the sincerity and commitment of the applicants regarding the value they saw in their proposed sites. The NPB's zone officers expressed heartfelt concern at the disappointment displayed by site owners whose applications were unsuccessful.

Following a review of the programme by our staff, it was recommended that the NPB ask the department to institute a recognition of Sites of Conservation Significance if they did not quite reach the level of importance to be recognised as a Natural Heritage Site. To the NPB's surprise the department agreed to the idea and introduced the programme in 1989. The zone officers found this a great tool for encouraging private citizens who were enormously proud of their conservation or biodiversity asset. They responded extremely well to being recognised for their stewardship. Once again NPB staff put considerable effort into the programme and by 1998 had registered 244 Sites of Conservation Significance, adding yet another 26 184 hectares to the provincial conservation estate.

Natal was the only province that used this additional tool to encourage respect and recognition of citizens who cared, and the credit for this must once again be given to the now immensely important cadre of zone officers working throughout the province as the primary agents, supported by the Planning Division, of spreading these concepts with great commitment. There is no doubt whatsoever that the NPB's reputation as a whole received a major boost through this initiative, both for conservation effort and the incredible public relations improvement brought about by the endeavours of a wide range of staff working outside the protected areas of Natal. More opportunities lay ahead to expand the conservation protection of lands not officially designated as protected areas.

Biosphere reserves

A biosphere reserve is essentially a conservancy formally attached to or surrounding a formally protected area, such as the Natal Drakensberg Park. As described in the United Nations Man and the Biosphere Programme, there should be three essential elements: a core area (normally formally protected), a buffer zone with prescribed use and a transition zone or area of co-operation.

The creation of biosphere reserves in Natal was championed by David Cook when he served as Chief Conservator West and later, when he was the Assistant Director of Conservation. At the time, UNESCO showed little interest in this development in South Africa, but thanks to David and the zone officers, three biosphere reserves were created, with enthusiastic support from the landowners: the Pongola Biosphere, the Polela Biosphere and the Tugela Biosphere reserves. Unfortunately, none of these biosphere reserves could be registered with UNESCO at the time but since 1994 and the arrival of a democratic South Africa, the Western Cape, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces have registered ten biosphere reserves.

Reaching out to disadvantaged communities

In 1994 the zone officers added a new dimension to their services. This followed the NPB's intention to ensure that those communities bordering on NPB protected areas, which were hitherto under the jurisdiction of the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation, were included in NPB conservation activities wherever this was possible. Until then NPB staff could operate in KwaZulu communities only following an invitation or by participation in a formal co-operative activity between the NPB and the Directorate.

As there had not been many invitations received over the years, and amalgamation of the two bodies was inevitable, NPB staff were determined that the goals of the NPB and the benefits of its conservation endeavours should be more visible and directed towards all neighbouring communities. The responsibilities of the zone officers thus increased with the introduction of another major initiative and that was to create neighbours' forums in tribal communities that were adjacent to the areas run by the NPB. Quite literally, dozens of such forums were established and programmes of assistance were promoted in liaison with schools, tribal *amakhosi* (chiefs) and herbalists.

Dancing competition for schools

One of the most rewarding programmes launched by the NPB's outreach programme, ably assisted by the zone officers, and adding yet another activity to a very densely packed programme, was the Ngome Dancing Competition. In 1994, Pieter Koekemoer (1992–1998) and his colleagues organised the first schools' Ngome Dancing Competition, held at Wagendrift Nature Reserve near Estcourt. More than 20 schools entered teams of ngome dancers, and



Graham McIntosh (board member) and staff at an ngome dancing competition organised by zone officers, Wagendrift Public Resort near Estcourt



The ngome dancing competition organised by NPB zone and outreach staff saw winning teams travelling all over the world

sponsorships were raised to cover running costs and prizes. It turned out to be a successful and exciting competition.

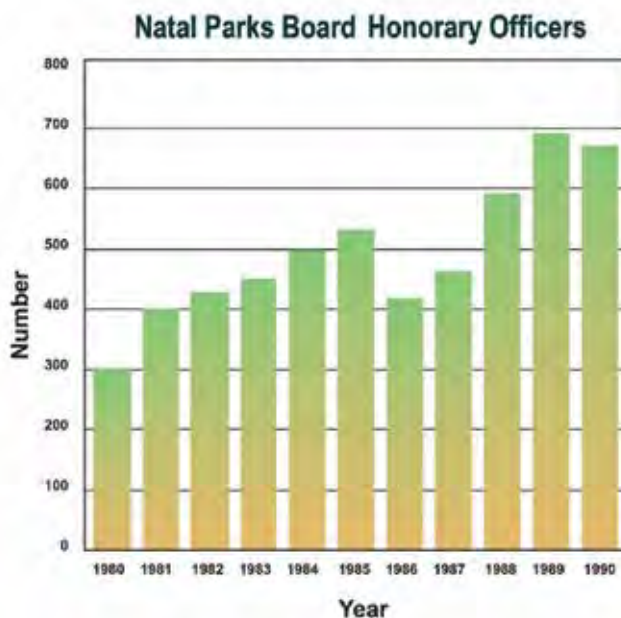
Not only was it an entertaining spectacle but the enthusiasm and commitment of the dancers themselves attracted so much attention that winning teams were funded by local government and NGOs to travel overseas. During the next few years, following subsequent competitions, one team danced before Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in the United Kingdom, and other teams performed in Germany, the People's Republic of China and Brazil. NPB staff were sponsored to accompany the teams and shepherd the young school pupils through what must have been for them a life-changing experience.

When the competition was first held in Zululand, the guest of honour was none other than Inkosi Mdletshe, a board member of the NPB, whose radiant pleasure at participating in this competition shone out for all to see, probably completely erasing, as had other experiences during his tenure on the board, every remnant of the hostility that he had once so publicly demonstrated against conservation. The NPB, its staff and conservation certainly owed Pieter and his colleagues and these young dancers an enormous debt for the positive achievement of demonstrating the benefits of identifying with a committed conservation agency.

Honorary officers

The first honorary officers were appointed by the NPB in July 1977 in response to the willingness of many citizens of Natal to provide a voluntary helping hand to the growing zone officer team. By 1982, there were nearly 500 honorary officers across the province and by 1998 the number was approaching 700. During these twenty or so years the force had become a remarkable body of support rendering an invaluable service to conservation. By then, in 1996, an Honorary Officers' Association had been created, and the NPB had introduced a training programme and approved a uniform and shoulder tabs to identify such volunteers. Their presence was invaluable for tasks involving law enforcement and they often stood in at the more remote stations when the resident officer was on leave or absent. Many made excellent relief camp managers and others were of immense value in assisting in the gathering of data on scientific projects or supporting exhibitions or campaigns such as beach clean-ups.

Dave Durow was elected president of the Honorary Officers' Association. The association became, over many years, a household word in the NPB.



Honorary officers volunteering to assist NPB staff

Field staff greatly appreciated Dave's cohesive role in recruiting and inspiring would-be honorary officers, and he was honoured with a NPB Conservation Award for his endeavours.

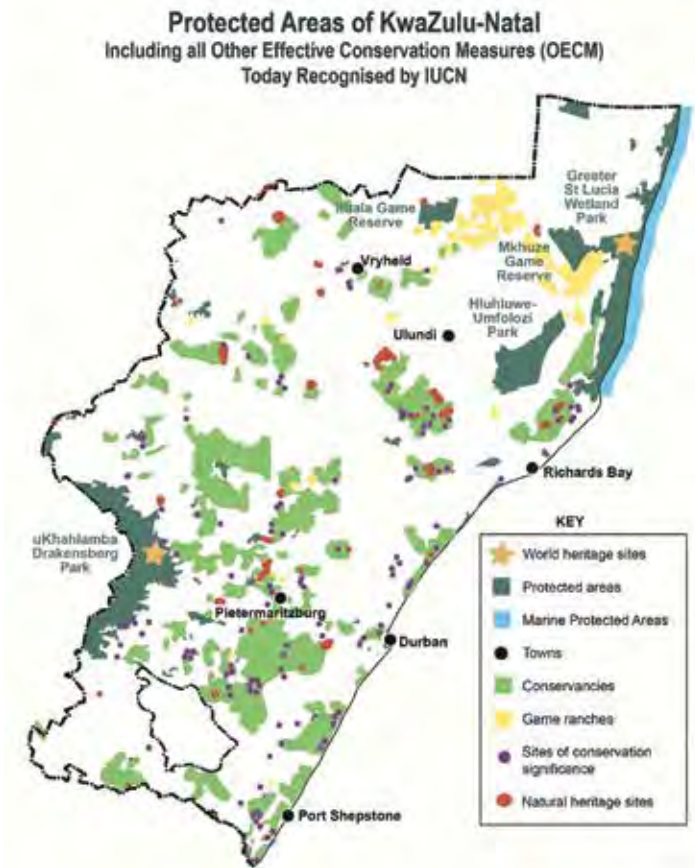
The zone officers' contributions to conservation

The zone officer system had many values and uses, not the least of which was that it provided a training and learning experience second to none. Young and inexperienced recruits were sometimes thrown into an intimidating environment that often culled the weaker souls very quickly. Many of those men, and women in many cases, quickly grasped the nettle and found great satisfaction in doing so. Others, like Charles Wright, made zone responsibilities their life's work, while a large number became inspired by other opportunities within the NPB and, after a period of service as a zone officer, felt confident enough to apply for posts within the protected area network or the specialised units of the NPB, such as Game Capture. Nico Snyman (1972–1998) started as a coastal zone officer and became so interested in the law that he ultimately graduated with a law degree and, with others, became a legal advisor to the NPB. Such staff made admirable contributions to the NPB's success.

Conclusion

If one tried to measure achievement in quantitative terms one had only to look at the contribution made by this extraordinary group of staff working in co-operation and co-ordination with the other divisions of the NPB. A notable measure of success in achieving the goal of making nature conservation relevant to people across the province, is the recorded growth of the conservation estate under private and state protection. By 1998 the situation was as follows:

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| Total land surface of Natal | 9 227 200 ha |
| Total area of land formally protected by the NPB | 677 786 ha |
| OECMs (today recognised by IUCN) | 3 013 758 ha |
| Total combined area of Natal with a conservation focus | 3 691 544 ha |



The positive achievements of zone officers can be gauged by the extent of voluntary public participation in conservation activities

By the end of the NPB's fifty-year endeavour to make conservation relevant and meaningful to the people of the province it had substantially exceeded the IUCN's original goal of 10% of the terrestrial surface of a country or region under conservation. NPB staff, with the admirable contribution of the zone officers, had inspired conservation support and active conservation management throughout the province which, when including the protected areas of the NPB, constituted 40% of the terrestrial surface of Natal.

There is no doubt that the NPB achieved and exceeded its goals of promoting conservation among the general population, especially private and indigenous landowners. The zone officer component of the NPB's staff deserve a great deal of credit for making all this happen.

NOTES

- 1 This does not mean to say that there were not deep grievances. Alf Jones was himself a skilled trout angler. On one occasion when visiting a farm outside Estcourt, he was given, by the farmer's wife, an excited and thrilling account of her hooking and losing a large brown trout in the Bushman's River. On ascertaining, by skilled questioning, the exact spot in the river where this monster was to be encountered, Alf approached the site from the other bank a day or so later and landed a magnificent fish of over four pounds. Alf foolishly boasted about his misdeed in the Plough Hotel bar and the angling wife got to hear of it. This caused a breach in public relations that was never forgotten until the day she died thirty years later.
- 2 For the record, Ivor's career was cut short in 1993 following an attempted assassination in which he was shot and crippled for the rest of his life. This foul deed resulted from a tragic misunderstanding when the identity of the murderer of a staff induna was thought to have been discovered by Ivor. He died in 2019 but his service as a guide and mentor to hundreds of conservancy guards over the years will never be forgotten.

AS mentioned in Chapter 1, Natal had held onto its fisheries responsibilities after 1910 and in 1916 created the Fisheries Licensing Board, which took responsibility for all inland and coastal fishing activities. After the NPB was gazetted in 1947, all field control of fisheries was taken over, but it was not until 1975 that the Fisheries Licensing Board handed over the collection of revenues from coastal and inland fishing licences to the NPB.

The first inland fisheries officer appointed by the NPB was B.M. Impey (1947–1950) followed by Eric von Puttkamer (1948–1979). There was at this stage a small number of fisheries inspectors and Len Chiazzari was the first Principal Fisheries Officer (1950–1954). The coast experienced a fairly meteoric rise in the number of zone officers, whose role was essentially, but certainly not exclusively, law enforcement. Even by the 1950s it was obvious that pressure was growing on coastal resources, especially the more common rod and line fisheries which were becoming ever more popular. Around the same time there was a rapid increase in the use of ski-boats for offshore angling and the resultant Wild West scenario resulted in some offshore and reef fish, like the 74, being fished nearly to extinction (Van der Elst, 1981).

Mike Brokensha (1957–1988) became Chief Conservator of the coast in 1974 and inherited some outstanding field men such as Ted Burke (1958–1988), who was the epitome of what a coastal zone officer should be, and one of the most admired staff members of the NPB. Another memorable and popular coastal zone officer was Eddie Cox (1965–1989) who rose through the ranks to become the NPB's Chief Technical Officer (Mechanical). Mike himself managed the coastal staff amazingly well given that he ruled the coast like the Godfather.

Coastal zone officers came to be perceived as somewhat rougher and readier characters (and some certainly were) than the staff of the protected areas, but Mike was fiercely protective of his staff and felt it unfair to suggest that law enforcement was their primary function. It would be true, I believe, to point out that while there were many similarities between inland zone officers and



Shad: pressure on this resource was intense



*Shad: catches often exceeded the legal limit and less scrupulous anglers tried to hide the surplus catch by burying it in the beach, sometimes with broken glass
(EKZNW photo library)*

those of the coast, the intensity of law enforcement activity of the latter far outstripped that of the inland officers. This was not just in quantity but also in timing, as the coastal staff's activities tended to follow the tides and not the hour. Holiday periods simply increased the pressure.

One of the many problems that faced them was the belief, held by many of the public, that the resources of the sea were unlimited and could be plundered without consideration for the future. This was exactly parallel to the attitudes of the early game hunters of South Africa, and similarly North America, which led to the near extinction of so many large mammals. It became necessary for the coastal zone staff to try to persuade unwilling groups of people to respect restrictions based on the breeding cycles of fish, molluscs and crustaceans.

The South African Association for Marine Biological Research (SAAMBR)

Fortunately, in the 1950s George Campbell, an ardent conservationist at heart, who hailed from Durban founded the South African Association for Marine Biological Research and motivated the Durban City Council and others to finance the creation of the Durban Aquarium. This facility was opened in 1959, along with its research wing, the Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI), under the directorship of David Davies. A remarkable development it turned out to be as it became essentially a non-government and non-profit institute with the goals of ensuring the sustainable use of food from the sea, furthering education and public awareness and, with the surge of shark attacks on bathers in the mid- and late-1950s, research into the threats to human life (Britz, 2018).

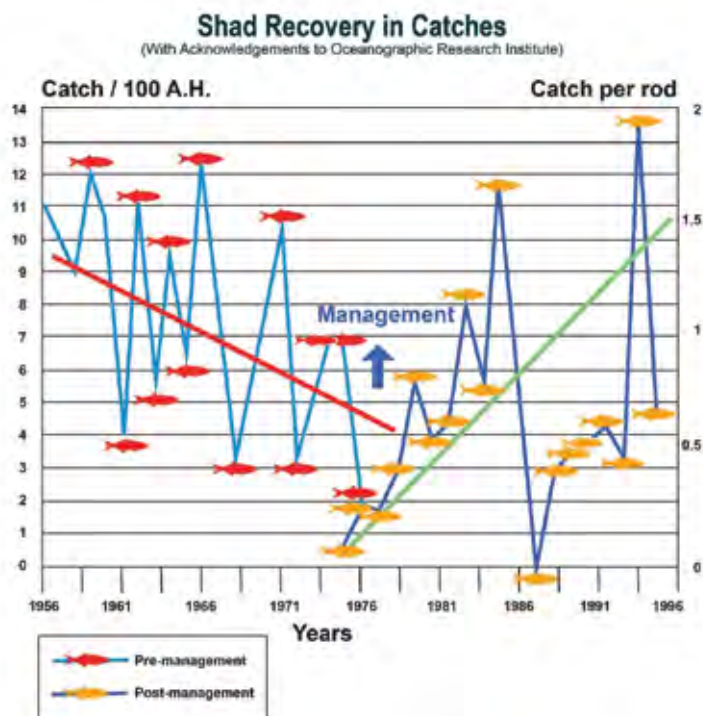
Almost immediately ORI established a research team that launched studies on crayfish, mussels, bait organisms, offshore prawn populations and a broad range of fish that were under pressure. In effect it began to act as the NPB's coastal fisheries research wing. The institute also offered opportunities for ex-NPB staff, including me to carry out postgraduate studies on marine species; for example, the sea turtles of south east Africa (see Hughes, 1974).

The synergy between these two organisations became legendary and NPB staff were ever happy to accompany aquarium staff on excursions to catch fish for their exhibitions. Over the years the NPB supplied ORI with a constant stream of rare and common species requiring identification and/or scientific information for their conservation and survival. These practices continue today to the benefit of the u-Shaka Marine World Aquarium in Durban (named and redeveloped in 2004) and the formal conservation authority.

The Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI)

The work of ORI scientists produced a stream of recommendations over the years that aided the NPB to set catch, size and seasonal limits for marine species. These have helped to ensure that exploitation of many much sought after species has been understood and controls respected. It is a matter of some pride to both organisations that none of the commonly pursued species has become threatened or extinct.

