

summit of the mountain.

'We sighted the dogs at eight in the morning on 13th February at over 19000 feet, near Hans Mayer Point, while we were resting during the exhausting process of walking round the southern rim of the crater towards the true summit, Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze.

'There were five of them, standing about on the great southern glacier, the edge of which was parallel with and just outside the crater wall. They were unmistakable, round eared, inquisitive in demeanour, blotchy in colouring though looking almost black as seen through snow glasses on a dazzling background of ice.

'As we pressed on for the last quarter mile trudge, which occupied half an hour they followed along the glacier ridge parallel with our course, evincing a palpable interest in us.

'We found other tracks of theirs, crossing our own, and plainly they had visited the crater itself. This was at a time when the crater and slopes of Kibo carried far more snow than is often seen; a less probable place for wild dogs could scarcely be imagined, and there was nothing to eat but ourselves.'

Webb supplied photographic evidence of his encounter and perhaps relying on his report, Dorst and Dandelot in their *Field Guide to the Larger Mammals of Africa* describe the wild dog's habitat: 'Open or wooded savanna up to high mountains (summit of Kilimanjaro; on Mt. Kenya, above 9,000 ft).'

At the end of January this year a party of us climbed Kilimanjaro by the Machame route, emerging on the rim of the crater between the Rebmann and Retzel glaciers. By 6.30 am we were about 500 metres from the crater edge and in the snow we could see clear evidence of paw marks not more than a day or two old. There were at times only one set but further up (and all the way round the crater edge practically to the summit) up to six different sets.

The snow around the paw marks had melted and refrozen, blurring the edges and unfortunately making it impossible to identify claw marks precisely. The spacing at times gave the impression that the animal was at least the size of a dog (for example the set of prints in the accompanying photograph), and while many years ago a dead leopard was found preserved in the ice the number of different prints nearer the summit would seem to confirm that they could only have been made by wild dogs. The guides who accompanied our party on the final ascent had apparently seen such prints before but were of little assistance when it came to trying to confirm the identity of their makers; the one I asked replied that their origin was '*Labda ndege*' (perhaps a bird) so I did not press the point further!

Rupert Watson



Arthur Christiansen

*A recent survey in Zimbabwe estimates that the ranger force would have to be increased fivefold to provide effective protection for the country's rhinos.*

## WIDER HORIZONS

### Zimbabwe's rhino war

Zimbabwe's battle to save Africa's last truly viable population of black rhinos continues unabated, and at first glance the situation, as it has developed since last reported on in *Swara* (see 'Chizarira', March/April 1989), would appear encouraging.

There has been a sharp drop in the number of rhinos known lost to poachers, from 149 in 1987 to 62 in 1988 to only 21 as of the end of June this year. The number of rhino poachers shot dead by anti-poaching forces since 1985 now stands at 73, with another 42 captured, against the loss of only one park ranger killed by poachers.

As there has been no real decline in the number of poaching incursions, these figures would seem to indicate both that the anti-poaching units are becoming increasingly adept at finding and confronting the poachers before they've had a chance to kill rhinos, and that they are aided in this by the increasing difficulty the poachers must be having in simply finding rhinos to kill. The rhinos are certainly thinner on the ground,

for since 1985 just under 600 are now known to have been killed while at the same time over 300 have been successfully translocated out of the lower Zambezi Valley.

A recently completed survey in the area suggests a remaining rhino population of between 500 and 600, and Zimbabwe's conservationists would like to stop translocating them and try to protect these in their natural habitat.

So much for the good news — the broader picture is, unfortunately, much less encouraging. To begin with, the survey also concluded that in order to really protect the remaining rhinos, a force of 500 game scouts would be needed as compared to the 100 currently fielded by Operation Stronghold. Yet the National Parks budget for 1988-89 is down 10 per cent from the previous year's, and 35 per cent lower than the amount requested. Furthermore, the WWF's support for the anti-poaching helicopter, which has been the kingpin of the effort, ended in May, and although the helicopter is still flying, thanks to the support of an 'anonymous benefactor', its future availability is not secure.

There has also been a gradual widening of the front lines in this mini-war. During the last year rhinos have been poached in the Chete and Matetsi Safari Areas, and in the Hwange and Kazuma Pan National

Parks. The gun battle which occurred last year in Hwange between park rangers and a gang of six Zambians, although it resulted in the death of two poachers and no rhinos lost, must be seen as effectively removing Hwange from the list of areas considered safe for rhinos. And yet Hwange is one of the areas where rhinos captured in the Zambezi Valley have been released, so to have begun losing them there after all the expense and effort is a very serious setback.

The ultimate success of Operation Stronghold also depends on Zambia, but so far efforts to persuade it to take serious action to curtail the poaching from its side have had little success. The first step, of course, is to get Zambia to admit it has a problem. Gangs of poachers, some known through interrogation to have been recruited in the suburbs of Lusaka, are regularly supplied with modern weapons and ammunition, and leave the Zambian side of the Zambezi River to make illegal forays into Zimbabwe every week. This has been going on for four years, which suggests corruption at levels well above that of the poachers themselves. But Zambia's reaction to a recent article in Britain's *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper which said as much was to hotly deny the possibility of any corruption of this sort in any official circles, and to even threaten libel action against the *Telegraph*.

