

15W-34371
FN-AAP-875/62

What Africans Think About African Wildlife

*When children
cry out from
hunger in some
of the poorest
places on earth,
do animals
matter?*



Leonard Lee Fua III

BY DAVID ABRAHAMSON

AFRICAN wildlife is in dire trouble. An estimated 10 million large mammals remain on the continent's great savannas and in its broad river valleys. But human populations, which have almost doubled since the early 1960s, are likely to double again to almost 850 million by the turn of the century. Already Africa contains 21 of the world's 45 poorest nations, and by the year 2000, Africans are expected to be able to provide just 65 percent of their own food. Pressed to feed themselves, these impoverished people are pushing wild creatures and wild land to the limit. For both animals and people, it is a desperate struggle for survival.

Against this grim backdrop, ways to stave off declines of wildlife, including large-scale commercial cropping of some wild animals for food to justify saving the rest, have been debated and tried. Most of these solutions have come from Europeans, but the policy of "Africanization," the replacement of former colonialists with African officials, has been a fact of life for a decade. As most expatriate whites with long experience in Africa now concede, Africa's problems, like its animals, are uniquely African, and any solutions must be African as well. The question, then, is how far Africans themselves are willing, or able, to go if the choice becomes free-roaming wildlife or farm-

land to grow food so that fewer African babies will starve. It is a new elite of native-born and often African-educated officials and bureaucrats who must decide. Their perspectives will largely determine the fate of the wildlife.

Nowhere are the issues as clearly crystallized as in Tanzania, and no country better represents the dilemma facing Africa: For three weeks earlier this year, I traveled through that East African nation on assignment for *International Wildlife* to interview park wardens, government officials and people from every walk of life to discover how Tanzanians themselves would solve their wildlife problems. What I found was a wide—and healthy—range of responses not unlike those held by outsiders. These positions were frequently accompanied by a professed will to save wildlife—but they were tempered by the realism of people who live with terrible poverty. "The African point of view is the missing link," says Tina Boshe, an instructor at Mweka, the College of African Wildlife Management. "Europeans speak of conserving wildlife for posterity. To an African, what is posterity? What is the future when you have nothing but an empty stomach?"

Tanzania is situated south of Kenya and north of Mozambique on Africa's eastern coast. It is the country which

has placed the largest wager on conservation and it is the country with the most to lose. Perhaps a quarter of Africa's large mammals are found within Tanzania's borders, particularly in the 300 miles stretching from Lake Victoria, the continent's largest lake, to Mt. Kilimanjaro, at 19,340 feet Africa's highest peak. Included in this area are the legendary Serengeti Plain, Ngorongoro Crater, Olduvai Gorge and the Great Rift escarpment beside Lake Manyara. The total mammal population of Serengeti alone exceeds four million, including 30 species of hoofed animals and 15 major species of predators.

Since 1961, the first year of Tanzania's independence, President Julius Nyerere has emphasized conservation. "The survival of wildlife," he proclaimed in a document known as the Arusha Manifesto, "is a matter of grave concern to all of us in Africa. These wild creatures amid the wild places they inhabit are not only important as a source of wonder and inspiration, but are an integral part of our natural resources and of our future livelihood and well-being. In accepting the trusteeship of our wildlife, we solemnly declare that we will do everything in our power to make sure that our children's grandchildren will be able to enjoy this rich and precious inheritance."

These commendable words were soon followed by commensurate deeds. Before independence, Tanzania had only one national park. Since then ten more have been established along with 18 game reserves and 49 game-controlled areas—all in all, almost 30 percent of the nation's land area. At 364,000 square miles, Tanzania is roughly the size of California, Nevada and Arizona combined. In this analogy, an area equal to the size of Arizona has been set aside for wildlife conservation; Serengeti National Park, in fact, is about the size of the state of Connecticut. Moreover, Tanzania spends approximately four percent of its annual budget on conservation. On a per capita basis, Tanzanian conservation funding is eight times that of the United States.

BUT NOBLE efforts of the past may not prove enough to secure the future. The Tanzanian economy is a shambles, shrinking at a rate of almost four percent a year. Inflation ap-

proaches 40 percent, and the government's balance-of-payments deficit is almost \$700 million. Costly imported oil took its toll on the economy in the mid-1970s. A bankrupting 1979 war against Uganda's Idi Amin followed in 1979. Many Tanzanians have retreated to a barter economy, trading on what is officially described as the "parallel" (read: black) market. The special cost of such economic turmoil, figured in terms of petty thievery, loss of trust and emerging selfishness is a shattering fact of daily life.

