





Nature's bounty

IN THE 19th century the eastern Transvaal was an exciting region, full of danger and adventure, with fortunes to be made at every turn. People were attracted to it for various reasons. The Boers wanted to escape British rule in the Cape Colony, and establish farms and towns where they could live under their own laws. Others came for the excitement of a frontier country and everything it could offer. They could become transport riders, taking ivory and other wildlife products, such as hides and horn, over mountain ranges that had never felt a wagon wheel; across wide rivers; and through bushveld teeming with wildlife. Yet others were lured by gold, and flocked to Barberton and Pilgrim's Rest, hoping for that prize nugget. In all, it was a colourful band of adventurers, swindlers, dreamers and entrepreneurs who swelled the population of the eastern Transvaal in its early years. Given the prolific wildlife, hundreds of hunters were active in the region, and many Boers and Africans hunted as a means of economic survival. Even the revenue of the short-lived Lydenburg Republic was bolstered by the sale of products of the hunt.

The sport hunters arrive

Ivory, rhino horns and skins were in great demand in Europe, the United States, and also southern Africa. And the eastern Transvaal had an abundance of elephant and other species of wildlife. This was a treasure trove for men who had the stamina, skill, and courage to hunt big game. Boers and Africans often hunted together in large parties, and killed enormous numbers of elephant and other wild animals. While ivory and skins brought in money, meat was either eaten on the spot or turned into biltong (cured and dried meat) for later use. These commercial hunters were joined by an enthusiastic group of men who hunted for the fun of it.

Sport hunters visited the eastern Transvaal to find trophies to take back to Europe, but some were content to get a photograph of themselves, rifle in hand, standing proudly over their kill. Some of these visiting sportsmen wrote about their adventures, giving European readers a vicarious taste of what life was like in the dangerous, spectacular African wilderness. These were the

Facing page:
Mariepskop in the Blyde
River Canyon.

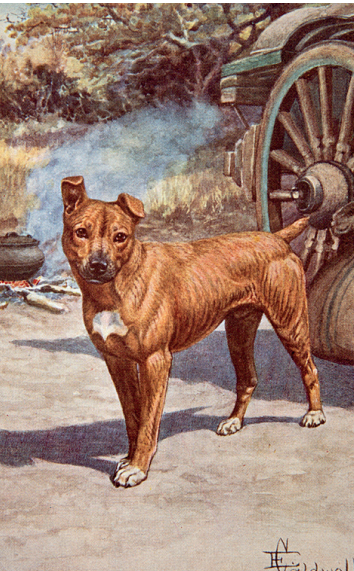
first armchair travel books of this nature, and signalled the beginning of the 'civilised' world's fascination with the wild and Africa as some sort of last Eden. But the sport hunters and the black and white commercial hunters were destroying the wilderness, or at least its wildlife, at a very rapid rate.

The first hunting laws

There was so much hunting in the middle of the 19th century that the abundant wildlife which had attracted hunters in the early days of Boer settlement soon began to dwindle. It was clear that some kind of regulation was needed. The ZAR passed the first hunting law in 1858. Called the *Wet tot het Beter Regelen van die Jagt op Olifanten en Ander Wild in de Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (Law for the improved regulation of the hunting of elephant and other wildlife in the South African Republic), it sought to stop hunting in summer when human diseases were most prevalent; reduce the number of animals being killed needlessly; and prevent Africans and foreign visitors from hunting.

This meant that only local white settlers could hunt, thus reserving this rich resource for them alone. The law did not work, however, because so many people depended on hunting in order to survive. They either did not want to, or could not, limit the number of animals they killed. Africans kept hunting in large parties with Boers, but also hunted alone, despite the risk of getting into trouble; and sport hunters generally ignored the law completely. But as wildlife continued to decline, attitudes towards this resource began to change. Boers who owned farms considered the wildlife on it to be their private property, and would apprehend 'poachers' when they could. Hunting wildlife on private land was not actually illegal – as wild animals belonged to no one – so 'poachers' were generally not prosecuted. In the 1870s the ZAR amended its hunting law to allow it to employ game keepers to watch over the game, but only provided game keepers if local *burghers* applied for them. Most of the time they did not do so, and *burghers* and government officials often did not co-operate with the game keepers.

