Londolozi Private Game Reserve: A model for the future of Conservation and Ecotourism in Africa and the world?

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Signed in Cape Town on 30th November 2006

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Abstract

The case traces the origins of Londolozi Private Game Reserve some 80 years ago by way of background information. It seeks to position ecotourism as a sub-sector of the tourism sector, and examines the activities that were undertaken by Londolozi over the years that have made it a torch-bearer of eco-tourism success in Southern Africa. Through the formation of Conservation Corporation (CC), the case study investigates its influence on other conservation efforts on the African continent and beyond.

The case focuses on specific, targeted actions taken to make the Londolozi wildlife experience a key tourist attraction that makes visitors feel special every time they arrive at the Londolozi door.

Keywords: Sabi Sands Wildtuin, Conservation, Ecotourism, Kruger National Park (KNP)
Glossary of terms:

**Londolozi** - Zulu word meaning “Protector of all living things”

**Earnings per share (EPS)** - A company’s Net Profit After Tax, divided by the number of shares issued. It represents each share’s interest in the company’s earnings and are the earnings returned on the initial investment amount.

**Big Five** - Elephant, Lion, Leopard, Rhinoceros and Buffalo are collectively known as the big five in South Africa

**CCA** - Conservation Corporation Africa
1. Introduction

Londolozi: “Care for the land, care for the wildlife and care for the people”

Cornelissen (2005a:674) defines tourism as the movement of people from one geographical location to another for the purposes of engaging in leisure or business acts. Diamond states that, narrowly defined, tourism consists of the accommodation industry, but broadly defined it includes industries such as transportation, catering, entertainment and retail (1976:36).

South Africa welcomed more than 7 million tourists in 2005, the numbers virtually doubled since 1994. This represents a compound growth rate of 6, 2% (South African Tourism). “Between 1995 (when total international arrivals rose by 22, 3%) and 2000, foreign tourism saw an average year on year growth of roughly 10%, well above the international average of 3%” (Cornelissen, 2005b: 681).

Tourism contributes some 42 billion rands to the South African economy, with 38, 8% of this spent on accommodation alone. This year alone, Cape Town is expected to host 2, 5 million people, more than 1 million thereof from abroad. This case study explores how Londolozi Game (see appendix 1: Map of the Sabi Sabi Wildtuin) Reserve has managed to create ecotourism awareness and influence, a new way of managing natural resources and interacting with people in a manner that enhances the visitor’s experience.

How has nature benefited from the growth in the South African ecotourism industry? This paper examines the role ecotourism has played in conservation and the benefits which can be derived as a result of responsible business practices in this sector by caring for the land, caring for wildlife and caring for the people.

\footnote{The Londolozi Private Game Reserve Mantra}
1.1 Ecotourism as a tourism sub-sector

The World Conservation Union and Ceballos Lascurain defines Ecotourism as: environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features—both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations (Ormsby and Mannle, 2006a).

Ecotourism is also defined as “responsible travel which conserves the natural environment and sustains the wellbeing of local people” (Herbig and O’Hara, 997).

Ecotourism is for many developing countries the biggest earner of foreign exchange, and provides the livelihood of millions of community members in these countries. South Africa is rich with natural resources, including wild animals roaming around game reserves and national parks. The Kruger National Park (KNP) employs 2077 workers, 6% of all tourism workers in the Mpumalanga province (Clifton, J. and Benson, A. 2006). These game reserves have become a major attraction for foreign tourists from around the globe who are prepared to pay premium rates for quality accommodation and a memorable experience in the wild.

However, as tourist numbers continue to grow, and reserve owners build bigger and better lodges and bathrooms, a higher environmental footprint is left behind. There are more vehicles at animal sightings, indigenous plants make way for more construction, and soil erosion and general environmental degradation becomes an unintended consequence of this growth. Can the trend be reversed? Is it too late to even start? The following case documents the initiatives undertaken by Londolozi Private Game Reserve that have now been adopted as The Londolozi model, and adapted to other reserves in the interests of responsible ecotourism and conservation objectives.
2. Research Methodology

The writer relied heavily on qualitative methodologies for gathering information, most of which was obtained during the two visits to the game reserve, a total duration of three and a half days, together with one full day’s visit to Londolozi’s Corporate Head Office in Hyde Park, Sandton.

During the visits, a total of nine scheduled interviews were conducted, with different individuals ranging from the lodge’s co-owner to rural community leaders in the neighbouring villages (Lillydale and Justicia, situated in the former Gazankulu Tribal Authority). These interviews were either recorded or transcribed into written text. Information gathered on these trips was used together with academic literature discussed in the literature review section.

The writer further relied to a large extent on insights given by the Reserve’s General Manager, Chris Kane-Burman, who joined Londolozi some sixteen years ago as a trainee ranger. Most of the information not gathered from the various interviews was obtained from general observations at the lodges themselves, on game drives.
3. Literature Review

3.1 Wildlife experience and natural beauty

Most literature strongly suggests that the wildlife experience and natural beauty are of the utmost importance in attracting visitors to a Game Reserve, and ranks higher than accommodation, meals and other benefits of staying in a Game Reserve.

According to Fennell (1999), natural setting and wildlife viewing are of primary importance. Accommodation ranked lower. Some case studies also emphasize the venue’s natural beauty as being absolutely essential to the success of any ecotourism venture. By continually investing in wildlife and professional land management practices as well as the preservation of natural resources, ecotourism operators can ensure a more sustainable profitability. According to Isaacs (2000b:66) sites with rare beauty, wildlife and other environmental characteristics may be able to maintain market position and profit by protecting natural areas.

