

NYASALAND PROTECTORATE



Annual Report
of the
Department
of
Game, Fish and Tsetse Control
for the
Year ended 31st December
1957



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offering to refund one third of their expenditure on bounty schemes if a "target figure" for the District was exceeded during the year.

10. The scheme was not introduced until late October, and there was not the time within which to judge its effectiveness before the end of the year, but there were some signs of increased effort.

11. Staff and housing difficulties prevented any direct effort in the Northern Province but the inhabitants of Nkata Bay District continued to maintain their high rate of vermin killing under the stimulus of the bounty scheme. This scheme was also extended to Rumpi District late in the year.

12. Appendix II shows the details of animals disposed of and Appendix III shows revenue accruing from crop protection activities.

CROCODILE HUNTING

13. The number of licensees fell to three during the year and these three were not in continuous action. 1,559 reptiles were reported as having been captured. Of this total 81 were trapped by Africans.

14. There were indications, towards the end of the year, of some re-surgence in the crocodile population. For the most part the relative proportions of the various sizes in the catch remained much the same as in previous years, but there was an appreciably higher proportion of large crocodiles, particularly towards the end of the year and in Central Province waters.

15. Damage to gill-nets was also perceptibly heavier in the closing months of the year and it looked very much as if the hunted areas had received quite a number of immigrants from parts of the Lake not yet much exploited.

16. On the whole it does not appear that the crocodile population is progressively declining. On the contrary it seems to have steadied, though naturally at a lower level than before exploitation started. So far the only ill effect which appears likely to follow the diminishment of the crocodile population is an increase in the number of outers in the Upper Shire River and the increased raiding of traps by these animals. This disadvantage is, however, at least for the time being, more than offset by the increased opportunities of gill-netting.

17. The value of skins exported during the year was some £8,000.

GAME CONSERVATION

18. The general picture in the Reserves is that game is still on the increase in all of them, with the possible exception of the Lengwe.

19. In the Mwabvi Reserve nyala now seem fairly well established. They were seen every month from July onwards by the Reserve Guards and, at intervals, by the Game Control Officer. One can now more or less rely on seeing rhinoceros, at least within the portion of the Reserve which is their chosen habitat, and buffalo appear to have more permanent residence in the area. These latter were observed by the Game Reserve Guards every month from May onwards, and it seems probable they are present all the year round. Sable, kudu, impala and reedbuck also continue to be seen frequently.

20. The increasing number of occasions on which game is observed in the vicinity of the main road passing through the Kota Kota Reserve, lend colour to reports of an increased population in this area. Such observations are still the exception rather than the rule, but since there were practically none at all three or four years ago their occurrence, even in small numbers, is encouraging. Game

Reserve Guards' reports, and the observations of the Game Control Officer, indicate respectable populations of elephant, buffalo, eland, roan, sable, hartebeest and waterbuck, with kudu and a number of varieties of small buck in lesser numbers. Rhinoceros are also occasionally seen.

21. Kasungu Reserve continues to carry a fair elephant population, which shows no sign of declining. Other animals, however, although present in fair numbers if the evidence of spoor is to be believed, are still disappointingly wary in their habits. In the latter part of the dry season, at least, they leave the open *dambos* for the denser bush very early in the morning. Nevertheless a satisfactory number of buffalo, eland, roan, hartebeest and zebra were observed during the year by the Game Control Officer and Guards, while the Secretary of the Fauna Preservation Society himself can vouch for the presence of rhinoceros.

22. The Majete Reserve game populations are reported as building up very satisfactorily, though there is still a great deal of movement of soft-skinned buck out of the area in the dry season, which, of course, exposes them to shooting. This movement may be in search of water, and has always been assumed to be so, but the area is not as badly watered as was at one time thought to be the case, and at least some of the movement is probably in search of dry season grazing. Nevertheless very encouraging concentrations can be observed in the main river valley during the dry season.

23. Poaching in the above Reserves, though it still continues, is gradually being brought under better control and there were successful prosecutions in respect of offences in the Kasungu, Mwabvi and Majete Reserves.

