GERMAN COLONIALISM AND THE BEGINNINGS OF INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE PRESERVATION IN AFRICA

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On November 24, 1906, the British weekly *Saturday Review* published an anonymous letter to the editor entitled “The Dying Fauna of an Empire.” Its obviously British author lavished praise on the former Imperial Governor of German East Africa, Hermann von Wissmann, for his far-sighted measures to save African wildlife from extinction. According to the anonymous writer, the German Governor’s enduring legacy was the idea that, if the great game was to be economized, sanctuaries or reserves must be established. He accordingly set apart two great districts of German East Africa in which game was protected absolutely. This seems to have been the first really effective step towards sparing the fauna of Africa. The English authorities saw great obstacles against the establishment of such sanctuaries in our own territory, but happily we have followed the German example.

Not unusual for the time it was written, the main thrust of the article was a rather nationalist appeal to Britain’s imperial honor, in this case to grant due protection to the fauna of the empire. Africa’s wildlife was framed as imperial heritage and its preservation invoked for the sake of posterity. Still, the author’s main argument for the conservation of Africa’s mammalian fauna was its economic value as “game.” But the most interesting point the author makes is the way in which this objective was to be achieved. Apparently it could not be attained without cooperation, or at least learning and borrowing from others. Particularly in the formative years of German and British colonialism, the exchange of information and concepts was intense. In the above-mentioned case, the concept of reserving space for wildlife and wilderness had been transferred across the globe from its origins in America. It reached the British colonies in East Africa via the neighboring German colony. East Africa had featured some of the richest and most diverse fauna of the whole continent, but in the 1890s travelers, hunters and the authorities of the East African colonies, both British and German, found animal populations to be severely waning. A controversial debate over the reasons for this decline followed. In reaction, British and German authorities took similar actions and made matters of wildlife conservation in Africa an issue of international debate in the imperial metropoles.

The processes of transfer and exchange in the early stages of African conservation deserve special emphasis, as the story of African wildlife
protection has so far mainly been told from a British perspective. This paper uses the example of German colonialism in East Africa as a vantage point from which to trace the entangled imperial beginnings of international wildlife conservation in Africa. It will concentrate on the early years, from the beginning of German colonization on the continent to the International Conference on Wildlife Preservation in Africa held in London in 1900. Throughout this period, the primary proponents of environmental internationalism were imperial hunters, naturalists, colonial authorities and governmental institutions. The first part of the article discusses the origins of conservationist concern and the first steps taken from 1890 onwards; part II focuses on the German East African Game Ordinance of 1896 and its repercussions in the British Empire, while the following parts examine the preparation (III) and the proceedings (IV) of the first International Conference on the Preservation of Wild Animals, Birds and Fish in Africa in 1900. The conference assembled representatives from all European colonial powers in Africa and agreed upon a convention that claimed imperial stewardship over African nature and asserted that wildlife preservation was part of Europe’s civilizing mission on the continent. The convention bore a strong Anglo-German imprint and established key concepts of preservation that were to dominate African conservation throughout the twentieth century. A result of imperial environmentalism, the convention epitomizes environmental imperialism and initiated the gradual exclusion of Africans from access to the wildlife resources of their continent. Thus, although its resolutions were never ratified, the conference represents a significant landmark in the early history of preservation.

I

From the start of European colonial rule in East Africa in the 1880s, conservationist concern focused mainly on elephants. The flourishing East African ivory trade had incorporated sub-Saharan Africa into the political and economic globalization that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ivory was the most important export commodity of the region and both its value and trade had been steadily increasing in the decades before the European scramble for Africa. The power of ivory stabilized or destabilized local chiefs and “big men,” secured political influence and allegiances and instigated bartering and new demands for goods and commodities by African societies, even beyond the established trading routes. Elephant hunting and ivory shaped the livelihoods of African chiefs, Arab and Swahili traders and middlemen, professional ivory hunters of African and European origin and also slaves; on the coast, rival Indian merchants and trading companies from Europe and America provided the capital to furnish caravans to exchange clothes,
beads, wire, guns and powder for ivory in the interior. However, ivory was a commodity that could only be procured at the expense of elephants. Not surprisingly, therefore, elephant hunting became a vital factor for the social, political and cultural life of the African societies that practiced it. The use of guns in elephant hunting was widespread and in the 1880s about 100,000 firearms a year were imported into East Africa.\(^6\) Although the figures are hardly reliable, in the early 1880s German and British sources estimated that some 65,000 elephants were shot throughout Africa annually.\(^7\) European voices complaining about the degradation of elephant populations were numerous and the Acting Commissioner of the British Central Africa Protectorate, Alfred Sharpe, was echoing the earlier concerns of explorers like Joseph Thomson or Georg Schweinfurth when he asserted that “throughout tropical Africa” elephants were “being gradually exterminated.”\(^8\)

