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Securing Wilderness Landscapes in South Africa

*Nick Steele, Private Wildlife Conservancies
and Saving Rhinos*

By

Harry Wels



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The Rhino's Role in Wildlife Conservation

The Idea of Rhino

A rhino is both a creature and an idea; a rhino is both a fact and a fantasy. Rhinos are living legends, combining physiological and imaginary aspects in their huge bodies. Following Chapter 1 on landscape, I am particularly interested in 'the idea of rhino'. How does a rhino fit in the landscape constructions and imagery that I argued for in Chapter 1? How do rhinos fit in the European idea and imagery of Africa (cf. Mudimbe 1994)? What do rhinos tell us about 'the spirit of Africa, the sense of wilderness' that Hurry (2013: 37) spoke about in terms of Steele's motivation? What does that tell us about the particular role that saving the rhino in Africa by translocation played in the early years of private wildlife conservation?

The European idea of rhino is probably best represented by one of the most famous French naturalists and zoologists, Georges Cuvier (1769–1832). His full name was Georges Léopold Chrétien Frédéric Dagobert Cuvier. His name is one of the 72 that stand engraved in the Eiffel Tower in Paris. In the nineteenth century, naturalists like Cuvier built on the images of rhinos transmitted in stories and images from the ancient times of Greece and Rome, in which live rhinos were shown to audiences. In the Circus Maximus in Rome complete landscapes were depicted, in which rhinos along with lions and leopards were caste in shows (Enright 2008: 32), of course all of them being translocated from wherever in Africa to Greece or Rome. Interestingly enough, not a single rhino came to Europe between the third and sixteenth century (*ibid.*: 33). In 1515, Albrecht Dürer therefore drew his famous picture of a rhino without ever having seen a live one, drawing on the European imagery of a rhino. His drawing came to dominate the European image of the rhino for the next two hundred years (*ibid.*: 35). It presented the rhino as a heavily armoured warrior, an armed soldier. Only when Douwemout van der Meer, a Dutch sea captain took a live Indian rhino to Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, was Dürer's image adjusted to a living example and the rhino became contextualised in 'the fashion for the exotic' (*ibid.*: 37).

This European exoticism was basically represented in two ways. On the one hand the rhino was presented as the 'sublime in nature', that is, romantic nature (*ibid.*: 43). It is a notion that runs straight through our current age and time. In an advertisement for computer wall papers in the *Holland Herald* of

February 2010, the monthly flight magazine of the Dutch national carrier KLM, a rhino is depicted almost in the style of Dürer amidst other decorative items, entitled ‘the essence of nature’.¹ On the other hand the rhino was represented as standing for everything exotic and native, and far-away places (ibid.: 37). Thus, the rhino stood for the sublime and the exotic, for climax and otherness, for awe and caution. There were obviously no black and white contradictions: the emphasis is on different moods and emotions towards the – most of the time – imaginary rhino.²

Georges Cuvier is, aside for his Romantic depiction of the rhino and his academic contribution to the so-called theory of ‘catastrophism’ in geological processes (Huggett 1997), well known for his important role in the anatomical research of the ‘Hottentot Venus’, Saartjie Baartman, and depicting this Khoisan woman as closer to animals than to humans. At the time, they held to the assumption that ‘the more primitive the mammal, the more pronounced the genitalia and the bodily enticements to procreation. They saw hyper sexuality and uncontrolled drives in the female Hottentot body’ (Crais & Scully 2009: 133). The ‘proof’ of this animality lay in what they called the ‘Hottentot apron’ or the ‘...elongated outer labia that would provide anatomical proof of the unrepressed sexuality and essential animal character of the Hottentot’ (ibid.: 133–134). Saartjie never allowed Cuvier to inspect her genitals while still alive, but Cuvier got his chance when she died in Paris in December 1815. ‘Now she could no longer resist their entreaties. Spreading her legs open, the men examined Sara’s genitals, to their delight discovering her “apron”’ (ibid.: 140). Cuvier was now able to ‘scientifically’ conclude and ‘confirm’ the already existing European belief that the Hottentot (women) were closer to animals than to men. In time Saartjie became an icon of a racialized imperial European imagery of Africa and Africans (cf. Hobson 2005; Strother 1999). Initiated by Nelson Mandela in 1995, Saartjie’s remains were brought back to South Africa in 2002, in a grand display of ‘returning home’ and South African national identity politics. The then President Mbeki quoted Cuvier’s report on Saartjie’s dissection extensively. ‘On hearing this gruesomely pornographic, bigoted descriptions [sic] spoken by the president, several youngsters in the audience wept and fainted’ (Holmes 2007: 179–180).

In representing the rhino and Saartjie Baartman, Cuvier made himself the icon and spokesperson of a time and age of (upcoming) European expansion,

1 Holland Herald, February 2010: 23.

2 A very powerful idea indeed, making the rhino the Newsmaker of 2012, for the National Press Club/Aon South Africa as a result of the increased poaching of the rhino again since 2008. This price was not without its critics though (see Abramjee 2013).

and masculine and sexist imperialism and colonialism. A European identity primarily created by contrasting and mirroring Europe in dichotomies with other people and cultures, as between civilisation and savagery (cf. Corbey 1989), Christian and heathen (cf. Magubane 2007) or, to translate some of the off-shoots of this process to the current day in the sphere of nature conservation, between the white and Western conservationist versus the black and native 'poacher' (cf. Adams 2004; Anderson & Grove 1987). These on-going processes of identity formation are violent and are as much about the physical and tangible as about the imaginary and the symbolic. Every physical representation stands at the same time for something imaginary. A landscape is twofold: it is stone, soil, undulation, foliage, animals, and at the same time it stands for what humans want to see in it, a wilderness utopia, a 'dream topography'. A rhino is flesh, bones, blood, and at the same time stands for an image of time immemorial and a Romantic notion of unspoilt landscapes and nature. The same also holds for depicting humans, as Saartjie's example shows. The physical cannot be analysed or understood without these imaginary associations; the physical is interpreted in the context of the imagery, as Cuvier's example makes abundantly clear. It is therefore necessary to present and describe the campaign to save the rhino in South and southern Africa, not only as a response and consequence of its predicted physical extinction, but to interpret that notion in the context of what the rhino stands for in the (mostly white and Western) conservationists' imagery. This means that I shall not only describe Nick Steele's involvement in all kinds of rhino conservation activities both in the public and private domain but will also relate that to and integrate it into Steele's broader interpretation and constructions of masculine African wilderness landscapes. In other words, I will not describe and isolate the rhino as a separate species to be saved from extinction but interpret this effort as an integral part of the process of 'picturing landscape', with all its implications and associations of 'the logic of the camp', in order to be able to conserve, or rather exclude and defend it against the assumed disorder on the other side of the fence.

Nick Steele and Saving the Rhino

In Africa there are basically two types of rhinoceros, the black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) and the white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) (Emslie & Brooks 1999: vii). Both the black and white rhino were, according to various sources, primarily herbivores on their way to extinction. That much was sure, and the primary reason for this was excessive hunting by European hunters. By the end of the

nineteenth century there were hardly any rhino left in southern Africa according to Ian Player (1972: 33). The famous hunter Frederick Courtenay Selous was talking of total extinction around the 1890s (*ibid.*: 32). We are given the impression that we are literally talking about a few remaining rhinos on the whole of planet earth. On its website, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) also notes the near extinction of the rhino in southern Africa, where ‘once’ the African savannah’s ‘teemed with more than a million white and black rhinos.’³ According to these sources it seemed that there were hardly any rhinos left in the wild. Despite and contrary to these alarming messages, there were nevertheless enough rhinos in Umfolozi⁴ Game Reserve in the 1950s. So many even, that they either had to cull them or find other solutions, such as, some sources suggest, Operation Rhino’s, which was moving the rhinos to other parks in South Africa so as to spread the risk of losing the remaining animals should some disease break out that would decimate them or in order to start founder breeding herds in other reserves around the country. Once the Natal reserves were restocked with rhino, they started to move some even to zoos and safari parks outside South Africa.⁵ Nick Steele, speaking on behalf of Ian Player at a conference in San Antonio in the United States of America in 1967, tells his audience that ‘during the eventful years since the start of [Operation Rhino] no less than *five hundred* White Rhino were captured...’⁶ And this in Umfolozi Game Reserve alone!

Following, or despite, the success of Operation Rhino and other initiatives to save the rhino worldwide, rhino populations were still declared as being in danger of extinction. The WWF reported shipments of ‘huge quantities’ of rhino horn to the ‘lucrative markets in the Middle East and Asia’ in the 1970s, causing a ‘crisis’ that could only be countered by an ‘Appendix I listing’ of the rhino on the list of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which ‘inhibited all trade of rhino parts or products.’⁷ A good example of how deep this sense of crisis had taken hold of conservationists is perhaps found in the *memoirs* of a game ranger from Zimbabwe, Nick Tredger, who at the end of his *memoirs* laments the political and economic meltdown in the country at the beginning of the

3 http://www.panda.org/who_we_are/wwf_offices/mozambique/?127280/More-of-Africa-urged-to-boost-rhino-numbers, visited 20 January 2010.

4 Now iMfolozi.

5 Thanks to Drummond Densham for bringing this to my attention.

6 Text of a speech by Nick Steele, 31 March 1967, pp. 1, italics added.

7 http://www.panda.org/who_we_are/wwf_offices/mozambique/?127280/More-of-Africa-urged-to-boost-rhino-numbers, visited 20 January 2010.

21st century with huge consequences in terms of human suffering but who still, in an afterword he writes in a report of the Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force, starts off with the words: '(o)ur *biggest* concern is for the fate of the rhino in Zimbabwe' (Tredger 2009: 311, italics added). This is not to say that Tredger might not be concerned about humans in Zimbabwe (too often used only as a rhetorical argument against conservationists or against people caring for animals), but at the same time this is quite telling about his preoccupations. According to conservationists worldwide, the threat of extinction remains; at the same time, however, it also remains difficult to add up the various available figures and statistics, and arrive at a clear picture of the rhinos remaining: a few individual rhinos at the end of the 19th century, an abundance in Umfolozi in the 1960s, a crisis again in the 1970s, relative peace and prosperity in the 1980s and 1990s, but code red again from 2008 onward? This book and chapter are not meant to unpack rhino statistics, but just adding and subtracting the various available statistics leads at least to a kind of common-sense confusion.

Never mind all that; Ian Player was the project leader of Operation Rhino and Nick Steele writes in his personal diary on 8 December 1966: 'I often thank God Ian is guiding us'.⁸ Nick Steele was Ian Player's second in command in Operation Rhino (see Figure 7) and in his book on Operation Rhino Ian Player (1972) refers to Nick all the time. Ian Player also used Nick Steele to 'rehearse (...) his arguments' about Operation Rhino: 'On their long horseback patrols he [Nick Steele] and Ian would argue back and forth' (Linscott 2013: 101). In this recent biography of Ian Player, Ian is also quoted as saying with regard to Operation Rhino that he (Ian) '(...) was just part of it. I had an excellent capture team' and then continues by mentioning all members of the capture teams and mentions Nick Steele first (Linscott 2013: 139). In his report of a visit to a conference in San Diego (USA) on the role of zoos in international conservation of wild animals in 1966, Player mentions Steele first in his acknowledgements.⁹ They were obviously two of a kind in saving the rhino. But what did they actually want to save by saving the rhino? In his report Player seems quite clear on that score: 'My main objective during this visit to the United States was to talk to as many senior people as possible on the problems of human impact on wild areas'.¹⁰

8 Nick Steele personal diary, 8 December 1966.

9 Report on a visit by the Chief Conservator Ian Player to the United States to attend a conference at San Diego on the role of zoos in international conservation of wild animals, October 1966, pp. 1.

