

# Safari '68

(PART 1)

BY THE EDITOR

= Patrick MACARTNEY

"Fasten your seat belts, please, we will be landing at Nairobi Airport in a few minutes time..."; that was the loud-speaker announcement to tell us that our overnight flight from Europe was nearly over, and soon we would be back on the continent of our adoption, that continent of change, of mystery, of fascination . . . Africa.

We landed early on a cloudy heavy morning, and were soon into Nairobi, one of our favourite cities, among friends and familiar places.

My wife and I had been several weeks in Britain and Europe, cramming in visits to as many friends, relations, and new places as we could in the short space of six weeks, almost one of those "it must be Rome because its Tuesday" marathons; and now we were back in Africa again, to round off our trip with a three week safari in Kenya and Tanzania.

Whilst in London, I was the guest of the Council of the Fauna Preservation Society for lunch at their Headquarters in Regent's Park; the keenest interest was shown by everyone, and I was kept busy answering some very pertinent questions, about the Wildlife situation in Zambia.

A few days later, on our return trip, my wife and I spent a night in Morges, the Swiss headquarters of the World Wildlife Fund and I.U.C.N. (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), a most

enjoyable visit, with again very kind hospitality, and great interest in Zambian conservation.

We spent a few hectic days and evenings in Nairobi, with of course a visit to the National Park five miles out, this time with Frank Minot, who has done so much for conservation in Africa.

He was duty warden that Sunday afternoon, and we had a most interesting time pulling cars out of ditches, catching speeding drivers, and giving advice generally, but found time to watch five cheetah (mother and four youngsters) on a Grant's gazelle kill . . . then followed a memorable evening at the Minots' home, enjoying real American hospitality.

All too soon it was time to leave Nairobi, and we headed south in our little hired Volkswagen, along the tarred road that leads to Mombasa, off to visit a chain of famous places, with magic names like Tsavo, Ngurdoto, Arusha, Manyara, Ngorongoro, Serengeti, and the Mara.

Our way led us through gently rolling short grass country, with only the occasional herd of cattle to break the loneliness of the landscape, until . . . was it possible? . . . yes, there stood a herd of a dozen giraffe right in the open, only a hundred yards from the road, heedless of the traffic; but in fact, apart from many species of birds, they were the only wildlife we saw for the nearly two hundred miles before

our understanding of this animal. Judging from Mr. Mwenya's knowledge of the wildlife and the methods of studying it, the training at Mweka must be of a high standard. We should send more people there to study, if we can find people who are suitably motivated. Mr. Mwenya became interested in wildlife on a visit to Luangwa — another good reason for supporting the Schools Camp program!

described by Hanks in the January 1967 issue. Much of the recent alarm about the future of the lechwe stemmed from an aerial survey that placed the population at 4,000 animals, but this figure probably is meaningless. We do not know how many black lechwe there are, or whether the population is increasing, decreasing, or stable.

Mr. Mwenya feels that the main herds are now receiving adequate protection from poaching during much of the year, because of frequent patrols by the rangers and game guards. Later in the dry season, when the water has left the floodplain, the lechwe are in remote parts of the swamp which cannot be reached by either boat or Land-Rover, and it has not yet been possible to provide much protection for them then. Herds in other parts of the swamp receive little protection at any season.