However, as the years went by, more and more people began to think very seriously about protecting wildlife in the region. They suggested to the government that more gamekeepers be employed, regardless of whether local *burghers* asked for them or not. They wanted a stricter game protection law, and they even wanted the government to limit the number of wildlife that could be killed on private farms. This was a definite move towards wildlife conservation. But the ZAR government had another political constituency to consider: the poor whites. The poor relied on the income they generated from selling products of the hunt, such as biltong and hides, and were negatively



Frontispiece by
E Caldwell for the first
edition in 1907 of Sir
Percy FitzPatrick's
famous work *Jock of the
Bushveld*.



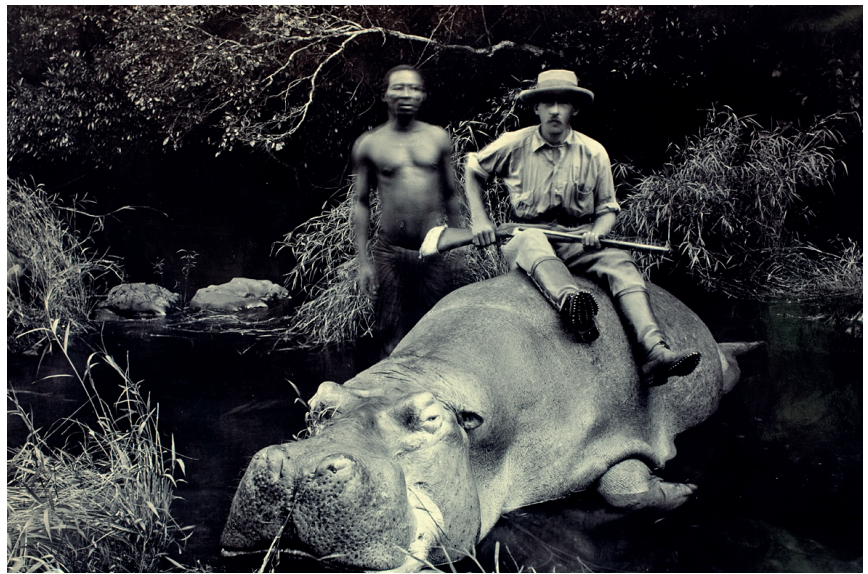
Museum Africa, Johannesburg. 799.2 Hunting Hunters

'A Good Day's Sport'.



Hunters posing
with their kill in the
Barberton mountains.

The exploits of the
lowveld hunter
Charlie Reid.



affected by stricter hunting legislation. They complained to officials that the rich were able to keep thousands of animals on their farms, and did not allow the poor to hunt even one of them. By the 1880s, however, those who wanted better protection of wildlife outnumbered those who were opposed to stricter hunting laws. The government began to consider drafting a new hunting law, and before doing so it wrote to the different *landdrosts* around the ZAR asking them for their opinions.

The *landdrost* of Middelburg reported that there was so little wildlife left in his district that he could not give an opinion on the matter. Some people, he said, were 'too lazy to work and wanted to do nothing other than destroy game'. The *landdrost* of Standerton said that until all the game had been exterminated no one would even attempt to find 'a better way of making a living'. The *landdrost* of Lydenburg had a problem with English-speaking sport hunters in his region. These were men who had come to the gold diggings to try to make their fortunes and have a good time while they were doing so. The *landdrost* simply could not understand that they killed game 'only for the pleasure of hunting and not even for the hides'. The Standerton *landdrost* also complained about visiting sport hunters who killed wildlife on other people's farms. All the *landdrosts* seem to have considered that conserving some of the wildlife was a good idea. This may have been so, but most of them also believed that land owners should be able to hunt as much game as they wanted to on their own properties.

Richard Kelsey Loveday

While conservation seemed to meet obstacles at every point, there was one outspoken advocate of conservation who opposed the demands of allowing land owners and others the right to hunt with impunity. Richard Kelsey Loveday (1854–1910) was the son of an early Natal settler family who had joined the Transvaal civil service as a surveyor. Having settled in Barberton, he became its energetic Volksraad member from 1891 to 1900 and campaigned for improved governance and administration as well as for wildlife protection. In Volksraad debates he frequently argued that hunting restrictions did not go far enough to protect wildlife in the Transvaal generally and the lowveld in particular, which had once teemed with game but now, after decades of unrestricted hunting, had experienced a major decline in wildlife numbers.

