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TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT
of the
NATAL PARKS GAME AND FISH PRESERVATION BOARD
for the period
1st APRIL, 1971 to 31st MARCH, 1972

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, 1971 to 31st March, 1972.

A. GENERAL

The Board :

In terms of Provincial Notice No. 740 of 17th December, 1971, four changes were made in the membership of the Board with effect from 1st December, 1971. The new members, Messrs. R. G. Poynton, C. D. Stainbank, M.P.C., C. Erasmus and D. C. Sinclair, replaced retiring members Professor J. D. W. A. Coles, Messrs. E. James and G. A. Rautenbach, and Major H. Urquhart.

The membership of the Board was then

- The Hon. G. A. Rall, M.E.C., Chairman.
- Mr. D. E. Mitchell, M.P., Deputy Chairman.
- Dr. H. B. Anthony
- The Hon. Mr. Justice D. G. Fannin, M.C.
- Mr. A. O. Simpson
- Mr. R. G. Poynton
- Mr. C. D. Stainbank, M.P.C.
- Mr. C. Erasmus
- Mr. D. C. Sinclair

The Board met ten times during the year, eight times at Queen Elizabeth Park headquarters, once in Thurlow House at Midmar, and once in Durban.

Advisory Bodies :

The Zululand Reserves Committee held three meetings, one each at Ndumu Game Reserve, Charters Creek and Empangeni.

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

Staff Reorganisation :

A radical staff reorganisation was carried out with effect from 1st August, 1971. Three divisions were created, Administration, Conservation and Recreation, each to be headed by an Assistant Director. The structures of the three divisions are set out in Annexures A(1) to A(3), whilst Annexure A(4) reflects the regional distribution of stations in the Chief Nature Conservator's section of the Conservation Division.

Specially protected game return :

As required by subsection (6) of section 9 of Ordinance No. 11 of 1955, the following is the return of permits issued and specially protected animals destroyed under the provisions of the section referred to, during the period 1st April, 1971 to 31st March, 1972:

	Permits issued	Animals killed
Buffalo	2	2
Hippo	10 (for 16 animals)	12
Eland	4 (14)	14
Black Rhino	1	1
Steenbuck	4 (11)	7
Mountain Reedbuck	8 (20)	14
Suni	3 (14)	6

I. CHIEF NATURE CONSERVATOR (See Annexure A (4))

(a) Conservator Reserves

(1) REGIONAL WARDEN CENTRAL

Hluhluwe Game Reserve :

The exceptionally heavy rains experienced throughout the reserve are well exemplified by the recording at Hilltop, where the gauge reflected a total of 1 428,9 mm. This is 470 mm above the average annual rainfall for the station, and 670 mm more than the 1970/71 figure. The effects of such precipitation were naturally far-reaching. In February the Hluhluwe dam filled completely for the first time ever, pushing up the Hluhluwe River approximately 3 kilometres into the reserve, and about 1,5 km up the tributary Manzimbomvu Stream. All the major rivers flowed until August and commenced flowing again in late September. The main Hluhluwe River bridge was under water on at least twelve occasions, during February the level here reaching its highest point since 1963, namely 5,5 metres.

Considerable improvement was observed during the year in the condition of the veld, as a result not only of the high rainfall but of the continued removal of excess game and the programme of active reclamation measures. Animals removed, by capture and on control, comprised 1 752 impalas, 288 wildebeeste, 139 nyalas, 302 zebras, 604 warthogs, 5 buffalos and 3 lions. The last-named three animals were among six lions, all immature males, which entered the reserve from Umfolozi. They were captured by "darting" and removed from the reserve. The other three moved northwards through the Bantu Reserve onto European farms, where they were in due course destroyed.

