

adding to addo

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At the end of October 1989 the Rhino and Elephant Foundation held a nationally televised "Pledge Day". It was fundraising with a difference. The South African Broadcasting Corporation, by giving live coverage on TV1 to phone-in centres in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, made it all possible. Volunteers, including many celebrities, manned telephones and took pledge calls from across the length and breadth of the country. The phone-in was backed up by competitions and other events. The bulk of the money raised was earmarked for land purchases with the particular objective of increasing the amount of land available in the Addo Elephant National Park as black rhinoceros and elephant habitat. During a guest appearance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Pik Botha, announced that the Government would match the funds, rand for rand, that were to be used by REF for buying land for Addo. This generous commitment was extremely well received as it doubled the money available. The multiplier effect did not stop there, for Dr Anton Rupert, President of the SA Nature Foundation, also agreed to match the REF funds with SANF contributions.

In addition to Pledge Day, a complementary project – a Golf Day – was held at Skukuza in the Kruger National Park. Avis Lease was the main sponsor – strongly supported by other corporate bodies who took places in the Pro-Am tournament. Leading professional golfers made an appearance and played the wild Skukuza course with a host of amateurs. The function at the 19th hole was attended by the President of the Rhino and Elephant Foundation, Dr Mangosuthu G Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu.

It took a long time to do the books as money pledged came in slowly, some of it in instalments, some of it needing reminders. Eventually, the books were closed and audited and REF's contribution was transferred to the National Parks Trust Fund which is administered by the SA Nature Foundation and by whom the land was purchased. At the end of the campaign – the contributions of REF, together with the contributions of the State and the SA Nature Foundation – amounted to a fund of R1,65 million dedicated to buying land at Addo.

The land purchase took many months to complete – but by the end of April 1991 – land registered under no less than twelve different title

deeds belonging to six different owners and amounting to 2 951 ha had been signed, sealed and delivered. The negotiations were successfully completed due in large measure to the diplomatic skills and business sense of Mr Frans Stroebel acting for the SANF and Mr Rob Schneider on behalf of the Rhino and Elephant Foundation. Together they negotiated fair prices for land that Addo desperately needs. Equally important – they won the confidence of the sellers, who will, we are sure, remain good friends and neighbours of the Park in the future.

Pledge Day and the Golf Day were great successes – thanks particularly to the generous contributions of the State and the SANF.

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During this tense period, 699 167 people visited the Kruger National Park in some 186 367 cars. On a busy weekend, some four out of five cars are turned away. At present Kruger Park can accommodate 3 076 people and it is estimated that their maximum will be 5 000 people.

It is estimated that by 1993, leisure time tourism will be the largest single industry in the world, surpassing oil. In 1989, 390 million tourists spent 2 trillion dollars on travel; it is estimated that by the year 2000, 2 million of these will be travelling to South Africa. Predictions are that the country will have neither the wildlife nor the accommodation or the infrastructure to handle them. Moreover, if the present park system tries to accommodate the rising demand, the very integrity of these parks will be threatened by the overcrowding masses they sought to attract.

Add to the above factors possible political unrest in the future; parks vulnerable to drought and (by their situation) to weakening and silting of rivers; parks at present effectively only available to the affluent; and a rapidly rising value of wild animals as hunting trophies or at live game sales. (Recently, sable antelope have fetched R26 000 per head alive, a white rhino R85 000 dead, and a black rhino a staggering R450 000 alive.)

Consider too that gameland is rising in value at a rapid rate. An 850 ha game farm without river front was recently sold for R4 million. To this scenario let's also add the imminent scrapping of the homelands system, and let's presume that more and more bankrupt cattle farms will be converted to game ranches. Most of the land in the homelands is marginal, low rainfall terrain, best suited to wildlife schemes.

Let's now look at the role of the private sector in the future of wildlife. I believe that the private sector should respond to these trends and invest in land suitable for wildlife; in tourism in the form of game lodges; and in people – the people who live nearby.

The investment in people is the most critical. In the formation of a park, the investors should ask: "How can I improve the region? What can I do for the community on the boundary?" A new holistic approach is needed.



Partnerships should be formed whereby neighbouring people are invested in the wildlife. The black rhino has disappeared from Africa because it was more valuable to local people dead than alive. This perception must change.


