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Northern Rhodesia's Protected Animals

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IN 1952 I wrote an article for this magazine which appeared in the issues for March and June (Volume 6, numbers 1 and 2).

Since writing this, the Fauna Conservation Ordinance (1954) has replaced the previous Game Ordinance in Northern Rhodesia, in which the schedules of game permitted on the various forms of licence have been a good deal revised, an important point in the new legislation being the complete protection of the females of certain species, for only male Kudu, Reedbuck, Impala, Roan and Sable antelopes may now be killed.

I want now to review the position as it is today and so bring the previous account up to date. To facilitate comparison I shall use the same serial numbers for each species as in the former article and, as before, only Northern Rhodesia proper is considered, (not including the Barotse Province).

1. AARDWOLF (*Proteles cristatus* subsp.).

In 1954 an aardwolf was killed on a farm about 8 miles south-west of Mazabuka town. This is the third definite record of the animal from N.R. and it is still known only from the Southern Province, the previous ones having come from Kalomo and Tara. Mr. Bruce-Miller, however, believes it to occur in the vicinity of his farm, about a dozen miles north of Choma, which seems likely enough as it is between known localities of the species.

While it is understandable enough that such things as bats, shrews and the like should be little known, and accordingly many species recorded only once or twice in the country, it does seem strange that an animal the size of an aardwolf should be so seldom encountered. The farmer on whose land it was killed did not know it, nor did any of his boys, and on being shown the skin not one of the Game Department hunters or guards at Mazabuka, even the most experienced of them, could recognise the animal. It did not prove possible, either, to get a definite vernacular name for it. Apropos of this question, I have, since writing about it in 1952, ascertained that the name "Dintingwe" (which I found under "Aardwolf" in an old Tonga dictionary, written many years ago), is used alternatively with the more usual "Fungwe" for the common civet (*Civettictis civetta*) and may or may not be applicable to the aardwolf. The compiler of the dictionary may not have known the one animal from the other, and it is not conceivable that the Tonga themselves make no distinction. The vernacular name, like the animal itself, remains

the lions would reach up and pat the gong with his paw—producing the faint tinkling sound—whereupon they would all regard it in a puzzled and interested way, with their heads held quizzically on one side. They took not the slightest notice of the barking dogs, who, as usual, were scampering fitfully from place to place all around, but quite clearly were greatly intrigued by the effect of the tinkling piece of iron. After watching this remarkable spectacle for as long as he wished, Ledebor retired once more to bed. However, as the furious barking continued, he failed to get to sleep again. Suddenly there was a scampering sound, followed by an agonised yelp from one of the dogs and an angry growl from a lion; and it seemed that one of the dogs had become over-venturesome and had "paid the supreme penalty."

Presently new sounds were audible outside the front garden, and these suggested that something was being dragged about rather hurriedly. Taking his torch, Ledebor again rose and went to the front door of his gauzed-in stoep, and from here he witnessed yet another remarkable sight. The lions were evidently enjoying a game with the carcass of the dog. One of them would seize it and romp away with it, until finally another would catch him up and snatch it from his jaws, and so on. They made no attempt to eat the dead dog, and finally they left it lying in the grass, when they eventually strolled away into the bush.



Red Lechwe photographed by Major W. E. Poles, M.C., on the Kafue Flats, showing typical flooded plain habitat.

Natives kill them for the scales if they get the chance, and they are sometimes illegally hawked for sale alive, though I doubt if these practices have any great effect on total numbers.

I understand it has now been definitely reported from the Namwala sector of the Kafue National Park.

12. YELLOW-BACKED DUIKER (*Cephalophus sylvicultor*)

There is nothing to add to my previous notes. One is now allowed on the Supplementary Licence, though this will hardly affect its status. Its secretive and solitary habits, and the dense cover it frequents, are its best protection.

13 BLACK RHINOCEROS (*Diceros bicornis*)

The rhinoceros, happily, is now completely protected in N.R.

In Kasempa, in the National Park, they continue to do as well as can be expected, and though still not great in numbers, there is reason to hope they have been saved permanently there. They also exist further South, in the Mumbwa sector of the Park, and at least in one place in the Namwala portion.

There are a few rhinoceros left in the Luano valley, but in the Gwembe part of the Zambesi valley, while one or two apparently survive, they are but a remnant with no hope of re-establishing in quantity. (Incidentally the Kariba Gorge area was once a well-known rhino locality.)

I have no current information about the species in the Lavushi Manda and Mweru Marsh Game Reserves, nor the Mafunshi-Luwembo part of Ndola district, in all of which a few only are thought still to exist.

The Luangwa valley is the real stronghold of rhinoceros in N.R. to-day. They are common enough and doing well in several parts, including the Game Reserves.

14. TSESSEBE (*Damaliscus lunatus*)

Reports of the numbers of this antelope surviving in the Serenje and Mpika districts, to the South-east of Lake Bangweulu, are a little conflicting.

Senior Game Ranger Major W. E. Poles, who has known the area for some years, stated in his annual report for 1952 that he considered the species was slowly decreasing, though the decline had been arrested to some extent by the protection they have been given in recent years.

During the aerial survey of lechwe made over the Bangweulu area in April, 1954, only 80 were seen, the biggest herd being 40.

Mr. C. W. Benson, Provincial Game Officer of the Northern Province, considers Major Poles correct in believing the species on the decrease.

On the other hand Mr. L. Estcourt, Game Ranger, Serenje, has written me as follows:—

"In the Serenje district the only place (they are) found is in an area by the Lulimala river on the 'Mukuku' flats, about 250 square miles. Total population estimated at 700, (largest herd yet counted 121). Unfortunately they are at a disadvantage during the rainy season, being forced from the plains to the borders of the timber country thereby opening themselves to poaching which is at present being experienced on an alarming scale. Considering these animals were reported in Pitman's time as being in several thousands it is quite apparent they are on the decrease. There are quite a lot more tsessebe across the Lulimala river in the Mpika district, and I estimate that their numbers are at least 1,500. This report was given to me by my Senior Game Guard who organised a tour there last year (1955)."

It appears possible, in view of Mr. Estcourt's statement, that the tsessebe are driven by the flood waters to the bush fringe and that the air survey may have missed the majority. I do not know exactly the extent of the inundation that year, but even after comparatively light rains it seems unlikely that the water would have sufficiently receded by April to uncover the major part of the flats the tsessebe inhabit in the dry season.

Mr. Estcourt has since informed me that his African staff are quite positive that there are many more tsessebe on the Mpika side than in Serenje district, and if this is correct, it is evident that Poles and Benson may have assessed the population as rather less than it is.

But, even if Estcourt's view is the more correct one, there is little cause for complacency, for, in spite of the legal pro-