

THARFIELD — THE STORY OF AN EASTERN CAPE FARM AND ITS INHABITANTS (1822—1977)

C. Thorpe

The new coastal road from Port Elizabeth to East London runs through Tharfield, not far from the sea. If you approach the farm from the west, you cross over the Riet River by the Tom Bowker bridge. Approaching it from the Fish River, you cross the Kleinmond River by the Victor Webb bridge.

BOWKER/WEBB

For a hundred and fifty years the story of this farm is linked with these two families. And that is what this article is about — one farm, Tharfield; and two families, Bowker and Webb. There are many lovely farms in this Settler country but Tharfield is the loveliest and most attractive, and one of the most interesting for anyone to study.

There is no other farm in this area that has the seashore and two rivers as its major boundaries. It is as unspoiled as any farm in the Cape can be. It has a wide variety of habitat for bird and beast. Tharfield is indeed a treasure-house of Settler history.

This study, this picture, may be of interest to the historian, the conservationist and the ecologist of the future; it will not be confined to an historical survey, but will talk of the wealth — or dearth — of natural life, of the ecology of this particular area, of the need for conser-

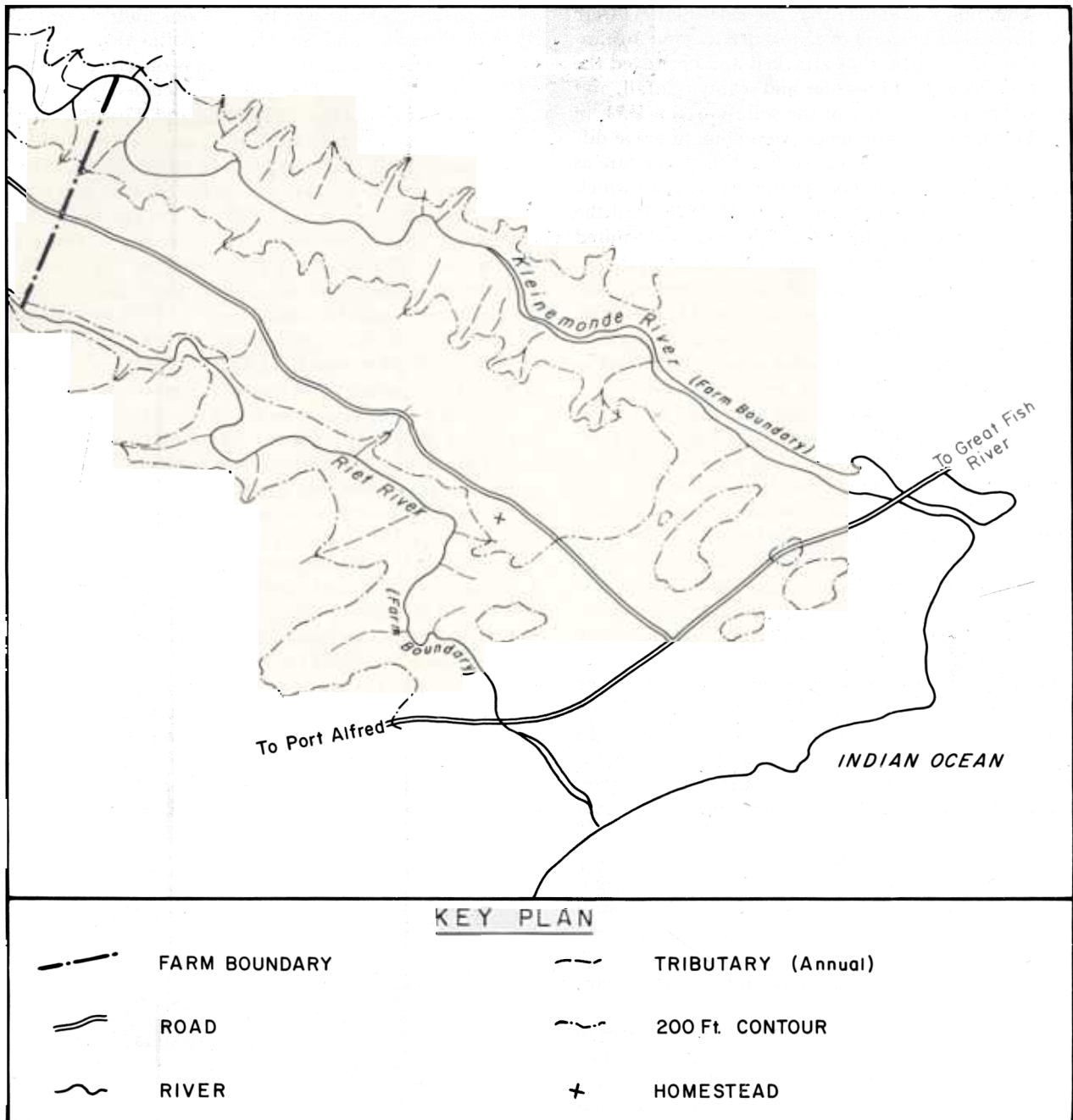
vation, of the farming methods practised. At a time when the winds of change blow with increasing strength, such a picture could be of some value.

