

UGANDA

(Extracts from the Report of the Trustees of the National Parks for the year 1954)

In a foreword to the report, Mr. R. Dreschfield, the chairman, writes: "The tragic loss of Ken Beaton has marred a year of great progress in the parks: a year graced by the visit of Her Majesty the Queen to the Queen Elizabeth Park. The foundations laid by Ken Beaton and the honour of Her Majesty's visit will stand us in good stead for many years to come and will be an inspiration for us to make our two parks second to none.

The principal tourist attractions in Uganda are the national parks and unless visitors are to be attracted to Uganda only for the purpose of "having a look at it", then the development of the parks is essential for the well-being of all the various enterprises which, directly or indirectly cater for visitors, and the success, efficiency and reasonable inexpensiveness of the services provided by the Trustees is a matter of the greatest importance to all concerned in such enterprises. This is essentially true of the hotel business. Tourists will not come to Uganda just to stay in Uganda hotels, however good they are, but they will come to Uganda to see the parks and while travelling to and from the parks they must stay in the hotels. Local holiday-makers will not stay in Uganda unless something more than a comfortable bed is provided, but our records clearly show that they will stay in Uganda to see the wild life in the parks.

Although it must always be remembered that the preservation of the wild life in the parks is the first duty of the Trustees, we do not believe that that duty in any way conflicts with making the parks a recreation ground for the people of the Protectorate and for visitors. It is not part of the Trustees' duty to keep the parks closed to all but scientists, naturalists and those experienced in safaris. The parks are large enough to cater for visitors of all tastes; in fact in 1954, 11,591 persons visited the two parks. It is part of the Trustees' duty to ensure that there are facilities in the parks for persons of all walks of life. In carrying out this policy, the Trustees have already erected close to the Mweya safari lodge a group of rondavels which can be hired either by individuals or parties at a nominal charge. It is also hoped that there will soon be established in the Queen Elizabeth Park a rest camp suitable for persons who do not wish all the facilities that can be obtained in the main Lodge. In

the Murchison Falls park a rest camp is being constructed by a trader from Gulu who will likewise provide facilities of a lower standard than that provided in the main Lodge which is being constructed at Paraa."

Of the parks themselves, Mr. J. R. F. Mills, acting director, writes :—

QUEEN ELIZABETH PARK

Elephant.—It is very probable that the elephant population is larger than generally believed and that it is increasing. Most breeding herds contain a high proportion of calves and juveniles. On one occasion a cow was seen with five calves, all of which appeared to be her offspring. They were aged between a few months and about sixteen years old ; for one brief moment all formed up in a line, in order of age, with the oldest on the right and the baby on the left.

It became necessary to destroy an elephant which had a very swollen back leg, could barely move and was in poor condition. After it had been shot the leg was found to be septic over a large area and there were four holes in it, two on each side. It is believed that the holes were the result of a hippopotamus bite.

Buffalo.—There are many large breeding herds, some numbering two to three hundred. These are shy, generally keeping away from the tracks and rarely seen.

Almost all the old bulls in the locality collect in the vicinity of the cross-roads, five miles to the north of Katunguru. Here they spend the remainder of their life in peace, never moving much except when a shower of rain brings up a spring of young grass in a nearby locality. They completely refute the idea that the old bull buffalo is a ferocious and highly dangerous animal and generally are placid and tame, allowing visitors in cars to approach quite close to take photographs. Nevertheless, an old gentleman in a bad temper is occasionally found and it behoves one to be careful and not take chances.

Hippopotamus.—Hippopotamus in the Kazinga Channel average about seventy to the mile and there are many hundreds in other parts of the park. It is doubtful whether the country around the Channel will be able to stand the heavy grazing of this large number of these great beasts for many years to come. Soil erosion is increasing and areas which not many years ago were open grass country are now becoming covered with bush. No doubt the hippopotamus will adjust itself to changing conditions, but the parks will have to take measures to control the erosion and spread of bush.

At dawn one morning a hippopotamus, which the warden suspects to have been blind, blundered into one of the houses at the Rutanda ranger post. It got a considerable fright and moved off quickly but unfortunately the kitchen was in the way. Here it knocked down one wall.

