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First, There's the Good News

THE NEWS COMING OUT of Africa isn't terribly upbeat these days—for people or wildlife. We hear of famine, droughts, plagues, epidemics, wars, poaching.

So it's refreshing to read some positive stories for a change. That's why I like our article on Ghana (page 38). It's a warm tale of hope and possibilities, of a people who are succeeding despite their problems.

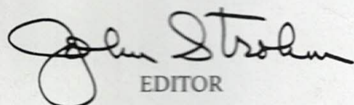
Our story about Britain and its bats (page 42) is a refreshing change, too. It takes a lighthearted look at a "pest" that's fast becoming one of the most-loved creatures in a country already batty about wildlife.

And our piece about monarch butterflies in Mexico (page 4) tells of good things happening as people change.

Finding positive or amusing stories like these is not always easy, of course. Nor would we want to ignore the problems of a perilous world. Our job is to report what's best about people and their natural world, but also to alert you to some alarming trends.

On the negative side, this issue introduces a bleak scenario for world climate change and its impact on wildlife (page 18). It looks at the woes of the planet's rarest penguin (page 22). And it examines a medical curiosity that seafood lovers should know about (page 36).

Good news and bad, we think this issue adds up to some intriguing reading.



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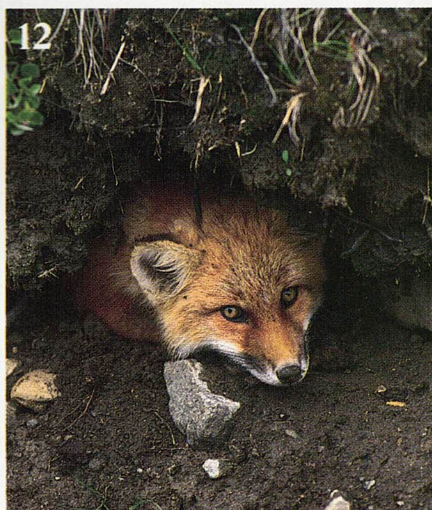

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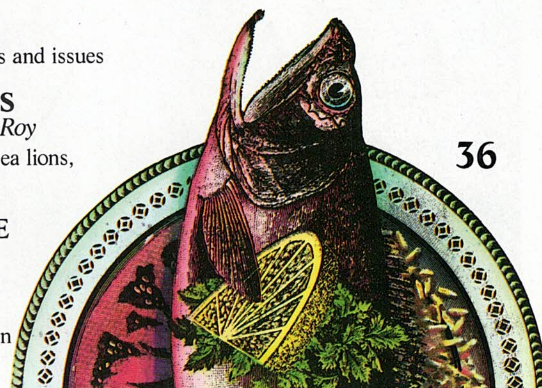

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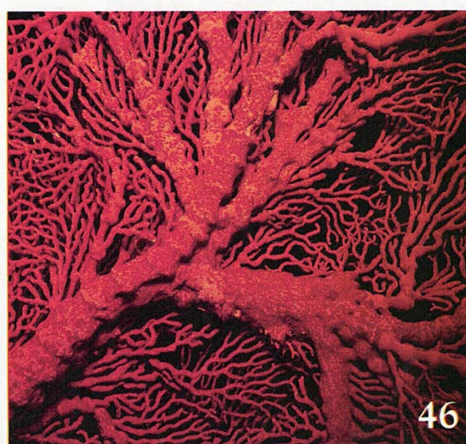

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ABOUT OUR COVER:

Forming a living orange tapestry, monarch butterflies sun themselves in a forest near Mexico City. Long-distance fliers, the delicate creatures migrate from North America, then winter in a handful of newly designated reserves, where they cluster for warmth. For this special wraparound cover, photographer Frans Lanting used a Nikon FE camera, 300mm Nikkor lens and Kodachrome 64 film. A story on this remarkable butterfly and Mexico's efforts to protect it begins on the next page.

