

TEN YEARS OLD THIS YEAR - THE ORPHANAGE STORY

BY 1950, four Kenya National Parks had been gazetted and even more National Reserves had been proclaimed. On their patrols, wardens of these Parks and Reserves were soon confronted by "orphans" in the bush.

There were animals that had strayed from herds, lost their mothers from a poacher's arrow, or been abandoned as a result of a stampede when something had frightened family groups. Sometimes it would be a case of a wounded animal such as a gazelle with a broken leg or a young animal caught in a snare. The question of what to do would be raised on every occasion, and the wardens, with their vast territories to look after, often with inadequate help in the early days, well knew that there were problems of much greater scope to be dealt with than that of one individual animal. Yet, inevitably, they would pick up the creature in their arms and carry it home.

Before long, at almost every camp site in the Parks and Reserves, there were little waifs demanding attention from all the staff—and many wives, who cheerfully put up with rhinos in their kitchens, bush pigs in their dining rooms, and lion cubs in their baths. Not even the first Director of Kenya National Parks, Mervyn Cowie, was immune. A half-tame buffalo once entered his office through the French doors and threatened to eat the stacks of papers in his "Pending" file.

In the long run, many of these animals were successfully brought up with the aid of baby bottles and formulas concocted with more luck than skill. Some eventually returned on their own to life in the wilds and would, on occasion, show themselves and their families to their foster parents.

Other "orphans" were either unable to be turned loose back into the Parks or simply refused to give up the safety and human friendship that had been bestowed on them. Somewhere, somehow, a place needed to be found for them where they could be taken care of for an indefinite period.

There was talk of starting a zoo in Nairobi, but, on the whole, public opinion was against the idea then, having visions of trapped animals behind iron bars. Mervyn Cowie presented to the Trustees of the Parks a solution—the Animal Orphanage in which all the animals could be looked after together. It would be located near the Parks Headquarters where veterinary help could be made available when necessary and where the public could see the animals. At first, the proposal was not accepted, but in 1963, he again presented it, stressing the need to relieve wardens from the time-consuming chores of rearing baby animals—which often means getting up in the middle of the night. He could also back up his sincere conviction that local people were interested in seeing and learning about animals.

For this proposal the objectives were stated then, and are still the same held to today: (1) to give care and sanctuary to young animals found abandoned in the wild and when possible to rehabilitate them into Parks (2) to let the public see these animals and to help foster an interest among Kenyans in animal life and conservation in conjunction with the Wildlife Education Centre (3)

to gather scientific information on these animals which could contribute to our understanding of feeding patterns, behaviour and diseases. This time a sub-committee was set up to study the possibility, and, three months later, on June 4, 1963, construction of the Animal Orphanage was begun in the area behind Headquarters with £6,000 (mainly donations) for initial development. A chain link fence was first put up—unlike in a zoo, not so much out of a need to keep the animals inside, but to keep predators out. Paddocks were built; water troughs and shelter were provided for every pen. A small hospital was also constructed at the suggestion of Dr. Harthoorn.

Animals began arriving even before the Orphanage was completed. The Orphanage was opened to the public on November 11, 1963, with 5 buffalo, 1 rhino, 1 elephant, 1 lion, 2 jackal, 3 cheetah cubs, 8 ostrich, 3 steinbok, 1 dik-dik, 1 wart hog, and within the first eight weeks, the animals had 17,000 visitors. By the end of the year, the figure reached 30,046, and in 1964, 104,582.

People soon began begging the Officer in charge of the Orphanage to take care of their pets while they went on leave—rather than depending on the somewhat reluctant offers of neighbours to look after their cheetahs' or chimpanzees. Such animals were accepted into the Orphanage as "paying guests". Their owners could then be assured that their pets were well looked after, given a reasonable temporary home, and a good deal of attention while they were away. The fees paid for their food also helped with the Orphanage's finances which still today depend considerably on donations. One of the first P.G.s was Sebastian, the large male chimp who is now a permanent resident. In those days he had his own tricycle and had already developed a fondness for cigarettes.

Two of the most memorable early residents were Bruce, a rhino, and Ugas, a lion cub. Bruce's mother had been killed by poachers when he was only a few weeks old. He squeaked with delight when someone called his name and came running up, hoping for a stick of sugar cane. Ugas had the distinction of arriving by helicopter to Nairobi, after an army patrol had rescued him. He stayed with the Nairobi Park Warden to begin with, and "earned his keep" by chasing away a burglar who tried to break into the house.

The Animal Orphanage grew quickly. In February, 1964, there were 33 animals, and by the end of 1966, there were 161, among whom nine species had bred. By May, 1965, the list of animals successfully released into various Parks and Reserves was impressive: 12 buffalo, 12 rhino, 12 leopards, 30 vervet monkeys, 5 Sykes monkeys, 6 baboons, 1 steinbok, 1 side-striped jackal, 3 serval cats, 1 cheetah, 6 white tailed mongooses, 2 genet cats, 1 ratel, 1 elephant, 3 bush babies, 10 tortoises, 1 crocodile, 1 python, 1 crested crane and 1 vulture.

At the end of the year, there were 38 species in the Orphanage, and the P.G.s, or boarders, had been a cheetah, a dwarf mongoose, a serval cat, and several bush babies, whose fees amounted to over 800 shillings. Between July, 1965, and May, 1966, there were 134,786 visitors and seven more births in the Orphanage.