EARLY SETTLEMENT — THE BOWKERS

With one or two insignificant additions and subtractions, Tharfield consists of the same area that was granted to its original owner in 1822. Miles Bowker, who came out in the *Weymouth*, was not a typical Settler. He was not a young man, he was not a poor man, and he did not lack farming experience. He was 56 years old when he arrived; his wife Anna was twenty years younger. In due course they had nine sons and two daughters.

At first he was given 1 500 acres (600 ha) further inland, three or four kilometres west of the present Tharfield, which he called Oliveburn. He had bred merino sheep in England, and it was his intention to breed them

THARFIELD FARM



here, on a larger scale. Because of the size of his family and the fact that he had brought eight retainers with him, he applied for a larger piece of land; and in 1822 the greater portion of what is now known as Tharfield was given to him.

The original Deed of Grant, dated 15 February 1822, and bearing the signature of the Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, and of the government surveyor, Johan Knobel, is in the possession of the present owner, Tom Webb. Tharfield is described as a "piece of One Thousand Two Hundred and Seventy Morgen of Land situated in the District of Albany..." The boundaries mentioned include the seashore, the George River (formerly the Riet River) and the Lynedoch River (formerly the Western Kleinemonde). Some of the conditions laid down were that "the land shall be cultivated by free labourers only, and that any employment of slaves upon it shall render the same subject to forfeiture ..." Likewise the owner was punctually to pay, or cause to be paid, "at the expiration

Tharfield farm between the Kleinemonde and Riet Rivers

of every twelfth month from the date of these presents, unto the Receiver-General of the Land Revenue, the sum of Ten Rixdollars" (about R1,50). Failing this, the land would be forfeit.

There is a second deed, dated 9 September 1843 (four years after Miles Bowker's death) granting a further 884 morgen (780 ha) to the estate. Though this second portion — the eastern part of the farm — was not legally made over until 1843, a map dated September 1827 included both portions, and shows that Miles Bowker was in actual possession of the whole of Tharfield in the 1820's. The rent for this second portion amounted to "thirteen shillings and three pence sterling" per year.

Miles Bowker lived on Oliveburn until approximately 1835, and it was his sons who built and occupied the two houses on Tharfield.

THE SETTLERS DIG IN

It is common knowledge that the early Settlers were soon in dire straits because of ignorance in some instances, because of the 'rust' that attacked and destroyed the wheat crops, because of irregular and scanty rainfall, and because of the poor quality of the soil. The Bowkers, in spite of their farming experience, were soon in grave difficulty themselves. Their wheat suffered the same fate as that of others; they had to endure the dry weather which persisted from the time of their arrival in 1820 until the deluge and floods of October 1823. The Sour Veld suited their merinos no better than it suited others men's sheep. They found some government officials, though not all, lacking in good sense but not lacking in stubbornness or arrogance. They were plagued by a shortage of supplies.