Return To Ghana

On a trip "home" to a continent in turmoil, an old park hand finds friends still battling to save wildlife

By Bob Jamieson

In the African savanna all things must come to water, and so we crouch, watching, at the water hole's edge. A pair of crocodile eyes rises without a ripple. Egrets, polished white, squawk and argue, filling the trees that line the pool. A lean savanna antelope, a kob, approaches, hesitant, to drink.

Suddenly the birds, the insects, the very air is still. The kob is electric with caution, still as death. And death comes, a flaxen streak from the long grass. Egrets fill the air as kob and lion collide. Then it is over. Dragging the carcass slowly from the water, the lion catches our scent, turns and glares at us with lignite eyes, standing over the last faint quiverings of its prey. It is the way of the bush, beauty and death twisted in a knot. That is the part that holds you, that never changes. Everything else changes.

Mole National Park, Ghana is a speck of wild West Africa that few outsiders have seen. But for me, 17 years ago, it was home. I was a game warden, working with a group of young Ghanaians called the Faunal Survey Team. Fresh out of school, I had been sent over as a wildlife biologist representing CUSO, the Canadian University Service Overseas. It is hard now to remember what made me drop my life in western Canada to go to Ghana. I knew I wanted adventure. I had no visions of changing Africa, or of teaching great things to Africans. The changes would be in me; I would be the student.

Once known as the "white man's grave" because of malaria and sleeping sickness, Ghana was never thoroughly settled by the British as Kenya was, and all but one of its impressive array of wildlife reserves were established after Ghanaian independence in 1957. When I arrived from Canada in 1969, only three parks had been created and there was only a handful of people to manage them, headed by Dr. Emmanuel Asibey, a Scottish-trained Ghanaian. In the bush were half a dozen Ghanaian rangers and one transplanted Canadian, me.

It was a stange and wonderful time. I remember best the nights when the moon was full and we camped by rivers without names. We joked around the fire and ate rice and thick meat stew. In the morning we would wake in the half-light of dawn and head into the bush, walking survey lines in search of wild things, filling our notebooks with records of the comings and goings of kob and waterbuck, hartebeest and roan antelope.

The ancient tow truck symbolized Africa's hope: backfiring and spewing diesel fumes, but somehow getting us there

There was more to it than that, of course. There was hunger, dysentery and the awful sweating shakes of malaria. Sometimes, as when a buffalo turned on us, dragging a leg festered by a wire snare, there was gut-twisting fear. But from the moments of fear and the miles and sweat, we created a parks system, gazetting a dozen major parks and reserves by 1973.

But that was a long time ago. Out of Africa now one hears only of turmoil, war, starvation, of wildlife retreating before the weight of greed, drought and too many people. What about Ghana? I did not know, and it was with trepidation that I boarded the plane to return.

