

A diversity of control

Power and the foundation of Lion's Bush Conservancy¹

Steve Kotze

In name and symbol [a guinea fowl], conservancies make an appeal to widespread disquiet about environmental degradation. On seeing the brown roadside notice board emblazoned with wild bird and the name of a specific conservancy, a traveler might assume that here efforts are made to curb the depletion of habitats, or that bio-diversity is nurtured, or at the very least that conservation and sustainable use of resources is practiced in some form. In most conservancies these topics are indeed part of the agenda, but there is the potential for another agenda too. A conservancy may demonstrate a rapid trend *away* from initial protectionist or even conservationist ambitions. Instead “conservation” can serve as the springboard for the relentless implementation of controls over natural resources and who has access to them. The impulse to control ultimately reflects the complexity in relations of power on farms, which might be extended over any entity which competes with landowners for access to resources. The establishment of Lions Bush Conservancy serves to demonstrate some of that complexity.

In their original form, conservancies were the product of two independent factors. Firstly, the location of informal nature conservation practices on private land for which the primary use was agriculture; secondly, a method of operation which entailed the use of game guards. In turn, the origin of these factors can be traced to separate, but related processes, and to the roles of specific individuals who determined the nature of each feature.² Thus private landowners in the farming profession contributed understanding of specific local conditions and requirements for informal nature conservation. Likewise, nature conservation officials' role concerned the employment and management of guards for effective administration of natural resources.

¹ This paper is a draft of a case study intended to form part of my MA thesis. Please do not quote from it in this form. The focus of the MA is the particular expression of informal wildlife conservation in two KZN conservancies.

In the first instance, informal conservation as a practice on private land has its foundation in the Balgowan conservancy, formed on 14 August 1978. The initiative was a wholly private strategy by a group of landowners who felt that they should make an effort to preserve the natural resources shared in common among them.³ From the beginning, however, the process of conservancy formation was informed by specialist knowledge of resource management provided by officials of the Natal Parks Board.⁴ Conservancies thus always entailed co-operation on a practical level by farmers who wished to implement the principle and representatives of the para state nature conservation organization who provided technical information and assistance. In very few cases was the participation or contribution of the labour force solicited and most workers on farms participating in conservancies experienced this form of conservation as a fait accompli.

A conservancy was defined by the Natal Parks Board as “a group of farms whose owners have combined resources for the improved conservation and well being of wildlife inhabiting the area.”⁵ It was in this form that the idea was actively promoted in the farming community in the Natal Midlands during the early 1980s, and which found favour among the cluster of landowners around Fort Nottingham.

In 1986 the farms in the immediate vicinity of Fort Nottingham stretched across nearly 15 000ha in the headwaters of the Lions river, straddling the broad valley between the watershed of the Mpofana and Mngeni rivers. The farm ‘Shawlands’ marked the northernmost extent of the ‘neighbourhood’ at 29°17’S and it ran as far as ‘Cotswold’ at 29°27’S in the south. The cluster of smallholdings around the actual ‘Fort’ formed the western extremity at 29°50’E, and in the east, ‘Shawlands’ around 30°E. Most of the valley undulates around 1500m above sea level, rising steeply in the ridge north of Fort Nottingham to a height of 1756m at Lions Kop. In the south, the highest point of the area is peak of Mpumulwane at 1854m. The junction of Highland

² This is dealt with in greater detail in a preceding chapter.

³ Interview with A.F.B. and L. Kerr, 21 July 1993.

⁴ Balgowan conservancy: Minutes of inaugural meeting, 14 August 1978. P.C.A. Francis, et al. ‘History of how the conservancy concept started’ (unpublished Natal Conservancies Association pamphlet, 1983).

and Submontane grassland types marks the natural vegetation predominantly, with occasional evidence of Moist Upland and Montane veld, and pockets of indigenous forest along the watershed ridges⁶. Two significant wetlands, the Mngeni and Stillierust vleis, occur within in the valley with areas of 1200ha and 800ha respectively⁷. The district road wanders pleasantly through the northwestern sections as it makes its way from Nottingham Road to the Dargle, and serves as the major conduit of road traffic, with several dirt roads branching off at intervals. Intensive agriculture including dairies, piggeries, beef and maize production marks the land use, punctuated by isolated lots of *Pinus* silviculture and numerous dams.