Foreign aid totaling \$2.2 billion in the last five years—almost \$400 million each from West Germany and Sweden, \$125 million from the U.S.—seems to have had little effect. Large foreign aid totals are deceptive in any case. More than two-thirds of all assistance funds are usually spent in the donor country. And rather than seeking out viable development projects, many foreign officials have a tendency to want to build, in the words of Great Britain's aid chief in Tanzania, "our own monuments."

The condition of Tanzania's agriculture has more immediate implications for the nation's wildlife areas. Declining agricultural productivity, especially since the resettlement in 1975 of half the country's citizens into collective villages, assures recurrent food shortages and occasional famines. Almost 90 percent of the population is engaged in hand-tool subsistence agriculture on less than 20 percent of the land. Moreover, the arable areas—concentrated around Lake Victoria, across the northern tier toward Mt. Kilimanjaro and along the Indian Ocean coast—include some of the nation's most spectacular national parks and game reserves.

For the moment, demand for more farm and pasture land is being held in check, but it may not last. "There is enormous pressure from people for more land," says Solomon ole Saibull, 47, the conservator of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, "and the pressure is genuine." His colleague, Fred Lwezaula, 43, director of the Wildlife Division, offers an explanation for the rising pressures: "In my opinion, the demand for land is artificial. In the west and south of our country, there are few people but good land with more rainfall than in the north. But Tanzanians are not like Americans. They don't want to move.

They want to sit by the graves of their ancestors."

In the long run, says Saibull, the greatest threat to East African wildlife will be a man with a hoe, not a man with a gun. For this reason, he warns, "If we want to save our wildlife, agricultural productivity is the only answer. Their future will ultimately be decided by the effectiveness of the Ministry of Agriculture, not the Ministry of Natural Resources."

TO FORESTALL the pressure, there is a growing consensus that local people now living near the parks and reserves must be made aware of the value of conservation. In the judgment of the current stewards of Tanzania's natural heritage, that is not now the case. "The average Tanzanian cannot relate to wildlife," says Gervace Moshia, 38, the acting principal of Mweka college, the alma mater of most wildlife officials in East Africa. Juma Kayera, 36, Lwezaula's deputy at the Wildlife Division, agrees: "Most of the values we emphasize with wildlife are not understood by the local people."

"The problem is historical," explains Hermann Mwageni, 34, a Mweka instructor. "The conservation areas were originally set up by the colonial powers. The common man could see little benefit in conservation, certainly no economic interest."

David Babu, 41, remembers the origins of the national park system of which he is now chief warden: "The local people were suddenly banned from the parks. And the parks were established with strong laws—at great cost, which we are paying today." The results are evident in the findings of a recent survey funded by the African Wildlife Foundation; the study found that more than 85 percent of Tanzanian school children think there is too much land in parks and reserves and that these areas exist principally for the benefit of foreign tourists.

Tourism is one of the underpinning economic justifications for Tanzania's conservation efforts. It earns substantial foreign exchange. But it is a subject fraught with ambiguities. An occasional byproduct of tourist culture is summed up in the Swahili word *kasumba*—the colonial tradition of submission and servility that most Third

World countries are trying hard to overcome.

Approximately 90,000 foreigners visited Tanzania last year, half of them on vacation. Of this number, an estimated 9,000 came to see the fabled game parks of Tanzania's "Northern Circuit." Of these visitors, 2,700 were American tourists, typically clients of large U.S. safari operators such as Overseas Adventure Travel, a Boston firm with perhaps a quarter of Tanzania's game-viewing U.S. business. "Little old American ladies," says Soter Mushi, 41, Tanzania's director of tourism, "are the best customers we have."

The foreign exchange earnings represented by these wildlife-watching visitors totaled \$2 million, including \$600,000 in park revenues. Moreover, the Tanzania Wildlife Corporation, the quasi-governmental agency which oversees all sport hunting, earned another \$1 million in safari and license fees. What must be remembered, however, is that little if any of this \$3 million in revenue generated by the presence of Tanzania's wildlife ever directly benefits the local people who live near the parks and reserves. In the absence of any direct benefits, allegiance to the concept of conservation has been rare.

