

Two New Game Reserves in West Cameroon

By *F. R. Mason*

IN 1963 elephants were doing such extensive damage to crops in West Cameroon that a Game Branch was established largely to control them. Once the elephant situation was under control the Branch was able to turn its attention to other wildlife, the need for which was urgent, because the wildlife was on the way to extinction.

Two Game Reserves were created. The largest and principal one is the Kimbe River Game Reserve between Wum and Nkambe. Here, from an area of approximately 45 square miles hemmed in by the Kimbe and the Junga Rivers, and deep in the grasslands, the scattered human inhabitants were moved to a settled community 12 miles away, and the land cleared of poachers by vigilant Game Guards with whom the local chiefs co-operated splendidly. Salt licks were placed at suitable points and a reforestation programme got under way in order to combat the ravages of the annual grass fires started by the cattle-men. Outside the Game Reserve these fires are still, slowly but surely, turning the West Cameroon grasslands into a sterile waste.

The results of this work over the past 12 months has been quite phenomenal and has greatly exceeded our expectations. In a territory that had been almost literally cleaned out of wildlife the numbers of animals observed in a recent survey was most gratifying. One herd of buffalo, with young, numbered 20, and other species, including waterbuck, bushbuck and kob, can be seen daily. Further development is in progress, and in the years that lie ahead the Kimbe River Game Reserve will be not only a haven for wildlife, but also a great tourist attraction and potential source of protein for undernourished people.

The second reserve is the Mbi Crater Game Reserve in the mountains above Bamenda. An extinct volcano, as the name implies, it has a diameter of approximately two miles. At some remote period in history, a lake had obviously filled this great hole, eventually breaking out at the eastern end and cascading down into the neighbouring valley. On a clear day the scenery from the rim of the crater is magnificent, and the climate at this altitude is very agreeable, the mornings and evenings being quite cold. Dense forest lines the perimeter of the Crater and the floor is a mixture of grassland, bush and swamp. In this ideal habitat dwell several small herds of situtunga, with antelope and wild pig in the surrounding forests. Lying seven miles from a spur road it is hoped to construct here a small tourist lodge at some future date. There are also plans to re-introduce at some early period a few giant Cameroon eland, giraffe, and possibly hartebeest into one, or both, of these Reserves, using tranquilliser techniques, should an ecological study prove the areas to be suitable.

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A survey is to be made soon of the Takamanda Forest in the Mamfe Overside which still contains a few families of the lowland gorilla, and a sanctuary will probably be created in the vicinity of Mbonye. In the recent revision of the Game Laws of West Cameroon both the gorilla and the chimpanzee were given full protection, such legislation being most desirable as a group of "animal collectors" in East Cameroon have already depleted several forest areas of their simian inhabitants.

Other developments are in progress and whereas a short time ago we were faced with a situation in which the wildlife of West Cameroon was being gradually exterminated, we now have two reserves providing havens of refuge for the wildlife, new game laws giving the fullest protection, and a Game Branch capable of enforcing them.

Rhino Reserve in Lake Victoria

This account of the transporting by the Tanzanian Game Department of black rhinoceros to Rubondo Island in Lake Victoria, which has been declared a Rhino Reserve, is based on work already reported by B. McCulloch, of the Veterinary Investigation Centre, and P. L. Achard, of the Game Division, in ORYX, August 1965, p. 131: "Mortality in the Capture of Game Animals".

TANZANIA has created a new reserve for black rhinoceros that is as near being 'completely safe' for these harassed animals as can be imagined. This is the 55,000-acre Rubondo Island in Lake Victoria, 20 miles long and 5 miles wide, which has been a Forest Reserve since the beginning of the century. No human settlement has been allowed on the island, and it has not been developed or exploited in any way. The Forest Division has agreed to it being used as a Rhino Reserve. With areas of open grassland, dense rain forest and open savanna, and an annual rainfall of 60 in. giving an abundance of shrubs and creepers, mostly palatable to rhino, it is ideal for the rhinos. There are no predators and the indigenous fauna includes vervet monkeys, situtungu, bushbuck, hippopotamus and otters.

The Game Department began catching operations in October 1963 in the Grumeti game controlled area to the east of Lake Victoria. Five animals were caught and taken to holding pens at Kirawira, where two cows became so tame that they could almost have been "driven to Rubondo by a good herdsman"; they could be induced to enter a crate "merely by calling their names and offering a titbit". Both were taken successfully to Rubondo in crates towed on a pontoon together with a third that was heavily in calf; ten days later this one was seen on the island accompanied by a calf.

In February 1964 a bull, taken direct from Mwanza on the southern shore of the lake, a journey of 90 miles, had a stormy passage. All went well for three hours; then a sudden electrical storm, for which Lake Victoria is notorious, tossed the rhino's crate on its pontoon so violently that the hawsers snapped, and for 2½ hours the rhino was