

Conserving Wildlife Resources in Zimbabwe: Reflections on Chirinda Forest, 1920s-1979.

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Abstract

This article uses Chirinda Forest as a lens through which to view wildlife conservation policy and practice in colonial Zimbabwe. Situated in eastern Zimbabwe, Chirinda Forest was unique in that though located in a typical savannah climate, it was a tropical rainforest and the only one of its kind in Zimbabwe. The article examines the structure, variety, maturity and density of the forest's trees. It describes its diverse game and water systems and contrasts the forest's traditional and modern ownership patterns. It also traces how the state acquired this forest and sought to conserve it for aesthetic, scientific, educational and recreational reasons - processes that set the state on a collision course with African communities surrounding this forest, who valued it as a source for timber, firewood, medicine, game and other resources. Drawing on the history of Chirinda Forest, the study questions the appropriateness and effectiveness of colonial conservation policies while exploring the strategies adopted by the marginalised sections of society to access clandestinely wildlife resources from this forest.

Key Words

Chirinda Forest, Ownership, Wildlife, Nature Conservation

Introduction

The spread of ideas about environmentalism, which began filtering into the Southern Africa region by the end of the nineteenth century, was a response to growing concerns about the unsustainable exploitation of wildlife resources in this region. The mid-nineteenth century Afrikaner settlement in the Transvaal had led to large-scale land clearances and market hunting resulting in a marked depletion of game by the end of the century.¹ The wave of large-scale hunting had also reached parts of Zimbabwe and

¹ Jane Carruthers, 'Changing perspectives on wildlife in Southern Africa, c. 1840 to c. 1914', *Society & animals* 13.3 (2005): 183-200. John MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988).

Botswana by the 1880s with elephants being targeted for their valuable ivory.² Over much the same period in Britain there emerged a conservationist mode of thought, one of whose outcomes was the holding of the 1900 London International Fauna Protection Convention.³ This was followed by the formation of the Society for the Preservation of the Wildlife Fauna of the Empire in London in December 1903.⁴ The society established a journal that was devoted to wildlife protection in the British Empire, constrained sport hunters, advocated regulations relating to game reserves, and disseminated game protection information.⁵ Notably, southern African colonial officials gave their own twists to western conservation ideas that infiltrated the region.⁶ At the same time, the ideas and writings of John Croumbie Brown and Robert Moffat influenced environmental policies throughout South Africa and later Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Botswana.⁷ Vimbai Kwashirai confirms this, saying foreign influences played a significant role in the transfer of Euro-American environmental conservation knowledge into South Africa, and this in turn influenced Zimbabwean environmental policies as it depended on South Africa for personnel and conservation ideas.⁸

For Zimbabwe, this study engages with the work of a number of scholars, notably Terence Ranger, Ian Phimister, Joann McGregor, Muchaparara Musemwa, and Vimbai Kwashirai. Ranger's account of the Matopos Hills in western Zimbabwe reveals the extent to which a unique landscape became a site of vigorous black and white contests over possession, representation and control.⁹ Ian Phimister has demonstrated how the forced conservation programme that government imposed on the African reserve following the promulgation of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 led to violent

² William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.66.

³ Jane Carruthers, 'Changing perspectives on wildlife', p.189.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.192.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ William Beinart and Karen Brown, *African Local Knowledge & Livestock Health: Diseases & Treatment in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013), p.19.

⁷ Meena Singh, 'Basutoland: A historical journey into the environment', *Environment and History* 6.1 (2000): 31-70.

⁸ Vimbai Kwashirai, 'Poverty in the Gwai Forest Reserve, Zimbabwe: 1880-1953', *Global Environment* 1.1 (2008): p.159.

⁹ Terence Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History of the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

protest against the government, and an upsurge in African nationalism.¹⁰ In a related study, Joann McGregor has shown the authoritarian and discriminatory aspects of environmental conservation in Zimbabwe revealing how, at a racial level, conservation for the white settler community involved both financial and nonfinancial incentives, while for Africans, it entailed coercion and punitive restrictions on resource use, which ended up provoking widespread African resistance.¹¹ Contrary to studies focusing on black - white relations, Muchaparara Musemwa's study of the white settler community's disputes over timber, grazing and water rights, and land damage on the Gold Belt of Zimbabwe discounts environmental concerns in the colonial conflict between white Zimbabwean farmers and miners, and concludes that, 'it was about economic greed'.¹² In addition, a study on the mining and commercial agricultural sectors in northern Zimbabwe's Mazowe District, by Vimbai Kwashirai, noted that a combination of ignorance and neglect among the white settler communities, evident in the 1890s to the 1930s, resulted in widespread deforestation and soil erosion.¹³

Although colonial Zimbabwe adopted Western wildlife conservation practices, missing from its environmental history are studies that interrogate the significance of aesthetic, scientific and recreational oriented conservation practices, and their interrelationships with the practical needs of communities surrounding forest landscapes. Using documents from Chirinda Forest station,¹⁴ the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), and oral interviews, the study uses Chirinda Forest as a lens to view the role of state in wildlife conservation, and to probe the nexus between communities and wildlife resources. In what follows, the first section outlines the nature of Chirinda Forest, and explores the varied perceptions that were attached to its fauna and flora, simultaneously evaluating the extent to which this forest was a unique piece of natural heritage. The second section

¹⁰ Ian Phimister, 'Rethinking the Reserves: Southern Rhodesia's Land Husbandry Act Reviewed', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19.2, (1993): 225-239.

¹¹ JoAnn McGregor, 'Conservation, control and ecological change: the politics and ecology of colonial conservation in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe', *Environment and History* 1.3 (1995): 257-279.

¹² Muchaparara Musemwa, 'Contestation over Resources: the farmer-miner dispute in colonial Zimbabwe, 1903-1939', *Environment and History* 15.1 (2009): 79-107.

¹³ Vimbai C. Kwashirai, 'Dilemmas in Conservationism in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1930', *Conservation and Society* 4.4 (2006): 541-561.

¹⁴ I consulted three files from Chirinda Forest Office in Chipinge, cited in this paper using official titles: Chirinda Forest File, Chirinda Camp File and File 68.6 General Correspondence.

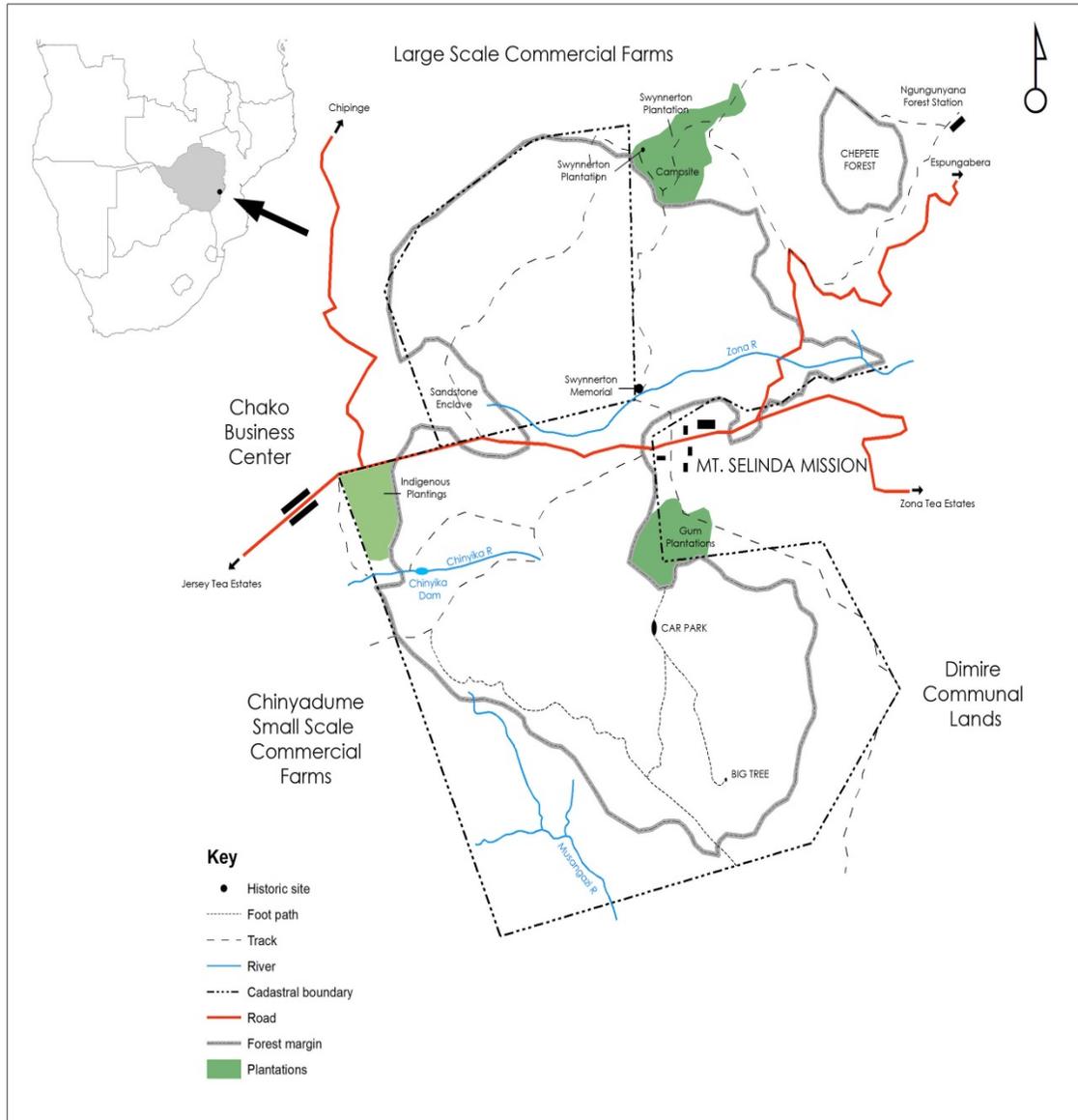
discusses changing ownership patterns of Chirinda Forest, while the third explores physical intervention made on the forest following its transfer from private to public ownership. The fourth section traces the roots of conflict with local African residents, who considered the forest as theirs, and had their own regulations concerning its conservation and use. It further examines the manifestation of African resentment and the various forms of contestations over ownership and use of this forest. The final section analyses conflict between the state and the adjacent American Board Mission (ABM) community, over the ABM's rights and need to exploits forest resources. It further examines state conflict with scientists and tourists who visited the forest for educational and recreational purposes.