In February 1824 Miles Bowker wrote to a friend in England, showing how they were weathering the storm. "For my own part, though my eight men that I took out with me did me no good except by fulfilling my agreement with Lord Bathurst in securing me one thousand acres of location, yet through the help of my sons and their most excellent mother, we have been able to get forward better perhaps than any other Settlers. Upon finding our location unequal to our means, Government has kindly given as another place ... making it near 5 000 acres with one and a half miles of sea coast, one of the finest spots in this country lying about four miles from the mouth of the Great Fish River.

"Our fruit trees, though only three years from the stone or cutting, are bearing fruit. We have planted above 15 000 vines, many of which are now bearing ... In cattle, sheep and pork, we have an excellent market for them salted at the Kowie [River], where our cheese, which we make very good, as well as fat and hides, find a good market.

"We have plenty of fish and game and almost every description of wild beast, from the elephant and hippopotamus to the mouse. Our worst enemy is the large wolf dog which hunts in packs and will pull down an ox before our eyes in the daytime.

"We have been very little disappointed in this country.

In the early records there are only a few references to the breeding of cattle, which were mentioned only when there were thefts by the Xhosa. The Bowkers, however, suffered comparatively few thefts. It was said that "generally Tharfield was not harassed much by the Kafirs because Miles Bowker's nine sons were a tough lot. In these days they fired first and asked questions afterwards, so usually Tharfield was treated as a hornets' nest and given a wide berth."

The story of the Frontier Wars has been told many times, and this is not the place to re-tell it. The Sixth Frontier War which started at Christmas 1834 is the only one that will be mentioned, and that briefly. In 1834, when the Sixth Frontier War broke out, the Bowkers had to leave Tharfield and retreat to Bathurst. They packed all the family silver, including two large seven-branched candelabra and other heirlooms, onto the kitchen table, tied them up in a table-cloth and four stalwart sons carried this huge bundle in the dark down into the valley at the back of the house and buried it in an ant-bear's hole. Although successive generations have been digging for it for more than a hundred years, it has never been recovered.

Peace was concluded on 17 September 1835; but

even when the treaty was being signed Tharfield was raided for cattle, though the attack was repulsed. During that comparatively short war the Bowkers had lost some hundreds of cattle, and by this time Miles Bowker was over seventy. His plan to breed merinos on a large scale had had to be abandoned ... and so he decided to sell out and leave the coastal area. Oliveburn and Tharfield were offered for sale in April 1836 and again at the end of May, but no sale took place. In fact, Tharfield was to remain in the hands of the Bowker family for another ninety years.

Miles Bowker died in 1839 at the age of 75. By this time the three eldest sons had acquired farms of their own, and Tharfield was taken over by the fourth son, Thomas Holden. He was not a good farmer but distinguished himself in other ways. In 1853 he represented Albany in the first Cape House of Assembly and served until 1858, after which he was the member for Victoria East (Queenstown). Such was his reputation and popularity that he was invited to stand for the presidency of the Orange Free State in 1864. Although he lost the election to J.H. Brand, this tribute was perhaps the highest ever paid to any Bowker at any time.

Holden Bowker's eldest son was named after him. He was born in 1857 and farmed for a while at Tharfield. He never married. His mother, Holden Senior's widow, was still alive in 1897 and was living at Tharfield at the time.

In 1913 Henry Mitford Barber, grandson of Miles Bowker, who assumed the name Mitford-Baberton, transferred Tharfield to Alfred White, who had married into the Bowker family. In due course Alfred White transferred the estate (1925) to Thomas Guard Webb. The transaction was not a straight sale, but an exchange of Tharfield for Burnt Kraal, in the Grahamstown area, with a cash adjustment. So, after just over a century, Tharfield passed from the hands of the Bowker family.

