

bongo

GHANA WILDLIFE SOCIETY



THE PLACE OF WILDLIFE IN THE FOREST RESERVE AREAS OF GHANA

by Anna H. Merz

IT is my opinion that the Forest Reserves could yield a high crop of meat as well as timber on a sustained yield basis if the animals in such areas were to be scientifically managed and cropped for meat instead of being hunted and trapped, usually by illegal means and with a total disregard for breeding seasons, until brought to the verge of extermination. Once exterminated, they cannot be brought back and the loss to the country, both economically and scientifically, of a valuable natural resource at a time when the population is growing rapidly and there is a shortage of protein, would be tragic.

The mammals indigenous to the forest areas harm neither the soil nor the vegetation and thrive under conditions impossible for cattle. They browse as well as graze and utilise a wide range of plants. In the United Kingdom an average beef animal should gain 300 lb. live weight per acre per annum. In many areas of Ghana more than 30 acres per animal are required and the animals take 4 years to mature. The wild ungulates have a higher growth and conversion rate, they are ready to breed at an earlier age, the protein content of the meat is higher, and there is less wastage on the carcass. Also cattle are highly susceptible to both trypanosomiasis and tick fever, to both of which diseases wild ungulates and elephants are virtually immune. Some of the local cattle such as the African Short horn have a semi-immunity but this is paid for by a very slow rate of growth. The drugs used against these diseases are costly and may be dangerous.

An animal already weakened by disease can be killed by the administration of a drug. The drug can cause severe abscesses, and if the treated animal also has worms it can cause severe or fatal colic.

A classic example of the profit that can be made from game animals can be taken from a farm near Bulawayo in Rhodesia, although this of course was in a savanna and not a forest area.

In 1959 this farm of 50 square miles supported 1155 cattle and produced for the market 189 steers of an average live weight of 1000 lb., which

dressed out 500 lb. meat per animal, i.e. somewhat less than 3 lb. per acre. In the first year that this farm began game ranching, it produced 4 lb. of bushmeat per acre although the biomass (lb. weight of live animals per square mile) was only 18,700 as against a biomass of up to 135,000 in certain parts of the Albert National Park in the Congo at that date. In the above farm in one year beef production brought in £5198 but the cost of production was £4692 leaving a profit of only £506 (or 10.8% of the investment). In the first year of game ranching meat worth £3,200 was sold, and this cost only £2,300 to produce. The profit was therefore 39.1% of the investment. Less labour was required, no costly irrigation schemes, no medical treatment, and most important of all, no damage to the soil was sustained.

The above example refers to a savanna area. In forest areas, the expenses involved in cropping game and also protecting the animals from poaching are likely to be somewhat higher, but even so, the very large difference between the low profit margin on cattle and the very high profit on game ranching in a savanna area indicates that although game cropping may be slightly less profitable in forest areas than in savannas, it would still be at least as profitable and probably considerably more so than any type of livestock production in such areas.

If the Forest Reserves were to be regarded simultaneously as Game Reserves, and illegal farming was kept out, it should be possible to control poaching on a commercial scale with the co-operation of Police Check points or by putting Game Rangers at strategic Police barriers.

There are also certain legal anomalies which need remedying if the Wildlife Conservation Regulations of 1971 are to be implemented successfully:-

- 1) It is illegal to hunt certain species but it is not illegal to be in possession of them, therefore unless the actual hunter is caught no action can be taken and the middle man escapes.

- 2) Under Article 7 of the African Convention of Nature and Natural Resources of which Ghana was a signatory at Addis Ababa, and also under the Wildlife Conservation Regulations of 1971, hunting at night using a hunting lamp is illegal. However, importing, manufacturing, selling or possessing such lamps is not illegal, and until this is the case the prohibition of night hunting is virtually impossible to enforce.
- 3) Under the same article of the same Regulations, the use of gin traps is illegal, but this is not enforced in Ghana unless the trap is of such a size as to necessitate the use of a "jack" to open-it.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The above article was written in late 1972. The recent Forest Protection Decree, 1974 (N.R.C.D. 234) brings the combined use of Forest Reserves for both timber and bushmeat production a little closer since it provides a much more effective means for the prevention of illegal hunting and for the prevention of disturbance to the forest habitat by unauthorized farming and other activities in Forest Reserves.

Having reached a stage where the passive protection of wild life in Forest Reserves is facilitated by the new Decree, the next stage would seem to be the introduction of active management of wildlife in these areas.

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