

THE RENATURING OF AFRICAN ANIMALS: FILM AND LITERATURE IN THE 1950s AND 1960s.¹

WILLIAM BEINART

Oxford University

This article on natural history film and literature was originally written as a lecture for students at the University of Bristol and inevitably its context has shaped its content. The references points are largely to books and films which were published for British readerships, or made for British audiences. Nevertheless, these cultural productions also involved people based in the US, Kenya, South Africa and elsewhere; many reached audiences well beyond Britain and over the longer term, their impact may have been very widespread. I hope that for such reasons, and also because of parallel, if different, developments elsewhere, the analysis will be of broader interest.

For many British people, patterns of knowledge are intricately bound up with images from photography, film and television which saturate public culture. One small element in the making of this visual world has been natural history and wildlife film, more especially television programmes, which have been popular in Western countries over a long period of time. On British television, for example, such productions have been able to command important slots, with audiences of millions, for half a century. African wildlife and nature have featured heavily in the televisual output both because of the variety and attractiveness of 'big game' and because of Britain's long colonial link with the continent.

My interest in this genre took academic shape in 1990, when I began teaching a course on the environmental history of southern and central Africa to undergraduates at the University of Bristol, just a few hundred metres from the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Natural History unit.² Visual media had the potential to provide a particularly useful supplement in teaching this course. On the one hand, relatively few British students had visited African countries or had first hand familiarity with African history and African landscapes. On the other hand, many had seen natural history TV programmes and knew something about African animals. Building on that televisual knowledge and a relatively familiar filmic terrain promised to be a valuable hook on which to hang more complex themes in environmental history. In any event, the introduction of a series of films as an adjunct to the lectures was a relatively intriguing and unusual teaching strategy for most of them.

The visual media did not become central to the course, nor to my strategies of presentation and research. Nevertheless, the videos shown presented a problem in the way that they represented African nature and African people. As

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1. This article was published under the same title, but in a slightly different form, without the illustrations, and with more limited references, in Paul Slack (ed.), *Environments and Historical Change: the Linacre Lectures 1998* (Oxford, 1999). Thanks to the editor and publishers for permission to republish here.
 2. My experience of and interest in such films dated back earlier, as they were, to me, a particularly attractive part of television programming: as coverage of Africa for an expatriate South African; and as educational, environmental family viewing.

will be illustrated, they could not be left to speak for themselves. My route into developing a critical analysis of natural history films involved trying to discover something about the history and approaches of some of the earlier filmmakers.³ This proved less difficult than anticipated because a number of them produced autobiographies and other popular writing. It soon became clear that some of the most important natural history filmmakers in the 1950s and 1960s, when TV became a mass medium in Britain, were part of a network of ardent animal lovers and conservationists.

This article focusses on the filmmaking involvements of a small number of highly committed people who worked at the interface with African animals, especially in Kenya: Armand and Michaela Denis; Joy and George Adamson; Sue Hart, and her husband Toni Harthoorn. In part it attempts to explore their representation of Africa. Here there are resonances with recent analyses of imperial photography which, James Ryan argues, allowed British people “symbolically to travel through, explore and even possess [colonial] spaces”.⁴ Visual images were important in binding a diverse empire into some kind of coherent picture in the British popular mind. They were a significant element in popular cultural imperialism.⁵ Paul Landau perhaps goes further in arguing that photography “naturalised the ‘possibility’” of colonised spaces.⁶

But there are other important questions raised by the filmmakers’ work: in particular their portrayal of animals and its significance for British and western ideas. The very success of their project suggests that their audiences, relatively few of whom had direct contact with Africa and its animals, were highly receptive to their message. Their approach and capacity to reach mass audiences was mediated by new developments in such diverse fields as veterinary medicine, ecology and ethnology, film, television, air transport, and popular publishing. I will suggest that the visual and literary output of this period has something to tell us about changing Western approaches to African animals. In turn these developments were not without their impact on African countries.

Authors and Filmmakers - A Collective Biography

African animals have long held a grip on a small corner of the British imagination. In the nineteenth century, hunting and its literary aftermath fascinated large numbers of Western people.⁷ This type of engagement persisted well into the

3. Bristol is a major centre of British wildlife filmmaking, partly because of the location of the BBC Natural History unit in the city. I could not get easy access to the output of these earlier filmmakers, although their work was occasionally featured on TV, so that the films used were not by and large the same as those discussed here. Jeffrey Boswall, a prolific British wildlife writer, sound recorder and filmmaker (specialising in birds) compiled a film ‘The Wildlife Moving Picture Show’ on the history of wildlife film for the BBC series *The World About Us*; this included footage from Kearton, Denis and others. The annual British wildlife film festival, *Wildscreen*, held in Bristol, sometimes included historical films, and historical footage was used in Scorer Associates three-part series on *Hunting and Game Conservation in Africa*.

4. James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photographs and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London, 1997), 214.

5. John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1984).

6. Paul S. Landau, ‘With Camera and Gun in Southern Africa: Inventing the Image of Bushmen c.1880 to 1935’ in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of Bushmen* (Cape Town, 1996), 132.

7. Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: the English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (London, 1987); John MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1988).



*Figure 1. Camera and Rifle in Africa.*⁹

twentieth century in the elite East African safari hunt in East Africa, and is still alive on the increasing number of game farms in southern Africa - as well as in Wilbur Smith novels. Victorian African hunting and adventure sagas had often included illustrations of animals. When cameras became available, hunters liked to be photographed with their kills displayed before them, sometimes with a foot firmly on the neck of the animal in a pose of domination. Even those who wished to photograph live animals could find that they had to make do with immobile dead subjects.⁸ Although camera technology was sufficiently developed by the 1880s to take photographs at one-thousandth of a second, and stop birds in flight, getting heavy equipment on location in Africa was far more difficult.

Around the turn of this century, predatory hunting started to give way, very unevenly, to increasing concern about game preservation in the British empire. Game reserves were gradually established in which hunting was strictly controlled. Conservationist approaches were mirrored in photographic books which displayed live animals shot, to use the metaphor of the time, with camera rather than rifle. Pioneer photographers such as Carl Shillings and A.R. Dugmore waited patiently in hides in order to capture their graphic wildlife pictures -

8. C.A.W. Guggisberg, *Early Wildlife Photographers* (Newton Abbot, 1977), 13.

9. *Ibid.*, 54.

which included predators hunting.¹⁰

The possibilities for filming wild animals in Africa were quickly realised in the early twentieth century, soon after the technology became available. Some of the early film was preoccupied with capture and spectacle. *Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt*, released in 1912, grossed \$500,000 and clearly struck a chord of Western expectations about Africa.¹¹ Cherry Kearton, perhaps the most innovative and important early British wildlife filmmaker accompanied Theodore Roosevelt's much publicised hunting safari to East Africa in 1909.¹² In 1911 he filmed an expedition to Kenya by an American military officer, Colonel C.J. Jones, who was a leading figure in the movement to preserve the American buffalo.¹³ Alarmed that African animals might meet the same fate, Jones took with him skilled cowboys to demonstrate that it was possible to capture animals by lasso. On a subsequent trip Kearton staged a spectacular reconstruction of a Maasai lion hunt. His pith helmet, lack of anthropological sensibility and chats with penguins now seem redolent of the imperial ethos and an uneasy anthropomorphism.

Martin Johnson, the key inter-war American filmer of African animals, started out presenting slide- and talk-shows of his trip with Jack London to the South Sea islands, including sequences on 'Cannibals' and 'Dances of the Head Hunters'.¹⁴ His first film in 1917, called *Jungle Adventures*, dwelt on the thrills, spills, and wildness of the tropics. In many successful feature films on Africa, released in the 1920s and 1930s, he and his wife Osa never dispensed with an element of showmanship. They induced elephants, rhinos and lions to charge at Osa, the vulnerable white woman who, with assistants, was ready to shoot the animal if it came too close.