One of the most popular of all angling fishes along the Natal coast was the shad, or elf as it is known in Cape waters, which, in days long gone, had an annual coastal run that saw shad in the tens of thousands sweeping up the coast, with resultant carnage. Rudy van der Elst, a young scientist in the 1970s, tackled the biology of the shad, and produced a series of recommendations that eventually brought the exploitation to rational levels and led to the long-term survival of the species. It was the responsibility of the coastal zone officers to legislate, police and monitor the fishing season, which was a huge task demanding attention at all hours of the day and night.



The Oceanographic Research Institute in partnership with the NPB proposed more rational catch limits and a monitoring system to assess their success

For all this hard work the public came to know these NPB staff as the Shad Sheriffs. The fact that the recommended controls were informed by a non-government research institute, well known to the anglers as a result of their being involved in data collection by a friendly and respected academic team of researchers from ORI and a sympathetic NPB staff, did much to ensure that these measures were appreciated and understood.

ORI has never been a wealthy NGO and there were times when the institute was in dire straits financially. On one occasion when SAAMBR was taking financial strain, having been a researcher at ORI myself, which involved close ties with the Director, Allan Heydorn, I suggested that SAAMBR might consider making an application to the province to become the formal marine research wing of the NPB and thus draw on government funding. It did not take Allan long to state that he believed that the effectiveness of ORI, and its standing with the community, depended on its non-aligned status. The moment passed.

The Shad Sheriffs earned the just reputation of being the most efficient and dedicated conservation authority in the monitoring and protection of marine resources in South Africa and much of that credit is shared with ORI and its staff. A good example of this co-operation was that both organisations agreed that there should be protected areas along the coast in which angling fish ought to be fully protected. When the NPB set aside a coastal wilderness, where angling was totally prohibited, in the St Lucia Marine Reserve, the annual sampling carried out by a carefully selected ORI team including Bruce Mann demonstrated that the protection zone was indeed beneficial in that fish numbers and sizes were significantly better in this area.

In 1981, Frank Junor (1981–1995) was the first of the full-time NPB scientists to become responsible for marine research and he was based at the NPB's Durban office in Congella. This development improved the NPB's liaison with ORI and facilitated, without adding more work to the long-suffering ORI scientists, the collection of scientific data in other components of the Coastal Division.

This effective partnership had been particularly useful when the NPB was called on to make submissions to the national government for the creation of marine protected areas. These submissions and recommendations, with input from both NPB and ORI staff, resulted in the proclamation of the St Lucia Marine Reserve and the Trafalgar Beach Marine Reserve in 1979. In 1987, the Maputaland Marine Reserve was declared, bringing the total proportion of the Natal coast under formal protection to 28%, a figure well above the 10%

of protection regarded as adequate in those days and even more than the more recent Aichi Targets of 17% by 2020.¹

It should not be overlooked that the coastal zone officers had some unique and challenging responsibilities not shared by their inland equivalents, such as the establishment and monitoring of ski-boat launching sites. Where coastal and inland officers had more similar tasks, such as regulating the harvesting of natural resources by traditional herbalists, the coastal staff were faced with problems that far outstripped those in the rest of the province. The main traditional markets in Natal were the Warwick Avenue and Dalton Road markets in Durban, where the quantity of traditional medicinal plant sales was then, and remain, astronomical.

When Mike Brokensha retired in 1988, the position of Chief Conservator Coast was taken over by Lex Fearnhead (1983–1994), a marine biologist who, incidentally, was undertaking postgraduate studies at ORI at the same time as I.² Without changing the primary goals of law enforcement, Lex promoted a singularly successful public relations programme that aimed to involve more of the broader community in coastal conservation. After Lex came Cedric Coetzee (1982–1998) at a time when public environmental awareness started to add more activities to the zone officers' daily pressures such as beach clean-up campaigns that while adding to their workload ultimately produced positive and collaborative results for conservation. The reputation and admiration of the Shad Sheriffs grew exponentially.

Coastal capers

Every zone officer has an encyclopaedia of stories to relate but there are only three that I feel should not be forgotten.

The hovercraft and the cracker shrimp poachers

As mentioned earlier, Ted Burke was a coastal manager with an immense range of talents, from being a skilled builder to remarkably successful in his law enforcement duties and even maintaining a positive public image among those he caught at their misdeeds. He was particularly well known to a section of the fishing community from the Scarborough reel shad anglers, who could be almost guaranteed to exceed their daily quota of ten fish, to the specialised unlicensed community who at low tide haunted the mangrove fringes of Durban harbour in pursuit of cracker shrimps (*Callinassa kraussi*) and bloodworms (*Arenicola loveni*). The latter were a special breed of poachers that emerged onto the extensive mangrove mudflats to dig up these highly desirable bait



Ted Burke, a dedicated and justly popular coastal zone conservator, addresses a public meeting in Durban with Director John Geddes Page, 1987 (EKZNW photo library)

organisms, which they would sell on to their more active angling colleagues at useful prices.

Over the years, these persistent illegal gatherers came to know the zone officers by name. Ted was certainly a famous figure and was highly respected because he was a warm and friendly man without malice. They were also aware of the techniques used to try to catch them out on the exposed mud banks. Normally, a youngster was appointed to keep an eye on the harbour through which would speed the NPB boat with a few staff who would land on the mud banks as near as possible to the collectors and pursue them on foot. The efficient early warning system made these efforts a bit of a waste of time because the collectors were extremely fleet of foot over the mud. After the call that Mr Burke was coming, regrettably more often than not they had disappeared by the time the staff arrived on site.

In the early 1980s the NPB staff at St Lucia had purchased a hovercraft, useful for patrolling shallow waters. Ted saw the craft one day and borrowed it, without protest, for a special purpose and brought it down to Durban. Waiting for a day when he knew the tide would be at its lowest, and the cracker shrimp

poachers at their densest, he launched the hovercraft from the NPB jetty and set forth at top speed towards the mangrove mud banks. Caught slightly by surprise because Ted's boat was not the usual one, and was identified too late, the illegal gatherers were stunned when the craft did not beach on the edge of the mud as usual but swept up over the mudbank with no loss of speed. As Ted was not yet a skilled pilot of a hovercraft, he described some wild and dangerous manoeuvres through the gang until he managed to spin it to a halt among them. Panic reigned supreme as staff leapt off the hovercraft and caught a record bag of miscreants, so many in fact that they had to be taken back to Congella in shuttles.

All were quickly transported to the police station to be formally charged and then appeared before the magistrate for punishment. Ted was present to give the NPB's testimony, and both he and the magistrate were somewhat taken aback by the poachers' defence tactic. Their main spokesman appealed to the magistrate for leniency because 'Mr Burke had cheated and used a new boat without warning them. This was unfair and not sporting'. Ted reported that the group was so sincere in its plea that the magistrate, with Ted's agreement, declared lighter fines than necessary with both men giving stern warnings to the gathering. Ted was clapped on the way to his vehicle by the very people that he had caught. This was empathetic and sporting law enforcement.

The crayfish and the pit toilets

One of the most persistent poaching problems facing the Shad Sheriffs was that involving the valuable and popular crayfish (*Panulirus homarus*) common all along the coast of the province and eagerly sought after by licensed collectors, full-scale commercial poachers and local disadvantaged communities. The last group was the hardest to police because most of the people technically lived in KwaZulu. The community that lived bordering the sea at Hibberdene south of Durban became the biggest problem and, on being prosecuted from time to time for selling crayfish along the main road between Durban and Port Shepstone, they became quite hostile and unfriendly.

Their normal technique was to appear next to the main road, holding up a few illegally caught crayfish as cars went by. This proved too much for the average passing motorist, who saw it as an opportunity to get a few highly desirable food items for a fraction of the normal price. The transaction between poacher and motorist took seconds and the road was clear.

A solution to this difficulty had to be found and one was. Sanitation for the local residents was normally (and somewhat inadequately) provided by a



Hibberdene: when made public, the discovery of the method of storing poached crayfish in pit toilets did much to reduce the pressure on this valuable resource (Carol Lane)

long-drop pit toilet near every kraal and it was miraculously ‘discovered’ that the poachers, having caught their crayfish at low tide at night, would return to their kraals and hide the crayfish by binding their collective antennae with string and lowering the bundle of crustaceans down the inside of the pit toilet, from where they could be quickly retrieved in the morning, as the passing traffic increased.

When this practice was discovered, invitations were issued to press, radio and television reporters to visit the area and be shown, by NPB zone officers, this rather unique storage technique which involved hiding the poached crayfish in a moist environment (thus preventing their drying out and in turn reducing their sale value), in a site unlikely to be found by

any searching thief or NPB zone officer. The media coverage was graphic and widespread and the market for these poached crayfish disappeared overnight. This was inventive lateral thinking at its best.

The perils of co-operation with the police

Very often, especially at the peak of the shad run, it was quite commonplace for the staff in Durban and other pressure areas to co-operate with the local constabulary. The police had the authority to set up roadblocks for any number of reasons and they were always happy to have some local help from NPB zone officers, who would check for excess fish or other publicly desirable items of conservation interest. To show willing, on their inspections some staff also noted and reported items that were of interest to the police. One evening,

a young coastal zone officer, Max Kay (1980–1986), who really loved being a Shad Sheriff, became over-enthusiastic on finding hidden, under the front seat of a bakkie conveying a group of fishermen, a largish plastic bag filled with white powder. Max whipped it out, anticipating a drug haul second to none (which was not his business anyway) and asked the driver what it was. He was ignored, so he slit open the packet, stuck his finger into the powder and tasted it. Not experiencing on his tongue any expected tingling sensation, he again asked the driver what it was. The driver replied straight-faced, 'It's my father, we cremated him this morning'.

Conservation in coastal Natal would never have been as successful as it was without the enthusiasm, commitment and hard work of the Shad Sheriffs. As mentioned elsewhere, the coastal staff worked tidal hours, day or night, to hold in check the illegal catches of useful marine and coastal products. These also included sardines during the famous sardine run in mid-winter, bait organisms such as red bait and mole crabs, mussels and oysters. The Sheriffs also carried out the monitoring of the catches by shore anglers and the much more valuable landings of reef fish by the constantly growing fleet of ski-boats.

Coastal staff were singularly successful in their endeavours and had, except in dealings with the most criminal, a cordial relationship with those plying their trade or enjoying their sport along Natal's shores. In general, the attitude



Coastal officers address members of the board during a tour of the South Coast, 1997

towards the Shad Sheriffs of the NPB was one of respect and their reputation among the knowledgeable fishing population of South Africa was that of being the best coastal managers in the country.

As the ORI provided the essential, and invaluable, catch statistics analyses and research into the most vulnerable species, the NPB is grateful for having been partnered by such willing and capable colleagues.

NOTES

- 1 In 2009 at Nagoya, Japan, at a meeting of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, a series of goals was agreed upon to achieve adequate protection of biodiversity into the future. These were named the Aichi Targets.
- 2 After leaving the service of the NPB, Lex played a major role in the construction of the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town and was later appointed its first director.

| Does Conservation Earn its Keep? | | |
|--|---|--------------------|
| Value of Legally Collected Living Wildlife Resources 1992 | | |
| A. Terrestrial | | |
| | Hunting Industry (Eg White rhino, wildebeest, zebra) | R 25 000 000 |
| B. Indigenous Plants | | |
| | Nurseries | R 8 193 000 |
| C. Marine | | |
| a). Formal fisheries | | |
| | 1 553.3 tonnes | R 21 668 000 |
| b). Commercial and recreational fishing | | |
| i). Shore angling (shad, garriick etc) | 950.0 tonnes | R 9 500 000 |
| ii). Boat angling | 1 157.0 tonnes | R 19 420 000 |
| iii). Spear fishing | 65.0 tonnes | R 650 000 |
| iv). Other (aquaria etc) | 3.0 tonnes | R 341 000 |
| c). Gourmet fisheries | | |
| Crayfish | 165.2 tonnes | R 6 796 000 |
| Crab | 5.6 tonnes | R 133 000 |
| Oysters | 1.2 tonnes | R 89 300 |
| Mussels | 283.7 tonnes | R 2 335 000 |
| Octopus | 4.8 tonnes | R 41 000 |
| Other | ? | R 453 000 |
| | | R96 659 900 |

The value of the marine resources protected by the coastal zone officers was found to be worth millions of rand in 1992

SECTION 3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

E. DEVELOP NEW INSTITUTIONS AND INSTRUMENTS
FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
FROM PROTECTED AREAS TO MAKE BIODIVERSITY
CONSERVATION RELEVANT TO NEIGHBOURING
COMMUNITIES

THERE is little doubt that the struggles during the first twenty years of the NPB's existence did not see much attention paid to underprivileged neighbouring communities. Colonel Vincent displayed little interest in such things and there was certainly minimal concern in the field (Hughes, 2014). I have mentioned elsewhere the problems faced in Zululand by the staff of the Hluhluwe and Umfolozi game reserves but there is little doubt that the NPB should have embraced the concept of better neighbour relations long before it did.

It was of note to read recently, during the social unrest in the United States aimed at acknowledging the inherent and residual racism practised there, that John Muir, the person responsible for the declaration of Yosemite National Park and a founder of the Sierra Club, was violently and abusively racist with regard to native and African Americans of his day. In the United States, Yellowstone was the first acknowledged national park where the early superintendents eventually built a fort to keep out the local native Americans. Skirmishes between parks officials and intruding Nez Perce tribesmen resulted in several intruders being shot and there is an incident recorded in which tourists were captured and held hostage by the native Americans.

South Africa has a well-documented history of apartheid, under which race was legislated into an appalling system of discrimination, so it is not surprising that creating positive attitudes towards black neighbours elicited little enthusiasm in the formal, predominantly white-managed nature conservation bodies of the country. It was only in the 1980s that some direct attention was rather reluctantly given to what was becoming a worldwide problem, with direct effects on the future and survival of protected areas.

In some state departments in South Africa the depth of support for apartheid reached levels of farce. In the early 1980s the Department of Forestry was sponsoring with enthusiasm a National Hiking Way system and all the provincial conservation bodies were drawn in to support and promote the

concept. It was only in 1985, as the NPB representative on the National Hiking Way Committee, that I experienced a serious clash with the department's policy of a whites-only use of the trails and the NPB was not the only organisation unhappy about the future policy of the trails system. In partnership with the Cape Mountain Club, the Cape Department of Nature Conservation had been involved in promoting the use of the Cape mountains by people of colour who were beginning to join the Mountain Club and were going out in integrated parties. This was regarded by my colleagues in the Cape as a positive development. Around the same time between 1980 and 1982, the NPB, had opened, without fanfare, all of its tourist facilities to all races and had earned a positive reputation for those progressive steps.¹

I was therefore primed and eager to question the Department of Forestry's policy. When I asked the chairman of the Hiking Way initiative to be honest about their future policy, he lost his temper on the spot and literally bawled at me that the trail was for whites only. The Cape and Natal joined forces and asked how on earth the Department would deal with the growth of interest in hiking by the wider community, both in South Africa and abroad, as the National Hiking Way was intended to attract foreign hikers as much as locals. The chairman replied without shame that the department would encourage the building of other trails for each race group. The committee as a whole burst into laughter as each organisation had expressed severe difficulties in finding funds to maintain those trails we had at the time; and even more so, in our case, for building the huts that were planned for those areas already approved for trails in Natal. The thought of at least four parallel trails being cut and maintained along the foothills of the Drakensberg was so utterly ridiculous that the attendees were left speechless. The subject was never raised again. There remains only one trail.

The rise of consciousness

The NPB began to receive both internal and external criticism for its apparent lack of action with regard to relations with neighbouring communities. During the next decade the NPB lost some very visionary and concerned staff, as well as potential staff, seeing them move elsewhere to influence and advance improvements and relevance to disadvantaged communities. Jeremy Anderson (1963–1980) moved to Bophuthatswana (one of the homelands declared under the apartheid regime for a community of specific ethnicity, in this case the Tswana people) where he started an enviable programme

involving local communities and encouraged the constructive employment of more black officers in their homeland conservation body. Chris Brown, a postgraduate researcher, departed for Namibia where, even today in 2021, he still exerts considerable influence on policies and direction, not only with regard to community relations, but also in general conservation actions on both the local front in Namibia and in international conservation matters. Alf Wills (1982–1990), after leaving the NPB, rose through a series of positions to become the Director-General of the Department of the Environment in the new South Africa. It is appropriate to remind these former staff members that their agitation was not a wasted endeavour and that their departure from the NPB was indeed regretted.

In the South African milieu there was a general feeling that the nature conservation bodies in the country were all a singular part of the apartheid system, but this was an error both in time and space. The problem of not recognising the rights of indigenous people was global in context and the result of various ignorant or indifferent colonial and controlling countries enthusiastically pursuing the concept of proclaiming protected areas on what appeared to be virtually uninhabited land. Thinly populated the lands may have been, but traditional use was far more the rule than the exception and, as communities expanded in numbers as well as needs, and they encroached onto and into the protected areas, problems began. These marginalised peoples who were approaching the boundaries of protected areas appeared to have little interest in conservation and saw the protected areas as usurped land that used to belong to them as far as grazing, medicinal plant collection, building resources and hunting were concerned.

Within the borders of the Umfolozi Game Reserve, the NPB housed the long-collapsed remains of King Shaka's hunting pits. This area was conveniently labelled by revisionist historians as an area where hunting by anyone other than Zulu royalty had been prohibited in the time of Shaka and was therefore to be seen as a 'protected area'. To the cynical this may be seen as romantic history, but in the context of the growth of human and political public relations spin it is certainly understood for what it represented for many Zulu people – a justification to reclaim the land as their own.

Land acquisitions and the moving of people

Weenen and Itala Game Reserves

It was not that the NPB had no interest in the communities living next to their protected areas at all, or was totally indifferent to their needs, but the goals of the NPB in its early years were focused on conservation, such as land acquisition for additional protected areas. The early 1970s saw the last of the large land acquisitions by the NPB and, even then, there was some political awareness of the human needs making an impact on decision-making where land was concerned. These changes exposed NPB field staff to the need to deal with neighbouring communities in a far more sensitive way and I believe the conservation staff began to become aware of the realities of the human demographics in Natal and how these might interact with protected area management.