Emphasis in the reclamation work was switched from donga control to the areas where the erosion starts, i.e. where there is little or no ground cover and where sheet or rill erosion is observable above the donga sources. Much has been learnt as to the most effective technique

to be applied according to the type of soil, gradient and situation of the area requiring treatment. Use of cut scrub is among the quickest, cheapest and most effective of the control methods yet tried. The remarkable veld improvement in those areas treated is most gratifying. From the fire aspect the year was also a good one. Firebreaking and the controlled burns were successfully carried out. No uncontrolled fires crossed the firebreaks into the reserve, and only three minor fires were started by arsonists. The Senior Ranger-in-charge attributes this improved situation partly to the efforts of the Wildlife Interpreter, who has spent much time in discussions with local chiefs in areas bordering the reserve, arson being among the subjects taken up. The chiefs agreed to investigate and deal with every case reported, and have done so with satisfactory results.

The populations of the four most prolific game species, namely impala, wildebeest, warthog and zebra, have now been brought down to reasonable limits, and no more large-scale removals should be necessary after 1972. Present research on the nyala should in time provide information as to whether in fact the species is becoming a problem. An effective means of capturing nyalas may in the meantime be evolved. Square-lipped rhinos are on the increase, and their possible detrimental effect on other game animals bears watching. Leopards continue to be regularly seen and heard, while cheetahs too are well distributed. Visitors frequently mistake cheetahs for lions, requiring investigation whenever such sightings are reported. A start has been made on a hyaena investigation, a number of animals being marked with collars to facilitate observations. Apart from determining numbers and movements, it is hoped to gain information on the effect of this predator on young black rhinos. Research on the population of the latter species also continues.

The year under review saw a welcome reversal of the trend towards increasing poaching activities which had coincided with the previous succession of drought years. Only 43 poachers were apprehended, against 69 the previous year. Sentences totalled 6 years and 20 days imprisonment and R1 275 in fines, both well under half the 1970-71 figures. Twenty-one marauding dogs were shot, and 5 firearms, 15 spears, 4 knobsticks, 48 snares and 13 cane knives confiscated.

Visitors to Hluhluwe Game Reserve topped the 50 000 mark for the first time, the actual figure of 50 413 representing an increase of 6 763 over the previous year. Once again, fewer visitors were accommodated in the hatted camp, 17 504 compared with 17 776 in 1970/71, but casual visitors rose from 22 874 to 32 909. Visitors from overseas totalled 17 202 and accounted for almost half the increase in casuals. While receipts from accommodation fees fell almost R200 to R26 514,14, entry fees rose by over R2 000 to R12 124,00. The satisfactory tourist statistics were achieved despite the fact that the year was climatically not a particularly good one for visitors. February was almost disastrous, its torrential rains (totalling 493 mm) stranding many visitors at the hatted camp when the main reserve road was impassable. Game viewing roads had frequently to be closed for repair, and game-viewing itself was far from its best owing to dense vegetation and wide dispersal of the animals. Fortunately the ideal game-viewing country in the north of the reserve offered its usual sightings of

buffalo, zebra, impala and wildebeest herds, and of course black and square-lipped rhinos and warthogs.

Umfoloz Game Reserve :

The above-average rainfall enjoyed led to an all-round improvement in the grass cover. Because of late rain, firebreaks were not completed until July. Uncontrolled fires were limited to a few small boundary patches and caused only minor damage. No bush eradication was undertaken, the only scrub cut being that used on donga reclamation in the western area. Soil reclamation work was carried through from mid-August to the end of the reporting period.

Lions are on the increase and were seen regularly along the tourist roads. Giraffes too are increasing, and from the sightings of young cheetah cubs it appears that the population of this species also is rising. Eland numbers on the other hand are dwindling, and no calf has survived in the reserve. In addition to the animals removed by the Game Capture Unit, and referred to in the appropriate section below, control measures accounted for 830 head, comprising 186 impalas, 182 wildebeeste, 442 warthogs and 20 zebras. Natural deaths were greatest among waterbucks (25), wildebeeste and nyalas (24 each), and square-lipped rhinos (21).

Only 35 poachers, 21 of them Bantu juveniles, were arrested, believed to be the lowest annual total ever caught. Twenty of the juveniles received canings, while the sentences imposed on the adult offenders totalled R133 in fines or 1 670 days imprisonment. Ninety-nine trespassing dogs were shot. Weapons confiscated included one shotgun, an axe, 10 cane knives, 24 spears and 18 knobsticks.