Lion and Leopard.—Lions are without a doubt the greatest of all the many attractions of the park. More is the pity that they are so infrequently seen. In the northern sector their numbers are not great and it is probable that the majority live in the area to the south of the Kazinga Channel.

Prides of lions frequently swim across the Channel. The Mweya pride, which was so unco-operative on the day of Her Majesty the Queen's visit, spending the day sulking in thick bush, shortly afterwards crossed the Channel and spent some months in the southern sector. They returned to the Mweya area towards the end of August where they stayed a few days and then moved on again.

Leopard are more common than is generally appreciated and while they are quite frequently heard they are not often seen. At least one leopard lives on the wooded bank below the safari lodge; even though he is heard almost every night he is well behaved and has never taken any of the domestic animals kept at the lodge.

Topi.—Considerable numbers of these animals can be seen in the open park-like country close to the Belgian Congo border near the Ishasha river. Towards the end of August the warden counted over three hundred and fifty on one small plain and there must have been half as many again lying down which were missed. The topi had bred well and there were many youngsters.

Reedbuck.—While these graceful creatures are found in almost all parts of the park, nowhere are they really plentiful except in the Kayanja area.

Hyenas.—A number of these scavengers have taken up residence close to the main track and about two miles from the Mweya safari lodge. No doubt they find this a convenient base for their nightly excursions to the Mweya peninsula. One bitch whelped twice during the year and had three puppies in each litter; of the second litter two were black and one spotted.

Birds.—The variety and quantity of birds that can be seen along the banks of the Kazinga Channel and particularly on the bird beaches is a sight in itself. As with so many of the animals, they, too, have become noticeably more tame and now take little notice of the launches. Birds in other parts of the park

are behaving in the same way, guinea fowl and francolin in particular.

While watching birds on the bird beaches near Kazinga village, one occasionally observes cormorants regurgitating fish. Pelicans and wood ibis lose no time in rushing in to collect the spoil, and a brawl usually occurs. A pied kingfisher was seen to dive down on a darter and endeavour to take a small fish which the darter held in its beak. It failed and was not given another chance.

MURCHISON FALLS PARK

A temporary camp to accommodate twelve visitors was opened in July. This camp consists of six large tents, each equipped with two camp beds, bedding, bath, wash basin, tables and chairs, a central mess banda complete with cutlery and crockery and a fully equipped kitchen with refrigerator. All that a visitor is required to bring is food and drink. The camp has proved very popular and many visitors who have never previously had the opportunity have been able to enjoy living in primitive Africa under the simplest conditions.

It has become necessary to station park rangers at the Murchison Falls permanently, in order to control visitors and keep the area clean. Like so many popular beauty spots all over the world, the state of the area in the immediate vicinity of the Falls after a holiday period has to be seen to be believed. Since the ranger post has been established the situation has much improved. The rangers have carried out their duties with firmness and tact. One or two unpleasant incidents have occurred but it has been possible to settle these satisfactorily. It is unfortunate that some visitors treat the animals with little respect and so spoil the enjoyment of others. At Christmas a party of visitors were seen driving fast along a track until they came on a pride of lions sunning themselves, a none too common occurrence. The lions were scattered like so many goats and the car went on without slackening speed. If this is the treatment that the animals are likely to receive in the vicinity of tracks, it is only natural that they tend to move off to more quiet and secluded parts of the park.

Poaching is still prevalent around the boundaries of the park; nowhere is it on a large or commercial scale, generally consisting of a few individuals killing for meat. This type of poaching is insidious and, while no very marked damage is done at any one time, the toll over a period is considerable. The antelopes suffer most and their numbers are not sufficient to stand

this continued killing. Ranger patrols have done a great deal to combat the menace and have achieved considerable success. A system of tracks covering the park will achieve even more; good communications are probably the greatest deterrent to the poacher.

Elephant.—It is likely that the elephant population of this park is considerably higher than was previously believed. On two separate occasions very considerable numbers have been seen from the air in quite small sectors. Until the closed areas of the park are opened up and very much more is known about their elephant population, it is quite impossible to make an estimate of numbers.

