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Wildlife Conservation in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the history of wildlife conservation in Malawi from the beginning of the colonial period to the present day. It concludes by suggesting a new approach to wildlife conservation in Africa.

KEY WORDS

Wildlife, Malawi, conservation, Africa, wilderness

This essay explores the history of wildlife conservation in Malawi, specifically focusing on national politics rather than on the broader issues of local people's relationships with wildlife, which I have explored elsewhere.¹ Wildlife conservation in Malawi has essentially passed through three distinct phases: an initial phase (1895–1930) of 'game preservation' when the hunting of game animals was the preserve of an European sporting 'elite'; a second phase (1930–1964) when the game reserves were established but sport hunting remained an essential concern of government, coupled with a strong emphasis on crop protection and the eradication of the offending mammals; and a final phase when sport hunting declined and viable game sanctuaries were established with a tourist clientele (1964–1990). We are now moving into a fourth phase, with the recognition that wildlife protection geared solely to the generation of foreign exchange and to the aesthetic enjoyment of rich overseas tourists – and to the detriment of the wellbeing of local people – is highly problematic. It is a strategy that is not conducive to the long-term conservation of wildlife, whose survival is ultimately in the hands of African people. I will discuss each of these phases in turn.

1. THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD (1895–1930)

Recent historiography has shown that in the early part of the nineteenth century Malawi was a well populated region, particularly along the lake shore and in the Lower Shire valley. The area was the focus of developed trade routes, a complex agricultural system which used dry season cultivation in low-lying areas (*dimba*) and where there was a flourishing iron industry and cotton production commented on favourably by Livingstone.²

By the end of the century, however, the increasing ravages of the slave trade after 1840, the advent of militaristic Ngoni and the incursion of Yao traders into the Shire Highlands, all adversely affected population distribution and disrupted the economy of the area. This led many people to take refuge in such places as high in the mountains of Zomba and Mulanje, or Chisi island in Lake Chilwa. In his travels near Lake Chilwa towards the end of the century the Scottish divine Henry Drummond reported that the region was ‘almost uninhabited’ and that ‘nowhere else in Africa did I see such splendid herds of the larger animals as here’.³ Zebra were particularly abundant, and he went on to describe central Africa as the ‘finest hunting country in the world’, where elephant, buffalo, eland, leopard, zebra, hippopotamus, rhinoceros and ‘endless species’ of antelope were all to be found.⁴

The reason for this abundance of wildlife Elias Mandala puts down to – in the Lower Shire at least – people’s loss of control over nature, resulting from the devastation and desolation caused by the slave trade, coupled with the chaos and instability that followed the famine (*chaola*) of 1862–63, when the rains failed over two seasons.⁵ Around the turn of the century, beginning with Johnston’s administration of 1891, further disruption of the local economy and to the land was caused by the alienation of vast tracts of land to European settlers and companies. Almost four million acres, representing 15 percent of the land was granted in freehold to Europeans, and this included much of the land of the Shire Highlands.⁶

It was in this context that the colonial government established the first game laws and ‘game reserves’. But the term ‘conservation mania’⁷ to describe these measures is something of a misnomer, for the colonial administration were not concerned with conservation but rather with a much more limited conception – that of game preservation. And for Europeans at the turn of the century ‘game’ had a more restricted meaning even than the cognate term in Chewa, *nyama*: it applied only to the larger mammals, the hunting of which was considered ‘sport’.

Following, it seems, the perspectives of Kjekshus and Vail, Vaughan’s contention that the government had a policy of ‘carving out game reserves in populous areas’ is misleading.⁸ For what early game regulations of British Central Africa (1897) were in essence concerned with, was to restrict the hunting of larger game animals only to Europeans, who alone could afford the game

licences. Only two ‘game reserves’ were in fact specified in the first game ordinance – the Elephant Marsh near Chiromo and Lake Chilwa – both popular duck shooting areas for Europeans – as they still are. Neither of these was initially a ‘reserve’ in the true sense, for those possessing the appropriate licences could freely hunt there. The animal species specified in the 1897 game schedule were all ungulates – elephant, blue wildebeest, rhinoceroses, zebra, buffalo, eland, warthog, bushpig and around 19 species of antelope.

