

# Wild Life Protection and Hunting in the Sudan

## Part I

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IN the Africa of today we are faced with conditions that have evolved from the deep-seated changes in the political situation of recent years. On attaining their independence these young states find themselves confronted by a large number of problems, with the result that they feel compelled at the moment to neglect matters of "secondary" importance in favour of the consolidation of their countries. The preservation of wild life is included in these "secondary" problems for the time being. He who is familiar with present-day conditions in this part of the world is justifiably worried about the continuance of its animal life.

It would naturally be wrong for one to generalise in this connection. Fortunately it does not apply in regard to all the new African states. We ought, too, not to overlook, in considering this authoritative criticism, that often despite the best will in the world, the right means are not available.

Since the moment it gained its independence in 1956, very little authentic information about the operations in connection with nature conservation or of wild life conditions in the Sudan has been obtainable or made public. Among a number of questions that are awaiting replies is: What will happen to the wild animals in the Sudan? Last year I spent nearly three months in this country trying to find an answer to this question. What I heard and saw during this period exceeded all my expectations. The work of the Game and Fisheries Department has progressed to a marked extent towards realising the views of the London Conference of 1933.

During the British-Egyptian administration in the Sudan, between 1935 and 1956, two National Parks and ten nature reserves were established in a country of 2.5 million square kilometers. This positive action taken as an immediate result of the London Conference was solely the life work of Major W. R. Barker. In close collaboration with the Administration, but with only one assistant for a period of fifteen years, he created the basis for a large successful nature conservation undertaking in this huge country between the desert and the tropical rain forest. Finally, in the last years of the British rule, the staff of the Game Department was increased to eight.

Every praise is due to the Sudan Government, in that in spite of their pressing economical and cultural development problems, they are pushing ahead to a much greater degree with game and nature conservation, than was the case under the British Administration.



On the road to Nimule

To my enquiry, as to whether it was at all possible that funds for the work would be available, the reply was: "Our animal world is a wonderful national heritage and we realise its economic potential."

The comprehensive work of nature conservation, hunting control and fisheries rests on the shoulders of the Game & Fisheries Department, a Division of the Ministry of Animal Resources in Khartoum. This Division also has a number of district officials in the provincial capitals of the country (e.g. the Game Preservation office in Juba). At the head of the Department is a Director, under whom are two Assistant Directors each responsible for a particular resort. Each of the latter officials has a Senior Inspector under him. While the operating staff in the last years of the British regime, as already mentioned, totalled only eight officials, the Game and Fisheries Department today employs more than 200.

This, in every way, surprising expansion and progress is, above all, the result of the excellent preparation of the Sudanese for their independence by the former Colonial power. At the same time, it proves the intelligence of the educated African. Last, but not least, the present sound state of the wild life conservation situation in the Sudan is due to a few men of great ideals, understanding and enthusiasm, who have worked and are still working for the cause. They have not only maintained the standard, created by the English, but rather have improved upon it. Today the Sudan owns three National Parks and fifteen game reserves, of which the latest, near the borders of Ethiopia, was proclaimed in 1960. As a result, the

number of Nature conservation districts has increased by six since independence was obtained.

Two individuals are specially worthy of mention in this connection: Mr. Mekki Mirghani Medani, Assistant Director of the Game & Fisheries Department in Khartoum, on whose shoulders rests not only the main burden of the Department's administrative work, but who is also responsible for the Khartoum zoological gardens. Mr. Medani spent several years working in close collaboration with Lt. Col. P. G. Molloy, the one-time Director of the Tanganyika National Parks. For sixteen years he has served in the Ministry of Animal Resources and has since gained further knowledge concerning the administration of a large zoological garden during a seven-months' sojourn in England.

Senior Inspector Mahmoud Abu Sineina, the second outstanding man in nature conservation in the Sudan, is similarly a manager of one of the outside districts, the Game Preservation Office in Juba, Equatorial Province. In stimulating conversations with both these gentlemen I realised very clearly how much enjoyment they obtained from the work and how closely they were bound up in it. Abu Sineina represented the Sudan at the Wild Life Conservation Conference in Arusha last year.

