



TED REILLY

The father and icon of conservation in Swaziland, Ted Reilly has worked to conserve existing animals and reintroduce those which had gone locally extinct – thanks to his efforts, 22 species of mammals have been reintroduced to Swaziland, from the blue duiker to the elephant. He was made Counsellor of the Royal Order by King Mswati III in 1989.

For more information, visit: <http://www.biggameparks.org>

## THE SWAZI CONSERVATION REALITY

by Ted Reilly



SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA



SWAZILAND

Coat of Arms

5th Anniversary of Independence

3c



WHITE RHINOCEROS OR SQUARE-LIPPED RHINOCEROS (*CERATOTHERIUM SIMUM*). SWAZILAND.

Major Ian Grimwood, a noted conservationist and a recipient of the much-coveted Paul Getty Conservation Prize, once said: "It is not governments or committees we have to thank for saving Africa's wildlife for the world, but a handful of individuals." This is certainly the case with Swaziland's designated protected areas, which total 75 000ha, with an additional 80 000ha converted to game farms and conservancies by the private sector, developments that

have been led and encouraged by Big Game Parks (BGP) and strongly supported initially by King Sobhuza II, and more recently by King Mswati III. Today, the country's wildlife tourist industry is marketed as one of the best Big Five viewing destinations, including superb opportunities to see rhino at close quarters in their natural habitat, in the process providing sustainable jobs across a wide section of the country's economy.

The role of the country's game rangers in these successes also



MSWATI III (BORN 1968) ON 10 EMALANGENI, 2006 BANKNOTE FROM SWAZILAND. KING OF SWAZILAND.

KINGSLEY HOLGATE VISITING BIG GAME PARKS' HLANE ROYAL NATIONAL PARK.



"IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT THE CALAMITOUS STATE OF RHINOS – AND WILDLIFE – IN AFRICA, THEN CONSIDER WHAT TED REILLY HAS TO SAY." – SCOTT RAMSAY.

needs wider recognition. What has worked for BGP is the realisation that an academic qualification often has little relevance to scenes of crime, and that many rangers today are overqualified in this respect.

The attributes required for a successful and functional game ranger are an ability to endure long and irregular hours of discomfort, extreme heat, bitter cold, hunger, thirst and fatigue, for these are the realities of the poaching coalface.

Academics are more inclined towards more comfort, shorter hours for more pay, tea breaks, lunch and unionisation; these have no place at hostile crime scenes. In fact, a good ranger is often an ex-poacher

whose bush skills can match those of bush-wise criminals. Furthermore, bush-wise intelligence, which such rangers have in abundance as opposed to some of their academic counterparts, is pivotal.

However, there is no ground for complacency, as in common with all other African countries Swaziland's protected areas and the species they contain are also facing an unprecedented level of threat from rapidly growing and encroaching human populations, with the illegal trade in rhino horn bringing rhino populations closer to extinction in most of the continent's protected areas. I believe that this priority

concern should be addressed by trying something new and radical, *giving more thought to the welfare of rhinos rather than focusing on more fundraising.*

The majority of African rhino custodians whom I have contacted favour a trial period of a legal trade in rhino horn, because they all appreciate and understand that the present trade ban is not helping keep rhinos alive. They have convinced me that until legalising the trade in horn as an option is tried, we will never know whether or not it will work.

These same custodians also argue that persisting with what is not working and has not worked for 38 years is not sensible, and that suggesting the precautionary approach – demand reduction and education – as a new alternative, is flawed and confusing because these are all integral to the ban anyway, and the ban has been in place since 1977. Introducing them now as something new simply serves to cloud and confuse the issues.

If this option is tried as a solution, it would be wise to do so now while there are still a sufficient number of live rhinos to provide a cushion





KINGSLEY HOLGATE, A SOUTH AFRICAN EXPLORER, HUMANITARIAN AND AUTHOR VISITED BIG GAME PARKS' HLANE ROYAL NATIONAL PARK TO DISCUSS SWAZILAND'S ANTI-POACHING METHODS WITH THE PIONEER OF CONSERVATION IN SWAZILAND, TED REILLY.

against possible failure. If CITES delays removing the trade ban until we reach the threshold of no return, it will be too late and rhinos will become history.