The game ordinances of 1902, 1911 and 1926 all followed a similar pattern, essentially restricting the hunting of larger mammals to Europeans; looking at the lists of those who took out game licences, these included missionaries as well as planters and administrators. There was much controversy focussed around the 1926 game ordinance, which was opposed by many missionaries and planters, though for very different reasons. The opposition to the ordinance centred on the following issues:

- i. It was felt that there was a strong association between game and the presence of tsetse fly, which had increased its range during the early decades of colonial rule. This had led to the loss of livestock through the disease nagana and several outbreaks of sleeping sickness.
- ii. That the government protection of game, and the restriction on the traditional methods of hunting, had a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of local people, in terms of nutrition and in crop degradation from wild game. The losses of life due to elephants and carnivores were particularly stressed. It must be borne in mind that prior to the introduction of muzzle-loading guns humans and elephants vied with each other for territory. Ecologically, and in terms of social organisation, humans and elephants are very similar. Elephants and many communities in east central Africa have social groupings that are essentially matricentric, and both humans – as shifting cultivators – and elephants are extremely destructive to the woodland habitat. Even the life cycles of human and elephants are similar, for both have protracted childhoods and are exceptionally long-lived species.⁹
- iii. It was felt that economic progress of the country was being retarded by the protection of game animals, and some missionaries suggested that it would be better for the protectorate if the larger mammals were exterminated. In spite of the protracted opposition, the 1926 game ordinance became law, mainly supported by the game warden, Rodney Wood.

The main outcome of the 1926 game ordinance was to establish three game sanctuaries – Lengwe, Tangadzi and Kasungu – which offered complete protection for the wildlife within their boundaries, and to make hunting outside these reserves the exclusive right of the Europeans who could afford the game licences. All traditional methods of securing meat, whether by trapping or

hunting were proscribed. Subsistence hunting by local people was thus deemed illegal.

Many writers have indicated similarities between the game ordinances implemented by colonial governments and medieval hunting laws in Europe.¹⁰ As in medieval times, the game ordinances devised and enforced by the colonial government of Nyasaland, made all game animals – essentially the larger ungulates – the sole property of the crown, the state. It assumed the ‘royal prerogative’ to game, and with the system of game licences, the colonial state ensured that hunting was the sole privilege of Europeans – as an aristocratic elite. As Graham, remarked: ‘It is a universal feature of game laws that they never favour the unprivileged’.¹¹ The colonial rulers thus claimed exclusive ownership of wild mammals, and all subsistence hunting, whether by traps, snares, nets, fire or dogs was declared illegal – a crime. As in the European context, subsistence hunting was described as ‘poaching’ and throughout the colonial period Europeans – the majority of whom engaged in hunting as a recreation – gave subsistence hunting a very bad press. It was described as wasteful, cruel, barbaric and irrational, and as being the primary factor in the decline of the larger mammals.

Even more enlightened Europeans, such as Rodney Wood, expressed strong antipathy towards subsistence hunting, particularly towards the communal hunt (*uzimba*). Such hunts were in direct contravention of the game ordinance although they were common throughout the colonial period – and in some areas still take place. Wood thought this kind of hunting an ‘abominable practice’ and made every effort – through pleas and directives to the governor and administrative officers – to get the practice not only proscribed but also eradicated in places. He was particularly concerned because on a visit to the Bua river with the governor, Bowring, they had observed a large-scale hunt taking place. Though indulged in throughout the protectorate, he wrote, this ‘barbarous method of hunting’ should not be tolerated. Needless to say, Wood did not succeed in putting an end to the traditional *uzimba*.¹²