#### **HUNTING LEGISLATION:**

Hunting legislation in the Sudan is set out in the following four statutes:—

1. The Preservation of Wild Animals Ordinance, 1935.
2. The Game Regulations, 1935.
3. The National Parks, Sanctuaries and Reserves Regulations, 1939. and
4. Order declaring Periods of Close Seasons.

As is apparent from the dates, this legislation was introduced by the English in the Sudan as a direct result of the London Conference and has remained in operation to the present day with only insignificant amendments.

Among the completely protected species, which no one may hunt, shoot or capture, unless he is in possession of a special permit from the Minister of Animal Resources, may be counted: Aard Wolf, Wild Ass, Elephant (of which the tusks do not exceed 5 kg. in weight), both species of Rhinoceros, Bald-headed Ibis and Shoebill Stork.

The following may be hunted only under a special licence issued by the Ministry:— Addax, Bongo, Giant Bushbuck, Cheetah, Chimpanzee, Colobus, Yellow-backed Duiker, Giant Eland, Elephant (tusks exceeding 5 kg. in weight), Giant Forest Hog, Giraffe, Tora-Hartebeest, Nile Lechwe, Situtunga and White Oryx.

In addition there are six classes of hunting licences in respect of various species and numbers in specified regions of the country, granted on payment of varying fees.

Counted as vermin and consequently allowed to be killed without a permit anywhere in the country are:— Buffalo, Lion, Hyaena and Crocodile, besides certain species of small carnivora.



Abdim Storks (*Sphenorynchus abdimii*) on the plains of the Blue Nile.

As diverse as are the customs and habits of the many indigenous tribes of the Sudan, just as different is their attitude to wild animals. It is understandable that the hunting laws are decidedly unpopular with many sections of the indigenous population. In many parts the view still prevails that wild animals exist purely to be killed by man. But in this direction particularly, steps have been taken by the Game and Fisheries Department, which promise a measure of success. It is also apparent that the responsible authorities have recognised how important and essential it is to explain the position to the masses. Finally, the survival of the animals in Africa depends on the education and instruction of the people.

At the outset the zealous hunting races, such as the nomadic Baggara in the north-west and the Zanda in the south, were induced to renounce the age-old and cruel hunting methods handed down by their forefathers. That these methods are still practised here and there is not surprising, but this in no way detracts from the work done by the Game authorities. The Baggara, traditional hunters for centuries, pursued elephant, giraffe, white oryx and addax on horseback and then killed the weary animals with their spears. With these cruel methods they did considerable damage in the game areas. In the eastern Sudan certain of the Beja tribes, who inhabit the mountains of the Red Sea region, hunt Barbary sheep and Ibex, with dogs. Other tribes of the south, who live primarily on the flesh of game, used ring-fire and pits. The practice of these hunting methods could be stopped to a marked degree by firm legislation and control. Efforts to do this date back to the time of the British-Egyptian administration after 1935, but are being conducted intensively right up to the present day. On the other

hand the superstitions of certain tribes provide the most effective protection for different species of game, in some cases for the entire game population, so long as the native population remains disinterested. Above all, superstition can then be of considerable importance, when it concerns certain rare species, that are thus protected from all pursuit. Thus, for example, the Dinka, the largest indigenous tribe in the Sudan, have renounced all hunting activities, because of their belief that the dead of their tribe are re-incarnated in animal form. The Schilluk, another tall nilotic people on the White Nile, spare the Nile-lechwe (Mrs. Gray's lechwe), which is reserved purely for their king, the one-time mighty Reth, who alone may kill this antelope.

The Zande in the south-west of the country never hunt the shy and retiring forest antelope, the Bongo, which according to them causes leprosy in anyone touching its skin.

Judging from Mr. Abu Sineina's remarks, the Government supports hunting but is strongly opposed to the destructive and cruel methods of the past. In view, however, of the fact that the meat of wild animals constitutes an important part of the food of certain tribes, the Government permits the destruction annually of some 600 elephant together with an unlimited number of small and abundant species.

Moreover it has been reported by authoritative persons that cruel massacres of game still take place annually in the inaccessible parts of the country near the borders of Ethiopia. One is compelled to silence, however, since the game meat is the basic food of the people living there and provides them with the protein necessary for their very existence.

