

# "Elephants Dying Faster Than They Reproduce"

—Oria Douglas-Hamilton

Oria Douglas-Hamilton recently gave a presentation to the National Geographic Society in Washington in which she warned that in the 35 countries where African elephants still live, they are being killed off faster than they can reproduce.

Mrs. Douglas-Hamilton, who with her husband Iain, carried out an Africa-wide census of elephants between 1976 and 1979, listed 10 African countries where she described the decline of the elephant population as "bad". Besides Kenya, she said these were Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Peoples' Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia. The elephant population was, in fact, declining in three-quarters of the countries in which they still lived. The total revealed by the census was 1.3 million.

Writing in the Society's journal, the "National Geographic Magazine", Oria Douglas-Hamilton noted that while the price of ivory had risen as high as \$45 per pound in 1975, it has now levelled

off to \$35 per pound, but in the field the demand is still high enough to fetch a poacher about \$500 for a pair of 22-pound elephant tusks.

Those in her Washington audience heard Mrs. Douglas-Hamilton state that throughout the continent poachers are now killing elephants at the rate of between 50,000 and 150,000 a year and she blamed this slaughter on a combination of poachers seeking "easy money", lax enforcement of laws in the reserves and the continual demand for ivory by international consumers, with Hong Kong and Japan the two places where 80 per cent of African ivory ends up to be carved and re-exported for sale.

Oria Douglas-Hamilton considers that Uganda is the country where elephants have suffered most and attributed the blame for the slaughter in Uganda's animal sanctuaries on Idi Amin's troops when they were fleeing after his overthrow, and because of the number of guns which found their way into poachers' hands afterwards.

## DISAPPEARING GATE FEES

Allegations that "a substantial amount" of the fees paid to enter game parks and reserves in Kenya never reached the proper authorities have been made in Mombasa by Mr. C. M. Kamau, of the Wildlife Planning Unit, who said that to conceal this loss of revenue, park entry records had been falsified.

Mr. Kamau quoted from the study by the Economist Intelligence Unit, which showed that the loss of fees from all Kenya's parks and reserves was substantial, and he pointed out that in the 1978/79 financial year gate fees from the National Parks alone amounted to Sh. 8.7 million. Most of the entry fees were paid over at the gates.

He added: "The payments are made at gates in remote places in the absence of senior officers, consequently the temptation to share the potential gate fees is greater. There is plenty of evidence which indicates that a substantial amount of the gate fees are not received by the right authority".

## 50 Rhino Left in Serengeti

A recent aerial survey carried out in Tanzania's Serengeti Park by Dr Markus Bornet, and financed by the Frankfurt Zoological Society, has revealed that only about 50 rhinos remain there out of the former population numbering 500 to 600.

According to the Frankfurt Zoological Society all the other rhinos have been killed by "well-equipped poaching gangs coming across the boundary from Somalia and Kenya with expensive cars and weapons" which the Society goes on to describe as "a real poaching mafia in East Africa."

The Society, which gets much of its funding from its President, Professor Bernard Grzimek, recently trained four Tanzanian park rangers as pilots and equipped them with aircraft.

## Bid to Replenish Omani Oryx

A nomadic Bedouin tribe in the Gulf state of Oman is playing a crucial role in a government-sponsored programme to re-introduce the Arabian oryx to its homeland. Members of the Harasis tribe are being trained to handle and look after a herd of oryx which have been bred in captivity. Five antelopes have been flown to Oman from the United States and seven more are being transferred.

The Omani Government aims to build up a viable herd to be released into a conservation area on a plateau. The Government sees the project as an opportunity to help both the nomads and the oryx. More than 20 Bedouin have been given the task of protecting the rare antelope from poachers. The last known member of the indigenous Arabian oryx population was killed by hunters in 1972.

## CONSERVATION AWARD

One of Europe's most prestigious conservation awards, the Diploma of the Council of Europe, has just been awarded to Minsmere, a private bird sanctuary on the Suffolk coast of England. This is only the second time the Diploma has gone to Britain and the first to a privately-owned site in Europe.

The 1,560-acre site contains a mixed habitat of woodland, heath and seashore which has long been a "mecca" for bird-watchers and is owned by the British Royal Society for the protection of Birds.

Ironically, only a few months before the award was announced, there had been an outcry in the district when it was revealed that several rare marsh harriers which breed at Minsmere had been found dead nearby, poisoned by bait intended to kill rabbits. In a report entitled "Hidden Death", the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds listed the marsh harrier along with the golden eagle, buzzard, hen harrier, red kite, goshawk and peregrine as being at the greatest risk from deadly poisons laid down by farmers, including mevinphos, strychnine and alpha-chloralose.

## Payment soon

Persons with legitimate claims for compensation for game trophies confiscated by the Kenya Government when it outlawed the sale of such articles in 1978 are to be paid soon. Answering a question put to him in Parliament by the Member for Iveti South, Mr. J. M. Kikuyu, the Minister for Natural Resources and Environment, Mr. Andrew Omanga, explained that the delay in paying the compensation had been due to dealers' claims taking longer than necessary to be scrutinised.

## "A TRIANGULAR SAFARI"

A TRIANGULAR safari for game-viewers has been arranged by Serena Lodges and Hotels. The flights leave Nairobi (Wilson Airport) in the afternoon flying first to Mara, with a game drive before spending the first night with dinner at the Mara Serena Lodge. The following day, after a second game drive and lunch, the aircraft flies on to Amboseli, with that night spent at the Amboseli Serena Lodge. On the third day of this triangular trip, passengers begin with an early morning game drive, followed by a lunch and then afternoon departure on the final leg to Nairobi.

Incidentally, walking safaris are now possible from both Mara and Amboseli Serena Lodges through arrangements with the Game Department which provides an experienced ranger to accompany each group of up to a maximum of six visitors.

It seems that at times one does not even have to walk far from the Serena Lodge at Amboseli to see something special, for recently it was reported that a female elephant gave birth just behind the lodge's staff quarters.

## Destructive Game Can be Killed

After lengthy agitation by farmers, especially in the Laikipia, Nyandarua and Meru districts, the Government has finally agreed that farmers killing wild animals threatening their lives or property will not be prosecuted.

Assurance to this effect was given to Parliament recently by the Attorney-General, Mr. James Karugu.