

## PRIVATE GAME RESERVES AND STATE RESERVES

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### Sources of information

The information on game ranching in the study area is scant. Limpopo Province's Department of Finance and Environmental Affairs have a database of game ranches with exemption permits. This database is not complete. 17 of the more prominent ranches and reserves in the study area cover an area in excess of 150 000 ha. Compared to provincial statistics for 1998, 26% of the surface area of the province was game fenced by that time. It has been estimated that more than 80% of former cattle farms have been converted to game ranches in the area north of the Soutpansberg Mountain. Obviously the database is not complete and needs updating.

### Summary statistics

Large mammals commonly found on game ranches in the area include: kudu, impala, blue wildebeest, zebra, giraffe, warthog, gemsbuck, eland, leopard, brown hyena and bushpig. Species that have been re-introduced include: sable, roan, buffalo, elephant, nyala, waterbuck, white rhino and lion.

Core areas, which have the potential to form conservancies with a view to linking up, consist of:

- Makuya Park, over 18 000 ha home to the Big Five, Crocodile, Hippo, Wild Dog and incredible Bird Life along the Levubu River.
- Madimbo Corridor, over 50 000 ha home to Elephant, Buffalo, Leopard, Lion and at least 10 species of plains game.
- Poppalin Ranch, 10 000 ha: home to Elephant, Buffalo, Leopard and over 15 species of plains game.
- Nwanedi Reserve, 9 000 ha: home to White Rhino and over 10 species of plains game, with two magnificent dams and a good resort complex.
- Greater Kuduland, over 15 000 ha home to four of the Big Five and over 20 species of plains game over 300 birds species.
- Wonder Why, 3 000 ha: plains game.
- Nzhelele Reserve, 2 000 ha: plains game and Nzhelele Dam.
- Phala Ranch, 5 000 ha: plains game.
- Studholme Nature Reserve, not sure about size or species.
- Pride of Africa Ranch, 6 000 ha: plains game and Buffalo.
- Elkana Ranch, 15 000 ha: four of the Big Five and Lions will follow soon.

- Plaas Marius and Conservancy, 5 000 ha: plains game and Leopard.
- Lesheba Ranch, not sure about size: plains game and Rhino.
- Goro Ranch, 7 000 ha: plains game.
- Bergtop Ranch, 4 000 ha: plains game and Rhino.
- Western Soutpansberg Conservancy, 90 000 ha, plains game and Leopard.
- Blouberg Nature Reserve, 8 000 ha: plains game.
- Maleboch Nature Reserve, 5 000 ha: plains game.

Game resources are utilised in different ways. These include hunting, live capture, intensive breeding and non-consumptive eco-tourism activities (photo safaris, etc.).

### Major studies and publications

- DU TOIT, J. T. 1995. Determinants of the composition and distribution of wildlife communities in Southern Africa. *Ambio* 24(1): 2–6.
- DU TOIT, J. T. 2002. Wildlife harvesting guidelines for community-based wildlife management: a southern African perspective. *Biodiversity and Consecration* 11:1403–1416.
- TROLLOPE, W. S. W. 1990. Veld management with specific reference to game ranching in the grassland and savanna areas of South Africa. *Koedoe* 33(2): 77–86.
- VAN DER WAAL, C. & DEKKER, B. 2000. Game ranching in the Northern Province of South Africa. *Southern African Journal of Wildlife Research*.

### Recommendations for priority studies required to fill any gaps identified

- Habitat suitability
- Grazing and browsing capacity
- Limiting factors such as bush encroachment

These Reserves and Ranches identified are a large part of the Soutpansberg Conservation area. We would not hesitate to add at least another 50–000 hectares of Private Game Ranches to the above. It's quite staggering, when one considers that in our Study Area there are probably 200 000 ha set aside for Wildlife. If this Study Area moved North 50–100 km then the area under Wildlife would exceed 500 000 ha.

Just North of the Study Area there is the Danish Foundation who have 40 000 ha with four of the Big Five. Venetia Mine with 40 000 ha have four of the Big Five. A Swedish investor has 30 000 ha near Pont Drift with three of the Big Five.

I believe that with this many Ranches and Reserves under game utilization we should seriously look at conservancies, as this whole area could have 5–10 major conservancies with no internal fences, which is exactly what wildlife needs to flourish and tourists pay to see. We have to get away from the small fenced Game Ranches.

There is obviously more land under game but this figure is the total of the area I've identified.

For the Study area we have used a map which covers the Soutpansberg Range and adjacent Blouberg massif. The core area stretches from Blouberg to Punda Maria following the Southern Slopes of the Soutpansberg and then from Punda Maria to Pafuri. It then follows the Pafuri Road West to just South of Mopani then carries on West to just North of Waterpoort and back to the Blouberg. The area is roughly 250 km long and is at its widest in the East, where it is 50 km wide. For this study I will not include the part of the Kruger which falls within the mapped area.

There are many smaller Game Ranches but due to time constraints and my limited knowledge I will work on the larger ones and the Reserves we know.

### “Hotspots” of particular importance

The following areas might act as starting points. These areas can be extended to cover the study area as more land-users come on board:

- Makuya Park encompassing the Madimbo Corridor and Poppalin Ranch.
- Nwanedi Reserve and Greater Kudu Land Conservancy incorporating Nzhelele and Phala up to the N1 road.
- Pride of Africa and Elkland
- Lesheba, Goro and Western Soutpansberg including Plaas Marius and its Western neighbours, basically the whole Soutpansberg from the N1 to Vivo.
- Blouberg and Maleboch Reserves.

Most of these hot spots are still pristine but certain areas need protection and alien plants are a problem in certain areas, as is bush encroachment.



J. Stam