



# NATIONAL PARKS OF BELGIAN CONGO

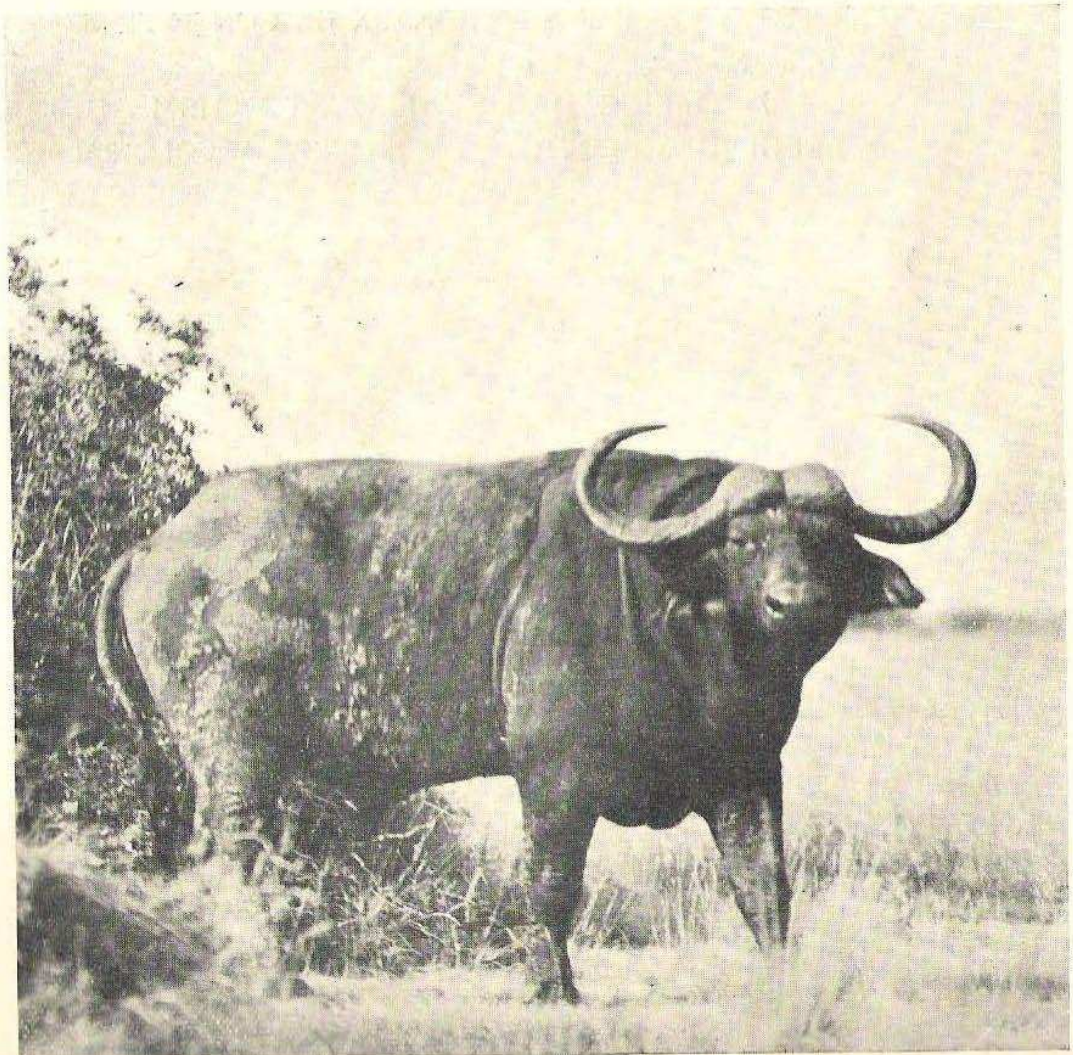


PHOTO E. HUBERT

This pamphlet has been published by the  
INSTITUT DES PARCS NATIONAUX DU CONGO BELGE  
21, rue Montoyer,  
and the OFFICE NATIONAL DU TOURISME DE  
BELGIQUE, SECTION DU TOURISME COLONIAL,  
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PARCS  
DU CONGO

# I. THE OBJECTS OF THE INSTITUTE

**T**HE idea of the preservation of scenery, flora, and fauna, in their natural state, which in itself is not at all new, is based in varying degrees on two main objectives.

As a secondary consideration, care is devoted to the preservation of natural beauties from modern constructions, mostly far from attractive in appearance, such as factories and advertisement hoardings.

The main object, however, is to prevent man, whose means of transport and weapons of destruction increase in proportion to scientific progress, from breaking up for his own temporary benefit the equilibrium of the three kingdoms of nature.

The animal kingdom suffers in two ways from human interference: directly, as the result of slaughter; indirectly, by the destruction of its environment, so indispensable to its existence. In the majority of civilised countries, man now regrets having squandered his natural resources to such an extent that game figures only very meagerly in present-day fare.

