

MEDIA RELEASE - 7 June 2002

ALLEGED IRREGULARITIES ON THE KILLING OF A GIRAFFE BULL AT THE NEW SATARA BUFFALO ENCLOSURE

Background

In order to breed disease-free buffalo in Kruger National Park, management set aside an area of approximately 900ha to the south west of Satara rest camp. The breeding of disease-free buffalo necessitated the construction of an enclosure to keep other animals out. The construction of the camp started in October last-year and the fencing was completed in mid-January 2002.

Prior to putting up the last section of the fence, the Game Capture team attempted to drive out all animals that were within the designated area. This operation was not entirely successful as some of the wild animals including six giraffe, remained in the designated enclosure.

On 7 March 2002, another attempt was made to drive these animals through the camp gate.

Four options were available for the removal of the giraffe in particular:

1. Capture and transport out of the park for sale;
2. Capture and release in the park;
3. Build a funnel leading to the camp gate and drive the animals through this;
4. If option 3 failed, put down the giraffe.

Option 1 was ruled out by lack of equipment for transporting giraffe and by the existence of foot-and-mouth disease in that section of the Kruger National Park.

Option 2 was likewise ruled out by a lack of equipment.

Option 3 was adopted. The result was that all but a few giraffe were successfully driven out. Two of the remaining giraffe collided in the funnel area, seriously injuring one of them. This animal had to be put down. The other giraffe was successfully driven out. One remaining giraffe stubbornly refused to leave the enclosure and as a result had to be killed. Initially it was shot several times using a shotgun. When this failed, one rifle shot was fired from a helicopter felling the animal. A second round was fired by ground crew to make sure the animal was dead.

In May, SANParks received a formal complaint from Dr Karen Trendler, Chairperson of the Animal Use and Care Committee (AUCC) that Dr Gertenbach, Head of Conservation: KNP, took friends on a hunting spree at Satara on 7 March 2002. The letter accused Dr Gertenbach of shooting animals from a helicopter like a cowboy and wounding a giraffe badly until its eyes popped out. It also made allegations of outsiders taking pot shots of the dead giraffe and scores of other animals like impala, kudu, warthogs etc that were shot and strewn in the veld. The story was subsequently carried by the Mail and Guardian – followed by other newspapers – with all the sensation that came with it, assuming a stance of "guilty until proven innocent".

SANParks responded by launching a high-level investigation into all the allegations made in Dr Trendler's letter. It is policy to act on any allegation received from whomsoever and investigate the substantiveness of such accusations. The investigator was guided by the SANParks Disciplinary Code, the Labour Relations Act and the Fraud Prevention Policy. Sworn statements were taken from eye-witnesses who were present at the scene of the alleged incident. Relevant persons not present at the scene were also consulted and interviewed to give more light on the allegations. On Monday, 3 June 2002, the Corporate Investigation Unit led by Mr Ken Maggs, and the IR Department led by Mr Norman Sanderson, submitted the findings of the investigations based on the sworn statements and interviews of all the witnesses. None of the witnesses confirmed or were prepared to testify that the allegations made in Dr Trendler's letter or the Mail and Guardian story.

The investigating team did not find any evidence of irresponsible behaviour on the part of Dr Gertenbach or indeed, any other SANParks employee present during the operation. There was no evidence of a hunting spree

as alleged. The operation had been approved by the Director of the Kruger National Park following consultations with the Conservation Committee of the park. The investigation found Dr Gertenbach initially used an inadequate weapon, viz, a shotgun instead of the recommended .223 rifle. As stated already, the inadequacy of giraffe capture equipment is a matter to be addressed by the SANParks Scientific Services Department.

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