



Module 2 Component 1

Introduction to
Field Ranger Management

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Introduction

This course was prepared for the benefit of the people who employ and manage game guards (or who should do so) for the purpose of game reserve security. Numerous instruction manuals and handbooks for the training of game guards have been produced to date, but it is often those that actually manage the game guards that require guidelines and instruction, this then is a manager's guide to game guard supervision and management. The current focus on game reserve security is due to the alarming escalation in rhino poaching. Dealing with rhino poaching can be used as a kind of "flagship" objective, but illegal activities of every kind are increasing on game reserves and in formal conservation areas and they can be significantly reduced through the deployment of adequately trained and motivated game guards.



The course is about the appointment, training, motivating, deployment, uplifting and appreciating the game guard wherever he may be employed and whatever the focus of his duties may be. These guidelines represent the extensive experience of a small group of dedicated game reserve managers that were involved with the training and management of game guards in the southern half of South Africa during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. They recognised a need for game guards where none were employed, and they built up a competent corps as well as the wealth of experience that is recorded in this course.

The pressing need for improved game security

The rhino, and therefore the reserves where they occur, are under the increasing threat of poaching because of the value of their horns in the illegal black-market trade. The market for rhino horn is insatiable because it is driven by an improvement in the standard of living of the populous East (most notably China and Vietnam), where obtaining powdered horn is considered an important status symbol. As the rhino, both black and white, become scarcer, so the poachers will become more desperate and more dangerous, throwing caution to the wind in their pursuit of quick financial gains.



The fate of elephants is much the same. As our impoverished rural and urban populations increase, so too will the need for medicinal plants, building materials, firewood and meat also increase, making game reserves and nature reserves obvious targets for an increasing market in these resources. In addition, the demand for wild animal body parts for muti, rare collectable animals and plants for illegal export and dwindling shellfish resources will also put our game reserves and conservation areas directly in harm's way.

More than ever, we now need to react to this escalating threat. Private game reserves will be specifically targeted soon because they are not known to employ trained and effectively operational game guards. According to Kevin Bewick (28/04/2013), head of the Anti-poaching Intelligence Group of Southern Africa, “weak wildlife legislation in most African countries is a major contributing factor to the success of organised wildlife crime, arrests of perpetrators are few, and convictions are even less”. He goes on to say “operational security in many cases has been weak or non-existent, and in a few cases where operational security has been practiced the syndicates have negated it by recruiting and paying (game reserve) insiders huge sums of money to provide information on security procedures or impending wildlife enforcement operations”.







“These, then, are the men in the vanguard of conservation and law enforcement - men whose primary task is to protect the game reserves from the armed incursions of poachers; to protect the fences and other installations; to observe and report game movements, and to do a hundred and one other jobs, some difficult, almost all dangerous to a degree.”

Nick Steele, in “*Bushlife of a Game Warden.*” (1979).

What is needed are well trained, well equipped, and mobile game guard units in the field, well supported by game reserve managers and also by good intelligence. Game reserve owners, particularly those with rhinoceros and elephant populations need to make an urgent paradigm shift! “Widespread poverty and promises of ready cash mean that there is a constant supply of willing recruits to undertake poaching operations. The fact that these poachers are often wounded and, in some cases, killed does not bother the organised criminal syndicates who recruit them” – Kevin Bewick (28/04/2013).

Game reserves differ vastly in their objectives and the approach to management. The following are the three most prevalent types:

-  Game reserves with a large staff establishment (mostly larger areas used for game viewing, visitor facilities provided, big five often introduced, field management is a strong priority). Trained game guards are usually operational.
-  Game reserves with a small staff establishment (large and small areas, used for game viewing, only essential visitor facilities are provided, limited dedicated staff, field management may be a priority). Game guards are sometimes operational, sometimes strained.
-  Game reserves with little or no staff establishment (all sizes of reserve, few skeleton caretaker staff, few if any visitor facilities, field management is seldom a priority). Game guards are seldom operational. The objective of this course is to provide inspiration for the establishment of effective game guard units and operations, whatever style of game reserve management is employed. These pages provide guidelines for optimal game guard management and each game reserve owner or manager, on reading this course, will hopefully find practical ideas that may better equip him to meet the demanding security challenges on game reserves today and in the future.
-  These guidelines may be considered by some to be far in excess of what is actually required, while others may think it deficient in many aspects of game guard management. The objective is to provide general instruction and a basic framework that can be modified to suit any particular set of conditions in any part of Africa.

What exactly is a game guard?

