

The Possible Extinction of Rhino at the Ngorongoro Crater

By TOM LITHGOW

JULY 1st, 1959, Tanganyika National Parks handed over the internationally-famous game park, the Ngorongoro Crater, to a Government administrative body called the Ngorongoro Conservation Authority.

The Authority is there to conserve forests, water supplies and pasture, primarily in the interest of man but "with due consideration of game."

The move was popular with the Masai residents in the Crater and the surrounding Serengeti district, as a definite antipathy had built up over several years between them and National Parks.

Within five months of the handover by the Parks eight rhino were speared by the Masai in the area.

This resulted in garbled reports of 'daily massacre' of game there, which, temporarily, seriously affected the tourist traffic.

I investigated the reports, found them greatly exaggerated, and published an article called "The Ngorongoro is NOT Lost."

The Tanganyika Travel Committee then sent copies of this article overseas to deny the adverse publicity the Ngorongoro had received.

My coffee farm borders the Crater and friends calling in on the way back from safaris there recently brought back disturbing reports of Masai interference with the game.

I returned to the Crater to ascertain what the position actually is and found it had seriously deteriorated.

It appears that unless stern measures are taken *immediately* to prevent the wanton slaughter of rhino there by the Masai moran, or warrior, this game species may well become extinct in the area.

Since my last visit to the Crater a further twenty rhino have been killed in the Ngorongoro Conservation Authority area.

Furthermore, fourteen rhino skulls have been recovered from the Embulbul Crater and another twelve in the Oldewye Gorge—both localities included in the Ngorongoro Conservation Authority area.

A number of skulls found at both places dated back to the period before the hand-over by National Parks.

It can therefore be stated, quite conclusively, that during the past three years *a minimum of 54 rhino have been killed in what is now known as the Ngorongoro Conservation Authority area.*

Undoubtedly, other rhino have been killed in more inaccessible spots and the carcasses not yet found—if, indeed, they ever will be.

How much longer can this state of affairs continue without the rhino becoming extinct there? Certainly his days are numbered unless a very drastic measure of control over the Masai moran,



An oasis near Alexandria. Oases of this type are frequently covered with bird traps.

bush in the desert is actually a trap for quails, hardly one escapes those human beings who proudly call themselves "bird-hunters."

At the beach, even sea birds, like gulls, are caught by nets erected a few feet over the water.

It is really a wonder that there are still birds remaining to take the usual migrating route via Egypt. But it explains the fact that many species of birds become rarer and rarer in European countries every year, especially quails.

There are so many organisations in Europe, especially in England and Germany, which from time to time launch strong protests about maltreatment of dogs and cats, organized (but sportsmanlike) hunting in Africa, and tiger-shooting (animals which must be kept down) by most respectable persons, that one can only wonder at their not seeing the wood for the trees.

Second Antelope Poster

THE appeal for 35 mm. colour transparencies of different species of antelopes to enable the Society to produce its second antelope poster has brought in slides depicting some six or seven different species, but we are still short of slides of bontebok, black wildebeest, grysbok, hartebeest, suni, vaalribbok, mpiti and dikdik. Further slides of the antelopes mentioned on page 2 of Vol. 14 No. 1. (March 1960), except giraffe and zebra, will still be welcomed.

As regards the first poster, copies are still available for distribution to schools free of charge, or to members at 2/6 each.



Rhino found on Ngorongoro Crater floor in November, 1960. Note spear wound enlarged by vultures.

who are gradually eliminating the species, is not taken immediately.

Why are they being killed? What action can be taken to prevent this wholesale slaughter?

More than half the rhino killed have had their horns removed.

Investigations have shown that some of the local moran are being used as "professional rhino hunters" by visiting traders from a non-Tanganyika tribe.

Since rhino hunting was banned in Tanganyika, in 1959, rhino horn prices have rocketted. There is a great demand for the horn in India and the Far East where it is used to prepare aphrodisiacs.

Illicit rhino horn transactions in Tanganyika have become a worthwhile proposition for unscrupulous traders when one pound of horn may sell for as much as £10. They have been, and still are, prepared to take the risk, employing Masai moran as hunters, and paying them either in cash or in kind—generally, illegal drugs.

There are certain main trunk roads in districts bordering Masailand where road blocks could be erected periodically to catch the trafficker, *if there were an adequate police force to carry out this function.*

Undoubtedly, other rhino have been killed by moran purely from bravado to impress their girl friends or fellow-moran with their "courage." Therefore, until such time as the "warrior" or "moran" tradition dies out in the Masai tribe, this will cause "show-off" slaughter of rhino or lion.

The only other possible reason for rhino death is the oft-repeated

plea of "self-defence." Many moran have escaped punishment in court after they have been captured—which, unfortunately, is seldom the case—with this plea.

It is invariably difficult to disprove since there are seldom any witnesses, or witnesses will not come forward and give evidence.

The significant factor, however, in almost every case of a "self-defence" plea, where a fresh rhino carcass has been found, is that the rhino has been speared through the shoulder and heart.

Of the first eight speared, seven were speared through the heart. The last one, discovered on the floor of the Crater on Thursday, November 3, had spear wounds there although, in this case, the horns were not removed.

Practically all the carcasses which have been found intact, or only partially-decomposed, before the vultures, hyenas and jackal have got to work, have had spear wounds through the heart.

It is quite obvious to anyone who has ever been charged by a rhino, or put in the position of having to defend himself, that a spear thrust to the heart under these circumstances is almost an impossibility. It could be possible only when one man takes the head-on charge and his companion manages to make a quick thrust from the side. Since, however, in practically every plea of self-defence only one moran has been concerned, obviously his plea does not, or should not, carry weight.