Other research indicates that wildlife is the key to attracting tourists to a game reserve. “In fact, most foreign visitors to South Africa indicate that wildlife is what attracted them to South Africa and that it had exceeded their expectations” (South African Tourism, 2001). Cornelissen contends that South African tourist appeal is largely built on the image of the country’s wildlife and natural environment, rather than the cultural components of the tourism product. He argues that this is image is a continuation of what was established during the apartheid era. As imaging affects tourist flows, such representation has an impact on tourism development (2005c). This type of imaging though does not appear to have a negative effect on the South African ecotourism sector. Research has shown that average occupancy rates of some lodges situated in the Sabi Sands Game Reserves2 are between 70% and 90%. It would appear that the imaging of wildlife and natural beauty is what safari makers are looking for.

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2 Research conducted telephonically at Mala Mala, Singita, Exeter, Ngala Game reserves, November 2006.
Boo (1990) indicates that protected areas were an important factor in choosing a destination for tourists visiting various South American countries, and the UNEP3 (1994) also mentions that the greatest increase in ecotourism has been observed in countries having the greatest number of protected areas. (Saayman and Saayman, 2006).

Care of wildlife can become a core attraction to a tourism venue, compared to other benefits. For example, the appeal for visitors to come to Masoala National Park includes such factors as the guaranteed visibility of animals and the anticipated quality of tourist experience in comparison to other parks in Madagascar that, although perhaps easier to access, less expensive, and more tourist friendly in terms of infrastructure, are likely to be more crowded. (Ormsby et al, 2006)

Tourists will sometimes stop at nothing in order to have the ultimate wildlife experience. In the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary, outside Homer, Alaska, tourists go to great lengths to view and photograph grizzly bears feeding on Pacific salmon. Tourists have to first obtain one of the 200 permits available, (out of 1500 applications), access the river by floatplane, in addition to enduring a four-hour hike through mud plains before camping for four days to watch this amazing spectacle. They also have to part with $350 in exchange for this privilege.

The existence of a tourist attraction is crucial in getting tourists to come to a venue. According to Hughes and McBeth (2005), the lack of tourist infrastructure can be overcome. “While inadequate infrastructure can be dealt with, given motivation, time and money, the lack of tourist attractions may be a more difficult issue to address”. It is of significance to note that there is no tourism infrastructure on the McNeil River State Game sanctuary, and yet tourists are willing to pay top rates, in addition to putting up with the inconvenience, to experience nature. Initially, ecotourism does not require large capital investments, since eco-tourists typically are willing to tolerate basic conditions and facilities (Ormsby et al, 2006b).

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3 United Nations Environmental Program
Although literature suggests that wildlife and natural beauty are crucial for attracting tourists, other factors can influence people’s decisions to travel to a particular destination. These include security concerns, perceptions about a country’s political status and stage of development, economic stability, etc. According to Cornelissen, South Africa’s tourism sector gained from the “Mandela Syndrome” (Cornelissen, 2005c:680).

Other literature seems to disagree with the notion that location or place is the most significant consideration. Trauer and Ryan (2005) suggest that location may be secondary in that the quality of experience is primarily determined by the intimacies that exist between people at that place, especially that existing between visitors.

It can be argued that this intimacy between visitors is an exogenous factor. An ecotourism supplier cannot influence the level of this intimacy prior to the visitors arriving at his door. However, a lot can be done subsequently to enhance this level of intimacy, thereby ensuring that visitors are able to relive a memory.

The following sections examine what can be done to further enhance visitor experience in an ecotourism setting, by using existing literature to gauge the relevance and likely benefits of undertaking these additional measures.

3.2 Lower environmental footprint

Ecotourism ventures that become phenomenally successful sometimes experience an unexpected downside due to their success. As ecotourism ventures grow, without the original founders’ influence, into multimillion rand corporations operational across several countries or continents, they lose the conservation objectives and focus more on growing their market share, earnings per share and cutting costs. By bringing in more tourists on existing infrastructure, they are likely to eventually cause significant damage to the environment.

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4 Cornelissen describes this as a high level of curiosity among potential visitors over the end of apartheid, and the country’s political transformation, bolstered by the prominence of former president Nelson Mandela (Mecklenburg, 2000)
“Facing decreasing returns, a rational entrepreneur may try to increase profits by reducing financial costs or increasing demand.” (Isaacs, 2000d: 66) In this way, ventures attract more tourists in order to drive turnover higher.

“Some bold, visionary leaders may establish firms that adhere to normative guidelines in addition to fiscal returns. In the long run, though, after strong leaders leave positions of influence, the goals of their firms convert to more mundane goals of profit maximization” (Heilbroner, 1996). These may include increasing demand in order to ramp up revenue.

Short term profit maximization efforts similar to those described above may come at a high cost to the environment. High tourist numbers can result in over-use. Over-use of an area may result in a loss of wildlife and natural habitat (Fennel, 1999). High tourist numbers do not only impact negatively on the environment, they can also be detrimental to relations between the different interest groups and social classes. “Increased tourist traffic can result in conflicts between indigenous cultures and other local social and economic groups” (Isaacs, 2000e).

The next paragraph highlights the significance of relations with local communities, and how they can be affected by the desire for increased profits or revenue.
3.3 Community relations

“Local people must benefit directly from wildlife, if their attitudes toward it are to become more positive. But changing attitudes and integrating villagers into tourism runs headlong into tribal culture. The safari is an alien concept to villagers who see the national park as grazing land and wildlife as a source of food and as a threat to their cattle”. (Flores, 2006)

Agricultural activities have a long history of conflicting with ecotourism in South Africa. In some cases, wild animals terrorize land inhabitants by devouring their crops, and killing their cattle and sheep. This makes communities antagonistic and therefore uncooperative towards ecotourism ventures. Improving relations with surrounding communities can be a long process which requires effort and patience from both sides. “In Botswana, tourism brings $240 million a year into the economy, accounting for almost 12 percent of the GDP. It is also the country's fastest growing sector, and the interests of tourism are running smack into conflict with the interests of the beef industry”. (Flores, 2006) This is due to the competing and contrasting needs for land use in the cattle farming and wildlife industries. Successful ecotourism ventures require cooperative coexistence with neighbouring communities. It is therefore in everyone’s best interests to maintain peace and harmony between ecotourism parks and surrounding land inhabitants.

