

A HAVEN FOR RHINOS

Zimbabwe's Bubiana Conservancy

In African Wildlife Vol. 47 No. 5 readers were offered an ecotour to the Bubiana Conservancy in Zimbabwe. Keith Cooper recently had the pleasure of visiting this combined group of ranches in south-central Zimbabwe as a guest of Guy and Myles Hilton-Barber of Barberton Ranch.

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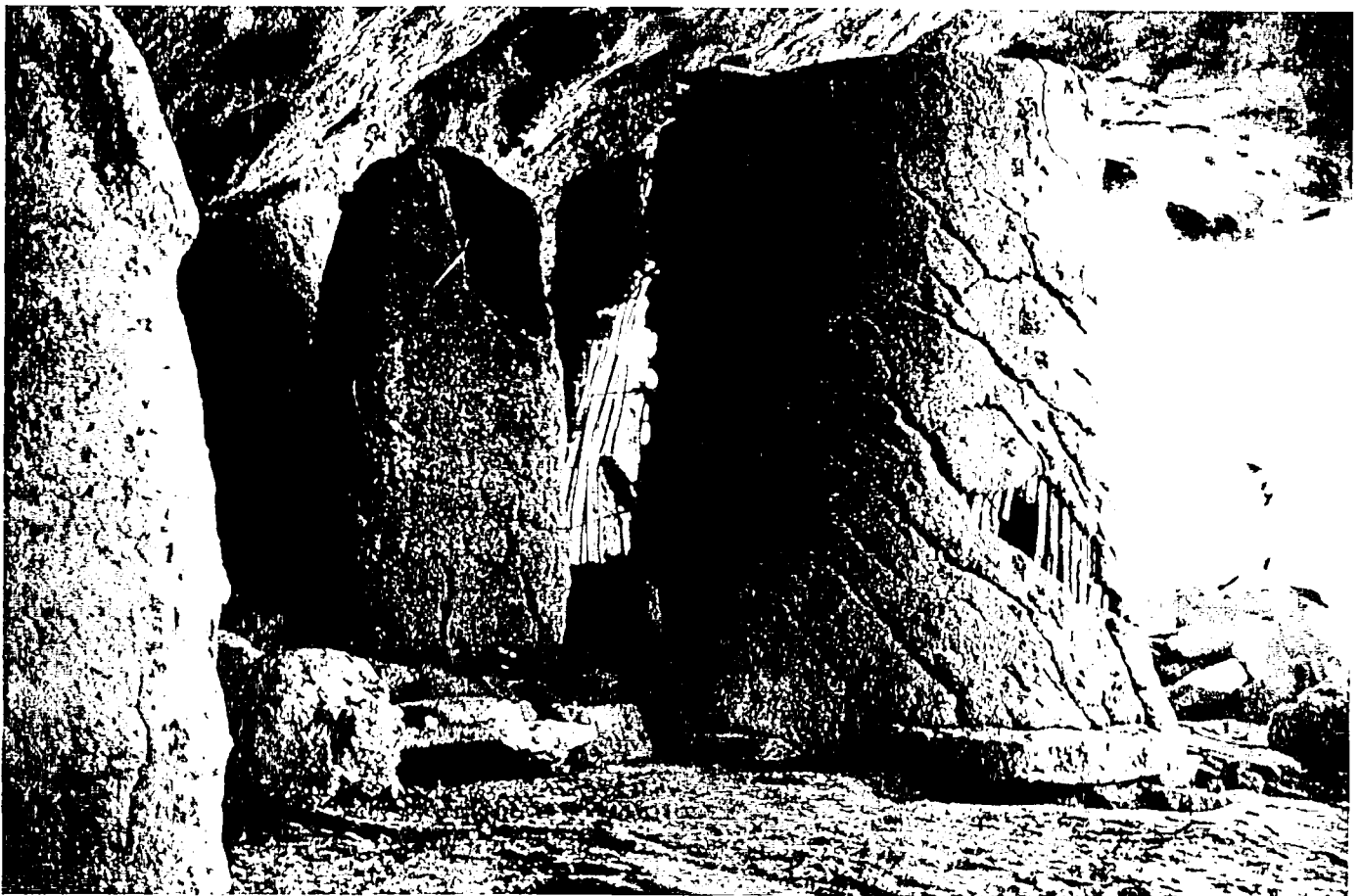
by Keith Cooper

Seven farmers in Zimbabwe have combined their skills and knowledge to embark on an ambitious and exciting wildlife conservation initiative. Bubiana Conservancy consists of 10 adjoining ranches with a combined area of 130 000 hectares on either side of the Buby River, south-east of West Nicholson. This is a region of spectacular granite outcrops and mixed woodland plant communities. Until recently most of these ranches were used for cattle production, with only moderate populations of wild animals. Following years of drought and uncertainty in the beef industry, however, the land-use preference is now moving from cattle to wildlife management and ecotourism. Bubiana is just one of three large



A view from the Barberton Lodge, Bubiana Conservancy.

