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A GAME RANGER'S NOTEBOOK



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PAUL SMILES



DRAWINGS BY NEAVE PARKER F.R.S.A., F.Z.S.

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A WORD FROM THE GAME RANGER

I was a ranger in Uganda and Bechuanaland—in tropical Africa—for several years after the last war.

Every boy I've ever known wanted to be a hunter. It is a natural desire, but it is very few who achieve that ambition and of those few who grow to manhood and get such a job not more than one in ten ever takes a real, *living* interest in the birds and beasts he shoots. Once that interest is awakened, however, the wish to shoot is overcome by a desire to see. The way of life of the wild things of bush and brook, of forest and stream, of rocky cliff and rolling grass plain, becomes a fascinating study.

In this book I have told what I know—what I have seen—about forty of Africa's animals and birds, from the viewpoint of the professional hunter. They are yours to think about while you read how they live. It is my express plea that you let them live.

Paul Smiles

The Buffalo

The life of a Buffalo is full of danger from the day it is born. The herds are followed by lions and hyenas and the hunter is never far away. Yet the Buffalo is consistently courageous. At the same time it is adaptable and grows fat in country where native cattle would almost starve. At midday it is always to be found in the shade.

The Buffalo mother is fiercely protective when on her own, but rejoins the herd as soon as she can after her calf is born. Behind the solid front of the massed horns and shoulders of the bulls she and her calf are as safe as they can ever expect to be, but even then lions pull down the careless stragglers.

At birth a baby Buffalo is about the same size as a Hereford calf. It is jet black with soft, silky hair. By the time it is a year old it is completely independent, yet sticks to the safety of the herd. It quickly develops a remarkable sense of smell and learns to be forever on the lookout, watching and listening for the lion, the wild dog and the leopard, but most of all for man. Against lions

and other meat-eaters it forms a packed circle with its fellows, but with man the only means of safety is swift retreat. Alone, cornered and wounded, the Buffalo is the bravest in the bush. In desperation it will often resort to a cunning move called the 'hook', when it circles round in its own tracks and waits to ambush the unwary huntsman. Once it puts its head down in the last charge, nothing will stop it but its own death.

The oldest bulls often live alone when they are driven from the herd by the youngsters, but even an old bull is tough prey for any but the most determined lions.

I had a Buffalo calf once as a pet. Her mother had been shot by the hunter boys and they did not know that the calf was there. The calf hid in the thicket where the cow had been shot and while the man left behind to look after the meat climbed a tree for safety, the little creature—only a few days old—fought three hyenas all night.





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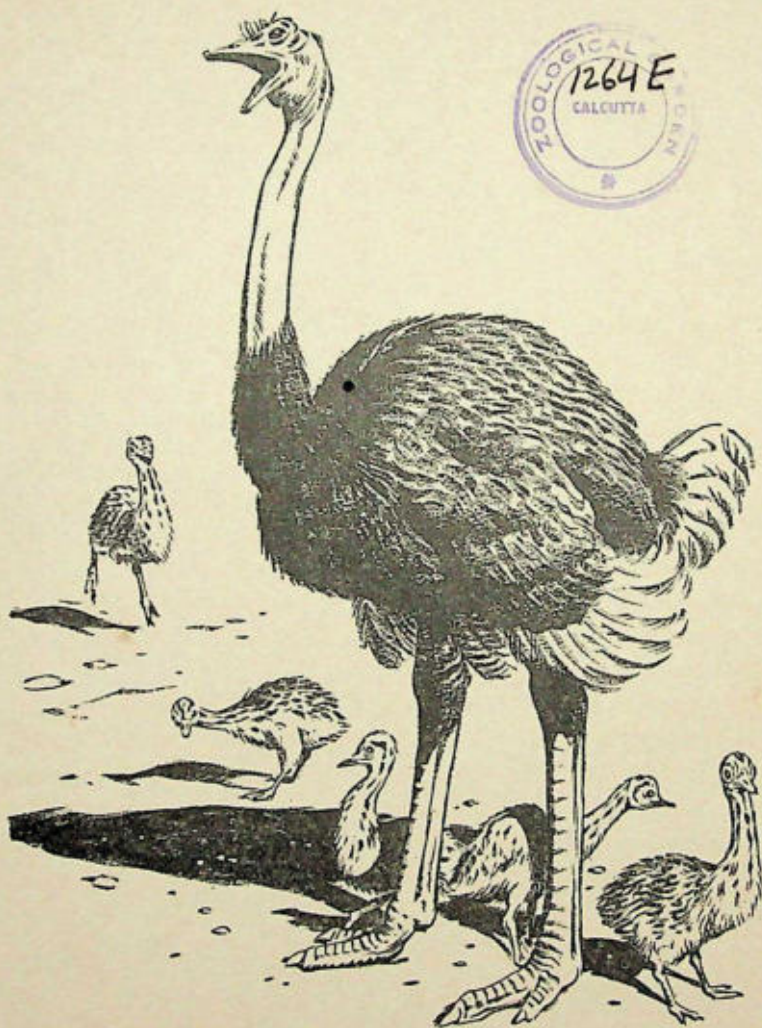
The Ostrich

The Ostrich is the largest of living birds. An adult male specimen stands nearly five feet high at the back, and its neck accounts for another three feet. It is incapable of flight, perhaps because its breastbone lacks the keel to which the strong flight muscles of most birds are attached.

Ostriches live on grass seeds, certain gourds and the 'beans' from species of thorn trees. If the day is windy, they love to twirl and spin on their nimble legs, with wings outspread.

One of the reasons for the peculiar gait of the Ostrich is the fact that it has only two toes on each foot and is not properly balanced until travelling at full speed.