Rhino poaching in Zimbabwe has not been the exclusive preserve of Zambians though. In early December the chief warden of Zimbabwe's parks, Mr Glen Tatham, was involved in an incident in which a Zimbabwean poacher was killed. This led to his temporary imprisonment with murder charges being brought against him, and the onset of uncertainty and low morale among the anti-poaching forces. To make matters worse there was a corresponding upsurge in the success rate of the poachers, with 17 rhinos lost that same month. The incident had a positive result, however, in that not only were the charges dismissed and Glen Tatham reinstated, but a bill was also drafted in Zimbabwe's parliament to protect anti-poaching personnel against murder charges when they kill poachers. With the strong support of Natural Resources and Tourism Minister Victoria Chitepo, the Protection of Wildlife Indemnity Act was quickly passed, placing the law unambiguously on the side of the anti-poaching forces.

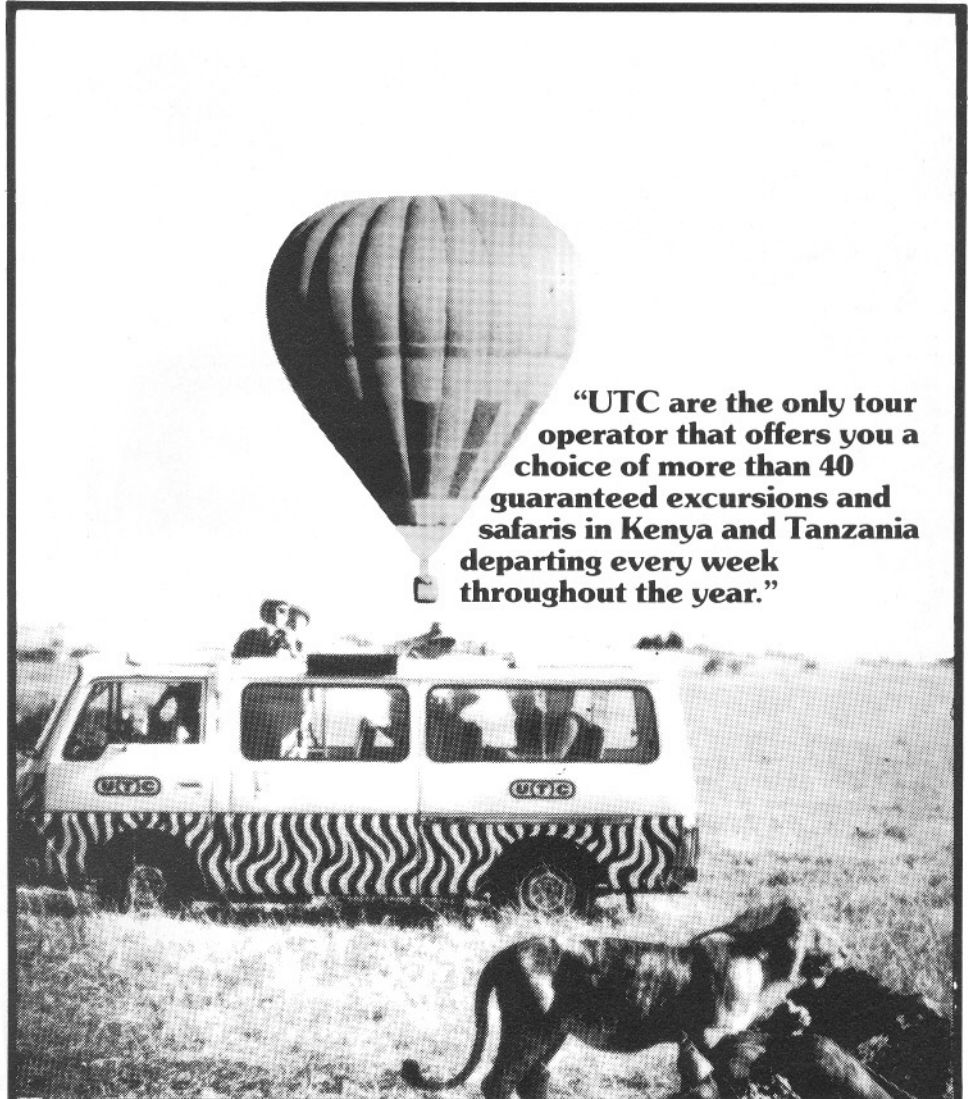
Under present circumstances, early detection and interception of poachers before they've had a chance to kill seems to be the key to protecting the remaining rhinos in the lower Zambezi Valley, but the sad fact is that Zimbabwe's parks haven't the resources or the manpower to be able to eliminate a rate of attrition which, however low, will inevitably reduce the rhino population to a level no longer genetically

viable in the long run. Their problems may soon be further compounded by the oil exploration contract for the whole of the Zambezi Valley which is about to be signed between Zimbabwe and the Mobil Oil Corporation. Oil exploration will almost certainly result in increased access to the more remote parts of the rhino habitat, and give new opportunities to poachers.

It's not yet too late to halt the rhino's

decline in Zimbabwe, but what is needed is money, and the developed nations of Europe and America would appear to be the only possible source. Perhaps current thinking that the wealthy nations should pay to preserve the world environment on which we are all dependent will come to fruition, and the black rhino might just be saved along with it.

David A. Buitron



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