

Wildlife Conservation in Tanganyika under German Colonial Rule

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Abstract

At the beginning of the new millenium the conservation of wildlife and other natural resources in Tanzania is undergoing major changes. Interestingly enough, the situation was the same in Tanganyika, German East Africa one century ago.

Whereas today the new concepts are called sustainable use, involvement of rural communities and maintaining biological diversity, at the beginning of last century one was fearing imminent extinction of the large mammals and therefore introduced the first protected areas in Africa and early protective legislation. But even in those days some of the concepts of today had already been thought of by some far-sighted individuals. Economic benefits were regarded as a justification to conserve wildlife and wildlands. It was proposed to introduce trophy hunting as a tool to finance protection of the resource and to conclude a CITES-like international treaty to control the wildlife trade.

The early history of modern wildlife conservation in Tanzania has not been researched in depth. Many records in the German language are awaiting to be rediscovered.

1. Commercial Wildlife Exploitation in the 19th Century

Conservation had not been a topic prior to the arrival of the Arabs and Europeans on the East African Coast. Human impact on game was minimal. The tribes hunted for food, and the way they went about was often rather wasteful. But due to low population numbers and the simple hunting technologies this did not reduce wildlife numbers. Additionally taboos existed, prohibiting hunting of certain species or hunting at certain times of the year. Also some forests were regarded as "holy" and neither tree-felling nor hunting was permitted there.

The Arab slave trade and ivory hunting went hand in hand. By the time Germany, a latecomer in European colonial expansion declared Tanganyika a Protectorate in 1885 the slaughter of the elephants was already well advanced. Commercial hunters of different nationalities, many supposedly Boers from South Africa, hunted not only for ivory, skins and horns, but also to sell the meat in the villages. They often contracted local Africans to shoot elephants and other valuable game on their behalf. This was the case with the largest elephant ever recorded with tusks weighing 235 and 226 pounds respectively. They were 3.17m and 3.10m long. This bull was shot with a flint-lock musquet in 1898 at Mount Kilimanjaro by Senoussi, an African slave of the Ivory trader Shundi, who was an Arab from Zanzibar. The tusks caused a sensation even among the ivory merchants of Zanzibar, who were used to seeing big ivory at that time. They are now in the British Museum in London and currently on exhibition again.

Just by looking at their own, orderly trade statistics, the colonial administration could see the devastating effect of such uncontrolled shooting of wildlife. Detailed trade statistics, which were kept from 1903 onwards showed that between 1903 and 1911 a total of 256 tons of ivory were exported, which represents approximately 1,200 to 1,500 elephants killed per year. This is actually not very many when compared to the 19th century or even to the poaching figures of the 1980s in Tanzania. These relatively low figures may however be due to the fact that a good number of elephant tusks could have been smuggled out by dhow from secluded beaches without being registered by German custom officials, eager to earn 15% export tax for the Kaiser. At the same time an amazing 53 tons of rhino horns were exported representing perhaps 2,000 to 2,300 rhinos shot per year. This eight year period also saw a good thousand live animals taken to the motherland, as well as 50 tons of antelope horns and 2.7 tons of valuable bird feathers.

2. The first Wildlife Acts

However, shooting restrictions were already becoming effective. The Governor had started to issue these in 1891, when the first hunting regulations were declared in Moshi District, only six years after the establishment of the Protectorate. Ivory exports started to decline afterwards.

The first general Wildlife Ordinance for the then German East Africa dates back to 1896. Its intention was made clear by Hermann von Wissmann, the Imperial Governor, in a decree: "I felt obliged to issue this Ordinance in order to conserve wildlife and to avoid that many species become extinct which can be expected for the not all that distant future, if the present conditions prevail We are obliged to think also of future generations and we should secure them the chance to find leisure and recreation in African hunting in future times. I am also planning to create Hunting Reserves in game rich areas in order that wildlife can find there refuge and recovery. In such areas hunting of game will be permitted only with the explicit prior permission of the Imperial Government. Their establishment should also serve science, in order to conserve such game species which have already become rare in East Africa."

Further decrees and implementing regulations were issued in 1898, 1900, 1903, 1905 and 1908, culminating in the Act of 1911.

And the colonial Government meant business. Many a European planter who thought that the bush had no eyes and that one could violate the Acts without consequences had to learn that the opposite was true and that offenders were taken to court and fined. The files of such courtcases are still to be found in the National Archives in Dar Es Salaam. There is for example the meticulous investigation against a corporal of the Schutztruppe in 1906 who was told to shoot a wildebeest as food for his askaris. But by mistake he shot an eland which was a protected animal. He was only acquitted after different Departments of the Governor's Office in Dar Es Salaam had found sufficient proof that he had not committed an offence against the Hunting Ordinance. And Hans Schomburgk, adventurer, famous writer and at that time professional elephant hunter was chased for four years by the law-courts in Tanganyika and Germany and finally fined 1779 Reichsmark because of a minor offense.