But it would be misleading to argue either that this early work was so one-dimensional or, as I will illustrate, that such approaches disappeared from natural history film by mid-century. Kearton came to Africa after he had established himself as the most systematic photographer of British birds. He had used a wide range of strategies to approach his subjects in their nests, lowering himself on ropes to photograph cliff birds or lying in a hollow model cow in fields or near hedgerows; he transferred many of his careful photographic techniques to film.¹⁵ He was a committed conservationist, and by the 1930s he felt that the art of natural history film was taking a step backwards. Kearton believe that his "true to life" techniques, "the real natural history film of which I had been a pioneer" had "ignominiously died" in the face of rampant commercialism, overexposed audiences and changing tastes.¹⁶

Similarly, in their fascinating biography, the Imperatos illustrate that the Johnsons also developed an alternative approach. After meeting with Carl Akeley, a major figure in the American Museum of Natural History, became

10. Guggisberg, *Early Wildlife Photographers*.

11. Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, *They Married Adventure. The Wandering Lives of Martin and Osa Johnson* (New Brunswick NJ, 1992), 97.

12. Cherry Kearton, *Adventures with Animals and Men* (London, 1935).

13. G.H. Scull, *Lassoing Wild Animals in Africa* (New York, 1911).

14. Imperato and Imperato, *They Married Adventure*.

15. Ada Cherry Kearton, *On Safari* (London, 1956), 42.

16. Kearton, *Adventures with Animals and Men*, 275-277.

absorbed in a project to compile an accurate record of animals whose survival was by no means certain.¹⁷ They spent long periods in Kenya during the 1920s, especially in the dry north at Mt Marsabit. It was an isolated spot, where the animals were less nervous than in areas more frequented by hunters; a small lake, which they called Lake Paradise, attracted many thirsty animals which they could capture, sitting in hides, on film. Much of their film taken in the 1920s concentrated on animals in their habitat. Akeley, who had developed a lighter, more manoeuvrable camera, visited them in Kenya; so did George Eastman, head of Kodak, who recognised the potential of their work for his industry. Both Kearton and the Johnsons wrote many illustrated books so that film and publishing reinforced each other from the start.¹⁸

The Johnsons, in particular, transformed wildlife film and Armand Denis (b.1897) entered the field just as their work was receiving its peak exposure. His career also displays the tension between a rather commercial, exploitative approach to animals and careful conservationism that became more marked from the late 1940s. Denis opened his autobiography, *On Safari* (1963), with a typical manifesto: "I have had two great passions in my life - travel and animals".¹⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by others in the field. Belgian-born and Oxford-trained, he worked as a research chemist in the USA in 1920s, and collected unusual animals. With money he made from inventing a method of volume control for radios, he financed a filming trip to Bali. When the film stock was damaged, he made contact with Kodak and worked for them. His Bali film, *Goona Goona*, satisfied a fascination for the exotic and was a hit in Paris and New York, where Goona Goona milkshakes went on sale in Times Square.

Zoos and circuses were popular in the 1930s, and the task of stocking them with a variety of large wild animals became the basis for a particularly fertile narrative of masculine prowess, capture and control. RKO, one of the biggest US film studios, released *Bring 'em Back Alive* in 1932, starring Frank Buck, who had already achieved some renown in this sphere. Denis was employed to help on its successor, *Wild Cargo* (1934). The films focussed on the drama of capture as well as *ersatz* battles between animals. An old tiger, which was to have fought with Frank Buck in a pit, drowned in a torrential downpour; Buck resolved the problem by being filmed wrestling hand to hand with the corpse.²⁰ *King Kong*, released in 1933, achieved its dramatic tension by inverting these same themes of capture. Control was lost over the wild ape-like monster, which threatened both the symbols of purity, a white woman, and of modernity, a skyscraper.²¹

Denis reacted strongly against his experience of popular animal cinematography and in the mid-1930s made a film independently about big game in the Albert Park, Belgian Congo. He remained involved with some of the more dubious aspects of the African wildlife enterprise, such as the search for the four-

17. D. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York, 1989); P. Bodry-Sanders, *Carl Akeley: Africa's Collector; Africa's Saviour* (New York, 1991); Imperato and Imperato, *They Married Adventure*.

18. See Guggisberg, *Early Wildlife Photographers* and Imperato and Imperato, *They Married Adventure* for bibliographies.

19. Armand Denis, *On Safari: the Story of My Life* (London, 1963), 15.

20. Denis, *On Safari*, 62.

21. Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 162.

tusked elephant of the Ituri forest with the grandiose New York Explorers Society. In 1940, when the war interfered with filming, he started a chimpanzee farm in Florida, partly for research on the origins on cancer, partly as a tourist attraction. He was only one of many who helped to fuel a market for exotic animals which was proving highly destructive. Wild animals were still there to be sold, possessed, researched on, caged and displayed. In 1950, he was employed on the MGM remake of *King Solomon's Mines* on location East Africa, a story which glorified the great white hunter.

Nevertheless Denis also developed a lyrical, celebratory natural history film, which reached fruition in *Savage Splendour*, released in 1949. It is, from our vantage point, a sometimes uneasy fusion of people and animals in the 'wild'. And it did feature animal capture, notably of a rhino and giraffe by lasso, a technique which Denis, like Colonel Jones before him, felt would prove that large animals could be captured for zoos or moved to safe reserves without loss of life.²² But considerable footage attempted to be "true to nature" and by constructing an underwater tank for the camera, he managed to secure perhaps the first film of hippos in "their monumental underwater ballet" at Mzima springs in Kenya.²³ The aim of the film was to record and educate, to view the wild rather than to capture it. It was RKO's most profitable feature film of the year and its reception suggested strongly that tastes were shifting.

In 1950, Denis married Michaela, then a fashion-designer "moving among the smart set in New York," who also claimed she had "devoured animal books" and developed an "African fixation" as a child in London.²⁴ As in the case of the Johnsons, the Denises became a glamorous, media-friendly team. One of Michaela's first jobs was to stand in for Deborah Kerr when animal shots were required in *King Solomon's Mines*. During a visit to Britain in 1953, to promote a further African film, *Below the Sahara*, Denis was invited to show footage and talk on BBC television. "The public response was quite extraordinary," he wrote later. "In all my years of film making I had never known anything like it. A week or two later ... we did another half-hour programme ... It seemed that we had become famous."²⁵

The Denises did not find success in a vacuum. A mass market for animal film and books - as well as illustrated magazines such as *National Geographic* - was well-established and the early 1950s seem to have been a particularly fertile period for a newly sympathetic approach.²⁶ Hans Hass was making prize-winning underwater films in the 1940s and early 1950s.²⁷ Konrad Lorenz, "the man who talks with animals", published his popularisation of advances in ethology, *King Solomon's Ring*, in 1952.²⁸ The Disney Corporation produced the first of their 'True Life Adventure' series, the *Living Desert* in 1953. Jacques Cousteau's best-

22. Denis, *On Safari*, 243.

23. *Ibid.*, 246.

24. Denis, *Leopard in My Lap*, 9, 21.

25. Denis, *On Safari*, 280.

26. Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge MA, 1999) for further background on the United States at this period.

27. Hans Hass, *Challenging the Deep: Thirty Years of Undersea Adventure* (New York, 1973).

28. Konrad Z. Lorenz, *King Solomon's Ring: New Light on Animal Ways* (Methuen, London, 1952; paperback London, 1957).

selling *Silent World* appeared in 1953, and the film version a year later.²⁹ Gerald Durrell's *Overloaded Ark* (1953), about a collecting trip to the Cameroons, was the first of a spate of books.³⁰ Bernhard Grzimek, German zoo director and champion of African wildlife, catered to a similar readership soon afterwards.³¹

Animals had featured on British TV in *Zoo Hour* in the 1940s when George Cansdale, superintendent of London Zoo, brought some of his charges to the Alexandra Palace studios.³² This was a didactic exercise to demonstrate anatomy, behaviour and party tricks, a tradition continued by Johnny Morris, based at Bristol Zoo, in *Animal Magic* in the 1960s. Even if Cansdale's animals were captive, their unpredictability, whether urinating or trying to escape, could make good television. David Attenborough, a young television producer with a zoology degree, made a series of three programmes with the renowned scientist Julian Huxley at this time to illustrate animal colourings and shapes.

