STEWARDSHIP ACROSS BOUNDARIES: GAUTENG CONSERVANCIES

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Abstract

This paper attempts to summarise the historical lessons to be learnt from conventional nature conservation, concludes that it cannot serve as a model for the future of conservancies and philosophically presents stewardship of land use as a potential alternative. Using the characteristics of conventional nature conservation and the philosophy of stewardship as background and context, a simplistic analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of, opportunities for and threats to Gauteng Conservancies are presented. In the final analysis this paper consists primarily of questions that sets up the central conflict between sentimental and rational land use, leaves it unresolved and in doing so provokes the reader to dwell on the subject.

INTRODUCTION

No two 'conservationists' share identical motives or methods. The same applies to conservancies. Therefore, it is not possible for an individual to accurately represent the diversity of motivations and methods employed by the Gauteng Conservancies. However, there does appear to be some generic motivation, some concern over the environment, quality of life and a future for our children. Furthermore, Gauteng Conservancies share certain strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. These issues are mentioned this paper.

The author's motives for involvement in conservancies are based on stewardship of land use. These personal motives have their origins in religion and science. In addition, the author is a firm believer in the lessons of history. This is something that our current self-righteous and arrogant societies appear to ignore. At the risk of being accused of digression, the following two sections of this paper are devoted to background and context. This is considered necessary because the concept of a conservancy, infrequently and fleetingly, at least to the author, appears to offer glimpses of some improvement to the historical, sentimental and almost animistic approaches to looking after nature.

Already it should be clear to the reader that the author does not prescribe to the "preserve" or "conserve" school of thought, as in putting something in a jar with a preservative, for looking at it. Land should be used in a rational manner **for the benefit of people** and not only for the benefit of a few very wealthy, people (Tourists) and a few conspicuous animals (Big 5).

NATURE CONSERVATION

What is a conservationist?

One definition of a conservationist is that he/she comes from a civilised, high-density urban community (Graham, 1973). They are individuals who try to find in nature innocence and peace they cannot find in human society and inevitably project onto nature those attributes they seek, especially onto animals. They deny that humans are part of the ecosystem and through propaganda establish a mindset that the environment is not for humans but for animals.

What is conservation?

Ultimately, the motives for conventional conservation boil down to disquiet over the threats human beings pose to other species and the health of the entire planet. The author's disquiet extends beyond this. In his case there are as great concerns over wildlife damage to human livelihoods, especially farmers. Farming profit is often turned to loss by wildlife. Even in the absence of the larger animals, the smaller animals pose a serious threat to livelihoods. When the livelihoods of humans are threatened, they end up on a collision course with wildlife.

Historically, African farmers lost their livelihoods and lives in the name of conservation. Colonial governments moved tens of thousands of people from their farmland to make way for wildlife sanctuaries (National Parks) in the pre-independence years (Graham, 1973; Western, 1997). Therefore, it appears that hard-line conservationism put Africans and wildlife on a collision course. Ironically, some African governments are now doing the same to white farmers.

Furthermore, one glaring discrepancy was never mentioned by conventional conservationism: How was it possible that areas which had been settled and farmed by people for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years could suddenly become pristine wilderness areas, attract thousands of ecologists and result in numerous academic qualifications and scientific papers? Moreover, why was it so, scientifically fashionable to publish many papers vilifying tried and tested farming practice, if these practices resulted in these so called pristine wilderness areas?

Pristine nature is an illusion (Srivastava *et al*, 1996). An illusion is something that exists only in thought and not in demonstrable practice. "You are hallucinating when you suppose that what you have in a national park is pristine nature. It simply isn't so. What you have is a tract of land barred to human occupation but which is surrounded by overtly or latently hostile humans." For example, Tanzania's

Serengeti Park, far from being a pristine relic held in trust for our children, is the result of centuries, perhaps thousands of years of cultivation, burning and grazing by man without which preparation would not support the spectacular wildlife it has for the past decades (Graham, 1973; Western, 1997).