Mrs Anna Bowker, the wife of Miles Bowker



THARFIELD CHANGES HANDS THE WEBB FAMILY

In Commemoration Church, Grahamstown, there are a number of stained-glass windows given in memory of the 1820 Settlers. One such window is that of the Webb family in which three generations are mentioned in an inscription:

Christopher Webb and his wife Mary (Gush)
John Webb and his wife Elizabeth (Wakeford)
Thomas Guard Webb and his wife Ilva (Short).

Christopher Webb was thirty years old when he landed as a Settler. He was a member of Richard Gush's party which arrived in the *Brilliant*. His wife, ten years younger than he, was Gush's sister. They had two small sons at the time, but nine more children were born subsequently.

Two of the sons remained in Grahamstown, the better known of the two being John Webb. He was a Justice of the Peace for 25 years, and served on the Municipal and Divisional Councils. He owned three farms, one of which, Burnt Kraal, had belonged to the Voortrekker Piet Retief in the 1820's. John Webb was a livestock specialist and an importer of pedigree cattle, horses and sheep. In 1849 he married Elizabeth Wakeford and had no fewer than nineteen children. By the time the eighteenth child was born they were running short of names. In 1865 a new Wesleyan Church was opened in Port Elizabeth by the Rev. Thomas Guard. John Webb named his next son, born in 1866, Thomas Guard Webb.

Guardie Webb (as he was generally known) lived on well into his nineties. He was a famous rugby and cricket player and represented Grahamstown against the rugby touring team from Britain in 1891. There are many tales told about him, especially in his old age. He was still riding round the farm on horseback when well into his eighties, and thought nothing of walking from the homestead at Tharfield to the Three Sisters and back — a tough walk for an old man.

When his wife, Ilva Short, died in 1937 he lived alone in 'Bertrams' House', while his son Victor and his family occupied the other house near by. Guardie Webb used to walk over to his son's house for meals. He would scorn the idea of taking a lantern at night — he could feel his way if necessary — but he always put a candle and matches on the sideboard just inside the door of his own house. One night, on his return, he heard a thumping noise inside the house; so he groped for the candle, lit it, and began to investigate. The noise was located in the pantry, where a spring-back rat-trap had been set. There he found a yellow cobra which had been probing into the trap and was lashing round furiously with the trap firmly fixed on its head. Guardie put the candle down and went to call Victor, but did not tell him what was happening. When they got back the cobra had managed to rid itself of the trap and had disappeared. The old man saw no reason to be perturbed — so he blew-out the candle and went to bed!

Victor Webb was born in 1892, and so was in his early thirties when they came to live at Tharfield. He had served with distinction in the First World War and was a lieutenant in the South African Motor Cycle Corps in East Africa. He was entrusted with the responsibility of conveying the terms for an armistice to the German General P.E. von Lettow-Vorbeck. In a citation signed by none other than Winston S. Churchill, Secretary of State for War, Victor Webb was mentioned in dispatches for

"gallant and distinguished service in the Field". Much of his time was devoted to public service in the area, and it is fitting that the new bridge over the Kleinemonde River should be named after him.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARM

Tharfield is and always has been a cattle farm. Miles Bowker was interested in merino sheep, but that experiment failed. His family tried to diversify their efforts, but never with much success. They had their fruit and vegetables and barley and mealies helped out when wheat failed. Bertram Egerton Bowker, one of Miles's sons, relates in his *Reminiscences* that about sixteen cows were milked every day; he admits, however, that the buttermilk ran largely to waste as the family never kept many pigs. They made cheese and butter which they sold in Grahamstown and Port Alfred. But cattle, especially beef cattle, were their standby.

In 1845, when the Settlers were celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of their landing, the Rev. John Ayliffe, speaking at Bathurst, made a strong plea for the growing of cotton as a staple crop. This was one idea, excellent in theory, which in fact came to nothing.

About this time an attempt was even made to establish a seaport at or near the mouth of the Kleinemonde River. In May 1847 the Cawood Brothers selected the Lynedoch (or Kleinemonde) River as a port. Their 'harbour' was sited on the right bank, and was named Port Jessie. A few schooners and cargo-ships anchored at this port during the next eleven months but the ideal of building a town there was never realised. Port Jessie in fact ceased to exist in early April 1848.

