

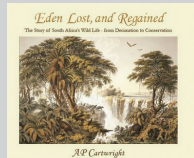
Eden lost, and regained – Book review



Book Title:

Eden lost, and regained: The story of South Africa's wild life: From decimation to conservation

Book Cover:



Author:

A.P. Cartwright

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Review Title:

Eden lost, and regained –
Book review

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This book begins by describing the incredible richness of South Africa's wildlife, continues with its progressive decimation by hunters during the 19th century and ends with the remarkable contribution of the James Stevenson-Hamilton, against all odds, to reversing the trend towards decimation. It constitutes a reprint of a book originally published in the late 1950s, under a pseudonym and a different title, by the journalist and prolific writer A.P. Cartwright. In a foreword to the reprint, the author's son suggests that his father used a pseudonym because the book was written quickly, within approximately 12 weeks, without the diligent research that characterised his later works.

The history of South Africa's wildlife has been often told – and much researched – so I confess to being initially sceptical as to the value of a book that is many years out of date and possibly inadequately researched. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised, the book provides an essentially true, lively and highly readable account, based on a well-chosen bibliography. The personal recollections of Cartwright's son yield an enchanting insight into his father's state of mind when writing the book. Cartwright commenced work on it shortly after being dismissed from a stressful, tiring position as Editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, and was visibly rejuvenated and enthused by the task of writing. Cartwright's creative joy is reflected in the vibrant, engaging style which he maintains throughout the work.

The book contains inaccuracies and errors of interpretation, some of which stem from the fact that it is old and pre-dates much relevant research into wildlife conservation and its history in South Africa. For example, Cartwright suggests that the tusklessness of Addo elephants was because of an adaptation to the particular vegetation in the area, whereas more recent research has indicated that it is probably as a result of non-selective genetic changes resulting from the population's isolation, small size and population bottlenecks during the 1800s and 1920s (Whitehouse 2002). Following misconceptions prevalent at the time, Cartwright gave Paul Kruger too much credit for the establishment of the Sabi Game Reserve (now part of the Kruger National Park) towards the end of his period as President of the Republic of South Africa. Carruthers (1995) showed that the main motivator for the Sabi Game Reserve was not Kruger, but various other members of the Volksraad, notably R.K. Loveday. Carruthers exposed the politically driven myths surrounding Kruger's supposed role in initiating what later became the Kruger National Park. She furthermore presented evidence that would undoubtedly have interested and amused Cartwright – namely that Stevenson-Hamilton shrewdly used the political appeal of the mythology, which he called the 'Kruger stunt', even though he was well aware of the truth (Carruthers 1995:61).

Another minor error is that De Kuyper's expedition into what is now the Crocodile Bridge area of the Kruger National Park occurred in 1725 (Punt 1958), and not in 1825 (p. 111).

Inaccuracies such as these are understandable given that Cartwright's aim was to inspire and amuse, rather than to produce a work of complete and detailed scholarship. Nevertheless, the book has potential value for scholars. For example, Cartwright gave a fascinating account of the life and death of the colourful Colonel Steinaecker, supported by details from Kruger Park Ranger Harry Wolhuter, who was a former member of Steinaecker's Horse. Information from Cartwright's original book is quoted in Van Vollenhoven's (2014) report on an archaeological investigation of Steinaecker's Horse in the Kruger National Park.

Apart from Steinaecker, Cartwright related an amusing and lively account of the lives and deeds of a selection of 19th- and early 20th-century hunters and travellers: William Burchell, Cornwallis Harris, Gordon Cumming, Frederick Selous, Major Pretorius, all of whom contributed significantly to our knowledge of an exciting fauna as it was in the past, and some

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of whom contributed even more significantly to its decimation. The best part of the book is devoted to its hero, James Stevenson-Hamilton, self-effacing but determined, shrewdly diplomatic, a hugely persuasive and effective leader, whose work laid firm and enduring foundations for the Kruger National Park.

An energetic, heart-warming story by a gifted storyteller; it will appeal even to those already familiar with the story, even now 60 years after its original publication.

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