Rinderpest: the bane of conservation

In the autumn of 1896 the eastern Transvaal and other regions in southern Africa were stricken by a severe rinderpest epidemic. Farmers watched in



James Stevenson-Hamilton, founder warden of the Kruger National Park.

horror as their cattle succumbed to the merciless disease. The economy of the Transvaal itself was threatened as livestock either died or had to be destroyed. What had caused the outbreak? No one knew for sure, but some laid the blame on wild animals. Rinderpest also killed wildlife, and many believed at the time that game harboured the disease and was responsible for spreading it. Farmers therefore slaughtered large numbers of wild animals in a desperate attempt to try to prevent the disease from spreading to their herds. The slaughter had no effect and eventually the disease swept relentlessly through the Transvaal, leaving many farmers destitute. The government allowed these farmers to hunt wildlife for subsistence, placing no limit on what they could kill. With the rinderpest epidemic making hunting a necessity for so many people, no further hunting laws were introduced until the end of the decade.

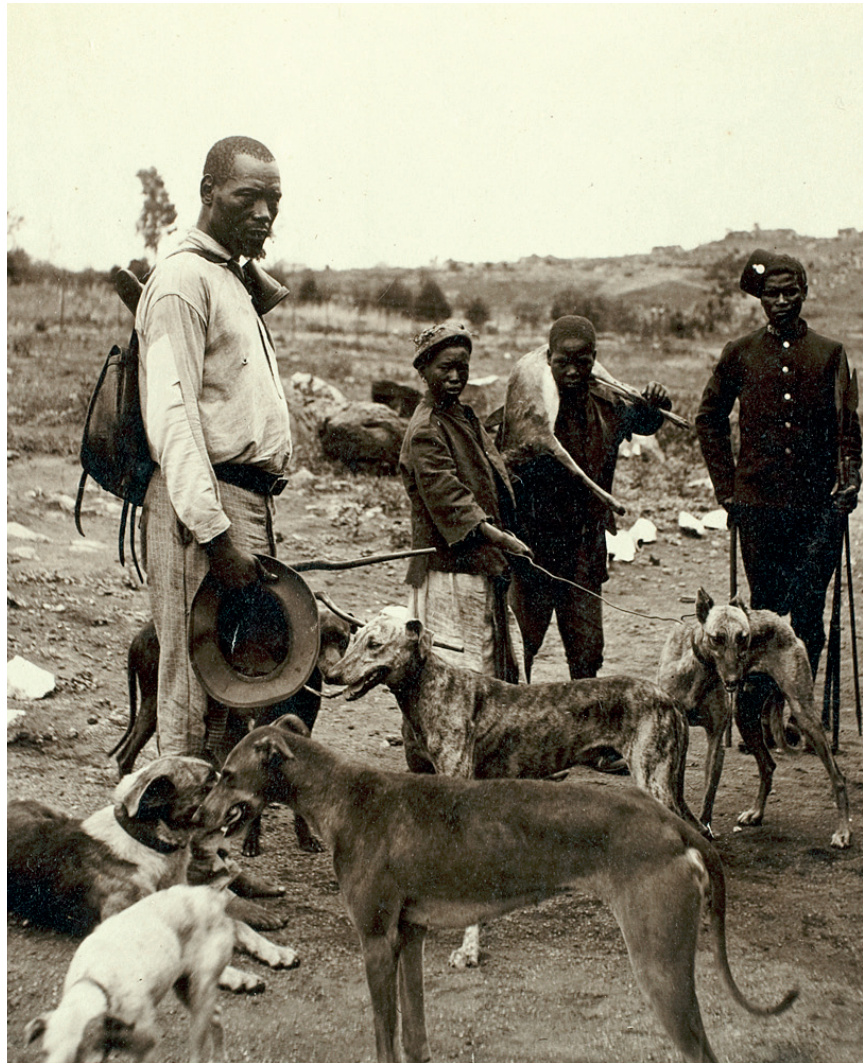
James Stevenson-Hamilton and the Kruger National Park