Nature of Chirinda Forest

Chirinda Forest is situated in south eastern Zimbabwe, 30 kilometres south of Chipinge Town. During the period under study, the forest covered 950 hectares, 606 of which constituted of moist evergreen forest while the remainder consisted of woodland.¹⁵

[Map 1, Chirinda Forest]

¹⁵ Chirinda Forest File, 'Chirinda Tropical Rainforest in South Eastern Zimbabwe', (anonymous: undated).



Adapted from 'Editorial', in 'Rhodesia Science News', 10, 2 (1976), p.40.

The forest was stunning. It had a diverse range of trees, which provided a variety of resources to the surrounding communities, harboured an array of wildlife and was the source of three rivers that flowed into the region. Appointed as the first warden of Chirinda Forest in 1949, R.B. Hack summed up his impression of this forest saying:

It has been said that man's idea of heavenly bliss is to forever pursue, and to forever be evaded by beautiful Maidens fleeing before him through the eternal woods. If this is true, then the forest of Chirinda could qualify for those eternal woods. For sheer beauty, it is

difficult to imagine anything in nature to surpass this tropical forest, which is known as Chirinda, and when walking in it, the sublime lines of Sydney Laneer's poem: *The Marshes of Glynn*, come readily into mind...¹⁶

Hack was, nevertheless, not the first to testify about the beauty and wonder of this forest. In October 1920, A.J. Orner, a senior missionary of the ABM, wrote to Forest Officer, James Henkel, expressing displeasure that the latter had not responded to an earlier correspondence requesting him to visit Chirinda Forest.¹⁷ A few months later, the District Civil Commissioner reported as well,

The Forest at Mt Silinda is a grand one containing a variety of trees, many of them valuable for their timber and some of them of enormous size. One mammoth Mahogany runs up to great height, without a single branch on its smooth white stem till it overtops all other trees and then spreads out grandly...it would be as well if this magnificent specimen could be preserved for all times.¹⁸

The report further described one dead tree as follows:

One huge Mahogany tree lying felled in the forest had a diameter of over 3 feet, 60 inches from its base, the wood being wonderfully sound for so large and old a tree. It was cut into ten-foot length for the purpose of being removed to the steam sawmill, but even then the logs were found to be too heavy to be shifted, so the somewhat wasteful method of splitting by use of blasting gelignite was adopted.¹⁹

Another reminder which A.R. Mathew of the ABM sent to Henkel in January 1921 emphasised that the ABM was still looking forward to the visit '... to our great forest'.²⁰

The state finally responded through a tour of the then Melsetter District [now Chipinge and Chimanimani] by Henkel and the Minister of Agriculture and Lands in October 1925. During this visit, Henkel noted '...several patches of closed type high forests containing a wide range of trees, many of them of considerable value for technical purposes'.²¹ He subsequently reported that, in general, the Eastern Districts possessed climate and soil conditions that were supportive to forestry, and deduced that the indigenous forests were

¹⁶ Report by R.B. Hack, pioneer warden of Chirinda Forest, (hereafter Hack Report), 1949.

¹⁷ National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), Records Centre (RC), Location (L), 25.12.6. F, Box (B) 92151, File (F) 1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from Orner to Henkel, 23 Oct. 1920.

¹⁸ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, Annual Report of Civil Commissioner, Melsetter to Secretary for Agriculture, 31 Dec. 1920.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, letter from Mathew to Henkel, 3 Oct. 1921.

²¹ Ibid, letter from Forestry Officer, to Secretary, Department of Agriculture, 19 Oct. 1925.

once far more extensive having then decreased owing to fires.²² This is consistent with practices the Iron Age farming communities, which utilised fire in clearing land for agrarian purposes. Henkel then made the following remark regarding the spectacular Chirinda Forest:

This forest, as far as I was able to study it during the brief period at my disposal, is of a unique type. It contains many species of trees found nowhere else. Trees of up to 200 feet in height are not uncommon... When inspecting the forest, I was impressed by the vigour and health of the trees, there is nothing decadent about them. The large trees seem as healthy as the young ones.²³

In addition, the District Forest Officer, G.M. McGregor, made a special note in 1939 of the presence of dolerite soils, minor forest patches and Mahogany trees around Chirinda area and concluded that Chirinda Forest was a remnant of a much larger forest.²⁴ A second Forester, B. Goldsmith, echoed the same in 1975, and attributed the forest's diminution to climatic changes dating back to millions of years. Goldsmith concluded that Chirinda survived because of its deep shade, the presence of evergreen creepers, shrubs and mosses, and the dampness of its floors that prevented the buildup of flammable litter.²⁵

Chirinda Forest had four layers and a diverse range of trees. In 1975, Goldsmith estimated the total wood species at 95,²⁶ and of the 88 tree species recorded by the 1990s, seven of these were unique to this forest.²⁷ The first layer consisted of the canopy, which was generally 40-55 metres high and had emergents occasionally rising to between 55 and 60 metres, while the second layer consisted of trees measuring 10-40 metres.²⁸ The third layer had trees of up to 10 metres, which included *Rubiaceae* species and other saplings. Finally, the fourth or ground layer consisted of evergreen small shrubs, *dracaena fragrans*, wild ginger, ferns, mosses and creepers, with certain of this area

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, Report by District Forestry Officer, May 1939.

²⁵ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6. F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from Goldsmith to Chief of Research, 10 Apr. 1975.

²⁶ B. Goldsmith, 'Trees of Chirinda Forest', in *Rhodesian Science News* 10. 2 (1976), p.55-61.

²⁷ Chirinda Forest File, 'Chirinda Tropical Rainforest in Eastern Zimbabwe', (report anonymous and undated).

²⁸ Ibid.

being as dense as to impeded human movement.²⁹ This final stratum also had a large layer of mulch, which the local peasant community valued and ‘poached’ for manure.

The forest consisted of a variety of creepers, climbers, twisting vines and leafy ropes, which crisscrossed trees from the fourth layer to the canopy. Goldsmith took special note of the *Acacia Pentagona*, which grew to the crown of the forest, and had vicious curved spines that made some areas impenetrable.³⁰ The commonest climbers belonged to the grape family called *Ciccus*, about which Hack said, ‘these vines have great tensile strength, and will easily support the weight of a man when hanging from branches 50 feet from the ground’.³¹ Other climbers were wild coffee and species belonging to monkey ropes,³² which hanged from the top of the tallest trees. A tourist, E.G. Hopper, referred to them as Monkey ladders, and further likened them to climbers that he found in South America, which were used to build suspension bridges across gorges.³³

The trees of Chirinda Forest had multiple significance: including aesthetic value, sources for herbs, multiple purpose timber. Describing one, *Strychnos Mitis*, Hack wrote:

...the trunk has gnarled appearance, resembling somewhat the muscles of the arm when the fist is clenched. The leaves are simple, opposite, entire, glabrous, tough and dark green. The flowers are creamy-yellow and appear during January. The fruit is a small yellow berry. Though seeds are produced abundantly, this tree appears not to reproduce itself readily and the fact that blue monkeys and hornbills are fond of these may be accountable. The timber is hard and heavy, and very resistant to nails when seasoned. It is useful building timber but must not be exposed to damp.³⁴

The forest also supported the largest indigenous trees in Zimbabwe. These were concentrated in the western section of the forest, fittingly named the Valley of Giants. Among these was the Big Tree. Estimated to be over 1, 000 years old and considered the

²⁹ Report by McGregor, District Forestry Officer, May 1939.

³⁰ Goldsmith, ‘Trees of Chirinda Forest’, p.45.

³¹ Hack Report, 1949.

³² Ibid.

³³ *The Sunday Mail*, 16 January 1949.

³⁴ Chirinda Forest File, R.B. Hack ‘Notes on the Trees of Chirinda Forest’, May 1950.

largest indigenous tree in southern Africa,³⁵ it was, because of this peculiar nature, declared a national monument in 1939.³⁶

The other existing large tree species included the giant and greatly appealing Mahogany. The Mahogany's aesthetic value emanated from the beauty of its small white flowers, which blossomed in November. Furthermore, its durability and resistance to borer attack rendered it 'an excellent furniture wood'.³⁷ Consequently, Africans who lived along the mighty Budzi River in the neighbouring Mozambique used the Mahogany timber to make canoes.³⁸ Hack noted that the other Mahogany specie, *Lovoa Swynnertonii*, produced 'very attractive, light to deep brown wood', which was extremely durable as 'trees which have fallen in the forest probably about 50 years ago are found to have sound heartwood'.³⁹ Regarding *Strychnos Mellodora*, Hack wrote, 'while its bitter fruits were not preferred by either monkeys or birds, its wood, which is hard and close-grained, is very good cabinet timber', adding 'its minute white flowers, which come out in September, and the yellow berried fruits, which strew the forest floor in February, all add to the beauty of the forest'.⁴⁰

Both African and white societies perceived and used trees of Chirinda Forest differently. While the white farming community treasured the *Trichilia Chirindensis* for its soft, light orange flooring timber, Africans preferred medicinal oil, which they extracted from its seed.⁴¹ The *Craibia Brevicandata*, which had a round light-green crown, produced 'sweet pea-like flowers which gave the forest top a white appearance' and its seed, when ripe, 'gave a loud cracking sound which could be heard by someone some 100 metres away'.⁴²

³⁵ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from Orner to Henkel, 23 Oct. 1920.

