

# THE GREAT KENYA WILDLIFE RIPOFF

What lies behind  
the recent ban  
on hunting—and  
why is the  
game declining?

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EDITOR

Last May, in a move heralded by many as a victory for wildlife, the government of Kenya announced a ban on big-game hunting. Unfortunately, reports from this East African country give every indication that the celebration is premature. In fact, some knowledgeable sources within Kenya are concerned that the ban is more a smokescreen to cover the continued activities of poachers than a serious attempt to protect the animals. They claim that instead of helping wildlife, the cessation of hunting will only further enrich the pockets of the corrupt elite ruling class of the nation—the family, relatives, and friends of aging President Jomo Kenyatta.

Because in politics-torn Africa, Kenya is a relatively “free” country and because it has been able to maintain a fragile “peace,” western governments—and particularly the United States and England—have continued to close an eye to economic and political corruption, says Julian Mounter, producer of a recent BBC television program, “The Elephant Run,” and author of an article on Kenya in *The Listener*, the magazine of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

“Behind the poaching of ivory and the slaughter of Kenya’s other wildlife,” Mounter wrote, “are some of the country’s most influential people. And the [Kenya] government does little to prevent it. Because Kenya has ‘peace’ and because it is ‘free’ it is treated by the United States and other western governments as a special case in Africa,” he said, noting that critics have complained of a tendency on the part of Europe and America to ignore a country’s ills on the basis that it is better to deal with a “partially corrupt capitalist country” than with a communist one, and “too much criticism of President

Kenyatta’s government might damage the country’s fragile stability and allow a further spread of Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban influence.”

The Kenya government on May 19, 1977, announced a total ban on hunting, claiming the move was made to prevent further endangering of threatened wildlife species.

Protectionist organizations, much of the Kenya press, and a considerable number of foreign news media—uninformed on game management practices—immediately jumped onto the “save-our-vanishing-wildlife” bandwagon without looking into the facts or considering the possible economic and political reasons for the ban.

Some of the suggested real reasons for the ban are sobering indeed. In 1973 the government halted elephant hunting and in 1974 banned all dealing and export of raw ivory in response to world pressures over the drastic reduction in Kenya’s elephant herds. Speaking of this ban, Minister of Tourism and Wildlife Mathews Ogutu told Julian Mounter that “I can confidently say that poaching is now being reduced to a minimum.”

This is far from the truth. Knowledgeable sources in Kenya estimate that there are fewer than 100,000 elephants left in the country and they are being reduced at the rate of between 10,000 and 20,000 each year by poachers. Although legal, licensed big-game hunters had never taken more than a fraction of that number and had never sold their tusks on any market, the hunting ban was heralded as the salvation of Kenya’s wildlife. Meanwhile, trade in ivory and other wild animal products has gone on.

Today there are approximately 200 curio shops operating in Nairobi, the capital ([Continued on page 85](#))

city of Kenya, selling everything from ivory to leopard claws to zebra skins to jewelry made of dikdik horns and hooves. Dealing is widespread in spite of the government "ban." According to the BBC, there are at least ten different companies exporting ivory to such international ports as Hong Kong, the primary market, in spite of the "ban." One of these companies is the United African Corporation, whose chairman of the board and principal stockholder is Margaret Kenyatta, the daughter of the longtime president of Kenya.

In his comprehensive article in *The Listener*, reporter Mounter wrote that he was shown export licenses this last spring that had been issued to private companies by the government in spite of the ban, which was dated August 10, 1974. Asked by Mounter about the issuance of export licenses to such companies and specifically to the United African Corporation, Minister Ogutu said, "If there has been any export by a company, not the government, then I have no knowledge. And this, again, is a case of smuggling. This can happen. If it is brought to our attention, we will take the necessary action, under the law of the land."

Of the United African Corporation, Minister Ogutu said that the

corporation had been allowed to export before the ban, but "the ban affected that company as well as other companies." Yet *The Times* of London (August 24, 1975) reported that a license to export 1,250 baby elephant tusks was granted to UAC three months *after* the ban!

Even Americans made blasé by Watergate and constant U.S. political shenanigans should have no trouble figuring out that the big question is how such companies manage to get export licenses when exporting is banned.

