

15th ANNUAL REPORT
of the
NATAL PARKS, GAME AND FISH PRESERVATION BOARD
for the period
1st APRIL, 1962 to 31st MARCH, 1963 1-37

To the Honourable T. J. A. Gerdener, Administrator of Natal.

Sir,

The Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board has the honour to submit its report for the period 1st April, 1962 to 31st March, 1963.

A. GENERAL

In December, 1962, the Board members took office for the ensuing three-year period. Mr. A. Mervyn Wood, M.E.C. was appointed Chairman in place of Mr. E. J. V. Grantham who had resigned, but otherwise there were no changes and the following nine members will hold office until 30th November, 1965:

Mr. A. M. Wood, M.E.C., *Chairman.*
Mr. D. E. Mitchell, M.P., *Deputy Chairman.*
The Hon. Mr. F. N. Broome.
Mr. E. James.
Mr. J. U. Friend.
Dr. H. B. Anthony.
Senator Dr. J. L. Pretorius.
Mr. A. O. Simpson.
Major H. Urquhart.

Seven Board meetings were held during the year, all at Queen Elizabeth Park, which is the Board's Headquarters.

Committees.

The Zululand Reserves Committee held one meeting.

B. HEAD OFFICE

Building.

Work by the contractors proceeded on the additions to the Head Office building. A wing at each end of the office is designed to provide laboratory accommodation, storerooms and an open carport. At the front of the building is a lecture theatre to seat 186 people.

Financial.

A statement of the Revenue and Expenditure for the period 1st April, 1962 to 31st March, 1963 is annexed and is self-explanatory.

Work being undertaken departmentally proceeded well until towards the end of 1962 when both the Board's full-time builders resigned. A number of projects at different reserves were carried out by Coloured or Bantu building workers, under the direction of the staff.

Road Maintenance and Construction.

The Board's heavy roads' maintenance plant and officer were occupied for most of the year on maintenance work in the three Reserves, Umfolozi, Hluhluwe and Mkuzi. Some work was, however, done on the roads at St. Lucia Estuary and Charters Creek. The D6 Bulldozer underwent a major overhaul during the year and was off the road for some three months: prior to this it had been clearing the boundary line in the southern Umfolozi Reserve. One new tourist road along the Black Umfolozi River in the Umfolozi Reserve was also constructed.

Game Capture.

Immobilization and capture of square-lipped rhino continued successfully at Umfolozi Game Reserve, whence 44 were moved to various destinations. Fifteen went to zoological gardens, overseas, seven to the Kruger National Park, eight to Southern Rhodesia, four to Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve and eight to our own Ndumu Reserve.



Impala Catching

(Photo: Natal Mercury)

Impala were captured at Mkuzi Reserve in April, May and June. Seventeen nights of operation resulted in the capture of a total of 1,213 animals. Of these 1,079 were distributed to applicants in all four Provinces, 657 within Natal, 211 to the Cape, 123 to the Orange Free State and 88 to the Transvaal. For the first time a fee of R2.00 per head was imposed for impala made available by the Board to private individuals.

HLUHLUWE GAME RESERVE

Building.

Construction was confined to minor works, including a water scheme for the Gate Warden at South Gate, outbuildings at other entrance gates and an additional room added to one of the Ranger's houses.

Prevailing Conditions.

During the winter of 1962 Zululand experienced a drought that was the worst for over 30 years. Despite the dry weather, animals bore up to conditions remarkably well, although by August the older animals of most species began to show signs of stress.

During the height of the drought a survey was carried out throughout the Reserve to ascertain the remaining natural water points available to the animals, and it was found that adequate supplies remained in all sections of the Reserve.

Good rains fell in the early spring and throughout the summer frequent and well-spaced rains were experienced with the result that both the animals and the vegetation in the Reserve made a very rapid recovery from the conditions that had prevailed earlier.

Grazing conditions continue to improve each year and the abundant grass in the autumn of 1963 ensured a good supply of food for the ensuing winter.

GAME NOTES

Mountain Reedbuck.

Continued observations of these animals indicate that the populations remain fairly static at approximately 40 animals.

Klipspringer.

During the latter part of 1962 a lone male klipspringer was observed on Makwanxa in the Reserve. This was the first record of this animal for over 10 years and it was thought to be extinct here at Hluhluwe.

Square-lipped Rhino.

During the dry winter white rhino were recorded in many parts of the Reserve where they had not previously been observed in their search for suitable grazing. During the summer many of them

remained permanently in these areas or continued to pay frequent visits to them with the result that the population of approximately 60 is now more scattered than in previous years.

Only one death was recorded during the year. A young white rhino bull received injuries that proved fatal in a fight with an older bull.

Giraffe.

With the birth of another male calf, the population now stands at 10. Unfortunately, there are only two mature females and one heifer calf, who will not be sexually mature for another two years, and so the increase in the population is naturally slow. It was indeed unfortunate that Foot and Mouth restrictions in the Eastern Transvaal prevented the acquisition of more females from that area.

Black Rhino.