10 Report on a visit by the Chief Conservator Ian Player to the United States to attend a conference at San Diego on the role of zoos in international conservation of wild animals, October 1966, pp. 19.

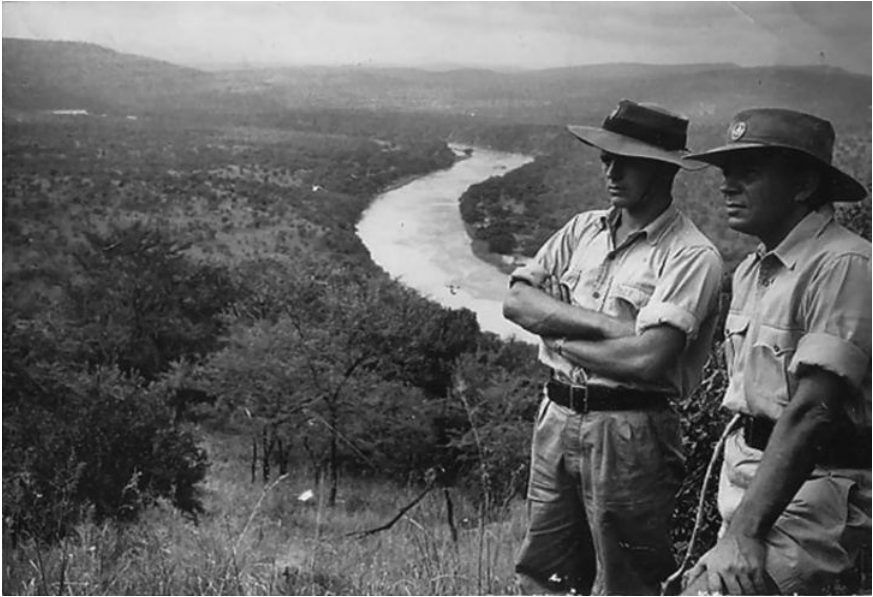


FIGURE 7 *Nick Steele (L) and Ian Player*

SCAN FROM PHOTO FROM PERSONAL ARCHIVE NICK STEELE N.D.

It is not so much about saving a species, but a particular wilderness landscape and area where the species fit in and reside; iconic species such as lion, elephant and rhino bring a certain ‘sense of place’ to the wilderness area; wild animals belong and are to be considered intrinsic to the wilderness landscape!

Nobody doubts that the success of Operation Rhino can to a large extent be attributed to the international charisma and media genius of Dr Ian Player (Draper 1998; press clipping not dated¹¹). Translocating rhinos is a tough job now and certainly back then: darting the rhinos (Harthoorn 1970)(see Figure 8), following them through the bush on horseback till the drug takes effect (see Figure 9), then getting the rhino in a truck and moving it towards its final destination by truck or ship (see for a description by Nick Steele himself Steele 1979: 125–134). Reciprocally, Steele acknowledges Player’s crucial role in saving the rhino in a presentation at a conference in 1967 in the U.S. by telling the

11 *6-year plan saves 400 rhino*: ‘the entire operation has been acclaimed by conservationists throughout the world’. Press clipping from Nick Steele’s personal archive.



FIGURE 8 *Nick Steele on top of a sedated white rhino*
SCAN FROM PHOTO FROM PERSONAL ARCHIVE NICK STEELE N.D.

audience that '(i)t was he [Ian Player] who was primarily responsible for the great comeback that the White Rhino has made in latter years'.¹² Never mind the accolades, Player himself humbly ascribes the success of the operation to his wonderful team of dedicated conservationists (Player 1972). And dedicated they were. 'Zealous' is probably a more appropriate term, as Nick Steele writes of themselves in his diary during those years as 'Soldiers of Conservation' and of working at the 'frontline'.¹³ This frontline though is not so much fighting *for* conservation, as it is fighting to keep the wilderness landscape clear of human intrusion. When Nick Steele writes about his promotion to become the Senior Warden in Zululand, he writes in his diary that 'the struggle before us is probably greater than ever before, not poaching or game problems, not fires or floods but people-people-people'.¹⁴ Whenever he feels depressed fighting this 'war', he saddles his horse and

12 The Future of the white rhino, 31 March 1967, presentation of Nick Steele to a conference in San Antonio, USA.

13 Nick Steele personal diary, 9 December 1966.

14 Nick Steele personal diary, 9 December 1966.

rides into the wilderness. ‘The answer to feeling befuddled is to saddle a horse and ride to the nearest high hill (...) On top of Ndengeza this heavily clouded day the bush looks tremendous – so lush. What a wonderful stretch of country Zululand is!’¹⁵ The dustcover of his *Game Ranger on Horseback* (1968), picturing Nick Steele sitting on his horse and from a hilltop overlooking the Zululand bush around the Umfolozi River, is well chosen in this respect.

One of the chief motivations for Operation Rhino was the fact that rhino constantly ‘escaped’ or moved from the Umfolozi Game Reserve onto neighbouring farmland or cattle ranches, destroying crops or bringing with them the (imagined) threat of diseases like the feared foot-and-mouth disease. I say ‘imagined’ in parentheses, because there have always been tensions between conservationists and state veterinary services. The latter drawing ‘red lines’ across perceived wilderness landscapes in Africa (see, for instance, Owen and Owen 1985; Wels 2000; 2003) in order, from their perspective, to prevent contamination of domestic livestock (see also Brown & Gilfoyle, 2009), but according to conservationists making life impossible for wild animals.



FIGURE 9 *Two game rangers following a rhino through the bush*
SCAN FROM PHOTO FROM PERSONAL ARCHIVE NICK STEELE N.D.

15 Nick Steele personal diary, 9 December 1965.

Dealing with farmers about these matters was not an easy task. In his personal diary in April 1960, Nick describes how a farmer is complaining about the buffalo that come onto his cattle ranch and bring the threat of disease with them.¹⁶ At Mpila he discusses this 'latest move in the border trouble with stock farmers'.¹⁷ And this antagonism between game reserve and farm continues throughout the years, as in his diary in February 1965, where he describes how, at the request of the farmer, they have darted and captured a rhino from Hazzard's farm. Steele writes in disbelief that '(n)ow he is complaining we have taken the rhino off his farm – which he now informs us is quarantined for Foot + Mouth. Farmers really are quite unreasonable people. It's so hard to understand their rotten attitudes'.¹⁸ In March of that same year, it is a certain farmer by the name of Van Rooyen who 'is bitching about rhino on his farm. Threatens to shoot them! If he does it'll be the most expensive trigger he ever pulled'.¹⁹ And Steele's antipathy towards farmers was not only because of their attitude towards wildlife but also towards their labourers: 'no feeling and little pay. Smug, rich and selfish...'.²⁰ To keep farmers at bay vis-à-vis the game reserves, in 1965 he envisions *excluding* them through offering them his 'Border Control Agency', 'to protect farmers from rustlers (...). Of course I'd make them pay through the nose for it'.²¹ At that stage of his career, farmers obviously seem to represent outside disorder for Steele, to be kept under control through establishing a control agency.

16 Here Steele is probably referring to the Corridor Disease or Theileriosis that some farmers ascribed to buffalo and which they causally linked to their loss of cattle (thanks to Drummond Densham for bringing this to my attention).

17 Nick Steele personal diary, 14 April 1960.

18 Nick Steele personal diary, 20 February 1965.

19 Nick Steele personal diary, 21 March 1965. As the NPB was part of the Natal Provincial Government that was not run by the Nationalist Party of the day, it was felt among the NPB staff that white Zululand landowners, of which many were Nationalist Party members, used the issue of wildlife on their farms to complain to the NPB (see also further down in this chapter: *Nick Steele and the ANC-IFP struggle*). When in 1974 the NPB amended the Natal Nature Conservation Ordinance, giving the landowners much more control of wildlife on their farms, this eventually softened their attitude towards the NPB, in later years even leading to many landowners switching from cattle to wildlife, or mixed cattle and game on their farms, institutionally also backed by Nick Steele's Farm Patrol Plan (thanks to Drummond Densham for bringing this to my attention).

20 Nick Steele personal diary, 7 September 1965.

21 Nick Steele personal diary, 7 September 1965. It is interesting to note here that the privatization of security that has become so much part of South African society nowadays seems to have been anticipated by Nick Steele (thanks to Malcolm Draper for sharing that observation with me).

I don't have to go into detail describing Operation Rhino here, as Player himself wrote a very readable account of the adventures and challenges of the whole process and operation (Player 1972; reprint with foreword by Julian Rademeyer 2013). Suffice it to say that key to the whole operation was translocating the South African rhinos to locations around the globe: zoos in the United States, the Netherlands, Portugal, Germany and other countries, national parks and game reserves elsewhere in Africa, 'Rhinos for Rhodesia',²² but also for Mozambique, Botswana, Kenya, and of course to farms and reserves inside South Africa itself (Player 1972: 246–249)(see Figure 10). Steele writes in his diary in 1964 that a particular farmer had contacted him and wanted 'delivery of a pair of white Rhino for his game farm in the Transvaal'.²³ Of the various zoos, Ian Player himself considered the translocation and sale of rhinos to the San Diego Zoo, as the transaction that really got things started in Operation Rhino.²⁴ 'Operation Rhino' surely 'catapulted the provincial conservationists to fame (...) [and had] opened global horizons' (Draper 1998: 806).

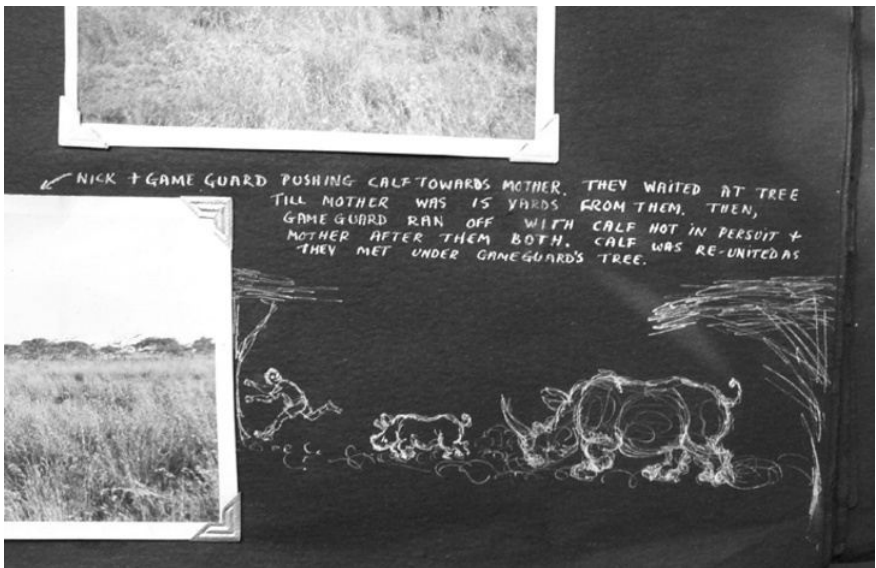


FIGURE 10 *Drawing by Nola Steele accompanying photographs of a rhino capture*
SCAN FROM PHOTOS FROM PERSONAL ARCHIVE NICK STEELE N.D.

