

Predator simulation in Itala Game Reserve

Prior to its proclamation in 1973, the land now comprising Itala Game Reserve was severely impacted on by man. Extensive areas of grassland had been converted into crop lands, while mining and heavy cattle and goat grazing had occurred in the remaining areas. Man's activities had resulted in disruption of the ecosystem, as well as the local extinction of most of the indigenous ungulates and major predators such as lions and wild dogs. Any large game species or predators that remained occurred at very low densities.

In line with its mission of maintaining functional ecosystems and preventing man-induced extinctions, the Natal Parks Board set about re-introducing animal species (23 species in all) including rhino, elephant and a variety of antelope. However, no major predators could be introduced because of inadequate fencing.

While introduced herbivores flourished, scavengers such as hyaena and vultures remained absent or at very low numbers. The lack of carrion in the veld was recognised as a problem for scavengers. Therefore, carcasses of domestic stock from surrounding farms were provided. However, this supply was inconsistent, and concern was expressed about the risk of introducing diseases.

News from the Natal

Parks Board:

Athol Marchant,
Ian Rushworth and Trevor
Wolf

Natural mortalities from the rapidly growing herbivore population provided a better food supply to scavengers, but in the absence of large predators, this was still less than occurs in a natural ecosystem. A decision was made to simulate the effects of predators by culling and the amount of carrion, leaving in the veld that we believe predators would have left, had they been present. This equates at present to two wildebeest per week. One is deposited in the veld, the other taken to the vulture feeding site near Ntshondwe camp.

Itala's predator simulation programme has been most successful. Before it started three years ago, vultures were very scarce in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The first arrivals were whitebacked vultures, later joined by lappetfaced and then Cape vultures. Every carcass now attracts these scavengers, with 150 whitebacked vultures often seen on a carcass, along with the other vultures.

An unusual phenomenon now occurs at Itala where lappetfaced vul-

tures are seen in groups of up to twelve (they normally occur singly or in pairs). A whiteheaded vulture was recently sighted, and there has been an unconfirmed report of a hooded vulture. Two other exciting scavengers have also been seen, namely tawny eagles and bateleurs. Hopefully these two eagles and the vultures will start nesting in the reserve.

Other creatures, ranging from insects through to the smaller carnivores and the larger scavengers, will also benefit from the programme. Monitoring has established that, in addition to hyaena and jackal; many animals are visiting the carcasses. These include mongoose, genet, African wild cat, even honey badger and wild dog.

It would be ideal for predators to build up their numbers to the point where they provide the carrion needs of scavengers. Already there are encouraging signs of an increase in the leopard population, and nomadic wild dog occasionally visit the area.

But in the absence of lion and a permanent population of wild dog, predation is always likely to be lower than it would be in a fully functional ecosystem. So it is likely, in the medium term, that the Board will continue to provide carrion for scavengers.

Sentence in rhino poaching case

Mr Nsingisi Thomas Zulu (38) of Ulundi was sentenced in the Empangeni Regional Court on 13 October 1997 to ten years imprisonment without the option of a fine for the unlawful killing of four white rhinos in the Umfolozi section of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park (HUP) on 23 December 1994.

Mr Zulu was arrested in November 1996 following an intensive SAPS and Natal Parks Board

investigation into the poaching incident in which one of the four poachers was shot dead by Natal Parks Board field rangers during an exchange of fire at the scene. One member of the poaching party later turned State witness and another died in an unrelated incident.

Mr Zulu was subsequently found guilty on charges of theft of the motor vehicle used in the incident and with the illegal hunting of specially protected game. He was sen-

tenced to four years imprisonment for the theft of the motor vehicle and the fire-arms used in the poaching incident were forfeited to the state. "We are really pleased with the outcome of this case," said Mr Derek Potter, Natal Parks Board Head of Conservation.

