

Somalia's Wildlife

Professor Alberto M. Simonetta, of the University of Camerino, in Italy, and an authority on the wildlife of Somalia, sends these comments on the article *Somalia's Wildlife*, by John G. Vos, in the September 1970 issue of ORYX:

Thomson's gazelles do not and never did occur in Somalia. The animals Mr. Vos saw are Speke's gazelles, which occur in all the coastal steppes as well as in the Noghal plains and a few other places. The sable antelope, too, is unknown in Somalia, and there is no record of it ever having occurred there. The horns seen by Mr. Vos in Mogadishu were most probably smuggled in from Kenya. I have myself purchased at tanners in Mogadishu hides of guereza (colobus monkey) clearly identifiable by their pattern as belonging to the very distinct subspecies inhabiting the region around Lake Tana in Ethiopia. Lesser kudu are rather uniformly distributed where sufficiently high bush occurs as far north as the Noghal valley at least, while the greater kudu occurs only sporadically in the Mata Arba, North of Belet Uen, in the Haud, and in some places in the former British Somaliland. In the former Italian colony it has always been so rare that it was omitted from the game legislation on the authority of Zammarano who held that it did not exist.

The present Government in Somalia has taken very active steps towards the protection of wildlife, not only by declaring a close season over the whole country, but by confiscating nearly all guns and by a very strict and effective control on all movement of people armed with weapons. It is impossible for any Somali authority to prevent the poaching of leopards and cheetahs. The value of a single skin being much more than the annual income of the average Somali citizen, how can poverty-stricken people refrain from killing animals whose skins can always be smuggled across the thousands of miles of badly defined frontiers? Such animals as these must be protected in Europe and the United States by a ban on import and trade.

Obviously Somalia would greatly benefit by technical assistance in the form of wildlife ecologists and the like. However, there is every reason to hope that the times of the worst abuses are over and that the situation will gradually improve. The only really great danger now is the destruction of habitat.

Green Turtle Research

Dr Robert Bustard, FPS correspondent in Australia, has been given a Commonwealth Government grant to start a three-year ecological investigation of the green turtle in Australia, with a view to making it possible for the Aborigines and Torres Strait islanders to be permitted to exploit the turtles on a sustained yield basis. Six pilot turtle farms are being set up on Darnley and Murray Islands in Torres Straits, and Dr Bustard will select his assistants from the islanders who will thus be trained in rearing methods. Hatchlings will be kept in pens for from three to twelve months, tagged and released, and it is hoped that their survival rate can be substantially increased.