22 *The Natal Witness*, 10 October 1966. They were aiming at translocating 100 rhinos to Rhodesia according to Steele's personal diary, 2 December 1966.

23 Nick Steele personal diary, 16 December 1964.

24 Interview Ian Player, 29 January 2009.

The threat of possible rhino extinction and everything the rhino stands for when picturing Africa kept on playing a crucial role in mobilizing Western NGOs' zeal for its conservation. This was international (financial) support that was essential to keep the wheels of war running: 'Without the outside support of national and international NGOs, the battle [to save the rhino]...would have been much more difficult' (Walker & Walker 2012: 117). Capturing the rhino had also meant capturing 'the imagination of the world' (Draper 1998: 806). Not only in the proliferation of the conservancy movement from South Africa to its neighbouring countries in the 1990s, as I will describe in Chapter 3, but throughout Steele's personal career in nature conservation he would increasingly become involved with all kinds of international contacts, especially in the USA, to support his ideas about keeping order within the fences of the conservation areas and keeping disorder at bay outside the fences. Following on his interests in military history, military style conservation, security and his strong ideas about the crucial role of patrolling ('feet on the ground', Walker & Walker 2012: 111) conservation areas and 'intelligence gathering' (ibid.: 110), Steele had particular interests in the military and intelligence worlds. In the late 1980s and 1990s Steele became member and chairman of both the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC) Rhino Management Group (RMG) founded in 1989 by 19 conservation agencies and NGOs, and the southern African Rhino and Elephant Security Group (RESG), a subcommittee of the RMG, focusing particularly on security and founded in 1991 (Emslie & Brooks 1999: 39–40). RMG was meant to help and save the black rhino by implementing the 'Conservation plan for the black rhinoceros in South Africa and Namibia'. The RESG was particularly established for the purpose of 'ensuring maximum cooperation between the conservation and law enforcement agencies'. As a result of various workshops around rhino conservation in the late 1980s, the Endangered Species Protection Unit (ESPU) was created in 1989 under the leadership of Colonel Piet Lategan and was meant 'to combat the illegal trade in wildlife products and to close the trade routes' (Walker & Walker 2012: 111).²⁵ Steele's lifelong preoccupation with controlling the disorder threatening the wilderness landscape from the other side of the fence had found a fitting species and institutional embeddedness. It gave him the opportunity to network with all kinds of security and intelligence-related organisations, and like-minded people inside and outside South Africa, who all used the discourse of having primarily the military-style conservation of Africa's wildlife, and particularly the rhino and elephant, in mind. In his personal diary Steele, already

25 To which Walker and Walker (2012: 111) add: 'With the change of government and politics in South Africa after 1994, the unit was unfortunately abandoned in 2003.'

in 1966, thought up a fitting war song to keep the Conservation Soldiers, game rangers and game scouts on the march:

'Onward Conserve' Soldiers
 Marching as to War
 With the Cross of Conservation
 Going on Before²⁶

Networking with the Military to Save the Rhino

The Game Rangers Association of Africa (GRAA or GRA) was set up in 1970 by Peter Hitchins (born in 1938), who was educated at Potchefstroom Boys High School and joined the Natal Parks Board in 1961; he served most of his time in the Hluhluwe and Umfolozi Game Reserves, before he was asked to join the research staff of NPB in 1968, specifically targeted to look at the ecology of the black rhinoceros in Hluhluwe Game Reserve. Interestingly enough the GRAA was meant to be a multi-national, non-racial, and non-political organisation. The first objective mentioned in the letter of invitation to join this association was '(t)o create and maintain contact between game rangers in all parts of Africa.'²⁷ Next to this objective, other objectives were:

- to keep its members informed of developments in the conservation of natural resources;
- to provide opportunities for members to meet; and
- to promote and safeguard the interests of nature conservation on an African basis.²⁸

The first meeting of the GRAA was held – where else given the background of Peter Hitchins – in Hluhluwe Game Reserve. The GRAA provided an opportunity to organise international linkages, under the banner of nature conservation, between game rangers across Africa, although mainly southern Africa, despite the international political context in which South Africa had become increasingly isolated because of anti-apartheid boycotts (cf. Spierenburg &

26 Nick Steele personal diary 5 July 1966. Before and after, the text is adorned with two music notes to indicate that it is a song text. It is based on the tune of the rather famous song 'Onward Christian Soldiers'.

27 Letter of invitation by Peter Hitchins, 26 February 1970.

28 Personal communication Drummond Densham.

Wels 2010). The discourse within the GRAA was constructed around 'war' (cf. Walker & Walker 2012; Leakey & Morell 2001), which asked and almost seemed to beg for a military-style answer. The invitees to become members of the GRA were at first all game rangers from South Africa, with Nick Steele named first.

During the first five years of its existence the GRAA had its headquarters at uBizane Game Ranch, a private wildlife initiative.²⁹ In April 1972 Norman Deane was elected Chairman of the GRA. Steele and Deane knew each other well. As a Junior Warden, Steele was trained by Norman Deane and, when Ian Player tells Steele in 1981 that Norman Deane has cancer, Steele writes in his diary that he 'cannot express the heart break this is for me... He moulded my outlook + my early career may that be...what I really regret is that Norman did not write a book. He had such rich memories + experiences – now lost forever'.³⁰ Steele himself made up for that loss, as he wrote the book he hoped Deane would have written himself (Steele 1992). In February of the same year, Nick Steele sees and speaks to Norman Deane, for the last time, at a meeting of the Game Rangers Association. He notes in his diary 'I felt God had answered a prayer of mine not to let him go before I could show him some of the love I feel for him as a friend and a mentor'.³¹ In this intimate context it is meaningful to note that Norman Deane had already resigned from the NPB in 1964 in order to start his own safari and game ranching business. He went private with conservation in a time when that was not yet at all something common. With this move he probably influenced Nick Steele's thinking in many more ways than one.

The Game Rangers Association wrote an occasional newsletter entitled, not surprisingly, *The Game Ranger*, of which Nick Steele was the Editor and a frequent contributor. One of his contributions shows so much of the ambivalence that had played such an important role in conservation history in southern Africa all along. It clearly shows how much conservation in southern Africa has always been part and parcel of, and been intertwined with, the white political agenda (cf. Kumleben Commission 1996; Ellis 1994; Spierenburg & Wels 2010). In this article Steele describes how many game rangers in southern Africa have died in contacts with poachers, with the latter, in one stroke of the pen, transformed into 'terrorists'. In Nick's rhetoric there seems to be only a thin line between anti-poaching activities and fighting the people that fight for democratic representation. For rhetorical reasons it seems, Steele distinguishes these battle-hardened game rangers from the ones who inhabit the large conservation bureaucracies that have been created to conserve wildlife. His respect

29 Interview Ian Player, 29 January 2009.

30 Nick Steele diary, 12 January 1981.

31 Nick Steele diary, 8 February 1981.

goes to the 'modern ranger [who] is the automatic-rifle toting type, adorned with ammunition pouches, who leads sticks of soldiers [not rangers!] through the sizzling bush in search of "terrs," as they are called. Many of these brave men have died in contacts in Southern Africa in the last decade. Others are still unobtrusively playing their part as game ranger-scouts in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and South West Africa'. In communication with one of this type of ranger, Willie Wilcox, he continues that 'Willie listed some of the items they require for anti-poaching patrols: an armoured car, FN machine guns, 60 mm mortars... They probably regard a black rhino or elephant charge as light relief from their grim task of confronting poacher-terrorists'.³² These formulations seem to imply that every poacher is a terrorist and vice versa. This seems a major ambivalence running throughout the Game Rangers Association throughout its existence. In an undated edition of *The Game Ranger*, Derek Tomlinson pays tribute to the game rangers that fought and died in 'the terrorist war' in Rhodesia, actually confirming that anti-poaching operations of game rangers were at the same time politically motivated operations against black insurgents. He ends his two-page tribute by quoting, in capitals, a poem 'found scrawled in charcoal across a wall in a military base camp':

After all have come and gone
 We will remain shadows
 Of a forgotten past
 Those that follow
 After we are long forgotten
 Will say
 Here lived men of substance
 Therefore I pray
 God bless all sons of Rhodesia
 At least we tried, didn't we?
 Yet how did we fail
 When we were so sincere?³³

This military bravado and melancholy, directly marking conservation and anti-poaching operations as part of the political agenda of the white minority regimes in southern Africa, is basically repeated years later when Nick Steele writes again in *The Game Ranger*, congratulating the organisation on its 21st anniversary, saying that a conservationist had stated on television that

32 Nick Steele, The Game Ranger's Lot, *The Game Ranger*, February 1980.

33 Derek Tomlinson, Rhodesian rangers in the front line, *The Game Ranger*, not dated.

“Military style game rangers marching up and down, saluting and carrying weapons, should be replaced by social scientists and women.” ... The Game Rangers Association should have immediately challenged this statement’, according to Nick Steele.³⁴ These various examples seem to add up to a rather notorious example, one where the military was involved in anti-poaching activities and ended up fighting ‘terrorists’: Operation Lock. In this operation the late Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands hired British SAS mercenaries, contracted by Kilo Alpha Services (KAS), a private security firm, to infiltrate the rhino-poaching networks in southern Africa, which ended up fighting off and killing anti-apartheid fighters from the ANC (Ellis 1994; Bonner 1993). They thought of military solutions to end poaching and considered all black Africans fighting white minority rule in southern Africa, particularly the ANC, as (potential) poachers. It led to a situation in which the logic behind their strategies was that to end poaching was to keep the status quo in the region intact; it meant to fight *for* conservation was to fight *against* any black resistance fighting for equal and democratic rights. This seems to have been the unwritten ideological conviction of the type of conservation and military networks that Nick Steele got involved in across the world.

What united the various people in Nick Steele’s network was a deep-felt fear of communism and in such a way that they superimposed that fear on everything that was happening around them. A fear that was also all-consuming in the South African military and police: ‘We soon believed that the good of the country took precedence over individual rights, and that all we had held sacred about our lives was under threat from the evil Communist empire that was brainwashing “our blacks” to raise [sic] up against us’ (Thompson 2006: 50). Writing about Colonel ‘Rooi Rus’ Swanepoel, Senior Interrogation Officer with the South African Police (SAP), a colleague writing his *memoirs* remarks: ‘I sometimes wondered if the enemy’s hatred could ever equal his smouldering loathing of Communism’ (Coetzee 2011: 197). Whatever happened in the region, it was only judged in terms of whether it was advancing or stopping the march of communism in southern Africa. Nothing could be seen in a detached way beyond this overriding concern. Everything they did had to contribute to keeping at bay or stopping communism, including their conservation efforts (cf. Onslow 2012).³⁵ In this context, Steele was particularly worried about what was happening in Mozambique. In November 1975 he writes in his diary: ‘I have been invited by the 2 i/c [in command] of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles,

34 Nick Steele in *The Game Ranger*, not dated.

35 In this book it is made clear how the global ideological environment at the time was all consuming and had its direct impact on decision-making and behaviour.

