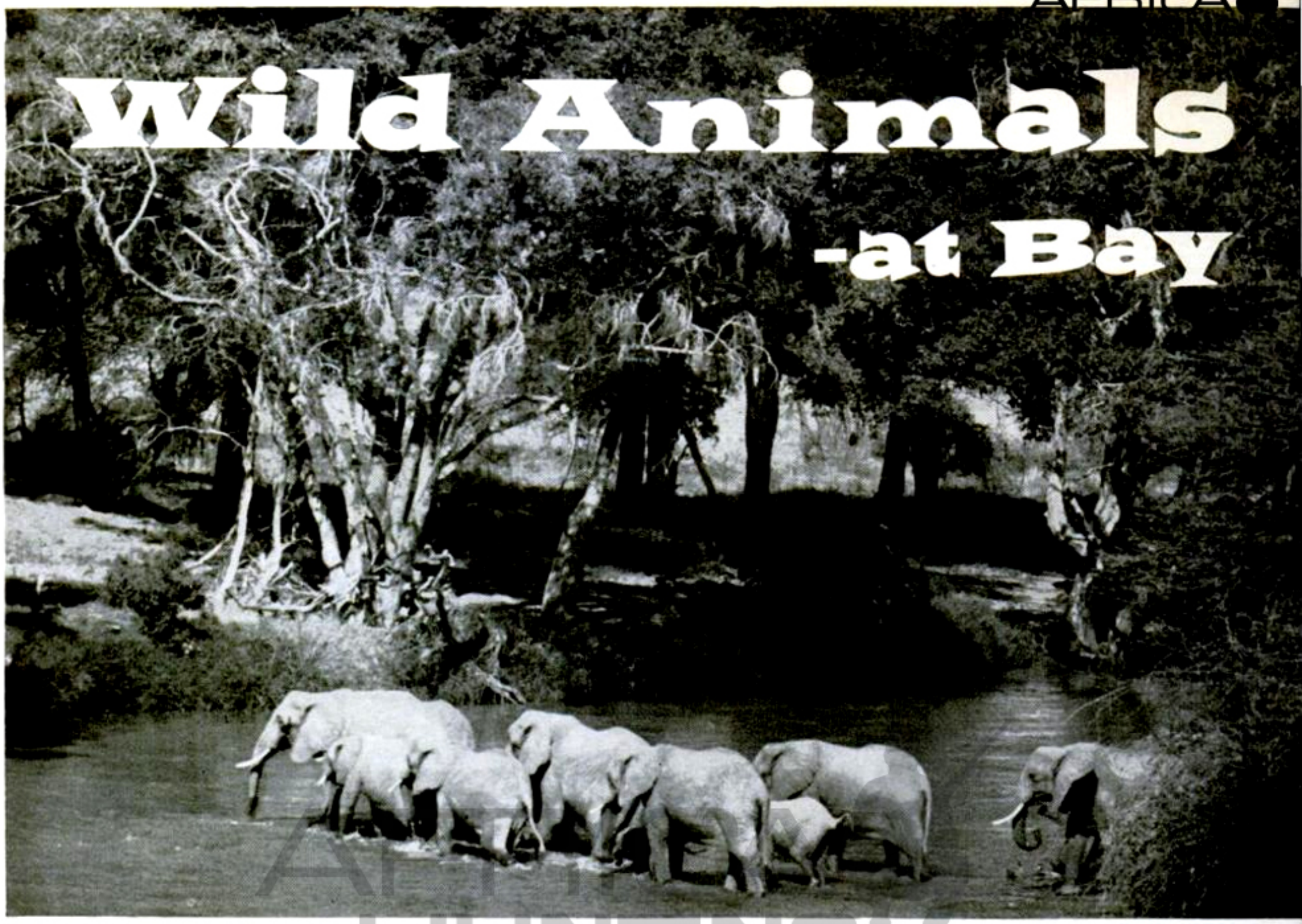


"There is (as yet) no shortage of elephant," though poachers kill hundreds a year. These are crossing Kenya's Uaso Nyiro River.

Illegal slaughter and expanding humanity threaten the existence of Africa's game.

