

THE EXPERIENCES OF A FORMER STUDENT
AT THE FEDERAL SCHOOL OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

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I did not have any idea what wildlife management was, prior to my admission into the Federal School of Wildlife Management in 1983. However I was impressed by the teamwork of staff members in the Protection Department of the Kainji Lake National Park. At the School we were given training in such subjects as wildlife management, wildlife extension and interpretation, ballistics, natural history, range management, zoology, botany, surveying and other topics. This involved many challenging experiences in both academic and practical work, as well as extra-curricular activities. As a self-sponsored student, I was faced additionally with financial difficulties to overcome.

The practical work was diverse, and our first experience was to survey the School campus, which gave us an insight into how to demarcate a game reserve or park. We had to learn the names of plants, and to identify by their botanical names the various trees within the School compound, including *Azelia africana*, *Butyrospermum paradoxum* (Shea butter tree) and *Parkia clappertoniana* (Locust bean tree). We were also taken on the "Man O'War" course at the Leadership and Citizenship Training Centre, Jos. This involved climbing the Shere Hills, which developed us physically and mentally.

One of the most important practical training any student undertakes is anti-poaching operations. At the Kainji Lake National Park, we were instructed how to carry out proper policing of a game reserve, and went on several patrols. We were also given training in the handling and use of both shotguns and rifles. On the first patrol, we arrested some fishermen along the Shagari track in the Borgu sector of the Park. During the next patrol we apprehended two poachers who had killed some Kob, Bushbuck and Duiker. The arrested men were handed over to the Park authorities, who took them to court.

The training lasted for two years. I was then employed by the Kainji Lake National Park in October 1985. My schedule of duties included general policing of the Park; and I was posted to the Oli River Lodge to take charge of the station. In the same month I embarked on various anti-poaching patrols with my team. We made four arrests for illegal entry into the Park, which contravenes Section 8 of Decree 46 of 1979, which established the Park.

I benefitted greatly from the training that I had received at the School. What I had learned in man management, motivation, promotion of team work, decision making, delegation of powers etc. were all put to good use. I discovered that some of my subordinates at Oli River could not handle and maintain guns properly, and I was able there and then to give them on-the-job instruction. The training in Field engineering was also useful when I led my men in reopening old tracks and making some temporary ones for effective patrols and game-viewing.

In conclusion, I would like to make suggestions for improvement of the course. The training in field engineering was not sufficient for my needs. It is very necessary that one knows how to drive a vehicle, and I recommend that driving should be introduced into the School curriculum. Also the conditions at the School are not conducive to effective learning. When the financial situation improves, it is hoped that better buildings will be constructed. Moreover, many wildlife books are not available in the country, and the School should liaise with the Federal Government to import these books so that the students can buy them.

Finally, let me seize this opportunity to thank the organisers of the anniversary for selecting me among the past students to write this brief acknowledgement.