European settlers and hunters were quite frustrated by their own Government, which only interfered with traditional hunting by the local African population when it was seen as commercial. Von Wissmann felt that the major threat to the African fauna came from the Europeans, but these immigrants including most famous hunters of those days - people like Selous, Schillings and Schomburgk - held of course the opposite view. The German East African Newspaper gave this resentment a voice.

It was the commercial culling which was considered by the Government at the time as representing an off-take that even a game-rich country like German East Africa could not endure in the long term without violating "the most distinguished principle of any wildlife use, namely the sustainability of the off-take", as it was then called. Therefore, in 1911 all commercial culling was stopped and all hunting regulated.

Interestingly enough in many cases the colonial administrators behind the conservation efforts were at the same time hunters themselves. They have later been criticized in literature that they conserved wildlife only because of their own selfish hunting interests. As much as this may have been the case the fact remains that they distinguished themselves from those civil servants who regarded wildlife only as vermin and obstacle to economic development and consequently called for its destruction instead of its preservation. The Governors von Wissmann and Rechenberg are good examples. The former was later scolded as the most committed spokesman for the hunting lobby. Nevertheless he had advanced the cause of conservation of East African wildlife. Rechenberg on the other side relaxed the hunting laws for political reasons, disregarding the fact that this might lead to the extinction of some species. When rinderpest reappeared in Uganda in 1910 he is said to have ordered the clearing of all wildlife in a 50km zone along the boundary, a slaughter which was widely considered unnecessary.

3. Protection and Use

According to the Hunting Act of 1911 the shooting of ostriches, vultures, secretary birds and owls as well as the collection of their eggs was forbidden. Chimpanzees received full protection, as well as all female and young wild animals. Other species were put into classes of different levels of protection. They could only be hunted on the basis of controlled licences. The Government was entitled to close certain areas to hunting, if they had the impression that the pressure from hunting in these areas was too high.

Hunting licences could be obtained by indigenous Tanzanians, non-indigenous residents, visiting non-residents, and the fees differed accordingly. The hunting of elephants was covered by special restrictions. Only holders of a general hunting licence were entitled to purchase an elephant licence on which they were allowed to shoot two elephants per year, not unrestricted numbers as before. Any exception from this rule needed approval from the Secretary of the Imperial Colonial Office in Berlin. Elephant populations consequently recovered. According to reports one could find villages between Kisaki and Mahenge (now Selous Game Reserve) at around 1914 which had been deserted by their inhabitants due to elephants destroying the crops. During the British colonial rule the administration spent many Pound Sterling to cull thousands of these pachyderms in order to keep their numbers in line with a growing population and expanding agriculture.

General licences which entitled a holder to hunt a good number of animals had to be approved by the office of the Governor in Dar es Salaam. Hunting licences once paid were not refundable. Licences were not awarded to people who had previously been convicted of contraventions of the game laws and could also be withdrawn due to offences. Landowners were allowed to shoot game on their land for the protection of life and property. In such cases, neither horns, skins nor tusks could be kept and they had to be submitted to the Government. In line with popular thought which classed animals as "useful" or "harmful" all the predators like lions, leopards, wild dogs or crocodiles could be hunted freely and even for a reward.

4. Sustainable Use in order to Conserve

But even in those days not everybody agreed with these widely held judgements. There was for example Carl Georg Schillings, born in 1865 in Düren, Germany who had undertaken three scientific safaris to Tanganyika around the turn of the 19th century. A born naturalist Schillings not only described precisely wild animals, which were at that time rather unknown in Germany, but he also explained ecological contexts. Thus for example, he recognized the significance of predators, such as wild dogs within their ecosystems. "Where there are many wild dogs there is game in abundance and the other way around. It is only civilisation which destroys the wild dogs as much as the game". And therefore Schillings concludes: "Let us throw overboard the strict differentiation between 'harmful' and 'useful' and let us protect - within sensible limits - flora and fauna in totality."

Interestingly enough Schillings, himself a keen hunter, worked in the years after the turn of the century on the development of the wildlife legislation. He wrote several drafts which could, however, never be fully enacted due to the outbreak of the war. He regarded Africa's rich fauna not only as a natural heritage which had to be conserved for future generations, but also as a resource which could be used sustainably for the benefit of the present generation and the economy of the colony. He did not agree to the widely held belief that economic development must automatically lead to the elimination of wildlands and wildlife. He accepted that wild animals had to be controlled in agricultural areas, but he insisted that they could be conserved and managed everywhere else. He wanted to establish additional protected areas and employ game scouts for the supervision thereof.