Many of the landowning families in this vicinity have lived or farmed there for at least two generations, some for longer, and the district reveals a complex social fabric in this particular fragment of the community. Marriage, friendship and commercial relationships jostle with rivalry and antipathy, but the institutions of the Farmers' Association, Polo Club and drinking establishments are shared collectively. It is not surprising that the phenomenon of conservancies, which had its origins nearby, should find expression in this area too. Mark and Rose Baldock, of 'The Grange' near Fort Nottingham knew Tony and Lynn Kerr, founder members of the first conservancy at Balgowan, and became aware of the spread conservancies were achieving in kwaZulu-Natal. Chip and Diana Turner, of 'Kingussie', were also conscious of the growing number of conservancies by the mid-1980s, and believed action was required to afford wildlife greater protection in the region⁸. The Baldocks began to canvas other landowners over the potential establishment of a conservancy at Fort Nottingham and found many farmers well disposed to the idea⁹.

In early April 1986, Fort Nottingham farmers were informed of a "meeting of all those concerned with the Flora and Fauna of our valley, and the formation of a conservancy to achieve these objectives [sic]" to be held at 'The Grange' on 17 April

⁵ *Environmental management in South Africa*, R.F. Fuggle and M.A. Rabie (eds) (Cape Town, Juta, 1992), p 711.

⁶ G.W. Begg *The wetlands of Natal (part one): An overview of their extent, role and present status* (Pietermaritzburg, Town and Regional Planning Commission, 1986), p 47

⁷ *ibid*, p 54.

⁸ Turner interview, 25 April 1997.

⁹ Baldock interview, 19 August 1997.

1986¹⁰. Tony Kerr was invited to address the meeting, to explain to interested landowners exactly what managing informal nature conservation on their farms would entail¹¹. No register of the meeting was kept, but representatives of the Anderson, Baldock, Boswell-Smith, Duncan, Ellis, Hulley and Turner families were present¹². The gathering took an immediate decision to form a conservancy, to be named the Lions Bush Conservancy, and elected Mike Baldock as the first chairperson¹³.

An important criterion for the successful establishment of a conservancy was the participation of owners of as many contiguous farms as possible. On an ecological level it meant that the greatest possible range of plant and animal species would be included in a single management structure, thereby increasing the efficiency of the conservation effort. In addition, prevention of unauthorized hunting [poaching] was a crucial factor in the establishment of a conservancy, and if there were areas where this could not be policed, the principle was compromised. The simple fact that game guards' would not be allowed across certain farm boundaries would make the organization and structure of their work more complicated if not impossible. A critical consideration at the start of the project at Lions Bush, as in other places, was thus the extension of membership beyond the initial core of founders. The perception of what conservancies meant was key to the manner in which an individual conservancy was created, by determining the membership and establishing consensus on collective action. The discussion at the foundation of the conservancy opened a dialogue on various themes that reoccurred consistently in the records of the organization.

Tony Kerr identified snaring as “the biggest problem” for a conservancy and added that there “are no snares if the guards are doing their job”. He felt that the removal of snares would directly result in an increase in “game”¹⁴. Although his use of the term was most likely unconscious, and ideological imperatives should not be exaggerated, there is an attitude implicit in the expression “game”. While the Natal Parks Board prefers the use of “wildlife” and by that mean all endemic mammals, birds, fish and

¹⁰ Lions Bush Conservancy records [LBC]: undated note.

¹¹ Kerr interview, 20 April 1997.

¹² Baldock interview, 19 August 1997, Anderson interview, 20 April 1997.

¹³ LBC: minutes of inaugural meeting, 17 April 1986.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

natural vegetation¹⁵, the identification of “game” as the primary concern suggests a slightly different approach. “Game” attributes a value to fauna that includes their potential as hunted quarry, an assumption held by many of the landowners in the valley¹⁶. The establishment of a conservancy would not necessarily compromise local landowning traditions of hunting, what was being determined was better management of natural resources¹⁷. The task of protecting the interests of landowners in wildlife fell to the game guards and the rest of the discussion was devoted largely to their role in the conservancy.

