

'Operation Noah' Revived As African Rain Imperils Animal Kingdom

LONDON (UPI)—There is one unchallenged distinction man holds among all the species of animals that have existed since the world began.

He alone has exterminated another species completely.

The dolorous roll of vanished birds and mammals and the lengthening list of species in danger of extinction are there for all to see at the office of the Fauna Preservation Society which is gathering itself for the second stage of "Operation Noah."

In December, 1958, the waters of the Zambezi River, dividing Northern and Southern Rhodesia, were dammed at the Kariba Gorge to provide power for the central African federation. An area of 2,500 square miles will eventually become Lake Kariba.

As the first waters poured into the rich game country, trapped animals retreated to islands above

the waterline. Southern Rhodesia launched "Operation Noah" to save as many as possible and it has rescued thus far some 2,300 aardvarks, bushpigs, monkeys, impala and other mammals.

But thousands have drowned or died of exhaustion or hunger.

Northern Rhodesia, according to the society, did not seem aware of the great animal tragedy in the making and took no part in the first phase of the operation which ended with the dry season. Now, spurred by a gathering public opinion, it was all set to match Southern Rhodesia's effort when the new rescue season started with the rains of November.

The Fauna Preservation Society, which helped mobilize this public opinion, is modest about its activities.

"We've just bought a 10-ton 45-foot super-ark," said assistant secretary Kathleen Clark after some persuasion. "I suppose it is the first boat since Noah specially designed for animal rescue work."

"You see, there isn't too much time. The waters will finally extend another 100 miles and the water level will rise another 100 feet by 1965. We believe we have till 1962 or 1963—and there are many rich game areas in the danger zone."

The society's funds are helping to mobilize science in the greatest challenge the group has faced since it was organized half a century ago by big game hunters alarmed at the indiscriminate slaughter of game. (The anti-hunting groups called them "the benevolent butchers.")

As part of "Operation Noah," darts tipped with tranquilizers or pep compounds will be shot into

trapped animals to make them lethargic if dangerous or energetic if exhausted, as needed.

Man is so feared by some animals that they get high blood pressure when caught and may develop pneumonia from the shock. Two cow elephants on one island beat their young calves to death rather than let them fall into human hands; then they themselves swam

to safety.

One curious sidelight of the flooding is that it has given new insight into the swimming ability of animals. And the best swimmer is that surprising catlike character, the leopard, who almost alone in Africa kills for pleasure. He can swim one and a half miles, a stroke or two ahead of the water-buck and the bushbuck.

Miss Clark's favorite true story from Kariba is of a great kudu whose huge horns were pulling down his head as he tried to swim from an island to safety. A kudu doe swam alongside and the exhausted male rested his heavy head on her back.

Then they swam into the sunset together and happily ended up on dry land.



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