A good number of calves were recorded during the year and despite the abnormally high mortality rate of 1961, there was no noticeable reduction in the population.

Five deaths were recorded during the year. A female died from wounds received in a fight with another rhino. Two died of old age. A young calf died in all probability as a result of the extremely cold weather that accompanied the first spring rains, and the fifth one died from causes unknown.

Buffalo.

These continue to thrive and during the year several new small herds were observed, the groups having broken away from the parent herds.

During the year baboons were recorded killing young antelope on four occasions. The victims were a bushbuck, a red duiker and two inyalas. In all cases the animals were no more than a few days old and it will be noted that these belonged to the more solitary species.

The old black rhino known as 'Herbert', who has for many years paid visits to the gardens of members of the staff at the rest camp, found a gap in the fence earlier in the year and once again began his depredations in the gardens.

Early one morning he was seen in the rest camp and Game Guides began to drive him out. The animal is normally an extremely docile one for a black rhino: his dignity, however, is always upset when being chased and unwittingly a member of the staff arrived on the scene in her small motor car and before she realised what was happening, 'Herbert' charged the vehicle. In his fury he ripped off the one back mudguard and tore the one back tyre to ribbons and put a hole in the boot of the car. His point of entry having been satisfactorily blocked, no further trouble has been experienced from him.

On the 23rd August a black rhino on endeavouring to drink on the banks of the Hluhluwe River, slipped on the steep bank and deep mud that had been deposited in the water from a nearby donga. Members of the staff battled from midday to sunset before the rhino was successfully removed with the aid of a Land Rover, ropes and boat.

During the height of the drought, hyaenas became extremely bold and in one area Game Guards reported nightly attacks by a pack of hyaenas in the Qumela area. The victims were mainly Inyala but on one occasion a young wildebeest calf was pulled down.

Field Studies.

The following projects were undertaken by members of the staff during the year:

- (1) 250 impala fawns were caught and eartagged, different colour combinations being used in different areas. The object is to acquire a better knowledge of the movement of impala herds and longevity of the animal.



Impala

The majority of arrests took place during the months of May, June and July, the remainder of the period being relatively quiet. Poaching on moonlight nights was again popular and several encounters took place between field staff and poaching gangs. Two very large hunting parties, in each case numbering over 60, entered the Corridor. In the one case the two Guards who encountered them were powerless, and by the time word reached Headquarters, the poachers were well out of the area.

In the second case, a force of 17 Europeans and Game Guards was hastily mustered and the gang put to flight. A portion of the gang was chased for several miles, three arrests were made and 38 hunting dogs destroyed. The remains of 10 head of game were recovered. Unfortunately, the greater portion of the gang managed to slip away undetected.

In November, Game Guards Mandlenkosi Mdletshe and Elias Mtetwa clashed with a party of five poachers at dark. When endeavouring to make an arrest, Mandlenkosi was stabbed to death and in a desperate attempt to defend himself, discharged his firearm, when one of the poachers was shot in the stomach and died the following day. Mandlenkosi had been an outstanding Guard whose service record for the previous three years was unequalled.

UMFOLOZI GAME RESERVE

Building.

At Headquarters a house was under construction for the rest camp receptionist and a start was also made on building a workshop and vehicle maintenance garage. A staff squaredavel was built at Mhlopene and a Roads Department cottage was moved to the western area of the Reserve.

Fencing.

As a result of the final fixing of the southern and western boundaries of the Reserve, and the removal of squatters from within its borders, a start was able to be made in the erection of a fence. Good progress followed in fencing the western boundary, although the terrain presented many difficulties and work had to proceed at times in a shade temperature of more than 110°F. Post holes for the southern boundary fence were also dug and preparatory clearing of the line carried out.

Prevailing Conditions.

The Umfolozi area was in the grip of a serious drought for most of the year and in some places the population of game was too great for the carrying capacity of the veld, despite the control measures which were aimed chiefly at warthog and wildebeest. Rainfall for the year amounted to only 29½ inches at Headquarters on Mpila hill with 33 inches at Gome outpost and 25 inches at Mbuzane. For the first six months from April to September, 1962, the figures at the three centres were 4.2 inches, 4.9 inches and 3.5 inches and no rain at all was recorded during June anywhere in the Reserve.

July was the coldest month, with a mean minimum temperature of 58°F. and a mean maximum of 77°F. at Mpila. In February at this station the mean minimum was 74°F. and the mean maximum 94°F. Gome was somewhat cooler on the average and at Mbuzane it was slightly warmer than at Mpila.

Operation Rhino.

Capture of square-lipped rhino and subsequent care of them in special enclosures continued throughout the year. The 44 animals which left the Reserve for various destinations were all transported in crates supplied by the Board, thus ensuring that the rhino were not confined in unsuitable crates.

The floors of all bomas were concreted for better hygiene and paddocks were added to help solve early feeding problems.

Two accidents occurred during capture operations: on one occasion the Land Rover crashed into some rocks injuring three of the passengers, and on another occasion a horse was horned in the back leg by an infuriated cow rhino which charged the two horsemen.