Game guards formed a new category of worker on the farms concerned, and presented another kind of dilemma for the farmers. The guards would be employed collectively by the members of the conservancy and were, by the nature of their work, granted freedom of movement on all participating farms, which was an unusual situation for farm labourers. The issue of responsibility for the guards’ actions was vital. Tony Kerr offered recommendations regarding the matter. He suggested recruiting guards from the local labour force and allowing them to work as game guards for an initial period of six months before sending them on a Natal Parks Board training course¹⁸. He also advised that they only be armed with shotguns and not rifles. This is a recurrent theme whenever conservancies allowed their guards firearms, though the aversion to rifles is never explained explicitly.

In his role as chairperson, Mike Baldock agreed to “run the guards initially”, that is, manage their activity in the conservancy. Anticipating conflict, Ted Duncan thought that “property owners [should] be responsible for their *problems* [my emphasis] with game guards” and while he was prepared to house the guards on his farm, he was not prepared to take on the burden of general management. Baldock asked if the guards had to request permission to go onto a farm. Tony Kerr, with greater experience in conservancy administration, clarified two issues. Regarding landowner autonomy, he

¹⁵ *Environmental management in South Africa*, R.F. Fuggle and M.A. Rabie (eds) (Cape Town, Juta, 1992), p 711.

¹⁶ Of course “game” also includes those animals kept mainly to be ‘viewed’ in reserves of different kinds, but the term was originally only used in the sense of hunting.

¹⁷ Snaring and the use of dogs as hunting techniques were only used by those engaged in unauthorized hunting, and these practices would dominate discussion during the setting up of the conservancy.

¹⁸ LBC: minutes of inaugural meeting, 17 April 1986.

declared “whoever houses the guards must control them,” but that the guards be required to report back to each landowner after an inspection and there be no set pattern of visits¹⁹. This allowed the conservancy to operate successfully as an entity distinct from the individual farms and allowed landowners the assurance that their independence was intact. One thing was clear as far as the farmers were concerned; guards needed to be controlled and would have to account for their activity on a number of levels.

At the heart of the problem lay farmers’ concerns over individual autonomy. By agreeing to employ guards collectively, each landowner became subject to some degree of external control in the form of the conservancy committee. Unlike other workers, the game guards did not answer to a single employer, and landowners were faced with the presence of personnel on their farms who could be under instructions from others. A further complication was that someone had to organize the daily activity of the guards and provide a liaison between the guards and conservancy members. This role implied a certain degree of jurisdiction over other members’ property, which appeared to be a stumbling point at the meeting. A suggested compromise was that the guards were housed at ‘Shawlands’, the Duncan farm, but managed initially by Mike Baldock at ‘The Grange’ nearby, and management duty would rotate thereafter²⁰.

An additional issue of concern also related to the game guards, specifically to their work. While reporting to the farmer after each respective patrol would increase accountability to some degree, Kerr believed the guards themselves required surveillance too. He suggested that the “Natal Parks Board will do a sweep to see if the guards are doing their job” [i.e. to see if snares were being removed effectively], and it was suggested that the guards keep a written record of their daily activities²¹. The question attached to how landowners could be certain of what the guards were doing if, by its nature the work was often covert? Mechanisms had been considered, tried elsewhere and were available to ensure that game guard salaries resulted in productive labour. The main cost of the conservancy was the game guards’ salary, an

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

expense for which landowners would see negligible immediate returns. Scrutinizing the efficacy of the investment was thus an important consideration. Indications were thus in place that the management of the conservancy would not be purely involved with wildlife conservation.

Funding the conservancy was the last topic raised. An initial budget of R2 500 per annum was proposed, the bulk of which would pay game guard salaries. The farms included covered approximately 25 000 acres [11 360ha²²] and therefore a pro rata fee of ten cents per acre was suggested²³. An initial fund for minor capital outlays was required and the possibility of holding a reedbuck shoot was raised. Chip Turner interjected over the impression that would be created among farm workers in the community if the initiation of the conservancy was funded in part by a hunt. “We can’t kill game and prevent blacks from snaring. If there’s harvesting, [we] must give some carcasses to the blacks.”²⁴ The minutes do not record how the matter was resolved, but in the event no hunt was held. The principle, though, was implicit; wildlife was regarded as a resource, which be “harvested”, but the way in which this happened was subject to carefully defined strictures. In some quarters there were also concerns about how the venture would be perceived by workers, but this was far from common opinion.

