

ORGANIZED POACHING IN KITUI DISTRICT: A FAILURE IN DISTRICT AUTHORITY, 1900 TO 1960

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Between 1900 and 1960, British officials in Kitui District, Kenya, were unable to stop illegal hunting and the subsequent trade in game products. Anti-poaching efforts were hindered by administrative problems, staff shortages, and poorly planned methods that offended the Kamba population. Kitui district officials did not understand the deeply-rooted nature of the precolonial ivory trade and its relationship to Kamba society, and as a result little could be done to prevent its reappearance.¹

Few attempts have been made to study organized poaching as a problem isolated from other facets of wildlife management, and no definitive study has been undertaken to determine the reactions of district officials to the problem. Published literature pertaining to wildlife preservation has little information on the subject during the period between 1900 and 1960. Most books range in scope from scholarly studies of man-to-animal relationships in Africa to less complex and often superficial travelogues or adventure stories. Those books that do mention organized poaching generally confine the subject to the period between 1950 and 1960 or briefly mention it in regard to European hunters and widespread game hunting that took place at the turn of the twentieth century.²

¹ The term "organized poaching" is used to describe both organized illegal hunting and the trade in game products. The terms "game product" and "trophy" are used synonymously to mean any saleable portion of an animal except meat. Organized poaching in Kitui District concentrated on ivory and rhinoceros horn. Other game products, largely ignored in official reports, are not considered in this study.

² For published works that help to reconstruct organized poaching networks before 1950, see Anthony Cullen and Sydney Downey, *Saving the Game* (London, 1960), George Adamson, *A Lifetime with Lions* (Garden City, 1968), and John A. Hunter, *Hunter* (London, 1952). For contemporary game problems in Africa see Alan Moore-

During the first thirty years of this century game animals that are now limited to Tsavo National Park were abundant throughout the surrounding districts. Kitui District held a substantial game population which included numerous rhinoceros, elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo, giraffe, gerenuk, and oryx. By 1960, however, of these major game species only a few elephants remained in the non-park area of the district.³ There were several reasons for this decrease. European sportsmen took a heavy toll in game before and after the establishment of British authority. As the Kamba population increased, herders required more land for their livestock, and as a result areas favorable to game animals were devastated, driving away the wildlife. Famine, drought, and disease combined with overstocking to reduce game even further. Poaching, while not altogether responsible for the decrease in game, did cause the eradication of many game animals, notably rhinoceros and elephant.⁴

Since the eighteenth century the dominant African group in Kitui District has been the Kitui Kamba, who are distinct from the eastern Kamba in both dialect and customs. Both Kamba groups traveled widely before the advent of British administration. Kamba traders made their way as far south as Tanga, raiding parties harried the Galla on the mouth of the Tana River, and hunters frequently crossed the Uaso Nyiro River to shoot elephant.⁵

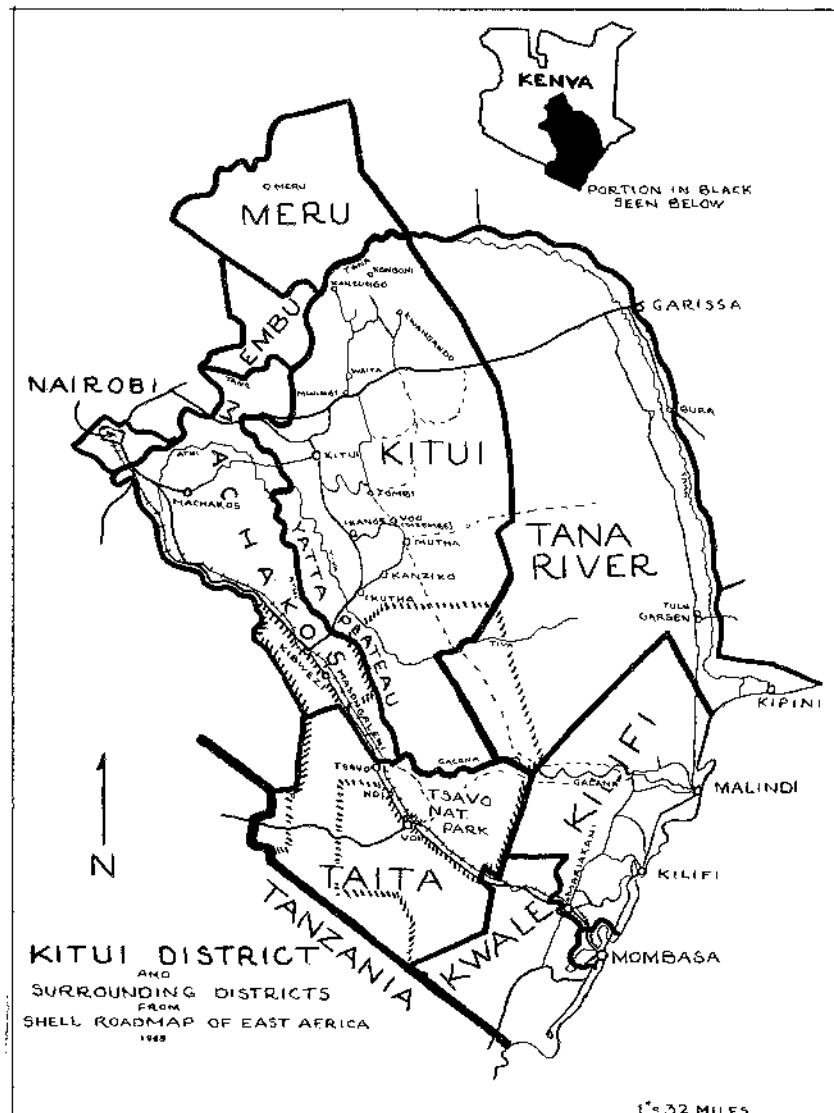
The Kamba played a major role in the precolonial ivory trade, and according to Gerhard Lindblom they hunted elephant from "time immemorial" for the profits that ivory brought. They were part of a network that sold game products to Asians living on the coast. Most of these men were employed by firms based in Scinde, Karachi, Bombay, and Kathiawar, and they satisfied a growing demand in Asia for various trophy items