Tharfield also tried ostrich-farming. There were two widely-separated boom periods for ostriches: one in the early 1880's, the other immediately before the First World War. Regular advertisements for the sale of breeding pairs, and even for ostrich incubators, had appeared in the newspaper *Port Alfred Budget* during the last two decades of the previous century. But there is little evidence that ostrich-farming was ever successful at Tharfield.

When the Webb family took over Tharfield at the end of 1925, they found three urgent problems needing attention. The first was fencing and the provision of more camps. In the early days the fences consisted of thorn-branches piled up in rows. In 1925, when the farm changed hands, there were only five camps — today there are twenty-eight.

The second urgent need was for a better water supply. Over a period of forty years, Tharfield recorded an average annual rainfall of just over 700 millimetres. If this had fallen regularly, it might just have sufficed. But it didn't. The Webbs thus immediately began to sink boreholes. Small dams were also built and improved. Today there are only four boreholes in use, but at least ten kilometres of piping have been laid down. The aim is to provide 20 000 litres of water daily for each camp in use, so that up to 500 animals may be left there without any worry about their drinking supply. In 1959, to supplement the borehole supply, a weir was constructed across the Kleinemonde River about five kilometres above the main road so that in an emergency, fresh water could be pumped to the flats above that point.

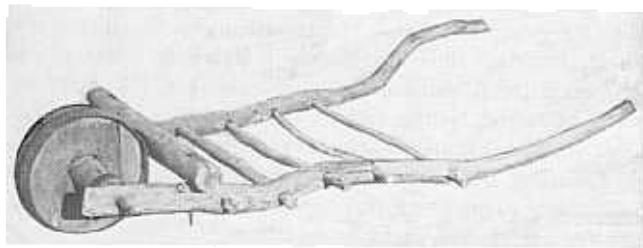
The third problem was that of cattle diseases. In 1925 there were no reliable dips on the farm, and half the

calves died from tick-borne diseases. The large bont tick, which carries heartwater, was recognised in Lower Albany before 1835. The blue tick is associated with red-water or Texas fever, and this was causing untold trouble in Victor Webb's time: it had acquired a resistance to the chemicals which were at one time able to exterminate it.

At one time it was the practice to cut the ticks off with scissors. The animals had first to be securely roped, so that they could not kick, and the mind boggles at the thought of what went on. The whole operation seems incredibly slow and cumbersome to our minds, and on a farm like Tharfield de-ticking might take a whole week. Nowadays a spray-race is used and the dipping of 700 animals every week is quite common.

Thomas Guard Webb and his son Victor were interested in crops, and at one stage there was a large area under cultivation, ranging from maize to pineapples. Victor put his faith in Shorthorn cattle, and at one time included dairying in his other pursuits. When Tom Webb, the present owner of Tharfield, took over the farm, he made up his mind that what he wanted was commercial beef cattle, on which this farm has concentrated ever since.

A wheelbarrow used on Tharfield in 1824



From the beginning the Webbs tried to improve the quality of the grazing by planting more palatable grasses, and this process has continued unchecked. The grazing has been brought to a fine art: a short grazing period of about one week followed by a long resting period of two to three months.

A farmer has to be practical and give full consideration to the economics of farming. But what farmer in South Africa could change over from trek-oxen to tractors without a pang of regret? At Tharfield the change-over began in 1956, though oxen continued to be used for the next five years or so.

THE BOWKER FAMILY AS NATURALISTS

The Bowker family has made a distinguished and diversified contribution to the life and history of South Africa. As naturalists they also played a significant role. Miles Bowker himself must take the initial credit. E. Morse Jones records that he (Bowker) was deeply interested in botany and was sending indigenous bulbs to the government secretary in Cape Town from Lower Albany as early as 1826. At the time of his death in 1839 it was reported that "much of his time in recent years had been devoted to botany."

