

Capture and relocate game

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Operation SUTISA (Sotho word for "moving around") encompassed the capture and relocation of game from a DOD training facility in accordance with national and DOD legislation and military

integrated environmental management practices. This was to ensure future sustainable use of military bases and training areas in the Limpopo Province. By incorporating these practices the concept of "green soldiering" was brought into being. Excess game in a military training area, namely Roodewal Bombing Range, was leading to a deterioration of the veld and this issue needed urgent attention.

Because the respective disposal sections at higher Headquarters had not carried out the instructions of the game disposal board and further related actions for various reasons, it became vitally necessary to resort to alternative steps. The SA Air Force also indicated that no flying hours were available owing to present financial constraints. This was in order to comply with national and DOD legislation. The DOD is a land user and custodian of national land assets and therefore has a responsibility to the residents of the RSA to ensure responsible and sustainable use of these valuable assets.

This is done through Military Integrated Environmental Management (MIEM), which can be

achieved through the following functions:

- Ecological management through sound range management practices by incorporating correct game and veld management as tools to achieve sustainable use of military bases and training areas, including removal of game where necessary.
- Legal compliance with national and DOD environmental and related legislation, policies and guidelines.

Because game disposal actions had not been carried out for various reasons in previous years and because a drought was putting the veld and

Green soldiering.

game under severe stress, this operation was initiated by Capt Hennie Davel, SO2 Reg Env Mgmt at RFIM Pietersburg. The veld was showing signs of deterioration and the bases and training areas under discussion were suffering game losses, ie the loss of a valuable State asset, with severe financial implications.

Capt Davel started researching this issue and established that RFIM Bloemfontein had a requirement for additional game as a management tool. Through dedicated liaison and professional preliminary planning he established that RFIM Bloemfontein, in conjunction with the game capture



Capt Hennie Davel from RFIM Pietersburg co-ordinating the capture of Sable Antelope.

section of the Free State Department of Provincial Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), could commit itself to the capture and relocation of various game species. Limpopo DEAT indicated that it was unable to assist with this project. The opportunity therefore arose for the SANDF to be involved in the capture and relocation of game internally and externally, relying on its own capabilities.

These species and their numbers were listed in the provincial ecologist's report (compiled after veld monitoring and census) and the RFIM Pietersburg annual game management requirements for 2002. This relocation will take place internally within the Limpopo Province (DOD), as well as externally under the auspices of the Free State Department of Environment and Tourism (DEAT) nature reserves and Northern Cape (Lohattha Training Area, DOD). All these actions were planned and carried out by Capt Davel in compliance with DOD legislation, policy and guidelines, as well as national legislation. Examples of national and DOD legislation, policies and guidelines that have been complied with are as follows, and are indicative of the commitment of environmental services in the DOD to the responsible use of military areas. Note the following relevant legislation:

- National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998.
- Transvaal Ordinance 12 of 1983.
- Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act 43 of 1983.
- Environmental Conservation Act 73 of 1989.
- National Veld and Forest Fire Act 101 of 1998.
- Animal Health Bill No 108 of 1996.
- National Water Act 39 of 1998.

The broad strategy for environmental services in the SANDF in August 1992 involves the following:

- Draft SOP for game management on DOD controlled properties.
- Environmental Implementation Plan. First Edition: Sept 2000.
- Log 17 Pam 20.

- General Support Bases' and training area game management plans.

Various game species had to be removed from a military training area (Roodewal Bombing Range) in the Limpopo Province. This had to be done to prevent severe training area degradation, which would jeopardise the ability of the SANDF to produce operationally ready soldiers (core business).

At any given time thirty members of the Free State DEAT and twenty members of the SANDF were involved in this operation.

RFIM Bloemfontein and Free State DEAT indicated that they were able to conduct this operation during the period 6 to 20 October 2002 (estimated time needed for the operation) taking into account their own internal commitments and obligations. There was a sense of urgency because of the state of the veld and game in the training area mentioned (weak, diseased and pregnant animals) as well as climatic conditions (drought and heat at that time of the year). This was seen as the deadline for this project so as not to lose valuable State assets.

Capt Davel started the planning phase in April 2002 and this included weeks of lengthy and complicated liaison, negotiation and co-ordination with RFIM Bloemfontein, Limpopo DEAT, Free State DEAT, DOD veterinarians, as well as with Commanding Officers and staff of both General Support Bases and their respective training areas. It must be mentioned that Capt Davel, in this planning phase, saved the DOD at least R10 000 by arranging the loan of external game capture equipment. This included crates from Limpopo DEAT (which at the last minute could not be loaned), a compartmentalised truck from General Support Base Potchefstroom and a giraffe trailer from a local game capture company which were obtained through painstaking negotiation and liaison.

Capt Davel successfully arranged and negotiated a lifting of the no-fly restriction on the ammunition subdepot of Naboomspruit for the civilian capture helicopter to operate. He also

arranged and negotiated all necessary permits for the capture, transport and export to other provinces of the game through professional and efficient liaison. Five capture, seven export, seven transport and two internal relocation permits were negotiated.

From 3 to 5 September 2002 he carried out a planning and reconnaissance visit to the three training areas affected by the project. At this stage a lengthy military order was compiled to enable DOD members to be tasked for this operation. This was also to facilitate all logistical arrangements, such as accommodation, medical support, rations, fuel and other support for the entire operation, and it ensured efficient and successful distribution to all parties. On 20 September 2002 he chaired a co-ordination meeting at the RFIM Pietersburg offices to finalise and confirm all arrangements for this vast project. The following is a breakdown of the financial value of the game captured and relocated, which gives an indication of the immense responsibility that Capt Davel had during this operation:

- 3 rhino (total value R735 000) relocated to Koppies Nature Reserve (Free State DEAT).
- 63 tsessebes (total value R793 800) relocated to Koppies Nature Reserve (Free State DEAT).
- 82 tsessebes (total value R1 033 200).
- 52 kudu (total value R130 000).
- 15 sable (total value R2 160 000).
- 5 giraffe (total value R71 000).
- 62 wildebeest (total value R155 000) = Grand total R5 078 000.

From 6 to 13 October 2002 Capt Davel led and co-ordinated the game capture and relocation at the Roodewal Bombing Range. These actions were conducted from 05:00 until dark every day, including Saturdays and Sundays, and this also involved the constant co-ordination of all staff, accommodation, food, fuel, vehicles and all capture, transport and relocation operations. The following
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