

Water for Animals in Rhodesia

In *ORYX*, December 1968, page 425, we published a brief summary of an article in the *Rhodesia Science News* about some of the unexpected results of increasing water supplies for animals in national parks. Mr R. I. G. Attwell, Chief Research Officer of the National Parks in Rhodesia, makes the following comments:

'The Department is well aware of the dangers of haphazard supply of artificial watering points, and indeed of the *dry season* maintenance of natural seasonal waterholes, for wildlife populations. The sites where water is required are carefully considered in relation to other factors, particularly vegetation and fire management, before action is taken. It is true that in the past, when ecological appreciation had not reached the stage that it has today, critical appreciations were not always made.

'Historical factors and present farming developments have necessitated the provision of water in the Wankie National Park. With the exception of certain limited areas, there is no permanent natural water available to wildlife throughout the year—although in the wet season there is adequate water in natural pans which are common on the Kalahari sands. Those wildlife species which in earlier days had free range from Botswana through Wankie National Park to the Zambesi are now denied such free range and the natural water supplies which it provided, due to agricultural development.

'In so far as natural "culling" processes resulting from lack of water are concerned, it is the present policy to allow *natural* waterholes to dry up, irrespective of the threat to wildlife concentrations in the area. Further, with the provision of a planned system of waterholes, it will shortly be possible (when and if necessary), to use water as a management tool, by creating artificial droughts in certain sections of the park; this will be done before the stress periods in the dry season, with the result that wildlife concentrations will be able to move off to other areas, while rest periods will be afforded to the over-used areas.

'It is clear that several errors have crept into the article: in paragraph 2, the reference to hilly areas of "north-east Rhodesia" should read "north-west Rhodesia". In paragraph 3, the animals listed as grazing ruminants include some which are not in fact ruminants. The state of knowledge concerning the animals listed is such that the authors of the article in *Rhodesia Science News* (and as reported by you), may or may not have produced satisfactory hypotheses in respect of water and food requirements, and ecological inter-relationships; nevertheless, there are clearly many other variables involved, such as those of soil, habitat, and fire regimes, of which no mention is made. The picture as painted seems to be one of considerable over-simplification.

'The article conveys the impression that the authority responsible for national parks in Rhodesia is unaware of the primary functions of wildlife national parks, or at best is lacking in a sense of ecological appreciation. It appears to be fashionable for some to criticise, not always with justification, the pattern of wildlife conservation in Rhodesia. If "clients before science" was in fact at any time in former years the "motto", it certainly is not today. The approved Government policy for the Wankie National Park states that it is maintained to preserve objects

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