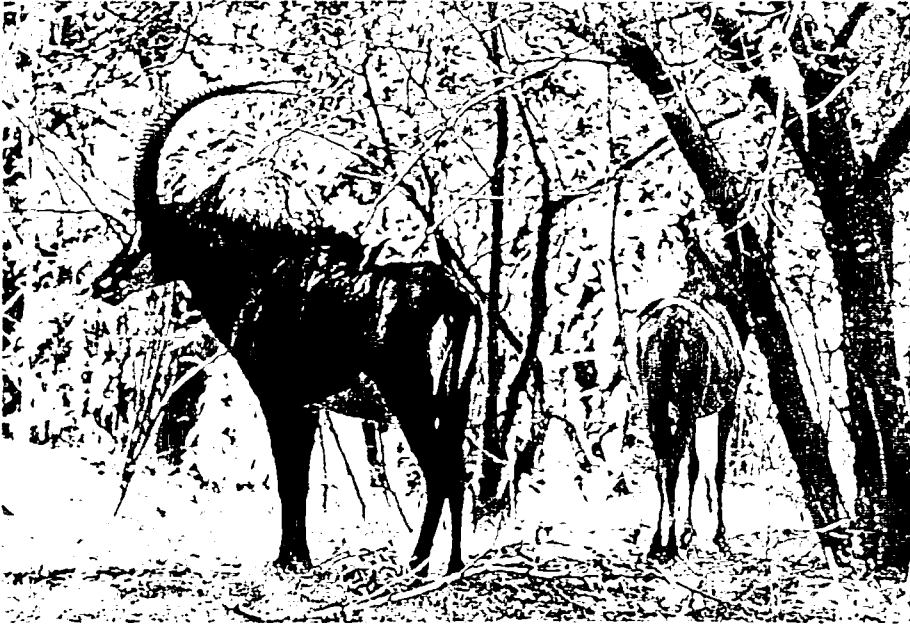
Keith Cooper



Ancient grain bins on Barberton Ranch, protected from the weather by a rock overhang

M. Mitchell





Twenty-two sable have been reintroduced to the conservancy

E L Button

conservancies recently established in Zimbabwe to promote wildlife conservation on a sustainable basis.

A project of local and international interest is the translocation of a number of black rhino to the conservancies from the Zambezi Valley, where they are presently being decimated by poachers. Once a stronghold for black rhino in Africa, Zimbabwe's population

of this highly endangered species is now estimated to be fewer than 500 animals. Their future survival is a matter of world concern, and new and innovative strategies will have to be instituted to save the species from extinction. To date 40 black rhino have been dehorned and relocated into the Bubiana Conservancy on an experimental basis. Will they survive and

BUBIANA

increase more successfully under private protection? Only time will tell, but having attended the AGM of the members of the Conservancy and heard their plans for the future, I am confident that they will succeed. Here is a totally dedicated group of wise and experienced conservationists devising practical ways of ensuring the survival of our wildlife and natural environment, yet at the same time making it pay.

Hunting, live animal sales, water conservation and ecotourism will hopefully yield a higher return and be better for the land than the cattle-ranching option. Cattle ranching will only cease when replaced by foot-and-mouth-free buffalo. These will initially be contained and bred in a 9 000-hectare section of the conservancy where no cattle are allowed; thereafter they will be phased in at the expense of cattle. The buffalo will come from two sources: one is a mature herd of 17 cows and a bull, and the other is through the capture of calves in the national parks. These have to be quarantined and tested over many months before release, at a cost of approximately R2 000 per calf.

What has water conservation to do with this project? One of the greatest problems of Africa is drought and, as

