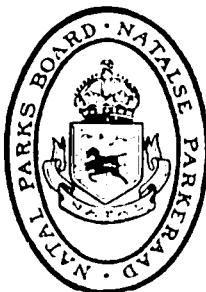


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THE DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS OF SOME LARGE MAMMALS ON PRIVATE LAND IN NATAL

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important aspects of any conservation programme is the assessment of species distributions. From a practical viewpoint such assessment provides the basic distribution information on which to monitor future changes. It is these changes, rather than an animal's distribution at any particular time, which are of interest to wildlife managers. They tell us something about that animal's ability to survive in any particular area, where environmental conditions may themselves be changing.

In this paper we attempt to go beyond simply describing the present distributions of various large mammals on private land in Natal, and include some information concerning their status. We define an animal's 'status' as its 'potential for long-term survival'. This is clearly affected by many factors, some of which are properties of the animal, some properties of its environment, and some the effects of management. It would be impossible to describe these in detail in a general paper of this nature, but we can, and do, provide details of observed population trends throughout each species' range, under various bioclimatic conditions.

The distribution of ungulates in Natal has been the subject of previous papers by Vincent (1962) and Mentis (1974), neither of which could be considered in any way definitive. This contribution is being made because:

- (a) a considerable amount of additional information is now available on the subject, that greatly improves on existing knowledge, and
- (b) ten years have elapsed since Mentis' (1974) paper, and it should now be possible to identify any major changes in distribution over that period.

The information contained in this paper relates specifically to the occurrence of large mammals on private land in Natal, and no attempt is made to record their status in KwaZulu, or in any of the province's conservation areas.

METHODS

Approximately 5,3 million hectares of land are under private ownership in Natal, representing almost 60 % of the province. This land is divided up into approximately 8 700 farming units. Since a complete survey of these would require a major financial commitment, two independent sampling methods have been used to gather the required information on large mammal distributions. We review the methods briefly under the headings NPB farm surveys and GAMEQUEST survey.

Natal Parks Board farm surveys

The Natal Parks Board (NPB) employs twenty extension officers (also known as zone officers), based at field stations throughout Natal, whose job it is to advise on veld and game management on private land. These officers are involved in an ongoing programme to collect information on the status of game on this land, through their own observations, and by completing a

