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CONGO EDEN

A comprehensive portrayal of the historical background and scientific aspects of the great game sanctuaries of the Belgian Congo with the story of a six months' pilgrimage throughout that most primitive region in the heart of the African continent.

by

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With Illustrations and Map



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graphing elephants and are cruising around in their usual haunts, it isn't exactly satisfying to be able to see only a little family of wart hogs or a baboon or two. All of which is to suggest that the unexpected usually happens in the jungle.

Ever since I had first answered the call of the wild in my own land, among grizzlies, moose, caribou and bighorns of the Canadian Northwest, I had done considerable still photography—some of it good, some poor. But it had been only in the Transvaal and in Portuguese East Africa ten years before that I had attempted to make any motion pictures. Then I had taken from the United States the 35 mm. Akeley camera; and in addition, one of the greatest of animal photographers in Africa, the late Paul Selby, had most graciously loaned me his Eyemo, which was a lighter camera for me to handle. I had done rather well on this trip. So now I had obtained the little brother of the Eyemo camera, the 16 mm. Filmo, as previously mentioned. And since reaching the Congo I had studied the instruction book at every opportunity and I would spend parts of the days and often of the nights loading and unloading the camera with dummy film.

My first venture with the Filmo was scheduled to occur at Vitshumbi on Lake Edward. Quite a number of park and government notables had foregathered at Rwindi Camp. Here were Commandant Georg Van Cools, *Conservateur* or chief warden of the Albert National Park, with headquarters at Rumangabo, between Rutshuru and Lake Kivu and now my host while in the park; M. André Gilson, *Commissaire Général Honoraire and Ancien Gouverneur de la Province Orientale*, a gentleman of most cultivated and gracious personality and a brilliant conversationalist; Mr. René Thomas, a member of the Commission of Congo National Park, and likewise a delightful personage, as was his young companion, Mr. L. Renson. That evening Hubert and I made up the party of six at dinner where the conversation touched more than once upon the "wonderful films" I would "surely make" the next morning. The Governor was full of unwarranted confidence in my abilities but his sympathetic inquiries about my camera equipment failed to lure me into a state of self-assurance. On the contrary, I spent a restless night and was up at 5:30 fussing with my camera until we were called to breakfast at seven.

We drove to Vitshumbi where Mr. Danly's mechanic was getting a large motorboat ready for our trip on Lake Edward. Here we would see many hippopotami, vast flocks of aquatic birds and also the natives hauling in their fishing nets.

We were rowed to the launch in a big steel boat, manned by eight oarsmen with long sweeps. We climbed aboard the craft which was anchored well out in deep water. It was about ten o'clock and already the sun was hot and blazing upon the silvery mirrorlike expanse. The engineer was very busy at the motor. So were we, chatting energetically, hopeful that soon we would be sailing along among the many green islands and reed beds of the lake. Governor Gilson charmingly entertained me with accounts of the north eastern Congo, the country in which he had spent many years of his life. When planning my trip to Africa I had hoped to see the new Garamba Park in that area but I was now confident that time would not permit me to do so. Therefore I was pleased to hear that in this new area of conservation there are not only many of the species which occur in the Rwindi sector of the Albert National Park, but, in addition, there are the rare white rhinoceros and the largest of all antelopes, the Derby eland or giant eland, the situngu and the giraffe. There are also many elephants in this park. Not far distant from the sanctuary is the famous elephant farm of Gangala-na-Bodio, where under the able direction of Colonel Offermann, previously mentioned as chief Game Warden of the Congo, wild elephants are trained to work, a feat long held by many naturalists to be either impossible, because of the intractable nature of the beast, or unfeasible economically because of the enormous food supply, which the great pachyderm requires. The answer to both objections is that today in the Congo, one thousand trained elephants are working for private individuals in bush and forest country. Others, also educated, have been sold to Australia and Egypt; to Barnum and Bailey's circus and to the Antwerp and New York zoos.

An hour had now passed without the engineer's relaxing his efforts or extracting more than an obstinate cough from the recalcitrant engine. Eventually and reluctantly, Mr. Danly informed us that the motor would not run and that instead, the rowers would take us over

There was no visible opening in this savage barrier except in one place where the wall of green gave place to a mud bank washed by the wide, deep river and above which rose a broad sandy bench.

"Here, Mrs. Akeley," said Hubert, "are your hippos. Are you satisfied? Surprised?"

Indeed, I was more than satisfied and surprised. I was astounded. Covering the open bank were dozens of these monstrous pachyderms, while even more were swimming or floating in the river or lying on the sand bars below me. As far as I could see, up and down the stream, there were hippopotami. They even overflowed to the opposite bank and out across the mud flats of a great wallow in which many more lay half-submerged. Hubert was keeping his promise. He was showing me hippos. There were probably not as many as at Ishango, at the outlet of Lake Edward. But they were enough for me.

The hippos on the sandy bench were lying close together in long rows head to head, facing the river; or getting up and lying down again, changing their position in the sun; or wandering a little to and fro, apparently looking at nothing in particular. The wind was blowing from them toward us. Their glossy hides were gleaming in the sun. They were of an almost indescribable color, ranging from a dark mottled brown on the back to a grayish pink on the belly. As Hubert drew up carefully to the extreme limit of the drive, the noise of the car disturbed them, and all but two made off to the river.

