

## NATIONAL PARKS AND ANTI-POACHING IN KENYA, 1947-1957\*

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The end of the Second World War allowed for the re-emergence of a conservation effort in Kenya that had been sidetracked by the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. This effort focused on the creation of National Parks as the centerpiece of wildlife and wilderness preservation strategies. Kenya's new program was modelled on the experiences of the United States conservation movement and aimed at the preservation of wildlife and the wilderness habitats required for their survival.<sup>1</sup> National parks as the loci of these efforts were intended to be far more than simple game reserves. They were considered "total sanctuaries," nature preserves, free in perpetuity from interference and predation by humans. The parks were envisioned as wilderness areas, pristine and undisturbed. Even when evidence of long-established human occupation within the wildlife ecological zone was apparent, efforts were made to return the area to an imagined pristine state before human presence. The focus was on the preservation of total environments or habitats within what were imagined to be self-contained ecological systems, rather than the conservation of game animals as a natural resource.

From 1933, this program of reserving wilderness areas as "national parks" was promoted internationally by the London Convention for the Protection of Fauna and Flora, which set the creation of wildlife sanctuaries outside the political control of the colonial regimes as the key to international conservation policy.<sup>2</sup> This international meeting involving the major colonial powers is of interest for two reasons. It derived in part from efforts to regulate traffic in game trophies between Italian and British territories in East Africa in the 1920s and was championed by members of the Kenya Game Department, especially Keith Caldwell, a one-time Kenya game ranger. Second, it set an international agenda for the establishment of game sanctuaries, which I believe was a significant departure from the earlier

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\* The author would like to acknowledge with gratitude the African Studies Committee of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies and Texas Tech University for the support of field and archival research conducted in Kenya and Britain.

<sup>1</sup> R. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, 1982), 355-62. Cf. J. Stevenson-Hamilton, *The Kruger National Park* (Pretoria, 1928), and J. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature* (Manchester, 1988), 227-51 and 261-94.

<sup>2</sup> Africa (Flora and Fauna) XXVIII, 1, Agreements concluded at the International Conference for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora of Africa, Cmd 4453, Public Records Office, London.

international agreement of 1900. The key element of these first conservation programs was the establishment of game reserves where animals would be offered limited protection until such time as they could be utilized by hunters as a source of sport and trophies.<sup>3</sup>

For Kenya, the national parks movement represented a major deviation from the programs of game conservation, regulation of hunting, and control of poaching that had been the staple of the colonial administration's Game Department from its origins in the first years of the century.<sup>4</sup> The Game Department's mission from the outset was the regulation of hunting by sportsmen, both resident and visitors, through a system of licensing and through limitations on the methods of hunting and the types and numbers of animals that might be taken. The conservation of game animals for future generations of hunters was the object of this regulation. Its byproduct was the creation of the colonial crime of poaching. By poaching, I mean something more than the technical violation of the game regulations and licensing laws such as over-shooting limits. As a colonial crime, poaching involved two somewhat distinct elements. First, the practice of subsistence hunting by Africans on Crown lands such as the tribal reserves, using "traditional" methods, such as bow and poisoned arrows, traps, and snares, which were explicitly outlawed by the colonial game laws, constituted what we might term "subsistence poaching." Second, the hunting of trophy animals, especially elephant and rhinoceros for ivory and horn, and the marketing of the trophies through an illegal network of smugglers and traffickers in game products has been termed "organized poaching."<sup>5</sup>

Poaching was controlled by the game department principally by the use of a network of (white) game rangers and (black) game scouts patrolling the vast expanses of the game reserves in search of violators. The senior white staff never numbered more than a few dozen men chosen for their skills as hunters and outdoorsmen and their character as "gentlemen." They were supported by a few hundred African subordinate staff, termed game scouts, chosen frequently from the

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<sup>3</sup> The earliest regulations are found in "The East African Wild Animals' Protection Regulations, 1897," Foreign Office (FO) 881/6951, Enc. 36. On the 1900 international conference, see T. P. Ofcansky, "A History of Game Preservation in British East Africa, 1895-1963" (Ph.D. thesis, West Virginia University, 1981), 18-20.

<sup>4</sup> This section draws on E.I. Steinhart, "Hunters, Poachers and Gamekeepers," *Journal of African History* 30 (1989), 247-64, and my forthcoming book, *Black Poachers, White Hunters* to be published by Manchester University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. J. Dalleo, "The Somali Role in Organized Poaching in Northeastern Kenya, c. 1909-1939," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22 (1979), 472, and M. Stone, "Organized Poaching in Kitui District," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5 (1972), 436, for attempts to define "organized poaching."

so-called "warlike tribes" of colonial stereotypes, the Kalenjin and Maa-speaking pastoralists. These gamekeepers were assisted by the provincial administration in the enforcement of the game laws affecting Africans and by a cadre of between twenty and forty amateur "honorary game rangers," appointed from among the best known and respected sportsmen among the white settlers, who helped with control work and public relations. As long as the purpose was merely to limit poaching to acceptable levels that did not threaten the capacity of the reserves to act as replenishment areas and to limit the losses of revenue from ivory and rhino horn smuggling, this system worked reasonably well. The Game Department as reorganized in the 1920s was able to perform this limited anti-poaching function alongside its other mandated roles of licensing and regulating sport and trophy hunting and controlling wild animals that threatened life and property by raiding the fields and herds of white settlers or African farmers.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1950s, the new conservation strategy of creating national parks posed a direct challenge to the Game Department's monopoly of control over the regulation of hunting, the policing of poaching, and the policies of game preservation in Kenya. The establishment of a separate entity, the Royal National Parks of Kenya, with its own staff of senior (white) wardens and subordinate (African) rangers outside the jurisdiction of the Kenya Legislature and separate from the government departments responsible for conservation policies created a situation of tension and rivalry.<sup>7</sup> During the 1950s, the success of the National Parks program spelled the end of African hunting for many peoples who operated as subsistence and commercial ivory hunters in and around the newly proclaimed game sanctuaries. In the following pages, I will try to trace the interaction between the two competing conservation ideologies that were embodied in the game department and national park organizations and examine how they influenced the history of hunting by both whites and Africans in Kenya during the last two decades of colonial rule.