head, *No Room in the Ark* (New York, 1957). The district and provincial records of the Kenya National Archives [hereafter KNA mic.] are the best sources for administrative reactions to poaching. These records are on microfilm at Syracuse University, and citations are based on Robert G. Gregory, Robert M. Maxon, and Leon P. Spencer, eds., *A Guide to the Kenya National Archives* (Syracuse, 1969).

³ G. H. Osborne, Kitui District annual report [hereafter KDAR], 1910/1911, KNA mic., reel 8, 41-42; Cullen and Downey, *Saving the Game*, 32.

⁴ For a scholarly study of man-to-animal relationships in Africa see J. Cloudsley-Thompson, *Animal Twilight* (Chester Springs, 1967); Vincent Harlow and E. M. Chilver, eds., *History of East Africa*, II (London, 1965), 256.

⁵ Gerhard Lindblom, *The Akamba in British East Africa* (Uppsala, 1920), 10, 11, 15. The Tharaka are the second largest African group in Kitui District. From population statistics taken from the Kitui District annual reports, the Tharaka do not appear to have comprised more than four per cent of the African population in the district. For all practical purposes, the Kamba can be considered the major population in this study.



such as ivory and rhinoceros horn. Ivory was of critical importance in Hindu ceremonies and was used widely throughout Asia for decorative purposes. Rhinoceros horn was demanded for the most part by East Asians, who used it as a base for manufacturing a reputedly powerful aphrodisiac.⁶

As the trade grew, the Kamba became firmly entrenched in it. They hunted and transported ivory themselves, or sold it to Arab and Swahili caravans at the borders of Ukamba. The traders in Ukamba fomented good relations with Kamba living outside the traditional homeland, incorporating these people in the business. These emigrant Kamba provided useful links between Ukamba traders and Asian dealers. Moreover, the Kamba were able to raise a military barrier between inland hunting regions and the coast. Using their reputation as excellent archers to the fullest, they profited by extorting fees from caravans for permission to pass through Ukamba, and they established themselves as agents between inland African hunters and coastal dealers.⁷

Hunting, like other aspects of life, was governed by religious rules and ceremonies. Activities before hunts were often identical to those preceding raids, and successful hunters were afforded the same respect as that given to successful war leaders. When the first game laws were passed in 1897, the ivory trade and most hunting activities were made illegal. The advent of British authority not only affected the Kamba business community, but the social structure of the people as well.⁸

The Kamba were not willing to stop the trade. During the first ten years of British rule, they hid their ivory for the most part, hoping that the British would leave and trade could resume. There can be little doubt that they looked upon the British as interlopers. When they realized that the British were going to stay, however, they dug up their ivory and rhino horn caches and sold them in much the same fashion as before.⁹

Administrative perception in terms of organized poaching was vague at best, and in order to understand the complexity of the illegal trade networks that existed before 1950, it is necessary to study source material that deals with known networks of the post-1950 period. There is no

⁶ *Ibid.*, 465; R. W. Beachey, "The East African Ivory Trade in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History*, VIII, 3 (1967), 277; Cullen and Downey, *Saving the Game*, 55-56. See John Lamphear, "The Kamba and the Northern Mrima Coast," in Richard Gray and David Birmingham, eds., *Pre-Colonial African Trade* (London, 1970).

⁷ Lindblom, *Akamba*, 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 465.

⁹ H. R. Montgomery, KDAR, 1915/1916, KNA mic., reel 8, 42; Lindblom, *Akamba*, 469.

reason to believe that the system underwent any great change prior to that time.

