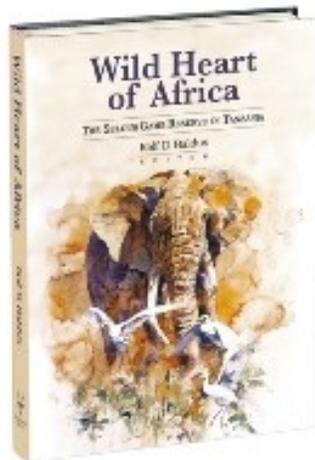


Wild Heart of Africa – Review of an Extraordinary Book by Gerhard R Damm



In addition to the many articles and papers – both for the lay public and for scientific circles – published over the past 15 years or so, Rolf Baldus now has two major Africa books to his name. His first book, an account of his personal adventures during his time in Africa, and in particular in Tanzania as manager of the Selous Conservation Program, took German speaking readers by storm. Finally, his new *Opus Magnus* is available through Rowland Ward Publishing Pty Ltd. And a great work it is indeed. I suggest “Wild Heart of Africa” is THE authoritative book on the Selous Game Reserve, one last paradise of untouched Africa, remaining so largely due to the sustainable hunting program and the support of many hundreds of passionate hunters around the world. Anybody who has been fortunate enough to hunt this magnificent wilderness, all those who contemplate to hunt there, and more importantly also those who will never make it to the *Shamba la Bibi* as the Selous is called in the local lingo will be spellbound by a masterfully arranged collection of highly informative, but also entertaining chapters.

As editor, Baldus assembled a great group of people, who all have intimate insights into the wonders of Africa’s oldest game reserve; and these insights don’t come from short sojourns into the wilderness, but by-and-large from years, in some cases decades of close to the ground work in Africa’s wild heart. First and foremost amongst them, the former warden of the reserve, Brian Nicholson. Ludwig Siege, himself an African stalwart of the German Development Corporation GTZ, writes an authoritative chapter about the eccentric first warden of the Selous, Iodine Ionides.

In his chapter, Nicholson describes the devastating sleeping sickness epidemic and the *Kihamu* ensuing evacuation process which led to the depopulation of Liwale and Mahenge. This status should never change again. Nicholson may be considered as the father of hunting safaris into the Selous, strongly supported by Major Bruce Kinloch, at that time head of the game department. He explains in short and clear words, why hunting safaris provide the bread and butter to maintain the reserve, much more so than photographic safaris (sometimes erroneously called ecotourism).



This Greater Kudu is the last African trophy shot by Frederick Courteney Selous, taken in 1915. The portrait and trophy were hanging in the library of the late Commander G. M. B. Selous (Reproduced from “Wild Heart of Africa”)

Gerald Bigurube, who started as a junior warden in the Selous was the Tanzanian counterpart of Rolf Baldus during the latter's years as Selous Conservation program project manager; now Bigurube is director general of TANAPA (Tanzanian National Parks Organization), His exploits are aptly described in Baldus' chapter about "Decline and Recovery" covering the all-out war against commercial poaching gangs which halved the Selous' elephant population in the early 1980s. With dry humor, but some sense of bitterness, Baldus recounts the futile efforts of well-meaning but amateurish animal welfare organizations, and how the millions of dollars collected by them failed to turn up on the ground where they were needed for conservation. No or very little money was made available from these funds, collected by playing to the global public's emotions; the equipment sent was either unusable in the harsh environment of the Selous, or it did not function. Baldus highlights that income generated from photographic tourism could not sustain the reserve and constituted only 10% of the revenue. Safari hunting income soon boosted the reserve's annual retained revenue from US\$2 per square kilometer (1987) to US\$55 in 2003. Baldus also critically remarks that the Tanzanian Government cut this sustainable funding stream by more than half after the project came to an end. In another chapter, "Past, Present and three Scenarios for the Future, Baldus focuses on "Use it or lose it", the involvement of rural people and community-based conservation, he discards the notion of absolute protection and recommends that Tanzania follow best practices to achieve the high standards laid down in the Tanzanian Wildlife Policy.

Hunting does have its rightful place in Baldus' book. The late Rolf Rohwer, experienced professional hunter and outfitter for decades, gives an overview over the hunting blocks, how safaris are run, camps built and accessed and how a typical safari day rolls out. Ludwig Siege spins the stories of the "Hunting and Hunters of Old", spiced with many historical photos, starting with James Sutherland's elephant exploits, and two hitherto unpublished (in English) hunting stories from the early 1920s. These are complemented by another English "first" of Wilhelm Kuhnert's (the famous painter) antelope hunts and some stories from General von Lettow-Vorbeck, the last commander of the Imperial German troops in East Africa. Finally the hunting stories of the wardens lead to the modern times with Rolf Rohwer's harrowing lion experience in a personal letter to Rolf Baldus. The chapter ends in Baldus himself being chased up a tree by a wounded buffalo. Baldus also describes the dangerous job of hunting *simba watu*, man-eating lion, and includes a death portrait of Osama, the notorious man-eater of the Rufiji.

Another chapter deals with the Selous-Niassa wildlife corridor at the Tanzanian-Mozambique border. Baldus and Hahn interweave history, people, culture and conservation with some spell-binding photographs. The story finds a continuation in some hair-rising accounts of chasing elephant bulls with dart guns, collaring them (and de-collaring them again after the study has been concluded).- a real close-up story of hard and effective conservation work.

History doesn't come short-changed neither – from the early years of Shamba-la-Bibi, when the Kaiser ruled at the Rufiji, and a chapter peppered with rare historic maps

assembled after years of researching libraries, to Burton and Speke searching for the sources of the Nile, Keith Johnstone's ill-fated expedition of 1878 to establish a route from the coast to the great lakes, the search for Johnstone's grave and the Great War epitomized by General von Lettow-Vorbeck and Frederick Courteney Selous.

The icing on the cake come in extracts from Wilhelm "Lion" Kuhnert's safari diaries from 1905. Kuhnert, artist, naturalist and hunter left his native Germany to use the wilderness of what was to become the Selous Game Reserve as his studio. 500 or so stunning oil paintings of lion added the "Lion" to his name. Kuhnert – the pioneer of wildlife art – documented the Selous in thousands of pictures, drawings and paintings, and Baldus selected seven impressive ones to be reproduced in the book. With Bodo Meier, a worthy 21st Century artist stepped into Kuhnert's tracks.

Last not least – the "Wild Heart of Africa – contains an absolute wealth of photos – not the run-of-the mill animal portraits, the African sunsets and hunters posing with impressive trophies, but rather a vast collection of photos – over 450 all in all - showing the everyday life of the game wardens, being on patrol, doing conservation work in the bush. Every single page holds another surprise, another scene.

The Wild Heart of Africa is a complete book – informative, entertaining, and educating. It is the account of the "Company of the Selous", men who have spent years in creating, protecting and enhancing this unique place in Africa, called the Selous, from the humble beginnings in 1896, to the 5 million hectares (13 million acres) which the reserve encompasses now. The contributors to this book share over a century of work in the reserve. They also share the belief that the Selous is not only the largest and oldest protected area in Africa, but one of the finest in the world. They hope that this book will make the public aware of how important it is to conserve this World Heritage Site.

You cannot, must not ignore this book.

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