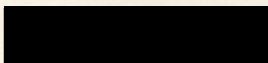


2 + B
The Royal Commonwealth Society
Essay Competition

Class B

Subject "A film producer's choice of a Commonwealth country
for a film on Wild life"

Name Peta Conradie

Date of Birth 

Address 110 The Gables,
Esplanade,
Durban.

School Durban Girls' College.
Muggrave Road,
Durban,
Natal.

Africa — dark, mysterious, uncivilised and unspoilt by Man, would be my choice of location for a film on Wild life. This is the Dark Continent, a continent which presents an everchanging scene varying from palm fringed golden beaches with crashing foam topped breakers to dense swampy exotic tropical forests. Somewhere between these two extremes lie the gently undulating, sun parched Serengeti Plains of Tanganyika. Bounded on the East by the Great Rift Valley, and by the source of the mighty Nile, Lake Victoria, on the north, this is the very heart of Africa, an area of natural beauty and limitless horizons, where Africa's game abounds.

A line of rugged weatherbeaten sentinels, extinct volcanoes, who have been on guard since time began, guard this natural game sanctuary, where, untouched by civilisation, vast herds roam over the plains and the cup-shaped craters of volcanoes.

Never having been hunted by Man, the animals know no fear, and wander close to humans providing excellent subjects for filming. During the day all species of game from antelope to elephant can be seen, and at night, the grunting cough and spine-chilling roar of lions, mingled with the hyena's mournful wail and the eerie yapping of jackals makes their presence even more acutely felt.

From the rim of a volcano crater, the rolling grassy plains below look like an unending carpet of greenish-brown, completely devoid of animal life. As the traveller descends, the carpet comes to life, and herds of buck can be seen grazing contentedly with a pride of lions resting nearby in the scanty shade of a spiky Euphorbia.

They seem to know instinctively whether they are likely to be stalked and killed. When a lion is hunting, buck stampede in all directions, alarming other peaceful herds who join in the panic and thunder across the plain for miles, followed by a reddish brown cloud of dust, which, undisturbed by any breath of wind, slowly resettles on the grass and trees. Often the king of beasts can be seen in the early evening, padding through the lengthening shadows, stalking a solitary buck, which stands bewildered, not knowing whence the attack is coming.

Once the lion has made his kill, gorged himself, and retired to the bushes to lick himself like an overgram cat, the hyenas and jackals attack the carcass. They become so intent on their feast that not even the headlights of a car can persuade them to leave it. The ever-circling vultures fly lower and lower, their bare throats quivering with anticipation as they hover over the fighting jackals. Occasionally one may venture too low, and be in danger of losing a few shaggy wing feathers as a snarling jackal snaps angrily at the intruder. The tawny feline king is always much sought after by photographers, and many pictures have been taken of the shaggy black-maned Serengeti lions.

The early mornings, before the scorching sun has dried the sparkling dew from rocks and grass, is the best time for photography. Herds of quaint thin-legged, knobby-necked giraffe lollop majestically past on their way to breakfast, pausing to survey the horizon and the rosy rising sun with mild gentle eyes, while slowly chewing a few dried prickly leaves. Their long necks enable them to stretch to the top of a tree with ease, but to reach the ground they have to almost fold in half. Giraffe never appear to be in any

hurry, or to have any destination or means of communication, but if they are frightened, their long strides allow them to cover miles at an effortlessly quick speed, and they can change direction and turn about in a fraction of a second. During the heat of the day they lie in the long grass, with only their two ridiculous horns and velvety muzzles above the surrounding grass, providing their own periscopes to keep a look out for danger.

Frisky, alert zebras are other inhabitants of the plains, who nomadically roam in search of succulent young grass shoots. Wearing a striped suit of dusty white and black, with an ever-swishing tail and a tuft of mane hanging over his eyes, the zebra always appears to be planning some mischief. They live in complete harmony with the more placid, sensible, less ridiculous mischievous wildebeest, who looks sulky with his drooping ears, dismal grey striped coat and thin stringy tail. Often confused by strangers with the buffalo, they are alike in nothing but colour. Buffalo give the impression of enormous strength, weight and brute force, with their massive shoulders and thick heavy horns, whereas the wildebeest, with his short, spiky horns and goat-like beard, looks anything but the most dangerous of Africa's animals. When wounded or molested, the buffalo is very dangerous, and employs great cunning to avoid his hunter and to be able to attack him from the rear. They are not very often seen on the plains, but prefer the tree covered slopes, or the swampy vegetation of the crater lakes, where they rest in perfect camouflage until the burning sun cools in the evenings.