The attitude of the elephants to human beings and vehicles in various parts of the park is quite remarkable. Those living in the vicinity of Paraa quickly became used to human beings and all the various happenings. A typical example is the carpenter's shop situated under a tree near a game path leading to the Nile which is frequently used by elephants when on their way to water. It is no uncommon occurrence to see the carpenters working and three or four elephants resting under a tree about a hundred yards away. When the elephants decide it is time to move on to water, the carpenters retire until they have passed; then they return to work.

When travelling between Paraa and Wangkwar it is rare not to see at least two or three elephants which are almost invariably browsing along the side of the track. Most of these old gentlemen already know all about cars; they take no notice of an approaching vehicle and carry on grazing. If the occupants are impatient to pass and approach too close, a demonstration quickly makes them retire to a respectful distance. It is not uncommon for visitors and park vehicles to be held up for an hour or more in this way.

The elephants in the Bunyoro sector of the park, being unused to human beings and vehicles, are still very wild; on approach they make off at their best speed.

Hippopotamus.—As with the elephants the hippopotamus have become noticeably more tame, now that they frequently see launches. At night they are frequent visitors to the Paraa camp area to take advantage of the grass which has sprung up where the bush has been cleared. It is not an uncommon occurrence to wake up during the night and hear a hippopotamus grazing outside the tent.

Mr. Roberts, the works supervisor, was sitting after dinner reading in his hut when he looked up and saw a hippopotamus

peering in through the door. He did not move and the hippopotamus apparently satisfied, moved off about its own business.

Lion.—The lion population of the park is very much higher than casual observation would lead one to believe. Even though they are infrequently seen they make their presence known at night, especially in wet weather. Sometimes at Paraa, prides can be heard talking to each other the whole night through. It is to be hoped that with the passage of time they will become less wary and will show up more frequently. This is unlikely if visitors treat them as described earlier.

The story of how two lions had killed a baby elephant near Fajao could be plainly seen from the marks on the ground in the vicinity. One lion had attracted the attention of the mother and kept her occupied while the second killed the calf, which was but a few weeks old. The tusks were $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. long.

Justino Tokwaro, the road supervisor, during the course of his duties, one morning met a lioness and cubs. To quote his own words:—

“She said, ‘You, Justino, just you keep moving. Don’t start anything with me and my tolos. Just you keep moving and don’t look back.’ I did as I was told.”

Crocodiles.—As with so many of the other animals it is quite remarkable how the crocodiles have lost their fear of launches. They can be approached really close before they finally lose their nerve and slide off into the water. Undoubtedly these loathsome brutes are among the biggest attractions of the park. Visitors are fascinated by them.

Antelope.—Jackson’s hartebeest, Uganda kob, reedbuck and oribi are reasonably plentiful in certain areas of the Acholi part of the park, particularly in the Lolim area, where they keep the grass permanently short. In other areas during the latter half of the year the grass gets so long that it is quite impossible to see any of these antelope. That they are not attracted by these conditions either is indicated by the numbers found on the airstrip. In a dry year it may be possible to burn small areas in July and August and so improve conditions.

In the Bunyoro sector of the park, Jackson’s hartebeest and Uganda kob are found only in small numbers. This is probably due to the country not being attractive as it is more heavily bushed than the northern sector, and also to heavy poaching in the past. Waterbuck are flourishing; some large herds have been seen.

Wild Dog.—Reports indicate that these brutes have done a certain amount of damage to the game in the Pakuba area.

One pack of about twenty has been reported and other smaller packs have been seen.

PARK RANGERS

The training of the park ranger force has continued satisfactorily and there has been a marked improvement in the all-round standard. A number of new men have been recruited and the weeding out of those unlikely to become efficient rangers has continued. The rangers are organized on military lines and have achieved a high standard of drill and discipline which will stand them in good stead when out on their own for long periods in the field. All the rangers now know the English names for the more common animals likely to be met in the parks; some have also picked up a certain amount of simple English. This knowledge helps considerably when they are called on to act as ranger guides to visitors.

Credit for the smartness and efficiency of the ranger force is in a large measure due to the head rangers, Lakana Jibi in the Queen Elizabeth Park and Saturnino Odida in the Murchison Falls Park.