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ANIMAL IDIOSYNCRACIES

E. Cronic Wilmot in his book *Always Lightly Tread* has some interesting remarks on the fact that individual animals or birds of the same species do not always act alike.

He says:

"When, over a number of years, a man's occupation has led him in almost daily contact with wild animals, he will almost certainly become aware of wide differences in temperament among individuals of any one species. By degrees he will become convinced that there is no great distinction between the idiosyncrasies of animal and human kind. This is a fact, I think, of which all students of nature area aware."

He goes on later:

"Failure to take into account the often widely divergent individual temperament of any one species, of the more dangerous game has led to numerous tragedies in the hunting field. When a hunter accepts previous experience as a criterion to the reactions of dangerous animals to any form of ill-treatment or annoyance, he is looking for trouble. There are no certain rules governing this aspect of animal nature, and it is seldom that a sequence of manifestations of ferocity, patience, or just sheer disinclination to fight, will occur."

WILD LIFE IN NORTHERN RHODESIA

By DESMOND FOSTER VESEY-FITZGERALD

RHODESIA has earned for herself a bad name from wildlife conservators. This is partly due to the much publicised slaughter policy which was carried out in the south as a tsetse control measure, and to the unfortunate game-free belt policy in the north which was envisaged as a barrier against rinderpest. But perhaps the main reason for Rhodesia's bad reputation as a game country is because a traveller can drive from one end of the Territory to the other, through the monotonous woodland, without seeing a single animal. Yet Rhodesia is a naturalist's paradise where as much well-wooded, well-watered, undisturbed country as anywhere in the world can be found, a country in which no species of animal has yet been exterminated and indeed where some of the most varied and spectacular concentrations of animals can still be seen.

Many people have the impression that in the past the whole of Africa was teeming with animals and that in the future none will survive. These ideas overlook important facts of distribution and survival which necessitate that every species is adapted to its own environment. Where the environment is unsuitable animals never have, and never will exist successfully. But it is also true to say that where their environment is suitable and preserved from destruction, the animals themselves have a very good chance of survival. Rhodesia never has presented an unlimited expanse of country suitable for occupation by game animals, such as is provided for example by the open grasslands of territories further south and further north. Even the earliest travellers such as Serpa Pinto, near Mpika in the year 1798, while deplored the depopulated and poverty-stricken country in which he finds himself, exclaims "were there game to supply the want of millet, or small birds to charm us with their song, the transit should have been less tedious". Continuing towards Luwingu he saw little to cause him to change his mind, for he writes, "I wonder at the scarcity of game in this bush; whatever may be to come, I expected in this desert march to see some animals at a distance" Burton (1873,) shrewd translator of Pinto's travels, notes: "The deep African forest is everywhere unfit to support animal life, unless it is broken by large clear spaces where wild beasts can enjoy sun and air." There is a wealth of information in this remark. Herbivorous animals will only be found where there are suitable pastures and for this reason the river valleys and great flood plains are even to-day the places in which to see and conserve our wildlife. The vast and monotonous woods of Rhodesia always have been, and always will be thinly populated by large animals. If the early travellers who walked from water hole to water hole in the low country saw so little game, it is certain that present-day motorists who speed along roads following the high land can expect to see nothing.

Recorded history in Central Africa is short, but we are fortunate in having the writings of Sir Harry Johnston, (1897) to consult. He made our first game laws and demarcated the first game reserves, and he gives us much information on the fauna in his time. He remarks for instance that, "elephants became scarce in the Territory during the great hunting boom following Livingstone's first expedition". Indeed it would appear that their slaughter in those days, when every slave carried ivory to the coast, must have far

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[Photo: D. F. Ure-FitzGerald]

Carrying a tail worth £2, hunting dogs have now become scarce and shy. Yet a thriving population of predators is a sure sign that the wild life of a country is thriving too.