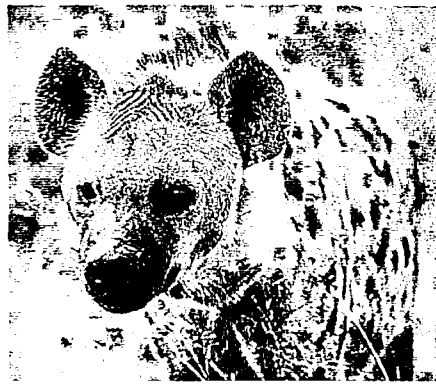


A group of tourists on a visit to some of the San paintings in the area

Keith Cooper



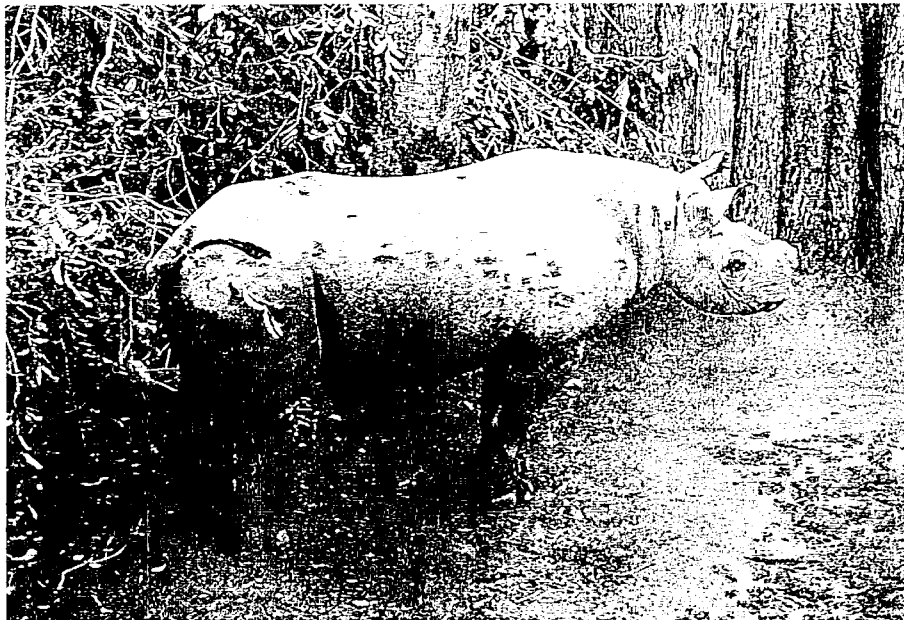
time progresses, droughts become more and more severe. Today there are many more people living on the land and struggling to survive, but without water, unquestionably our most precious natural resource, there is no hope. The Bubiana Conservancy is situated in arid country where rainfall is distinctly seasonal and usually takes the form of brief thunderstorms. For short periods of the year there is abundant water, only to be followed by long rainless periods or drought. Clearly, water storage dams or reservoirs are the best method of harvesting water in times of plenty and retaining it for use during droughts. The Bubiana Conservancy has a comprehensive network of storage dams as well as a catchment protection programme. Not only does this initiative enhance the carrying capacity of the land, but it also provides a source of water for the



Bubiana has one of the largest populations of spotted hyaena in Zimbabwe. Keith Cooper

thousands of people living in the area. A scheme has also recently been approved to supply Conservancy water to an adjoining Communal Area.

To promote ecotourism in the Con-



A dehorned black rhino a few minutes before its release into the Bubiana Conservancy. Keith Cooper

BUBIANA

servancy, the Hilton-Barber family have built a superb lodge on their Barberton Ranch. It is magnificently situated on top of a rock outcrop, and visitors can look out over the scenic surrounding countryside while enjoying the comforts of a luxury hotel. Without doubt I would rate this lodge one of the best in Africa. Visitors to the Ranch can enjoy many other features besides the lodge and the Conservancy's wildlife. There are examples of San art as well as ancient Bantu-made grain bins, probably used by the indigenous people when fleeing from the raids of Mosilikatse. A late afternoon boat trip on the Barberton Dam is a highlight for photographers and bird-watchers, as species such as cormorants, weavers, kingfishers, herons, swallows and even certain birds of prey abound. Late in the evening thousands of quelea finches flock into the reeds and surrounding vegetation. Animals such as waterbuck, kudu, impala, warthog, giraffe, zebra, blue wildebeest, eland and bushbuck are also attracted to the dam to quench their thirst. Hippo and elephant have been introduced, saved from the lowveld drought, and Bubiana has some of the largest populations of spotted hyaena, leopard and cheetah in Zimbabwe. Twenty-two sable have also been reintroduced, and nyala, tsessebe, Lichtenstein's hartebeest and ostrich are to follow (all were original inhabitants).

The members of the Bubiana Conservancy work closely with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, as well as with their local Natural Resources Board. Ways of involving people from the adjoining Communal Areas are also being investigated since their co-operation in the whole venture is vitally important. The recipe for certain success will, however, be the extent to which the scheme can generate foreign currency, as well as the public support it receives from the people and government of Zimbabwe.

Our Society can help this project by encouraging members to visit the Conservancy and stay at the Barberton Lodge. In this way revenue will be generated to make the project financially viable. Further information about the Lodge and the Conservancy can be obtained from Guy Hilton-Barber, P.O. Box FM444, Famona, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe or tel. Bulawayo 6-4638 (o/h); 7-9829 (a/h); fax 7-2870.

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SPECIES TO BE FOUND AT BUBIANA

Antbear	Baboon	Bat-eared fox
Bushbuck	Bushpig	Cheetah
Civet	Dassie	Duiker (grey)
Eland	Elephant	Giraffe
Hare	Hartebeest (red)	Hedgehog
Hippo	Hyaena (spotted)	Impala
Jackal (black-backed)	Klipspringer	Kudu
Leopard	Mongoose (several spp.)	Monkey (vervet)
Pangolin	Porcupine	Rhino (black)
Sable	Serval	Steenbuck
Warthog	Waterbuck	

SPECIES TO BE REINTRODUCED

Buffalo	Gemsbok	Lichtenstein's hartebeest
Lion	Nyala	Ostrich
Tsessebe		