However, the German colonial administration initially had neither the inclination nor the necessary means to interfere too heavily in African elephant hunting, as ivory remained the colonies’ foremost source of revenue until the turn of the century.\(^9\) Therefore, the control of indigenous elephant hunting by the few and desperately understaffed government stations was a gradual and protracted process. European hunters entering the colony via the coastal ports appeared easier to regulate. Hunting had already been an essential part and pastime of the sporadic European expeditions in East Africa since the middle of the nineteenth century. With the advent of colonial rule, the number of white hunters increased significantly.\(^10\) In particular, the promise of bountiful game lured the globetrotting members of a wealthy international aristocratic and bourgeois hunting elite to Africa. They brought with them not only the latest technological achievements in precision rifles, but also the destructive record of European expansion and white settlement, a record that included the near extinction of the North American bison as well as the game-exhausted velds of South Africa. During the 1880s, the frontier for white hunters shifted from South to East Africa, thereby “opening up” vast new territories for enthusiastic white hunters.\(^11\) Although there was frequent unrest between rival groups in the districts around Kilimanjaro until the turn of the century,\(^12\) a German military officer nonetheless reported that “English, American and Russian shooting expeditions” were “relentlessly hunting for sport” as early as April 1890.\(^13\) These hunting parties not only caused considerable damage to elephant populations, but were in many cases also involved in conflicts with and among the resident population of the areas they chose as their hunting grounds. Usually, these private expeditions traveled under the flag of the hunter’s country of origin, thus blurring the distinction between the columns of “official” colonization and conquest and private travel. Hence, authorities
on both sides saw themselves forced to intervene. In autumn 1890 the East African coast was declared closed to sportsmen and the first imperial governor of German East Africa, Julius von Soden, tried to prevent all attempts at large-scale hunting by controlling and occasionally forbidding European hunting parties, as well as those African or Zanzibari caravans setting out from the coast with the sole purpose of hunting. In the district of Moshi near Kilimanjaro, a licensing system operated for professional elephant hunters, charging an annual fee of 500 rupees or the return of an equivalent amount of tusks for the permission to hunt. In an effort to check “the destruction of the large game of the country, as also of preventing collisions with native tribes on the part of irresponsible adventurers,” the British Imperial East Africa Company likewise curbed the unrestrained pursuit of game by forcing all sporting expeditions to apply for a permit at the head office in London. The company also introduced hunting licenses that were obtainable from the administration in Mombasa or local superintendents. No restrictions, however, were placed on hunting by officials of the company, which counted some of the most infamous and rapacious white elephant hunters among its ranks. In German East Africa as well, military and administrative personnel enjoyed unrestricted hunting, as did scientific expeditions. In May 1895, for example, Fritz Bronsart von Schellendorf, a former member of the German Schutztruppe and himself a prolific hunter, sent alarming reports of the slaughter of 60 zebras by the ornithologist Oskar Neumann, who collected specimens for the Natural History Museum in Berlin. In his letter to the Colonial Department in Berlin, he predicted the near extinction of several species and pushed for a lease system for hunting similar to the one in Germany. His propositions were passed on to Wissmann, who had just taken over as the governor of East Africa.

II

Reports like Bronsart’s were only one of several reasons why Wissmann displayed more concern for matters of wildlife preservation than his predecessors. Not only was he an ardent hunter himself, but he could also draw upon his rich experience as an African explorer, having crossed the continent from west to east in the 1880s. During his travels in the Congo, he claimed to have “too often seen how every European who possesses a gun... fires in the most reckless fashion... without having any regard as to whether or not he can possess himself of the animal when killed.” He witnessed the same wanton destruction of game by his own administrative and military staff, whose “unsportsmanlike shooting” (unweidmännische Aas-Jägerei) 22 decimated game populations
and, even worse, defied the German hunting ethos Wissmann held so dear. The overall impression of a decline in wildlife numbers was further exacerbated by the ecological crisis of the early and mid 1890s, a series of man-made and natural catastrophes that in many areas led to the collapse of regional economic and ecological systems. Wissmann witnessed some of this devastation while engaged in ruthless campaigns to restore German authority around Kilimanjaro in 1891. The north of German East Africa, in particular, was struck, consecutively, by a rinderpest pandemic, droughts and locusts, which culminated in crop failure and famine. Approximately 90 percent of the region’s cattle died as a result of the pandemic, which also severely reduced the populations of ungulates such as buffalo, zebra and several species of antelope. Pastoral societies that depended on cattle, such as the Maasai, were particularly hard hit. Many of them turned to cattle theft and hunting to survive, which in turn in-
creased European perceptions of social and ecological turmoil that seemed to require and justify military and administrative intervention.\textsuperscript{23}

However, the immediate impetus for Wissmann to take active measures and push for international agreements seems to have come from an article in the \textit{Gazette for Zanzibar and East Africa} published on September 25, 1895. The author, referring to a correspondent in Mombasa, likened the devastation of big game in Africa by “the rifle-bearing hunter, professional and amateur,” to the destruction of the herds of bison on the American Plains. As there was “ample evidence” that East African game was “going the way of that in America,” the author advocated the confiscation of ivory below a certain weight and the establishment of “great plain and forest reserves” as wildlife breeding grounds rather than merely relying on a licensing system for control.\textsuperscript{24} Wissmann read the article closely and discussed the implementation of its suggested provisions in a letter to Berlin in October 1895. However, his scepticism with respect to the possibility of setting up reserves led him strongly to favor the banning of trade in immature ivory below a certain weight. With this in mind, he asked the Foreign Office in Berlin to approach the governments of France, Britain, Portugal and the Congo Free State in order to negotiate an international agreement for the protection of elephants.\textsuperscript{25} A few months later, however, Wissmann had apparently changed his mind on game reserves, and he asked the Colonial Department for permission to “turn some of the game rich areas of German East Africa into a national park.”\textsuperscript{26} Since the establishment of Yellowstone in 1872, the idea of setting aside space to preserve wilderness as national heritage had been received by conservationists in all parts of the world.\textsuperscript{27} Its subsequent implementation in different political, social, natural and ecological contexts often entailed significant modifications to the US-American model. The German East African version, as proposed by Wissmann, combined the American idea of preserving wilderness with the model of the German hunting estate. On the one hand, all hunting was to be forbidden in the reserves, which were to be owned and managed by the government, in order to create ideal breeding conditions for wildlife. On the other hand, Wissmann was content to give the governor discretion over whether or not German hunters should be allowed to hunt in the reserves. Set in a beautiful and “uninhabited” landscape, these “small paradises”\textsuperscript{28} should thus convey to the visiting hunter the idealized picture of German Africa as an untamed wilderness. Roderick Nash has argued that the American national park represented the royal forest of medieval Europe in its democratic form, with the sovereign now being the nation.\textsuperscript{29} In a way, then, the German East African adaptation took the idea back to its European roots. This is clearly reflected in a later memorandum from Wissmann which proposed that the animals in the reserves be declared
“imperial game” (*kaiserliches Wild*), thereby suggesting that the reserves were comparable to the German Emperor’s hunting estates in Rominten and Schorfheide.\(^3\)

