

The Nile perch in Lake Victoria

There are two major errors in 'Big fish threaten Africa's great lakes' (*Oryx*, **XX**, 3, p. 138) (and in the IUCN Press Release on which it was based) which must be corrected.

First, there are no plans afoot, nor have there ever been such plans, to 'repeat the experiment' by introducing Nile perch into Lake Malawi. The idea that such an introduction was planned, first put about in the IUCN report, has quite understandably angered the Fisheries Department in Malawi. The Department's recent statement on the subject of introductions into Lake Malawi makes quite clear their very proper and scientific attitudes to the dangers and consequences of such actions.

The second point in your article to which I take strong exception is the statement that 'At the last moment' (before Nile perch were introduced) 'scientists and local observers voiced serious doubts about the wisdom of the project'. As one of those scientists, and one who had been working on Lake Victoria as a member of the East African Fisheries Research Organization since 1951, I can assure you that there had been opposition, clearly argued and stated, from the very first moment the introduction had been suggested by the Uganda Game and Fisheries Department. Regrettably those arguments were ignored. I am not aware, as your article states, of the FAO being in any way involved with setting up the pilot project, which, by accident or design, led to the Nile Perch getting into the lake itself from nearby fish ponds.

There are other, relatively minor, errors in the article. For example, the Nile perch, *Lates niloticus*, is not a carp but, as its common name indicates, is a perch-like fish; there is no evidence that one of the cichlid fishes now eaten by the Nile perch '... helps control the human killer disease schistosomiasis (bilharzia) ...', and it is nonsense to claim that any of the small cichlid fishes were part of a major dollar-earning trade in aquarium fishes, or indeed that they are—or were—'rare species prized as ornamental aquarium fish'.

The importance of the many endemic cichlid fishes threatened with extinction in Lake Victoria is threefold, namely: as an important source of

protein for local people; as the dominant vertebrate elements in a complicated ecosystem that is being drastically modified and is unlikely to return to its previous state; and as major contributors to one of the world's most important natural laboratories in which to study evolution and speciation (see Greenwood, 1981; Barel *et al.*, 1985).

References

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Future for East Usambaras

During the past year we have come across some articles dealing with the involvement of the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA) in the 'asset-stripping' of natural forests in the East Usambaras and Kilombero, including one in *Oryx*, **XIX**, 4. The information in these articles is strikingly similar and the source can be traced to the article 'African violet may disappear from the wild' in *New Scientist* (2 May 1985). Furthermore, a number of organizations have approached us expressing concern about the future of the natural forests of the East Usambaras.

We understand the concern, but the picture depicted in the press articles is wrong and misleading. The alleged plans to clearcut 12,000 hectares of forest in the Usambaras and 40,000 hectares in Kilombero have been misinterpreted. The studies, which were prepared in 1978–79 by a Finnish consulting company engaged by the Tanzania Wood Industries Corporation (TWICO), the Tanzanian Forest Department and FINNIDA, have not resulted in any investment projects for large-scale utilization of the forest resources.

Instead of building new sawmills in the Usambaras, sawmills are being closed down.