

## Encouraging Report on the Congo National Parks

**T**HE most encouraging aspect of the situation in the Congo national parks after the rebel activities of recent years is the determination of the central government to preserve the parks intact, and to build up again what has been destroyed. This emerges from a report by Dr Kai Curry-Lindahl who, as a representative of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, accompanied the Minister of Agriculture, Mr Zamundo, at the request of the Congolese government, on his recent 16-day inspection of the Albert and Garamba National Parks.

Inevitably there has been considerable destruction in some areas of the north-eastern Congo in the fighting since 1963; nevertheless, all the national park areas are territorially intact. The general situation in the Albert park is good and there have been several improvements in the last year. The gorillas on the Congo side of the Virunga volcanoes are in no danger, although the forests on the Rwandesian side have been severely burned and grazed on the lower slopes.

In the Lake Edward area of the central sector of the park all the fishing villages illegally established between 1961 and 1964 have been removed, and one large village, established in 1965 with the permission of the former government, has also been declared illegal and 1200 people evacuated. This leaves only one fishing village in the park, authorised since 1948, and even there all goats, cattle and poultry have been removed since the beginning of the year. This strong government action has immensely increased the prestige of the national parks and had a considerable effect on the attitude of local authorities, chiefs and tribes, and their respect for the parks.

In the northern sector of the Albert park the disturbance was more serious, but even here poaching rather surprisingly does not seem to have been very great, and numbers of most species have been maintained. Hippos have increased considerably, apparently by immigration from Uganda. The government is now in control again and has removed a number of fishing villages on the upper Semliki river. It has also turned down proposals to exploit mineral deposits on the Ruwenzori inside the park.

The Garamba National Park has suffered much more severely, and in 1963 was in fact completely occupied by well-equipped rebel forces and soldiers from bases in the Sudan. The park organisation is now being built up again, but practically all equipment has been destroyed or removed, including the vitally important vehicles, and must be replaced. Moreover a large proportion of the rangers are new and it will take time to train them.

The slaughter of game was heavy in the northern sector of the Garamba, and this sector is now almost empty of large mammals. But in the southern sector Dr Curry-Lindahl found game still fairly

plentiful and unafraid. Most serious has been the slaughter of square-lipped rhinos; aerial and ground censuses combined with other data suggest that possibly as many as 950-1150 have been killed or have left the national park, leaving a residue of about 100. From this nucleus, however, given strict protection, stocks could be built up again, and the determined attitude of the government suggests that they will be.

Elephants suffered even more severely, with possibly 4000 eliminated, leaving a remnant of about 700. An aerial census together with counts from the ground produced a total of 519 elephants. The killing of rhinos and elephants was largely for horn and ivory, and not for meat. Except for the giraffe other species were much less affected.

All in all, despite the destruction, the report is much more encouraging than might have been expected. Nothing has been lost irreparably, and if the central government does indeed "regard the preservation of the national parks as absolutely vital and of high priority," and can enforce its determination, the outlook for the future is hopeful.\*

### **IUCN Resolutions**

Following his journey, Dr Curry-Lindahl suggested that there should be concerted action by the three governments concerned in the protection and management of the slopes of the Virunga volcanoes, home of the mountain gorilla. These lie mostly in the Albert National Park, partly in Rwanda and partly in the Kivu province of Congo (Kinchasa), with a small portion in Uganda. A resolution passed by the IUCN General Assembly at Lucerne in June urged the three governments to arrange a joint meeting to work out concerted action, and, under the auspices of IUCN and its National Parks Commission, invite an ecologist to carry out a reconnaissance in the area.

Two other resolutions concerning the Congo passed at the General Assembly referred to "the lively interest shown by the Congo Democratic Republic in the creation and maintenance of National Parks," and urged the Government to establish without delay two more national parks, one in the Kahuzi-Biega region where the mountain gorilla occurs, and another in the equatorial rain-forest area of the Salonga River basin.

\* The FPS and the New York Zoological Society were jointly responsible for the expenses of Dr Curry-Lindahl's visit.

### **ANTELOPE CROPPING HELPS THE MEAT SUPPLY**

**S**OUTH AFRICA has made considerable strides in organised cropping of wildlife for meat. In 1965 the Transvaal Nature Conservation Department issued permits for hunting antelopes which, if they had been fully taken up, would have amounted to about four million lb. According to the IUCN Bulletin, this is about 20 per cent. of the total amount of beef and mutton slaughtered in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Germiston and Springs together in the previous year. In the Transvaal there are forty local committees to assess antelope population numbers and recommend an annual hunting quota for each species that may be hunted. The members are mostly farmers with a knowledge of their local game.