There was again an appreciable increase over the previous year in the number of visitors to Umfoloz Game Reserve, from 13 755 to 16 048. Casual visitors rose from 9 860 to 12 066, and visitors accommodated in the Mpila hutted camp from 3 895 to 3 982 only. The Bekapanzi hie, officially opened on 23rd April, 1971, attracted many visitors. The Masinda hutted camp was put in good order during the year and set aside as a brace camp for the wilderness trails. The latter had a good year, the 856 people taken out on 151 trails representing an increase of about 25% over 1970/71. A most generous and greatly appreciated gift of R1 000 from Mrs. Y. E. Parfitt and Miss Mallett towards the wilderness trails organisation was used to re-equip three of the staging camps where trailers spend the night.

Game Capture Unit :

To conform to the programme of capture and disposal, the Unit's operations are reported on in terms of the calendar year, not the period April to March. The statistics given in Annexure D accordingly relate to the year 1971. It will be seen from Table I in the Annexure that captures during the year consisted of 424 zebras, 1 789 wildebeeste, 3 139 impalas, 138 nyalas and 6 warthogs, a total of 5 496 animals. Most of the zebras, wildebeeste and impalas were caught using a helicopter and strips of plastic material for guiding animals to the capture enclosure. The use of this technique for impalas has virtually eliminated the previous method of catching at night, with its frequent injury to capture staff and damage to vehicles. The new method enables whole herds of impalas to be taken at once, facilitating removals from selected areas. It was found to be

necessary to remove the larger impala rams after capture, otherwise they killed the younger males and females. It was such killings, and the poor condition of the animals from Mkuzi Game Reserve following on the previous dry year that caused the high losses shown in Table II of Annexure D. The losses among wildebeeste were also mainly among those from Mkuzi affected by poor grazing.

Altogether 5 065 animals were disposed of, comprising 425 zebras, 1 695 wildebeeste, 2 832 impalas, 100 nyalas, 4 warthogs and 9 waterbucks. They were distributed to 48 centres, namely two Board nature reserves, one Transvaal Conservation Department nature reserve, one Mocambique game reserve, and 43 private ranches and game parks. The largest order fulfilled was for 190 zebras, 402 wildebeeste and 1 279 impalas which went to a Transvaal game ranch. At the other extreme one Natal client took two impalas.

Square-lipped (White) Rhino Translocation :

One hundred and forty-four white rhinos were distributed during the year under review, to the following provinces and countries : Transvaal 29; Orange Free State 1; South-West Africa 12; Swaziland 44; Germany 16; Holland 20; United States of America 22. The countries mentioned are those of first destination and do not necessarily represent the final homes of the animals, as increasing use is being made of agents overseas who may subsequently distribute their acquisitions further afield. The grand total of white rhinos translocated up to 31st March, 1972, stood at 933.

(2) REGIONAL WARDEN LAKES

The staff reorganisation already referred to led to a division of the responsibilities in the St. Lucia complex which were hitherto solely in the hands of the Regional Warden Lakes. The St. Lucia Game Reserve and False Bay Park, including Charters Creek and Faries Island hutted camps, remained under the Regional Warden in the Conservation Division. The estuary and Mapelane campsites, and the prawning operations in the estuarine region, became the responsibility of the Chief Coastal Resorts Officer of the Recreation Division, and are reported on under his chapter.

St. Lucia Game Reserve and False Bay Park :

The exceptional rains enjoyed by all Zululand reserves not unexpectedly had a profound influence on conditions at St. Lucia. The following are the rainfall figures for the last two years at the three recording stations :

	1971/72	1970/71
Charters Creek	1 457,8 mm	989,0 mm
Banghazi (E. Shore)	1 936,3 mm	1 112,4 mm
False Bay	1 073,3 mm	707,2 mm

Evaporation for the twelve months was 1 386 mm compared with 1 607 mm in 1970-71. The water level at Charters Creek gauge, which in April, 1971, stood at 0,112 metre below mean sea level, rose to 0,547 m above m.s.l. in February, 1972, falling slightly to 0,455 m above m.s.l. at the close of the period under review.