It does not stick its head in the sand. If it wants to hide it just sits down, laying its neck straight out along the ground. Besides this its only true defence is its speed combined with a weaving run. The hen will draw off the hunter by running away from her chicks and stopping again at a short distance. She calls her chicks with a trembling, high-pitched sound like a whistle. The chicks



are very wary and obedient and the moment the call is sounded they go to ground, crouching down and keeping still for hours afterwards. The 'All Clear' is a double call and much shorter.

Ostriches are still found in large numbers, running wild in the Transvaal bushveld, the Kalahari, and throughout East Africa. Their survival in such numbers is due to the fact that the flesh is useless for eating, although the eggs are considered a delicacy by the natives. Ostrich females will use a common lair to deposit their eggs, each of which is the size of a small football.

The Ostrich lays its eggs in a convenient hollow away from the tracks of other game. Both male and female sit on the eggs. Because of the strength and thickness of the shell, the eggs are usually safe from the smaller raiding animals, and the larger animals, like the hyena, are too scared of the hen's powerful legs to take chances. But as soon as the chicks are hatched, everything is after them. Small as they are—about a foot high—they have a surprising turn of speed and their very numbers confuse attackers. They scatter over a wide area as they run and weave, leaving the drooling jaws of the attacker behind them, as it snaps at this one and that, and ducks under the hen's savage feet. An added protection is their spotted neck, which offers excellent camouflage, though as they grow up their necks become quite bare.

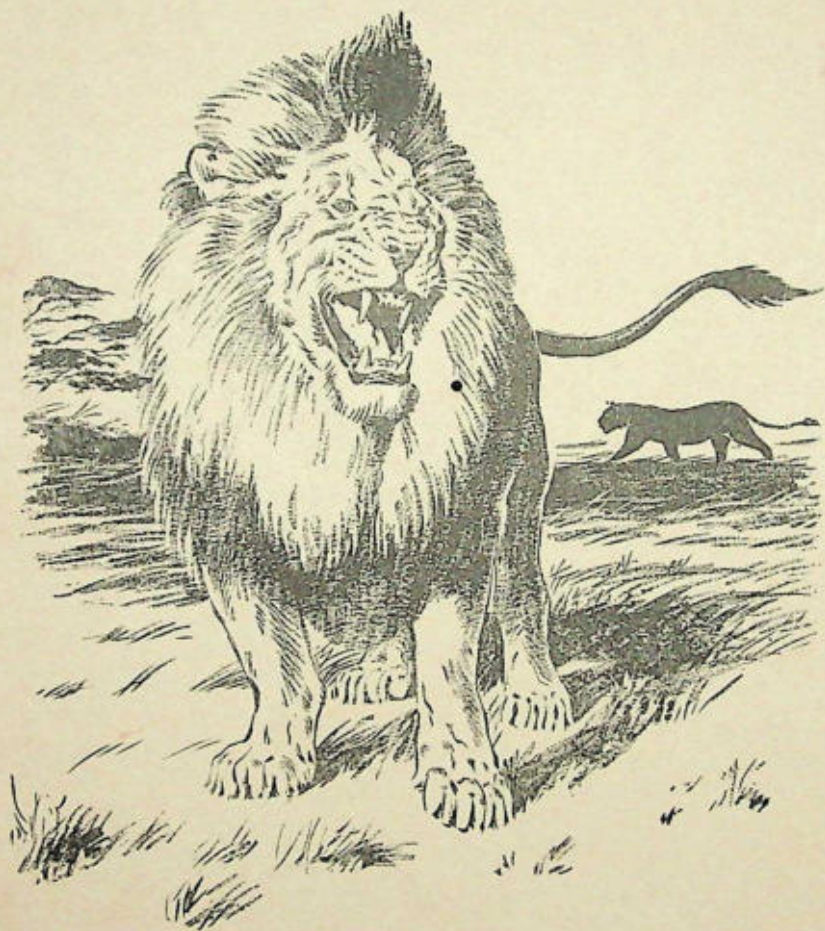
The male's plumage is a sharply contrasted black and white, while the female's is a rather drab grey. The neck in adult birds is leathery and naked, but in baby Ostriches it is covered with soft yellow down.

The Lion

In the bush the Lion seems to be a lazy, slumbrous, sauntering creature, but in fact, when you see it like this, it is merely resting between events. It has vast physical strength and can pull down a big ox with ease, making nothing of a Kudu. They usually hunt in pairs; one stalks the game while the other lies down wind. A pair can live on the carcass of a Kudu for three days until the next kill.

The Lion is a magnificent judge of distance and it is a rare thing for it to mistime its leap. This is because its eyes—like all predatory animals—are at the front of its head.

Lion cubs are spotted at birth and very quarrelsome. As they grow older they continue to follow the parents around and it is not the youngsters who leave the pride, as a 'company' of lions is called, but the old ones which grow helpless because of blunt teeth and weakened muscles. A big pride is usually the result of one large male retaining its strength beyond its normal span and being able to keep the youngsters in order. But nowadays Lions



are generally seen in much smaller prides, though even these frequently take to raiding cattle posts. During the mating season Lions have terrible fights and occasionally kill one another in their fury.

Man-eating Lions are not common and are not always the toothless old ones of popular belief; very often a man-eater is one that has found man the easiest prey.

The Lion has the assurance of its enormous strength and always gives an impression of temper held in leash—head up, yellow eyes wide and tail-tip twitching as it so obviously thinks, deciding, perhaps, what its next mood will be. It has an extraordinarily insolent approach to life, made up of curiosity and confidence, together with a certain coldness. It will walk through a sleeping camp merely to see what it has heard or smelled at a distance. Once I woke up just in time to see a Lion striding within a few yards of my camp stretcher, between the blanketed forms of my sleeping Africans. As it went away, sauntering into the line of thorn trees just beyond the camp, it passed the tail of a truck loaded with fresh meat without even a glance.



