

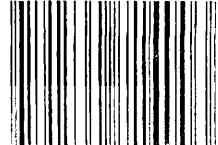
WILD

RHYTHMS OF THE WILDERNESS

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

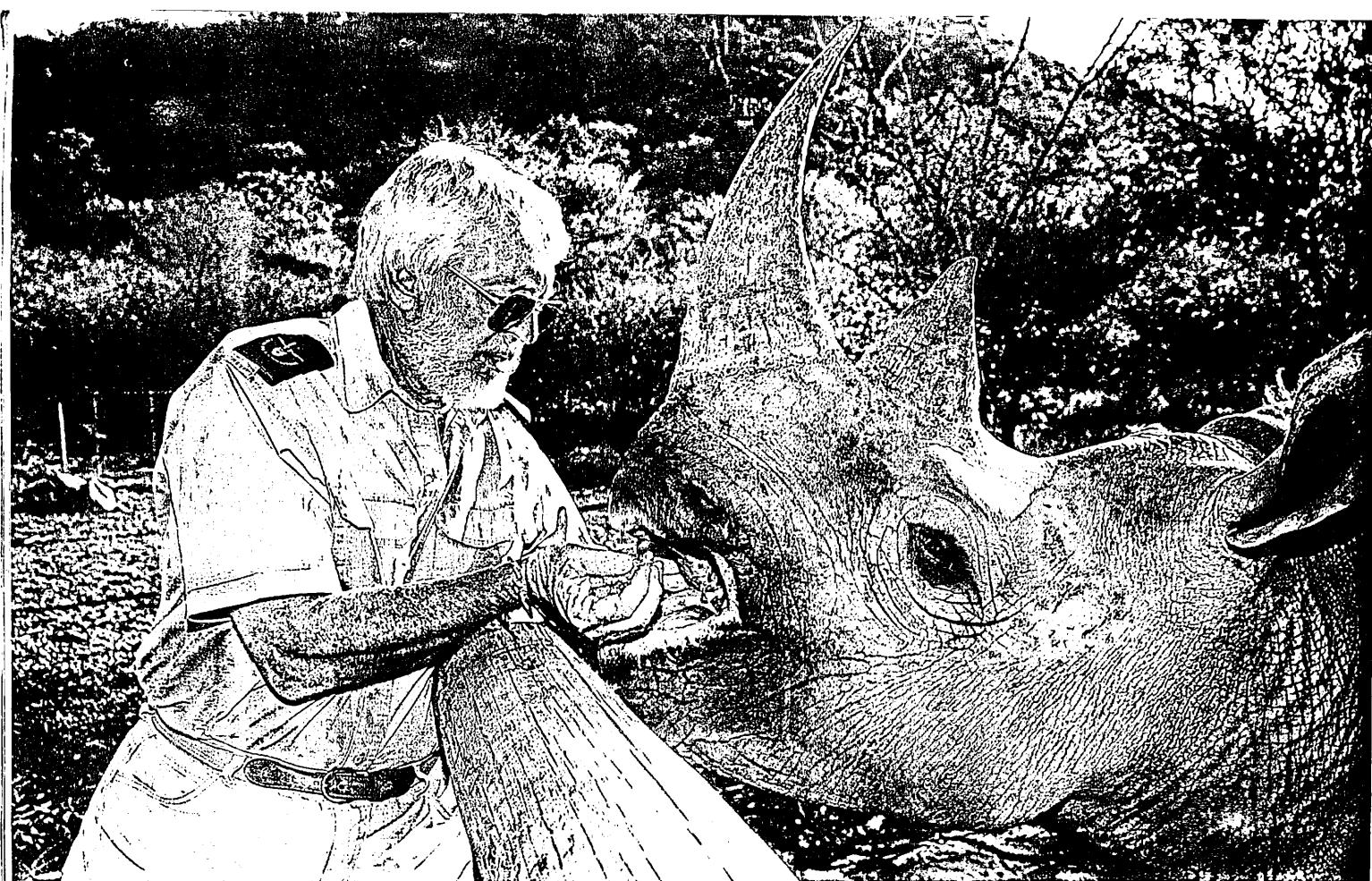


SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL PARKS



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MAN WITH A MISSION

Conservationist extraordinaire Clive Walker has dedicated his life to preserving fauna and flora in the sub-continent. He tends them all. But he does have his favourites.

Story: Sue Duthie **Photo:** Nigel Dennis

He is searching for a partner," was the answer given by Clive Walker, with a quiet chuckle. The question posed was: "Why is our rhino bull walking so feverishly and restlessly, the full 1 500 hectares that he lives on, destroying fence droppers and electrical poles in his path?" Fifteen hundred hectares is a little on the small side as

rhino territory goes," was Walker's second concern. This was the content of a casual conversation, over a meal at the new Rhino Museum in the Waterberg.