The Denis's BBC contract did, however, represent something new: a commitment to location filming of animals in their habitat in a regular half hour slot. They made Nairobi a permanent base, built their dream house there, and assembled a filming team. Armand produced his own films, Michaela wrote books, and their long-running series helped to define television natural history and attract attention to Kenya's parks. The "breath-taking animal sequences which thrill millions", Michaela recorded, were only "the highspots of weeks and even months of routine work, of constant disappointment, and backbreaking journeys".³³ Kenya was becoming a significant submetropole of natural history film-making, drawing on the infrastructure of colonial rule (despite Mau Mau) and on the networks of specialists and scientists, including the Leakeys, white game rangers, and African intermediaries.³⁴ Denis began to make explicitly conservationist films, for example illustrating how the crude wire traps set by poachers cut into the legs of elephants, and explained his switch to TV partly by its potential for such messages. Feature film distributors were still hesitant on this front and television was beginning to reach a wider public, more regularly.

In turn the Denis's programme, *On Safari*, and the growing television audience, provided a platform for Peter Scott's Look series and Attenborough's *Zoo Quest*, both initially broadcast in 1954.³⁵ The first *Zoo Quest*, in some sense a step backwards, was of an animal capture expedition to Sierra Leone, but it also aimed at a more scientific approach and concern for small exotic animals as well as large.³⁶ George Michael, a Lebanese-South African jazz musician who also ran a gun shop in Pretoria and organised hunting safaris for an elite tourist market, made a feature length film called *African Fury* in 1952.³⁷ On a trip to the United States to sell his film, he conceived of a family television programme *The*

29. J. Y. Cousteau, *The Silent World* (London, 1953); Richard Munson, *Cousteau: the Captain and his World* (New York, 1989).

30. Gerald M. Durrell, *The Overloaded Ark* (London, 1953); Douglas Botting, *Gerald Durrell: the Authorised Biography* (London, 2000).

31. B. Grzimek, *No Room for Wild Animals* (London, 1956) and *Serengeti Shall Not Die* (London, 1960).

32. David Attenborough, *The Zoo Quest Expeditions: Travels in Guyana, Indonesia and Paraguay* (London, 1980), 7.

33. Denis, *Leopard*, 64.

34. Michaela Denis, *Ride a Rhino* (London, 1967), 20. First published, 1959.

35. C. Parsons, *True to Nature* (Cambridge, 1982); Attenborough, *The Zoo Quest Expeditions*.

36. Christopher Parsons, *True to Nature* (Cambridge, 1982); Attenborough, *Zoo Quest Expeditions*, 8.

37. Marjorie Michael, *I Married a Hunter* (London, 1958); George Michael, *The Michaels in Africa* (London, 1959).

Michaels in Africa. Its success, his wife believed, came from its sincerity of purpose: “we don’t use actors, and we never fake shots to make them look better than they might otherwise appear”.³⁸ There was no television outlet for them in South Africa, but their material was screened in the USA, Europe and Britain.

The involvement of George and Joy Adamson in the linked production of books and films, as authors and subjects, illustrates some further key developments. Born in India in 1906, George Adamson followed his family to Kenya and found work in 1938 as a game warden after a chequered career of hunting and trading.³⁹ Based in Isiolo, north of Mt Kenya, where the fertile highlands end, he fell in love with the arid north and then with Joy in 1942. She was an Austrian botanical illustrator, already on her second marriage, talented and impetuous.⁴⁰ Her relationship with Adamson, whom she married in 1944, was always deeply troubled, although it created important opportunities for both of them.

As part of his duties, Adamson shot a lioness in 1956 which was believed to have attacked a Boran homestead; he found himself with three motherless cubs of about ten days old which he brought home. It was by no means unusual for Africans or Europeans - including filmmakers - to keep wild animals. The Keartons had a pet chimpanzee, the Johnsons a gibbon, the Denises kept a menagerie in Nairobi, and so did the Michaels in Pretoria, including a leopard, a springbok and a lion (segregated) in the garden. Joy had already kept unusual pets and in earlier years, when she was drawing plants on Mount Kenya, she stayed with Raymond Hook, who trained cheetahs for hunting and racing - a practice which had been common in India.⁴¹ In Zambia, soon afterwards, Norman Carr, warden of the new Kafue National Park, found himself with three motherless cubs, of which he adopted two.⁴² (The third went on to participate in the film *Cleopatra*.)

“At once,” Adamson recalled,

Joy took absolute possession of the cubs. How little did Joy or I imagine that the story of the smallest of the three cubs, and the cubs she herself would have one day, would be translated into thirty-three languages, sell several million copies, be made into a film and, as we hope and believe, make a lasting impact on the way in which human beings regard wild animals.⁴³

Two cubs were sent to zoos in Europe, but they kept the third and name it Elsa who went everywhere with them. At two years old, this lioness started hunting local livestock and they decided, after some conflict with the authorities, to put her back into the wild - a long and difficult process.

38. Michael, *I Married a Hunter*, 98.

39. George Adamson, *Bwana Game: the Life Story of George Adamson* (London, 1968) and *My Pride and Joy: an Autobiography* (London, 1986).

40. Adrian House, *The Great Safari: the Lives of George and Joy Adamson* (London, 1995), 64.

41. House, *The Great Safari*, 55. For the long history of cheetah training in India see Divyabhanusinh, *The End of a Trail: the Cheetah in India* (New Delhi, 1995).

42. N. Carr, *Return to the Wild: a Story of Two Lions* (London, 1962).

43. Adamson, *Bwana Game*, 219.



Figure 2. Joy Adamson with Elsa the lioness.⁴⁶

Joy Adamson wrote about the experience in a short book, *Born Free*, which appeared in 1960.⁴⁴ Its extraordinary photographs showed the Adamsons, relaxed, in daily interaction with the lion both as a cub and when fully grown. Collins publishers, who gave the text maximum publicity, had been looking to expand in this area and became an important outlet for popular wildlife books. In the next couple of years, the Adamsons maintained some contact with Elsa, who gave birth to three cubs, and Joy wrote two further books, *Living Free* and *Forever Free*.⁴⁵ A children's book was produced, David Attenborough made a film, and Joy travelled the world on a speaking tour, promoting her publications and raising money for a Trust fund she had established for animal conservation. *Born Free* sold one million copies in England and five million copies overall; it is still one of the easiest books to find in the nature section of second-hand bookshops in England.

In 1964, George Adamson participated in a film based on their experiences, produced by Carl Foreman who had made *Guns of Navarone* and *Dr Zhivago*.⁴⁷ Both the film crew and the lead actors, Virginia McKenna and Bill Travers, were determined that they should capture the spirit of *Born Free* as closely as possible. George again domesticated and lived with lions on a daily basis, in an even more intense way than before: film produced a reality which was as extraordinary as the earlier events it was portraying. Partly because of the publicity around the books, the film had an enormous impact when it was released. The experience of making it deeply influenced Travers and McKenna, also a husband-and-wife team. She wrote that Adamson's "attitude towards lions, and indeed all living creatures, was our chief influence during those very difficult months of filming, and will always be a guiding light to us on questions of animal treatment, animal-human co-existence in the world." Already animal lovers, the "incredible experience of working with the lions" persuaded them to devote their energies to conservation.⁴⁸

44. Joy Adamson, *Born Free: a Lioness of Two Worlds* (London, 1960).

45. Joy Adamson, *Living Free: the Story of Elsa and Her Cubs* (London, 1961) and *Forever Free* (London, 1962).

46. Adamson, *Born Free*, between 112, 123; and 128, 129. My thanks to Mrs. Jean Aucutt, The Elsa Conservation Trust, for permission to use these pictures.

