

IS THERE A PLACE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION IN THE TRANSKEI?

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The Republic of the Transkei is situated in the south-east of the Republic of South Africa and is bounded by the Cape Province, Natal, Lesotho and the Indian Ocean. The area of the country is some 43 200 km², almost as large as Denmark and twice the size of Wales. It is a country made up of mountainous regions along the Lesotho border and the rest is made up mostly of rolling hills with deep river valleys. It is a summer rainfall region ranging between 500 mm and 1 300 mm per year and thus the country may be termed well watered. Climatic conditions may be described as temperate with occasional frosts during the worst winter months.

According to statistics, communal pastorage covers over 70% of the Transkei area, arable land 24%, with forest plantations and residential areas 3% each. The 1971 population census revealed population figures as follows: 1 650 825 Blacks, 9 556 Whites and 7 655 Coloured. The people are mostly pastoral farmers with maize, whilst sorghum crops play a lesser but important role in the daily needs of the people.

Umtata is the administrative capital of the Transkei where all the Government Departments are situated. In passing it is interesting to note that the name Umtata is derived from the Sneezewood (*Ptaeroxylon obliquum*) tree which in Xhosa is named the Umthathi tree.

According to Acocks (1953) the Transkei is divided roughly into six veld types each with conservation and/or recreational potential. These veld types are:

1. Pondoland Coastal Plateau Sourveld
2. Coastal Forest
3. Mangrove Woodlands
4. Ngongoni veld
5. Mountain forests of the Highland Sourveld and
6. Valley Bushveld

Pondoland Coastal Plateau Sourveld

This area starts north of Port St. Johns and co-incides with the outcrop of Table Mountain Sandstone and takes in the Districts of Lusikisiki, Flagstaff and Bizana. The forests in this area are characterised by the following trees: *Strelitzia nicolai*, (wild banana), *Croton sylvaticus* and *Ficus natalensis* while the Sourveld which is the densest veld in the Republic, is so dense that the grasses grow as single shoots rather than as tufts, and is characterised by *Themeda triandra*, *Tristachya hispida* and *Diheteropogon filifolius*.

Coastal Forest

Coastal Forests occur along most of the Transkei Coast and good examples being the Manubi, Dwesa and Egoso forests. These forests are characterised by trees such as *Heywoodia lucens*, *Milletia grandis* and *Vepris undulata*.

Mangrove Woodlands

Mangrove forests occur on many rivers which have suitable muddy flats. Exceptionally good examples are found at the mouths of the Mtafufu, Umgazana and Umtata Rivers. The three species of mangroves that occur are *Avicennia marina*, *Bruguiera gymnorhiza* and *Rhizophora mucronata*.

Ngongoni Veld

This veld type occupies a narrow and irregular belt of rolling country just above coastal forest belt, and is characterised by *Aristida junceiformis*.

Mountain Forests of the Highland Sourveld

These forests have been slowly eroded and now consist of very small scattered examples with the best being seen near Umtata and at Langeni, Mhlahlane, Baziya and also at Gomo near Mount Ayliff.

Valley Bushveld

This veld type is found in most of the southern river valleys and a particularly good example is found along the Kei River.

Due to the topography and abundant rainfall the Transkei is well endowed with water-rich rivers, most of which have their catchment areas within the borders of the Transkei. The rivers were stocked with bass, carp and trout in the past by early settlers. All the species have done well and trout seem to have established themselves in the upper reaches of most of the larger rivers.

The traditional way of life has both been beneficial and detrimental to the fauna and flora of the country. The beliefs of the people have helped

in the protection of certain species of trees, birds and animals as well as the forests, the latter being areas of escape during faction fights.

The traditional ways of farming have been detrimental to the soil as each farmer wants to be able to supply his household with grain and this often leads to them ploughing areas on steep gradients which are not suitable. Having the community spread over large areas brings the people and more especially the herd boys with their dogs into daily contact with what wildlife there is in the area, and all their leisure time is spent hunting. The fuel needs of the people take a heavy toll on the forests and where no trees are available even dung is used for fires which means nothing goes back into the soil. The constant need for grazing has led to overburning and this in turn has led to soil erosion.

The Department of Agriculture is busy with the planning of locations which consist of a living area as well as indicating where ploughing, grazing and other activities may be undertaken while other areas are left where wildlife can re-establish itself again. The needs of the people are brought closer to their homes e.g. woodlots are planted in these areas as fuel for the population.

The Transkei has its own Nature Conservation Act (Act No. 6 of 1971) and through this the division of Nature Conservation has come into being. The division is situated within the Department of Forestry which in turn is part of the larger Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Its present staff is very small and consists of four Nature Conservation Officers, one Senior Nature Conservation Officer and one Professional Officer, but will soon be expanded to include eight professional officers as well as a number of nature conservation officers posts that will be filled from students completing the nature conservation course at Cwaka College in Zululand. In addition to these posts the Forestry Department have many forest guards posts who help in the administration of the nature conservation act.

