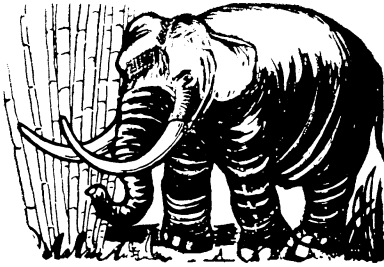


ZOOLOGY
NATURE RAMBLINGS
by Frank Thome



Postwar Perils

➤ GREATEST dangers brought by the war to the animals of the Old World's warmer lands will come now, after the soldiers have stopped shooting. It is not known yet how much damage was done to the wild beasts of the jungles by the conflicting armies that clashed in their tangled depths. Probably, however, the direct destruction was not very great. A

number may have been killed by chance bombs and shells or by stray bursts of machine-gun fire. Occasional antelope or wild pigs may have been shot by troops for fresh meat. But the animals, knowing the forest better than the human strangers could ever hope to, were probably able to slip away from the scenes of fighting and hide until the noises stopped.

However, now that men have stopped shooting at each other, some of them will want to relax by going a-hunting. We can expect greatly increased hunting pressure on surviving wild-animal populations, now that air travel to the remotest corners of the earth has become commonplace. True, governments controlling the remaining big-game lands are much more conservation-minded than we Americans were a couple of generations ago when we massacred the bison and the pronghorn. But we can expect the animals to be hunted right up to the bag limits—and considerable effort to be exerted to extend those limits.

An even greater danger threatens. Some of the great game areas will probably be opened up to agriculture and grazing by the end of the present century. Means for making life in the tropics safer and more comfortable were being worked out even before the war, and their development was greatly hastened under the necessities of the conflict. DDT

may rid great stretches of Africa of the dreaded tsetse fly, bearer of sleeping sickness to man and the equally deadly nagana to animals. And where man takes his cattle and horses in, elephant and antelope and zebra and giraffe must depart, just as deer and elk and bison departed from most of our own continent.

There is an even graver threat, of a disaster that may overwhelm not only the game animals but the very ground they and their domesticated rivals walk and graze on. So-called civilized man has made a very bad record as a destroyer of soils by over-cultivating, over-cutting and overgrazing, just to get more money. But to certain native peoples cattle are not a means to wealth, they are wealth itself: a man's standing is not reckoned in dollars but in cows. Such peoples almost always over-graze their pastures whenever they get a chance—and disaster dogs their heels. Unless new lands opened up in the tropics are administered with scientific wisdom and the firmest of discipline, neither game nor livestock will long survive to enjoy them.

Science News Letter, October 20, 1945

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