

Developments in the Sudan Parks

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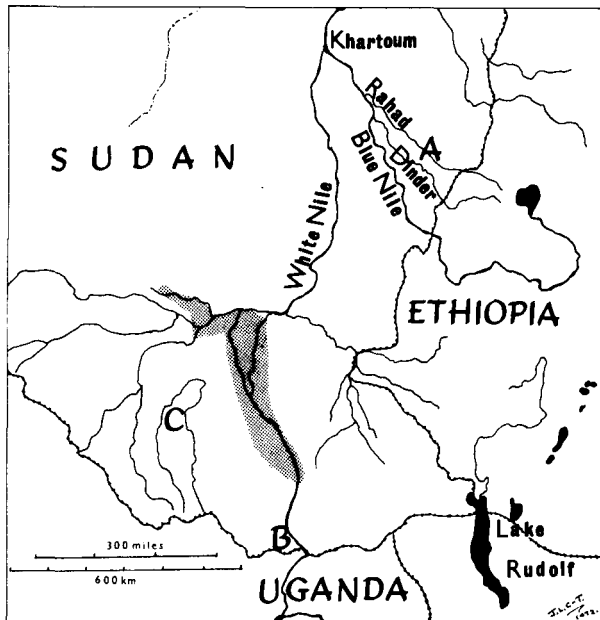
The Sudan today has three National Parks and fifteen game reserves. In addition there are sanctuaries and forest reserves where hunting is forbidden.

Dinder National Park covers 7120 sq. km (2750 sq. miles) and lies 406 km (315 miles) south-east from Khartoum, near the Ethiopian border in Blue Nile Province. Its fine assemblage of game includes elephant (during the rains), hippopotamus, giraffe, buffalo, roan antelope, waterbuck, tiang, greater kudu, red-fronted and Soemmering's gazelle, reedbuck, bushbuck, oribi, duiker, Salt's dik-dik, warthog, bush pig, lion, leopard, cheetah, hyaena, wild dog, grivet and red hussar monkeys, and baboon.⁵ According to Dr William Dasmann (*in litt.* August 1972) the status of tora and lelwel hartebeest is uncertain. It has been decided not to reintroduce hippopotamus as poachers would be the only gainers.

Southern National Park, covering 16,835 sq km (6500 sq miles) in Bahrel-Ghazal Province, comprises mainly wooded country and the animals include elephant, white rhinoceros, hippopotamus, giraffe, buffalo, giant eland, roan antelope, waterbuck, tiang, lelwel hartebeest, reedbuck, bushbuck, oribi, duiker, warthog, lion, leopard, serval, hyaena and wild dog.

National Parks of
the Sudan:

A Dinder; B Nimule;
C Southern



Nimule National Park, 260 sq km (100 sq miles) on the Uganda frontier in Ekuatoria Province, is famous for its enormous herds of elephant. White rhinoceros, hippopotamus, buffalo, Uganda kob and waterbuck are very common. Smaller species, such as bushbuck, lelwel hartebeest, oribi, duiker, warthog, hyrax and baboon, are less plentiful, but the aggregation of bigger game is remarkable.^{1,2}

This superb park lies in an ideal setting between mountains on the west and the Nile, with the Fula Rapids, on the east, where, for a distance of nearly a kilometre, the great river hurls itself through a gap not more than 30 metres wide. Since 1961, owing to the rebellion in the south, Nimule has not been accessible to visitors. The game scouts were withdrawn two years later, after which the park had no supervision. According to unconfirmed reports, however, the rebels did not greatly interfere with the game; indeed, the army is likely to have been a far greater menace in this respect. On the other hand, there was no control of poachers from Uganda, although these may have been deterred by the danger of operating so close to the scene of armed conflict.

In a letter dated 10 July 1972 Dr Salah Omer wrote that the Deputy Director of Game was hoping, now that peace had been restored, that Nimule might be reopened soon after the beginning of the next dry season (November 1972). As far as was known, both southern national parks and the game reserves in the south were under full control of the Regional Minister for Game and Tourism, but complete liaison in this respect had not yet been achieved between Khartoum and Juba. The people of the South were now busily repairing roads, rebuilding bridges and making efforts to reopen the parks and reserves as soon as possible.

