

# Wildlife Specialists School: Range Management Education for Africans

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In Africa, particularly in French-speaking West Africa, most post-secondary schools fall short of offering well-developed courses or programs in range management. This is quite different from what one finds in East Africa, especially in Kenya where there are strong, well-developed programs (Karr and Metto 1984). There is a school in West Africa, however, which teaches range management and where I had the opportunity to instruct. The school is the Wildlife Specialists School (L'Ecole pour la Formation de Specialistes de la Faune) in Garoua, Cameroon, a training school for wildlife specialists who will eventually become the custodians of Africa's protected areas.

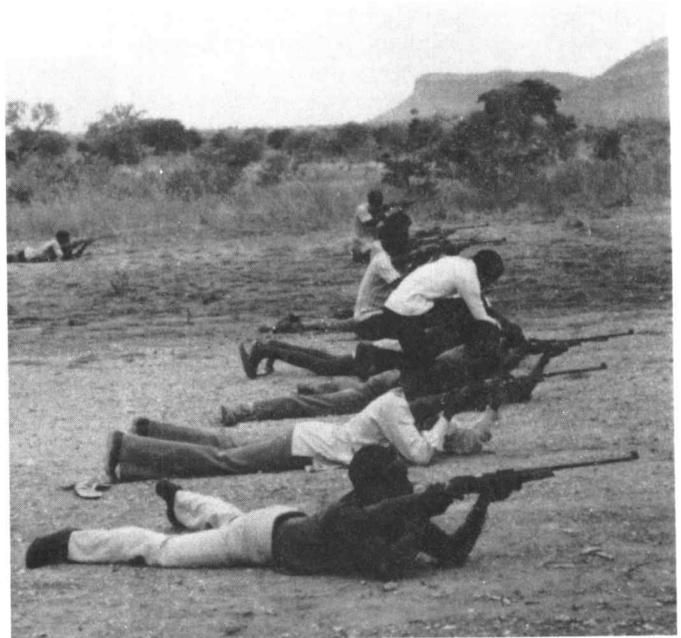


Two students, one from Zaire, the other from Senegal, standing at the entrance to the Wildlife Specialists School.

Historically, the idea of establishing protected areas for wildlife began in the United States in 1872 with the creation of Yellowstone National Park. The idea was quickly adopted around the world, but particularly in Africa, with its many diverse, natural ecosystems, and easily accessible, teeming wildlife populations.

Overall, the idea of protected areas was good, but it was also necessary to have the personnel to supervise them. In Africa, white expatriates filled most of the original park personnel positions such as warden, assistant warden, and game guards. When countries obtained their independence, there was a push to replace expatriates with Africans (expatriates who became African citizens were usually allowed to retain their positions until retirement). But few Africans had any formal training or the chance to receive any training, apart from their menial field positions. Therefore, to prepare Africans to take over the responsibilities of wildlife management,

park administration and research, it was evident that the establishment of training schools was necessary.



The handling of firearms and shooting practice are an important part of field exercises.

The funds to build these schools however, were usually scarce in developing countries and were eventually provided by international funding agencies. The first training school (The Mweka College of Wildlife Management) was established in 1963 in Moshi, Tanzania, for English-speaking Africans. In the same year in Nairobi, Kenya, the 8th general assembly of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) recommended that a similar school be created for French-speaking Africans. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was called upon to research and coordinate all activities, the program requirements, and the eventual construction of the school. In 1966, Cameroon was officially proposed as the host country for the school, and in November 1970, the Wildlife Specialists School was opened in Garoua. The FAO was designated as the executing agency and the Ministry of Agriculture was the supervisory agency. In 1982, the Delegation of Tourism took over the supervisory role.

Instructors for the school were originally hired from France, Holland, Canada, and the United States, but today all

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seven instructors are African, most nationals of Cameroon. Instruction is available at two levels. To qualify to enter into Level 'B', an applicant must either be less than 30 years old and hold a B.Sc. degree, or be a government employee with no less than two years experience, and be less than 40 years old on the first of January of the year of registration. An applicant applying to enter into Level 'C' must be at least 25 years old and have a high school diploma, or be a government employee holding a technical diploma and having a minimum of 5 years field experience. Each applicant must write a qualifying entrance exam, and from experience, it has been shown that in addition to basic training, students with professional or field experience are better all-around students. Therefore, all applicants who successfully pass the written exam are also scrutinized according to their experience. Those with the most experience are usually selected first. To date, no women have applied to enter the school.