The new conservationism was curtailed by the war effort in East Africa, which had the further effect of producing lax law enforcement, food shortages, and

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<sup>6</sup> Steinhart, "Hunters, Poachers and Gamekeepers," 255-58.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Cowie, "History of the Royal National Parks of Kenya," Kenya National Archives (henceforth KNA) KW/1/78, and his *Fly, Vulture* (London, 1961). Cf. Nash, *Wilderness*, 364-65. Ian Parker believes the differences were personal and institutional and in no way ideological (personal communication, 22 June 1989). Mr. Parker was closely involved with the events described below and his assistance is gratefully acknowledged. The views expressed on this and other issues, however, are my own and others bear no responsibility for any errors or misinterpretations that may appear.

a general crisis atmosphere; together with the large numbers of men under arms, this led to an increase in poaching and pressure on game during the six years of war. However, the idea of conservation planning received a new impetus from the war and the need for the mobilization of resources it engendered. The idea of planning had gained a wider currency among colonial administrators during the economic crisis of the Depression years.<sup>8</sup> Soil conservation in particular and water catchment projects were especially popular with the colonial administration, but game preservation seems also to have benefitted from the allocation and mobilization of resources.<sup>9</sup>

As early as 1937 the Kenya government convened a Game Policy Committee to plan the future of Kenya's wildlife. The committee was chiefly the product of two years of public agitation by Mervyn Cowie, a Kenya settler who had tried his hand at hunting and whose failure and disgust at himself led him to champion a preservation ethos.<sup>10</sup> In particular, Cowie used his influence and persuasive powers to advocate a program of national park development such as had been favored by the 1933 London Convention. Although the war interrupted the Game Policy Committee's work, it was reconvened and completed its work in 1944. The recommendations for the establishment of complete sanctuaries removed from the control and influence of the government and the settler-dominated legislature<sup>11</sup> might have been written by Cowie himself, who was indeed a member of the Committee. And when the plan was about to be implemented, it was Cowie who was chosen by the governor to become the first director of what came to be called the Royal National Parks of Kenya (RNPK).<sup>12</sup> This provided him not only

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<sup>8</sup>David Anderson, "Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought: The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa," *African Affairs* LXXXIII, 332 (July 1984), 321-43. Cf. W. Beinart, "Soil Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas about Development," *Journal of Southern African Studies* II, 1 (1984), 52-83, and J. Akong'a, "Drought and Famine Management in Kitui District, Kenya," in David W. Brokensha and Peter D. Little, eds., *Anthropology of Development and Change in East Africa* (Boulder, 1988), 99-120.

<sup>9</sup>This seems especially true in Kitui District, as noted in M. O'Leary, *The Kitui Akamba* (Nairobi, 1984), 45-48. Cf. Kitui District Annual Report, 1947, KNA DC/KTI/1/1/5.

<sup>10</sup>For this period, the autobiographical account by Mervyn Cowie provides not only detailed information on his ideas and motives, but a blow-by-blow account of his political maneuvering in aid of those ideas. Cowie, *Fly, Vulture*, 32-38, 59-100.

<sup>11</sup>I don't mean to beg the question of the extent of settler control over the Kenya government, which has been carefully examined in Bruce Berman's *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya* (London, 1990), but simply to state the widespread belief among conservationists and others that settlers were able "to shape the state and its policies to meet their immediate needs" (p. 185).

<sup>12</sup>Game Policy Committee Interim Report, KNA KW/18/2. Cowie, *Fly, Vulture*, 124-35. I will refer to the administration of the RNPK simply as the National Parks to avoid the misnomer

with a position of power from which to determine the policies of the national parks as they came into existence, but also a vital platform from which to propagate his preservationist views on wildlife and habitat.

The first victory came quickly, when in December 1946 Nairobi National Park was gazetted on what had been African commonage on the southwest edge of Nairobi, Kenya's capital and largest city. Ken Beaton, who was named as the first park warden, shared the somewhat romantic and aesthetic vision of his director as well as the delight in wildlife observation of a modern naturalist.<sup>13</sup> The park's establishment was a shallow victory at best, however. It was so small (only 40 square miles) and so close to densely settled areas of Nairobi that the chances for providing sanctuary to some animals were slim. By 1955 the park had to be fenced on its northern perimeter abutting Nairobi's western suburbs of Langata and Karen. Moreover, it was simply too small to support elephant and so near populated areas that lions frequently were reported to jump the fence and prowl the streets and gardens of the fashionable adjacent suburbs, giving the well-to-do an occasional scare and a regular topic of conversation.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the threat of lions among the bougainvillea came to symbolize the objections of many settlers to the entire idea of preservation and national parks. The supposed incompatibility of civilization with wildlife was starkly drawn whenever a lion escaped the zoo-like enclosure of Nairobi Park.<sup>15</sup> It gave force to the argument that if Kenya were to become a civilized country, the wild animals, like nudity and paganism, had to disappear into the safe precincts of history books, museums, or zoos.

