

## WILD LORE OF ZULULAND

### MAGQUBU NTOMBELA

Interpreted by Maurice Mackenzie

I greet you all and all those who have come from afar to see this land of mine. I am Magqubu Ntombela, and my father was Makhosini Ntombela. He was in Ceteswayo's regiment and he fought at the battle of Isandhlawana where we defeated the British. My great-grandfather was in military service with Senzangakona and then with King Tshaka and then also with King Dingane. I speak Zulu so listen well. Zululand is a country of great beauty and we Zulus have our own descriptions for the months and the seasons. We know the animals, the birds, the trees and the plants. They have always been part of our life.

I will begin my talk with the month of October, *uzibandlela*. It is the month when spring breaks and it is named *uzibandlela* because it is the time that the footpaths of Zululand become covered with new grass. It is also the month when the red flower of the *msinsi* (*Erythrina caffra*) falls, and the green leaves of that tree appear. As you can see it is the erythrina leaf that is the symbol of the Wilderness Leadership School and of this World Wilderness Congress.

There are other trees which also come to life, such as the sycamore fig which grows along the banks of our rivers. Animals love the fruit of this tree. The baboons climb up to the very top and in their haste to feed themselves they spill many figs on the ground. Other animals like the bushbuck, rhinoceros, warthog, grey duiker and inyala will then feed on the fallen fruit. When the baboons have had their fill they play and start trouble amongst themselves. Youngsters tease the older animals who then chase them about the tree, asking, "What do you think you're doing?" and the youngsters will reply, "Sorry, father! Sorry!". "What do you think you are doing?" the older baboon will repeat, and the youngster will say, "Please, father, please." But the older baboon will then hurl the youngster out of the tree by his tail. This will annoy the mother of the young baboon and she will say, "Hey! Hey you! You want to kill my child? What do you think you're doing?" The troop leader, reclining right at the top of the tree, having watched this inter-play, makes screeching loud noises.

*Uzibandlela* is the month when the owls call most. One that calls frequently is *mabengwana*. The husband calls his wife saying, "Come, come with a pillow." She replies after several invitations, "I'm coming." Always he calls for her and she does not come.

The month of December is named *umasingana* as it is the time of the year when the pumpkins ripen and the women go in search of this vegetable under the hills. It is the month when the blue wildebeest and the impala drop their young. This month dries out everything and is usually without rain. It is so hot and dry that the umbilical cords on the young calves dry out. It is in *umasingana* when the lion is most vocal. Toward evening he can be heard roaring along the banks of the Umfolozi River. When the lion roars all the antelope get frightened and stay in fear. You can follow where the lions are moving on their hunts by listening to the other animals calling out in alarm, like the bushbuck which barks, the zebra which snorts and the reedbuck which whistles through its nose.

*Nhlangula* is the month of May, the month when winter starts, when the leaves fall and we feel the first pinch of cold. The days grow shorter and a great stillness falls upon the land. *Nhlangula* is the time when my people begin burning grass on the hills and pastures and it is this month when the *insingizi*, the ground hornbill, begins calling while walking across the burnt grass in search of grasshoppers. As they go one says, "What tree? What tree? What tree is that?" And the other bird will turn round and say, "That tree, that tree, that tree is an *msinsi*." Then after having eaten well one will say, "Have you had your fill? Have you had your fill? Have you had your fill?" And the other will reply, "Yes, I've had my fill, I've had my fill, I've had my fill."

It is in this month of May that the *mpafa* tree (buffalo thorn) matures. The leaves change colour to a deep gold-red, fall and give way to the fruit which will be eaten by baboons, monkeys, warthogs, kudu, and black rhinoceros. The black rhinoceros, in order to get the fruit, will place the tree under his chest and foreleg and by exerting pressure will push the tree over, then he will eat the fruit, branches and thorns. Having eaten he will leave the *mpafa* tree and when some distance away will dung. Then he will turn round and destroy this dung, and have a fight with it, and he will scatter it far and wide.

This is the time in the month of May when the impala starts to mate. When the impala mates it makes a snorting noise and the males chase each other and fight. It is also the month of mating for the wildebeest, and the young wildebeest call when they follow their mothers who are being chased by the males.

In this month of May, when the silence is upon us, you can hear the bird we call the *inkwamazane*, the emerald spotted wood dove. It calls out in grief because the genet cats have climbed up to the nest and when the female returns the eggs or chicks have gone. The bird then sits on its empty nest and cries out, saying, "I gave birth to my children and they're taken, I gave birth to my children and they're taken. I hear my heart say du, du, du du du."

That is all I have time to talk to you about today. I give thanks and request of God that the work of wilderness conservation moves forward and grows stronger in order that all nature may be conserved and that we will continue to work with nature for the sake of our children's children. Ian Player, with us, conserved these animals for the people. I give thanks for Ian Player's work in conserving these animals, such as the capture and handling of the white rhino, a feat which in my many years of service in the game reserve I had never before witnessed. Thank you all and may God bless this congress.