ANIMAL AFRICA

(Radio Edition)

By Earl Denman

Animal Africa is an endeavour to present the other side of the picture. The author respects the true naturalist-sportsman, the discriminating hunter. But his own considerable experience of going unarmed among wild animals has taught him that few are dangerous unless goaded beyond endurance. He shows the falsity of the picture painted with so little feeling by the big game hunters. Even today, wherever the chance avails, they exterminate the wild life with ruthless persistence for their own selfish ends.

To the wild life of Africa
and the guardians who
watch over it with kindly interest,
for beauty's sake,
for the sake of freedom
and for the pleasure
of future generations.

Contents

1. THE CHANGING SCENE IN AFRICA

Broadcast by The South African Broadcasting Corporation on Tuesday, 19th October, 1954. 7.45-8.00pm

Before the white man came to Africa, with his drive and energy, there were no day-to-day changes, such as we have become used to in our lifetime. Africa was a savage continent – savage, but sleepy. Central and Southern Africa in particular, remained in a state of reserve. They were, in truth, vast natural reserves, remote from the awakening outer world. The Africa of those days belonged as much to the wild beasts as to man. The elephant ranged throughout the entire continent, from north to south, and from east to west.

Beyond the great rivers, lakes, swamps and forests, which acted as barriers to overland migrations from the north, there was for unknown centuries a primitiveness which is now gone, and which we can scarcely imagine. Simplicity was the keynote, because nature itself deals with first principles, and here was the true state of nature as best we can imagine it, in a land undisturbed by elements that were not a part of the indigenous pattern.

Europe moved from one period of development to another, and then progressed with tremendous speed when it reached the era of mechanical development. During the whole of this time, Africa remained dormant. For very, very many centuries, and animal kingdom was a reality, and the two realms of animal and man lived in almost complete interdependence. Indigenous African tribes, where these existed, hunted by primitive means, and as a matter of necessity only. The early African was not creative but neither was he unduly destructive where nature was concerned.

The interdependence was such that man, where he **took** animal life in the interests of his own livelihood, also **gave** the wherewithal for survival, particularly of the antelope species. He performed this service by periodically setting fire to the grasslands, thereby retaining them as open pasturage for grazing animals,

and for the fleet-footed antelopes which could not have survived if they had been prevented from putting to use their speed in swift, evasive action.

Make no mistake about it, the African of this prehistoric period was in many respects a true conservationist. His weapons of offence were primitive in the extreme, and therefore, although animal life was more than plentiful to meet his every need, he could not afford to be wasteful. When he killed, he made use of every morsel of flesh and skin. He did not slaughter and leave whole carcasses to the scavenging beasts and birds, as the white man did at a later date, and still does today.

The primary forces of nature, which held away, were never challenged by his silent, uncertain methods of hunting in which he made use of simple traps, snares, pits, and such crude devices as falling logs and drop spears.

In all ways the primitive African lived simply. He was influenced by the primary urges - all connected in one way or another with survival. These urges are common to all, whether man or beast.

Hunting as a 'sport', or as a pastime, or merely for trophy collecting or a show of bravado, was generally unknown. Fishing, for any reason but the basic one of need, probably never entered the head of the primitive African. Certainly he was a ruthless hunter upon occasion, as when taking part in 'drives', during which he would make use of ring fires, but these organised drives only took place on rare occasions. His innate laziness saw to that.

There was never an unceasing, indiscriminate slaughter, as in later years, when firearms were introduced by the White man. The primitive African, though he gave no heed to the finer points of selective hunting, or breeding seasons, used methods that were equally unrefined in other respects, and it is hardly likely that he was ever guilty of exterminating a single species of animal or bird.

Some of his tribal customs gave automatic, unthinking protection to certain trees and shrubs, birds and beasts, and some of his superstitions also gave a measure

of scarcity to the lower forms of life. Many of these superstitions, for instance, were connected with the leopard, which, although a dangerous adversary, also has the power to do a great deal of good.

Tribal warfare had the important effect of limiting the human population, and at the same time it made large areas unsafe for human settlement. These were harsh, savage days, and Africa stood in need of a change. But, whereas the human world thrives upon change, the animal world almost invariably suffers when any sudden or great change takes place.

We have no idea how long this state of affairs lasted, because there is no record of it. But it continued in Central and Southern Africa long after the fall of the ancient civilisations of Assyria, Babylon, Rome and Egypt.

It is likely that game was fairly abundant in North Africa until the fall of these empires, by which time the desert had encroached, squeezing the herds into restricted areas where they fell easy prey. However, we know very little about this period in relation to the wild fauna of Africa.

