

HOW IT ALL STARTED

In 1973 a business I had in Cape Town went into liquidation. At that time I owned two acres of land in Hout Bay with very large aviaries of exotic birds kept for breeding. When the land was lost together with most other possessions in the liquidation process, I was finally left with the birds. Realizing that there was nothing more to lose I decided to follow a childhood dream: to concentrate on the breeding of birds and to create a bird park. Just up Valley Road it was possible to lease another piece of land where the aviaries could be reconstructed. Left without a car it took one full year to move the aviaries and birds with a wheelbarrow. This also meant that the birds had to be fed at two different places. When the task was completed and all the birds had been moved to the new accommodation, dogs broke into the property one night, ripped into most of the aviaries, and killed and maimed three quarters of all the birds. It was only through the kindness of neighbours, Mr and Mrs Mitchell, who arranged for the construction of a proper security fence, that the strength was regained to start all over again.

Beautiful things must be shared, and visitors to the Park we had right from the beginning, up to 300 on Sundays, but with limited financial support. Many official letters from the authorities demanded the aviaries be broken down, reversed through an application to the Administrator of the Cape who authorized a Recreation Park / Bird Park. Parking for ten cars on site, and toilet facilities were requested. As we did not adhere to separate facilities for the different race groups (apartheid), Divisional Council and nature conservation officials kept on insisting that World of Birds be closed down.

In 1979 an entrance fee was charged of 75 cents for adults and 25 cents for children (schools 10 cents per child), with the money going towards the care of sick and injured and baby birds and animals brought in daily by the public. Many people turned away in their expensive cars when they could not enter for free any more, but our four fulltime workers had to be paid. For the first four years I had to care all on my own, unable to rest for even one day, and taking all the sick and baby birds home in the evenings for extended care, as we had no indoor facilities, and no electricity.

Every day was too short for all the duties to be performed. It became increasingly difficult to cope with over 2000 healthy and handicapped birds and their specialized food requirements, the maintenance and improvements of the park, the construction and repairs of aviaries, and the demands from the public. Up to 200 birds and small animals were brought in every month by caring individuals, animal protection societies, conservation organizations and vets, and countless phone calls with requests for help and advice were handled from early morning till late at night.

The original intention of the early years, to create a Bird Park and to breed exotic birds, became far removed from escalating problems. Most aviaries were bursting with unproductive 'liabilities' which cost money every day and brought no return. There seemed to be only two alternatives: either not to accept injured and helpless creatures any more, or to approach the community for help. The responsibility for wild animal care could not rest with me alone. In spite of appeals for assistance, financial support has been sporadic and minimal.

This was written in 1979. Much has changed since, although no corporate or official support has ever been received. Caring for 3000 birds and animals of 400 different species, permanent staff now number 40, and the running costs are R600 000 per month. We have a no-kill policy, and birds/animals in need are still brought to the Sanctuary every day by the public to find help and care. The creation of World of Birds Wildlife Sanctuary and Monkey Park was an impossibility right from the very beginning. It is a Spiritual Creation, and a Heritage Site for the People of Cape Town.

Walter Mangold