Zambezia (1979), VII (i).

ESSAY REVIEW

IS OUR WILDLIFE LITERATURE COMING OF AGE?

WILDLIFE IS AN all-embracing term to many people, yet to others it conjures up a very special image. Can we accept it as a subject which is all things to all men? It has been said that wildlife management, of all natural history disciplines, is the most subject to opinion by the layman. Nearly everyone thinks he knows a lot about it. In America there are hunter groups who pass influential resolutions which inhibit freedom of action by wildlife professionals. Many game departments are afraid to make management decisions which have been shown to be biological necessities for fear of publicity and criticism. In many countries there is direct control of departmental purse-strings by the public, and public relations becomes an exercise in survival.

Yet even in other places without such direct control, the public always has a finger in the pie. Everyone seems to hold opinions, even without having first-hand experience, and in almost every walk of life there are people who feel their experience gives them a right to enter the arena. A farmer can always claim intimate knowledge of the ways of nature and he frequently suffers some indignity at the hands of wayward wildlife. Bears or lions eat his livestock, deer or quelea invade his crops, and even little beaver or mighty elephant work to destroy his water supply. Hunters and fishermen form a vast army that periodically invades the wild countryside or peaceful waterways. Their experiences range from concentrated slaughter of specific creatures to countless hours of patient waiting and contemplating their environment. Others who stalk wildlife go armed only with binoculars and camera and often express great abhorrence of killing, even when it is a natural event. Meanwhile some of their bedfellows, jaded by the excitement of television, are disappointed in any visit to a game park where they are not witness to the dying struggles of the buffalo, his throat gripped in the jaws of a black-maned lion.

Even the townsman is a wildlife expert. Schoolchildren, raised on the glory and farce of Disney nature films, are quick to post their views alongside those of the collector of butterflies and the breeder of tropical fish. Everyone who contacts living things seems to establish some bond of emotion that influences his thoughts on wildlife. The vast majority of people have pets of some kind, usually personable family members which are much loved. The dog has surely reached the pinnacle of human - animal relationship by pervading the cultures of men throughout the world. Working relationships with hunters and herdsmen have strengthened the bond far beyond the reaches of the family or city and brought the dog to be the most universal symbol of love and faithfulness between man and animals.

Strange, in view of this, that it is so difficult for man to accept that the wolf could be endowed with these same psychic qualities. This animal, so closely related that it interbreeds with dogs, is burdened with traditional hostility, superstition and fear that has caused its widespread extinction. So preconditioned has man been that he has been unable to see these natural relationships and only recently has the wolf been presented in the literature

as the highly social, co-operative and fascinating creature he really is.[1] It is not surprising that man has traditionally shrouded the beasts, particularly fierce ones, in myth and legend, in almost all societies. But scientific and living observation of animals has been with us now for hundreds of years. Even in the most civilized and advanced parts of the world the truth has been long in its revelation, and still has a long way to go before it lifts the shrouds of pre-conceived ideas and feelings.

Perhaps we have not really wanted to know. Perhaps the demand of the public for books which touch on the familiar, which play with the instinctive fears and loves of wilderness and life have influenced authors and limited the scope of what has been published. Early wildlife books were mainly impressions of pleasant countryside, as exemplified by Walton,[2] and later Thoreau[3] on the other side of the Atlantic. There were, of course, more specialized books on the arts of hunting or falconry but they rarely said much of the natural life of the animal Much of the remaining early wildlife literature is anthropomorphic or artistic. Sometimes the latter works were blended with the study of the species present in an area to produce illustrated guidebooks. Audubon,[4] for example, shows the early glimmerings of scientific study of birds and concern for their conversation which was to take nearly another century to mature.

Against this background is placed the evolution of conservation, wildlife management, and ecology as legitimate fields of study. These are recent developments, starting from scattered threads less than a century ago. Their more scientific and unbiased influence seems to have only crept into the general wildlife literature within the last twenty years and as yet their influence on the African literature is minimal.

The early steps in wildlife management were almost invariably the protection of certain species from hunting or poaching, whether the locality was Europe, America or Africa. The best reserves in Asia and Europe today arose from a much earlier trend: the privileges of royalty The private hunting estates of kings and rajahs in India and Nepal, for example, provided refuges for tiger and Indian rhino until their declaration as game reserves in the international sense within the last twenty years.