The same applies to the Kruger Park, in which burning, cultivation and grazing also played a major preparatory role. Dozens of other examples could be given, all of which underline the main point: that to a greater or lesser degree all game parks owe their present status to the effects of man (rational land use) rather than to animals (Graham, 1973; Kruger, 2002).

Unfortunately, this covetous behaviour is not merely history. This statement is borne out by current attempts to convert North East Gauteng to a Big 5 Game Reserve. According to the feasibility reports, the present occupants of the land are terrible custodians and the land must forthwith become a sanctuary for a few large and truculent animals.

What is ecology?

What is ecology, besides being the darling word of the animistic environmental propagandist? Ernst Heinrich Haeckel, philosopher-biologist, is credited with the invention (1869) of the word ecology, which he and others after him spelled oecology, since the first part of the word came from the Greek root oikos, meaning home. Haeckel considered ecology to deal with the general economy of the household of nature (Graham, 1944). Interestingly, the word economy (human activity) also has it's origins in the Greek root oikos and was originally spelled oikonomia and used to refer to the household economy, i.e. "the management of the household so as to increase its value to all members of the household over the long run" (Daly & Cobb, 1989).

Pursuing the above historical lesson any further is not possible in this paper, except to mention that it appears if the best interests of the human household and of nature are inextricably linked. Unfortunately science has very little to offer young people in this regard. Western (1997), when as a young man he wanted to study this phenomenon was firmly told that no university in the world could help him. One studied either humans or wildlife; you can't study humans and wildlife. If it is to be ecology then you study areas free from human disturbance - but there are none, since most of the earth's surface has been altered for the purpose of agriculture (Srivastava, 1996).

STEWARDSHIP

What is stewardship of land use?

Stewardship is foremost an attitude and not something that can be dictated and is best described in the words of Michener (1983). "A field is like a human soul. It must be nurtured in specific and careful ways. It must be tended with love. The man cultivating it must respect it and want to see every seed mature. He must feel that if he does not do well with his field, the corner of the earth allowed him all the rest of the world will starve." Although the example is agricultural, the attitude, so aptly described by Michener, applies to all human activity.

Philosophy to reality

Stewardship of a tiny piece of land, if surrounded by a sea of thoughtless behaviour, is very difficult if not impossible. However, if supported by a number of neighbours sharing similar value systems, then the exercise of transforming an attitude of stewardship into everyday practice becomes more feasible. Only from the safety of private land ownership, can people take hands across property boundaries and attempt stewardship of the larger environment (Freyfogle, 1998). Once stewardship across boundaries becomes reality, the concept of a conservancy can also be transformed into reality.

As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of a conservancy, infrequently and fleetingly, at least to the author, appears to offer glimpses of some improvement to the historical, sentimental and almost animistic approaches to looking after nature. Perhaps functional conservancies also have the potential to put humans back into the ecological picture.

A conceptual solution

A conceptual solution needs to be sought in a broader reinterpretation of what value systems need to be engrained (Kruger & de Wit, 2002) in economics and ecology.

> Members of a conservancy need to change their attitude in order to move away from sentimental concern over the "furry" and the "cuddlies" and view wild animals in the context of the landscape and a functional oecology/oikonomia.
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> Gauteng Conservancies are seriously constrained by the daily drain of human capital. Therefore, the economy of every household needs to become profitable so that the "live and work" ideal can be realised. There should be no more need to spend our days in cities in order to make a living.
>
> There is no benefit without cost. "It is amazing the number of people who think they can extract benefits out of fresh air, without figuring out what the cost could be" (Louw, 2003).
>
> We need to consider the consequences of our actions, both good and bad but we have no methodology to help us. Perhaps we need to develop methodology that will allow us to investigate how much good and bad could

any proposed action or decision produce in due course, both intentional and unintentional.

We should strive to understand the need for resilience and that it depends on diversity. In the same manner that ecosystem function is dependent on biodiversity, land use resilience depends on a mosaic of economic activities.

Perhaps we could learn some lessons from the game sanctuary model. In a land use context, it is similar to monoculture in industrial agriculture. There is no mosaic of activity and hence no diversity nor resilience. It consists only of fenced game and tourists. Food for the tourists, fodder for the game and the tourists are transported over long distances with fossil fuel to the detriment of adjacent and distant environments.