A new phase was opened up when the white races began to explore beyond the open seas to navigable land waters, The Senegal River, on the west coast, and then the Gambia, served to take the explorers inland. Hunting did not take place on a large scale, because these west coast regions proved too unhealthy for settlement, or for indulgence in sport.

They lent themselves to two forms of exploitation, however, and it was not long before shiploads of natives were being transported to America and other parts of the world. Then the ivory trade grew along with the slave trade. It was not enough to have the slaves marched empty-handed to the coast, and so they were given loads of ivory or some other commodity to carry. Mostly, the load was ivory, and in this way the elephant was singled out as the first African mammal to be exploited by the white races.

As an instance of this, natives were sent far inland from the Gambia to hunt in bands of 20 or 30 for elephants which at that time, were said to roam in herds of one or two hundred. (This would be no exaggeration, for Cornwallis Harris claimed to have seen as many as 300 elephants in a herd during his 1836 visit to Southern Africa).

The slave trade reached as far south as Angola, where it flourished. Off the East Coast, the island of Zanzibar acted as the main springboard. The wastage of African manpower would have had vital consequences, but slavery was abolished before any lasting harm had been done.

While the exploitation of human life had remained the first consideration, there was no great threat to the animal kingdom, except to the elephant. The species would have been the first to become extinct, if it had not been for a number of factors which counted in its favour. Its range was very widespread, so that extermination in any one area did not mean total extermination; it was intelligent enough to retreat wherever retreat was possible; and, although slow-breeding, it breeds steadily without any limited season for breeding.

Now let us turn to the southern tip of Africa, because it was in the south that a brief period of actual extermination started.

The first settlers arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. For several years, the Cape was nothing more than a revictualling station; there was no thought of colonisation, and none of open exploitation of either human or animal life. During the early days of settlement, there was only limited shooting, most of it confined to marauding and dangerous beasts.

In time, civilisation spread eastward and northwards, and the wild life of the Cape suffered as a result of these advances. The hinterland was penetrated by missionaries, who were followed by hunters and then by settlers. The Voortrekkers headed north in 1835, and were helped immensely by the abundance of grazing animals, which gave them food and clothing at no coast to themselves, apart from powder and shot.

The middle of the 19th century was the beginning of the end as far as the wild life in its original abundance was concerned. Something in the nature of a military campaign got under way, following closely upon the heels of the great explorers – Livingstone, Burton, Speke, Emin, Brazza and others.

The blue-buck, or bloubok, was the first species of African fauna to become totally extinct. Remnants of the last herd were shot on the wooden hills of a valley near Gwellendam in 1800. The quagga, in its wild state, was exterminated in 1958, near Aberdeen.

Further north, there was a similar story unfolding, though there was no actual extermination. The extent to which the elephant underwent persecution can be gauged from the size of the ivory trade. Between 1853 and 1879 (only quarter of a century) a total of 3,706 tons of ivory passed through the Red Sea port of Suakin. That was a fantastic amount, when it is borne in mind that collection and transportation were crude, laborious processes in those days.

One ivory trader bought and sold more than a million elephant tusks at Suakin during 17 years of commercial activity. Most of the ivory, no doubt came from Ethiopia and the Sudan. Perhaps some of it came from as far inland as the Belgian Congo and French Equatorial Africa.

At about the same time, the Barbary States were being taken over by France, and in the process, their wild life was practically exterminated.

Then, exploration of the Somaliland territories began, and led to innumerable hunting forays by officers of the Indian Army and the Aden garrison.

In every instance, and from every side, the big game animals were hard pressed, and only those species which were ubiquitous or capable of migrating, or of living in desert areas, stood any chance of surviving.

The pressure was then joined from the east, farther south, and Kenya became the favourite hunting ground.

In Northern Rhodesia, where the big game hunters did not penetrate in any great numbers until later, the narrative were armed with obsolete muzzle loading guns, and wholesale havoc was wrought amongst the fauna of Central Africa. A similar fate overtook the big game of Tanganyika.

Each territory went through its own phase of highly concentrated extermination. Instead of permitting the meat-hungry Africans a supply of game meat over the course of many years, there was a rapid and abandoned, wasteful slaughter.

It was time for a truce to be called. But we know from our experiences with the human races, backed by a history of constantly recurring wars, that peace in any sphere is not easy to achieve. The instinct to kill is so deeply ingrained that we have yet to learn how to gain salvation for ourselves. This being so, can we possibly do anything of a lasting nature to save a fully representative selection of the wild fauna of Africa? Perhaps, in later talks, the pattern of events may be clear, and it may be possible to say whether the Changing Scene will lead to salvation or extinction for the wild life of Africa.