As an example of the destruction of natural vegetation, turn to those places once wooded, now desert or barren spaces, as the result of indiscriminate timber cutting.

The appearance of the land itself has even been changed as a result of man's interference. One example will suffice: the floods which have occurred in France, the United States and the Dutch Indies caused by the sudden silting up of river beds. This silting was the direct result of huge quantities of earth being washed down from upstream: the earth was washed away from the sides of valleys, where formerly the roots of trees and other vegetation, now destroyed, bound the soil and sub-strata firmly together against the erosive action of rain-water.

For half a century or more, the reaction against such methods has been general. Wild animals are everywhere protected by the legislative control of hunting and the creation of special reserves. The preservation of forests, legislative control of the clearing of ground, and schemes for re-planting have similar aims in view for the preservation of the vegetable kingdom.

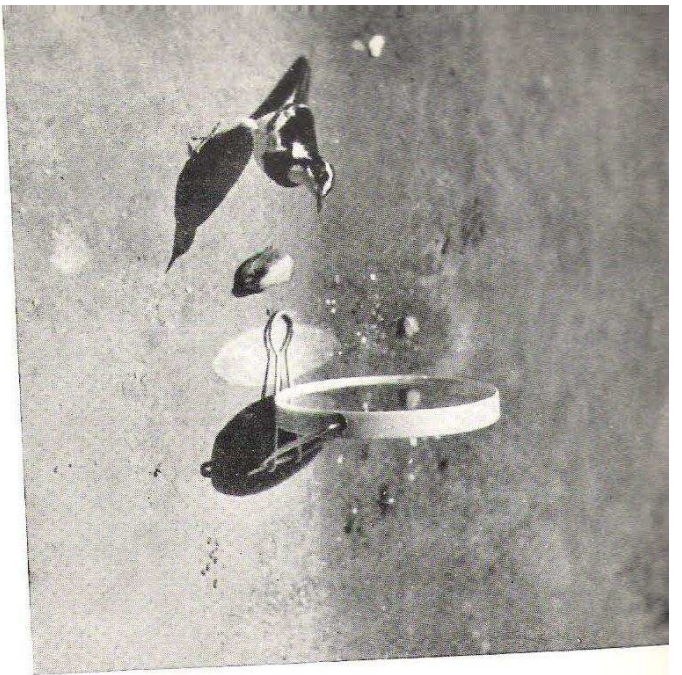
The definite idea of the creation of National Parks first came into being in the United States in 1872, on the occasion of the opening of Yellowstone National Park.

This point requires certain developments, to explain the origin of the name and to clarify its meaning, which can still be interpreted in various ways according to different countries where it is used.

MAR 2 1939

*Gift of the Publisher*

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1. Rwindi Camp.  
Wagtail's laminary.  
(Photo J.-P. Harroy).

The words « National Park » have been adopted direct from America, where the word « Park » refers to a stretch of country, comprising some particularly remarkable natural beauties, to be preserved intact for the pleasure of man; the adjective « National » makes it clear that the project concerns the whole nation.

The « Conference for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora in Africa », which met in London in 1935, adopted a definition of the words « National Park »:

For the purposes of the present Convention:

1. The expression « National Park » shall denote an area (a) placed under public control, the boundaries of which shall not be altered or any portion be capable of alienation except by the competent legislative authority; (b) set aside for the propagation, protection and preservation of wild animal life and wild vegetation, and for the preservation of objects of aesthetic, geological, prehistoric, historical, archaeological, or other scientific interest, for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the general public; (c) in which the hunting, killing or capturing of fauna and the destruction or collection of flora is prohibited except by or under the direction or control of the park authorities.

In accordance with the above provisions, facilities shall, as far as possible, be given to the general public for observing the fauna and flora in National Parks.

The following is the definition approved by the same Conference for the « strict natural reserve »:

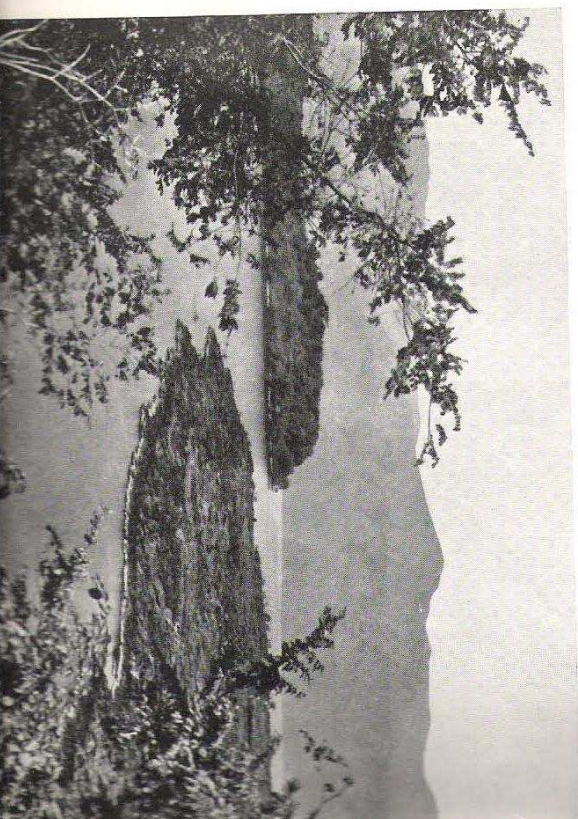
II. The term « strict natural reserve » shall denote an area placed under public control, throughout which any form of hunting or fishing, any undertakings connected with forestry, agriculture, or mining, any excavations or prospecting, drilling, levelling of the ground, or construction, any work involving the alteration of the configuration of the soil or the character of the vegetation, any act likely to harm or disturb the fauna or flora, and the introduction of any species of fauna and flora, whether indigenous or imported, wild or domesticated, shall be strictly forbidden; which it will be forbidden to enter, traverse, or camp in without a special written permit from the competent authorities; and in which scientific investigations may only be undertaken by permission of those authorities.