47. Carl Foreman, *A Cast of Lions: the Story of the Making of the Film Born Free* (London, 1966).

48. Virginia McKenna, *Some of My Friends have Tails* (London, 1970), 36.

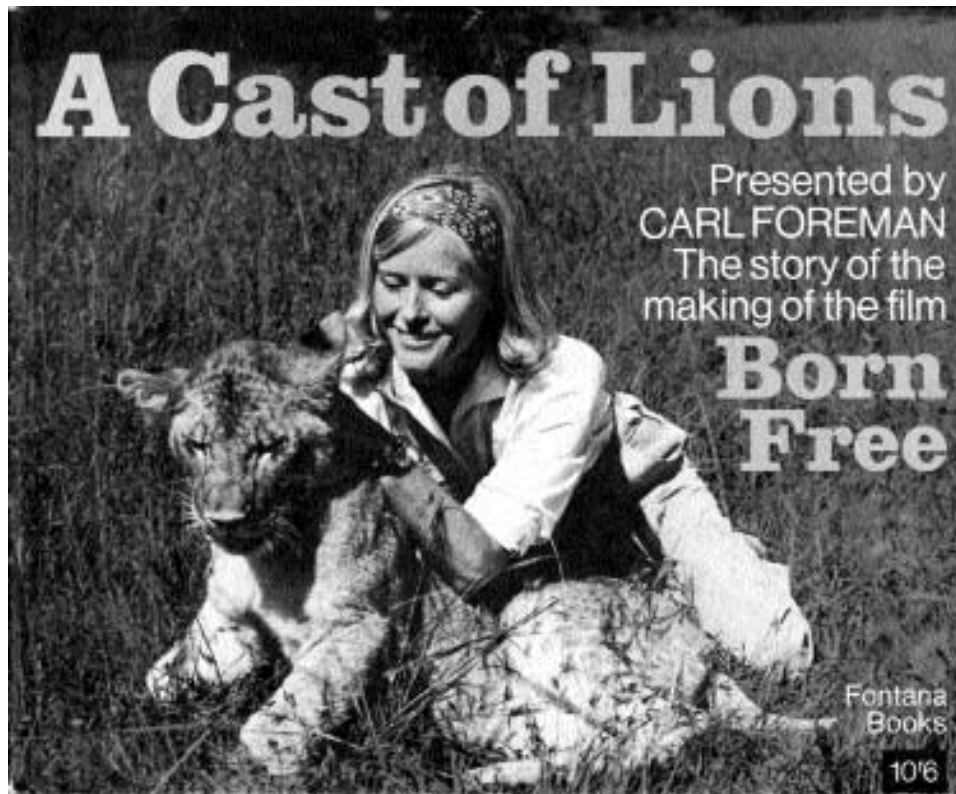


Figure 3. Virginia McKenna with lion cub.⁴⁹

Adamson managed to secure some of the lions involved in the film, and repeated the process of restoring them to the wild in Meru reserve. Travers filmed this as a documentary called *The Lions are Free* (1967). It included a scene at Whipsnade Zoo in England, where two of the film lions had been taken, showing them bounding up to greet McKenna but trapped by a fence.⁵⁰ The film was shown three times in 1967 on prime-time US television to estimated audiences of 35 million and netted large profits. Travers and McKenna made further conservationist films: in Scotland, based on Gavin Maxwell's *Ring of Bright Water*, on otters; and in Tsavo National Park, Kenya, with the Sheldricks.⁵¹ The drama of Elsa's life and its aftermath played to a large Western audience.

When the Adamsons required veterinary attention for their lions in the 1960s, they turned to Drs. Toni and Sue Harthoorn. Sue Hart trained at the Royal Veterinary College in London, married a South African in 1950, and lived on a farm in the Eastern Transvaal, where she started a veterinary practice. In 1957, she met James Stevenson-Hamilton, legendary retired first warden of the nearby Kruger National Park, a year before his death. Hart maintained strong contact with his wife Hilda (who kept zebra on her farm) and later suggested that the cou-

49. Foreman, *A Cast of Lions*, front cover.

50. McKenna, *Some of My Friends*, 42.

51. Gavin Maxwell, *Ring of Bright Water* (London, 1960).

ple had greatly influenced her to focus on wild animals rather than livestock.⁵² She wrote animal stories and “spread the gospel of conservation” in her *Dr. Sue* series on South African radio, later transposed to BBC Playschool in Britain.⁵³

Toni Harthoorn, a friend of hers from veterinary college working in Kenya, was a pioneer in the use of drugs to immobilise animals. In 1958 he experimented with these techniques to transplant antelopes; he worked with both Denis and Adamson in Kenya.⁵⁴ In 1959 he participated in Operation Noah, rescuing animals threatened by the flooding of the Zambezi valley during the construction of the Kariba dam. He was called in because the team, while successful with many smaller animals, could not move black rhino without immobilisation.⁵⁵ Subsequently, the Natal Parks Board in South Africa requested his help in moving white rhino, a complex and much-publicised operation that resulted in transfers of this rare species to the Kruger National Park, Zimbabwe and Kenya.⁵⁶ During his visits to South Africa, he met Sue Hart again; they married and moved to Kenya.

Immobilisation techniques had tremendous potential in the veterinary context, in scientific work on live animals, such as weighing, measuring, tagging and radio tracing, as well as in conservation. The new drugs anaesthetised animals quickly and evenly, so that they did not damage themselves, and had an effective antidote. They also had implications for the management of animals for film and the techniques themselves soon became the subject of television broadcasts. Film soon also found the Harthoorns. Ivan Tors, an American director who made the successful *Flipper the Dolphin* series, came to Kenya to shoot *Cowboy in Africa*, at much the same time as Foreman was filming *Born Free*.⁵⁷ Sue Hart acted as vet, animal manager and minder of the African child actor, Charles Malinda.⁵⁸ The film explored the idea of ranching wild animals in Africa, already being developed for commercial and conservation purposes in southern Africa, as a temporary means of saving them. Its ‘villain’ tried to set the animals free, but the animals, understanding their best interests, returned. Many animals had to be captured to make the film and immobilisation was essential. Despite the rather dubious message, great trouble was taken to train the animals. “Nothing was faked”, Hart protested, except when the rhino captured for the film battered off its horn, and had to star with a rubber replacement.

Using the Harthoorns as models, Tors developed the *Daktari* TV series (‘doctor’ in Swahili), shown widely in the US and Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s. *Daktari* became big business, with spinoffs like the *Daktari Annual*. Its hero Marsh Tracy expounded many of the values which people like the Adamsons and Harthoorns were trying to publicise, although this did include advice on how to capture animals (for benign causes of course). In a nice inversion of reality, in the story ‘Fame comes to Clarence’, the cross-eyed lion,

52. Sue Hart, *Dr Sue: A Vet in Africa* (Johannesburg, 1995), ix, 77.

53. Sue Hart, *In the Wild* (Johannesburg, 1974).

54. A.M. Harthoorn, *The Flying Syringe: Ten Years of Immobilising Wild Animals in Africa* (London, 1970); Hart, *Dr Sue*, 82; House, *The Great Safari*, 251; Denis, *On Safari*, 244.

55. A BBC film was made of Operation Noah before he came. See Charles Lagus, *Operation Noah* (London, 1959). Sue Hart, *Life with Daktari: Two Vets in East Africa* (London, 1969), 37; Hart, *Dr Sue*, 83.

56. Ian Player, *The White Rhino Saga* (London, 1972).

57. On dolphins in film and display see Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 175ff.

58. Hart, *Life with Daktari*, 139 ff.

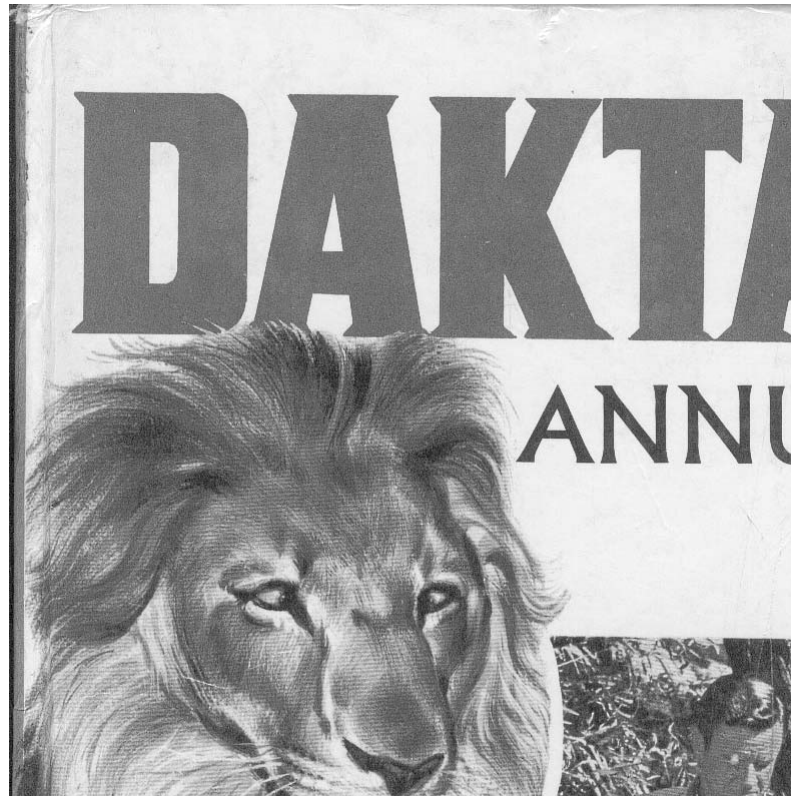


Figure 4. *Daktari annual*.⁶⁰

Daktari is approached by an oily American film director with “pig-like eyes” who solicits his help, only to be told that Daktari was “not interested in our animals as film stars, only as patients”.⁵⁹ The *Daktari* films did not, however, call directly on African networks as they were shot in ‘Wameru’, southern California. Sue Hart called her autobiographical book *Life with Daktari*.

