

## CHAPTER 3 BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

### THE SOUTHEAST LOWVELD

In general, the pattern of utilisation by humans of the natural resource base has followed rather similar lines throughout the low altitude, savanna ecosystems of the summer rainfall areas of southern Africa in the last 100 to 150 years (Joubert 1999a). Initially this involved extensive livestock production and, in many cases, also some form of rotational grazing by moving stock to alternative areas at different seasons of the year. This form of ranching, together with seasonal grazing alternatives, offered some form of protection from the impacts of the severe periodic droughts, which naturally ravage these areas in a cyclic manner. From the earliest of times the harsh climatic conditions also precluded virtually any form of dryland crop production on an economically viable scale.

The area that today forms the Save Valley Conservancy was first occupied by British colonists in 1920 (Somerville 1976). Prior to this the Save River Valley was sparsely populated by indigenous cattle herders and limited cultivation was practised (Du Toit and Price Waterhouse 1994). The Devuli and Humani Ranches were created when British pioneers first moved into the area in 1920 and settled the land (Somerville 1976). Devuli Ranch was square in shape and was bound by the Devuli River in the north, the Turgwe River in the south, the Sabi River to the east and the Bikita Native Reserve to the west. The total area was over 200 000 ha. Humani Ranch lay to the south of the Turgwe River and was considerably smaller. Cattle, oxen, horses and donkeys from Europe were brought into Devuli Ranch in 1920 and by 1921 there were 5 185 head of cattle on Devuli Ranch. The Senuko, Hammond and Levanga Ranches were created in the 1970's (Goodwin *et al.* 1997).

Copper was discovered at what is today the Umkondo Copper Mine between 1850 and 1890 (Somerville 1976) and was first pegged in 1899 (Swift 1962). From that date onwards various claims have been registered or re-registered. However, ancient workings were found in the mine which indicated that this area was inhabited previously. When Somerville (1976) first entered the Save River Valley in 1920, he passed by the Umkondo Mine and found it to be in operation by Europeans. Somerville (1976) saw the ancient workings that were dug into the side of a hill. However, a few months after Somerville's visit the mine closed down. Later, the mine was re-opened and flourished during World War I because

of a high copper price. The mine is currently deserted and studies have shown that no viable copper reserves remain (Goosen pers. comm.)<sup>3</sup>.

The infrastructure for cattle management on Devuli Ranch was created in the form of roads, water supplies and fences (Somerville 1976). Water development took place from 1966 to 1971. Apart from cattle ranching, crops such as maize and cotton were cultivated on the alluvium adjacent to the Save River. Several irrigation farms were also created on the ranch. Hunting was also an important source of income to supplement revenue from cattle when the revenue from cattle was suppressed by poor rainfall and disease. Huge mahogany trees (*Azelia quanzensis*) were felled in the forests for houses and several areas of vegetation were cleared for various reasons (Somerville 1976). The land-use to which the Save Valley Conservancy was exposed to in the past altered the area and today few undisturbed areas exist.

## THE SAVE VALLEY CONSERVANCY

By the late 1980's the landowners in the Save River Valley had realised that cattle production was losing its viability, the incidence of drought was escalating and the importance of the wildlife industry was increasing (Goodwin *et al.* 1997). The productivity of the land was declining and the soils were being eroded. By the early 1990's cattle ranching had ceased to become profitable to the landowners of Devuli Ranch and they consequently began selling their assets. The 1991 to 1992 drought resulted in an almost complete destocking of cattle. It was during this time that extensive discussions were being conducted between the landowners of the area and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management of Zimbabwe about the potential of developing a financially viable wildlife enterprise.

The Save Valley Conservancy was formed in June 1991 when the constitution was signed by its various members (Du Toit and Price Waterhouse 1994). The original reason for the formation of the Save Valley Conservancy was the creation of an area large enough to facilitate the breeding and conservation of the black rhinoceros. The formation of the Save Valley Conservancy was a collaborative endeavour between the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, the World-Wide Fund for Nature and the Beit Trust (Goodwin *et al.* 1997). It was envisaged that the black rhinoceros would become a valuable asset as part of a profitable wildlife venture, together with plains game and cattle. The re-introduction of black rhinoceros into Humani Ranch and the subsequent re-

<sup>3</sup> Mr D. Goosen, General Manager, Sango Ranch, PO Box 24, Birchenough Bridge, Zimbabwe.

introductions served as a catalyst for the formation of the Save Valley Conservancy.