exceeded that of the present time. But he adds that, "they remain abundant in the Mweru marsh and the Luangwa Valley", which is certainly true at the present time. In the Mweru wa Nipa for instance the writer recently counted 500 elephants in the flooded grassland surrounding the lake during a single morning. Hippo were so numerous during Johnston's time in the Shire River as to constitute a danger to navigation and consequently their numbers had to be reduced. This process has been continued wherever hippos have become a nuisance with the result that they are scarce now in some of the most frequented rivers in the Territory. But elsewhere they survive in big herds though they seem never to have been abundant in Rhodesia's great swamps. Zebra and buffalo are reported to have been extremely abundant on the plain all over the protectorate, but already retiring from settled areas. These animals have certainly been eliminated from many suitable areas at the present time, even from those areas which are remote from settlements. Although both buffalo and zebra are still ubiquitous, Lancaster (1951), they are now only abundant in restricted localities. Johnston's statements that eland and kudu frequent the woods where the roan antelope is however the commonest species, and that klipspringer are found on all the rocky hills, and that sitatunga are abundant in the larger swamps, are true to-day. But what he says about enormous herds of puku along the rivers no longer holds, for this animal, of very restricted habitat, has suffered seriously at the hands of hunters in more recent years.

Gibbons (1898) was hunting in Central Africa just before and just after the great rinderpest epidemic of 1899. He gives us some vivid glimpses of what happened. He started on the Chobe in the vicinity of Sebeke and seems to have had plenty of sport among a variety of game, the animals being plentiful and tame because "but for traps and pitfalls the animals knew no danger at the hands of man". But seven months later the rinderpest had well nigh killed everything. He travelled on through country which should have been teeming with game but his porters were continually short of meat; he reckoned 95 per cent of all ruminants had died, buffalo, eland and kudu being particularly affected. He states that "according to native report everything was dead and the fine herds of buffalo were lying rotting in the veld!"



[Photo: D. F. Ure-FitzGerald]

The "thin red line" of puku, restricted to the riverside grassland zone and enclosed by woodland into which they never venture, puku are easily shot out from their chosen habitat.

Lyell (1910) notes that "the duiker is without doubt the most plentiful animal in the country", but evidently he never travelled in lechwe country. Oribi he records, as very local and absent from many parts altogether, and impala as plentiful along the Luangwa River. The reedbuck was evidently rather scarce throughout Northern Rhodesia compared with other species, but puku, though very local, existed in great numbers where they were found. The sasaby he records as "very local indeed, and confined to the borders of Lake Bangweulu where they exist in considerable numbers". The Lichtenstein's hartebeest he states was not so common as it used to be as they are easily shot. Waterbuck, the war, referring to *clipp. drymophilus* east of the Mushinga, were most plentiful near perennial rivers and wherever extensive swamps occur they are pretty certain to be common. Sable are recorded as "preferring fairly open bush and often climbing high hills". Eland were evidently very plentiful all over the country and often long distances from water. Warthog and zebra were very abundant throughout every part of the country. Buffalo however had been much reduced in numbers since the rinderpest of 1891-96.

As far as the distribution of the animals mentioned is concerned, Lyell's summary might apply at the present time, but certainly the comments on their abundance would have to be qualified, see Grimwood *et al.* (1958).

Letcher's (1910) account of his visit to the Luangwa Valley implies that the species present and their distribution and abundance was much the same in his time as it is to-day in the Luangwa Game Reserve. But in the neighbourhood of Mpika he evidently saw much more game than would be possible there to-day. He notes that roan, eland, and Lichtenstein's hartebeest are the most widely distributed and plentiful large antelopes in north-eastern Rhodesia, but that the zebra is even more abundant, there being hardly a "dumb" (grassy plain) which does not contain half a dozen. He mentions that buffalo occur in large numbers but not in swamps, as was the case before rinderpest decimated their ranks. Unfortunately to-day there is hardly a "dumb" in north-eastern Rhodesia where zebra can be seen, and the antelopes only visit these grasslands shyly during the night.

This is because "dambos" provide the essential dry season grazing for these animals but these pastures are nowadays often ringed round with African cultivations or are favoured places for hunting parties during the dry months after the grass is burnt, and the sun has set.