By DONALD KER

WHEN I first came to Africa in 1911, half a century ago, the accepted ideas of the continent were couched in terms of exploration and missionary work, unlimited ivory, the terrors of disease and witchcraft, but withal—in the newspaper sense—romance. The news and jargon of today are so much more severe: trade unions and hydroelectric projects, industrial expansion and constitutional advance. That is a measure of the vast evolutionary change that has swept across Africa in the space of my lifetime, a change precocious in some territories, more languid in others, but everywhere and all-embracing; its roots in ambitions and national rivalries, its branches groping anxiously in every field of progress. The drums . . . to talk of television. The rites of barbarism . . . to the rights of man.

In the context of Africa's wildlife, the changes have been no less fundamental, every bit as immense. One change is obvious: complete transformation in many areas or zones from the untampered herds and migration routes of years ago to the game stocks now left, worriedly scrutinized or still dwindling today. Another change has been inevitable: that from the pace and idea of porter safaris into relatively unknown country—as when I started professional hunting in 1926—to the intensity and speed of highly mechanized, precisely equipped, and carefully controlled safaris which distinguish this decade. With this latter form of evolution has come, gladly enough, a revolution in purpose and technique: the old ideas on sport through killing have been tempered by the lure—no whit less noble—of observation, understanding. Thus, while the hunting of elephant, buffalo or leopard, or kudu and sable, under rigid conditions of sportsmanship, can exercise the mind and muscles, stir the blood, yet in

ever-increasing hands today the camera brings more bounty than the gun.

That neatly presages the greatest change of all: the change in mankind's attitude of mind. In a sense this has come through a reassessment of luxury values, through knowledge—almost shock—that the erstwhile luxury of abundance has given place, in what remains, to the luxury of scarceness. It is neat, and heartening, that the conscience and the science of conservation have entered the scene in time. It is a miracle—usefully acknowledged while the eyes of the world rest so avidly on Africa —that so much does remain.

My task for the remainder of this article, which can barely in such length scratch the surface of the subject, must be to put these reflections in perspective.

Africa south of the Sahara is huge territory. There are the East African countries, which I know most intimately, of Kenya and Tanganyika and Uganda, and these beyond doubt contain the greatest residue, in terms of numbers and variety, of game. There are the Federation territories: the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, lying above the great loom of South Africa from Limpopo to the Cape. There are Portuguese territories—Mozambique and Angola; the yawning Belgian Congo; the huge forests of French Equatorial Africa reaching toward the enigma and experiment of gathering independence in Africa's West.

So much that I must say, therefore, can be but generalization. A point that is relevant here may be inapposite there; but, as in all such instances, the device of generalization will contain the aura of truth.

Clearly enough, the greatest single cause of decline in game numbers and loss of wilderness areas has been the phenomenon of human expansion. This itself has had two aspects: first, a fantastic acceleration over 50 years in sheer numbers of human beings with their livestock and paraphernalia and needs, resulting from the introduction of security and administration, education and medicine, improved agrarian techniques, and all those services often described as the horrors of colonialism; secondly, the almost unbelievable creation, over such a short period, of cities and communications and industries and agricultural projects, thrusting into Africa, damming up migration routes, pushing the wildlife aside. Both these aspects, while not yet disastrous, have in the context been inevitably damaging; yet the attitude underlying development has, if anything, been even more damaging. Only now are Governments generally paying heed to voices that hitherto have been crying for the wilderness. So much destruction, hitherto, has been caused and threatened by expansion ignorant of or indifferent to the conservation of primary natural resources: water sources and the land.

Hunting is often held to be a major cause of game decimation, but in such a view rationality is required. It is possible to single out, historically, events in South Africa, or in French and Belgian territories, or in parts of almost any territory, that

Donald Ker is one of the most famous "white hunters" and best shots in all Africa. Yet, as Alan Moorehead reports in No Room in the Ark, *"Having spent half a lifetime hunting in the bush—at the age of 16 he was already out on his own, sometimes for months at a time, shooting elephant—he [Ker] cannot now bear to destroy a wild animal . . . except for food; and even that he does with reluctance." As director of Ker & Downey Safaris, Ltd., Nairobi, Kenya, and as honorary park warden for the national parks of both Kenya and Uganda, he much prefers to lead camera safaris. His latest book is* African Adventure *(Stackpole).*

resulted some decades ago in most distressing slaughter of plains game or elephant or lion. But the professional hunting of today, as practiced in East Africa and elsewhere, does not fall in this category. It is rigidly controlled, both in extent and in its code; it is selective; the mere presence of hunting parties will frequently discourage or prevent far more disastrous, illegal techniques.