Tourists.

The number of visitors accommodated in the hutted camp was 2,081, an increase of more than 30 per cent over the previous year. Casual visitors numbered 1,737 and 216 persons went on Wilderness Trails.

Members of the press and the South African Broadcasting Corporation paid visits to the Reserve, which thereby received useful publicity. Excellent publicity also accrued from the film *To Catch a Rhino* made by the South African Tourist Corporation with active participation by members of the Board's staff.

Poaching.

Ninety-eight prosecutions were brought against poachers during the course of the year, involving 194 individuals. Only three of those charged were found not guilty, all the others receiving penalties up to a maximum of R120 or 120 days each. The areas in which poaching was particularly prevalent were the southern and north-western portions of the Reserve.

NDUMU GAME RESERVE

Construction work consisted of the provision of quarters for visitors' native staff, as well as routine maintenance, especially on boundary fences from which the theft of lengths of wire occurred on several occasions. Roads received attention, especially those leading to the popular tourist areas around Nyamiti and Banzi pans.

The hippopotamus population continued to increase both in the pans and in the Pongolo River. Eight square-lipped rhinos brought from the Umfolozi Game Reserve were all settled in the Reserve and a calf was born on the 16th February, 1963. The single

black rhino spent most of its time in thick cover and was seldom seen. Antelope of several species were on the increase, especially inyala, while the number of impala was between 250 and 300. Bushbuck were often visible near Nyamiti Pan and both grey duiker and Natal red duiker were plentiful.

Convictions obtained by members of the staff against various offenders amounted to 162, with fines totalling R583.60. More than 300 snares and other poaching devices were confiscated.

Visitors to the Reserve numbered 1,895.



Scavengers

MKUZI GAME RESERVE

The new hutted camp was completed this year. The game viewing hide at Bube Pan was built in June, 1962. Access to the hide, some nine feet above water level, is by way of a long passage-way screened by reeds. The popularity of this thatched roof hide is such that it has already become a major attraction in the Mkuzi Reserve. During the dry months many people travelled long distances to enjoy the views of game seen drinking at close range. A report was received from a reliable visitor to the hide that he saw an estimated 4,000 animals during one morning spent in the hide.

Since the opening of the new camp, more and more visitors were staying at the Reserve. Lawns and gardens were laid out but have not yet been completed. Demand for the old rustic camp declined after the new one was completed.

A severe drought continued over the entire year. The veld degenerated alarmingly in the absence of good rains, but game was in excellent condition despite the lack of water. The 15.74 inches of rain mainly fell in sharp thundershowers on 32 of the 41 days in which rain fell. Run-off was such that very little was absorbed.

A caravan and camping site was chosen at Mtshopi gate entrance in October.

The Nsumu pan had dried up completely and most of the birds on the pan had migrated.

Poaching was still rife. A departure from conventional snaring methods made its appearance particularly in the western and south-western areas bounded by the Bantu reserve. The inhabitants of this reserve used to hunt during the day and seldom set snares. This has now changed to hunting by moonlight. The poachers slip into the Reserve in large groups with dogs at sunset, set their snares and lie quietly until the moon is high. They then start drives towards the snares. The dogs used by these poachers are exceptionally well trained and silent hunters: an occasional yelp is the only sign that there are dogs about. The poachers keep in touch with each other by drumming two sticks together to make a sound which the uninitiated would pass off as coming from a drumming night jar. On several occasions contact was made between Game Guards and poachers, but in most cases they managed to evade capture under cover of darkness. Several dogs were, however, shot.

Where a kill had been made, the poachers invariably abandoned it at the appearance of the Guards. The dogs often remained behind with the meat and were then destroyed. In June three Europeans were brought to justice for night-hunting, one conviction and a fine of R40.00 or 40 days was obtained. A torch and .22 Hornet rifle were confiscated.

Two black rhino were destroyed by snaring in the Reserve and one square-lipped rhino was killed on the 5th August, 1962.

The Nxwala State land is well stocked with game, but due to shortages of Game Guards, it is impossible to patrol the area effectively.

In the year under review, 78 convictions were obtained out of 109 poachers charged. In the same period 1,511 snares were collected, 42 dogs destroyed, one muzzleloader and one .22 rifle confiscated. Total fines imposed amounted to R3,400.

A total of 152 animals were known to have died in snares. The figure was made up as follows:

64 impala, 45 blue wildebeest, 22 inyala, 1 bushbuck, 1 kudu, 1 leopard, 2 black rhino, 1 white rhino, 1 red bush duiker, 2 porcupine, 9 warthog, 1 grey duiker, 3 Livingstone antelope (suni).

A large increase was noted in the warthog population, kudu also increased while impala remained relatively static. Blue wildebeest decreased in numbers, due to a poor calving season the previous year, when many of the calves died from an undetermined cause.

A tame hadedah ibis, named 'Hardy', became quite an institution at Headquarters. Originally brought in by Game Guards as an abandoned orphan, he remained happily stalking around the garden