It is Miles's daughter, Mary Elizabeth, however, who must be singled out for special mention. In his *The rise of South Africa*, Vol. II, Sir George Cory states: "She was remarkable for her vast and accurate knowledge of the plant and insect life of South Africa. Charles Darwin owed much to her for the information she gave him in these

Mary Elizabeth Bowker



matters in connection with the famous *Origin of Species*. Her numerous, beautiful and accurate water-colour paintings of insects and flowers now adorn the walls of one of the rooms of the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, and are justly prized as one of the most valuable treasures of that Institution."

William Henry Harvey was the leading botanist of the 19th century in South Africa. In his *Genera of South African plants*, published in 1838, there is an introduction to botany. Later on Mary Bowker wrote to him: "I am one of your converts; it is to you that I owe the existence of my hobby, for I should never have known anything of botany had I not, by mere chance, seen a copy of your *Genera of South African plants*. This volume I borrowed and here commenced some of the happiest days of my life; for in all places and at all times, in peace and war, botany has been one of my greatest pleasures; and often when we have been driven away from our homes, and had them burned by savages, and had nothing to shelter us but a wagon for months together, then botany has been my sovereign remedy to drive away all care ..."

The details of Mary Elizabeth Bowker's education are scanty. Indeed, she had no education in the formal sense, but obviously had a mind of unusual brilliance and capacity, and an insatiable urge to explore, to observe, to analyse and to comprehend. Her achievements were nothing short of miraculous. She had no reference library at her disposal, and no access to any museum or laboratory.

She turned her attention to insects, and Roland Trimen, the renowned entomologist and authority on South African butterflies, paid her several tributes. In the Albany Museum some of her coloured drawings reproduced in his books are displayed. The majority of her 71 paintings presented to this Museum were unfortunately destroyed by a fire in 1941. Only fourteen are left, apparently, seven of which are of birds, the rest being of flowers and plants.

Her brother, James Henry (1822—1900), was a noted authority on butterflies, of which he discovered over forty species. He assisted Roland Trimen with his three-volume work *South African butterflies* (London, 1887—89), and his sister Mary with her many treatises on plants and insects, Trimen adding his (James's) name to the title-page

of the book as co-author. James Henry, who served as an inspector in the Frontier Armed and Mounted Police, as Governor's Agent in Basutoland, and Chief Commandant responsible for the annexation of the Diamond Fields (1871), was a lifelong bachelor and tended to grow somewhat eccentric in old age. He could be seen walking down the street with a butterfly net wound round his hat like a veil, while he used the handle as a walking stick. He also had a turkey buzzard, that is a ground hornbill, which he had caught as a young bird and tamed. This bird was devoted to him and was intensely jealous of anybody who came near the Colonel.

THE FAUNA OF THARFIELD AND ENVIRONMENT

Tharfield is a bird-lover's paradise. It has almost every conceivable type of habitat. A large farm by local standards, yet reasonably compact, it has suffered less than most from senseless tree-felling and irresponsible burning. During the hundred and fifty years of its existence as a farm it has been in the hands of only two families, both of them responsible and nature-loving. It has not escaped the impact of modern civilization, but its bird life has suffered to a markedly less degree than has, for instance, its animal life.

Coming to the birds of the present day, Tharfield is fortunate in its birds of prey; and outstanding among these is the crowned eagle. Ornithologists have given this eagle the proud title of "King of African birds". A forest bird, it is one of the big three among the eagles, and undoubtedly the strongest. The history of the Tharfield pair, one of the most studied pairs in South Africa, goes back the best part of thirty years, and these birds have built four nests at Tharfield, two in euphorbias and two in kaffirtrees. The world authority on crowned eagles is Leslie Brown who studied his birds, one pair in detail, in East Africa for something like 24 years. He proved to his satisfaction that they cannot breed annually. Unfortunately the Tharfield eagles haven't read the text-book, and they *do* nest every year; there are at least three proven instances of their breeding at Tharfield in successive seasons.

Other predators found on the estate are the jackal buzzard, the gymnogene, the little sparrowhawk, the African goshawk, and, just occasionally, the osprey. And of course the secretary bird; a nesting pair has been seen on the farm recently.

