

Captiva Sanibel Chronicle

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Featuring: Local Island Interest Stories, Art, Entertainment, Travel & Club Happenings for April

Fleur Wales-Baillie, On Conservation's Front Line

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By Elaine Stacy

I first met Fleur Wales-Baillie on a recent afternoon at her new home on Sanibel. Several days earlier she had called me at my office with an invitation to discuss something she felt would interest the readers of The Chronicle, knowing that in Sanibel and Captiva conservation has long since been a way of life. She told me of a foundation of her making, called the Khumbula Thina Trust—a foundation dedicated to the preservation of Southern Africa's wildlife and wildlife habitat, through various means. She was preparing to leave for South Africa to observe the translocation of 2 elephants, a project funded by her foundation. Indeed, Fleur had a story to tell. We made arrangements to meet in three day's time.

I arrived at her home and found Fleur and half a dozen others busy with the multitude of tasks necessary to establish a new residence. Furniture was being delivered, yard maintenance was in process, tile samples were spread out on the floor. The lady of the house was definitely in charge and had everything under control.

Fleur supplied me with some reading materials which would give me background information

on Khumbula Thina, while she took a few moments to free herself of immediate responsibility. In perusing a newspaper article about Shamwari, a game reserve located in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, I found a passage describing the area as "a convergence of five ecosystems...coastal and temperate forest, eastern grasslands, karoo, fynbos and savannah...[ensuring] the existence of a diversity of animals unequalled in South Africa."

Hmmm...didn't I hear a similar description of Sanibel given by the SCCF's Kristie Anders during the Resident Environmental Program I took just this last December? Wasn't the Island described as "a unique ecosystem...where land meets the sea, where the temperate zone meets the tropical, where fresh and salt water intermingle, offering a full menu of habitat, resulting in a wonderful diversity of flora and fauna?"

A short time later, Fleur joined me by the pool. We sat down with a pot of rooibos, a tasty sort of tea made from a plant native to her place of birth and the focus of her many projects. I mentioned the parallel between the descriptions of South Africa and Sanibel, which brought about the discussion of another coincidence

connecting these two distant locales.

Khumbula Thina supports the efforts of South Africa's Center for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife. The acronym for this organization is C.R.O.W. When Fleur first learned of its existence, she already knew of the C.R.O.W. of Sanibel (Care and Rehabilitation of Wildlife). A confusing conversation with friends in South Africa brought out the fact that there were two C.R.O.W.s, separated by an ocean and thousands of miles, but functioning in very similar capacities- Fleur has since arranged for Sanibel's P.J. Deitschel, DVM, currently working for "C.R.O.W.-US," to intern at "C.R.O.W.-SA" for a year, her time there as well as several other projects underway at the facility sponsored by Khumbula Thina.



Sanibel's Fleur Wales-Baillie, President and Founder of Khumbula Thina, Inc., a conservation foundation

So, Fleur is well-aware of the eco-consciousness of these islands, and it was a determining factor in her and her husband's decision to buy property here. Fleur's husband Richard Cook recently retired from a senior executive position at Lockheed Corporation. He and Fleur were first introduced to the area when corporate meetings held at South Seas brought them to Captiva. Years later, when they thought they might want to establish a home away from their Washington

D.C. area home, Captiva and Sanibel came to mind. At first they thought they would look for a "winter only" residence, but deeper thought brought about the purchase of a little piece of paradise on West Gulf Drive. Further thought and investigation caused the purchase of the *-claimed for wildlife* neighboring lot, to maintain a home for seven (the count so far) gopher tortoises. Here, within driving distance of Washington, D.C. (important because Fleur will not allow her English bull terrier, Numbi, to fly), Fleur will go about the business of running the Khumbula Thina Trust.

Khumbula Thina means "Remember Us" in Zulu, a language in which Fleur is fluent, although she hasn't lived in the African bush for some time and has been a resident and citizen of the US for more than 25 years.

Fleur's British parents owned a game and cattle ranch on the Swaziland border near Johannesburg. She was totally at home in the bush. As a young girl, she was sent to boarding school to keep her from "running wild." She was to become a doctor but never returned to medical school after she was introduced to flying while on holiday. She got her pilot's license in 1964 and acted as a bush pilot for six years. She came to the US in the 70s to attend the Sheffield School of Aeronautics in Miami, this when she found she couldn't get a job with a commercial airline in South Africa because she was a woman.

She was the first woman Boeing 747 Pilot/engineer. She routinely flew DC-8s and Boeing 720s and 707s to the Middle East, South America, Europe and Africa. She was trained and checked out by United Airlines in 1977. She has founded and run aircraft transport companies in several countries. Having had an exciting and successful career in aeronautics, her focus as of late has been on the fate of her beloved former' home, Southern Africa—the land, its people and wildlife.