One of the ways in which the negative attitudes of communities towards ecotourism can be changed is by incorporating incentives for them in the ecotourism business. Game Reserves can play a significant role in changing the attitudes of people living in their vicinities, and introducing them to projects that stimulate economic development. Ormsby et al. assert that culturally sensitive ecotourism programs may serve to mediate conflict by explaining to local residents the purpose of conservation and the roles of park personnel, and most importantly by emphasizing the benefits that will accrue to the particular communities (2006:286).
Ensuring that community members benefit from ecotourism activities in their neighborhoods without dividing the different interest groups, is a long-standing challenge that takes years, sometimes decades to resolve. “A host of actors and interest groups have pursued a variety of competing objectives, and just who should be ‘empowered’ has been fiercely contested. The different groupings have engaged in a number of power plays and entered into complex and shifting relationships with each other at different moments in time, ranging from alliance or collaboration at one end of the spectrum, through wary neutrality or relative indifference, to outright hostility and confrontation at the other”

Community cooperation and participation is crucial in any initiative that seeks to convert agricultural land into a commercially viable wildlife undertaking.

3.4 Making more land available for conservation of plants and animals

It is a well known fact that land used for wildlife purposes is much more economically productive than agricultural land, especially in an area characterized by poor rainfall and soil quality. Land under wildlife produces R5000 per hectare per annum; 66 000 hectares of land can create 2000 jobs and support 20 000 dependants5. (Dave Varty, 28 October 2006). In addition to potentially providing economic benefits to tens of thousands of rural inhabitants, it is highly beneficial for animal welfare. It is logical then that more land needs to be made available for the conservation of plants and animals.

Returns to ecotourism have encouraged the preservation of elephant (Elaphas indicus) habitat in Thailand and protection of wild lands on Mount Kinju, South Korea (Isaacs, 2000f). Elephant populations in the Kruger National Park, South Africa are now estimated to exceed 13000.

5 Newspaper Article published in the Weekend Argus, 28 October 2006
3.5 Moral suasion

Recognising the limitations of government or the market in maintaining restrictive development practices, ecotourism enthusiasts may rely upon ethical appeals to convince individual entrepreneurs or consumers voluntarily to reduce the negative impacts of their activities. (Isaacs, 2000g)

There are various ways in which conservation enthusiasts can influence entrepreneurs or consumers to voluntarily reduce the negative impacts of their outdoor activities. They lobby for government intervention, publish newsletters and internet articles that will persuade readers to change their behaviour. They can also form formal partnerships which will enable entrepreneurs to plough back into nature by reducing the impact of the financial or business-related activities on the environment.

3.6 Marketing activities in the ecotourism industry

“The international industry is characterized by large numbers of small suppliers who are globally scattered” (Wynne, C., Berthon, P., Pitt, L., Ewing, M. and Napoli, J. 2001a). Suppliers therefore have little or no bargaining power, and have seemingly limited ability to influence exorbitant commissions levied on their clients by tour operators. Travel agents (tour operators) are able to form long standing relationships with their regular clients. This gives them enormous power when it comes to negotiating commissions. However, the internet looks set to change the rules of the game.

Internet bookings can add a lot of value by breaking down both time and distance barriers, thus giving the user flexibility in searching for the right travel package. The “Death of Distance” describes how the Internet can eliminate the barriers caused by distance while the “Homogeneity of Time” refers to the ability of virtual businesses to operate 24 hours a day 365 days a year, overcoming both the limitations of human working hours and geographical time zones. Finally, the “Irrelevance of Location” concept shows how the inherently global marketplace challenges conventional ideas on physical location. (Wynne et al, 2001b)
Those travellers who do their own search are increasingly likely to also book online, especially as they get more and more educated about the internet. As more and more prospective travellers undertake their own internet searches, the power of tour operators will be eroded further and further.

Saayman et al contend that from a sustainable point of view, the marketing policy should follow a 10:100 principle (2006: 97). They define this as follows: Ten tourists spending R100 are better than 100 tourists spending R10 each. This seems to be the strategy employed in the ecotourism (safari) industry, where fewer, high net worth clients are targeted by tour operators.

A 2001 survey by South African Tourism (SATOUR) confirmed that tourism promotional efforts (such as brochures and editorial material) convinced only 10% of the tourists to visit South Africa. Word of mouth recommendation and previous experience remain the most influential inputs in the decision to travel to South Africa (Saayman et al, 2006: 94). A SATOUR survey conducted in 1997 identified personal experiences, advice, word of mouth (70%), and promotional sources (37%) as the two main sources of information for visitors.

Some 30% of South African tourists come for Wildlife (SATOUR 1998). In 2003 terms, this accounted for R23, 1 billion worth of spending (South African Tourism, SAT Domestic Tourism Survey, 2003, Monitor Analysis)

The travel industry is one of the largest purchasers of services on the internet. In 1997, travel was already the single largest revenue generator among consumers on the internet, accounting for $800 million in sales (Heung, 2003). Travel purchase is a high involvement activity that is intangible and differentiated than most consumer goods. As such, consumers are willing to invest time in search activities in an effort to find the right holiday package. This makes the internet a perfect tool for travellers to rely on for finding travel information and eventually purchasing the right holiday package.
A study by Weber and Roehl (1999) found that online travel purchasers are more likely to be people who are aged 26-55, with higher incomes, with higher status occupations, and have more years of experience with the internet than those who do not search or purchase online.