Despite these limitations, Nairobi Park has proven remarkably successful as a tourist attraction, with perhaps the highest visitors rate of any park in Africa. The reasons for this are the obverse of the limitations: the prospect of seeing four of the big five game animals (rhinoceros, buffalo, lion, and leopard) after a twenty-minute drive from downtown Nairobi virtually guaranteed the new park regular paying

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of Parks Department as it was crucial to the planners and administrators of the RNPK that they not be reduced to a department of government under the budgetary control of a settler-dominated legislature. The loss of National Park independence in 1976 was seen as a major blow to the conservationist stance. The creation of the autonomous Kenya Wildlife Service in 1989 has helped restore the conservationist dominance. Cf. P. Olindo, "The Old Man of Nature Tourism: Kenya," in Tensie Whalen, ed., *Nature Tourism* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 23-38.

<sup>13</sup>K. Beaton, *A Warden's Diary* (Nairobi, 1949). Cf. Royal National Parks of Kenya, Report, 1946-1950, 8-25, KNA KW/23/59.

<sup>14</sup>Royal National Parks of Kenya, Report, 1946-1950: 1, KNA KW/23/59, and Cowie, *Fly, Vulture*, 109-17.

<sup>15</sup>Beaton, *Warden's Diary*, 108.

visitors from among international tourists and local residents. The convenience more than offset the small size and occasional distractions from arriving and departing jets at the neighboring airport (now the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport). Purists continued to ridicule the park as "the only national park set between a drive-in theatre and a cement factory," but others continued to visit it for its park-like beauty and the ease of viewing a great variety of animals. Especially when the vast herds of wildebeest migrating seasonally out of the plains to the south reached the unfenced southern boundaries of the park, the park becomes an especially rich as well as the most convenient place for the observation of Kenya wildlife.

The absence of elephants from Nairobi Park rather than the presence of lions provoked the next debate in the preservationist campaign for a total sanctuary for Kenya's wildlife. Nairobi Park might admirably serve the interests of foreign tourists and day-trippers from Nairobi, but it could never be the kind of national park envisioned by the organizers of the 1933 Conference on the Preservation of Fauna and Flora or their Kenyan disciples.<sup>16</sup> A search was begun to find a large area to be reserved as a total wildlife sanctuary, which would not infringe on any vested interests of private individuals or governmental authorities. The elimination of any settled land or land "suitable for commercial, mineral or agricultural development" left a broad swatch of barren and arid territory in eastern Kenya that late nineteenth-century had referred to as the Tana Desert. This region centered around the railroad station at the Tsavo River bridge, made famous by a pair of man-eating lions and their determined exterminator, Lieut.-Colonel J.H. Patterson.<sup>17</sup> To the north and east of the station lay what would become Tsavo East, the vast heartland of eastern Kenya's elephant country, stretching from the line of rail on the south to a point near the bend of the Tana River to the north. West and south of the line of rail was the better watered, more scenic region of Tsavo West, which made up for the scarcity of game by several areas of great natural beauty, including Mzima Springs at which tourist facilities would be located.<sup>18</sup> Gazetted as Tsavo National Park in April 1948, the almost 8,000 square miles made Tsavo both Kenya's largest park and the most difficult to administer.

After a year of stagnation under an ineffective warden, Tsavo was split into two sections along the line of rail for ease of administration. The vastness of Tsavo East came under the control of David Sheldrick, a Kenya-raised former military

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<sup>16</sup>"Preservation of Big Game." (1930-35), KNA KW/27/1, and Royal National Parks of Kenya, Report, 1946-50, 8. KNA KW/23/59.

<sup>17</sup>J.H. Patterson, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo* (New York, 1986).

<sup>18</sup>"Proposed Conceptual Master Plan for Tsavo National Park," KNA KW/1/67.

officer of youthful distinction.<sup>19</sup> In taking over his responsibilities as warden of Tsavo, Sheldrick implicitly issued a challenge to the gamekeeping establishment in Kenya, the implications of which formed the heart of a decade-long controversy at the heart of the politics of game conservation.

Before examining the ideological confrontation of the 1950s, we must take a brief look at the opposition Sheldrick and Cowie faced in their attempts to formulate a new conservation consensus. Until the creation of the National Parks under Cowie and Tsavo East under Sheldrick, responsibility for game conservation policy and enforcement lay entirely with the Kenya Game Department. Created shortly after the turn of the century, it was given lasting shape and direction after 1923 when Captain A.C. (Archie) Ritchie was brought in as chief game warden.<sup>20</sup> In Captain Ritchie's scheme, the bulk of the department's day-to-day work went towards fulfilling its other functions, although game preservation work received much attention in the annual reports. The first priority was the licensing of sports hunting by residents and visiting sportsmen, which provided the government with an important source of revenue; second was the control of game and vermin in settled and tribal reserve areas, which provided Kenya's settlers and peasant farmers with a modicum of relief from the depredation of their crops and fields by wildlife. Such conservation work as was done focused on protecting the trophy animals (especially elephant and rhinoceros) from commercial poaching and on preventing the smuggling of ivory and horn to markets outside East Africa. This effort was as much a concern of the Treasury Department over the loss of ivory export revenues to smugglers as it was a matter of saving the game.<sup>21</sup> The war interrupted even that limited conservation role of the Game Department after 1939, and by 1950, with the illness and retirement of Captain Ritchie, the Game Department's conservation efforts appear leaderless and adrift.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>My thanks to Daphne Sheldrick for allowing me to interview her about her work with her late husband (personal communication, 24 January 1991) and for permitting me to read his personal archive and an unpublished memoir by Noel Simon, "The Elephants of Tsavo," located at the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, Langata, Kenya.