The core area of Weenen Nature Reserve had been purchased in the nineteenth century as a farm by a Voortrekker leader, Andries Pretorius. It was subsequently sold as a labour farm and ultimately had been so grossly misused and overgrazed that it was a near desert in parts.² Up to two metres of top- and sub-soil had been lost across the entire property. At the end of World War Two, it was like a moonscape, devoid of grass, and was seized by the State and handed to the Department of Agriculture to try to save what was left. The department took its responsibilities seriously and commenced a huge programme of soil restoration which was pursued with determination for over twenty years. Most of the people on the farm were occupying it illegally and were either requested to leave or departed of their own accord because it was almost impossible to make a living off the degraded land.

In this restoration endeavour the department did a fantastic job. Appointing Alan Fisher, a conservation-minded agriculturist, it poured the modern equivalent of millions of rands into the effort of constructing stone walls and dams to try to save whatever soil might remain from being swept away into the nearby Bushman's River. What the Department of Agriculture did not do, however, was keep the farm free of humans and, in the absence of rigorous controls, there once again began to build up a resident population. The department decided to sell the property and in the interim, between the decision to dispose of the farm and a resolution to put this into practice, no fewer than 114 families and their livestock took up residence on the now unsupervised property. Livestock began to reverse the process of restoration and this, no doubt, decided the future of the farm.

The NPB's positive relationship with the Afrikaans community in Weenen, led by Mayor Hansie Kilian, resulted in his actively lobbying the department not to sell the 5 000-hectare property but to hand it to the NPB for declaration as a nature reserve. The wider Weenen community were eager to have their own neighbourhood game reserve and Hansie was a tenacious negotiator.³ At no cost to the NPB, the reserve was handed over to the province and declared the Weenen Nature Reserve.

Alas, along with taking over management of the proposed reserve, came all the occupants and their livestock, which posed a challenge to Mark Astrup (1966–1998), the first Officer-in-Charge, whose fluent Zulu and gentle empathetic character was tested to the limit. Mark actively assisted and encouraged the families to move to areas of their choice, motivated successfully by the NPB via a resettlement allowance from the provincial authorities. He personally organised NPB transport to move families and livestock to their chosen new homes at no cost to themselves. This was a major change from the normal state relocations of people under apartheid in which they had no choice but were simply uprooted, driven to a completely new site chosen by the Department of Bantu Affairs and dumped with the broken remains of what could be salvaged from their old homes. Mark's selfless and sympathetic devotion to setting a humane standard in dealing with such evictions became the gold standard for the NPB and resulted in a positive change of attitude.

A similar process was followed at the much larger Itala Game Reserve (proclaimed in 1973, shortly before Weenen) when the NPB moved the resident people, who were regarded as squatters by the sellers of the cluster of labour farms purchased by the province near Louwsburg on the Transvaal border. As with the Weenen community, the Itala residents who were required to move did not have to appeal for humane treatment. Such treatment was now NPB policy and was fully supported by the NPA, which helped with the costs of transport to sites of choice and willingly paid a generous resettlement allowance. The first Warden of Itala was Graham Root (1965–1981, a dynastic ranger whose father, Peter Root, had been a long-serving officer at Loteni Nature Reserve in the Drakensberg) and, although it was never an easy task, Graham executed his responsibilities with the same courteous and sympathetic spirit as Mark had done at Weenen (Root, 2005).

This is not to suggest that there was universal acceptance by the residents of the properties and that all accepted relocation with equanimity. It was understandably a period of considerable stress for them as well as the local staff and this was also felt, in various ways, by senior staff and board members.

Within the NPB, the appetite for acquiring new protected areas which necessitated the resettlement of large numbers of people, then declined rapidly. But the decision to accept land for conservation had a positive outcome as the new protected areas of both Weenen and Itala were to become successes and a credit to nature conservation.

The Natal Indaba

In 1986, politics once again created difficulties for conservation as the Natal Indaba, a political movement involving the Chief Minister of KwaZulu, the New Republic Party and various interested private sector groups had generated a conviction that Mangosuthu Buthelezi was a leader through whom a stable and secure rapprochement between the KwaZulu-controlled territories and those of the NPA could be achieved. In their enthusiasm the Administrator and Provincial Council of Natal became willing to consider an often-hinted request from KwaZulu that management of the Hluhluwe and Umfolozi game reserves should be handed over to KwaZulu. Buthelezi had already displayed an encouraging interest in nature conservation and in 1982 had established the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources (KBNR) as his department responsible for conservation matters. The bureau was headed by Nick Steele (1956–1983) who had recently left the NPB. To me, there seems little doubt that Nick was probably behind the suggestion as his passion for Umfolozi Game Reserve was legendary.

There was little public knowledge of the possible transfer of the two protected areas, but I know that the province favoured appeasing the Chief Minister and had sent John Geddes Page to Ulundi to discuss the matter with Buthelezi. John asked me to accompany him as I had recently been promoted to the Assistant Director Conservation position and he felt that I should be appraised of these developments.

Feeling that these two iconic reserves were already in extremely capable hands under NPB management, I was appalled at the proposal and when the plans did become public the board was clearly less than charmed at the thought of losing its prized Zululand protected areas. To the distress of the staff, however, it appeared to be tacitly accepted by all that this would ensue and the process went as far as an agreement that the KBNR could have its staff represented at the reserve management meetings. In due course they were made welcome but, unfortunately, they displayed a complacent and superior attitude which so offended the NPB staff that I was moved to stop the practice.

Understandably, this action provoked a negative response from KBNR staff, especially from Nick Steele, but John Page upheld my decision, and the NPB staff and I genuinely appreciated his support.

Another understandable reaction to this unwanted component of the Natal Indaba was a suggestion that if the board agreed to the change in management, the province would try to arrange a compensatory replacement protected area of similar size. The Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex, including the Corridor, was about 89 000 hectares in extent. The province, in turn, realising that it had a tiger by the tail, then approached the Department of Bantu Administration to find an equivalent tract of land that could be given to the NPB in exchange for the loss of the complex. The Department of Bantu Administration had the reputation of being the *gauleiters* of the apartheid state and, spreading their maps before them, they found a substantial area of tribal land called Nibela on the north-western shores of Lake St Lucia, of a size roughly equivalent to the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex.

The Nibela area was offered to the province to replace the great Zululand protected areas that would then be handed over to KwaZulu. The board was enraged, and the staff of the Conservation Division apoplectic, as one problem, of little interest and concern to the Department of Bantu Administration, would be NPB involvement in resettling an entire tribe of Nibela people, 65 000 in number, to an as-yet undisclosed destination. To cause us even greater consternation, no politician appeared sensitive to the fact that one of the board's foundation Zulu members was Inkosi Simon Gumede, the traditional chief of the Nibela tribe.

We staff saw this as the death knell of conservation in Natal and one of our younger scientists, Roger Porter, was given the urgent task of preparing a report for the board, which he did with characteristic thoroughness. He concluded that this was a proposal that the NPB could never accept. Roger recommended that the board refuse to be associated with such a massive disruption of a very settled community and, even if the province forced the concept through, the NPB should never be associated with such a move even if it meant giving up the Zululand parks.

It fell to my lot to deliver this report to a very attentive and concerned board, including Dering Stainbank, the MEC responsible for the portfolio of the NPB, which I did with some trepidation as this was placing John Page in a rather awkward position to put it charitably. However, the outcome was incredibly rewarding. John Page thoroughly endorsed the report (indicating that he had been put under personal and political pressure to advance the suggestion of

passing the Complex to KwaZulu, and board members were unanimously complimentary about the execution and import of Roger's recommendations. Gumede rose nearly in tears and expressed his gratitude for the decisions and commitment shown by the NPB staff and the board itself. It was a moving moment.⁴

In the years that followed, the NPB made considerable progress in developing a positive attitude towards ensuring better relationships with adjacent communities and had undertaken some remarkably effective projects that had greatly improved the atmosphere on the ground. With the introduction of the management by objective reporting system from 1982, field staff had a clear understanding of what was required from them to improve relations between the protected areas and their neighbours. Some staff excelled in making positive progress, including several quite remarkable changes.

Mkuzi Game Reserve

In 1983, Trevor Scheepers (1965–1998) became Warden-in-Charge of Mkuzi Game Reserve and aided by his incredibly dynamic wife Carol, he initiated a local monthly meeting with Inkosi Jobe, who had a reputation for being uncompromising and unco-operative. For years he had appeared hostile to NPB staff and did little to reduce what was one of the highest poaching levels in any park in the province. Trevor's obviously sincere enthusiasm eventually persuaded Jobe to attend a meeting in the reserve. Being asked immediately why he appeared to be so unfriendly, he explained that the establishment of the reserve in 1912 had rendered it impossible for his family to consult with their ancestors as their founding *inkosi* had been buried in what became Mkuzi Game Reserve and his family were forbidden to visit the grave site. Trevor soon solved that problem, not only by granting access to the site whenever it was requested, but also by fencing the site off, so that only those permitted by the *inkosi* could visit and maintain it.

During the culling season, Trevor also initiated a project to sell fresh venison at a particularly low price to the local people and announced that whole impala carcasses could be purchased once a week at the park's abattoir. Business was brisk on the sale days as a stream of buyers arrived in bakkies and bought all the carcasses available at R1/kg. In an unexpected turn of events, Trevor was quick to discover that most of the bakkie owners were butchers from as far afield as Richards Bay who were cashing in on what was a real bonanza of profit as the venison was sold on in nearby towns at somewhat more than R1/kg.

As the prime objective of the sales was to see that the immediate neighbours had access to an affordable source of protein from the culling, Trevor consulted the *inkosi* and expressed his disappointment that only the butchers were buying the meat. The *inkosi* explained, appreciative as he was, that the NPB had not considered the financial position of the people, as few could afford a whole carcass, even fewer had transport and it was too far for people to walk through the reserve to the abattoir. All these points were simple and were clearly understood. Trevor changed the system immediately and, after accepting guidance from the *inkosi* and his councillors, created a system whereby venison would be made available twice a week in 2 kg. plastic bags at designated sites on the borders of the park making it possible for almost any tribesman or woman to walk to a designated spot and buy a packet or more of fresh meat for their families at an affordable price. The relationship between the previously hostile *inkosi* and the park improved dramatically and in due course Trevor had raised funds from donors for the drilling of boreholes to supply water, the purchase of brick-making machines and even the creation, with help from the Jobe people, of a traditional village for tourists. This enabled visitors to the area to appreciate how the KwaJobe people had lived in the past and purchase handcrafts created by their descendants.

In addition, these events all took place while the NPB was taking control of the Nxwala Estate, a large tract of state land to the south of Mkuzi, and developing it as one of the NPB's most successful hunting areas. It was at the official opening of the Inkumbi hunting camp on this site that Jobe showed his true colours to the astonishment and joy of the staff. It was a very special affair, involving the Chairman of the board and other board members, as well as leading members of all the hunting associations and clubs of Natal and the rest of South Africa. There was a large media presence. The guest of honour was Don Lindsey, president of PHASA, who in due time gave a speech that, to my chagrin gave overmuch credit in my view to the hunters of South Africa, more or less claiming that no conservation achievements would have occurred without the hunters' influence and endeavours. This was not quite the case given the contribution of the NPB conservation staff and board to the project.⁵

To the surprise of Mark Astrup, Chief Conservator of Zululand, Jobe, one of the honoured guests from the neighbouring communities, demanded the opportunity to give a speech. Mark had noticed that Jobe had visited the refreshments table quite frequently and expressed a little concern. Despite this it was immediately agreed that he should go ahead. Jobe held forth with real enthusiasm. As his English was limited and insisting that he speak in Zulu,

he was accompanied, as his interpreter, by none other than Dering Stainbank, Chairman of the board of the NPB. It was an amazing speech in which he praised the NPB for building the camp and developing the hunting area, appreciating the jobs created and noting that he loved visiting Mkuzi because it was the only part of Maputaland that resembled the land where he had been raised as a child many years before. He also dropped an amusing hint that he wanted one of his sons to join the NPB and ended with conviction, saying that his community worked very well with the reserve and was proud of it. Jobe's speech was one of the most stunning endorsements of the work of the NPB that I had ever heard.

The opening of Inkumbi Camp and the hunting area was widely reported after the event but, to my disappointment, not one member of the media ever reported via radio, print or television that Jobe had even been there, let alone did they convey his totally impromptu endorsement of the NPB and its community relations.

The growth of pious media outrage

Farieda Khan, mentioned earlier, was an activist concerned about racism, and with real justification. However, she was admirably not a member of a fast-expanding group of media journalists who started to consistently attack all the nature conservation bodies in South Africa for not sharing benefits with local disadvantaged communities. Despite a growing reputation for conservation achievements, the NPB was not excluded from their condemned list and, for field staff deeply involved in community assistance, this became very disheartening.

As a start, these journalists never provided a description of exactly what they felt should be done for local communities but provided an oft-quoted example of an ambitious programme called the Campfire Project, which had been started in Rhodesia and continued by Zimbabwe. After 1980, the Zimbabweans had expanded Campfire, which attracted much attention because Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife facilitated, with great success, direct access to money derived from the hunting of large mammals to the benefit of people living in traditional tribal lands. It was a great programme, but not directly repeatable in South Africa because the country was far more developed, and those lands held by indigenous communities had been virtually stripped of large mammals. Campfire certainly did not involve Zimbabwe's protected areas other than as a

source of game for translocation and the excellent advisory services provided by the staff of the parks and wildlife department.

Joining the *mélée* of criticism were many NGOs whose prime reason for existence was to be seen to be fighting apartheid and supporting those who were negatively influenced or affected by apartheid policies. Immediately prior to 1994, there were apparently more than 50 000 such NGOs operating in South Africa, and these were funded mainly by first world countries and agencies. Almost all disappeared after that date as the State demanded that such funding should now be directed to the new democratic government. Many such NGOs rapidly became extinct. A good example of such an NGO was the Community Law Centre (CLC), which was run by an American lawyer, Carole Baekey, who came to our attention through a cartoon series in their newsletter that purportedly showed poor children in the lands surrounding the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex being arrested and beaten by overweight and bullying thugs intended to represent NPB game guards. We were horrified.

Staff immediately arranged for me to visit the CLC to discuss the cartoons and ask for help in identifying any instance of inhumane behaviour by our guards. Baekey, her senior staff, Bongani Khumalo and Greg Moran, as well as other co-workers, made me welcome, and we spent a constructive few hours discussing the sources of their reports, all of which turned out to be hearsay. Following a presentation on the NPB's policies and work, Baekey and her colleagues expressed surprise at our aims and goals towards our neighbouring communities and appreciation for all the efforts that were made to ensure that they did benefit from the existence of the protected areas. She and her team soon became valued collaborators and the NPB owes them a word of thanks for providing a final clinching incentive for us to have an extensive, publicly available, policy on our neighbour relations.

Benefits to adjacent communities

By the 1990s the media in South Africa had reached the conclusion that local communities around protected areas should receive financial benefit from the parks. The NPB fully supported this view and believed that the contributions were already significant. The NPB had, since its establishment, permitted local people to enter the protected areas to collect surplus raw materials of value to them. This was not a practice followed by all conservation agencies. In Natal, an essential example of such a resource is thatch grass, which has been the traditional building material used by rural neighbours across the province from



NPB policy to make available appropriate surplus natural resources to neighbours became more organised and efficient from the 1980s as staff recorded quantitative data



the Drakensberg to Zululand. Sadly, as a result of negative grazing pressure on the grassland habitat from too many uncontrolled domestic animals in tribal lands, the protected areas are today virtually the only source of good thatch grass available to neighbouring communities. There is almost none to be found on tribal land.

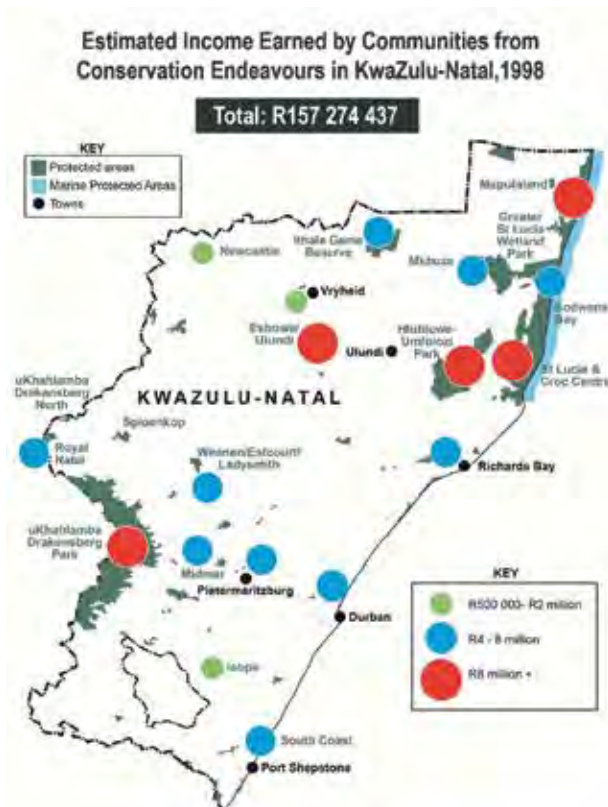
As it grew, in addition to these benefits, the NPB became a major employer, in some areas the only employer of significance. It should be noted that with few exceptions all staff had permanent positions, complete with free uniforms and accommodation, clear salary scales and pensions. This contrasted quite dramatically with the working opportunities offered at many private sector tourism destinations. The NPB's basic salaries and conditions significantly exceeded those paid even in the case of upmarket tourist lodges (Creemers and Wood, 1997). The proof of these advantages was obvious in the

Much of the thatch used by neighbouring communities for their homes is available only from protected areas

The Neighbour Relations Policy

The first step towards developing a coherent policy towards neighbour relations was an attempt to bring all staff members into its development and to convince them, by so doing, that they should take ownership of the policy. To this end, an inclusive meeting of all senior staff, zone officers, scientists, administrative and public relations staff was held at Queen Elizabeth Park theatre on 13 February 1991. At this gathering the objectives of the policy were roughly outlined. It was made clear that none of what was stated constituted the policy itself as yet, but clarity was sought from staff as to the needs and desirability of developing one.