GIVEN THIS variety and complexity of difficulties confronting Tanzanian wildlife, it is not surprising that the country's wildlife officials hold a diversity of points of view on the important issues. In the main, their individual attitudes reflect, as in the case of their counterparts in more developed countries, the goals of the institutions which they serve.

In Tanzania, six agencies, which report directly or indirectly to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, have an explicit stake in the future of the country's large mammals: Tanzania National Parks (Tanapa), the Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority, the Division of Tourism, Mweka (the College of African Wildlife Management), the Division of Wildlife and the Tanzania Wildlife Corporation (Tawico).

The first two, Tanapa and the Ngorongoro Authority, are, like the U.S. National Park Service, decidedly "preservationist" in outlook. Their repre-

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*Tina Boshe, instructor,
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sentatives are clearly embattled. "The parks should not be an economic factor," says Tanapa's David Babu. "But how do you convince the politicians of the needs of wildlife? They'll look at you as a crazy man." Ngorongoro's Solomon ole Saibull adds: "My opponents like to say that I love animals more than people."

Tourism officials typically side with the preservationists, for the parks and reserves are recognized as one of Tanzania's principal tourist attractions.

Representatives of Mweka and the Wildlife Division, like many U.S. academics and the U.S. Forest Service, generally talk in terms of "multiple use," tending to give more weight to "utilizationist" arguments. "It's not fair to tax people to protect animals, which have no direct benefit to them," says Mweka's Hermann Mwageni.

Tawico, the wildlife corporation, anchors the camp of "utilizationists." Its spokesmen propose making wildlife pay for itself. In addition to overseeing the licensed sport hunting of more than 1,500 game animals a year, by which Tawico earns an average of \$13,000 per hunting client, it is authorized to conduct its own "control safaris"—hunts of game for meat, skins and live sales to zoos—which earn almost \$1.5 million a year. At present, Tawico crops approximately 2,000 zebras a year, each worth \$450 per hide and \$150 in meat. "I have a standing order from Saudi Arabia for 300 Grant's gazelles," says Muhidin Ndolanga, 42, Tawico's managing di-

rector. "Every rich man in the Middle East wants to establish his own zoo. But I suspect some of those gazelles are for the dinner table."

No issue more clearly defines the range of opinion held by wildlife officials than the subject of "cropping"—the commercial harvesting of wildlife for profit. Most recently, ecologist Norman Myers, who had lived in Kenya for 20 years, put forth a controversial proposal in the pages of *International Wildlife* ("A Farewell to Africa" in the November-December 1981 issue). "You either use wildlife or lose it," Myers wrote. "If it is not economically self-sufficient, there is little point in saving its living space. If it pays its own way, some of it will survive. If it can't, it won't." By Myers's estimation, harvesting ten percent of the Serengeti

Plain's annual wildlife migration could produce 80 million one-pound cans of meat.

SOME Tanzanian officials offer qualified approval. "I've heard about this for many years," says Wildlife Director Fred Lwezaula. "There has to be a good reason—to earn foreign exchange, to provide protein. I think we could find a market for the meat in Europe. For species like wildebeest, zebra and gazelle, it can be done. If done for meat I would approve it."

Says Mweka's Hermann Mwageni, "We should, of course, conserve the endangered species. But we have other animals in good numbers, millions of wildebeest. I'm not saying we should start slaughtering them, but perhaps we should utilize them for money to protect the endangered species."

Tawico's Ndolanga warns: "The growth of our population will one day make its demands. One day the government will see that it is only fair that the wildlife must pay its own way. The argument is reasonable. With proper equipment and facilities, cropping could be done." But he insists that Tawico be in charge. "If it is done by others, I cannot say."

Other voices, however, are vehemently opposed. "Everyone is talking about cropping," says Chief Park Warden David Babu. "Why? Money, protein, to mobilize support? None of these are justifiable reasons to crop.

The only justifiable reason is an ecological problem such as overcrowding, and this can only be determined after extensive research."

Ngorongoro's ole Saibull is even more explicit: "If there is any cropping, it must be based on the needs of the animals, not the needs of people."

Parmena Kitomari, 34, a Tanapa planning officer, is just as emphatic: "The idea of harvesting is selfish. We simply have to make sacrifices today for the people who will come tomorrow."