In *Saving the Game* Anthony Cullen and Sydney Downey have re-created a network that was uncovered in 1958. The poachers in this network hunted elephant and rhino exclusively. They sold the ivory and horns to contact men, probably Kamba, who paid about two shillings per pound for ivory and perhaps three shillings per pound for rhino horn. The contact men in turn sold the products to receivers for about twice what they paid. Receivers sold the products to dealers in Mombasa who were paid about thirty-five shillings per pound for ivory and as much as eighty shillings per pound for rhino horn if the Asian market was good.¹⁰

Kitui District officials were bound by duty, though not necessarily by sentiment, to enforce the game ordinances. The ordinances were changed periodically to meet the needs of the game population, but the basic structure remained the same. Game animals were protected by law and could not be killed unless licences were purchased. No person could possess ivory or rhino horn unless the animals had been killed by a person possessing a licence. No game trophy could be sold without a licence. Costs and types of licences varied, depending upon the type of animal being hunted and the residency status of the hunter. Complex schedules were established as to what animal could be killed and the number of each that one hunter could legally shoot. Each licence had its own schedule. The purposes of the game ordinances were two: protecting game species from wanton slaughter and channeling revenue into administrative coffers.¹¹

The problems in enforcing the game ordinances were monumental. During most of the colonial era, Kitui District encompassed 18,281 square miles of territory, most of which was thorn-scrub desert. There were rarely more than three European officials stationed in Kitui at any given time, and the rate of transfer, leave, or evacuation was such that during a given year as many as seven different administrators could be posted there.¹² District officials had to rely on tribal police partially trained in anti-poaching work who were limited in number as well as in ability. On the average, forty-six men were maintained between 1909 and 1923. However, between 1923 and 1933 the number of policemen dwindled to fifteen. Eighty were maintained during the second world war, but their

¹⁰ Cullen and Downey, *Saving the Game*, 56-57.

¹¹ H. F. Ward and J. W. Milligan, *Handbook of British East Africa* (London, 1913), 208-209.

¹² Montgomery, KDAR, 1916/1917, KNA mic., reel 8, 15. Statistical data was gathered from district reports for the period between 1909 and 1960.

primary function was to guard military stores. Six policemen were always on leave. Expected to enforce all the laws, tribal policemen were unable to concentrate on the poaching problem.¹³

The Kenya Game Department was unable to provide much support to Kitui District. As late as 1954, it was expected to solve wildlife problems throughout the whole of Kenya with a staff consisting of one game warden, two senior game rangers, eight game rangers, three clerks, ten drivers, and two hundred African game scouts. It had to rely upon volunteer European residents, "honorary game wardens," to crop game and shoot dangerous animals, while game scouts were farmed out to districts having problems with poachers.¹⁴ These African game scouts proved to be administrative problems in themselves. Often they were corrupt. Many were involved in organized poaching, while others used their privileges to extort favors from the people in the districts where they worked. Kitui Kamba hated them so much that tribal police often had to protect them from irate mobs. Not only did their reputations discourage popular identification with anti-poaching efforts, they may have hindered the apprehension of wanted fugitives as well. It was rumored, for instance, that one man wanted to turn himself in to authorities but was too frightened of game scouts to do so. Kitui District was not the only district to have game scour problems. In 1934 game scouts hired their own lackeys and roamed Machakos District doing pretty much as they pleased. Two were arrested for rape and another for assault.¹⁵ District authorities in Kitui were faced with a problem of whom to trust — Kamba authorities or game scouts. Until 1945 it was official policy to trust the latter, and this attitude led to further alienation between the administration and the people.

The example of Headman Nzuki wa Muliki of Kanziko revealed to authorities the effect that this trust had on anti-poaching activities. In 1936 the Kitui district commissioner wrote that Nzuki was suspected of being the key figure in an organized poaching racket at Kanziko. In 1943 Nzuki was noted to be at odds with the head game scout there. However, in 1945 Nzuki broke up the poaching ring, bringing fifty-two suspects to trial. After an investigation Nzuki was cleared of all suspicion, and the

¹³ See note 12 above.

¹⁴ Cullen and Downey, *Saving the Game*, 164. John A. Hunter was a white hunter and volunteer game warden for the Kenya Game Department. His book, *Hunter*, recalls his life in Kenya.

¹⁵ B. W. Bond to C. Tomkinson, Kitui District handing over report [hereafter KDHOR], March 1936, KNA mic., reel 38, 27; Bond to C. A. Cornell, KDHOR, 1938, KNA mic., reel 38, 2-3; W. S. Marchant, Machakos District annual report [hereafter MACHDAR], 1934, KNA mic., reel 7, 40.

game scouts were found to have been deeply involved in the ring.¹⁶ District administrators faced these problems with resolve, and they did attempt to make the game ordinances work. Licence sales were encouraged and attempts were made to profit from ivory found in caches or in the bush. By law all such trophies were the property of the district, as well as those possessed by people without licences. A system was established to reward the turning in of found ivory,¹⁷ which was sent to the customs office at Mombasa. Given permission to sell ivory on the world market in 1901, the customs office credited the proceeds to Kitui District.¹⁸

This system had its shortcomings. There was no way to determine whether ivory that was turned in had been found or poached. Often during famines and other periods of distress, or perhaps when poaching networks were not paying well, the system actually encouraged poaching. District commissioners throughout Kenya were aware of the disadvantages, and some districts stopped paying, while other districts, Kitui for one, continued to do so.¹⁹