<sup>20</sup>See Nora Kelly, "In Wildest Africa: The Preservation of Game in Kenya, 1895-1933" (Ph.D. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1979), and Ofcansky, "A History of Game Preservation in British East Africa," for the early history of game preservation in Kenya.

<sup>21</sup>See Steinhart, "Hunters, Poachers and Gamekeepers," 255-58. Also, A.C. Ritchie to Ag Col. Sec., 3 August 1933, KNA KW/8/28, and correspondence in "Ivory and Rhino Horn, Smuggling of (1924-35)," KNA KW/14/3, 4 and 5.

<sup>22</sup>William Hale was appointed to replace Ritchie from the ranks of the provincial administration, where he had reached the highest likely level of advancement in his civil service

In this situation of lassitude, the energies and initiatives of David Sheldrick and the National Parks leadership appeared as both a challenge and threat to the Game Department. Initially, at least, the newcomers were greeted with some skepticism, if not derision. In April 1949, Sheldrick and his newly appointed assistant warden, nineteen-year-old Billy Woodley, were instructed to survey the remote areas of Tsavo East. After a briefing that emphasized the "scientific" nature of their endeavor, Woodley was dispatched to make "comprehensive nature notes on all species" found in the park.<sup>23</sup> In addition to this wildlife survey, Sheldrick and Woodley were told to look for places to site facilities, roads, and stations from which the park could be accessed by tourists, visitors, and conservation personnel. This "familiarization tour" led the two gamekeepers to a shocking discovery—they found a large number of fresh elephant kills, tusks removed but most of the meat left to rot. Their tracker, Elui Nthengi, a knowledgeable former poacher from the Kitui District of Ukambani, explained to the incredulous wardens the significance of their finds.

Nthengi explained that the elephant kills were the result of poaching operations carried out on foot by Waata or Waliangulu hunter-foragers, whose chief weapon was a long bow and poisoned arrows.<sup>24</sup> Although the evidence of bow-and-arrow kills was plentiful, Sheldrick and Woodley were initially skeptical as they shared the conventional wisdom that this was an inefficient, dangerous, and hence marginal form of elephant hunting. But their skepticism was nothing compared to the positive disbelief and ridicule their findings received when reported to both the park director and the Game Department.<sup>25</sup> Eventually Sheldrick convinced his superiors that the Waata and the Kamba bow-and-arrow hunters who inhabited the areas in and surrounding Tsavo East<sup>26</sup> were not only highly effective

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career. He appears to have lacked the energy, experience, and public respect Ritchie had earned. Nor did he have the disposition to lead the Game Department on a major departure in conservation methods or ideology. Game Department Annual Report (GDAR), 1950: 1-10, and Interview D/2, Ian Parker, 25 August 1987.

<sup>23</sup>Holman, *The Elephant People* (London, 1967), 9.

<sup>24</sup>The Waata (or Waliangulu, as they are referred to by their Bantu-speaking neighbors) are, like many hunting peoples, poorly identified ethnographically, inhabiting a liminal area between the settled societies with which they interact and the world of nature. The best descriptions of Waata hunters are to be found in Holman, *Elephant People*, 57-69, and Parker, *Ivory Crisis*, 24-56.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Tsavo National Park East, Wardens Monthly Report for July 1949 and August 1949, KNA KW/23/31; Holman, *Elephant People*, 27-42.

<sup>26</sup>The approximately 2,000 Waata live on the arid eastern margins of the Park where there Mijikenda neighbors called them Waliangulu ("those who eat meat"). The Kamba I refer to are the Kitui Akamba, the eastern pioneer branch of the large central Kenyan ethnic group of mixed



elephant hunters despite using "primitive" techniques, but that they represented the most significant threat to the survival of the herds and the park that he had been employed to protect.

While Sheldrick's argument and evidence won the day, it is unclear how accurate his assessment was of the impact of Waata and Kamba poachers on the Tsavo elephant herds. It seems clear that the effects had previously been underestimated, but I remain unconvinced that a centuries-long symbiotic relationship between hunters and prey had been so thoroughly upset by commercial motives as to present a credible threat to the survival of elephants in eastern Kenya. In the absence of mechanized transport and under the conditions in which Waata and even the more numerous Kamba poachers operated in the 1950s, I believe that poaching alone by these bow-and-arrow hunters did not significantly endanger elephant herds or their habitats at that time.<sup>27</sup> What it did constitute was a significant challenge to the image and mission of the National Parks as a "total sanctuary" for the preservation of wildlife in a state of nature, free from human predation.

In the months that followed this "discovery" of extensive Waata poaching, a debate, muffled and often at cross-purposes, emerged between the parks personnel on one side and the old guard of the Game Department on the other. The debate centered on how this "new" threat to the survival of the elephant in Tsavo should be treated. Some of this debate may have represented divergent institutional interests between the new boys on the block, namely Sheldrick and Woodley and, at one remove, Cowie at the National Parks, and the career gamekeepers in the understaffed, underpaid, and under-appreciated Game Department. Certainly as the decade of the 1950s advanced, the sense of mission and of privilege attached to the Parks and their personnel, right down to the snappy new uniforms worn by their field staff of African rangers, contrasted sharply with the poorly turned out and ill-disciplined African scouts of the Game Department. An attitude of elitism and modern sophistication came to characterize the parks staff, which, added to their freedom from the restraints of government-imposed budget accountability, gave

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farmer-pastoralists who also hunted extensively and traded widely in the nineteenth century. They inhabited the western and northern margins of Tsavo. Cf. Kennell Jackson, "An Ethnohistorical Study of the Oral Traditions of the Akamba of Kenya" (Ph.D. thesis, U.C.L.A., 1972); M. O'Leary, *The Kitui Akamba* (Nairobi, 1984).

