

REVIEWS

BETWEEN THE SUNLIGHT AND THE THUNDER. THE WILD LIFE OF KENYA.
By NOEL SIMON. Collins, London. 30s.

This is a splendid book. A copy should be in the library of every school, university, and conservation group and on the desk of every administrator who has anything whatsoever to do with the future of Africa.

Mr. Simon, a founder of the Kenya Wild Life Society, is now working for the International Union for Conservation of Nature at Morges, near Lausanne, in Switzerland. The central contention of his book is that, within the last eighty years, human interference has upset the natural balance of East African wild life disastrously. Only now are people beginning to realize, perhaps too late, what the consequences are likely to be. Few know how rapidly the relationship between man and nature in Africa has changed, even during the last ten years. Much thought has been given to the problem of re-creating the depleted game herds, relatively little to what should be done about thinning out small pockets of excessive numbers of animals such as elephant. The careful regulation of numbers is an essential ingredient of the art of management and Simon believes it can be accomplished most successfully through the medium of scientifically-managed hunting.

The existing national parks give an illusion of faunal security and some of them are now inadequate in themselves to serve the purpose for which they were created. In many respects, the Masai exemplify the central problem of man and the land. To quote Simon: "The lodestar of British policy has always been the paramountcy of native interests but, in regard to land, excessive altruism has defeated its own object and would have been better served with some degree of benign firmness." The author considers it likely that the Masai first settled in the vicinity of Lake Rudolf some hundreds of years ago and are responsible to a great extent for the condition of that now almost completely arid desert. Will present-day Masailand degenerate into a second Northern Frontier Province?

Some ethnologists may well challenge what Mr. Simon has to say about tribal movements. One would have thought that relic cultural evidence of past Masai occupation would still remain among the tribes in the Lake Rudolf region. But this is an academic point. What is a stark and indisputable social fact is that a country with an economy based almost exclusively on agriculture cannot hope to raise the standards of its spiralling population to the extent of an industrialized country, and neither milking machines nor prophylactics against trypanosomiasis can alter this fact.

Mr. Simon has traced the ecological history of Kenya since the advent of the first settlers. What he has to say about the creation of the reserves and the parks, hunting methods past and present and the present status of species there, is applicable in many respects to other territories. His factual summaries can be regarded as encyclopaedic and should be invaluable to those who want information promptly about arrow poison, the use of fire, de-afforestation, disease, including the significance of the tsetse fly and modern methods of land-exploitation such as tourism and the harvesting of wild animals. His conclusions are forthright. Land, he says time and time again "must be used"; and he writes, "a person who has the temerity to suggest that in certain circumstances controlled slaughter is not merely harmless but downright beneficial is liable to find himself regarded in much the same light as a priest caught rifling the offertory". This, he infers, is nonsense. Do we agree with him? At least we can prove our reactions by buying his book and following his arguments.

J. H.