Hughes (1933) refers to his life in the Bangweulu Swamp from 1901-19 and his writings are full of interest. He seems to be the first writer to record the vast herds of black lechwe at Mbo Island, he states, "their numbers must be seen to be believed". But even in his time great slaughter evidently took place. He states, "east of the Luapula natives harry and drive the lechwe in the marshes all day long, using nets and dogs; also pole-traps are set for them. Enormous loads of lechwe biltong are dried, more than the hunters can ever eat but it is bartered for other produce". Other game was also abundant on the flats and Hughes likens parts of the area to a farm-yard. At Mbo Island again he says "a grand variety of big game to be seen, all in view at once, roan, reedbuk, hartbeest, puku, oribi, cheetah". He also notes that game, especially buffalo, had been greatly thinned by the rinderpest epidemic of 1896, but was increasing rapidly during the period 1909-19. He makes special mention of the tsessebe (sassaby) antelopes which occurred all over the southern plains between the Luapula and Chambeshi Rivers though they never cross either. Sitatunga were abundant in the long swamp grasses.

When the present writer first visited Bangweulu in 1939 he was also impressed by the thousands of lechwe in the vicinity of Mbo Island. More recently we have carried out aerial surveys (1954 and 1959) and some 15,000 head were photographed upon each occasion in the Mpika and Serenje Districts. Vesey-FitzGerald (1955). A subsequent ground visit to the lechwe pastures after the most recent count revealed that the herbage was grazed down to the water level, so the herds in this area are evidently still very numerous in relation to their pasture. Other game however is now scarce on the flats. Vast stretches of the grassland, as viewed from the air, especially to the north of the swamp in the Luwingu District are empty. The tsessebe are nowadays restricted to a few localised areas where herds of only a few hundred survive.

Hughes also wandered further afield and describes the vicinity of Mpika as a sportsman's paradise. This was up to 1914, it certainly is no paradise for game today. In the vicinity of Fort Rosebery also he says game existed in good variety but in small numbers owing to comparatively dense native population. Hartbeest were the most plentiful of the larger antelopes, running in herds of a couple of dozen, often with zebra, all over the park-like stretches along the rivers. He records the abundance of reedbuk seen along the Chambeshi, and says that puku are the principle game seen by travellers on the river, giving the appearance that they are very common. But, he writes, "they are just a thin red line along the banks presenting easy shots and are in greater danger of extermination than any other species". This last remark is very true, puku having been shot out from most reaches of the rivers of Northern Rhodesia though small, scattered flocks still occur in some places. In most respects Hughes' comments on the distribution of the species are applicable to-day but the numbers he records are at present sadly depleted.

Grogan (1900), who walked from Cape to Cairo, hunted rhinoceroses on the Chozzi Flats of the Abercorn-Isoka Districts in 1899. None occurs here now and there is not even any tradition among Africans that rhino ever occurred in this area. The beautiful grass plain of the Chozzi was also at that time the haunt of "countless herds of puku" but it is doubtful if more than a handful exist anywhere on the Chambeshi drainage at the

present time. But even Grogan had to walk sixteen miles to come up with rean which he particularly coveted, because, he says, "the slaughter of game had already started in the area". He writes "drives were organised against funnel-shaped fences and sometimes 200 animals were killed as a result". The Chozzi Flats and other similar types of riverine grassland in Northern Rhodesia are remarkably devoid of game and of domestic stock at the present time, and old residents have told the present writer how they remember great massacres taking place on the great flat grasslands during times of high flood when the animals were restricted to small islands of elevated ground.

Melland and Cholmeley 1912, who bicycled through the heart of Africa also spent some time in the Abercorn District of Northern Rhodesia. They state that the Mzingi Park, nearby, after the grass fires, was the resort of large quantities of game. As recently as 1939, when the present writer first knew these parks, it was not unusual to see reedbuck, eland, roan, Lichtenstein's hartebeest, or waterbuck *(defassa)* abroad there in the day time. But at present it is very rare to see anything out in the open by day, though bush pigs are common at night and occasionally a few of the antelopes and warthogs may be encountered there in the small hours of the morning. Lion however are still regular visitors.

