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Incorporating WWF — Kenya's "Panda News"

EDITORIAL: Joe Rodrigues

Editor-in-Chief, Nation Group

Battle goes on but game still in danger

THE eternal battle between poachers of African wildlife, on the one hand, and conservationists and governmental forces continues to be waged. In some countries, such as Kenya, there are fewer incidents these days, which means the authorities are over the hump in their campaign against wanton killing of animals in the country's numerous and widespread sanctuaries and national parks. They have been helped in this work, undoubtedly, by the total ban on hunting and export of game trophies and the fact that there is no let-up in the war on poachers despite the ever-present constraints posed by shortage of funds.

But the African scene is changing, in some cases for the better as far as the well-being of the continent's wildlife is concerned. In Uganda, where during the eight years of dictator Idi Amin's rule countless head of wild animals were slaughtered for their skins and ivory, and where even after his ouster very large numbers of animals were killed for food by Ugandan troops and the Tanzanian military forces which helped liberate the country, the authorities are now able, for the first time in a decade, to turn their attention to the urgent need to do something concrete to protect what is left of the country's wildlife heritage.

In Tanzania, where hunting is permitted on a selective basis after a five-year ban enabled the herds to build up, the Government has declined to impose a new ban unless the rich nations compensate it for lost revenue. The country earned TSh. 6 million in 1979 from hunting, in the shape of 48 tourists and 82 overseas professional hunters. The previous year only 36 foreign hunters visited Tanzania. Despite the fact that hunting is permitted, the Tanzanian Government continues to do whatever it can in the field of wildlife conservation.

The fight goes on. The newly-independent State of Zimbabwe has opened up new ground for poachers and conservationists alike, though the Government of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, despite its multifarious problems, must sooner rather than later turn its attention to the protection of wildlife. All over the continent, however, according to facts and figures adduced by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the overall picture is grim. And the main target is the elephant. Loss of habitat poses the major problem to the animal, but poachers continue to be the main threat. Unfortunately, international demand for poached ivory shows no signs of diminishing. The elephant scene is grimmest in Uganda, where Dr. Eric Edroma, head of research in the Uganda National Parks, says the massacre of elephants since 1973, reducing their numbers from 30,000 to 1,500, is akin to genocide.

Despite the brighter side of the poaching scene in Kenya, the rhino population is in dire danger of being wiped out, as we show in an article in this issue.

A great deal is being done to protect and preserve the world's wildlife, but the burden of seeing the cumulative campaigns of wildlife lovers to a successful conclusion rests, and will continue to do so, in great measure on those who are determined that the fauna with which the Creator populated this earth is given the right to live without the dice being loaded heavily in favour of commercial exploiters.

Finally, a word to our readers. Corporate restructuring has been responsible for unavoidable delays in producing this issue of "Africana" and everything possible is being done to restore publication to an even keel as soon as possible. The contents will, it goes without saying, be of the usual high standard. We thank readers for their forebearance.

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CONTENTS

Page 4 MISCELLANY
Game Warden killed by poachers; Nakuru Game Park land grab

Page 5
Readers' letters

Page 6
Operation Genesis; The future of turtles

Page 7
Giraffe to the rescue, by Betty Leslie Melville

Page 11
Conservation: Time to swing into action, by the Hon. Charles Njonjo, MP

Page 12
Rhino Scrapbook

Page 15
The Rhino: Grim prospects for survival, by Esmond Bradley Martin

Casting an Elephant — pictorial by Camerapix.
Pictures by Mohamed Amin

Page 27 PANDA NEWS
Uganda elephant in danger; Primates for sale; Ban on fur coats; Project Gorilla

Page 34
Growing public concern for the elephant

Page 35
Death of a python — a photofeature by Camerapix