“Nathaniel the head game guard often worked with game guards in areas where poaching was particularly prevalent. From the time the poachers fired the first shots in this steep, rough terrain no effort was spared to capture them. With his men Nathaniel slept out in the hills, lying on rocky ground, often plagued by ticks and mosquitoes and with only the meagre rations snatched from a pot before they left their base camp. It was rough, exhausting work undertaken in all kinds of weather, often stumbling along in the dark, eyes and ears strained for rhino or buffalo, by men whose dedication was largely taken for granted. Nathaniel was an inspiration to his game guards and also to the young rangers who, unaccustomed to the hazards, drew strength from his stoic acceptance of a trying situation. Nathaniel expected no less than that the guards should track down and arrest these poachers. That is what the job was about. No one contemplated postponing such work because of the fall of night or a rainstorm or the presence of big game. It was unheard of.”

Nick Steele in “Bushlife of a Game Warden”, 1979.



A game guard is exactly what the name suggests, a person who has the task of guarding game and he does this on private game reserves, conservancies, and formal nature conservation areas. Through the years, the game guard has also been known as a ranger, a game scout, and a game guard, but whatever he may be named, his core business is to protect game. In the early days, game guards in British East Africa, North and Southern Rhodesia, South West Africa, Botswana, Nyasaland, and South Africa were generally maintained as para-military units, their training and deployment following the military example. This rigid approach is still considered to be necessary today where discipline is mandatory in the life-threatening situations that game guards often find themselves facing. The game guard is not a farm labourer in a uniform - he is a specially trained and active member of the key staff of a game reserve. His task is one of great responsibility and huge commitment, often dangerous and it can only be done effectively if the game guard is completely loyal to his task, his game reserve with its animals and his employer. This level of commitment and loyalty can only be ensured if the game guard is well supported and his worth well appreciated. A game guard works in the field under the difficult conditions of extreme heat or cold when it is raining and at night when everybody else is asleep. The game guard's work is done by patrolling the game reserve, by spending time in the field where the game occurs and by being observant.

A game guard is not afraid of what he does or may have to do in the course of his duties. He is not a coward and he is confident because he has been given adequate training which equips him to deal with illegal poaching. He is unafraid because he has knowledge, information and the backup that is needed to successfully apprehend and arrest trespassers and poachers. The game guard helps to plan anti-poaching actions, he knows where he must be to be effective, and when, and he knows how to be one step ahead of game poachers. The personal and home circumstances of the game guard play a pivotal role in his general efficiency and commitment to his duties. A person continuously burdened with the trials of abject poverty, heavy debt, family illness or substance abuse will obviously not be able to give full attention to his work, let alone display the qualities of loyalty and commitment that are required for effective game guard work. The answer to these problems lies not only in the extremely careful selection and appointment of game guard candidates but also in the quality of game guard supervision.



The following is a summary of some of the typical deficiencies in game guard management, control; training and effectively that are commonplace on game reserves and formal conservation areas today:

- 🐾 Many managers do not have a clear idea of what the duties of a game guard actually are.
- 🐾 The need for game guards has yet to be “sold” to many of these managers, despite the alarming escalation of poaching in South Africa.
- 🐾 There is often no clear division between labourers and game guards.
- 🐾 There is often a tendency in managers to place greater importance on labour ranks than on the game guard unit.
- 🐾 As a result of the above, game guards are often “abused” and are largely used for work functions not related to their core tasks.
- 🐾 In too many cases game guards appear to enjoy minimal support from their managers in respect of equipment and protective clothing required, the need for a suitable headquarters, the need for independent transport and time devoted to their training and development needs.
- 🐾 Many landowners or managers delegate the responsibility for game guards and their activities to junior managers of less experience and without instruction, training, or guidance.



- 🐾 Managers may think that they do not have problems relating to illegal activities, but it is more often a case of simply not being aware of the illegal activities that do take place or that may still take place.
- 🐾 Very little in-service training takes place and game guards are seldom sufficiently motivated.
- 🐾 Some game reserves and formal conservation areas have no game guards at all (despite their close proximity to urban areas, high public pressure, and the presence of rhinos) while others are hopelessly understaffed and as a result, are inadequately patrolled and controlled.
- 🐾 On many game reserves and formal conservation areas, the game guards work only during normal office hours with no after hour patrolling or surveillance duties.
- 🐾 Game guard reporting and observation recording is in most cases well below the basic standard that is required for gathering good intelligence about illegal activities.
- 🐾 With respect to law enforcement work on game reserves and formal conservation areas, very few prosecutions are ever made. This can surely not be a true reflection of the real situation. Managers frequently confess to recurring problems but very little appears to be done about them.
- 🐾 When last-minute financial cuts have to be made in respect of savings, they are usually done so in the direction of the game guard units. Transport and camping allowances for game guards are often discontinued as are their functions and effectively.
- 🐾 Game guards returning from successfully completed training courses to their home bases, often lapse into pre-training inefficiency and ineffectively due to the fact that the persons responsible for game guard supervision are often ignorant of the requirements of game guard management and reserve security.