2. CHANGES IN ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR AND APPEARANCE

Broadcast by The South African Broadcasting Corporation on Tuesday, 26th October, 1954. 7.45-8.00pm

There are many interesting aspects of animal life that are worth giving thought to. Firstly, on the grounds that the time is already past when widespread interest should be awakened in the problems of protection through a system of National Parks and Game Reserves, let us consider captive animals in relation to wild animals.

Recently I was looking though a book of animal drawings, all of which had been made from life. The artist, who is already well known for his pencil studies of dogs, states in his Preface that each animal has quite a lot of character of its own. He had set out to capture these characters, and he had done so admirable.

But his subjects were zoo animals, and at once I noticed something disagreeably odd about some of them. The porcupines, squirrels, reptiles, and some of the smaller primates and cats looked quite at home, and had pleasing characters, which the artist had portrayed accurately and skilfully. But, upon turning the pages to the African elephant, I saw a puny, withered, mean-looking beast. In my mind I compared it with the magnificent beasts which I had seen in complete freedom in Central Africa.

At first I was inclined to doubt the artist's ability in this instance, but I soon came to realise that his subject was, in fact, a puny, withered, mean-looking beast. It had been portrayed accurately enough, even to the pitiable expression that could only have come from years of captivity.

The artist, unknown to himself, no doubt, had portrayed in pencil a broken will, and years of submissiveness. The elephant, as portrayed seemed to know that he

was an inferior creature, an object of pity more than anything else – one who was missing something in life; a prisoner, as indeed he was.

I have no desire at this stage to enter into the right or wrong of keeping wild beasts in captivity, and so I will carry on with my story.

I turned the pages to the artist's impression of a black rhino, and I saw something more pathetic than ever. The beast had mere stumps for horns.

As explained in the text, it had worn them down by rubbing them against the concrete and iron of its cage, as is the habit with rhinos in captivity. In the wild state, the beasts polish their horns against termite mounds and trees. In this way they merely polish, and do not wear away the horn – which, by the way, is not true horn. I have used the word as a matter of convenience. The outgrowth is really an agglutinated mass of hairs.

Some people, looking at rhinos in captivity, and ignorant of them in their wild state, are under the impression that the horns have been removed deliberately in order to make the animals less dangerous to their keepers. Others, looking at caged specimens, have not known that the short stumps were abnormalities.

If no more rhinos existed in their wild state, then the zoos of the world would have no source of replenishment, and by constant inbreeding of zoo specimens it is likely that an animal differing considerably from the rhino as we know it in the wilds of Africa would result.

This is just one reason why we should seek to preserve Africa's wild life in its truly natural state.

Another change in animal form and behaviour was brought to my notice in a letter from the Keeper of a Department of Mammals in Germany. The letter referred to warthogs in Africa, and the writer, in trying to make his point clear in a language with which he was not familiar, produced a touch of unintentional humour.

"On the narrow room of a zoo fence," he wrote, "these hogs cannot run with so much speed that they throw the tail to the sky."

After an irrepressible smile at the quaint wording, I realised that the writer had made a very interesting observation.

Most of us have seen warthogs on the run, or have seen photographs of them and have been amused by the habit of trotting importantly with tail erect, the tufted end drooping over the hindquarters. Zoo visitors are denied this amusing sight, which is so typical of warthogs in the wild state, because the animals are unable to get up sufficient speed to adopt the comical tail-up attitude. Or, as the writer stated so aptly and humorously, "these hogs cannot run with so much speed that they throw the tail to the sky."

And, when we come to think of it, the familiar 'pronking' of the springbok takes place on the open veld, but not in zoos.

Lions in captivity are known to grow more luxuriant manes that lions which roam in freedom. This has led many people to think that conditions in zoos are therefore better for the animals. The truth is that lions in captivity have no thorn bushes and other natural vegetation to claw out the hair from their manes. Therefore they grow bigger manes, though this is not in itself a sign of better health.

Now that health has been mentioned, it will be fitting to speak of age. Many of the larger mammals live longer in zoos than in the wild state, but this is only because they are given attention in their old age which they would not receive as wild animals: or they are protected from the species which normally would prey upon them. Also they cannot exert themselves in the confines of the zoo as in the open savannahs or bushveld, and therefore, like human beings who live easy, sheltered lives, they tend to outlive those who live hard, energetic lives. There is no reason to believe that longevity is an indication of greater health or happiness either in relation to human beings or animals.

In fact, all the changes which I have mentioned as being the results of confinement in zoos are abnormalities. And abnormalities are not, as a rule to be admired.

