

A cause célèbre?

Ian Parker comments:

I got to know Mkomazi well and have continued, from a distance, to follow its fortunes down the years. It all started when Tanganyika was German East Africa, and a large expanse of Masailand west of the Ruvu River was proclaimed the Ruvu Game Reserve. The British continued with the reserve until pressure from Masai grazing so changed things that the Game Department abandoned the Ruvu and sought new territory.

A tract of seemingly uninhabited and seldom used land between the Pare and Usambara Mountains and the border with Kenya was proposed as the Mkomazi Game Reserve. Game Ranger David Anstey was principally responsible for its boundaries. Coincidentally, I was from 1957 to 1960 the Ranger posted across the border, where Mkomazi abuts on Kenya's Kwale District.

Bear in mind two points from these early days. Mkomazi was a substitute. It became a game reserve not because it was a good area for game, but because it appeared to be vacant. Second, while David found some Kwavi (*aka* Parakayo, who are Maasai speaking herdsmen linked to the Maasai) in the reserve with 3,000 head of stock, he agreed that they could continue to use the land. But then, within a decade of taking this decision, Anstey was aware of pressures from other pastoralists outside the reserve, all wanting greater access to Mkomazi.

While human usage is unacceptable in national parks, it is possible in game reserves. So in conservation terms a game reserve is a lesser entity, lacking the assured permanence of a national park. There must have been reasons why Mkomazi was not accorded park status. Nevertheless, Anstey's hope was that in time Mkomazi would generate revenue enough to support itself. Throughout its existence, however, a lack of money has held back Mkomazi's development. Indeed, the only time any revenue was forthcoming was when David Anstey contracted my company – Wildlife Services – to cull 600 elephants. We paid UK£ 12,000 and were in the middle of the second phase of this work when Anstey moved to Ethiopia.

He had intended to use this money to resettle the Kwavi outside Mkomazi, but nothing came of the plan. The historical point is that 33 years ago, David Anstey was taking steps to resolve a problem he

The appearance earlier this year of a book, *Fortress Conservation* by Dan Brockington (James Currey, Oxford/Indiana University Press; ISBN 0-85255-417-6), criticising the management Tanzania's Mkomazi Game Reserve has elicited an impassioned response from Tony and Lucy Fitzjohn, who in the name of the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trusts are running the Mkomazi Project there. The Fitzjohns have since copied their response, in a large folder complete with numerous supporting documents, to the East African Wild Life Society, together with a copy of the Brockington book. For some insight into the background behind this acrimonious state of affairs, SWARA turned to veteran wildlife consultant and conservation historian Ian Parker.



initially underestimated: that of people wishing to use the reserve. After Anstey's departure, Mkomazi's never very bright fortunes as a game reserve dimmed.

Pastoralists entered the reserve in ever greater numbers. Naturally, this will have changed the vegetation and displaced wild grazers. Conservationists called this degradation which, in their own terms, it was. But, in animal production terms, where a stock population is on the increase – as Mkomazi's apparently was – carrying capacity has by definition yet to be reached.

In 1988 the Government of Tanzania expelled the pastoralists and denied local people access to the reserve, hoping that it would be able to generate revenue through tourism. In effect, they treated the 'B' grade