When comments were called for there appeared to be overwhelming support for the creation of a policy but, as is often the case, there had been a level of lobbying prior to the meeting that resulted in a small group, represented in this case by a zone officer, criticising the concept and belittling the whole effort, suggesting that this was ‘just another Head Office idea which would devolve to the field staff to do all the work’.



The NPB could demonstrate that its value to local people through employment was substantial; and ecotourism in KZN was becoming a major creator of jobs by 1998

As chairman, it was my responsibility to deal with the Luddites in the hall, so I responded at once by emphasising that the NPB's reputation, and perhaps even its future would depend on our having a policy on neighbour relations. It had to have a structure in which the benefits of all the NPB's efforts towards communities would be clearly visible, relatable and credible. As I felt very strongly about this endeavour, I suggested that if any staff present felt as the naysayer did, I did not wish to waste their time and they were free to decide either to remain and make a contribution, or to leave now. A pregnant silence followed and the speaker sat down.

It was then clarified that the development of a policy should not be perceived as a Head Office responsibility only and there was a call for volunteers with a genuine desire to add value and leadership to the development of the policy. Only two conditions were set: the group had to be multiracial and multi-gender. I certainly assumed and hoped that staff with experience at the coal face of community relations would step forward and I was not disappointed. Five strategic discussion groups, including scientists, community outreach and public relations staff, planners and managers, were formed and each group went off to selected venues from whence they returned in the afternoon with schedules of relevant issues. The meeting ended with the nomination of eight members of staff who would act as facilitators. They would consider the recommendations of the strategic groups and formalise the format and structure of a draft policy.

The first draft was completed and approved by 6 March 1991, and then revised and expanded by 20 March 1991. This draft was dispatched to all stations for consideration by relevant staff with discussion and input from local community leaders and *amakhosi*. By 15 May, after receipt of comment from the field, a new and expanded draft had been agreed to and, following recommendations from staff, twenty outside organisations and NGOs (including Carole Baekey's CLC) were selected, to each of which was sent a draft copy of the policy. They were requested to review the draft, make comments, suggest additions, and submit criticism.

The response was interesting. Five organisations, chosen because they had been critical of the NPB's lack of policy, did not even acknowledge receipt of the request. The KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation effectively refused to comment, but at least said so. Some respondents made proposals that were totally unusable as it was not the NPB's function to alleviate poverty and get voting rights for neighbours and nor was the board or staff in favour of several suggestions that this entire exercise be controlled and managed by

so-called independent facilitators. The balance of those who returned the draft policy provided extremely valuable guidance and suggestions which were incorporated for submission to the board. It accepted and approved the policy on 25 September 1992. It read as follows:

Policy on neighbour relations

The Natal Parks Board, in terms of its mission, fulfils regional, national and international responsibilities for the conservation of marine and terrestrial protected areas which are significant examples of the world's heritage. This is undertaken in ways that encourage public understanding, appreciation, enjoyment and use of this heritage in a sustainable manner.

The Natal Parks Board, entrusted with the custody and management of protected areas in Natal **realising** that

1. All people have the rights to the benefits from protected areas;
2. The benefits of protected areas such as employment, markets, natural resources, education, recreation, stimuli for tourism etc., are not fully developed nor understood and appreciated by all communities;
3. Through research and consultation, the NPB strives to define the most appropriate manner and degree to which people may have access to these benefits

and **accepting** that neighbours may validly claim for more attention than the public at large, is **concerned** that

1. Despite the positive contribution of nature conservation by recreating South Africa's wildlife heritage, adverse attitudes towards protected areas are still prevalent amongst our neighbouring communities; and
2. Population pressure and social change are exacerbating this problem.

The Board **believes** that accelerated attention should be given to these issues and **undertakes** to do so by concurrently

1. Creating trust through
 - a. Improved communications;
 - b. Negotiating solutions to common problems;
 - c. Encouraging participation in conservation activities.
2. Developing environmental awareness through education and interpretation programmes.

3. Facilitating access to the material and spiritual benefits of protected areas through understanding neighbours' resource needs and encouraging access.
4. Fostering the economic and social development of neighbouring communities and thus contributing to an improved quality of life or the continued existence of an acceptable and/or desired lifestyle.
5. Training staff in order that they may participate effectively in neighbour related activities.

Based upon the above policy the Board has approved the following actions by staff to meet the goals set in the policy

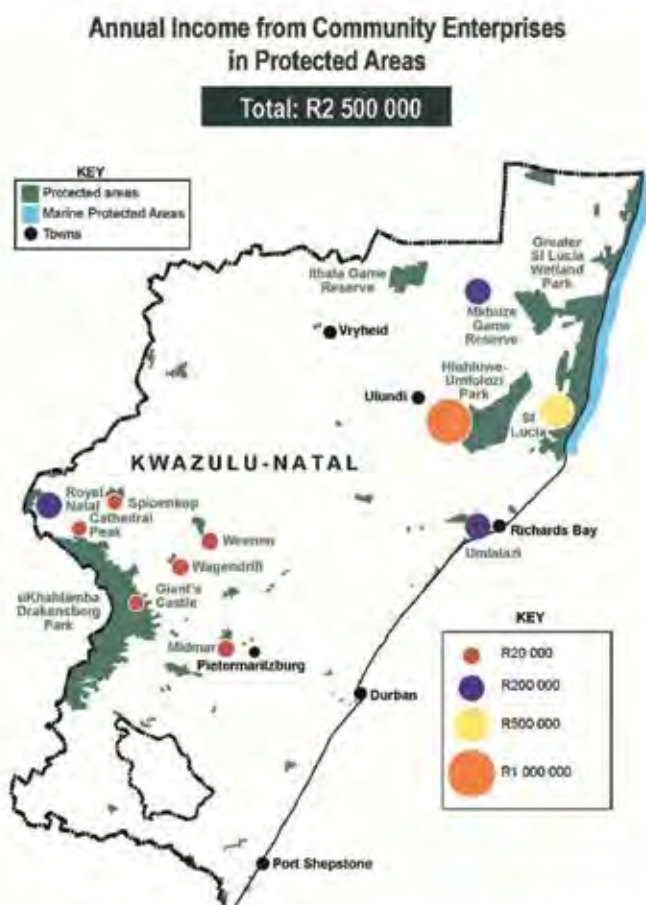
- 1. To encourage participation in protected area management and planning by the creation of neighbours' forums to**
 - a. Create trust;
 - b. Discuss boundary and land issues;
 - c. Create and expand wildlife resource harvesting programmes;
 - d. Provide control free access;
 - e. Formalise and honour commitments.
- 2. To foster economic and social development thus contributing to an improved quality of life by**
 - a. Addressing basic social needs of neighbouring communities;
 - b. Encouraging preferential employment;
 - c. Involving local entrepreneurs;
 - d. Developing wildlife resources areas on the periphery of protected areas;
 - e. Undertaking appropriate training of staff.
- 3. To enhance environmental awareness by:**
 - a. Developing environmental education and interpretation programmes;
 - b. Creating an appropriate problem animal policy;
 - c. Undertaking training of staff;
 - d. Creating a Neighbourhood Trust to fund such actions.

Results

During the seven years following the approval of the Neighbour Relations Policy the staff of the NPB pursued its goals with tremendous enthusiasm and, above all, were now required to quantify all benefits flowing from the protected areas to communities and the assistance programmes that were requested by

local community forums. To the board, the results were remarkable and for the first time gave a clear picture of the NPB's outreach efforts. Giving rand values to all the programmes began to show that local people were benefiting to the tune of tens of millions of rands per year.

One might say that this was all very well, but the real value of these endeavours could only be ascertained by measuring the responses of the communities themselves. As a benchmark, the NPB had used results gathered by Mark Infield (1988) who had carried out a study on community attitudes towards conservation and the NPB itself around the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex in late 1985 and early 1986.



*Income of community entrepreneurs operating in NPB
protected areas, 1998*



Umfolozi Game Reserve: Vulamehlo Curio Shop started earning over R30 000 per month from tourists visiting the Game Capture Centre, 2001

| Natal Parks Board Contributions to Reconstruction and Development Programme | |
|--|--|
| 1994 - 1995 | |
|  Anti-litter campaigns |  Curio sales outlet |
|  Adult education |  Cultural village |
|  Block making |  Fencing projects (schools etc) |
|  Cattle breeding training |  Indigenous nurseries for Nyngas |
|  Capacity building |  Literacy training |
|  Children's theatre workshops |  Medicinal plant propagation training |
|  Civic education training |  Organic vegetable gardening |
|  Clinics / health services |  Sewing workshops |
|  Community water schemes |  School classrooms and facilities |
|  Community conservation areas |  Visitor assistant training - (public relations, care and launching of ski boats, care of SCUBA equipment). |
|  Community resource centre | |
|  Community committee training | |
|  Craft training | |

The NPB made a significant effort to improve the lives of neighbouring communities

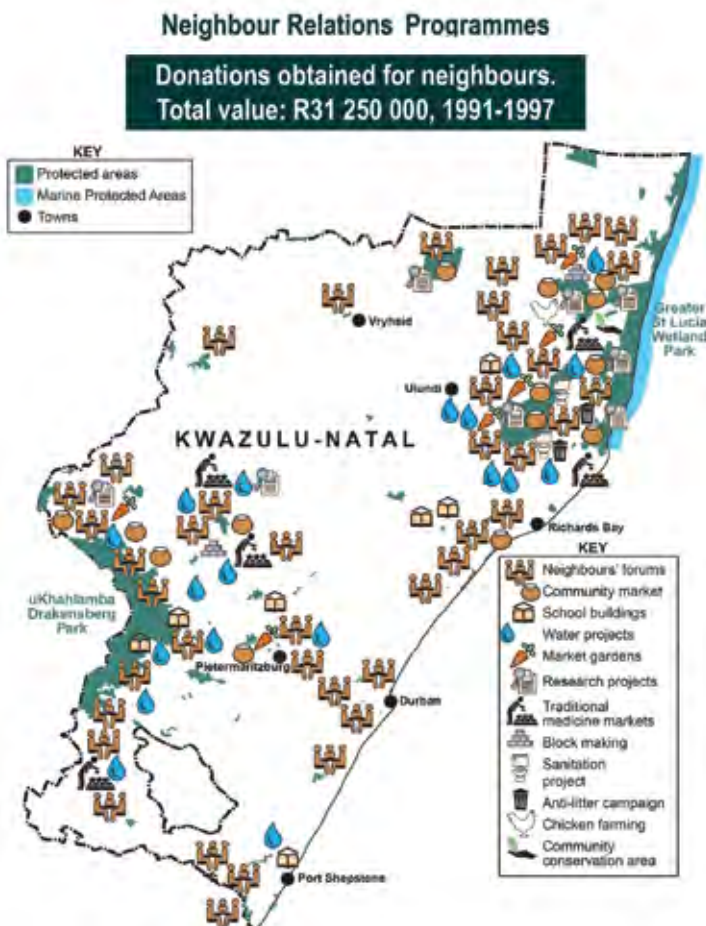
It would be true to say that staff were not without criticism of Infield's methods and findings, but the essence of the neighbours' responses was indisputable. He recorded that 28% of all those interviewed held negative or very negative attitudes towards the NPB and its staff and 33% were negative towards conservation in general. A significant proportion of very disadvantaged communities were, however, positive towards conservation and almost as many positive towards the NPB and its staff. The important goal for the staff was to try to reduce the negative components even more by improving on what had been done and expanding the direct communication opportunities for staff to meet and liaise with all community groups. I have already mentioned the improvements at Mkuzi through the provision of meat at suitable sites at minimal cost, but so many more benefits were provided over the final six years of the NPB's existence.



Left: NPB outreach staff promoted market gardens and other enterprises around the protected areas

Right: The NPB board approved a free entry card for families of neighbours living within 15 km of the borders of the nearest protected area, but it was rarely used because of a lack of transport

I genuinely believe that the NPB's efforts were successful, not just in the general ambience of community relations, but in more concrete aspects. At Mkuzi Game Reserve, once neighbour relations improved poaching fell by 85%, a remarkable figure. A sample review of Hlubi tribal attitudes around Giant's Castle showed a positive result from 82% of community residents. An extensive survey of community opinions along the length of the Drakensberg in 1997 as to whether it was felt that the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park should be declared a World Heritage Site showed that the proposal was supported to the astounding level of 98%. This was indeed a great credit to the staff who had been involved in the work of presenting the concept to neighbours



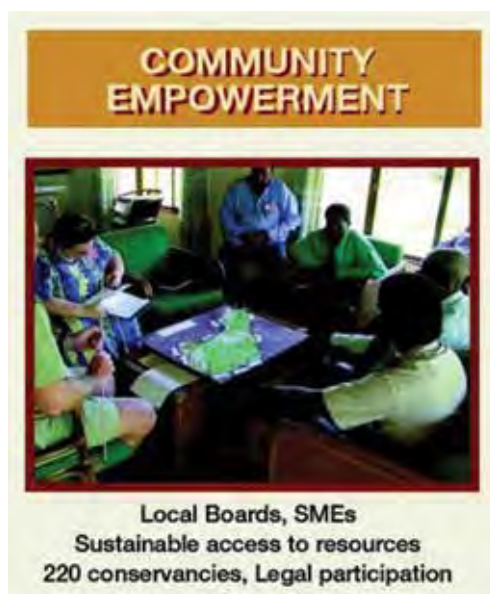
By 1997, NPB staff had solicited donations from state and NGO sources to assist neighbours with improvements to infrastructure and other projects

and the creation and distribution of 5 000 English and 5 000 Zulu Z-folder questionnaires in which the goals were explained and questions posed for return to the NPB. An exceptionally high return of 45%+ was obtained. It demonstrated a diligent application of the Neighbour Relations Policy.⁶

Of course, across the province the NPB enjoyed fluctuating fortunes, which must be expected from surrounding communities almost constantly facing economic stress and even more so by communities that had suffered almost complete repression under apartheid.

When NPB Warden Herman Bentley swam across a river near St Lucia to retrieve the body of a young boy killed by a crocodile, Herman's bravery, watched by a huge crowd, and the gratitude of the family for bringing the body for burial, sparked a long period of good relations. In contrast, near Hluhluwe, some years before the intensification of the neighbours' programmes, a lion killed a NPB game guard taken off his horse and the local staff most disrespectfully delivered his rather scant remains to his wife in a plastic bag (then known as a Checkers) generating intense outrage and negative criticism well beyond the borders of the protected area. This incident resulted, almost instantly, in a policy declaration from the board that any death on duty in staff ranks required the body to be returned to the family in a coffin.

There were, however, a few occasions when the board's concerns about injustice were not welcomed. In 1993, an incident near Cathedral Peak in the Drakensberg saw the Amangwane tribe drive out a sub-tribe, the Shabalalas, a group of which had, in 1812 or thereabouts, fled Shaka's colonisation of Zululand. The fugitives came to the Drakensberg foothills and were given shelter by the Amangwane. During the intervening nearly two centuries, the Amangwane community had grown to the point that they demanded the Shabalala community now leave the area and find somewhere else



The NPB made considerable effort to improve the empowerment of local neighbours but was not always successful



The NPB raised a large donation from Switzerland that was used to build the first high school (green roofs) in the upper Amangwane valley near the Cathedral Peak section of the Drakensberg Park (other schools were built near Loteni Nature Reserve and Giant's Castle Game Reserve)

to live. Seven Shabalala tribesmen were killed as they resisted ejection, before the entire group fled to the Culfargie section of the NPB's Drakensberg Park to find a new home. When the NPB, through the office of the CEO, raised the matter with Inkosi Hlongwane of the Amangwane, I was told that it had nothing to do with the NPB and we should mind our own business. The incident did lead to a little stress in relations.

For those readers who see community relations in Africa simply in terms of racial interactions or human rights I beg your indulgence and to give thought to the fact that such associations are complex, are filled with short bursts of anger or praise, and have to be worked at constantly. There is no magic formula. As for the media that for years have remained, even today, more than twenty years after the passing of the NPB, caught in the paradigm of thinking that protected area conservation is deliberately and indifferently depriving communities of all benefits, it is regrettable that they have injected politics into an assessment of conservation practice. I remain convinced that many journalists totally embraced the opinions that they published, and simply ignored or would not accept evidence to the contrary.

My favourite example of this single-mindedness was a feature in the SABC television programme 'Good Morning, South Africa', which focused one morning on Mtunzini, a town north of Durban. The report included an account

of a visit to the Vulamehlo Curio Shop operated in Umfolozi Game Reserve by local Mpukunyoni tribal women. When the journalist asked one of the senior women if she was pleased that there was a proposal to deproclaim Umfolozi, which to the NPB's knowledge there was not, she was horrified and told him in very clear Zulu that this was unthinkable as the park was their brother and keeps them all. The journalist looked shocked and quickly edited out whatever else this woman might have said to focus on negative matters near Mtunzini.

The Neighbour Relations Policy, and exceptionally hard work by the staff involved, produced positive outcomes. We were all hoping for a dramatic and permanent achievement that would seal the positive relationships so passionately wanted by both the NPB and its community neighbours. We were looking for the Holy Grail. And it almost came to hand.