This option implies full commercialisation and includes harvesting the horn. It has to be agreed that a farmed rhino without a horn is not the rhino we all want to see. But it is at least a live rhino, and a live rhino is also a breeding rhino, and surely a live rhino has got to be better than a dead rhino or no rhino at all? Furthermore, as has so often been said, legalising the trade would enable sustainably harvesting the horn without killing the rhino, because the horn keeps growing. The anti-trade lobby, which includes many NGOs, is vehemently opposed to legalising the trade, dividing and polarising the conservation community into opposing camps.

The same lobby also believes that opening the trade will negatively impact on Kenya's rhinos and expose them to extinction. The truth is that if Kenya or any other country cannot look after its own rhinos,

it will lose them anyway, whether or not there is legal trade – and there is nothing any southern African State, or even the United Nations, can do to stop Kenya's poaching if the country does not itself have the political resolve and exercise the practical ability to do so by protecting its own rhinos. This is easily shown by comparing Kenya with South Africa over the past 40 years. Since Kenya banned the consumptive use of wildlife, it has lost 80% of its wild animals; since South Africa legalised ownership and consumptive commercialisation of game, it has more than trebled its wildlife estate over the same period of time!

In South Africa, the late Dr Ian Player was another graphic example of Grimwood's 'handful of individuals'. Shortly before he died, he told me that the celebrities of the world are being misinformed by the anti-trade lobby, and that while rhino custodians are preoccupied defending themselves and their rhinos at the poaching coalface, they are being totally outsmarted by



the marketing skills of the anti-trade lobby. He had no doubt that the world is highly influenced by global iconic characters, including members of the British royal family, Hollywood stars and popular sports icons.

Dr Ian Player, who more than anyone else was responsible for making the southern white rhino safe by its wider distribution, was a sincere advocate of its consumptive utilisation as a strategy for its survival, and a strong supporter of a legal trade in rhino horn.

BGP also subscribes to the IUCN philosophy of sustainable utilisation of natural resources – both consumptive and non-consumptive – and is governed by the economic imperative. In the absence of government subsidies, if we do not generate the

funds we need from admission fees, accommodation revenues and trading receipts, we cannot pay our staff each month. Over the years, BGP has necessarily evolved to practice what we call *pragmatic conservation*. However, BGP has *not* hunted a single rhino since successfully applying for CITES Appendix II status, as economic viability has been achieved without having to resort to sport or trophy hunting – these being the two most lucrative components of nature conservation. I hope we never will because I have no stomach for killing animals for sport, but when you have a labour force and a ranger force and administration staff to pay at month-end, you have to have money with which to do it. The alternative is bankruptcy or the loss of habitat to alternative land use, which might come with a reduction in job opportunity.

To save Africa's rhinos requires custodians who are dedicated beyond themselves to the welfare of rhinos and other wildlife, and in southern Africa there is no shortage of such individual custodians. Most importantly, it needs a supportive police force and the support of

the head of state, without which conservation efforts would be futile. It needs a committed game ranger force with legal protection to enable rangers to perform their duty without fear or favour. It is of interest to note that rangers perceive their greatest risk not to be sudden death at the hands of poachers, or snakebite, but the risk of being arrested and charged with murder for performing their national duty at the poaching coalface. This is a huge indictment on society, with its preoccupation with the human rights of criminals

taking precedence over the human rights of victims.

I believe in miracles. In Swaziland, we had no wildlife to speak of 50 years ago, but the Kingdom now has an extremely rich wildlife offering, and a portfolio of diverse parks to support it. Now another miracle is needed, this time for the rhinos of Africa, by persuading two thirds of the CITES membership that the ban on horn trade is not working and that it be lifted before it is too late to reverse the current trend toward extinction.