2. THE LATER COLONIAL PERIOD (1930–1964)

When Rodney Wood resigned as game warden in 1931 he recommended to the government that the post of game warden be abolished, and that the maintenance of the three main game reserves, together with the duties of crop protection, be undertaken by the district administration. But by the 1930s, with much of the game population depleted in Malawi, there was a shift of opinion in the thinking of many Europeans, and a need was felt to preserve game mammals. Many of these new conservationists were ‘penitent butchers’, as Rodney Wood described himself. While in the early game period the game laws essentially functioned to preserve game for ritualised sport hunting – focusing on the collecting of trophies

and, to an important degree, serving as a ritual of prestige and domination – the establishment of ‘game reserves’ had a different motivation. Even so, the motivations behind the establishment of ‘reserves’ in colonial Nyasaland were many and varied, and largely geared to human problems and needs: with Lengwe, the need to protect declining numbers of nyala; with Kasungu, the need to protect people from the ravages of sleeping sickness; with, later (1938) Nkhotakota game reserve, the need for a refuge for marauding elephants who were causing crop depredation along the lake shore. Whatever the motivations towards the establishment of game reserves, the end of the colonial period went hand-in-hand with crop protection, and a determined effort to control, even to eradicate, all larger mammals outside of the reserves. This signified an implicit acknowledgement by the administration that the presence of larger animals and human populations whose subsistence was based on agriculture, did not easily co-exist. Such crop protection activities are still an important aspect of the present government.

From 1931 until the end of the Second World War, game conservation was thus handled by the district administrations, and was to remain at a virtual standstill. Game guards were employed by these administrations mainly to protect crops, especially against the ravages of hippopotamuses and elephant – often attempting to drive the latter back into the forest reserves or game sanctuaries. The game reserves themselves, like Kasungu and Nkhotakota were largely a ‘no-man’s land’. They had few staff and there was no serious effort to enforce wildlife legislation. They were frequented only by the occasional subsistence hunter and people travelling across the country.

In June 1946, the report of a commission, especially appointed by the colonial government to look into the whole issue of forest and game reserves, recommended the formation of the Department of Game, Fish and Tsetse Control. The department was finally established in 1949, and flourished – if that is the right word, for it was always under-staffed and under-funded – until 1962. With regard to wildlife, it had essentially a dual function, being concerned with both game conservation and crop protection. Yet it is clear from the beginning that crop protection rather than wildlife conservation was the primary role of the department. As its 1949 report acknowledged: ‘since the main reason for the formation of the game side of the organisation was the protection of crops, emphasis has to date been laid on game and vermin control rather than on game conservation’. Indeed, the game rangers were initially described as ‘game control officers’. During the 14 years from 1948–1961 the following animals were killed in the protection of crops: elephant 852, hippopotamus 1048, buffalo 562, waterbuck 489, roan, eland and kudu 554, other antelope 1199, as well as more than 300,000 ‘vermin’ – mainly bushpig and baboons. By 1955 buffalo, roan, eland and kudu and the other antelopes had ceased to be a problem, and hippopotamus had been drastically reduced in number. They are now virtually extinct along much of the lake shore, and recent efforts (1995) to curb human-

hippo conflict in the Lower Shire have led to their demise from this region as well.

Towards the end of the colonial period, non-hunting areas were established on the Nyika plateau and in an area around Majete hill (1952), and four years later, largely through the initiative of Chief Katumbi, a controlled shooting area was declared around the Vwaza Marsh.¹³

3. THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

When the Department of Game, Fish and Tsetse Control was disbanded in 1962, the work of crop protection and game conservation came under the auspices of the Forestry Department – as the Department of Forestry and Game. A decade later, in 1973, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife was established – and a new era of conservation began. At its inception it had around a hundred personnel.¹⁴ Already in 1983 the new government had shown an awareness of the wider aspects of wildlife conservation and had issued a Wildlife Policy Statement which read:

It is the policy of the Malawi government to afford all the protection in its power to game animals and wildlife in general in so far as such protection does not conflict with planned development of other essential national resources. In affording protection to game and wildlife the government has in mind the value of this national resource as a tourist attraction, as a possible source of food and a scientific and educational asset of national importance.

It is the intention of the government to afford protection to wildlife in all existing game reserves and forest reserves by means of enforcing restriction of hunting and the prevention of disturbances of the natural habitat. In other areas it is the intention to control the hunting of animals, birds and other forms of wildlife through restriction by licence both of hunting and of trade in game meat and trophies through the provisions of the game ordinance.