NOTES

- 1 When matriculating around 1982, a young future journalist called Farieda Khan, who would turn out to be very opposed to apartheid, developed a passion to visit South Africa's protected areas and, on asking her father to take her to one as a reward for passing matric, was told 'you know we coloured people are not allowed there; but, he said, 'if you can find us a place I will take you there as a reward, if you pass matric'. Farieda applied herself to the search with a will and was turned down, as predicted, by everyone but the NPB. When she got through to the reservations office, she blurted out bitterly that she and her family were black only to receive the reply 'Young lady, we don't care what colour you are, you are more than welcome in our parks' (Farieda Khan, pers. comm.). Farieda did indeed turn out to be a very intense activist critic of environmental matters under apartheid and in the early years of the new South Africa wrote a very bitter piece about racism in conservation. As was the NPB's practice at the time, any particularly biting criticism was sent through to me, whose job it was, in turn, to telephone the author and request an opportunity to meet to discuss the views expressed. This I duly did and Farieda immediately stated 'No, I deliberately did not include the Natal Parks Board in the critique' and then explained to me the reasons why (Farieda Khan, pers. comm.). I was delighted and offered to meet her in Cape Town when next I came down and, after giving herself and her colleagues a presentation on our work, found her a passionate and sincere critic of any form of racism. We parted good friends. This did not change her deep-seated passion though. After 1994, she became an advocate for allocating blame for racism in conservation, even in Natal, making a public plea that Colonel Jack Vincent of the NPB should be called to appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Happily, that never occurred. I hope this was because, busy as they were at the TRC, Farieda had not insisted on it out of a fond memory, when she was younger, of being welcomed with sincerity by the organisation to which he contributed so much.
- 2 A labour farm during apartheid times was owned by white farmers who permitted black people to live on it with their livestock and plant sustenance crops. With no control, overgrazing and soil erosion resulted. The farmer normally had other farms and annually would use the people from them to work without payment, or with minimum payment, on another farm. Critics of this system considered the practice to be one of slave labour (Roger Porter, pers. comm.).

- 3 Hansie was even more tenacious when it came to the NPB introducing ungulates to the reserve a few years later. The NPB felt morally obliged to introduce a selection of game despite being advised by one of the NPB's most committed ecologists, Mike Mentis, that the most efficient way of rapidly improving the condition of the veld was to divide the reserve into paddocks, stock them with cattle and move the cattle from paddock to paddock, gradually improving the grasslands. Hansie however, insisted that the reserve had to have game. Politics and gratitude dictated that the NPB give in to his request. I took further advice from Mike and although approving a range of introduced species from eland to giraffe and two species of rhinoceros, the NPB refused to introduce impala and blue wildebeest as these species appear to thrive on degraded land and would, very likely, keep it in that state. This launched a point of argument between Hansie and me that endured for ten years.
- 4 And it had an incredible spin-off effect on the attitude of the Zulu leaders as some years later I attended a meeting of *amakhosi* in Zululand and collected a few brickbats about conservation from the more aggressive of those present. To my delight Inkosi Gumede, a highly respected leader, stood up and shouted down the aggressors, loudly declaiming that 'The NPB is our friend!' This statement took the wind out of the sails of the critics as he added the story of the board resolutely resisting the plan to move the Nibela people.
- 5 While I wholeheartedly acknowledge the supportive, ecological and economic role that hunting plays in conservation, I have observed this to be a well-known weakness in hunting circles, and it is almost universal. While I was attending a Safari Club dinner in Denver, Colorado I was seated next to a professional ecologist from Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The guest speaker, a hunter of course, lauded the hunting chapter for its work in successfully introducing some mountain sheep into a hunting area in Colorado. There was no mention of the work of the professional nature conservation staff of Colorado who, it was muttered into my ear, had initiated the idea, found a suitable source, done all the EIAs and arranged the capture and translocation of the sheep. The hunting chapter had made a generous donation towards translocation costs. My colleague from Colorado and I were definitely kindred spirits.
- 6 Roger Porter, pers. comm.

HAVING accepted that achieving the goals set by the NPB's approved Neighbour Relations Policy would require a considerable amount of time from our senior staff in the field, and even more from senior staff at the coal face of interaction with the press and general media, it was hoped that this would not prove too onerous. The NPB was also convinced that if all the goals were accomplished the constant pressure on us all would be relieved to the greater benefit of the cause of conservation, as well as our neighbours.

Staff at Hluhluwe and Umfolozi had experienced an especially challenging time with their neighbours who were represented by no fewer than ten separate tribal groups. Since the establishment of Umfolozi there had been severely strained relations with the local people, whether as a result of rhino straying into tribal lands and terrifying the children, lions and leopards killing livestock, or crops being trampled by buffalo. Then there was the long-disputed destiny of the Corridor area between the two reserves, which was maintained as part of the protected area and eventually fenced in, effectively forming the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex.¹ The local communities adjoining the Corridor had long claimed the land and wished to resettle there. The fencing now surrounding the greater protected area did not improve relations.

As described in Chapter 8, even the presence of Nelson Mandela at the centenary celebration of the Hluhluwe and Umfolozi Game Reserves did not deflect the local communities from mounting a serious campaign of objections. Therefore, the Complex (as it was known to staff) was strategically chosen as a site for a focused public relations effort. What was required was a special event that might be more likely to stimulate the interest of influential community leaders. Simple invitations to participate in functions, which had become the order of the day, were clearly no longer enough. The term consultation had been a feature of the NPB's policy but was, more often than not, interpreted as informing rather than engaging the local community in serious discussion. One day, Inkosi Nkhwanazi of the iMpukunyoni bluntly said to me that neighbours' forums (as part of the new policy) were going to be precisely the same as

in the past. The old paradigm that those in authority called the tune clearly still prevailed. He added that, to be honest, the indigenous communities were getting tired of such futile meetings after 350 years. While the remark stung a little, I had to point out to him that the NPB's policy clearly called for more effective consultation with the *amakhosi*, and with his own team of indunas or elder advisors.

The prospect of building a new lodge called Tshevu in Umfolozi Game Reserve to the same standards as Hilltop Camp at Hluhluwe and catering for the modern demands of the visiting tourist, thus bringing the creation of over 150 new jobs, seemed to offer an exciting opportunity for engagement with neighbours. NPB staff were therefore requested to discuss the development with the neighbouring *amakhosi*.

The Conservator of Umfolozi, Tony Conway, later Chief Conservator of Zululand, came to me for help because Nkhwanazi refused to visit the reserve to discuss the development. The iMpukunyoni formed a major community in the area and simply had to be involved as it was the NPB's expectation that fully understanding the potential of the camp would persuade all ten of the communities to endorse the endeavour publicly.

In response to Tony's concerns, I formally invited the chief and a group of his indunas to visit Umfolozi on a weekend of his choice. To our delight the invitation was promptly accepted, and a suitable weekend chosen when accommodation for the group could be arranged. The visit would entail a tour of Hluhluwe and Umfolozi including a viewing of the Game Capture Centre, with an overnight stay at the then quite new Hilltop Camp. The final afternoon was scheduled to include an inspection of the proposed Tshevu Lodge site. A full overview would be given to our visitors, including a sight of the preparatory draft plans (the architectural team chosen to produce draft plans for Tshevu was Taljaard, Carter, Ogilvie and Straw) and a projection of employment and additional benefits that were envisaged from the development of the lodge.

There were several fundamental reasons for the NPB's consideration of the building of the Tshevu Lodge. First, the success of Hilltop Camp was beyond all expectations as the NPB had borrowed R25 million to build it and at that stage it appeared that we would be able to repay the loan, with interest, without any discomfort. The income being generated was the largest ever achieved by any single NPB hutted camp and its obvious financial success had already attracted the interest of lending institutions prepared to offer financing for similar developments.

Umfolozi's original hutted camp at Mpila required a complete overhaul and, despite the fact that the rather limited income from the camp had been partially enhanced by adding a series of tented units that were also proving successful, the location of Mpila was not considered ideal for a large modern camp because it overlooked the wilderness area. The light emanating from such a large new structure would detract from the experience of wilderness trailers. Another reason for finding a new site for the lodge was to ensure that overnight visitors would not be cut off, as had happened frequently in the past, by the flooding of the Black Umfolozi River. The site should have easy access for building operations and for provision of electricity and water.

The locality eventually chosen for the Tshevu Lodge was north of the Black Umfolozi River adjacent to the road, five kilometres from the low-level bridge to Mpila. The lodge would be situated on a ridge overlooking the Enselweni bend in the river where it would command a splendid view up the Black Umfolozi. There was plenty of game to be seen on the open riverbed below the planned viewing sites of the lodge.

An extensive EIA had been carried out by the Planning Division, with major input by Trevor Hornby, whose computerised images showing possible impacts, both visual and auditory, using the most modern techniques were a source of wonder to all seeing such things for the first time. The financial feasibility studies giving detailed projections of pricing required to provide a profitable return against known occupancy rates experienced at Hilltop Camp were prepared by Geert Creemers, one of the resource ecologists in the Planning Division.

It was now considered necessary by staff and the board that the whole camp should have a unique theme designed to be of value to the lodge itself, and also to appeal to both local and foreign visitors. After an interesting discussion among staff, it was agreed that as the lodge would be situated literally in the heart of Zululand and crucially, because no fewer than ten communities lived along the borders of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex, that a theme with real value would be the rich history and culture of these communities. It was felt that engaging with these groups, all of whom would be encouraged to contribute to the project, and using the stories and histories that meant the most to each of them, was a winning strategy. Various staff of the Design Studio were thrilled at the prospect and with the challenge of making this lodge a very special one indeed.

The weekend visit by Nkhwanazi and his indunas proved to be a most rewarding endeavour. During our drives we encountered plenty of game and all

were enthralled by the presence of animals they could get close to in the Game Capture Centre. Our visitors also thoroughly enjoyed their overnight stay at Hilltop Camp. The presentation on Tshevu Lodge given by staff at the site was excitedly received and it prompted numerous questions, many of which were answered immediately. There was a very warm and rewarding ambience when we stopped at the Nyalazi Gate where our visitors' vehicles were parked. The suggestion that part of the lodge's decoration and information material would embrace the history of the local communities along with the possible naming of accommodation units after local historical characters, such as the late Inkosi Mtubatuba of the iMpukunyoni people, had evinced very positive approval from our guests.

Nkhwanazi appeared to be a forbidding man who had seldom shown any warmth towards the NPB, or its staff, but he was glowing with pleasure as he thanked us for arranging the visit and the discussion about the new lodge. He then stunned me by saying that this was his first visit to Umfolozi Game



Amakhosi on a visit to the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex: right to left Inkosi M.M. Mkhwanazi, (Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority), Inkosi B.N. Mdletshe, (Mdletsheni Traditional Authority) (left of staff member), Inkosi D.J. Hlabisa (Mpembeni Traditional Authority), M. Buthelezi (Ximba Local Authority) left of staff member. In forefront holding horn, Induna M. Shabangu (Ubeka Traditional Authority) and to his left F.F. Zulu (Chairman, Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority)

Reserve, and he was glad that he had at last been able to enjoy it. Knowing that he was 43 at the time and finding this a rather strange statement, I asked him why he had never arranged to see Umfolozi. He replied, rather sharply, that he had never been invited. This I knew, was not the case, as Tony Conway had informed me that he had invited the chief many times without success. I replied that I had heard that he had been asked before but was delighted that he had agreed to come this time. He smiled at me and replied that we *abelungu* (Europeans) forget that he was chief of a large and very important community and was equally honoured to receive an invitation from, and the company of, the head of the NPB.

This response was made with no perceivable malice, but it was a salutary lesson for me that the NPB's decision, through the Neighbour Relations Policy, to schedule engagement with local community leaders should be preceded by a better understanding of traditional protocols. The weekend had proved that such attention to detail was very necessary, because being rebuked, even gently, is never comfortable. Nevertheless, the outcome had been better than expected and Tony and I were delighted. Little did we know that the result of this visit would, within two years, produce a short-lived period of euphoria around neighbour relations that has probably been unmatched in African conservation history. Most certainly, this experience produced the closest approximation in our KwaZulu-Natal conservation journey to the achievement of total acceptance of a major protected area by local neighbouring communities.

The community levy and Community Trust Fund

In 1994, following the acceptance of the Neighbour Relations Policy by the board in 1992 (Chapter 26) we found that the new IFP-controlled Provincial Council heartily approved the NPB's proposal to create a Community Trust Fund by introducing a community levy on all tourist attractions and services. It was not a new idea as NPB staff had proposed such a levy several times over many years, but this had provoked very strong objections by some of our more conservative politicians in the Natal Provincial Council.

The KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation under Nick Steele had taken the decision that neighbouring communities should enjoy some financial benefits from any adjacent protected areas. While the principle was sound, this arrangement required only that the Directorate should calculate the amount of revenue received by each protected area, work out 10% of each sum and submit the information in a schedule to Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who then approved the payment from the KwaZulu budget. In the NPB, we



Operational structure of the Community Levy and Trust

had never found anything attractive in the Directorate's system because it was not directly related to the earning of money from tourists, and, in effect, the monies being paid out annually were coming straight from the South African taxpayer.

In our view this was not sustainable and could not have been defended if applied by the NPB, as its system of revenue earning activities involving tourism was based on a properly structured income and expenditure accounting procedure. The arbitrary disposal of revenue earned was not defensible, especially in terms of the King Report on Corporate Governance, as, in the KwaZulu case, there did not appear to be any auditing of money disposed of in this manner.

The first steps undertaken by staff after the board's approval of the Neighbour Relations Policy, were to discuss the concept of a Community Trust Fund that involved tourists and to seek the agreement of communities. It can be truthfully

stated that there was not one chief across the province who dissented and there was universal approval of the establishment of the promised trust fund. The NPB's proposed community levy would be structured as follows:

- All tourists visiting any NPB protected area, be it day entries, overnight stays, wilderness trails, night drives and so on, would attract a small fee for the community levy. The management of funds collected was to follow the following process:
- All moneys collected would be deposited into a unique account to be known as the Community Trust Fund and held distinctly separate from the NPB's normal revenues;
- The board would establish an independent board of trustees to maintain oversight of the trust;²
- 90% of all funds collected for the trust in any protected area would be available for distribution to neighbouring communities of that specific protected area;
- The remaining 10% of funds would be held in an overall communal trust account for use at the discretion of the trustees. This was primarily intended to ensure that there were some funds accessible for communities that were adjacent to protected areas which did not attract large numbers of tourists. Many of the small biodiversity-focused protected areas fell into this category and it was felt that the provision of assistance to local schools and clinics around such reserves was as necessary for these communities as for those fortunate enough to be situated adjacent to high revenue-earning protected areas. The sizeable and popular reserves were therefore, to a limited extent, going to modestly subsidise those areas less visited. This was also seen as a means of assisting those NPB outreach officers working with communities where the giving of even a very modest amount of help would be greatly appreciated. It was furthermore intended to create a reserve fund, from which might be drawn some cash to enable a valuable project to be executed if such extra funds were available. This strategy would hopefully meet any estimated shortfall from the direct levy;
- At appropriate intervals, staff would be authorised to open negotiations with the relevant community structures to inform them of the amount of money available for use by the community. These communities would then be asked to submit potential projects for funding that would be of demonstrable benefit to their community;³

- The proposed projects would then be considered by NPB staff who would investigate the viability of the project by having it checked for correct costing by the technical divisions. If feasible, it would be submitted to the board of trustees for approval;
- Within reason the NPB undertook to assist in the execution of the project.⁴

The board registered the Community Trust in 1997.

The Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex allocation

The community levy was introduced by the NPB in 1997 and by the time it was decided to implement the distribution of funds programme the NPB and the Directorate had amalgamated to form the KZN Nature Conservation Service, and I had been confirmed as the new CEO. I was thus eager to get the levy benefits into action and the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex was chosen as the first site to implement the distributions programme. The Chief Conservator of Zululand, Tony Conway, was asked to convene a meeting of the local *amakhosi* representing the ten communities around the Complex. Staff had agreed that this was going to be an interesting task as a significant sum had become available for use in 1999.

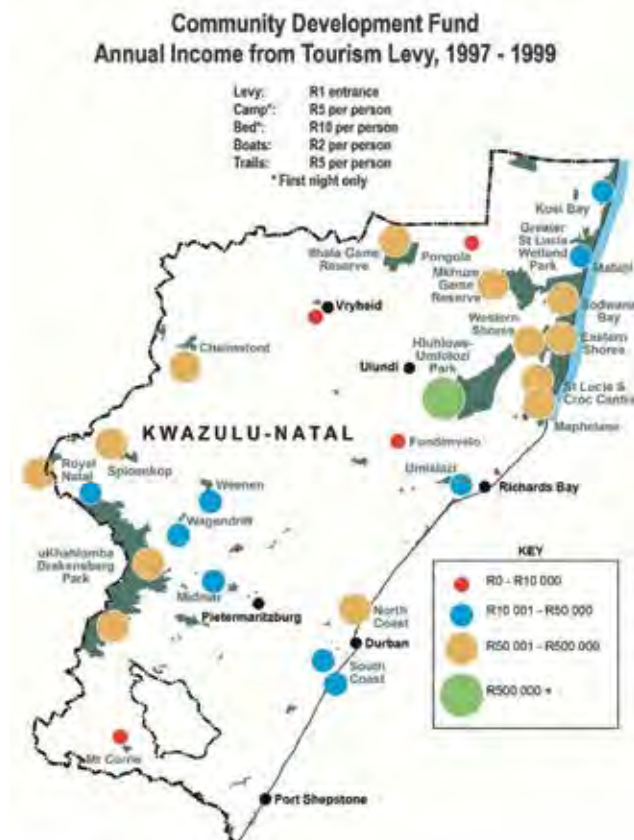
The meeting was held on 16 June 1999 in the old office and curio shop (now converted into a communal boardroom suitable for meetings, presentations and functions) in the original hutted camp at Hluhluwe. Tony and I were a little nervous as a significant gathering had formed. Those attending were called to order by the chairman, Inkosi Mthethwa. A similar meeting under the same chairman had been held by the NPB staff to gain their collective approval for the creation of the Community Trust and we were concerned that a lot of time would be devoted to going over the entire procedure and rules.⁵ How mistaken we were.