The Kruger National Park – which falls partly in Mpumalanga and partly in Limpopo – is the largest national park in South Africa, and a major tourist destination for South Africans and overseas visitors alike. The history of the Kruger Park begins in 1898 when, responding to sustained pressure from Loveday, President Paul Kruger signed a proclamation establishing a new game reserve in the lowveld area of the eastern Transvaal. Kruger had never been a great supporter of conservation; in fact, he wrote in his memoirs that it was necessary to destroy wildlife so that land could be cleared for agriculture. This, he argued, would bring about civilisation and settlement. But even he recognised the need to have an area in which game should be allowed to multiply. Another consideration that may have helped push Kruger's pen was that the area to be proclaimed was relatively small, and not ideal for human settlement. Situated between the Crocodile and Sabi Rivers (on the eastern lowveld, bordering on Moçambique), it teemed with mosquitoes carrying the deadly malaria parasite. It was initially called the Sabi Game Reserve.

While the South African War raged the ZAR took no steps to protect the proclaimed land. As the war neared its end, however, the British military government appointed the first warden, called a 'game inspector'. This was Captain H F Francis, who was killed by Boers in a raid on Fort Mpisana in August 1901, shortly after taking up the post. Two months later, W M Walker was appointed to replace him. Walker was apparently a 'reliable man ... well acquainted with the low country' who could speak Dutch and a few African languages, but he was not up to the task and was fired a few months later, in January 1902. Towards the end of that year, after peace had been declared, the Transvaal interim government employed another person who would have



Two of the first African game rangers employed in the early 1900s in the Sabie Game Reserve, later the southern portion of the Kruger National Park.



Poachers with their dogs, date unknown.

a major impact on wildlife conservation in the eastern Transvaal, and South Africa in general: James Stevenson-Hamilton. Stevenson-Hamilton had been a British cavalry officer during the South African War, but was keen to remain in South Africa.

At first he had conservative views about the purpose of a game reserve. In his opinion, and that of the Transvaal colonial government, a game reserve was a place in which antelope would be protected from everyday hunters so that their numbers would be allowed to grow. Once this had happened, sport hunters and others would be allowed into the reserve to hunt, at a handsome fee. Members of the Interim Transvaal Legislative Assembly were very excited; one stated that 'many wealthy sportsmen will be pleased to pay high prices for the privilege of shooting big game'. But when Stevenson-Hamilton took over, not much game was to be found in the reserve. In 1902 the Sabi Game Reserve contained no black rhinos, elephants, eland, hartebeest, or ostriches. There were about 15 hippos, five giraffes, eight buffalo, 12 sable antelope, two

roan antelopes, five tsessebe, 40 blue wildebeest, 100 waterbuck, 35 kudu, and more numerous impala, reedbuck, steenbok and duiker. Stevenson-Hamilton had his work cut out for him.

His first step was to enlarge the reserve. He was given control of private land to the north of the Sabi Game Reserve as well as of the neighbouring Singwitsi Game Reserve (the northern part of the Kruger National Park that today falls in Limpopo). The warden realised that this expansion would give the animals a greater area in which to move around, and thus enable them to multiply more rapidly. His next move was to expel Africans living in the reserve, because he was worried that they would poach the game. By 1903 some 2 000 to 3 000 Africans had been removed from the area. Some went willingly, but others resisted fiercely. Stevenson-Hamilton declared that Africans living in the reserve 'were perfectly ready to move whenever or wherever they were told', but the Africans asserted that they left only when their houses were burnt to the ground and they were forced to leave.

Stevenson-Hamilton was a very efficient administrator; he organised his staff along military lines, with strict lines of authority, and kept meticulous records of wildlife numbers and events in the reserve. Africans and poor Afrikaners who still depended on hunting for subsistence or for commercial activity resisted the idea of a game reserve, and poached animals whenever they could. One group of Boers, who lived near White River, was notorious. They were generally known as 'the wild people', and Stevenson-Hamilton tried hard to get their farming leases cancelled so that they would be obliged to move

A hunter and his
'shooting car',
photographed in 1920.