Khumbula Thina, Inc., incorporated with 501 (c) (3) non-profit status in February of 1995,

was formed "to promote the survival, welfare, and improvement of endangered wildlife species in and about Southern Africa." So read its Articles of Incorporation. It is dedicated to providing logistical support, equipment, and facilities towards that end, engaging in relocation and translocation practices as necessary. The augmentation/extension of protected areas, thereby increasing habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species, is also on the agenda.

Fleur credits her dedication to wildlife to her early association with great names in the field of preservation and conservation. As a girl growing up in the bush, she became acquainted with Dr. Ian Player, who initiated the program that translocated the white rhinoceros, saving it from extinction 30 years ago. Player, the recipient of countless awards and distinctions for his conservation efforts over the years, is on the board of directors of Khumbula Thina.

Other board members include the former Ambassador to Washington from South Africa, the Hon. Harry Schwarz, now practicing law in South Africa and associated with Akin, Gump in Washington, D.C.; Colonel Harry J. Zink, USAF Retired and former Managing Director of the National Transportation Safety Board; and the Hon. James Symington, former member of Congress from Mississippi. Dr. Enos Mabuza, Chairman of National Parks in South Africa, along with Simon Avis and Richard V. Alien round out the panel of advisors fondly referred to by Fleur as her "Silverbacks."

Fleur's personal philanthropic efforts began when President Nelson Mandela became South Africa's new leader. She was concerned that efforts to improve human conditions would result in the neglect of conservation efforts and the protection of wildlife. She thought there must be a way that both could be served.

Through Dr. Ian Player's Wilderness Foundation, she supported a program designed to educate young citizens about their heritage and thereby instill national pride and

perhaps lessen the violence erupting throughout the country.

"I thought I could be of assistance," says Fleur. "Children—ten-year-olds even—were killing each other. • energy, We established bush camps and trails where the kids could be guided to appreciate wildlife and their heritage. They learned respect for themselves and for others. They learned that the preservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat is good for the country's economy, and that they could personally benefit from the eco-tourism business generated by conservation efforts."

The instructors at these camps are retired black game rangers, who act as role models as they share a wealth of knowledge not only of conservation, but of culture and traditions that might otherwise be lost to future generations. Over 10,000 black youth have been embraced by this continuing program, which is now aptly named after Khumbula Thina (remember its meaning), to honor Fleur and her involvement over the years.

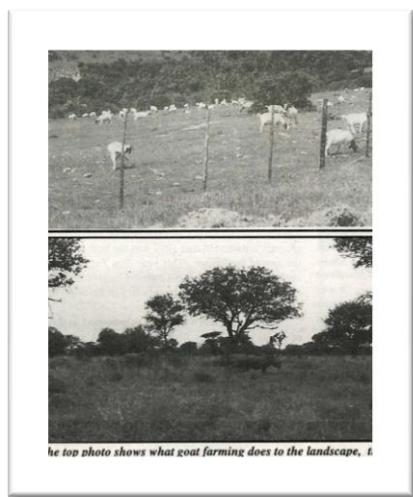


Fleur and many other conservationists believe that wildlife is better protected by concerned and caring private parties. The game reserves are businesses looking for profit, but at the same time the land is returned to its natural state, the game restored and protected by electric fences and guards on duty 24 hours a day. Jobs are created; culture preserved and passed on; the

country as a whole better off for their existence.

Because of this, another focus of Khumbula Thina, Inc. is the promotion of small eco-tourism related enterprises owned by indigenous members of the community. Start-up and continuing funding and entrepreneurial training are provided. The foundation prepares and distributes materials, and plans to establish schools and other facilities focused on conservation education for the Xhosa, Zulu, Swazi and other peoples of Southern Africa.

Shamwari is a privately-owned reserve which is fully endorsed by conservationists and owned by Adrian Gardiner, whose actions there prove he is a conservationist first and a businessman second. Shamwari now is home to "the Big Five," animals that are hunted widely as big game—elephants, lions, rhinos, water buffalo and leopards. In addition, zebra, hippos, black and blue wildebeest, springbok, blesbok, aardvark, aard-wolf and red hartebeest are found there. Varieties of birds and raptors number in the 300s. The clock was turned back 150 years with the reintroduction of these animals. Well over 100 locals are employed by Shamwari. Gardner has invested millions to reclaim the land ruined by years of cattle and goat farming. As it turns out, he is getting a pretty good return on his investment.



Fleur is particularly fond of a rather unusual point of interest on the Shamwari Reserve and that is Kaya Lendaba, a traditional African

Healing Village run under the direction of Credo Vusamuzulu Mutwva, a high Sanusi or spiritual leader of the Zulu nation. At this museum of sorts the knowledge of ancient African healing remedies, traditional methods of smelting iron ore, and divination and meditation rituals are preserved and presented along with other aspects of African life, history and art.

"Adrian has done an incredible job," said Fleur regarding the improvements Shamwari has undergone under his direction. She sincerely hopes his success can prompt others to do the same. According to Fleur, Gardiner himself invites competition in the area, knowing it will only serve to expand protected lands, promote the preservation of wildlife and make the Eastern Cape a serious eco-tourism destination as well.

