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TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT
of the
NATAL PARKS, GAME AND FISH PRESERVATION BOARD
for the period
1st APRIL, 1972 to 31st MARCH, 1973

To the Honourable W. W. B. Havemann, Administrator of Natal.

The NATAL PARKS, GAME AND FISH PRESERVATION BOARD has the honour to submit its report for the period 1st April, 1972 to 31st March, 1973.

A. GENERAL

The Board :

There were no changes in the membership of the Board, which held twelve meetings during the period under review. Eight meetings were held at Queen Elizabeth Park headquarters and one each at Thurlow House at Midmar, Giant's Castle and Hluhluwe Game Reserves and Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve.

It is with regret that the death has to be recorded of Mr. A. M. Wood, who first joined the Board in 1953 and served as its chairman from 1962 until his resignation on health grounds in 1970.

Advisory Bodies :

The Zululand Reserves Committee held three meetings at Queen Elizabeth Park, Giant's Castle and Empangeni.

Four meetings were held of the St. Lucia Scientific Advisory Council, all at Queen Elizabeth Park.

25th Anniversary Celebrations :

A cocktail party was held on the evening of 2nd December, 1972, to celebrate the Board's silver jubilee. Some 250 guests accepted the invitation to attend, and the occasion was held in the new library, which had not as yet been put into use.

His Honour the Administrator was the guest of honour and main speaker of the evening, which was memorable in that he announced the foundation of a Natal Trust for the acquisition of land for conservation and recreation purposes. Other speakers included the Board's Chairman and Deputy Chairman, and the Director.

General :

During the course of the year, six members of the public drew up a 209 page document alleging malpractices in the Board, and presented it in the form of a petition to the Administrator. The matter was publicly debated in the Provincial Council, whereafter, at the Board's request, the Executive Committee placed it in the hands of the Attorney General.



Crested Guinea Fowl photographed in the Mkuzi Reserve
(Photo: Clem Haagner)

In addition to these major operations there were as usual many smaller projects completed, such as new guard posts, Bantu staff quarters, ablution blocks, kitchen facilities, reservoir and water reticulation systems, pump houses, pumps and engines, as well as extensive electrical wiring, and re-wiring to E.S.C. standards, of staff houses. Finally, minor renovations and routine maintenance were undertaken throughout the Board's reserves.

The additions to the headquarter offices at Queen Elizabeth Park were completed by the contractors during the year except for several items to be rectified under the retention period.

Historical :

The small rise in the number of visitors to the Bushman site museum in Giant's Castle Game Reserve, to 5 285 from 5 100 the previous year, represents a satisfactory indication of its appeal when account is taken of the reduction in overall visitors to the reserve. The numbers of young people, including school parties, who visit the museum encourage hopes that the project is succeeding in arousing interest in the country's past, and with it a desire to preserve the rock paintings inherited from the Bushman era.

Evidence from another phase of the past, that of early Bantu occupation, was disclosed in the excavation carried out during the year in Moor Park Nature Reserve by Dr. O. Davies of Natal Museum. The full report of his work awaits evaluation of the finds and in particular carbon-dating of charcoal samples collected. In a preliminary report Dr. Davies records that his finds include all the typical elements of Bantu culture. Pottery, of simple shapes and well baked, was abundant, at least two kinds of vessel being recognisable. Some iron fragments were present, grindstones indicating grain cultivation, and incomplete clay figures of cows. The site itself takes the form of a "citadel" at the end of a dolerite spur running north from Makabeni Hill along the reserve's western boundary, the whole enclosed in a wall, and with terraces and inner walls. Some of the terraces bear foundations, and in places door or gateways are marked by two large stones as jambs. No estimate of the date of occupation can be given until the carbon samples have been processed.

Turning to evidence of more recent occupation of Natal, nearly twenty items used by the early European arrivals have been put on display at the renovated settler's homestead in Loteni Nature Reserve. They include a spider, a racing gig, scotch-cart, Cape cart and agricultural implements such as harrows, planters, thresher, hay-press, etc. About 30 further items await display, some requiring restoration and the remainder being in store pending completion of the interior decoration of the homestead where they are to be housed.