It is clearly shown that the « strict natural reserve » is subject to regulations considerably more severe than those applied to the « National Park ». It is also to be noted that the National Parks in the Belgian Congo, in which only parts of the sections are open to the public, are theoretically closer allied to the « natural reserves » than to « National Parks » as defined by the London Convention.

King Albert, who allowed his name to be given to the first of the National Parks in the Belgian Congo, promoted and developed this idea of National Parks for the Belgian Congo.

Thanks to his good offices and the support of King Leopold III, who, as Duke of Brabant, was for several years President of the « Parc National Albert » Institute, the Belgian Congo to-day possesses a number of National Parks, subject to very rational legislation.

2. Sake straits. - Recent lava from Kamoka volcano, with new vegetation. (Photo G.-F. de Witte).



In the speech delivered in London, in November 1935, a speech which constitutes the charter of the « Institut des Parcs Nationaux du Congo Belge », King Leopold III, then Duke of Brabant, defined in detail the three main objectives of the Institute.

These aims, which were incorporated in the decree of November 26th, 1934, can be given, in general outline, as follows :

1) *Preservation* of a biological nucleus in its primitive state, by the elimination of all human influence. This object necessitated the development of new regulations and a strict supervision.

2) *Scientific study*, based on a general plan, of the National Parks. This aspect of the Institute's programme, which raises it to a very special level, has already been put into operation and has been greatly stimulated by the interest of a generous patron. A large donation subsidised the creation of the « Fondation pour favoriser l'Etude scientifique des Parcs Nationaux du Congo Belge », and this body can now send to the Belgian Congo every year one or two scientific missions to pursue definite programmes.

The first of these groups was sent out in 1935, thanks to the support given by the « Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique », and a detailed inventory of the fauna and flora of the « Parc National Albert » was made.

Important collections and data were gathered and carefully examined, and specialists' reports are now being published.

The Institute has pursued its programme by sending groups of specialists to the « Parc National Albert » to examine questions of lacustrine evolution, magnetic influence, botanic sociology, mammalogy and vulcanology. A special and purely scientific film, intended to depict the characteristic flora and natural habits of the fauna of the National Parks, was also made under the auspices of the Institute.

5) Third aim of the Institute : as far as compatible with the principles of preservation and scientific study, the development of *touring* in the National Parks is to be encouraged.

The restrictions quoted previously from the speech of the Duke of Brabant and the text of the constitutional decree of the Institute permit the Institute to open to visitors only a portion of the territories under its jurisdiction. In certain cases the passage of man has had to be prohibited, in order to permit the fauna to settle down unmolested in its primitive surroundings and to ensure its propagation. In other cases it has been necessary to reduce the human element, so that the natural growth of vegetation is not interfered with (*Photo 2*). With these exceptions, however, it has been found possible to open to tourists a number of foot-paths and roads for cars so that visitors can, at their leisure, come into close contact with the natural beauties of such astonishing variety that nature seems to have piled with prodigal hands into the relatively small area of the « Parc National Albert ».

## II. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

**A**S early as 1886 King Leopold II had created special game reserves in the Congo Free State for the protection of elephants from ruthless destruction.

In 1909, on his return from a voyage to the Colony, Prince Albert of Belgium emphasised the necessity for the creation in the Belgian Congo of natural reserves, destined to ensure the preservation of certain animal and vegetable species threatened with extinction.

After his visit, as King Albert, to the United States in 1919 he took up the same suggestion, but with the additional idea of a National Park, regulated in accordance with equatorial conditions.

General opinion became favourable to this idea during the years just after the War, principally as a result of the intervention of Baron E. Cartier de Marchienne, then Belgian Ambassador to the United States. After an expedition to the Kivu conducted by the American naturalist, Carl Akeley, had returned, a first decree was issued, creating in 1925 the « Parc National Albert ». This was at first a reserve of very small area, mainly intended for the protection of the last of the

5. The « Parc National Albert » in 1925. - Visited *Karisimbi* and *Mikano*. (Photo G.-F. de Witte).

