

during or just after a shower, which brings the toads out in force.

Mehelya capensis lays about five or six eggs in late October or November. The young snakes are nearly a foot long when they hatch.

The Nyasa File Snake is a small species which rarely exceeds two feet in length. Although widely distributed, it does not seem to be common anywhere and only about two dozen specimens are known to science. The seven Southern Rhodesian specimens in the National Museum are from Fatima, Sinoia, Mount Darwin, Umtali and Mount Silinda.

Mehelya nyassae lacks the white vertebral stripe of *capensis* and is uniform blackish-brown above and paler brown below, each vertebral scute being light-edged. It is a slimmer snake than the previous species, the tail being particularly slender. Lepidosis in Southern Rhodesia—Scales in 15 rows at midbody; ventrals 173-184; anal entire; subcaudals 60-74. Largest examined—575 mm. (1 ft. 10½ ins.) from Fatima.

Nothing is known of the diet of this species. The only breeding record is from Kenya, where a female was found to contain three eggs.

Society's New Offices

Reading Room for Members

THE Society's headquarters are now located on the Fourth Floor, Fillan Chambers, 108 Fox Street, Johannesburg (between Rissik and Joubert Streets), where the accommodation permits of the provision of a Reading Room for members.

The material available in the Reading Room comprises a number of reference books on all aspects of wild life—mammals, birds, flora, reptiles and insects—as well as a wide range of current wild life magazines and journals issued in South Africa, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and other European countries, New Zealand and Ceylon.

Other publications also available to members in the Reading Room comprise the annual reports from the South African National Parks Board of Trustees, various Provincial Nature Conservation Departments in the Union and other African territories, and those from other wild life societies and official departments in Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and the Rhodesias, as well as scientific and other journals from Belgium, Holland, Morocco, Madagascar and Mozambique.

There is also an extensive collection of photographs of mammals, birds, reptiles and flora.

All members are welcome to use the Reading Room during normal office hours from Monday to Friday.

The new phone number is 33-1576.

Wild Life in the Zambezi Valley

by D. J. SHELTON

THE wild life of the Zambezi Valley from the lower Kariba Gorge to the border of Mozambique has attracted little attention or publicity, as yet. Mr. Astley Maberly, in his excellent book about wild animals in Rhodesia, does not even mention the area.

Nevertheless, it is an area occupied by wild animals, and by almost nothing else. There are no natives living in the valley except at road maintenance camps; no agriculture or industry apart from the Chirundu Sugar Estates.

At various times, parts of the valley have been subjected to hunting both by sportsmen, and by the Southern Rhodesia Government in an utterly abortive attempt to clear the area of tsetse flies, of which there are probably more per acre than anywhere else in Africa. As a result, wild animals are not often seen along the main Karoi-Chirundu road.

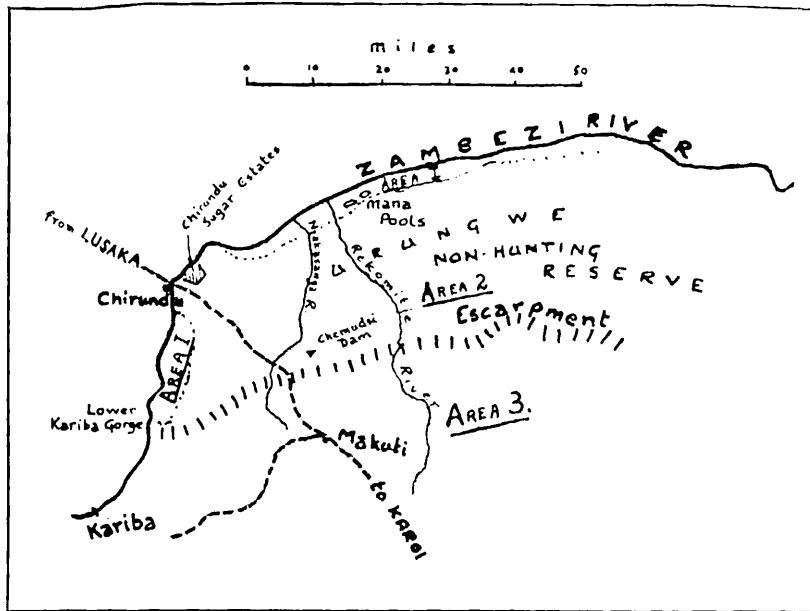
But there are large numbers of wild animals in the valley (here I refer only to the Southern Rhodesia side, since I know nothing at all of the Northern Rhodesia side). One has only to visit the Mana Pools to discover this. In order to do so, one first must obtain a permit from the Department of Wild Life Conservation to visit the Urungwe Non-hunting Reserve, and one must report to the police before entering and after leaving the place.

The road down is really only suitable for Land-Rovers. But it is possible to travel it in a car (I did so). Most of the journey is through thick bush, but near the Mana Pools, which are really small lakes, the country opens up and it is possible to see large numbers of wild animals. It is well worth while going on the short distance to the Zambezi. The escarpment on the north side of the river is fairly near, and the scenic vista of river and mountains is very lovely. A game ranger (Mr. Hughes) has an extremely attractive camp-site on the river bank.