24. On the Nyika Plateau game populations have built up considerably following the prohibition of hunting at the beginning of 1952. With the withdrawal of the officials of the Colonial Development Corporation from Chelinda camp, however, following the cessation of their softwood experiments, poaching is again reaching serious proportions.

25. Unfortunately these circumstances have coincided with the difficult staff position reported in the first section and it has been impossible to post a senior officer to the Northern Province this year. It is, however, hoped that it will be possible to remedy this situation in 1958.

26. With regard to opening reserves to visitors progress was a little disappointing. Due to staff shortages and to late rain in the preceding wet season, there was delay in completing the reopening of the Kasungu camp and it was not ready till too late in the season to be of much service. It should be possible to make a better showing in 1958 with the problems more clearly in view and the Lisitu River already strongly bridged as a result of this year's efforts.

27. Outside the Game Reserves there is little of moment to report. The figures of licences taken out show a small rise from previous years, but are still very far short of the number of firearms registered. The number of Protectorate licences taken out is still very small, surprisingly so in view of the limited schedule of the Resident's licence which most people take out and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that these limitations are frequently ignored.

28. There were some successful prosecutions of those offenders who employ hunters to shoot for them with a loaned firearm.

29. Nevertheless, game still persists in a number of areas outside Reserves though it is now mostly nocturnal in habit. The Sumbu area of Chikwawa still has a fair game population and a good deal of time was spent this season in trying to prevent poaching there. This locality may well offer possibilities for a Controlled

Area if easily recognizable boundaries can be defined. Elephant on the Cape Maclear peninsula still persist and were seen in the vicinity of the Palm Beach Inn and Lake-shore cottages on a number of occasions.

30. Wild dog were also in evidence in the Lower River area generally, though more particularly in the Majete and Mwabvi Reserves. One is doubtful whether to deplore the appearance of these very destructive animals, or to welcome them as a sign that there is some increase in game to attract them to the area. Towards the end of the year arrangements were made for the careful recording of observations of these animals, with a view to getting some idea of their cycle of movements as a prelude to an attempt to control them. The Nyasaland Fauna Preservation Society was asked to co-operate and it is hoped that members will assist during the coming year.

31. An observation on rhinoceros made by Mr. O. J. Carey, Game Control Officer, is perhaps worth recording. In the company of two Game Reserve Guards in the Mwabvi Reserve he came unexpectedly on a bull rhino. The animal was aggressive but he was able to get behind a rock before it charged, while the Game Guards similarly "froze" behind trees. He then attempted to take a photograph but since he was using a reflex camera had to expose himself above the rock to do so. On each occasion he made an attempt the rhino made an abortive charge up to the rock and he had to crouch down again. After some time the rhino was joined by two tick-birds. On the next occasion that Mr. Carey showed himself above the rock the tick-birds observed him and gave their alarm cry, whereupon the officer was interested to observe that the rhino immediately turned tail and made off as quickly as possible.

32. It seemed that the stimulus of the alarm cry brought forth the immediate response of retreat, notwithstanding the earlier aggressive response to the presence of an unknown object.

33. The question of a new Wild Birds Protection Ordinance was still under discussion with the Fauna Society at the close of the year.

(c) Fishery

THE STATE OF THE FISH STOCKS

34. The figure of *Tilapia* catch per unit effort of the two sample ring-nets in the south-east arm shows a small decline from the 1956 level, though it is still higher than some years ago.

35. It is, however, to be noted that one of the two firms whose catches have been the basis of calculations for some years greatly increased the size of its ring-nets during 1957. In making allowance for this it has been assumed that the catching ability of a ring-net increases in direct proportion to the increase in size, but this may well err on either side of the truth so the detail of the 1956/57 comparison cannot be fully relied upon.

36. Gill-net *Tilapia* catches show a small rise in the south-east arm. This may well reflect the fact that a more accurate method of calculating the effort employed has been used this year.

37. The total landings of *Tilapia*, mainly from ring-nets in the south-east arm, increased by about 57 per cent, but the number of pulls increased by 82 per cent. This, even without any allowance for the increased size of net in use, gives general support to the impression of a slightly reduced stock which emerges from the figures for individual nets. This may be due to some purely natural cause, but may also be due to the present greatly increased effort being more than the stock can bear.