At the moment preparations are being put in hand by the Game Department to confiscate the last muzzle-loaders, of which it is estimated that there are still some 900. These fire-arms, which are not only a danger to game but also to the hunters themselves, have been in the possession of natives since the beginning of this century.

By and large it may be said that tribal hunting and cruel massacres have been reduced to a minimum. Poaching with fire-arms, which had attained devastating proportions in many parts of Africa during past centuries, reached its zenith in the Sudan after the Second World War. At this time large quantities of fire-arms and ammunition came into the hands of irresponsible poachers who withdrew to the most distant corners of the country. Particularly heavy damage was done to the game in the vicinity of the Rahad and Dinder rivers in the north-west near the Ethiopian border. Bands of Abyssinian poachers then destroyed what remained. These conditions prevailed for some years and an end could only be put to them by the introduction of armed police and ranger patrols. Today only trustworthy and qualified Sudanese receive licences. Further, an additional permit is required to obtain ammunition, which is only issued in limited quantities. As a result the renewed spread of illegal hunting with fire-arms in the outlying districts of the country will be curbed. It has been reported once or twice



Vervet Monkey photographed beside the Blue Nile.

in recent years that, as a result of poaching in South Sudan in which, above all, the white rhinoceros was the victim, the Government made it a capital offence to enter the then Nimule Reserve. Similarly a poacher would be promptly shot. Mr. Medani remarked that such statements were incorrect. Just as in the time of the British administration, captured poachers are imprisoned and given a normal trial, in which of course very severe sentences can be passed. In reply to my question as to how many poachers had been shot by officials of the Department in self-defence, Mr. Medani was silent.

The future programme of the Game and Fisheries Department is very comprehensive. Initial projects have already been realised. In 1959 a Game and Fisheries school was established under "Gordon's Tree" near Khartoum. Young people between the ages of 18 and 25 here receive their final course as Game Officers. They receive instruction in Game Preservation Laws, Fisheries Laws, accounting, clerical methods and works, organisation, administration, etc. One group of qualified Game Officers gives instruction in military training and self-defence. On graduation of these candidates the Ministry sends them out into the field where they control operations in contact with game and also conduct big game safaris while taking full responsibility for the game areas.

Mr. Medani informed me in Khartoum that plans had already been made to bring groups of scholars and students into the Dinder National Park in the Spring of 1962. The young people will be shown the wonders of the animal world on the spot with the object of awakening a love and respect for nature in them. If this plan materialises, it will be an example of national enlightenment.

In order to make wild life preservation, if possible, a payable proposition in future years, the primary task will be the provision



Game Scouts of the Game Preservation Office, Juba.

of suitable traffic arrangements for tourists to the favourably situated Dinder National Park. In this connection the construction of roads and the building of bridges and rest houses are essential. It is intended to encourage European tourists to visit this game paradise by pampering them and sparing no comfort in the rest houses.

The Sudan is a huge country. With a low population density of only five people per square kilometer (13,000,000 inhabitants) there is no continuous competition going on between human and agricultural interests on the one hand and the needs and requirements of wild life on the other. As the protected area today, exclusive of the forest reserves, is only some 1% of the total area of the country, new schemes and plans are already being prepared. Two additional nature and game sanctuaries are being established in the north-west this year.

Last year Professor Frazer Darling, New York, accepted an invitation from the Sudan government to carry out a comprehensive ecological survey of the country. His valuable findings will be helpful to the Sudanese in adding a scientific section to the Game Department.

We wish the Sudanese, who constitute an example today for many young African states, every success in their future efforts.



A showcase erected in the Bloemfontein Zoo to encourage a greater interest in wild life conservation.

## Elephants try to raise dead comrade

On the 13th a herd of females and calves raided some grain-bin and banana gardens at Limbani village. I followed this herd and found it on the other side of the Katete stream. four big females were seen, and one of them I shot. After I shot it, the other elephant came to the dead body and tried to lift it up, but they failed. They lifted the front legs and the head, but still it was in vain. I stayed there for one hour and thirty minutes, watching them trying to lift it.

When I saw that they entirely failed to do it, I went up wind where they scented me and ran away and left the dead body alone.  
(Report from Mchilagule Kachari, N. Rhodesian Game Scout.)