“Marcussen (1999) mentions that lower prices and discounts offered by internet booking are the reasons for the increase in the number of consumers using online purchase of travel products.” (Heung, 2003)

How then should ecotourism venues apply the marketing mix to their businesses, in order to correctly market their product to consumers? The following is a theoretical overview of the marketing mix (4 P’s) and how they apply to ecotourism. It draws form Peter and Donnelly (2006a).

3.7 The marketing mix

**Product**

According to Peter and Donnelly, 2006 in order to create consumer perceptions about a product, marketers need to differentiate their products from those of competitors and create perceptions that the product is worth purchasing.

**Price**

In the ecotourism industry, price competition is not very common. Product quality and prestige are what matters. “For some offerings, higher prices may not deter purchase because consumers believe that the products or services are higher quality or are more prestigious” (Peter and Donnelly, 2006b). One method of creating this ‘prestige perception’ is to limit the number of customers, thus making the product exclusive, and therefore desirable.

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6 Product, Price, Place and Promotion. Initially introduced by Jerome McCarthy
Place

The internet brings new convenience for consumers, and is likely to influence product distribution in the ecotourism arena. “Offering products by non-store methods, such as on the internet or in catalogues, can create consumer perceptions that the products are innovative, exclusive, or tailored for specific target markets” (Peter and Donnelly, 2006c)

Promotion

Word of mouth promotion is very important for ecotourism marketing. Peter and Donnelly (2006c) assert that marketers need to create favourable images and perceptions, in addition to sending consistent messages about their products. By profiling the location and its wildlife, suppliers of ecotourism products can entice prospective travellers into choosing their offering over other comparable offerings. This type of promotion can include participation in overseas tourism exhibitions, forming relationships with tour operators and offering special deals to prospective customers.
4. The Case Study

4.1 Introduction

The dawn of democracy heralded boom times in the Sabi Sands Wildtuin (Game Reserve). International tourists were flocking to South Africa in search of the Madiba Magic\(^7\) and in particular to the Kruger National Park to see the Big 5\(^8\), and experience the warm welcome of the African continent, just as nature intended. They were arriving by road and by air, six hundred of them daily in the Sabi Sands alone. To accommodate this surge in visitor numbers, seventeen landing strips had to be built in the Sabi Sands portion of the park alone. Most lodge owners were building bigger and better rooms, in order to cater for the discerning international tourist. Most lodges were running at average occupancy rates of 70-90%, bringing in hundreds of millions of rand in foreign currency earnings.

It had been a successful twelve year marriage between Londolozi Private Game Reserve and Conservation Corporation Africa (CCA). The management contract had expired in 2005, and had been extended for another two years. For the Reserve’s owners, brothers Dave and John Varty, it was now time to decide if they should sign another long-term concession with CCA, allowing them to manage their family-owned business for another decade, or alternatively take over the day to day management of the operation. After all, a lot had changed since the two had started the lodge thirty-five years earlier, charging R3 per person per night for tented accommodation, later upgraded to four mud huts and game drives in one old rickety Land Rover. At stake was the future direction of Londolozi Private Game Reserve, its profitability model, expansion plans, its conservation role and impact on the environment, etc.

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\(^7\) Madiba is Mandela's traditional clan nickname. The magic he deploys: compassion, humour, political shrewdness, and a complete absence of bitterness about the 27 years he was imprisoned by the apartheid regime

\(^8\) elephant, buffalo, lion, rhino and leopard are known as Africa’s big five animals.
4.2 Background to Londolozi Game Reserve

“Care of the land, care of the wildlife, care of the people”

Londolozi Private Game Reserve is a 14,745 hectare 60 bed luxury game lodge situated in the 61,938 hectare Sabi Sands Wildtuin, Mpumalanga Province, adjacent to the world famous Kruger National Park. It occupies the land known as Sparta and Marthly farms, bordering both sides of the Sabi River, and consists of four camps, the Varty camp, Pioneer camp, Founder’s camp and Tree camp. Sparta farm had been purchased by the current owners’ grandfather, Charles Varty and his friend Frank Unger in 1926 for a mere £1236.11.5d. At the time, the surrounding tracts of land were mainly used for cattle farming and were infested with tsetse fly, not a very attractive proposition for a property investor. Prior to this, cattle farming had led to the erection of fences and animal populations were declining at an alarming rate due to poaching and general animosity between wild animals and indigenous communities. In Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton’s book, ‘South African Eden’ he writes, “many white men and natives made a living solely by shooting, and trucks, filled to the brim with carcasses of animals, came down with every construction train returning to Komatipoort. Wild animals existed to be killed with as much profit as possible to the killer.” (Brief history of the Sabi Sand Wildtuin, 1996).

The brothers John and Dave Varty established their lodge two years following the unexpected death of their father, Boyd in 1969. Over the years, through Dave and John’s efforts, Londolozi was to become arguably a Conservation model for the whole Southern African region. Today, Londolozi is home to 17 leopards, five prides of lion, 950 elephants and 70 hippos. In addition, 250 bird species can be sighted all over the Reserve. The four lodges hold a total of 60 beds. A turnover of approximately R40 million is created per annum, at an average occupancy of 72%, a far cry to the tsetse fly infested farm their grandfather had bought in 1926. Guests arrive by road or aircraft at the camp. An average of 25 motorcars and a further 13 flights come to Londolozi every day. (Land Care Report, Sparta & Marthly 1978-Present)
Londolozi had now become part of a major corporate entity, with a strong focus on operational efficiencies and bottom line profitability. However, guests were not always leaving the lodge with an unbelievable experience. The “Londolozi experience is certainly lacking”, Chris Burman has commented when interviewed. Dave Varty knew it was not going to be a quick and easy decision, and it called for some sober-minded, deep thinking process and careful engagement with other stakeholders: Should they extend the management contract with CCA, or manage the park themselves. “We need a model that places a question mark on Western economies, which are built on Earnings Per Share (EPS). This, I believe is CCA’s directional change. Focussing on EPS is a tragic error. Although highly profitable, I’m of the opinion that we have lost the plot.” Dave Varty asserts. He had become aware of the potential disadvantages of extending the contract with CCA.