<sup>27</sup>E. I. Steinhart, "Kenya Ivory Hunters: 1850-1950," paper presented at the American Society for Ethnohistory Conference, Chicago, 2-4 November 1989. Cf. James D. Alladay, "Elephants and their Interactions with People in the Tana River Region of Kenya" (Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1979), 270-73. And, although he may have recanted these views in light of subsequent and increasingly efficient poaching operations, cf. Parker, *Ivory Crisis*, 169-75.

them an *esprit de corps* totally lacking in the Game Department, which was seen from outside and within as "just another government department."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, there may have been generational and class differences separating the champions of the two sides in the debates. But, at core, what was being contested was the ideological terrain on which the struggle for a conservation policy adapted to the needs of a new Kenyan society would be fought.

Once the problem of Waata and, to a lesser extent, Kamba poaching was understood, the efforts at countering them began. "The accepted method of counteracting poaching . . . had always been to operate from a series of outposts, but in Tsavo this system was proving a dismal failure."<sup>29</sup> Posts had been created in the park from which ranger patrols pursued poachers, yet they proved no match for experienced and locally knowledgeable poachers. Neither the time-honored techniques of the gamekeepers' art, nor the fact that African rangers were drawn from the northern pastoral tribes with a reputation for hardiness and "war-like" qualities, met the poachers' challenge.

When the Game Department was approached for advice, Senior Game Ranger George Adamson simply reasserted the old verities. Adamson, later to become famous together with his wife, Joy, for their efforts at returning tame lions to the wild, had patrolled the Northern Game Reserve since being employed by the department in the mid-1930s. In 1950 his response to a perceived poaching crisis in Meru District, which he describes as "one of the worst poaching areas in Kenya and a hot-bed of illegal trade in leopard skins," was to intensify the difficult patrolling of the district from headquarters in Isiolo and the Northern Frontier District.

It is a job that requires a special officer whose sole occupation for a year would be to harry the Meru and Kamba poachers. . . . In my opinion the easiest way to put a check on the illegal traffic in trophies, is to get at its source, that is to deal with the shenzies [savages] who actually obtain the trophies by hunting and trapping. The sophisticated trader who buys the loot, is a much more difficult and expensive bird to catch.<sup>30</sup>

The kind of "special officer" that Adamson himself embodied and whose role he saw as central to successful gamekeeping was a kind of "lone ranger" in pursuit of

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<sup>28</sup>Interview D/2, I. Parker.

<sup>29</sup>Daphne Sheldrick, *The Tsavo Story* (London, 1973), 43.

<sup>30</sup>G. Adamson to Game Warden, 3 September 1950, KNA KW/23/148.

bands of poaching desperados. Increasing foot and vehicle patrols to harass the poachers and catch them red-handed would avoid the problems created by trying to arrest and prosecute the illegal receivers and smugglers, whose wealth, sophistication, and capacity for corrupting the authorities had caused the Game and Treasury Departments so much grief over the decades.<sup>31</sup> It relied upon the tried and proven methods Adamson clearly believed had held poaching in check for decades before 1950. And it relied on the kind of special skills, dedication, and determination he himself possessed in abundance.<sup>32</sup>

It is difficult to determine if Adamson's "lone ranger" approach held the day because of his forceful advocacy or if mere inertia and failure to appreciate the changed nature of the challenge was responsible. In any case, the outbreak of the Mau Mau Emergency in 1952 brought an end to whatever anti-poaching programs had been in operation.

As it turned out, the Emergency and its suppression had a profound influence on the anti-poaching campaign in Tsavo. It was far more than a hiatus in the anti-poaching efforts and careers of Sheldrick, Woodley, and the other Kenya gamekeepers. As a policing operation, it proved a training ground for key personnel and helped inspire the strategies and prepare the ground for the next phase of anti-poaching operations. But, initially at least, the call-up of able-bodied white men into the ranks of the local "anti-terrorist" levies depleted the ranks of the Game Department's rangers and the Parks' junior wardens.<sup>33</sup> In particular, Woodley answered the call and saw active duty in the forests of central province, "hunting" Mau-Mau guerrillas. He gained vital experience in bush warfare against an enemy who had superior knowledge of the terrain and the ability to survive in the bush.<sup>34</sup> The analogy between anti-Mau-Mau operations and hunting was not lost on the military authorities. Mau-Mau fighters were instructed that "The qualities which must be developed in troops engaged against the Mau Mau are . . .

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<sup>31</sup>On the history of ivory smuggling, see R.B. Woosnam to Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1913, KNA KW/14/27; A.C. Ritchie, "Memorandum," 2 April 1927, KNA KW/14/3. Cf. Parker, *Ivory Crisis*, 118-21.

<sup>32</sup>If Adamson's two autobiographies (*Bwana Game*, London, 1968 and *My Pride and Joy*, London, 1986) were not sufficient testimony to his character as a lone ranger, his death at the hands of poachers in 1989 is a testament to his reckless and heroic personality. London *Sunday Times*, 27 August 1989, A9)

<sup>33</sup>See various Mau Mau files in KNA KW/23/135.