Under the penal section of the Fauna Ordinance it is comparatively easy for a person to avoid conviction for the killing of game by pleading self-defence. The onus rests on the Prosecution to prove that it was not self-defence. First offenders, if found guilty, are generally let off lightly with a fine and an admonition.

The penalty for game offences is a fine and/or imprisonment.

Seldom is the culprit imprisoned.

Possibly a revision of the Fauna Ordinance, or similar ordinance, is indicated with fewer, if any, loopholes for an offence committed, particularly in an area where game is protected or semi-protected.

Formerly, both in Tanganyika and Kenya Masailand, the communal fining of a Masai Age-Clan, Boma, Manyatta or district group was accepted as being the quickest and most effective antidote to law-breakers.

It has been estimated that the 62,000 or so Masai in Tanganyika possess more than a million head of livestock. As a comparatively very wealthy tribe, therefore, communal cattle fining would not unduly embarrass them financially.

Nowadays,—unfortunately, in the opinion of many Government officers who are in close contact with the Masai—this practice is no longer allowed.

Ever since the first missionary-explorers "discovered" the Masai last century it has been recognised that the tribe has two great loves in its life—fighting and its cattle.

This has always led to cattle raids and fighting between the Masai and neighbouring tribes, even as recently, on a large scale, as the semi—"war" in Kenya between the Masai and the Wakamba.

Communal cattle fining would therefore not only assist game protection but would also be a deterrent to cattle-raiding, illegal grazing in forest reserves, illegal fire-razing and the many other offences the Masai commit, making them a continuous headache for their neighbours and the administration.

October 24, last year, a lioness was speared in the Crater. This was, admittedly, the only known case of lion-killing there during the past eighteen months. If, however, the moran finds that he can slaughter rhino with comparative impunity, how much longer will the lion remain unmolested?

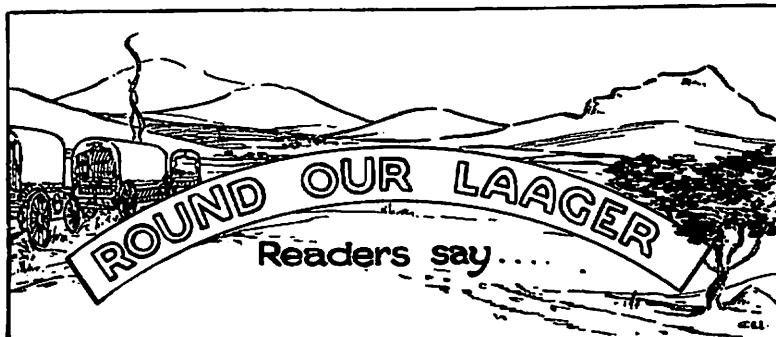
The Ngorongoro Crater is one of the few surviving game-protected areas in Africa where the indigenous game may be seen in its natural habitat in great numbers. A large percentage of the 367,000-odd game surveyed by Dr. Grzimek for his "Serengeti Shall Not Die" book, and film, use the Crater during the year.

Should a comparatively small number of Masai, with an excessive number of livestock, be allowed seriously to interfere with this priceless heritage?

In this article I have suggested methods of controlling the Masai in the Ngorongoro Conservation Authority Area, which is, at present, only a game reserve. There is one drastic step, however, which would prove completely effective. *That would be to move the Masai out of the area completely and renew the status of National Park for the Crater.*



Zululand zone exhibit at Eshowe Show



BLACK SPRINGBUCK — WILDERNESS AREAS

The Editor, "African Wild Life",

Sir,—I would like to make the following comments about an article and a letter which appeared in the March issue of "African Wild Life".

1. Black Springbuck.

This very interesting article by Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer raises rather a controversial point. I personally think that it would be wrong to name the black springbuck as a new race.

In the first place, they are found mixed with normal coloured buck and do not form separate herds. Secondly they are found in herds widely separated from each other, and thirdly, as far as I know, they can produce offspring which are normal in colour. It seems to me the black colour could be a throwback to the colour of the prehistoric antelope from which the Springbuck evolved. Under natural conditions the freak appearance of the black colour is of course very rare, but since the interference of man—directly and indirectly—these freaks of nature have been protected and have interbred and hence the tendency for the freak colour to become dominant has increased.

I therefore feel they should be regarded more as oddities, like the famous Ligers of the Bloemfontein Zoo, and not as a truly natural phenomenon.

2. Wilderness Area.

I agree wholeheartedly with the idea of Mr. E. A. Bazeley about a Wilderness Area, free from roads and cars, being established in the Kruger National Park.

I think that our Society should make one of its aims the establishment of such areas in the K. N. P. and other big Parks and Reserves. In these areas one should be allowed to make long excursions on foot, carrying your own provisions. It is only when one is able to walk among game, follow up spoor and stalk them that one can truly learn about nature and come under the "spell of the wilds".

As far as danger is concerned I am quite sure that everybody who has "hunted" game, i.e. without killing, and carrying no weapon, will agree that there is practically no danger attached to coming up close to the so called dangerous game, provided that not more than three people (preferably only one or two) are in a group and that they have a true love of nature, and do not provoke the animals. Dangers do exist, but they are dangers of snakebite, falling and breaking a leg or ankle when one is alone and far from camp, and also, the possibility of getting lost.

However the whole matter should be regarded the same way as mountaineering is; it is dangerous but no one is prohibited from learning and practising this art.

A new kind of sport, comparable to mountaineering could be developed after a few practical problems have been solved, and I hope our Society will be able to form a club for our "Naturalist-Hunters".

S.A. Mutual Bldg., Bloemfontein.

M. J. HAVENGA.