The Zebra

The East African natives call the Zebra the 'Punda Malia', the donkey of the crying, because its wheezy 'yak, yak, yakiyakiyak' resounds across the veld all over the continent. It is invariably found in a herd, where its alternating black and white stripes offer excellent camouflage against the typical African background of blazing light and shadow, for it is almost impossible to pick out one animal from the confused, shifting pattern, while alone it stands out like a brick tower in a snowfield. A Zebra's colouring can only be described as exciting, and when a herd dashes across the often drab setting of the African bush—say, in winter, when the grass is dull and lifeless and the background a dun monotone—the whole bushland seems to brighten and come alive again.

The Zebra likes water but can do without it for a long time in country where there is a regular fall of dew overnight. It is unaffected by the bite of the tsetse fly and grows fat in places where cattle would be lean and stringy.

It is frequently found in company with the wildebeest. They



offer one another mutual protection by reason of their natural vigilance and acute sensitivity.

The Zebra is wily but not intelligent, alert but muddle-headed, sensitive but hysterical and easily driven to panic. It can be tamed and becomes reasonably tractable, but has no stamina—not for work, anyway—though it can put up a fine turn of speed in the bush.

The unattractive taste of its meat—which is high-flavoured and sweet—has been the Zebra's best protection against man and explains why it is present all over Africa in large numbers. Only the more uncouth African tribes will tolerate it, but to the lion Zebra meat is a delicacy. Indeed, in many areas lions would have starved had it not been for the herds of Zebras.

One period when Zebra do not fall easy prey to lions is when the herd includes young. Then the Zebra is doubly vigilant and will defend itself—and the youngsters of course—with a tremendous display of angry courage. Stallions and mares resort to tactics they would not bother with at other times. Rearing up on their hind legs they will chop down on the aggressors with flailing hooves. Against such a barrage a lion will think twice before pressing home its assault. When the herd goes to drink—at river or water-hole—mares and stallions form a protective circle around the youngsters, standing guard as they slake their thirst.

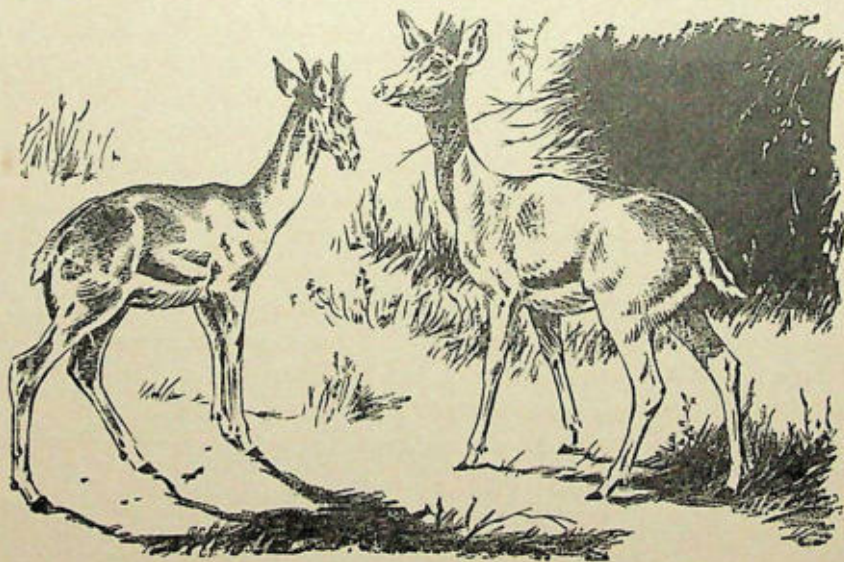
The Dikdik

The Dikdik is found throughout East Africa and places north of there, such as the Northern Frontier District of Kenya and Somaliland, though not in Rhodesia.

It is the smallest of the antelopes, not much bigger than a hare, with dainty cloven hoofs the size of a thumbnail. Its eyes are extraordinarily large and meltingly soft. The male has tiny horns like the spikes on running shoes.

It feeds largely on thorn growth. Indeed, certain branches of the Dikdik family have developed such elongated lips from dipping into thorns that they look almost deformed, like the South American tapir. The Dikdik takes advantage of the tangle of thorn and cactus thicket which is peculiar to many parts of East Africa. Its smallness protects it, for it can slip through the low-growing thorn, and in this way elude any larger animal in pursuit. It seldom comes out into the open, but if caught there it 'freezes' at once, making it almost impossible to pick out the small grey-brown body even at a distance of three or four yards.

I have not always been able to kill a Dikdik, even when meat was badly needed. I remember a time in the Northern Frontier District when I lay on my empty stomach in a typical Dikdik hideout while two Dikdiks, a male and a female, enacted a scene from some bush love story. It was the first time that I realized that Dikdiks are vocal, for they made 'gugnunck' noises to one another as they ran in quick circles under the barbs of the low-growing thorns. I watched them for over two hours and then, as the sun was setting, made my way back to the camp, unable to shoot.



The Hyena

The Brown Hyena is very widespread and at one time probably extended from Abyssinia to the Cape; it seems to be more numerous than its cousin, the Spotted Hyena. It is a dirty yellow-fawn colour all over except for its back, which is brown. Its legs are striped like a zebra's and its hair is very long, much longer than that of the Spotted Hyena. Its muzzle is rather like a dog's in shape, but prowls in the manner of all Hyenas—head down, hindquarters dragging, casting left and right as it follows a scent. Both varieties of Hyena make a loud howling at night, which sounds like 'Ohh-yew-w-w-w'. The Spotted one's voice, however, is very much deeper than that of the Brown.