This leads, of course, to poaching, and there is no doubt whatever that poaching, over this past decade, has been the greatest scourge that African animals have ever had to face. In East Africa alone, the richest game areas, the poaching toll in the past few years has certainly exceeded 300 animals per day. I repeat: per day. The impetus is easy to follow. In the old days the illegal slaughter of game—called poaching for convenience—had its roots in environment: animals were killed by the African peoples for food or clothing or weapons and utensils, in protection, or to accumulate the impedimenta of witchcraft. The scale was relatively trivial in its impact. But in recent times, poaching has become highly and viciously commercialized. The black-market prices of ivory and rhino horn have rocketed, offering the lure of fantastic profits to receivers and middlemen on the colorful (or shoddy, according to

point of view) East African water fronts, the traders who pull these particular strings. Inland, greatly increased purchasing power among teeming African communities, springing from coffee or cotton or whatever it may be, has created a lustful market for meat and tails and other things. With the onset of new markets has marched new organization and new techniques. Poison arrows and muzzle-loaders and pits have long been with us, though never on today's scale. Steel-wire snares, stolen from mines and ginneries or even (nowadays) freely on sale, have provided the modern murderous technique. Crafty minds, at the center of a web of pitiless organization, with transport at its command, and skilled in law evasion, have been—all across the face of Africa—winning the day. But, at last, public outrage is aroused.

There are other, and comparatively small-scale, factors in the narrative of wildlife destruction. It can certainly be argued that modern four-wheel-drive vehicles, through their ability to penetrate swiftly once-inaccessible terrain, have helped to thin the stocks, both through direct destruction and through the effect—which we still do not fully understand—of disturbance on animal resilience and breeding potential. In some territories (Rhodesia is a justly favorite example) the slaughter of game in an inept endeavor to eliminate tsetse fly has been sickening both in scale and in effect; elsewhere, prior to the now-hopeful results of spraying techniques, tracts of Africa have been bulldozed clear of bush and vegetation, with results, yet to be fully felt, that can only bring smiles to the desert.

Control shooting by game departments in defense of crops and projects has been, as a matter of policy, inevitable, and, broadly speaking, over the whole face of Africa it does not rate as catastrophe. Isolated incidents or qualifications stand out, however, notably affecting the status of rhino and lion. Last under this heading might come a note about capture and export of animals, and here, in its effect, I would just mention cheetah.

In the face of all pressures and assaults it really seems miraculous, as suggested earlier, that so much game remains. In latter years the fact can be ascribed in part to conservation practice. But over the longer period it is the sheer vast magnitude of Africa that has been on the animals' side. For all of Johannesburg and Nairobi and Elizabethville; for all of Kariba and coffee and railway networks and the Copperbelt scene; for all of parliaments and universities and oil and Coca Cola . . . yet tracts of desert and forest and mountain and swamp, and even snaches of plain, lie brooding today under the changeless African sun, much as they always were.

Of course when saying, as must be said, that the huge animal accumulations encountered by the early hunters are no more, this does not mean that the girth and sweep of Africa do not still hold their faunal wonderment, regarded by many as the greatest natural phenomenon left to the world. But it does underline the need for perspective in assessing or describing the stocks of today.

It is quite impossible, in this space, for me to mention or relate specific remarks to all the species and subspecies of animals and birds and reptiles that make up the composite lure of Africa. Still less am I able to subdivide such remarks in respect of different territories or zones. But what I can and will do, in the cause of perspective, is to look very briefly at the status of East Africa, as wildlife's heart and cradle.

