

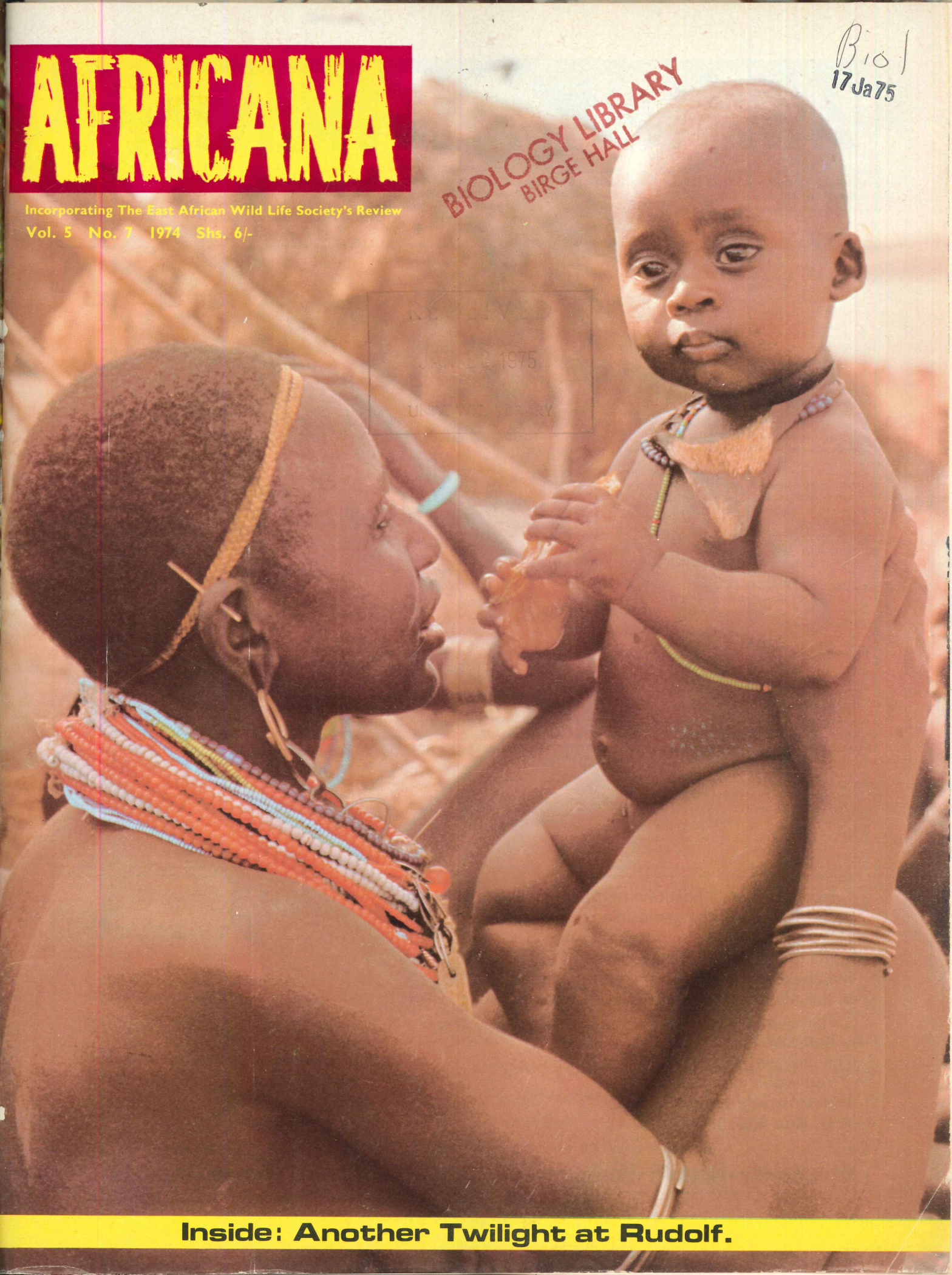
AFRICANA

Incorporating The East African Wild Life Society's Review
Vol. 5 No. 7 1974 Shs. 6/-

BIOLOGY LIBRARY
BIRGE HALL

Biol
17Ja75

RECEIVED
JAN 23 1975
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



Inside: Another Twilight at Rudolf.