The Southern National Park is even more remote than Nimule. It has only a skeleton staff and has not been developed in any way. Nearly all the efforts of the Ministry of Animal Resources and of the Tourist Department are being directed towards Dinder National Park. When my wife and I first went there in 1961 the only other name in the visitors' book was that of Professor K. N. G. McLeay who had been in 1959. By contrast, in 1971, 265 visitors used the park accommodation. There are even plans to build an hotel at Galegu, just inside the northern boundary of the park, but these will probably not be realised in the near future. At present, accommodation for visitors is limited to some well constructed straw huts with electric light; meals are served in a pleasant dining room, and showers have been installed and latrines dug. An airstrip permits a twice-weekly schedule by Sudan Airways, and there is an excellent rest camp at Guweisi, where the railway crosses the Dinder river, 155 km (96 miles) north.

Dinder is completely inaccessible during the rains and the park is open to visitors and staff for only four or five months of the year. Poaching is consequently a great problem. In 1970, several water-holes were poisoned by local poachers—possibly as a protest against the Government decision to abandon the Rahad canal



REEDBUCK in dom palms in Dinder National Park. *J. L. Cloudsley-Thompson*

scheme which, they hoped, would bring wealth—and many animals died. The project to build a canal from the Roseires dam on the Blue Nile to the Rahad river, which would cut the game migration routes between dry season and wet season ranges, and could be disastrous, was opposed by both the Game Department and Sudanese members of the Department of Zoology in Khartoum University. A new pumping plant at Es Suki, further north on the Blue Nile, was started this year. The future of the park must inevitably remain in jeopardy while an economically hard-pressed government invariably gives priority to irrigation schemes without considering the long-term interests of the country.

In an article on the future of wildlife in the Sudan in *Oryx*, December 1966⁶, Dr D. C. D. Happold outlined some of the many problems facing the staff of the Game Department, but he did not give credit for what these sorely pressed officers have actually managed to achieve, despite lack of Government support. Nor did he mention that what makes Dinder outstanding among the national parks of eastern Africa is not so much the rich fauna as the wealth and beauty of the forests, where chalky white *Acacia fistula* are interspersed with the red ochre of *A. seyal*, with groves of dom palms, wild fig trees alive with grivet monkeys or baboons⁵, and guinea fowl calling all round. Crocodiles, mistakenly shot off by an

earlier chief warden some years ago, are beginning to reappear. Overburning in recent years resulted in a great increase of reedbuck and a reduction in bushbuck populations, but this policy has now been reversed, although the presence of long grass makes the game less easy to observe.

Destruction Outside

Outside the parks and reserves, the traveller does not see much wildlife in the Sudan, apart from the occasional monkey, gazelle, waterbuck (whose meat is said not to be good eating) and ostrich; that is, unless he makes a special effort to go to the best places. Except for hunters, few people bother to do so since game can normally be seen so much more easily inside the parks, especially Dinder.

The extent to which the game of the Sudan has been destroyed during the last century is amply documented,³ the result of human activities which are likewise responsible for an extremely rapid expansion of desert.⁴ Bird life is still surprisingly rich, although a sharp decline in the numbers of cattle egrets of recent years may be associated with the increased use of insecticides, especially in the Gezira. In general, however, agricultural development seems to be less harmful to birds than to mammals (other than rodents) and the construction of reservoirs is beneficial to aquatic species such as pelicans.

The future of Sudan's wildlife depends on how long it takes to build up a profitable tourist trade. This, in turn, depends on the establishment of stable government, the relaxation of immigration formalities, competitive costs and the provision of facilities. These objectives will probably take many years to achieve.

The national parks and game reserves of the Sudan are still relatively inaccessible. They preserve a wild aspect and the game is not unnaturally tame. They cannot hope ever to compete for the massive tourist trade of East Africa. But they have a potential appeal to the more adventurous traveller who is prepared to stand considerable discomfort and innumerable frustrations to see a part of Arica that is, as yet, little affected by modern civilisation.

References

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