

The Role of the Nairobi Animal Orphanage

By Perez Malande Olindo

The Director of the Kenya National Parks describes the work of the Animal Orphanage at the entrance to Nairobi National Park, and its contribution both in education—95,000 schoolchildren visitors in one year—the collection of scientific information about the animals, and the breeding of animals for zoos to save wild stocks. Future plans include a new education centre which will enable the present site to be used purely as a breeding centre and to expand.

THE problems of wildlife conservation in East Africa are numerous. We have the problem of poaching which I think is getting under control. We have the problems of the black rhino, one of the endangered species, and of elephant over-population. We have the problem of discovering the migration routes of animals. All of these problems are still with us despite the magnificent work that has been done in the past. These are the problems that I have inherited, that I live with, and if I can live to make a contribution to the solution of one of them, that would be a big contribution.

The Nairobi Animal Orphanage, at the entrance to the Nairobi National Park, was opened in September 1963 for three major reasons. First, to give care and temporary sanctuary to young wild animals which had been found deserted, or whose mothers had been killed, or whose owners wanted to give them to the National Parks. Those that we are satisfied can look after themselves are kept for short periods before being released in one or other of the parks. In cases where this is not possible, they are either sent to recognised zoos around the world or retained in the orphanage. The decisions as to where these animals will go rests with the Board of Trustees of the Kenya National Parks.

The orphanage has made it possible for us to show animals that would not normally be seen by the public in their natural habitats, and this is the second reason for its establishment—for the education of both the general public and organised school parties. In our film library we have only five films, but at week-ends we show these films to the public free of charge, and over a three-month period we have had an attendance of 17,000 people. School parties in 1965 brought up to 25,000 pupils.*

* At the time of going to press, figures for 1966 show a total attendance of over 95,000.

Our education programme revolves around the Animal Orphanage and the Wildlife Education Centre which is also at the entrance to the Park. The Centre was a contribution by the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation, organised in Washington and sponsored by American private citizens. Education is our best tool for securing the future of wild animals in Africa, and this effort by the Wildlife Leadership Foundation is one of the best contributions towards insuring that generations to come can be sure of seeing wild animals in their natural habitat, so that we may be able to say: "At least we played our part in bringing about this awareness."

The third reason for the orphanage is to give us the opportunity to study animals in captivity and, in this respect, it has yielded a lot of information. At the beginning of 1964 there were 33 animals in the orphanage, of which 13 were buffaloes which had either been rescued as calves during the severe drought in 1961/62 or been used for blood tests by the Veterinary Department. This small herd was turned loose in the park later that year, and has successfully gone back to the wild; five calves have been born. During 1964, the number of animals in the orphanage increased to nearly 100, of 30 different species, and by 1966 it was 120 of 40 species. Between 1964 and 1965, ten species bred in the orphanage: bat-eared foxes, white-tailed mongooses, bushbuck, Kenya oribi, steinbock, grey duiker, lion, caracal, side-striped jackals and Cape hunting dogs which are the African wild dogs. We have reports on mating, gestation periods and general behaviour of both adults and young, and copies of these have been sent to the Zoological Society of London. Animals sold to recognised zoos include cheetah, Cape hunting dogs, hyaena, steinbock and grey duikers.

Breeding for Zoos

One of the orphanage's most important projects is to breed certain animals for sale to zoos, thus saving wild species by avoiding the need to capture wild specimens, and avoiding also the large number of animal deaths in capture operations. Professor Leakey has taken upon himself the task of establishing a primate centre for research in Nairobi, and this too should provide a lot of valuable data for zoos. Not nearly enough is known about the behaviour of African animals despite all that has been written about them. The food preferences of ungulates are yet to be studied. The pathological questions involved are enormous. We have noticed that immunity from disease is much greater or lasts longer in the animals that have come from the wild than in those that have been raised in captivity and subjected to medicines when they appeared sick. Parasites, internal and external, are another problem. When animals are brought to us we have no choice but to accept them. We confine them in a small animal hospital and make immediate arrangements for their future. If an animal is to be forwarded to a zoo in some other part of the world, blood, dung and external condition are checked by the Veterinary Department for

both internal and external diseases. Any serious infection involving danger to other animals allows us no choice but to eliminate the animal as quickly as possible, but we have not yet been faced with this situation.

One advantage of breeding for zoos is that it might avoid the need for quarantine regulations, because, if the animal has been with us for over three months, it would be our responsibility to see that it was not diseased in any way and zoos could then be assured of getting specimens much more cheaply than they do today.

In the Animal Orphanage, we have very few pens, and, so far as we know, there is no satisfactory method for cleaning these. Although it is simple to administer medicines to carnivores through their food, it is a different matter with antelopes. We are looking into the possibilities of preparing a special salt-lick which will contain a small quantity of non-toxic vermifuge to be given continuously to antelopes under careful observation, with a view to perfecting a workable method of parasite elimination in captives. In dry weather, we have to spray these animals' pens frequently to forestall any possible invasion by fleas.

Problems of Disease

We do not have enough information about wild animal diseases, and this is important for conservationists because wild animals have been widely condemned as transmitters of dangerous diseases to domestic livestock without adequate proof. Less than two years ago, four young cheetah, a caracal and a leopard died from feline enteritis because they had not been inoculated against that disease. Now we do not accept into the pens any cats that have not been inoculated. About a year ago we had several cases of animals which appeared normal and healthy on one day and were found dead the next day. Postmortem examination revealed no pathological conditions, and several theories about the mysterious deaths of these animals have implied heart condition. The present pens are only divided from the Nairobi Park by a wire fence, and several animals have died as a result of being frightened by park animals, such as lions, coming around at night.

As regards nutrition, we are becoming convinced that if wild animals in captivity are given a proper diet and the proper environment they will reproduce, and we are planning our breeding programme to this end. Several groups of people have been trying to breed cheetah in captivity, and I am glad to report that cheetah have been bred in semi-captive environment in the Meru Game Reserve* by Joy Adamson in her efforts to rehabilitate a cheetah in the wild. We are studying these cases very carefully.

Climatically, Kenya is very fortunate, and we do not have to make special arrangements for winter. The available pens were not designed

* Now the Meru National Park, having been gazetted as a national park in December, 1966.

with any special animal in mind; they are just wire, about ten feet high, and intended to keep humans from going into the pens and not animals from going outside. They are inadequate and, moreover, none have any drainage system so that they become very muddy during the rains. Because animals in captivity tend to walk along the edge of the fence, we have laid a concrete strip about three feet wide inside the fence so that they walk on dry ground.

New plans are taking shape now to re-site the Animal Orphanage and change its name to the Nairobi Park Education Centre. The site of the present orphanage will remain as our breeding centre, which will then be closed to the public and only open to scientists who are studying animals or who are participating in the breeding.

Photographs taken in the Nairobi Animal Orphanage are on plates 15 and 16, following page 116.