The development of the Kruger National Park, 1903–1995.

out of the area. Meanwhile, the staff of the Sabi Game Reserve apprehended African poachers with rigour, and any African even found with game meat 'under suspicious circumstances' would be arrested. Another group of people who resented the game reserve were sport hunters, who complained that it spoilt their fun in the region. But Stevenson-Hamilton remained dedicated and determined, and eventually his zeal was rewarded.

By 1909 the reserve contained 25 elephants, seven or eight rhinos, 50 or 60 buffalo, numerous hippos and eland, and large herds of roan antelope, hartebeest, kudu, and many others. Humans were not the only hunters to be apprehended by the game rangers. 'Vermin' that preyed on the sportsman's quarry – including lions, leopards, wild dogs and crocodiles – were shot on sight.

Over time, Stevenson-Hamilton began to change his mind about the purpose of a game reserve. His inspiration came from the United States, whose federal government was implementing a National Parks policy. A new idea in conservation had been born in the late 19th century, with the acceptance that governments should play a role in protecting wildlife areas. They would be called National Parks, and would be open to the public to enjoy. While visitors might view animals in their natural habitat, hunting of any kind would be forbidden.

In 1926 the Union parliament in Cape Town passed a new law that expanded the Sabi Reserve into the Kruger National Park. The park was to be administered by the central government. Soon after the law was passed, tourist facilities were constructed, and visitors began to arrive in large numbers.

Why have a national park?

In South Africa there were many reasons to establish a national park. In the opinion of a commission of inquiry established to investigate the proposal in 1918, these included the need to protect wildlife in its natural habitat; generate public revenue from tourism; create an ideal place in which to study botany, zoology and other life sciences; and add cultural value to the country – it would, the commission stated, become a symbol of nationhood and identity for white South Africans.

Meanwhile, Stevenson-Hamilton had changed the way in which he managed the reserve. He began to think more seriously about biodiversity and ecosystems. In 1912 he wrote a book on the subject, entitled *Animal Life in Africa*, that publicised his new thinking. He stopped the regular killing of 'vermin' animals, such as lion, and generally allowed the wildlife to live without too much interference. He called this the 'balance of nature'.

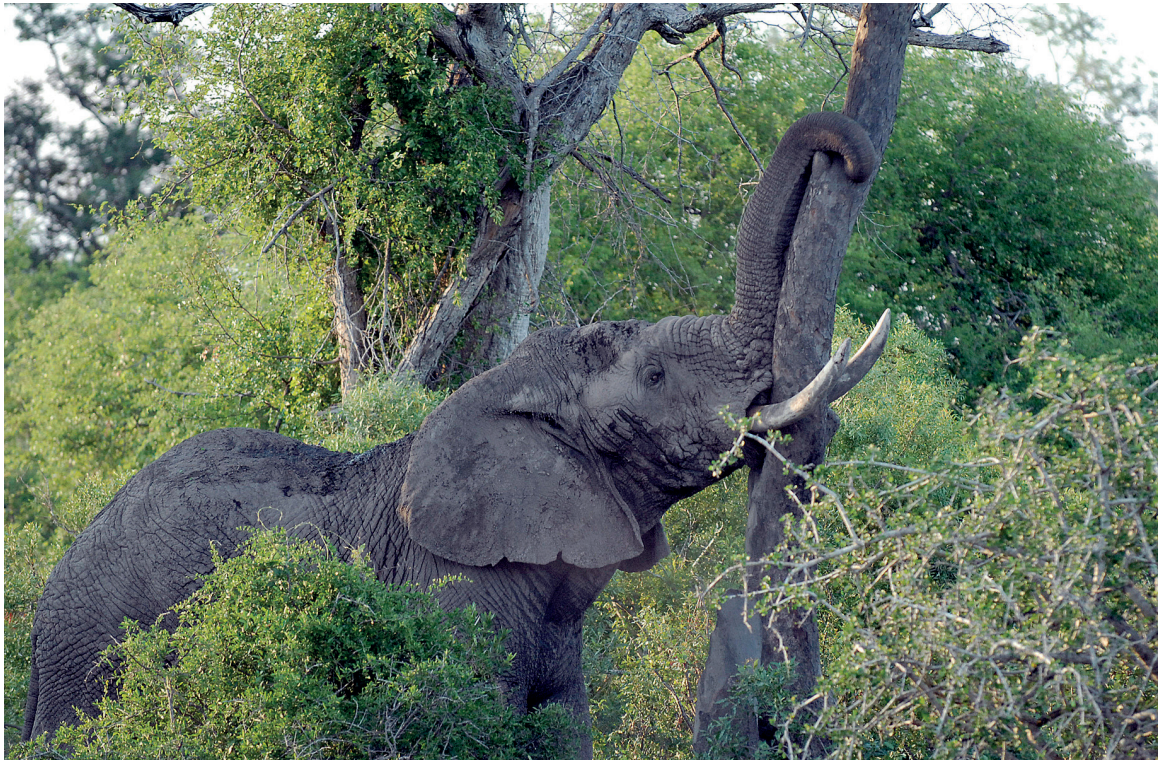
A tourist photographs
a lion in the Kruger
National Park, 1930s.