The fact that the meeting was intended to discuss the disbursement of funds to the ten communities may explain why the meeting attracted a full house of *amakhosi* and all ten were present when the meeting was due to start. Tony, I and the supporting staff were all present and welcomed to the meeting by Mthethwa who turned immediately to me and asked me to address the meeting.

The first matter that I intended to cover was an overview of the required process, but I had hardly started when Mthethwa said that everyone present understood the process and could I address any other important matter. I hastened to explain that the dispersal of funds would have to be decided upon by the collective gathering of community leaders and it was up to them to

decide how they wished the funds to be allocated, and in what form. I kept repeating that the funds had been collected for the benefit of the communities present and it was their decision as to whether to agree, among themselves, to a single large project which might benefit all communities as a collective, or whether the funds should be split up on some pro rata basis, using perhaps the proportions of the boundary fence adjacent to which each community lived. An equivalent percentage of the sum collected each year could be calculated and then each community would nominate their own projects for which they could apply for funding directly.

I had been determined to finish this discourse in the interest of furthering full understanding by the gathering and, despite vocal demands that I tell the meeting how much money was available, I laboured on until the explanation



Tourism community levy: this had a tremendous impact as it raised ten of millions of rands and nearly achieved the greatest step forward in community relations ever experienced in South Africa and possibly elsewhere

was complete. The chairman once again admonished me gently, saying that I had been through all this before, and could I please tell them how much money would be under discussion.

Taking a deep breath, I announced that we had just over R760 000 available. A warm response from all around the room greeted this sum and smiles broke out even among some of the most suspicious of the *amakhosi*. One must remember that the year was 1999 when a sum of nearly R1 million was fairy tale material to most of the South African public and certainly to these leaders. There was a babble of excited discussion and Mthethwa sharply called the meeting to order. When the room had quietened down, he turned to me and asked me please to vacate the meeting with all the NPB staff as the *amakhosi* were going to caucus.

Somewhat surprised, all the staff left the room and we wandered across to the parking area opposite the old curio shop and sat down on some of the boulders scattered around the edge. It was a beautiful day and the dense flowering thickets of *Aloe arborescens* surrounding us were in colourful red profusion, which was magnificent. I murmured to Tony that we were lucky to be able to enjoy such a splendid day as we were likely to be out there for some time, adding that this might be a very long caucus and was highly likely to be a noisy one.

To our surprise, as only 25 minutes had passed, a messenger exited the meeting room and trotted over to me requesting that we all return as the chairman wished to address us. To say that we were a little stunned was an understatement, but when we were duly seated and comfortable the chairman delivered an announcement that left us all totally speechless.

An unanticipated but thrilling development

Mthethwa turned to face me and said, 'The ten communities around the Hluhluwe and Umfolozi Game Reserves have caucused and decided that we are not going to take the money'. Of all the possibilities that we staff may have considered likely, not one of us had ever contemplated such a decision and we were all thrown into confusion. I was at a loss as how to respond. My first, perhaps pessimistic, thought was that the group had decided to end the 100-year existence of the protected area complex now that South Africa was under a democratic government and had interpreted the Community Trust Fund as a provocation, trying to buy their acceptance and persuade them to give up land claims. Staff were simply incapable of imagining the reason for the decision apparently reached after such a short interval.

Mthethwa then, very soberly, continued by saying, 'Dokotela, you know the new lodge at Umfolozi that you have been telling us about, Tshevu Lodge? We wish you, in our name, to invest the entire sum in the development of the lodge. We wish to be shareholders of the lodge and derive a yearly dividend which we shall share out equitably amongst the ten communities'. Such a decision had never before occurred to any member of staff of the NPB and as no staff member responded there was a long pregnant silence. The chief looked at me enquiringly and necessity demanded that I reply, but I had suddenly become so excited that I could barely speak. I required a few more moments to gather my wits.

It dawned on me that this was the ultimate solution to the public relations impasse that had bedevilled tribal community relations since the establishment of conservation focused protected areas. The decision was the Holy Grail of community relations. In one sentence, Mthethwa, in the name of all the neighbours, announced the acceptance of the existence of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex, something that had never been openly done before. They had taken ownership of the protected area. Such a result would guarantee its future.

At the same time, the ten tribal communities had recognised the nature conservation organisation as the manager of the protected area and declared a willingness to work with it. In effect they would become partners in a significant development and thus co-owners of the protected area. The fact that this decision had been reached after the NPB had ceased to exist did not deter me from seeing it as the culminating success of its Neighbour Relations Policy and the efforts of the NPB's staff before the amalgamation. It was, of course, a triumphal start to the new KZN Nature Conservation Service, another first in public relations in KwaZulu-Natal, and another guarantee of the future of this important protected area.

All I could think of in response to Mthethwa was 'We are absolutely thrilled, as I know the board will be'. In truth I could feel tears in my eyes as I felt that we had achieved what had been one of the most important goals facing any protected area – total acceptance of the worth of conservation and total acceptance of our endeavours by the people with whom the protected areas were associated. It was a declaration of trust which we, the formal conservationists in all our various forms, had sought since 1895.

Inkosi Nkhwanazi of the iMpukunyoni community brought me back down to earth by asking if there would be another tranche of money available the following year. I responded quickly to confirm that this would be so and,

as tourism improved, this sum would enlarge and when Tshevu Lodge was opened it was likely that the sum would double. He announced that this was good and that the communities would invest more in the lodge. I assured him that the board would be fully supportive of such a decision.

Nkhwanazi, having obviously given some thought to the future, then questioned whether there would be the possibility of using some of the money to purchase suitable tour vehicles and register as tour operators, as had been done by neighbouring private sector lodge companies. I reacted with enthusiasm for two reasons. First, the obvious one, as this would be yet another guarantee of support for the protected area as the iMpukunyoni community would earn direct financial support; but second, the idea also blended well with future plans that we had been considering in the NPB.

The massive increase in private cars on the limited road system was clearly increasing congestion and discomfort. This was reducing the quality of visitor experience, so much so that the future management of the park would have to introduce some rational control of tourist vehicles. We had envisaged trying to reduce the use of private vehicles dramatically by making it a rule that only a few private cars per day would receive a permit for leisurely touring in the park, while most visitors would be required to use organised group vehicles such as those envisaged by Nkhwanazi; the perfect public-private partnership.

Mthethwa ended the meeting by saying that it was up to the conservation staff to champion the communities' collective request and he called for a meeting to discuss their proposal after its acceptance by the KZNNCS board. Tony, I and the outreach staff were euphoric and could not wait to present the proposal to the board, expecting an enthusiastic blessing for the project. I have seldom departed a meeting feeling such joy for the future.

The opposition

Unbeknown to me, following the first viewing of the plans and the progress that had taken staff beyond completion of the EIA for the Tshevu project, yet another coalition of NGOs had been formed to raise objections to it. This group, consisting of WESSA and the Wilderness Leadership Foundation was, in my view, simply a group of purists who could not see the value of facilitating responsible tourism in protected areas, thus bringing in more financial resources for conservation and encouraging the public to enjoy nature. In this they were very similar to the group that submitted the Petition condemning the NPB in 1972 and the one that more recently had objected to

the new Didima Camp at Cathedral Peak. Sad to say, it was encouraged by Ian Player who, being a close confidant of Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the influential leader of the IFP, was undoubtedly the prime mover of the campaign against the building of the lodge.

When the NPB was disbanded in 1998, the new board of the KZN Nature Conservation Service carried over only two of the members who had served the NPB; namely Sam Goba and Lucas Mchunu. The new board members appointed were clearly drawn from that section of civil society that had worked closely with the KwaZulu Directorate of Nature Conservation. Others included some previous members of the board of the NPB from a few years before, whose terms of office had been terminated by the NPA when they were deemed to have served for long enough. Two such prominent members were Ian Player and Nolly Zaloumis, a former office bearer of WESSA. Both reacted negatively to the building of the lodge, organised a protest meeting and started to lobby against the project. Ian Player even brought into a public meeting, Colonel Jack Vincent, 27 years retired and well into his nineties, and had the old gentleman stand unsteadily and state without giving a reason that he was against the lodge. The lodge was also called a Disneyland by one rather over-enthusiastic wilderness supporter which, of course, was grossly unfair. No attempt at rational understanding of the value of this project and what it might bring to the local communities, the sustainability of nature conservation and wider economy was even considered.

The campaign against Tshevu Lodge was launched on Ian Player's website, where he claimed that the camp would destroy the wilderness area of Umfolozi. I was not impressed with this and telephoned him asking that he take the statement off the website as he knew that great care had been taken to ensure that there would be no damage to the wilderness area. Attending the EIA report back meeting, he had publicly complimented NPB planner, Trevor Hornby, on the excellent report. The offending statement was taken off Ian's website, but the removal made no difference to the outcome of the project.

A matter of weeks later the KZNNCS board was informed via Ian Player that Mangosuthu Buthelezi was against the lodge and there, into ashes, fell the greatest community public relations opportunity ever given to conservation in Natal and KZN. The new board simply ruled that the lodge would not proceed and that was that. All the planning, discussions, EIA and architectural work simply became wasted expenditure.

To the former NPB staff involved it was never considered for a moment that the ultimate go-ahead for the camp was not a mere formality, or that

the project would not be lauded far and wide and carried forward with the enthusiasm, blessings and high expectations of the ten communities of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex. It was a bitter disappointment and a tragedy for conservation.

The Holy Grail of the NPB's endeavours to gain the popular support of all the communities around one of our most important protected areas had been touched and then wrested away, by narrowly directed convictions fuelled by one person's apparently uncompromising focus on a part of the game reserve that made him famous. In Ian Player's biography he stated quite emphatically to the biographer that 'I made every effort I could to stop the building of Tshevu Lodge' (Linscott, 2013). Such is the danger to formal conservation from over-focused and often over-emotional, single issue conservationist NGOs. A sad day for conservation endeavour.

NOTES

- 1 The Corridor was eventually declared a protected area in 1989 and the entire complex finally gazetted as a combined protected area, the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, in 2012. The spelling of Umfolozi was changed in the process.
- 2 It was anticipated that the board of trustees would be drawn from members of the board, community leaders and financially skilled and influential business people from civil society.
- 3 This qualification was not clearly understood, or deliberately misunderstood, by one community that promptly asked for R150 000 to complete their chief's house situated some distance from the game reserve. Clearly not an altruistic project.
- 4 An interesting project was the building of new classrooms at a school adjacent to Loteni Nature Reserve where a most appreciated outcome was a request, from the builders employed by the local community, for a written statement from the NPB's Structural Division declaring that the structures satisfactorily met all the required building standards. When given such a document the builders looked as if they had just been awarded a degree.
- 5 It should be recorded that all such meetings had Zulu interpreters, normally contributed by NPB outreach staff, so that all attending the committee could speak in their language of choice, either Zulu or English.

SECTION 4

DRAWING TO A CLOSE

BY 1993, the NPB had built up a reputation as a world-class body. It had done so through innovative change, sound fiscal management, outstanding staff and a demonstrated record of achievement. The contents of this book will, it is hoped, have provided ample evidence of the commitment of the Board as a whole and the actions of its staff. It has been shown that the periodic restructuring of its model and a willingness to remove shortcomings in management had always led to improvements in efficiency and direction. With the prospect of a new political dispensation in South Africa, the NPB was convinced that new opportunities lay ahead, and expert advice was sought.

The final strategic plan

During 1993, staff tried to persuade Clem Sunter to lead a scenario planning exercise for the NPB but he was too over-committed to lead the project himself and he recommended a colleague from Cape Town.¹ Peter Dugmore was an inspired choice as far as the involved NPB staff were concerned as the result was one of the most successful endeavours of this nature ever undertaken by the NPB. Altogether twenty participants drawn from all divisions, representing different population groups and genders, spent several weeks on the exercise. Peter was so impressed by the enthusiasm and achievements of the organisation by the end of the programme that he volunteered to provide, free of charge, additional guidance to staff developing the action plans that would flow from the core strategies.

The approved strategic plan and core strategies were summarised as follows:

Natal Parks Board strategic plan

The services and benefits provided by the Natal Parks Board are:

1. The preservation of the biodiversity of Natal through
 - the establishment of a network of protected areas;
 - the regulation of the utilisation of wildlife resources;

- the encouragement and development of nature conservation activities by the public.
2. The knowledge base, skills and management expertise, essential for the wise use of wildlife resources, which the NPB has developed, and which is readily available to the public.
 3. A diversity of natural resource-based activities available to the public.
 4. The provision of wildlife resources from protected areas.
 5. The infrastructure, facilities and services within protected areas contributing significantly to a growing ecotourism industry.
 6. Opportunities for local employment and entrepreneurship and the seeking and channelling of funds for specific projects to address community needs and facilitate rural development.

Core strategies

1. To achieve universal acceptance among the people of Natal and South Africa of the value of nature conservation by
 - a. providing ongoing environmental education and awareness programmes and promoting an environmental ethic;
 - b. demonstrating the aesthetic values and economic contributions of nature conservation and ecotourism;
 - c. expanding the diversity and enhancing the quality of products and services; and
 - d. building powerful alliances.
2. To increase the NPB's contribution to social stability through economic development in the KwaZulu-Natal region by
 - a. supporting, promoting and developing ecotourism as an industry;
 - b. using Board administered protected areas as a catalyst for development in rural areas through
 - i. optimising opportunities for local employment;
 - ii. stimulating entrepreneurship;
 - iii. initiating and supporting projects in local communities;
 - iv. empowerment of local communities through the transfer of skills and training;
 - v. seeking and channelling funds to address community needs;
3. ensuring that the NPB's activities continue to receive adequate funding by
 - a. continuing to use the annual state subsidy it receives in the best interest of nature conservation;

- b. optimising the generation of funds from ecotourism and conservation activities;
 - c. generating additional funds through joint ventures, sponsorships, donations and contributions from NGOs;
 - d. actively supporting the Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust, established to assist the NPB in meeting its conservation responsibilities; and
 - e. generating international financial support.
4. broadening and strengthening support for the NPB as the appropriate conservation authority for Natal by
- a. continuing to be professionally competent, credible, responsible and transparent;
 - b. continuing to carry out its responsibilities without regard to political affiliations and irrespective of race, gender and religion;
 - c. continuing its affirmative action programme to correct gender and colour imbalances in the NPB's staff;
 - d. demonstrating the NPB's relevance as a result of its focused understanding and commitment to the Natal region for the past 45 years.

The board approved the strategic plan and the staff not only accepted it but threw itself into its execution in a way that earned the NPB an international reputation. It can be confidently stated that every commitment made in the plan was pursued with vigour. There may have been components where there was still room for improvement, but all aspects were engaged with rewarding degrees of success.

The amalgamation procedure

After the arrival of a new dispensation in South Africa in 1994, it was inevitable that the NPB would amalgamate with the KZDNC to form a single new conservation authority for the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The NPB and its staff looked forward with some interest and enthusiasm to this new authority but in my experience the same could not be said for the Directorate as early attempts at co-operation were not embraced by a very reluctant Nick Steele, director of the KZDNC. Regrettably, I can only speculate at the reasons for this approach as he never discussed his vision of the future at any of the combined meetings that he was eventually encouraged to attend by the minister, Inkosi Nyanga Ngubane.

The NPB had responded very positively to political regime change in South Africa and almost immediately it considered renaming the NPB as the KwaZulu-Natal Parks Board, a simple enough suggestion that would have conveyed immediately to the public in general that the Board was not intending to retain its original title and thus that it fully embraced the opportunities of the new dispensation. The only definite statement made by Nick Steele was that over his dead body would the new organisation be called a 'Parks Board'. As a result, the NPB was advised not to act prematurely and risk causing possible offence. I accepted the board's stand and continued to try to get the amalgamation started in a positive spirit.

The rather negative start made the prospect of fruitful discussions rather dim. Once ordered by the minister to start the negotiations, Nick Steele insisted that all meetings had to be held at a neutral venue, which meant neither the NPB nor the KZDNC offices. This conditional imposition necessitated added expense that was neither necessary nor welcome. In truth this cloak and dagger approach was regarded with deep suspicion by staff as they speculated over the reasons for this over-defensive strategy. Rumour even reached the ears of NPB staff that the office of their CEO had been bugged, which necessitated the efforts of Nico Snyman, and his specialist security colleagues, to ensure that this was not the case. The implications of such a suggestion did nothing to improve the belief that the amalgamation was being wholeheartedly supported.

On top of that, at one of the first meetings of staff from the two organisations, Nick Steele announced that he did not believe that the statutory board model was the best choice and felt rather that the simple model of a provincial department was preferable. An inordinate amount of time was thus wasted while Ngubane and his departmental secretary, Robin Raubenheimer, applied their minds, following bureaucratic practice, to explore the matter. The provincial government launched a formal study to investigate which model of conservation management would be suitable and acceptable to the new province of KZN. The study was set in motion by the Director-General of KZN, O.E.H.M. Nxumalo, after a meeting to which he called the heads of the existing nature conservation bodies in the province. The study was carried out by D.J. Joubert, who completed his research and published the findings in December 1995 (Joubert, 1995).

