



*Frans Rathokolo, the dog handler with his specially trained tracking hound.*

# Custodians of Wilderness: *The Sabie Game Park, Mozambique.*

*By Zig Mackintosh*

*The Western world has always tried to impose on Africa its principles of natural resource management. Using the sensationalist Western media, cuddly cartoon characters and social media, public opinion is systematically manipulated.*

Preservationism, the idea that wildlife should roam free in some kind of idyllic Eden with no human influence, is presented as the only doctrine. This ideology has given rise to the indignant keyboard conservationist whose animal rights mantra rings out across cyberspace, crowding out any rational discourse. But should Africa be dictated to on how to manage its natural resources using punitive foreign laws? The continent does have its challenges. Wildlife and wilderness is under threat from many quarters but there are

practical ways of dealing with these issues.

The Transfrontier Park concept, where adjoining national parks from two or more neighboring countries are combined to form a single conservation unit, is based on the principle that ecosystems should transcend national borders. The collaborative management of the single unit is key to its success. A Transfrontier Conservation Area differs from a Transfrontier Park in that it comprises different component areas such as the Transfrontier park itself, private

game reserves, communal areas and safari hunting concessions. Free movement of animals between the different sectors may not always be possible because of man-made barriers such as fences, major highways and railway lines. The overall objective is to establish large conservation areas by integrating vast landscapes and re-connecting ecological systems. The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park aims to link various national parks in South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe into an area of around 14 000 sq. miles in extent.



*Early morning patrol along the eastern boundary of the reserve.*

The larger Great Limpopo Transfrontier conservation area will eventually cover an area of almost 39 000 sq. miles. With the transfrontier park at its core, it will include bordering communal areas and private game reserves and conservancies.

In February 2017, the 600 000 acre Greater Libombo Conservancy was incorporated into the Great Limpopo Transfrontier conservation Area. Within the Greater Libombo Conservancy lies the Sabie Game Park, extending over 75 000 acres.

Before the independence and civil wars in Mozambique, which spanned 25 years, most of the properties bordering South Africa's Kruger National Park were cattle ranches.



*The Sabie Game Park has drilled 15 boreholes for the local communities.*

*Established in 2001, the initial aim of the Sabie Game Park was to create an upmarket eco-tourism destination. This model, however, was not viable and in 2007 the current directors decided to convert the area into a safari hunting concession.*



*With the trackers and dog loaded up, the rapid reaction team is deployed*

The larger animals such as lion, elephant, and leopard were deemed pests and were eliminated by the ranchers. When war broke out in 1964, anarchy reigned as wildlife across the region was slaughtered to feed the forces on both sides. The unsustainable bushmeat trade thrived. Established in 2001, the initial aim of the Sabie Game Park was to create an upmarket eco-tourism destination. This model, however, was not viable and in 2007 the current directors decided to convert the area into a safari hunting concession. Five water points were established in strategic positions across the reserve to provide year-round water for the animals. The flow of water into these waterholes is regulated so as not to attract too many elephants from the Kruger National Park, which would have an adverse effect on the vegetation.

With the provision of water and by securing the habitat, wildlife numbers and diversity flourished.

The Sabie Game Park is committed to community upliftment projects with five major villages outside of the reserve. Sourcing clean, fresh water is a perennial problem and the reserve has drilled 15 boreholes across the area for the people. A further community benefit is the provision of meat from the animals that are hunted in the reserve. The meat is given to the kids after school for two reasons. The first is to encourage the kids to go to school and the second is to make sure that the meat goes back to the family. When the Sabie Game Park was established there were a number of families living within the boundaries of the reserve who needed to be relocated. An equitable resolution was agreed upon and the park undertook to build 15 new houses outside of the reserve for the displaced families. Food security is a fundamental component of any community based natural resource management program. The reserve is proactive in helping the local communities develop their farming skills.

The Sabie Game Park has secured from the government a safari hunting quota outside of the reserve, for the local communities. The wildlife has been given an economic value, the people now view these animals as their own and in the same light as their cattle. The incentive to develop game populations across the region has been enhanced.

Game populations, including the vulnerable black and white rhino, increased rapidly with the rehabilitation of the conservancy. These successes, however, brought problems in the form of rhino poachers. The outsourcing of complete anti-poaching solutions is an emerging trend in Africa. The practice allows the operations to concentrate on their core business and responsibilities. The Dyck Advisory Group, or DAG for short, is a company that provides a comprehensive, turnkey anti-poaching service. DAG has teamed up with the Sabie Game Park in order to tackle the poaching threat across the region.

Aerial surveillance of the rhino population is carried out with the use of a Bat Hawk aircraft. Two

flights a day are made over the reserve to look for rhino. If a rhino is spotted, a ground team is positioned to monitor the rhino whilst it is in the area. In addition to this, DAG is committed to fighting the rhino poaching scourge affecting the sub-region. Their strategy is based on early detection, rapid reaction. Aircraft, helicopters, vehicles, armed game scouts and trackers with tracker dogs are deployed in the fight against rhino poaching.

The Sabie Game Park, a hunting reserve, is home to the only resident population of rhino in Mozambique. Its success has been made possible through controlled, sustainable safari hunting. Without the revenue from safari hunting the reserve would simply not survive. Across the continent of Africa, repressive foreign laws and controls are stifling the conservation efforts of custodial organizations such as the Sabie Game Park.

The “Sabie Game Park, Mozambique” is the Hunter Proud Foundation’s latest documentary in the Custodians of Wilderness series. The movie can be watched here: <https://vimeo.com/251291744>

**The Hunter Proud Foundation** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable public foundation based in the USA. The foundation’s principal aim is the use of charitable tax-deductible donations to produce educational documentaries promoting the success of the conservation through a utilization model. For more information please visit the Website at [www.hunterproud.com](http://www.hunterproud.com).