From the outset, Lions Bush Conservancy was concerned with a diversity of control. The physical environment would be patrolled by game guards to prevent unauthorized hunting, some landowners resisted the conservancy imperative of shared management and specifically stressed absolute control of their own land. It is significant in this regard that ‘conservation’ was limited to a narrow protectionist approach and that there was no discussion of farming practices that were ecologically harmful as this might be seen as encroaching on farmers’ individual control of their land. Finally, the activities of the game guards, as paid workforce, demanded close scrutiny. Integrating these themes and finding a way paying the cost was the task of the new committee. The meeting ended with a resolution that the chairperson, and unidentified members of an executive, would publicize the advent of the conservancy and attempt to involve

²² Conservancy records exclusively use of acres as a measure of area. Hectarage is supplied for comparative purposes.

²³ LBC: minutes of inaugural meeting, 17 April 1986.

as other landowners as possible. The process of forming the new conservancy was under way.

A short report of the meeting was circulated among Fort Nottingham farmers announcing the new conservation initiative and outlining the costs. The report departs substantially from the cursory investigation of costs reflected in the minutes of the inaugural meeting. The expenditure on salaries was more than double that originally discussed, supported by a more complicated system of fees. Employing two game guards would require R5250 per annum and, if participating farms covered not less than 30 000 acres [13 430ha] of land, revenue would be apportioned according to the respective size of the farms. There would be a membership fee of R100 per farm, or R50 for smallholdings, and a levy of 12.5 cents per acre per annum²⁵. Once sufficient interest in the scheme had been demonstrated, a meeting was arranged between the executive members of the conservancy and the regional Zone Officer of the Natal Parks Board responsible for Nottingham Road, Ken Morty. He would acquaint the Lions Bush landowners with the more practical elements of operating a conservancy²⁶.

The meeting was important as it reinforced the tendency of the embryonic conservancy to favour staff management procedure above integrated conservation practice. In this regard Ken Morty raised a number of issues for the first time and emphasized those already discussed. The presence of game guards, chiefly in order to prevent poaching, was the defining feature of the conservancy. Consequently, much of what he contributed dealt with the guards and, to a lesser extent, the prosecution of poachers. His first observation was that two guards would provide inadequate protection for 30 000 acres of farmland. He was opposed to arming the guards with guns of any kind and suggested that “the Natal Parks Board can get assegais”²⁷, further evidence of an institutional reluctance to arm the guards with firearms. At a time of increasing civil unrest, part of this suggestion may have had been directed at the threat of firearms being stolen. What protection spears would have offered the guards and the degree to which their efficiency would be impaired, though, is

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ LBC: memorandum of meeting, 28 April 1986.

²⁶ LBC: undated minutes of executive meeting with Ken Morty.

debatable. His third recommendation was that “when the guards arrived, they be introduced to senior labourers. They are not spies, they are here to help.”²⁸ The need to make this point explicitly is a mark of the degree to which farm workers could perceive the guards as having a ‘police’ function. Next it was suggested that Mark Baldock, in his position as chairperson, point out the boundaries of the conservancy and indicate any specific problems to the guards. Then they would be taken to meet each landowner individually, becoming orientated with the layout of the territory.

Of greater consequence, and the primary role of the guards as far as the conservancy was concerned, was the prevention of any hunting not sanctioned by the landowners. Poaching was to be reported to the ‘manager’, in essence the chairperson of the conservancy. Morty pointed out that poachers were charged under chapter one of Provincial Ordinance 15/1974(N)²⁹, which dealt with unauthorized hunting and was usually referred to simply as the ‘Provincial Ordinance’. Conservancies posed unusual circumstances for prosecution however. Ordinarily “poachers” were fined under Section 42 of the Ordinance, for trespass. In the case of resident workers it would be difficult to prosecute for this breach and it was felt that a choice of the following clauses be made, as best applied to each situation:

Section 31(2) Hunting during closed season.

Section 33(1) Licences necessary to hunt game.

Section 43 Destroy dogs that are hunting.

Section 44 Non-whites may not carry or use weapon to hunt.

Section 45(1) No hunting or discharging of weapon on public roads.

