PREFACE

HUNDREDS OF ELEPHANTS, silhouetted by the sinking sun, drifted, dreamlike, over the flat, featureless plains of eastern Kenya. The herds were moving, in a vast, timeless procession, over the edge of the horizon. It was the great gathering of the elephant clans at the beginning of the October rainy season.

From our Land Rover, 600 yards away, my wife, Illie, and I watched in near disbelief as the column of tuskers paraded majestically in front of us for half an hour. The herds were abandoning the stripped, overbrowsed woodlands of Tsavo National Park. In search of richer feeding grounds, they were heading for the adjacent Galana Ranch—2,500 square miles of wild, raw Africa for which Illie and I had, recently and improbably, become responsible.

In that moment I realized, with humility, that we were undertaking something much bigger and more profound than we understood.

It was October 1968—five years after Kenya had won independence and sixteen months after its government had granted us, and two associates, a forty-five-year lease on this vast, unpeopled, untamed African landscape. Inspired by the spirit of *harambee*—the optimistic call, meaning "Let's work together," of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta—we were hoping to make a contribution to the young nation. Our goals were to succeed in a uniquely challenging business venture and to manage and protect the wildlife in this huge, harsh stretch of bush near the Indian Ocean.

I was an entrepreneurial attorney from Hawaii, in my early forties, and to me, Galana seemed removed from the civilized world. It was not "beautiful" in the normal sense of the word. Its topography was almost relentlessly flat, except for a few hillocks, and its palette was unvaried, except for exquisite gradations of clay, burnt ochre, and rust, with flashes of green and silver. In this unchanging, monochromatic landscape, time and civilization did not exist—especially in the lingering half-light before dark, when night prowlers and predators began to wake.

We were idealistic and enthusiastic about what we might achieve and the life we could lead on these Kenyan grasslands. When we first arrived, Galana was a romantic relief from the modern world. Its single airstrip had been built in the 1920s by the legendary British hunter-explorer Denys Finch Hatton—the lover of Beryl Markham, author of *West with the Night*, and Karen Blixen, who wrote *Out of Africa* under the name Isak Dinesen. Galana's history, the immensity of its land—one percent of Kenya—and the vastness of its wild animal population made us conscious nearly every moment that our time there, legally and metaphysically, would be very brief. The beginnings and end of Galana's true calendar were as infinite and distant as the blazing stars.

Our obligation, under terms of the lease, was to ranch cattle on this grassland for the first time. That was no simple task, since Galana was dry and full of tsetse flies and ticks carrying bovine diseases. Our lease also required us to manage Galana's natural game population, help it grow to a level the land could support, and protect it against threatening imbalances. Beyond that, our dream was to use Galana's wildlife as a renewable resource to provide protein for Kenya's expanding population. In the 1960s, biologists, ecologists, and conservationists around the world were arguing that on marginal lands game ranching could be ecologically beneficial and economically more profitable than cattle ranching. Game ranches, however, had been developed on a major scale only in southern African nations, below the Zambesi River. Kenyan efforts had been very limited. I wanted to experiment with game domestication on a greater scale, with greater scientific discipline, than had ever been attempted in Kenya. We called our venture Galana Game and Ranching, reflecting our true priority—game before ranching.

Over the next two decades, we achieved those goals. We developed Galana into the largest cattle ranch in Kenya and perhaps all of Africa. Our 26,000 head included a government-registered stud herd of 400 breeding, humpbacked, pale-hided Boran cows, whose ancestors had arrived from north of Suez centuries ago. We learned how to introduce cattle into an area with virulent tsetse- and tick-borne disease, adapt our animals to the land, and breed resistant stock. We conducted scientific research for the domestication of wildlife, and we discovered that oryx were best suited to domestication. We employed 400 Kenyans, from a variety of tribes, to herd cattle, oryx, eland, buffalo, and antelope. We also developed miles of roads, airstrips, buildings, boreholes, pipelines, and dams and poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into their construction. But as soon as we entered the picture in 1967, we were also contending with politically complex, competing ambitions and ideas about wildlife management and conservation.

At the time, the biggest threat to Galana's habitat was the elephant population explosion in Tsavo National Park, a nearly 8,000-square-mile wildlife sanctuary. Elephants were thriving in Tsavo, and by 1966, their numbers had climbed to about fifteen thousand. There were so many elephants that their grazing was destroying the park's woodlands and threatening the wildlife they supported. Kenya's Game Department, at first, believed that cropping was the best way to control the elephant population. The government wanted us to shoot and kill up to three hundred elephant a year to reduce the size of the herds that moved between Galana and Tsavo.