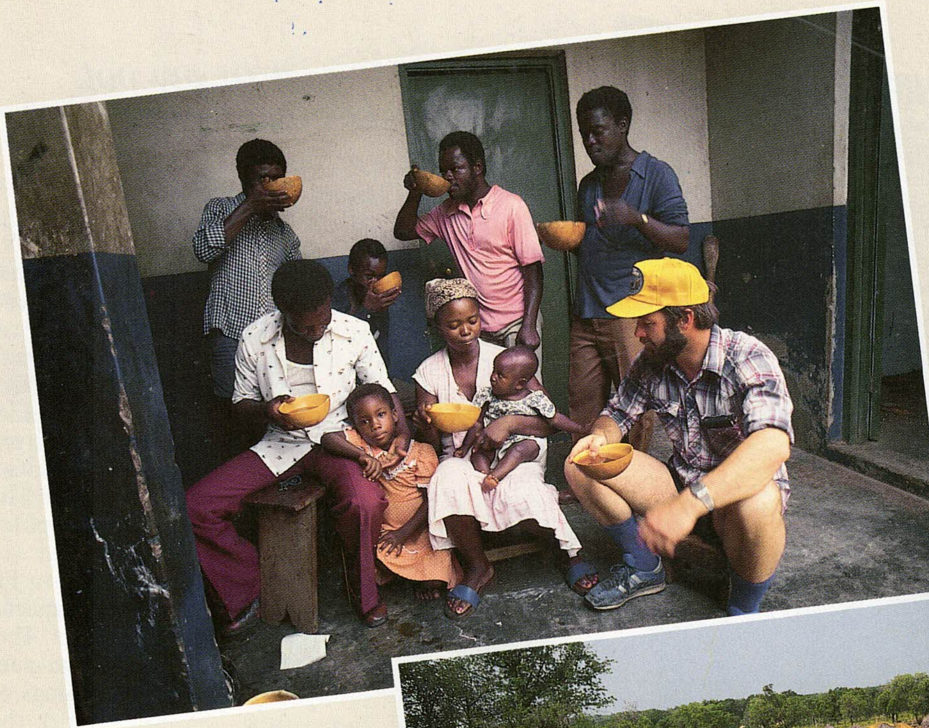
I wanted to see, firsthand, how wildlife had fared in the places I had known. I wanted to know if those places that had been dear to me had been swept away, or if somehow they had survived. More than anything, I wanted to see my friends and co-workers. From Accra, Ghana's capital, I traveled north to Mole Park, three days' hard driving.

At the headquarters, Ofori Fringpong, who had been my partner in running the survey team, looked up from his work, perplexed at the sight of this strange white man. Then his face lit up. "Ehh!" he shouted, and we hugged and laughed. He was still lean and hard. But his eyes showed the little wrinkles that come from rugged living and too much sun, and he had a patch of silver in his beard to rival my bald spot.

We went down to the park motel for a drink, and to talk of the fate of old friends. Ofori now runs the park. Several former team members have gone to work in the new parks we created. Others have retired to their villages. One man was killed the year before by an elephant, and just a few months before, another took a poacher's musket ball in the stomach. He had lain in the bush for three days before he was found and taken to the hospital. Somehow he survived.

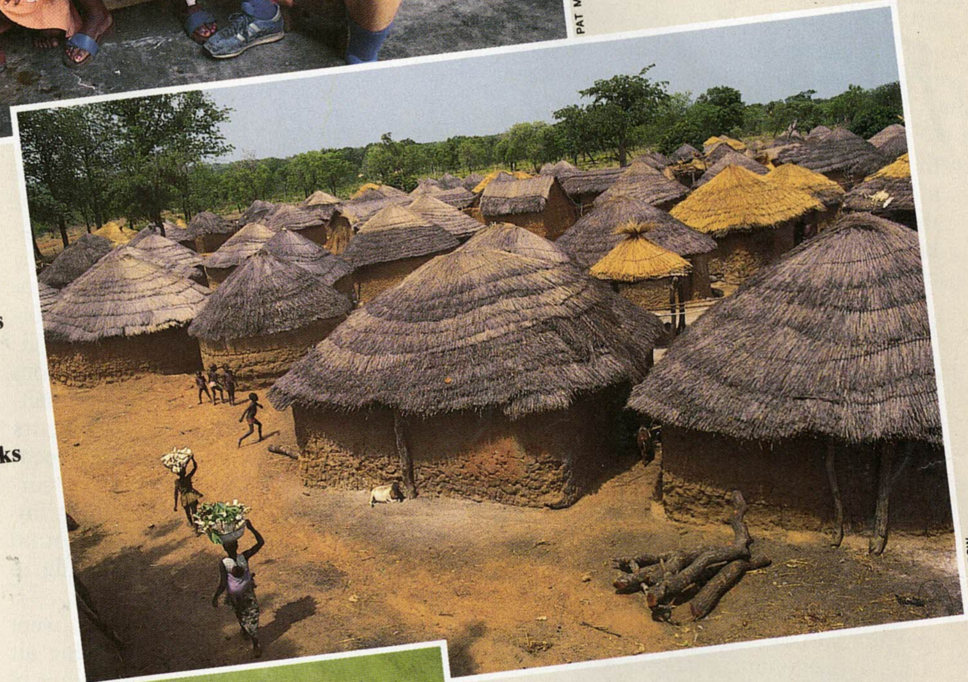
"As for the game, Bob, the poaching is too, too bad. And we have no petrol, no vehicles, nothing. Sometimes I think," and Ofori swept his hand across the park before us, "sometimes I wonder if it is all finished . . ." Then a dozen kob came to water below us, and far off in the savanna an elephant trumpeted.