At Londolozi, it’s all about the wildlife experience. “It’s not about the bathroom” is one of the Vartys’ favourite sayings. “We can afford to build bigger and better bathrooms” says Chris Kane-Berman, General Manager of Londolozi, in response to the ever increasing number of ultra luxury lodges being built in the Sabi Sands. “We can also increase the number of beds, but instead we have recently closed one of our camps”. It simply equated to saying: “We want to make less money than before”. But then I remembered sitting with Dave Varty in his comfortable lounge one glorious summer afternoon. He was relating the following story about his brother, John Varty had just returned from an exhausting safari drive, he threw his hands in the air and said to Dave ‘That’s it, I have had enough. There is no time to rest, we have too many guests and I cannot take it any more’.

“We will double our rates, that way we will not have as many guests.” And so it was done. All it took was a phone call to the booking centre (Dave’s wife), and the rates were increased from R450 to R900, literally overnight. After an initial slowdown, the number of bookings continued to rise that day, emphasizing the Londolozi way…less is better.

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10 Recorded at Londolozi Private Game Reserve, 15 September 2006.
There seems to be a general understanding that more beds mean more game drives, which in turn implies more vehicles at any given animal sighting. More beds also implies more lodges, which means more tree and bush clearing, more encroachment on animal territory, etc. Londolozi puts their money where their mouths are. In order to preserve the Londolozi experience, sacrifices have to, and are being made. Through self-managing the establishment, the family plans to put the bush back into the tourist experience, and reduce the focus on urban-style luxuries.

The Londolozi conservation model has been well documented. In the Jacobs and van Breda study of CC Africa and Afro Ventures (2003), the case states that the model rested on three elements: “care of the land, care of the wildlife and care of the people”. This model will be explored through the reserve’s land care activities (land), animal sightings (wildlife) and community relations (people).

4.3 Lower impact through fewer beds

There are currently 656 beds in the Sabi Sands (61,938 h). This amounts to an average of 94 hectares per bed. At Londolozi, the ratio of total hectares per commercial bed has been reduced to 250. In 1996, the commercial bed density within the Sabi Sands was capped at 150 h per commercial bed. This has gradually been reduced to 35 h/ bed (July 2006). Interestingly, not one application has been received by the Warden’s office to build more lodges since the said reduction in the number of hectares per bed. There seems to now be a realisation that overdevelopment lowers both the property and experience value.

Dave Varty explains that a scramble for commercial sophistication in recent years has been at the expense of good old-fashioned values in the ecotourism industry, such as warmth, simplicity, flexibility and friendship. “The focus on hospitality has been marked by a heavy socio-economic and environmental footprint”. Every hour or two our conversation is interrupted by the sound of aircraft preparing to land at a nearby strip, one of seventeen or so that come to the Sabi Sands daily.
In the Masai Mara, there were approximately 250 beds in 1984, charged at $250 per night. Five years later, there were 1800 beds at $59 per person. This illustrates how the wildlife experience can be devalued through over usage. By having fewer beds, other minimisation steps are bound to follow.

4.4 Lower environmental footprint

Londolozi’s mission is to deliver something unmatched in Ecotourism, and create an example for all to follow. Less consumerism means lower environmental footprint. To minimise any sign of human construction in the bush, in 1991 Londolozi spent R400 000 burying obtrusive power lines on the reserve. (The Londolozi model: “An Integrated Approach”).

As mentioned above, light airplanes can be heard circling overhead in the Sabi Sands, prior to landing on any one of the seventeen strips within the Sabi Sands Game Reserve. Besides carbon emissions, one cannot imagine the trauma caused to animals by the ever increasing engine noise. This can only get worse, as there aren’t enough flights. Booking time is three months (previously 6 months). In an effort to find an alternative solution to this growing problem, three years ago Londolozi Game Reserve initiated discussions with community members with a view to building a commercial airport outside the reserve (on community land), which would be owned and operated by community members. After three years of intermittent discussions, this grand plan was abandoned. As Samuel Mohaule, a community leader and pastor explains: ‘We have no more energy left, we exhausted all possibilities’, pointing to the challenges involved in multi-party negotiations with community members.

It is virtually impossible to serve the various interest groups, all with competing interests and agendas. Even where community leaders make decisions which appear to be in the best interests of the community at large, personal interests normally drive emotions high, leading to a state of irreparably damaged relations.

The case study of the failed Mkambati Eco-Tourism Project has been mentioned in the literature review section, where similar problems were also experienced.
4.5 Fewer vehicles at animal sightings

In the Masai Mara Game Reserve (Kenya), it is apparently not unusual to find 30-40 vehicles at any one sighting. At Londolozi, the maximum is two vehicles. During my recent visit there, our vehicle was the only one visible at most of the sightings that we visited. This can only be achieved by having fewer guests at any given time. Fewer vehicles imply less off-road driving, and consequently less damage to trees and vegetation. According to Alex van den Heever, land care manager, Londolozi has a strict off-road driving policy which aims to protect sensitive habitat types (e.g. sodic sites, riparian zones and black turf soils).

4.6 Land care management

Londolozi owns 6225ha, but has traversing rights on another 8519ha. In addition, it occupies 7km of river frontage. Their land care mission statement is “to develop and sustain high ecological diversity through progressive yet sensitive land management, to disallow the correlative growth of human impact, and to lead the race towards the restoration of habitual balance.”

