

# Reading Writing and Rhinos

by Hugh Russell,

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During the early part of the Second World War many city children were evacuated to my part of Northamptonshire and I remember being amazed at how little they knew about country matters. I really believe that they thought milk came out of tins, not cows.

When I first started working in nature conservation in Africa, I was also surprised when I found out how few Tanzanians had ever seen the great variety of 'game' animals of their homeland. A high proportion of the ten million people of Tanzania live in intensively cultivated and relatively densely populated areas, mainly on the fertile mountain slopes and near the coast. All wildlife, except small mammals and birds, has long been driven from these areas by the clearing and cultivation of land.

Though domestic animals form a regular and well-known background to the lives of the inhabitants, and are handled with nonchalance by even small children, only about 30 per cent of the population has ever had a chance to see for themselves the bush and spectacular fauna for which East Africa is world famous. One influential Tanzanian told me that he was ashamed to admit that he first saw a lion in Regent's Park zoo in London.

Animal fables, very like the 'Brer Rabbit' stories, which themselves originated in Africa, are still told to

African children by the old people. But the main characters of these yarns—Ndovu the elephant, Simba the lion, and the inevitable Sungura the hare (Brer Rabbit)—are no more familiar to the African children who listen so raptly than is the wolf to the English boy or girl who shudders with fearful pleasure at the tale of Little Red Riding-Hood.

In Europe and America children (and adults too) become acquainted with the animals which figure in their folklore by reading books and magazines, playing with animal toys, going to the cinema, watching television, and visiting zoos. Here in Tanzania books are hard to come by and few people read for pleasure, animal toys are virtually unknown, cinemas are few and far between, and there is no television. What is more, there are no zoos, although there are tentative plans for establishing one near Dar-es-Salaam, the capital.

What, then, is the answer to the problem of introducing Africans to the priceless wildlife heritage of their continent, with its rich cultural and aesthetic background? Readers of *Animals* will recall an article by Chief Adam Sapi Mkwawa (Vol 5 No. 20) entitled 'National Parks of Tanzania' in which he dealt at some length with the aims of the education project which was mounted in this country over three years ago. There are many facets of this project which were briefly outlined, by Chief Adam in his article but, none, I think, is more rewarding than the attempt to bring children into the National Parks on educational visits.

There are five National Parks in Tanzania with a total area of over 11,000 square miles (as big as Belgium bigger than Israel). These Parks have been set aside entirely for the conservation of wildlife and are, for the most part, remote from human habitation. As

with flowers; surface water is plentiful. Grey columns of rain march majestically across the plains and the rivers are full of rushing cocoa-coloured water.

In the Serengeti huge herds of wildebeest are cropping the tender grazing in the cloud-dappled sunshine, or stoically turning their backs to the rain as the fierce squalls sweep across the open country; fragments of rainbows hang in the sky and the roads become more and more impassable. This is our quiet season, when only a few parties of children visit the Parks.

In two of our Parks, Lake Manyara and Serengeti, we have specially-built hostels in which visiting parties of school-children (as well as members of other organised parties such as Town and District Councillors, and Women's Groups) may spend the night at minimal cost and at the same time get the benefit of a light-hearted educational programme designed to make their visit memorable, meaningful, and enjoyable. We plan to build hostels in the Ruaha and Mikumi National Parks as soon as funds become available.

School teachers are kept in touch with National Parks by means of newsletters, film shows, and lectures given in their schools as well as occasional radio talks. When they want to make a visit to a National Park they write to the National Parks educational office to make a booking. Parties must bring their own food and blankets, but all their other needs are provided for by National Parks in the hostels which have beds for 32 people and eating and cooking utensils for the same number.

As far as possible, parties arrive at the hostels at about 4.30 p.m. whereupon they are provided with a cup of strong, sweet tea which helps to lay the dust of their journey. As soon as they have unloaded their vehicle, ex-

gathered together and taken by foot to the gatehouse at the entrance to the Park itself. Here a member of the National Parks staff, after first allowing the party to look round undisturbed (usually the ostrich eggs hold the centre of the stage at this point) calls them together and explains the meaning of the various natural history exhibits and invites questions.

When everyone's curiosity is satisfied in the museum, the party returns to the hostel to make their beds and eat the evening meal which the National Parks cook has been preparing for them. After supper the tables are pushed to one side and the dining-room is quickly converted into a cinema. They are shown films with Swahili soundtracks—*Serengeti Shall Not Die* being one of the most popular.