Taking into consideration Kamba participation in the precolonial ivory trade, the complexity of organized poaching, and the basic problems that administrators in Kitui District faced, it is understandable that anti-poaching efforts failed. Their every disadvantage proved an advantage to poachers. Forced to employ untrained or untrustworthy personnel to counter poaching activities and to use spies to acquire information about them, officials could only guess at the methods, extensiveness, and motivations of poachers. Official understanding was so incomplete that administrators could hardly distinguish between individual hunters and the organized bands that killed for profit. They were baffled because of the secrecy of organized poaching, and efforts to stop the slaughter were carried on with totally inadequate insights into the problem.²⁰

Between 1900 and 1922, the Kitui district administrators felt that poaching was a repudiation of government authority and an activity that

¹⁶ C. Tomkinson, KDAR, 1936, KNA mic., reel 9, 10; P. S. Osborne to R. D. F. Ryland, KDHOR, 1943, KNA mic., reel 38, 11; R. D. F. Ryland, KDAR, 1945, KNA mic., reel 9, 17.

¹⁷ Ward and Milligan, *Handbook*, 208-209.

¹⁸ Montgomery, KDAR, 1915/1916, KNA mic., reel 8, 53; Beachey, "Ivory Trade," 289; C. H. Adams, KDAR, 1918/1919, KNA mic., reel 8, 6.

¹⁹ Cullen and Downey, *Saving the Game*, 59.

²⁰ George Adamson notes that Kamba hunters on the Tana sold trophies to traders and meat to the inhabitants of the area (Adamson, *Lifetime*, 153). Meat hunting could have been just as profitable as trophy hunting, particularly during periods of famine. There is no evidence that Kitui district officials were aware of such meat sales, and they could have been mistaken by assuming that increased poaching during famine was not a profit-oriented activity.

denied the district its game licence revenue. There does not appear to have been any concern for the animals themselves. For instance, in 1902 the hut tax was paid partially with rhino horn and hippopotamus teeth with no administrative disapproval. Although a headman was deposed in 1909 for poaching, this appears to have been done merely to set an example.²¹ A brief paragraph from the annual report for 1910-1911 sums up the official opinion on game for this period.

The preservation of game is not a matter of great import if we except elephant. The district is too thickly covered with bush ever to become a game resort and with the exception of lesser kudu and oryx, which can I believe be easier obtained elsewhere, the game is of the very common class.²²

District administrators confined their anti-poaching activities to gathering and selling ivory. Between 1913 and 1914 a vast amount of ivory valued at 13,450 rupees was discovered and confiscated; this was thought to represent only a small portion of the ivory hidden in the district.²³

There was indeed little reason to worry about poaching as a menace to the game population. At the end of the 1915-1916 reporting period, H. R. Montgomery, Kitui district commissioner, complained about the damage that game was doing to Kamba crops. Lions and leopards attacked stock and herders with little discrimination, and in the eastern portion of the district on the fringes of the Yatta Plateau, rhino and buffalo were a serious menace to crops and human life. Yet mixed in with his complaints, Montgomery made a brief but significant reference to a suspected ivory trade between the Kamba and the Meru. This was the first official reference to organized poaching made by a Kitui district commissioner.²⁴

In 1918 a drop in the world ivory price forced district officials to pay less for found ivory, and voluntary turn-ins decreased. Whereas confiscated ivory alone brought the district administration 13,450 rupees in 1914, by the end of 1918 the combined total of found and confiscated ivory brought only 4549 rupees. This decrease was thought to be due to diminishing stockpiles.²⁵ By the end of 1919, however, it was apparent to district officials that stockpiles had not diminished. The Kamba were suffering badly from famine, influenza, and Carrier Corps losses during 1918

²¹ J. B. Ainsworth, Kitui District quarterly report, December 1909, KNA mic., reel 8, 2-3.

²² Osborne, KDAR, 1910/1911, KNA mic., reel 8, 41-42.

²³ Osborne, Kitui District quarterly report, September 1916, KNA mic., reel 8, 11, 17, 19; S. W. J. Scholefield, KDAR, 1913/1914, KNA mic., reel 8, 46.

²⁴ Montgomery, KDAR, 1915/1916, KNA mic., reel 8, 53.

²⁵ Montgomery, KDAR, 1917/1918, KNA mic., reel 8, 22.

and 1919, and to alleviate the shortage of food, they turned in ivory valued at 30,761 rupees. This vast amount alerted the district administration that widespread poaching was going on, and officials realized that the Kamba were not hunting for food alone. It was probably at this time that organized poaching became something more than a desultory practice.²⁶

District Commissioner C. H. Adams felt that it was wise for the district to continue paying for found ivory. "To confiscate it out of hand would stop the supply which brings in a large revenue, without stopping the slaughter."²⁷ Adams was the first district commissioner to note suspicion of a Kamba-Giriama trading combination in rhino horn, although Lindblom made note of it while preparing his ethnological monograph between 1910 and 1912.²⁸ Kamba-Giriama combinations proved to be a potent factor in organized poaching throughout the first sixty years of the twentieth century.