“Conservation is about space” Chris Kane-Burman. Londolozi spends in excess of R1million per annum on land care management, and has been recognised for their efforts. This expenditure has risen steadily from R50 000 in 1980. Frequent clearing of alien plant forms and repairs to Dongas (to prevent soil erosion) accounts for most of this spending. A balanced habitat management approach is required in order for a property to yield high quality game viewing, on a sustainable basis. Dave Varty maintains that one species cannot have all the land. People must learn to share with the animals.
4.7 Community relations

Londolozi Private Game Reserve is situated in the province of Mpumalanga, home to more than three million people, 6.9% of South Africa’s population. Approximately 53, 5% of Mpumalanga’ population lives in poverty (Saayman M and Saayman A, 2006aa). The reserve employs 150 workers, contributing to the economic activity of the area. “Seventy years have passed since Charles Varty and Frank Unger first set foot on Sparta and pitched their tents on the banks of the sand river. They met up with communities whose forebears had for many generations been hunter/gatherers” (Varty et al, 1996).

It is hard to imagine that in the early days at Londolozi, relations between the game farms and surrounding communities were hostile and acrimonious at best. Poaching activities were widespread, and wild animals terrorized land inhabitants by devouring their crops and killing their cattle and sheep. Improving relations with surrounding communities is a long term process which has required effort and patience from both sides.

Today, due to the pioneering work undertaken by Londolozi in the surrounding communities, “some communities are under the impression that all the Private Reserves in the Sabi Sands region are owned by Londolozi”. (Lotus Khoza, community leader and Community Development Officer, Conservation Corporation Africa)

According to Samuel Mohaule, a pastor and community leader, Londolozi has for a long time been a pathfinder and pioneer in developing relations between the community and the greater Sabi Sands Reserve.

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11 Recorded at Justicia Village, Hazyview, 15 September 2006
It was the first CCA lodge to build classes for surrounding communities. Singita, Ulusaba and Inyati followed this initiative up with netball and soccer fields. Projects are misleading, in that their impact is not directly measurable, he says.

Dave Varty does not subscribe to this social responsibility programme of building a school here, a clinic there. He argues that it had a time and place in the past, but a new way of thinking is called for. The concept of community needs to be dispensed with, and individuals should be engaged with. Individuals must make decisions that affect their own lives. The homeland system of land use (Permission to occupy) must die. People must be given title to their land, so that they can decide on the best use for that land. “Always challenge the norm, we need to start moving away from creating dependants” says Dave.

An example of this is Phinda Game Reserve, where the reserve will pay rental to traditional land owners for their own development.

The Londolozi living model

“The experience and the knowledge gained at Londolozi could and should be exported to other areas of Southern Africa and beyond, wherever it is needed” (Varty, S. and Buchanan, M. 1996)

“Since the development of the model in 1978, Londolozi has aimed to be ecologically sustainable in every aspect of its operation—from tourism activities to land and wildlife management and community development projects. This striving for holism has been extended to ecologically friendly hotel amenities—and air conditioning, television, radio and pesticides are banned from all lodge rooms.” (The Londolozi model, An integrated approach).
Londolozi is sometimes visited by highly influential people, some of whom are top movers and shakers in industry. Famous movie stars and international musicians are sometimes seen on Londolozi game drives, together with government ministers and presidents. Former South African president Mr Nelson Mandela visited Londolozi shortly after his release from prison. Mr Mohammed Valli Moosa, Former Environmental affairs and Tourism minister, also visited the reserve during his tenor. He was later to become highly instrumental in the establishment of the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park, together with Mr Dave Varty.

Five years ago, more than 1000 elephants were relocated from the Kruger National Park to Mozambique, in a symbolic gesture marking the establishment of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. At the time, it was the biggest animal relocation project in the world.

Former president Mr Nelson Mandela had the following to say then: “Approximately 100 years ago, Kruger National Park had no elephants as the population had been hunted to extinction. History shows that 30 brave elephants walked across the Shigwedzi River from Mozambique to Kruger. They are the great grandfathers and mothers of these you see here today, which South Africa is now returning to Mozambique, thus repaying an old debt. The bold steps taken today are as heroic as those of the founding elephants whose population has now grown to a staggering 10 000 in Kruger. I believe that the economic benefit this peace park will have on the area, will have the same multiplying effect as the 30 elephants. Human beings and nature are taking hands across international borders for the benefit of all.”

By succeeding in having guests stay longer (average 2, 4 days per stay), the rangers are able to engage with them on a deeper spiritual level. “It is easier to challenge the inner person after they have seen the Big 5” says Chris Kane-Berman. This enables you to influence them, and hence you are able to elevate the debate to global warming, drying rivers, endangered species, etc. It is these seemingly small steps that will eventually change people’s behaviour, create awareness and eventually lead them to responsible behaviour, which leaves behind less environmental footprint on the planet.

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12 Excerpt taken from a speech by former president Nelson Mandela, recorded at the symbolic opening of the Trans Frontier Park, 2000.
By relating factual stories of how the white rhino and other species were nearly driven to extinction in Africa, human beings have a deeper spiritual feeling, and are able to connect better with nature on night drives, sitting atop moon bags and looking at the stars. That is exactly how Londolozi was able to persuade tourism stakeholders to take bold steps in ensuring that more land is claimed back for wildlife, and turned into a more productive asset by converting its use from low-yielding farming activities. This is also how Conservation Corporation (CC) was born in October 1991. “The Conservation Corporation was established to apply the principles of the Londolozi model to other areas of southern Africa”. (The Londolozi model, “An integrated approach”)

CCA’s founders, Dave Varty and Alan Bernstein established Phinda Game Reserve as their first project, the link between the Mkuzi Game Reserve and St. Lucia Game Reserve. Phinda was to become the biggest private wildlife development in Southern Africa. Conservation Corporation had the following to say about the Londolozi model: “In consolidating the Phinda project, three of the fundamental principles of the Londolozi model have been brought together13:

- That the project be commercially viable
- That all activities adhere to the principles of ecological sustainability
- That local communities be incorporated into the benefits of the project

Londolozi was considered an example of grassroots ecotourism development in Southern Africa, and under CC the model has since been transferred to Phinda, Ngala, Singita, and East Africa.