The Hyena is not very big—as African carnivores go—about the size of a ridgeback dog. It is, however, big enough to have an appetite not easily appeased by small game, such as steenbok, duiker, rabbit, all of which are much too quick for it. For this reason it is compelled to be a scavenger—the follower of lions and leopards—and must take what they leave. As they frequently

camp by a kill and leave it only when it is unpleasantly high, the Hyena has become adapted to eating rotten meat.

Its apparently weak and decidedly inadequate hindquarters slope down from immensely powerful shoulders, a thick, short, muscular neck and business-like head with pointed ears and remarkable jaws—it can crack the shin bone of an ox between its teeth.

The Brown Hyena is much less of a scavenger than the Spotted. It is very definitely quicker on its feet and, banded together with two or three companions, will attack cattle quite boldly and is much less afraid of man. Sometimes, indeed, Brown Hyenas will come into a camp and attack men asleep. For this reason in



certain parts of Africa a lone native benighted on a journey will not sleep on the ground but will climb a tree, for the Hyena quickly learns when a man is alone and is more of a danger than many people realize, especially if game is short.

Strangely enough the Brown Hyena for all its initiative, feeds less well than the Spotted—presumably because the latter is content to allow the leopard or lion to kill for it and avoids the haunts of man as it prowls alone waiting for a kill.

I find Hyenas distinctly amusing and thoroughly impudent in a sly sort of way; they actually have the nerve to sneak into one's grass-roofed kitchen and clean out the pots that the cook-boy has left until tomorrow.

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The Vulture

The Vulture is the most familiar bird of prey. It is an ugly creature with a scrawny neck rising out of a mass of untidy feathers, and an habitually evil smell. Together with other scavengers, it serves a useful purpose in removing polluted matter with the minimum of delay. It is always either half-starved or gorged to a state of helpless repletion, barely able to flap off the ground.

It flies at remarkable heights, with little or no visible effort, rising on draughts of air like a glider, as it patrols the African sky in slow circles, watching the earth far below. It notes the gait of beasts and if one is behaving oddly, especially if it lies down, it swoops through the sky, the wind fluttering its flight-feather tips, down, down to the tree-tops where it sits waiting for the last signs of life. Then it flaps ponderously to the ground, with many uneasy and awkward glances, to land like a heavy aircraft, approaching its prey with waddling greed, ugly bare neck outstretched and razor-sharp, hooked beak advanced. With a



last cautious, all-round, hunched-up look, it hops closer, once, twice, three times, then stabs down at the victim.

Once the Vultures foregather, with their downward swoops, they will never leave the carrion until, fighting over every last morsel, they have ripped every minute scrap of flesh from the bones and picked them completely clean.

The first downward dip of one Vulture—the only one in sight—is a signal to its mate, quartering an invisible section of the heavens several miles away. The swift flight of this one in pursuit is noted at once and followed by another bird hundreds of feet above it. In this way the news is telegraphed across the sky and the Vultures all converge on the kill. If the killer itself is present, they perch ghoulishly above their snarling hosts, waiting for the leavings. All the scavengers, jackal, hyena and marabou stork, like an easy meal, but the Vulture with the advantage of height and keen eyesight is nearly always first on the scene, if the killing takes place in daylight. Otherwise the Vulture will wait for the dawn, hunched in the branches of trees, looking more like a big bundle of black and filthy rags than a bird.

The Eland

The Eland is the largest and heaviest species of antelope. It is no great fighter. It runs slowly, judged by bush standards, but jumps superbly. In spite of its weight it can leap a seven-foot fence and it is a great sight to witness half a dozen Eland clearing a small coppice of thorn trees in one graceful bound, like steeple-chasers. The Eland's agility is unexpected but has undoubtedly kept it alive through thousands of years of steady hunting both by man and by the great carnivores.

The Eland is found all over Africa, north, south, east and west, most commonly in very arid, almost waterless tracts of country like the Kalahari or the desert areas of the northern frontier district of Kenya, bordering on the Somaliland desert regions. It is probably its ability to do without water that saves it from lions—the only animal large enough to pull it down—for lions cannot go long without a drink.

The Eland stands as much as six feet at the shoulder and may be nine feet from horns to base of tail. Old bulls have been known



to weigh as much as fifteen hundred pounds. The skin is tawny-grey, fading to fawn, and shading down to pale grey underneath. It has a thick forelock of dark hair and a heavy dewlap. Eland meat is the finest in the bush; sometimes, indeed, old bulls get so fat that they can hardly run and go off at a shambling trot. Its body is rich in fat, especially around the brisket. The Eland is gentle by nature and most unsuspecting and its numbers have been sadly depleted for the sake of its tender and juicy flesh. Its milk makes excellent butter and it is easily the most useful of all wild animals. Its very meekness may one day enable it to inherit the wilds of Africa—as the friend, instead of the prey of mankind.

In Southern Rhodesia attempts, although still on a small scale, are being made to rear Eland instead of cattle, in places where the tsetse fly has made ranching a serious problem.

The Eland is intelligent and adaptable and this saves it from man. It is easily domesticated and becomes a persistently affectionate, though embarrassing pet. A District Commissioner I knew in Uganda had brought one up from a calf. He could never stop it from following him to work where it fed on the papers of his 'out basket', causing a great deal of confusion and many dark looks from the clerks who had done the typing.

The Leopard

One of the members of the 'big cat' family, renowned for its ferocity and relentlessness, especially when brought to bay, the Leopard is capable of giving an account of itself out of all proportion to its weight and size.