Official reactions to poaching-trading combinations were quiescent until 1922 when District Commissioner A. E. Chamier initiated an anti-poaching campaign. Perhaps Chamier was alarmed by the apparent decline in Kamba discipline and decided to tighten administrative control of the district. Kenya was faced with a general disregard for authority after the war, and Kitui District was by no means an exception.²⁹ Chamier wrote in his annual report for 1922:

There can be no doubt that the natives of the Southern locations . . . are poaching elephant in the uninhabited area to the South of the reserve, and in consequence a practice was made of confiscating all ivory from those locations. It is doubted if this made any difference, but it is necessary to draw the line somewhere.³⁰

Chamier requested and received three African game scouts to add some experience to his tribal police. With their help sixty-four persons were arrested for poaching, of which fifty-four were convicted. However, by the end of 1923 two of the three scouts were sentenced to a year in prison on two counts each of wrongful confinement to extort ivory.³¹

During 1923 Chamier forced the removal of Kamba stock from the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5; Adams, KDAR, 1918/1919, KNA mic., reel 8, 2, 6, 32.

²⁷ Adams, KDAR, 1918/1919, KNA mic., reel 8, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*; Lindblom, *Akamba*, 454-455.

²⁹ A. E. Chamier, KDAR, 1921/1922, KNA mic., reel 8, para. 28; Chamier, KDAR, July-December 1922, KNA mic., reel 8, 19; F. S. F. Traill, *Ukamba Province annual report, 1919/1920*, KNA mic., reel 1, 16-17.

³⁰ Chamier, KDAR, July-December 1922, KNA mic., reel 8, 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*; Chamier, KDAR, 1923, KNA mic., reel 8, 24.

Kitui portion of the Yatta Plateau, and he closed the entire southeastern portion of the district to human habitation in an effort to keep out poachers and other undesirables. His successor, C. B. Thompson, the first district commissioner to note officially a decrease in game on the Yatta Plateau, continued to apply pressure on poaching organizations in the south and east of the district. In 1924 Thompson's efforts led to the conviction and fining of forty-three Kamba for illegal game activities. By the end of the year he was able to report that game seemed to be coming back to the Yatta Plateau.³²

By 1924 it was evident that Kamba poaching activities were not limited to Kitui and Machakos Districts. Campaigns against organized poaching were initiated during the year in Kwale, Mombasa, and Tana River Districts, and district commissioners found the Kamba embedded in trophy smuggling in their districts. The Kilifi district commissioner noted in his annual report for 1924 that there was:

a great increase in illicit trade in ivory, coming from both Akamba and Giriama which found its way into the hands of various non-Natives at Mombasa, one of whom, a European, had a staff of native agents. Natives were selling tusks to these persons at about half the price paid by Government. With the assistance of the Game Warden who visited Mariakani in October several convictions were obtained notably that of Said bin [?] an Arab of [?] who was fined 3000/- by the Resident Magistrate, Mombasa.³³

In Tana River District A. W. Sutcliffe moved to destroy an illegal ivory network between the Galla and Somali, halting payments for found ivory as well. Despite the fact that the Galla and the Kamba had never been on good terms with one another, Kitui Kamba replaced the Somali in the eastern portion of Tana River District, sharing the trade with Arabs and "Wanyika," probably Giriama. As Sutcliffe's personnel began to break into the interior, this became more and more apparent.³⁴ "Wanyika, Wakamba and Arabs roamed the district trading ivory and supplying hunting needs, powder and shot to gun-owning Gallas, and poison to the bow and arrow hunters!"³⁵ By the end of 1926, game scouts in Mombasa

³² C. B. Thompson, KDAR, 1924, KNA mic., reel 8, 27-28.

³³ Citation from E. C. Tisdall, Kilifi District annual report [hereafter KILDAR], 1924, KNA mic., reel 55, para. T. Kwale District Commissioner H. B. Sharpe elaborated on the European dealer in Kwale District annual report [hereafter KWADAR], 1924, KNA mic., reel 54, ch. III. A question mark in brackets denotes illegibilities in the source materials.

³⁴ A. W. Sutcliffe, Tana River District annual report [hereafter TRDAR], 1925, KNA mic., reel 51, 20.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

and Malindi had discovered more Kamba smugglers. An entire ring of dealers in rhino horn was arrested in Mombasa, while in Malindi a Kamba-Giriama combination was arrested for organized poaching activities.³⁶

It soon became apparent to officials in Kitui District that they were dealing with a problem the magnitude of which they had never suspected. An assistant game warden was sent to Kitui District to help the administration explain to the people that "they were not to be shy of bringing in found ivory."³⁷ By the end of 1927, 9851 pounds of ivory had been turned in. This amount was an increase of 8600 pounds over the amount turned in during 1926. To district officials it was clear that ivory was being withheld pending sale to dealers, or withheld for security against future famines or epidemics. The assistant game warden's visit was thought to have done some good, however, since no poaching activity was noted during 1928.³⁸

The rains failed in 1928, however, and during 1929 Kitui District was seized by famine. A. M. Champion, then district commissioner, noted an "alarming rerudescence" in poaching. He convicted 145 poachers during the year. Champion noticed that numerous rhino had been slaughtered on the Yatta Plateau, but he did not make any connection between this and an increasing number of Giriama poison traders in the district. Apparently not considering the possibilities of an increase in organized poaching, he assumed that most of the illegal hunting was being done for food.³⁹ Champion's assertion, typical of most Kitui district commissioners, was not realistic. W. S. Marchant, Kwale district commissioner, wrote in the same year that "there was considerable traffic in Rhino Horn between the Akamba of Kitui and Mariakani, but unfortunately only two captures were affected."⁴⁰

If Champion had been naive in 1929, he had acquired some knowledge as to the complexity of the problem by June, 1930. In his "handing over report" to D. McKay, he warned his successor to be on the watch for poaching, "especially elephant shooting on the East and South boundaries of the Reserve."