³⁶ L.J. Mulin, 'Chirinda Forest in Legend and History', in J. Timberlake and P. Shaw (eds), *Chirinda Forest: A Visitor's Guide* (Harare: Forestry Commission, 1994), p.25.

³⁷ Chirinda Forest File, R.B. Hack, 'Notes on the trees of Chirinda Forest', May 1950.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

While the *Albizzia Fummitera* beautified the forest outskirts through its 'large flat-crowned top', Africans prized it more for its tough and medium hardness, and used it to make hoe handles, pounding sticks, and yokes.⁴³ At its peak, the *Celtic Durandi*, popularly known in vernacular as *Guniti*, would become large, strongly buttressed, hard, and durable, but this tree, also known as 'Chirinda Stinkwood', produced good timber but was seldom used because of the 'objectionable smell it emitted'.⁴⁴ However, some Africans believed that the smell scared away snakes and offered protection against evil spirits and witchcraft; hence was highly sought by Africans owing to these, 'medicinal properties'.⁴⁵

Regarded as unworthy were the Fig Tree and *Lantana Camara*. The former, which was part of the forest canopy, attained a large spreading crown that would appear 'extremely handsome'.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, being parasitic, it germinated from seeds trapped in cracks, barks or joints of other trees and grew gradually round the trunk of its host, forming a network of aerial roots. When the roots reached the ground, it grew rapidly, completely enveloping the trunk of its host, which finally died and rot, leaving 'a hollow trunk'.⁴⁷ Birds, monkeys and vampire bats carried most of the seeds to the host. Up to the early 1970s, forestry conservators destroyed Fig trees fearing that they could choke the forest. However, this was rescinded upon realising that the tree's destruction was ecologically unsustainable because certain birds and animals ate fig fruits that ripened when most other fruits were out of season.⁴⁸

Chirinda Forest was also significant because of its spectacular fauna. The forest supported small and medium sized animals, which comprised of carnivores such as jackals, leopards and hyenas, and herbivores including duikers, antelopes and warthogs. There were also baboons and monkeys, with the latter being very conspicuous and living

⁴³ Interview, E.M. Shumba, Patrol Officer, Chirinda Forest, 10 July 2010.

⁴⁴ Goldsmith, 'Trees of Chirinda Forest', p.43.

⁴⁵ Interview, Shumba.

⁴⁶ Report by McGregor, District Forest Officer, May 1939.

⁴⁷ Goldsmith, 'Trees of Chirinda Forest' p.42.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

in groups of up to 30. Also striking were small mammals like hares and squirrels, and several bird, insect and reptiles species. Notable among the reptiles were snakes; confirmed in the 1976 G. Broadley article that there existed at least 15 large snake varieties, ranging from the harmless Green Snake to the deadly Spitting Cobra.⁴⁹

Chirinda Forest's birds were particularly eye-catching. In 1976, P.S. Irwin noted that although some birds were migratory, 76 species permanently inhabited the forest.⁵⁰ The forest's cherished bird species were the guinea fowls, whose huge numbers were confirmed during Hack's patrols as he witnessed separate flocks 'in practically every area of the forest'.⁵¹ Also conspicuous were the weavers, usually identified by their nests seen usually suspended 'from ends of tree branches, and attracting attention by their "wheezy calls"'.⁵² The forest's canopy was home to hornbills, which Irwin described as 'the noisiest, most conspicuous and mobile', and the *chirinda apalis*, which was usually heard, 'calling all over the forest canopy'.⁵³ Another notable habitant was the owl. Being a shy night bird, most Africans associated it with witchcraft and sinister forces of darkness, hence hunted and killed it whenever it trespassed in African homesteads.⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, this bred clashes with wildlife conservators because the owl was a rare, royal and protected species. Author and journalist, Peter Godwin, who grew up in eastern Zimbabwe during the colonial period, explained in his memoir: "I had already learnt that there were certain animals you could shoot... but you were not supposed to shoot honey birds or weaver birds or any hawks or eagles. And most certainly not owls".⁵⁵

While the Eastern Districts of Zimbabwe was home to a wide variety of insects: butterflies, wasps and bees, approximately 80 percent of these inhabited in the Chirinda Forest.⁵⁶ Nature lovers always sought the fastest flying, most colourful and alert butterfly

⁴⁹ G. Broadley, 'The reptiles and amphibians of Chirinda Forest', *Rhodesian Science News*, 10. 2 (1976), p.51.

⁵⁰ P.S. Irwin, 'Birds of Chirinda Forest', *Rhodesian Science News* 10. 2 (1976), p.55.

⁵¹ Hack Report, April 1950.

⁵² Irwin, 'Birds of Chirinda Forest', p.59.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Interview, P. Gwenzi, Retired Forest Guard and Chirinda Resident, 10 July 2010.

⁵⁵ P. Godwin, *Mukiwa, A White Boy in Africa* (London: Macmillan1996), p.129.

⁵⁶ A. Gardiner, 'Insects', in Timberlake and Shaw (eds.), *Chirinda Forest, A Visitor's Guide*, p.110.

species such that Forestry Officers were always at war with visitors who made illegal collection of these butterflies. Equally notable was fungi. While it was dangerous when it attacked living trees, it remained a vital decomposing agent.⁵⁷ In addition, the non-poisonous fungi produced mushroom that the local people ‘poached’, thereby causing endless battles with Forestry Officers. The forest was also the headwaters of the Zona, Musangazi and Chinyika Rivers, which provided water to the surrounding ABM centres, Chako Business Centre and Zona Tea Estates.⁵⁸ One observant captured the aesthetic impression of this forest:

Flying over Chirinda forest in the spring gives the impression of a European wood lightly sprinkled with snow. This effect is caused by the white blossoms of the iron wood, a member of the Gardenia family. Seen from above or below, from any aspect, Chirinda is beautiful and well worth of attention, from Rhodesian holiday makers and tourists from across our borders.⁵⁹

Who owned Chirinda Forest?

The English translation of the word ‘Chirinda’ is ‘a place for keeping watch’. It originally referred to a strategic point on the western edge of the Chirinda Forest hilltop that overlooked the surrounding lowland.⁶⁰ The local Ndaou people of Mapungwana Chieftainship, who were often victims of the mid-nineteenth century *Shangani* Raids, used the place to ‘keep watch’ of raiders’ movement, and on observing their foes advancing, took refuge in the evergreen thick forest.⁶¹ The Shangani feared pursuing their foes due to mysteries which were associated with this forest, such as sudden built ups of mist, getting lost, and abrupt ambushes.⁶² The raids ended with the British South Africa Company’s (BSAC) occupation of what then became Southern Rhodesia in 1890 and this

⁵⁷ A. Masuka, ‘Fungi’, in Timberlake and Shaw (eds.), *Chirinda Forest, A Visitor’s Guide*, p.71.

⁵⁸ J. Timberlake and C. Musokonyi, ‘Forest conservation and utilisation’, in Timberlake and Shaw (eds.), *Chirinda Forest, A Visitor’s Guide*, p.119.

⁵⁹ *The Sunday Mail*, 16 Jan. 1949.

⁶⁰ Interview, C.H. Mhongwe, Manager, Muguzo Forest Research Station, 27 Aug. 2010.

⁶¹ Following the *Mfeqane* Wars of the 1820s, the Shangani people migrated from present day KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa and settled in the present day southern Mozambique and south eastern Zimbabwe, subsequently formed the Gaza State, which often raided grain, livestock and labour among the Ndaou people.

⁶² Interview, S. Chibhaahlangwe, Chirinda Resident and Former Employee of Ngungunyana Forest Plantation, 11 Jul. 2010.

brought in a colonial twist to the strategic significance of the forest. As part of a strategy to block Portuguese encroachment into south eastern Zimbabwe, the BSAC, led by Cecil John Rhodes, sponsored white settlement of this area. Subsequently, some nine Treks, comprising Afrikaner farmers, mostly from the then Orange Free State, (now the Free State Province of South Africa), settled in this area between 1892 and 1895.⁶³ Christian Mission Institutions, namely the ABM, the South African General Mission and American Methodist Episcopal Church were also awarded land along this border area, subsequently setting up the Mt Silinda, Rusitu and Mutambara Mission stations respectively.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the local Ndaу people continued practicing traditional ceremonies within this forest. They revered it for being a burial site for local chiefs and other notables and sustaining certain animals, which they considered as personification of the ancestors. It remained taboo to kill the high flying Eagle and the Python; with the latter being considered ‘a snake of the ancestors’.⁶⁵ Certain parts of the forest remained as sacred places for rain making ceremonies and appeasement of the ancestors. Added to this, local cultures: songs, epics, poems and salutations continued identifying the Ndaу people with this forest, including the official salutation for the Mapungwana Chieftaincy, recounted on several occasions at appropriate gatherings as follows:

...Mapamba pashi, Buwe Rinorema,

Rinoremera varikuretu

Vari pasinde vanotamba naro

Mapungwaana... Mapugwaana

Gwasha re Chirinda!

