

THE NATAL GAME RESERVES

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By L. ATTWELL

AFTER many decades during which the larger and finer forms of wild life of the world had been losing ground rapidly — the speed of their disappearance rising to a climax with the perfected deadliness of the rifle backed by the development of motor transport and roads — a strong movement arose in most parts of the world to conserve at least a fair sample of such wild life as still remained.

The need for such a movement was especially pressing in Africa, since Africa possessed by far the grandest assemblage of wild mammals that had survived into the modern world, and they were being exterminated at an unprecedented rate. Most of the countries of Africa have joined in the movement, mainly by way of setting aside tracts of country as game reserves. It is a gratifying fact that South Africa took the lead in this direction, and that in the Kruger National Park she has what is recognised as the finest game reserve in the world.

It is all the more regrettable, therefore, that South Africa should also be going back on some of the measures already taken. Smaller reserves were set up in different Provinces of the Union, several of them in Natal, and of recent years the game animals in two out of the three main game reserves of Natal have been systematically exterminated by the Government without sufficient scientific evidence to justify so drastic a policy.

The decision to carry out this extermination of game has aroused fierce controversy, and for the understanding of the issue, some idea of the reserves is necessary.

Home for White Rhino Natal has several small game reserves administered by the Province (being game reserves and not national parks, which are Government controlled) as well as bird sanctuaries, but here we are concerned with the three reserves which are the most important, not only because of the species contained in them but also because of the fact that they harbour tsetse fly. They are the Umfolosi, Hluhluwe, and Mkuzi Reserves and all are in Zululand. Of these the Hluhluwe Reserve is being maintained and the other two abolished. It has been laid down, however, that the rare white rhinoceros will not be shot, and attempts will be made, through the addition of the corridor to the Hluhluwe Reserve, to make this a suitable home for this animal. There is another reserve, the Ndumu, but this has



Black rhinoceros in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve.

S.A.R. & H.

little game left in it, and although it has fly it is not significant in the present controversy.

The Umfolosi Reserve (approximately 72,000 acres or 112 square miles) is important in that it is the natural habitat of the remaining few southern white, or square-lipped rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum simum*). There are perhaps 100 to 200 specimens alive, and if it is to be preserved as a species, it appears that the Umfolosi should be retained even if other game is exterminated.

For the white rhino breed here, and if forced out of this area it is possible that it will not be able to breed elsewhere. At one time other species of large game—buffalo, wildebeeste, zebra, kudu, and so on—were numerous, but as a result of several campaigns of game extermination in the past there is extremely little game left in the Umfolosi Reserve to-day. The reserve is subject to periodic droughts, which in former years, when it was still well stocked, used to lead to a certain amount of wandering of game into the surrounding settlement areas.

Ideal Game Reserve The Hluhluwe Reserve (approximately 35,000 acres or 54 square miles) was, as in the case of Umfolosi, proclaimed in 1897. It is the only one of the three that has not been de-proclaimed and is not now in process of being shot out. According to the findings of the Game Reserves Commission of 1935, (1) the Hluhluwe Reserve fills all the requirements of an ideal game reserve for Zululand, in that, it is capable of supporting all the various species of Zululand fauna (this is to be criticised in the light of what has been said in the previous paragraph about the White Rhino); (2) it lends itself to adequate control in order to ensure that the animals do not wander outside the area; (3) it is attractive to visitors from a scenic point of view; (4) it contains adequate grazing and water facilities at all seasons. Further it is very comfortably equipped with rest houses, easily reached by car in about five hours from Durban, and can be safely visited, from the health point of view, at any time of the year.

The black rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) is the chief attraction, being well established and to be seen at any time; buffalo are common, and there are some rather rare and beautiful nyala antelope besides the commoner species of game. There is a very limited and inconstant number of white rhino which seem to wander between this and the Umfolosi area through the portion of country known as the "corridor."

Once Best Stocked The Mkuzi Reserve (approximately 62,000 acres or 95 square miles) was proclaimed in 1912, and is to-day—or was until the present official slaughter had begun to make headway—without doubt the best stocked of the Natal reserves. It consists of fine park-like country which carried large herds of impala and wildebeeste and a very few black rhino; and it is the real home of the nyala, which is found in considerable numbers. Other species, too, are (or were) common. It is a reserve of definite importance in the preservation of the nyala as a species in Natal.

There is little doubt that the Hluhluwe is not at present carrying anything like the numbers of game it is capable of supporting. This is borne out by large-scale burning which the game warden has to put into effect each year. In 1939 a single five-stranded six-foot high wire fence was commenced, and to-day the reserve is almost



White rhinoceros,
Hluhluwe Reserve,
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completely fenced with the exception of the area bordering the "corridor." A double fence with a buffer zone between was promised in 1941.

