

UGANDA'S ANIMAL PARADISE

A GUIDE TO OBSERVING BIG GAME AT ITS BEST

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ONLY a small proportion of English children have seen a badger or a fox out of captivity. Stranger is the fact that the proportion of African children who have seen a lion, a buffalo or an elephant is probably less than the proportion of English children who have seen a fox or a badger. In England one can travel along roads, mile after mile, and never see a wild animal larger than a rat; likewise one can live and travel in Africa for many years and never see a wild animal larger than a mongoose. It is not uncommon to meet town-dwellers who have never seen an antelope outside a zoo.

It is with surprise and excitement, therefore, that the traveller climbs down the escarpments into the Queen Elizabeth and Murchison Falls National Parks, and suddenly discovers Africa as it was some 40 years ago, an Africa till teeming with game.

Even on arriving by air the excitement is there. Elephant will certainly be watching the plane land, while the antelope will be in attendance, and even the ugliest of all God's creatures, the rhinoceros (Fig. 1), may be watching. On one occasion in the Murchison Falls Park, while a pilot was testing his engines, before take-off, his plane was charged by an ill-disposed rhinoceros. The sight of the plane taxiing down the runway as fast as it could, being chased by an infuriated rhinoceros, is one that will not easily be forgotten by those who saw it.

Not so many years ago most travellers who came to see the big game of Africa came to shoot and later turned their homes into fantastic natural history museums. To-day visitors are far more numerous, and few of them have any interest in heads and skins. What they want is a permanent photographic record.

The Queen Elizabeth Park is ideally suited to the photographer, as the grass rarely gets longer than the grass in an English paddock. It is possible for visitors to motor over large areas of the Park, looking at and photographing animals with small likelihood of damage to their vehicles. Even the most amateur photographer with the cheapest of cameras can take good photographs of many of the great mammals of Africa if he displays only moderate amount of patience. Let it not be



1.—A BLACK RHINOCEROS IN UGANDA. "The ugliest of all God's creatures, the rhinoceros, may be watching your 'plane land'"

thought that good photographs can be taken by just pointing a camera at the nearest animal and flicking the shutter. The traveller who points his camera at the first elephant or buffalo he sees will nearly always be disappointed.

A visitor who wishes to take photographs in a national park should spend the first day driving in the park without a camera, looking around to see what sort of pictures there are to take, and the conditions under which they will have to be taken. The Army maxim that time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted is a truism so far as game photography is concerned. In the Queen Elizabeth Park, so far as elephant, buffalo, hippopotamus and antelope

are concerned, it is certain that they will be there every day; there is, therefore, no danger that by waiting a day one will lose the opportunity to photograph these animals.

Going out and having a look round does not mean driving on the park tracks at 40 m.p.h. with an occasional glance from side to side. I can well remember once, while travelling at some 15 to 20 m.p.h., being passed by a car full of anxious and keen tourists. I arrived at the safari lodge some half-hour later than these visitors, and they listened to me with amazement and disbelief when I told them that they had passed elephant, buffalo and a lion.

What are the animals that the visitor can be sure of seeing in the Queen Elizabeth Park? In the first place there are over 11,000 hippopotamuses in the Park and they can always be seen and photographed not only in the water, but also in wallows and walking on the land—if the clumsy gait of the hippopotamus can be called a walk. There are about 2,500 elephants (Fig. 2) in this Park, and there is no more rewarding animal to photograph. With care, the photographer should be able to get within less than twenty yards of a family of elephants, and if he is prepared to spend half an hour taking his photographs, what fun he can get!

I can well remember the occasion when, with no intention of taking any photographs at all, I stopped to look at a family of elephants. The father of the family was a big bull, and close to him was a little warthog. The bull was irritated by the warthog and made a number of mock charges at him; each time the warthog moved away, but always came back. Finally he got tired of being chased away by the bull, and, instead of running off when the bull charged him, he charged back at the bull, who was so surprised that he backed away hurriedly and left the warthog in peace.