Often in the early morning the rattle heralding the approach of a porcupine can be heard, and a family of five or six

quaint black-and-white spiky animals scramble across the road, the babies nursing to keep up with their parents. They emerge from the golden brown grass like an explosion of sparks and disappear as suddenly in the long grass.

At dawn too, the snow-clad dome of Kilimanjaro can be seen, with clouds covering the lower slopes like snowy white chickens nestling round a mother hen. Only one stream is fed from the melted snow, and this broadens into a wide river, providing crocodiles and hippopotami with a warm bathing place, and in the winter with a mud bath. The muddy river banks are scored by thousands of hooves and pads into wide paths and tracks leading to the safest drinking places. In parts the river is shallow enough for the most timid reibucks to drink without fear of attack from a crocodile lurking in the depths, while in other parts deep, natural rocky pools have formed where blundering hippopotami can swim in comfort.

As the water in the pools is crystal clear, the animals can be photographed easily, and by a patient watcher, many unusual pictures can be obtained. lighter grey babies splash contentedly in the water, and ride on their mother's back as she swims with only her nose and eyes above the surface like black, shiny floating pebbles. Sleepy hippopotami yawn widely, showing huge pink mouths and tongues, and very formidable pointed teeth.

Crocodiles, apparently sleeping, lie basking on the mudbanks, but at the first sign of a likely meal, the huge bulks slide into the water without a splash, submerging immediately. By swimming underwater without rippling the surface, many a crocodile has taken an unsuspecting buck by surprise, and dragged

it to the murky depths below.

To Ngorongoro, the largest of the timeworn extinct volcano craters, countless herds of jostling animals make their way in a steady stream, every year, when the grass of the Serengeti Plains is too scorched to provide even the most meagre meal, and the river is shrunk to a muddy trickle. Over ~~fifty~~ fifteen miles from rim to rim, this huge cauldron-shaped crater provides invulnerable game with lush grasses and mud baths in the swampy waters of the salt lake on the sunlit crater floor, two thousand feet below. The forested slopes of the crater are the homes of vast herds of elephants, who find grazing all the year round, and an undying supply of water in the lake.

Against a background of tangled undergrowth, pendulous lianes and other creepers hanging from the knarled old trees, the elephant's huge grey mass blends in perfectly, and can only be observed when he flaps his enormous ears or flicks his ridiculously small tail to scare a fly. Seemingly the most peaceful of animals, they are also the most unpredictable, and when their trunks arch in the air, and their ears spread out to catch the faintest sounds, it is wise to retire quickly!

Even the quietly drinking animals at the lake allow elephants a clear path to the water, and clouds of coral pink and grey flamingos and white pelicans rise gracefully from the surface of the lake, and fly to a less dangerous part of the water. Monkeys are the only animals that seem entirely fearless, and chatter to themselves unconcernedly as a herd of elephants passes below them. Black and white Colobus monkeys with long silky

hair and mischievous round clown faces, take a delight in dropping vegetable wories, and other hard seeds on the passing mammoths, and are not in the least afraid that the swaying trees might crash to the ground many feet below at any minute.

Unaware of any eminent danger, unmoved by modern contraptions and architecture, the game of Ngorongoro and the Serengeti Plains follow the same tracks and paths that they did centuries ago, the same tracks that ^{led} to the same grazing and drinking places that their ancestors frequented. Here in the heart of Africa is a world all of its own, a world of savage splendour, incomparable vastness, and awe-inspiring ruggedness, where the forces that shaped the earth are strikingly apparent. This unspoilt, untamed heart of Africa is my choice for a film on Wild life.

Books consulted:

Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti Plains - From the Tanganyika
Govt. publication.

Philips' Students Atlas for South Africa.