

The wildlife conservation pioneers

JEZEBEL. Even if you're one of those Land Rover owners that likes to give your pride and joy a special name, it's unlikely that you'd pick Jezebel. In the Old Testament, Jezebel was the evil wife of Ahab, the king of Israel. Feel free to delve into Kings I and II if you want to know more, but suffice to say that it all ended rather badly for Jezebel when she was defenestrated (that's thrown out of a high window to you and me) and her body was eaten by dogs! As we all know, 'jezebel' is shorthand for a shameless, immoral or wicked woman who deceives people to make sure she gets what she wants. Could any Land Rover have possibly behaved so badly that it deserved such a name?

But like it or not, Jezebel is the only identification this particular Land Rover has, because its chassis number is lost in the mists of time. Whatever paperwork there was has long since disappeared and the number stamped on the dumb-iron has been obliterated by the reinforcing plates that have been welded over the rusting, Swiss-cheese steel. All we really know is that she dates from 1956, and that's what the chassis plate on the bulkhead says, except the number on it relates to a 107in Station Wagon!

That Jezebel has survived at all is a miracle of almost Biblical proportions, but it is good that she did. Because Jezebel played a leading role in one of the world's earliest and most dramatic wildlife conservation projects. And now, following what is nothing short of a resurrection, she is hopefully going to contribute again to the ongoing battle to preserve Africa's wild animals. What is astonishing is that so few people know her story.

So when did Jezebel begin her journey into the history books? In 1959 Ted Reilly was a young man of 21 who had just returned to Mlilwane, his family's farm in Swaziland, after ten years at boarding school in South Africa. Swaziland is a small and landlocked country that is bordered by Mozambique to the east and South Africa to the north, west, and south. At that time Swaziland was a British protectorate. It gained its independence in 1968 and in 2018 was renamed the Kingdom of Eswatini.

"I bought the Series I in about 1960 when it was only around four years old," remembers Ted. "I can't recall what I paid but I bought it from a man called Botha who was a policeman in the Swaziland Police in Mbabane, the Swazi capital. It was in excellent condition with a hardtop and doors, both of which came off as soon as I got it home. I bought it with a very specific purpose in mind and for that it didn't need doors or a hardtop, or any kind of roof at all!"

"At that time, Swaziland's wild animals were in danger of disappearing completely because of habitat loss and uncontrolled hunting," says Ted. "Poaching was already a huge problem. People think that the illegal trade in ivory and rhino horn is a relatively recent phenomenon, but actually it goes back a long way and was already a big issue in Africa by

Ted Reilly and Jezebel are legends in the world of wildlife conservation, having together created the enduring legacy of Eswatini's national parks

STORY BY GARY PUSEY

Ted Reilly drives Jezebel in pursuit of one of Swaziland's last Zebra, early 1960s

LAND ROVER LEGENDS

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**TED REILLY AND
JEZEBEL**

PICTURES: TED REILLY AND LAURIE MUGGLETON



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the 1950s. As the years have gone by it has increased massively and is now carried out on an industrial scale. When I returned to Mlihwane in 1959 almost all the wild animals I remembered from my early childhood had gone.

"The contrast with how things had been just ten years earlier, not just at Mlihwane but across all Swaziland, was too depressing for words. I thought that something needed to be done to create areas where the kingdom's rapidly-vanishing wild animals could find refuge and protection. I put my ideas to the colonial government but they were turned down on the grounds that it was an extravagance, because in their view the Kruger National Park to the north and the Hluhluwe Game Reserve to the south could adequately service the people of Swaziland, even though both are in South Africa. I tried to interest other farmers, but nobody seemed to think it was important or viable. It was obvious that we were on our own. Meanwhile, the decimation of wildlife in Swaziland continued unabated.

"That was when we decided to dedicate our 1200 acre farm to wildlife conservation. It wasn't ideal as the basis for a wildlife sanctuary because it was a productive farm and also had a tin mine, but we closed everything down and invested heavily in regenerating the original bush, creating dams and waterways, and planted thousands of trees. We also had to put up game-proof fencing around the whole area. Nevertheless, at the time it provided the only survival possibility there was for at least some of Swaziland's threatened wildlife.