Mr. Selwyn Meyer to accompany him on an inspection of his armoured car regiment camped in the field opposite the Mozambican Frelimo border'. Not without a wry sense of humour he finishes this diary entry by saying that '(a)lthough' it looks like being a long war against the Communists they will not find us easy to subdue, simply because we have our back to the ocean + it's a damn long swim to England, Holland + India'.³⁶ When he travels from Kosi Bay to the Mozambican border a month later in December 1975, he writes in his diary: 'Gazing through the two border fences we saw the Frelimo camp with its civilian + military tents, flag post with Frelimo flag + several soldiers armed with A.K. machine guns. Communism has arrived at our doorstep in all its ugly colours'.³⁷ Seen from the perspective of Nick Steele, no wonder that all the game reserves bordering Mozambique were considered of particular relevance, and he opted for proclaiming and extending them, no matter the political controversy. This happened to the reserves in Maputoland: Kosi Bay (proclaimed in 1950 and extended after a huge controversy in 1984 under Steele's jurisdiction at the KZBNR, see Guyot 2005 and photo in Figure 11)³⁸ and Tembe Elephant Park, established in 1983, also under Steele's leadership.³⁹ The third Maputoland game reserve is Ndumo Game Reserve, already proclaimed in 1924, so not under Steele's jurisdiction. Nonetheless, there is also a land claim on land inside the boundaries of the reserve from the Mbangweni community (Naguran 2002). In Steele's mind, at least in these conservation areas he could fight and keep the communist enemy at bay, his overriding concern, while the areas were legitimated by referring to them as rhino or other animal sanctuaries, safe havens and crucial for conserving wilderness landscapes. A telling example of this logic comes from a book on the natural history of

36 Nick Steele personal diary, 27 November 1975.

37 Nick Steele personal diary, 21 December 1975. 'A.K.' stands for 'Автомат Калашникова', a Russian Kalasjnikov model machine gun.

38 'In the 1980s, the Kwazulu government realises that it would be beneficial in terms of self government autonomy to have the control of its conservation areas and also to be able to proclaim new parks – as happens at Tembe Elephant Park in 1984. The control of the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve is passing from the Natal Parks Board to the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources (KBNR) in 1989' (Guyot 2005: 445).

39 I am all too aware of the political controversies around these public game reserves at the time and later on, but these cases fall outside the scope of this book in terms of going into detail about them. I do come back to these cases in the section entitled 'Nick Steele and the ANC-IFP struggle' further down. See also Maré and Hamilton on 'loyal resistance' (1987). Tembe Elephant Park was run by an ex-soldier from Rhodesia, Ed Ostrovsky (see also note 58). Georgina Hamilton was a journalist who wrote critical articles on Kosi Bay and the removal of people (thanks to Malcolm Draper for bringing this to my attention).



FIGURE 11 *Nick Steele, third from left, while the angry people of Kosi Bay are addressed*
JOHN WOODROW, *THE DAILY NEWS*, 7 MARCH 1989

Maputaland by Alan Mountain (1990)⁴⁰ and the foreword written by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, by that time a good friend of Nick Steele, in his capacity as Minister of Economic Affairs and Chief Minister of KwaZulu. In the opening lines of his foreword, the Chief Minister writes that Maputaland 'has a quality that is becoming one of the rarest commodities on our overcrowded earth: the quality of *wilderness*' (Mountain 1990, italics added).

Walker and Walker (2012: 133–136) writing 22 years later about Ndumo Game Reserve, describe how Nick Steele, in his capacity in 1989 as the Director of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources, 'was to prove 100 per cent [sic] correct'

40 Alan Mountain was a facilitator and participant in a meeting of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation organized by Nick Steele on 21–23 June 1989 at the Wildlife Society's Environmental Centre at Treasure Beach in his capacity as consultant from Development and Communication Consultants, Durban. In their book, Clive Walker and his son Anton (2012) quote the outcome of that meeting extensively. Clive Walker was present at that meeting as Vice Chairman of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation (The illegal hunting of rhinoceros workshop, 21–23 June 1989, available at http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/pdf_files/130/1309906751.pdf, visited 8 January 2013).

(*ibid.*: 134) in translocating black rhinos from an area that ‘was sandwiched between the Ndumo Game Reserve in the west, a community corridor in the middle and the newly established Tembe Elephant Park in the east. Somewhere in this bush were ten black rhino which, unless removed, were in grave danger of being poached [as they were outside the fences of the two mentioned wilderness areas]. The objective was to relocate the animals to a safer environment... The understanding was that one day, when the situation changed, the rhinos could be returned, and that is precisely what transpired. Many black rhinos were eventually relocated to nearby Tembe [as the] intended incorporation of the area, combining Tembe and Ndumo, has never happened. In fact, the very area the rhinos were taken from has been *invaded* by local people’ (*ibid.*: 133–134, italics added). The logic of rhino conservation is a recurring legitimisation based on sticking to ‘the logic of the camp’, that being the forces outside the fence, whether communism or local communities.

Back to the theme of anti-communism (because of their years of working together, Steele was probably also influenced by Ian Player’s stern anti-communism): ‘[Player] spoke of the march of Communism + MPLA successes, of the ultimate fate of whites in South Africa if the land fell. “They would seek their retribution on us + I’d rather commit suicide than face that.” His utterances provided a bleak picture of the future in Southern Africa. While I do not hold such a pessimistic view I feel more strongly by the day that the Afrikaner has led us all into the sea with his blind bloody stupid prejudice.’⁴¹ It shows how almost all topics in the end came together and were judged, almost on a scale, in terms of what it did to favour or stop communism in South Africa. It echoes parallels to what Gilliom (2003), in his monumental work on the Afrikaners, tries to argue about the Afrikaner links with Nazi Germany in the 1930s: They linked up with the Germans not so much for reasons of endorsing their fascist ideology, but in their position against Britain and the British.⁴² Analogous to this reasoning, one could argue that Steele did ultimately participate in the fight against the ANC, not because of the fact that he was defending white minority rule in South Africa, or that he would not want to live and work under a black government (as director of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources he actually already worked under a black homeland government,

41 Nick Steele personal diary, 17 February 1976.

42 Although one has also to be very careful in embracing this line of reasoning or generalising too easily from it: Marx (2008: 238–239) shows how much of this anti-communism was ideologically rooted in National Socialism and other forms of fascism, and that the nationalist Afrikaners’ ‘brand of anti-communism was so brazenly anti-Semitic that one can hardly talk of “undertones”’ (*ibid.*: 239).

headed by Buthelezi), but because they represented the ultimate threat of communism for him. The ANC's alliance and close cooperation with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and their worldwide linkages with communist networks supporting their struggle ideologically and with weapons (Shubin 1999) made them the ultimate threat for conservative and rather militarily oriented conservationists. On the basis of recently opened archives, Ellis (2011) shows how the SACP, the ANC and the decisions to embark on an armed struggle against apartheid through Umkhonte we Sizwe were 'inscribed in the politics of the cold war' (Ellis 2011: 657). In the same article Ellis also shows that it has become apparent that Nelson Mandela, as the first commander of Umkhonto we Sizwe, 'was a member of the SACP' (ibid.). This is not presented here as an excuse for ignoring its dire consequences in terms of human suffering, but it does show the various layers of complexities that are involved in trying to understand conservation's role and Steele's positions and decisions in South Africa under apartheid. And it was not just South Africa: it was a regional affair with all parties fighting for their independence and/or democracy being supported by communist partners, Russia and Cuba in particular, both financially and in straight-forward military training and material support. This counted for FRELIMO in Mozambique, for SWAPO in South West Africa (now Namibia), the MPLA in Angola, and ZANU and ZAPU in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) (Shubin 2008).

To give some impression of the deeply felt concerns about the threat of communism in southern Africa in certain more right-wing-oriented political circles, I will quote some phrases from a representative book at the time, published by the Southern African Freedom Foundation (SAFF). On the dust cover of the book, the SAFF is presented as 'dedicated to the advancement of freedom and democracy in Africa through the creation of greater understanding of the issues and problems confronting the continent. The foundation believes that the economic welfare of all societies can best be served by the free enterprise system, and while it recognizes that inadequacies and lack of freedom do exist in our present systems, it seeks to expose the greater lack of freedom and dangers to the freedom of the individual in other systems – particularly the Communist system' (Greig 1977).⁴³ The book is sketching a picture in which the communists are after world domination and are particularly on the rise on the African continent. The analysis is basically grounded on figures of the build-up of military arsenal by the Soviets, derived from United States military intelligence and NATO sources. What is most worrying according to this analysis is not so much the sheer numbers of weaponry, but the fact that 'the Soviet

43 First published in 1977 by the Foreign Affairs Publishing Co. Ltd. in Richmond, Surrey, UK.

High Command has been switching the emphasis in its general strategic outlook and tactical doctrines from the defensive to the offensive' (Greig 1977: 19). Southern Africa is one of its spearheads for this offensive, particularly by supporting, what Greig throughout his book writes between inverted commas, 'Liberation Movements'. In Chapter 7 of the book, he presents the reader with 'Glimpses of some "Liberation Movements" in action'. In it he describes amongst others the MPLA in Angola, ZAPU and ZANU in Rhodesia, SWAPO in South West Africa, the ANC in South Africa, and FRELIMO in Mozambique, and their various military wings. Writing about the ANC he says that 'the most potentially serious activity, thought to involve members of this [ANC] movement, would have seemed to take the form of a small scale guerrilla raid across the frontier from Moçambique into the Eastern Transvaal early in December [1976]. Although involving only four men, the raid was the first of its type and was presumably a consequence of the establishment of guerrilla training and base camps in the southern part of Moçambique with the aid of the South African Communist Party' (Greig 1977: 242). Greig's very last lines of his book could have been written by Steele, as it seems to capture Steele's overriding urge for security, blending securing rhinos, landscapes and South Africa as a whole: 'to believe in the possibility of the birth of a new concert of mutual interest transcending racial issues which will at least point the way to the attaining of genuine freedoms, security, and prosperity for all the people of Africa, whilst holding at bay the efforts of alien Communism to use the "liberation" of Africa as but a stepping-stone in its own proclaimed goal of world domination' (Greig 1977: 334).

Nick Steele and the ANC-IFP struggle

Fighting the ANC most probably also had to do with Steele's close friendship with Mangosuthu Buthelezi and his IFP,⁴⁴ considered by an outspoken critic of Buthelezi 'the most controversial black politician in South Africa' (Mzala 1988: 1 'Mzala is a pseudonym for Jabulani Nobleman Nxumalo, an ANC and SACP member and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) soldier involved in the war with

44 'The Inkatha National Cultural Liberation movement was formed in 1975. It was not the first campaign to give organisational form to Zulu ethnic nationalism during the twentieth century, nor even the first that was mobilised under the name Inkatha. In the 1920s, prominent isiZulu-speaking intellectuals, businessmen and local leaders established an organisation under the patronage of King Solomon kaDinuzulu. This earlier Inkatha sought to advance a range of political concerns and economic ambitions that were suffering under the assaults of legislated racial segregations and exclusions, beginning with the Act of Union in 1910' (Waetjen & Maré 2008: 353).