While I was visiting Fleur, Mr. Gardiner called with some "jolly good news." It seems two lions documented to belong to Elsa's (of "Born Free" fame) pride had been found caged on Tenerief, off the coast of Africa. Joy Adamson's friend, actress Virginia McKenna, rescued and took them to England several years ago. She is now returning them to Africa.

She was very excited about the lions and their release. On a table in Fleur's home rests a bronze of Elsa, which she found years ago unfinished and gathering dust in an friend's studio. She commissioned its completion. Now she thinks a more appropriate spot for it may be the main house at Shamwari.

The lions were to arrive in Port Elizabeth on March 27th. By the time this story is published the lions will have been released on Shamwari (which means "friend" in Shona). Of course, Fleur was there. She left for Africa on the 23rd of March.

The project of which Fleur had spoken during our initial phone conversation is the relocation of two elephants from Knysna to the Shamwari Reserve, thus removing them from the danger of being shot by irate farmers on whose land

these magnificent animals sometime roam and cause damage. The elephants will have to be darted, and then transported by truck to the reserve. Shamwari's wildlife manager and resident veterinarian, Dr. Johann Joubert, will be present throughout the relocation project and will monitor the elephants' introduction and adaptation to the reserve.

Regarding this project, Fleur had these comments: "These elephants are not being mistreated. It is not a 'Free Willy' enterprise. But they are in imminent danger, and they need to be moved and protected to ensure their survival."

The relocation may or may not take place while Fleur is in Africa for the arrival of the lions. The elephants have to be located first, they have moved deep into the forest. If they are inaccessible, the elephants must be gently persuaded to turn around, but extreme care must be exercised or they may become frightened and injure themselves.

Khumbula Thina is in the negotiation phase for the purchase of 10,000 acres of land adjacent to a one million acre wildlife reserve in southern Africa. This land will be fenced in as part of the reserve and provide a new home for animals that used to be indigenous to the area, but will have to be brought in.

The foundation hopes to purchase helicopters which will facilitate the monitoring of game and help deter poachers on protected lands. A strategically located "Rapid Reaction Unit" is planned, its panel of advisors national celebrities whose names are instantly recognized by most Americans. The team will act much like a combat unit in the dangerous business of thwarting killers of game who are not adverse to killing people in the process.

In Africa, word of Khumbula Trust is out. Pleas for funding come in from various sources. Recently Fleur was contacted by the chairman of the African Game Rangers Association. In his letter he asked for advice and assistance (money) in the professional training of person-

nel, especially in areas where poaching is out of control and certain species of animals, specifically the northern black rhino and the chimpanzee, are severely threatened.

Because of her and her husband's background, Fleur has many contacts in the global community of conservationists, politicians, and business people. Friends and acquaintances know of her involvement in Africa's future, recognize her dedication and write checks freely. She received what she called a huge sum of money from a man she never met who had asked around, did some research and felt that Khumbula Thina would use the funds for projects in which he believed. She has raised millions, in spite of the fact that she never mentions money when discussing her projects, even when those in attendance have made it clear that they intend to support her foundation.

"I'm so enthused and carried away with the whole thing, I don't ask for money. I think of it as a spiritual thing. People will give if their heart moves them to. I'm asked, 'Well, how much do you need? You haven't said.' Even then, I don't mention a dollar amount."

None of the board members or officers of the foundation draw a salary. In fact, Fleur tries her best to get people who perform certain operational functions to donate their time. Not everyone can, she knows. People have to eat and pay the bills. But it kills her to pay attorneys' fees which can be very high. "That money should go for the animals," she says. She's actively lobbying for pro bono status, especially in that area.

And Fleur's been thinking about expanding her conservation efforts to areas beyond Southern Africa. Thinking about changing the foundation's Articles of Incorporation to encompass endangered wildlife and habitat all over the globe. That way, contributors can specify which projects they would like to support.

"I believe in being on the front line," Fleur

commented. "Wildlife is taking a hammering. If people would rather their contributions be used to help save the manatee in Florida versus its relative the elephant in South Africa, it doesn't matter. Both need help. What matters is that all wildlife everywhere is protected."

Yes, Fleur would like to help all species of animals to survive for perpetuity on a global scale. An ambitious undertaking even for this attractive, vivacious woman who radiates warmth and love for all living things. Who talks reverently about her partners and friends, Ian and Jim, among many. Who, while making rooibos, is playing soccer with Numbi (both of them are quite good), picking out tile and talking on the phone to South Africa about missing elephants all at the same time.

In Sanibel, she loves the large female tortoise she occasionally comes across in her yard. She hopes it continues to spit and hiss at her throughout their relationship; it is wild as it should be. She loves the beach as does Numbi. She loves the people walking and bicycling about on a Monday morning, nodding and waving hello. Fleur is glad to be here; we are lucky to have her.

Believe me, you will soon know your new neighbor Fleur Wales-Baillie, if you don't already. She's not one to be quiet or timid. She likes to be involved and has energy to spare. And she has lots of interesting stories to tell.