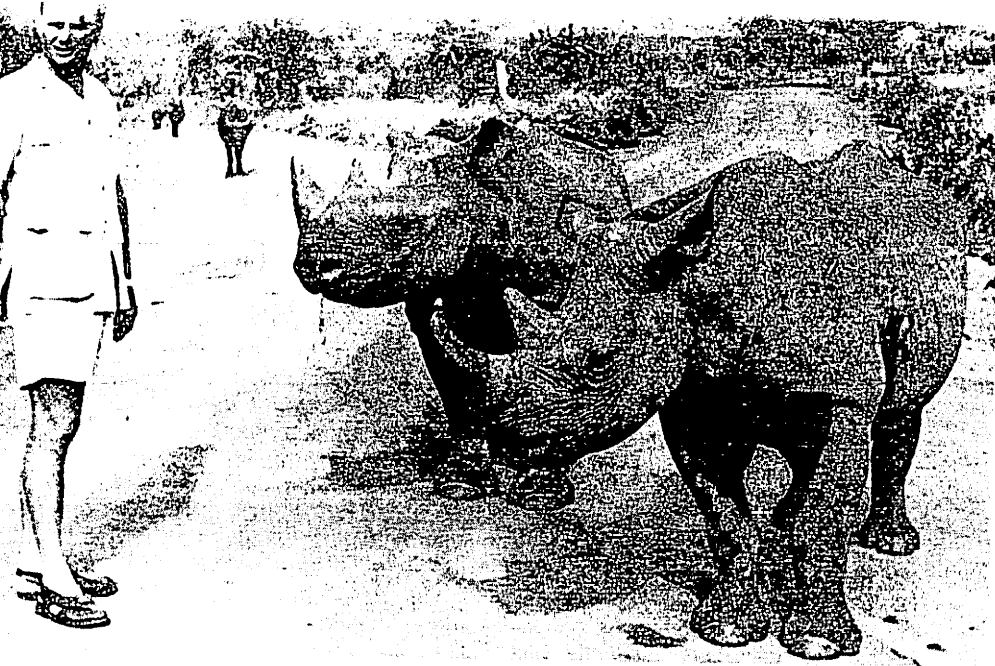
In spite of this continued poaching the lechwe seems to be in no immediate danger of extinction, and it may be that the herds would increase even with the present level of protection. This does not mean that we can afford to relax our efforts. Any race that exists in such small numbers always faces the danger of dying out altogether.

## Zambia takes Responsibility

Two more governments have now joined the IUCN Survival Service Commission's Ultimate Responsibility scheme, by which they are asked to accept respon-

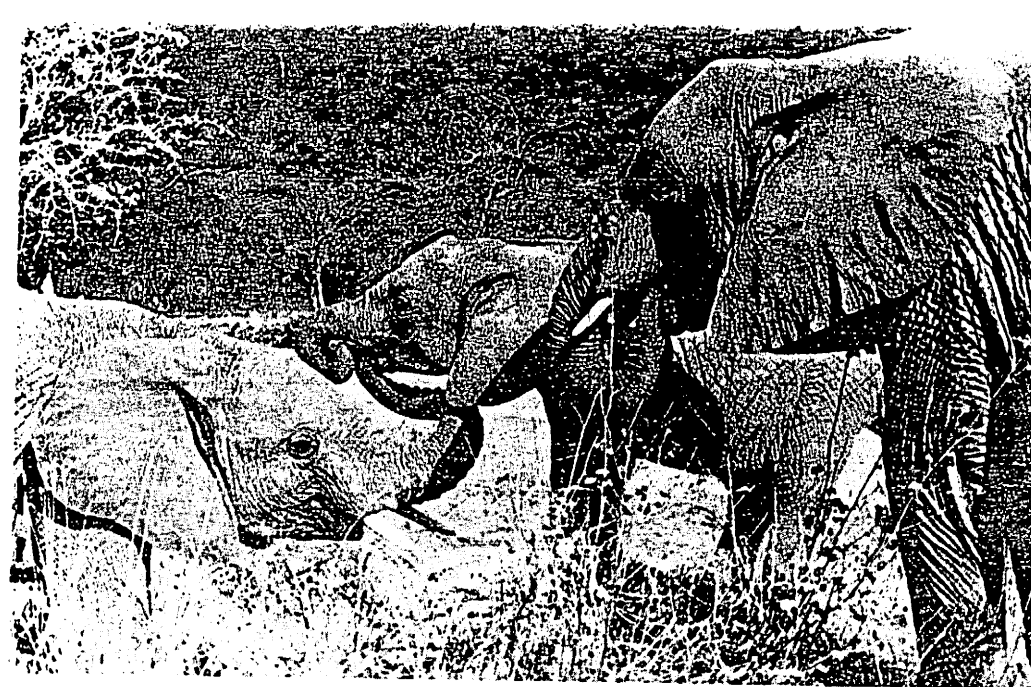
sibility for the conservation of rare and endangered animals; they are Zambia, for the black lechwe, and France, for the Corsican red deer.

