



A STRANGE BATTLE

The Editor, "African Wild Life".

Sir,—An article under the title "A Strange Battle" by R. M. Breach in the March edition of "African Wild Life" strikes me as being rather heartless.

The writer recounts how, in the Umsfolozi Game Reserve, he stopped to watch a young Martial eagle mauling a full grown white stork. The stork struggled as its aggressor picked and clawed viciously at it. Eventually the eagle, sensing human presence, flew to a neighbouring tree: finally it took off altogether. The stork, still watched by the photographer struggled to its feet, whereupon it was seen to have one leg broken or badly damaged, deep breast wounds, and possibly a broken wing as well. It could not get off the ground.

The observer then left the scene and returned seven hours later. The bird was still there. Next morning he came again and it had gone—presumably to die of slow starvation, or more mercifully to be dispatched by some predator.

One does not grudge wild life photographers the right to record unusual incidents such as this one. One feels, however, that the observer might have made some effort to contact a Game Ranger, after taking his shots, and had the poor creature put out of its misery. Game Rangers are usually willing to do this. The excuse is of course that the event is 'natural', and one must not interfere with Nature. (To witness such 'natural' scenes the ordinary tourists drive round all day in the game parks, often with young children, in the hope of coming upon a pride of lions disembowelling a kudu, or, better still, a leopard pinning down a screaming baboon.)

It was, I think, the Marquis de Sade who said that not only is Nature red in tooth and claw, but she thoroughly enjoys it. In other words, predators kill not only when they are hungry, but because they get a kick out of the act of killing.

I do not go along with that view. A dreamy eyed owl will, it is true, sit for some time with its prey squirming in its talons before it decides to devour it. Members of the cat family will play with their victims before dispatching them. But I question if they are really aware of the suffering they are inflicting. Primitive races, such as the Bushmen, are said to laugh at the idea that animals suffer at all. Although I do not, for obvious reasons, go along with this view either, it is possible that both animals and primitive human beings have a lower pain threshold than more highly civilized types. (Paradoxically it is these same civilized or over civilized types who, when aberrant, get the greatest kick out of inflicting pain.)

The days of animal predators are in any case numbered. The lion's kill must be filched from him to feed the increasing human hordes. When there are no more animals left, will man start to eat man? Or will he by force of necessity become a vegetarian, as his remote ancestors were said to be?

I prefer to believe the latter. Then perhaps a few herbivores will creep back to share the good earth with him, and the vision of the Prophet shall become reality. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain . . ."

Plaston

P. WOLSTENHOLME

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HAVENSA

The Editor, "African Wild Life".

Sir,—In the March number I was interested in the article entitled A Strange Battle", by R. M. Breach.

The account of the unusual attack and the really excellent photographs were unusual and good, but the lack of compassion shown at the end of the story appalled me. Mr. Breach states that the stork was very badly wounded—very shaky—and unable to get off the ground. Seven hours later it was standing still, having moved about 300 yards. The writer then went home and returned the following morning to find it gone, adding "What eventually happened to it is anybody's guess".

I am no sentimentalist, but I have rescued many birds—storks, cranes, egrets, pigeons, doves and swallows—and was delighted to see them recover and return to their own way of life. Surely this was a case where the stork should have been captured, fed and kept until it was well enough to return to the wilds?

To leave him in that state seems to me the height of callous behaviour.

Lidgetton, Natal.

(Mrs.) ELIZABETH JONSSON

Mr. Breach writes:

I share the feelings that many readers have over animal suffering. However, when considering the matter in terms of animals living in their natural environments, one has to be realistic.

In their natural environments, countless animals that manage to escape from the clutches of predators suffer from wounds of every description. Very few of these suffering animals are ever encountered by man. Many of these animals or birds die from their wounds, whereas others recover and carry on a normal existence. Although man might think that this is harsh, it is nevertheless the way nature maintains a balance. In most environments in nature, you have predator and prey, and where you have predator and prey, you must expect suffering. This is the way of nature. The ways of nature are only upset when man steps in and then you either have chaos or extermination.

The incidents that I recorded took place in the Umsfolozi Game Reserve. Any person who visits South African game reserves frequently is well aware of the fact that it is strictly forbidden to get out of one's motor vehicle, let alone put an animal out of its misery. Therefore, even if I had wanted to do so (which I did not, as I believe nature should follow its natural course), I could not put the white stork out of its misery. Game reserves have been set aside by the authorities to enable wild creatures to live in their natural environments according to the way nature intended them to. It is thus undesirable for man to continually step in and apply his criteria to nature. When matters reach serious proportions and nature is not able to maintain a balance (for example, when there is a population explosion in a particular species), it is necessary for the authorities to step in and correct the course of nature. This action of man is to be condoned as it is in the best interests of that particular environment, as a whole. However, to summon the park authorities to put the occasional suffering animal that is encountered out of its misery, is not only unrealistic but also incongruous with the idea of allowing animals to live normally in their natural environments.

In conclusion the views expressed here are my personal views and are not necessarily the views of any of the authorities who control game reserves in South Africa.

BLACK RHINO FOR KRUGER PARK?

The Editor, "African Wild Life".

Sir,—I would like to add my support to Mr. Patrick Lockhart who, in his letter in "African Wild Life" (Vol. 24, No. 1), wants to know why black Rhino have

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not been reintroduced into the Kruger Park.

Apart from safeguarding this species from becoming extinct and providing an obvious attraction for tourists, it is most essential from an ecological view point that there should be black Rhino in the K.N.P. Being browsers and needing large quantities of food, black rhinos must have a marked effect on the vegetation. We read and hear a great deal about the bush encroachment that has taken place in the Park and, although other factors also play their part, I am sure that if the Park had the number of black rhino that area carried before they were exterminated, the bush encroachment problem would be solved and the vegetation would revert to normal "open bushveld."