Professional hunters, who have been thrown out of work since the ban, told *FIELD & STREAM* at the Game Conservation International Conference in San Antonio, Texas, in May, that they are in dire need of objective news coverage in the American and foreign press to alleviate the intolerable situation. They noted that not only has the ban put the professional hunters out of work, but it has cut off the millions of dollars spent each year by foreign big-game hunters, which formerly helped enable the Kenya Game Department to manage wildlife herds, maintain anti-poaching squads, finance game department operations, and train upcoming game biologists.

The Kenya government's claims

that wildlife was being endangered by licensed big-game hunters is absurd, Harry Tennison, president of Game Conservation International, said. "The total number of licensed foreign big-game hunters in any year in Kenya never topped 300," he noted. "The money spent by legitimate hunters reached all levels of Kenya's society and certainly its most important result was to maintain trained game department personnel and provide some anti-poaching programs. All that is gone, now," Tennison added. "Not only will the elephants continue to suffer from the poachers, but so will every animal wearing a skin that is wanted by the curio dealers. Licensed hunters don't sell their trophies to dealers," he pointed out. "In all my professional life as a conservationist and hunter, I have never seen a legitimate big-game hunter do anything with his trophies but bring them home. There is a law in Africa that prevents the sale of trophies by hunters. The curio shops are getting ivory and skins from two sources: the rotten elements of the government and the poachers who work for both them and the illicit dealers."

In addition, the tragedy of African wildlife species being threatened by unthinking tourists on photo

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"In an untouched herd, the tusks of a bull elephant may weigh 100 pounds each," he wrote. "But in the heavily poached herds of Kenya, an average tusk now weighs twenty pounds or less. Thus in an untouched herd, ten bull elephants might produce about one ton of ivory. But the calculation made by experts is that in Kenya each ton of ivory now represents the death of up to fifty beasts. Kenya's export of 345 tons or more of ivory in 1973 required the death of at least 15,000 elephants!"

NOBODY knows for sure what the poaching situation is like in "Big Daddy" Idi Amin's Uganda, but Dr. Keith Eltringham of Cambridge University has reported that the situation as of last spring had reached "crisis" levels. According to Dr. Eltringham, in the Kabelega National Park, where in 1973 there were 14,300 elephants, there are now only 2,400 left. It would be hard to blame this decline on legitimate hunting. One resident of Kampala, capital city of Uganda, told BBC's Julian Mounter, "I think top government officials are involved, and this obviously includes some of the armed forces."

How do dealers get away with it? As in so much of the rest of the world, money talks. These people were described by Julian Mounter as a sort of "African Mafia. They survive by buying their way out of trouble, by bribing members of the police force, the game department, customs and excise officials and even members of anti-poaching squads." He further said that the commander of one of the major anti-poaching squads told him the dealers "can pay my men more than we can and so we have much trouble trying to keep our movements secret."

And what is the Kenya government doing about all this? Besides banning legitimate, licensed big-game hunting in May, in June Minister Ogotu announced a ban on all private agencies that were collecting money for the conservation of Kenya's wildlife. According to the *Nation*, Nairobi daily newspaper, Ogotu said that a new body—the Wildlife Fund Trustees Committee—would be responsible for the management of wildlife. "We will have no other organisations poking their noses into the management of our wildlife," the newspaper quoted him as saying.

Just how this new arrangement would benefit wildlife was not made clear, nor were the problems of poaching and illegal sale of wildlife covered in much detail. Even the *Nation*, which took credit for bringing about the hunting ban, expressed concern for the future, and in an editorial dated May 31, 1977, offered what it considered a workable plan. Included in the list of suggestions was the closing of the curio shops after a fixed period of time during which they could wind up their business; the establishment of a

safaris buying ivory, skins, teeth, claws, and other animal parts as souvenirs has not been publicized.

"It is the so-called protectionist," Tennison stated, "who will support an anti-hunting ban, then go over to Kenya to photograph all the lovely animals—and at the same time load up on souvenirs from the curio dealers who are exploiting African wildlife to extinction."

Several informed sources in Kenya have expressed their concern that removing the professional hunters and their parties from the bush would simply further open the way for poachers, since most outfitters had organized anti-poaching operations of their own. One went so far as to question the motives and timing of the ban itself.