A second group of birds particularly well represented at Tharfield is the kingfisher family. South Africa has ten species, of which five are resident at Tharfield, the commonest being the pied, the giant and the brown-hooded. The malachite is found on both the rivers, a dazzling jewel of a bird, blue with red beak and red legs. But the fifth, the half-collared, is the most interesting. The text-books say it is not common anywhere. The definitive book on South African birds, written in the 1880's by Layard and Sharpe, says that it was found on the Kowie River (at Grahamstown) and the Fish River. No other place is mentioned. It nests on the Kleinemonde River at Tharfield, and is also found in the Little Riet River, the only blue kingfisher with a black beak.

In his *Reminiscences* Bertram Egerton Bowker writes: "When we were living at Tharfield the flamingos used to visit the river and we often picked up their red feathers. The pelicans also used to come there in great

flocks of about 30 and looked as white as snow, with pouches so big that I could stand with both feet in the pouch. They used to fish in a large circle, gradually closing in till they got all the fish together in a terrible scuffle, and [then] catch the fish."

Honey-guides were common in Settler days, and are still found on Tharfield. Trumpeter hornbills and crowned hornbills and Knysna loeries keep to the forests; and one bird that we are constantly looking for is the narina trogon. It has occasionally been spotted near by, and is probably the most beautiful bird in that part of the world.

Though there are few references to birds in the early Settler literature, a good deal is said about animals. When Jeremiah Goldswain was on his way to embark on the *Zoroaster* at the end of 1819, he was warned about the wild beasts and "all sortes (*sic*) of wild animals" (*sic*) at the Cape of Good Hope. For details of these we must consult the early records. E. Morse Jones, in his *Chronicles*, notes: "1819, Dec. 31. Among the larger fauna in Lower Albany were quagga, zebra, eland, hartebeest and springbuck; and there were some rhinoceros in the Fish River Valley. Elephants were very numerous and lions plentiful."

This quotation is interesting in more than one respect. It mentions quagga and zebra together, obviously differentiating between the two, though it is generally held that zebra were not found in Lower Albany at that time; nor have they been since. Secondly, this is one of the few references to the rhinoceros in the area; in all probability it is the black rhinoceros that is meant. There is another record which says: "teeth and other rhino remains are [to be seen] in the Albany Museum from Tharfield farm." Thirdly, it is categorically stated that lions were plentiful in about the early nineteenth century. All later evidence, from 1820 onwards, suggests that in Lower Albany lions were anything but plentiful, and, within another twenty years, extremely rare.

From Morse Jones we learn that a hunting-party, returning to Lampeter by the Wellington and Lynedoch River mouths in March 1821, came across hartebeest, quagga and springbuck. Three years later the same author stated that there were still elephant and hippopotamus in the George and Lynedoch River valleys (that is, on Tharfield).

Writing in 1824, the Rev. William Shaw maintains that elephant "literally swarmed in the great bush on both sides of the Fish River. I have seen them in numbers from two or three to more than a hundred. Occasionally, when travelling on horseback, I have been startled by coming suddenly on them and being in very close proximity to them. When [I was] accompanying a wagon, this rarely happened as the loud cracking of the whips startled them."

According to Morse Jones elephant were still to be found in the Fish and Bushman's River valleys in 1844, lions were more scarce, quagga and hartebeest were seldom seen, while buffalo, springbuck, reedbuck, Cape wild dog, and spotted hyena were still plentiful.

In the last 150 years — since the arrival of the 1820 Settlers, in fact — thirteen species of mammals have been exterminated in the Albany and Bathurst districts. These are lion, cheetah, wild dog, reedbuck, eland, red hartebeest, black wildebeest, buffalo, warthog, elephant, hippopotamus, black rhinoceros and quagga. Seven more are almost extinct: spotted hyena, brown hyena, leopard, rattle, serval, klipspringer and grey rhebuck.