Translated to say; ‘The conquerors of the land, heavier to those who are not familiar with him, while those who are familiar play with him, Mapungwana...Mapungwana..., The great forest of Chirinda’.⁶⁶ Yet, this continued claim of forest ownership occurred within

⁶³ S.P. Olivier, *Many Treks Made Rhodesia* (Bulawayo: Books of Rhodesia, 1975), p.23.

⁶⁴ Henry Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land in Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), p.110.

⁶⁵ Interview, B. Maunganidze, Liberation War Veteran, Chipinge, 14 Jul. 2010.

⁶⁶ Interview, Gwenzi.

a historical reality of legal loss to the new arrivals. This new ownership consisted of initial divisions of the forest into four properties in which the ABM got legal ownership of the Mt Silinda Forest section of Chirinda Forest in 1902, and white farmers: J.G. Raath, W.N. Odendaal, and J.N. Labaschaque, took up Emerald, Houtberg and Ngungunyana sections respectively.⁶⁷

Colonial Zimbabwe was not exempt from the environmentalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century British Empire. Accordingly, while, by 1902, Chirinda Forest had fallen into private ownership, there was mounting pressure by the 1920s that it should become a national asset. The District Commissioner for Melsetter lamented in 1920 saying, ‘...indeed, it is a great pity that the whole forest was not originally reserved for public purposes’.⁶⁸ Henkel raised similar concerns in 1924, pointing out that while other indigenous forests could give way to commercial agriculture, Chirinda Forest, ‘like Victoria Falls, Chinhoyi Caves and Zimbabwe Ruins’, should become a national asset. Citing ‘the famous Giant Hardwood Trees of California’, and that, throughout the USA, ‘there are numerous national parks and beauty spots which are maintained at public expense for the public’, Henkel predicted that turning Chirinda Forest into a nature reserve would attract visits by scientists ‘from all over the world’.⁶⁹ Likewise, in 1926, a local resident castigated the ABM for commercial exploitation of the forest, and wondered further why the forest, ‘...which is a valuable asset to Rhodesia, went, in the first place, to private hands’.⁷⁰ These concerns should be understood within the context of changing perspectives on wildlife, an entrenchment of a sentimental, romantic and aesthetic view of nature; the context partly within which Jane Carruthers examined dynamics in the establishment of the Kruger National Park from 1910 to 1926.⁷¹

⁶⁷ L.J. Mulin ‘Chirinda Forest in Legend and History’, in Timberlake and Shaw (eds.), *Chirinda Forest, A Visitor’s Guide*, pp.17-19.

⁶⁸ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6. F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, Annual Report of Cecil Commissioner, Melsetter to Secretary for Agriculture, 31 Dec. 1920.

⁶⁹ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6 F, B92151, F1680/1 Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, memorandum by Henkel, 12 Dec. 1924.

⁷⁰ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 29 Dec. 1926.

⁷¹ Jane Carruthers, ‘Creating a national park, 1910 to 1926’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15.2 (1989): 188-216.

Ultimately, the conservation movement carried the day as the state acquired the Chirinda Forest between 1939 and 1951. Negotiations for the purchase of the Ngungunyana section began in mid-1938, following the death of the owner, C.F.M. Swynnerton.⁷² The National Museums of Southern Rhodesia lobbied vehemently for the forest to be a nature reserve and so McGregor surveyed it and, following his recommendation, the state purchased it in 1939.⁷³ Subsequently, the state proclaimed the forest a nature reserve in 1940, while the non-forest portion was set aside for afforestation purposes.⁷⁴ The Houtberg section, though purchased last in 1951, had been on offer since 1930. The delay in state acquisition was due to ‘absurd pricing’ as the state needed it for ‘scientific and aesthetic interest, and not to exploit the timber it contains’.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the state got the first opportunity to acquire the ABM section of the forest in 1924. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which was faced with an annual budget deficit of between £8, 000 and £15, 000, resolved to sell the Mt Selinda Mission altogether. While the Dutch Reformed Church showed some interests, the ABM preferred government takeover, arguing that the educational facilities offered there compared favourably with those offered at government owned Domboshava and Tjolutjo Training Centres. However, Government was only willing to purchase the forest and not the entire ABM institution.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, as government initiated purchase procedures, the ABM reversed its mind, after securing ‘a timely financial grant’,⁷⁷ only to encounter another financial crisis following the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, after which it resolved to sell the forest.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, war commitments delayed the state purchase of the forest to December 1948.⁷⁹ Therefore, three of the four sections

⁷² Swynnerton managed Ngungunyana Farm from 1909 to 1920. When the owner sub-divided in 1921, Swynnerton purchased sub-division “A” that included part of Chirinda Forest; conducted extensive studies on the forest and many trees and bird species of Chirinda Forest have the affixed name “*swynnertonii*” in his honour.

⁷³ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from Secretary, National Museums of Southern Rhodesia to Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs, 18 Apr. 1940.

⁷⁴ Ibid, letter from Department of Internal Affairs to Conservator of Forests, 25 Apr. 1940.

⁷⁵ Ibid, letter from Conservator of Forests to Secretary, Department of Agriculture, 11 Dec. 1935.

⁷⁶ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6. F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from Henkel to Secretary for Agriculture and Lands, 12 Dec. 1924.

⁷⁷ Ibid, letter from Orner to Henkel, 19 Jan. 1927.

⁷⁸ Ibid, letter from J.S. Marsh, Secretary, ABM, to Minister of Agriculture and Lands, 13 Sep. 1940.

⁷⁹ Ibid, Chirinda Forest No.1, Memorandum of Agreement between the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the Government of Southern Rhodesia, 29 Dec. 1948.

of Chirinda Forest became state holdings between 1939 and 1951, and this was followed by landmark infrastructural interventions.

Physical Interventions on Chirinda Forest Landscape

Following state acquisition, each section of Chirinda Forest was transferred to the Forestry Branch, which was transformed into a parastatal, the Rhodesia Forestry Commission (RFC), from April 1954. Meanwhile, the Forestry Branch could not immediately set up a fully-fledged conservation unit after acquiring Ngungunyana Farm in 1939 and thus it entrusted this property to the Tsetse Fly Control Unit, under the charge of a Mr. Clarkson, the Entomologist Ranger operating in this area. Although this forest was immediately declared nature reserve, Africans already residing there stayed put, as their labour was required for Tsetse Fly eradication operations.⁸⁰ Therefore, in February 1940, Africans occupying Ngungunyana Farm entered into labour tenancy contracts, requiring each signatory to commit three months labour per-year, in lieu for land, 'reasonably sufficient for growing food' and for keeping a maximum of ten and 20 large and small stock respectively.⁸¹ As shall be demonstrated in a later section, this became the basis for future resources conflict.

It was only from July 1949, following the appointment of Hack as warden for Chirinda Forest, that a fully-fledged conservation apparatus was set up.⁸² This warden, a former teacher of the Mt Silinda Institute, had extensive responsibilities. He had to educate the local peasant communities to conform to conservation objectives of the Forestry Branch, supervising the construction of fireguards, monitoring forest patrols, arresting and sending the accused for trial, studying forest biodiversity and making recommendations aimed at establishing an ecological balance. The warden was further required to manage

⁸⁰ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6 F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from Conservator of Forestry to G. M. McGregor, 29 Sep. 1939.

⁸¹ Ibid, Agreement of Tenancy signed under Section 28(2) of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 entered between Chief Native Commissioner and Ngungunyana Tenants, 9 Feb. 1940.

⁸² NAZ, RC, L25.12.6 F, B 92151, F1680/1, Chirinda Forest File No.1, letter from A.J. Orner to G.M. McGregor, 06 Apr. 1949.

fencing, road and path construction, tree labeling and signposting as well as collecting tree seeds and carrying out tree planting along the forest margin.⁸³ While assisted initially by three guards, he could hire extra labour, as was the case in September 1949, when he hired 12 labourers to stump a ten acre-plot for a wattle plantation,⁸⁴ and in November 1949, when he engaged 17 extra labourers to make a fireguard, pathways and to clear a site for the warden's house.⁸⁵

One of Hack's first major tasks was a month long process of marking the exact boundary of the forest. Consequently, all 15 households staying within the forest got a year's notice to vacate.⁸⁶ Remarkably, Hack was sensitive to this eviction, as he wrote:

Below, I submit a complete list of the native men in or near the area. With the exception of No 3 (Chibatira Sixpence) who is a government servant and No 6, 7 and 8 (Mundane Basket, Kudyenso Jonas and Munyenyiyi Sugera, respectively) who are decrepit. They are working for the mission. The mission authorities and the natives themselves would want to know if the Forestry Department would allow them to keep on living in Government area.⁸⁷

Scholarship has debated widely on this practice of relocating Africans from nature conservation sites. Writing on the nexus between societies and the environment in Africa, William Beinart observes that, drawn from European and Indian models, modern approaches to forestry in Africa segregate rural people because Western romantic appreciation of African landscapes include "an imagery depopulation of the land".⁸⁸ Similarly, Roderick Neumann has questioned the enforcement of 'fortress style parks and reserves' in the Global South, which has required 'the wholesale removal of human settlement and use', in contrast to European parks and reserves 'which allow settlement

⁸³ Ibid, memorandum by McGregor, 1 Feb. 1950.

⁸⁴ Hack Report, Sep. 1949.

⁸⁵ Hack Report, Nov. 1949.