When a Gazankulu businessman sees a leopard as a renewable tourist-attracting asset and a valuable income earner, not a killer of his goats, then we will have taken the first step in protecting Africa's wildlife for all time. Because at this point we would have invested Third World people previously aggressive to wild animals not only in the future of wildlife, but in their own future as well. 



Photo: Anthony Hall-Martin

Unfortunately, however, it was not without its share of critics. The "Damn the rhino, plant a tree" brigade had their say. The small band of trustees and staff of REF matured overnight from the ideal world of doing good things for rhinos and elephants to the cut-throat realities of the competitive world of fundraising. For REF nothing has since been the same. But was it worthwhile? We can only answer such a question by considering some ecological and biological realities.

Before the REF land purchase the Addo Elephant National Park was some 8 767 ha in size. This Park protects a fair sample of the Addo bush – a vegetation type that is confined to the Sundays River Valley and that is a variation of the more

widespread Valley Bushveld of the Eastern Cape. Valley Bushveld, wherever it occurs, is threatened by bush clearing for cultivation of wheat, birdseed, chicory and pineapples, or by hordes of goats – the mainstay of the smallstock industry. The rate at which the Valley Bushveld is disappearing is accelerating and by the turn of the century perhaps only as little as 10% - 20% of Valley Bushveld will still be in relatively good shape. Even within the Park, concern has been expressed by researchers at the impact of the Addo elephants in their habitat. When the area was proclaimed a National Park in 1931, there were 11 elephants and no black rhino. Thanks to the efforts of the National Parks Board and its professional staff, there are now 162





elephants and 21 black rhino in the Park. The density of elephants is therefore at a level of close to two elephants per square kilometre – or about six times the density of elephants found in the Kruger National Park. Fortunately, the evergreen, succulent thicket of Addo with its year-round rainfall, can support this density of elephants, but not more. The National Parks Board was inevitably on course to start culling the rapidly increasing elephant population. Not only would too many elephants affect the vegetation, they would also deprive the black rhino of food and would affect Addo's buffalo – the only population of Cape Buffalo to survive into the 20th Century in the Cape Province. In the absence of a proven method of elephant birth control, culling is inevitable. The purchase of land, instigated by REF has, however, increased the size of the Park by 3.4% to 11 718 ha. This will effectively postpone the elephant problem for the next 5 - 10 years. A short breathing space during which we can try and channel overseas money into effective rhino and elephant conservation at Addo by further land purchases, or by translocating elephants to other areas like the Zuurberg National Park.

The black rhino of Addo are a particularly important population of the East African subspecies *Diceros bicornis michaeli*. When the founders of this small population were translocated from the Kiboko area in Kenya, adjoining the Tsavo National Park, there were over 5 000 *michaelis* in the area. Today Kiboko has no rhino and Tsavo has, perhaps, 15 animals – fewer than Addo. A long-term conservation objective for Addo's black rhino is to one day transfer Addo animals back to Tsavo to supplement the population from which they originally came.

The long-term objective of the National Parks Board is to maintain genetically viable populations of Addo elephants, black rhinoceros and buffalo. For this, minimum populations of between 250 and 500 animals are thought to be necessary. With modern technology for moving breeding animals around they do not necessarily need to be all present in one area. However, the ideal would be to have such genetically viable populations within the boundaries of the Addo Elephant National Park. Whether the existing Park could be doubled

in size over the next two decades will depend upon public and political support, the money being available, and landowners around the Park willing to sell their land.

The new land, which will probably remain known as the Gorah area, after the largest of the farms, must now be incorporated into the Park. The steps in the long process of rehabilitating 1 250 ha of cultivated lands (about 42% of the land purchased) must be taken. There are stock fences to be removed, dwellings and other buildings to be demolished, exotic trees to be eradicated. The extensions to the elephant-proof Armstrong Fence, which will mark the new boundaries of the Park, are already under way. The Park Warden, Nico van der Walt, and his team will live with this project for many months into the future. Railway lines and scrap cable from mines will have to be found or purchased, transported to Coerney Station and then taken by truck to Gorah. The fencing team must be paid, they need transport, accommodation and tools. New water points for the game will have to be established. Much remains to be done before the Addo black rhinoceros and elephants savour the fruits of Pledge Day – and even more before the people who contributed so generously will be able to drive up the beautiful Gorah Valley and see African elephants where only last year goats and sheep were grazing.

Acknowledgements

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