The population of buffalo (Fig. 4) in the Queen Elizabeth Park is in the neighbourhood of 12,000. The majority of these are to be found in large herds, although in certain areas of the Park old bulls are to be found alone or in groups. There is one particular area known as the Bachelors' Club, where a number of these bulls stand about all day glowering at strangers and wondering why they can't be left alone. The photographer will be well advised to



2.—ELEPHANT IN A DRY RIVER BED CLOSE TO THE NILE. There are about 2,500 elephants in the Queen Elizabeth Park, Uganda



3.—A UGANDA KOB, THE EMBLEM OF THE UGANDA NATIONAL PARKS. "Kob seem happy to pose for the photographer, w they regard with curiosity." (Right) 4.—A BULL BUFFALO IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH PARK

proceed warily when taking photographs of lone buffalo, and should never stop the engine of his car while watching or photographing them. Even with buffalo, however, the exception proves the rule. In the Murchison Falls Park, where the buffalo are far wilder than in Queen Elizabeth Park, there are eight or nine large bulls who spend all their time in one of the rangers' lines and behave like and are treated as ordinary domestic animals.

Although, as a general rule, it is not difficult to get a good photograph of a buffalo standing alone or in a small group, it is difficult to obtain a worth-while photograph of a herd of buffalo. The lone bull will stand and regard the intruder with suspicion and at times annoyance. He may move away a few paces or, if angered, charge. But generally, if treated patiently, he will submit to what he clearly considers the indignity of being photographed. Buffalo in a herd, however, will gallop off if disturbed, and the greatest care and patience is necessary if a good photograph of them is to be obtained. It is rare, however, for a buffalo from a herd to attack a human being.

Elephant, hippopotamus and buffalo provide dramatic pictures, but antelope are the most essential part of the African scene. In the Queen Elizabeth Park superb photographs can be obtained of waterbuck, who, with their

thick rough coats, seem to be more suited to the north of Scotland than the tropics of Africa. Close to the waterbuck one nearly always finds the Uganda kob (Fig. 3). Unlike the buffalo, the waterbuck and kob seem happy to pose. They will stand and regard the photographer with curiosity and then kick up their heels and move off, soon to stop and pose again.

The sight in the Queen Elizabeth Park that will never be forgotten is of the topi in the southern end of the Park. Herds up to a thousand strong gallop past at a distance of a few yards and are reminiscent of, but far more exciting than, the galloping herds of cattle seen in western films.

