

The Nile perch in Lake Victoria

There are two major errors in 'Big fish threaten Africa's great lakes' (*Oryx*, **XX**, 3, p. 138) (and in the IUCN Press Release on which it was based) which must be corrected.

First, there are no plans afoot, nor have there ever been such plans, to 'repeat the experiment' by introducing Nile perch into Lake Malawi. The idea that such an introduction was planned, first put about in the IUCN report, has quite understandably angered the Fisheries Department in Malawi. The Department's recent statement on the subject of introductions into Lake Malawi makes quite clear their very proper and scientific attitudes to the dangers and consequences of such actions.

The second point in your article to which I take strong exception is the statement that 'At the last moment' (before Nile perch were introduced) 'scientists and local observers voiced serious doubts about the wisdom of the project'. As one of those scientists, and one who had been working on Lake Victoria as a member of the East African Fisheries Research Organization since 1951, I can assure you that there had been opposition, clearly argued and stated, from the very first moment the introduction had been suggested by the Uganda Game and Fisheries Department. Regrettably those arguments were ignored. I am not aware, as your article states, of the FAO being in any way involved with setting up the pilot project, which, by accident or design, led to the Nile Perch getting into the lake itself from nearby fish ponds.

There are other, relatively minor, errors in the article. For example, the Nile perch, *Lates niloticus*, is not a carp but, as its common name indicates, is a perch-like fish; there is no evidence that one of the cichlid fishes now eaten by the Nile perch '... helps control the human killer disease schistosomiasis (bilharzia) ...', and it is nonsense to claim that any of the small cichlid fishes were part of a major dollar-earning trade in aquarium fishes, or indeed that they are—or were—'rare species prized as ornamental aquarium fish'.

The importance of the many endemic cichlid fishes threatened with extinction in Lake Victoria is threefold, namely: as an important source of

protein for local people; as the dominant vertebrate elements in a complicated ecosystem that is being drastically modified and is unlikely to return to its previous state; and as major contributors to one of the world's most important natural laboratories in which to study evolution and speciation (see Greenwood, 1981; Barel *et al.*, 1985).

References

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Future for East Usambaras

During the past year we have come across some articles dealing with the involvement of the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA) in the 'asset-stripping' of natural forests in the East Usambaras and Kilombero, including one in *Oryx*, **XIX**, 4. The information in these articles is strikingly similar and the source can be traced to the article 'African violet may disappear from the wild' in *New Scientist* (2 May 1985). Furthermore, a number of organizations have approached us expressing concern about the future of the natural forests of the East Usambaras.

We understand the concern, but the picture depicted in the press articles is wrong and misleading. The alleged plans to clearcut 12,000 hectares of forest in the Usambaras and 40,000 hectares in Kilombero have been misinterpreted. The studies, which were prepared in 1978–79 by a Finnish consulting company engaged by the Tanzania Wood Industries Corporation (TWICO), the Tanzanian Forest Department and FINNIDA, have not resulted in any investment projects for large-scale utilization of the forest resources.

Instead of building new sawmills in the Usambaras, sawmills are being closed down.

FINNIDA has since 1979 provided limited support in the form of technical assistance, replacement of obsolete equipment and spare parts to Sikh Sawmills (SSM) Ltd in Tanga, which takes its raw material from natural forest mainly in the Amani region. During the past few years doubts have been raised within FINNIDA about the viability of the SSM activities. Forest inventories have shown that the forest resources are dwindling. Furthermore, there has been growing concern about the deteriorating watersheds and the unique fauna and flora of the area.

There would have been many strong reasons to justify a complete withdrawal of Finnish support to SSM. However, after careful consideration FINNIDA decided to maintain support until the situation has been thoroughly investigated. SSM is one of the very few enterprises providing employment in the Tanga region. Approximately 4000 people depend on the company for their daily subsistence. In addition, SSM produces products that are needed locally as well as providing packing materials for the foreign-currency earning tea exports.

Even if the Tanzanian authorities decided to close the mill, the destruction of the forest would continue. Almost 90 per cent of the Usambara forests has been destroyed during the last 100 years, and the impact of industrial logging has played a marginal role. Most experts agree that the main threat to forests today is the ever increasing need for agricultural land. In addition to this the Usambaras are creamed by a large number of pit-sawyers.

To secure the future of the natural forests in the East Usambaras FINNIDA is carrying out a comprehensive inventory of the East Usambaras with special reference to forest resources, watershed management, ecology and land use. A forest management plan will be prepared, to define the forest areas that need complete protection and to indicate the needs for silvicultural measures. The possibility of utilizing planted teak, myrsine and softwood will be investigated, and areas, if any, that still may be logged will be delineated. A monitoring system will be created to follow up the plan.

FINNIDA employed the consulting company FINNMAP-SILVESTRIA to perform these tasks.

The project is co-ordinated with NORAD and the activities of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

By early 1988, when the project will be complete, the type of possible future support to forestry and forest industries activities in the Tanga region will be carefully considered. In the meantime everything will be done to minimize the impact of logging. The discontinuation of SSM logging activities has already been discussed at the highest level in Dar es Salaam and the matter is currently being reviewed by the Tanzanian authorities.

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Postscript

We have just received (30 July 1986) reports from Tanzania that, largely as a result of pressure from FINNIDA, the Forest Division ordered Sikh Sawmills Ltd to stop logging in natural forests. However, it seems that the company, which has been in the area for 50 years or so and which exerts strong political influence, has managed to get this decision reversed. The company now intends to log 450 hectares in the East Usambaras Forest Block, where much of the terrain is very steep and where there are only an estimated 1000–4000 hectares of intact forest left. Sikh Sawmills also operate in Uganda and Kenya and is obviously a major influence on the future of the forests of East Africa. The company seems willing to operate in flagrant disregard of local regulations and international opinion.

Editor

The cost of supporting the fur trade

Your Editorial (*Oryx*, XX, 2) provided a panacea for all the supposed ills of the fur trade. May I very humbly suggest that there are many sides to your argument, which you obviously happily ignored. As a trade we do not exterminate species as this would deprive trappers of a future. In fact, trappers are the best conservationists, not those who sit and examine statistics and pontificate on what is right and wrong.

Let us put this into perspective. The main cause of extinction is that the natural habitat of jungle cats, together with other wild animals, is being taken by humans as they develop more housing and factory sites. It has nothing to do with the fur trade.

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