

Notes from the *Royal Nairobi National Park*

By K. de P. Beaton, Warden

THE park is dry, dusty and unattractive at present. I have burnt off large patches of long, sour grass and these look like black scars thirsting for rain.

The little dams are still holding plenty of water, however, and at mid-day zebra, wildebeest and other antelope can be seen wading deep into the water to enjoy its cool caress. Vultures and marabou throng these places also. The other day I was interested to watch three silver-backed jackals thread their way through the resting birds, who paid them no attention, to plunge into one of these pools. They swam about biting at the water much in the same fashion as domestic dogs enjoying a bathe.

Game is plentiful everywhere. The first wildebeest calves of this season have arrived, looking as attractive as these little fellows always do. Cheetahs are more numerous than they have been in the past and two females are accompanied by pairs of youngsters.

The eight big cubs with the forest pride of lions are growing out well. Three of them are going to be fine lions. They are just beginning to grow the first ruff of a mane. They are also vying with each other as to **A Form of Competition** which can produce the deepest grunt.

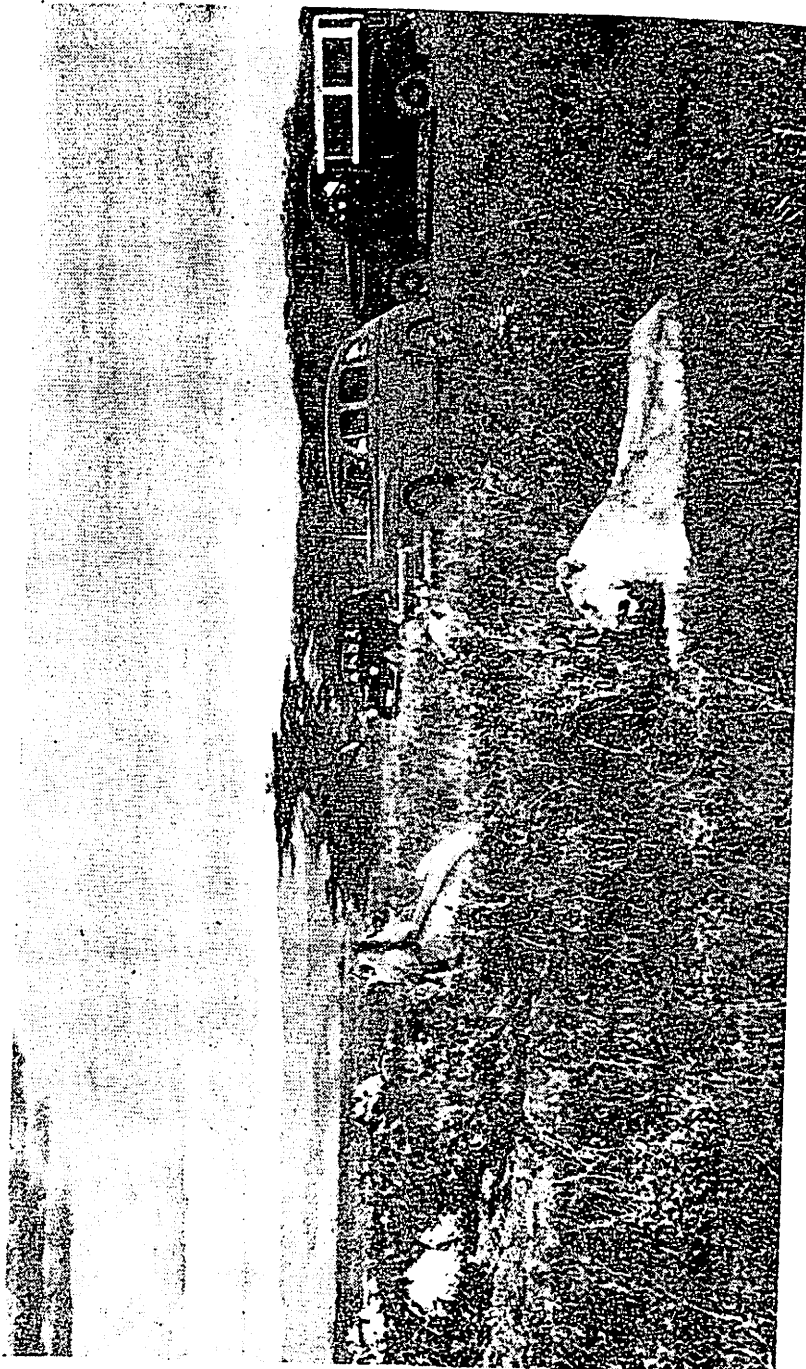
Watching this pride in Lion Valley last night, many visitors saw an amusing scene. About a hundred yards off three hyenas were lying on a mound. One of these was nursing two large pups. The young lions decided to have a game and started stalking the hyenas. They were soon spotted, however, and the hyenas moved off, the pups going to ground.