While they did not achieve anything like the personal profile of the Adamsons, the Harthoorn’s house in Nairobi was a meeting point for people associated with wildlife and film. Sue Hart was involved with the animal orphanage in Nairobi National Park. Perhaps her most interesting initiative was a TV series called *Animal Ark*, made for Kenyan, not metropolitan audiences and acted by Kenyan children with African producers. Morris Mwenda, television controller after independence, was keen to develop a children’s programme which did not directly transmit British material and values. Hart saw it as an opportunity to continue her South Africa work and spread the conservationist message: “I concluded - and confirmed - my suspicions that the African child knows far less about wild African animals than the European”. Knowledge about animals, Hart argued, would quickly lead to love and care for them.

59. J.L. Morrissey et.al., *Daktari Annual* (Manchester, 1967), 5.

60. *Daktari Annual*, 1967 front cover.

Film, Literature and Wildlife

My sources have largely been autobiographies and animal books, many well illustrated, as well as biographical accounts and films. Our subjects were eager to express their ideas, promote their causes and advertise their motives, although their books were sometimes quickly written and are frustratingly short on historical detail. Let me try to draw some general themes from their accounts without losing sight of their individual emphases.

Some of those discussed, such as Toni Harthoorn, were primarily scientists, some were park wardens or wildlife researchers who did not have to make their living primarily from publicising wildlife. Others, such as the Denises, were professional filmmakers and self-trained writers who had to be alert to the mass market that they served. But they were all animal lovers and their work was increasingly sensitive to ecological thinking which saw people as part of nature, to conservationist ideas which advocated protected areas for wildlife, and to filming techniques which presented animals in their habitats. As privileged interlocutors with wild animals, they were all also experimenting with what they felt to be a new set of relationships between people and animals. They were not necessarily the first to do so, but they had access to the combined force of literature, photography, film and television. There was considerable glamour in their projected lifestyles and interaction with the media. They were determined to use these advantages to change the image of wild animals in human minds.

The Denises, Adamsons and Harthoorns transmitted a strong affection, even love, for animals. Occasionally this is expressed with intentional humour. Armand Denis, discussing his turtle collection in the 1920s, recalled that “my love was an all or nothing affair”.⁶¹ But throughout his life, Denis surrounded himself with unusual animals and tried to relate to them on an individual basis. When he and Michaela settled in Nairobi, they developed a “long and agreeable friendship with Voodoo the vulture”, which they had found injured. Although the vulture was free, it followed them when they were out walking and filming, swooping down to perch nearby or on Denis’s head. He was “remarkably gentle ... He would never peck or misbehave”.⁶² Their house in Nairobi was home to many pets and half-domesticated animals. On one occasion they briefly adopted a baby elephant; on another, they tried to tame an aardvark. Denis ended his book: “I am still happiest when I am with animals, particularly if I can tame them or live close to them in the wild”.⁶³

Joy Adamson, George thought, was also happiest when she was on safari or deeply involved with animals. She kept the rock hyrax Pati as a pet for many years; it helped to domesticate the lion cubs in 1956. After Elsa, Joy’s energy went into Pippa, the cheetah.⁶⁵ *Born Free* was not only a minutely observed

61. Denis, *On Safari*, 31.

62. *Ibid.*, 284.

63. *Ibid.*, 317.

64. Denis, *Leopard in My Lap*, front cover.

65. J. Adamson, *The Spotted Sphinx* (London, 1969).



Figure 5. Michaela Denis and leopard.⁶⁴

record of a lion growing up in captivity; what made it unique were the frequent descriptions of emotional interaction between Elsa and the Adamsons. We read about ‘gentle caresses’, ‘smacks’ (by the lion not the Adamsons), playfulness and humour. Elsa’s expressions were interpreted by the Adamsons and, in turn, she was seen to understand theirs. Elsa could apparently experience emotional conflict, like a child in relation to parents, even “the meaning of ‘No’ ... when tempted by an antelope”.⁶⁶ There was a good deal about trust. When the lioness formed a relationship with a wild lion “she returned to George’s tent for a few moments, put her paw affectionately around him and moaned softly, as if to say to him ‘You know that I love you, but I have a friend outside to whom I simply *must go*’.”⁶⁷ The pictures expressed it all: as one caption had it – ‘Elsa affectionate as ever’.⁶⁸

The classic images of George Adamson are those of his walks with Elsa, and later the film lions Boy and Girl, his back to them while they followed like large dogs. Talking about the filming of *Born Free*, George noted: “Most of the people of the unit were extremely nice and friendly but their way of life was not mine. There were too many dramas and ‘goings on’ for my peace of mind. I felt

66. Adamson, *Born Free*, 32.

67. *Ibid.*, 129.

68. *Ibid.*, facing page 97; see also facing page 129.

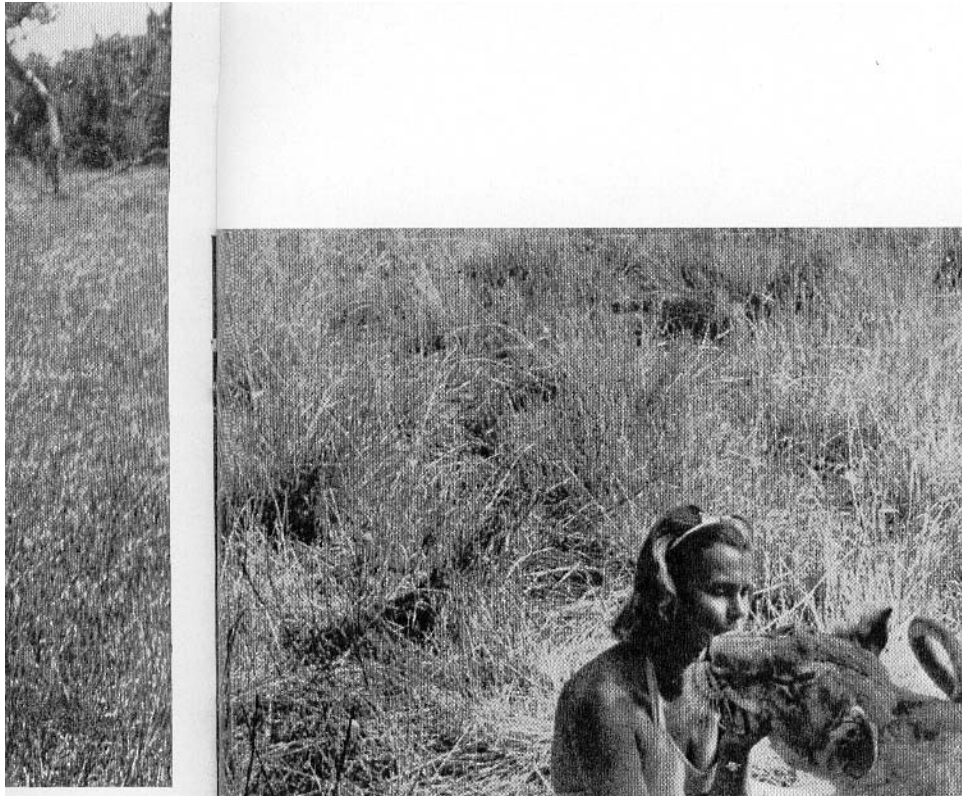


Figure 6. Elsa affectionate as ever.⁶⁹

safer with the lions”.⁷⁰ As part of training the lioness Mara, he moved his tent into her enclosure:

For the next three months she slept regularly in it, usually stretched out on the floor alongside my bed and sometimes on it. Although many of the nights were far from reposeful, particularly when Mara decided to share the bed, she never gave me any cause for anxiety regarding my personal safety.⁷¹

In the preparatory work with another lioness, who had to do a bedroom scene with Bill Travers, Adamson spent “nights with her in the room ... Before dawn I would be woken up by feeling a rough tongue rasping my face and her heavy body pinning me to the bed”.⁷²

Hart wrote: “one only had to be with George and his lions, [to] sense and see their unique relationship ... a sort of man-to-man understanding which ... broke the barriers of previous animal-man communication”.⁷⁴ When she

69. *Ibid.*, between 96, 97.

