

# JUST A BLADE OF GRASS

The African Bushveld – a dynamic system in need

## PRE-PUBLICATION OFFER

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JUST A BLADE OF GRASS

PADDY HAGELTHORN  
& MOLLY BUCHANAN

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HIS BOOK has a two-fold task; firstly, through some 200 superb photographs largely taken by Paddy Hagelthorn, the book aims to remind us of the unutterable beauty of the Bushveld. Secondly, this book tells us what has gone wrong. Sometimes the problems are like the weather, beyond our

control. But there is so much that can be done.

Here you will find comment on many controversial issues such as CITES' 40-year failure to control poaching through banning the sale of ivory and rhino horn. And attitudes on hunting and culling, which have become an emotional issue and are not based on sound reason. Only recently the New York Times published a front page article on the advantages of hunting. The funds raised from issuing licenses to hunt old, toothless and scarred, bighorn sheep in the mountainous country of Montana, have enabled many areas to be repopulated with the species that had virtually disappeared. The licence money also pays for the care and security of the animals. HRH Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, has also spoken about hunting, which, he believes, under controlled conditions and only taking out animals past their prime, can help pay for wildlife conservation.

We were reminded of Tsavo where, in the 1970s, the authorities in Kenya allowed the elephant population to become out of hand. They refused to cull and the result was severe damage to the forests and the disappearance of much of the wildlife diversity. This is now happening in Botswana where elephants walk up to 50 km from their eating grounds, through degraded woodlands, to reach the Chobe River.

In 2016 the Kruger Park and the adjacent reserves came close to the same problem. When the rains failed there were nearly three times as many elephants as there had been 20 years earlier when relocation and culling held numbers to 7,500. Many trees disappeared but fortunately, later than usual, in November 2016, the rains returned, grass started to grow, the rivers flowed again and waterholes filled. But it will be decades before trees regrow. Now we cannot relocate elephants. No one wants them. We cannot even give them away. If we want to maintain the wonderful diversity of wildlife, we must find more land for elephants – or face the unpalatable choice of hunting or culling.





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# 'JUST A BLADE OF GRASS'



## CHAPTER TWO

### A FRAGILE CONTINENT

Ten million years ago grasslands appeared on the African continent. For the first time there was food enough to support herds of buffalo, zebra and other antelope. In the valleys and gorges where there was water, a mosaic of trees and other plant life that had been established even earlier, continued to flourish.

The balance between the open grasslands and the tangle of trees and shrubs was left to the elephants which took down old trees and scattered seed to create new forests. The wide variety of plants in the Bushveld led to an unequalled diversity of wildlife. But droughts, floods and searing heat are part of the Bushveld climate and not always easy for the survival of the wildlife. As well as the reptilian species, many animals are water dependent, especially hippo and buffalo.

The drought which started when the summer rains failed in November 2015 led to withered grasslands and eventually leafless shrubs. Both the grazing and the browsing wildlife struggled for survival. Eventually, late in November 2016, gentle rains fell and a magic carpet of green appeared. But it was a long haul for the antelope to rebuild their strength. Many had suffered and many had died.

CHAPTER TWO  
A FRAGILE CONTINENT

CHAPTER FOUR  
THE WILDLIFE WAR



## CHAPTER ONE

### MY BUSHVELD LIFE AND MY CONCERNS

It is always rewarding to see the Bushveld at its best – long grasses, rivers flowing with crystal clear water and abundant wildlife. It's hard to accept that droughts and floods are part and parcel of life on this planet. Like all things in nature, they have purpose. Some forms of life flourish during droughts, while others do not. It's nature's way of balancing things out.

What we do know is that weather is beyond our control. We also have problems which we can do something about. But do we always find the right solution? A solution that takes into account the needs of the people of Africa as well as our incredible wildlife heritage. Africa was once a continent that was in balance. Nature had created an order to ensure that every life form had its space. The result was that for millions of years birds, reptiles and mammals flourished and when man evolved, he too, recognised and respected the laws of nature.

Today, despite interethnic conflicts, droughts, poor soils and floods, human populations in Africa are exploding. The balance has disappeared. Kenya's population has grown from 10 million in 1960 to 50 million in 2017. Tanzania and Uganda show similar population growths while South Africa may soon be the front-runner. What is of concern is that about 40 percent of the populations of these countries are children of pre-school or school-going age. However, the economies of these countries are not growing fast enough to ensure that the young people will have opportunities for education, jobs, medical services and sufficient food. Furthermore, whether we like it or not, pressure is being put on the land previously designated for the protection of wildlife.

I believe that we have it within our grasp to help solve Africa's problems by making the best use we can of our unique wildlife heritage.

CHAPTER ONE  
MY BUSHVELD LIFE AND MY CONCERNS

CHAPTER FIVE  
WHAT DRAWS US TO THE BUSHVELD?