It is thus very clear that there is generally a major perceptual problem with respect to the requirements and responsibilities of game guard management. A paradigm shift is what is required at all levels of game reserve and formal conservation area management. This course is about game guard management, it endeavours to change outmoded perceptions and it proposes the use of the following guidelines, ideas, suggestions, and tips to do so. This course represents the collective experience of many decades of private game reserve, Provincial Nature Conservation, National Parks Board and Forestry game guard systems as well as the wealth of experience built up at the various game guard training schools and courses through the years. The following duty sheet contains most of the tasks that are generally performed by game guards.

Typical game guard duty description

- 🦁 Receive instructions from manager/supervisor on a daily or weekly basis and carry out.
- 🦁 Detect and control illegal activities on the game reserve in conjunction with supervisory staff, by means of patrolling.
- 🦁 Supply supervisory staff with information which results in possible management action, e.g, water point or fence repairs, by means of patrolling.
- 🦁 Supply special information of a biological nature which is taken into consideration when managers formulate management proposals, e.g, observations on herd size, predation records, mortalities and so forth by means of patrolling.
- 🦁 Perform incidental tasks such as horse care/feeding, boma management, maintenance of fire-fighting units, cutting firewood for game guard outposts and assisting game reserve staff with monitoring or other tasks as required.
- 🦁 Assume responsibility for firearms issued by the manager on a daily or weekly basis (where applicable).
- 🦁 Assume responsibility for radios, binoculars and other costly equipment issued by the manager on a daily or extended basis.
- 🦁 Report in writing and verbally to the manager on a daily/weekly basis, using prescribed report formats where required, on patrolling activities.
- 🦁 Undergo in-house in-service training regularly.
- 🦁 Assist with game capture operations.
- 🦁 Assist with fire-fighting on the game reserve or neighbouring farms when required.
- 🦁 Be prepared to work unusual hours, after hours and on public holidays in the interest of the efficient control and management of the game reserve.
- 🦁 Successfully attend a recognised game guard training course.
- 🦁 Assist with training of game guard recruits as required.
- 🦁 Communicate with the manager regarding problems of any nature, e.g, personal or management-oriented problems.
- 🦁 Assist with alien invasive vegetation control, either physically or by evaluating problem areas.
- 🦁 Be prepared to wear the prescribed uniform in the prescribed manner when on duty.
- 🦁 Monitor and control public utilization activities on the game reserve,
- 🦁 Occupy game guard outposts on an extended basis from time to time.
- 🦁 Communicate in a polite, firm, and knowledgeable manner with any member of the public regarding information, contraventions, facilities, and contact persons.
- 🦁 Deploy game guards by vehicle.
- 🦁 Maintain patrol motorcycles or horses on a daily and weekly basis.
- 🦁 Assist with occasional conservation extension drives, particularly in the surrounding previously "disadvantaged" communities.
- 🦁 Assist with the development of natural baseline information on the game reserve by means of bird and other observations, collecting reptiles and amphibians and the observation of animal sign.

Possible alternatives

There are a number of possible alternatives to the establishment of a game guard unit for security on the game reserve. These include:

Make use of an established game security company

These companies provide a security service consisting of suitably trained game guards. This is usually done in response to a “flare-up” of poaching or regularly to discourage poaching. These game guards are generally well trained in the skills required for anti-poaching work (AP).

Disadvantages:



The game guard unit is not on the reserve full time and determined poachers will be able to find out exactly when the AP unit is operational. These game guard units are not committed to the reserve in any way and may not be sufficiently motivated to provide the service that is paid for.



Make use of a commercial security company

This is usually done to man gate entrances or provide security at headquarters, lodges, and other infrastructure. The persons used are usually not specifically trained for field patrolling or anti-poaching work.





Disadvantages:

-  These units are not specifically trained or informed about game guard work. They will be able to provide security at infrastructure, but not in the field, where it is most needed.
-  Security guards on rotational duty are in itself a risk, as numerous “outside” people get to know the workings and operational timetable on the game reserve. Although supposedly screened, these security guards may not be sympathetic to the particular security needs on the game reserve and may be open to bribes for information that can be invaluable to poaching syndicates.

The use of closed-circuit television

This method can, at best, provide for the constant monitoring of certain areas along the boundary fence or specific localities in the field. It operates in exactly the same manner as “Crime-stop TV” surveillance that is now being used in city areas. The method implies the need for a central monitoring locality in which the TV monitors must be controlled on a full-time basis.

Disadvantages:

-  Full-time surveillance of TV monitors is required.
-  Security coverage is patchy at best and cameras are also easily disabled.
-  There will always be too many “dead spots” in the area covered by the cameras.
-  Poachers can learn to identify the cameras and to avoid the monitored areas when illegally entering the game reserve. There is no doubt that some of these methods of ensuring security on the game reserve may be successful in certain circumstances. There is also no doubt that to have the maximum-security coverage on a game reserve, game guards will have to be deployed to patrol throughout the area. Perhaps in some areas, a combination of security methods will deliver the best results, but long experience has shown that game guards patrolling the area are indispensable.