Mole Park is a triumph for Ofori, who has managed to keep the reserve working over the past two decades while Ghana's economy and the condition of most of its people have declined steadily. Recent letters from friends in Ghana tell me that conditions are now actually improving, with roads and bridges being built and produce



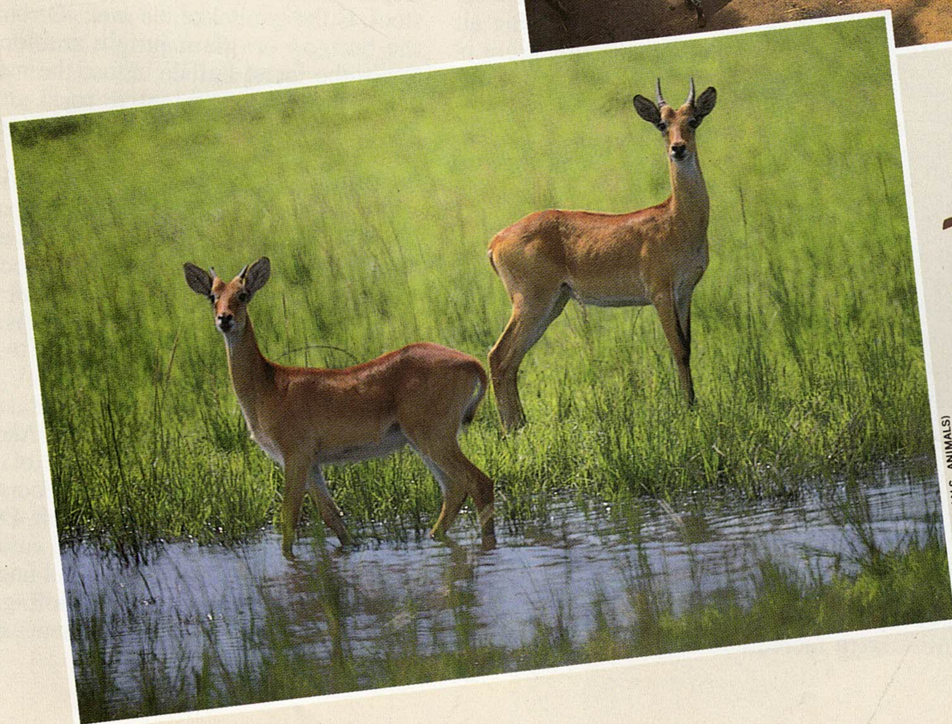
PAT MORROW

After a day beneath the African sun, beer from bowls quenches thirsts. The author (with cap) returned to Ghana partly to learn the fate of old friends, like these staff members at Mole Park.



PAT MORROW

In this and other villages in the neighborhood of Mole Park, tribal law no longer sanctions the killing of elephants, a change that followed talks between game wardens and a regional chief.



