

RHINO VERSUS TRAILISTS?

It would need a full length article to do any justice to the tangled web of issues raised by the shooting of a black rhino in Pilanesberg National Park (*African Wildlife* Vol. 50 No. 1), and in the end the arguments turn on such intangibles as quality of life, and the spiritual value of wilderness and wildness.

Within the limits of a short letter, I have one uncompromisingly concrete question: Who pays? A young black rhino bull is worth at least R150 000. Since Hechter has moved on to financially greener pastures, I presume that the cost of the rhino is not being taken out of his pay!

Pilanesberg, under the then Bop Parks, broke new ground with its integration of conservation and tourism with local development. In a very real sense, the dead rhino belonged to the communities around the park.

With the pressures on land in Africa it is nothing less than sensible pragmatism that conservation has to pay its way, but being in business means being businesslike. In the case of incidents like this, this might mean passing on the full cost of their activities to the commercial operations that sell the "African wilderness" experience.

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RHINO CONTROVERSY

Your article "Black Rhino versus Trailists" in *African Wildlife* Vol. 50 No. 1 refers. Thank you for a very interesting article on a subject that is always with all trail leaders on a walking safari in the bush anywhere in Africa. I conducted safaris for 10 years in all the national parks in Zambia, and then gave up owing to poor eyesight.

Our hearts are always in our mouths in case we have to do exactly what young Rupert Hechter felt that he had to do to save the lives of his tourists: shoot an animal that was his "bread and butter" as a trail leader. Our greatest naturalist was killed by a female elephant in a Zimbabwe national park, when he did what he had done for 20 years to stop an elephant's charge: tapped two sticks together. All animals are dangerous and extreme care is needed at all times when conducting tourists on a walking safari.

We all respect Clive Walker and are pleased to note his concern for tourists, and the formation of the Field Guides Association of Southern Africa, to train field guides properly and give them all the experience they require before allowing them to hire themselves out as guides.

My personal opinion is that the young man in question was sadly lacking in many aspects of his training, and that the system

that allowed him to hire himself out as a field guide was also at fault. Granted black rhino are aggressive, but they are myopic and can only see for a very short distance, as they rely on enemy detection by smell principally. Neither the female nor its young could have known of the tourists' presence if the simple rules had been adhered to: move into the wind at all times; do not rush out of thick bush into the open; if an animal rushes away in panic, then turns to discover what has disturbed it, leave it alone immediately; all female animals when accompanied by their young are defensive and aggressive – if you separate a mother and calf of any species, you are asking for trouble; stay out of "pecking distance" of all animals such as the "big five"; firing shots at the female first and possibly wounding her, would infuriate the two-year old male calf and make him charge in defence of his mother. In Zambia, trail leaders do not carry firearms, but must at all times be accompanied by an armed game scout or warden with several years' experience.

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LIESBEEK RIVER – CAPE TOWN CITY COUNCIL RESPONDS

The feature on "Rivers of southern Africa", sponsored by South African Breweries (SAB), which appeared in *African Wildlife* Vol. 50 No. 1, concentrated on the Liesbeek River, which is one of the few rivers in the country that passes through an urban area for its entire length. Whilst not disagreeing with what the feature stated concerning past abuses of our rivers, and the Liesbeek in particular, it needs to be stated that a process is in train to bring life back into the Liesbeek River and to make it into an asset for the public.

The Cape Town City Council report, "Greening the City", which was adopted in 1984, spoke of developing a trail beside the Liesbeek from the mountain to the sea. The City has concentrated its efforts on building a trail suitable for walkers, joggers, wheelchairs, prams and, where appropriate, cyclists, on the middle section of the river. Work on the upper section has been limited to removing invasive alien vegetation and replacing this with indigenous and/or more appropriate material. In addition, some work on bank stabilisation using natural materials has taken place.

The Liesbeek River project has been used as a pilot scheme by the City of Cape Town, and will serve as a guide for other river improvement projects in the City. The Liesbeek River project has been a joint initiative between the community (here the Wildlife Society affiliate "The Friends of the Liesbeek" has played a major role in the exercise and cajoled us when action has flagged), the private sector as a major funding source (we are pleased to say that SAB have been one of several sponsors) and the local Council as the planning/implementing authority.

Our first objective was to create greater interest and awareness in the river by constructing the trail and thereby improving public access. Coupled with the construction phase has been landscaping and planting of mainly indigenous plant material.

The next phase in the project is to develop a management plan for the river. Three actions have to date formed part of this phase, namely:

- the appointment of consultants to undertake a scoping exercise;
- the appointment of freshwater scientists to do a biological survey; and
- the development of an experimental exercise at Albion Springs using new river management techniques to bring aquatic life back into a canalised section of the river.

The University of Cape Town's Freshwater Research Unit is monitoring this project. We await their report to inform us how successful the experimental scheme has been, as well as to make recommendations as to how future regeneration exercises could be improved upon.

Clearly, all the actions mentioned in this letter cost money, if only in staff time, and in times of financial stringency river improvement schemes may seem something of a luxury. To date, almost 75 per cent of all money spent on the Liesbeek River has been raised from the private sector and we would appeal to sponsors such as SAB to continue to support this project.

However, despite the other pressing demands on the City's financial resources, such as housing and basic service provision, we still consider it important to improve people's quality of life by creating livable environments.

In spite of the financial constraints, Cape Town is still determined to bring life back into local rivers and make them usable public amenities.

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