In May 1896 Wissmann put his ideas into practice with an ordinance that bore a strong imprint of German hunting traditions.\(^3\) While district and military commissioners were asked to suggest further areas suitable for game sanctuaries, two reserves were established immediately, one in the south along the Rufiji River, the other in the area west of Kilimanjaro. The regulations contained no special provisions for the enforcement of the ban in the reserves, but apparently Wissmann envisioned “that the nearest stations to the reserves would be charged with the carrying out of his Game Regulations” and, if “the first few offenders [were] duly punished, it will be quite possible to ensure a considerable amount of respect for the game reserves.”\(^3\) All hunters, European and indigenous, were required to take out a game license in advance, prices being 5 rupees for indigenous hunters, 20 rupees for Europeans and 500 rupees for participants in hunting expeditions and professional elephant or rhinoceros hunters. To further the development of agriculture and plantations, the ordinance introduced a distinction between vermin on the one hand and useful animals or those worthy of protection on the other. Whereas it was permitted to kill all preying cats, apes, pigs and most birds without a license, each elephant or rhinoceros shot cost an additional fee. By declaring hunting techniques like the use of fire and nets and the driving of game illegal unless special permission was obtained from the government, the ordinance also made an attempt to exclude those indigenous hunting practices that conflicted with German—and European—hunting codes. Another transfer of German *Weidgerechtigkeit*\(^3\) to tropical East Africa was a ban on hunting females and foals of all animals, with the exception of vermin and those animals where the females were hardly distinguishable from the males. The shooting of young elephants with tusks below three kilograms in weight was strictly forbidden.

Given the very limited extent of actual control Germans exerted over most parts of their claimed territory in 1896, the effort to introduce aspects of the German hunting ethos to Africa appeared futile. Putting them into practice proved difficult in many ways; visiting sportsmen, for example, could recognize big game such as elephants, lions, rhinoceroses, buffaloes and giraffes, but could hardly distinguish between the several species of antelope, not to mention between the sexes. Hence the game ordinance was severely criticized, largely by visiting hunters. Max Schoeller, for instance, who undertook a hunting expedition through German East Africa in 1896, complained that the high fees merely penalized European hunters, whereas Africans, whom Schoeller believed to be the true culprits in the game slaughter, could not be made to obey the provisions
anyway.\textsuperscript{34} Barely two years later, Wissmann’s successor, Eduard von Liebert, suspended most provisions of the 1896 ordinance, feeling that too little was known about wildlife biology to introduce effective measures. The new ordinance allowed, amongst other things, the shooting of females and foals, and some district stations were even encouraged to handle elephant hunting, both by Africans and Europeans, in such a way as to divert more of the ivory trade revenue into the government’s purse.\textsuperscript{35}

Despite being short-lived and of limited practical value, the German ordinance of 1896 nonetheless influenced future efforts at wildlife preservation. Itself an amalgam of different traditions, Wissmann’s Game Regulations introduced the idea of the reserve in East Africa and engendered widespread discussion in the neighboring British colonies and even the British possessions in India. Moreover, it ushered in a period of intense Anglo-German cooperation leading up to the International Conference on the Preservation of Wild Animals convened in London in April 1900.