In appearance the Leopard is striking, and has a strong personal smell which adds to the terror it inspires, so much so that when it passes beneath a tree sheer fright may cause the baboons above to drop down like over-ripe fruit on top of the Leopard's head. Under circumstances of this nature it is possible to see what appears to be a miraculous snatch out of thin air of otherwise unharmed game.

A Leopard never goes hungry: its speed, adaptability and cunning enable it to live on the edge of a town or in the middle of a desert, and in this way give it an advantage over other meat-eaters, for it will eat anything. In strength it is phenomenal. The average specimen weighs as much as the average man, but its strength is equal to that of four.

The Leopard is for the most part nocturnal, though hunting by daylight does not worry it. By reason of its comparative smallness it is easily satisfied with small buck or birds. It is fondest



of dog-meat and the dog has never been bred that would prove a match for a Leopard. After a big kill it eats only the parts it fancies, leaving the rest of the meat for the scavengers. Its finicky appetite causes it to kill much more frequently than other cats.

Like all cats the Leopard is extraordinarily lazy. This failing gets it into a great deal of trouble with the farmers whose flocks it snatches. But in spite of this it has the strongest disinclination to move out of a good hunting area, no matter how much it may be chivvied by men and packs of dogs. It has its regular rounds and is thoroughly annoyed if it has to work for a living. Then its temper is easy to see. Little waves of anger tremble across its coat and twitch at the black tip of its tail, while its face twists in a silent snarl.

Another characteristic is the Leopard's curiosity. Once one walked into my sleeping-hut on a rainy night in Uganda and, after wandering round the room, sat crouched at the foot of my bed, its nose a few inches from my bare feet. How did I know this? It had left its muddy paw-marks all over my white Indian rug.

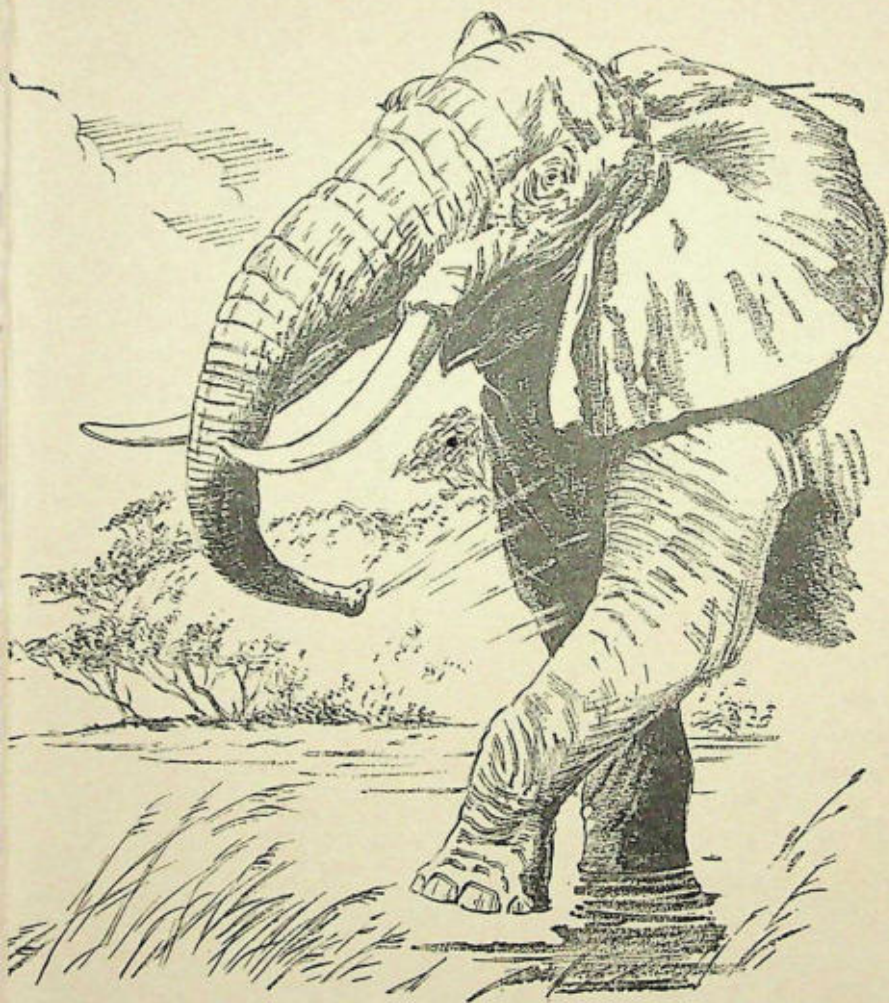
The fully-grown Leopard is a magnificent animal, tawny white in colour with black circular rosettes patterned all over it. The fangs and the claws are extraordinarily well developed. A Leopard weighs up to 100-180 pounds, and can measure as much as seven feet six inches from nose to tail.

The African Elephant

African Elephants are seldom seen in captivity. For this reason one tends to imagine that they look like the more familiar Indian Elephant, whereas the differences are immediately apparent whenever two specimens are standing together.

The African Elephant is a dull grey colour; it is between eleven and twelve feet at the shoulder and weighs about five tons. Its feet are spongy pads which spread when it walks. Its ears are enormous—unlike the Indian Elephant's—and, extended in a charge, are as much as fifteen feet from tip to tip; at rest, they cover the shoulders and the back of the thick neck. The skull lacks the soft depression of the Indian Elephant, a fatal weakness. Its brain is set lower in the head, protected by a great layer of porous skull-bone resembling a sponge. Another difference is the line of the back, from head to tail. The African Elephant seems to be all shoulders, sloping down to the back, whereas the Indian in silhouette resembles a cow or bullock. The Elephant is commonly supposed to grow a pound of tusk





a year. This seems incredible when one looks at the great tusk in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, which weighs two hundred and twenty-six and a half lb.