Section 47 Snares.³⁰

The use of this legislation was not for the outright prevention of hunting, but its more precise regulation. Hunting per se would not stop in the conservancy and it remained a leisure activity for landowners.³¹ For unauthorized hunting the Natal Parks Board official suggested fines in the range of R50-R100 per snare of any person found in

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ LBC: A summary of procedures and sections for laying charges.

³¹ Anderson interview, 20 April 1997; Shuttleworth interview, 20 April 1997.

possession. Of vital importance though, was that members “agree on how to handle offences”³² thereby ensuring *consistency* of prosecution. It was decided that the committee should formulate guidelines for prosecution, which members would agree to. Here two competing sets of interests had to be balanced. The need to deter poaching was as important as the individuals’ rights as employer and landowner, and the degree to which autonomy was relinquished would be carefully negotiated.

Ken Morty stated, “Guards must be backed up” for if the hierarchy of control was to function, support for the game guards in their contest against poachers was essential. Turner thought it important to inform farm staff that they would be charged if caught snaring or hunting. What this record reflects perhaps indistinctly is that, from the outset, conservancy members knew that “poaching” was perpetrated by their workforce. Turner elaborated the point in suggesting that “if a worker is charged, the landowner is informed... [with] the option of paying [the] fine.”³³ How this cost would be recouped was not clear, but an incentive to stop poaching would be to “bonsella [sic] labourers by shooting an animal for them.”³⁴ At no point is there any discussion of why farm workers might engage in unauthorized hunting, neither is there any attempt to involve them in the process of conservancy formation and management. The underlying theme though, is that those workers inclined to poach did so in the face of direct competition with the owners’ rights over wildlife. Access to resources remained the domain of landowners, those rights to be enforced by game guards.

Finally, Morty impressed the need to keep the game guards motivated by sending them to Natal Parks Board refresher courses and “passing out parades”, but the farmers were more anxious about how the guards would be managed. A query was raised concerning how the guards themselves might be disciplined in the event of a transgression³⁵. It was suggested that a further general meeting was necessary to achieve consensus on the matter. The guards, as far as certain landowners were concerned, were caught squarely between competing interests. In a reversal of Tony Kerr’s suggestion that guards be recruited locally, it was advocated that they be

³² LBC: undated minutes of executive meeting with Ken Morty.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

recruited from beyond the immediate area of the conservancy³⁶. Without loyalties in the local community, they would be forced to regulate the access to hunting and other natural resources with as much detachment as possible. From the outset, though, the guards too were subject to rules and implied disciplinary action.

For prospective members of the Lions Bush Conservancy, at this point informal nature conservation meant more efficient monitoring of natural resources, mainly “game” or faunal wildlife species, and the prevention of unauthorized hunting. The effort would be directed, in part, against snaring by workers on participating farms. Of equal significance was exercising sufficient discipline over the guards who enacted the control, and that the various imperatives of the conservancy not jeopardize the existing standing of landowners. These concepts had begun to coalesce within six weeks of the conservancy being proposed. As a result of the meeting with Ken Morty, it was felt that members, and any other landowners who might wish to join at this point, should officially “formulate rulings” to achieve consistency of application regarding policy within the conservancy *and* serve the interests of individual autonomy.

A report of the meeting with Morty and notice of a further general meeting were circulated simultaneously³⁷. This document once more stressed the “importance of reaching consensus on important issues, in the interests of successful management of the conservancy”, but it raised items for the agenda that were not previously reflected in any record of discussion concerning the conservancy. These topics reveal the extent to which the objectives of the conservancy were transformed.

- (a) Definition of offences: (i) game related (ii) petty theft.
- (b) Punishment of offenders.
- (c) Control of black owned dogs.
- (d) Definition of vermin.³⁸

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ LBC: Report and Notice of meeting, 8 June 1986.

³⁸ *ibid.*

The origin of this subject matter was not identified, but by raising the debate, the executive of the conservancy either reflected issues identified among themselves or on an informal level with members more generally. The revised format of Lions Bush Conservancy, based on these questions, would be discussed at a meeting on 16 June 1986 at 'Kingussie', the home of Chip and Diane Turner. On accord being reached, the parameters of the undertaking would be in place and the conservancy a reality. This agenda defined the conservancy in another way too as it canvassed more broadly among landowners than formerly and addressed themes that would remain contentious for the conservancy.