<sup>34</sup>Sheldrick, *Tsavo Story*, 59-60.

those required to track down and shoot shy game."<sup>35</sup> We should also recognize that the techniques of counter-insurgency, although not formalized until after the British Malay campaign of the late 1950s, also played a role in the formulation of an anti-poaching strategy in the wake of the suppression of the insurrection in Kenya.

David Sheldrick was refused leave and stayed on the job during the Emergency, although he volunteered during his leaves for active duty with the "mounted section of the Security Forces."<sup>36</sup> He was already an experienced military officer, having served with distinction during World War II. A brilliant career as an intelligence officer had been predicted for him and his decision to leave the service to take up employment as a gamekeeper was regretted by his superiors in the Kenyan military. It should be noted that virtually all of the white game and police officers who would serve with Sheldrick and Woodley on the anti-poaching campaign were experienced counter-insurgency warriors and veterans of the Mau Mau war.

The death of one of the Tsavo East African rangers on 15 January 1955 at the hands of a cornered Waata poacher led directly to the formation of the key instrument of the new anti-poaching campaign, the Voi Field Force.<sup>37</sup> The Field Force was initially an operation within the National Park administration headquartered at Voi on the southern edge of Tsavo East. In October 1956 a meeting was convened by Park Director Mervyn Cowie that included ranking Police and Game Department officials. A decision was taken to begin a joint, all-out operation against the Tsavo poachers and to create two more field forces of 100 men each. Moreover, specially recruited African rangers would be commanded by Game and Park field officers under the control of David Sheldrick. The force would have access to transportation, including a police spotter plane, and the newly recruited African staff would undergo a three-month training period in the new anti-poaching techniques.<sup>38</sup> In April 1955, the Voi Field Force was in operation and enjoyed initial success in finding and apprehending both Waata and Kamba poachers. Indeed, after October 1956 and for the next fifteen months, unprecedented success was obtained in curtailing the activities of the poaching

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<sup>35</sup>Government of Kenya, *A Handbook on Anti-Mau Mau Operations* (Nairobi, n.d. [1954?]), 11. My thanks to John Lonsdale of Trinity College, Cambridge for making this citation available.

<sup>36</sup>Sheldrick, *Tsavo Story*, 60.

<sup>37</sup>Tsavo Royal National Park East, Warden's Quarterly Report for the Period 1st January-31st March, 1955, KNA KW/23/31. Cf. Holman, *Elephant People*, 89-100.

<sup>38</sup>Noel Simon, "The Elephants of Tsavo," and Sheldrick, *Tsavo Story*, 43-45.

fraternity in the Tsavo region, making the operation in the words of one of its key Game Department officers, Ian Parker, "The only successful poaching operation in the history of colonial Africa."<sup>39</sup> The operations of the campaign were declared a success and wound up in December 1957.

What accounts for the novelty and success of this anti-poaching operation, which became the model for the World Bank—sponsored postcolonial Anti-Poaching Units operating in Kenya from the late 1960s to the present?<sup>40</sup> I believe that there were three practices adapted to the special purposes of the Voi Field Force that gave it its novelty and capacity for dealing with a difficult poaching problem. First, there was the matter of intelligence gathering and its application to the apprehension and prosecution of poachers. Second, there was the tactical application of police and anti-Mau Mau techniques to the needs of anti-poaching. And finally, there was the gradual transformation of the African and European personnel from the "lone ranger" model to the less romantic but highly effective use of former poachers as local spies, informants, and game rangers. In the effort to round up poachers and destroy their support networks and their access to local resources, poachers themselves were turned into gamekeepers. Let us look at how these new methods worked and then examine the ideological underpinnings of this transformation.

The key to the first new practice was the files. Starting in 1955 and working retrospectively, Sheldrick began to collect "rap sheets" on the Tsavo poaching fraternity eventually producing an extensive "rogues gallery" of poacher biographies. Both criminal activities and a wide range of personal data, regarding family background, habits, haunts, and idiosyncracies on each of the two to three hundred Kamba and Waata hunters and especially the handful of "aces," or specially talented and experienced poachers, was collected, collated, and kept on file at the Voi headquarters.

Not only did this provide the gamekeepers with a profile of each of the hunters, complete with "mug shot" when available, but it also provided anecdotal information on alleged but unproven illegal activities, which became especially useful in interrogating suspects. The adaptation of this police technique to the poaching problem was novel, but in and of itself could not win the struggle against

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<sup>39</sup>Interview D/2, I. Parker.

<sup>40</sup>N. Simon, "The Elephants of Tsavo," 76-78, on the establishment of the Anti-Poaching Unit. Cf. Daphne Sheldrick, personal communication, 24 January 1991.

the poachers. However, in combination with other police tactics, the "intelligence files" proved crucial to breaking up the poaching network.<sup>41</sup>

The second new practice was the mounting of pre-dawn raids on the homes, hideouts, and haunts of the poachers from information about their habits collected in the rogues gallery. This was a significant departure from the anti-poaching sweeps made by the Game Department rangers and scouts. Prior to the 1955-1957 campaign, arrests for poaching could only be made if the poachers were caught red-handed in the bush with weapons and the evidence of recent kills. This put the wardens at a disadvantage, as the poachers were able to use all their accumulated skills at bushcraft, tracking and stealth to avoid pursuit and capture. Poachers captured outside the Parks or at home could only be charged with possession of contraband game products or arrow poison, which carried only mild penalties.