Inkatha'. (Francis 2011: 19)), having 'a double agenda', that is, an image of being against apartheid in a non-violent way, but on the other hand a loyal partner of the apartheid regime (Maré and Hamilton's (1987) 'loyal resistance'), unleashing vigilantes in the townships under the banner of apartheid's structures of Community Councils, covered by the South African Police (SAP) (cf. *ibid.*: 139–164). These are quotes from an obviously and brazenly critical book on Buthelezi. On behalf of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, attorneys Friedman and Friedman even sent a letter to various universities in South Africa advising them to remove Mzala's book from their collections because it was considered 'defamatory'. With the advice came the juridical threat that if they kept copies of the book in their libraries, 'it would lead to claims for damages' (Wyley & Merrett 1991: 98). Interestingly enough the second author, Christopher Merrett, is also the author who implicated Nick Steele as Director of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources, in an article in the *Index on Censorship* (6/1992), of being indirectly involved in forced removals of local communities in Kosi Bay in Maputaland to make room for conservation land (see Figure 11) and in the murder of anthropologist Dr David Webster, who was researching the Tembe-Tonga people who live in the Kosi Bay area. This article led to a major lawsuit by Nick Steele against Christopher Merrett, which went to the Supreme Court of South Africa (case 471/93). This lawsuit was executed by the same attorneys who defended Buthelezi, Friedman and Friedman. Nick Steele won, although during the process it also became clear that the KZBNR had as part of its operations a 'Special Services Unit'. In the *Weekly Mail* of 9–14 November 1991, it was reported that the duties of the unit were to monitor the flow of ivory, rhino horn and weapons from Mozambique into South Africa. Quite a few members of this unit had a military and/or intelligence background. 'The team reported directly to the director of the KwaZulu Bureau for Natural Resources [i.e. Nick Steele], who was close to Chief Buthelezi' (Ellis 1994: 66). In a press release of the KZBNR following the lawsuit (6 December 1993), it said: 'the Director of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources and one of South Africa's prominent conservationist, Mr Nick Steele, has been awarded R20,000 damages and including costs and an apology following a Supreme Court defamation case against a Pietermaritzburg citizen, Mr. Christopher Merrett'. Linking this particular lawsuit to the bigger politics of the IFP it is noteworthy to mention that on 24 February 1992, the Director of the Inkatha Institute sends a confidential letter 'to all secretaries of departments', including the KZBNR, stating that: 'It has for urgent reasons become necessary that statistics/information reflecting the subversive role the A.N.C. has played in areas under the jurisdiction of the KwaZulu Government since 1984, be summarised and be forwarded to this office (...)'. This request seems to be in line with the Institute's task which is,

amongst others, 'to counter 'negative propaganda against Inkatha by some exile groups in Europe' (Langer, 1983: 89)' (in Maré & Hamilton 1987: 177). Nick Steele, in his capacity as Director of the KZBNR, in a letter dated 3 March 1992, answers to the request that 'The Director, KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources states that in his view most of the Bureaus problems in Northern KwaZulu [including Kosi Bay] can be traced to the A.N.C. or its agents, including the organisation CORD [Centre for Community Organisation Research and Development] which operates from the University of Natal as well as AFRA [Association for Rural Advancement]. The aim has been to discredit the KwaZulu Government and its leader Dr M.G. Buthelezi by all means including intimidation, threats, damage to government property, abuse of officials and defiance (...) There have been no physical atrocities per se committed on Bureau staff but the onslaught has been sustained by adverse press publicity initially through the daily and weekend newspapers and, when these lost interest through the Weekly Mail'. AFRA and CORD decided, sponsored by Western NGOs, to defend the citizens of Kosi Bay against the KZBNR and the KwaZulu homeland pro-Pretoria government and targeted their arrows towards Nick Steele (Guyot 2007: 56–61; see also Draper 1998).⁴⁵ Nick Steele was intricately part of the machinations and political battles between IFP and ANC and the way that he responded to accusations were rather authoritarian and make up an interesting contradiction with his liberalism and critical stance towards apartheid in general.

As is generally known, the ANC and IFP were outright enemies in Natal (and northern Zululand as the ANC operated from bases in Mozambique) and the dynamics in that relationship must have had an enormous influence on Nick Steele. Although, when the new IFP was formed in 1975, the ANC welcomed it as an ally in the struggle against apartheid,⁴⁶ it soon became clear that the IFP was basically an ethnic-based organisation, representing Zulus instead of the whole of the South African population.⁴⁷ The struggle between IFP and ANC in Natal has caused tremendous violence and thousands of people have been killed because of it. Actually an estimated 11,600 people have died (Jeffery 1997: 1), and a conservative estimate 'is that 25,000 people have suffered injury in the conflict' (ibid.: 2). The figure of people fleeing or being displaced because of

45 Guyot (2007), available on http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/19/91/71/PDF/Zulushores_pdf.pdf (visited 18 January 2013).

46 '(W)hen Buthelezi and others launched the *new* Inkatha to fight apartheid, this initiative was welcomed by exiled members of the ANC' (Waetjen & Maré 2008: 354).

47 'Inkatha's relationship with other anti-apartheid organisations quickly became contentious. The issue of ethnicity became the pivotal source of discord' (Waetjen & Maré 2008: 354).

the conflict is even higher and is estimated to be between 200,000 and 500,000 between 1984 and 1994 (ibid.). It was a conflict between the IFP and the ANC that 'many portray as civil war' (ibid.: 3). Although the main contestants are clearly the IFP and ANC, it has also become clear that not all violence could only be attributed to IFP/ANC rivalry, as there was also much factional fighting involved that only made use of the overall conflict to settle local and personal scores. Msinga district is for instance well-known for this (ibid.: 9). Furthermore there was the role of the United Democratic Front (UDF), officially launched on 20 August 1983 (Van Kessel 2000) and 'issued a statement saying it was prepared to affiliate to most bodies, "except Inkatha"' (Jeffery 1997: 135).⁴⁸ The IFP considered the UDF the 'internal surrogate' of the ANC, and sought to resist and undermine the IFP in Natal and Zululand (Jeffery 1997: 127). It also participated in the ongoing violence to make that happen (ibid.: 647). By the mid-1980s, according to the ANC, Chief Buthelezi became so worried about the growing support of the UDF that he tried to suppress and intimidate them with violence (Jeffery 1997: 51, 62–63, 80). These allegations were of course, as it was mutually happening between the IFP and ANC all the time, denied by Buthelezi and the IFP (Jeffery 1997: 144). And so the IFP, the ANC and the UDF ended up in a spiral of negative reciprocal violence, allegations and denials of violence, and a general atmosphere of ultimate and mutual suspicions and fears.

It is not necessary here to give a complete account or overview of this 'civil war', but some aspects of it are worth mentioning for contextualising Nick Steele's work in conservation and more particularly his friendship with Buthelezi. Going into particular aspects of the fight between the ANC and IFP will clarify why Steele's involvement with the military was not only because of his own fascination with military history or conviction that an almost military approach to conservation would save his beloved wilderness landscapes, but because of the alleged inter-linkages of the IFP, more particularly Buthelezi with the SADF (and the SAP for that matter).

I do not at all intend to settle a political score here. I am certainly not in any position, nor presume to have any right to make any type of judgement on the issue of IFP and ANC fighting over the years, nor on the choices made during that time. I do want to make observations though that might explain courses taken by Nick Steele in his conservation work. For this purpose I will make use of a thorough account of those years of conflict in Natal published in 1997 by Anthea Jeffery of the Johannesburg-based South African Institute of Race Relations. In the author's note Jeffery states that it 'is a long book', which is true with its 900 pages. It seems an appropriate source to work with, as Jeffery is

48 In the *Clarion Call*, October/November 1984: 27.

quite adamant not to be judgemental about either the IFP or the ANC being 'right'. Its approach is unique in that it provides a comprehensive perspective of the viewpoints of both the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). It not only describes in full the theories put forward by each to explain the conflict but also identifies the evidence which appears to support each theory. The book does not attempt to judge the validity of either theory. (...) It also leaves open the question whether there are elements of truth in both the theories described and, if so, whether there is equal culpability for the conflict on both sides. (...) It is for the reader to decide which theory seems the more credible' (ibid.: 773). This is very much in accordance with the stance I try to take in this book: I am not in a position to judge anything, although I try to critically engage with the empirical material through constructing a particular theoretical perspective.⁴⁹

For the purpose of my interpretive argument it is interesting to note how, over the years of the intensifying conflict with the ANC, the IFP becomes more and more involved with the South African military (South African Defence Force, SADF) and police (South African Police, SAP). Despite convincing evidence, this has always been denied by Buthelezi,⁵⁰ as much as he insisted that his cooperation with the apartheid government in Pretoria was a 'practical necessity, a means of dismantling apartheid from within' (Waetjen & Maré 2008: 354). But his close relations with Pretoria and the military gave Buthelezi tremendous benefits in securing his power base in Zululand, because Pretoria took care of a 'vast police force which buttressed notoriously fragile tribal homeland governments' (ibid.: 354) including Zululand. Obviously, 'Buthelezi never found it easy to resolve the contradictions between sustaining anti-apartheid opposition

49 This is not to say that Jeffery's study is above criticism. In addition to all kinds of official reports from commissions and the like, the study also makes very extensive use of 'evidence' provided in the various newspapers at the time. It can be at least questioned to what extent they are a reliable source for quotations and 'evidence' about what 'really' happened. Newspapers have their ideological biases themselves and a more critical look at the role of newspapers during these years in Natal would have given more credit to its use as 'sources of evidence'. Secondly, the book seems to be very much confined to what happened in Natal and South Africa only, and does not take the international context and political dynamics into account at all. For instance the fact that the Berlin Wall collapsed in 1989 has had a huge worldwide impact on the influence of communism in all kinds of conflicts, including the one in South and southern Africa (Guelke 2005: 161–165).

50 'Buthelezi has vehemently continued to deny Inkatha's relationship to the SADF, despite findings by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to the contrary. In 2003 he lost the suit he had brought against the TRC, which documents evidence of Inkatha units trained by the SADF in Namibia' (Waetjen & Maré 2008: 354, note 9).

and accumulating benefits from Pretoria's institutional bodies' (ibid.: 354). On top of the already existing evidence, the material presented in this book seems to add to the conclusions that there were certainly links between KwaZulu and the South African military, at least in the field of nature conservation. The IFP linkages with the defence force led to the procurement of weapons (ibid.: 113) and training of IFP youth in the Caprivi strip in Namibia via the SAP and SADF (ibid.: 251), which was of direct use in their fighting against the ANC in the 1980s, but it also led them straight into the accusations by the ANC of the SADF's and SAP's involvement in 'third force' activities in the early 1990s that basically tried to fuel the conflict between IFP and ANC (and the United Democratic Front, UDF, for that matter) and in which the IFP was a more than a willing participant according to the ANC (ibid.: 294–300). It was particularly the 'third force' activities that were very much delaying and interfering with the first general democratic elections in 1994 (cf. Ellis 1998). These 'third force' activities coincided with Buthelezi's call for Self-Protection Units (SPUS) (Waetjen & Maré 2008: 391), for which the weapons came via Colonel Eugene de Kock, commander of the Vlakplaas unit of Koevoet (ibid.: 429). According to Buthelezi 'the SPUS were being trained "to protect rural communities against ANC-inspired violence"' (ibid.: 391).⁵¹ What seems to become clear from the above is that Buthelezi's IFP was probably quite involved with the central apartheid government in Pretoria, the SADF and the SAP. Although we must realise that many of the accusations come from the ANC, but it was later also proven by the TRC; I dare to suggest that it at least can be taken that the IFP was involved in these things, although the level of involvement is difficult to determine. It not only shows the IFP's involvement with the police and military, which seem to come close to Steele's appreciation of the military, but it was also rather on the right-hand side of the political spectrum. This together may explain much of the anti-communist stance that Steele and many others in his environment shared.