Stevenson-Hamilton retired after World War Two. By then the countryside had begun to change. Many African communities in the eastern Transvaal were removed from their ancestral homes and placed in new locations and reserves, some of which were near the Kruger National Park. At the same time, the country was modernising, and more large commercial farming operations had been established in the area. People were living all around the park, and their activities on its borders affected what happened inside it. The wildlife in the park was being put under pressure, and in order to deal with these changes the management of the park altered accordingly. Instead of allowing the wildlife to live with as little interference as possible, management became more interventionist. A regular burning policy began, so that if any fires were started they would not get out of control. Boreholes were drilled in various parts of the park so that animals were provided with water even in dry seasons. This changed the way in which wildlife used the veld. In later years, when more people lived upstream along the rivers which flowed through the park, and drew water from the rivers for their own needs, boreholes became an even more important source of water for wildlife.

Elephants and conservation

When the Sabi Game Reserve was first established, there were no elephants in the area. By 1909 there were 25, and by 1960 there were so many in the Kruger National Park that they began to destroy the environment. In order to deal with this overpopulation, the park authorities began to cull them,



usually in large family groups. For years the optimum number of elephants in the park was considered to be around 6 000, and this level was maintained. For many reasons – animal rights activism among them – a moratorium was put on elephant culling in 1995. The elephant population began to grow and within a few years had reached about 15 000. The effect on the landscape was substantial; this included the disappearance of large trees which elephants felled to obtain food. While delighted to see more elephants, tourists began to complain that the park was not as visually attractive as it once was. What could be done? The government was reluctant to allow the South African National Parks authorities to resume culling, fearing that financial aid from animal rights groups would be withdrawn and that there might be a public outcry. Scientists needed to do more work on evaluating elephant damage more precisely. Contraception was considered, but not only would this be extremely costly, it would upset the complex social structure of elephant herds. Ideas for enlarging the park into a transfrontier conservation area and allowing elephants to roam into Mozambique were put into play. Africans living on the outskirts of the Kruger National Park also had their say. Not only do elephants have a commercial value from which these impoverished communities might directly benefit, but elephants sometimes trample fields and – very occasionally – even kill people.

The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (the department in charge of national parks and other protected areas) initiated a comprehensive survey, and invited public comment. As a consequence, a set of

An elephant fells a tree in the Kruger National Park.

strict norms and standards was announced in March 2008 which leaves the door open to culling once more, providing all other methods of control have been considered, and only after permission has been granted by the national department. The issue remains controversial.

Conservation and leisure

By the 1940s the Kruger National Park was a great success. However, like the country's other national parks, it was a national conservation initiative, and people began to be concerned that provincial governments were not doing enough in the realm of nature conservation. After extensive surveys, and another commission of inquiry in 1947, the Transvaal provincial government created a Flora and Fauna Branch. Its functions were to centralise control over natural resources, liaise with farm owners, establish and develop nature reserves, regulate hunting, exterminate vermin, encourage research, maintain publicity, and develop outdoor recreation and public resorts.