70. Adamson, *Bwana Game*, 255.

71. *Ibid.*, 258.

72. *Ibid.*, 261.

73. *Ibid.*, between 288, 289.

74. Hart, *Daktari*, 56.



Figure 7. George Adamson walking with lions.⁷⁵

arrived to attend the film lion Ugas's eye she recounted how George Adamson summoned him:

'Oogas', he called, pitching his voice in such a way that it sounded like the call of a lion ... over and over again until the lion appeared, walked straight over to him, leaned on him and purred loudly. It was the most amazing sight I had ever seen.⁷⁵

Describing Joy Adamson and a baby leopard, she noted the "incredible play of emotions".⁷⁶

Sue Hart herself expressed profound attachment to animals, including a baby elephant: "not very long after my first meeting I grew to love that little elephant as I had never loved an animal before in spite of the fact that it was not my

75. *Ibid.*, 52

76. *Ibid.*, 87

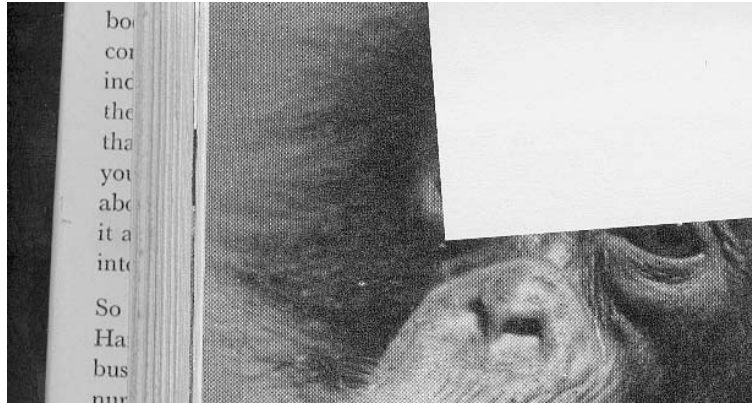


Figure 8. Hart: moment of love.⁸¹

own”.⁷⁷ In a discussion of Stinkie, a baby rhino reared in the animal orphanage, Hart approvingly quoted Yuilleen Kearney’s argument that “a baby animal can sense whether you really love it ... When it knows that, then it grows confident. It *knows* because it can scent your love”.⁷⁸ A caption to a photo of Hart with a chimp has: ‘Moment of love: Hugo and the author’.⁷⁹ She described how the animals in *Cowboy in Africa*, which the film villain had set free, returned:

with gentle guidance they allowed themselves to be herded into the corrals where they knew that food, water and sanctuary awaited them. It was like something out of the Bible; gone were fear and apprehension, the barriers between man and beast. The scene contained a dream-like, almost fairy-tale quality that made one want to rub one’s eyes in disbelief.⁸⁰

Household affections were not only reciprocally transmitted between humans and animals, but seen to be operating between different species. One of the most striking images expressing this is Hart’s picture of Helen the baby elephant, Stinkie the rhino and Maureen, a child, resting together, a tricycle in the background.⁸²

If the drama of earlier animal literature and film had been the hunt, the charge, the capture, this phase depended on the play of emotion between people and animals, a theme which has remained important to the present in films such as *Free Willy*. Natural history documentaries tended to depart, if hesitantly, from these strategies in the 1960s. There were already well-established ‘true to nature’ alternatives which tried to present animals in their own terms. The BBC Natural History Unit (1957) espoused such an approach, for example in filming British birds.⁸³ It had difficulties with the Denises’ series soon after they took it over in

77. *Ibid.*, 193.

78. Hart, *Life with Dakari*, 189.

79. Hart, *Dr. Sue*, photograph facing page 23.

80. Hart, *Life with Dakari*, 152.

81. Susanne Hart, *Listen to the Wild*, (London, 1972), between 144, 145.

82. Hart, *Dakari*, facing 192.

83. Christopher Parsons, *Making Wildlife Movies: an Introduction* (Newton Abbot, 1971); Parsons, True to Nature.

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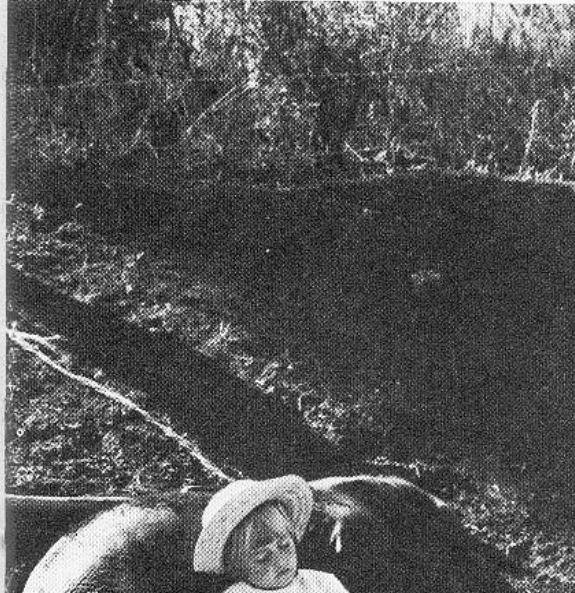


Figure 9. Baby elephant, rhino, child and tricycle.

1958. Despite its popularity, the Unit felt that the presenters were too intrusive. Increasingly, natural history filmmakers tried to extract people from the narrative and to concentrate on animals. Alan Root's work for the *Survival* series was another advance in this respect; the films often focussed on endangered species and strategies for saving them.⁸⁴ Where presenters remained involved, they focussed more on the animals themselves; film-makers sought to avoid anthropomorphisation and imputing human emotions to animals.

Again, we should not see too sharp a break in the type of film screened on television. The BBC Natural History Unit was hardly consistent in establishing *Animal Magic* in 1962. Its presenter, Johnny Morris, was even more present than the Denises, playing with zoo animals and extracting humour from the interactions. (His style, as a plain-speaking, informal, witty, English zookeeper was completely different from the more formal, international image projected by the Denises.) Moreover, the Denises, Adamsons and their network also saw themselves as representing nature more accurately. Like the zoologists of this post-war era, they were deeply aware of the importance of understanding animal behaviour in the context of notionally undisturbed natural habitats. Their strategies for handling animals depended to a significant degree not just on kindness,

84. A little of his footage from the early 1960s is recorded in the film by Colin Willock (writer and producer), *25 Years of Survival* (Anglia Survival, 1986). Thanks to Jeffery Boswall for a copy.

but on study and experience of instinctive animal responses - especially how to avoid aggression. In their view aggressiveness had been exaggerated as a trait of large mammals, even if part of the attraction of the films was a sense of imminent danger.

It may be possible to argue that even if this early generation of filmmakers and authors placed themselves centrally in their productions, nevertheless their depiction of intense human-animal interactions, by grasping Western imaginations, helped to open the way for a more animal-centric vision. Moreover, they were certainly being transparent about some of the disturbance to animals which filmmaking necessitated. Dispassionate strategies of presentation, where humans were as far as possible extracted from the narrative could, by contrast, dissemble, in that wild animals were now inevitably affected by encroachments of human society, not least during filming. In openly and unselfconsciously depicting their presence, the early presenters were in some ways ahead of their time.⁸⁵

Emotional involvement with wild animals, so explicitly expressed in print and film in the 1950s and 1960s, blurred the boundaries of the wild and domestic. All of our subjects reared injured or motherless animals which became part of their households for a time. They were, in some senses, making pets of wild animals, including the largest and most dangerous - although these animals were more than pets in that they often demanded more attention. Collapsing the barriers between people and animals was seen as important for human society as well. When the Denises visited the southern Maasai game reserve to film lion sequences for *Below the Sahara*, they found that the warden kept “two half-grown lion cubs, and seven dogs” as pets. Michaela wrote that “out of the bush they created a Garden of Eden where they lived in complete concord with wild animal life,” achieving “what more than half the world is looking for and will never find: a new Golden Age”.⁸⁶ In her more intense moments, Joy Adamson saw herself as an innovator in the progress of civilization. These authors expressed not so much a yearning, in the manner of their contemporary, van der Post, to celebrate human archetypes epitomised by the San who were seen to live close to nature, but, rather, an alternative vision of modernity in those decades of technological and scientific hubris. Although they have not perhaps been claimed as leading influences by modern environmentalist movements, they did surely influence some strands of popular environmentalism, especially its animal-centric anglophone forms.