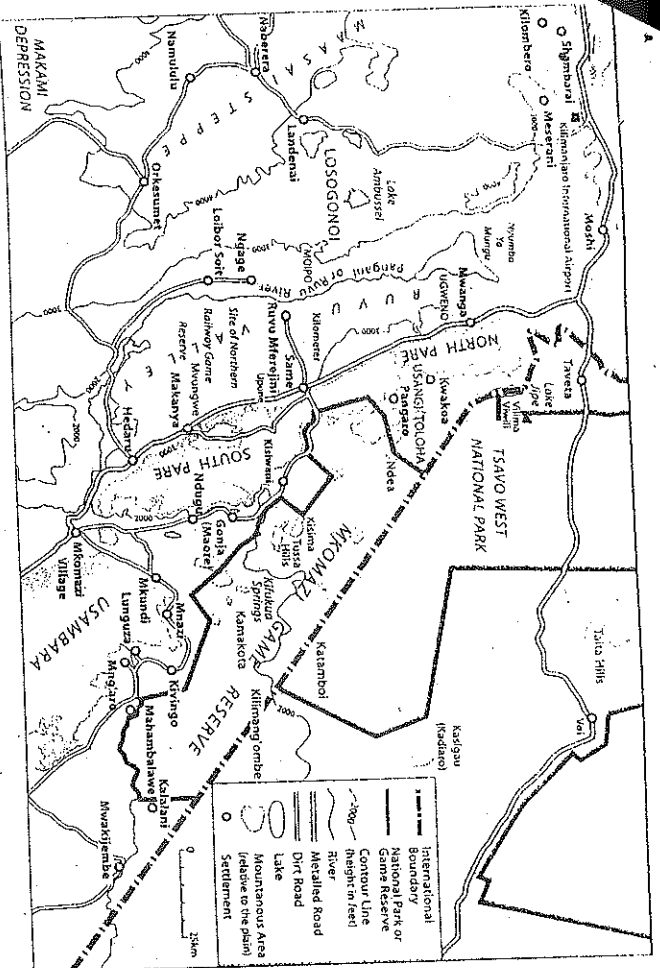
Mkomazi Reserve as an 'A' grade national park. Tony Fitzjohn profoundly influenced the consolidation of this policy. Groomed as George Adamson's assistant, Tony was at a loose end after Adamson's murder, having been denied permission to go on living at Kora on Kenya's Tana River.

Mkomazi, languishing without funds and with no rival conservation personalities in residence, was an inviting alternative.

Trading on the Adamson connection, Fitzjohn the showman conservationist raised funds for the Tony Fitzjohn/George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trusts on the cocktail circuits of North America and Europe. The image he projected – that of the heroic warden valiantly defending dwindling nature – pitted the goody sheriff against the baddy poachers/land grabbers. In fund-raising terms, this is always more fetching than trying to solicit cash to alleviate poverty. Donors find helping the goody attractive, and poverty repulsive – which is why Hollywood makes films about Indiana Jones: wardens, hunters and derring-do, but seldom any about poverty.

As his Trusts' Field Director, Tony is a *de facto* warden, driving and flying about conserving wildlife in a manner perfectly in keeping with the popular image of what wardens in Africa do. With considerable PR skill, he has selected high profile issues – like reintroducing rhinos and wild dogs to Mkomazi – to bring the international spotlight on to the reserve.

In the sense of a conventional African game park, with roads for tourists, dams to attract animals, rangers on patrol to keep poachers and trespassers away, and periodic pour boire contributions to communities beyond the Reserve's borders (to convince



The lie of the land: Tanzania's Mkomazi Game Reserve, again the subject of conflicting views, has never been entirely free of controversy, says Ian Parker.

them it is there for their benefit), Tony has, by all accounts, done a very good job. Indeed, there is even talk of the reserve's status being upgraded soon by the Tanzania Government to that of a national park.

The one persistent drawback, however, is that much needed revenue from tourists flooding in to admire this wilderness and its wildlife is still just a hope. And, even if the reserve does become a national park, its problems will certainly not go away.

In fund-raising terms, the Fitzjohn strategy makes good sense. And, if selling the case means living the life, well that's the way the cookie crumbles. If the result is a romantic lifestyle as Governor of an African game reserve, making occasional swings around the glitterati circuit to solicit funds, then so be it. That the living is about as good as it can get is neither here nor there. But it may go some way towards explaining the Fitzjohns' outrage over Brodckington's findings, which threaten to undermine this way of life.

During the 1990s, Dan Brodckington, a British social scientist, spent six years working among the people who live around Mkomazi. In 2002 he published a book, *Fortress Conservation: The Preservation of the Mkomazi Game Reserve, Tanzania*. In it he challenges the running of Mkomazi as a fortress from which local people are excluded, arguing persuasively that this is unjust. He puts forward this view despite the Tanzanian Courts' having thrown out a case the pastoralists brought against the government after their expulsion in 1988.

Brodckington's contention is that while Mkomazi may have been little used when it was proclaimed a game reserve in 1951, historically this was a temporary situation

suggesting greater use before the colonial era. He has dredged the colonial records, presenting a perception of land use and of tribal distribution that is more diffuse and ill-defined, altogether less tidy, than any sought by the colonial powers, which had their own cultural attitudes towards land tenure and rights.

