

WILD LIFE CONSERVATION EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN RHODESIA

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Seventy years ago the population of Southern Rhodesia was only about 500,000. The inhabitants occupied the land according to their tribal customs, and were mainly hunters and pastoralists. In those days the whole country abounded with wild life. Then western civilization came to the country, bringing with it advanced agricultural techniques, medical science and the western system of law. Within thirty years vast changes and development took place. The indigenous population trebled: industries, particularly mining, sprang up all over the country and around these industries towns were built with the resultant network of road and rail communications. But, following the pattern of development seen in so many countries, Rhodesia's natural resources were being squandered and destroyed, in some cases through lack of knowledge, in others wantonly. Nevertheless, even in the 1920's a few people, supported by the Government, did make some provision for the conservation of wild life and in 1927 the first game reserve was established at Wankie. By the 1930's, however, it was obvious that other resources, particularly the soil, were being lost at an alarming rate. Again a few far-sighted people, led by Water Court Judge McIlwaine, stirred up public opinion, the Governor appointing a commission of enquiry into the extent to which the natural resources were being squandered. The outcome of this enquiry was the establishment of the Natural Resources Board, constituted by Act of Parliament which, in essence, recognized the Board as the public trustee for the natural resources of the country. The Board has extremely wide powers and can give orders to the owners, occupiers or users of any land to adopt such measures as it may deem necessary for the conservation and protection of the resources. Whilst an appeal to the court against such orders is provided for, the Board relies upon persuasion rather than compulsion and depends upon the goodwill and common-sense of the people to ensure a future both for themselves and for those who are to follow.

The problem confronting the Board was enormous. Not only was it necessary to organize a conservation education campaign to cater for different races with different customs and with varying standards of education, but also to take into account that very large sections of the community were in the transition stage, drawn between their old instincts and tribal customs and the exacting mechanism of a modern world. In addition the Second World War limited activity, so that conservation education was confined at first primarily to the farming community with particular emphasis on mechanical conservation of the land, the importance of water conservation and improved farming practices.

Once hostilities had ceased, a comprehensive campaign was planned to create a conservation consciousness towards natural resources generally

in all branches of the community, with particular emphasis on the country's youth. A Conservation Education Committee was established with sub-committees in Mashonaland, Manicaland, the Midlands and Matabeleland.

The overall plan of campaign was that while general publicity and educational material would be produced on all natural resources each year, one specific resource would form the main theme for an all-out conservation drive. Highlighting each year's activities is Conservation Week which falls during July, with the Sunday of the Week observed as Conservation Sunday. During 1961 the theme was Wild Life Conservation.

At the beginning of the year a National Poster and Slogan Competition was organized to attract entries from commercial artists and adult amateurs and also from school children. In the Open or adult section attractive cash and consolation prizes were offered and in the Schools section prizes were given for the best entries in each age group from 6 to 18. The winning entry from the Open section formed the basis of the National Campaign Poster and embodied the slogan "Conserve Wild Life—Don't Destroy—Let's Enjoy". Tens of thousands of these posters were distributed throughout the country in shops, garages, halls, offices, schools, and clubs. The competition and the resulting national poster created widespread interest in wild life throughout the country and as a result of international publicity given to the campaign, requests for copies were received from organizations in the United States, Great Britain, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of South Africa, West Germany, Kenya, and Tanganyika and, of course, were widely distributed in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

Two coloured posters under the titles "Game Animals of Rhodesia—Antelopes" and "Some Rhodesian Birds of Prey" were also produced in co-operation with other Government departments.

Following the general pattern of conservation education special courses for teachers were organized by the Regional Conservation Education Committees with talks by experts, supported with slides, films and outings to national parks and game reserves. This activity is being followed up during the current year.

Wide use was made of the radio, particularly on a programme called "Our Natural Resources" which is produced by the Natural Resources Board each week. Throughout the year the campaign theme was highlighted on this programme, and special scripts were written for translation and broadcast in the vernacular. During Conservation Week special radio programmes were introduced, such as a talk for "Rural Correspondence Schools", a quiz on the "Young Rhodesia" programme which has become a popular feature attracting many thousands of entries. Every morning of the Week a competition entitled "What Animal Is It?" attracted tremendous support. Each day the first three correct entries opened received attractive prizes given by commercial firms.

Of paramount importance in the campaign was the support of commerce and industry and organizations connected with wild life. At the beginning of the year, therefore, all chambers of commerce, publicity associations, town management boards, wild life and hunters' associations and travel

agents were given details of the campaign with suggestions as to how the wild life theme would fit in with their normal activities. This paid handsome dividends for not only did it ensure wide distribution of conservation education material but also attracted active support from numerous large organizations. For instance, a leading oil company sponsored the production by the Board of over 40,000 wild life colouring-in books which gave twenty-four outline illustrations of different wild animals with a short simple write-up on each. The cost of this production was over £1,200 and the books were distributed to primary schools throughout the country.

In another instance a large tea concern ran its sales campaign on the wild life theme and, through the Board, distributed coloured wall charts illustrating fifty different game animals. Picture cards of these animals were also produced and given away with packets of tea bought in the shops. Large quantities were made available together with special albums for free distribution by the Board to schools. The same company offered a special prize in a National Wild Life Photographic Competition which enabled a number of senior school children of all races to spend one week in a wild life national park.

Then again a leading soft drinks company were given permission to use the National Poster and slogan in all their advertising and gave away miniature models of wild life for a specific number of their product's bottle tops. By working in conjunction with this company not only did the wild life campaign generally receive far more publicity than could otherwise have been achieved on the Board's limited financial resources but the company gave over £400 towards wild life conservation. This money went towards a national appeal for funds to re-introduce white rhinoceros into two national parks and to re-stock national parks throughout the country with certain species of wild life rescued from the rising waters of Lake Kariba and other areas where wild life is in danger of extinction.

The national press was used extensively for special advertising which not only drew attention to the campaign and canvassed for support but also highlighted pernicious practices such as snaring. This programme was supported by articles both in the press and magazines and also by special competitions for children for which attractive prizes were given. Particularly successful was a colouring-in competition in which applicants were sent a scenic picture incorporating ten different species of animal. Entrants also had to name the animals in the picture. Many hundreds of children of all races entered for this competition.

On the production side a popular and successful approach was the distribution of tens of thousands of the game Snakes and Ladders which was adapted to the wild life theme. At the bottom of the ladder a good wild life conservation practice was illustrated, likewise a bad one at the tail of each snake.

Apart from material actually produced by the Board reprints of selected articles such as "Huxley in Africa" obtained from the Fauna Preservation Society, "The International Importance of African Wildlife" by Fulbright Scholar Thane Riney and "Wildlife and Human Values in Southern Rhodesia" by T. Riney and R. H. N. Smithers, were distributed throughout the country. This material was not only of value at teachers' training

colleges and to school teachers generally but also added support to the educational drive directed at farmers and ranchers. Considerable emphasis was placed on giving publicity to the fact that if wild life was to survive outside national parks and game reserves it would have to be utilized to the economic benefit of the country. Dealing with the whole aspect of wild life utilization in Rhodesia, a 30-minute film was produced by the Board with financial assistance from the Fauna Preservation Society, and technical advice from Mr. Thane Riney.

As a result of the Board's activities and indirectly as a result of the tremendous national interest created by the year's campaign, research into wild life conservation has received far greater impetus and a wild life conservation course has been introduced by the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The campaign generally was an unqualified success and has aroused the nation's interest in the importance of conserving the wild life of the country and an appreciation of its economic importance as a tourist attraction, as a conservation measure in areas overgrazed by cattle and as an important additional source of much needed animal protein.