

Opportunity in Somalia

WILDLIFE in Somalia is "still better preserved than in many African countries", but the situation is deteriorating fast, and if prompt action is not taken, in only one generation "Somalia will be as bare of wildlife as any of the poorest countries in Africa". This is the conclusion of a valuable and wide-ranging report by U. Funaioli and A. M. Simonetta.* The usual factors are at work: increasing population, increasing domestic stock, increase in firearms – often supplied by dealers in skins to professional hunters – and improved communications which make it easier to dispose of skins and trophies. The destruction of trees and bush is fantastically high, estimated at 1,700,000 tons a year, of which 350,000 tons are exported – this from a country that is arid and subject to erosion. Black rhino and leopards have been almost exterminated; Grevy's and Burchell's zebras are rare, the Somali wild ass "exceedingly rare", and Soemmering's gazelle and cheetah much reduced. Elephants have been exterminated in the north, but have increased considerably in the south where there is much poaching for ivory, although much of the "dead" ivory auctioned in Somalia is smuggled in from Kenya. Dugongs are rare and regularly taken despite protection.

One extraordinary aspect of the situation in Somalia is that the capture and killing of animals is still regulated by two Acts – one promulgated by the British in their former territory in the north, the other by the Italians. This results in many anomalies, gives much scope for evasion and provides smugglers of skins from Kenya and Ethiopia with useful alibis. Some animals – greater kudu is one – have no protection in the Italian legislation but are protected under the British. The British Act requires game licences; the Italian, for Somali citizens observing certain rules, does not. Thus, licences issued for lesser kudus in 1960 permitted a *maximum* of 1,040 animals to be killed; in fact, according to the Customs Office figures, 19,600 skins were exported.

Some of the export figures for skins are, as the authors say, "appalling". Crocodiles show a dramatic crash – from 5,000 skins exported in 1951 to 100 in 1962 and none at all in 1963 – which unfortunately is a true reflection of the status of crocodiles in Somalia. Between 1951 and 1958 a few hunters were carrying on an intensive capturing campaign with what success the figures show. The authors believe that there may be many fewer than 1,000 crocodiles left today. For leopards, despite the fact that they were already very rare in the early 1950's, export figures rose from 369 to 808 between 1952 and 1963, clearly the result of the smuggling from Ethiopia and Kenya; examination of the skins for sale in the market showed that the majority were from highland populations. Rhino horns continued to be exported despite the near extinction of the animal in Somalia; these too must have come largely from poachers in Kenya, and the same applied to much of the elephant ivory.

*The Mammalian Fauna of the Somali Republic: Status and Conservation Problems. *Monitore Zoologico Italiano*. Supplement to Vol. 74, 1966.

Nevertheless, there still are areas in Somalia with a rich and diverse fauna, as well as the rarities such as the wild ass, which could be built up and become a valuable asset. The authors of this report have listed and mapped thirteen such areas, and recommend that they be made either nature reserves or controlled areas. One, the Lower Juba-Lower Shebeli area in the south, they suggest could become one of the finest national parks in Africa and a considerable tourist attraction.

Clearly there is a great opportunity in Somalia; the problem is of course economic. The task is beyond the powers of the Somali Government, and it is urgent that the government should seek international help and funds to start the necessary measures. The authors of this report have provided an admirable blueprint on which to begin work.

News from the Congo

IN the course of two visits to the Congo in February/March and May/June this year, Dr. Kai Curry-Lindahl visited both the Upemba National Park in Katanga and the Albert National Park twice. His visits were made at the invitation of the Congolese Government, and in the company of His Excellency the Minister of Agriculture, M. Alphonse Zamundu, on behalf of IUCN and aided by an FPS grant.

From the southern sector of the Upemba park he reports a sorry tale of destruction, dating back to 1960. Between 1960 and 1962 UN troops invaded this sector and killed large numbers of animals, particularly zebras and antelopes, with automatic weapons. Their example was followed by Katangan gendarmes, and later still by the Congolese National Army; commercial operators also killed large numbers of animals, often more than their lorries could carry away, and carcasses were left to rot. Inevitably local poaching increased, and even the park guards became involved. The result is that, whereas in 1960 this part of the Upemba park swarmed with wildlife, today the numbers of animals are seriously reduced, and those that are left are exceedingly shy, fleeing at the sound of a vehicle. One consolation is that this part of the park is still territorially intact, with no villages and no pressure to start settlements.

In the northern sector of the park the situation is reversed: despite the presence of at least eight villages, Dr. Curry-Lindahl saw plenty of animals which were not in the least shy, with numerous large herds of zebra, hartebeest, roan and baboons; oribi and reedbuck were common, and vervet monkeys, mongooses, warthogs, waterbuck, puku, bushbuck and eland were seen. But hippo were notably absent; buffalo, duiker, klip-springer and sable were rarities.

This northern sector of the park, however, has suffered seriously in equipment. Invading Baluba warriors had plundered the main station at Lusinga, burned the rangers' quarters in the park interior, and destroyed a road bridge and the vital ferry on the Lufira River, thus breaking the road link between the northern and southern sectors of the park. The Baluba were still occupying about a third of this sector, and the lack of vehicles made it exceedingly difficult for the rangers to keep control.