"It was unclear how it would pay for itself and everyone predicted it would not succeed. I remember the then President of the Wildlife Protection Society of South Africa describing it as 'a wonderful but impossible dream, with financial implications so vast that it cannot possibly work'. Well, we did make it work and it's still here today."

With very limited personal resources and no government subsidy whatsoever, Ted approached King Sobhuza II, Swaziland's then monarch, for permission to capture wild animals from Hlane, which was an area of land owned by the Swazi royal family where some of the last remaining wild animals could still be found in remnant numbers. The King gave Ted his full support and allowed the capture of animals from his own dwindling herds. It became a race against time to capture the last remaining animals before they were snared or shot by poachers.

"This also sparked the start of a strong and lasting working relationship with the Swazi monarchy," says Ted. "This special relationship is now reaching into the second generation through His Majesty King Mswati III and our son Mick, known to the nation as 'Jubela'. In fact, old-time Game Rangers have said that Mick was given this name as a result of his mother Liz being part of a wildlife capture operation when she went into labour. They have explained that the name indicates perseverance, as evidenced when a herd of wildebeest crossed in front of a charging Jezebel, to the very last animal, which only narrowly missed collision!"

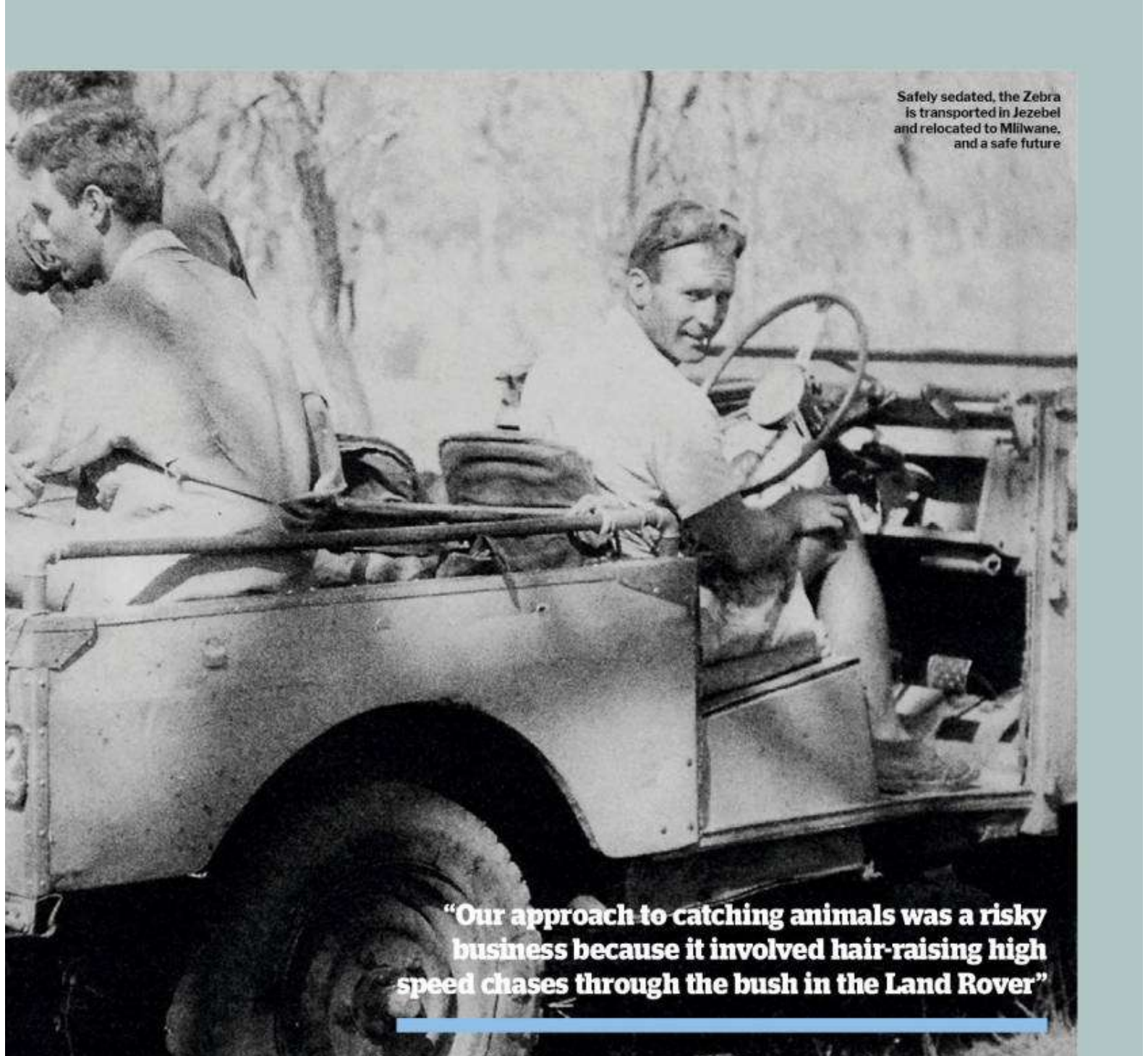


Dramatic photo of the Oelofse technique in action. Wildebeest stampede diverted with a plastic sheet

Wild animal capture techniques were in their infancy and experiments with chemical immobilisation had only just begun. In 1968 Jan Oelofse, a game warden in Natal in South Africa, perfected a novel approach in which animals were herded by helicopter into a funnel-shaped capture stockade or 'boma' enclosed with plastic sheeting, and because the animals couldn't see through the plastic they didn't try to charge through it. At the same time, he developed an idea to build a wooden pen onto the capture boma which led directly to the transport lorry via a ramp. Previously, Jan had been in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) catching game and once doubled for John Wayne in the film 'Hatari' in many of the dangerous scenes.

Known today as the Oelofse Method, the system is used wherever large numbers of wild animals need to be captured for relocation and causes minimal trauma to the animals. But the Oelofse Method wasn't available when Ted started his wildlife capture and relocation efforts. He had to do things rather differently.

"Our approach to catching the animals was a highly risky business," remembers Ted, "because it involved hair-raising, high speed chases through the bush in the Land Rover. One of us would be driving while the other sat in the passenger seat with the tranquilizer dart gun. The driver was handed the dart gun when we got close enough to shoot because split



Safely sedated, the Zebra