When the translation of Wissmann’s game ordinance arrived at the British Foreign Office at the end of June 1896, the discussion about bringing the “excessive destruction . . . of the larger wild animals” in Africa to a halt was already well under way. A few weeks before, the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary had recommended a series of measures—including the introduction of a closed season, reserved districts and a limitation on the number of game to be shot—to the commissioners in British East Africa and Uganda, demanding some kind of legislation on the matter.\textsuperscript{36} Already John MacKenzie has observed the “curious fact” that the British South African tradition of game legislation had not been tapped by the Department for the African Protectorates in the British Foreign Office as a source for measures in East Africa.\textsuperscript{37} This knowledge would have been available at the Colonial Office, which, among other issues, dealt with matters concerning South Africa. Apparently, the institutional distinction between the Colonial Office, Foreign Office and India Office handicapped the transfer of information within the Empire. In this case, only the arrival of the German Ordinance instigated exchange between the different departments. In the following months, experts in India, South Africa and the British East and Central African possessions were asked to comment on the German regulations and especially on the practicability of wildlife reserves.\textsuperscript{38} A flood of correspondence followed. The British Foreign Office accumulated all available knowledge on game preservation, including the game laws from Zululand, Natal, Bechuanaland and the Cape Colony, and several memoranda from forest conservators as well as the Forest Regulations of British India,
which incorporated the wildlife preservation measures there. Authorities in densely populated areas, such as the South African settler colonies, expressed their scepticism about reserves and remained doubtful about the possibility of patrolling them. Existing regulations in South Africa therefore mainly relied on licenses and closed seasons.\(^{39}\) A commentator from India greeted the sanctuaries as “the only proper and rational course to pursue if the interesting fauna . . . is to be preserved from eventual extinction.”\(^{40}\) Between 1896 and 1899 all British colonies bordering German East Africa established sanctuaries, sometimes hesitantly.\(^{41}\) To coordinate conservationist efforts, the British authorities agreed to make their hunting regulations match those of German East Africa, but with one important difference. While Wissmann’s successor, Liebert, denied foreign sporting expeditions access to the hunting grounds in the interior of German East Africa,\(^{42}\) his British counterpart, Commissioner Sir Arthur Hardinge, advocated the following principle:

Keep as close as possible to the German Regulations, but make our own slightly more favorable to wealthy sportsmen who bring money into the territory and who, so long as their destruction of its game can be kept . . . within safe limits, should be encouraged rather than otherwise to visit it.\(^{43}\)

Kenya’s status as a sportsman’s paradise and playground of the “great white hunter” can be traced, in part, to this principle.

III

Hardinge realized that East African wildlife could be turned into an important source of revenue as long as its sustainable utilization was guaranteed. Mandating hunting licenses and creating reserves as breeding grounds were ways to achieve this target. Reserves, however, would only provide local protection to endangered species. Compared to the grand-scale destruction, especially of elephants, that was perceived to be taking place throughout the continent, many colonial officials deemed reserves and regulations to be of little or no use if unaccompanied by an international agreement to establish certain standards of protection. As Wissmann had encouraged the German Foreign Office to take steps in that direction, Sharpe did likewise on the British side, demanding that all the powers who hold territory in Africa should agree to prohibit the export of tusks of less weight than, say, 15 lb. each . . . For one power alone, or two or three, however, to pass such a regulation as this would be useless unless all the others joined in it, as it would simply result in the ivory of small size no longer being exported through those particular territories where it was forbid-
Paul Kayser, director of the German Colonial Department, had argued along similar lines when he approached the British Ambassador in Berlin in July 1896 to enquire about the attitude of the British Government towards an international conference on the protection of African wildlife. Kayser was convinced that "British and German authorities would heartily cooperate in the effort to protect elephants and other big game from extermination." In his eyes, the main problem was to secure the adherence of territories like the Congo Free State or Portuguese East Africa, which might seek to benefit from protection measures in the British and German protectorates and provide a ready market for the banned underweight ivory. Behind all preservationist concern, Kayser pinpointed a manifest structural and economic problem: elephant preservation in the 1890s was first and foremost an East African concern. Although elephants were far from hunted out in the German and British East African territories, populations there had suffered most from trade-related hunting in previous decades. By the 1890s, the main areas of ivory procurement were situated well west of the Great Lakes. The newly erected colonial borders, however, significantly curbed the trade via the old caravan routes towards the east coast, and each of the colonial powers tried to divert as much of the ivory trade as possible towards their own ports and outlets. German representatives along Lake Tanganyika constantly complained about heavy tolls by which the authorities of the Congo Free State tried to discourage Zanzibari traders from exporting their ivory through German territory via the caravan routes. Therefore, it was not only decreasing elephant populations that made preservationist measures appear to be most urgent in the East African territories. Waning export figures due to the curtailment of long-distance trade in the interior further added to the impression among German colonial authorities that, without severe measures, the ivory trade would soon cease to be profitable.

Preservationist concern, economic interest and the prevalence of hunters in the British colonial administration led to a most favorable reception of Kayser's proposal on the part of the British Foreign Office. In April 1897 Wissmann, already retired as governor, sketched out his initial conference idea in more detail. Apart from the main issue of banning the trade in underweight ivory, he also suggested addressing questions of general interest such as the breeding and domestication of "useful" animals like the zebra. Both were problems where preservation was inseparably linked with colonial development and thus likely to be seen as more important in the imperial capitals. Wissmann suggested Brussels as the
most suitable venue for negotiations. The Belgian capital had a strong tradition of international and imperial cooperation in African matters, and it was easily accessible for the invited powers. The former Imperial Governor also expected the authorities of the Congo Free State to have a particular interest in the matter. Having been in the service of Belgian King Leopold II as an explorer, Wissmann had no doubt:

The Congo State will show the utmost readiness to take measures to preserve its natural wealth, ivory. What is true of the Congo State is no less true of the ‘Congo Français,’ and therefore I have little doubt that the French colonial authorities will also see their advantage in adhering to the proposed protective measures.

It can be assumed that Brussels as a venue would have given the conference a more economic edge, with representatives of the trading companies engaged in the Free State trying to gain influence over the proceedings and to limit any economic disadvantage from the restrictions the conference’s findings might cause.