⁸⁶ Hack Report, Aug. 1949.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ William Beinart, 'African History and Environmental History', *African Affairs* 99, 395 (2000): p.298.

and use to continue'.⁸⁹ Unsurprisingly, aggrieved by the relocations from Chirinda Forest, Africans located their sentiments within the broader context of colonial hegemony.

From the mid-1950s, the RFC embarked on a project to fence Chirinda Forest. It was an ambitious scheme that underestimated budgetary implications and underplayed African resistance. The five strand barbed fence, which began from the southern margins of the forest, bordering the Dimire communal land, had an initial cumulative cost of £156.0.0.⁹⁰ Though, in accordance with the Fencing Act,⁹¹ the ABM agreed to share the cost, it always raised disgruntlements, considered the amount too high and that it was not consulted in the tender selection process.⁹² While the ABM confined its grievances to cost matters, Africans surrounding this forest objected that this project signified unilateral appropriation of a common property by the state. Thus, while Chief Mapungwana consistently complained that it was taboo to fence 'his forest', some of the community members sabotaged this fence. The destruction reached a peak during the Second *Chimurenga* War, fought from 1975 to 1979, when Africans took up arms against the Rhodesian state, such that on the attainment of majority rule in 1980, the only remnants of the fence were 'few standing posts'.⁹³

Another conspicuous intervention related to the documentation of trees. In this exercise, unique trees were numbered and their characteristics documented for easier reference. This exercise, which began in May 1950, had been conceived in 1935, when the Principal of Mt Silinda Institute, S.J. Guster, requested numbering materials from the Forestry Branch so that:

⁸⁹ Roderick Neumann, 'Stories of Nature's Hybridity in Europe', in Susana Hecht, Kathleen Morrison, and Christine Padoch, *Social Lives of Forests, Past, Present and Future in Woodland Resurgence*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014) p.34.

⁹⁰ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6 F, B92151, F1680/1, Chirinda Forest No. 1, letter from McGregor to Superintendent, Mount Selinda Mission, 17 Jul. 1950.

⁹¹ P. Scott, 'The Fencing Act interpreted', *Rhodesian Agricultural Journal* XLIII, 2 (1946): 139-5.

⁹² NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Chirinda Forest No. 1, letter from Chief Conservator of Forests to Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs, 18 Nov. 1950.

⁹³ Chirinda Forest File, letter from Forester, Black to Chief of Research, 9 Jul. 1980.

We might be able to have these names or at least the names of the larger trees stencilled on metal plates and placed on the trees along the main road and along the Ngungunyana road.... These would be for the benefit of the general public and would add considerably to the interest of the forest especially since several of these specimens are unique and found only here. ...the Mt Silinda Forest is visited by a rather large number of residents and tourists of the colony and we anticipate still larger numbers after completion of the Berchnough Bridge across the Sabi River...⁹⁴

While the Forestry Branch appreciated Guster's proposal, it turned down his request, citing financial constraints.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the documentation scheme, which began in 1950, proved to be a long-term one, stretching at least up to the 1970s. Thus, in 1971, R. N. Bonwell, the Headmaster of Dudely Hall Primary School in Norton, drove 520 kilometres to Chirinda Forest, with ten, 12 year-old pupils, and attached numbered metal plates on trees along the path to the Big Tree, the Valley of Giants and the Main Road. To Bornwell, this was, 'a way of putting something back into the forest which I and other visitors appreciate so much'.⁹⁶

The construction and improvement of roads and pathways constituted yet another significant intervention. While there was a national road passing from Chako Business Centre through the forest to the Espungabeira Border Post with Mozambique, from September 1950, the warden hired labourers for constructing roads that radiated into specific sites within the forest, followed by regular maintenance works.⁹⁷ Consequently, the RFC had constructed several roads and paths by 1973: the popular ones being roads to the Big Tree, the Valley of Giants and to Chinyika River.⁹⁸ This facilitated easier movement of tourists, patrol guards and people travelling to the ABM owned hospital and learning institutions.

Although, because of its moist nature, Chirinda Forest was generally fire proof, it remained prone to fires particularly along its margin. The fires emanated from the

⁹⁴ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6 F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from Guster to Director of Forestry, 12 Nov. 1935.

⁹⁵ Ibid, letter from Chief Conservator of Forests to Principal, Mount Selinda Institute, 21 Nov. 1935.

⁹⁶ File 16.8, General Correspondence, letter from Bonwell to Forester, Chirinda Forest, 15 Jan. 1971.

⁹⁷ Hack Report, Sep. 1950.

⁹⁸ 'Editorial', in *Rhodesia Science News*, 10. 2, (1976), p.40.

adjacent *Chinyaduma* peasant community, which regularly used fire to clear land for planting purposes. Hack reported consistently about such fire outbreaks. For instance, on 17 April 1950, a major fire broke out along the forest's southwestern corner, burning twenty acres of bush land and the Chipinge magistrate fined a man named Bekapi £4 for starting the fire.⁹⁹ Similarly, the local community assisted forest guards in extinguishing a fire that burnt sixty acres on 6 October 1950, and the same court fined a certain woman for this offence.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, in order to curtail fire damage, the warden supervised the expansion and maintenance of fireguards on a yearly basis.

The Forester, Goldsmith, who managed Chirinda Forest from early 1960s to late 1970s, implemented notable enumeration and afforestation of indigenous timber. During routine patrols, Guards collected certain tree seeds for nursing and later use in nationwide afforestation activities.¹⁰¹ A notable incident was in 1963, when Goldsmith roped in students from the Mutare School of Forestry and conducted indigenous tree enumeration and afforestation between Chako Business Centre and Chinyika River, and later, along the forest margin.¹⁰²

The RFC certainly left an indelible mark on the Chirinda Forest landscape, noticeable through roads, tracks, fence, signposts, tree labels and tree plantings. This was indicative of the commitment to the conservation and marketing of this unique piece of natural heritage. Nevertheless, this approach ignored the interests of a significant section of the African population, whose activities form the gist of the subsequent section.

Chirinda Forest and the Local Peasantry

Overall, the relations between the RFC and African peasant communities over Chirinda Forest were characterised by conflict. Because African communities surrounding this forest were agrarian oriented, they hunted predators in order to protect their livestock. They also hunted and ate the small to medium sized herbivores, trapped raptors which

⁹⁹ Hack Report, Apr. 1950.

¹⁰⁰ Hack Report, Oct. 1950.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Shumba.

¹⁰² File 68.6, General Correspondence, memo from Ngungunyana Forest Reserve, 25 Oct. 1972.

devoured vegetables, small grains and fowls. In addition, the forest had a utilitarian value to the communities; as it was source for several resources such as timber, firewood and herbs. Therefore, contestations were inevitable as local peoples' interests contrasted with RFC's aim to protect the forest from any form of African exploitation.

In fact, some informants regretted that Africans welcomed the missionaries, only to lose their rights over a forest they valued highly. The indignation, which was grounded in historical memory, was glaring from oral narratives, as exemplified below:

Upon their arrival, the missionaries were amazed by the forest. They went on to ask Chief Mapungwana, 'are you the one who planted these trees with your wives', to which he said 'No'. They asked for a place to set up a mission station and they were given. We were then horrified when the missionaries and government denied us the right to hunt, collect firewood and poles. Both the mission and government said they bought the forest and we asked, 'from whom?' Our chief never sold the forest to anyone but freely gave the mission a place to set up a school.¹⁰³

As Marshall Murphree argues, conflict always arose upon imposing Western conservation norms on subsistence-oriented communities.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, David Anderson and Richard Grove argue that there are intricate relations between African rural economies and the environment, making conflict inevitable when policy makers missed or ignored this reality.¹⁰⁵ Communities surrounding Chirinda Forest actually looked up to the forest for a variety of resources, including:

1. Firewood
2. Poles for constructing houses, cattle kraals, fencing etc.
3. Small timber for yokes, hoe and axe handles
4. Basketry material
5. Thatching grass
6. Herbs in forms of tree roots, barks and leaves
7. Game like antelope, bushbuck, warthog, hare etc.
8. Fruits and mushroom

¹⁰³ Interview, Gwenzi.

¹⁰⁴ Marshall Murphree, 'Considerations in linking African environmental scholarship policy and practice', in N. Christofferson, D. Campbell and R. du Toit (eds.), *Communities and Sustainable Use: A Pan-African Perspective* (Harare: The World Conservation Union, 1996), p.4.

¹⁰⁵ David Anderson and Richard Grove, *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.8.

9. Various edible birds and insects
10. Honey
11. Fish from Chinyika dam
12. Grazing and browsing land
13. Land for cultivation and residences
14. Mulch
15. Water sources
16. Tourist revenues
17. Rights for animal passage
18. Rights for perform rituals.¹⁰⁶

African response to RFC prohibitions over use of the Chirinda Forest resources was dynamic and oscillated between covert and covert reactions. The 1939 acquisition of the Ngungunyana Farm led to reduction of African land and stock holdings, following which they resorted to an illegal use of land and forest products. While a 1939 inspection of the Ngungunyana Farm confirmed that soil erosion induced by cultivation was practically nil,¹⁰⁷ this had become a topical issue ten years later, particularly along the headwaters of Chinyika, Zona and Musangazi Rivers. The District Forest Officer raised this in 1949, stating, ‘natives in Ngungunyana area, estimated to number 200 families, are ruining the soil by their erratic methods of cultivation’.¹⁰⁸ The local Conservation and Extension Officer, A.R. Boucher confirmed, writing:

When making an inspection of Zona Tea Estates, I noticed that the slopes and headwaters of the Zona River are being cultivated and as the headwaters rise on the Ngungunyana, which belongs to the Division of Forestry, I would like to know what steps to take to move the natives from the area. Mr Clarkson, the Tsetse Fly Ranger, informs me that he does not know how many natives are on this farm, but judging by the amount of cultivation, they are many of them. He is dependent on them for cutting the fly belt but, as he admits, he is quite sure that only about a quarter of the number living on Ngungunyana

¹⁰⁶ List compiled from oral interviews, written documents and researcher’s observations.

