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PRESERVATION OF WILD FAUNA IN SEMIARID REGIONS IN EAST AFRICA

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The area of East Africa with which this paper is concerned is the region of low-lying country stretching between the Kenya highlands to the south and the Ethiopian highlands to the north. Roughly two-thirds of this area is sandy desert thickly covered by thorny acacia scrub of a more or less uniform height of about 8 feet, relieved at long intervals by tall acacia trees lining the banks of dry watercourses. The same description might apply to the remaining third, except that sandy desert is replaced by ancient lava flows and boulder-strewn plains and ridges.

During at least nine months of an average year, the land is gripped by drought. There is practically no surface water accessible to wild animals, and grass is limited to a few parched-up wisps under the denser bushes and between the boulders. The bushes are leafless and appear dead. This region is sparsely inhabited by nomadic tribesmen who rely almost entirely upon water drawn with much labor from wells and holes in the beds of dry rivers to water their flocks and herds.

It is a matter for wonder how animals can survive such hard conditions. Nevertheless a large variety and number of wild animals do manage to eke out an existence, and look remarkably healthy on it, the commonest being antelope, including Oryx beisa, Grant's gazelle, Waller's gazelle, dik-dik, and lesser kudu. Giraffe, Ostrich, Grévy's zebra, and Lions are also to be found, and in a few places even Elephants and Rhinoceros. Since it is a law of nature that all animals must take in water in some form, it is found that the majority, with the possible exception of the carnivores, obtain their moisture from various succulent plants such as the widely distributed *Sansevieria* and aloes

and an enormous barrel-like *Euphorbia* which grows in a few places and can provide up to 20 or 30 gallons of liquid. In the case of lions and other carnivores, the blood and bladders of their prey provide sufficient liquid.

On the whole these conditions do not appear to have any marked unfavorable effect on the growth or size of most of the animals. Perhaps the Lions, Leopards, and some of the Antelopes are of lighter build than their brethren further south. Where I think the adverse conditions definitely do impose a serious handicap is in breeding. The urge to procreate is not so strong, and fertility is lessened. Pregnant females cannot achieve the extra fitness necessary to properly nourish the embryo. Milk cannot be plentiful among the nursing mothers, and there is a host of other factors which must affect the number of young produced and reared.

The answer to many of the problems in country such as I have described — and where the necessary funds are available — lies in the increase of water supplies by means of dams and artesian wells, and the introduction of succulent plants; the improvement of food supply, by means of irrigation where this is possible, and the introduction of suitable drought-resisting grasses and other edible plants; and finally, the suppression of illegal and uncontrolled hunting, best achieved by the imposition of game laws and their efficient application. From my experience, I have found that although it is always necessary to work amicably with the local government or administration, it is at the same time essential to have a separate and independent organization specializing in wild animal preservation, directly under the highest state authority.

The views expressed above are entirely my own personal views and do not necessarily reflect official opinion.