("Oryx", September 1968)



DAVID SHELDRICK WITH RUEDI AND RUFUS

(Photo: The Editor)



KADENGE, POLE POLE AND ELEANOR

(Photo: The Editor)

we turned left at Manyani Gate into Tsavo East, when our real safari began.

We drove in along a smooth sandy road, and at once started to see game; dik dik, always in pairs, a herd of fringe-eared oryx, who galloped off, leaving a tiny baby behind, kongoni, and many others, until we arrived at Mudanda Rock.

This is a large whale-back outcrop of rock nearly a mile long, which forms a natural grandstand overlooking a drinking pool, where a hide has been built for visitors to watch the hundreds of elephant which visit the spot to drink and bathe.

It was evidently not their afternoon there, or we left too early, for all we saw were a few water-buck (females of the common or *ellipsiprymnus* variety), a lone oryx, and a warthog having a most satisfactory wallow in the mud at the edge of the pool.

So on to Park Headquarters, there to meet the Sheldricks, who

had kindly asked us to stay with them, and who welcomed us most warmly.

David Sheldrick, Warden of Tsavo East, started the Park in 1950, and developed it from a savage wilderness into the well organised unit that it is today; his wife, Daphne, is the charming author of the best-seller, "The Orphans of Tsavo", who last year went to Paris to be presented with the literary prize won by the French translation.

Readers of the book, which was reviewed in the January 1967 issue of "Black Lechwe", will recall most of the animals we saw that evening as they returned with the Ranger from another day at the Voi River.

First came Rufus, eight years old, with his inseparable companion Ruedi, now six, and then the third rhino, little Stub, a female just over eighteen months old.

With them were the two regular elephants, Eleanor, aged

nine, and Kadenge, seven, accompanied by two-year-old Pole Pole (which means slowly, carefully in Swahili) from a film company on location in the Park.

The orphan herd was completed by three young buffalo, Lollipop, Mustapha, and Curly, whose ages ranged from eighteen to seven months.

The herd goes down every day to the river, and returns every night to the shelter of the stables and stockades behind the Sheldricks' house; all the animals are free to return to the wild, as and when they wish. Some do, others (such as Rufus) probably never will, they have it too good where they are.

That evening we met Virginia McKenna and her husband Bill Travers, stars of the film "Born Free", this time making a film about elephants instead of lions (hence Pole Pole), dedicated lovers of Africa and its wildlife.

Next morning we set off for a whole day in the Park with

Daphne, David, and five-year-old Angela, a day we will always remember as something most special.

An early thrill was the sighting of lesser kudu, male and female, a "first" for this species; being from Southern Africa, the greater kudu (a prize for East African viewers) is commonplace to us, but a lesser . . . unfortunately they are shy, bush-loving creatures, and we got no close views of them.

We visited Aruba Lodge, built on the edge of a large dam, now a do-it-yourself camp rather on the lines of our Zambian ones, as opposed to the usual East African safari lodge, which is a self-contained hotel in the wild, to the same formula as Mfuwe, Ngoma, and Kasaba.

We had our first view of RED elephants, the almost universal Tsavo East colour, caused of course by the red earth of the Park, but a novel sight for the stranger.

Then lunch by the Galana River, which goes down to the Indian Ocean, with the volcanic Yatta Plateau towering above us on the other side, and elephant feeding on the river banks, an enchanting spot indeed; equally beautiful was the junction of the Athi and Tsavo rivers, (which combine to form the Galana), where we stopped for tea.

In common with most people who live their lives in the wild, David Sheldrick's eyesight was a source of continual wonder to us; it was commonplace for him to point out say a rhino on the far bank about half a mile away, which we had to search for with binoculars to find.