The feasibility of marketing wildlife for food is not assured regardless of its merits; wild animals are not sedentary like cattle, and they would be hard to hunt. Furthermore, the infrastructure for an industry is not in place. "We would have to have refrigeration," says Colonel William Chacha, chief of Tanzania's anti-poaching force, "and without such proper equipment, the effort would be useless." Adds Mweka's Hermann Mwageni, "In some regions meat will spoil in less than a day. We don't have the transportation to move the country's present food supplies. How could we transport the game? It is impracticable to speak of such big schemes."

"The population near the game," adds Juma Kayera, "are poor people without high buying capacity. And there are cultural problems, because certain species are not eaten. People are very selective; they don't eat everything."

Tourism Director Soter Mushi agrees: "I'm not sure Africans like game meat. Many that live nearest the wildlife don't eat it. I've eaten game myself, but I don't like it very much."

Tanapa's Parmena Kitomari raises a related question. "What would happen if we did develop an appetite for wildlife?" he asks. "Suppose we can establish a local market, what would the result be if people switched from beef to game?" Subsistence poaching currently claims an estimated two to five percent of Tanzania's migratory wildlife a year, while commercial poaching for rhino horn, elephant ivory and leopard skins remains an ongoing problem. "If we began cropping," says Juma Kayera, "it might be very hard to tell the difference between a licensed harvester and a poacher."

Africans are sensitive to another

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Ministry of Natural Resources
and Tourism*

consideration: international reaction. "Three days after we authorized Tawico to crop zebras," recalls Wildlife Director Fred Lwezaula, "I got an angry call from UNESCO in Paris." Worries tourism's Soter Mushi: "Tanzania has long been identified with wildlife, as the Mecca of game. We must sustain that attraction. I'm sure that if we began large-scale cropping, we would lose in terms of tourist arrivals."

AND THERE is a last question, rarely discussed openly in Africa but perhaps pivotal. Given the levels of inefficiency—if not outright corruption—which afflict almost every aspect of organizational effort in Africa, can an operation such as large-scale cropping of wildlife be carried off without descending into chaos?

"I think it can be done," says Wildlife's Fred Lwezaula. "We can control it. In any system there are isolated abuses, but all our senior wildlife officials are decent people. They have not succumbed to the temptations."

Others are less sure. One of Lwezaula's subordinates remembers a past attempt: "About ten years ago there was a cropping program in the Morogoro district. They killed buffalo and sold the meat. But it didn't work because of management problems—finance, logistics and, yes, leadership."

Perhaps mature leadership is the key. Mweka's Gervace Mosha certainly thinks so, for it is his job to try to de-

velop it in the students at the College of African Wildlife Management—the future stewards of the continent's conservation efforts. "Given the incentive and devotion, cropping could be accomplished acceptably," he says. But are these givens present today in Tanzania? He hesitates for a long moment and then, with a sigh that carries the indelible remorse of a difficult truth, answers simply, "No."

So where does all this leave the horizonless herds of Serengeti wildebeest, the ponderous rhinos of Ngorongoro Crater, the lions that doze in the trees on the shores of Lake Manyara?

Feroz Kurji, 33, a Tanzanian graduate student in land-use policy, speaks with informed passion about his country's wildlife efforts:

"Never forget that conservation is ultimately a question of political will, not economics. And I believe that Tanzania's political will has been amply demonstrated. It may look stumbling and stumbling, but there is a coherence to it. Perhaps we have made mistakes in the last 20 years. Our performance may have been poor by Western standards. But the fact remains that we *have* conserved the wildlife."

The Tanzanian official until recently most responsible for sustaining that political will is Julius Sepeku, former principal secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism. A bespectacled man in his fifties, Sepeku has about him an air of professorial seriousness. He is also a man of strong views. "I would say this to those who would criticize us: If they are genuine, they should assist us with support. If not, they are no use to us, and I consider their comments destructive."

"It is unfair to criticize us," Sepeku continues. "We are a poor country, blessed with an abundance of wildlife which we must hold in trust not only for our own future generations but for the whole world. We are poor, but we are committed. And I think our record shows that commitment." ■

David Abrahamson, a Manhattan-based freelance writer, has covered environmental and technological issues for The New York Times Magazine, Science '83 and Adventure Travel. This is his first contribution to International Wildlife.