¹⁰⁷ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from Williams, Entomologist, to Chief Entomologist, 4 Oct. 1941.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, Chirinda Forest No. 1, letter from District Forestry Officer, Umtali to Chief Conservator of Forests, 22 Feb. 1949.

turns out when called upon to do so. The Mt Silinda Mission also has several families ploughing the slopes along this river.¹⁰⁹

The subsequent denial by the Chief Conservator of Forest, McGregor, was probably a face saving exercise. Boucher challenged McGregor, saying, ‘...in spite of the statement made by the Chief Conservator of Forests to the effect that NO, NOR has there ever been any cultivation of the above river banks, I again report that both the Zona and Ngungunyana River banks and slopes are cultivated extensively by natives’.¹¹⁰ Clearly, Africans tenants who lived on Ngungunyana farm responded to reductions in land sizes through cultivating land unsanctioned for cultivation.

As mentioned earlier, it was also the warden’s responsibility to conscientise local communities about the conservation objectives for Chirinda Forest. Hack, who was aware that this task required considerable social tact, sought the company of Boucher and approached Chief Mapungwana’s at his homestead in October 1949. Though the Chief agreed to cooperate in this endeavour,¹¹¹ the community could not abandon long held practices overnight. A three-day assessment tour revealed that while some of the ABM converts had complied by quitting gardening on the headwaters of the Musangazi River, the majority had not. Hack lamented:

As far as I could see, the tenants have taken very little notice of my instruction and are planting in and near water sources, and in the garden just as they have done in the past. It is doubtful if this practice will cease until a white man is placed permanently on the farm. I gave instructions that the mealies, which have been planted contrary to my instruction, should not be cleaned by hoeing, and my patrol boys have been instructed to see that this is carried out. It appears to be useless to rely upon the Chief in this matter.¹¹²

Unsanctioned cultivations aside, hunting was an equally contentious issue. Because game provided a significant dietary supplement, hunting remained frequent despite its ban following acquisition of the Ngungunyana Farm in 1939. The continued existence of hunting was confirmed by McGregor, who wrote immediately after the 1939 acquisition

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, letter from Boucher, Conservation and Extension Officer, Chipinga, to Chief Conservator of Forests, 5 Mar. 1949.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hack Report, Oct. 1949.

¹¹² Hack Report, Dec. 1949.

that, ‘They [Africans] hunt in gangs of about a dozen with assegais, bows and arrows and accompanied by packs of dogs’.¹¹³ Opinions on a solution differed. While the Assistant Director of Research and Specialist Services, L.A. Normandy, suggested the eviction of the excess African population, the District Forestry Officer opposed this, in view of the labour needs of an afforestation programme that was in the pipeline.¹¹⁴

In response to state restrictions, Africans adopted clandestine strategies to access forest products. Open defiance, which had been common during the early years of state control, gave way to subtle approaches. For instance, the establishment of forest patrol unit in 1949 severely reduced group hunting and, instead, snaring, particularly that which used wire and sisal traps, became common. As a result, destroying traps had become a key task of the guards, who, by 1952, destroyed up to 400 traps monthly.¹¹⁵ Forester R. Finch’s revelation here is enlightening, stating by 1960 that, ‘... any dog that leaves the main road runs a 50 percent chance of not coming out’.¹¹⁶

Loopholes within the forest security system enhanced African clandestine strategies. While the forestry security services remained understaffed, the guards’ major weapons remained the ‘pen and paper’, used for recording the identity of the accused, nature of the offence and trial dates.¹¹⁷ Therefore, it was imperative to engage guards from the surrounding areas who knew the local people well. Inadvertently, this compromised the security system because guards and offenders were kith and kin, ‘... sharing the same grocery shops, boarding the same buses to town, attending church services together and sharing meals at funerals ceremonies’. Therefore, ‘...depending on circumstances, sometimes we would just look around and if convinced that *baas* Hack was nowhere nearby; we allowed the accused to disappear quickly’.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from McGregor to Chief Conservator of Forests, 3 Jan. 1940.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, Chirinda Forest File No.1, letter from Normandy to Conservator of Forests, 7 Mar. 1949.

¹¹⁵ Hack Report, Jun. 1952.

¹¹⁶ File 68.6, General Correspondence, letter from Finch to District Forestry Officer, Umtali, 27 Nov. 1960.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Gwenzi.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Furthermore, a clear lack of a sense of guilty among the Africans perpetuated ‘poaching’. One community member blamed the RFC for depriving the community of critical resources, including lifesaving herbs from the forest. The member clearly outlined the trees whose barks, latex, leaves and roots cure a variety of ailments, ranging from minor scars to diarrhoea, abdominal pains, colds, venereal diseases and hallucinations.¹¹⁹ Additionally, most penalties meted on offenders, ranging from warnings, fines to imprisonment, were generally not deterrent enough. For instance, a man who was arrested for setting snares in the forest was tried by the Chipinge magistrate in October 1950 only to be let off with a reprimand on grounds of old age while first time firewood collectors were usually pardoned.¹²⁰

Therefore, the Chirinda community resorted to clandestine maneuvers certainly to minimise confrontations with the coercive state apparatus. Arguably, this reaction fits into James Scott’s thesis on master-subordinate relations. According to Scott, the oppressed do not always confront their master as they sometimes feign compliance and express discontent through hidden transcripts ‘... discourse or activities which take place off-stage, beyond the direct observation of the power holders’.¹²¹ Furthermore, they use pretends to ‘consistently chip out a niche for themselves within the system without openly challenging the dominant master’.¹²² Hence, the local communities were constantly in conflict with the RFC, a reality also demonstrated hereafter in the RFC’s contention with other stakeholders: the ABM, tourists and other visitors to Chirinda Forest.

Relations with the ABM, Tourists and Business Communities

Established in 1893, the Mt Silinda Mission had become a fundamental centre of the ABM in the Chipinge District by the 1950s, with a flourishing hospital, primary and secondary schools. Notably, it had already established the Industrial Department by 1909,

¹¹⁹ Interview, Chibhaahlengwe.

¹²⁰ Hack Report, Oct. 1950.

¹²¹ James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1990), p.4.

¹²² Ibid.

equipped with a sawmill that processed timber for woodwork, building studies and for sale. Carpentry and joinery courses, introduced in 1939 and 1949 respectively, popularised the ABM as its furniture, ‘found its way into many homes, winning high praises for its beauty’.¹²³

The ABM’s education system expanded rapidly from the 1940s. The establishment of Chikore Mission Station in this district during the late 1940s, the opening of a secondary school and a higher teacher-training course at Mt Silinda in 1955 and 1959 respectively are clear testimonies.¹²⁴ That constructions associated with these developments required large quantities of timber comes out clearly from a statement by E.D. Alvord, Chairman of the ABM Rhodesia Mission:

In view of the fact that you shall not be able to supply the timber we require until the end of September, would it not be possible to grant us permission to cut some from the Silinda Forest? The position here at Chikore Mission is serious. We have two houses all completed and waiting for the roofs. If we do not get them covered and protected before the rain begins, there will be considerable damage to the brick work as the bricks were laid on ordinary mud only.¹²⁵

Plainly, disposing of Chirinda Forest in 1948 was a sacrifice, for, prior to this, the ABM met its timber requirements freely from this forest. It was for this reason that in the 1948 Agreement of Sale, the state guaranteed that it would secure timber for the ABM’s ‘reasonable requirements for instruction, for building purposes and carpentry at a tariff rate that may be mutually agreed upon from time to time’.¹²⁶

Nonetheless, by committing itself to secure timber for the ABM, the state sow seeds for antagonism over this vital resource. The RFC-ABM relations were characterised by squabbles over quantity, price and type of timber: with the RFC harbouring suspicions that the ABM was wasteful. Thus, the RFC turned down the ABM timber request of March 1949; meant to complete a classroom building, a boys’ hostel at Chikore, a

¹²³ *The Bulawayo Chronicle*, 7 Sep. 1957.

¹²⁴ Takesure Taringana, ‘The Socio-Economic Impact of the American Board Mission Activities in Chipinge, 1893-1965’ (BA Honours Diss., University of Zimbabwe, 2008), 1-60.

¹²⁵ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6 F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest No. 2 Letter from Alvord to Chief Conservator of Forests, 28 Aug. 1953.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, letter from G.L. Guy to Chief Conservation Officer, 7 Feb. 1953.

dwelling house at Mt Silinda and other smaller jobs, on grounds that the latter had not accounted for a previous allocation. When, by 1950, the ABM cut 9110 cubic feet, which was more than double the agreed allocation, and had, by mid-1951, already felled 3669 cubic feet,¹²⁷ the Chief Conservation Officer, who suspected that the ABM was being extravagant, ordered an investigation into whether the timber required by the ABM was for its use only.¹²⁸ However, a subsequent report exonerated the ABM; noting that timber was being used ‘for mission purposes only’.¹²⁹ Yet this could not settle the case because, in June 1953, the District’s Forestry Officer complained that while the maximum annual requirement for ABM timber stood at 4200 cubic feet, its average annual consumption was, in fact, between 1, 250 and 1, 700 cubic feet: an allegation suggesting that the ABM had exaggerated its quota.¹³⁰

In the midst of hostilities over quantity, the RFC unilaterally increased the price of timber; from 2d per cubic foot to 15/6. Certainly, the ABM was not amused, lamenting, ‘...it seems rather queer to pay 15/6 when we live on the top of a forest where timber might be cut’.¹³¹ The District Forestry Officer, Wilkins, dismissed this statement as unfounded, writing, ‘...his statement about living on top of a forest where timber might be cut has no meaning’.¹³² Such disputes raged into the 1960s, as in June 1963, the ABM requested an upward review of its quota, while the RFC insisted that the ABM should be appreciative as government continued providing it with timber at below the market price.