He also points to the implausibility of claims made in 1988 that the area had been wrecked by pastoral use. If so, he asks, then how had the land been able to recover so quickly to become the magnificent wilderness Fitzjohn's donors were being told their money had created?

Fortress Conservation stresses how little tourism is contributing to the welfare of local people. The case could have been put more strongly. East Africa's core tourism area is defined by the highland plains of northern Tanzania and southern Kenya, by the land between them, and by the beaches of the Kenya coast. Investment in tourist facilities there over the past half century runs to hundreds of millions of dollars, and the industry is sophisticated, aggressive and innovative. And while 'big game' may still be the area's primary attraction, wildlife tourism has evolved specialised aspects catering for other interests: birds, plants, butterflies, you name it.

That this same tourist industry has not invested so much as a single tented camp in Mkomazi, despite the reserve's being

among the bigger conservation units in the core area, reveals much about its potential. Compared with other areas, and like the larger and more accessible southern third of contiguous Tsavo, Mkomazi's potential has clearly been found wanting. Claims based on the area's tourist potential rest on 51 years of evidence that it has little such potential.

Brodckington also criticises some of the findings set out in *Mkomazi: The Ecology, Biodiversity and Conservation of a Tanzanian Savanna* (ISBN 0-907649-75-0), an earlier book documenting the scientific work of the five-year Mkomazi Ecological Research Programme (MERP) that commenced in 1992 and that lists the impressive biodiversity its staff had found in the reserve. While highly commendable in most respects, this book does contain some inexact and misleading statements.

The authors maintain that Mkomazi is biologically one of the richest savannas in Africa. At face value, this impressive claim would make donors contributing funds to Mkomazi feel they were conserving an area of exceptional value. Not pointed out is the fact that very few African savanna ecologies have been studied at comparable depth. So, while the authors are justified in saying Mkomazi's ecology is rich, the term richest gives a false relative value.

In claiming biological significance, the name Mkomazi is used without any qualification to apply to all 3,234 km² of the reserve as though this were a single homogeneous entity, when clearly it is not. Indeed, a very substantial proportion of the diversity cited is contributed by a few hills in the western part of the reserve that, quite reasonably, could be considered separate ecosystems, isolated from the flat drylands making up the bulk of the reserve.

Mkomazi forms the southern fringe of the great, dry Nyika ecosystem separating the highland Kenya from the coast. Of this, 21,000 km² lie within Tsavo National Park (administratively split into East and West). Ecologically, then, Tsavo – with the higher conservation status of national park – is a far bigger and 'safer' conservation unit. And it is in this context that Mkomazi's value should be measured before claims about its significance are made.

In an otherwise invaluable record, the MERP researchers, by presenting some of

...findings out of context give Mkomazi an unwarranted elevation relative to other places. That this may well have been for political rather than purely scientific ends seems likely, since the Tanzanian Wildlife Department had been keen to justify the expulsion of people and livestock in 1988 through stressing Mkomazi's 'uniqueness' and biological value.

Brookington's critique is, on balance, reasonable. The local people have lost more from Mkomazi's creation than they have gained. Those whom David Ansey found grazing their stock in the area in 1951 and whom he allowed to go on living there, in particular, have been treated unfairly.

The prediction that continuing to run the reserve as a fortress with little or no local participation will bring about the demise of Mkomazi appears plausible enough. Yet Brookington does not advocate the reserve's abolition, only that it be run on a community basis.

This sounds well and good, but — in the single biggest omission of his presentation — Brookington does not tell us *how* such community conservation might work.

Community conservation is a catchphrase very much in vogue. But where are

there any examples of its actually working? And whose poverty is it alleviating? Lessons drawn from ventures such as Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE programme may contribute ideas for Mkomazi's betterment. No such parallel models have yet been explored, however.

For as long as community conservation remains just an interesting idea, then, Tony Fitzjohn's fortress — for all its imperfections — is at least working in the short term. On this basis, and providing it is a stepping stone to something better, the Fitzjohns deserve the support of bodies like the East African Wild Life Society.