is transported in Jezebel
and relocated to Mlilwane,
and a safe future

"Our approach to catching animals was a risky business because it involved hair-raising high speed chases through the bush in the Land Rover"

second swerving often caused coordination breakdown. So it was better for the driver and the shooter to be the same person. Two more men would be seated in the back and we would have to get extremely close to be certain of a good shot. Then we would have to carry the sedated animals in the back of the Land Rover, one-by-one, and load them into crates on the back of a truck to be driven for release on Mlilwane. Our adventures with Jezebel were legendary.

"One day, she developed a short in her wiring and smoke poured from under her bonnet. The flames which started when her bonnet was lifted were smothered with greatcoats before they could take hold. When the smoke had cleared the prospects of getting out of there with Jezebel appeared hopeless. The wiring was all blackened and bare and the small half-roll of insulation tape we had with us would not even cover one wire from end to end. Emergency repairs call for imagination and ingenuity!

"We had a knife and there was plenty of bush around, so we set about stripping the strong, flexible bark from young branches of the phuzi trees and prepared suitable lengths of insulating material with it, which we dried in the sun. Then ever so slowly we separated the essential wires and insulated them with the bark. Several hours and many mistakes later, Jezebel roared out of there with a new lease of life. That bush bark was so effective that

she continued for months like that before we scrounged for her and fitted a new wiring harness!

"On another occasion we had just captured a nine-foot long crocodile and had it bound and covered in sacking in the back of Jezebel. Then we had a puncture and while we were changing the wheel a man appeared out of nowhere and asked for a lift. He had been drinking and had lost all his inhibitions. He got in the back and off we went. We told him to stay clear of the sacking because it sheltered a crocodile, but he didn't believe us and leaned forward to open it.

"The crocodile spun round, growling and hissing, and our passenger screamed and leaped into space. We were travelling rather fast and he hit the dirt and rolled several times. This did not dampen his determination to get away and he was on his feet in an instant, undoubtedly very sober indeed by now, and he fled into the bush. We never saw him again."

Ted's pioneering conservation activities inspired many people at the time and a South African film producer named Elmo de Wit, together with his brother Louis, tried to record the game capture operation on film. They abandoned their plans when the Land Rover hit a rut at high speed during their first chase, causing the spare wheel to bounce up and carry Louis out with it and into a thorn bush. Elmo lay crouched on the floor, holding on for dear life, and later said

to Ted's mother, "Lady, I feel sorry for you. Your son is not going to die from old age!"