The meeting began by attending to the role of game guards. Chip Turner identified three possible areas of responsibility for guards, "(i) Game offences – damage to flora and fauna (ii) Petty theft (iii) Security". He immediately suggested, however, that "the game guard not have a dual role – in order not to undermine."³⁹ By this he meant a limited role for the guards, that they were specifically assigned responsibility to prevent "damage to flora and fauna." Although previous discussions had only made reference to "snaring" or "poaching," no definitions of either "damage" or "flora and fauna" were offered. Whatever common understanding of those terms existed at the meeting, none are reflected in the minutes, but must roughly relate to and include "poaching", among other offences. Any use or collection of natural resources without the permission of the relevant landowner could henceforth be punished within the 'Rulings' of the conservancy. A brief discussion followed and general agreement reflected that guards could report petty theft or security violations "if they wanted, but they [were] not to be asked by farmers or implicated."⁴⁰ Awareness was thereby demonstrated that the conservancy should not be seen, or represented, as a 'security force' type organization.

Secondary to the broad designation of offences game guards would be on the lookout for, was the matter of penalties. In his role as Natal Parks Board 'Zone Officer', Ken Morty suggested that NPB officials be called in whenever perpetrators were caught.⁴¹ Following his recommendations at the previous meeting with the conservancy

³⁹ LBC: Minutes of general meeting, 16 June 1986.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

executive, procedure was established that offenders be charged under the Provincial Ordinance [Chapter one, 15/1974(N)]. Certain landowners were reluctant to prosecute their own workers, but Morty insisted that a charge always be laid.⁴² He argued “at that point the employer had the option to pay the requisite fine”, but a uniform process needed to be established. When Peter Brown, of the farm ‘Lions Bush’, asked if an initial warning might not suffice, Chip Turner replied that this would undermine the game guard. Brown responded that the conservancy needed “to get people on farms interested in game. [He] felt the Natal Parks Board should explain to labourers what the purpose of a conservancy is.”⁴³ Until this point there is no record of any attempt to involve farm workers in the process of the pending conservancy. Brown’s interjection would not change this, but the presence of workers as members of the community, as potential participants in the conservancy and not simply as latent “poachers” was recognized.

A realization dawned that simply informing labourers of the game guards’ imminent arrival, as was previously recommended, was not sufficient. W[illiam?] Butcher thought the conservancy “involves labour in consensus,” though no attempt had been made to ascertain how farm workers felt about the idea, or if they even knew about it. Helen and Andy Shuttleworth, whose farm shares a boundary with ‘Lion’s Bush’ had specifically been asked by one of their staff not to join the conservancy because certain of their workers grew *dagga* and were “afraid of the police.”⁴⁴ This implies that, in formulating the organisation, when landowners decided that game guards and the conservancy would mainly represent the interests of nature conservation, for some workers the failure to communicate these objectives was construed as confirmation that the function of the guards was inclusive of regulating petty criminal activity as well. No efforts were apparent to dispel these ideas. In the end those involved in organizing the conservation effort were all property owners and the pervasive understanding was that the conservancy extended greater and more efficient control over their property, some of which existed in the form of natural resources. The minutes do not clearly record how the issue of fines and warnings was resolved, but in light of previous discussions, and Ken Morty’s insistence that offenders be

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Shuttleworth interview, 20 April 1997.

prosecuted, it is probable that the resolution was for thorough prosecution of any person caught “damaging flora and fauna.” Interpretation remained the prerogative of the game guards or landowners in a specific situation.

The last two items on the agenda had never been raised in discussion before, though one was linked closely to the previous point of discussion. While no attempt had been made to inform farm workers of the conservancy, the notice of 8 June 1986 had introduced “control of black owned dogs” as a subject. Dogs attached to African homesteads were regarded as problematic either because they would roam, some eventually becoming feral and attacking stock and wildlife, or because they were used for hunting.⁴⁵ While landowners might be reluctant to pursue criminal prosecution of their labour force, dogs were an easier focus of control.