We wanted nothing to do with the wholesale killing of wildlife.[1] At the Galana Ranch, we permitted hunters, in accordance with our lease terms, to shoot a few mature bulls a year for a large license fee—part of which went to the government and part of which helped pay for the protection and management of Galana's wildlife. Our hunting memberships discouraged a shoot-anything-that-moves mentality and ensured that only elephants of a minimum size, past breeding age, would be shot on the ranch.

As the price of ivory climbed drastically in the 1970s, however, poaching became a dangerous, disastrous problem. By 1971 gangs of poachers, armed with automatic weapons, had moved into Tsavo. With growing government

1. The "Letter of Allotment, Game Ranching Scheme," dated June 7, 1967, put us in possession of the Galana territory. In paragraph 16 of the "Special Conditions" section, the Kenya government stated:

> Game cropping shall be carried out by the Grantee in accordance with the following rules: . . . (b) Game cropping shall be in accordance with an annual quota allotted by the Game Department and the Grantee shall rigidly adhere to the terms of the allotment of the quote. Both maximum and minimum quotas will be stipulate . . . (d) the Grantee shall pay to the Government of Kenya K.Shs. 100/= [a hundred shillings, equal at the time to five dollars] in respect of each elephant killed in the process of game cropping.

Shortly after receipt of the Letter of Allotment, Mike Prettejohn and I had a conference with the Honorable Bruce Mackenzie, then minister of agriculture in President Kenyatta's cabinet. We pointed out to the minister that it was unlikely that any public health office would approve for human consumption meat from elephant that had been shot miles away from a processing plant. Anyway, such cropping would quite properly arouse public condemnation. The minister agreed and excused performance of that condition.

It was particularly galling when government officials later gave any credence to wild rumors that Galana was killing elephant for sale in the ivory trade. Under the Letter of Allotment, we could have shot elephant for ivory and legally made hundreds of thousands of dollars. We refused that at the outset.

corruption, elephant tusks were becoming vehicles for laundering money and taking it out of the country. By 1973, when the black market price of ivory jumped from $50 a kilo to $700 a kilo, a thousand elephants a month were being slaughtered in Kenya.

The problem worsened after May 1977, when the government imposed a total ban on hunting, ostensibly to preserve what remained of Kenya's once boundless wildlife. Animal lovers around the world cheered the move, believing that something was at last being done to stop the eradication of Kenya's great game herds. Editorialists from New York to Tokyo praised President Kenyatta for a courageous decision to spare the nation's unique wildlife for the future.

The ban, of course, meant the immediate end of our hunting safaris and a loss of income. But it also removed the watchful eyes of law-abiding hunters and their clients from Kenya's game lands. Without the presence of professional hunters, trackers, skinners, and clients in the field to report illegal activities, poachers were free to continue their destruction of Kenya's wildlife. There was little cause for optimism, given the rumors that high-ranking officials and members of Kenyatta's family were involved in the illegal sale and exportation of skins and ivory.

As we feared, poaching increased dramatically after the hunting ban. Galana's game manager was soon finding two, three, or four bloody elephant carcasses a week, their tusks hacked out of their heads. By 1987, poachers had slaughtered more than 5,000 of the 6,000 elephants counted at Galana in 1967. They spared fewer than 6,000 in Tsavo National Park. The elephant herds were being wiped out—and, ultimately, the Galana Ranch was too big to succeed.

As Kenya's population exploded, it became politically untenable for a few white ranchers to control so much territory in a country where land was unavailable to many Africans who needed it. Our Galana experiment ended in 1989—less than halfway through the length of our lease. The elephant migration across the horizon that Illie and I witnessed in our early years at Galana will likely never be seen again on such a massive scale. The cattle have vanished, and the roadways have disappeared. The dams and water holes are no longer tended, although the pipelines remain. Galana's carefully built lodge, homes, and other buildings have been razed or have fallen into disuse, and only a small tourist accommodation remains. Almost all of the ranching activity that once thrived at Galana has vanished.

Still, the experience was invaluable—to us and as a lesson in conservation, political realities, and Africa's profound challenges. Galana was an adventure, a

way of life, but it was also an experiment in wildlife management, animal domestication, and scientific research in a dangerous, dynamic political landscape. Although Galana ultimately failed, it was a successful laboratory for new ideas and a case study in the interplay of hunting and game management policies.

In this book, I recount the story of how and why the Galana Ranch came into being, how it grew, and what it accomplished. I owe this record of the Galana experiment to the courageous and devoted men and women—American, English, Waliangulu, Masaai, Orma, Turkana, Kamba, and others—who were responsible for its contributions.

More, I owe it to Illie, whose daily journal of our time at Galana gave life to this book.