The British Foreign Office, however, objected to Brussels, advocating London and the Foreign Office instead. The shift to the heart of the British Empire meant not only a change of locality, but placed the conference in a more “preservationist” context. This was well illustrated in an internal Foreign Office note that stressed the importance of hosting the conference and placed special emphasis on the fact “that more experts would be in London... and there would be an advantage in being able to consult British authorities on the spot.” Those taken to be experts on African wildlife were first and foremost big game hunters, together with a few naturalists and zoologists. While Wissmann still favored Brussels, he acknowledged the advantage of expert knowledge and put forward that each delegation should comprise government representatives as well as experts, be they hunters, naturalists or zoologists. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, remained adamant that London should be the location and the change of venue can be regarded as a general shift of initiative, signifying that Salisbury was now determined to take the lead in the matter.

Expert knowledge, especially that of hunters, remained a characteristic feature in the course of preparations for the conference, as well as throughout the conference itself. Before drafting the conference agenda, Salisbury approached hunters, zoologists and officials with African experience to hear their opinion. Drawing on Wissmann’s suggestions and the help of these authorities, six points were singled out as being of foremost importance: the prevention of the export of elephant tusks of less than a certain weight; the creation of reserves, closed seasons and the prohibition of the hunting of females; a system of licenses for both “na-
tive” and European hunters; the enforcement of the provisions of the Brussels Act in regard to the supply of arms and ammunition to natives; and the complete protection of animals and birds deemed useful. As far as the aims of the conference were concerned, expectations were rather low: “The utmost which would be obtained ... would be the passing of resolutions engaging the governments concerned to issue regulations containing the above or similar provisions.” In successive drafts, Sharpe’s grand project of uniform regulations throughout the continent made way for the more limited objective of cooperation between the territories of mainland sub-Saharan Africa north of the Zambezi and German South-West Africa, excluding possible problems with the rival self-governing colonies of South Africa and the Boer Republics. Although the zone finally demarcated still included the African states of Liberia and Abyssinia, both were excluded from participation in the conference. Internationalism was confined to the circle of the “civilized” European imperial powers. However, the two African states were expected to accede to the regulations afterwards.

IV

After the German government had signaled that it considered the drafts a “suitable basis for the negotiations,” the British Foreign Office invited representatives from France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the Congo Free State to the conference, which finally took place at the Foreign Office between April 24 and May 19, 1900.

The list of participants reveals the varying degree of interest the invited parties had in a conference on the preservation of wild animals, birds and fish in Africa. German and British predominance at the Conference was expressed in the size of their delegations. Germany sent four plenipotentiaries, two of them representing the government, while Hermann von Wissmann and Carl Georg Schillings, a hunter-naturalist later turned conservationist, took part because of their knowledge of African wildlife gathered from their hunting experience. Apart from the informal expertise of hunters and colonial officials present in London, the official British delegation was headed by the Earl of Hopetoun, who also presided at the conference. He was accompanied by the Director of African Affairs in the Foreign Office, Sir Clement Hill, and the director of the Natural History Museum in London, Edwin Ray Lankester, a distinguished zoologist. Spain, Italy and Portugal sent only one representative of their respective embassies in London, the Congo Free State was represented by a colonial official who had at least worked in the Congo, while the French interest was advocated by two plenipotentiaries from the London embassy and the French Colonial Department in Paris. The
governmental interest dominated, and this was clearly reflected in the strategies pursued during the conference.

Both France and the Congo Free State had expressed their reservations beforehand as far as customs and restrictions on the trade in skins, hides, horns, plumes and immature ivory were concerned, drawing attention to the Congo Basin as an internationally acknowledged zone of free trade.\(^{58}\) At the time, the French Government had just started to split up the territory of the French Congo among private companies, granting a thirty-year monopoly to some forty-two companies to extract the natural products of the area. In the Belgian Congo, European companies exploited ivory and rubber using brutal coercion and violence,\(^{59}\) and Salisbury realized that “the profitable trade in ivory now going on between the Free State and Belgium”\(^{60}\) would represent a major obstacle to any international agreement.

Still, the conference was able to agree on general measures of protection. Banning African techniques of hunting by restricting the use of nets and pits gained general approval, as did closed seasons and the protection of useful animals. Constraints on trade both in arms and in animal products, however, were subject to heated debate. The Anglo-German proposition to prevent the killing of young elephants by prohibiting the export of tusks less than ten pounds and simultaneously raising the customs duty for those weighing between ten and thirty pounds met with staunch opposition from the representatives of France, Portugal and Belgium. In the end, the resulting convention did not forbid the export of immature ivory; it merely rendered all elephant tusks weighing less than five kilograms (approximately ten pounds) liable to confiscation, as well as enacting a general prohibition on the hunting and killing of young elephants.\(^{61}\) Wissmann and Schillings’ attempt to instil an element of Weidgerechtigkeit at the international level failed as well. For years, Wissmann had complained about white hunters, who, furnished with modern breech-loading precision rifles, would not dare to stalk game but instead shot from long distances, leaving many of the game wounded.\(^{62}\) Schillings supported his colleague and demanded that the use of these weapons be severely curtailed. The proposition, however, was thwarted by the French representative, Louis Gustave Binger, who emphasized that the present conference did not have the authority to alter or amend the provisions of the Brussels Arms Act agreed upon in 1889.