The government intends to encourage the fullest public support for its wildlife policy through education in wildlife conservation and by general publicity to stimulate the interests of the people of Malawi in the importance of wildlife as a national asset and to obtain the willing co-operation of the people in all wildlife conservation programmes.¹⁵

Although the statement failed to acknowledge that the wildlife of the country has intrinsic value, nevertheless it recognised the importance of the fauna and flora as national assets. Following suggestions laid down by the NFPS it accepted that the government should play a leading role in environmental education, and seek the active co-operation of the people in its wildlife conservation programmes. The policy was a far cry from the earlier focus on crop protection. Nevertheless, the government still recognised the crucial importance of protecting gardens

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from the depredations of wild animals, particularly hippopotamus and elephant. This was seen as crucial near the wildlife sanctuaries – Nkhotakota, Kasungu and Liwonde in particular. In 1975 a crop protection unit was established by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife.

By 1973, four important national parks, Nyika, Kasungu, Lengwe and Liwonde had been established, totalling an area of 6,885 square kilometres. This constituted around seven percent of the total land area of the country. By the end of the decade, tourist facilities had been established in each of these parks. Together with the four game reserves – Vwaza was declared a game reserve in 1977, and Majete, Mwabvi and Nkhotakota had long been proclaimed sanctuaries for wildlife – these constituted a further 3,614 square kilometres (4 percent) – Malawi, as G.D. Hayes admitted, probably had as many wildlife sanctuaries as the country could afford. For within just over a decade, since independence, 11 percent of the land area of Malawi had been set aside purely for the conservation of wildlife.

The emphasis was thus put – by both the Department of National Parks and Wildlife and the NFPS – on developing these sanctuaries for a growing tourist clientele and in putting increasing energy and resources into environmental education.

How important wildlife is to the tourist industry is reflected in all the tourist brochures that have been produced by the Malawian government and by other tourist agencies since independence. All highlight the aesthetic enjoyment to be derived from wildlife. Although there have been some setbacks, with the depletion of such larger mammals as the elephant, rhinoceros, zebra and hartebeest within some of the reserves, the establishment of wildlife sanctuaries in Malawi has largely been a success story.¹⁶

But what also has to be recognised is that these sanctuaries contribute very little to the wellbeing of the local people – on the contrary, by restricting hunting and the utilisation of the woodland for basic subsistence needs and in being a ‘reservoir’ of wild mammals which cause serious depredations to crops and human life, the sanctuaries cause much harm to local communities living within their vicinity. Small wonder, then, that the majority of rural people in Malawi have an antipathy, even a more actively hostile attitude towards such wildlife sanctuaries.

4. A NEW APPROACH TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

A recognition of this state of affairs had led many conservationists to suggest the need for a complete re-thinking of wildlife conservation, even a change of attitude towards the African hunter, who, as a ‘poacher’ had been maligned and criticised by wildlife conservationists for over half a century. One of the best accounts of this changing attitude towards conservation is Adams and McShane’s

The Myth of Wild Africa (1992), which is subtitled *Conservation Without Illusion*. It is of particular interest because McShane spent four years undertaking wildlife research in Malawi, mainly at Vwaza Marsh reserve, and the study has a short chapter on poaching within this reserve.¹⁷

The myth of wild Africa pertains to the idea – depicted in many books and on TV – that Africa is an untouched ‘wilderness’, an ‘unspoilt Eden’ (which is how Malawi is described in the tourist brochures). Deep ecologists and people like Laurens Van Der Post have stressed the intrinsic value of such ‘untouched’ wilderness areas as a source of spiritual renewal, as a means of re-affirming our ‘lost harmony’ with nature. But of course Africa has never been a pristine wilderness, for humans have long been an integral part of the landscape. And Malawian people neither advocate the control and domination of nature, nor the celebration of the wilderness in its own right, but have always acknowledged the close interdependence of humans and nature, including its wildlife. But what is significant is that when game reserves and national parks were established in Malawi – as elsewhere in Africa – they largely followed the pattern of the United States’ national parks, such as Yellowstone and Yosemite. This pattern was later taken up by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources based in Switzerland, and it is this pattern that has been largely advocated by conservation agencies, and implemented by governments. The result, as one observer put it, has been a ‘bizarre situation’ in which ‘Africans are hired, trained and armed to guard African parks to keep out African people, for the benefit of both the protected animals and the foreigners who come to see them – and of course for the tourist revenue, which goes into the government or hotel bank accounts, not to rural people’.¹⁸