## CHAPTER FOUR – THE WILDLIFE WAR

Many years ago, in 1977, a ban was imposed by CITES on the sale of ivory and rhino horn as a measure to prevent poaching. Instead, poaching has escalated and in the last three years 3594 rhinoceros have been killed by poachers in South Africa. After forty years most people will agree that this plan has been a failure. All it has done has been to send trade in these products into orbit. What is worse, activities have expanded from small skirmishes into an out-right war, which, unless something is done, can only end in the extinction of rhinos and elephants.

Within the last five years, the killers have targeted East Africa to collect ivory and southern Africa to collect rhino horn. But even after some 90 percent of rhinos in East Africa had been killed, the poachers, it appears, will not be satisfied until there are none left. And should the numbers of elephants in East Africa decline any more, it is likely that the poachers would quickly turn their attention to the elephants in Southern Africa.

When will we learn that the war against poachers cannot be won. We have to find some other way to protect our wildlife against these people.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### WHAT DRAWS US TO THE BUSHVELD?

Not only do people come from all over the world to see the African Bushveld, but they come again and again. In South Africa there are now well over a thousand game lodges or bush camps – in the dry desert of the west, in the arid central areas, in the Cape where the abundant floral kingdom is one of the natural wonders of the world and, not least of all, in the east where there are numerous reserves in KwaZulu Natal and Mpumalanga. Along the east coast of Africa there are reserves in Mozambique and further north in Tanzania and Kenya.

CHAPTER FIVE  
WHAT DRAWS US TO THE BUSHVELD?



BELIEVE THE attraction of the African Bushveld is that of learning. Life can never be dull when every day is a day of discovery. You learn something new about life, about this planet, and even about yourself. Some days in the Bushveld I find that

there is almost too much for us to absorb – a new life, a death, a loving mother, a struggle for survival, a game of fun and, perhaps, a moment of such joy or beauty that it will be packed away in your memories for the rest of your life.

I remember when I was out walking in the Bushveld and a lilac-breasted roller spiralled downwards a few metres from me in a kaleidoscope of colours. For weeks after that when I shut my eyes I could recall every moment of that marvellous territorial display.

On one game drive we discovered the little lion cub I photographed on the previous page. We watched him with his siblings for hours. Each had found a 'toy'; a branch with leaves, a stick, or as in the picture, a blade of grass. Each of the cubs wanted the property of another, but was not prepared to give away ownership of its own prized possession. We felt his joy as he showed us the spirit of the wilderness. Here there are no rights or wrongs. No lies or deceptions. Life goes on in our Bushveld world without fuss or bother, without recriminations or anger.

He reminded us of an age of innocence. At one moment we saw the vibrancy of life and, at the next, its fragility. No life could be more fragile than his. His uncles would break his neck with one shake of his little body. So, too, would hyaenas.

What excitement we had one day when a giraffe calf dropped from its mother's womb. We had been watching her for a few weeks and then, early one morning, we saw that she was giving birth. She bent her back legs to lower her body and lessen the drop of her calf to the ground. When the bundle of life fell, the umbilical cord snapped and within 20 minutes the calf, about two metres tall, stood on its rather wobbly legs and was drinking at its mother's teats.

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SADDLE-BILLED STORKS  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS PAGE

ELEPHANTS AFTER THE FIRST RAINS  
PAGES 54/55



RHINO WITH HER NEW-BORN CALF  
END PAPER FRONT

LEOPARD DRINKING  
END PAPER BACK







AST AFRICA IN THE 1950s, held so many stunningly lovely landscapes. The Masai Mara grasslands in Kenya and in Tanzania, the Serengeti plains, extinct volcanoes and lakes were beyond compare. The forests around Mount

Kenya, Kilimanjaro and the Ngorongoro crater were magnificent. Most significantly, there were no fences and the wildlife could wander over vast areas. There was not even a fence between Tanzania and Kenya, just a lonely border post in the middle of the grasslands.

In the Amboseli at the base of Kilimanjaro, the black rhinoceros, like the long-horned rhino named Gertie in the photograph below, were abundant. To the east of Amboseli was the Tsavo – about the same size as the Kruger National Park in South Africa. Here, even in the 1950s, were massive herds of elephants wandering through heavily forested areas. Everything seemed, like the mountains themselves, to be on a scale larger than anywhere else in Africa. The great herds of elephants, the abundant rhinos, the stunningly lovely gazelles and the annual wildebeest migration watched closely by crocodiles, lions and other predators, were spectacles that attracted people from all over the world. But change was on the horizon.

By the mid-20th century, the elephant herds, particularly in the sanctuaries in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda where hunting was not allowed, flourished, in part because elephants moved from areas where they were hunted into places of safety. The concentration of the mammals combined with the natural growth of the