In its final guise, the convention contained a host of vaguely phrased provisions. Expressions like “to a certain extent” or “as far as it is possible” reduced many paragraphs to mere recommendations.\(^{63}\) France made its ratification dependent on the accession of Liberia and Abyssinia to the convention, whereas Portugal did likewise with respect to the British and German territories in South Africa.
The adherence of these powers to the convention, despite the British Foreign Office’s frequent efforts, could not be secured in the following years. Thus, the convention was never ratified by all signatory powers, which is probably why the conference, although sometimes hailed as the epitome of “transimperial concern about environmental degradation,” “a pioneering effort in international cooperation” or the “world’s first international environmental agreement,”64 has never received more than a few sketchy lines in any portrayal of the beginnings of international environmentalism.65

British representatives at the time, however, did not consider the conference a failure and emphasized “that each power must reserve to itself complete freedom as to the actual administrative measures to be applied in its own possessions,” especially as far as matters of “legitimate commerce” were involved.66 When, some thirty years later in April 1932, the British Economic Advisory Council discussed the preparation of a new international conference on the protection of nature in Africa, it was pointed out “that although the Convention of 1900 had never been ratified, it had been very largely followed in practice by this country and that other European countries were also gradually coming more into line.”67 At the conference in 1933, the idea of the reserve, which had been internationally agreed upon in 1900, matured into the “fortress conservation” of the national park.68 Participants in the conference in 1933 also acknowledged that reserves “have in the past fulfilled a valuable purpose in preserving wildlife and have probably saved some of the rarer species of animals from extinction.”69

The 1900 conference on wildlife preservation in Africa established standards which were to dominate conservationist thinking in the twentieth century. Among these were hunting licenses and closed seasons. Most significantly from the perspective of conservation history, the decision to create reserves and protected areas, as one contemporary official noted, was “the most important step to be taken in an unsettled country.”70 Although references were made to the American origins of this idea, the first East African sanctuaries had little appeal to any nation. Rather, it appears that the sanctuaries inscribed in Africa European ideas of the hunter’s responsibility for the well-being of his game, an ethos known as Hegel in nineteenth-century Germany.71 For instance, the convention defined reserves as “sufficiently large tracts of land which have all the qualifications necessary as regards food, water and, if possible, salt for preserving birds or other wild animals and for affording them the necessary quiet during the breeding time.”72 However, even at this early stage there were discussions about whether reserves were of a temporary
nature or “absolues et perpétuelles,” and many of the early game reserves were indeed later converted into national parks. The conference decision to allow local authorities to establish, shift, alter or remove a reserve, thus designating the use of African space according to their will, reflected not only imperial ideologies of white overlordship but also the changeability of the early colonial situation in which administrations claimed territories on the map, but hardly had the means to control them. The German administration in East Africa may serve as a good example. Wissmann’s hastily introduced regulations were substantially altered by succeeding governors, whose handling of the reserves was shaped by the needs of an extractive economy based predominantly on plantations. In fact, marking African maps with green conservation areas at times served merely to silence calls for conservation at home.

Establishing certain standards also meant that these could be claimed by others, including non-governmental actors, and used to exert both intergovernmental and domestic pressure. The provisions of the London Convention were used as both an argument and guideline for measures of wildlife preservation. Many of them were introduced in the game ordinances of German and British East Africa, while in the years up to the First World War, the British Foreign Office constantly encouraged the other signatory states to adhere to the convention. It was also used as a means of exerting metropolitan pressure on the colonial authorities. As the British plenipotentiaries to the conference remarked:

In the present stage of European administration in central tropical Africa, much depends on the formation of a sound public opinion to discountenance the wanton destruction of large numbers of harmless and useful animals by hunters and traders.

Exactly this objective was pursued in Britain by the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire. Founded in 1903, the society, later nicknamed the society of “penitent butchers,” attempted to persuade British colonies to adhere to the stipulations agreed upon in 1900, in particular “to further the formation of game reserves or sanctuaries, the selection of the most suitable places and the enforcing of suitable game laws and regulations.” In Germany, this cause was taken up most fervently by Carl Georg Schillings and a Commission for the Improvement of Wildlife Preservation in German Africa, which formed in 1908 and recruited its members predominantly from German colonial circles. Moreover, the endeavors to preserve the African fauna also had an impact on the formation of conservationist networks at the international level. An example of such a group was the Movement for the Global Protection of Nature promoted by the Swiss explorer Paul Sarasin. This early non-governmental transnationalism thrived on a global awareness
fueled by imperialism and networks of natural scientists and hunters. This is not the place to discuss the connections between the genesis of conservation as an international problem and the success or failure of conservationists to gain influence at the national level. It appears, however, as if in the German case Carl Georg Schillings was forced to establish transnational links to back up his case for colonial wildlife conservation, whereas the above-mentioned British society could rely on established networks within the Empire. It could promote its cause thanks to the influence of a distinguished membership, which included many former governors, colonial officials and members of parliament.

The 1900 Conference further serves to highlight the fact that behind a general idea of African “wilderness,” the meanings and values attached to African animals were quite divergent. Although the London Conference referred to the protection of “animals,” it was mainly concerned with “big game”—those animals that could be utilized as an economic resource, be it via sporting licenses or the trade in ivory, skins, hides and horns. The convention emphasized and further refined the distinction between those animals considered vermin and those considered useful or worthy of protection, a distinction that characterized most of the game regulations in the South and East African colonies. It classified African animals on five different levels, distinguishing between “usefulness,” “rarity and threatened extermination” and those where reduction was desired “within sufficient limits.” Further distinctions were also introduced: in the case of some species the killing of females or of young animals was prohibited; for others, such as elephants, rhinoceroses and hippopotamuses, there were limits to the number that could be hunted in a given time and region. Such regulations were clearly dominated by utilitarian and economic concerns. The interests of hunters in the preservation of “game” ranked highly, especially among German and British authorities, but the preservation of the elephant and other animals as species and Naturdenkmäler (natural monuments) was also demanded, both on scientific grounds and with the prospect of preserving this natural heritage for future generations. At the conference, conservationist attitudes differed according to the economic interest involved, but also according to different traditions imported from Europe, especially as far as hunting was concerned.