Rhinoceros, white *Ceratotherium simum*

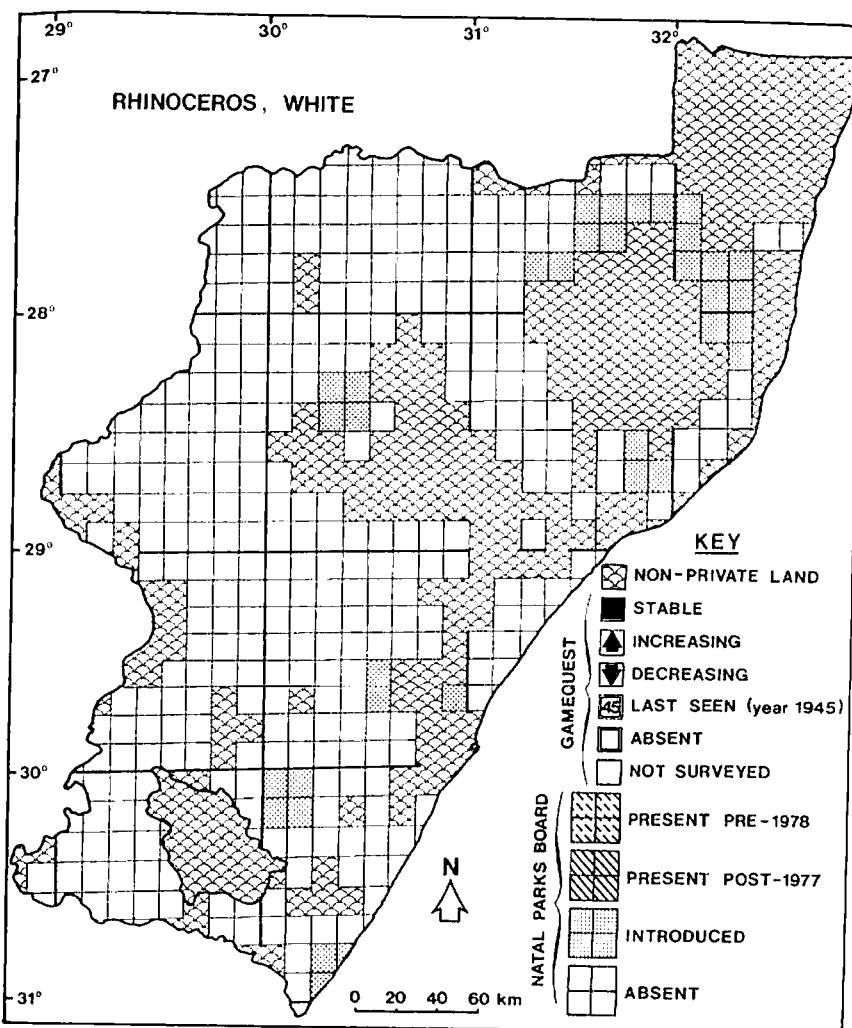


Figure 46. Distribution of white rhinoceros, *Ceratotherium simum*.

This species has been introduced to a number of properties mainly in north-east Natal.

Sable *Hippotragus niger*

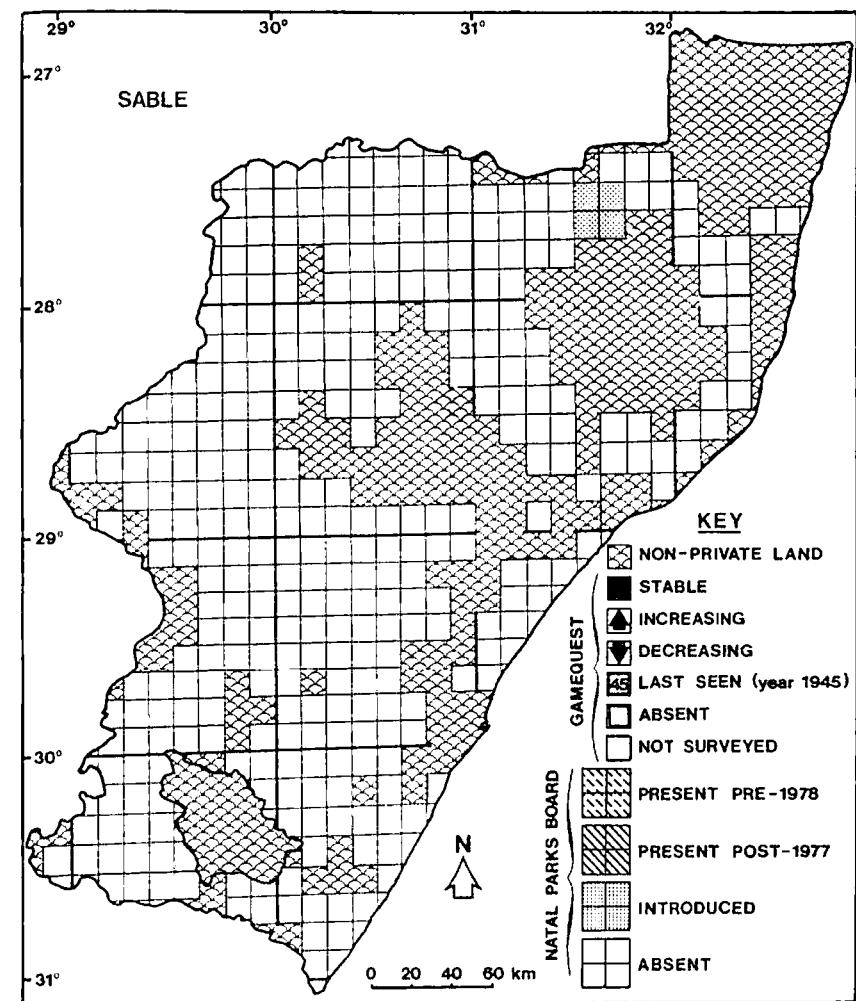


Figure 47. Distribution of sable, *Hippotragus niger*.

An introduction has recently been made in the Magudu area.