Adams and McShane echo these sentiments, suggesting that the mode of establishing parks in Africa has resulted in a park ‘surrounded by people who were excluded from the planning of the area, do not understand its purpose, receive little or no benefit from the money poured into its creation, and hence do not support its existence’.¹⁹

They conclude that the notion of wilderness ‘does not apply to the African context’. For human and animals have evolved together in the continent’s diverse ecosystems. They also maintain that African countries have, historically, successfully coexisted with wild animals, although of course, this has only been the case where human populations have been relatively low and sparsely distributed. But given the current antipathy of local people towards game sanctuaries, in Malawi as elsewhere in Africa, their contention is that such sanctuaries will eventually be overrun by people in their need for land, unless the national parks serve, or at least are not inimical to, the wellbeing of local people.

Conservation and development thus need to go hand in hand, as part of a single process. For ‘conservation cannot ignore the needs of human beings, while development that runs roughshod over the environment is doomed’.²⁰

Adams and McShane give graphic accounts of the conflict between game scouts and local people living near Lake Kazuni in Vwaza Marsh game reserve, where an angry mob of local villagers killed two game scouts, and the life and times of one local hunter – poacher – Joshua Nyirenda. Armed with an 1844 Tower Musket, a relic of the Swahili slave trade, he was arrested with three other men for hunting elephants in the reserve. As a second offence he was fined \$500 or five years' hard labour. Unable to pay the fine – the annual income for a farm worker in Malawi in 1990 was only \$176 – Joshua went to prison. What is of interest about their account – quite unique among conservationists and wildlife officers – is that they sympathise with the hunters' predicament and acknowledge the crucial importance of subsistence hunting in the local economy, and to the very livelihood of men like Nyirenda. The 'poacher' is no longer depicted as a 'villain' – the origins of this term is worth reflecting upon in this present context – and Adams and McShane suggest that conservationists are gradually coming to realise the 'futility of waging constant war against poachers'.²¹

These authors therefore conclude that a completely 'new approach' is needed towards wildlife conservation, one which ensures that the benefits derived from conservation are directed more towards the needs and wellbeing of the local rural communities. 'Conservation will either contribute to solving the problems of the rural poor who live day to day with wild animals, or those wild animals will disappear'.²²

The person who, perhaps, more than anyone else has been responsible for this changing orientation in conservation is Richard Bell. Like McShane, Bell spent many years in Malawi as a wildlife research officer. His essay on 'Conservation with a Human Face' is, in fact, seminal.²³

Bell stridently challenges two images of Africa that are currently portrayed in the literature and media. The one, emphasised by tourist agencies in particular, depicts Africa as we have noted as a garden of Eden, or wilderness area teeming with wildlife – and suggestions are made to keep parts of Africa in this 'pristine' state for the good of future generations. The wilderness concept was well expressed by Bernard Grzimek and Laurens Van Der Post. Grzimek was an avowed and passionate advocate of African wildlife conservation in the early post-war period. In his classic *Serengeti Shall Not Die* (1987) – the jacket of the book significantly patterned like a zebra skin – which he co-authored with his son Michael who was tragically killed in a plane crash in 1959, Grzimek portrayed the African plains as a wilderness. It was 'eternal' nature, with great herds of wild animals, untouched by humans. This Africa was 'dying', and so much of Africa he tells us was already dead. But small parts of Africa, such as the Serengeti must be retained in its 'awe-filled past glory'. He argued that a national park, to be effective, must be a 'primordial wildness' and that no humans, certainly not Africans, should be allowed to live within its boundaries. That there were any wild animals at all in the Serengeti was largely because the Maasai people who

lived in the area had changed its landscape and co-existed with the larger mammals for several centuries. But this was lost on Grzimek. He was utterly opposed to granting grazing rights to the Maasai, and failed to see the idea of striking a balance between wildlife and human needs was a constructive and creative approach to wildlife conservation.²⁴

The other image of Africa is quite different. It depicts Africa as in crisis – both politically and ecologically. The image we thus have of Africa, as portrayed through the media, is one where political violence and repression, famine, civil war and ecological degradation are ubiquitous. And for some political analysts and conservationists, the situation is hopeless. Nowhere on the continent, one commentator wrote, is there a ‘flicker of hope’. Although Africa does indeed have its problems – like the rest of the world – Patrick Chabal has countered, as far as politics is concerned, this biased and highly prejudiced image.²⁵ Richard Bell has attempted to do the same with regards to the alleged ecological crisis.