Animosity also centred on the variety of timber. While the 1948 Agreement of Sale was silent on this, the RFC often turned down the ABM’s timber preferences. For instance, in August 1953, the RFC denied the ABM permission to cut the Mahogany species on ground that it was a high value timber suitable ‘for final year students, and only the best of these’. Instead, the RFC urged the ABM to resort to ‘more refractory timber, whose

¹²⁷ Ibid, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest No.2, letter from Conservator of Forests, Umtali, to Chief Conservation Officer, 7 August 1951.

¹²⁸ Ibid, letter from Chief Conservation Officer to Conservator of Forests, Eastern, 10 August 1951.

¹²⁹ Ibid, Report from Conservator, Eastern, to Chief Conservator of Forests, 30 Aug. 1951.

¹³⁰ Ibid, Letter from District Forestry Officer, Stapleford, to Superintendent, Mt Silinda, 12 Jun. 1953.

¹³¹ Ibid, letter from Meachem to District Forestry Officer, 11 Nov. 1952.

¹³² Ibid, letter from Wilkins to Chief Conservator of Forests, 3 Feb. 1953.

properties nearly resemble those they [Africans] are expected to use in practice'.¹³³ The ABM dismissed this as 'baseless and lacking'.¹³⁴

Hostilities also emanated from clause 2 of the 1948 Agreement of Sale. Through this clause, the RFC committed itself to establish a ten-acre wattle plantation from which the ABM would acquire fuel wood. Pending maturity of this plantation, the ABM retained the right to extract dead wood from Chirinda Forest.¹³⁵ Yet a few months after the establishment of the plantation, the meaning of 'establishing a plantation' became controversial, as tensions developed over lack of maintenance, to which Hack ridiculed:

I have spoken to Mr. Meacham about it several times but nothing is being done... The mission does not seem to have the time, the inclination or the money. All their energy is spent in praying and talking so they do not have any left for work. As Laudermilk remarked, the missionaries and their converts may be going to heaven, but the land is going to hell.¹³⁶

However, the RFC later took responsibility: weeding and replanting the plot.¹³⁷ After felling the first batch of fuel wood from this plantation in October 1955, the RFC terminated the ABM's right to acquire fuel wood from Chirinda Forest.¹³⁸

Nevertheless, contestation thereafter took the form of illegitimate firewood collection, particularly by the ABM community. This prompted T.A. Strokes, the Acting Forester, to formally warn A.C. Worden, the Mt Silinda hospital superintendent. In particular, Strokes mentioned hospital staff who hired relatives of patients to collect firewood from the forest.¹³⁹ The superintendent responded:

Our staff has been thoroughly warned and if this continues or recurs, I think you should go ahead and prosecute... I am wondering if it is necessarily forbidden for the women

¹³³ Ibid, letter from Acting Chief Conservator of Forests to Principal, Mt Silinda Mission, 10 Aug. 1953.

¹³⁴ Ibid, letter from Meachem to Conservator of Forests, Eastern, 17 Jun. 1953.

¹³⁵ Ibid, Chirinda Forest No.1, Memorandum of Agreement made between the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the Government of Southern Rhodesia, 29 Dec. 1948.

¹³⁶ Hack Report, May 1950.

¹³⁷ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Chirinda Forest No.1, letter from McGregor to Meachem, 12 Jul. 1950.

¹³⁸ File 68.6, General Correspondence, letter from Chief Afforestation Operations to the Principal Mount Selinda Mission, 24 Oct. 1955.

¹³⁹ Chirinda Forest File, letter from Acting Forester, Strokes to Medical Superintendent, Mount Selinda Mission Hospital, 14 Oct. 1974.

patients to scavenge dead wood to build for her working fire...They don't use chopping or cutting tools of course...The individual women, of course, don't use but a stick or two, as you know that the hospital is so close to being on the red financially that we can't set up a routine supply for them.¹⁴⁰

Clearly, Worden acknowledged the warning but simultaneously protested subtly, questioning the morality of preserving the forest at the expense of human welfare.

Conflict involved other forest products as well. In April 1972, forest guards descended on Mrs A.G. Worden, spouse to the hospital superintendent, after her gardener took mulch from the forest. The guards took her to task, even though the place where the gardener had taken the mulch, 'has been so superficial that it is actually invisible...impossible to distinguish the spots'.¹⁴¹ She got away with a warning, after pleading with the Forest Officer:

I just find to my horror that I may have been under a misapprehension that it was permitted to go into the forest and scrape leaf mould for one's garden for planting bushes and trees. Today my gardener was getting a wheelbarrow of it, and apparently met one of the forestry workers who asked if he had permission to collect it... I'm sorry it just had not occurred to me...flowers, plants, birds, animals, yes...but I never thought of dead leaves. Anyway, my apologies.¹⁴²

In a related 1974 incident, a guard arrested the son of a white missionary who, for the joy of it, shot dead a monkey in the forest. The forester released the boy after his father paid a fine for him.¹⁴³ The foregoing is not an exhaustive discussion on contestations over the use of Chirinda Forest resources; it is just but a tip of the iceberg illustrating facets of contestations over this forest.

Chirinda Forest also served sentimental and recreational purposes where visitors experienced natural conditions of the countryside. Thus between September 1949 and July 1950, an average of 55 tourists visited the forest monthly, the highest being 90 who visited it in July 1950.¹⁴⁴ About three quarters of these were from Zimbabwe, followed by

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, letter from Worden to Strokes, 20 Oct. 1974.

¹⁴¹ File 68.6, General Correspondence, letter from Worden to Forestry Officer, 26 Apr. 1972.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Interview, Gwenzi.

¹⁴⁴ See Hack's Monthly Reports, Sep. 1949-Jul. 1950.

South Africa, Britain and the rest of the world. Their interests varied from mere recreational pleasure to specifics like watching game, recording birds' song, taking photographs, collecting butterflies, moths, reptiles, chameleons, birds, seeds, cuttings and suckers for private and botanical specimens.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, the forest met the interests of various categories of students and researchers of botany, zoology and related life sciences. Among several educational visits were that by P.A. Clancey, Director of the Durban Museum, who collected bird specimen for museum display purposes;¹⁴⁶ research visit by Professor B.I. Balinsky, Head of the Zoology Department of University of the Witwatersrand;¹⁴⁷ a team headed by C.B. Cottrell of the University of Rhodesia that visited the forest to research on nocturnal insects;¹⁴⁸ and a visit by a Mr Bradenkamp, who collected 12 monkeys for the Queen Victoria Museum in the then Salisbury, (now Harare).¹⁴⁹ Notably, in June 1969, 12 members of the Kirk Society of the University of Rhodesia made a week-long forest camp for botanical and zoological research. Thereafter, the Forest Manager, P.J. Welton, presented a damning report about bottles, empty tins and labels left strewn all over the campsite. He was so disgusted that he computed the mess:

- 1) Near the old fig tree there were 17 tins, 8 bottles and labels in one heap
- 2) There was an open pit not covered showing the contents. Nearby, not in the pit, were 12 tins, 6 bottles and labels
- 3) A fire had been lit at the base of the fig tree and the bark is burnt off. The tree might not survive

Cost of clean-up:

6 hours of my time
4 hours native labour
12 miles in Land Rover.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ File 68.6, General Correspondence, letter from National Museums, Bulawayo to R.H. Hunt, Forestry Commission, Umtali, 7 Aug. 1972.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, letter from Professor Balinsky to Forester in Charge, Gungunyana Forest Reserve, 21 Oct. 1955.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, letter from RFC, Umtali, to Forester, Gungunyana Forest Reserve, 7 Feb. 1975.

¹⁴⁹ File 68.6, General Correspondence, letter from Chief Conservator of Forests to District Forestry Officer, Melsetter, 29 Jun. 1962.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, letter from Welton, to Director, Research, Forestry Commission (date missing).

Fearing that such activities threatened the ecology of this forest, at the same time setting a bad precedent, Welton strongly recommended banning the society from visiting Chirinda Forest again.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the District Forestry Officer felt that a ban was too stringent, so he fined the society R\$5 meant to meet the cost of cleaning the campsite.¹⁵² While this fine may not have been deterrent enough, it sent a clear message about the RFC's conservation concerns.

Meanwhile, the RFC turned down certain business applications that it considered detrimental to forest conservation. It rejected a request by a Mr Madison to open a store at Ngungunyana Farm on fears that this would increase the African population passing through the forest.¹⁵³ Some 3 Timber-logging proposals made by a Bulawayo-based sawmilling and plywood firm, the African Lumber Company, were unapproved on grounds that the Chirinda Forest was a nature reserve.¹⁵⁴ The only exception was the approval of the Mutare-based Eastern Gateway Ceramics' proposal to mine clay in the forest. Nevertheless, animosity soon arose as its employees, notably one Mashiri, became notorious for felling and selling timber to builders at the nearby Chako Business Centre.¹⁵⁵ Further accusations were that Mashiri illegally slaughtered forest birds, evidenced by 'freshly plucked forest guinea fowl remains which meant the birds had been trapped and cooked on the site'.¹⁵⁶ This sparked intense debate amongst Forestry Officials, resulting in cancellation of the mining licence.