Taking the "Big Five" first, there is (as yet) no shortage of elephant, although big tuskers are notably scarcer. Over these past few years, buffalo, quite decidedly, have seemed on the increase. The position with rhino and lion is infinitely more disturbing: of course, there are odd pockets where these animals seem plentiful, but over the countries as a whole regulations for the sharply increased protection of these species have been introduced, and nobody is inclined to call them premature. Leopard, in the cause of stock protection, and for the value of their skins, have taken a considerable beating, but

"There yet remain in these fascinating lands [of East Africa] large herds of wildebeest and zebra." Game is scarcer elsewhere.

there are forested and mountain areas and river country where leopard are still profuse.

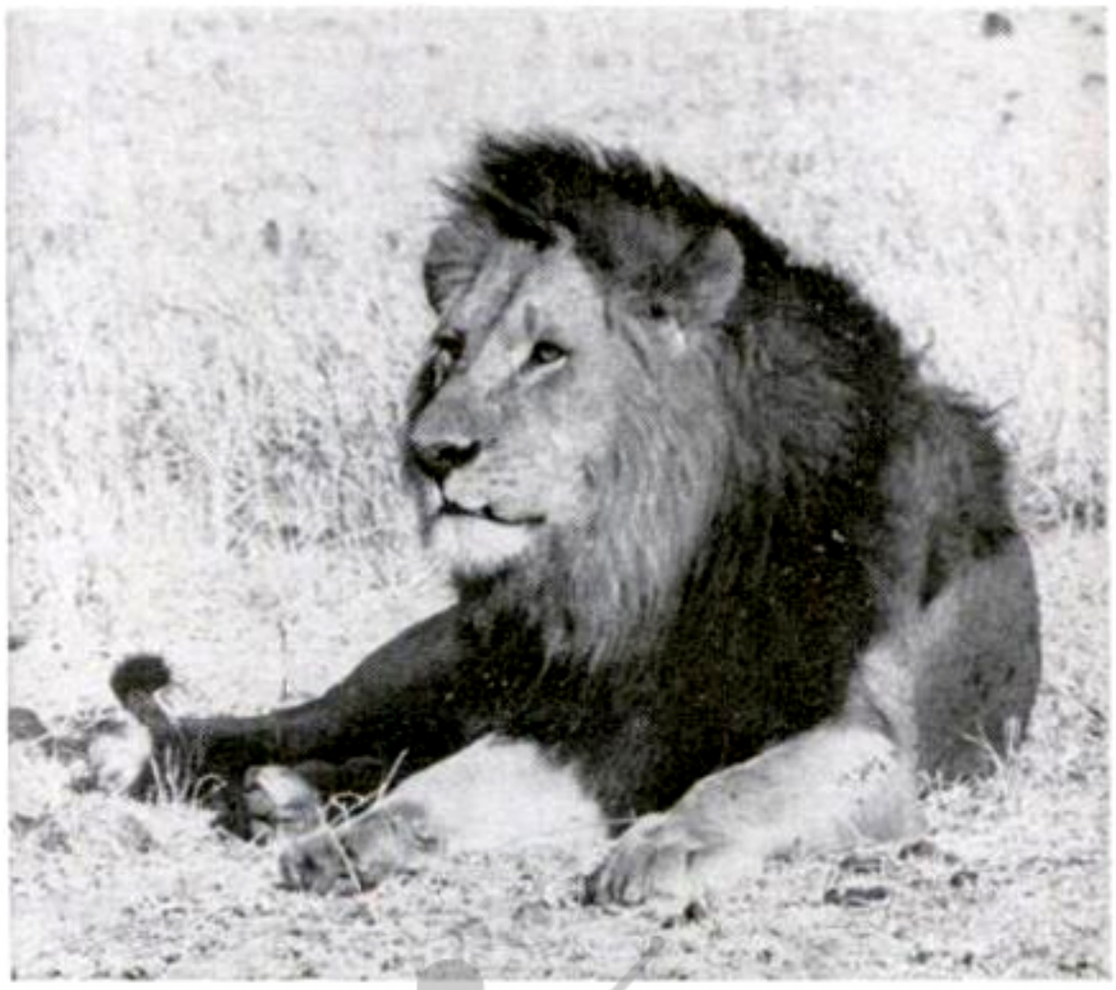
Still more rapidly: Hippo, in the panorama, are plentiful, but crocodile have been horribly poached. Cheetah are becoming decidedly scarce. Kudu can be found, and sable can frequently be found, but roan are now rare. Though confined to narrower migration routes and grazing grounds, there yet remain in these fascinating lands large herds of wildebeest and zebra, Tommy and Grant's gazelles, kongoni and impala, eland and giraffe; to some, the bush-fringed plains breathe most of Africa, so that these—with topi and oryx, wart hog and ostrich, hyena and jackal—put zest and meaning into the balm of each African day.