Nick Steele was part of a conservation network, with strong links to military and intelligence organisations especially in the USA, whose aim was to keep communism at bay, which favoured and served each other by endowing prestige on one another for achievements in conservation, as if it concerned a politically neutral common good for mankind. Prince Bernhard for instance, as President of WWF International, awarded its most prestigious award, the Knight of the Order of the Golden Ark, to no less than four South Africans, of whom Ian Player was one. The others were Colonel J. Vinent, Rocco Knobel and Anton Rupert.⁵² The latter was the founder of the unofficial South African national

51 Quote taken from *The Citizen*, 10 November 1993.

52 *The Game Ranger*, March 1983; De Vos 1996.

branch of WWF, the South African Nature Foundation (SANF), and a lifelong friend of Prince Bernhard, who in turn was known for his international linkages to the world of international intelligence and the arms industry (Spierenburg & Wels 2010; Feinstein 2011).⁵³ Both Bernhard and Rupert, like Ian Player for that matter, were staunch anti-communists (resp. Klinkenberg 1978; Domisse 2005).

Steele's anti-communism also fits in with his request in 1987 as director of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources (KZBNR) to 'the honourable Chief Minister, Department of Economic Affairs' (which incorporated KZBNR), that six ex-NPB black game scouts be permitted training in a commando as 'commando training will help them in their work, especially as they are stationed in the Ingwavuma region on the international border [with Mozambique]'.⁵⁴ Steele's request to the Chief Minister follows a few months after Steele himself was instructed by the Tugela Commando to register for training.⁵⁵ The ambivalence I want to point out here comes up immediately following upon this request, where Steele writes that 'The Director [i.e. Nick Steele], however, sees an inherent danger in that it could be construed that KwaZulu civil servants are actively supporting the RSA military regime. Whereas white seconded civil servants have to undergo commando training the same cannot be said for blacks'.⁵⁶ The minister grants Steele's request, but adds in his official and confidential Memorandum to the Cabinet that 'the KwaZulu Game Scouts Force should not be seen as an extension of any security force, KwaZulus or otherwise' as '(s)uch an impression could be seriously damaging to its image as a Conservation Organisation engaged in peaceful pursuits. It could also jeopardise the Bureau's chances of seeking international funding for its conservation projects through the KwaZulu Conservation Trust'.⁵⁷ Nick Steele's

53 In 1997 Anton Rupert and Prince Bernhard would establish the Peace Park Foundation (PPF) with Nelson Mandela as its patron, one of the major lobbying organizations for transfrontier conservation linking various elite networks around the world (Draper et al. 2004).

54 'Pretoria [central government] attempted to give the underdeveloped region of Ingwavuma to Swaziland, thereby raising the landlocked British protectorate's hopes of developing a port at Kosi Bay. On the basis of an arguably slim ethnic case, Buthelezi successfully challenged the land deal and Ingwavuma became the principle focus of the [KwaZulu] Bureau(s) [of Natural Resources]' work which was supported by the International Wilderness Foundation' (Draper 1998: 817–818).

55 Letter from the Secretary for Economic Affairs to the Chief Minister of Economic Affairs, File no. 7/4/2/10; 11/1/17, 15 January 1987.

56 Memo by Nick Steele, Director KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources, File no. 7/4/2/10; 11/1/17, 28 July 1987.

57 Memorandum to the Cabinet from the Department of Economic Affairs, File no. 11/1/17; 11/1/15; 11/14/39, 24 August 1987.

well-known love for military history and his strong dedication to the cause of conservation and anti-poaching obviously provide fertile ground for ambivalences, certainly in the time and age of the apartheid state and the Cold War in the 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed conserving wilderness landscapes and saving the rhino in the process was considered a 'war', but maybe, as I try to show here, not so much against the poachers, as for fighting the communist-oriented political opposition to the white minority regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa.

What made this ambivalence harder to disentangle for any conservation organisation in South Africa at the time, which was serious about anti-poaching operations to save the rhinos, was the fact, already implied above, that all white game rangers were part of the Army Commandos all over South Africa. The South African Defence Force (SADF) coordinated and trained these commandos, who could then be called upon in any time of emergency or otherwise. As a commando you were provided with arms and weaponry. Especially with regard to rhino poaching they were in need of rather heavy material. This was provided for, free of charge, and together with training on how to use them, by the SADF (interviews: Ed Ostrovsky,⁵⁸ 28 July 2007 and Ivor Matthias, 18 July 2007).⁵⁹ In return, game rangers became active and conscious participants in keeping the feared communists of the ANC at bay and, in the process, contributed to maintaining white minority rule in South Africa. Nature conservation all over southern Africa operated in this atmosphere of almost hegemonic militaristic masculinity, in which conservation was presented as politically neutral but in fact was fiercely anti-communist and in the process served white minority rule in both Rhodesia and later in South Africa (cf. Draper 1998; Samson 2006).

Rhino Conservation as 'Bush War'

Nick Steele's anti-communist stance probably provided the basis for his network within the military in South Africa, but also with other like-minded people outside the country, such as in the 1990s with Dr Robert Cleaves from the

58 Also a delegate at the Rhino & Elephant Foundation at Treasure Beach in June 1989, in his capacity as Principal Nature Conservator of Tembe Elephant Park and colleague of Nick Steele at the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources (see note 39). ('The illegal hunting of rhinoceros workshop', 21–23 June 1989, available at http://www.rhinosourcecenter.com/pdf_files/130/1309906751.pdf, visited 8 January 2013).

59 Ivor Matthias was a former conservancy Game Guard trainer at Weenen (see Chapter 4).

Wilderness Conservancy founded in 1992, WILDCON in short, in the United States. The endorsement of its anti-poaching programme came in 1993 via the Zoological Society of San Diego (remember that what got Operation Rhino going, according to Ian Player, was the translocation of rhino to the San Diego Zoo, i.e. the same network). At that time, Cleaves was an attorney but was also a jet fighter pilot and test pilot for 36 years in the United States Air Force. He represented President Ronald Reagan at the transition of Rhodesia to Zimbabwe in 1980. Together with Ian Player he was co-founder of the International Wilderness Leadership Foundation in 1974. Since 1968 he has been involved with anti-poaching activities in southern Africa and particularly by using aircraft. The top echelons of WILDCON are referred to as 'officers' and consist of an airline transport pilot, his wife and a secretary. The Board of Directors consisted then of five people, of whom two were retired Lieutenant Generals from the USAF and one retired Deputy Chief from the Los Angeles Police Department. Finally nine 'Distinguished Advisors' are listed, of whom Ian Player and Nick Steele are two. Three other advisors belong to the highest-ranking officials of the Natal Parks Board and the National Parks Board in South Africa and the then Acting Director of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNPWLM) in Zimbabwe (who later became its Director). In the foreword to its 1996 dossier, it says that 'its main thrust has been in support of brave men who lay their lives on the line in the day-to-day war against poachers. And when I say "lay their lives on the line," I mean exactly that'.⁶⁰ WILDCON's mission is defined as 'a direct-action foundation that provided hard assets to persons and organizations (governmental and non-governmental) with specific needs that cannot be addressed because funds are lacking', that is, weapons and aircraft.

The logo of WILDCON speaks of its air force links by depicting a stylised Osprey, 'one of the most efficient of aerial hunters', with the motto written under it 'Pamwe Chete', Shona for 'We are one', or 'all together' or 'forward together'. The WILDCON logo strongly resembles, if not a straight forward look alike of the logo of and motto for the Selous Scouts in what was then called Southern Rhodesia, an elite military unit, specifically geared towards and trained for the elimination of what they considered 'terrorists' (see Figure 12A and B).⁶¹ The name, *Selous Scouts*, was derived from the famous hunter whom

60 *Dossier of the Wilderness Conservancy*, 1996.

61 *Newsletter of the Wilderness Conservancy*, January 1996. The current website of the Wilderness Conservancy no longer has the stylized osprey as its logo, but the far less controversial Fish Eagle (<http://www.wildernessconservancy.org>, visited 8 January 2013). It is further noticeable that the site does not seem to be kept updated regularly anymore, as there is much old news on it, going back to the 1990s.

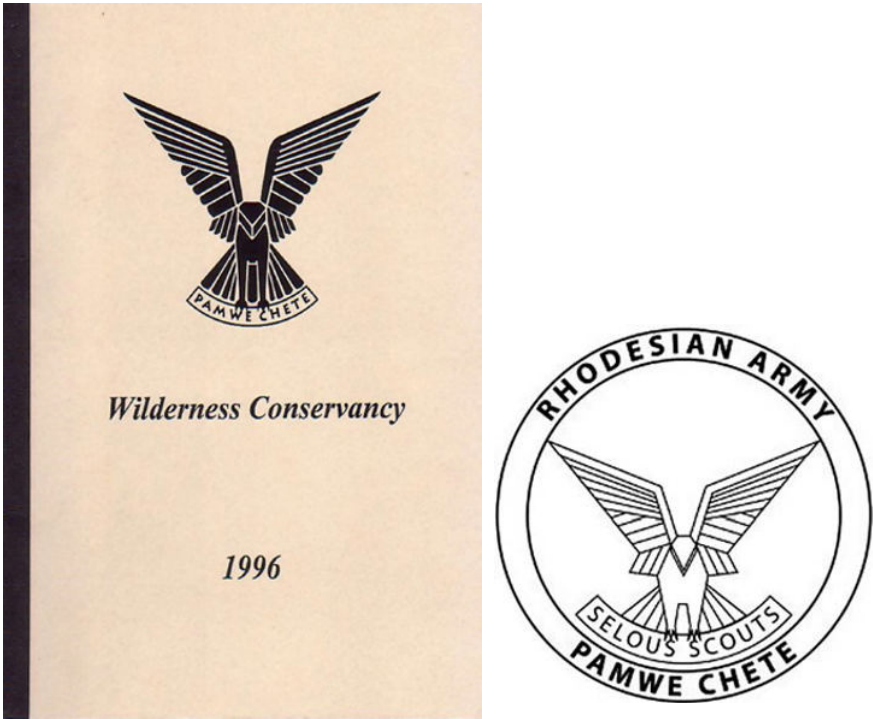


FIGURE 12 A. The early logo of WILDCON; B. The logo of the Selous Scouts⁶²

I mentioned earlier with regards to alerting the world at the end of the 19th century about the dwindling numbers of game and particularly rhino. Selous was a military man and probably the most famous of the white hunters, a man of the wilderness; Selous as role model and caricature of the British Empire: ‘The colonial hunter was one of the most striking figures of the Victorian and Edwardian imperial landscape. [It became] the archetypal colonial figure’ (Ryan, 1997: 99). Hathaway Chapstick (1992: 10) describes Selous as ‘probably the most shining example of English manhood that the Victorian Empire could field in the Britain of those days’. The Selous Scouts were operational in Southern Rhodesia’s bush war from 1973 to 1980, when the country became the independent Zimbabwe. ‘The Selous Scouts had their first training camp in a wildlife park, and made a point of recruiting former game wardens or others with specialised knowledge of the bush’ (Ellis 1994: 55). Its charter says: ‘The clandestine elimination of terrorists/terrorism both within and without the country’ (Reid Daly 1983). Patrolling the area was one of their preferred tactics,

