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RHINO EXPERT VISITS PILANESBERG

During October, Dr Esmond Bradley Martin visited Pilanesberg. He is best known for his book on the "International trade in rhinoceros products" which he produced as a consultant for the World Wildlife Fund and International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, through the IUCN African Rhino Group.

All rhino species are classified under Appendix 1 of CITES (The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) - this means that there is no legal trade in any rhino products between countries which are members of CITES. Dr Bradley Martin's survey showed that there was however still considerable legal and illegal trade, equivalent to the deaths of 2 500 rhinos annually, by countries which were not members of CITES. While this trade exists, it perpetuates a market which threatens all living rhinos, not only in Africa, but elsewhere too. Even if countries agree not to sell rhino horn onto the International Market, its continued existence in stores offers a great temptation to misuse. Dr Bradley Martin, under the auspices of the African Rhino Group, has therefore advocated the burning of all existing stocks of rhino horn. He was consequently very interested to visit Bophuthatswana, the only country which has done so thus far. He hopes that other countries will follow our example, as the IUCN Rhino Specialist Group has for some time been encouraging this action, as evidenced by recent resolutions passed at the African Rhino Group meeting in Wankie during August, and in Delhi (CITES) earlier this year.



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OPERATION GENESIS

In early 1980, the South African Nature Foundation launched 'Operation Genesis' which heralded the restocking of Pilanesberg, an operation that will be the biggest relocation of game in southern Africa's history. Since then R1,1 million has been spent on the purchase and re-introduction of game. The 2 tables below reflect some interesting facts about 'Operation Genesis' and the current status of the larger mammals at Pilanesberg.

Table 1. Approximate purchase prices of some of the animals which have been introduced to date

SPECIES (ea)	PRICE
Elephant	5 elephants donated by National Parks Board, rest purchased for R1750-00 ea.
White Rhino	R700-00 ea.
Black Rhino	Donated by Natal Parks Board.
Cheetah	R350-00 ea.
Giraffe	R1250-00 ea.
Blue Wildebeest	R200-00 ea.
Red Hartebeest	R190-00 ea.
Sable	R3000-00 ea.
Tsessebe	R900-00 ea.
Kudu	R390-00 ea.
Burchell's Zebra	R200-00 ea.
Impala	R45-00 ea.
Waterbuck	R680-00 ea.

The following larger mammals also occur at Pilanesberg, but because they occur naturally (ie. have not been introduced) nothing is known about their status save the fact that they are numerous. They are: Leopard, Brown Hyena, Mountain Reedbuck, Grey Rhebuck, Klipspringer, Bushbuck, Warthog, Bushpig, Steenbuck, Grey Duiker, Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Black backed jackal and Coracal. There is also a variety of smaller mammals including Pangolin and Aardvark, but they aren't seen all that frequently. Also of interest is the fact that 32 ostriches have been introduced and have bred successfully.

Some of the figures in Table 2 require a bit of explanation:

Buffalo numbers are very low and visitors may wonder why we don't introduce more. The fact is that disease-free buffalo are very difficult to obtain, only the Addo buffalo being free of both corridor disease and foot-and-mouth disease. The 11 buffalo presently in the park were acquired from Addo, but since Addo buffalo are in great demand, we are now at the end of a long waiting list. Consequently it is our intention to set up a disease-free herd in conjunction with the Natal Parks Board and Onderstepoort, as a means of overcoming this problem. More of this in a later issue.

In contrast to buffalo, which are coarse grass (bulk) grazers and which have a virtually unlimited niche to fill at Pilanesberg, impala, wildebeest and hartebeest are short grass (concentrate) grazers and, we feel, have already exceeded their carrying capacity slightly. Consequently large numbers of each species have been removed by live capture this year and were sold to Bophuthatswana Wildlife Services, a private game catching company. This operation realized almost R100,000-00 and is the start of what is likely to become a regular feature as other species reach their maximum stocking rates.

From Table 2 it will also be noticed that all 24 springbuck which were introduced subsequently died from heartwater disease - more about this in the following article.

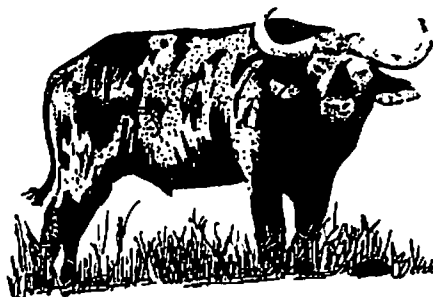


Table 2. Current status of the mammals occurring at Pilanesberg. Those marked with an asterisk were already established at Pilanesberg prior to its proclamation as a game reserve. Their numbers may or may not have been subsequently supplemented. Additions to the initial populations are in the form of births - these are only known for the larger and/or less numerous species. Subtractions can be due to natural mortality, mortality due to capture stress or due to culling/capture for veld management reasons.

Species	Number introduced	Additions	Subtractions	Approx. numbers
Elephant	23	0	4	19
White rhino	151	10	27	134
Black rhino	7	0	0	7
Buffalo	11	0	0	11
Cheetah	7	7	1	13
Giraffe	55	0	0	55
Eland	366	?	46	320 +
Blue wildebeest	824	?	200	1000 +
Red hartebeest	901	?	195	1000 +
Sable	13	0	0	13
Tsessebe	7	0	0	7
Kudu*	167	?	29	200 +
Gemsbuck	158	?	3	155 +
Burchell's zebra	679	?	32	800 +
Impala	1909	?	317	3000 +
Springbuck	24	0	24	0
Waterbuck	60	?	32	40 +