Whatever we may think about zoos, let us be frank and admit that they have definite limitations, especially where the larger mammals are concerned. If we admit this, then we must also admit that it is more admirable to preserve Africa's wild life in its natural state, if at all. And, having admitted this, we must surely see the value of a widespread system of national parks and game reserves in Africa.

I could go on to point out many other changes of behaviour and appearance resulting from the confinement of animals in zoos. But it is not only in zoos that changes are taking place. Less noticeable changes are occurring elsewhere. Most of these are due in some way or other to human interference.

Let us take as a first example the elephant. Under normal conditions the age at which cows start bearing calves is about 15 to 18 years. Under conditions of stress, where herds are subjected to constant thinning out by men engaged on elephant control work, it is becoming evident that the cows start bearing calves at a younger age. This is nature's way of countering the abnormal casualties which are taking place.

When left undisturbed, it is the older bulls which are mainly responsible for reproduction of the species. It is these same animals which do most damage to crops, and therefore they are the ones to be singled out for shooting by elephant control officers. The younger males then turn to breeding, and being most numerous, they turn to some of the cows which normally would not start breeding until they were older and more mature.

An even greater change has taken place amongst lions. In much earlier days the lion was regarded as a symbol of courage and nobility. In the animal world it was superior, fearing no other beast and roaming the plain virtually unchallenged.

Then the white hunter came, with his firearms, and lions were shot from a distance, and often from the safety of a tree. The lion could not get to grips with this new adversary, and often could not even see him.

As improvements were made to the rifling and precision of firearms, so the white man's superiority grew. The breech-loader gave the lion virtually no chance at all. The lesson on man's superiority was taught. Surviving lions passed on the seeds of learning to their young ones, indicating to them the needs for caution, and even for discrimination, the white man being more dangerous than the black man. Consequently the lion took on slinking habits and avoided the white man and his guns as much as possible.

Man-eating lions are a case apart, but here again a change has been brought about as a result of interference.

Man-eaters come into being for one of two reasons. Either they have, as a result of injury or old age, become unable to pursue their normal, fleet-footed prey or they have turned to human flesh because their natural prey is not available, usually as a consequence of extermination by the white man. This has been so in Tanganyika, where man-eating lions have been unusually prevalent. So great has been the havoc wrought by them that I have more than once come across native villages which have been entirely deserted for no other reason than that man-eaters were operating in the neighbourhood.

The history of Southern Africa is without any comparable man-eating episodes, but only because lions were exterminated before there had been a total extermination of their natural prey.

In the Kruger Park there is a kind of lion which differs greatly from the man-eaters of Tanganyika. In the sanctuary of the Park, lions no longer recognise man as an enemy. Indeed, they no longer recognise man at all, so long as he remains a part of the vehicle in which he travels, and is associated with its disagreeable smell, which to a lion can hardly smell like anything edible that is known to it.

Another change which I think is taking place in the Kruger Park and other sanctuaries concerns the giraffe.

In completely normal habitats, giraffes are alert animals. They need to be, because of their cumbersome build, which makes it difficult for them to rise quickly from a sitting or lying position. Rather than be caught at a disadvantage, they prefer to remain standing. I do not think a photograph has been taken of a giraffe sitting down, other than in one of the game sanctuaries. On the other hand, I have seen photographs of giraffes sitting nonchalantly in the Kruger Park.

The reason for this apparent change of behaviour may be that, although lions are very numerous in the Kruger Park, their normal prey is also numerous. There is no need for them to turn from easy prey such as impala, zebra and wildebeest, to the tall and powerful giraffe. So the giraffes of the Kruger Park may be developing a sense of security that could easily prove fatal to giraffes in wilder regions.

Baboons have felt the impact of civilisation in more ways than one. Restricted in their range, and cut off from many of their normal supplies of food, they have turned to marauding, and have developed a liking for cultivated crops of many sorts. It has been recorded that they have even taken to flesh-eating. If this is true, then they have overcome one of their greatest natural aversions.

Leopards, which might have continued to keep baboons in check, have been slaughtered unwisely in many parts of Africa. This has led to an overpopulation of baboons which has been harmful all round. One wrong leading to another.

Wherever man has interfered with nature he has brought about changes which he has not had the wisdom to foresee. For his own defence he has created a new class of animal, known as vermin.

Nature does not know of vermin or of royal game. It works in a more subtle manner, and more smoothly.

There is no need for false sentiment, but let us learn all we can from nature. With this in view, we should strive to retain every known species of wild life in Africa.

Only when we have found out all there is to know about this can we afford to lose them. I cannot think that there will ever be an end to the need for knowledge. Therefore wild life of Africa will be of potential value for all time.