Louis de Wit was neither the first nor the last person to be unceremoniously thrown from the back of the Series I. "That's why she was given the nickname Jezebel," laughs Ted. "For her rather evil habit of continually tossing people out during capture operations in the bush! But she still managed to manipulate her way into people's affections, being known locally as Sponono which means 'Beautiful Lady'."

A film was eventually produced for Anglia TV's long-running 'Survival' series by Ted's brother-in-law, Howard Kirk, which Ted has very kindly let me see. Ted isn't sure when it was first broadcast in the UK, but it would appear to have been in early October 1970. It is a charming and fascinating colour film of almost half an hour's duration, and it would be wonderful if it could be viewed more widely, because I'm sure that Land Rover enthusiasts everywhere would find it as enjoyable as I did. Quite how Ted and his cousin Ralph, who was usually in charge of the dart gun, did not meet the early end predicted by Elmo de Wit is another miracle in the Jezebel story! To create the dramatic footage taken from on board the Series I, Howard Kirk was apparently anchored by ropes to the four corners of the rear tub so that he could not fall out.

Jezebel was suffering as many as 30 punctures a week until Ted developed a very innovative solution, which was to fit a smaller tyre with its tread removed inside the normal tyre. The outer tyre still picked up the punctures but the inner tyre, rotating inside the outer, would break off the tip of whatever had forced its way through the outer, which prevented the tube from deflating. Punctures thankfully became a rarity.

For years, Jezebel and her crew captured and translocated wild animals to the safety of Mlilwane, one animal at a time, establishing viable breeding nuclei of several different species that were being hunted to extinction elsewhere in the kingdom. But the next stage in the development of Swaziland's national parks would require effort well beyond that which Jezebel could offer, although the battered Land Rover continued to provide sterling service on and around Mlilwane.

Ted wanted to reintroduce some of the larger species of game such as giraffe, rhino, and elephant which had long been absent from the Swazi landscape. But this would cost large sums of money – money that Ted no longer earned after he had stopped farming and mining at Mlilwane. His conservation efforts were being recognised internationally by then, and various organisations made funds available to relocate animals from elsewhere in Southern Africa, including the first rhino.

Four years after Ted had started his conservation programme, Mlilwane was formally opened to guests, most of whom were naturalists in the early years. Ted and his wife Liz had built a visitor centre and accommodation, and the farm's transition to wild animal sanctuary and national park was complete.

Ted Reilly's pioneering conservation efforts laid the foundations for what would become known today as the Kingdom of Eswatini's Big Game Parks, a privately-owned, not-for-profit trust. "We are mandated by the Head of State, King Mswati III, to administer and manage the Eswatini Wildlife and Flora Act and to manage the government's responsibilities under the Convention for International



Jezebel after she had been plundered for parts, on display at Mlilwane



Ted Reilly behind the wheel of Jezebel before the restoration. Liz Reilly, left, with Head Ranger Petros Ngomane, seated. Petros has survived numerous assassination attempts by poachers over the years, one of which left him paralysed from the waist down. Back row, left to right, Nkontsho Vilane, Senior Ranger and still serving in the field after 53 years; Bill Norrie and Roland Stanbridge, who were both Jezebel crew members in the 1960s.

Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora," says Ted proudly. "BGP's patrons today are King Mswati III of Eswatini and the late Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, who was the first president of the World Wildlife Fund. Early BGP trustees included Sir Peter Scott and Lord Howick of Glendale who, as Sir Evelyn Baring, was the last colonial Governor of Kenya, where he had been a staunch supporter of George Adamson's work with lions.

"We are very proud of the fact that BGP receives no financial support from the government and has achieved financial viability by developing its own tourism and associated revenues, an accomplishment that is virtually unique in Africa. As well as the park at Mlilwane, BGP also administers three further conservation parks including Hlane Royal National Park, which is held by King Mswati III in trust for the nation. All four parks are afforded the highest possible levels of protection under Eswatini law. Over the years, we have reintroduced and ensured the survival of 23 species of large wild animals that had become locally extinct during and immediately after the years of colonial rule, including lion, elephant, both black and white rhino, buffalo, giraffe, tsessebe, eland, roan and sable antelope, and Jezebel has been integral to all of this."