All of this has virtually escaped the public eye until now, but events in 1960 make it likely that the wild life in this area will no longer hide its light under a bushel.

A new road, to replace the old, bumpy strip of tar is under construction, although outside the boundary of the Non-hunting reserve. In December, 1959, a dam was built on the Chemudsi River to provide water for the road. Right now it is possible to go down to this dam (just a couple of miles from the main road) with the probability of seeing elephant, kudu, sable and so on, which shows clearly that there is an abundance of game in the bush (tracks and droppings confirm this) which will be attracted to water.

During the dry season of 1960, a large number of borrow pits have been dug to provide earth for the new road. Some of these are



Sketch map of the area, by the writer.

fifteen to twenty feet deep, and it is very likely that they will fill with water during the coming rainy season. The implication is obvious. There will be a large number of artificial pans right alongside the new road, which are bound to attract wild animals, from elephants down, as from 1961, so that if events transpire as I expect, it should be possible to see wild animals (during a portion of the year) from a section of the main Salisbury-Lusaka Road! This is surely something unique, and has great touristic possibilities for Southern Rhodesia.

Now, although the whole area is at present strictly protected from hunting, it seems likely that the Zambezi Valley from the Lower-Kariba Gorge to the main road will be thrown open for controlled shooting in May, 1961. This could spoil everything.

I suggest that an area extending five miles on either side of the main road should be absolutely protected until the situation resolves itself. How grand it would be if travellers from Salisbury to Lusaka were confronted with a notice board at the top of the Zambezi Escarpment saying:—

**ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK
SHOOTING STRICTLY PROHIBITED
ELEPHANTS HAVE RIGHT OF WAY**

Perhaps the Society could do something about it?

Because this area is so little known, I include by way of an appendix first-hand information about the wild animals to be found there, together with a description of vegetation.

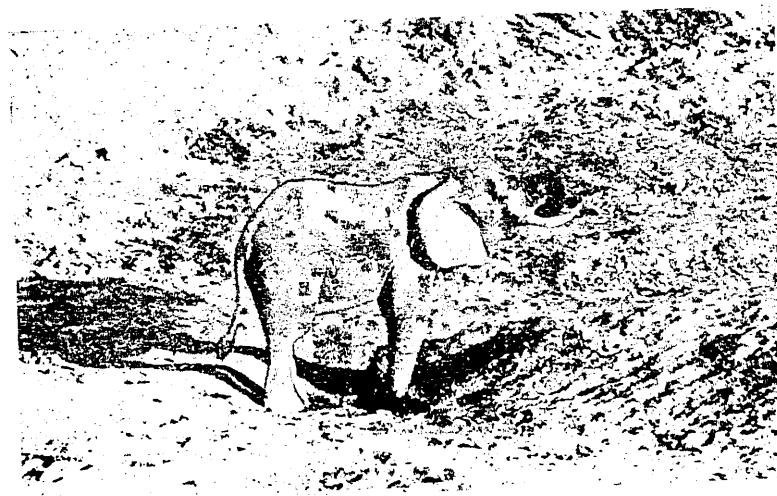
Areas 1 and 2 are similar in character, but Area 1 is the strip along the Zambezi River. Most of the country is covered either by thick jessie-bush or else mopani, varying from open cathedral-like woods

to mopani scrub. There are a very few small areas of open grass land, notably near the Mana Pools. Baobab trees abound, and there are some acacias and camel-thorns. The area is quite flat and there are pans everywhere, but these mostly dry out by about August-September and do not refill until December-January.

By way of contrast, Area 3 is steep, rocky hills, mountains, cliffs and valleys offering superb scenery. Medium size trees, mainly m'futi and m'sasa, cover the area with orchard-like woods.

Elephant are fairly plentiful, perhaps one to three thousand in the area. During the wet season they spread through areas 1 and 2, wander into Area 3, but generally converge into Area 1 as the dry season advances. They occur typically in herds of 10-20, young bulls singly or groups up to six. Elephant in this area appear to be generally smaller than, say, those of the Wankie National Park.

Rhino are present, but very rare, generally preferring the thickest of thick jessie bush (Area 2). Buffalo are fairly general, some herds of 100 or so, but generally smaller parties of a dozen or fewer. Eland are seldom seen, but are in herds of 10-30 when encountered (Areas 1, 2 and 3). Kudu are common, occurring throughout in groups of 5 to 25. Sable are not very often seen, but a number of herds of 20 to 50 range throughout the area. Bushbuck are general but shy, seen as individuals and groups up to 8 (Area 2). Impala are extremely common. There are many herds from 20 to several hundred. They are a feature of the area (Areas 1 and 2). Duiker and steenbok are quite common. Oribi are rare (Area 2). Warthogs are common (Areas 1, 2 and 3). Waterbuck are found in Area 1 only. Reedbuck occur in Area 1, and also in Area 3, where there are some marshy



Elephant at Chemudu Dam.

(Photo: Alan Williams)