Tusks will come rolling in if 4/- a pound is paid, as it is safe money. But I fear a large majority of the tusks belong to the elephants but re-

³⁶ T. Ainsworth-Dickson, Mombasa District annual report [hereafter MOMDAR], 1926, KNA mic., reel 53, 22.

³⁷ J. D. McKean, KDAR, 1926, KNA mic., reel 8, 29; S. H. Fazan, KDAR, 1927, KNA mic., reel 8, 36.

³⁸ E. D. Emley, KDAR, 1928, KNA mic., reel 8, 40.

³⁹ Champion, KDAR, 1929, KNA mic., reel 8, 19-20.

⁴⁰ Marchant, KWADAR, 1929, KNA mic., reel 54, 44.

cently killed. For some months 2 patrols with a Corporal or 2nd Grade Constable accompanied by a Tribal Retainer have been sent out and as a result a severe check to poaching being set up. I have no doubt however but that the Akamba are but biding their time in the hopes that this form of crime may sooner or later receive less attention from the Boma when they will be able to renew former activities with less danger.⁴¹

Between 1931 and 1933 both poaching and anti-poaching activities increased. Kitui Kamba poachers moved into Meru District where, according to the Meru district commissioner, they did not hesitate to use their poisoned arrows against those who came to arrest them.⁴² In Kitui District fourteen Girjama were arrested for trading poison for game products. They were convicted through a very liberal interpretation of the drugs and poisons ordinance. In 1932 found ivory sales were scrutinized closely, and ivory was confiscated if its finding was at all suspicious. Some Kamba who attempted to turn in ivory were arrested.⁴³ In 1933 a band of poachers attacked an anti-poaching team.

A case has recently occurred where a native wanted for a game offence called up some six followers and engaged a Tribal Police patrol with poisoned arrows. Some ammunition was expended and the net result of the engagement was

- a) Patrol (2 Tribal Police and 1 Game Scout and 2 others) retired in good order with 1 Tribal Policeman wounded (since recovered).
- b) Enemy remained in possession with no casualties. Mr. Turnbull made a subsequent attempt to round up the gang but their courage failed them and they took to the bush. Had there been a trained shot in the original patrol results might have been different.⁴⁴

After another skirmish in 1934, in which the leader of the poachers was shot in the leg, the band was rounded up and sentenced to prison.⁴⁵

The rains failed again in 1934, bringing about famine conditions in 1935. Poaching, which usually increased during famines, was encouraged by dealers on the coast who raised their prices for ivory and rhino horn. Permission to kill dik-dik antelope without licences was given. Steel traps were allowed on farms and other enclosed areas to protect crops from vermin. Later on in the year, permission was given to kill larger antelope of the more common varieties. Despite these concessions, poaching con-

⁴¹ Champion to D. McKay, KDHOR, June 1930, KNA mic., reel 38, 6.

⁴² J. G. Hopkins, Meru District annual report, 1931, KNA mic., reel 16, 14.

⁴³ A. A. Seldon, KDAR, 1931, KNA mic., reel 8, 24, 27, 31, 33; R. J. C. Howes, KDAR, 1932, KNA mic., reel 8, 27-28.

⁴⁴ B. W. Bond, KDAR, 1933, KNA mic., reel 8, 31.

⁴⁵ Bond, KDAR, 1934, KNA mic., reel 8, 3.

tinued to increase, not to gain food, but to provide goods for the illegal trade in ivory and rhino horn.⁴⁶

By 1936 Kitui district authorities realized that poaching and the game products trade could not be stopped without Kamba cooperation. But apparently the reasons for previous failures were not taken under serious consideration. District Commissioner C. Tomkinson, aware that poaching would not stop as long as Asians on the coast offered to pay for trophies, suggested that some revisions be made in anti-poaching methods.