A significant feature of these relationships was not just an appreciation for other species, but for individuals amongst them. George Adamson specifically made this point. His lion experiments came under considerable criticism not least from local African people who feared for their stock. Wildlife officials argued that animals reintroduced to the wild, but habituated to people, might be unpredictable and dangerous in game reserves, and secondly that lions were by no means a threatened species. George Adamson justified his work after *Born*

85. House, *The Great Safari*, 244 alludes to this point.

86. Denis, *Leopard*, 59-60.

Free partly on the grounds that the animals deserved their freedom, but partly because these were not just any lions, they were important individual lions. In his mind, he was attributing them certain rights.

Both individuality and partial domestication were signified by the naming of all these animals - an essential element in their absorption into human households, or interactive contexts, where they could become the object of warmth and care.⁸⁷ They were given a wide variety of names from literature, or common objects: lions were called Gog and Magog, Boy and Girl; elephants became Whiskey and Soda; the rhino Stinkie, initially Tinker Bell, was named after its smell; even Voodoo the vulture “would answer to his name and come waddling over”.⁸⁸ There also are examples of European and African names usually reserved for people. Naming wild animals helped to project them to the public, to incorporate them partially into human civil society, and hence to accord them rights, at least of survival - a long debated issue.

I suspect that the emphasis on families and domestication struck a chord with audiences during the 1950s, a conservative post-war decade in Britain and the USA, when stability was valued. Not only human but animal families were projected as a desirable state. *Born Free* ends, as does Carl Foreman’s photobook of its making, with “the family - Elsa, her mate and the cubs relax on their rock”.⁸⁹ (He was dissuaded from an alternative scenario in which Virginia McKenna was to cuddle Elsa’s three cubs.) For Western, especially British audiences, these were also a more comfortable vision of Africa than images of Mau Mau in Kenya, Nkrumah in Ghana, or apartheid and the ANC in South Africa.

Film, and especially television, was a medium which lent itself to the project of connecting Western audiences to African wildlife. Animals were perhaps no longer so strange and exotic nor intrinsically photogenic. For much of the time they graze or rest. Film could exclude long static sequences and capture the moments to which it was best suited as a medium: movement, dramatic encounter, and violence - the latter now very largely between animals. Film had enormous advantages in transmitting energy and excitement, even in the black and white pictures to which television were limited at the time. Improved telephoto lenses and new techniques helped to enlarge the scope of animal activities to include such activities as mating and giving birth. By cutting and juxtaposing scenes filmed at different times, even the most prosaic activities could be spliced into an absorbing narrative. Action could be achieved partly compressing time.

On television wild animals were brought literally into people’s front rooms to produce what Haraway called the “absurdly intimate filmic reality we now take for granted”.⁹⁰ Mitman suggests a dual process taking place in the United States in these post-war years: that television was being “domesticated in American homes”, effectively becoming part of the household, and that in turn it “tamed nature for family audiences”.⁹¹ No moment of animal life was immune.

87. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London, 1983), 113-5, discusses animal naming.

88. Denis, *On Safari*, 283.

89. Foreman, *A Cast of Lions*, endpage.

90. Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 42.

Through film and television, western audiences could see a vastly enlarged scope of animal behaviour which few had encountered in the flesh.

The language of film, as it had developed for western audiences also contained a powerful strain of sentimentality. Feature producers like Carl Foreman clearly saw how natural history and drama could be married to make animals cosy. Derek Bouse notes that even where natural history filmmakers wished to be more 'scientific', box office, the medium and viewer's filmic literacy militated against this: producers were constrained by what "film and television should do best: grab viewers' emotionally".⁹² Perhaps this combination of new knowledge and sentimentality helped to transfer the protective impulses which British people, though not them alone, extended towards pets onto wildlife. Denis could argue: "there are grave drawbacks to television and I would be the last to underestimate them, but the mass wave of sympathy and understanding it has produced for wildlife during the last ten years must certainly be counted among its positive benefits".⁹³ Even when film styles changed, this intimacy was retained, and enlarged through colour, slow motion, underwater cameras, cameras placed to represent the vantage point of the animal, and time-lapse photography. As the numbers of many rare species dwindle, we know them, visually, better than ever before, "an index of our power over nature, as well as our distance from it".⁹⁴

I have used the idea of renaturing not because these authors were changing the behaviour of whole species, but to emphasise that they were consciously projecting wild animals in a new way and that human understanding of nature is clothed in a cultural cloak. In the main, they were not simply attempting to domesticate wild animals. All of them believed that the best place for wild animals was in the wild, even if human care was sometimes necessary and even if, ironically, the wild now had to be protected. They were against hunting and only in favour of capture in specific circumstances such as educational filmmaking or scientific research - although their special role at the interface between humans and animals, and their professional need to handle animals, might justify the occasional transgression.

Just as the nature of wild animals was being reinterpreted, so, too, by the 1950s and 1960s, returning animals to the wild did not necessarily imply losing them completely. The 'wild' - which by now implied reserves or Parks - was itself increasingly an incorporated world. Few places had in the past escaped the human imprint and the areas designated as wildlife reserves and national parks, some of which had been recently and regularly occupied by African people, were increasingly being managed by specialists. Some species could be encouraged, others discouraged, depending on their perceived balance. Animals were being moved between areas; predators were allowed in some reserves but not in others. Waterholes were provided to facilitate viewing and also animal survival in the

91. Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 134ff; Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, 1992).

92. Derek Bouse, *Wildlife Films* (Philadelphia, 2000), 153.

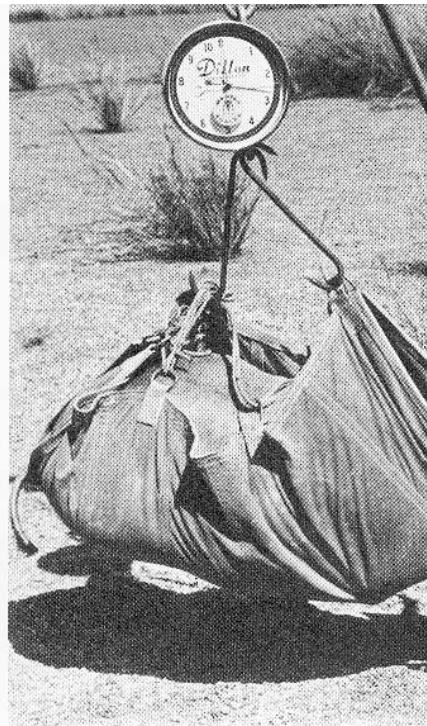
93. Denis, *On Safari*, 316.

94. A. Wilson, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Oxford, 1992), 122.

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Toni Harthoorn with an immob

Figure 10: Immobilising and measuring.⁹⁶

smaller areas now reserved for them. In a few cases, the future of species depended on human management. Light aircraft, immobilising darts, radio tracking, roads, landrovers and microbusses shouldered their way into these preserves making them and their animals more accessible to scientists and tourists. Patrick Marnham decried such strategies as ‘elephant farming’; his was a backward-looking romanticism.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the very fascination with imagined wilderness - fed by some of the visual representations discussed - helped to create the conditions for this simultaneous protection and intrusion.