After Phinda, Conservation Corporation has spread its influence to far-flung locations that have aligned themselves with it. These include Tswalu Private Desert Reserve in the North West Cape and Makalali, a reserve linking the Drakensburg Mountains to the eastern seaboard.

13 Taken from a Conservation Corporation document entitled The Londolozi Model: “An Integrated Approach”.
As Phinda Private Game Reserve celebrated its tenth year, CC Africa prepared to emulate its success at Kwandwe - a brand new Big Five game reserve on the banks of the Great Fish River in the malaria-free Eastern Cape. Developed by CC Africa founder Dave Varty at Phinda nearly a decade ago, the model has won the group numerous accolades, including the most recent Sustainable Tourism Award 2001 awarded by British magazine Tatler. Informed by CC Africa's guiding principles - care of the land, care of the wildlife, care of the people - this model of sustainable ecotourism is widely recognized as saving the biodiversity of Africa and contributing to the upliftment of rural communities.


Mr Varty has not stopped his conservation crusade. His next mission is to see the establishment of elephant corridors between the Kruger National Park and Drakensberg mountains, an action which will not only reduce the elephant populations in the Kruger, but also create economic opportunities for people living in and around the proposed corridors through the establishment of tourism infrastructure-game lodges, restaurants, etc. It is a highly ambitious project, which calls for borderless imagination, however it is not impossible. Mr Varty is not one to sit on ideas. He has already started to lobby stakeholders and key decision makers by using the media and other platforms. Several newspapers have published his speech, in which he passionately articulates his mind-blowing vision to give land back to the elephants.

4.8 Marketing

The Safari market is not meant to have mass appeal. The literature review on marketing refers to the 10:100 principle, which emphasises the importance of targeting fewer, high spending tourists. It also articulates extensively, how self search and internet bookings are likely to affect the industry. It is therefore appropriate that Londolozi does not undertake extensive marketing activities or run a massive marketing budget. Word of mouth (WOM) promotion, coupled with previous experience currently accounts for the majority of Londolozi’s business. One of the guests who visited Londolozi in September 2006 happened to mention that six of her friends had also been to visit the lodge in the six month prior to that.
What Londolozi should focus on is differentiating themselves from their competitors by enhancing their product offering. This is currently being done through the lodge’s low impact strategies, focused game drives, intimate knowledge of repeat visitors through record keeping and Public relations exposure through newspaper articles, etc. It is challenging for an organisation to distinguish itself in a homogenous market such as the safari market, but once this is achieved, it can become an important marketing tool that can have enduring and sustainable benefits.
Appendix 1-Map of the Sabi Sabi Wildtuin

SOUTH AFRICA

Appendices
Appendix 2

LONDOLOZI LAND FACT SHEET:

The Land
Londolozi Game Reserve is situated in the heart of the Sabi Sands game reserve

Londolozi owns 6225ha. Londolozi traverses 8519ha

The Total Londolozi Area is 14745ha

Londolozi occupies 7km of Sand River frontage.

The Londolozi property comprises of large open clearings in the south and densely wooded areas with rocky outcrops in the north. The 3 major habitat types are Acacia thornveld, grassland savannah and riverine woodland.

There are 17 small waterholes and 10 large Hippo dams

An area of 880ha of restored seep line clearings

The Animals
Leopards: 17 different individuals (a record 128 different sightings in May 2006). The ‘original’ Mother leopard was first seen in 1978 and her off-spring are still being viewed today. We have a 30 year relationship with leopards.
Lions: 5 resident prides

Cheetah are seen regularly in the vast open areas of Londolozi

Elephants: There are 950 in the Greater Londolozi area.

Hippo: 70 resident hippos, which is 45% of the total population

Abundant plains game like Wildebeest, Zebra, Waterbuck, Warthog, Impala, and Giraffe etc. Northern Londolozi has the highest density of giraffe in the Sabi Sand complex

Wild dogs are seen periodically. Africa’s most endangered carnivore

Large herds of Buffalo (300+) and numerous White Rhino are viewed at Londolozi

Birds: 250 species

The Management

Londolozi has spent a million rand per annum for the past 12 years on its Land Care program. We have a squad of permanently employed, highly skilled men and woman who look after the land and habitat of Londolozi. We have partnered with our land.

Alien Plants - Londolozi has the cleanest stretch of Sand River bank in the Sabi Sands Wildtuin. Our Lantana density is down from 14% in 2001 to 3% today.

Londolozi has an active micro-catchment management program i.e. we help the land to retain its water thereby making Londolozi much more drought resistant. Our land Care program is overseen by some of the world leaders in rangeland ecology.
The Londolozi’s land Care program has been endorsed by the highest environmental order of South Africa.

Our primary goal is to ensure that Londolozi remains wild and that its natural processes are uninterrupted by the successful tourism operation.

Research
An ongoing leopard research project is conducted at Londolozi. We are studying the movements, territories, genetic relatedness and hormonal levels of approximately 10 individual leopards. Much of the data is collected by the trackers. Data is collected using a cyber tracker device which is cutting-edge technology. Hair samples and dung are also being used to gather information.

We monitor our grasslands annually in order to understand productivity and diversity of the ecology.

All animal sightings are recorded daily.

We plan to study the small mammal densities through a Master Tracker thesis project.