Bushbuck are still plentiful. Tom Webb estimates that he has over a hundred left on Tharfield, and says they are to be found in any wooded kloof on the farm, as well as in the private nature reserve among the dunes. They are certainly holding their own. Duiker and grysbuck are still plentiful, but the oribi is fighting for survival.

A survey was made of oribi in 1962 by nature conservation officers. At that time it was estimated that in the Albany District there were 8 left, in Alexandria 13, in Bathurst 191. It is doubtful whether there are 191 today. There is some fluctuation of numbers, but the Tharfield population may be down to as low as ten. During the last breeding season two fawns were seen, so there is still hope.

There are not as many monkeys on Tharfield as one might expect with so many wild fruit trees abounding. Because no crops are grown, no baboons are to be found here. There is one entry in the farm diary, dated 25 October 1933: "A baboon was seen on the farm today." None have been recorded since then.

The clock cannot be put back. Never in the Eastern Cape, never again on farms like Tharfield will elephants in their hundreds roam at their leisurely pace from the Kooms to the Kowie, and thence to the Addo. Never will the leopard's deep bass sound for hours among the krantzies, nor will the hartebeest raise their horned crests or the quaggas gallop heavily among them, as H.H. Dugmore's rather melodramatic description of the Eastern Cape read, almost a century ago.

NATURE AND WILD LIFE CONSERVATION

Conservation is basically a matter of holding on to what we have, and this article has been leading up to this important subject, especially for the descendants living in this region and in South African generally.

The present generation is pollution-minded: the symbol of this evil is a sea-bird soaked in oil, condemned to death by starvation. Curiously enough, Tharfield experienced oil-pollution of birds fully a hundred years before the world became aware of the problem. The oil came from the sea, but the birds didn't. Not long after the wreck of the *Waterloo* at Port Jessie in 1848, we are told by Bertram Bowker that six whales were washed ashore near the mouth of the Kleinemonde River. "The oil all melted out of the whales and spread down the sand to the sea. Wolves and Wilddogs and vultures and smaller vermin were there in hundreds. Some of the vultures were so soaked in oil that they could not fly."

Up to the present the Tharfield beach has fortunately never suffered oil-pollution from tankers. Pollution from riverwater is a minimal problem too since the two rivers, the Riet and the Kleinemonde, are relatively short and do not pass through any populated area.

When we think of the deliberate destruction of wild life in the last 150 years, we are appalled. The last quagga died in 1884, yet fifty years earlier there were large numbers of them in the Eastern Cape. The plain fact is that in the early days no one had any conscience about indiscriminate shooting and killing. The record shows that the Bowker sons were no different from their fellows. So even those who might have been expected to encourage conservation set a bad example.

Two further problems of a different kind regarding effective conservation arise: pollution by the introduction

of exotic plants, and natural bush encroachment. There are virtually no exotic trees on Tharfield, no plantations of conifers or eucalyptus. This is one of the farm's great attractions — it is largely unspoiled. But bush encroachment is a difficult problem to solve. Thorn-scrub can be dealt with by using dieseline. Monkey-apple and wild currant are being systematically rooted out and used to repair wind damage on the dunes.

In 1973 a thousand acres (400 ha) of Tharfield were set aside as a reserve. This is the portion between the main road and the sea, and it was officially gazetted as the Tharfield Private Nature Reserve on 4 June that year. Perhaps the names of nature reserves like Umfolozi (the white rhino), Cradock (the mountain zebra) and Swellendam (the bontebok), will do something to ease South Africa's conscience when it remembers the wanton destruction of wild life, on an incredible scale, in past years. Individual farmers can make an appreciable contribution to the cause of conservation — and Tharfield is doing its share.

Miles Bowker, the 1820 Settler, is buried in a private and unpretentious cemetery near the Bowker homestead. His spirit would be restless in a more formal grave, decorated with a marble slab and stone angels. He is buried, as he would have wished, on Tharfield, the farm that he helped to establish in the wilds. Over his grave has grown a dog-plum, now mature, which produces much luscious fruit year after year — food for the hornbills and pigeons and loeries that he loved. ☐

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