3. HOW WILD IS AFRICA'S WILD LIFE?

Broadcast by The South African Broadcasting Corporation on Tuesday, 2nd November, 1954. 7.45-8.00pm

It has been said that there is no such thing as a wild, ferocious animal. The so-called wild animals, it is suggested, are reaching out for human friendship. It is only humans who are not conditioned to accept this friendship.

This may sound ridiculous at first, especially to those who have been brought up to believe unquestioningly that the indigenous animals of Africa are indeed wild. We have become so accustomed to hunters' tales and have been influenced by them, that we seldom if ever submit them to the power of reasoning.

The truth may be that we prefer to believe in the wildness of animals, and therefore in the heroism of men who face then in mortal combat. The peace-time world is starved of heroes, and the lion hunter, the elephant hunter, the gorilla hunter, and even those who hunt the placid white rhino and giraffe, and inoffensive antelopes, are raised to the status of adventurers in the minds of those who dream of adventure but never go actively in search of it.

For some strange reason, those who hero-worship the big game hunters have not moved with the times. They have not taken into account the fact that modern firearms have made the odds overwhelmingly in favour of the hunter, and have taken away a great deal of the skill that was once required. There is now no need for the hunter to stalk his prey until within close quarters, and therefore no longer a sporting chance for the hunted as in the days of non-precision firearms.

Pity for the underdog, which is a very pronounced characteristic amongst the more civilised nations, does not often extend to the beasts of the wilds. Whatever pity may be shown, is shown for the hunter, who already has everything in his favour.

I have often considered this strange inconsistency when roaming the remoter parts of Africa, living alone close to nature and to the beasts which are a part of the natural scene in Africa.

I recall the time in Uganda when I came upon a herd of elephant, which I could observe clearly, though the animals were unable to see me. They had detected my presence, and some of them held their trunks like periscopes, trying to locate me. I pitied them, knowing that the advantage of a surprise attack lies nearly always with their enemies.

On another occasion I stood so close to a solitary bull elephant in the Congo that I could have almost put out a hand and touched it. Yet it was altogether unaware of my presence. If I had been armed, and inclined to shoot it, I could have bagged it from a range of 4 feet or so.

I thought at the time, derisively, what bravery the act would have called for. It would have been sheer slaughter, but I would have had a fine pair of tusks for the walls of my study, and would have been acclaimed a big game hunter, and therefore a man of prowess and even a hero. Of such stuff are heroes made, I lost the opportunity, and went my way, leaving the unsuspecting elephant to go its own way in peace.

On one of the Virunga mountains I came within a very few yards of a troop of mountain gorilla. I was not hunting them, but I had longed for a chance to photograph them. What a hope I had! As soon as they heard my small party closing in upon them they went as fast as they could through the dense bamboo forest in the opposite direction.

So much for the ferocity of gorillas. There have been numerous tales of attacks by these reputedly fearsome beasts, but I think I am correct in saying that there is only one authentic instance of a gorilla attacking a human being, and in that instance there was extreme provocation.

Another encounter with a supposedly dangerous animal took place near the Murchison Falls, in Uganda, where I almost stumbled upon a lioness in a clearing surrounded by fairly open bush country. It was lying in the pathway, and I did not notice it until almost upon it. As always, I was totally unarmed. The beast rose to its feet, glared at me for a few seconds, and then loped leisurely away. Before it had gone many yards, it turned and surveyed me afresh. The odds, for once, were in favour of the animal. I felt a slight quickening of the pulse, but no real fear. The animal seemed to sense that I was unarmed. If it was capable of thought, then it must have been thinking, "If you don't hurt me, then I won't hurt you." It made no sudden move, and I stood my ground. After a few seconds of this cat and mouse act it made off into the fringing bush, leaving me to go my way, confirmed in my belief that the dangers of the wilds have been exaggerated a thousandfold.

As for buffalo, which rank high among the dangerous big game animals according to popular belief - well, they may be dangerous when wounded, but until then they are not to be feared. When left alone they are perhaps more placid than domesticated cattle. Goad a buffalo, and it will react in the same way as a bull that is tormented in an arena.

The same applies to every animal, whether wild or not. It will show annoyance, and it will attack if it has any means of attack. Hence the saying that even a worm will turn.

Once, in the Southern Sudan, I threw a clod of earth at a python, which was of the "tree trunk" variety - the biggest snake by far that I have ever seen. It was lying half obscured by the tall papyrus grasses, and it merely moved farther from view. I did not molest it any more.