To ensure that all aspects of nature conservation are properly researched, a Conservation Advisory Board has been formed to advise the Transkei Government. It is hoped that by the formation of this Board any projects which can have an effect on the environment will be properly researched at the vital planning stage. All reserves will be planned by suitably qualified ecological planners as well as having management plans drawn up by qualified persons.

Following six nature reserves are in different stages of proclamation, planning and development:

1. Dwesa Nature Reserve
2. Hluleka Nature Reserve
3. Mount Thesiger Nature Reserve
4. Mkambati Nature Reserve
5. Swartberg Nature Reserve and the
6. Nduli Nature Reserve

Dwesa Nature Reserve

Dwesa was proclaimed in 1974 and consists of an area of 5 000 ha and is divided roughly into one-third of rolling grassveld, and two-thirds of indigenous coastal forest. The tourist facilities have been planned by a firm of ecological/landscape planners and the first bungalows are at present being erected. Buffalo, eland and blesbok have been reintroduced to supplement the bushbuck and blue duiker, grey duiker, genets, mongeese and vervet and samango monkeys already occurring there. It is hoped that in the near future that one of the conservation departments who have hippo under their control will be able to let this department have a few as there are three very large estuaries ideal for hippo – the last hippo being shot in this area in the early 1890's. Other animals that used to occur there are reedbuck, zebra and hartebeest, all which seem to be very difficult to obtain at present. An easy way of locating Dwesa on a map is to find the Bashee River and the reserve is situated to the south of it.

Hluleka Nature Reserve

Hluleka is an area of 1 000 ha and situated about 40 km south of Port St. Johns and was proclaimed during 1976. It is at present being planned by an ecological/landscape firm and is being fenced at the moment.

Mount Thesiger Nature Reserve

This area is situated directly inland from Port St. Johns and is at present under the control of the Forestry Department of the Republic of South Africa. On the eve of Independence this area will be proclaimed a Nature Reserve. There are steep rises from the coast and it consists of forest and sour grassland interspersed with heaths and proteas.

Mkambati Nature Reserve

This area of 7 000 ha is situated between the Mtentu and Msikaba Rivers. It can be classified under the coastal sourveld type and the very rare *Jubaeopsis caffra* communities occur within its borders. This area will be proclaimed as a reserve in the very near future.

Swartberg Nature Reserve

This reserve of 9 000 ha is situated on the borders of the Transkei and Natal and is well within the snowline as it lies 2 000 m above sea level. In the summer large numbers of waterfowl descend on vleis left behind by the melting snow. The estate of a single part owner is all that is withholding the proclamation of this reserve.

Nduli Nature Reserve

Nduli is an existing reserve at Umtata which is being administered by the local Municipality and will be taken over and enlarged to include a National Botanical Garden on the eve of Independence.

In addition the division is constantly on the lookout for viable reserves within the vegetation types as well as the establishment of a mangrove reserve which is a priority.

While we are discussing reserves I would like to mention that the traditional erection of fences – you stay on your side and we stay on our side – attitude does not work in the Transkei. We in the Transkei make it a point of involving the people around the reserve in as many of the facets of the day to day running of the reserve as possible. We draw all our labour from the surrounding location and this includes the staff in the tourist camps. In conjunction with the Department of Agriculture we plan the settlement areas in such a way as to be able to draw our labour from them. We also encourage market gardening and traditional homecrafts amongst the people so that they can sell these directly to the tourists. In addition regular get-togethers are held so that every person on the reserve and around it knows exactly what is being done. This tends to minimise the problems usually encountered with other but similar landuse projects in the Transkei.

Extension work is hitherto confined to a weekly 30 minutes radio program, lectures to the Agricultural College at Tsolo and schools in and around Umtata as well as schools in the vicinity of the reserves. A start was made during 1976 on introducing a course for Biology teachers at Dwesa and this seemed to be a success. However, it is difficult to gauge this success as for some reason or other, there is no follow up to questionnaires sent to these teachers after the course.

Even though we are very limited by staff at the moment we have a large bass breeding station at Tsolo, a trout hatchery at Mhlahlane (26 km from Umtata) and a carp breeding station at Tsomo which will be moved to Tsolo in the very near future.

To take the pressure off our cycads we have a nursery combined with the trout hatchery from which at least 600 seedlings were sold during 1976 – most of these being bought by visiting officials from Pretoria!

The question placed before me was “Whether there is a place for Nature Conservation in the Transkei” to which I reply YES. There is a tremendous need for Nature Conservation in the Transkei – to preserve its natural assets and to boost its national economy through tourism.

REFERENCE

ACOCKS, J P H 1953. Veld Types of South Africa. *Mem. bot. Surv. S. Afr.* 28.