No great mammal that I have ever seen is as ugly as a hippopotamus. In fact, not one of the pachyderms, the present-day descendants of prehistoric creatures of even more strange and revolting mien can be said to possess any attribute of comeliness in form, movement or color. The eyes of all these thick skinned animals—the elephant, the rhinoceros and the hippopotamus—are small and "sinister looking." They have great strength and frequently can attain terrifying speed. But compared with their present-day contemporaries, such as the antelope, the lion and all the small Felidae, which inhabit Africa, they lack all semblance of beauty and refinement which place these smaller creatures of a later age and a wholly different species in such complete harmony with the charm and often the splendor of their natural abode.

"We'll go down here and make the film," said Hubert, pointing

to a place in the wall of green in which I could see no opening. He went ahead, forced aside the thorn bush and stepped down on a strip of muddy bank about a foot wide and three feet long. He motioned to me to follow. The narrow, slippery ledge gave me a most precarious footing. I was immediately above a deep pool in which next to the largest existing quadruped in the world was churning up the water into waves and foam. It was a hideous bull hippo. He was only fifteen feet away from me. I measured the interval carefully with my eye—I have an accurate sense of distance and focussed my camera accordingly. At that time I was not frightened. I was too excited and gratified at having the chance to make some good film. The old bull, too, seemed excited. I believe that a free-for-all fight had taken place here in this big pool not many hours before. He had a deep red gash, three times the size of a man's hand, on his shoulder. Downstream, a little way, were other animals, four or five of which carried fresh wounds. The big river horse rampaged about, thrashing around in the water and muddying it. He submerged and blew bubbles up from the bottom. Then he surfaced again, snorting furiously. Out on a sand bar, or lying in the river thirty or forty feet distant, were a dozen other hippos. A mother hippo almost immediately came swimming along with a very young baby on her back. She was ferrying him to the sand bar and was making sure that no crocodile would get him. He scrambled onto the sand bar and she nuzzled him into a safe spot. This seemed to infuriate the bull, and he turned his head toward mother and baby and let out another series of awful snorts.

I was having a wonderful time with my camera. But I had become increasingly aware that Hubert was blowing tobacco smoke from his none too fragrant pipe over me, and as I then thought, over my camera. I turned on him and said in an agitated whisper, "Stop blowing that smoke over me—you'll cloud my lens." Now every friend of mine who has ever met Hubert is loud in his praise. Not only because he is a good naturalist but also because he is a fine gentleman. To me, heretofore, he had been the acme of consideration, helpfulness and courtesy. But now, he paid no attention whatsoever to my uncivil remark. He went right on blowing smoke in my face. And the old bull hippo went right on churning up the water fifteen feet away.

them in the truck. I would stand on the running board, focus my camera carefully and expose my film without experiencing the slightest tremor. I could not have asked for more willing subjects. The same was true the day I photographed a small band down by the hippo pool. Then they had scarcely looked at me or moved an inch, except when a single buffalo joined those standing in the river.

Buffalo are very fond of swamps, lakes and rivers. They are perfectly at home even in the papyrus swamps. There they move about with little effort where a man would quickly sink to his waist in mud and water. During the rains they live and feed in the submerged reed beds and often in water four feet deep. They swim easily in deep water and against swift currents. We once camped near a large swamp in which a herd of one hundred or more buffalo lived. These beasts had had a long and unhappy experience of men. They were extremely wary and never came out to feed before midnight. During the day, I used to mark their whereabouts with ease. Attending the herd was a large flock of buff-backed egrets or cattle herons, that would fly hither and yon above the moving herd in order to feed on the insects which the buffalo disturbed. Often the whole flock would rise in the air and circle round and round. Their snowy wings made a brilliant showing in the sun against the blue sky and in contrast with the dark green vegetation of the swamp, which at this time was abloom with bright yellow flowers. Presently the birds would alight again on the backs of the buffalo.

The buffalo has other attendants—dark gray tickbirds about the size of a robin. They accompany all the larger game such as the giraffe and the rhinoceros. They live upon the ticks infesting the hides of the buffalo and they are particularly careful to remove these disagreeable parasites assailing the eyes and ears of the beast where elimination by another means is well-nigh impossible. It is certainly true that these curious birds are on the lookout for the welfare of their host; and when the tickbirds fly aloft, the animal immediately becomes alert because he recognizes the action of the bird as a sign of danger.

It is often asserted that tickbirds have a correct understanding of what constitutes a menace to their host and what does not. Certain it is that the suspicions of the beast are allayed when the birds return to

him. Tickbirds, when perched on the back of domestic animals, are said to take little notice of man. Here along the banks of the Rutshuru, each buffalo had one or two egrets on its back, while others were walking among their feet and still others were perched on a near-by bush. And often, among the old bulls near the Rwindi Camp, I would see in addition, a wagtail or a pipit on the alert for any insects disturbed by the feet of the buffalo.