It came as no real surprise to the NPB that the fundamental structure recommended for the new body would be parastatal, along the same lines as the NPB; but, alas, with some critical changes that became apparent as the legislation under which the organisation would be brought to life was drawn

up by the provincial legal department. The first major departure from the NPB system was that board members of the new KZN Nature Conservation body would be paid a standard provincial stipend for time spent attending meetings on its behalf. The proposal appeared to be based on the belief that this move would ensure that it would have broader representation than in the past and include people from less affluent backgrounds. The manoeuvre appeared innocent enough, but it became more difficult for members and staff of the NPB to accept its implications when common knowledge reported that a vindictive senior civil servant in the provincial administration stated at a private gathering that he regarded the NPB as an elitist body and expressed his intention to change its structure.

The accusation that the NPB board was deliberately elitist was misplaced as since 1980 it had demonstrated that it welcomed members from all societal groups. It had long counted Zulu-speaking members among its membership and welcomed people of different race and gender, from a variety of backgrounds. The commitment of those members had managed to achieve an admirable record of transparency and good governance and the members themselves had shown a high degree of loyalty to the existing structure. It must be conceded that members appointed to the board of the NPB by the province of Natal were often drawn from communities with an interest in conservation and a willingness to contribute, drawing on their respective fields of endeavour. However, they received no financial reward for their hours spent in service. Of course, serving members of the board had every right to claim expenses associated with travel or other costs while serving the board's interest and this opportunity was, in fact, grasped by those members who could ill-afford the costs of attendance.

The second major legislative change to the powers of the board was that executive powers would be lost. Almost any decision taken would require the approval of the appropriate minister. This clause so offended Graham Cox, a board member of long standing, that he resigned in protest. Graham foresaw an undesirable



Graham Cox
(EKZNW photo library)

increase in bureaucracy and concomitant time delays in decision-making that he felt would seriously affect the efficiency and efficacy of the board.² The NPB had served Natal for nearly fifty years under different political parties without undue influence from any of them for partisan reasons and Graham saw this as an unacceptable change, exposing conservation to political interference. Graham also foresaw that the efficiency of the board would be seriously influenced by delays while trying to obtain ministerial authority for executive actions.³

Many of the members of the board and, indeed, the staff expressed their doubts over the draft legislation, but the new dispensation did not lack determination to create what they envisaged as a just and effective new structure. Despite the concerns raised and Graham's demonstrative reaction, the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Management Act was promulgated by Ordinance no. 9 on 18 December 1997.

The KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service (KZNNCS)

The name adopted in 1998, the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service was, in my view, an appalling name that emerged as the only one that the KZDNC would accept. In fact, such a stipulation was just one of the many stumbling blocks that the KwaZulu negotiating group created to stymie progress during the years that passed before the final creation of the new board and service.

From meeting to meeting, it became clear that any member of the KwaZulu team who showed any enthusiasm for the ideas of the NPB, or indeed, the genuine melding of the two structures, was simply removed from the negotiating team by KwaZulu. This caused considerable delays as the negotiators battled to maintain continuity. Added to this, was the alarming fact that the KZDNC appeared every bit as disorganised as had been hinted at by the Auditor-General's office when, in response to my enquiry whether the KZDNC would also undergo a full forensic audit, I was informed that the Auditor-General would not waste his staff's time (see Chapter 15).

Reports of the bureaucratic shambles became so widespread that a financial investigation report into the KZDNC was called for (Deloitte and Touche, 1998). It was not a flattering report and emphasised incompetence, staff negligence and wilful misconduct, but, as amalgamation was planned for execution within a month of publication, its recommendations were never acted upon. During this period Nick Steele passed away following a long

illness. On 1 April 1998, the amalgamation took place. Acting in good faith, the old NPB structures took over the organisational and logistic necessities of combining the two organisations and incorporated every relevant component into a consolidated format that continued to operate with minimal procedural difficulties.

At the end of its existence, the NPB had an enthusiastic and committed group of staff that brought the best of attitudes and proven skills to serve the new body. It soon became obvious that many difficulties lay ahead as certain former KZDNC staff displayed an astonishingly loose attitude towards fiscal discipline and administrative efficiency. The realisation that a greater effort was now required from former NPB staff was viewed with some sadness, and the odd complaint was received, but, in the main, these staff members nevertheless hurled themselves with gusto into trying to make the new service the equal, or even better, than the NPB.

Some continuity was enabled by the KZN province first extending my position, now as the Acting CEO of the KZNNCS, until 1999. After a rather painful and stressful period, the Minister of Environmental Affairs, Narend Singh, called for applications for the new position as CEO of the body, the name of which, in the interim, the new board had changed to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW). I was once again appointed as CEO for a contract period of two years.

Progress with World Heritage Sites

During the same period, the national Department of Environmental Affairs had decided to forward the NPB's application to have the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park recognised as a World Heritage Site to UNESCO. The document had been written and submitted to the department by the NPB in 1998 but was added to and amended as the application had to be perceived as a national and not a provincial submission.

David Sheppard, CEO of the World Commission on Protected Areas of IUCN, led the team from UNESCO on an inspection of the park. They were given a full presentation on conservation work in the province and a thorough inspection tour that involved visiting Giant's Castle, Cathedral Peak and RNNP, including a hike to the top of the spectacular Sentinel peak. As it was hoped that the park would be categorised as having global value for both biodiversity and culture, a visit to Cathedral Peak focused on its San rock art, some of which was thought to date back over 8 000 years. Here, the

inspection team was shown the plans for the new Didima hutted camp, which was themed to focus on the astounding rock art wealth of the Drakensberg and was ready to launch, alongside a world-class exhibition centre on the history and art of the Drakensberg San First People. The tour was a great success as UNESCO inscribed the park as its 23rd Mixed World Heritage Site in 2000. The success was further illustrated by the remarks made in March 2000 by David Sheppard, when he stated in the *World Parks Commission Newsletter*:

What makes a great parks agency? The answer was apparent to me on a recent visit to South Africa with the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service, a provincial protected area agency, and the South African National Parks Board, which manages the nationally designated South African parks. Though operating at different levels, both agencies are outstanding in the management of protected areas.

Why? Firstly, both enjoy support from governments which appreciate the vital role of parks in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, particularly in relation to nature-based tourism. Also, the parastatal status of KwaZulu-Natal Service provides management flexibility and innovation.

Second, dynamic and effective leadership from the two Chief Executive Officers and executive teams provide an essential ingredient in the performance of both agencies. Other factors include the willingness to innovate, the ability to generate and retain income and last, but certainly not least, the presence of highly dedicated and committed staff in both agencies.

If protected area agencies are to be viable in the 21st century it is important for them to look at examples of successful agencies, such as those provided in South Africa and to replicate the elements for this success within their own countries (Sheppard, 2000).

It would not be too boastful to imply that this glowing report would suggest that the former staff of the NPB, in the face of considerable difficulty, continued to serve the cause of nature conservation with renewed commitment and with inspiration and belief in the future. It is wonderful that they impressed knowledgeable conservationists, like David, from across the globe. However, I would place even greater value on a statement made to me some years ago, with great sincerity, by one of the NPB's Zulu game guards when attending a bi-annual game guard competition on the airstrip at St Lucia next to our Crocodile Centre. These were always exciting affairs, attended by hundreds

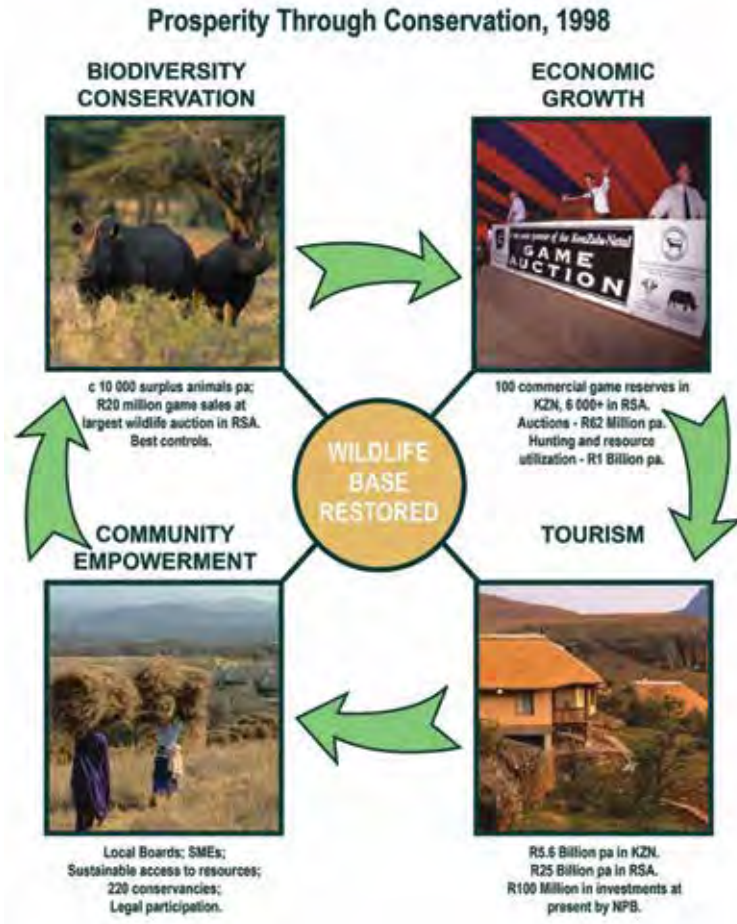


David Sheppard (on the far right) from the World Parks Commission at Giant's Castle Game Reserve on an inspection of the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, proposed by the NPB as a World Heritage Site. From left are Peter Openshaw (Warden), Roger Porter (Chief Planner and author of the proposal), Carol Scheepers (PA to Roger) and Derek Potter (Director of Conservation), 1998

of personnel, for inter-park football, drilling, shooting, marathons and, best of all for me, their dancing teams. I confess I did not recognise the guard as he stepped up next to me and, greeting me, said in Zulu, 'I want to thank the Board; please tell them that I am so happy. I joined the Natal Parks Board 25 years ago, and then, when I went home to my kraal, I was an object of suspicion. Today, when I go home, I am an object of pride'.

The guard turned away and disappeared into the crowd of staff and I did not ever learn his name. But, of this I am certain, he spoke for so many of those men and women fortunate enough to have worked for the NPB in its fifty-year lifespan. His observations could serve as an epitaph for the NPB.

Over fifty years as a conservation agency, the NPB greatly expanded the protected area network in the province and was rewarded by the global recognition of two World Heritage Sites. The NPB halted the threats to large mammal species, expanded their range and most certainly brought some species back from the edge of extinction. Many other species, from marine fish and sea turtles to birds and butterflies, received positive attention with positive results.



The results of the strategic goals embraced by the board and staff of the NPB speak for themselves both for KZN and the rest of South Africa

The development of a highly efficient and effective game capture team saw the safe capture, distribution and sale of over 100 000 large mammals throughout southern Africa. The NPB contributed, in a positive and effective way, to the development of an extraordinarily successful and job-creating wildlife tourism industry in South Africa. By making large mammals available through the holding of annual public sales, the NPB encouraged the private sector to expand its interest in the game industry and the sector rewarded the NPB through purchasing and stocking game from its auctions, thus assisting the financial stability of the organisation and adding to the resilience of game species through the establishment of additional thriving populations.

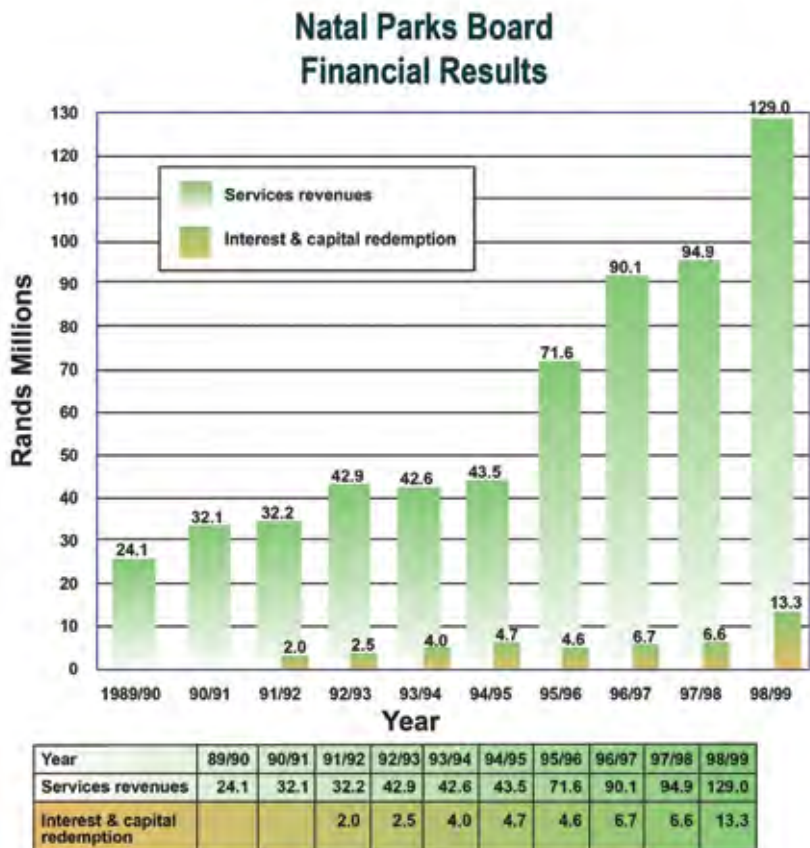
The NPB through its network of zone officers and outreach staff brought environmental awareness to the citizens of the province. This included an understanding of the value of sound management, which gave rise to an astonishing support for wildlife in the farming communities through a simple aesthetic appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage and also because of a realisation of the benefits arising from the sustainable use of animals and plants. And it had the advantage of the trusteeship of a dedicated and adventurous board that endorsed the policy of making tourism and game services major contributors to the board's budget. In 1998, their final year as the NPB, board members saw the its self-generated income exceed the annual grant received from the province for the management of conservation assets.

Does Conservation Earn its Keep?

| Protected Area Earnings 1995 | | |
|--|---|--------------|
| FACT | 90% of foreign visitors come to South Africa to see wildlife and scenery | |
| FACT | Number of foreign tourists | 1 052 000 |
| VALUE FOREIGN TOURISM: R13 000 000 000 | | |
| HOWEVER | Total revenue of two major Wildlife Agencies | |
| | Natal Parks Board: | R 58 000 000 |
| | National Parks Board: | R200 000 000 |
| | R258 000 000 | |
| | So, it can be seen that despite the fact that the Parks are the main catalyst, Natal and National Parks Boards receive very little of the cash spent by foreign tourists. | |
| THEREFORE | General economy through hotels, private parks, car hire, etc benefit by over: | |
| R12 500 000 000 | | |

Survey carried out by the NPB, 1995: tourists clearly come to South Africa to see wildlife but spend most of their money in the general economy and not directly in the protected areas

That there was still work to do is an inescapable fact but, through the protection of some of the region's most famous and iconic sites of great beauty, our people were blessed with aesthetic delight, economic opportunity through tourism and sustainable use of our biodiversity as well as the reality of secure employment. For board members and staff of the NPB, a satisfactory achievement was that collectively, with the people of the province, they had restored, as much as was

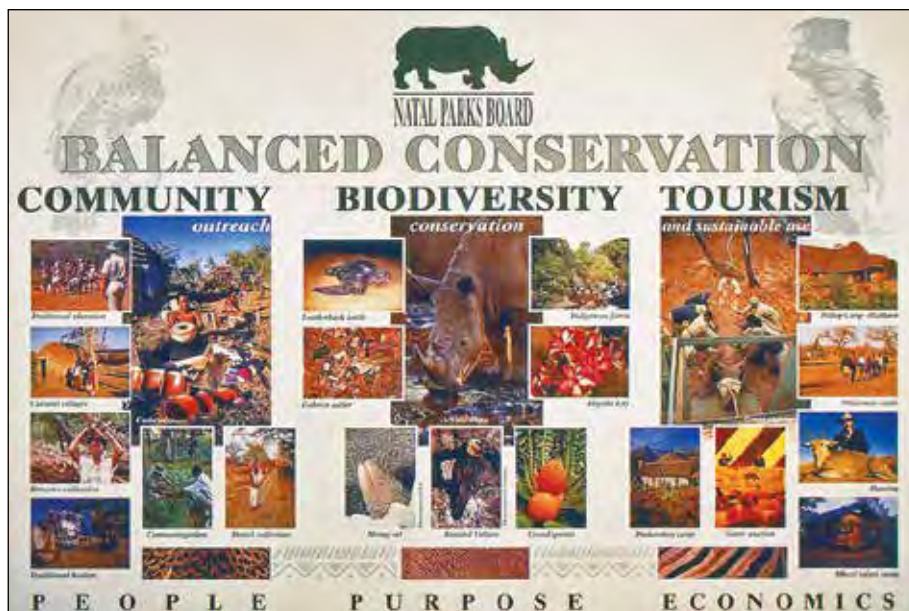


The thrust to increase self-generated finances proved highly successful in the 1990s

possible, and certainly beyond the expectations of fifty years ago, the wildlife heritage of the region.

Not unlike the question posed to Cervantes' Don Quixote in 1604, NPB staff are often asked today whether this magnificent endeavour was worthwhile. Did the NPB really believe, as did Don Quixote, that their passion and achievements would see their successes appreciated and shared by the people who were supposed to benefit from our restored and thriving wildlife? We can but reply as Don Quixote, a kindred spirit, did when his altruistic endeavours were questioned as the work of a deluded idealist. He implied that the outcome of his endeavours might be in doubt, but the effort remained sublime.

The efforts of the Natal Parks Board, over its fifty-year existence, do, in the opinion of those who served it, remain sublime.