In November 1992 a planning workshop was held by the Save Valley Conservancy members to discuss the future of the Save Valley Conservancy (Goodwin *et al.* 1997). At this workshop the members attempted to identify their strengths and weaknesses and the following Mission Statement of the Save Valley Conservancy was decided upon<sup>4</sup>:

*To create a land-use model based on economically and ecologically sustainable utilisation<sup>5</sup> of wildlife. The land-use model will lead to maximum wealth creation for stakeholders<sup>6</sup> through the establishment and management of internationally renowned tourism<sup>7</sup> operations. These operations will lead to a healthy and viable environment in the Conservancy and will contribute to the conservation of endangered species, especially the black rhinoceros. In undertaking these operations the Conservancy intends to take maximum advantage of the synergy potential of group effort, while at the same time ensuring that the identity of individual properties is maintained.*

A report by Price Waterhouse (1994) concluded that wildlife production was particularly suitable as a land-use option in the Save River Valley because the financial returns were significantly higher than cattle ranching, employment opportunities were significantly increased, foreign exchange was promoted, the economy of the area would be enhanced and environmental degradation would be reversed. The Save Valley Conservancy was seen as possessing an enormous ecotourism and conservation appeal due to its large size. At a meeting of the Save Valley Conservancy members in 1994<sup>8</sup> an agreement was reached that the major objective of all the members would be the development of multi-use wildlife production systems based on high quality tourism (Goodwin *et al.* 1997). Simultaneously, the members agreed that such operations would necessitate the presence of substantial wildlife populations including the "Big Five" (Du Toit and Price Waterhouse 1994). This would entail the reintroduction of a wide range of antelope as well as the elephant, lion and buffalo. Buffalo became one of the most sought after animals due to the fact that these animals greatly enhance the

---

<sup>4</sup>Save Valley Conservancy Strategic Planning Workshop Summary, 16 to 17 November 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Original footnote: "Consumptive or non-consumptive".

<sup>6</sup> Original footnote: "Primarily consisting of landowners and investors in the Conservancy, and the local communities".

<sup>7</sup> Original footnote: "Definition of tourism includes hunting".

<sup>8</sup> Save Valley Conservancy Project Outline, July 1994.

viability of ranch-based hunting operations (Child 1988, In: Price Waterhouse 1994). These factors were significant in the formation of the Save Valley Conservancy in that lion reintroductions would threaten the cattle populations present, that elephant reintroductions would result in fence and crop damage and that buffalo reintroductions would only be approved by the Department of Veterinary Services when all the cattle were removed. The Save River Valley is situated in a "red zone" with regards to foot-and-mouth disease and this places severe restrictions on the marketing of various animal products (Du Toit and Price Waterhouse 1994). The members agreed that their objective would be to reintroduce all necessary species as quickly as possible and to dispose of any cattle that they still owned. The Save Valley Conservancy members decided to target high-quality tourism and to ensure that all the developments were of a sufficiently high standard so as to create and sustain a reputation as a game reserve of international standing (Goodwin *et al.* 1997). A policy of low tourist densities, with minimum disturbance to neighbouring properties, was adopted by the Save Valley Conservancy and it was agreed that the Save Valley Conservancy would be a leading example of a sustainable wildlife-based land-use option. There are at the time of writing 23 members in the Save Valley Conservancy (Table 2).

## THE VISION, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF SANGO RANCH

Essentially, the vision for Sango Ranch is:

*To establish a wildlife conservation area in which the natural assets are maintained in their pristine, natural state, as far as this may be possible and for the sake of posterity, and to utilise its natural resources on a sustainable basis for the socio-economic benefit of the region (Joubert 1999a).*

The mission for Sango Ranch is:

*To maintain the natural biodiversity of the area through the application of sound ecological management practices and to gain maximum economic viability and social upliftment through the sustainable utilisation of its resources on a consumptive and non-consumptive basis (Joubert 1999a).*

The major objective of the owners of Sango Ranch is for Sango to make a meaningful contribution towards the Save Valley Conservancy. However, this can only be entertained so long as the Save Valley Conservancy subscribes to the same ideals as Sango Ranch (Joubert 1999a).