Ansell (1959) gives us an erudite account of the past and present distribution of ungulates in Northern Rhodesia. After pointing out that certain animals were naturally absent from parts of the country he discusses the fragmentation of the "original range"



[Photo: T. F. Vesey-FitzGerald]
Bush-group grassland on the Chambeshi Flats. A type of country formerly most frequented by nearly all types of game, but now sadly empty and unused by any human activity.

of many kinds as the result of human activity during the present century. Modern Rhodesians have also changed their habits and range. Old timers lived in remote bush stations and travelled slowly in the low country where animals were to be found. Therefore they saw what there was to see and hunted of necessity. But now most people live in big towns and travel far and fast by car or by air. They therefore do not see even the animals that there are, and big game hunting for sport is now considered to be hardly worth the trouble in our country. But there still remain a few keen naturalists and rather more photographers who are successful in their quests because they take the trouble to go and look for the animals in the places where they live. The question is therefore, where do the animals still live and how are they faring there. Astley Maberly (1959).

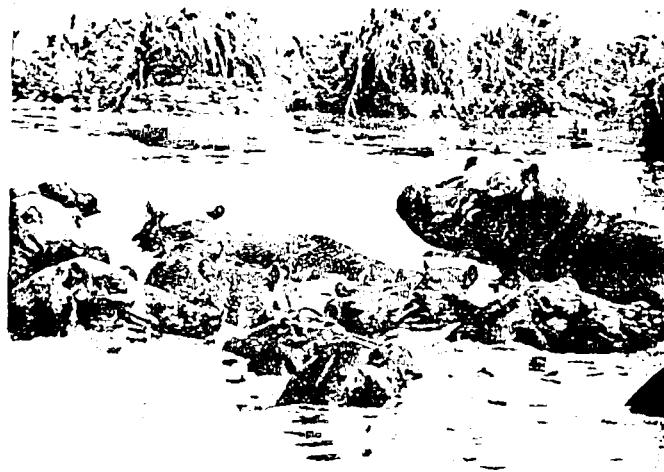
The "big game" or wildlife of Rhodesia can be rather loosely divided into four communities. Firstly the woodland and valley species which includes zebra, roan, sable, kudu, elephant, buffalo, rhinoceros, waterbuck, impala, eland, duiker, Lichtenstein's hartebeest, bushbuck, and warthog. Secondly the specialised riverine and flood-plain species such as lechwe, puku, sitatunga, reedbuck and antelope. Thirdly the intrusive southern "plains game" element, which is poorly represented in most of Rhodesia, such as wildebeest (very local), gazelles (i.e. springbok in Bechuanaland but not reaching Northern Rhodesia), giraffe (very local and never occurring in the prevalent *Brahystegia* woodland) and ostrich (which according to Benson and White (1957) survive only as stragglers). And fourthly the animals of special habitats, such as klipspringer on rocky summits, sitatunga in swamps, hippopotamus in rivers, and the rarer species of duiker in relic forest patches.

Animals in the first group ranged widely over the Territory in early days, though the rhinoceros was already in decline before man's intervention. They were, however, only encountered in large numbers when concentrated on their dry season pastures in the valley grassland. Such pastures have for long been the happy hunting ground of sportsmen and others, and they have also been used for stock rearing, and their perimeters are often cultivated. The wild animals have therefore encountered hunting pressure, and competition with man's activities during their visits to this essential grazing, which period also in many cases coincides with the breeding season. They have therefore become scarce and shy and restricted to the remoter places, with the result that the extensive wet season range is no longer fully occupied. Nevertheless no species has yet become extinct in the country as a whole.

Animals of the second group were at one time the most spectacularly abundant of all forms of wildlife in Rhodesia. But, remembering Hughes' remark, they formed only a "thin red line". They were always easy to find and to shoot and as a result long reaches of their riverine habitats are now empty. The flood plains on the other hand are difficult of access and useless for any form of development, and it was here the greatest concentration of animals occurred and even now do still occur in the country.

Animals of the third group were always local in distribution, and much of their range has been game reserve since the early days. In such places they probably exist, on sufferance, much as they did in former days.

Animals of the fourth group depend entirely on the preservation of their habitat. The high hills remain a habitat for klipspringer as do the swamps for sitatunga. The case of the hippopotamus is rather different because there are other demands on the river



[Photo—D. E. V. Fox-Gerald]

The hippo cluster in quiet pools of un frequented reaches of the river, preferably with a firm bank along which they can wander at night. In the war between man and nature, hippo are seldom the aggressors.

habitat, namely fishing, navigation and cultivation, and if these interests conflict with the welfare of the hippos, the latter suffer. Nevertheless even to-day the hippo is quite common and usually to be found wherever suitable waters exist.