THE WHITE RHINO MAN



IAN PLAYER is perhaps best known for his work on the build up of white rhino, from no more than 20 animals in Southern Africa to many hundreds—and, in fact, to a situation of overpopulation at Umfolozi Game Reserve where he was Chief Ranger. Some of these animals were re-introduced into Kenya at Meru National Park and it is hoped that more can be acquired as a unique visitor attraction for Meru and to create a viable breeding herd there. But Ian Player has recently broadened his interests with an appointment as Director of the U.S.-based International Wilderness Leadership Foundation... **MIKE PARRY**, formerly editor of "Safari Notebook" in the *East African Standard* reports

IT WAS while walking the game trails of the Umfolozi Game Reserve with his Zulu guide and mentor, Maqubu Nthombela, that Ian Player decided to fight for the wilderness areas of the world.

"I realised that game departments and governments and protection societies were still not enough to stop the onslaught of man on wild places, and each one of us who cared had to make a contribution, no matter how big or small, if this wild country was to survive."

Today Ian Player is following his quest in earnest—as the working director of the New York-based International Wilderness Leadership Foundation. The formation of this new conservation body was

announced in March when Player visited America to receive the Washington Safari Club's annual award as "Conservationist of the Year."

He is only the second man outside America and Canada to win this coveted award; the first was Perez Olindo, Director of the Kenya National Parks.

It was the second top award for Player who was named Game Conservationist of the year at the 1969 meeting of Game Coin in San Antonio, in recognition of his efforts on behalf of the white rhino.

It is difficult to believe that in 1897 there were only 20 white rhino left in the whole of Southern Africa.

continued on Page 18

WHITE RHINO MAN

continued

Their last refuge was the relatively minute area at the junction of the Black and White Umfolozi Rivers in Natal, which was declared a sanctuary in that year.

In its first 32 years, however, the sanctuary was by no means secure due to continual tsetse fly game elimination campaigns. A game conservator who toured the reserve for six weeks in 1916 saw no white rhino though he did find four outside the reserve.

Fifteen years ago the rhino were still giving cause for concern—but this time because there were too many!

There was a population explosion in the 40s and 50s and, with only limited food resources within the reserve and many rhino resident on vacant land soon to be settled by man, something had to be done.

Ian Player was by that time Chief Ranger for Zululand. On his shoulders fell the task of co-ordinating the translocation of the rhino, which by then numbered 600.

Dr. A. M. Harthoorn, the eminent veterinary physiologist from East Africa, was invited to experiment with the latest tranquiliser drugs. Several were tried but it was not until July 1963, when M99 became available, that an entirely satisfactory method of darting and capturing the rhino was found.

The techniques of capture, developed during "Operation Rhino" are used in most parts of Africa today. The dart is fired on foot, from a Land-Rover or helicopter and horsemen follow the animal until it falls or is drowsy enough to be restrained by rope. Then the capture truck, equipped with winch, rollers and crate, is brought to the tranquillised animal.

Player found that if a rhino ran into country inaccessible by truck, a small injection of antidote was enough to get the rhino moving. On one occasion a fully grown adult was led for two miles like this—much to the consternation of tourists and some local African women!

Once the drugs and capture techniques had been successfully developed the Natal Parks Board authorised the export of the square-lipped rhino to zoological gardens all over the world and former ranges in Africa were recolonised.

A few were even sent to Kenya to the Meru Game Reserve where, much to the delight of conservationists, a white rhino calf was born two years ago.

To date, the Parks Board have translocated 1,400 of these animals and stocks of a once endangered species are healthy again.

Player described the operation in *The White Rhino Saga* (Collins). This book, and later visits to America, made for Ian Player a respected name in conservation. He has not been slow to use this fame, not for himself, but to promote the cause closest to his heart—an international brotherhood of conservationists dedicated to saving the wilderness areas of the world.

He has always loved the bush and adventure out-of-doors. Like most of his breed, he detests the city.