An interesting thought is that antelopes such as roan, tsessebe and sable which prefer "open bushveld" and are mainly grazers, have slowly diminished in numbers since the beginning of this century, most probably because of the gradual replacement of the grass by bush. Is it possible then that the introduction of black rhino would be beneficial to these rare antelope species? I think so.

Bloemfontein

DR. M. J. HAVENGA

A spokesman for the National Parks Board states:

"The black rhino is the only species of large mammal which used to occur in this portion of the Transvaal Lowveld at present lacking in the mixed community of large mammals in the Kruger Park. It is not only our intention but our duty to reintroduce them into the Kruger Park."

"The sad fact is that we have for many years now been unsuccessful in finding someone prepared to donate black rhinos to the Park. In view of veterinary restrictions we cannot import these animals from beyond our borders (where they are obtainable) and we have to rely on the goodwill of the Natal or South West African authorities to supply us with a breeding nucleus.

"The numbers in South West are so low that this does not appear to be a likely source of supply. The Natal authorities are also concerned about the numbers of their black rhino population, but I am confident that they will eventually be in a position to supply us with a sufficiently large number of black rhinos for a successful recolonisation of the Park.

"All these things take time, and although I feel certain that black rhinos will again roam through their old haunts in the Transvaal Lowveld, we will have to be patient for a while yet."

DISTRIBUTION OF WHITE RHINO

The Editor, "African Wild Life".

Sir,—In No. 2 of Volume 24 of "African Wild Life", Dr. M. J. Havenga states that he has been unable to find any record of the white rhino having occurred anywhere north of the Save River in Portuguese East Africa. I would like to draw attention to the following extract from Miss J. Sidney's treatise entitled "The Past and Present Distribution of Some African Ungulates, Transactions of the Zoological Society of London, Vol. 30, December, 1965":

"The white rhinoceros has been said to be extinct in Mozambique for some time (M. A. Andrade Silva, personal communication). However, the photograph (Fig. 10) taken by Judge Beadle (Bulawayo, personal communication) was of a bull white rhinoceros shot in Portuguese East Africa about 1935. It was shot in an area midway between Gauveia and Marcorsa and the species was then apparently quite numerous, at least nineteen being seen in one day. It appeared to be more numerous than the black rhinoceros which was living in the same area. Judge Beadle believed that the white rhinoceros occurred near Tega Kraal, about seven miles from Marcorsa and forty miles from Gauveia at the foothills of the Gorongosa Mountains. He was certain of his identification, having

compared the dead white rhinoceros with a black rhinoceros which he killed on the same day." (Note: The photo referred to clearly shows the broad upper lip of the white rhino.)

Both places mentioned lie sixty or more miles north of the Pungwe River that flows into the Indian Ocean at Beira, whereas the mouth of the Save River at Mambone is about 100 miles south of Beira.

Brooklyn, Pretoria.

R. BIGALKE

The Editor, "African Wild Life",

Sir,—With reference to Dr. M. J. Havenga's letter on page 171 of the June 1970 issue of "African Wild Life", he is of course quite right to deplore the introduction of exotic wild animals into national parks, which should provide for the perpetuation of the indigenous fauna and flora.

He is, however, not correct in stating that the white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) was unknown north of the Save River in Mozambique. Vaughan-Kirby found two skulls on the south bank of the Zambezi River, above the Shiré confluence (*Ann. Durban Mus.*, 2, 20, p. 220, 1920), while Sidney (*Trans. Zool. Soc. Lond.*, 30, p. 61, Fig. 10, 1965) recorded that it survived between Gauveia and Marcorsa to at least 1935, and she illustrated a specimen shot about that time. This was in the general area of Gorongoza, though I am unable to say whether the species actually occurred within the national park boundaries. Player & Feely (*Lammergeyer*, No. 1, Map 1, 1960) indicated a putative former distribution in Mozambique as far north as the Zambezi, which was its limit in historical times.

Chilanga, Zambia.

W. F. H. ANSELL

NESTING SITE OF GREAT SWIFTS

The Editor, "African Wild Life".

Sir,—As a keen bird watcher I should like to pass on information, gained on a recent expedition, about a nesting site of African great swifts.

The site is in the Orange River Gorge, in the Colesberg district, in an area which will be flooded after the construction of the P.M.K. le Roux dam.

Cliffs rise from the river bed to a height of about 200 ft. and about 20 ft. from the top, under an overhang, there is a crack about five feet broad and about four inches high. In this crevice there are many nests.

Twenty birds were counted visiting the nests and more were disturbed from the crack. Five white eggs were seen — undoubtedly eggs of African great swifts.

The nests are in the shape of a half-moon and are made entirely from the feathers of Cape vultures. The vulture nesting site is about a mile upstream. It was once frequented by a pair of lammergeyers.

Thank you for your pleasant reading.
Colesberg.

J. BELL

CROCODILE'S FIGHT

The Editor, "African Wild Life".

Sir,—I have recently spent a most interesting and enjoyable week in the Kruger Park.

One afternoon, whilst I was sitting at Orpen Dam watching some impala and waterbuck drinking, one of the 16 or so crocodiles which inhabit the dam at present caught a large barbel, which, at a guess, could quite easily have tipped the scales at 40 lb. After some time the croc went back into the water and with one flick of the head had "topped and tailed" the fish in one operation, and proceeded to devour it. The water around the croc became blood-stained, and whether this induced the following incident or not, I have no idea.

Two crocodiles, one fairly large and the other of medium size, on the opposite side of the dam began fighting. There was much splashing and thrashing of tails, "African Wild Life", Vol. 24