What then can be done, and should be done to conserve the wildlife resources of our country? The answer is surely quite clear from the foregoing account of the animals and their habitat. The wide ranging woodland and valley game species, which includes most of the "common" game animals of Rhodesia, can be conserved by protecting them on their restricted dry season pastures. At the season of the year when they are, or should be, concentrated on these pastures they threaten no crops, and in most areas compete with no domestic stock because there are still vast areas of valley pasture in Rhodesia which are not occupied by cattle. Therefore all hunting that take place at this time of year is purely for the pot or profit, or thinly justified in the name of sport. Pot hunters and poachers are doing them a disservice to hunt them sparingly at this time of year. The "thin red line" of riverine and flood-plain species should be conserved at all seasons, because proper game management in this environment will pay the highest dividends and will provide the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people who need to reap a harvest from these otherwise unproductive flood-plain pastures. The natural harvest of the swamps is fish and of the flood-plain game, both these resources can be maintained by proper management but both can be easily lost by thoughtless exploitation.

The "plains game" element can be, and indeed is, preserved in properly managed game reserves which are an asset to the country, because visitors will continue to come in increasing numbers to see and photograph these animals of Africa. Tourists can however enjoy this African fauna in other neighbouring countries to better advantage than in Rhodesia. So if Rhodesia is to maintain its trade in tourists it must pay fuller attention to the future welfare of its own share in the heritage of Africa. The animals which are restricted to special habitats will be themselves conserved if their habitats are adequately preserved and protected. And it is perhaps the most important duty of the present-day Rhodesians to see that adequate samples of their countryside are in fact handed on to future generations. The time has come when the concept of nature reserves must be developed in this country because their value and importance in any part of the world increases as the country becomes more developed and the people become more civilised and prosperous. Fortunately all these natural assets and resources of Rhodesia can still be saved and developed, but it is essential for the benefit of the future that the knowledge and effort of the present are applied to good effect.