JANET THIEDE (ANIMALS, ANIMALS)

The comings and goings of kob were tallied by the author when he first came to Africa as a young game warden. With local rangers, he helped set up Ghana's park system.

and exports finally beginning to move again. But just four years ago, when I sat with Ofori, roads were in disrepair throughout the country, vehicle parts were almost impossible to get, gas was rationed. Broken plumbing remained broken. Even simple foods were expensive and hard to come by. And yet, in such times, Ofori and the game department had survived. Almost miraculously, they had staffed a half-dozen new parks and developed the apparatus necessary to protect them.

Next morning, we boarded a beat-up Land Rover and jolted down a long, narrow track into the park. There is no better way to travel in the African bush than in the open back of a Rover, with the wind in your face and the bush sliding by. We saw bushbuck and kob, as well as birds—Abyssinian rollers and a Malachite kingfisher.

Down on the flats, we jumped a herd of hartebeest—tall, long-faced antelope, mooselike in their ugliness. They ran beside us, then charged across the road in a cloud of dust. We shouted and laughed. It was good to see a big herd like this because their numbers are down along the margins of Mole Park. Meat poachers are taking their toll.

But if poaching is a serious threat, it is dwarfed by the loss of habitat. Throughout Africa, wild land disappears at the staggering rate of 40 acres per minute. In Ghana, the human population has doubled in the three decades since independence. The farmer and his hoe, the engineer and his dams, the white-smocked doctor with another newborn wailing in her hands: these destroy more African wildlife than the poacher and his musket ever will.

Nonetheless, Africa's story is not one of constant, catastrophic decline. There are successes. If I had been asked 17 years ago to predict the fate of Ghana's elephants, I would have guessed that many of the herds would be gone by now. In fact, every major herd we found in 1970 remains today. And as Ofori and I drove farther into Mole Park, we saw far more elephant sign than we ever saw in the old days. One reason, undoubtedly, is the game department's anti-poaching effort. Another is the scarcity of rifles in Ghana capable of killing an elephant. More important, however, is the realization by local people that elephants are important to Ghana's future.

In Damongo, the town nearest the park, tribal law has always dictated that the tusks and ears of an elephant that is killed must be brought to the chief. But the chief no longer sanctions elephant killing. His about-face followed long sessions with department staff, especially with those in the department who come from his region. Africans talking amongst themselves accomplished what no amount of "international concern" could have done.

Back at Mole Park headquarters, another old member of the survey team awaited me. Ahmed Nuhu is a squat, tough northerner, his face slashed by the traditional scars of the Walla tribe. With him was his wife Vivian, also a game department officer.

Nuhu, who will not trade the sweat and danger of the bush for a desk job, is a rare breed anywhere, and one especially needed in Africa. His perspective on wildlife is a combination of his own culture's attitudes and of the knowledge and ethics he absorbed at Mweka College. The college, located on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, trains people from across Africa in parks and wildlife management. It not only provides students with an intellectual basis for management but also with practical skills such as surveying and the use of firearms. Most important, students are instilled, around campfires in the bush, with a pride in being "for the game."

As darkness fell, the four of us went down to the water hole. The evening air was full of savanna sounds—the grunt of warthogs, the bark of baboons, the strange hacking call of guinea fowl. A branch snapped loudly in the bush: elephants feeding. In the dense brush by the pool, tusks glinted in the moonlight. A huge gray form emerged. We had no rifle. Ears wide, he tested the air, found our scent, turned and was gone. We laughed as we headed back toward the motel, but there was an ancient taste in our mouths, a taste from when our species did not rule Africa.

The next day I said farewell and headed south to a very special place: the oldest game sanctuary in Africa. Deep within Ghana's southern rain forest, it consists of two tiny villages, Boabeng and Fiema. When the Ashanti people first occupied Ghana several hundred years ago, fetish priests decreed that the monkeys here were sacred and must be protected. And so for generations, monkeys and people have shared the circle of forest that surrounds the two villages.

In our own time, however, Ghanaians from other parts of the country who did not respect the local traditions started killing the monkeys for their skins. In 1971, I was asked to look into the situation. After much discussion with village elders, the department declared the area surrounding the villages a game sanctuary, adding legal clout to traditional protection. There are now 3,000 to 4,000 monkeys of four species living there.