In 1948 the Flora and Fauna Branch was made responsible for turning Loskop Dam on the Olifants River into a recreational resort. At the same time the provincial administration took over the Loskop Dam Game Reserve, an area of about 12 000 hectares. The dam had been built during the Great Depression of the 1930s, but there had been no developments around it. It was, however, ideal as a recreational resort, for besides being scenically attractive it could be used for water sports and for fishing. The provincial

Photograph from a 1950s calendar promoting South African tourism.





authorities stocked the reserve with wildlife, and it soon became one of the great attractions in the region.

The Flora and Fauna Branch also established conservation areas at the Blyde River Canyon and Blyde Dam. Once again, this resort combined recreational facilities with beautiful natural surroundings to create a popular public space. In the late 1960s the Fanie Botha Hiking Trail was opened. It runs through mountainous areas that house a variety of interesting plant and animal life, and is also renowned for its relics of a precolonial past. During the apartheid era all these facilities were for the use of whites only – this is, however, no longer the case.

In the mid-20th century another recreational activity was adding to the tourism potential of the province. This was trout fishing, which was introduced to eastern Transvaal streams and encouraged as a sport from the late 19th century onwards. It became very popular, and by the late 1940s the Transvaal Anglers Union had about 60 000 members, most of whom were

The unveiling of a bust of Paul Kruger outside the Kruger National Park, September 1976. From left to right are the chief director of the National Parks Board, Dr Rocco Knobel; the sculptor, Coert Steynberg; the minister of agriculture, Hendrik Schoeman; and the administrator of the Transvaal, S G J van Niekerk.

trout fishermen. In 1944 an Inland Fisheries Board was established, focusing on husbandry, and in 1948 the Provincial Fisheries Institute was established in Lydenburg. At that time it had only two members of staff, but they went about their work with enthusiasm, and within five years they had made their mark on fly-fishing in the province.

Since then fly-fishing has become a major leisure and tourist activity in the province, and its consequences have been both positive and negative. On the one hand, fly-fishing brings money into the province and creates direct and indirect employment. Moreover, some beautiful areas have been protected because of the fly-fishermen's desire to fish in a pristine environment. On the other hand, fly-fishing has led to the damming of many highveld streams and rivers, which has been detrimental to riverine ecology generally. Moreover, trout are not indigenous fish, and protecting them has led to the destruction of local fish populations.

Africans and conservation

From the very beginning of conservation initiatives in the region, Africans have come off second best. The first hunting laws of the 19th century made it illegal for Africans to hunt game. This, in theory, excluded them from sharing in one of the richest natural resources in the region at that time. Later, when the Kruger National Park was established, many Africans were forcibly removed for the sake of a protected area that benefited white visitors. After 1948, when the apartheid government assumed power, the exclusion of Africans from game reserves and national and provincial parks and resorts was made even more formal in law. At the same time, Africans from all over the province were removed to reserves and 'homelands', which soon became overpopulated. This led to problems with the sustainability of the environment. While people became poorer in the reserves they watched money being spent on white recreational facilities and on protecting wildlife and plants. It seemed to many that nature was for whites alone, while Africans were prevented from using natural resources freely and even from enjoying the privilege of viewing nature from the comfortable vantage point of a car.

Tragically, Africans were regarded as incapable of contributing to a greater understanding and appreciation of nature. The effect has been that indigenous knowledge of plants and wildlife has been ignored, and some even lost. Folklore and stories that contain a different understanding of nature from the western and scientific, and could add cultural richness to the region, have not been given due attention. The consequence is that, today, many people regard conservation as a luxury for the rich. It has a history of not benefiting



An early fly-fisherman
in the eastern Transvaal.

Fish being sorted at
the Lowveld Fisheries
Research Station at
Loskop Dam in the
late 1950s.



Boophane disticha (poison bulb, *gifbol*, *incotho*), an indigenous plant that occurs throughout Mpumalanga and has a variety of medicinal uses; *Bauhinia galpinii* (Pride of de Kaap), which grows profusely around Barberton and in the De Kaap Valley.

the poor, the huge majority of whom are Africans. Often, natural resources are not treated with enough respect or care because of this legacy, as well as the extreme poverty that plagues the region. These are challenges that continue to this day, and that more recent conservation initiatives are trying to redress.