Although a few of the individual conservation projects in Africa are comparatively venerable, it is only in recent times that the idea of the management of game resources has appeared or appealed as a feature of deliberate policies.

THE direct impetus, over the continent as a whole, has been the increasing scarcity of viable stocks of game. Using that as a key, Governments and peoples have come to realize that they were in danger of losing, by default, a significant cultural heritage, a phenomenon that should be held in trust for mankind and that could be matched, as a source of national possession and pride, with the arts and institutions of more emergent lands. Then, apart from cultural or aesthetic value, Governments have been increasingly advised, from their domestic scientific staffs and by visitors from overseas, that their game and wilderness areas were of very real scientific consequence: intrinsically, and as the cradle for important ecological research. Coupled with this has come the new understanding that preservation of game and wilderness areas was a vital factor in the fight against erosion, the battle for water and the conflict with the desert; wild Africa was needed, as a bastion guarding the flanks and vitals of developed land. There has arisen the belief that game cropping (game farming) might be designed as a proper and rewarding land use. And, finally, there has emerged the competitive scramble all over Africa for tourist revenue, in its cash and goodwill aspects, which depends for its lure on the presence and presentation of wildlife.

Thus, the conservation and management of game have come to seem both necessary and urgent. When confronted at first, there were obvious problems. One of the greatest was lack of knowledge: so many of us in Africa could contribute a great deal of piecemeal knowledge based on long experience and observation, but there was no classified data springing from disciplined study. Research projects had to be envisaged, but stubbed their toes always on finance. This point—sheer lack of money—has been a massive and enduring problem. It has frustrated so many of the efforts and disheartened the staffs of game departments and national parks; it has held up water schemes and road building and all forms of development; it has vastly hindered antipoaching foray; it has loomed over game affairs with the awful logic of young and poor communities in which so many other things have seemed essential first.

Nonetheless, we have, spread across Africa, a chain of variously designated national parks and game reserves. Names like Kruger, Wankie, Selous, Serengeti, Gorongoza, Tsavo, Amboseli, Murchison Falls, Parc National Albert, are of world renown. They are supported or surrounded, in many cases, by other or intermediate styles of sanctuary—partial reserves, controlled areas, closed districts, and the like. The idea of control and preservation is widespread, from the Indian Ocean to the equatorial jungles and the desert's fringe. Mankind has stirred slowly, often with parsimony or under handicap. But, at last, mankind has stirred.



"The position with rhino and lion is infinitely more disturbing." Here, a great black-maned lion basks in the sun.

Admirable work has been commenced, and the record of Government intent displays that more will yet be undertaken. It has saved much; it stands between wildlife and ultimate disaster.

But . . . it is not yet systematic. It is sporadic. And not only is it sporadic, but also it does not carry universal conviction among the peoples of these lands. Traditionally, the African peoples have been indifferent to or inimical toward wildlife. Their ignorance is profound. Our duty and opportunity now are to remedy this by massive schemes of education, and by policies which give the African both a tangible and a psychological stake in all that needs to be done. There is heartening evidence that this is recognized, and that coherent undertaking—through reward and example—will yet meet with fuller African response.

Well, there it is. The half century cannot easily be patterned in words. So many ills have their roots in enormous material progress ill matched, as yet, by human preparedness and comprehension. In the context of game, much has been plucked, if only just, from the abyss, and dedication is not lacking for the years that lie ahead.

In that, at least, we find belief and consolation. Men, and their hopes, must go on.