62 Scan from personal archive Nick Steele next to logo of Selous Scouts (taken from <http://www.redbubble.com>, visited on 25 November 2014).

as shown by the amount of attention and detail given to foot patrols on their website.⁶³ WILDCON provided Nick Steele's KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources with a light aircraft 'used to patrol remote areas where rhinos and other wildlife have been hardest hit by poachers'.⁶⁴ He also provided the Rhino and Elephant Security Group Southern Africa with 14 Ruger rifles.⁶⁵ In the second half of the 1990s, WILDCON would also provide semi-automatic rifles to Shamwari Game Ranch,⁶⁶ currently the biggest private game ranch in the Eastern Cape, based on a report done by Ian Thomson, coordinator of the Rhino and Elephant Security Group of Southern Africa of which Steele was the Chairman.⁶⁷ Ian Thomson was working for Steele at the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources as Chief Nature Conservator, Tourism.⁶⁸ To bring it all full-circle: The anti-poaching staff members of Shamwari 'were fully trained by [Steele's]... Department of Nature Conservation, KwaZulu-Natal'. Although rhino conservation was definitely not a primary reason for starting private wildlife conservancies in Natal in the first place, Nick Steele's involvement with rhinos all through his professional life in nature conversation, almost inevitably led to the two processes, private wildlife conservation and rhino conservation, coming together.

In the 1990s there was also an American conservationist couple who made international headlines with their military-style anti-poaching work in southern Africa, Mark and Delia Owens, famous for their book *Cry of the Kalahari* (1985) about conservation in Botswana. When they were no longer allowed by the Botswana government to stay, they moved to Zambia and started the

63 <http://selousscouts.tripod.com/footpatrols.htm>, visited 9 March 2012.

64 *Dossier of the Wilderness Conservancy*, 1996, pp. 2.

65 Letter by Ian Thomson, coordinator of the Rhino and Elephant Security Group Southern Africa (RESG) to Dr Robert Cleaves, 22 December 1996.

66 Draper and Maré (2003) describe and analyse in detail eccentric Englishman John Aspinall, who made his fortune in the gambling industry and with that money became a philanthropist supporting all kinds of conservation initiatives, amongst which also (rhino in) Shamwari Game Ranch. John Aspinall was also closely related to Ian Player. Adrian Gardiner, founder of Shamwari, developed a 'close relationship' with both men who were instrumental in helping Gardiner to conceptualise how conservation and tourism could be brought together without compromising each other, but by 'working in synergy' (<http://www.shamwari.com/propertycontent.asp?pageID=82>, visited 3 September 2014).

67 Report by Ian Thomson from the Rhino and Elephant Security Group Southern Africa, entitled 'Shamwari Game Ranch, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Report and recommendations on the security of rhino and elephant', May 1997.

68 'The illegal hunting of rhinoceros workshop', 21–23 June 1989, available at http://www.rhinosourcecenter.com/pdf_files/130/1309906751.pdf, visited 8 January 2013.

North Luangwa Conservation Project. Mark became known, if not notorious, for his very drastic anti-poaching operations in Zambia. Via Robert Cleaves he writes to Steele to ask him if he could assist him in training his scouts, free of charge. In his description of what he would really like in the training, it becomes clear that he is basically thinking, like Steele, in military terms about conservation: 'From my point of view, the training of any officers that I send to you should emphasize firearm safety, maintenance, and riflry and shooting a shotgun, on the ground and from an aircraft (many, if not most, cannot even shoot moderately well); discipline and the observance of a chain of command; field command decision making; anti-poaching field tactics; the logistical organization and execution of a field patrol; work with aircraft, especially a helicopter; village sweeps for poachers and firearms; field navigation; and first aid medical techniques'.⁶⁹ In the same letter Owens remarks that in order to get the approval of the Ministry of Tourism and the Director of National Parks, he 'must submit to them a description of your school, de-emphasizing the military aspect of the training (although that is what is most important to me; and what is most needed)'.⁷⁰ Steele answers immediately and very positively the following day, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Rhino Management Group Security Committee, and writes: 'I hasten to inform you that we will be only too happy to assist you in all fields you mention in your letter'. He further adds that he does 'understand some of [Owens'] difficulties in regard to the need to de-emphasize aspects'.⁷¹

Another example, but at the same time a far less controversial one, to make my point that Steele was very much in military-oriented circles and ideologies in and outside South Africa as part of his involvement with rhino conservation is his request to the Headquarters of the South African Air Force (SAAF) for equipment. Steele was already familiar with the SAAF because the SAAF helped them with an Alouette helicopter for the first translocation of wildebeest and zebra from Zululand in the sixties. But two of his sons, Warren and Clinton, were at some stage in their career pilots with the SAAF, and so Steele also uses that by way of introducing himself in this letter. He writes in his letter about having 'a long and proud association with the SAAF'.⁷² In the correspondence following this introductory letter, Steele makes explicit that he is only asking

69 Letter from Mark Owens to Nick Steele, 30 November 1993, with a CC to Robert Cleaves.

70 Letter from Mark Owens to Nick Steele, 30 November 1993, with a CC to Robert Cleaves.

71 Letter from Nick Steele to Mark Owens, 1 December 1993.

72 Letter from Nick Steele to Lieutenant General J. Kriel (SAAF), 4 November 1993. Buthelezi is president of the Rhino and Elephant Foundation (Draper & Maré 2003: 555; Temkin 2003: 395).

for 'non-combat items' which 'will only be used for anti-poaching operations and lifesaving incidents',⁷³ and is basically talking about night vision goggles and radio sets.

Finally, Steele as chairman of the RESG and the GRA was instrumental in officially recommending to the Commissioner of the South African Police 'that a central bureau be established within the South African Police to deal specifically with the illicit traffic in rhinoceros horn and ivory'. This was recommended by '(t)he South African and international delegates attending the Rhino & Elephant Foundation/Game Rangers Association of Africa Rhino Conservation Workshop at Skukuza' in 1988.⁷⁴ This has indeed led to the creation of the Endangered Species Protection Unit (ESPU), a very military-oriented force combating poaching, led by Colonel Pieter Lategan. Steele and Lategan knew each other personally, as may be concluded from the fact that following an official letter from Lategan (as commander of the ESPU) to Steele (as Chairman of the RESG), Lategan adds a handwritten message and calls Steele by his first name, 'Nic'.⁷⁵

In a cover story of the *New African* in 1998 the ESPU is portrayed as 'the tough, macho organisation whose task is to crack down on the crime syndicates which are targeting Africa's wildlife'. The ESPU falls under the South African Police Services (SAPS) and its predominantly white employees are heralded as being 'combat veterans of South Africa's elite military units universally acknowledged as some of the toughest, best trained, combat experienced soldiers in the world' (Krott 1998). The ESPU officers received their training with Koevoet, which was one of the secretive white counter-insurgency units created by officers from the Security Branch of the police who had worked in Rhodesia, amongst which with the Selous Scouts, and who after that had established a 'special counter insurgency unit in Namibia' (Ellis 1999: 56), 'originally set up by a security policeman from Natal with mostly Zulu personnel' (Ellis 1994: 65). Koevoet had a known 'fearsome reputation for intimidation and brutality' (ibid.). 'The main function of Koevoet was the identification and elimination of suspected insurgents (...) Its officers were preoccupied with kill-ratios and body-counts' (Ellis 1999: 56), and it was proved in the trial of *State v Paulus & Mateus* (...) that members of Koevoet had been paid "kopgeld" (bounty) for every insurgent killed by them' (Jeffery 1997: 297). Just like the Selous Scouts

73 Letter from Nick Steele to Brigadier M.J. Louw (SAAF), 13 December 1993.

74 Attachments to letter of Colonel Pieter Lategan, Commander ESPU, to Nick Steele, Chairman RESG, 19 September 1996.

75 Letter of Colonel Pieter Lategan, Commander ESPU, to Nick Steele, Chairman RESG, 19 September 1996.

mentioned earlier, patrols were a preferred tactic of Koevoet and 'there is evidence', particularly relevant in this context, 'that this talent for deception includes the use of counter insurgency troops as game wardens' [who are known for their preferences for patrolling] (Ellis 1994: 65). 'Clint' (age 18), who worked with Koevoet, tells about one Koevoet patrol into Angola 'to catch specific terts that had been identified and targeted. We all crossed the jati into Angola. The jati was an area a few kilometres wide and it ran for a few kays before ending at the Angolan border. It was an area of nothingness – everything had been flattened so that anything moving was visible. The Koevoet (...) guys caught the terts they were after and then gave them what we call a bos-bus. They tied the terts spread-eagled on the bonnet of the Casspirs [armoured personnel carrier] and drove through the thickest and thorniest bush they could find. I enjoyed talking with the Koevoet guys – they were a law unto themselves' (Thompson 2006: 113). The links between the IFP and Koevoet were revealed by the fourth interim report by the Goldstone Commission, presented on 18 March 1994, which made clear that Koevoet had been instrumental through its centre at Vlakplaas in getting weapons to the IFP. The infamous Colonel Eugene de Kock, in charge of Vlakplaas, 'was paid by the IFP for the weapons' (Jeffery 1997: 695). Vlakplaas and the IFP knew each other because of these transactions. Sisingi Kamongo, one of Koevoet's 'Bushman' trackers in Namibia and Angola, and the only non-white so far who has written his memoirs about his Koevoet experiences, seems to add to the emerging picture sketched above, since after Namibia gained independence in 1990, he is brought to South Africa.⁷⁶ After 1994 there is no room for them anymore in the SAP, now called the South African Police Services (SAPS), and many former Koevoet members and trackers join South African private security firms like Executive Outcomes (Kamongo 2011: 222; for a hagiographic history of Executive Outcomes, see Barlow 2008). There is no explicit mentioning of names or organisations (except for Executive Outcomes), but the descriptions at least strongly suggest a connection between conservation practices and military-oriented strategies. Ellis (1994: 65) writes that '*koevoet* men joined new game conservation units some of which, it later emerged, received funding by WWF International'. From its base at Vlakplaas, the ESPU was involved in combating poaching all over southern Africa, amongst which was Swaziland, where

76 The 'Bushmen' who worked for the SADF were taken to South Africa for fear of revenge by the new SWAPO government (Battistoni & Taylor 2009), where they started working for the SAP in Zululand and in the northeast of South Africa, specifically in the field of farm security (considered one of the primary reasons for starting the first private wildlife conservancies, see Chapter 4).