In May, 1966, the Trustees decided to move the Animal Orphanage to the west side of the Main Gate to Nairobi National Park primarily because the increase in the number of animals in care of the Orphanage was beginning to cause overcrowding. The new site would be just as convenient while there was much more open grassland for plains game and indigenous trees for those animals requiring shade, 25 acres in all. Larger cages could be constructed and there would be enough room to separate animals from the public by ditches. It was hoped, too,

 Schniff, one of the Orphanage's most popular residents. Picture: Cranville Davies

that more breeding would take place and, the offspring of some of the rarer animals could be sent to foreign countries, in order to limit trapping in the wild. The visitors were to be considered as well: landscaping was to be carried out to give them more pleasure in viewing the animals in open and attractive areas. It took time, however, for the plans to be drawn up to approval and for money to be raised. Dutch children through the World Wildlife Fund raised a very considerable sum, and the Orphanage also received a very generous contribution from one of the Rockefellers. Many firms in Nairobi as well as some societies also helped.

It was in March, 1969, when the present Officer in charge of the Animal Orphanage, Samuel Ngethe, began moving the animals to their new premises. It was not as easy a procedure as might be imagined. He had no capture gun and so the less tame animals had to be persuaded and cajoled into walking into traps. Wellington, the hyaena still to be seen today, refused to co-operate in any way. Instead, when left to examine and familiarise himself with a trap, he promptly chewed its timbers and left it in shreds. The pygmy hippo, a gift from the late President Tubman of Liberia to the Government of Kenya, decided to investigate the whole new Orphanage and managed to escape from his pool—he made it all the way over to the opposite side, near the water tanks before he let himself be caught.

Today, when you approach the animal Orphanage, you cross through a lovely little garden graced by acacia thorn trees that Mr. Ngethe planted just before he went off to England to study at Bristol Zoo. There is bright bougainvillea camouflaging the front fence, and a truly pleasant atmosphere reigns. Inside, you will find undoubtedly many varied species of animals, but because the Orphanage is not a zoo, and no animal is ever captured for it, you will not see all the different kinds of animals in Kenya here. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that animals come and go more often here than at a zoo; whenever possible, these animals are released into Parks, and on occasion one is presented to a recognized zoo in European and other African countries. Mohammed, a very friendly cheetah who played football with Mr. Ngethe has just gone to Zaire.

The antelope pens are of particular interest to visitors unfamiliar with the wilds. Here are many species in natural surroundings, dik-dik, Thomson gazelle, bushbuck, Grant's gazelle, and duiker among others, and it is a good test for your eyes to see how many you can locate and identify.

There are several chimpanzees now in the Orphanage. Sebastian still holds the prize as the Number One Entertainer—but beware! He has a habit of throwing his fruit, and his aim is very accurate!

Among the cheetahs is Schniff who was hand-reared by the previous Officer, Julian Tong, and his wife. He lived a life of luxury, being quite spoilt because he suffered a broken pelvis when he was very young and needed constant medical attention.

You may also see at the Animal Orphanage lion, leopard (usually there is one high up in the tree of the pen), wart hog, bush pig, jackal, bat-eared fox, rhino, eland, serval, wild dog, hyena, zebra, and several monkeys. Feeding time is 2:30 p.m. daily, except on Friday.

There are further plans for the Orphanage, including a nursery for baby animals that have special needs. It is hoped that some animals could be kept there for children to be allowed to handle under supervision. A dwarf mongoose pit and a porcupine pit are needed as well.

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EDUCATION NOTES

MANY of our readers have enquired about educational activities. This is the first in what we hope will be a continuing feature describing the work of Kenyan groups involved with environmental education. The notes are supplied by Melville C. Thomason, Head of Education Section, National Museums of Kenya.

A number of governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations are active in Kenya in the area of environmental education. Many of these groups are represented on the Kenyan Committee on Environmental Education. This newly organised body is trying to identify environmental education needs and find ways that the various organisations can co-operate in meeting these needs.

In this first report I will briefly describe the activities of a few organisations especially involved with wildlife education.



WILDLIFE Club members tape a radio programme at Voice of Kenya studios.

One agency with a special interest in this subject is the Kenya National Parks. The National Parks have had an educational programme at Nairobi Park for more than five years. This programme has recently been reviewed by Daniel Dougherty, the Parks' Educational Planning Officer. In Mr. Dougherty's report prepared for the Parks' Trustees a vastly expanded programme has been proposed. The Warden for Education, David Mbuvi, reports that in 1972 some 60,000 people visited the Nairobi Park Education Centre as organised parties. These parties are given talks, lectures and film shows, as well as guided tours to the Animal Orphanage and National Park. Mr. Mbuvi tells us that their educational work "covers the broad spectrum of natural resources" in their aim to achieve "balanced and viable ecosystems".

The Kenya National Parks has another educational facility at Tsavo East National Park. There the Parks have recently made a substantial capital expenditure to improve hostel facilities for visiting school groups. This development programme was supervised by Ron Stanek, a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer assigned as Education Warden at Tsavo East. Mr. Stanek has now turned over the job of operating programmes at this facility to a newly-appointed Kenyan citizen, Miss Rosalie Osborne.

The non-governmental Baharini Wildlife Sanctuary has also recently appointed an Education Officer, Marvin Pistrang, to help implement some of its long term educational plans.

The Wildlife Club movement is one of the most hopeful signs that Kenya's wildlife will indeed be saved for future