In America, and South Africa for that matter, laws restricting hunting, setting limits on kill, and establishing public reserves were all on the books by the turn of the century. The National Park concept was born and the first preservation of whole wild environments, not merely incidental to the preservation of certain wildlife, was begun. To the south of us, the Kruger National Park set an early example to the whole continent in the face of strong traditional use of wildlife for sport hunting and commercial sale.

More elaborate management, for protection of declining species as well as for developing a hunting resource, was soon being practised in America and slowly spreading elsewhere. The reduction of any deaths not desired by the manager was a primary object. In the wild situation, not only was hunting prohibited and poachers pursued, but any natural predator was persecuted

[1] L. Crisler, *Arctic Wild* (New York, Harper, 1958); D. Mech, *The Wolf : Ecology and Behaviour of an Endangered Species* (New York, Natural History Press, 1970).
[2] I. Walton, *The Compleat Angler* (London, R. Marriott, 1653 and numerous reprints).
[3] H. D. Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (Boston, Ticknor & Fields, 1854).
[4] J. J. Audubon, *Birds of America* (London, privately, 4 vols, 1827-38).

sometimes to extinction. Food was sometimes provided, but it was mainly a later development along with other practices of improving the habitat for the managed species. These more ecological aspects first occur in the text by Aldo Leopold[5] who first put wildlife management on a scientific basis and suggested that predators did not necessarily do harm, especially if their prey had adequate cover. It took another thirty years for these ideas to become generally accepted and evolved into modern ecological notions of a balanced ecosystem and protection or management for the optimum habitat for a wildlife species, as opposed to managing that species itself.

This slow percolation of modern management ideas into wild places like Rhodesia was partly complicated by the lack of literature suggesting this approach and partly by the political power of the pioneer farmer. One important influence on African wildlife management had its origins in the rinderpest epidemics just before the turn of the century which wiped out vast amounts of both domestic livestock and wildlife. On the one hand, it made wildlife relatively scarce and encouraged the development of the protective phase of game conservation. On the other hand it emphasized the relationship of domestic and wild animals with respect to diseases. For the next seventy years there was a major force in Africa dedicated to wiping out the chance of disease spreading to domestic animals from wildlife. The easiest and most persistent of methods used was to wipe out the wildlife in an area which would then result in the dying out of insect transmitters of disease such as tsetse fly.

Obviously the hunter and the lover of wildlife were both bound to feel opposed to this. Their rarely-combined thrust resulted in the designation of certain areas for game and others for agriculture, often with a fence and game-free area in between. It was this situation that put Rhodesia's first game reserve on the map fifty years ago, an event that is followed through in one of the books under review here.[6] In many ways this book illustrates the evolution of thinking about wildlife and thus it forms a major prop for this essay. Ted Davison himself was a tsetse fly ranger before becoming the first Warden of Wankie Game Reserve. His book, though to a large extent a chronicle of the establishment of the Park and its early management problems, provides a clear picture of the change in attitude he made. Although he loved the bush and being with big game, there is obvious reluctance to join in the wholesale killing that the tsetse people desired. Yet where killing was necessary he accomplishes it with professional efficiency, having exhausted the options of driving the animals or capturing them by the methods of the period.

Throughout the early chapters we see the dominant themes of early wildlife management which persisted relatively late in Africa: the protection of animals from poaching and the slaughter of predators for daring to reduce the stocks of herbivorous game. Very soon these themes are joined by the dominant theme of Wankie, the provision of water supplies: a process of dambuilding, borehole drilling and pumping that continued for forty years.

Just as in the history of wildlife management itself, more and more we see that Davison is using his time with the game to objectively gather information. In the book we find whole sections of measurements and other factual

[5]A. Leopold, *Game Management* (New York, Scribners, 1932).

[6]T. Davison, **Wankie : The Story of a Great Game Reserve** (Salisbury, Regal, 1977), 211 pp., Rh$4,50.

data on animals he observed, despite his lack of research training. In from the sidelines come the tourists and the scientists, the roads and facilities, and the complexities of modern management. The evolution and modernization of approach is clearly given, though it lies unobtrusively within the unembellished prose. This book is more than one man's story, or even one game reserve's story. It is the background for the coming of age of that most universal of scientific fields, wildlife management.

