

Linchpin

EDWARD CHARLES GOSS (1936 - 2002)

Imre Loefler remembers the achievements of one of conservation's most accomplished warden pilots.

People always referred to him as 'Ted Goss', never just as Ted or Mr Goss.

He was undeniably one of the linchpins of wildlife conservation in East Africa in the postcolonial era, one of only a small group of men with vision – that telling blend of imagination, patience, courage and insight – with which to cope with rapidly changing circumstances in the region. Such people have had to do battle as much with corruption in high places as they have with poachers on the ground.

Perhaps the best memorial to Ted Goss's life and work is the Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary on the slopes of the Shimba Hills, near Mombasa. As Kenya's first community-based game reserve, this was the product of dogged determination on his part. Central to it, was the understanding that for conservation to succeed, it must be practised as an integral part of development, cognisant of the welfare of local people who must ultimately benefit from it.

Ted Goss, who died on 17 June 2002 in Nyali, Mombasa, aged 66, was the driving force behind this Sanctuary.

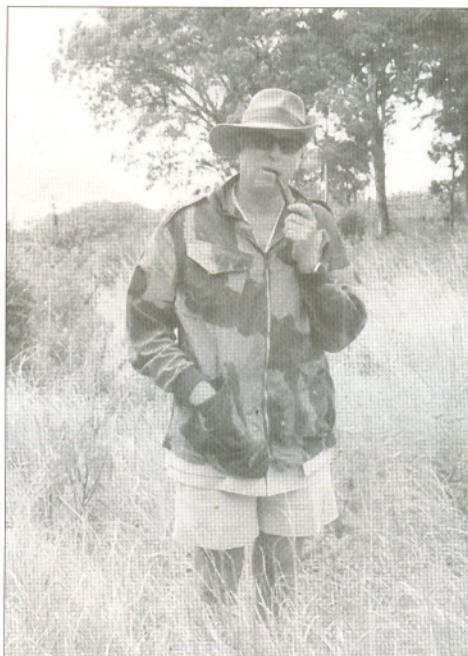
Edward Charles Goss was born in Mbeya, in Tanzania's southern Highlands on 1 May 1936. At primary school there he learned to speak proper Kiswahili, unlike many of his peers, who could speak only 'kitchen Swahili'. In 1949, he moved to Nairobi to attend the Prince of Wales (now Nairobi) School.

Ted Goss's first 'real' job was – by his own admission – the establishment of the Meru Game Reserve (now Meru National Park) on a shoestring budget. At the time, he was just 26. But he was full of energy and self-confidence and had plenty of ideas. Kenya, meanwhile, had just become independent. And so began a period of service to the republic that would go on to span fully 40 years.

During this period, Ted Goss was the first game warden to learn to fly small aircraft. Initially, he bought his own light aircraft, a Piper Cruiser, but he had to swap this for a Peugeot 404 to meet the financial demands of his expanding family.

It was in Meru that Ted Goss nearly lost his life while trying his hand at darting an elephant for the first time. When the

elephant began to stagger, he seized it by the tail, whereupon it quickly came to and gave chase. Ted Goss fell over and soon found himself under the elephant's belly. The infuriated elephant raked the young warden out with its foot, before standing on his femur, crushing it to smithereens. Ted Goss then dragged himself away, enabling a game



Feet on the ground: Ted Goss, pictured during his nine-year stint as Warden of Kenya's Tsavo West National Park.

scout to shoot the elephant without fear of the beast's collapsing on him.

This miraculous escape was followed by a long period of intensive care in Nairobi Hospital, where Ted Goss's life hung in the balance.

As soon as he could walk again, Ted Goss joined the Kenya National Parks as assistant warden for Mountain Parks under the tutorship of the already legendary Bill Woodley. In this capacity, he was able to learn from a man who knew the secrets of the Aberdares as well as the best of the Kikuyu.

Ted Goss's next posting took him to Tsavo, where his tutor was another of Kenya's legends, David Sheldrick. He then started the first marine parks in Kenya at Malindi and Watamu with the assistance of Lalli Diddum. On turning 33, he was appointed

Warden of Tsavo West National Park. He stayed on there for nine years, doing much to give that vast but then little developed park the face it has today, with such features as the observation tank at the Mzima Springs, and the road network opening up the southern section.

The notorious 'ivory wars' in Tsavo intensified during the 1970s, and Ted Goss risked his life almost daily fighting the poaching gangs. He was able to raise sufficient funding in America to obtain his helicopter licence and to acquire a chopper, which was essential to the success of the operations against the militarised poachers. He subsequently became one of Kenya's best bush chopper pilots, logging more than 4,000 helicopter hours. He used his great skills in the air not only to track down and rout poachers, but also – increasingly – in masterful translocation operations aimed at preserving big game, rhinos especially.

In the course of one of his daring chopper sorties, he became involved in an accident. When reporting this back to his benefactors, he was asked if he was sure it was not the poachers who had "shot him down," causing the helicopter to crash. With the insurance money, a larger and more powerful helicopter was purchased and donated to Ted Goss as a replacement for the one the 'poachers' had shot down. In Nairobi, around the Aeroclub bar the gossip turned at once to admiration for a man "who by crashing his chopper, gets an instant upgrade."

The Aeroclub was one of his most cherished watering holes, and Ted Goss could on some days be prevailed upon there to relate one or other of his many dramatic, often hilarious game-cum-flying stories.

Ted Goss's career in government service culminated in his appointment in 1978 as the head of the newly formed Anti-poaching Unit. He and a crack force of 400 rangers fought increasingly gruesome battles against the Somali poaching 'shifta' throughout Kenya.

From 1988 onwards Ted Goss was the executive officer of the Eden Wildlife Trust, which had been set up by a London couple, the Edens, to support Ted Goss's work in Tsavo. With the Edens' backing, Ted Goss became involved in numerous conservation activities, ranging from the Rhino Rescue Programme to the Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary.

He went on working, to the very last, showing determination and enthusiasm even when his health began to fail.