

CONSERVATION

Ranches for Wild Beasts

Scientists, statesmen and animal lovers the world over are using a marvelous new scheme to solve vast problems of supplying food to hungry people and saving rare wildlife.

By BARBARA TUFTY

See Front Cover

► BITE INTO a juicy slice of hippo steak; munch an elephant sandwich; eat some tender broiled antelope.

With such a menu for man, the noble wild beasts may be saved from extinction.

This exotic selection of meat on the table may sound an odd way of saving wildlife, but it offers a dramatic new method of supplying humans with tasty pieces of protein as well as conserving many majestic beasts that otherwise may be destroyed and vanish forever from earth.

There is no contradiction in the plan of eating wildlife to conserve it. The controlled "harvesting" of selected game animals for food, skins, ivory and other products is one of the best means of assuring their care and survival in today's man-dominated world. By weeding out the sickly animals to keep the population down, caring for the hardy ones and protecting their natural habitats from poachers and enemies, man may raise herds of elephants, giraffes, deer and other wildlife in much the same way he has raised herds of cattle, sheep or other domestic beasts.

New Industries

Developing wildlife game reserves and parks is a marvelous way for nations or private business to build up industries of meats and furs, to say nothing of attracting tourists, sports enthusiasts as well as scientific research teams, campers, photographers and writers—all sources of income and esteem to the host.

The idea of eating wild animals could easily become more acceptable to the general public by making available various packages of elephant, deer and other meats in the same stores as conventional beef, lamb and chicken.

Anyone who has tasted wild game can attest to the good flavor. Venison, wild duck and buffalo meat in the United States are always welcome additions to the family table. A good index of the popularity of wildlife menus is the soaring membership in the Anteaters Club in Washington, D.C. Started over 20 years ago by L. Gordon Leech who expressed a whim to taste some rare food, the Club now has nearly 6,000 members, many of whom enjoy savory selections of seal flippers, elephant steak, Pakistan chukkar partridge and other wild game luncheons served at the National Zoological Park restaurant.

Animal specialists point out that game animals are considered superior food to

domestic animals for several reasons. For one thing, there is less fat on the wild animals, states Dr. R. C. Bigalke of the Alexander McGregor Memorial Museum in Kimberley, South Africa. Since the digestive tract and its contents weigh considerably less than that of domestic animals, there is more nutrition and edible meat per wild animal—also more animal protein in the form of lean meat. Another point in their favor is that they grow faster than domestic breeds and can thus be harvested more often.

Many species of wild animals can thrive on low-quality land where most of the vegetation has been stripped by domestic animals or which is being rapidly invaded by worthless shrubs. Wildlife also has the ability to withstand some sicknesses that strike domestic stock. For instance, wild animals are immune to the tsetse fly which gives sleeping sickness and death to cattle over vast tracts of land throughout Africa.

The great beasts of the forests, plains and savannahs have long been considered as dangerous destroyers of man, his farms, crops and communities. Bears, deer, elephants, buffaloes, rhinoceroses, tigers and others have been ruthlessly slaughtered wherever man has encountered them—whether in America, Asia or Africa. As man has increased his population and expanded his domain across the earth, destroying for-

ests and marshes to make way for his cities and highways, he has trapped, poisoned and wounded these animals by many atrocious and cruel methods, leaving them to die by the thousands, rotting under the sun or being eaten by predators.

Tragic Histories

There have been many tragic case histories. During the early settling of the United States, vast herds of buffalo were slaughtered and run off cliffs until the race became almost extinct. Year after year, the passenger pigeon used to fly in such enormous flocks they would darken the skies for hours. But they were shot and plowed under the soil in such numbers that the last survivor died in 1919. When the gigantic three-ton Steller sea cow was accidentally discovered on a lonely island in the Arctic, it was hunted so hard that in 20 years it became extinct.

Illegal poaching for the coveted single rhinoceros's horn, said to carry aphrodisiac powers, has left many a huge beast dying with its horn wrenched off. Huge herds of elephants have been killed and left where they fell, their tusks pried out for ivory and feet cut off for wastebaskets. Deer periodically become so numerous they threaten many crops in parts of the United States and elsewhere. Recently a New Zealand Government edict has permitted hunters to "exterminate" a herd of red deer on a northern island. With a little care and judgment, these creatures could be saved and turned to man's benefit rather than be exterminated as pests.



Fremont Davis

ROAST HIPPO—A juicy roast hippopotamus is carved by the head chef of the National Zoological Park restaurant in Washington, D.C., for Gordon Leech, founder of the Anteaters Club, which serves savory wild game luncheons every year to some of its 6,000 members.

