

NYASALAND

PROTECTORATE



Annual Report of the Department of Game, Fish and Tsetse Control for the year ending 31st December, 1952

A. STAFF AND GENERAL

1. The year was a somewhat anxious one for the Department as a whole, for during the greater part of it Government was considering, in accordance with a recommendation of Standing Finance Committee, the possibility of its being abolished and its functions absorbed by the Departments of Agriculture and Veterinary Services. Decision on the point was not given till the closing months of the year and though no proposals for actual retrenchment of staff were mentioned in the original recommendation, a feeling of anxiety was inevitable and persisted until the die was cast. Eventually it was decided to make no changes at present.

2. The establishment of the Department was considerably reduced during the year, the number of Game Control Officers being reduced from four to three with the completion of Mr. Lindsay-Smith's contract in April, while the posts of Fish Ranger and second Tsetse Ranger were placed in abeyance when Messrs. Dunlop and Ainslie completed contracts in March and June respectively. Mr. Harrington, Tsetse Survey Officer, also resigned during the year.

3. Mr. Mitchell, Tsetse Entomologist, returned from leave on 29th May and Mr. Muldoon, Game Control Officer, was on leave from 1st May to 26th December. Messrs. Lewis and Graham, Tsetse Survey Officers, went on leave pending termination of agreement at the end of December.

4. The staff position as at 31st December is set out in Appendix I.

B. GAME

5. The reduction in the Game Control Officer establishment, coupled with the simultaneous departure of one officer on long overdue leave, left the Game section with only two officers from May onwards, and it was difficult to work very systematically with so few. In the main the policy was to lay less emphasis on vermin and rather more on dangerous game beyond the scope of the average villager, than has hitherto been the case. This, together with the shortage of field officers inevitably meant some decline in mere numbers of animals dealt with, though much valuable work was done.

6. The shift of emphasis was a matter of decided policy, not solely dictated by the shortage of officers. The intention is to replace the activities of the armed, centrally paid, hunters by those of district vermin control teams made up largely from the inhabitants of the various infested areas, controlled by the local authorities and eventually financed by them. Progress in establishment has not been as rapid as was hoped, but it is considered essential that these local efforts should be developed, and the attempt will continue.

7. The shortage of officers and lack of housing in the Northern Province made it impossible to station an officer there after April, when the establishment was reduced. From May onwards, therefore, the effort had to be again restricted to that of skeleton teams operating under District Commissioners, Rumpi, and Tsetse Ranger, Katonga. The Rumpi team accounted for a number of elephant and, in a restricted area, did useful work. In the main, however, little more than a token effort could be made.

8. The inhabitants of Nkata Bay District continued, under the stimulus of bounty payments, to do good work against vermin and disposed of some 2,960 head.

9. In the Central Province the main effort was devoted to keeping dangerous animals within the confines of the Reserves, keeping the Kasungu resettlement area free from dangerous animals and to extending the system of district vermin control teams. No great success attended this latter effort but the team established on the Dowa Lake-shore last year was successfully maintained. Vermin destruction by the armed hunters continued, but for the reasons stated above, emphasis on this was much reduced. Personnel of the Central Province teams also took part in the drive against elephant in the Central Shire Valley, mentioned below.

10. Under the stimulus of the exhortations of the Game Control Officer, Kota-Kota and the system of bounty payments, the inhabitants of Kota-Kota and Dowa Districts made a better contribution to vermin destruction than previously and accounted for some 1,660 head. Unfortunately, this type of effort declined in Fort Manning District.

11. The Southern Province team was divided into two portions during the first part of the year, one small team under a Senior Guard being left in Chikwawa District to keep elephant from coming down from the hills into the cotton lands of the Mwanza Valley, and the other, accompanying the Game Control Officer in the attacks on vermin, hippo, etc., in the rice lands east of Lake Malombe and in the Central Shire Valley. In the second half of the year the team was united again and changed its base to Dedza for the remainder of the year. From this base attacks were made on vermin in the Bwanje Valley and other low-lying parts of the southern end of Nchue District and, from July to October, on the elephants on the Liwonde-Mpimbe area of the Central Shire Valley. During the period of attack on the central Shire elephant, the Game Control Officer was able to start a district vermin control team in that area.

12. The effort in the early part of the year in Chikwawa was very successful and on practically all occasions elephant were turned back into the hills before they had done any significant damage.

13. The attack on the elephant in the central Shire area achieved its main object, namely the drastic reduction of numbers. Shooting was broken off when the survivors consisted of cows and calves only. Unfortunately, these Central Shire herds are not living in connection with any sanctuary into which they can well be driven, nor, being largely tuskless and of bad reputation for ferocity, are they attractive to the private hunter. They cause continual damage to crops and there seems no alternative but to keep their numbers severely in check.

14. The details of animals destroyed and African Staff employed are set forth in tabular form in Appendix II, while the direct revenue, accruing as a result of crop protection operations, is shown at Appendix III. Revenue from sales of meat would have been much higher had not many of the elephant been shot in predominantly Mohamedan areas, where there was very little demand for the meat. Furthermore, considerable quantities of meat were handed over to the Native Administration without charge.

15. Crocodile destruction by Government was abandoned after the end of March and the field left clear for commercial hunters. Five licences were issued, but only in two cases did the licensees make a very serious attempt to exercise their privilege. One of these was compelled to abandon his effort by the shipwreck of his launch. Nevertheless, the remaining licensee was fairly successful and was able to persuade quite a number of Africans to catch and sell skins to him. A total of 1,141 reptiles were dealt with by commercial licensees during 1952.

16. There is little of moment to report concerning the question of game conservation. The revision of the boundaries of Kota-Kota Game Reserve were still under consideration by Government as was the question of a new Game Ordinance. The departmental draft of the latter was, however, passed for circulation to Provincial Commissioners and other interested parties, to clear up any controversial points before legal drafting began. A formal Bill is now awaited.

17. The shortage of Game Officers prevented very much field effort in the conservation aspect of Game Control, beyond the safeguarding of the Reserves, but this latter was carried on as far as limited staff permitted. The checking of hunters' licences also continued as opportunity offered. Appendix IV tabulates the licences taken out during 1952 and shows a slight increase on 1951 figures. The number of licences, however, still falls far short of the firearms registered.

18. Reports from the Game Reserve Guards continue to indicate a respectable game population in the Reserves, particularly Kota-Kota, where in the course of a single day the Tsetse Entomologist saw seven species and 69 head in all, together with fresh spoor of rhinoceros and buffalo.

C. FISHERY

State of the Fish Stocks:

19. The main commercial fishery, namely ring netting for the off-shore species of Tilapia, shows a heartening increase in catch per single haul of net, with little variation from 1951 in the total number of pulls. This naturally resulted in a considerably increased catch and it would appear that the stock of this species is at a fairly satisfactory level, at least in the S.E. arm.

20. The African fishery for the inshore species was not so successful however, and the slight improvement which appeared to have been made during 1951 does not seem to have continued generally. The actual data collected show no very definite overall difference from those of 1951, but there was no significant increase of effort by the fishermen, such as usually reflects marked increase of abundance of fish. All in all, the stock of the inshore species appears to be moderately static, but at a rather low level compared to ten or twelve years ago.