Conservation today

Currently, Mpumalanga harbours world-class private game reserves and lodges, and many new game and nature reserves have been opened in the past decade. Many of these are managed as recreational resorts, and some are managed – and even owned – by Africans. Some game reserves have close links with African communities, which help make decisions about natural resource management. Known as ‘community conservation’, these protected areas are managed in such a way as to benefit local people. Some of the older conserved areas have been taken over by African communities after successful land restitution claims.

Following South Africa’s transition to democracy the new government introduced a land restitution programme in terms of which communities that had been removed from their land as a result of racially based legislation could reclaim their land and livelihoods. But many community-run game reserves and farms that have been reclaimed have not been as successful as was first anticipated. The problems are many, including divisions within communities, inappropriate management structures, a lack of skills, and



Botanical drawing
by Rudolf Marloth of
Gerbera asplenifolia
and *Gerbera Jamesonii*
(Barborton Daisy).



Lake Chrissie,
the largest natural
fresh water lake in
South Africa.

unrealistic expectations about how many tourists will visit and how much profit will be made.

But, Mpumalanga's tradition of innovative thinking in conservation is continuing. A number of non-government organisations run programmes that focus on resource conservation for rural communities. These include environmental youth clubs, environmental education, youth outreach, water management, skills training, and small-scale farming. Besides gaining knowledge and skills, Africans have benefited from fresh approaches to conservation and tourism through training opportunities. People are trained as guides in a range of specialist areas, such as wildlife, birdlife, or regional environment and history. Meanwhile, another new kind of institution has been developed in Mpumalanga. Called conservancies, these are projects that involve land owners and local people who work together to improve tourism and conservation in their area, with benefits for all. The success of these projects varies.

As well as these local projects, others have been conceived on a far larger scale. These have a variety of names – transboundary protected areas, transfrontier conservation areas, or ‘peace parks’ – and have taken conservation to a new level. They are enormous protected areas that straddle international borders and are aimed at conservation and eco-tourism. The aim is to protect an enlarged area of biodiversity, but while national parks once excluded people entirely, ‘peace parks’ are designed to include and assist them. They allow for a range of natural resource uses, including hunting, allowing livestock to graze on the land, and where possible, even the cultivation of crops. The general aim is sustainable management and development. Certainly conservation is central to these parks, but so is socioeconomic development and co-operation among different countries in the region.

Mpumalanga's natural treasures

Mpumalanga has a wide variety of fascinating places to visit, and flora and fauna to appreciate. Most people who visit Mpumalanga want to see the Big Five – leopards, lions, buffalo, elephants, and rhinos – that are thought to be the most exciting species. But Mpumalanga has many other natural treasures that add richness to any tour of the province. The Barberton district, for instance, contains one of the most ancient mountain ranges in the world, with rounded slopes and beautiful valleys. The area contains fascinating plants including some of the most beautiful flowers in the country, such as the Barberton Daisy (*Gerbera jamesonii*) and Pride of de Kaap (*Bauhinia galpinii*). Lake Chrissie – the largest freshwater lake in the country – is another underappreciated treasure. It has one of the most pristine natural environments in the whole of southern Africa, and contains a complex system of pans and wetlands that are home to an abundant and diverse range of frog and bird species. For bird lovers, a visit to Wakkerstroom in the far south of the province is imperative. Its high-altitude grasslands and wetlands contain three endemic species: Rudd's Lark, Botha's Lark, and the Yellowbreasted Pipit. The Mount Anderson escarpment is another of the province's most beautiful spots, and the source of major rivers such as the Klein Spekboom, Spekboom, Kliprots, Kranskloof, Sabi, Treur, and Blyde. Bird and animal life is abundant, and eland, mountain reedbuck, zebra and blesbok thrive in this pristine environment. The area also contains many pre-colonial sites and ruins.

Mpumalanga is a region with a rich and diverse natural heritage. While some challenges remain, it has made great strides in protecting that heritage and making it accessible to its inhabitants as well as tourists.



Heteromiraфра ruddi
(Rudd's Lark) and
Spizocorys fringillaris
(Botha's Lark), two
of a number of rare
bird species in the
Wakkerstroom area.



Bertha Everard, 'Peace of Winter', Transvaal, 1909. The river is the Komati.