Africa, according to many commentators, is facing ‘environmental bankruptcy’. It is dying through ill-advised attempts to modernise itself, and such development has led to famine, soil erosion, desertification and ecological degradation. Africa is held to be in ‘crisis’ and on the brink of ecological collapse.²⁶ Again, although Africa does have serious ecological problems that need to be addressed, Bell suggests that this scenario is overdrawn and misleading. Bell points out that although the human population in Africa is indeed increasing rapidly, the continent still has not reached ecological carrying capacity, and that surveys have indicated a considerable area of usable land is available. When Europeans encountered Africa at the outset of the colonial period, they encountered a human population probably smaller than it had been since the iron age revolution two millennia earlier – given the slave trade, the introduction of diseases and the rinderpest pandemic which ravaged throughout the continent in the 1890s. As human and livestock populations were reduced to a low ebb, Bell writes, so wildlife and its habitats expanded – a situation that was perpetuated by much of the colonial conservation legislation.²⁷ As regard to famines, when these are not related to droughts, Bell suggests, they are invariably associated with civil disturbances or are related to political and economic rather than to ecological issues. With respect to the availability of land, Bell points out that although Malawi is the fourth most densely populated country in Africa, some 33 percent of the land is under ‘natural vegetation’, over and above the national parks and game reserves (11 percent), forest reserves (9 percent), agriculture (36 percent) and urban developments (11 percent). Except on a local basis, such figures suggest that Africa is not facing an immediate shortage of arable land. The figures also indicate a high degree of commitment by the Malawian government to wildlife conservation, and a similar pattern is found in Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania, where over 10 percent of their land area have been allocated to wildlife sanctuaries.

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The primary objectives of the World Conservation Strategy outlined by the IUCN in 1980 were as follows:

- i. To maintain essential ecological processes and life support systems.
- ii. To preserve genetic diversity.
- iii. To ensure the sustainable population of species and ecosystems.

Bell argues that there is an inevitable conflict between short-term, individual interests and long-term commercial needs and that the costs and benefits of conservation are not equally shared between different sectors of a society. The administration of conservation programmes, in terms of management and costs, are the concern of national governments, which also enjoy the international prestige, and most of the revenue derived from wildlife resources. The benefits of recreational and aesthetic experience, Bell writes, as well as scientific opportunities, are enjoyed mainly by foreigners. Local communities, however, bear most of the costs of having wildlife sanctuaries, but derive few benefits. Moreover, the World Conservation Strategy and other conservation bodies tend to stress the indirect, utilitarian values than can be gained by conservation – for example, the preservation of genetic diversity on grounds of its potential as a source of useful products. Such stress is probably due to the fact that aesthetic and long-term, ecological values are felt to carry insufficient weight with government and local communities. But, as with the Master Plan For Malawi Wildlife, Bell argues that the emphases on the utilitarian justification of conservation is opportunistic and potentially counter-productive. He writes: 'If conservation is justified on the grounds of utilitarian benefits, anything that produces more of those benefits must take precedence over conservation'.²⁸

The reality of the conflict between conservation and local interests is also emphasised by Bell who notes that most conservation agencies are paramilitary organisations, with armed and uniformed game guards, and that a good deal of expenditure is devoted to law enforcement and public relations. We have noted the serious conflict that exists on the boundaries of almost all game sanctuaries in Malawi, and Bell remarks that under existing 'game laws', normal, rural existence is impossible without breaking the law. In Malawi, around 500 people a year are charged with breaking wildlife offences, and in many African countries there are serious armed conflicts between poachers and those enforcing wildlife legislation.

In such circumstances, Bell advocates a more flexible and liberal approach to conservation, one that aims to reduce the conflict between short-term interests and long-term community needs and which seriously takes into account the needs of local communities and the unequal benefits and cost of wildlife conservation.²⁹ It is this more flexible approach that is advocated by Adams and McShane.

