

# AGRICULTURE DUNN COUNTY NEWS

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## Conservation practices have changed greatly over time

BY JEAN D'ANGELO  
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

*Editor's note: This is the third in a series about a trip abroad to South Africa by Menomonie High School agriscience teacher Jean D'Angelo.*

Journal entry — Tuesday  
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Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

Woke this morning very rested! Went to breakfast in the cafe with the group. Had toast with yummy peach jam, strawberry yogurt with a few bran flakes sprinkled on top, eggs, fish patty, mushrooms, and juice. Ready for another adventure in South Africa!

This morning the American teachers loaded the vans and met up with a professor of ecology from Fort Hare named Rod Baxter. I nicknamed him the "mouse man." As a group, we traveled to the Great Fish River Reserve and I was expecting to learn about big game conservation, but we also got a taste of the importance of preserving the little guys too.

The Great Fish River Reserve is approximately 48,000 acres and is located on a plot of land that was owned by the Kent family back in the 1830s. The homestead is still standing and has become a research and conservation center for youth and adults. While we were getting a tour of the facility, a small group of young



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MHS agriscience teacher Jean D'Angelo is pictured holding a young door mouse at the Great Fish River Reserve near Grahamstown, South Africa. The mouse, which was hibernating weighed about 20 kg. Adults reach 40 kg.

on hunter safety and conservation practices. Although the game is different, many of the concepts handed down from generation to generation at these seminars are very similar to what our local hunter safety classes are like here in Wisconsin.

The ambassador of the park taught us that conservation practices have changed over time in South Africa. In the past, people thought that by shooting all the predators you would increase the game populations (I thought to myself as I listened, sounds similar to our wolf situation in Wisconsin). Today conservationists understand that a balance of predator and prey must exist to provide a healthy ecosys-

tem for this big game reserve.

As we looked at a group of buffalo captured and fenced behind burlap cloth, our teachers talked about how expensive it is to keep the game reserve alive. To help defer some of the costs, tourist hunting of big game was introduced. People pay a very steep price to come out at certain times of the year to hunt water buffalo, rhinos, warthogs and other large game. They are also trying to keep down the Kudu population because they can easily jump the fences and have been known to infect the surrounding domesticated cattle with TB (tuberculosis).

The Great Fish River Game Reserve has been a very successful donor reserve over the

past several years. They have bred the rare black rhino and now have a total of 106 animals on the land. Recently, the reserve started to sell its black rhinos to other reserves, with each rhino bringing in 700,000 rand (about \$100,000) to help support the park.

Although the big game was very impressive and I found the conservation practices very demanding to the park workers, I had the most fun with "mouse man" Rod Baxter learning about his studies with the door mice. Mr. Baxter had set out about 12 nest boxes in the woods near the game reserve to study the behaviors of these cute little mammals.

The houses are hung on

combretum trees because the trees are naturally hollow and the mice love to run through the trees. To help study the mice and their offspring, Mr. Baxter captures and tattoos each mouse. Each dot inside the ear represents a number, and each year is represented by a different color.

We were able to find an occupied nest box and, because the mice were hibernating, we even got to hold a young mouse. They are very clingy and can almost climb upside down. When placed on one of the teachers' shirts, it stuck on like Velcro. Mr. Baxter and his students even study the mice at night when they are more active by marking them with ultraviolet dust.