"Mr. Ogotu emphasizes that the ban was timed to give the game a chance to recover and increase," our informant stated. "Unfortunately, we rather feel that a more likely reason for the timing is that the zebra migration will soon be coming out of the Serengeti and Mara and onto the Loita Plains. They [the government/illicit dealers and poachers] want hunting parties out of the way so the poachers can operate unhindered! These Masailand areas were made into hunting concessions, together with Magadi and those around Kajiado and Amboseli, and this is where most of the game is these days. The concessionaires, having paid handsomely for the privilege of

having the hunting concessions, were organizing anti-poaching units with some success."

Raw ivory sells for about 300 Kenya shillings, approximately 20 British pounds, or 43 dollars, per kilo (1 kilo equals 2.2 pounds). A well-endowed elephant could carry tusks worth many thousands of dollars. Although much of the ivory sold and exported is handled legally by the government and consists of tusks confiscated from poachers or found on elephants that had died of natural causes, an indication of the illicit export trade can be gotten from import-export figures recorded in Kenya and Hong Kong. According to Julian Mounter, Kenya authorities claimed that in 1975, 106 tons of ivory were exported to Hong Kong, which is unquestionably the center of the world ivory trade. But figures from Hong Kong customs (where ivory is a perfectly legal import product) showed that during this same period exports from Kenya totalled 148 tons. The latest figures the BBC reporter was able to get for the period of July to September 1976 indicated that the discrepancy amounts to more than 122 tons!

John Barry, a reporter for the *Sunday London Times*, author of an incredible six-part series on Kenya and its political and economic picture (August 10-24, 1975) said that "simple arithmetic demonstrates the carnage [the tonnage arriving in Hong Kong] represents.

stringent set of penalties for poaching; and the enlistment of professional hunters associations to serve as what the newspaper called "honorary game wardens" to help keep down poaching.

At the time of the hunting ban, there were 106 active professional hunters in Kenya—sixteen of whom were Africans. But on June 1, Minister Ogotu told a *Nation* reporter, who had asked him whether members of the East African Professional Hunters Association should be given the chance to help the government conserve wildlife, "The government already has enough personnel to deal with this." He then added that there was "only one anti-poaching unit," which would be diversified "in due course." According to John Barry's series in the *London Times*, the Game Department's anti-poaching unit, which prior to the merger between this department and the National Parks had the responsibility for all non-park land in Kenya, amounted to only forty men with no aircraft and few vehicles.

It seems that this beleaguered force is in for some help. During a press conference televised early in June, Minister Ogotu reported that the World Bank had loaned the country "a substantial amount" of money, of which some 24 million Kenya shillings (about 3.4 million dollars) would be spent on anti-poaching activities, including ground equipment, helicopters, and the like. Subsequent reports indicate that the actual loan is more than \$35 million, with nearly \$5.3 million to be spent on three anti-poaching units. The rest of the \$30-some million would go into various wildlife tourism projects, including the construction of roads, dispensaries, and other facilities in game areas. Whether this expenditure, hailed as a boost for wildlife, includes construction of a huge tourist complex on the south coast is not known. *FIELD & STREAM* was told, however, that receipt of the World Bank loan was contingent on the government doing something constructive to stop poaching.

MEANWHILE, the trade in wildlife products goes on. At his June press conference, Minister Ogotu was asked what intentions he had for the curio dealers in Kenya. His answer was less than reassuring: "At the moment the curio shops are fully stocked," he stated. "Anyway, the ban does not affect them because the curio shops never got their supplies from the hunters. The curio shops have been and continue to be supplied with the ivory and other trophies from the Ministry stock." These trophies, Ogotu went on to say, come from animals that have died of old age, drought, accident, or were confiscated from poachers.

From descriptions of the curio stores, however, it is hard to believe that natural mortality could account for the quantity and variety of wildlife products on hand.

"All sorts of high ranking politi-

cians, civil servants, and public figures are in the curio trade," *FIELD & STREAM* was told. "The number of curio shops has increased enormously over the years, and now it seems that almost every other shop in Nairobi is a curio store dealing in game trophies and full of ivory and ivory carvings, zebra skins, lion and leopard claw jewelry, mounted lions and lion skin rugs. Some of these are cubs less than 1 year old. There are wart hog tusks, dikdik horns and hooves made into jewelry and, of course, piles and piles of game skin rugs, coats and handbags.