Publications :

Three issues of the Board's journal "The Lammergeyer" appeared, No. 16 in August and No. 17 in December, 1972, and No. 18 in March, 1973. A booklet "Ungulate Management on private land in Natal", based on papers presented at a Game Ranching Conference held at Queen Elizabeth Park in March, 1971, was published during the year. So too

were new issues of the information brochure "Resorts, Parks, Game and Nature Reserves in Natal" and of a booklet "Wilderness and Mounted Trails".

The titles of papers by Board staff published in journals other than "The Lammergeyer" are given in Annexure C.

C. CONSERVATION

Specially Protected Game :

Proclamation 48 of 1972 removed the square-lipped rhinoceros from the specially protected to the protected game schedule of the Game Preservation Ordinance, 11 of 1955. Proclamation 171 of 1972 effected a similar transfer, from the specially protected to the protected category, of eleven more species, namely elephant, hippopotamus, buffalo, eland, black wildebeest, oribi, suni, leopard, cheetah, samango monkey and bush-baby. Two more species, steenbuck and mountain reedbuck, which had been specially protected game in certain regions of the Province, were put in the protected category for the whole Province by Proclamation 27 of 1973. These re-classifications left only seven species on the specially protected game schedule, these being black rhinoceros, giraffe, red hartebeest, klipspringer, grysbuck, pangolin and antbear.

The reduction in the number of specially protected game species only took effect in August, 1972. Until then, permits for their control were still required under section 9 of the Game Preservation Ordinance 11 of 1955. As required by sub-section (6) of that section, the following is a list of such permits issued during the year, the number of animals authorised being shown in brackets and the last column giving the numbers actually killed :

	Permits Issued	Animals Killed
Antbear	1 (1)	—
Buffalo	5 (6)	3
Eland	4 (17)	4
Hippopotamus	9 (12)	6
Square-lipped Rhino	1 (1)	1

I. CHIEF NATURE CONSERVATOR

(a) Reserves

Annexure D summarises available figures of the numbers of persons who visited the Board's reserves, those who were accommodated at rest camps and those who stayed at campsites, together with revenue from entry, accommodation and camping fees. For purposes of comparison, the figures for 1971/72 are given in addition to those for the year under review.

(1) REGIONAL WARDEN CENTRAL

Hluhluwe Game Reserve :

The year was a dry one, all three stations where rainfall is recorded reflecting totals about half those of the previous year. At Hilltop, where the mean annual rainfall is 958,9 mm, only 726,7 mm fell compared with 1 428,9 in 1971/72. However, the previous year's abnormal rains stood the reserve in good stead in respect both of surface water, which remained sufficiently well distributed in pans, streams and rivers to ensure that there

were no excessive game concentrations, and of the condition of the vegetation. The improvement in grass cover was even more noticeable than in the past two years, and except in those areas where intensive reclamation is still necessary, the reserve now appears to be well placed in this respect. Much of the grass in areas previously badly overgrazed is nevertheless of unpalatable pioneer species, and it will take time for more desirable species to replace them.

Reclamation operations have been put in the hands of a special "Reclamation Officer" directly responsible to the Warden. Work proceeded satisfactorily if somewhat slowly. The acquisition of stone for donga barriers has become quite a problem, and a small quarry has had to be opened to avoid the appreciable disturbance of the veld which had begun to show as a result of the collection of loose surface rocks.

The eradication of exotics was intensified during the year. Controlled burns were carried out according to programme except in parts of the south where the very dry conditions led to proposed firing being abandoned. Work proceeded apace on two sections of new fencing where the line has been established within a few yards of the old fenceline. The completed part of the Sithole/Mthole section has already solved many of the problems previously experienced consequent on game straying out of the reserve at this point.

The Game Capture Unit was again active, as reported below. In terms of game population, a healthy situation has now been achieved, and it should not be necessary for some years to come to remove large numbers of any species, except perhaps nyala. It may in fact be possible to allow an increase of those animals which are primarily grazers. Buffalos have become an increasing problem owing to their straying on to European farms and Bantu Reserve from that section where indecision over the boundary line has precluded fencing. Lions too are a problem, continuing to enter the reserve from the corridor. All males which came in during the year were destroyed, but three females which settled down in the centre of the reserve have been left unmolested.

