

# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES OMGEWINGSOPVOEDING SENTRUMS

## HAPPY ACRES EDUCATIONAL FIELD CENTRE

### Harry and Brenda Cauldwell

*This article is the fifth in a series aimed at covering all the major environmental education centres in Southern Africa.*

Happy Acres is the oldest outdoor educational field centre in South Africa, having been started in 1945 by Mr and Mrs Holland, who recognised a need for young people to learn more about their environment. It is situated in picturesque Magaliesburg, some 58 km west of Johannesburg and within easy reach of all schools in the PWV area. Schools have in fact come from as far away as Phalaborwa, Welkom and Swaziland to attend courses.

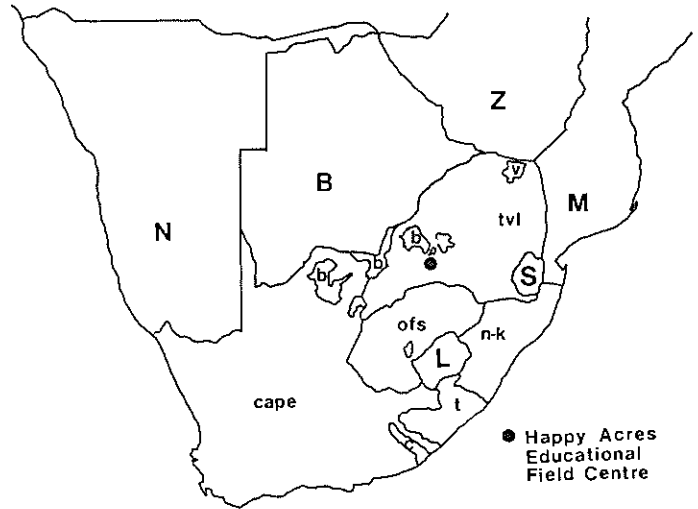
Work is done in the field along the beautiful Magalies River, which is rich in ecology and contrasts with the typical dry grasslands of the Highveld. Living animal and plant exhibits are housed at the Centre where pupils have the opportunity to see them at first hand and to experience the ecology that they are learning about at school. Happy Acres is an extension to the classroom and possibly offers the finest biology facilities in South Africa for school groups from standards 1 to 10.

Children are not specially selected to attend the courses and in 1987 a total of 19 562 pupils plus their teachers from all race groups enjoyed the facilities offered at Happy Acres. The Centre operates throughout the year and most Education Departments encourage their schools to attend during school time. Booking is therefore essential.

Schools usually choose one standard to attend a course at Happy Acres. Because each child is expected to pay his/her own costs the course fees are kept to a minimum so as to be within the means of all children. Although the Educational Field Centre is still privately owned, an Educational Trust Fund has recently been formed to assist with the financial burden incurred in an organisation of this size. Donations to the Trust Fund are tax deductible.

The aim of the Field Centre is to make biology a *living subject* rather than just a 'book subject' by relating it to everyday living and the ecology of the environment in which we live. Courses are matched with school syllabuses so that each pupil learns at his/her appropriate level. A love for animals and plants is generated by understanding more about them; a desire to conserve our natural resources grows from understanding more about ecology. Happy Acres believes that the way to conservation is through understanding. By allowing children to enjoy their environment they will see a need to conserve it. All courses are structured so that pupils gain the maximum benefit in the time available.

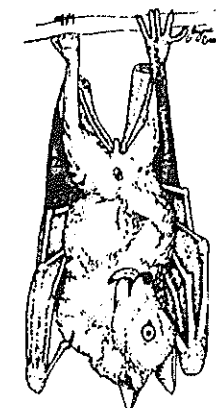
The Centre operates resident courses from two to four days in length for between 60 and 120 pupils at a time. These cover a wide range of topics: birds, grass, animals, plants, insects and arachnids, trees, ecology, keys and the elementary geology of the area. Time is made for recreation such as swimming, games and crab catching and an evening programme is organised. Children become very involved in their environment. Day courses are also offered for groups of up to 150. Such courses start with an introductory walk where pupils are introduced



to the ecology of the area and an explanation of the need to conserve it. After a cold drink pupils split into two groups and while one group does a study in the animal vivarium, the other does a plant study in the greenhouse. All exhibits are displayed and labelled for each course to study. After a cooked lunch the groups change over so that those who studied animals before lunch will now study plants and *vice versa*. The teaching is of a specialised nature. Happy Acres staff run the courses, but teachers are most welcome to participate if they wish to do so.

Camps are also run during the school holidays. These cater for children from seven to 14 years old and are run on the American Camp system, with two camp counsellors working with children in groups of about 12. The holiday programme is fun from start to finish. There is plenty of nature work for those who want it, but it is all very informal. Bookings must be made by individuals.

Further enquiries may be directed to:  
The Director  
Happy Acres Educational Field Centre  
Box 65  
MAGALIESBURG  
2805



Pauletted Fruit Bat *Epomophorus* spp.

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A thought on seeing the whole . . .

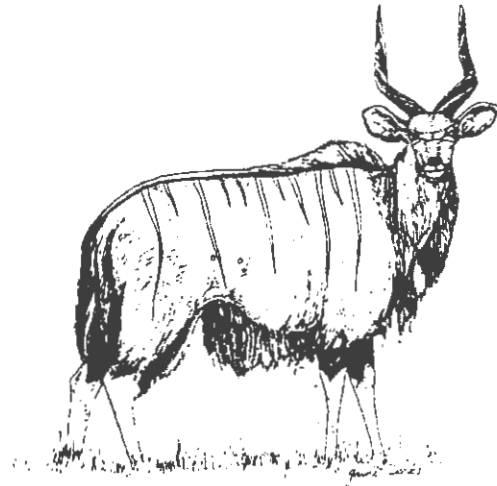
"Once upon a time there was a rajah in this region who called to a certain man and said: 'Gather together in one place all the men in Savatthi who were born blind . . . and show them an elephant.'

'Very good, sire,' said the man, and did as he was told and said to them, 'O blind, such as this is an elephant' - and to one man he presented the head of the elephant, to another its ears, to another a tusk, to another the trunk, foot, back, tail, and tuft of the tail, saying to each one that that was the elephant . . .

Thereupon, brethren, that rajah went up to the blind men and said to each: 'Tell me, what sort of thing is an elephant?' Thereupon those who had been presented with the head answered, 'Sire, an elephant is like a pot.' And those who had observed an ear only replied, 'An elephant is like a winnowing basket.' Those who had been presented with a tusk said it was a plowshare. Those who knew only the back, a mortar; the tail, a pestle; the tuft of the tail, just a broom.

Then they began to quarrel, shouting 'Yes, it is!' 'No, it is not!' 'An elephant is not that!' 'Yes, it's like that!' and so on, till they came to fisticuffs over the matter. Then, brethren, that rajah reflected deeply upon the scene."

- Udana, IV, 6



Nyala *Tragelaphus angasi*

Journal No. 8 will be a special issue on 'Museums and Environmental Education'.

● **Journal No. 9** will focus on 'Environmental Education, Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquaria'. Closing date for contributions is 30th August 1988.

Articles pertaining to these or ANY other aspects of environmental education will be welcome.

Send to: The Hon. Editor, Box 972, GRAHAMSTOWN 6140. South Africa.