Ultimately, Mkomazi's fate will be decided by two tightly interlinked issues: economics and demography. The fortress concept's viability depends on being able to match the opportunity costs of displacing local people from entering the area. Such costs will reflect principally those of a subsistence pastoralism that in 1980 was said to be worth US\$ 400/km² annually.

Were that still to be the case today, then people denied use of the reserve would have to receive a total of some US\$ 1.3 million annually. If tourism cannot provide this (an impossibility, surely, in the foreseeable

future), then some alternative will have to be found. Mixing conservation with cattle, as I suggested 30 years ago (although the idea, then, was purely theoretical), may be just such an alternative. This idea has since been applied to another portion of the ecosystem to which Mkomazi belongs: the Galana Ranch, where it worked remarkably well.

On the demographic front one thing is certain. Had the government in power in 1951 been obliged to contend with present human numbers, the Mkomazi Game Reserve would never have come into being in the first place. With a doubling time of less than 25 years, Tanzania's population is now four times what it was then. With increasing numbers comes the parallel demand for increased space. Equating rights and assigns today with those granted in 1951, when the need for space was only a quarter of what it is now, is downright silly. And all the parties in the Mkomazi controversy are guilty of this.

Populations that are either increasing or decreasing are by definition unstable. This instability will undermine conservation for as long as it exists. That, above all else, is what the Mkomazi problem is all about. #

Swaru . Jan - April . 2005 .

In defence of Mkomazi

One of the few valid points in Mr Parker's article is the importance of attacks to Mkomazi as part of the greater Tsavo Ecosystem. Why then should it be managed any differently from the Tsavos, in respect of carrie encroachment, or the culling of wildlife? On this basis, I fail to see how Mkomazi is "B" grade, unless of course the same grading system used by the author also makes the Tsavos 'B' grade Parks?

It is worth remembering that scenarios like those described in relation to Mkomazi's formation apply to many of East Africa's protected areas. That Mr Parker is able to justify the "removal" of 600 elephants from Mkomazi suggests the area once had a very healthy wildlife population, and confirms its importance to Tanzania as a recovering wildlife area today. Hardly the wasteland it is portrayed. It certainly does have potential in the future — if the habitat can be kept intact and the wildlife numbers increasing.

Mr Fitzjohn did not move to Mkomazi after George Adamson's murder. The George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust still supports Kora in Kenya, and in particular the local community around that 'B' (?) grade National Park. Mr Fitzjohn regularly visits Kora, and works with both the KWS and AMREF there. For someone who doesn't drink the "cocktail circuits of

I am writing in connection with the article [in SWARA 25:3] on Mkomazi. The author is particularly ill informed and needs to do a lot more than simply "follow its fortunes down the years" from a distance! A gap of 40 years is a very long time in African conservation terms — too long to claim that one "knows the area well."

The faint but damning praise meted out by Mr Parker in his article suggests that he might have a personal axe to grind with the Fitzjohns. The EAWLS is above all a society that promotes and supports conservation. When several millions of dollars, and many years of work, have gone into a project that continues to meet its objectives, I should have expected a more balanced and accurate review.

Mkomazi — A cause célèbre? is an insult both to Tanzanians and to the Society's membership. I hope that you will find time and space to set the record straight. In the meantime, I am enclosing some pointers (accompanying article), in the event that you see fit to open this topic for discussion.

Peter Silvester
Royal African Safaris

North America and Europe" must be pretty gruelling, I should imagine. But the spotlight is exactly what Mkomazi needs.

Mr Parker states that "In 1988 the Government of Tanzania expelled the pastoralists," when in fact the Tanzanian High Court decision was reached only after much selfless effort and tenacity. This was, incidentally, also a precedent that, had it gone the other way, could well have opened vast tracts of presently protected areas elsewhere to subsistence agriculture.

Securing areas for wildlife without compromise is no different from the policy underpinning National Parks across East Africa. This does not alter the fact that local communities must benefit. It simply confirms that such areas must be protected if they are to become economic engines for their surrounding communities and for the nation as a whole. It is interesting to note that the two existing industries adjacent to Mkomazi, sport hunting and mining, produce very little for the community.