In those days I nearly always walked and climbed barefoot, and twice in Southern Rhodesia I stopped in my stride with one foot poised directly above a snake. That it should have happened twice was remarkable. On each occasion the snake hissed a warning but made no attempt to strike. On the first occasion I was afraid,

and in my fear I killed the snake which was the cause of my fear. On the second occasion I spared the reptile, and I felt the better for having done so.

I have told of these personal encounters with beasts which are supposedly dangerous, not from any sense of bravado, but in an attempt to show that my conclusions are based upon actual experiences. I have been particularly vulnerable, too, because of my habit of going unarmed and practically unclothed.

I am one against many, but I am convinced that, with due regard for the inevitable exception, animals will react according to the attitude adopted by the human being. I have always gone as a friend amongst Africa's fauna, and to date I have come to no harm. On the contrary, I have gained an inestimable wealth of sheer delight. Furthermore, I have discovered a form of mastery that is worth more than the absolute mastery gained by killing.

I am of the firm belief that s lion, elephant, buffalo, or any other African beast that has been subjected to hunting, knows if a man is armed or not, and whether there is cause for fear or not. And it is my absolute belief that an animal will only attack because of fear - fear for itself or fear for its offspring. A big game animal carrying a festering wound, or with a bullet lodged in its body, will perhaps charge on sight. An animal will charge to protect its young. Or an animal, no matter how small or ill-equipped for attack, will become aggressive if it should be concerned, or feel itself to be concerned.

My only danger, which I willingly accepted and would accept again, was the danger of disturbing a beast which was susceptible to fear - a beast for instance, that had been wounded in a previous encounter with humans.

I have tried to deal similarly with primitive peoples. Again it is a case of believing that trust, tolerance and respect will meet in turn with trust, tolerance and respect.

In short, if one goes in search of trouble or danger, one is likely to find it. A big game hunter is a man in search of danger, and well prepared to meet it. He needs

to be a brave man if he hunts lion or elephant, but his calling does not necessarily give him heroic proportions.

It is true that the earliest hunters in Africa took their lives in their hands, but the circumstances changed very quickly as Africa and its wild life became known, and as the craft of the gunsmith improved.

Even so, it is worth remembering that some of the old-time hunters like Jan Viljoen, Petrus Jacobs and Henry Hartley each spent thirty or more years as active big game hunters. William Cotton Oswell lived to be more than eighty years of age. Gordon Cumming, Cornwallis Harris, W. C. Baldwin, Martinus Swartz and many others of their kind died natural deaths after taking part in numerous forays. Selous, after hunting for more than 16 years, was killed in the first world war. These early hunters had to do with extremely primitive, unreliable firearms, but not one of them was killed or incapacitated by a beast of the chase.

Armed with modern precision firearms, the present-day hunter is exposed to far less danger. And yet the big game hunter is still looked upon as one of the bravest of the brave, a kind of legendary hero who pits his life against that of the wild beasts. For some reason or other the legend has survived, and despite our usual sympathy for the underdog, the whole of our sympathy goes to the hunter and none to the hunted.

As a means of substantiating my own arguments, I shall tell of a conversation which took place between myself and a game warden in the eastern Congo. We were overlooking a wild tract of country teeming with big game. Natives live there also, unarmed save for their own primitive weapons.

The Warden laughed as he indicated the area with a sweep of his arm and declared that if the animals were as wild and dangerous as most people pretended, there would be no natives left in that part of Africa.

I agreed entirely with the warden, but I do not expect the majority of listeners to be shaken from the age-old belief that wildness and ferocity are inseparable from

the animal life of Africa, and that all form of big game hunting are closely associated with dangers and bravery.

For myself, I shall go on believing that, long before the white man came to Africa, the animal population held very little fear of the indigenous African. It was not until firearms were introduced to Africa that humans, and particularly the white races, became a symbol of fear to the animals. Then a change in behaviour was brought about, and animals, instead of standing their ground within sight and sound of humans, immediately fled from their presence.

To those who remain in doubt, I would put a few simple questions:

Why, if animals have always been dangerous, were there any indigenous tribes in Africa when the first white man arrived?

Why, if big game hunting is so dangerous, have so many animals been killed - untold millions - for the loss of so few European lives?

Why, if elephant and lion hunting are the most dangerous of all forms of hunting, have so many men been able to bag more than one hundred of these species without suffering any injury to themselves? Petrus Jacobs alone is credited with a personal bag of more than 500 bull elephants and well over one hundred lions. He hunted long ago, before the days of precision firearms, and what is more, he lived far beyond the normal span of three score years and ten. The odds between Petrus Jacobs and the bull elephants were more than 500 to one in favour of the hunter. I have no doubt that, if we could know the total number of elephants shot by the white hunters, and the number of deaths amongst those hunters which have been directly attributable to elephants, the odds would work out at more than a quarter of a million to one. This, of course, is pure guesswork, but it is quite certain that the odds are fantastically high.

