



"ELEPHANTS HAVE SLOWLY LEARNED TO LEAVE THE CULTIVATED AREAS ALONE AND STAY AT HOME."

## CONTROLLING BIG GAME

By Captain KEITH CALDWELL

The protection of the human population is the essential to make the conservation of wild life possible



**G**AME control is essential if African wild life is to be preserved; man must be protected from wild animals as well as wild animals from man. Much of the opposition to control arises from lack of knowledge.

The aim of conservation in Eastern Africa is to ensure the continued existence of animals in areas where they can do little or no harm or threaten to impede development. Laws can only be enforced with at least the tacit agreement of the governed. In the case of game laws more than this is needed, for a game department cannot function, nor enforce its regulations, without the whole-hearted support of public opinion. People do realise the importance of preservation, and they like to be able to see game; but they do not always give sufficient thought to the depredations, often severe, caused by the very animals they enjoy watching. It is the clear duty, distasteful as it may be, of a game department to limit game to the numbers that an area can carry having due regard to the ecological needs of its human inhabitants. Population of a sufficient density is resistant to game, and in such areas no difficulties arise. But when residents are scattered, and especially where land is being developed, trouble is to be anticipated.

One of the dangers to wild life is the out-and-out protectionist. When departmental action has to take the form of killing, a small but vocal minority, who fail to appreciate the basic problems involved, are often ready to raise an outcry which may be taken up by uninstructed opinion even throughout the world. Their well-meant effort usually results in recrimination and does nothing to help the conservationist fighting an uphill battle.

The sentimentalist does not realise that unless a game department is ready and willing to give efficient and organised help to those who are suffering genuine damage from wild animals it will lose the sympathy and support of the public, and its essential laws of conservation, passed in the face of considerable opposition, will be swept away. There is always a

small minority of people who claim that all game, outside national parks, should be destroyed without let or hindrance. Any relaxation of needful measures of control, or any unwillingness on the part of a game department to give help where help is needed, must play directly into their hands.

Game control may be directed against any animal, but is most usually employed, particularly in native areas, against elephant and buffalo. The cultivator can generally protect himself from damage by most ungulates, but elephant are a different matter; the help of the game department is required in dealing with them.

The general public are apt to think of the African elephant as rare, but in fact it is the one beast that probably has increased during the last 50 years. The laws regarding the killing of elephant are strict and the penalties severe. Even a landowner, though he may kill, on his own land, any elephant that is a source of danger, is not allowed to retain the tusks. Such a regulation is essential; otherwise the country would be flooded with tusks from animals alleged to have been "killed in defence of property," and all hope of keeping control of the ivory trade would be gone.

The elephant laws are not difficult to enforce, since every tusk produced for sale or export has to be explained by the special licence under which the beast was killed. Anyone in possession of ivory for which he cannot account is liable to very severe penalties. Moreover, not only does an elephant carcase take some time to disappear but it advertises its presence while doing so, thus inviting inquiry. Finally, illegally acquired tusks are not easy to move. Broken up they are of little value, and unbroken they are conspicuous.

The large elephant herds found in parts of Africa to-day have to be controlled since, as human population increases, more and more land is required for cultivation and the elephant have to be driven further back. There are, I am glad to say, vast areas of

country valueless to man and tsetse-infested bush and forest where they can still roam. But once such areas are fully stocked the natural increase of the herds has to be killed.

Long experience has shown that the only efficient way to do this is by the game department staff. Elephant can be taught, provided their regular lines of migration are not completely cut, to respect areas where they are not wanted. The object of the game department is to achieve this end without any unnecessary killing, but the lesson has alas, to be repeated again and again. A control officer, supported by a well-trained native staff, attempts to hold a general line, which may be 100 or more miles long, dividing the elephant's normal habitat from the cultivated districts. For this scheme to succeed the habitat must be a place where the elephant can remain unmolested at all times, and thus it is usually proclaimed a game reserve or elephant sanctuary. Time has shown that the animals have slowly learned their lesson and are more inclined to leave the cultivated areas alone and stay at home.

If they do cross out they must be dealt with by experts who know which animals lead the herd and need to be killed, and who can kill cleanly and quickly, leaving no wounded beasts. A game department officer, since he makes nothing out of the ivory, has no temptation to shoot the big tusker. He can therefore concentrate on the herd leader, probably a cunning old cow who has in the past cultivated a taste for bananas and sweet potatoes and wishes to gratify it.

All sorts of alternatives to organised control have been put forward, some by humanitarians and some by interested parties. The former plead for fences, electric or otherwise, but do not realise that it is quite impossible to erect or maintain them over vast

distances in Africa. They forget, too, that the great elephant herds are always increasing naturally, and that such increases must be destroyed to prevent overcrowding and its inevitable consequent troubles.

Others who attack control do so for a very different reason. Many years ago, in Uganda, before a game department had been started, the experiment was



RHINOCEROS ON THE ALERT. Occasionally one moves into settled areas.

tried of allowing free elephant shooting. The hunters were allowed to keep one tusk in two. Not unnaturally they concentrated on the areas where the biggest ivory was to be found, regardless of whether the elephant were doing any damage there or not.

This was very nice for the hunters, but the result was to drive the animals all over the country, and there were surprises for residents of districts where there had not been an elephant for years. Conditions

at the end became so bad that the scheme was abandoned precipitately.

Even to-day some visiting sportsmen often ask: "If elephant have to be killed, why should we not be allowed to kill them? We are quite willing to pay to do so, and will do it where you say." This sounds very reasonable. But the visitor has seldom the training, knowledge, nor experience of the regular staff to do the job efficiently, and above all he is almost certain to leave wounded animals behind. For these reasons game departments insist that all needful control killing should be carried out by their own men.

Elephant, owing to their numbers and the damage they cause, are the animals against which control is chiefly directed. But sometimes it is necessary to kill the odd rhinoceros which insists on descending into the settled areas, or to destroy a small herd of buffalo which refuse to leave their home in a patch of forest surrounded by cultivation.

Sometimes plains game have to be removed from pastoral areas where they are causing trouble by trampling out springs, breaking fences, or acting as centres of epidemic diseases. Evicting them is not easy, and they must be subjected to severe "driving" combined with a certain amount of shooting.

Many demands are made on game departments to deal with baboons, and while help is given whenever possible, it is probable that sufferers could do a great deal to help themselves. I remember, many years ago, on the Tana river, where baboons were in hundreds, being asked to kill some to protect the crops.

I asked the old gentleman who made the request, why he and his friends did not shoot the animals themselves. "What!" he exclaimed. "Waste a poisoned arrow on a baboon? We are not such fools. We cannot eat them."