An initial recommendation, by Mike LeSueur, was to ban dogs from African homesteads altogether, and this caused considerable debate. A. Baillie supported the proposal and added that “eighty per cent of sheep deaths due to dogs... [was a] proven fact.”⁴⁶ This indicates that restraining dogs was a concern over property as much as it was about wildlife management, and betrays a fascinating belief about the death of livestock.⁴⁷ W[illiam?] Butcher, thought it unfair to deny workers any dogs as long as landowners kept theirs, but felt workers dogs should be chained,⁴⁸ a subtle refinement of control, but control nonetheless. Ultimately it was considered an unrealistic expectation that dogs be removed from African homesteads. The compromise was a general request to workers not to have any dogs, but if dogs were kept, to be limited to one dog per household and no unspayed bitches. Finally, having achieved broad consensus among themselves on the primary control of dogs, without the participation of any workers in the discussion, the members turned to the specific problem of dogs found hunting. On this matter there was unanimous assent and a ‘Ruling’ was made. Regardless of who owned it, any dog found hunting, chasing game or livestock would be shot.⁴⁹ It could be argued that roaming dogs are a threat to wildlife, but only to a specific category of wildlife, namely fauna described by landowners as “game”. In

⁴⁵ Turner interview, 25 April 1997; Baldock interview, 19 August 1997.

⁴⁶ LBC: Minutes of general meeting, 16 June 1986.

⁴⁷ Do sheep only ‘die’ if, in doing so, they are rendered useless as carcasses? My estimate is that at least 80% of sheep end up in butcheries.

⁴⁸ LBC: Minutes of general meeting, 16 June 1986.

exerting closer control over dogs, conservancy members were further reducing potential competition for hunting, be that in the form of traditional African hunting by poachers, or by roaming dogs. The principle remained the same. The conservancy was the vehicle for better control of natural resources and what access there was to the resources.

The last issue dealt with was the most surprising for an organization ostensibly formed in the service of nature conservation and entailed the definition of ‘vermin’ and the best methods for its elimination. A cryptic allusion in the minutes of the inaugural meeting was thus clarified. At the launch of the conservancy there was a comment that the “[Natal Parks Board] Forest Reserve at Fort Nottingham [was] a problem.”⁵⁰ This was an uncharacteristic attitude to hold toward several hectares of indigenous climax forest, the remnants of more widely spread forests originally felled for timber in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Pockets of forest might ordinarily be considered the prize asset of a conservancy, except in this case it was perceived as a haven for species of wildlife deemed ‘vermin.’⁵¹ A profound contradiction for the founders of Lions Bush Conservancy was that some kinds of animal got in the way of efficient farming. A willingness to participate in the conservation effort was subject to condition that it not interfere with farming. The principal land use remained agricultural and nothing demonstrated this better than the challenge of how to deal with ‘vermin.’

Debate on the matter was condensed as follows, “Individuals felt strongly about lynx [*Felis caracal*] and jackal [*Canis mesomelas*] and the role played in their presence by the [Natal Parks Board] Forest Reserve.”⁵² The conservancy ‘Ruling’ resolved that each farmer could decide their own policy on vermin and inform the game guards accordingly. The ‘Ruling’ stipulated that if poison was used a landowner was bound to inform respective neighbours. It was noted, however, that the use of poison wasted birdlife as well as ‘vermin,’ there was “a need for balance.”⁵³ The failure of the meeting to formulate a general ruling on the use of poison indicates the need for

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ LBC: minutes of inaugural meeting, 17 April 1986.

⁵¹ LBC: minutes of general meeting, 16 June 1986.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

control operating on two levels. Firstly, landowners in proximity to the Forest Reserve felt a need to stake their autonomy from those further away who did not necessarily have to deal with predator species among their calves and sheep. Furthermore, implicit in all discussions was the notion that conservation meant *management* of natural resources. In the case of wildlife in direct competition with farmers, management entailed keeping predator species under control, even if that required poison. The conservancy ruling on ‘vermin’ illustrates that landowners would not tolerate competitors in any form. Control of all entities and resources, including the extermination of endemic wildlife seen as a threat, was condoned in conservancy rulings.