And now, in closing, let me hasten to add that there is no greater admirer of the true naturalist-sportsman than myself. What I object to is the attachment of false values to big game hunting, the encouraging of a misconception concerning the

animals which are hunted. Perhaps it is wrong, as I have tried to point out, to think of Africa's fauna as essentially wild.

If it is true that animals of the savannahs and forests are reaching out for human friendship, then we should think at once of making acquaintance with Africa's not-so-wild life. We can do so by going amongst it unarmed.

4. THE GAME SANCTUARIES OF AFRICA

Broadcast by The South African Broadcasting Corporation on Tuesday, 9th November, 1954. 7.45-8.00pm

The idea of a system of National Parks originated in America in 1870, when the Washburn Expedition was sent out to verify reports on the natural wonders of a region in north-western Wyoming.

In camp after exploring the Canyon of the Yellowstone River, conversation turned to the problem of what should be done to preserve the area, with its falls, hot springs and other attractions. One of the party, Cornelius Hedges, suggested that the entire area should be set aside for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

This was only the germ of an idea, and it took two years of unceasing dogged action before the Yellowstone National Park became a reality.

American national parks, it should be explained, are mainly scenic. They have little to show in the way of animal life. Their primary attractions are mountains, lakes, canyons, geysers and similar natural formation. America was only just in time to save the bison from extinction, and there is nowhere a wild fauna which compares at all favourable with that of Africa, either in variety or abundance.

In the case of Africa, where preservation is mainly concerned with wild life, progress was very slow. There was so much big game on the open veld that, to early travellers, it must have seemed inexhaustible. It was not, however, and two species – the bloubok and quagga – were exterminated with surprizing suddenness in the Cape Province.

A few farmers, aware of the threat of further irretrievable losses amongst the indigenous fauna, took what steps they could to preserve game animal on their farms. A start was made, based entirely upon individual enterprise, at about the time when America's first national park was created – that is, in 1872. A

significant move was made in 1880, when a veteran sportsman, Mr. C Bramley, inaugurated a Game Preservation Society in Swellendam.

By 1890, a number of private game reserves were well established. President Paul Kruger visited some of these, and was impressed by them. No doubt these individual efforts served to strengthen his own views, which were far-sighted, and ahead of those of most of his contemporaries. The idea of a game reserve for the benefit of the nation grew in his mind, and he struck tenaciously to his principles. His thoughts in this respect were centered in an area of bushveld in the north-eastern Transvaal – near the Sabi River.

This area had not been exploited because it seemed useless, and it was commonly believed that no man could live there in the rainy season. It was the last retreat of any size for the big game animals of the Transvaal. But it, in turn, became overrun by hunters, and it is recorded that, in the late years of the nineteenth century, these men were putting the final touches to the total extermination.

Then gold was found in the Selati region, and in 1892 work was started on a branch railway line that was intended to link the gold mines with the main line at Komatipoort. As a result, it appeared likely that this last real game area in South Africa would lose its wild fauna.

Some of the hunting fraternity, however, were the first to favour a policy of protection, and in 1884 a Parliamentary lead was given by the President at a meeting of the Volksraad. Nothing came of this, but five years later, upon instructions from the President, the matter was again brought before the Volksraad. On this occasion, two areas were defined, one with the Pongola River as its principal feature, and the other in the Shingwedzi area. A resolution was passed, but nothing resulted from this.

The first positive step was taken on September 6, 1889, when a proposal was submitted in which the old Sabi Game Reserve was defined. A debate took place on September 17, and a motion was agreed to with enthusiasm by the Volksraad.

But the shadow of war was growing, and it was not until March 26, 1898, that the Sabi Game reserve was proclaimed.

This reserve was to provide the nucleus of the present Kruger National Park.

War broke out shortly afterwards, before any action could be taken to implement the proclamation. Actual warfare did not encroach to any serious extent within the boundaries of the new reserve, though slight guerrilla action took place, and there was considerable trekking between Komatipoort and Lydenburg. Another indirect repercussion of war was the stationing of the irregular corps known as Steinecker's Horse at Sabi Bridge and other points.

The Sabi reserve, though threatened from the very start, managed to survive, and in 1903 the area between the Letaba and Pafuri Rivers was a proclaimed reserve. This was known as the Shingwedzi Reserve. Then, in 1904, the area between the Sabi and Olifants Rivers was added to link the two reserves.