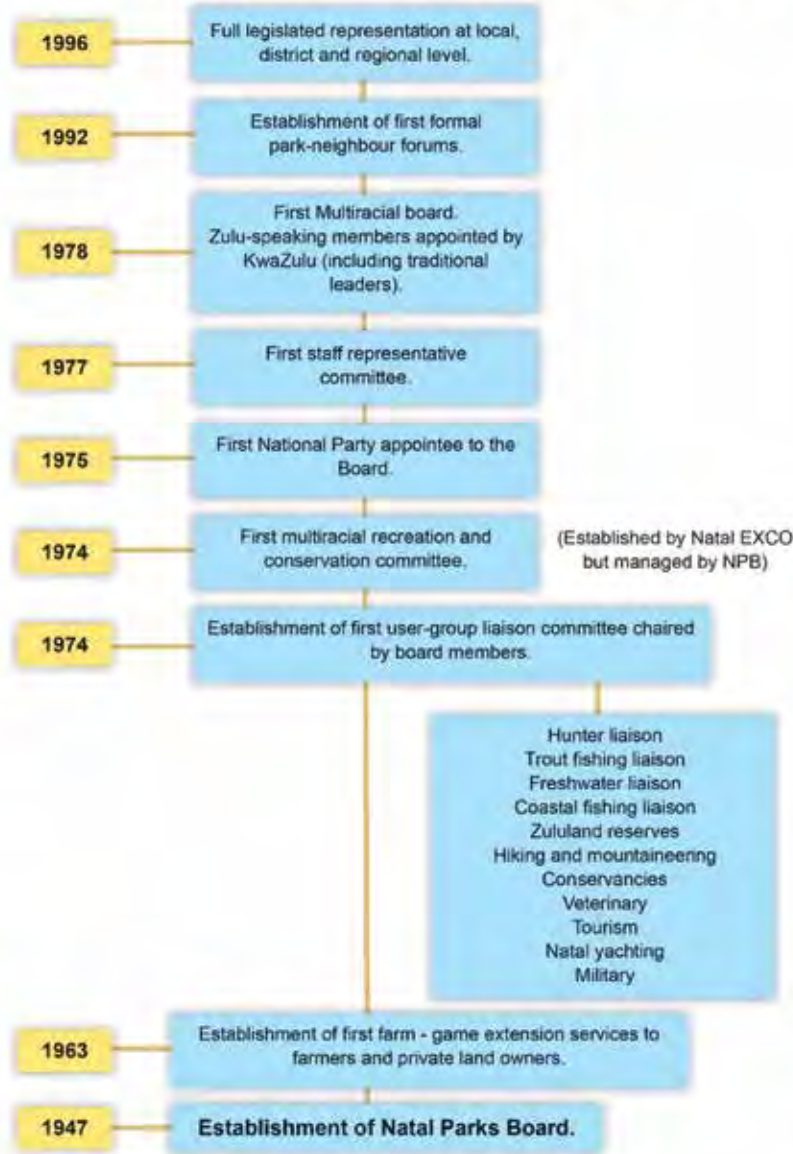


The strategic focus of the NPB in the 1990s ensured a balanced output to KZN



Three NPB directors in a lifetime of fifty years: Jack Vincent (centre), John Geddes Page (right) and George Hughes (left)

The Evolution of Representation in Conservation in KZN



The history of the NPB shows a steady embrace of public participation in conservation and a broader and more inclusive representation of the people of the provinces of Natal and KZN

NOTES

- 1 Clem Sunter is a widely renowned strategic planner in South Africa. NPB staff had approached Clem after he had appeared as a guest speaker at a Conservation Trust AGM in Durban, where he inspired all present and persuaded the NPB to pursue such a strategic approach.
- 2 Future developments adequately demonstrated that Graham was quite correct in his concerns.
- 3 All sound reasons that have indeed had negative outcomes.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aylward, Bruce and Lutz, Ernst (eds). 2003. *Nature Tourism, Conservation and Development in KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa*. World Bank.
- Bailey, Gordon. 2017. *Game Ranging: A Life Worth Living*. Privately published.
- Barnes, Bill. 2003. *Giants Castle: A Personal History*. Privately published.
- Boycott, Richard C. and Bourquin, Ortwin. 2000. *The Southern African Tortoise Book*. Privately published.
- Brett, Michael R. 2019. 'The Pongola Game Reserve revisited: the search for an early South African protected area'. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* 8(3).
- Britz, Lyn. 2018. *SAAMBR: A Legacy: The Creatures and Characters that Made SAAMBR What it is Today*. Durban: South African Association for Marine Biological Research.
- Buthelezi, Mangosuthu. 2010. 'Inkosi N.J. Ngubane' *IFP Newsletter*.
- Carruthers, Jane. 1985. 'The Pongola Game Reserve: an eco-political study'. *Koedoe* 28: 1–16.
- . 2013. The Royal Natal National Park, KwaZulu-Natal: mountaineering, tourism and nature conservation in South Africa's first national park, c.1896–c.1947'. *Environment and History* 19: 459–485.
- Carruthers, Jane and Arnold, Marion. 1995. *The Life and Work of Thomas Baines*. Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press.
- Chadwick, Douglas H. 1996. 'A place for parks in the new South Africa'. *National Geographic* 190(1): 2–41.
- Charlton-Perkins, William and De la Harpe, Roger. 1995. *Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park*. Cape Town: Struik.
- Child, Brian. 2015. 'Wildlife policy in southern Africa: why not crop the game?' *WRSA Rhino Supplement*.
- . 2019. *Sustainable Governance of Wildlife and Community-Based Natural Resource Management*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Clavell, James. 1975. *Shogun*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Crass, Robert S. (Bob). 1964. *Freshwater Fishes of Natal*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.
- . 1971. *Trout Fishing in Natal*. Durban: Daily News.
- . 1972. 'Guineafowl on Natal farms' (summarised from articles by Mike T. Mentis). *Natal Parks Board Research Communication* 3.
- . 1986. *Trout in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Macmillan.
- . 2011. 'Early days with the Natal Parks Board'. *Natalia* 41: 82–89.
- Creemers, G. and Wood, L. 1997. 'The economic contribution of tourism to KwaZulu-Natal: report prepared for the interim Provincial Tourism Steering Committee'.
- Davies, Kevin. 1991. 'Natal Parks Board'. Supplement to *Financial Mail* 22 March.
- De Bono, Edward. 1970. *Lateral Thinking*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- . 1985. *The Six Thinking Hats*. Boston, Mass: Little, Brown.
- Delegorgue, Adulphe. 1990. *Travels in Southern Africa* translated by Fleur Webb and introduced and indexed by Stephanie J. Alexander and Colin de B. Webb. 2 vols. Durban and Pietermaritzburg: Killie Campbell Africana Library and University of Natal Press.
- Deloitte and Touche. 1998. 'Financial investigation report: the Directorate of Nature Conservation'. Durban: Deloitte and Touche.
- Dixon, John. 1999. *Poachers, Politics and Other Peoples*. London: Minerva Press.
- Drucker, Peter. 1966. *The Effective Executive*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Durban Botanic Gardens. 1993. *The Cycad Collection*.
- Dutton, Paul. 2017. *Spirit of the Wilderness*. Pinetown: Southbound.
- Ellis, Bev. 1975. 'Game conservation in Zululand (1824–1947)'. BA essay, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Fitzpatrick, Percy. 1907. *Jock of the Bushveld*. London: Longmans, Green.
- Gowans, J. 1997. 'Rhino horn dispute intensifies'. *Mercury*, 12 June.

- Grinnell, George Bird. 1962. *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Gush, Reg. 2000. *Mkhuze: The Formative Years*. Privately published.
- Hanks, John. 2015. *Operation Lock and the War on Rhino Poaching*. Cape Town: Penguin.
- Harris, William Cornwallis. 1839. *The Wild Sports of Southern Africa*. London: John Murray.
- Hemingway, Ernest. 1966 [1935]. *The Green Hills of Africa*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Henwood, Rodney. 2013. *Game Ranger*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse.
- Hey, Douglas. 1995. *A Nature Conservationist Looks Back*. Cape Town: Cape Nature Conservation.
- Hughes, George R. 1974. *The Sea Turtles of South-East Africa*. 2 vols. Durban: Oceanographic Research Institute.
- . 1992. 'Conservation in Natal: the history and economics of wildlife'. *Natal Parks Board Records*.
- . 1995a. 'CITES: tool or weapon'. *Panorama* 40(1): 38–41.
- . 1995b. 'Report to Natal Parks Board: ASTA World Congress, 9th COP CITES, World Bank, National Geographic Society and IUCN-CNPPA Task Force'.
- . 2001. 'The Natal Parks Board experience in southern Africa' in *The Politics and Economics of Park Management* edited by Terry L. Anderson and Alexander James. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield: 31–41.
- . 2012. *Between the Tides: In Search of Sea Turtles*. Johannesburg: Jacana Press.
- . 2014. *Drakensberg Ranger*. Pinelands: Platanna Press.
- Hughes, George R. and Brooks, P.M. 1996. 'Proposal to alter certain conditions attached to the appendix II listing of the South African population of the South African white rhino: submission to the 10th CITES Conference of the Parties, Harare, Zimbabwe, 9–20 June 1997'.
- Hughes, S. 1996. 'Rhino horn stockpile'. *NPB Internal Report* E15/1.
- Huntley, Brian J. 2017. *Wildlife at War in Angola*. Pretoria: Protea Book House.
- Infield, Mark. 1988. 'Attitudes of a rural community towards conservation and a local conservation area in Natal, South Africa'. *Biological Conservation* 45(1): 21–46.
- IUCN. 2017. *Guidelines for Recognising and Reporting other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- Johnson, D.N. 1983. 'Constructing dams for waterfowl'. *Wildlife Management Technical Guidelines* 2.
- . 1984. 'Management of guineafowl on farmland'. *Wildlife Management Technical Guidelines* 1.
- Joubert, D.J., 1995. 'Study into the institutional structures for the management of the environment, nature conservation and related matters in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Pietermaritzburg: Department of the Premier.
- Kay, Charles. 2010. 'Predator-mediated competition'. *Muley Crazy* July–August: 21–25.
- Kotze, Steven. 1993. 'Conservancies in Natal: the origins and applications of a component in informal wildlife conservation'. BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Kumleben, Mark E., Sangweni, Stanley S. and Ledger, John A. 1998. *Report of the Board of Investigation into the Institutional Arrangements for Nature Conservation in South Africa*. Pretoria: Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.
- Linscott, Graham. 2013. *Into the River of Life: A Biography of Ian Player*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.
- Marchant, A.N. 1988. 'Management of impala on farmland in Natal'. *Wildlife Management Technical Guidelines* 5.
- Mason, D.R. 1976. 'Reproduction in Zululand warthog'. *Natal Parks Board Research Communications* 23.
- Mentis, Mike T. and Duke, R.R. 1974. 'Stocking rates of game on private land in Natal'. *Natal Parks Board Research Communications* 17.
- Mutwa, Credo. 1964. *Indaba, My Children*. Johannesburg: Blue Crane.

- Nash, Dick. 2005. *I Remember When . . . !* Published privately.
- Natal Parks Board. 1987. *The Natal Parks Board 1947–1987*. Pietermaritzburg: NPB.
- Natal Provincial Administration. 1972. *Debates and Proceedings of the Provincial Council*, 3rd Council, 3rd Session, 5–7 June.
- Oatley, Terry and Arnott, Graeme. 1998. *Robins of Africa*. Johannesburg: Acorn Books.
- ODA (Overseas Development Agency). 1996. *African Wildlife Policy Consultation*. London: ODA.
- Oelofse, Annette. 2010. *Capture to be Free*. Privately published.
- Ogutu, Joseph O. et al. 2016. 'Extreme wildlife declines and concurrent increase in livestock numbers in Kenya: what are the causes?' *Plos One* 11(9).
- Page, John. 1987. 'The corporate board' in *Conservation: The Natal System*. Pietermaritzburg: NPB.
- Pager, Harald. 1971. *Ndedema*. Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt.
- Pearse, Reginald O. 1989. *Barrier of Spears: Drama of the Drakensberg*. 2nd ed. Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers.
- Phelan, Anne J. 1976. 'Drakensberg policy statement'. Pietermaritzburg: Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission.
- Pienaar, Uys de Villiers. 2012. *A Cameo from the Past*. Pretoria: Protea Book House.
- Player, Ian. 1973. *The White Rhino Saga*. New York: Stein and Day.
- Player, Ian and Feely, J.M. 1960. 'A preliminary report on the square-lipped rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum simum*)'. *Lammergeyer* 1(1): 3–24.
- Pooley, Elsa. 1998. *A Field Guide to Wild Flowers in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Region*. Durban: Natal Flora Publications Trust.
- . 2003. *Mountain Flowers: A Field Guide to the Flora of the Drakensberg and Lesotho*. Durban: Flora Publications Trust.
- Pooley, Tony. 1992. *Mashesha: The Making of a Game Ranger*. Halfway House: Southern Books.
- Porter, Roger N. 1981. 'A preliminary impact, assessment of the environmental effects of proposed dams in the Umfolozi catchment, Natal'. Pietermaritzburg: NPB.
- Pringle, John A., Bond, Creina and Clark, John. 1982. *The Conservationists and the Killers: The Story of Game Conservation and the Wildlife Society of Southern Africa*. Cape Town: T.V. Bulpin and Books of Africa.
- Root, Graham. 2005. *Roots of a Game Ranger*. Privately published.
- Rowe-Rowe, David. 1985. 'Facts about otters'. *Wildlife Management Technical Guidelines* 10.
- . 1988. 'Why aren't all antelopes equally abundant?' *Wildlife Management* 8.
- . 1994. 'The ungulates of Natal'. 2nd ed., Pietermaritzburg: NPB.
- Schmidt, David F., Ludwig, Craig A. and Carleton, Michael D. 2008. 'The Smithsonian Institution African Mammal Project (1961–1972): an annotated gazetteer of collecting localities and summary of its taxonomic and geographic scope'. *Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology* 628.
- Scott-Shaw, Rob. 1999. *Rare and Threatened Plants of KwaZulu-Natal and Neighbouring Regions*. Pietermaritzburg: KZN Nature Conservation Service.
- Sheppard, David. 2000. 'Editorial'. *World Parks Commission Newsletter* March.
- Simpson, Ian F. 2012. *Mpunzi: Dawn of a New Era*. [Cape Town]: Privately published.
- South Africa. 1910. *South Africa Act*, section 85(x).
- South Africa. Council for the Environment. 1993. *The South African Classification of Terrestrial and Marine Protected Areas*. Pretoria: Council for the Environment.
- South Africa. Department of Environmental Affairs. 1993. *Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia: Kingsa/Tojan Lease Area Review Panel Report*. Pretoria: Department of Environmental Affairs.
- South Africa. President's Council. 1991. *Report of the Three Committees of the President's Council on a National Environmental Management System*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Steele, Nick. 1971. *Take a Horse to the Wilderness*. Cape Town: T.V. Bulpin and Books of Africa.

- Stevenson-Hamilton, James. 1956. *South African Eden*. London: Panther.
- Struthers, Robert Briggs. 1991. *Hunting Journal 1852–1856 in the Zulu Kingdom and the Tsonga Regions*, edited by Patricia L. Merrett and Roland Butcher. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Taylor, Richard H. 1987. 'Lake St Lucia bibliography'. *NPB St Lucia Research Series* 2.
- Taylor, Richard H. and De la Harpe, Roger. 1995. *The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park*. Cape Town: Struik.
- Taylor, W.A., Lindsey, P.A. and Davies-Mostert, H. 2015. *An Assessment of the Economic, Social and Conservation Value of the Wildlife Ranching Industry and its Potential to Support the Green Economy in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Endangered Wildlife Trust.
- Tinley, Ken L. 1985. 'Coastal dunes of South Africa'. *South African National Scientific Programmes Report* 109. Pretoria: CSIR.
- Tory, Peter. 1993. *The Giles Family*. London: Headline Book Publishing.
- Van der Elst, Rudy. 1981. *A Guide to the Common Sea Fishes of Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Struik.
- Vincent, Jack. 1988. *Web of Experience: An Autobiography*. Privately published.
- Walker, Clive. 2016. *Lapalala Wilderness in the Waterberg*. Vaalwater: Lapalala Wilderness School.
- Wels, Harry. 2015. *Securing Wilderness Landscapes in South Africa: Nick Steele, Private Wildlife Conservancies and Saving Rhinos*. Leiden: Brill.
- Wijnstekers, W. 1988–95. *The Evolution of CITES*. Geneva: CITES Secretariat.
- Wilks, Terry. 1980. *The Biography of Douglas Mitchell*. Durban: King and Wilks.
- Wright, R. Michael. 1996. 'Which way to the mountaintop?' *African Wildlife News* 31(5): 2–3.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr George Hughes, who spent over forty years in conservation, has experienced the good fortune to have travelled extensively through Africa, the United States, Europe, the Indian Ocean and parts of the Middle East in the interest of sea turtle research and for conservation in general. Displaying a broad canvas of interests he has written over 300 articles, papers and reviews on subjects ranging from sea turtles, trout angling and conservation to wildlife economics and wildlife-based tourism. He has participated in international conventions



such as CITES four times as part of South Africa's official delegations and presented the case for sustainable use as a valid conservation tool.

A foundation member of the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group, which was founded in 1969, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Sea Turtle Society in 2009. In 1989 he was instrumental in launching and fund-gathering for the Natal Parks Board Conservation Trust. He was appointed a patron of the trust in 2003. In 1996 he was awarded the prestigious Chairman's Award of the South African Tourism Board for his contributions to tourism. His most valued award is from the Convocation of his alma mater, the University of Natal, the Dr Edgar Brookes Award for his contributions to 'human freedom and endeavour' (1991).

He has published two books: *Between the Tides: In Search of Sea Turtles* and *Drakensberg Ranger*. He is also a keen photographer and popular lecturer. As an invited speaker he has lectured in many countries across the world and sat on numerous international committees, from the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Committee to serving as chairman of the Indian Ocean/South East Asia Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA) Advisory Committee. He was chairman of the South African Broadcasting Corporation radio programme 'Talking of Nature' for four years.