The African Elephant's eyes are small, and so bad that a man can remain unseen within a stone's throw—if he keeps still and the wind is blowing in the right direction. For the Elephant's sense of smell and hearing are possibly the best in the bush: it can hear a twig snap at more than 200 yards and some say that a big fellow can smell trouble as much as 600 yards away.

The Elephant has much the same life cycle as a man: a baby for about five years; adolescent up to eighteen; mature at twenty-five to thirty and middle-aged at about fifty. It becomes old between sixty and eighty, but may live to be well over a hundred. It is quite common to see old ones like this resting the weight of their huge tusks in tree forks or across leaning branches.

Elephants are wonderfully loyal to members of the herd: a pair of bulls will station themselves on each side of a wounded one and support it with trunk and tusks as they struggle to follow their comrades. This sort of thing has touched the heart of many a tough old hunter and bears out the stories of the Elephant's intelligence and family feeling. Unhurt, an Elephant can move out of danger without a sound and melt into thick cover as easily as a seal into the sea—and here it often waits in ambush for the hunter, its little eyes red with anger and its great ears gathering in the whispered warnings of careless feet.



The Sable Antelope

The Sable Antelope is about the same size as the Roan Antelope, but its horns—tremendous black scimitars—make it appear much larger than it actually is. With head erect it is an impressive sight, the horns curving back and down from a small, neat head set on a short, powerful, arched neck with a stiff, black mane. Its body is glossy and jet black, fading under the belly. The shoulders are strong and the flanks lean and athletic. Its numbers are not large; the normal herd is about fifteen to twenty strong.

The Sable can go without water for a long time and for this reason inhabits the dry parts of the country. I have seen it as far north as Tanganyika and once in the Mababi area of Bechuanaland on the 19th Parallel. It is a shy, elusive animal, quick to spot danger and withdraw in swift retreat. It was never intended by nature to compete with modern progress in the development of a country, for it needs untrammelled bush and freedom from disturbance. The kind of interference it suffers from these days—in spite of being rigidly protected—disturbs its breeding habits

and it is more likely to die out as a result of this than from actual shooting.

The Sable Antelope is a noble animal and as the emblem of Southern Rhodesia appears on Rhodesian coins.

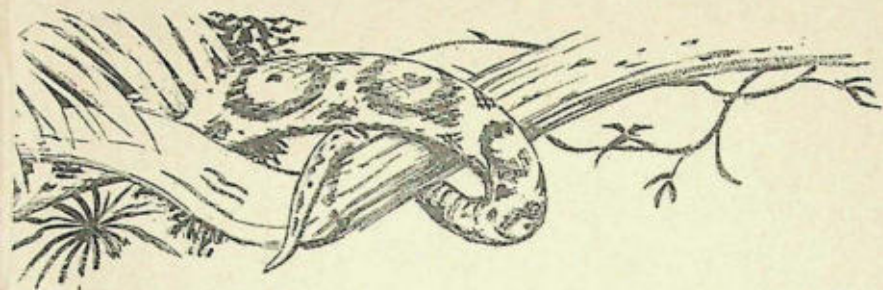


The Python

The female Python, like other snakes, lays eggs in a hole in the ground, usually an antbear's, the only one large enough. The young Pythons quickly begin to fend for themselves. They start on frogs and mice and progress through the weights until eventually they take on all comers—though they seldom try to make a meal of the members of the cat family. The reason is obvious: the redcat, for instance, finding itself trapped, has four sets of razor-sharp talons with which to tear the Python's coils to shreds. Monkeys, however, fall a frequent prey to the Python and you can almost guarantee the presence of one or two Pythons where monkeys live habitually.

Weight for weight, the Python is the strongest creature in the bush, but it must have a section of its tail wrapped round a branch to exert the full pressure of its writhing coils. It usually haunts game tracks where creatures have a regular run to water. It plays on the fact that most game seldom notice anything above eye-level, and, coiled round a branch, keeps dead still until it





judges that the time is ripe to strike. Then its swift coils whip round the wretched victim like the lash of a whip.

On the ground, however, the Python is very nervous and ill at ease, and it seldom attacks large animals, but contents itself with a Duiker, its own weight acting as a fulcrum from the ground. It is a slow mover, compared to other snakes and often waits a long time for a meal.

It is supposed to stun its victim with a blow of the iron-hard snout beforehand, but I have no evidence of this. It seems a reasonable supposition, as the antelope is extraordinarily quick, just as quick as a snake; I cannot imagine a Python getting a chance with its coils without having first laid its victim out. If the horns of any beast penetrate its skin—and it does happen—the mishap does not appear to be too serious, for the horns drop off as the carcass is dissolved inside the snake. After a meal it is very sluggish and anxious only for a quiet corner to digest its prey. The Python will never be wiped out, because it can live anywhere so long as there is game about.

The Warthog

The Warthog is one of the ugliest animals in the African bush, with its long, warty snout and great, ponderous head, but it has a high intelligence which is lacking in other beasts which have a claim to grace and beauty. The big tusks curving up from the lower jaw are not for fighting; they are for digging, for the Warthog lives largely on roots and bulbs, grubbing them up with grunting pleasure. Wild lily roots and the bulbous underground parts of the river reeds, where the waters have receded, appeal most to the Warthog—moreover, they are in the open in case of a surprise attack. If danger threatens, the Warthog takes refuge in a hole, and regardless of the need for haste will always turn round at the last moment and back down the hole so that its head faces the enemy, ready to defend itself, its business end to the front—and have no illusions about the ability of the Warthog to defend itself. If it has to come out of that hole it will do so at speed, savage head swinging to rip open the nearest legs of the first incautious dog.