"These things are mainly bought by the photographers and group tourists," our informant continued, "and it is *they* who help keep the trade going. If we could get the anti-hunting and anti-killing lobby to turn their energies into persuading these tourists not to patronize the curio shops, it might begin to have an effect and help conserve the game. In Europe apparently there is a move afoot along these lines and they are trying to organize a campaign."

THERE are those who claim that the "high government officials" who condone or engage in the illicit ivory trade reach as far up as President Jomo Kenyatta. *London Times* reporter John Barry says Kenyatta himself made the scramble for ivory possible in 1960 following the Mau Mau War. Approached by destitute ex-Mau Mau who wanted to sell illicit ivory they had hidden in the forests during the rebellion, Kenyatta devised "collectors" letters. These empowered the holders to hack ivory from elephants found dead in the bush and bring it to government depots where it would be purchased.

There were two things wrong with this system, according to Barry. There was no way of checking to see whether the elephant was dead at the time the "collector" first saw it, and there was no guarantee that the ivory would end up at the government ivory depot. Furthermore, there was nothing to prevent unauthorized documents from being produced, and when forgeries and even photocopies of the "collectors" letters began to circulate, the whole system degenerated into a national farce.

The farce continues today, this time with Minister of Tourism and Wildlife Ogotu as the principal spokesman. According to the Nairobi newspaper, *The Standard*, Ogotu is now accusing the developed countries of encouraging poaching by providing a market for game trophies. Yet his department continues to defend the curio shops in his own country. At a recent meeting of the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, Tourism and Wildlife Deputy Secretary J. D. Wandera stated that since the ban on hunting, all dealers are supposed to get their wildlife stocks from government stores. (Ogotu had previously admitted that no curio trophies came from hunters, but that's another story.) And where does the

government get its stocks? From "animal cropping, animals found dead, and those confiscated from illegal dealers," Wandera explained. Unfortunately, this explanation is hard to accept for those familiar with Kenya. Although it is possible for ivory to be found in quantity, how many skins of animals dead of natural causes would remain intact long enough for them to be brought to the government store? And just because a poached animal product is confiscated doesn't make it less of a poaching problem. Just recently it was reported that some 30 thousand dikdik horns found in the possession of a poacher were confiscated, and then ordered sold to the curio dealers—where they were destined to go in the first place.

In Nairobi, the *Daily Nation* is beginning to ask some serious questions about the true state of wildlife affairs. In a strongly worded editorial dated August 6, 1977, the paper said: "Poaching shows no signs of abating; if anything, the reports in the media indicate that it is rife, that animals are being killed in large numbers in our national parks. . . . Will the Minister tell the public what he is doing to ensure that the animals that increase and multiply are safe from destruction? And can he

also say if he is going to do something about the sale of game trophies in such large quantities that they cannot possibly have come from legitimate sources? If he is not, why not?"

All of these points raise questions in the minds of FIELD & STREAM editors, and we are sure in the minds of the hunting public and the real conservationists of the world.

Is U.S. foreign policy—in previous administrations as well as the Carter one—talking out of both sides of its mouth? How can the U.S. support a strong Endangered Species Act in its own country and at the same time turn a blind eye to what is happening in Kenya? Although the government of Jomo Kenyatta may be defined as "free" and temporarily "safe" from the intrusions that have influenced too many other African nations, is it honest for our government to officially sanction a nation which, from all indications, not only began but actively supports an international illicit trade in illegally harvested wildlife? Where do we define value? What is the value/relationship between political belief on one hand and the age-old treasure of the great herds of African wildlife?

FIELD & STREAM recommends that

several actions be taken:

The international ivory trade should be administered by an International Trust—possibly under the jurisdiction of the United Nations. That trust would see to it that all ivory exported and imported came only from animals that could be certified to have died of natural causes or from official cropping by government game departments in cases of overcrowding or disease.

The curio industry should be strictly policed to see that no parts of endangered wild animals are bartered for profit. This should be instituted world wide.

Professional hunters (licensed) who have gained such a great store of knowledge of game management conditions in Africa should be hired by the various African and Asian governments in the capacity of game management advisors.

Legitimate, licensed hunting should be reinstated in Africa for game species not endangered, with the license fees being used to help stop poaching and for wildlife management programs.

Finally, the United States should impose strict economic and political sanctions upon any African nation that takes part in or encourages the illicit trade in wildlife. 