A remarkably similar pattern is unfolded in the picture Viv Wilson gives of his early years[7] despite the fact that he had not even been born when Davison began work in Wankie. Early years in the Zambian Tsetse Department resulted in love of the wild bush and a revulsion, not really against the killing itself, but against the loss of information on unknown species and against drastic management based on so little understanding. Before long he was raising orphaned animals and becoming a self-made researcher, lines that were to guide his later life.

Thus he transfers to the Rhodesian Game Department and further developes his love of the bush and then later he joins the National Museum and furthers his scientific interests in wild mammals. Meanwhile he is still looking after orphaned animals, a vocation that he eventually undertakes full-time in the development of the Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage. The stories read well and the well illustrated hardbound book proved so popular that it has now been reprinted. Rayner has also written a small paperbound book[8] on Chipangali which contrasts in its small print and few illustrations. Nevertheless it is a charming narration of the main characters of the orphanage, and it will appeal to the many people who identify with the animal pet side of literature on wildlife.

What might be called a classical wildlife pet story is told by Wilson MacArthur[9] who raises a duiker. Many people must have tried to raise baby duikers, as they are such a widespread antelope and often the main species remaining on farmlands. Thus many readers will identify with the narrative in this well-written little book whose only fault is its excessively small print.

A much less typical pet is Cousin, and Alan Weaving's story[10] has a different flavour. It is the story of a photographer and bird watcher who finds himself unable to countenance the killing of a young Augur Buzzard by its nest-mate and takes it home. The natural behaviour of the species and the efforts of the Weaving family to raise the chick and return it to the wild are the two main themes.

The lengths that the Weavings went to in returning their buzzard to the wild pale into insignificance next to the extraordinary tale of returning Tommy the lion to wild Africa from life as a home pet in Germany.[11] The long journey of the Forster family with their unusual pet through wars of officialdom and real guerillas to eventually reach Rhodesia is entertainingly written by Peter Stiff. This true story with its evidence of the modern political chaos of Africa is packed with real people, places and adventure.

[7]V. J. Wilson, **Orphans of the Wild : The Story behind Chipangali** (Bulawayo, Books of Rhodesia, 1977), 254 pp., Rh$1,57.

[8]R. Rayner, **Who Cares? Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage** (Salisbury, Regal, 1977), 88 pp., Rh$2,40.

[9]W. MacArthur, **We Knew a Duiker** (Salisbury, Regal, 1977), 52 pp., Rh$2,25.

[10]A. Weaving, **A Bird Called Cousin** (Salisbury, Regal, 1977), 72 pp., Rh$2,25.

[11]P. Stiff, **Tommy Goes Home** (Salisbury, Jacaranda Press, 1977), 230pp., Rh$7,98.

For a modern adventure with wildlife in Africa one must surely turn to the live capture of dangerous animals. To stalk close enough to fire a tranquilizing dart and then to wait for more than five minutes with the angry beast before the drug takes effect is clearly a more heroic act than to kill it with a modern firearm. Such is the tale of a black rhinoceros told by Bryan O'Donoghue.[12] This adventure story also involves real people and events in Rhodesia, but is thickly embellished with popular dialogue and mishaps surrounding a boy hero which will certainly appeal to the younger reader.

Also purporting to be true stories, but at times seeming rather hard to believe, are the short stories of bushlore collected under the title of *Zambezi Trails*.[13] They contain numerous nuggets of wildlife information and hunters' skills, and a good deal of nostalgia for the safari man in the wilderness of Rhodesia's earlier years. Most, however, are too brief and choppy to provide good images, written as they were as a series of newspaper articles.

Another hunter's tale, this time fully blown into a smoothly readable piece of fiction set in the Zambezi wilderness, is *The Old Man's Lion*.[14] Anyone who has pioneered in the bush, farmed in game country or had to deal with stock-raiding animals will identify with this story.

Stock-raiding animals, the control of predators, the elimination of disease-bearing game, the ranching of game, the pursuit of poachers and the pure joy of observing a great population of free wildlife all pervade the complex little book by Alan Wright.[15] All short little stories, this collection sweeps the whole field from historical game elimination, to control and protection and eventually to modern management and use. This is accomplished through eyes sometimes in conflict with nature, sometimes scientific, sometimes emotional and loving, and yet sometimes administrative and political. This rather mixed up collection puts in a nutshell much of the evolution of thinking and complexity of approach to the world of wildlife.