If there is no hole handy, it makes for deep shadow and stands stock still except for the questing, twisting ends of the sensitive snout feeling the air and the small, rolling, red-rimmed eyes, wickedly alert.

Warthog mothers are an amusing sight, with a string of duplicates trotting valiantly behind on their dainty, cloven hoofs. The mother snorts ahead like a steam engine, trotting energetically and at surprising speed, while the little ones mimic her every move in a strict disciplined line, all their absurd tails uncurled and straight up in the air. When they reach the hole they have been making for the mother backs in first, followed in turn by each of her progeny, also in reverse. The mother is now safely ensconced between the dark cave-back and her brood of bumper-to-bumper babies.

The Wildebeest or Gnu

The Wildebeest (or Gnu) is a species of antelope though it does not look like one, and is built for speed. It most nearly resembles a light-weight buffalo with the buffalo's tufted tail. Its hide is a dull blue-grey and the shoulders are much higher than the rump. Its meat is tough, dark and stringy.

It can be found all over Africa, north, south, east and west, on the open veld, frequently in the company of zebras and eland. The Wildebeest is forever on guard and it is probable that the other animals rely on its eyesight, hearing and sense of smell to detect danger. It does not stop to be curious about anything, but takes to its heels at the first hint of danger, with the result that it survives in large numbers.

The Wildebeest cows suffer the most casualties because, for some strange reason, they always have their calves in thickets on the fringe of the bush which they normally avoid. For a few hours the young Wildebeest is very weak and it is then that the lions and hyenas take their toll. The mother will defend her calf



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bravely, and is savagely quick as she spins on her heels like lightning to present sharp, scimitar horns to the foe.

The running herd of Wildebeest is a splendid sight as they charge, heads down, tails up, with the stripes of galloping zebras intermingled in the cloud of dust.



The Hippopotamus

Although the Hippopotamus is a land animal, it spends a great deal of its time in the water. On land it is not very dangerous unless you are between it and the river, but in the water it is seen in its true proportions—an active giant with the most destructive jaws of all the beasts, and ivory tusks a foot long. It can cut through a dug-out canoe with one vast bite, or tip a boat over with the greatest of ease.

It is the sworn enemy of the crocodile and more than a match for it. The two animals usually live together in the same river under a sort of armed truce. But the Hippo is only vicious when it feels that its privacy is being invaded. At most other times it is playful, cavorting, blowing and tumbling with its fellows in the quiet pools it lives in.

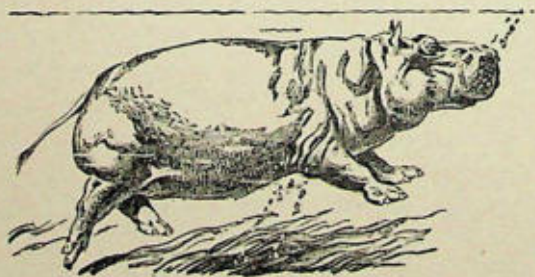
The Hippopotamus can hold its breath for a long time and grazes on the river bed, where certain weeds form its staple diet; then it comes to the surface to swallow what it has gathered. It keeps the water-channels open by controlling the growth of



weed which causes stream-beds to silt up. If every Hippo in Africa were shot, or if their numbers were seriously reduced, many rivers would change their course in a few years.

For a change of food the Hippo is fond of roaming native lands where it makes short work of the gardens. This marauding is always done after dark and it is an alarming experience to meet several tons of Hippo on a narrow, slippery footpath several hundred yards away from the water. On these occasions the Hippo nearly always panics and with a loud snort charges into the water.

If a favourite lake remains below a certain level when it should have been topped up by the rains, the Hippo leaves. Like the crocodile it moves at night and migrates across the country until it finds a deep pool. When there are no Hippo or crocodile in a pool, it is more than likely that in a few weeks time there will be no water.



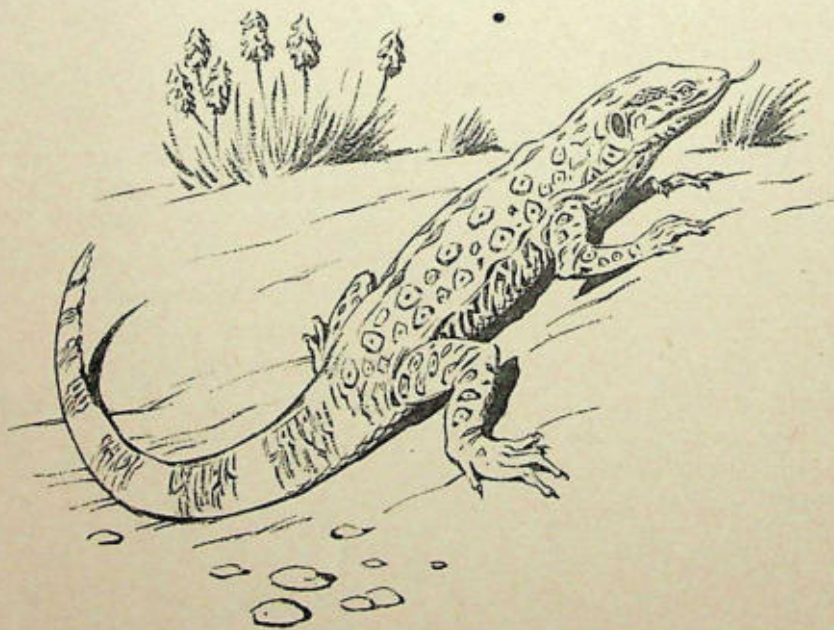
The Monitor or Leguan

The Monitor or Leguan is a huge lizard of about three to four feet in length. It is not dangerous although it can be a little alarming. It is dark grey with a nicely patterned underbelly and tail. The neck is long, quite unlike that of the crocodile, and the mouth is rimmed with white 'lips'. There is also a cousin to this Leguan which is called the Blunt-Nosed Monitor. It is greenish chrome-yellow and the skin is laminated like a new football. The female lays round, white eggs about the size of a native hen's, which are hatched by the sun.