Tourists were also at loggerheads with the RFC over tree engravings and the collection of forest fauna and flora. Tree engravings, informed by aesthetic gratification, sentimental and historic attachment to flora, was a common practice among nature lovers. Examples, which are plentiful, include that of nineteenth century Missionary-Explorer, David Livingstone, who, on passing through the Victoria Falls on 17 November 1855, carved

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid, letter from the District Forestry Officer to Director of Forestry, 18 Jul. 1969.

¹⁵³ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, memorandum from Conservator of Forests, 15 Jan. 1940.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, Chirinda Forest File No. 1, letter from Chief Conservator of Forests to Managing Director, African Lumber Company, 1 Dec. 1950.

¹⁵⁵ Chirinda Forest File, letter from Goldsmith to Divisional Manager, Eastern, 19 Nov. 1974.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

his initials on a large Baobab tree at this site.¹⁵⁷ Another example is that of Davidson, who, after burying the remains of the 34 members of the *Shangaan* Patrol killed during the Anglo-Ndebele War of 1893-94, ‘carved a cross and words, “TO BRAVE MEN”, on a tree at the spot’.¹⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, tourists who visited Chirinda Forest also practiced tree engravings, with some actually bringing pre-inscribed metal plates for nailing. This practice became of concern to foresters after realising that bacteria and fungi attacked standing trees through cuts caused by tree incisions. McGregor initially raised this in 1939:

I wish, however, to draw attention to real damage being done by the carvings of initials and dates in the bark. This discretion has now reached alarming proportions and the fungus which is attached is *polyporous sp*, which was growing from the initials of one W.S., who visited the big tree in 1933 ... I consider that this continual carving on trees is the only real damage to which the trees are subjected.¹⁵⁹

This practice was banned forthwith, but some tourist never took heed. Thus, in 1953, the Forester, Finch had no kind words to the culprits:

The following vandals carved their names on the Big Tree on an afternoon of Sunday the 11th or 12th July – C.S.M., E.M.M., W.N., E.K.R., J.C., C. du P., and J.D.P. It is hoped that they gained sufficient satisfaction from knowing that their names are recorded for the next 3 or 4 years. This is downright hooliganism. Their interest is for future visitors to know that they have visited the area...¹⁶⁰

Enraged, Finch scoffed at these individuals, saying instead of an African guarding property in their cars, what they really needed was a piccanin or nanny ‘to stop them from indulging in childish pranks’.¹⁶¹ Meanwhile, government turned down a suggestion to intensify security through engaging the national police force, particularly during weekends and public holidays, on grounds of budgetary constraints,¹⁶² and difficulties this would cause to the national police’s operations. McGregor had earlier on regretted:

¹⁵⁷ Chirinda Forest File, ‘Notable Trees of Zimbabwe’, memo from L. J. Mulin, to Black, Ngungunyana Forest Research Station, 1 Apr. 1982.

¹⁵⁸ P.E.N. Tindall, *A History of Central Africa* (Salisbury: Longman, 1968), p.164.

¹⁵⁹ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B 2151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, Report from District Forestry Officer to Acting Conservator of Forests, 28 Apr. 1939.

¹⁶⁰ File 68.6, General Correspondence, letter from Finch to Conservator of Forests, Eastern, 13 Jul. 1953.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid, letter from Conservator of Forests, Eastern Districts, to Forester, Gungunyana, (undated).

The big tree continues to receive a quota of initials, and at the moment, supports an arrow about 401' up to its hole. I know the culprit whom I reported to the police but they stated they could not take action unless someone saw the arrow leaving the bow. I do suggest, however, that the offending individual should be required to remove the arrow by the Secretary of Historic Relics and Monuments Committee. I shall furnish his name and address.¹⁶³

Other controversies regarded collection, quantity and use of treasure, chiefly birds, butterflies, monkeys and ornamental shrubs from this forest. As demonstrated earlier on, both the public and private sectors collected stuff from this forest. Nevertheless, some officials distasted the fact that many private sector collectors and researchers never gave after-collection feedback regarding the value of the specimens, 'thereby losing what I think might be information of scientific value'.¹⁶⁴ Finch raised this sentiment after one E.A. Edwards collected certain bird species in 1959 and admitted further that the country was losing valuable specimens and data due to tourists' collection laxities.¹⁶⁵ Edwards made a second visit in 1960, 'for the purpose of collecting bird species and recording bird song'.¹⁶⁶ There were similar concerns regarding illegal collections, officially raised by the Director of Museums, R. Smithers, who, in February 1959, protested strongly against visitors who purported to be collecting stuff for the National Museums.¹⁶⁷ The RFC subsequently imposed stringent measures, including declaration of all stuff collected by visitors before departure. The Deputy Director of Museums, Roger Summers, embraced the by-laws, stating that 'anything that can be done to stop this nefarious practice has our complete approval'.¹⁶⁸

A Bulawayo Entomologist, Dr. E.C.G. Pinhey, later raised the issue of unsanctioned collections again in November 1975, Pinhey expressed outrage at the laxity of

¹⁶³ NAZ, RC, L25.12.6F, B92151, F1680/1, Mount Selinda and Chirinda Forest, letter from McGregor to Conservator of Forests, 27 Nov. 1940.

¹⁶⁴ File 68.6, General Correspondence, *Ibid*, letter from Chief Afforestation Operations to Director, National Museums of Rhodesia, 17 Jan. 1959.

¹⁶⁵ File 68.6, General Correspondence, letter from Finch to Edwards, 8 Jun. 1959.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, letter from L. Wiltshire to Edwards, 13 Oct. 1960.

¹⁶⁷ File 68.6, General Correspondence, *letter* to Smithers to Forestry Officer, 2 Feb. 1959.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, letter from Summers to Chief Afforestation Operations, 27 Jan. 1959.

collections, especially as unique butterflies were getting extinct.¹⁶⁹ Using his own resources, he proceeded to make colour pictures of the endangered butterflies for easier identification by conservators and guards.¹⁷⁰ Thereafter, the RFC delegated the issuance of collection permits to the local forester, Goldsmith, who then made strict spot-checks on visitors' activities. However, due to the intensity of the Second Chimurenga War, Goldsmith, who had become the custodian of this forest, quit unceremoniously in early 1978, after his wife was nearly killed in a cross fire following a battle between the Rhodesian Security Forces and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army. Thereafter, Chirinda Forest did not have a forester until the appointment of J.M. Black following end of war, and the attainment of majority rule in April 1980.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how ideas about wildlife conservation, sweeping across the British Empire by the beginning of the 20th century, permeated, firstly into South Africa, and later Zimbabwe. It traced trajectories in the acquisition of Chirinda Forest from private to public ownership, and the subsequent transformation into a nature reserve, showing how this conformed to the changing empire-wide perspectives on wildlife conservation. It has also shown how state acquisition of the forest principally served the interests of Western oriented, predominantly urbanites, who, nostalgic about the rural life, wanted to gain knowledge and experience of the natural conditions of the countryside. Clearly, the state's commitment towards conserving this forest is illustrated by the extent to which it sponsored resources towards this cause; set up an administrative apparatus to manage the forest and invested into the physical improvements of the forest landscape. Furthermore, not only did the state fall into conflict with the local African peasantry over use of forest resources, but with virtually all sections of society: black and white; the ABM, foreign and local tourists and businessmen. However, by adopting a top-down developmental approach, the state ignored African perceptions, livelihood interests and local environmental conservation initiatives associated with this forest, which proved

¹⁶⁹ Chirinda Forest File, memo to Director, National Museums, 24 Nov. 1975.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, letter from M.A. Raath, Director of Museums and Monuments, to Director of Forestry, 13 Feb. 1976.

¹⁷¹ Interview, Shumba.

retrogressive as the marginalised communities responded by devising clandestine strategies to acquire forest resources. This created eternal animosity between the state and these communities over Chirinda Forest.

The study endorses Phimister's observations about the interface between coercive conservation policies and African resistance in colonial Zimbabwe. Phimister demonstrated how the implementation of the state driven Native Land Husbandry Act in Zimbabwe's African reserves provoked sustained resistance from African , an upsurge in African nationalism that ultimately lead to the suspension of the programme. Likewise, Mcgregor's study on colonial conservation initiatives in Shurugwi, central Zimbabwe, made similar findings that state conservation initiatives also induced Africa opposition against the state. Equally, the intensity of conflict in a distinct natural landscape supports aspects of Ranger's study, which noted how state appropriation of the Matopos Hills into a national park was contested by the local indigenous communities, whom the colonial regime side-lined on the pretext that they lacked sentimental attachment to nature. But missing from these studies is a sustained examination emphasising local communities' interests over an indigenous forest landscape, significant for its aesthetic, recreational and scientific value, and the interactions with different coercive conservation regimes. This study has shown that conflict over Chirinda Forest went beyond black-white discourse; it traversed racial categorisations. Contestations over the forest arose not only between state and local African residents who challenged denial of their rights over the forest; it was equally prevalent between state and other white communities: tourists, missionaries, researchers, and officials from other government institutions. This study makes a contribution to the problem of development; that policy makers need to be sensitive to perceptions and practices of those communities they govern, so as to win their cooperation in rural development initiatives.

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