Two of the lions went up to the earth and sniffed around. Immediately there was a great to-do. The three hyenas danced about close by, howling, gibbering and chuckling. It was a call for help, and I was amazed at the immediate response. From all directions, out of thickets, gulleys and clumps of grass, reinforcements arrived. In a very few minutes no less than 22 hyenas were on the scene displaying a courage with which I had not previously credited them.

They would rush in towards the lions in groups of four and five with tails fanned out and erect. The young lions looked

FACING: More lions than cars. A scene in the Royal Nairobi National Park.

(Photo: Mervyn Cowie, Director of the Royal National Parks of Kenya.)



quite disconcerted and retreated a few yards from the earth. Then one of the young males decided to show his manhood. He rushed in among the hyenas whirling his tail with a circular movement. They scattered and he bounded on, turning this way and that and followed by the other lions. The hyenas always kept their distance, but all the time they were drawing the lions further and further away from the hole in which the pups had taken refuge.

As dusk closed in the hyenas were still baiting the lions, but had succeeded in moving them off a considerable distance. Later, after dark, with a new moon riding high in the sky, I heard the grunt and answering roar of lions hunting far out on the plains.

The two little cubs with this forest pride are now nearly five months old. They must be tough little chaps, for often in a night they will cover ten to fifteen miles.

Remus and his ladies are sulking. I had to move them some weeks ago as they were getting into bad habits. They have not forgotten or forgiven me for the harsh treatment and although I achieved my object in driving them further to the west, they have decided to avoid human beings and their motor cars. They skulk in the gorges and ravines, coming out only after the last of the cars has gone. There are some new lions south of the Athi river but I do not know them well yet.

First I.U.P.N. Bulletin Issued

THE International Union for the Preservation of Nature, in an Editorial note introducing its first Bulletin, says: We are starting modestly with four pages per issue, and intend at first to appear once every two months, in an attempt to fill the gap caused by the suspended publication of "Pro Natura."

In this first Bulletin there is a paragraph on the transportation of wild animals which is of general interest, because it applies to an evil that is widespread:

Last autumn, the directors of the Zoological Gardens at Basel were notified of the passage through the city of some European storks being transported by train and destined for some animal merchant. The railroad company had asked the Zoo directors to feed the storks during their stop at the station in Basel. The storks had been packed for shipment with such lack of precaution that several of them were dead. This information only confirms the pessimistic opinions expressed during the last technical meeting of the I.U.P.N., at The Hague, regarding the scandalous conditions under which certain wild animal merchants send their freight, at the risk of seeing their inhuman economies be the cause of considerable losses.

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ALBRECHT *Shows Perfect Camouflage*

By G. Theiler

THIS four-day old *Lepus saxatilis*, (Kolhaas — Scrub-hare), like many other ground animals, shows excellent concealing-colouration and pattern. Living usually amongst scrubs and on stony ground — that is, against an irregularly patched background — its mottled pattern blends with the surrounding irregularities. By coincidence, in the photograph a whitish pebble accidentally caught the light and acted as an excellent foil for the white spot on the forehead. This whitish spot, as does the white line on the forehead of the hedgehog, simulates a sun-fleck in the background. In the crouching position the camouflage is perfected even further, the long baby hairs smothering and thus falsifying the outline, so that from any angle the hare is difficult to see.

When trying to assess the protective value of colour patterns we must bear in mind that most animals are colour-blind, and that what to us is a pattern of colour to them becomes degraded into mere black, white and grey; so that the black and white

Heading Photograph: The baby hare, like the baby plover, will crouch and flatten at the merest hint of unexpected movement or danger. If in its usual surroundings it will blend perfectly with the background. (Photo: J. Odendaal.)