Table 2. Membership of the Save Valley Conservancy in Zimbabwe.

<i>RANCH</i>	<i>OWNER</i>	<i>AREA IN HA</i>
Matendere	Pioneer Capital Partners/ARDA	13 123
Gunundwe	B. J. Gouws	11 374
Mapari	H. J. Vorster	23 153
Chishakwe	Rovambira (Pvt) Ltd	9 977
Msaize	Powerlock (Pvt) Ltd	16 340
Chapungu	Zimbabwe Sun Ltd	12 976
Umkondo Mine	Bikita Rural Council	6 627
Savuli	Savuli Property Investments (Pvt) Ltd	5 529
Mokore	Mokore Ranch (Pvt) Ltd	7 451
Bedford Block	Dunmow (Pvt) Ltd	12 215
Humani	Humani Estates (Pvt) Ltd	41 158
Angus	Sabi Star Enterprises (Pvt) Ltd	15 792
Mukazi River	Mukazi River Ranch (Pvt) Ltd	11 457
Mukwazi	Wenhope (Pvt) Ltd	12 549
Senuko	Senuko Ranching (Pvt) Ltd and Save Lodges (Pvt) Ltd	24 120
Masapas	Bataleurs Peak Farm Holdings (Pvt) Ltd	15 437
Levanga	Kingsbrook (Pvt) Ltd	13 040
Mkwasine	Mkwasine Ranching Co. (Pvt) Ltd	12 547
Impala	Fair Range Estates (Pvt) Ltd	13 040
Potential	ARDA	12 146
Sango	Pabst Holdings (Pvt) Ltd	44 348
Mkwasine Estate	Mkwasine (Pvt) Ltd	3 502
Hammond	Mid-West Ranching Ltd, Nyerzi Safari s	12 109
Total		345 067

A further objective of the owners of Sango Ranch is to consolidate their interests in such a way that they can give effect to their objectives, either as part of the Save Valley Conservancy, or independently when the Save Valley Conservancy disagrees with their objectives (Joubert 1999a). To achieve such independence, Sango Ranch must be managed as a self-sufficient ecological unit and it must also be in a position to enter into co-operative partnerships with its immediate neighbours. Sango Ranch could at present, with some constraints, be managed as an ecological unit, but the addition of neighbouring properties would greatly enhance the ecological integrity of the area, and also provide additional opportunities in terms of socio-economic objectives. The Umkondo Lease is a property situated approximately midway along the southern boundary of Sango Ranch and comprises 6 627 ha (Figure 2). Umkondo is an arid area with no natural surface water resources and is not ecologically self-sustaining. However, its addition can make a major contribution towards the ecological integrity of Sango Ranch and also ease management practices by straightening its southern boundary.

A number of wards of the Devuri Resettlement Scheme adjoin the western boundary of the Save Valley Conservancy. Sango Ranch shares a common boundary of 16 km with this Scheme and it is envisaged that an area, approximately 5 km wide, on the eastern half of these wards could be incorporated into the Save Valley Conservancy or Sango Ranch (Joubert 1999a). Throughout these eastern areas local residents are sparsely distributed and are, with the exception of a single village, confined to scattered homesteads. The local community utilises this land for stock ranching with cattle and goats and for dryland agriculture. However, because of the recurrence of frequent droughts both forms of land use have largely failed, or are at best unreliable. Any neighbouring properties within the Save Valley Conservancy that may become available for acquisition will also be considered for consolidation into Sango Ranch. The achievement of these objectives will rely heavily on the reintroduction and/or augmentation of key animal populations of which the numbers have been depleted by past land uses (Joubert 1999a). Animals enjoying the highest priority in this regard are buffalo, sable antelope, roan antelope and tsessebe.

Sango Ranch has committed itself to play a constructive role in applying sound ecological principles in its land management practices, and to strive towards economic viability and social upliftment (Joubert 1999a). These ideals would preferably be met within the framework of the Save Valley Conservancy, on condition that the same ultimate goals, as set out in the vision and mission statements of the Sango Ranch, are accepted and implemented by its members.