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KANYANTA AND HIS TIMES

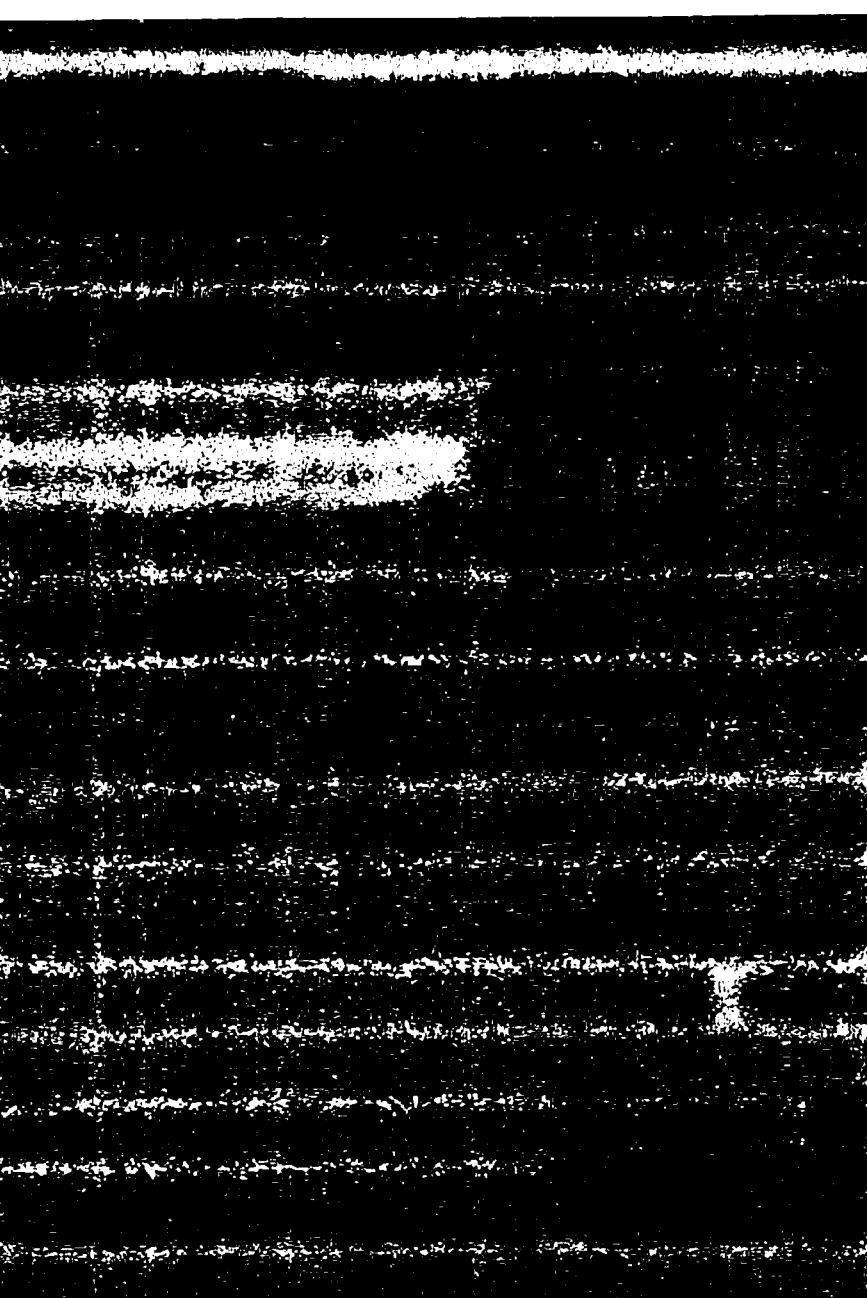
By J. E. THOMAS

In the early 1860's a man was born in the Bemba country who was to live in, and help to mould, the most important period in his tribe's history. This man was Mfuppa Kanyanta. He later gained another name, Kalonga Nsouf, because of his prowess as an elephant hunter. He was no ordinary tribesman however, since his mother, always the most important person in the Bemba family hierarchy, was a woman of considerable position in the Bemba Royal Family. It was therefore clear that this first born of Kangwa Chonya, niece of Chitimukulu Chitapankwa was, as a birth right, to have every opportunity of achieving fame. His heritagewas soon made clear to the young Kanyanta for when he was still a boy his uncle Mubanga Chipoya, then Nkolemfumu, took him away from his parents so that he should learn the elements of chieftainship. The character of Mubanga Chipoya is drawn fully for us in the autobiography of Bwembya, an old inhabitant of his area (in *Ten Africans*, edited by Marjory Perham). Here was a chief who clearly manifested all the traits which the Bemba admired in a leader. He was wise and dignified. He would sit on an anthill and discuss tribal affairs with his elders while the people of his village listened in respectful silence. When later he became Mwamba he was arrogant and had little respect for his Paramount Chief. Indeed he went so far as to imprison one and carry on a life-long feud with another. He was a great warrior, and gained the complimentary and all-embracing title, "Bow of the Lubemba". Undoubtedly Mubanga contributed much both to the increasing military prowess of his tribe, and to the consolidation of the semi-insular status of the Mwamba chieftainship.

Under the tutelage of so great a chief, the young Kanyanta could not fail to develop all his latent talent. And in addition, Kanyanta had the good fortune to be Mubanga's favourite nephew. The old men of the tribe say that this affection was not only a result of the normal close bonds between nephew and his maternal uncle, but also because Mubanga recognised in Kanyanta those qualities which he most admired, the qualities of bravery and wisdom. Kanyanta thus had the benefit of contact with, and instruction from, the man who probably was the strongest chief in Bemba history.

As soon as Kanyanta was old enough he married the daughter of Mubanga Chipoya, a girl called Chilesha Kapota. Soon after this Kanyanta's mother became Chandimukulu, which position together with that of Mu'ukamfumu, were the most important which a Bemba woman could hold. This rise in the hierarchy resulted in her evacuation of Musowa, the small chief's area in Kasama District in which Kanyanta had been born. Kanyanta was given this country, and so had his first opportunity to put into practice what he had learned at the court of his uncle. Here Kanyanta built his first village and called it Chotma.

At about this time Dr Livingstone visited Chipapankwa. As a young boy Kanyanta shared the excitement when Dr. Livingstone visited the chief. This was in January, 1867. Even as early as this the traveller records that the power of the Bemba was beginning



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