Then, driving along past a baobab tree, he suddenly stopped and reversed, saying he had seen a pearl-spotted owlet on the elephant ravaged trunk of the tree; sure enough, after much searching, we found the bird, which is about the size of a sparrow or kingfisher, but he had seen it while driving past!

As the light faded, we found ourselves on a grassy plain, and as always in the twilight, animals become bolder, and soon we were surrounded by herds of fringe-eared oryx, which galloped past us as we drove, more and more, until we must have seen hundreds in the semi-darkness, an unforgettable sight.

Poaching had always been a problem in Tsavo, and several times it reached terrible heights, with wholesale slaughter of elephant and rhino; now, with special anti-poaching units and constant aerial patrols, it is good to know that it is virtually non-existent in all the 3,000 sq. mile area of Tsavo East

Early next morning, in brilliant sunshine, another wonderful experience was in store for me . . . a flight in a Piper Super Cub across the Park.

David Sheldrick piloted the aircraft, as do most of the wardens in East Africa, in the same way as he had driven the Land Cruiser the day before, as a means of getting around his area during the course of his duties; he has incidentally flown over 1,700 hours in the course of five years, so naturally I had the greatest confidence in his skill as a pilot.

I had read and heard much of the violently controversial history of elephant damage in Tsavo East, and now I was to see some of the actual results from the air.

As far back as 1954, the herds had started pushing over and destroying the shallow-rooted commiphora forest, which at that time covered large areas of the southern end of the Park, leaving behind a graveyard of fallen skeletons strewn across the landscape.

Then came the terrible drought of 1961, and the violent floods of 1962, both so vividly described in "The Orphans of Tsavo".

The drought seemed to be the final stage in the destruction of the fallen commiphora areas, which appeared to be headed for Sahara conditions, whilst the floods did nothing to help the situation.

Plans to crop the herds in large numbers were now being seriously considered, and later on a pilot scheme was actually launched in which small herds of elephants were shot as family groups to minimize the disturbance factor.

In the meantime, a carpet of

ipomea was spreading across the ravaged lands, which protected the bare ground from the elements; then, unseen and unsuspected, protected by the dead commiphora trees from sun, wash of rain and wandering animals, under each trunk an oasis of sweet perennial grasses started to grow and to spread.

As the months went by, the ipomea withered, the trees rotted away, and the lush grasses joined up to form flat plains of first-class grazing land, whilst, as an added bonus, the legume indigofera established itself as good rhino feed, and the deep rooted acacia tortilis trees grew up to provide browse for giraffe.

The interesting thing I saw so clearly from the air as we flew over was the dividing line of the railway, which for some reason the elephants did not cross; on the western side, the untouched commiphora forest was there,

each tree surrounded by a circle of bare earth, caused by the shallow root system which stops all growth beneath the tree.

In contrast, on the eastern side, starting right from the rail tracks, divided as if by a ruler from the forest, stretched miles of beautiful grassland, grazed by herds of oryx, zebra, buffalo, and kongoni; and all amongst them are herds of elephant, now living apparently contentedly on a diet of grass, on the very lands where once they had seemed to be making a desert out of their habitat.

Now the cropping plans have been abandoned, to the great satisfaction of David Sheldrick, who was against them from the beginning, and a new ecological cycle seems to have started in Tsavo.

All of which gave me the idea that perhaps the elephants knew best after all!

(To be Continued)

## Careers in the Game Department

BY W. R. BAINBRIDGE (Chief Game Officer)

What are the functions of the Game Department? Possibly the aims and objects of this Department are less understood than most other Government Departments.

To most villagers, wild animals are something to be feared — or eaten. And they usually never believe — until it is too late, because our Wildlife can be so abundant — that there could ever be an end to their numbers.

These days, people are beginning to realise that not only is it

really quite easy to kill off the animals, but once they are gone, there is cause for regret as our Wildlife is really one of our most valuable Natural Resources.

It is valuable because:-

- (a) Firstly, the animals are, in many cases, more efficient at using extensive areas of our country than most domestic animals. This is especially so in the tsetse areas and in other parts, like swamps, which cannot be used by domestic ani-