

LETTERS

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RHINO POACHING

Sir When driving South from Marsabit recently, we came across a dead rhinoceros on the side of the road. It was certainly not there a few days previously and from the condition of the blood I suspected that it had been killed within 12 hours. There were stab wounds on its back and one ear, and needless to say its horns had been crudely slashed off from the skull.

I reported this to the Anti-poaching Centre at Isiolo, but they already knew about it.

Naturally I took a number of photographs, although I suspect, unfortunately, that you have plenty of pictorial evidence of such poaching.

F. J. Simmonds, Director,
Commonwealth Institute of
Biological Control, Farnham Royal
Slough.

LAMU SOCIETY

Sir—Your readers will be interested in learning that recently a new society has been formed, the Lamu Society. The purpose of this non-political organization is to encourage the documentation of preservations, restoration, and appropriate development of the area and to raise funds to help further these objectives.

The Lamu District of Kenya has many historical monuments dating from the ninth century to the early twentieth century which need immediate attention to prevent them from falling down from wind and rain erosion and also vandalism.

For example, in Shela, there are some magnificent eighteenth-century houses but due to neglect the roofs have collapsed and the rain has severely damaged the exquisite plaster work on the walls. The Lamu Society has attempted to remedy this situation by setting up a fund by which persons who might otherwise not have the money can obtain a loan from the Society to make necessary repairs to their houses.

The traditional arts and crafts are still practised to some extent in Lamu today. There are people who can make model dhows, carve wooden doors, construct furniture, do plaster work, and make silver jewellery. The Lamu Society is encouraging these people to continue their work by offering several annual prizes to the best craftsmen.

The Lamu Society has sponsored lectures by John Allen. Usam Ghaidan, and Neville Chittick on the culture and problems of Lamu District. The Society plans in the future to publish several pamphlets and occasional newsletters. All those interested in aspects of the culture, way of life, and environment (including natural history) of Lamu are invited to join the Lamu Society by writing to the Secretary, P.O. Box 45916, Nairobi.

Esmond Bradley Martin
Villa Langata
Nairobi

WHY NO NEWS?

Sir—We have just received the latest *Africana* and it is, as always our most welcomed publication.

However, this was a most disappointing issue as it did not have the most important item that my wife and I look forward to *Africana* is the single publication from which we get news of each of the National Parks of East Africa in which we spent over a thousand hours (in total!)

We know many of the animals in the parks as well as the "personality" of each and through your magazine we have been able, at least to some extent, to keep up with what is happening in them—until lately.

If *Africana* does not offer us a source for what is happening in the day-to-day life of East African Game Parks and Reserves, interested people away will not be able to keep and feel the more personal and intimate link with the East African Wildlife.

Ben H. Areott.
Lexington Technical Institute
Lexington, Kentucky.

●The difficulty is the Parks are too widely scattered for regular visits and the wardens usually far too busy for the chore of preparing reports for us. However, Ted Norris is making the effort to get what Park news he can for his 'Society Notes' section—Ed.

A WORD IN THEIR FAVOUR

Sir—"It was just great; but of course the place was crawling with TOURISTS!"

How often have you heard such comments from Kenya Residents, returning from a Game Lodge visit? The tone is one of utter disparagement. Obviously, a TOURIST is a creature about as welcome as malarial mosquitoes or safari ants.

Many of our most noted conservationists evidently share this attitude. It is implicit in their articles and books. Some even state that a certain phenomenon is "too good" to be appreciated by mere TOURISTS.

Perhaps the time has come to examine the tourist more closely, to observe his behaviour, speculate on his motivation, and attempt to fit him into the ecology of East African Game Parks. *APPEARANCE*: Your average tourist may be instantly recognised by one or more of the following characteristics:-

● He has flakes of red skin on his nose. These are sometimes garnished with suntan oil, making the effect even more nauseous.

● He wears a most peculiar hat.

● He is permanently bowed by a great weight of cameras, lenses, light metres, binoculars, sunglasses, tape

recorders and airline bags which dangle from his neck and shoulders.

● He is breathless, since most of these articles collide with his chest at every stride.

● The female of the species is usually shorter, though not necessarily smaller, enamoured of even more bizarre headgear, and inclined to twitter. She wears trousers that are baggy everywhere but where they ought to be. She often sports red fingernails and blue hair.

BEHAVIOUR: Your average tourist has two left feet, and a mouth large enough to accommodate both of them. His fingers are all thumbs, his limbs all knees and elbows. He over-reacts, over-eats, and over-tips. Depending on his nationality, he may exhibit excess garrulity, gluttony, meanness, insensitivity, credulity, helplessness, anxiety, sloth or hypochondria. He is credited with every vice known to man, from odd sexual proclivities to halitosis.

When the long-awaited Bongo finally materialises at the water hole, it is your average tourist who blunders across the room, spraying soup and bawling in a foreign language or dialect. (*Gee, Ethel, willya take a lookit THAT*) Whereupon *THAT* usually fades quietly into the night, never to return, and the TOURIST, unabashed, rejoins the orgy of the food, drink, and loud conversation.

Surely, you say, he is a terrible case, deserving all the vilification he gets. The noted conservationists are right. He is unworthy of our wildlife. But you have overlooked a fundamental truth.

We may glory in the gazelle's grace, the lethal beauty of the leopard. We may strike a pose, prattling of the human heritage, preserved for posterity. But whatever happened to our own wildlife? The few beasts which survived centuries of systematic slaughter are now dying of poison in shrinking reserves. Well may we mourn the lost nobility of the great outdoors. With our rampant technology, our jet-age transport, our synthetic foods, we can afford the luxury of sentiment.

But how does the African man-in-the-shamba feel? He has no leisure time for game viewing. He hasn't the patience for portentous anthropomorphisms regarding the monarchy of lions or the dignity of elephants. His is a simple, hard life, often complicated and even threatened by the very animals we seek to protect. Just as our forebears hunted the wolf from the woods and the bear from the beanpatch, so must the African farmer destroy the predators that raid his cattle and the browsers that trample his crops. The gospel of conservation gains few converts among men who squeeze a precarious living from the soil.

In an area stricken by land hunger, many gaze askance at the vast acres of Park, seeing only wastage. There is no yield; neither meat nor milk nor hide nor harvest, nor any lone item of practical benefit is produced. These are simply reserves for the enjoyment of richer, idler men.

Why, then, do the Parks survive? How can the policy makers possibly justify such extravagance to their less fortunate brethren?

The answer is simple. The National Parks bring in one vital commodity—hard cash. Only coffee exports contribute more to the National Budget, and this lead is unlikely to last, despite the handicaps of the energy crisis.

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