Londolozi
Londolozi is open to and part of the Greater Kruger National Park. All our animals are free to roam in this vast 3 million hectares area. We view our animals doing exactly what they would do even if we were not there. We get into the daily lives of wild animals.
6. INSTRUCTOR’S GUIDE

6.1 Importance of the case for education

Ecotourism ventures such as Londolozi’s pioneering work have gradually succeeded in claiming back underutilised land resources and handing them back to nature, with remarkably positive consequences for conservation and economic development. Land values can easily escalate from R350 a hectare to R45000 a hectare following the introduction of wildlife and tourism infrastructure. Elephant populations are known to have more than doubled in the Kruger National Park over the past decade.

Ivory poaching, the logging industry and increased agriculture had seen Africa’s elephant populations halve from 1,4m to 600 000 between 1979 and 1989 (BornFree.rg.uk./elefriends). It is believed that the numbers dwindled to a low 400 000 before recovering to more than 13000 today. Due to many successful conservation programs in the Southern African region, conservationists are faced with a new dilemma: elephant overpopulation. It was due to Londolozi and others’ efforts that the establishment of the Trans Frontier National Park became a reality, a project which saw 1 000 elephants relocated to Mozambique from the KNP, giving them a new lease on life.

In another pioneering initiative, Dave Varty and Londolozi are behind a new campaign to establish elephant corridors between the KNP and the Drakensburg Mountains, a project that will ensure that more land is transferred from low-yielding (subsistence) agricultural activities to the potentially lucrative ecotourism sector, thereby benefiting poor communities located along the proposed corridors. These initiatives are responsible for identifying new and innovative alternative solutions to common problems. The corridors will relieve increased elephant populations, thereby obviating the need for culling or expensive relocation to other Game Parks.
The issue of conservation-driven ecotourism is critically important to students and future business leaders. In a world that is threatened by global warming and the possible extinction of endangered species, environmental consciousness and responsible behaviour will only be possible through a new breed of pioneering leadership that understands the possible consequences of our actions, and more importantly are willing to do something concrete about it.

6.2 Learning objectives.

- Wildlife experience is the main attraction for a traveller to a game reserve. “It’s not about the bathroom” (Dave Varty)
- Innovation and pioneering vision are essential ingredients for successful conservation programmes
- The opening of new natural areas is crucial for conservation, in order to stimulate economic growth in poor communities
- Ordinary people can do extraordinary things for conservation, projects that can have high impact benefits for animal welfare and growth

**Discussion Questions**

1. What influenced the Vartys’ decision not to renew the CCA contract, and to decide to run the lodge themselves from March 2007?

2. What has been the Londolozi model’s role in influencing the establishment of conservation projects in Southern Africa and beyond?

3. What can be done to accelerate the policy changes that will ensure that land that is not suitable for agriculture is rapidly converted into productive wildlife reserves, thereby unlocking much needed economic development for communities located in these low-yielding areas.
4. In a homogenous market such as an African Safari, what specific actions has Londolozi undertaken to distinguish itself by differentiating their product offering from that of competitors?

5. What is the best manner of making a meaningful contribution to community development without creating dependency, whilst still creating a sustainable programme of action that ensures that benefits flow to people that reside in close proximities to game reserves?
7. Conclusion

The endless pursuit for profit, similar to the western corporate model of maximizing Earnings per Share, has been partly responsible for global warming, depleted rivers and more than 2 billion people living in poverty.

This report has attempted to demonstrate how by linking personal values with those of the organization and ensuring that the two are aligned, sacrifices can be made that can yield positive long term results for the wider benefit of all stakeholders, both living in the present and for future generations still to come. It follows the role played by Londolozi Private Game Reserve in clearing the path for other lodges to be established, with remarkable consequences for the preservation of wildlife in Southern Africa, and the rest of the continent. Towards the end of 2006, a few months before the expiry of the two-year extension, Dave and his team had made a firm decision to take Londolozi back from CC Africa, and run it themselves, to “put the bush back into the tourist experience” as Dave explains. “A game lodge should not be treated like a hotel. Guests get a much better experience if the owners are at the front door” he says.

One example of these differing philosophies is the quality vs. quantity argument. Many visitors to our Game Reserves demand to see Africa’s big five, and rangers will usually go out their way to make this experience possible. The game drive is likely to be rushed, in pursuit of this objective. In comparison, you might only be shown the big one or two on a Londolozi game drive. However, the experience is likely to be much more memorable, as the whole game drive will be focused on enjoying that one specific event.
In following CC Africa’s development since its formation by Dave Varty and Alan Bernstein, it is clear that the development of other lodges thereafter followed the Londolozi model: Care for the land, care for the wildlife, and care for the people. Through the establishment of Phinda Lodge, Ngala Lodge and Conservation Corporation’s management contracts in Kenya and Tanzania amongst others, the Londolozi model has now been successfully exported to other regions and countries. Its influence has been well documented in other research papers. In addition to the above, the paper has also attempted to trace the adoption of this model by other lodges.

Responsible business practices in Ecotourism, together with much needed conservation efforts, require incremental contributions by all role players. The path undertaken by Londolozi through its pioneering community development initiatives, tireless lobbying for more land to be returned back to wildlife, and attempts to scale down commercial activity in the interests of a lower environmental footprint, are seemingly small but highly significant steps in the race to turn the tide against environmental degradation and wildlife preservation for future generations.

These efforts should not only be recognised and documented, but more importantly they should be encouraged, expanded and supported, especially from a Policy perspective. Only then will human ideas and dreams become a reality for wildlife, not only in Southern Africa but also in other parts of the world.

In the meantime, Londolozi will continue to push boundaries, ask uncomfortable questions and be pioneering in the field of ecotourism, in addition to being globally competitive and promoting the country in foreign markets.
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