Before closure of the meeting, a proposed constitution for the conservancy was circulated. The document was, in fact, a revised form of the Dargle Game Conservancy constitution. Considering the various discussions, undertaken over months to bring the conservancy into being, and the carefully structured controls envisioned in the particular version of informal nature conservation finally presented, the legal manifestation of Lions Bush Conservancy was unusual in the respect that it did not reflect much of that process. The second section the constitution comprised the “Objects of the conservancy”, listed as follows:

- (a) To generate interest and active participation by landowners in wildlife preservation.
- (b) The protection, regulation and improvement of wildlife.
- (c) To promote better general security.
- (d) Raise funds for improvement of wildlife in the conservancy area.⁵⁴

Apparently no-one present saw any contradiction between these aims and the subjects that had been under consideration that evening. The “Objects” of the constitution and the “Rulings” contained in the same document were an expression that ‘conservation’ might be a noble ideal, but it was still subject to the greater authority of maintaining order on constituent farms.

A series of undated acceptance remittance notes recorded the initial membership of thirty-nine individual landowners and a combined area of 31 244 acres [14 200ha] in

⁵⁴ LBC: Constitution

the conservancy at its formal launch⁵⁵. Within three months two game guards were hired and were installed in purpose built accommodation at ‘Shawlands’⁵⁶. Over three hundred snares were removed in the conservancy and a successful game count had been held.⁵⁷ The final dynamic of control in the conservancy then emerged. In the months which followed, hundreds of snares were removed from fences and thickets across the conservancy, but their numbers only declined marginally over time.⁵⁸ In spite of concerted efforts by landowners, unauthorized hunting in the form of snaring could not be adequately controlled by the two game guards employed. In June 1988, two years after the conservancy was founded, the central topic of the Annual General Meeting was still snaring. “It was resolved that farmers should talk to their labourers [about snaring]. Ken Morty suggested it was a good idea to shoot the odd reedback [*Redunca arundium*] for the workers.”⁵⁹ Control, it seemed, remained tenuous and “poachers” remained resourceful. There was the assumption that snaring was an effort to source meat, which might well have been the case, but members of the conservancy made no enquiry regarding the matter. The putative solution remained in the realm of control. Reedback were a resource that could be sacrificed on a limited basis to alleviate the pressure of snaring and the right to grant this access was determined by who owned the land. Ultimately the effort to curb unauthorized hunting through greater surveillance and control of the wider community at Fort Nottingham did not produce the results conservancy members sought. The conservancy made poaching more difficult, but could not prevent it.

The motivations for establishing Lions Bush Conservancy were no doubt as varied as the diversity of participants. While care for the environment and wildlife conservation might have been a factor for some, the record of the process itself indicates that access to natural resources on the farms was contested. The introduction of informal nature

⁵⁵ LBC: N.D. Anderson 200, M. Baldock 300, F. Bishop 689, A. Bosworth-Smith 600, A. Boyd 30, P.M. Brown 1000, W.M. Butcher 1500, M.R. Ellis 1400, B. Fergussen 100, Garlick 1000, B. Greene 700, B. Griffin 835, C. Griffin 500, R.L.W. Hancock (manager: T. Duncan) 5887, R.G. Haw 390, J. Hulley 5340, R.I. Hulley 792, Ivanhoe Piggery 1200, F.H. Kahn 176, A.B. King 450, A.J. Messenger 600, Rainbow Chickens 110, W.P. Robarts 2500, G.N. Ross 400, M.W. Rowe 300, R.M. Scott 1000, M. LeSueur 1800, G.H. Talbot 15, Q.K. Turner 1200, The Fort (small-holdings of less than 20 acres each): T. Baker, G.W.T. de Mattos, M.W. Fletcher, J.D. Fox, W.J.R. Gallocher, B.L.C. Hayse-Gregson, F.J. Ridsdale, A.L. Smith-Bailey, R.E. Tatley.

⁵⁶ LBC: Report 23 September 1986.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ LBC: Bi-annual reports, 1987-1992.

⁵⁹ LBC: Minutes of AGM, 19 June 1988.

conservation practice was an effort by landowners to exert their rights of ownership more fully, though it was superficially couched in the ideology of environmental sensitivity. The strategy proved unsuccessful as snaring continued unabated and in response members resolved that the part of the problem lay with inadequate competency on the part of the game guards.⁶⁰ Increased surveillance of the guards themselves, in order to see if they were doing their work, was proposed as the solution. Control, in a diversity of structures remained at the heart of the conservancy.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*