



Regular feeding of game

Gert Fourie

G&H: Do you think game being fed supplementary feed on a regular basis is acceptable?

Pieter Wagner: I do not have a problem when game are fed supplementary feed in years of severe droughts or disasters (like veld fires), when adequate grazing and browsing are not available. However, when game species are supplemented on a regular basis to “artificially” sustain the stocking rate and increase the carrying capacity of a farm, it becomes a problem.

Pine: Not only acceptable, but a necessity because the fencing-in of game in a smaller environment like game farms, prevents them from following ancient migration routes between summer and winter veld, where suitable graze or browse is seasonally available.

Pieter Eloff: In general, game are supposed to be wild and free-ranging animals that migrate to areas where at certain times of the year they can get optimal nutritional value from their preferred food source. As soon as the farmer puts up his fence, the migration routes are being cut off and the responsibility of supplementary feeding starts.

G&H: What do you think may be the effect of regular feeding on the game population in SA in general over a long period?

Pieter Wagner: Regular feeding may make certain game species too dependent on supplements, which, at first, could lead to an increase in their numbers. During a severe drought or disaster, feed supplements may become too expensive or even unavailable, and severe losses will follow. Considering the overall high prices nowadays, in the long run it will certainly not be economically sustainable.

Jeremy: It is possible that animals that are regularly fed supplements may not have the rumen development and rumen flora to cope with being introduced onto natural veld. There are also likely to be behavioural problems in that the animals grow up learning to feed at feeding sites, not to forage naturally where their normal food is found.

Pieter Eloff: Feeding is better for the animals that would not have survived in the enclosed area. By feeding, farming with some animals, e.g. roan, sable and nyala, starts to make economical sense.

It doesn't take a long time for the exception to the rule to become more and more common, until it is the accepted norm.

Only a few years ago, in the '90s, it was not common practice to feed game on a regular basis. Most of the game farmers we consulted then were only feeding during very dry years and sometimes during winter periods. In fact, those days our recommendations were: If you need to feed animals, you are most probably over the capacity of the land and you may experience deteriorating veld conditions in the future.

Since then, feeding has become such a common phenomenon that almost every land owner is giving supplementary feeds, whether necessary for the survival of the game or not.

With regular feeding of game becoming the accepted norm on the majority of farms, the question arises: To what extent are the environment (habitat for game) and the game influenced?

For a better perspective on the topic we asked some role-players in the game industry a few questions. Our panel consists of Pieter Wagner, Department of Agriculture grazing and veld management specialist from Polokwane; Pieter Eloff, animal nutrition expert and part-time farmer from Thabazimbi; Pine Pienaar, manufacturer and distributor of game feed supplements close to Bela-Bela; and Dr Jeremy Anderson, ecologist and previous director of Pilanesberg National Park and KaNgwane Parks Board.





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