

HERMANUSDOORNS
Veld assessment
by Frits van Oudtshoorn
April 2011

Hermanusdoorns was visited on 19 April 2011 to visually assess the veld condition and make recommendations for future management. The visual assessment was done by visiting as much as possible areas on the property accompanied by Andre Cochren.

A. FINDINGS

1. Veld condition, in terms of grass cover and grass species composition, has substantially improved since my last visit in 2007. The main reasons for this seems to be the overall good rainfall received during the last three seasons, a successful bush encroachment control program and possibly a somewhat reduction in grazer numbers. Improvement is also due to the fact that most the farms were generally overgrazed by the previous owners.
2. There is however an uneven distribution of grazing animals causing selective overgrazing in some parts and underutilisation in others (currently not very visible due to good rain and good grass growth). The main reason for this is an uneven ratio between bulk and selective grazers on the farm. The recommended ration between these two feeder groups are 50% bulk grazers and 50% selective grazers. At the moment the ratio is about 20% bulk grazers and 80% selective feeders. Although this ratio is usually present in natural ecosystems, through high numbers of buffalo and zebra, it is often difficult to apply on a medium to small game farm due to the high cost and danger risk of buffalo as well as the low meat value of Zebra.
3. The browsing capacity might be exceeded. This is evident on browsing damage to some popular feeding trees, such as Acacia species and Monkey apple trees.
4. The sand pit is too visual, specifically from the main road.
5. There is some increased soil erosion originating from houses due to high runoff from the roofs.
6. Some small areas still have dense bush encroachment. There is a huge improvement in bush encroachment. Many of the older Sickle bushes are also dying due to grass competition.
7. There is quite a bit of young Queen of the night (Nagblom) plants in some areas. Other declared invasive plants noticed were Sisal agave (sisal) and Seringa (Maksering).

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The following recommendations are made to decrease selective overgrazing on the farm;
 - a) Slash the old lands and other open areas on the farm during early growing season (December). This simulates the effect of bulk grazers by removing the bulk of the grazing and preparing larger areas for selective grazers to utilize. This action will also stimulate kweekgras, a valuable grazing grass on poor sandy soil which can withstand continuous grazing. Slashing will assist with increasing the organic content of soil and generally assisting soils on old lands to recover.
 - b) If available, use high number cattle to intensively graze traditionally ungrazed areas for a short time. Electric fencing and protein supplement (winter) might be needed to force animals to remove enough bulk in a short time. This method is used to simulate a herd of Buffalo moving through an area. It helps to remove bulk in order to increase the palatability for selective grazers and assist with seed germination through the effect of trampling.
 - c) Improve the bulk: selective grazer ratio by increasing the number Zebra (bulk grazer) and decreasing the number of selective grazers such as impala (a selective grazer).
 - d) Fire can also be used to attract animals to ungrazed areas. For this a cool fire is recommended and a large enough area should be burned. It is generally recommended that between a third and a quarter of the property be burned to prevent subsequent overgrazing in the burned area. At this stage I do not recommend burning for the farm due to the risks involved. It is however important to make sure that the amount of biomass does not increase to such an extent that an accidental fire will cause severe damage. The general guideline is that the biomass on the farm should not exceed 4 tons/ha. By slashing and having enough bulk grazers (zebra or cattle as supplement) the biomass could be controlled.
2. Control the number of Kudu on the farm. It is difficult to say how many animals to remove. Andre will probably have a better idea of the condition of Kudu during September/October, as this time is a good indicator for correct Kudu stocking. Remember that there is probably a drought coming soon (this applies for all game species).

3. The sand pit needs some attention. Try to conceal the sandpit by establishing local trees along the edges. Also do some rehabilitation by levelling the sides of the pit to make it less visual. Grasses like kweekgras will probably establishing by it. Kweekgras can however be established after rehab by using cuttings.
4. Continue with erosion control around houses by establishing kweekgras on the bare areas. Where there are more steep levels, or already erosion rills, use stone lines on the contour or small stone wall to prevent further erosion.
5. Continue with maintaining and constructing spillways on roads to divert rainwater out of roads. Also continue with stabilising erosion gullies by constructing gabions and filling older gullies where possible.
6. Do bush control in the few areas where dense bush encroachment is still prevalent. This does not include the dense riverine bush in some areas.
7. Control Queen of the night (nagblom), Sisal, Seringa and other declared invasive plants. The following herbicides are registred:

Queen of the night and Sisal – MSMA 720 SL (stem treatment for Sisal)

Seringa – 1. Basal stem application – Ranger 240EC or Garlon 480EC

2. Cut stump treatment – Chopper, Access 240 SL or Timbrel 360 SL

The end - Please contact me should you have further queries

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