At 17, he went to fight in the war. And in Italy he conceived an idea that led to the toughest canoe race in the world. A group of men were gathered about a fire at 6th Div. Reserve HQ at Santa Barbara, south of Florence. They were talking about home. One said he would like to be lying on the hot sands of an African beach. Another yearned for the city. Another was Player, whose thoughts turned to the tortuous Umgeni River which twists its way through the Valley of a Thousand Hills and spills into the sea at Durban.

In 1950 he tackled the 100-mile journey with two companions. It took them six days and their adventures on the Umgeni, with its dangerous weirs, its crocodiles, were written up by Player in *Men, Rivers and Canoes*.

He admits that when he became a Ranger "I understood the physical delights of wilderness, but had no intellectual appreciation."

That came later during his years in Zululand. It gave him an understanding of the ecosystems and showed him how vitally important, in philosophical wildlife terms, and wild country are to mankind. He determined to do his part in saving these areas.

"I believed that if we could get the future leaders to have the same experiences I and my colleagues had, we could go a long way to influence public opinion," he said.

A start was made in 1957 when he founded the Wilderness Leadership School in Natal on an initial grant from his golfing brother, Gary. From very humble beginnings the school has grown into a force that has attracted international attention to its achievements.

Men and women who have taken the course—and it is as popular with middle-aged businessmen as it is with teenagers—come away feeling closer to nature. "After that course there was something inside me that was not there before," said one American boy.

Another girl wrote: "I was not only awakened mentally and physically, it was as though I had found a new religion; my spirit soared in its fulfilment and I saw life from a new angle."

The formula is simple. The students, mostly big city dwellers, are given lessons in ecology at base camp. They learn more on the wilderness trail at Umfolozi where they sleep in the open and understand that *they* are the intruders in the animals' territory.

They canoe among the hippo and crocodile on Lake St. Lucia and, the climax to the eight-day course, is a survival hike along the desolate Zululand coast. They are without a guide and during the 40 mile journey, they lose the last vestiges of their pampered city life.

They learn the disciplines of the bush which in turn build character. Some are driven home quite drastically.

Like water discipline. In the heart of the bush, their guide makes them empty their water bottles. Then they hike for a day under the African sun until, feeling they will die of thirst, they eventually reach a river. But before they can rush to quench their thirst, they sit down and hear some startling facts about water and how precious a resource it is. It's a safe assumption that none of the students will ever leave a tap running when they return home!



Ian Player

The courses are aimed at attracting those who show leadership qualities. Player believes it is important that young industrialists from America and Europe take the course. "These are the men who are about to step into power and who will be influential in the next few decades," he explains.

At the end of April, Player resigned after 22 years service with the Natal Parks Board. It was, the board chairman noted, "a sad day for the Board, but it could be the dawn of a new era in conservation."

For Player it means an opportunity to devote himself full time to the cause. He has begun by visiting African countries to search for new regions that can be set aside as wilderness areas to take students.

He has just returned from the Kalahari, and hopes to establish a wilderness school in Botswana. He visited the legendary Okavongo Swamp region, one of the last unspoiled areas of the continent, where he wants to establish a canoe trail for his young followers.

In August the first party of American Endeavour Scouts are to undertake a wilderness course, the first to travel under the auspices of the new foundation. The best of these students are likely to take part in a wilderness trail—with Red Indians as guides—that Player is organising in the Canadian Rockies next year.

Other schools will follow in Australia, other African States, the Far East and Scotland.

"What I see is the globe as a circle with schools all around it so that people will have the chance of seeing every environment. The better students will visit all and so get a constant comparison between a wilderness area and man's technological advancement.

"It will be an opportunity to explain the meaning of the biological shield—the forests, the oceans, mountains and those things so vital for man's survival."

Player does not expect to live to see his project through to the end. But he believes that he has made a start in building a generation that will fight for the remaining natural regions. He is not unaware of the tremendous task he has in a world blinded by "progress".

But he has no doubt about the necessity of wilderness areas. "Wildlife conservation is not a plaything," he says. "It is not a luxury: it is survival." ●