All this required money. He wanted to raise the required funds from the controlled and sustainable utilisation of wildlife. "Without any doubt it would be good to bring as many wealthy hunters from abroad into the German colony as possible. Such hunters would not only pay considerable fees for their hunting permits, but through their safaris they would also bring business to the colony." Such trophy hunting would be strictly regulated on the basis of quotas. It would not only pay for the conservation of wildlife but would also assist the economy. Schillings wanted to keep prices for hunting permits high. He estimated that initially 200,000 German Gold Marks could be earned annually in German East Africa through hunting licences alone and that five times as much would be spent by these tourists while they were hunting in the colony.

With quotas and other regulations controlled by game scouts Schillings was not worried that such safari hunting might result in the destruction of wildlife. Those who can use wildlife will protect it in order "to benefit from a high rent from these natural resources for a long time", was his opinion.

The income from hunting was to be channeled through a sort of 'retention scheme' back to wildlife conservation. Interestingly enough even nowadays the financial basis of wildlife conservation and protected areas in Africa is one of the major unsolved problems and income is often not reinvested. In 1992 such a 'retention scheme' was established in the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania. The Selous can retain 50% of its income which comes to a great extent also from hunting. This has greatly helped to turn it into a well-managed protected area with high and secure wildlife populations.

Schillings' ideas were rather revolutionary for the time. They reflected already the concept of "use it or lose it" – i.e. use game sustainably and re-invest into conservation or lose it. Only nowadays have such

strategies become popular again. Schillings even had further plans. He wanted international laws to prevent the destruction of the African wildlife. He participated in the first "International Conference for the Preservation of the Wild Animals, Birds and Fishes of the African Continent" which took place in London in 1900. Later he wrote however that there had been a lot of talking with no subsequent action – not too different from many conferences today. Schillings proposed even an international convention to control and regulate the international trade with wildlife because, to quote him, "such species are not a commodity like any other". This idea became true with the creation of the "Convention on the International Trade In Endangered Species" (CITES) only three quarters of a century later.

5. Fifteen Protected Areas Established

In order to conserve wildlife the Government had by 1911 officially declared 15 protected areas totalling approximately 30,000 sq.km or 5% of the colony. Some, as reported by Schomburgk, who traversed Southern Tanzania at that time, had already been established around 1908. According to other reports the first game reserves must have been declared already before the turn of the century. They are said to have been created by Wissmann in 1896 north of the Rufiji river (now Selous) and on the west side of the Kilimanjaro. This was even before the establishment of the Umfolozi and Hluhluwe Game Reserves (1897) and the Sabi (later Krueger) Reserve (1898) in South Africa, which are generally regarded as the first protected areas in Africa. In Tanganyika such protected areas were called "Hunting Reserves", but in fact all hunting was prohibited there. Any violation could be penalized with three months imprisonment or a fine of up to 5,000 rupees. In comparison, an elephant licence costed 550 rupees for the first elephant and four hundred rupees for the second.

Four of these game reserves were situated along the Rufiji and Ruaha rivers and near Liwale and Lindi. They were later amended and expanded by the British Colonial Government. The resulting area was named "Selous Game Reserve" after the famous Victorian adventurer, hunter and writer Frederick Courtney Selous who was killed in action in the area (at Beho Beho) in 1917 during the First World War. Enlarged until 1964 it is presently with 50.000 sqkm Africa's largest protected area. One early reserve formed the core of present Katavi National Park, which was redeclared a Game Reserve by the British in 1951 and assigned National Park status in 1974. Another was close to the Wami river north-east of Morogoro. Here local communities are currently creating their own village-run Wildlife Management Area called Wami-Mbiki. Four reserves were situated in Iringa and Moshi Districts, one at Lake Nyasa and a further one in Lushoto district. Mount Kilimanjaro (National Park status in 1973), Mount Meru (National Park since 1960) and Ukerewe Island in Lake Victoria also enjoyed full protection. The Ngorongoro crater was also earmarked to become a game reserve and had already been surveyed and mapped for that purpose. With the coming of World War I implementation was delayed and the area was finally given a special protected status (Ngorongoro Conservation Authority) in 1959.