When the film is over, a discussion group is encouraged until bedtime. The subjects discussed vary greatly, but the economic value to the republic of a national parks system is often high on the list. Sometimes the questions are of such a searching nature that even the most experienced Park Warden quails!

The next morning the visitors are up and about early. As soon as their breakfast is eaten and cleared away they set off by Land-Rover into the Park with an experienced guide who can interpret to them what they are seeing. The more spectacular animals are most popular with the children, as they are with most first-time visitors to the Park. They tell each other how fierce the lions are, how destructive elephants are to crops, how sly is the leopard. They laugh, invariably, at the hyena, and have little interest in birds. Where the European or American visitor (particularly the ladies) would exclaim 'Oo! How sweet!' at the sight of a lion-

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and the interesting thing is that the monkeys moved in with them. The trees around our house, the fact that this is that we can no longer have fresh garden peas or a good crop! Tango, the baby vervet, is in the process of learning his way to the Blue Lagoon, prior to taking dominion when he feels ready for it. He is white-tailed and one slender legged, two leguans, a clawless monkey, many galagos (both large and small varieties), crowned cranes, ibis, white-backed vultures, and martial eagles, numerous birds of many species — all have been given their freedom in suitable

genet cats ('Tinker', 'Small' and 'Nickie'), all have returned to the wild state, each small cat had been reared on the bottle, lived in a cage and when fully grown, came to the house and less frequently for food, but finally all had gone. A young baboon and a young jack were released by our Ndola. Also two cheetah in the Kafue National Park.

In addition, the Society has presented several animals to the Livingstone National Park, which is much the same as the old, as they have a wonderful 1900 acres fully fenced to roam in; amongst these are duiker, kudu, roan antelope, kudu, zebra, and Sally the lioness, who is happily in a one acre enclosure with her handsome husband, Chaka. A good selection of animals were given by the then Warden, Guy Hallam, under 'Operation Noah' to stock up the park and in a report on the project, he had asked volunteers from the Society for help in the animal rescue, which included impala, porcupine and zebra. Ian Carr, author of Return to the Wild, has mentioned Sam the leopard, released near Lion Camp in the Luan-

gwa Valley, and it may please our readers to know that in 1965 Sam was fat, happy, and not at all afraid of human beings.

He was released in 1961, and this year I plan to visit Lion Camp to see him again.

Subject to contradiction, I would say that any and every wild creature MUST have its freedom when it is ready to take it.

Any private citizen who keeps an adult wild animal captive (and this of course includes birds, and reptiles), should be subject to legislation, as is the case in South Africa, where permission must be obtained to possess any such animal, and where strict regulations are in force governing size of enclosures, weather-proofness of housing, and supply of water and food.

Moreover, any member of the Game Department, Police, or S.P.C.A. may inspect captive animals at any time.

Yours etc.,  
Erica J. Critchley.



Lulu, the Baby Lechwe.

(Photo: The Editor)

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ess suckling her cubs, the children often remark, with little emotion and much truth 'now they are sucking'.

If I am there trying to photograph the animals, the children look at me instead of the animals. After all, everything is new and wonderful, from a camera to a camelopard, a Land-Rover to a lioness. But they enjoy themselves. Complaints are rarely heard, when tired but happy they start out for home.

Although Tanzania National Parks provide all services and hostel accommodation without charge, the cost of a Park visit can be considerable when their homes are far from the Park. Transport charges are high in Africa and the parents of the children are usually peasant farmers whose cash income is unbelievably low by European standards. To this end a small subsidy is offered towards the cost of transport, which does much to make their visit possible.

After the children have returned to school they are encouraged to write essays on their Park visit, either in English or Swahili. Some of these are classics of their kind. One young lady wrote 'The leopard is a beautiful animal but his heart is like a rotten apple'. Another said 'The giraffe seemed to be smiling, like a young girl on her way to be married'. Topi were described as 'polite and foolish animals'. Prizes are awarded for the best of these essays—usually a book on wildlife which, it is hoped, will help to keep green the memory of a unique experience in the child's life.

Last year 4,000 children visited the Parks. This year it will be at least 7,000. Next year who knows? The sky's the limit.