The conference was also a striking demonstration of how imperialism served as a driving force of international cooperation in environmental matters. This is not to say, however, that imperial rivalries did not matter. All too often, nascent efforts at international cooperation on African conservation issues were impeded by nationalist imperatives and existing transimperial cooperation was obfuscated by nationalist rhetoric. For ex-
ample, Sir Clement Hill, a member of the Foreign Office who had participated in the conference, later emphasized:

We did take the first steps for the preservation of game in East Africa. We initiated an international conference on the subject, and from that date attention has been paid by the nations of the world to preserving the wonderful fauna of East Africa.\(^1\)

However, the emphasis on a British “we” should not obscure the fact that colonialism and conservation were imperial European projects, marked by both competition and cooperation, rivalry and transfer. The internationalism of European imperialism might have made the London Conference possible, but it also provided some states with a reason not to ratify the convention—in this case, because Abyssinia and Liberia were not included.

Finally, internationalism and environmentalism are both attitudes that usually have positive connotations, especially when seen against the backdrop of the nationalism and environmental degradation prevalent before the First World War. However, the alliance between European hunters and African wildlife, and the measures taken by colonial authorities to preserve this alliance, seriously affected the livelihoods of the local population. In many areas, Africans lost access to the wildlife which served as a food resource while also losing the ability to control animals that threatened their fields and crops. In short, they experienced imperial environmentalism as a form of environmental imperialism; a process which saw the re-ordering of space, the often violent expropriation of traditional rights, enhanced vulnerability and the imposition of European values.\(^2\) Indeed, the problems arising from the separation of humans and wildlife in Africa may well be the most persistent legacy of imperial environmental internationalism shaping African conservation to this day.

Notes

This paper presents preliminary results of my PhD dissertation project on hunting and wildlife conservation in German colonialism. I am grateful to the German Historical Institute London for a scholarship to carry out research for this project in Great Britain.

1 “The Dying Fauna of an Empire,” *The Saturday Review. Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, November 24, 1906, 635ff., quoted from 636. Although “reserve” and “sanctuary” were later invested with specific meanings, contemporaries drew no distinction between these categories and they will be used interchangeably in the context of this essay.

2 The terms “preservation” and “conservation” are translated from the German sources according to their established use in environmental history, with preservation denoting the protection of wild nature and conservation referring to sustainable resource management; see Karl Jacoby, “Conservation,” in *Encyclopedia of World Environmental History*, eds. Shepard Krech III, John R. McNeill and Carolyn Merchant (New York; London, 2004), 1:262–268, 266ff.; Joachim Radkau, *Natur und Macht. Eine Weltgeschichte der Umwelt* (Munich, 2002), 269. However, the contemporary British use of the terms did not follow the American meaning of preservation and conservation; see John MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1988), 201.


13 Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BAL) R 1001/7776, fol. 2: Wissmann to the Colonial Department in the German Foreign Office, April 28, 1890.


15 An English hunting expedition was denied access to German East Africa in December 1892, and Governor von Soden generally charged sporting expeditions 2,000 marks to grant them permission to hunt in German territory; see BAL R1001/7776, fol. 21 and 22: Soden to the Foreign Office, May 5, 1892, and December 28, 1892.

16 Wissmann mentions this scheme in a circular dated May 7, 1896, Deutsches Kolonialblatt 7 (1896): 340ff.

17 See Foreign Office Confidential Print (FOCP) 6127, No. 188: Imperial British East Africa Company to FO, Acting Secretary Ernest L. Bentley, June 19, 1891; The Field, the Farm, the Garden. The Country Gentleman’s Newspaper, May 9, 1891, 680.

18 Regarding the examples of Frederick Dealtry Lugard, Frederick Jackson and Arthur Neu mann, see MacKenzie, Empire of Nature, 151–153; Steinhart, Imperial Hunt.

19 BAL R 1001/7776, fol. 25–30: Bronsart von Schellendorf to the Colonial Department, May 11, 1895. Wissmann had taken over government in April 1895.


22 BAL R 1001/7766, fol. 29: Internal Memorandum of the German Colonial Department, drawing on Wissmann’s accounts, November 22, 1896.


25 BAL R 1001/7766, fol. 7: Wissmann to Chancellor Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, October 29, 1895.

26 BAL R 1001/7776, fol. 31: Wissmann to Hohenlohe, March 26, 1896.


28 BAL R 1001/7766, fol. 56–63: Memorandum of Wissmann, March 20, 1898.

29 Nash, American Invention of National Parks, 733.

30 BAL R 1001/7766, fol. 56–63: Memorandum of Wissmann, March 20, 1898.

32 Head of the Colonial Department Paul Kayser to Martin Gosselin, July 15, 1896, in PRO FO 403/302, no. 4: Martin Gosselin to the Marquess of Salisbury, July 15, 1896.