Poaching activity was at a low level by previous standards, probably owing to adequate crops outside and the wide dispersal of game occasioned by the good grass cover. Further, the establishment of a new game guard camp at Ngovuzo led to a sharp reduction in the hitherto heavy poaching in this area of the north. Of the 40 poachers apprehended, 16 were juveniles who were dealt with by staff and 24 were taken to Court. Three were cautioned and discharged, the remainder being convicted and sentenced to a total of R230 or 340 days. Thirty marauding dogs were shot. Forty complaints were investigated, 31 relating to crop damage and 9 to damage by predators, appropriate action being taken where possible.

For the first time for years the number of visitors fell compared with the previous year, as shown in Annexure D. It is interesting that oversea tourists actually increased by over 3 000, whereas local visitors were more than 5 000 fewer. Furthermore, it was the number of local Whites that declined, as the figures for Bantu, Indians and Coloureds all increased. The drop in visitor numbers is linked with the influx control measures that have had to be imposed to keep the number of visitors from exceeding

the capacity of the reserve to cater for their accommodation and game-viewing needs.

Umfolozi Game Reserve :

The rainfall of 464,7 mm was the lowest recorded over the past twelve years. Heavy falls in the three months immediately preceding the year under report had given hope that the condition of the grazing would be maintained, but this was not to be. The very poor precipitation, particularly from January to March, 1973, cancelled out what benefit the previous year had brought, and areas which had shown marked signs of veld improvement reverted to their previous poor condition. The main rivers, not being dependent on local falls, were less affected. The Black Umfolozi flowed throughout the year, and the White Umfolozi ceased flowing only from September to October.

No direct eradication of exotics was carried out during the year, the only scrub cut being that used in reclamation of eroded areas. The latter activity continued steadily despite transport problems, with noticeably successful results. Firebreak burning was completed late owing to the green growth resulting from the heavy rain at the beginning of 1972. Controlled burning in Spring was accomplished according to programme. Three uncontrolled burns occurred, but not on a large scale.

The year saw the final disappearance of elands in Umfolozi Game Reserve. A prime target for early hunters, the species was extinct in the area by about 1890. Re-introduction was effected in 1964 with a small herd of animals captured as calves in the Drakensberg and hand-reared at Loteni but they never thrived in their new home. Whether greater success would have been achieved had totally wild elands been used is an interesting question. The giraffe population showed a further small increase. Cheetahs are regularly seen, but there is no reliable evidence to indicate whether they are increasing or decreasing. The lion population is certainly growing, with occasional attendant problems.

Forty-four poachers were arrested, only 18 of them adults and of these six were women caught cutting grass. Sentences meted out to the adults were on the whole exemplary, a total of R505 or 660 days imprisonment being imposed. The 26 juveniles shared 119 cuts between them. Weapons confiscated consisted of 10 cane knives, 15 knobsticks and 13 spears, while the number of dogs shot within the reserve reached the high figure of 130.

Altogether 148 wilderness trails were taken out in the reserve, of which 58 were conducted by the Wilderness Leadership School. A total of 539 persons participated in the other 90 trails.

Game Capture Unit :

The figures of animals captured which are given in Annexure E relate to the calendar year 1972, not the twelve months under report, to accord with the capture programme. The total of 6 838 represents an increase of 1 342 over the 1971 captures, a good indication of the valuable contribution the unit is making to the Board's reserve management programmes.

Although nyalas still presented a problem, greater success was achieved with their capture and handling. The figure of 242 removed from Hluhluwe and False Bay is over 100 more than that of the previous year, and disposals reflected an appreciably lower mortality rate. Altogether 5 883 animals were disposed of, being distributed among six of the Board's own reserves, the Transvaal Nature Conservation Department, Manyeleti Game Reserve in the Eastern Transvaal, 48 private game ranches and parks throughout the Republic, and two export orders.

Square-lipped (White) Rhino Translocation :

Four hundred and forty-eight of this species were captured during the year 1972, 151 being exported, 255 disposed of locally, and 42 being on hand at the end of the year. Of the oversea exports, 75 went to the United States of America, 61 to the United Kingdom, and 15 elsewhere in Europe. The grand total of white rhinos translocated from the inception of the capture project up to 31st March, 1973, stood at 1 339.

(2) REGIONAL WARDEN LAKES

St. Lucia Game Reserve and False Bay Park :

After the abnormal rains of the previous year, the falls recorded in 1972/73 were below average. False Bay's 390,7 mm was a little over a third of the 1971/72 figure, while Charters Creek (743,8 mm) and Banghazi (851,1 mm) were each about half that year's totals. The carry-over from the previous year of abundant surface water and high water table countered the effects of the poor precipitation, however. There was no shortage of domestic water or at game watering-places and the grassland maintained its condition.