In all this grim history of needless slaughter, some men have had an acute sense of appreciation for the graceful and powerful beasts that roam the earth, quite harmless to man unless wounded or frightened. But these still, small voices of conservation have had too little power to stem the blood bath as human civilization pushed across the earth.

Now, however, more people are beginning to think about these things in a new light of sanity, and to act upon them. Many game farms and reserves are springing up throughout the United States, in an attempt to protect not only American animals, but animals from all parts of the world.

Seen on this week's front cover is the hippo, which is becoming more appreciated by human beings realizing the benefits of out the world in zoos, parks and game farms.

India is becoming stricter in rules about hunting, poaching and destroying animals on their reserves.

Alert Africa

In Africa, that splendid last stronghold of wildlife, certain alert nations have already started developing their wildlife resources, increasing their national incomes and providing livelihoods for thousands of people.

On the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanganyika perches a small college of African Wildlife Management where students are learning to manage game resources. Developed by the United Nations through the Food and Agriculture Organization in association with the local government, the college is on the move to increase and stabilize the wild animal population in that region.

In the Transvaal, wild animals are cared for and harvested as a well-established and growing industry, providing more than 3,500 tons of meat with over a million dollars in sales. Here strict protection is given to animals such as the agile impala, the zebra, the blue wildebeest with its long melancholy face and horse-like body, certain wild fowl and the kudu, one of the largest antelopes in Africa. In South Africa stocks of game are being built up by various national park authorities, provincial governments and municipalities. South Africa and Rhodesia have recently entered an agreement called Operation Game Exchange by which they will exchange and preserve wild animals in an attempt to keep their game reserves among the best in the world. In the Luangwa Valley of Northern Rhodesia, elephants and buffalo are being carefully harvested and their meat sold at 14¢ a pound, while in Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda, about a thousand hippopotamuses are selected and killed each year, bringing about \$117 per animal.

Disease a Problem

Conservation of wild animals poses many difficult problems and dangers, however. For instance, some game animals may foster diseases that would easily spread to domestic herds. Sickness and disease can be controlled to a certain degree in domestic livestock by vaccinations, medicines and hygienic check-ups and measures. But little or nothing can be done about checking for diseases of wild

game if they wander at will over large stretches of land. Serious epidemics could erupt with diseases such as anthrax, rabies, rinderpest and foot-and-mouth disease.

Another problem of conserving and harvesting wild animals is that of transportation and refrigeration. Since the game must be tracked down and shot deep in their natural wilderness, hunters sometimes must make long journeys into the forests or plains to find them. This means a long haul back, carrying heavy carcasses back to a road or camp for refrigeration and taking to market.

Herding Suggested

One method of solving these difficulties may be in herding large numbers of suitable game together and, in essence, domesticating them. This brings up the whole history of man's successes and failures to domesticate the animals of the earth and to bring them into a workable pattern.

As man and beast have evolved through the ages, man has been able to domesticate about 22 species of animals—15 of which belong in the large order of Artiodactylae, which are the even-toed hoofed mammals including pigs, camels, deer, antelopes, sheep, goats and cattle. Horses and asses, mules and jackasses belong to the order Perissodactyla; while elephants belong to the Proboscidea order; and dogs and cats belong to the Carnivore order.

The ancient Egyptians in the Nile Valley made many attempts to tame wild creatures. They tried keeping pelicans in captivity to lay eggs, taming mongooses to kill rats and mice in granaries, force-feeding hyaenas until they were fat enough to eat, and trying to domesticate ibexes, desert antelopes, addaxes and other animals.

Taming Wild Animals

Two general characteristics are shared by almost all our domestic animals—sociability and adaptability. It is easier to tame animals if they are able naturally to live in groups and form strong social bonds with their own kind and other species, including man—and if they can accept changes in diet and climate as they travel with man from one land to another.

Among the animals which could possibly support domestication are those found in the Giraffidae and Bovidae families, points out Dr. Bigalke. The giraffe is a gentle and social creature, and has already been tamed to some extent and bred in zoos. Besides this, its meat is delicious, tasting much like beef. The numerous domesticated animals such as cows, goats and sheep in the Bovidae family suggest that other members of this pleasant sociable family could be domesticated to serve man—the antelope, eland, addax and oryx.

With today's scientific knowledge and modern tools, man needs only to awaken fully to the realization that he should corral, not exterminate the marvelous herds of wild animals still wandering on earth. In life, these beasts can be a source of spiritual beauty and majesty; in death, they can provide valuable food and fur for man's expanding civilization.

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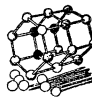


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