33 Itself heavily debated in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Weidgerechtigkeit denoted an ethos of sustainable hunting, which claimed the hunter’s mastery over nature, but included a moral responsibility of the hunter for his game, for its fair pursuit and for its humane killing without unnecessary suffering; see Hubertus Hiller, Jäger und Jagd. Zur Entwicklung des Jagdwesens in Deutschland zwischen 1848 und 1914 (Münster, 2003), 135ff.


35 BAL R 1001/7776, fol. 56ff.: Ordinance concerning the preservation of the fauna of German East-Africa, January 17, 1898.


38 PRO FO 403/302, no. 2 and 3: Foreign Office to India and Colonial Offices, July 14 and 15, 1896.

39 See MacKenzie, Empire of Nature, 205ff. However, the collected evidence of the Foreign Office reveals that even here some governments had turned to the creation of reserves for wildlife conservation. Game reserves seem to have been in existence in Zululand since 1895, whereas the Cape Colony featured two elephant reserves; see PRO FO 403/302, no. 10: Colonial Office to Foreign Office, October 8, 1896, transmitting a Memorandum on the Game Laws of Zululand; no. 28: Richard Crawshay to Foreign Office, August 7, 1897. John McCormick dates the first reserves in South Africa as far back as 1857, while private game reserves have existed on large estates since 1875; see John McCormick, Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement (Bloomington, 1989), 9. The Boer Republic of Transvaal established the Pongola Game Reserve in 1894, although this apparently had no influence on the discussions in East Africa; see Carruthers, The Kruger National Park, 17–23.

40 PRO FO 403/302, no. 25: India Office to Foreign Office, July 20, 1897, enclosure 23: Memorandum of the Inspecting Forest Officer of Sirmur, R.H.E. Thompson, February 25, 1897.


42 BAL R 1001/7776, fol. 53: Liebert to Count Hatzfeldt, April 6, 1898.

43 PRO FO 403/302, no. 31: Hardinge to Salisbury, Zanzibar, August 27, 1897.


46 Franz Stuhlmann, Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte von Ostafrika. Allgemeine Betrachtungen und Studien über die Einführung und wirtschaftliche Bedeutung der Nutzpflanzen und Haustiere mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Deutsch-Ostafrika (Berlin, 1909), 791; Oskar Baumann, Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle. Reisen und Forschungen der Massai-Expedition des deutschen Antiskla-


48 The following export figures drawn from sources of the British Board of Trade were those the 1900 conference had available for discussion. The ivory export of German East Africa slumped from a peak of 150,500 kg in 1894 to 88,000 kg in 1895, rising to 106,100 kg in 1896 to drop again to 96,900 kg in 1897; see PRO FO 881/7395 H, Appendix 2: returns showing approximately the amount of ivory exported from Africa from 1891 to 1899, 18.

49 The International African Association had been founded in Brussels in 1876, and in 1889 the European Powers signed a convention for the non-proliferation of arms to African “natives” there; see Madeleine Herren, “Governamental Internationalism and the Beginning of a New World Order in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in Mechanics of Internationalism, eds. Geyer and Paulmann, 121–144, 129ff.; Madeleine Herren, Hintertüren zur Macht. Internationalismus und modernisierungsorientierte Außenpolitik in Belgien, der Schweiz und den USA 1865–1914 (Munich, 2000), 83ff., 91ff.

50 BAL R 1001/7766, fol. 39–43: Wissmann to Colonial Department, April 2, 1897. A translation of this letter can be found in PRO FO 403/302, enclosure 2 in no. 22: Gough to Salisbury, May 1, 1897.

51 PRO FO 403/302, no. 30: Foreign Office to Colonial Office, September 8, 1897.


53 See PRO FO 403/302, no. 30: Foreign Office to Colonial Office, September 8, 1897.

54 Ibid., no. 38: Salisbury to the British Embassy in Berlin, March 3, 1898.

55 Ibid., no. 59: Colonial Office to Foreign Office, March 13, 1899.

56 Ibid., no. 66: Lascelles to Salisbury, August 8, 1899.

57 Count Gustav von Lindenfels was the German Consul-General in London. Theodor Bumiller, who left the conference earlier, had joined Wissmann in his East African campaign 1890/91 and worked for the Colonial Department in the German Foreign Office. Schillings had the inferior status of a delegate and therefore did not sign the Convention.

58 PRO FO 403/302, enclosure in no. 79b: De Cuvelier to the British Embassy Brussels, December 5, 1899; no. 86: French Embassy London to Salisbury, December 29, 1899.


60 PRO FO 403/302, no. 79d: Salisbury to Lascelles, December 13, 1899.

61 FO 881/7395 B: Protocols of the 3rd session, April 27, 1900; 4th session, April 30, 1900; 5th session, May 1, 1900; 6th session, May 14, 1900; 7th session, May 15, 1900.

62 For the discussion of the ban of weapons of precision, see FO 881/7935 B: Protocol of the 4th session, April 30, 1900, 4ff.


See MacKenzie, Empire of Nature, 216ff.; Dan Brockington, Fortress Conservation: The Preservation of the Mkomazi Game Reserve, Tanzania (Bloomington, 2002). Unlike reserves, national parks as defined in 1933 should be established on ecological principles with enough space for animals to migrate. Disturbance by humans should be reduced to a minimum, but areas should also be accessible for tourism. Its borders cannot be changed by proclamation, but only through legislative action.


For the concept of Hege see Hiller, Jäger und Jagd, 132–139.