The campaign involved several important changes in the game laws. First, the rangers of the Voi Field Forces were empowered from 1956 on to operate both inside and outside the park, against the haunts and hideouts in the dense bush used by Waata and the hilltop camps favored by Kamba poachers on the outskirts and the remote areas of the Tsavo vastness. Previously, only the Game Department had jurisdiction outside the park boundaries.<sup>42</sup> Second, penalties for the lesser offense of possession of contraband were increased by the courts on the directive of the attorney-general to the same level as for poaching itself.<sup>43</sup> This gave the Field Force important leverage in dealing with suspects caught in the pre-dawn raids. Finally, Sheldrick and Woodley in particular made effective use of the rogues gallery in gaining confessions and valuable information on other poachers from those caught in the raids.

To understand this last strategy, it is necessary to recognize the disorienting situation in which Waata and other *washenzi* poachers were caught. Roused from sleep by armed men bursting into a camp or hut, the suspect would be threatened with arrest for possession of poison or contraband and confronted with accusations

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<sup>41</sup>These files on 3" x 5" cards are the property of Daphne Sheldrick, the widow of David and at the time of the campaign the wife of Bill Woodley. My thanks to Ian Parker, who is using them in writing a collective biography of the Waata hunters, for allowing me to examine them and for his generous sharing of his experiences with the Voi Field Force. Interview D/2 Parker; Sheldrick, *Tsavo Story*, 67-68 and 77-78; and Simon, "The Elephants of Tsavo," 70-92.

<sup>42</sup>As a corollary of this, it had become possible, after some discussion within government, for the National Parks to retain ownership of confiscated trophies (i.e., ivory) and sell it to benefit the National Park accounts instead of the general treasury, as happened with ivory seized by the Game Department, Cf. KNA KW/17/12.

<sup>43</sup>Attorney General's Directives Nos. 1 and 22 for 1956, Governor's Circulars, KNA KW/3/8.

about his past activities. Effective use was made of gossip and other information about the poachers' previous criminal activities or personal life in an effort to persuade him that the interrogators already knew everything. He was encouraged to confess his recent poaching escapades and implicate his contacts and collaborators in crime. Promised lenient treatment and in some cases recruited then and there to the Voi Field Force as trackers, some poachers were turned into gamekeepers by this method.<sup>44</sup>

Many questions are raised by these "police state" tactics. First, the possibility of abuse by the interrogators is clear. No search warrants were needed, but then none had been required of Game Department personnel at any time in the history of the colony. No legal counsel was permitted, and suspects were not formally read their rights. Physical abuse of suspects did occur, especially at the hands of the seconded police and Game Department officers of the Force. But in the hands of interrogators like Sheldrick and Woodley, the intimidation achieved by the knowledge of intimate details of the suspects' lives proved more effective in extracting confessions and information than physical coercion.<sup>45</sup>

Why did the poachers succumb so readily to the browbeating and blandishments of their interrogators? These hunters were a particularly unsophisticated group of people. Their knowledge of the outside world, of the workings of colonial law (as opposed to colonial prisons), and of the protections it afforded was negligible. No poacher would have known to request a lawyer even if he could afford to hire one. Second, the poaching fraternity, although extremely small (with perhaps 200 Waata, 250 Kamba, and 50 members of "other tribes" operating in the Tsavo East area),<sup>46</sup> was not closely knit. According to rangers' accounts, the highly individualistic hunters saw no shame or betrayal in turning in their competitors if it helped them lessen their own punishment or secure the rewards of employment as trackers and scouts for the gamekeepers. No sense of ethnic or guild solidarity or *esprit de corps* seems to have operated among the poachers. This greatly facilitated the work of the Field Forces in gathering additional intelligence on the habits, operations, and plans of the poachers remaining at liberty. By late 1957 virtually the entire Waata poaching fraternity and

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<sup>44</sup>Holman, *Elephant People*, 143-65; Attorney General's Directive Nos. 1 and 22 for 1956, Governor's Circulars, KNA KW/3/8.

<sup>45</sup>Interview D/2 Parker; and Holman, *Elephant People*, 143ff. Given the widespread reputation for brutality of Game Department subordinate staff and the routine use of physical force by law enforcement agents, I believe that the moral coercion of Sheldrick and Woodley was the exception rather than the rule in these encounters. However, there is no direct evidence that the anti-poaching campaign engaged in torture or physical coercion in these interrogations.

<sup>46</sup>Holman, *Elephant People*; and Interview D/2, Parker.

a large number of the Kamba had been run to ground by these methods, under the direction of Bill Woodley, Ian Parker, and the other Field Force officers.<sup>47</sup>

The last new practice that grew out of this campaign was the recruitment of Waata and Kamba poachers into the ranks of the junior (i.e., African) staff of scouts and rangers for the Parks and Game Department. Originally the Field Force was composed of six European officers (Woodley from Parks; David McCabe, Dennis Kearney, and Ian Parker from Game; David Brown from Administration; and Major Hugh Massey from Police) and African rangers recruited from the northern "war-like tribes" (Turkana, Samburu, Somali, and Orma).<sup>48</sup> Increasingly as former poachers were recruited to serve with the Force, it began to develop a local character. This gave the gamekeepers better information on the terrain, methods of operation, and habits of the Tsavo poachers. The tactic was not without its difficulties, however, as on more than one occasion Waata and Kamba rangers were dismissed for conniving in the escape of prisoners or of misleading the European officers to protect friends or kinsmen.<sup>49</sup>

After the mid-1950s campaign, many of the newly recruited Waata remained with the Parks or Game Department, employment that allowed them to continue the outdoor life that they knew, hunting down the hunters of the game that they had once pursued themselves. By 1958, the former way of life of Waata and many Kamba hunters had been eradicated.<sup>50</sup> Poaching by Tsavo's indigenous hunting peoples no longer represented a threat to the survival of the elephant herds in whose interests the cultural survival of the Waata had been sacrificed. The way of life of the hunter-foragers was at an end, and new cultural and conservation problems emerged.