Bell recognises that many species of the larger mammals in Africa are incompatible with most forms of agricultural development, even though pastoralists and wildlife can happily co-exist if the human population is not too high. I have noted the depredations to crops and human life in Malawi due to elephant, buffalo, bushpig, hippopotamus, hyena lion, crocodile, baboons and in some situations, the larger antelopes. Bell thus acknowledges that the integration of wildlife conservation – he suggests that the allocation of at least five percent of the land area of a country to conservation in the form of national parks would be sufficient to meet the objectives of the World Conservation Strategy – with other forms of land use, particularly agriculture, has always been a ‘chronic problem’ in Africa. Its solution would entail two strategies. The first was the protection of people and their cultivation from depredations through controlled hunting, the creation of ‘buffer zones’ and the development of electric fencing – all of which have been tried in Malawi with varying degrees of success. The second strategy aiming to reduce the conflict between local communities and wildlife was to ensure that the revenues earned by conservation areas (that is, from tourism, professional hunting or culling) should be explicitly fed back into the communities that largely bear the cost of the conservation area. Such revenue allocation schemes have been tried in Zambia and Zimbabwe. The funds often went, however, to district administrations rather than the local communities near the conservation areas. Moreover, such local communities did not participate in the decision-making. Nor did they derive any aesthetic benefits from conservation. But rather, ‘they are being treated as a nuisance that is being bribed to keep quiet’.³⁰ Thus Bell advocates a more radical proposal; namely, that local communities living in the vicinity of the conservation areas should be allowed concessions allowing them to use wildlife resources in certain areas, and that the conservation agencies should act as marketing agents for the products. Bell noted that in 1981 poachers in Malawi were obtaining about \$10 per kilo for ivory, which at that time was fetching at least \$50 on the world market. If, in this situation, he suggests, the conservation agency purchased ivory from the hunter, for, say, \$30 per kilo, ‘all parties would benefit, while the reward would be targeted precisely to the sector of society paying the cost of lost opportunity’.³¹ It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that local peoples’ interest in wildlife is only utilitarian, although this is clearly important for subsistence cultivators – and can thus be ‘bought off’ with development schemes or the allocation of revenues derived from the conservation areas.

Although conservation areas tend to be the ‘playgrounds’ or ‘recreational areas’ of rich tourists, there is evidence to suggest that wildlife sanctuaries have an aesthetic appeal to local Malawians, although the cost and difficulties of transport and accommodation can make visits to these sanctuaries impossible for the average Malawian. Both Bell and Adams and McShane emphasise the fact that rural communities will only tend to support wildlife conservation when they

not only derive benefit from it – to offset the costs – but also become participants in the process of conservation. They fear that simply protecting wildlife for the benefit of rich tourists will, in the long-term, be disastrous, quite apart from the failure to meet the needs of local communities. Unless local people support conservation projects and areas, by participating in their management and receiving some material benefits from them, it is felt that the African national parks will not long survive. Bell cites the Campfire project in Zimbabwe (Communal Area Management Programme For Indigenous Resources) and the Luangwa Integrated Resource Development Project (LIRDP) as two projects combining conservation and local community development that are worthy of consideration for future wildlife conservation in Africa.³²

In recent years there have been developments on a number of fronts with regard to wildlife conservation in Malawi. The National Fauna Preservation Society in 1989 changed its name to the Wildlife Society of Malawi, establishing in 1992 its own headquarters in Limbe. Funded by grants from USAID and various other trusts, the Society became a fully independent NGO with a full time executive director and staff, including two environmental education officers. The society thus greatly expanded its activities, and was instrumental in efforts to ‘re-introduce’ the black rhino and the blue wildebeest to the country (Liwonde National Park) and in establishing community forestry projects in the Chiradzulu and Chikwawa districts, as well as working on various projects with regard to rural small-holders and with people living close to wildlife sanctuaries. The emphasis of the Society is now on resolving environmental wildlife concerns through the encouragement of community participation. Working in close co-operation with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, the Wildlife Society has also devoted considerable efforts to environmental education, in establishing various environmental education centres, and in encouraging the formation of wildlife clubs for young people. At present over five hundred have been established throughout the country, and regular visits are arranged for members to conservation areas, where student hostels have been established.