*Field trips make up integral part of instruction at the school. Unimogs and Landrovers provide versatility for off-road use and space for transporting camping equipment and supplies and students. Each student is provided with a complete field uniform.*

The school year commences annually on the first day of September, and the programs last two years (up until 1977, the programs were only one year in duration). Thirty students per year (15 in each level) are accepted. The school is closed during the month of August, but students are allowed to remain in residence during this period, since their homes and families are usually thousands of kilometers away. The annual fee per student is approximately \$1,360 US, plus \$70-80 US per month to cover the costs of field trips, field uniforms, room and board, laundry, textbooks, etc. Although most governments finance their own students, there are grants available from the FAO, the European Economic Community (EEC), France, West Germany, Holland, IUCN, Switzerland, African Wildlife Foundation, Washington, and Canada to help pay for students' expenses and offer scholarships.

The curricula in both levels is rigid, and there are no electives. Courses taught include Range Management, Firearms, Forest Science, Soils, Aerial Photo Interpretation, Botany, Wildlife Management and Censusing, First Aid, Animal Science, English, and Fire Management. Practical field experience is stressed and approximately one third of all the instruction is carried out in the national parks of Cameroon



*Students have the opportunity to practice their shooting skills in controlled hunting zones during field trips, and have a 'hands on' opportunity to learn the physiology and anatomy of animals. Later, cooks prepare the meat for students and staff.*

and neighboring countries. The field training ensures that the graduates are capable of being operational in the field immediately upon graduation. The Government of Cameroon also loans the school 150,000 ha to carry out research.

The handling of firearms and shooting practice, chemical immobilization of animals, ground census techniques, plant identification, forage (grass/browse) productivity, range condition, and stocking rate are all actively carried out by students in the field. One or two animals (usually antelope or warthog) are actually shot by students during field trips in order to have a 'hands on' opportunity to study the animals' physiology and anatomy (the animals are eventually prepared by field cooks for the students and staff). The handling of firearms and shooting practice are important because graduates assigned as park wardens or game wardens are often involved in cropping schemes (systematic shooting of wildlife in protected areas to maintain a sustained carrying capacity), and shooting wounded or marauding animals.

The school is also involved in promoting nature conservation and all students are urged (it is not compulsory) to become involved in promoting wildlife awareness by participating in the Friends of Nature Club of Cameroon. These Clubs attempt to familiarize rural as well as urban children of north Cameroon with the importance of conserving wildlife.

All graduating students receive diplomas. Graduates of Level 'C' usually become game guards, government technicians and park wardens' assistants in their respective countries, whereas graduates of Level 'B' usually become park administrators or park wardens. Although diplomas in Range Management are not offered at the school, the principles and practical uses of range management make up an important part of the school's curricula. Over the years, African Governments have realized the importance of wildlife as a major factor in attracting much-needed foreign currencies



Chemical immobilization of wildlife is undertaken as part of the field exercises.

through hunting or photographic safaris. Increasing pressures from agriculture and human habitation are continually mounting on many protected areas and wildlife populations continue to be compressed within the confines of protected boundaries. Governments acknowledge the need and impor-



Students prepare to stalk and immobilize Buffon's kob during the dry season in Waza National Park.

tance of range management. They are emphatic that students at the Wildlife Specialists School learn such concepts as stocking rate, range management, carrying capacity, and range condition, and that they are familiar with knowing how to assess these.

The Wildlife Specialists School is still young, but it has come a long way in a very short time. Its programs and graduates are highly regarded internationally, and by the end of the 1983/1985 program, 450 students had graduated, representing 20 French-speaking countries. By 1986, the school hopes to increase its size to accommodate more students into both levels. For the moment at least, graduates have a basic knowledge and understanding of range management. This is an important and very large step in any developing country, and although more demands will be placed on tomorrow's graduates, I am confident that they will meet the challenge.

#### Literature Cited

Karr, B.L., and P.K. Metto. 1984. Range management education in Kenya. *Rangelands* 6:54-56.



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