

Good-bye to Brian Nicholson (1930 – 2010)

By Rolf D. Baldus

With great sadness we inform AHG readers that Brian Nicholson has gone on his last safari. In March Brian passed away at age 79 in Australia, where he'd been living with his children and their families since leaving Kenya.

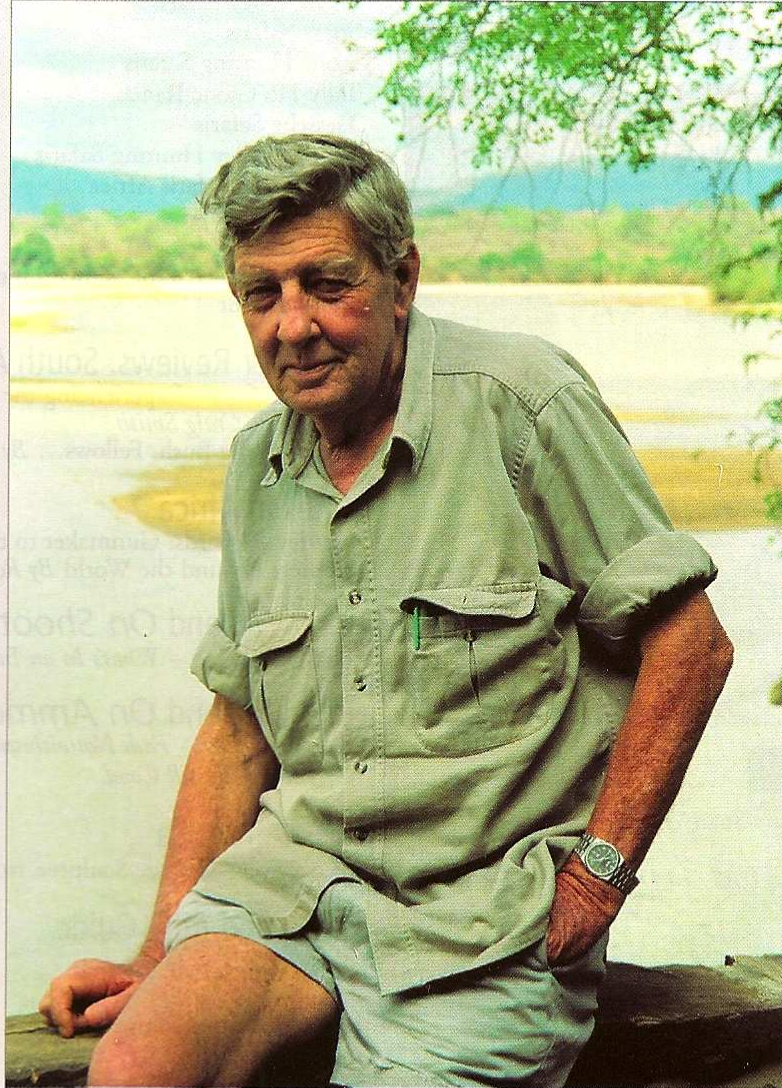
Brian was one of the founding fathers of the Selous Game Reserve and a pioneer of sustainable and ethical safari hunting in Tanzania, developing it into an instrument to finance the management and protection of the Reserve, which he'd expanded to its present size of 50,000 km².

Brian was born in 1930 in Eldoret, Kenya, and joined the then Tanganyika Game Department as an elephant control officer when he was only 19. Until 1973, when he resigned from his post of Game Warden, Southern Tanzania, he travelled many thousands of miles through the Reserve, mostly on foot.

Brian had been able to convince the colonial administration to allow hunting tourism. He worked out the details and soon had a flourishing industry that operated on the basis of low and sustainable quotas and strict controls. The suppression of poaching soon led to big ivory, including 100-pounders, mature cats, old Cape buffalo bulls, and many fine trophy antelopes being harvested. Proceeds from hunting financed the Game Reserve's upkeep. Unfortunately, this strictly controlled system was not continued after his departure.

In the 1950s and 60s Brian published a number of articles that show his great talents as a field biologist, conservation manager and planner. Brian visited the Selous again in 1979 with photographer Hugo van Lawick and author Peter Matthiessen, who wrote the book, *Sand Rivers*, about their foot safari. In 2001

Nicholson's book, *The Last of Old Africa*, was published. It is a classic African hunting book and amongst the best ever released. His stories have the advantage of being true. It's a pity this book is out of print, and we hope it will be reprinted soon. Brian never stopped caring about the future of the Selous; its role in conservation and hunting tourism were amongst his major lifelong concerns.



I was honoured when Brian agreed to provide a chapter for my book, *The Wild Heart of Africa – The Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania* (Rowland Ward 2009), recounting the Reserve's development years, from 1922 to Independence. I give him the last word by quoting from the book, his last publication:

In the last 15 or so years the fortunes of the Selous have been revived to some extent by a reversal of Government policy towards private business and finance, the German

Government's aid project, and a retention scheme which allows the Reserve to retain approximately half of its income. This will hopefully be continued after the German project has come to an end. However, as long as the game wardens think going on long safaris on foot in the wet and dry weather is an ordeal, administration in the field will remain weak. Setting up some leadership for their staff to emulate is important. Sitting at base and running about in vehicles and airplanes is not going to set up such leadership, neither is it going to provide them with the detailed knowledge required to effectively manage this great area.

High-density tourism with lodges is not suitable for much of the Selous because of heavy tsetse fly infestation, great distances and the lack of suitable roads as well as a relatively short season when it is dry enough to travel by vehicle. Without the revenue from safari hunting the Reserve will not be able to exist, but hunting must include adherence to the quotas in each block, appropriate monitoring of trophies and game populations, and the maintenance of ethics.

This is Brian Nicholson's legacy. Without him, the Selous World Heritage Site would not be what it is today. May his wish that his successors continue to hold it in trust not be in vain!

German economist, Dr. Rolf D. Baldus, has worked for 40 years in or with developing countries as a scientist, civil servant, ministerial ghostwriter, and as head of development policy section in the Chancellor's office in Bonn. He worked for six years in Tanzania rehabilitating the Selous Game Reserve and eight years as government advisor to the Tanzanian Wildlife Division. Baldus is the President of the Tropical Game Commission of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC).☺