

## NGONYAMA

**Uys de Villiers 'Ngonyama' Pienaar:** Tol Pienaar began his career in the Kruger National Park on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1955, as junior section ranger stationed at Kingfisher Spruit. He remained in this post until April 1957 when he was promoted to Assistant Biologist in Skukuza and later in 1961 to the position of Biologist (Head of Research). It was at this time that 'Tol' married Annette van Rooyen on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1961. He held this position until March 1970 when he was further promoted to Assistant Director of Nature Conservation and later Director of Nature conservation in 1974. Tol was later appointed in 1978 to the position of Park Manager for the Kruger National Park. Tol made the move from the Kruger National Park to Groenkloof in Pretoria in 1987 as Chief Director of National Parks. Tol retired to Stillbaai with Annette in 1991.

Tol and Annette have 2 sons. Danie is currently the Head of Scientific Services for SANParks being based in Skukuza and Pierre who farms with game in Mokopane.

Tol has authored one of the most well know books on the history of the Kruger National Park – “Neem uit die Verlede” - which has recently been translated into English as well a recently released book called “Goue Jare” which covers his time in SANParks.

(Information provide Tol Pienaar)

*Tol inherited his nickname in a rather unusual way. As part of the then predator control programme in the Kruger National Park, Tol was carrying out patrols in one of the control areas alongside the Timbavati. On the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1956 Tol and his team headed via Satara for the Olifants River and overnighted at the Olifants/Timbavati confluence. Lions were calling throughout the night in the direction of the Timbavati-Shisakashanghondzo confluence, the team left again at first and moved in the direction of the lion calls, upon reaching the confluence a camp was set up under a Nyala tree (in the area of the current Rodewal camp). The area along the Shisakashanghondzo spruit was patrolled yet no lions were found but upon returning to the camp that evening the lions began to call very close to the camp. Luckily Tol was in the possession of a 'big beam' flashlight and upon investigation found behind the Nyala tree in an open area nearby a large pride of approximately 15 lions that were busy eating a giraffe that they had killed earlier in the day. Tol was able to destroy 3 adult females and 4 young males before the rest of the pride disappeared into the surrounding bush. Upon returning with the vehicle to remove the carcasses it was discovered the one of the females was only wounded and had moved away. Given the late time at this stage it was decided that it was unwise to try and track her in the dark.*

*On the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> July 1956, Tol and his team awoke to find the river area covered in a thick layer of mist and when returning to the site of the giraffe carcass the team were able to pick up the blood trail of the injured female lion. She did not get far as it would appear that her right leg was injured, she was quickly found and appeared to be stiff from the cold and on first sight apparently dead.*

*Before approaching her to ensure she was in fact dead, Tol fired a shot from his 9mm pistol, the next moment he found himself looking onto flaming yellow eyes as the female jumped up, turned and with a loud roar charged. Tol managed to drop the pistol and shoot with his rifle a shot from the hip, but by this time she had jumped at him and attempted with her good paw to hit at Tols face. He was luckily able to deflect this with the butt of the rifle he was still holding but upon falling over the lioness grabbed him on the left hip and shook him a few times.*

*At this stage she was dying from bullet wound in her chest and a mercy shot was needed to put her out of pain. Tol was too shocked at this stage to realize that he was also in danger of dying and in hindsight as to how lucky he was. During the attack the corporal Pios Hlongwane stood his ground, but was unable to get a shot in at the lion while it had Tol as the safety catch of his rifle was stuck. Pios was able to help Tol up from the ground it was at this stage that the pain started. The lion had bitten through the leather belt with the rounds holder with a .404 cartridge in it and this helped deflect some of impact of her teeth from his body but the remaining teeth however leaving deep wounds in Tols hip.*

*Back at the camp Tol treated his wounds with a mixture of salt and spirits and bound the wounds with fabric bags that he tore up. He stayed in his tent for the rest of the day while the rest of the team processed the carcasses. Upon departing none of the staff had driver's licenses and Tol had to drive the vehicle himself to Satara to get help from the district ranger Dawie Swart. En route to Satara, Tol and his team, despite his injuries managed to destroy another lioness, and at this stage his wounds began to bleed again so that by the time he arrived at Satara he was a 'bloodied spectacle'. Dawie did first aid on Tol and then insisted on taking him to the ELM Hospital in Acornhoek. At Orpen Gate it was discovered that a certain Dr Pullen from Nelspruit was visiting his father who was the then Rest camp Manager at Orpen Gate. Dr Pullen was able to do the necessary first aid on Tol as well to inject the penicillin.*

*Dawie Swart took Tol at this stage back to KingfisherSpruit where he could recover from his injuries at home. This time at home allowed Tol to think back over the brave way the lioness fought for her life as well as the merits of the Predator Management practice in the Kruger National Park.*

*SI n April 1987 when Tol ended his career in the Kruger National Park to move on to the position of Chief Director of National Parks the rangers surprised him with the skull of his brave female from the TImbavati mounted on a Kiaat Board along with the .404 round that she bit through as well as his old bronze ranger badge from when he was a ranger as acknowledgment and a reminder of the that fateful day along the Timbavati River.*

**(Excerpt translated and summarised from Tol Pienaars new book "Goue Jare" provide by Danie Pienaar)**