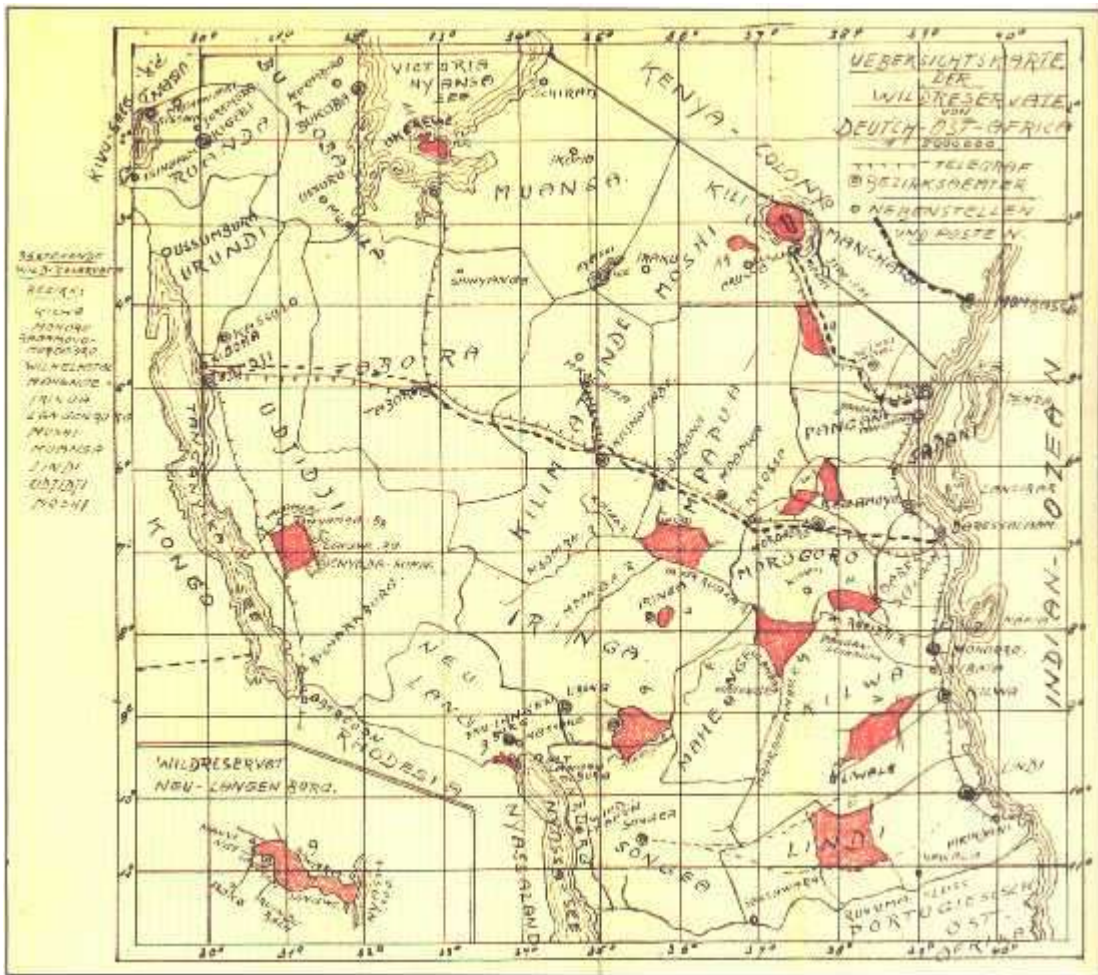
Supervision of these game reserves was left in the hands of the local chiefs. They were assisted by one or two local game scouts. This system shows some parallels to the present creation of Wildlife Management Areas where the rights over wildlife are vested upon the communities owning the land. For reports on poaching rewards were paid to informers, and in general levels of poaching are reported to have been low. Only at Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Meru Parks were German foresters posted as game wardens.

6. Extinction Did Not Become True

At the beginning of the century the general opinion in Germany was that African wildlife was on the brink of extinction. At the time no systematic monitoring of game populations as we know it today was in place. District officials kept, however, a close eye on wildlife populations. They reported their observations regularly and were also encouraged to consult knowledgeable local people. In 1911 and 1912 all local administrations were interviewed on a systematic basis about all wildlife issues. Based on this information the colonial administration concluded that contrary to the general fears wildlife populations were far from being in a catastrophic state. Instead German East Africa was, like British East Africa, still one of the most game-rich countries in the world. However, it was already obvious that modern agriculture was pushing back wildlife populations and that in European settlement areas like Lushoto (then Wilhelmstal), Tanga, Kilimanjaro and Meru game was becoming less abundant.

Carl George Schillings voiced the public concern and wrote in his book “With Flashlight and Rifle” as early as 1905 that most African game would become extinct soon. Fortunately there are now more buffaloes, elephants and giraffes – to mention only a few species - in Tanzania than there were in his time. After independence Tanzania created many more protected areas. Today approximately 20% of the country enjoy full protection as National Parks (12), Game Reserves (31), Ngorongoro Conservation Area and forest reserves. Presently a new “Wildlife Policy” is being implemented creating new “Wildlife Management Areas” on village land where rural communities will protect wildlife and use it sustainably for their own benefit.

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German map of ca. 1912 provided by Mr. Woerz

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