So we have come full circle and verified in part that this subject can almost be all things to all men. Yet there *is* this great picture of evolving attitudes and values both in the scientific and in the emotional approach. The great blending of these two things that can be seen in a few books, starting in Africa perhaps with Eugene Marais,[16] is still not fully matured in this country, although the trend is visible in the wildlife literature as a whole.

The ecological and aesthetic pioneering in the American literature has invaded Africa in recent years, and the wildlife scientists are producing eminently readable material about the real life of beasts like elephant[17] or the widely despised wild dog.[18] Even the whole Serengeti ecosystem has been beautifully given to the public.[19] Yet neither this ecological-scientific aspect

[12]B. O'Donoghue, **Black Rhino Rescue** (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1976), 115 pp., Rh$4,50.

[13]U. G. de Woronin, **Zambezi Trails** (Salisbury, Regal, 1977), 96 pp., Rh$1,95.

[14]A. S. Coetsee, **The Old Man's Lion** (Salisbury, Mimosa Publishers, 1976), 120 pp., Rh$1,50.

[15]A. Wright, **Grey Ghosts at Buffalo Bend** (Salisbury, Galaxie Press, 1976), 136 pp., Rh$13,90.

[16]E. Marais, *My Friends the Baboons* (London, Methuen, 1939).

[17]I. and O. Douglas-Hamilton, *Among the Elephants* (London, Collins, 1975).

[18]J. van Lawick-Goodall, *Innocent Killers* (London, Collins, 1970).

[19]G. Schaller, *Golden Shadows, Flying Hooves* (London, Collins, 1974).

nor the aesthetic-philosophical aspect of the wildlife literature has really reached any heights in this country yet. Admittedly there is something of the ecological-scientific approach in the Wankie handbook by Child and Reese,[20] but the different parts of the book do not form a literary unity. Instead they fill the genuine need for more complete understanding by the visitor to our great wildlife reserves. Their book also joins the already excellent collection of identification books available to the nature lover, as it contains a major sectoin of the mammmals of the Park. The identification drawings are in pen and ink, unlike the lavish colour photos in the earlier bird manual for the Park by Peter Steyn.[21]

Also lavishly illustrated, but this time with both black and white and colour photos, and line drawings as well, is the substantial guide to insects of Rhodesia by Alan Weaving.[22] Since insects form over half of all living animal species, a book about them must be at once intimidating and yet incomplete. This book remains remarkably readable and useful, while covering most of the orders and families of this huge group.

Another valuable contribution to the Rhodesian literature by the wildlife scientists, but this time with a great deal of help from the practical managers, is the booklet edited by Pat Macartney.[23] It covers the spectrum of desirable wildlife from fish through gamebirds and waterfowl to the large antelope, and specifies the techniques for encouraging, capturing, breeding and feeding these animals. The final chapter is a brief analysis of the economics of game farming in Rhodesia. Thus we see a further broadening of the wildlife literature on the practical management side, partially compensating for the lack of depth in the two areas mentioned earlier.

So in concluding our final examination of the question, 'Is our wildlife literature coming of age?', we find that there are certain important aspects which are still immature, but there is no doubt we have progressed along the path. It is now up to a new generation of writers to add those important pieces which, like the science of wildlife itself, have reached new horizons in recent years. Perhaps it is inevitable that the science should remain ahead of the public, and by the time the public demand its present offerings there will have been further evolution. Who is prepared to look in the crystal ball and begin writing a book that will not only broaden our outlook on wildlife, but which will appeal to the all-important new audience of a new kind of Rhodesia?

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[20] G. Child and B. Reese, **Wankie National Park** (Salisbury, Department of National Parks, 1977), 88 pp. Rh$3,00.

[21] P. Steyn, **Wankie Birds** (Salisbury, Longman Rhodesia, 1974), 57 pp., Rh$2,50.

[22] A. Weaving, **Insects : A Review of Insect Life in Rhodesia** (Salisbury, Regal, 1977), 179 pp., Rh$11,25.

[23] P. Macartney (ed.), **Wildlife on Your Farm** (Salisbury, Longman Rhodesia for Rhodesia Game Association, 1975), 60 pp., Rh$1,40.