I am especially interested to learn about how BGP makes itself relevant to the people of Eswatini, rather than just focussing on the international tourist market. "Over half of our visitors are emaSwati, or local Swazis," says Ted. "For any African wildlife conservation organisation to have this level of engagement from the local population is almost unheard of. Many of Eswatini's government ministers and other national leaders had their first experience of their country's wildlife heritage at Hlane or Mlilwane when they visited us on an organised school group tour in their youth. We are very proud to continue to provide young people with the opportunity to engage with nature, and to help them to appreciate the historical importance of these animals in the culture of our country."



Jezebel airborne!
A still from the
Anglia TV
documentary

Rejuvenated Jezebel with Laurie Muggleton (left) and Mick Reilly, ready for another adventure



“Over the years, we have reintroduced and ensured the survival of 23 species of large wild animals that had become locally extinct”

Meanwhile, sometime in the 1970s (no one can remember exactly when) the exhausted and battered Land Rover was resurrected. “She was sent away to an establishment in Eswatini to be restored to her former glory,” says Ted. “Unfortunately, this did not happen and by the time she was recovered she was just a shell. Every part that could be removed had been either stolen or sold, and all that was left was the chassis, bonnet and the remains of the body. It was tragic.”

The mortal remains were put out to grass but in 2014, when Eswatini celebrated 50 years of nature conservation, she was dragged out of the bush, dusted off, fitted with a pair of axles and placed on display in the museum at Mlilwane with a little narrative of her amazing contribution to conservation. And there she may have remained, a pale shadow of her former self and destined never to turn a wheel again.

But in 2018 the decision was taken to put Jezebel back into working order. The driving force for this bold and ambitious plan was Laurie Muggleton, a surveyor by profession and old school friend of Ted and Liz’s son, Mick. Laurie also happens to be a lifelong Land Rover enthusiast and the owner of several Series Is who uses a Defender 110 as his daily driver and for his job. Laurie has also restored a number of Land Rovers over the years.

“I’d seen the film of Jezebel in action as a young boy during the school holiday at the Reilly’s, and I was totally captivated. In October 2017 I was working in the Kalahari and camped under a tree. During the night I had a dream that I restored Jezebel and drove her to London! I woke in the morning thinking ‘Good Idea!’ I took a quick photo of the campsite where the idea took root.

“The next time I was in Swaziland, I told Ted. He has never let anyone touch Jezebel since she had been pilfered for pieces in the 1970s. He said to go ahead and do it, but Ted, Liz, Mickey and I all agreed that if Jezebel was going to be renovated it was

vital that all of the hard-won scars from her years in the bush needed to be preserved. No-one was interested in creating yet another factory-fresh, shiny restoration that is devoid of character and deprived of its own history.”

The renovation was completed by BGP’s own workshop team, overseen and supported by Laurie, who also coordinated the generous donations from Land Rover enthusiasts across Eswatini and South Africa. “A period-correct 1956 engine was donated, as well as a gearbox, axles and everything else that was needed,” says Laurie. “Parts that could not be found locally were ordered from the UK, including things like bearings, piston rings and distributor. Other items such as the fuel tank and brake lines were manufactured on-site at Mlilwane. The end result is an authentic example of how a working, period African Land Rover would have been kept running back in the day. Jezebel was completed in time for us to be able to drive her to Ted’s 80th birthday celebrations!”

“And now we want the wider community of Land Rover enthusiasts to see and appreciate Jezebel,” he says. “We want to give her the opportunity once again to contribute to the preservation of wild animals at Mlilwane. Raising funds is a constant challenge, and this has intensified to a critical degree with the collapse in tourism caused by the coronavirus pandemic, and the general decline in donations that wildlife charities and trusts are experiencing throughout Africa. It remains a hugely expensive business to keep animals like Hlane and Mkhaya’s rhinos safe from the ever-present risk of poaching, and we are planning to drive Jezebel from Eswatini to Solihull to raise funds for BGP’s work. We are already in discussion with several potential sponsors, and once the travel restrictions are eased, we hope to announce our plans.”

It is a noble and ambitious undertaking, and how wonderful it is that Jezebel might once again help Mlilwane’s wildlife conservation endeavours. When Jezebel does set off, LRM will be with her every inch of the way.