Ostensibly guided by the four principles referred to above, the Game Reserves Commission recommended the retention of the Hluhluwe Reserve and the deproclamation of the Mkuzi, and further decided that the Umfolosi did not come up to the requirements stated. Umfolosi Reserve, deproclaimed in 1920, was re-proclaimed in 1929, but only so that there should be no interference with fly investigations. This reclamation, it was known, would fall away when fly operations ceased.

Precarious Existence These game reserves have had a precarious existence ever since the surrounding areas were opened up for settlers, and an inter-relationship between game, nagana and tsetse was proved. Except for the presence of tsetse, the surrounding areas are suitable for cattle ranching. Extensive shooting of game with a view to tsetse control took place in former years, from which the game even in the reserves, with the exception of the Mkuzi, has never recovered.

Some idea of the extent to which this slaughter was carried out is given by the following figures: In 1917, in the area of the Mkuzi, between 20,000 and 25,000 wildebeeste, apart from other species, were destroyed; in 1919, a large-scale drive was held in the Ntambana settlement area, meeting with an apparent failure to lessen the incidence of the nagana stock disease; in 1927, game patrols on the southern border of the Umfolosi destroyed 2,000 zebras and other common species of game; while in 1929 to 1931, it was estimated, by the number of tails brought in, that 35,000 animals were destroyed, mainly in the areas surrounding the three reserves, but also to some extent in the reserves themselves. Undoubtedly a great many more died of wounds in the bush and were not recorded.

Irreparable Havoc No animals can stand destruction on this scale. Evidence of the havoc caused, and lack of recovery in the Umfolosi in particular, was provided during several days spent in this area in 1939. A considerable distance was covered on foot each day, the party being accompanied by native trackers. There was an extreme scarcity of game. Yet one of the assertions made by the settlers as an argument for the extermination of the game was that game was streaming out of the reserves on to their farms, carrying tsetse which infected their cattle.

Shooting on an organized basis to exterminate all game in the Mkuzi and the Umfolosi (with the exception of the white rhino in the latter) was begun in March, 1943. Figures showing the results of the first three months of the campaign were published in October. The total head of game destroyed in this period was given as 30,000. Of this number, 5,000 were described as big game animals.*

(Continued in next page.)

Seen from my hide-out

By P. W. WILLIS

EAGLE vs MONKEY . . . fight to the death

IT was summer, with heavy low clouds and a high wind.

A lone old Vervet monkey came running along an almost treeless flat near the river, making for the dense bush and large trees. One lone tree, not more than 12 feet high, with soft branches and heavy foliage stood on the flat 20 yards off the river. Just as the monkey reached this tree a Martial eagle swooped down on him. He just reached the protection of the tree in time and clambered up as high as he could with safety, but he was still exposed to the eagle, and the tree afforded little cover or no protection.

The eagle then made several swoops at the monkey, trying to dislodge him, and at each sweep the bird lost several feathers as it brushed through the small branches and twigs, until at last the animal lost its nerve, sprang to the ground and made for the safety of the river bank and large trees. It had not gone more than ten yards when the eagle swooped down and carried it off screaming and fighting in the air. The monkey fought with all the desperation of despair, but the bird had a good hold and must have had its powerful talons sunk deep into the vitals of the monkey.

They were about 50 feet in the air when the monkey got a grip and sunk its formidable teeth into the bird's breast. Both fell to the ground with a thud. When I reached them I found both in their last gasps, the monkey's teeth embedded in the eagle's breast and the bird's talons sunk deep into the animal's liver and back.

THE NATAL GAME RESERVES (Continued).

In 1933 it was decided by the Natal Provincial Council to add the Crown lands known as "the Corridor" to the Hluhluwe. These lie to the south-west of the reserve, and extend to the Black Umfolosi River. It is proposed to include a strip south of the Black Umfolosi River, i.e. a portion of the present Umfolosi Reserve. With this addition, increasing the size of the Hluhluwe Reserve to approximately 100,000 acres, it is possible that the future of the white rhino may, after all, be assured. This step has been opposed by the settlers, who, far from wishing to see any game reserve area extended, wish for the abolition of all of them.

* It may be noted that in this statement of October 29, 1942, Senator Clarkson said: "The statement that 15,000 head of game are to be destroyed is fantastic. If the number is divided by five it will be nearer the mark." This was no doubt intended to reassure the opponents of the slaughter, but the Senator's prophecy has been completely falsified by events, ten times as many head of game having been shot up to October, 1944, and the destruction is still continuing in spite of several public protests.