Alongside these developments there has been a sustained effort to encourage and develop wildlife tourism through private initiatives, especially at Liwonde and Kasungu National Parks. Here expensive tourist lodges continue to cater essentially for a rich overseas clientele, and the extent to which the ‘profits’ from these tourist enterprises are channelled into local communities seems a debatable issue.³³ But ‘poaching’ continues to be a problem throughout Malawi, and at Liwonde (for example) antelopes such as kudu, sable, impala and waterbuck are still hunted using muzzle-loaders or trapped with wire snares. In the period September–November 1994, game guards collected around 5000 snares that had been set to capture mammals, as well as apprehending six men in possession of firearms.³⁴ Regrettably, in Malawi, as elsewhere, the protection of wildlife conservation areas still has an aura of a para-military exercise.

Long ago, Keith Eltringham remarked that in general ‘wild animals and agriculture do not mix’.³⁵ This is no doubt true, but what is surely needed in Malawi is the maintenance of wildlife sanctuaries that benefit not only visiting tourists but also local people, and which will ensure the coexistence of humans and wildlife for the mutual well-being of both.

NOTES

¹ See my study *The Power of Animals: An Ethnography* (1998)

² Livingstone 1865: 536.

³ Drummond 1889: 30–2.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 106.

⁵ Mandela 1990: 74–8.

⁶ Pachai 1978: 11–47.

⁷ Vaughan 1978.

⁸ Vaughan 1978: 9. Cf. Kjekshus 1977, Vail 1977.

⁹ Graham 1973: 97–98.

¹⁰ Graham 1973, MacKenzie 1988.

¹¹ Graham 1973: 40.

¹² MNA/NC 1/10/1.

¹³ Although much of the initiative for the establishment of game reserves came from the colonial government, and the newly formed (1947) Nyasaland Fauna Preservation Society (which was largely an expatriate organisation), many Malawians were also instrumental in conservation issues. Chief Katumbi was the ‘moving spirit’ behind the idea of Vwazu Marsh becoming a controlled hunting area (Report of the Game, Fish and Tsetse Control 1958), and the establishment of Liwonde game reserve was largely due to the initiatives of Chief Liwonde and the game ranger Les Kettle. The idea of the latter reserve was first broached at a council of chiefs held at Kasupe (Machinga) in 1965.

¹⁴ Clarke 1983: 10.

¹⁵ Hayes 1972: 29–30.

¹⁶ This success has to be measured in terms of the conservation of wildlife habitats, and the continuing presence of many species of larger mammals in Malawi – zebra, eland, kudu, sable, impala and especially the nyala. Compared to East Africa, many of the wildlife sanctuaries in Malawi have not been great tourist attractions and have never been ‘profitable’. This was recognised by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife in resisting efforts to turn much of Kasungu National Park over to tobacco farming. This success, however, has to be tempered by the fact that in the recent decades rhinoceros and cheetah have both become extinct in Kasungu National Park, and the elephant has almost been completely eradicated from the Majete Game Reserve, where it was once common.

¹⁷ Adams and McShane 1992: 122–138.

¹⁸ Timberlake 1985: 160.

¹⁹ Adams and McShane 1992: XV.

²⁰ *Ibid.*: XIX.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 130.

²² *Ibid.*: XIX.

²³ Bell 1987.

- ²⁴ Adams and McShane 1992: XVI, 50–53; Collett 1987.
- ²⁵ Chabal 1992.
- ²⁶ Timberlake 1985.
- ²⁷ Bell 1987: 89.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*: 81.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*: 90.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*: 93.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*: 93.
- ³² For these projects see Martin 1986, Adams and McShane 1992: 105–107, 178–183; for earlier discussion on the conservation of mammals in Africa see Eltringham 1979: 207–46; Delany and Happold 1979: 364–95.
- ³³ Research studies undertaken at Kasungu National Park and Vwaza Game Reserve in 1991 indicated that very few Malawians visit the wildlife sanctuaries (11 and 14 per cent respectively) and that most of these tended to be government officials.
- ³⁴ WSM Newsletter, February 1995.
- ³⁵ Eltringham 1979: 213.

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