in 1992 they tried to set up an ambush to catch illegal rhino horn traffickers. The incident that resulted from this is now known as the Big Bend Shoot Out. Two of the alleged poachers were shot dead. Perceptions of this incident vary greatly. Ted Reilly⁷⁷ describes it as ‘the most successful anti-poaching bust of all time’,⁷⁸ while others refer to it as the ‘hair-raising shoot out at Bend Inn’⁷⁹ (Samson 2006: 1).⁸⁰

An interesting aspect of both the Selous Scouts and Koevoet was that they had a particular non-racialist and militaristic bravado that is also very much part of Nick Steele’s rhetoric in his diaries. This non-racialism is one of the many reasons why he is against the apartheid government. This attitude can perhaps be partly traced to Allan Savory, an ecologist by training and a game ranger, who started a Tracker Combat Unit (TCU) in the Rhodesian army in 1966 that was eventually to become the basis for the later development of the Selous Scouts (copied again later by Koevoet). According to an erstwhile military student, David Scott-Donelan, he was introduced to Allan Savory, who was a ‘(...) a game ranger known for his innovative and successful hunting down heavily armed elephant and *rhino poachers*’ (Scott-Donelan 1998: ix, italics added). He applied this knowledge of ‘hunting down’ rhino poachers to ‘(...) the mission of tracking down and annihilating Communist-trained and equipped nationalist insurgents infiltrating the Rhodesian border from Zambia and Mozambique’ (ibid.). The CTU and Selous Scouts employed both black and white soldiers and regarded themselves as non-racial. Because of their black skin it were obviously particularly the black Selous Scouts that were successful in counter-insurgency operations (cf. Wood 2010), as their white-skinned colleagues could only paint their faces black and operate at night in the hope that their disguise was not noticed too early by the local population or the ‘terrorists.’⁸¹

77 Ted Reilly is the premier name in official conservation in Swaziland and is said to have started it in the early 1960s. See for a rather hagiographic introduction to Ted Reilly: <http://www.thepricedocumentary.com/home/ted-reilly/> (visited 18 January 2013). He is founder and owner of the Big Game Parks Foundation, managing three of Swaziland’s game reserves, see <http://www.biggameparks.org> (visited 18 January 2013). See for a more critical account of Ted Reilly, Samson 2006.

78 Statement in *Times of Swaziland* by Ted Reilly, 10 September 2004.

79 *Times of Swaziland*, 14 September 1993.

80 Many members of Koevoet, Selous Scouts and the like, found employment with Executive Outcomes, a private organization providing military advise and security all around the world (Barlow 2008).

81 Savory, according to this source, was ‘advised by Ian Henderson, the Kenyan exponent of pseudo-warfare’ (Wood 2010: 201). It is also interesting to note that the name of the

On the website of the Selous Scouts, Scott-Donelan reiterates and relates under the title 'Zambezi Valley Manhunt': 'Savory's concept took native tracking and turned it into a military discipline. He argued that a soldier already skilled in patrols, ambushes and tactical maneuvering [sic] could better almost anyone in the man tracking game once trained in the necessary techniques. From Rhodesia's SAS he selected eight men which he felt had demonstrated special potential to form a test group. Savory put them through a Spartan, rigorous training program in the Sabie Valley adjacent to the Mozambique border. Eight weeks in the field, two weeks back in town and another eight weeks back in the bush was just enough to bring his men to what he felt was the required standard'.⁸² When the military authorities made the CTU a permanent unit, Savory could not continue recruiting from the army, since it was necessary 'to avoid the charge that his priority tended to strip units of their best men'. Instead he turned to his former colleagues in Rhodesia's Game Department because, as Scott-Donelan writes, 'he already knew the type of men he wanted'. These game rangers were able to apply the early lessons of the SAS trackers to their 'vast font of bush knowledge'. In 1967 they had their 'first real operation' and it should come as no surprise that it was a game ranger, David Scammel, who found spoor when checking 'disturbed wildlife patterns (...) The captured commies complained profusely at their Rhodesian government trial about having been *tracked down like wild animals*'. According to Thomas (2008: 116) '(g)ame rangers right across Rhodesia were caught up at the forefront of this guerrilla war from the onset, quite simply because most already belonged to the TCU'. Later on, 'the TCU was ordered into the ranks of the Selous Scouts'.⁸³ It can be concluded that especially game rangers were perfectly prepared and

publishing house of this book is Osprey Publishing, a stylised osprey being the symbol of the Selous Scouts.

82 http://selousscouts.tripod.com/zambezi_valley_manhunt.htm, visited 12 March 2012.

83 All the above quotes taken from: <http://feraljundi.com/tag/selous-scouts/>, italics added, visited 13 March 2012. At a later stage in his career, Allan Savory became a politician leading the white opposition against Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front, from which he resigned because of its racist policies and handling of the war. Eventually Savory left Southern Rhodesia and went into exile. In 1992 he started the Africa Centre for Holistic Management (ACHM), and in 2009 followed up with the Savory Institute, 'a non-profit [organisation] dedicated to promoting large-scale restoration of the world's grasslands through holistic management. We use properly managed livestock to heal the land and empower others to do the same'. On the same website ACHM is called a 'sister organization' based in Zimbabwe. The Savory Institute is based in Boulder in the United States (<http://www.savoryinstitute.org>; see for ACHM: <http://achmonline.squarespace.com/>, both visited 8 March 2012.

trained for their work in counter-insurgency units, as they were used to tracking down animals and poachers. It is therefore also not surprising that after their spell in the army and wars they often returned to their game ranger duties or related activities: same bush and almost the same priorities, although now differently labelled as ‘combating poaching’. For instance, as game ranger, hunter, and erstwhile Selous Scout, Kevin Thomas relates in his *memoirs* (in which he devotes five chapters out of 26 to his stories about the Selous Scouts) that, after his military adventures and five years in the Selous Scouts, he returned to South Africa and started to work for Ian Player’s Wilderness Leadership School. When interviewed, he had told Dr Ian Player about his background in the Selous Scouts, and Player thought of it as an advantage for the tasks at hand (Thomas 2008: 308–309; see also Kamongo 2011).⁸⁴ Thomas (2008) also relates extensively on the poaching that was done in the context of the SADF and Selous Scouts (see also Breytenbach 1997; Ellis 1994; Spierenburg & Wels 2010).⁸⁵ Nature conservation is seen by many white men involved in it at the time of Nick Steele and Ian Player as in many ways a ‘bush war’, just like Glen Tatham, then Chief Warden for Zimbabwe’s national parks, told the interviewer plainly: ‘It’s a bush war’ (in Walker & Walker 2012: 112). At the time of Zimbabwe’s ‘Operation Stronghold’, an attempt in 1984 to stop rhino poaching in the country, the same Glen Tatham told a South African environmental journalist in 1993: ‘In Zimbabwe they don’t talk about patrolling parks. They talk war, they talk counter-insurgency, they go out with machine guns’ (in *ibid.*: 113). Rhino wars are ‘bush wars’ all over again, including bounty money for capturing or killing poachers and preferably whole gangs of them (Duffy 2000: 50–52). Tracking skills can obviously be used for all kinds of purposes, men or beast. No wonder that many former Selous Scouts and Koevoet members ended up in

84 In 2012 Ian Player is still of the same opinion with regard to the idea that a military and police background makes for good conservationists. In an article in the Wildlife Ranching magazine, *Wildlife Ranching South Africa*, Damien Mander is introduced to the readers as someone who after his military training in Australia started to work for a ‘private military organisation tasked with retraining the future police of Iraq’. In 2009 he develops the idea that he wants to ‘apply his background skills to wildlife conservation and conservation’. For that reason he starts the International Anti-Poaching Foundation (see <http://www.iapf.org>), ‘which is designed to counteract the bloodshed through assertive action and specialist training’ (all quotes taken from Mander 2012: 59). The article concludes with a special box written by Dr Ian Player: ‘Damien Mander is an extraordinary man who was in the Special Forces in the Australian Army’ (Mander: 2012: 63).

85 A state of affairs that hasn’t changed either in 2012, see Carnie, 31 December 2012: ‘SA a top culprit in ivory trade’, *The Mercury*.

private security in the context of conservation: they basically continued doing what they had been trained to do during the 'bush wars'.⁸⁶

Rhino as Steele's 'Totem'?

It can be safely concluded that Nick Steele's involvement with rhino conservation and wars over the years, starting with Operation Rhino, and later in the networks and various commissions and committees specifically dedicated to the conservation of the rhino, made him part and parcel of a very militarised environment and discourse. His deep interest in military history made these circles no doubt an exciting and fascinating environment for him. People like Ian Player and Norman Deane, as Steele's superiors and mentors at various stages in his career, probably 'moulded' him in that way as much as his character and personality fitted a 'mould'. As with 'the idea of rhino', you can wonder if all this basically has to do with a huge urge to conserve a particular species or whether it is more about a certain urge to preserve a certain idea and sense of control over a masculine type of wilderness landscape that Steele associated with 'the way Africa should look like'. What is certain is that his involvement with the military in the seventies and eighties (see, for example, the GRA type of stories, which will be further reinforced later in the book with regard to the development of the conservancy concept) placed him on the side of (international) forces that were tasked with keeping a minority and much internationally criticised apartheid government in power: not the best of allies in the context of wildlife conservation and giving food to critics who blame conservationists as being Western-oriented elitists, right-wingers and putting animals before people.

'The idea of rhino' and the actions necessary for preventing it from becoming extinct seem indeed key to understanding some of the networks and interactions that Steele became involved in during his career. The coincidence that Steele became involved in Operation Rhino at such an early stage of his career, and the people who were instrumental in getting it done, particularly Ian Player, but also the international links to the United States, had a decisive if not 'moulding' influence on the road he took. The rhino and all it stands for was a

86 Since the upsurge in rhino poaching in 2008, the same circles speak of the 'Second Rhino War'. In the magazine of Wildlife Ranching South Africa, Strauss (2012) reports on a round table organized by the Department of Environmental Affairs on 30 July and 1 August 2012. The article in which Strauss reports on these round tables with the Private Rhino Owners Association and other stakeholders in anti-rhino poaching is entitled, 'It's time for war'.

fitting animal to get involved with for Steele. Its warrior-like appearance, its strength, its primordialism in the African landscape, its stature and the necessary masculine heroism involved in getting the animal darted, down and translocated during Operation Rhino, all fitted the personality and thinking of Nick Steele. The rhino's future existence had to be secured by Steele's actions and decisions in conservation: rhino stands for security for Steele. It stands for militaristically securing the landscape in which rhinos could live. It is where militaristic style operations meet the protection of landscapes, including its rhino that the 'logic of the camp' speaks of. The rhino as a species can perhaps be considered as Steele's totem. But would that totem also safeguard him on the route that his career would now take? He was himself translocated, from the Zululand reserves to a post in Seven Oaks, 'dreadful place',⁸⁷ a little town in the Natal Midlands that in atmosphere couldn't even come close to the exciting primordial landscapes of Zululand. Would 'the idea of rhino', that is, the rhino as symbol for security, also see him through now?

87 Nick Steele personal diary, 22 December 1974.

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