On the subject of Game Preservation I have addressed you considering that the policy of general suspicion is wrong and the extended employment of the "agent provocateurs" is worse. Natives do not appreciate the aims of fauna preservation but it should be possible for the Game Department to obtain great assistance from Government Headmen, if the position could be better explained and a more open policy pursued.⁴⁷

Although there was never another reference to the withdrawal of "agent provocateurs," an attempt was made in August 1937 to explain the principals of game preservation to Kamba authorities, and the reactions were favorable. Despite these reactions, organized poaching increased, and C. G. MacArthur was sent from the Game Department to study the situation. Aided by funds from the Kitui Public Works Department, MacArthur began to cut a track through the uninhabited southern portion of the district to facilitate game control in that area. As the area was being considered for a prospective national park, the road could also be used to move men and equipment into the area to build the necessary facilities.⁴⁸

Efforts were also made to popularize the Game Department with the Kamba. Europeans on game control missions had been met with suspicion, and often the Kamba would demand that these Europeans pay for game damage to crops. In 1938 a permanent African hunter was assigned to Kitui District to kill animals that damaged crops. Two Africans were hired to poison vermin such as porcupines that destroyed grain. However, the district administration never rectified a major grievance — the continual assigning of corrupt game scouts to areas where poaching was suspected — and Kamba cooperation understandably was withheld.⁴⁹

District Commissioner B. W. Bond reflected his pessimism in the an-

⁴⁶ Bond, KDAR, 1935, KNA mic., reel 9, 2, 35; P. J. Foster, MOMDAR, 1935, KNA mic., reel 53, 43.

⁴⁷ Tomkinson, KDAR, 1936, KNA mic., reel 9, 41.

⁴⁸ R. Pedraza, KDAR, 1937, KNA mic., reel 9, 3-4; Bond, KDAR, 1938, KNA mic., reel 9, 26.

⁴⁹ Bond, KDAR, 1938, KNA mic., reel 9, 26.

nual report for 1939. Bond was alarmed, as had been his predecessors since 1924, at the decrease in game in Kitui District.

There is little doubt that game generally has greatly diminished in the course of the last 10 years and with further opening up of the more backward areas by means of roads whereby white hunters and their clients can motor in comparative comfort, a further decrease in the game population is to be expected.⁵⁰

The year 1940 was a famine year which led to the usual increase in organized poaching, this time complicated by the presence of South African troops in Kitui District, "plentifully supplied with convenient ammunition and petrol."⁵¹ District officials and Game Department agents were unable to cope with the situation, and Kamba poachers continued to expand into other districts. The area to become part of Tsavo National Park "was badly shot up."⁵² The Game Department established a station in Kitui District near the Kilifi District border to check smuggling activities in that direction. Renewed efforts by Kamba and Giriama smugglers in Tana River District were carried on with impunity. The war had disturbed the traditional trade between the Galla and the Somali, and the Kamba were able to fill the gap as they had in 1924.⁵³ During the war years the only successful anti-poaching effort in Kitui District was Nzuki wa Muliki's campaign against the poaching organization at Kanziko. Even this mild success was dampened by the fact that the game scouts were discovered to have been involved in the racket.⁵⁴

In 1948 two significant events in Kitui District did much to revive the fight against organized poaching. Tsavo National Park was gazetted, incorporating 2500 square miles of Kitui District in its 7000 square mile expanse.⁵⁵ This brought some additional manpower to bear against poaching in the form of park employees. Also, in Voo, approximately twenty miles north of the park boundary, the first arrest of Asian receivers made in Kitui District took place.

N. G. Hardy, a Kitui district officer, and John A. Hunter were investigating a series of poaching incidents for the Game Department when they were approached by a disgruntled Asian. This man informed them that his employer, a branch manager of Abdulali Jivaji and Company at

⁵⁰ Bond, KDAR, 1939, KNA mic., reel 9, 24.

⁵¹ Cornell, KDAR, 1940, KNA mic., reel 9, 3, 8.

⁵² Cullen and Downey, *Saving the Game*, 79.

⁵³ W. A. Perreau, KILDAR, 1941, KNA mic., reel 56, 10; KILDAR, 1942, KNA mic., reel 56, 9; R. G. Darroch, TRDAR, 1942, KNA mic., reel 52, 7.

⁵⁴ Ryland, KDAR, 1945, KNA mic., reel 9, 17.

⁵⁵ W. F. P. Kelly, KDAR, 1948, KNA mic., reel 9, 18.

Voo, was a major figure in organized poaching in Kitui District. Subsequent investigations revealed that two branch managers of the firm were involved, and they were arrested. The Game Department refused to prosecute them because of insufficient evidence, but the district administration decided to press charges anyway. Although both men were acquitted, the resident magistrate remarked that it was a borderline case, and the provincial commissioner did not renew the firm's trading licences for seven branch outlets in the eastern part of the district.⁵⁶

Perhaps these prosecutions and the subsequent closing of the seven businesses had a salutary effect on game preservation in Kitui District. There was little activity noted between 1948 and 1952. The situation changed entirely in 1953, however.⁵⁷ Anthony Cullen and Sydney Downey have considered the period between 1953 and 1956 to be the "black years" of poaching. "During those years the toll of elephant and rhino in a vast area of Kenya, the Coast hinterland and the country to the north of Tsavo National Park, approached the stage of decimation."⁵⁸

In Kitui District, District Commissioner R. A. M. Birkett noticed an increase in poaching activities and opined that game scouts were involved since they had turned in no arrests during the year. Hoping to increase the rate of crime detection, Birkett requested and received help from the Kenya police. His suspicions seem to have been well-founded.