Clive Walker is always committed to his 'bush' interest. He should know about rhinos as he lives with a seven-year-old black rhino called Bwana, and a three-year-old white rhino called Munyane. Both animals were acquired as orphans on the farm Lapalala, where Clive and his wife Conita live. Ruefully he

related the story of an escapade in the early hours of the morning, attired in pyjamas and running shoes, accompanied by Conita, herding in Bwana who had broken out of his enclosure. It was necessary to retrieve Bwana quickly, as he was at risk of being gored by a 'wild' rhino protecting its territory.

Clive and Conita lovingly tend these two rhino, providing food and security for them. Bwana and Munyane fill an important and much-needed role at Lapalala. They provide children with an opportunity to experience the size, vulnerability and beauty of the rhino species.

By getting so close to these habituated creatures, children can observe the manner in which they feed, the agility of the black rhino's hooked lip in tripping foliage, and the breathing which is part of their communication with one another. This is a rare and impressive experience for youngsters.

The rhino species is of passionate interest to Clive Walker and he has committed much of his time and effort to securing its conservation. Walker instigated the Rhino Museum in the Waterberg to serve as an international catalyst for information on all the rhino species. The Museum provides wildlife enthusiasts with an educational opportunity second to none.

Walker also firmly believes that private game farms are "the way of the future for rhino conservation". He predicts that within the next 10 years, 50 percent of the rhino population will be housed on private land. This, he believes, is because private land conservationists are able to respond to problems with more flexibility and unrestricted by bureaucracy.

"They have a lot to learn from the government in terms of security," says Walker. Protective sanctuaries are usually more compact and thus often facilitate easier protection of their animals. The existence of these private rhino populations thus "supports the national effort of conservation".

On the subject of the future of conservation in South Africa, Walker has some strong views. Firstly, he believes that conservation is not just a job for a few committed individuals, but rather for every one of us if we are to contribute to the success of a holistic international conservation effort. He believes education is essential in instilling a high ethic and regard for our environment. Walker personally promotes this principle on a daily basis, through his involvement with numerous boards and associations, and through his support of the Wilderness School at Lapalala.

Walker's vigorous and effective chairmanship of the Waterberg Biosphere attests to his dedication to advancing responsible and sustainable land usage throughout our environment. By achieving biosphere status, the Waterberg sanctuary will gain political protection and international recognition, resulting in the upliftment and positive development of all the communities involved. It embraces and extends the policies of South African National Parks, but also includes the private sector. Walker is strongly aligned with and supportive of the national parks, with which he maintains a strong and sound working relationship.

It might be feared that such demands on his time and energies would have the effect of removing Walker from his original hands-on commitment in the field. When challenged on the possibility that he could become a mere figurehead, Walker retorts firmly that he "makes the time" to get out there and pursue his interest in the bush. His career in conservation remains a driving force. He harbours no regrets whatsoever about abandoning his former occupation in the far more financially rewarding advertising industry. His move to conservation in 1974 has proven to be an all-consuming commitment. As he puts it: "My involvement with various institutions and boards has furthered my own knowledge. It has put me in touch with people with enormous knowledge and skill in their specialised fields."

His active fieldwork on behalf of many associations has also exposed Walker to many adventures and unusual opportunities in the bush. He says that he has been "fortunate enough not to be seriously injured, as in a job of this nature one is not always able to avoid danger". However, he remains respectful of wild animals, which he feels is the essence of bush behaviour. This is no mean feat, considering that elephants are his favourite animals. Recently Walker was awarded honorary life membership of the Field Guides Association in recognition of his efforts and ethics in this area.

It is no wonder that conservationist *extraordinaire* Clive Walker is attracted to wilderness areas in his somewhat limited free time. He loves the South Coast, because it offers him a landscape vastly different to the one he works in.

Last year Walker took a trip to Kenya to study work being done on rhino conservation there. Among others, of special interest to Walker is the tiger, which he has visited on elephant back in Nepal and India. This focused interest and love of wildlife has been creatively expressed in many drawings and paintings. Walker has recently completed 135 drawings of large carnivores, soon to be published in book format, before going on to his next project: capturing the flora of the Waterberg area.

Walker's principles and committed interest in our environment are inspirational. His understanding of the delicate balance between man and his environment has imbued him with a great sense of patience and caring. His search for a method to address effective and realistic land management for all nears fruition as registration for the Waterberg International Biosphere gains the green light.

As he affects our enthusiasm and awareness of our fragile earth heritage, so he succeeds in achieving his goal. He states in his mission that "the environment is like a village common. We all use it, but few take care of it". Walker's objective in this mission is "to encourage as many people as possible to take care of it - whatever it takes!". And judging from the example he has set, he shouldn't have to look far for partners in this endeavour. ■

OPPOSITE PAGE: Clive Walker with black rhino Bwana at Lapalala.