Evaporation recorded for the twelve months was 1 481 mm, almost 100 mm more than in the previous year. The lake level, which stood at 0,34 m above mean sea level in April, 1972, fell steadily to 0,29 m below m.s.l. in March, 1973. Salinities at all five recording points started at a low level, mostly fell gradually until July, then increased steadily and ended the period under review in some cases at double the starting concentration, as the following table shows, the figures representing parts per thousand :

Month	Charters Creek	Hells Gates	Mkuze Mouth	Selleys Mouth	Mitchell Island
April, 1972 ...	22,6	17,8	3,5	16,7	23,8
July, 1972 ...	18,0	17,7	13,1	16,4	18,0
March, 1973 ...	35,4	44,2	44,4	42,7	35,3

Both hippos and crocodiles are on the increase in the lake complex. It is estimated that there are 550-600 of the former, of which some 100 along the Eastern Shores returned during the year to the open water from the pans they moved to under high water conditions. An aerial count recorded 300 crocodiles, a figure probably well below the true total as sightings are not easy. Large numbers of young crocodiles up to 1,5 m in length are regularly seen. At False Bay 56 Nyalas were taken by the Capture Team, and another 80, together with 37 impalas and one each of reedbeek and warthog, were removed on control.

From the bird-life aspect the year was a good one. Wildfowl not recorded for years, such as red-billed teals, hottentot teals, pochards and

Cape shovellers, were seen around the lake early on. Greater flamingos, which numbered up to 12 000, were recorded breeding for the first time, and it is estimated that 4 000 chicks survived from 6 000 nests. Lesser flamingos numbered approximately 1 000 at the highest count. White pelicans had an exceptional breeding period from May almost to March, over 3 000 chicks being estimated to survive. Pink-backed pelicans appeared to have limited success outside their normal protected area on the Hluhluwe River. Other species recorded breeding successfully were spoonbill, sacred ibis, goliath heron, wigecn, hottentot and red-billed teal and Cape shoveller.

Law enforcement patrols arrested 51 Bantu for a wide variety of offences. All were convicted, the courts confiscating 12 boats, 17 nets and 40 snares involved in the cases. A further 18 boats, 40 nets and 35 snares were destroyed while in illegal use.

Angling conditions improved but little and were still poor, resulting in a lower visitor patronage than in the previous year. Launch tours continued to be a most popular facility, and despite the False Bay launch being out of the water for some time for new engines and jet units, and the Charters Creek service having to be suspended in the latter months owing to the low water level, over 1 400 passengers were taken out.

Thirteen wilderness trails were conducted in the St. Lucia area, 63 trailers taking part. Revenue from fees amounted to R1 330,95, a very substantial improvement on the R529,55 collected in 1971/72.

Enseleni Nature Reserve :

Steady progress was made in the development of this small conservation area as an amenity for local residents. The existing picnic site nature trail was improved by the erection of three timber footbridges, and of a 150 m boardwalk across a swamp. This walk is very popular, particularly at weekends and in school holidays. A new trail, to be about 5 km long and going through the game paddock, is being cleared and made up. It passes through varied country, including open grassland at both low and high levels, thick river swamp forest, high lying open bushland and dense valley bush, and will provide an interesting contrast to the existing trail. A concrete dam wall was built at the quarry and topped with stone to improve its appearance. Many loads of soil were brought in to fill in behind the wall, and grass planted. A 2-metre high fence was erected from the level crossing to the Enseleni River bridge, which should effectively prevent further thefts of cycads and aloes. About 400 more aloes were planted this year, as well as cycads, strelitzias and watsonias.

The loss of one zebra reduced this species to only three, grey duikers remained at four, but all other species increased both by births and further introductions. There are now 18 blue wildebeeste, 5 waterbucks, 19 impalas and an estimated 25 nyalas. No losses from poaching occurred. The single-strand fence installed to keep hippos from the neighbouring farm was taken away in a flood, complaints of hippo damage following promptly thereafter. Restoration of the fence and its extension on to the next farm stopped complaints for the time being, but with development going on all round it is doubtful whether the Senior Ranger's so far successful efforts