

Saving the Wildlife of Ethiopia

Recommendations of a UNESCO Mission

In response to a request from the Ethiopian Government, a mission, sponsored by UNESCO and led by Sir Julian Huxley, visited Ethiopia in September, 1963, to survey and make recommendations for the conservation of the country's natural resources, fauna and flora. The other members were Dr. E. B. Worthington, Professor Th. Monod, Mr. Lloyd W. Swift and M. Alain Gille. In their report the mission commented on the spectacular scenery of Ethiopia, the extraordinarily wide range of vegetation and habitats and, despite recent ravages, the large stock of interesting wildlife which, however, could well be increased. They recommended the establishment or extension of five national parks and three controlled wildlife areas, and urged special measures for the protection of five species of extremely rare large mammals. The following is a summary with extracts of part of the report.

THE conservation of wildlife and wild areas is especially important in Ethiopia because the country possesses such outstanding and extraordinary landscape features, a good stock of interesting wildlife, especially large mammals and birds, and considerable wild areas of marginal land which deteriorate under cultivation or grazing pressure by domestic stock, but are capable of carrying a large and varied assemblage of wild species.

Ethiopia consists of a tremendous massif rising from 146 m. below sea level in the Danakil depression to 4,620 m. above sea level at Ras Degien (Simien), which is the remains of a gigantic volcano. In the 4,766 m. between these two there is a whole series of bioclimatic stages, ranging from desert-savanna to mountain type forests. Thus there is an exceptionally wide range of biological environments and hence of types of vegetation and ecosystems. Of the nineteen colour symbols used for the vegetation map of Africa, Ethiopia claims ten, more than any other African country, including South Africa which has only eight.

The scenery and landscape of Ethiopia is of outstanding interest and splendour. To the south, the Great Rift leads down towards Lake Rudolf. It contains a number of lakes, some fresh and some saline, with a great abundance of water birds and fish. To the east of Addis Ababa, however, the Rift gapes open, its original eastern scarp bent at right angles to run nearly due east, passing north of Harrar and eventually facing the Gulf of Aden. Its western scarp continues its original northward direction, providing a striking eastern flank to Ethiopia's main mountain mass. The west flank has been eroded into a spectacular wall some 5,000 feet high, reminiscent of the Grand Canyon in its grandeur. There is grandeur too in the gorges of the Blue Nile, which rank high among the world's great canyons; and the Falls of Tisesat—"Smoke of Fire"—near the outlet of the river from Lake Tana which itself has a tranquil beauty of its own. A group of fantastic conical peaks rise to the north-east of Aksum; and

there is fine mountain scenery on both sides of the rift south of Addis Ababa, though not so spectacular as in the Simien massif. There are numerous extinct volcanic craters of recent date, many covered with vegetation and some containing lakes and deserts in the Danakil region and the Rift Valley at the north end of Lake Rudolf; the shores of the Red Sea are also extremely arid, but their barrenness is compensated for by the richness of marine life, including corals of many kinds in the adjacent waters. Much of central Abyssinia is an extensive plateau, deeply dissected by steep-sided ravines, where every square yard of the plateau has been utilised for cultivation, even where the only access is by precipitous mule track.

The freshwater fauna of the country is of considerable interest with four distinct aquatic regions each with its own particular characteristics: the Nilotic fishes of Lake Rudolf and the Blue Nile; the Rift Valley lakes to the north; Lake Tana, isolated by the Tisesat Falls; and the east-flowing rivers. A number of catchment areas are now without an outlet to the sea, so that their fauna offers good material for studying the processes of speciation through geographical and ecological segregation. Some rivers are divided into sections by insurmountable waterfalls, and there are exceptional environments, such as the numerous hot springs and the underground lakes and rivers in the Ogaden limestone regions. In the latter, in Somalia, there is a highly interesting blind fish *Uegitglanis zammaranoi*, discovered by Gianferrari in 1923.

Cultivation to the Mountain Tops

Wild animals which are large enough to be conspicuous have taken a severe buffeting in most parts of Ethiopia during recent years when fire-arms have been numerous. Those species which provide meat or valuable pelts, notably leopard, colobus monkey and some of the small antelopes, have suffered most. The Imperial Game Proclamation of 1944 and the Regulations issued under it provide very thorough protection in theory, but it is well known that illegal slaughter continues and large quantities of pelts and carcases of skins of protected animals are sold daily in Addis Ababa and other centres. The habitats of most wild creatures and plants have likewise suffered severely in many parts of the country and in certain areas have been obliterated by intensive agriculture even right up to the summits of high mountains. In Gojjam, for instance, the summit of Mt. Talo at 4,000 m. is entirely devoid of trees and every acre cultivated. In any other African country such very high mountains would be clothed in dense forest, more or less virgin. The general impression is that, even in a country which, like Ethiopia, has a reputation for holding many game animals, all species are scanty, by contrast with comparable areas, say, in the Sudan or Kenya or Tanganyika. It was the unanimous opinion of the Mission, whose members together have probably seen every important conservation area in the continent, that all the surviving wild lands of Ethiopia could with advantage hold a larger stock of animal life than they do at present.