After greeting the elders in Fiema, I went to the monkey shrine, a quiet, simple place at the edge of the forest. The shrine was thick with duiker sign and giant forest centipedes, for all living things are protected there. Once each week the fetish priest and the elders come, as they have for centuries, to pour palm wine libations to protect the shrine and the monkeys.

Places like the Fiema shrine are central to the fate of wildlife in Africa. It is at such spots that respect for wild things is expressed within an African culture. Such respect is not something new for Africans, but it is something generally lost— something that must be recaptured for the continent's wildlife to prosper.

Africans and animals have lived side by side for eons. Among the Ashanti, the ears of the elephant are used to make the huge drums that call the elders to council. A leopard skin, draped across the chief's stool, is the symbol of his rank. Otromo, the bongo, or giant jungle antelope; Ekoo, the forest buffalo; Efoo, the monkey; Adowa, the diminutive royal antelope: all are central to Ashanti tales and proverbs.

Contemporary Ghanaians care that their children be able to see these animals. But they also care that their children eat. It is a matter of priorities, as expressed in the old Ashanti proverb: "I cannot be sympathetic to the antelope if there is no meat in my pot."

Dusk. Bloated with palm wine, I sat with the family of Daniel Akowuah, the ranger in charge of the monkey sanctuary, in the doorway of their home. Twelve-year-old Kofi, Daniel's eldest, watched me with big, curious eyes and held my hand in his small fingers as we taught each other songs in English and Twi, the language of the Ashanti. Kofi

wants to be a game warden when he grows up. I try to envision the kinds of problems he will face. It is on kids like Kofi, raised with wildlife, with wild things as part of their cultural heritage, that the future of Africa's wildlife hangs. Kofi's job will be a big one, but there is reason for continued optimism.

We rarely hear of quiet, relatively stable countries like the Ivory Coast, Zambia, Botswana and Ghana—countries where wildlife has a hopeful future. We hear of strife, but not of the little bands of wardens, like my friends in Ghana, who are "for the game."

Yet almost every country in Africa has a park system of some sort. Effective administration and protection are often marginal, but the parks are there. That in itself is an amazing success. Less than 2 percent of the land area of North America is committed to national parks and other reserves. Few African countries have less than 2 percent; Tanzania has more than 11 percent. That commitment the African nations have made to parks and wildlife is worth celebrating. But as we cheer, we must also acknowledge the harsh realities of modern Africa. We must accept that the continent's wildlife will only be saved by Africans, and only for reasons that make sense to Africa's people.

The next morning I left the monkey sanctuary amid laughter and promises. Down the road the Rover broke down, and I hitched a ride south on an ancient tow truck. It was a greasy old behemoth, chugging along, grinding gears, backfiring and spewing diesel fumes: inefficient beyond words, yet somehow getting me there, a grand simile for modern Africa. Too soon, I was ushered into the Western world of cooled air and piped-in music, where everything works and everything runs on time but where no one holds your hand in friendship.

High in the thin blue air, I looked down on Africa. The hot, dry steppes, starched flat, receded into a dull brown horizon. I turned away from the window. I did not know if I would ever return, but somehow that no longer mattered. I knew that somewhere out there on the dusty plain, there was a water hole. And once more, at dusk, a kob will come, hesitant, to drink. ▣

Writer Bob Jamieson is now an outfitter living in northern British Columbia.

JEN & DES BARTLETT (SURVIVAL ANGLIA)

Changed attitudes, coupled with a scarcity of rifles, have eased pressures on Ghana's elephants. In Mole Park, the author saw more elephant sign than he had 17 years earlier.

PAT MORROW

Youngsters carry food on the road to their village. Ghanaian parents want their children to see wild animals, but not if the price is their children going hungry.