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<sup>47</sup>In addition to the account based on interviews with Bill Woodley found in Holman, *Elephant People*, additional accounts can be found in Sheldrick, *Tsavo Story*; Simon, "The Elephants of Tsavo"; Parker, *Ivory Crisis*; and the Monthly and Quarterly Wardens' Reports for Tsavo East from 1955 through 1957, KNA KW/23/31.

<sup>48</sup>Sheldrick, *Tsavo Story*, 43-45, 76.

<sup>49</sup>E.g., Tsavo Royal National Park East, Warden's Quarterly Report for 1st July-30 September 1955, KNA KW/23/31. I see this less as an act of solidarity than as a recognition of the sympathy the gamekeepers felt for what they saw as honorable fellow hunters, a feeling often shared by senior European staff as well. It may also reflect attempts at bribery of the low-paid African subordinate staff.

<sup>50</sup>Although it was possible during my field work in 1987 to find individuals who were identified by others as Waata, it was no longer possible to find a surviving community with a collective life that represented a hunter-forager cultural survival.



The success of the 1956-57 anti-poaching campaign was not merely a triumph for the conservationists. It also represented the coming of age of an ideology of conservation based on the bureaucratic and administrative model of African change and development that had already triumphed in many other spheres of Kenyan life. The change of gamekeeping personnel and the emergence of the National Park administration as the leading force in wildlife conservation at base reflected the transformation of colonial society in Kenya. The pioneer settlers and big game hunters had largely passed from the scene with Lord Delamere, Baron Bror Blixen, and Denys Finch Hatton in the 1930s, although in the white hunter clique certain figures from the 1920s heyday managed, like J. A. Hunter, to make the transition to modern gamekeeper.<sup>51</sup> Among the gamekeepers, the social change was reflected in the change from the ideals and values of hunter-game wardens like Captain Archie Ritchie and George Adamson to those of the non-hunting preservationists like Mervyn Cowie and Noel Simon.<sup>52</sup> Can this be seen as symbolizing the change from the romantic and aristocratic game conservation ideology, suited to the Kenya of the pioneer settlers, to that of the modern preservationist ethos espoused by its mid-twentieth century colonial leaders? Even more symbolic, not to say ironic, is that fact that Mervyn Cowie served as the Colony's director of manpower during the Mau Mau Emergency, a position held a decade earlier during World War II by that exemplar of aristocratic hauteur and Kenyan settler decadence, Lord Erroll.<sup>53</sup>

This transition created a situation in which ironies were bound to arise. Let me close with two others. In 1959 Ian Parker was selected to head a government-sponsored scheme that turned the now disorganized and despondent former Waata poachers into gamekeepers and elephant hunters to "control" by scientifically managed culling the same elephant population they once threatened. Armed with modern rifles instead of their far more effective bows and *acocanthera*-poisoned arrows, the Waata were resettled in a community and employed to cull elephants along the Galana River as part of a wildlife management scheme. The scheme

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<sup>51</sup>Errol Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers* (New York, 1985) is a collective biography of the settler pioneers. Individual biographies include Trzebinski, *Silence Will Speak* (Chicago, 1977) on Finch Hatton; Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country*, 2 vols. (London, 1935) on Delamere; and U. Aschan, *The Man Whom Women Loved* (New York, 1987) on Bror Blixen. J.A. Hunter's autobiography, *Hunter*, traces his career from "professional white hunter" to professional gamekeeper.

<sup>52</sup>Cowie, *Fly, Vulture*; and N. Simon, *Between the Sunlight and the Thunder* (London, 1962).

<sup>53</sup>Sheldrick, *Tsavo Story*, on Cowie as director of manpower; and James Fox, *White Mischief* (London, 1982) on Lord Erroll.

ultimately failed because of bureaucratic inefficiency, a profit orientation, and the unwillingness of the Waata to be "managed."<sup>54</sup>

Second, the need for the Galana River Scheme was created by the fact that, from the mid-1950s until the time of Kenyan independence, a combination of drought, decline in predation, and natural increase had led to so serious an expansion of the elephant herds of eastern Kenya that the chief threat to their survival was no longer seen to be the operation of poachers but the degradation of the environment caused by an over-population of elephants. The prospect of having to answer the "elephant problem" by the culling of elephants even within the Parks by white hunters employed by the National Parks and Game Department became a major source of embarrassment as well as real concern to the ideologists of wildlife preservation, who were by the 1960s firmly in charge of Kenya's conservation establishment.<sup>55</sup>

The final irony is the resurgence of poaching in the 1970s, as the price of ivory skyrocketed and new non-traditional poachers entered the game with new methods, weapons, and logistical support. That this new challenge evoked the symbolic response by the government of Kenya of announcing a total ban on legal, licensed hunting underscored the irony of what we might term the Gresham's Law of Wildlife Management: bad hunting driving out good.

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<sup>54</sup>Parker, *Ivory Crisis*, 52-56. Cf. Simon, "The Elephants of Tsavo," 92-104.

<sup>55</sup>I. Parker, Galana Game Management Scheme Annual Report, 1 April, 1960-30 June, 1961; and D. Sheldrick, "The Elephant Problem," Memorandum 23 October, 1964. On the ecological crisis of the 1960s, cf. "Notes of Meetings held 11 July, 1962, 14 September, 1962 and 12 May, 1965 at the Kenya National Parks Headquarters," Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Archive, Langata, Kenya.