The report recommends that the Ethiopian Government should set up two organisations: a Conservation Board, with the Minister of Agriculture

as Chairman, to be responsible for the conservation and development of the natural and archaeological resources of the country ; and a Conservation Bureau, to be directly responsible for the establishment, organisation and staffing of national parks and other conservation areas. The training of staff, including wardens, is regarded as of the highest importance, and once adequate staff has been trained, the establishment and development of five national parks should be proceeded with.

The one national park already declared is the Managasha National Park, on the slope of Mount Wochacha, west of Addis Ababa. This

has 3,500 hectares and includes a number of the larger wild animals. The report recommends this park should be enlarged, and a scientific study of it made. The area of the Matahara Proposed National Park in Awash Plain where there is at present a game reserve they recommend should be enlarged. Lake Abyata, the site of another proposed national park, which has a magnificent bird fauna, with vast numbers of pelicans, cormorants, ibises and herons of several species, storks, flamingos, waders and plovers, sandpipers, geese and ducks, the report suggests could become self-supporting in a comparatively short time, and although all large animals have disappeared from the adjacent savanna land, an area could be fenced off into which they could be re-introduced.

Of the two new sites recommended for national parks one is further south in the lake area of the Rift Valley and again the report suggests a re-introduction of the fauna that has been shot out. In this national park the University of Addis Ababa should have a permanent field station for scientific research. Later it might be possible to join this park with the proposed Lake Abyata Park, to make one really large park covering the whole of Lakes Abyata and Shala and at least part of Lake Awasa, with the main Rift Valley road as its eastern boundary. The fifth site for a park is at the south end of Lake Tana, including part of the lake and its islands, the Tisesat Falls of the Blue Nile and some of the spectacular Blue Nile Gorge.

In addition the report recommends the establishment of Controlled Wildlife Areas where a measure of supervision could be exercised over



human activity with a view to building up wildlife stocks, and, where appropriate, introducing cropping on a sustained yield basis. Three areas are suggested as a start :

First the south-west extremity of the country, including the northern end of Lake Rudolf, Lake Stefanie and a substantial part of the Omo plains. In due course, says the report, this corner of Africa not only the part in Ethiopia, but its extension into Kenya, the Sudan and even Uganda, will need examination from the conservation viewpoint on an international basis. It is one of the last big wild areas left in the Continent. In the meantime, with the aid of the frontier police posts in Ethiopia, it should be possible to establish and maintain a controlled wildlife area without undue expenditure once the policy is laid down by the Conservation Bureau. Second, the area along the Sudan border in the neighbourhood of Maji, to the north of the last one, and also partly within the Omo catchment. This is said to be one of the best surviving areas of wildlife in the country. To the west, across the Omo, " the Plain of Death," an extensive dry bush-clad plain, apparently devoid of cattle and people, possibly owing to tsetse flies, could be included.

Third, the Dinder tributaries. Further north, about the latitude of Lake Tana, the Sudanese Government are opening up the Dinder National Park, a substantial area abutting on the Ethiopian frontier along the upper reaches of that river. The Sudanese side which has been a game reserve for many years, is one of the most important wildlife areas in this part of Africa, and the Sudanese complain of serious depredations by poachers coming in from Ethiopia. Some kind of controlled area on the Ethiopian side is most desirable, and by agreement between the two countries might be developed as part of the buffer zone of the park where controlled cropping could be organised.

Finally, says the report, Ethiopia has a particular responsibility to the rest of the world to ensure that its fine species of rare large mammals do not become extinct. These are the walia ibex or wild goat, *Capra walie*, which survives only in the highest mountains of Gondar and Simien in the north ; * the mountain nyala, *Tragelaphus buxtoni*, which lives only in the mountains of the south, chiefly in Arusi ; the Somali wild ass *Equus asinus somaliensis*, which still exists in Danakil and the Ogaden ; the dibitag antelope, *Ammordorcas clarkei*, which lives in the open bush of the Ogaden-Somalia border ; and the Abyssinian wolf or fox, *Simenia simensis*, known only from the Simien plateau. There are other species which may have to be added later, such as the reticulated giraffe. Stringent regulations are needed to protect these species, and for the first three appropriate areas should be demarcated and supervised where they can have real sanctuary.

* Mr. Leslie Brown, who was investigating the walia ibex in its precipitous home in the Simien Mountains at the same time, estimated the population at about 200 animals ; of the females he could identify with certainty, more than half had kids. Their only enemy is man—he found no trace of leopards. Legal protection by the Ethiopian Government, he says, has not stopped the persecution in this remote area, but even two guards strategically placed could achieve much ; the best solution would be to make the area a national park.



World Wildlife Fund

SQUARE-LIPPED RHINOS—MOTHER AND CHILD

Plate 16 : This square-lipped (or white) rhino calf was born on April 11th this year in the Loskop Dam Reserve in the Transvaal. The species was exterminated in the wild in the Transvaal in 1896. This mother was captured in Zululand and brought to the Reserve a year ago.

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Plate 17 :
Red Squirrel in the Snow.
Photograph by V. Minkevich





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