I suggested at the outset that these popular representations were not without their ramifications for Africa. The images of African animals discussed here were essentially for western people, a moment largely, though not exclusively, in British and American culture.⁹⁷ They were part of a late imperial phase which asserted the need to control nature in distant parts of the world, from the ocean depths to the summit of Everest. Some of those at the interface with nature most certainly admitted to doubts about the effects of the expanding human presence. That is why they were such powerful advocates of protected areas. Yet most of them still saw the primary responsibility for protecting African wildlife

95. Patrick Marnham, *Fantastic Invasion: Dispatches from Africa* (London, 1987), 24-5.

96. Hart, *Daktari*, facing 196.

97. Parallel processes were at work in segments of southern African society, particularly but by no means only amongst whites; these have not been researched for the purposes of this paper.

to lie with themselves and Western society. Thus although elements of their conservationist projects were deeply subversive of an earlier imperial ethos, they were not in general directly challenging the pre-eminence of western ideas.

Such approaches drew on well-established ideas that Africans tended to be careless of nature while many whites, if sometimes initially butchers, had become penitent about the slaughter of wild animals and taken upon themselves the mantle of care. Although the concept of trusteeship was being abandoned in respect of African people at this time, as they surged towards independence, a creed of responsibility was ever more strongly emphasised in relation to African animals. It is striking that natural history literature and film at this period - and even to the present - often tends to write out or diminish the presence of African people who had lived so long with wild animals.

It is important not to oversimplify this point for three reasons. Firstly, especially up to the 1940s, many filmmakers focussed on both African people and animals as part of natural Africa. Some have represented Africans as 'tribal', and concentrated, for example, upon their dress or facial markings. But not all did so. More sensitive portrayals, reflecting a new cultural relativism, projected an element of symbiosis between Africans and the natural world they inhabited. One of Kearton's last major filming efforts tried to weave a narrative around the relations between African people and animals; in his own language, he was trying to explore what would now be called indigenous or local knowledge.

While Denis was certainly capable of racial stereotypes and of objectifying African people, he shot dramatic sequences of a gorilla hunt by forest people, and justified this activity: "To the protein-starved forest dwellers hunting is a necessity not a luxury as it is with the white man. The risks are more equal, and I tell myself that it will go on whether I witness it or not".⁹⁸ Joy Adamson's successful animal books created the opportunity for the publication of an artistic project on which she had worked over some time: a careful record of Kenya's 'tribal' people in typical dress.⁹⁹ Alongside this popular genre of natural history filmmaking, which catered to a mass audience, there was a strong parallel tradition of specialist anthropological film, reflecting shifts in that discipline, which continues to the present.

Second, African people were in fact essential auxiliaries and intermediaries in every phase of these ventures. The literature produced, to a greater extent than the photographs and film, does often name and discuss those involved. It is true that in the earlier material, they appear as the porters and servants, literally and figuratively, of an essentially European project. The biographers of the Johnsons explain to their readers why these films pandered to their audiences' sense of racial superiority, even if they could - as a picture of Osa suggests - become close to the Africans who worked with them.¹⁰⁰ The Michaels depended on an African employee, called only Penga, to feed their pet lion. Although it

98. Denis, *On Safari*, 196.

99. House, *The Great Safari*, 292.

100. Imperato and Imperato, *They Married Adventure*, 101.



Figure 11. Makedde and Elsa.

was Penga who developed a day-to-day relationship with the lion, at least until he was badly mauled, he is depicted in Marjorie Michael's book as hapless and irresponsible.¹⁰¹ Amidst a written reverie on Africa, Michaela Denis includes a typical colonial discussion of the weaknesses of her servant, Kirmani.¹⁰² Yet there is no doubt that Africans are part of the record. Wilson suggests in *Nature and Culture* that a role for native peoples in Disney films was impossible; that was not quite the case in the literature and film discussed here.¹⁰³

And third, especially but not only after independence in the early 1960s, some of the authors are more generous in their recognition of African involvement. George Adamson worked for sustained periods with African communities and assistants whom he reports as deeply involved in his projects; the pictorial record gives an inkling of this, notably striking photographs of a Turkana assistant, Makedde, with Elsa.¹⁰⁴ *Born Free* included both African and Indian actors and some attempt was made to win the support of the new Kenyan government. Sue Hart in particular tried to incorporate African people in filming and viewing wildlife. She goes out of her way to appreciate African

101. Michael, *I Married a Hunter*, 73-8; Michael, *The Michaels in Africa*, 52.

102. Michaela Denis, *Ride a Rhino*, 24.

103. Wilson, *Nature and Culture*, 120.

104. Adamson, *Born Free*, between 112 and 113.

skills: for example “Malutu, ... appointed to keep the rhino [Stinkie] company” was described “a young African who had a way with animals”.¹⁰⁵ After she returned to South Africa in 1972, she pursued conservation projects in African educational institutions.

Despite these qualifications, this phase of natural history film and literature was ultimately a drama played out between African animals and white men and women. Together with many other historical processes, it fed into changing western attitudes as well as the exclusive reservation of large parts of Africa for wildlife, scientists and tourists. Such claims should be made with caution. Sufficient has been written about Western attitudes to animals for historians to know that great caution should be exercised in pinpointing trends. For example, Thomas suggested that the period around 1800 might be considered as a watershed in England, when more modern sympathies had begun to displace older patterns of domination, aggression and mistreatment.¹⁰⁶ Yet the first half of the nineteenth century probably saw more intensive use of working animals in Britain and fox-hunting flourished as did extraordinarily predatory hunting of wild animals in Africa.

Similarly, few would disagree that publicly expressed attitudes in the last half-century have become more protective and benign; yet factory farming, Serpell notes, has simultaneously reached its apogee. “We nurture and care for [pets] like our own kith and kin, and display outrage and disgust when they are subjected to ill-treatment”, he continues, but were condemn useful animals like pigs to a sacrificial life as if they were “worthless objects devoid of feelings and sensations”.¹⁰⁷ The domestication and use of animals in particular has produced complex tensions and contradictory impulses in human approaches which allow for the nurture of other mammal species, and also for dispensing with them, and often consuming them. Jostling sets of moral values are not least evident in regard to wild animals: fascination and respect have run parallel to fear, aggression and carelessness about their habitat. At any particular time, there have been wide range of practices, as well as strikingly different views about particular groups of animals, whether classified as wild, vermin, domestic or pet.

Despite these cautions, the evidence suggests that significant changes can be discerned in the way that African animals were presented to, and regarded by, Western audiences in the 1950s and 1960s. Although there are parallels between this phase of filmmaking, and earlier imperial photography of Africa, which reflected power relations and European ‘possession’ of elements in the African landscape, it would be inadequate to leave the analysis here. The new developments in this cinematic genre could also be subversive in a number of respects.¹⁰⁸ They were highly critical of the older imperial hunting ethos; they

105. Hart, *Daktari*, 189.

106. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*.

107. James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: a Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (Cambridge, 1996), 19.

108. For the occasional subversiveness of imperial photography, see Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 222ff. on missionary pictures of the brutality of King Leopold’s Congo Free State regime. He also notes that the huge variety of picture-takers undermined any systematic coherence in the photographic record.

opened up viewing of African animals to a far larger popular audience; they were a vehicle for a popular version of scientific ideas about ecology and ethnology; and they could provide hard-hitting conservationist images critical of both whites and blacks in Africa. Film could present a lyrical vision and a fascinating record of African animals, which, while it was also a form of ideological representation, was potentially available for celebration by a wide range of people, including Africans.¹⁰⁹

The debates and conflicts on these issues have become increasingly central to wildlife management and, more recently, also the subject of fascinating environmental films which go beyond the earlier natural history genres to incorporate political discussion of the costs and benefits of conservation to local people. Local African knowledge and skills are now being more explicitly researched and celebrated on film - taking up the legacy of earlier, sympathetic anthropological approaches. African societies have themselves undergone far-reaching transformation and are fully immersed in debates about wildlife management and about representations of African animals. Wildlife filmmaking is still largely pursued by professionals based within wealthier countries, who travel temporarily to Africa. But that parallel development, the wildlife reserves, are under African control; they are generally seen as an important heritage which thus far most African governments, at least, have been reluctant to dismantle.

109. Robert J. Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen: the Denver African Expedition of 1925* (Athens OH, 1997), 11, 15 is highly critical of the context in which the photographs were taken, but notes that by 'problematizing' their origins, their 'enchanted and engrossing' elements can also be appreciated and warns that later reactions to them by African people are unpredictable. Landau, 'With Camera and Gun', 138, 141 also seems to leave a small space for such undermining of colonial stereotypes within the images.