"This is the maximum penalty for an offence of this nature and it is significant that the courts are

Continued on p 37

Hunting, keeping and trade of lion, leopard and cheetah

The Mpumalanga Parks Board considers the keeping of wild animals in a wild state to be of fundamental importance to the principles of conservation and to the existence of the tourism and hunting industries in the Province. These sustainable industries contribute substantially to the provincial economy. The legislation of the Parks Board seeks to unify its responsibility to the conservation of the province and the countries' biological resources with the needs of the economic dynamo and the esthetic demands of the wider conservation community.

The Parks Board's underlying principle with regard to the keeping and hunting of wildlife is that both activities should be conducted in a manner which complies with the accepted ethics of these activities. In this document:- "Cat" refers to lion leopard and cheetah.

"Captive cat" means any cat which is kept in a fenced area less than a thousand hectares out of which it cannot readily escape, or any area regardless of size where artificial or regular supplementary feeding other than live game is supplied.

"Canned" in relation to hunting means an animal which is confined within an undivided area of less than 1 000 hectares or otherwise prevented from free movement, and/or which is drugged, lured or otherwise prevented from behaving in a natural manner or being given the opportunity to escape or to defend itself. These conditions are considered to be self evident with-

In this updated draft position paper, the Mpumalanga Parks Board deplures unethical hunting.

in accepted hunting ethics.

"Hunting" means to hunt, to shoot at, to kill, to pursue, to search for, to lie in wait of with the intent to kill or to shoot or to disturb wilfully any cat.

Proposed policy - No cat:

1. may be kept in captivity unless the applicant satisfies the Parks Board that the capture, keeping and breeding of the animal/s has a conservation objective and forms part of a bona fide research programme or project attached to a recognised institution of research or higher learning.
2. may be hunted unless the Parks Board is satisfied that the animal/s will be hunted in a manner which complies with the legislation controlling hunting and will be carried out in accordance with the principles of "fair chase".

Key points are that cats

- may not be hunted in an enclosure of less than 1 000 hectares and which is undivided
- may not be drugged using other than short term drugs for trans-location
- may not be hunted within one week of such translocation
- may not be lured by sound, sent, visual stimuli, artificial feeding, bait, other animals of that or another species or any other method.

No captive bred or tame cat from whatever source will be allowed to be hunted in the Province.

No hunt will take place from a vehicle. However, a vehicle may be used to follow up wounded animals.

No exotic cats may be hunted or kept in any conditions other than in a recognised zoological garden complying with international criteria for the management of such institutions.

Captive cats which need to be destroyed may only be euthanased by lethal injection administered by a qualified veterinarian and reported to the Board within one week.

Cats outside of the boundaries of a conservation area which have, or could, pose a threat to human safety or to domestic stock should be reported to the Parks Board who will take all reasonable steps to translocate these cats and to re-introduce them to the wild. The Parks Board will not sell, donate or translocate cats into captivity unless this complies with the conditions outlined in #1.

Cats which pose an immediate and serious threat to human life or to stock, may be destroyed by the land owner by a legal method providing that the incident is reported within 24 hours to both the police and the Parks Board. The onus is on the landowner to satisfy the Parks Board that the act was justified.

Any person who receives, or is found in possession of, or in any manner acquires skin, bones or other body parts shall acquire such parts in terms of an appropriate permit.

Rhino from 23

viewing these cases in such a serious light," he said. "This remains the largest single rhino poaching incident in the 100 year history of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park and we hope that the successful outcome of this case acts as a serious deterrent to other would-be poachers," Mr Potter added.

TEENWILDDIEFSTAL-EENHEID

Het u probleme met wilddiewe en/of strikke.

Kontak die mees Professionele Eenheid beskikbaar landwyd.

Ons beskerm die wild.

Vir nadere besonderhede kontak Quintus Cloete by Sel: 082 951-9566 Faks: (012020) 2367

VORIGE UITGAWES VAN SA WILD & JAG

1996 & 1997 Uitgawes nog beskikbaar.

Tel: (012) 3226980 Faks: (012) 3200557