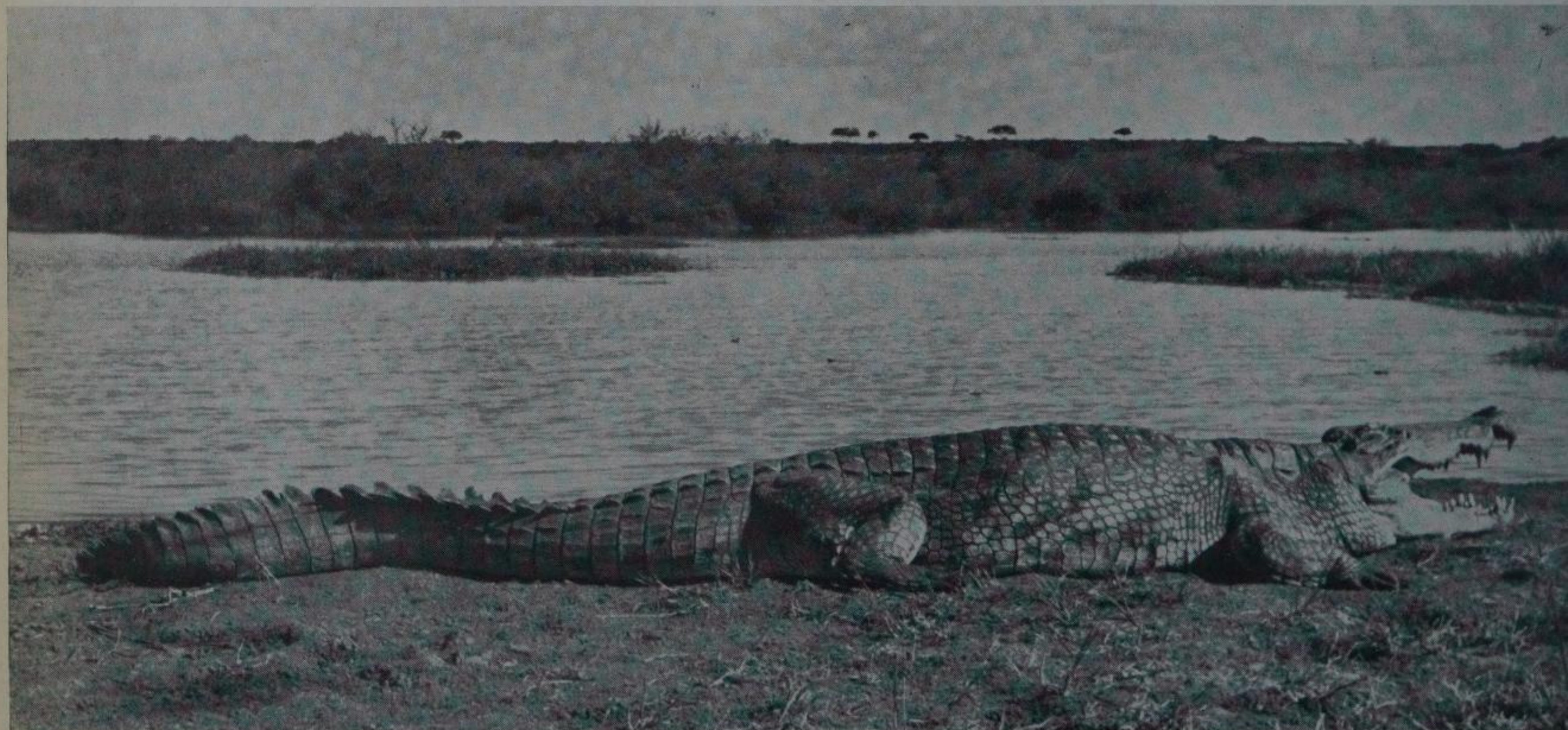
In contrast to the Queen Elizabeth Park, with its short grass, its many roads and tracks, and parklike appearance, the Murchison Falls Park, with its tall grass, its rugged escarpments and soil erosion, is essentially a part of story-book Africa. The Park is centred on the Murchison Falls, where the Nile, after being constricted in a gap 19 feet wide, falls 140 feet to the level of Lake Albert. These Falls, numbered among the great waterfalls of the world, must be unique in that under them fish weighing up to 160 lb. can be caught on rod and line. A Nile perch of this weight was recently caught by the Park Warden close by the Falls; and—who knows—a greater one may yet be caught, as Nile

perch have been known to weigh as much as 360 lb. Where else in the world can one fish a catch of this size and, at the same time, be obliged to keep a look-out for crocodile (Fig. 5). Recently, when a visitor was trolling for Nile perch from the back of a launch not far from the Murchison Falls, a fish eagle dived and caught the perch in its claws; within seconds the fish eagle, plucked all, was seized by a crocodile. There are still about 300 crocodiles to be seen in a seven-mile stretch of river from the Safari Lodge to the Murchison Falls.

Lucky indeed is the visitor who, while watching the crocodiles, sees a whale-headed stork, that rare and improbable bird. But the visitor will be unlucky if he does not see the most beautiful of storks, the saddle bill, as well as scores of herons and other water birds.

There are two pictures that the visitor to the Murchison Falls Park will take away with him: the one of the Nile, which seems in the Park to be the exact image of the tropical river of our imagination; the other of that majestic of all animals, the elephant. Here the greatest elephants in the world can be seen standing black against the shining river, their tusks so large and unlikely that the visitor, returning to the Safari Lodge feels he must have been dreaming.

Illustrations: J. M. Savidge



5.—A CROCODILE ON THE BANKS OF THE NILE. There are about 300 of them in the seven miles of river from the Safari Lodge to the Murchison Falls