The task of restoration was placed in the capable hands of Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton was chosen as the first Warden. The choice was a fortunate one, and the name of Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton will always be associated with the efforts made in South Africa as a whole, to establish game reserves on a worthwhile basis.

The early fortunes of the combined Sabi and Shingwedzi reserves were watched over by two diverse elements – those who were impatient for the area to be opened to hunting as soon as the depleted stocks of game had been built up, and those who looked to the example of the American National Parks scheme in the hope that South Africa might follow with a national park of her own.

The early years were lean ones, and particularly in 1922 the Sabi Reserve was at a low ebb. Any less redoubtable man than the Reserve's first Warden could never have coped with the situation. There cannot be too much praise given to him for seeing the Union's first real game reserve through its formative years, and for

much of the spade-work which led to its eventual establishment as a national park on September 15, 1926.

In America, it was an expedition, and quiet fireside talks, which led to the start of a national parks system. In the case of South Africa which took the lead in creating a system of national parks in Africa, it can be said that individual effort, on the part of farmers and sportsmen, was co-ordinated in President Paul Kruger. Fittingly, South Africa's first national park was named the Kruger National Park.

Now let us take a more general look at the system of national parks and game reserves that has grown in Africa from such slender beginnings.

According to my tally - and I think I have information which is not available to others – there is today a total of 56 national parks in Africa. Of these, 31 are national parks or strict nature reserves intended primarily for the protection of a wide variety of wild fauna. The remaining 25 are forest or zoological national parks, mountain national parks, historic sites, or scenic national parks. There are also 116 sanctuaries which qualify as game reserves.

Thus we have in Africa at the present time a total of 172 national parks and game reserves.

A question I have often been asked is, which is the largest game sanctuary in Africa?

The largest, by far, is Game Reserve No. 2, in South West Africa. It has an area of roughly 25,000 square miles, and it situated in the Kaokoveld.

The second largest is the Selous Game Reserve, in Tanganyika Territory, with an area of 11,512 square miles.

Next comes the Marsabit National Reserve, kenya Colony. It has an area of roughly 11,000 square miles.

If the question is asked, which is the largest **National Park** in Africa? Most people are inclined to think of the Kruger National Park. It is not widely known that two national parks have a considerably greater area.

The Kafue National Park of Zambia, comes first, with an area of 8,650 square miles. Second largest is the Southern National Park of the Sudan, which has an area of 7,800 square miles. The Kruger National Park comes third on the list of largest national parks with an area of nearly 7,340 square miles.

Now that I have introduced a few statistics, I may as well go on and give the order in which the first five African territories made a start with a national parks programme.

South Africa, as have already said, was the originator of national parks in Africa with the Kruger National Park, which was inaugurated on September 15, 1926.

The Belgian Congo came second, with the Albert National Park, which was officially proclaimed on July 9, 1929.

French Equatorial Africa followed with three national parks in April, 1935. These were Bamingi-Bangoran, Saint-Floris, and Odzala.

Then came the Sudan, with the Dinder National Park, and Southern National Park, and Southern National Park, declared in 1939.

Fifth on the scene with a national parks programme was Tanganyika (now Tanzania), when the Serengeti was declared a national park in 1940.

Of the 37 territories in Africa, 15 have at least one national park. The territory with the greatest total area given over to game sanctuaries is, I would say, Tanzania. Its one national park and 8 game reserves cover an area of approximately 30,000 square miles.

The territory with the greatest variety in its wild fauna is the Sudan, and this territory, because of its low density of population, its climate, and other factors, is best equipped to retain a representative selection of its large fauna.

There are many other interesting aspects concerning Africa's wild life and its preservation in a system of game sanctuaries. Most intriguing to contemplate is the possibility in years to come of using Africa's national parks as "stepping stones" in a south-to-north tour over a course of years. We could gain familiarity with Africa and its fascinating wild life by going, say, from the Kruger National Park of South Africa to the Wankie National Park of Rhodesia, and then the Kafue National Park (Northern Rhodesia), Serengeti National Park (Tanzania), Albert National Park (Belgian Congo), Tsavo National Park (Kenya), Murchison Falls National Park (Uganda), and the Dinder National Park (Sudan).

Later it will be possible to include some of the lesser-known national parks of Equatorial and West Africa as these become more easily accessible.

The prospects are immense, but at present the general public knows far too little about the national parks and game reserves of Africa as a whole, and preservationists are fighting a losing battle. In my opinion, the only chance of saving a worthwhile selection of Africa's varied wild fauna lies in the awakening of public interest.

As people come to know more about the national parks and game reserves of Africa, and the animals which find sanctuary in them, so there will be a strengthening of the desire to save rather than destroy.