It is often possible to detect the presence or nearness of buffaloes because of their strong and peculiar scent. Even after they have moved on some distance from a locality they leave behind a barnyard odor where they have rested in the shade during the heat of the day or where they have spent a few hours of the night. This smell emanating from their wallows is very heavy.

With Carl I had seen many buffaloes on my first trip in Africa. Usually they were suspicious and savage. And from him I had learned much of the character and habits of this mighty beast.

When a buffalo has been hunted or, even worse, wounded, and he gets the scent of an enemy, he will attack swiftly and often with deadly effect. He thrusts his nose straight out when charging so that his horns, now thrown back, cover the vital spots in his shoulders at which a shot might be aimed in line with the heart. He watches his enemy intently and lowers his head only at the last moment, preparatory to attacking with his horns and hoofs. Seldom can a man escape the fury of a buffalo that means business. At best the man may climb a tree, often to remain there during many hours while the beast patrols the ground underneath.

I know of another instance where the hunter was not quick enough for the buffalo. He reached the tree, and was swinging from a low limb when the buffalo picked him off with his horns, tossed him in mid-air and gored him to death.

In countries where hunting is permitted, both buffaloes and elephants are often wounded by bullets or even points of spears which, lodged in their bodies, they may carry perhaps for years. There is no wild animal so dangerous as one thus injured and suffering. When such a beast is finally finished off, an abscessed bone or festering wound will present unquestionable evidence of the cause of the creature's

rected his attention exclusively to Mr. Grauwet. A conspicuous yard pet was a large white rabbit, the especial care of a small boy who put him in his house at night and cared for him during the day, thus keeping him safe from jackals. Then there was the pride of the house boys, an incorrigible little monkey whose particular delight was to dash at chain's length among the many pigeons, feeding at their vessels of grain nearby. At present the monkey was dark brown in color but when Pamba had found him a few months before, deserted in the bush, the little baby had been pure white. This small primate displayed a particular friendliness toward all the household staff. They in turn afforded him much amusement which he abundantly reciprocated. Doubtless if Pamba had the gift of rhetoric he could write an interesting chapter on animal behavior.

When Mr. Grauwet first began the survey of the Upemba Park in 1940, there were a few animals of the many indigenous species within the park limits. Much hunting by natives and also by some Europeans had occurred and the animals were both scarce and shy. However, during these seven years of protection a decided change had taken place. The animals had not only increased normally but they had become accustomed to the sight of man and motor cars. Almost any evening we could see, grazing in the meadows adjoining the Station, large herds of zebra and roan antelope; and not far away the rare and beautiful sable antelope. Often among them were hartebeest, oribi, bushbuck and eland.

The rapid multiplication of wild life within this short period was remarkable. While surveying along the river Katago in 1940, Mr. Grauwet could find only four zebra. Now there were many hundreds. So also at Kisiba Mukana, at an altitude of 1,900 meters, more than 6,000 feet, he had observed only four or five roan antelope. Now there was a herd of fifty or sixty. This increase was not by any means due solely to natural propagation. It can be attributed even more to the fact that all the various species of animals dwelling beyond the limits of the park have sought and found sanctuary within the protected zone. This case is exactly paralleled by that of the elephants in the Kruger Park of the Transvaal where at the time of its creation the herd was small. After a year or

so of protection, however, it became greatly enlarged. Elephants entered from the Lebombo mountains, in Portuguese territory, where the natives were destroying many by shooting them with poisoned arrows and by trapping them in pitfalls. Thus "good news" spreads across the animal kingdom and the hunted move into a region of security.

In the Upemba Park in the swampy papyrus-filled lowlands bordering the Upemba Lake or along the Lufira River, herds of elephants and buffalo, hippopotami and crocodiles abound. In the higher regions there are bushbuck, duikers, bush pigs, wart hogs, wild dogs, and cheetahs. Hyenas of three kinds occur—the spotted, the striped, and the very rare brown which displays a wide band of white along its back. There are baboons and several kinds of monkey, including the guenon, the green monkey, and the gentle colobus, conspicuous for his pelage of long black and white silky hair, the most beautiful monkey in Africa.

That region now occupied by the Upemba Park was once inhabited by the rhinoceros as were other large areas in the Katanga Province. Due to slaughter these great creatures have practically vanished. Mr. Grauwet was hopeful that in his explorations he might one day locate the last of the species because not so long ago he discovered spoor, which, while by no means fresh, must have been made in comparatively recent times.

He told an interesting story of a primitive conception of the rhino's habits. Several years before the founding of the park, he was traveling with a native when they came upon rhino spoor. They followed the fresh tracks which led to one termite hill after another and then on to bush so thick that they could go forward only on their hands and knees. As they progressed, they saw very fresh droppings which the rhino had scattered and partially covered as is the custom of the beast.

"Now," said the native, "we are very near." And in a few moments they saw the rhino which immediately charged upon them, so that Mr. Grauwet was compelled to kill him at a distance of seven feet! As they sat down to recover their breath, the native remarked, "This animal is always very bad. He would like to be a good animal but he has eaten so many mimosas (a tree of many thorns) that he has thorns in his brain." Then the native pointed to the scattered droppings. "See," he said,