The main items of interest from the poaching point of view were the capture of a haul of some 1,100 pounds of ivory in Ikutha location, and the following up of a smuggling party to Masongaleni where a further 600 pounds of ivory was recovered together with all the culprits. This led to the prosecution of 54 people and to the imposition of substantial fines. The persons responsible for these captures were handsomely rewarded by the Game Department.⁵⁹

At about the same time, C. H. Brown, Tana River district commissioner, moved to destroy the Kamba-Girima organization that had poached and traded there since 1942.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; Kelly, KDAR, 1949, KNA mic., reel 9, 17. John A. Hunter's book, *Hunter's Tracks* (New York, 1957), is based on the incident involving the branch manager at Voo. While certain facets of Hunter's account appear to be accurate, he may have elaborated for literary purposes.

⁵⁷ Kelly, KDAR, 1949, KNA mic., reel 9, 17; KDAR, 1950, KNA mic., reel 9, appendix III; KDAR, 1951, KNA mic., reel 9, 19; KDAR, 1952, KNA mic., reel 9, 1; R. A. M. Birkett, KDAR, 1953, KNA mic., reel 9, 17.

⁵⁸ Cullen and Downey, *Saving the Game*, 54.

⁵⁹ Birkett, KDAR, 1953, KNA mic., reel 9, 17.

⁶⁰ C. H. Brown, TRDAR, 1953, KNA mic., reel 52, 25.

By 1955 anti-poaching measures were being carried out in deadly earnest, particularly in Tsavo National Park. David Sheldrick, warden of East Tsavo, was countering organized poachers with a small army recruited mainly from northern Kenya. Sheldrick broke his men into teams which he sent through the park to root out nests of poachers. These teams were soon fighting pitched battles, and at least one man was killed by Sheldrick's men in the Kitui section in 1955. A Home Guardsman sent by Kitui district authorities to investigate the death was arrested by one of Sheldrick's teams and taken to Voi, park headquarters.⁶¹ The arrest of the Home Guardsman was only one incident in a series of disputes over territorial jurisdiction. As a result of these disputes, the Kitui section of the park was given to Sheldrick to administer, while the non-park portion was retained by the district commissioner.⁶²

With less territory to cover, the Kitui District administration was better able to implement anti-poaching efforts. At the end of 1958, District Commissioner R. J. Hickson-Mahoney noted:

Possibly as a by-product of this [the settlement] there has been an increase in the big game in the Reserve whose depredations have caused serious concern to the peasants in the Northern and Eastern Divisions. The three Game Scouts were inadequate to deal with the problems and the assistance of the Game Wardens at Simba and Chuka had to be sought.⁶³

If Hickson-Mahoney had any illusions as to the success of anti-poaching efforts in Kitui, he was made aware of the real situation in 1959. Heavy poaching broke out near the Embu District border and near the national park at Ikutha.⁶⁴ His methods of combating this were vigorous but largely unsuccessful.

Patrols of Tribal Police disguised as poachers were sent to the Athi-Tiva and were responsible for bringing in 26 cases to Court from which 22 convictions were obtained.

The anti-poaching team from Voi operated in Ikutha and Mwingi during the year, but although a number of persons were brought to Court all the offences were of a very minor nature. Their method of operating — hut to hut searches at night — may be necessary in this type of campaign, but there is no doubt that it brought difficulties in its train.

⁶¹ Moorehead, *No Room in the Ark*, 108; J. W. Balfour, KDAR, 1955, KNA mic., reel 9, 19.

⁶² R. J. Hickson-Mahoney, KDAR, 1957, KNA mic., reel 9, 14.

⁶³ Hickson-Mahoney, KDAR, 1958, KNA mic., reel 9, 11.

⁶⁴ Hickson-Mahoney, KDAR, 1959, KNA mic., reel 9, 16-17.

The main result was that African opinion became definitely antagonistic to the Game Department and any hope of convincing the indigenous population of these areas of the value of the Game Laws receded. It seems to me that these teams should concentrate much more on the protection of big game and that they would be much better employed in the combatting of organized poaching by gangs.⁶⁵

Sixty years of effort were best summed up in the annual report for 1960. The general tone of the comment and its applicability to any of the previous years indicate that anti-poaching efforts had been relatively ineffective.

Poaching as a livelihood increased greatly because of the famine and when, towards the end of the year, Kamba began to abuse the Meru Game Reserve, anti-Kamba feeling was roused. . . . The famine led to the formations of several groups of poachers moving down the Tana into Garissa.⁶⁶

During the period between 1900 and 1960, the Kitui district administration was unable to stop illegal game activities. Faced with staff shortages and 18,281 square miles of barren land to administer, officials were unable to acquire the necessary insights into poaching. District officials failed to study the nature of organized poaching in regard to its economic roots. The reasons why it existed were never fully understood. As a result anti-poaching efforts were never altered to meet the changing social and economic conditions within Kitui Kamba society. In spite of the recognition afforded to this view in 1936, nothing new in anti-poaching techniques was developed beyond the planning stage. Organized poaching grew from a mere nuisance to a complex problem in organized crime, and unable to cope with it, British authorities passed it on to their African successors.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ A. D. Galton-Fenzi, KDAR, 1960, KNA mic., reel 9, 14.