There is a distinction between tourism and tourist pollution. The former can contribute to a mosaic of activities and resilience. The latter concentrates the money in the hands of a few outsiders and impoverishes the local people, causing loss of their land, homes, dignity and all control over their own destinies.

Members of a conservancy need to make the best use of what there is and each passing generation should leave their land in a slightly better condition than they found it.

An alternative to industrial agriculture could be oecological agriculture.

An alternative to mainstream economic activity of maximising profits and minimising costs could be one of stewardship (oikonomia), an economy of care and sufficiency. This household economy should be aimed at achieving a certain quality of life without impeding the ability of our support systems to produce this quality in a sustainable fashion.

The ideas, for a broader reinterpretation of what value systems need to be engrained in economics and ecology, listed above are by no means comprehensive. The complexity of stewardship and lack of knowledge precludes any attempt other than presenting a few ideas. However, ideas are greater monuments than cathedrals and people must have access to them (Ludlum, 19??). Unfortunately, there is much nervousness about proposing new ideas (or reintroducing old ideas) within academia these days. Because they fear ridicule, most scientists tend to shy away from using their minds (Rohl, 19??).

GAUTENG CONSERVANCIES

Conservancies share certain strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Although an individual can hardly do justice to a SWOT analysis of such a complex and contested concept as a conservancy, it is hoped that the following attempt will serve as a basis for future debates.

Strengths

Gauteng Conservancy Association
National Conservancy Association
Human capital
Natural resources
Open spaces

Weaknesses

Low membership
Thoughtless behaviour of some members and non-members
No legal support
Lack of meaningful and lasting relationships with authorities
Conservancies are seen as an impediment to 'development' and detrimental to the economic interest of investors
Poor political marketability
No recognised mechanisms to voice opinions and concerns
The name 'Conservancy'

Opportunities

Establish meaningful and lasting relationships with authorities
Practice stewardship of land use (use land in a rational manner for the benefit of people)
Create public awareness
Relieve the 'conservation' tax burden
Redress the emotional animal 'conservation' bias. Our plants may be far more valuable than our animals
Move away from the paradigm of running conservation as a charity
Gain national and international recognition via Conservancy Associations

Threats

Global village
Poorly planned urban development
Poorly planned industrial development
Waste streams from 'developed' areas
Conventional conservation
Unconstrained emotionalism
Propaganda (investors and emotional game savers)
Inflated land value - diminishing opportunities for new entries to farming.
Anti-farming sentiment
Cash cow approach of authorities (taxes)
Tourist pollution
Incentive schemes

Ignorance
Avarice

DISCUSSION

The key issue raised in this paper is land use for the benefit of most people versus land use for the supposed benefit of nature but in fact for the benefit of a few wealthy people. The latter, as history has shown, results in 'conserved' islands surrounded by openly or covertly hostile people. For the benefit of people implies, at least to the author, many more than, but definitely including financial benefits. It *inter alia* implies that:

- People remain on the land and are not forcibly removed from their traditional homes
- The household economy thrives
- The aesthetic value of the landscape is retained
- Biodiversity is retained or improved and used, not preserved
- Water and wetlands are looked after
- Soil health is retained or improved - ultimately everything depends on soil fertility
- Air quality is looked after
- Agrobiodiversity is retained and improved
- Land is used with little detrimental impact on adjacent and distant environments

In the words of Graham (1973), "we come finally to the point at which reason and sentiment confront one another directly in the world of 'conservation' with the full knowledge that globally the power lies with sentiment. Whenever one seeks to invade an emotional citadel one is bound to tread heavily on certain cherished things."

Can conservancies become a conduit for the incorporation of reason and science into the system?

CONCLUSION

The quality of life is within our minds. Our minds are greatly influenced by our experiences and our immediate surroundings. There is something very good about nature. We cannot destroy any component of it until we are very certain that we do not need it. Furthermore, it is far too valuable to hold only in national parks and nature reserves, which lack resilience and where few can afford to go.

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