The Leguan is amazingly fast on its feet—even though its legs are set out at an angle from the sides of the body like a lizard's. At the same time it is at home in the water. During the day it tends to hide up, although it is not completely nocturnal and frequently makes sorties to and from water in broad daylight. It is never far from water and if caught between its favourite hole and the open bush where it has been hunting birds' eggs and frogs, it is frantic to get back to its sanctuary. It likes to dig

holes barely large enough to accommodate its long body, down which it backs, tail first.

For many, many years the place where my house now stands was virgin bush with a natural 'pan' that filled up every rainy season and became alive with frogs. One day without any warning at all I knew I was being watched. It was several seconds before I spotted the eyes. Then I stepped back and waited. Suddenly the Leguuan erupted from the hole as if it had been blown out and, scurrying off to the bush, found safety.



The Oryx or Gemsbok

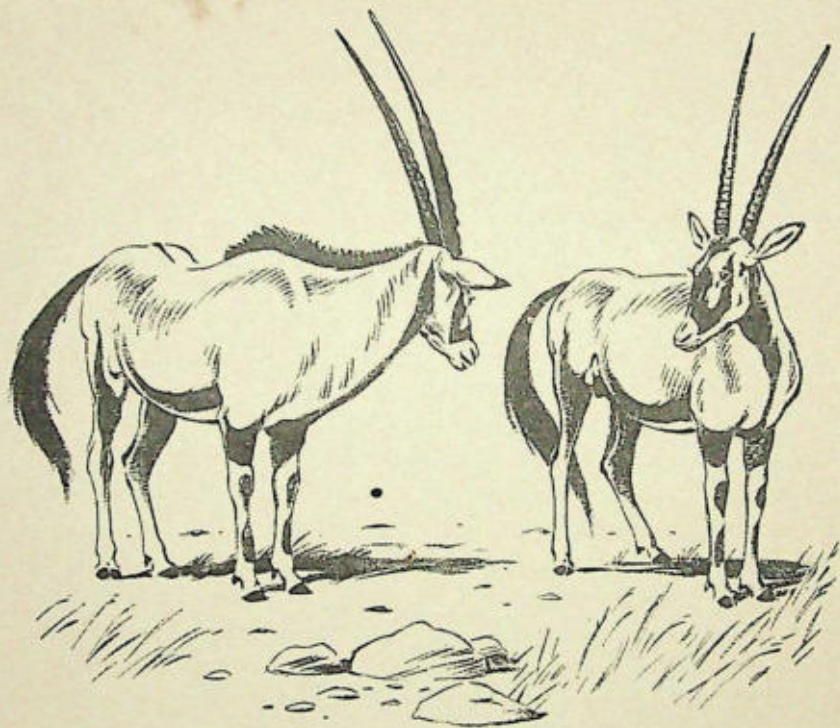
Although the Oryx is a plains animal, it has no fear of fairly open bush. It usually lives in semi-desert regions, arid, sun-parched and uninhabitable by man, even in parts of Somaliland, stretches of the Northern Frontier District in Kenya and the arid wastes of the thirsty Kalahari. In completely waterless regions such as these it is kept alive by the early morning dew on otherwise tinder-dry grass stems in high plateau land and—in South-western parts of Africa—by a green wild melon, called 'tsamah' by the Bushmen. In these areas the heat is almost unbelievable. The direct rays of the sun are deadly and the Oryx, like other desert animals, seeks shade at midday in which to sleep and remains there until the sun has declined. At night it moves out into the open, well away from cover and at that time it is tensed, poised and alert.

The Oryx does not like mankind and gives humans a wide berth. This cautiousness helped to give rise to its legendary fame, which originated with such early treasure hunters as the Greeks

and Romans. To them, Africa was a mysterious land of vast fortunes in gold and precious stones, roamed over by savage black men and fabulous beasts, such as the Oryx. For, seen at a distance and standing sideways, it appears to have only one straight horn—and from such glimpses the legendary Unicorn was born.

Yet although legend is inaccurate, in one respect it preserves the truth: the lion is often shown fighting with the unicorn. The lion is in fact one of its enemies, though the Oryx can put up a good show against it. For it has the sharpest horns of all the antelope and there is nothing quicker on its feet. If surprised from the rear, it can turn its head unbelievably swiftly to present the needle points of two straight, unwavering horns that follow, as though magnetized, every slightest movement of the enemy. In this position it can make a double scimitar sweep, left and right, over its tail and back again, faster than the eye can follow. And if you are within the range of that sweep there is no doubt about what happens next. You move—fast—or you get impaled.

I once wounded an Oryx and followed it for miles in scattered bush, using my last round to hit it again as it raced across an opening between two coppices of acacia. I saw it fall and ran up, calling to the tracker who was armed with a spear. He came upon the Oryx unable to rise to its feet, but then it was stalemate. I had no ammunition and the tracker could not hit the Oryx at all. Every time he cast his spear the Oryx caught it on its horns. Even when he moved behind it, the sweeping horns flashed across its rump like lightning, striking the spear in mid-flight



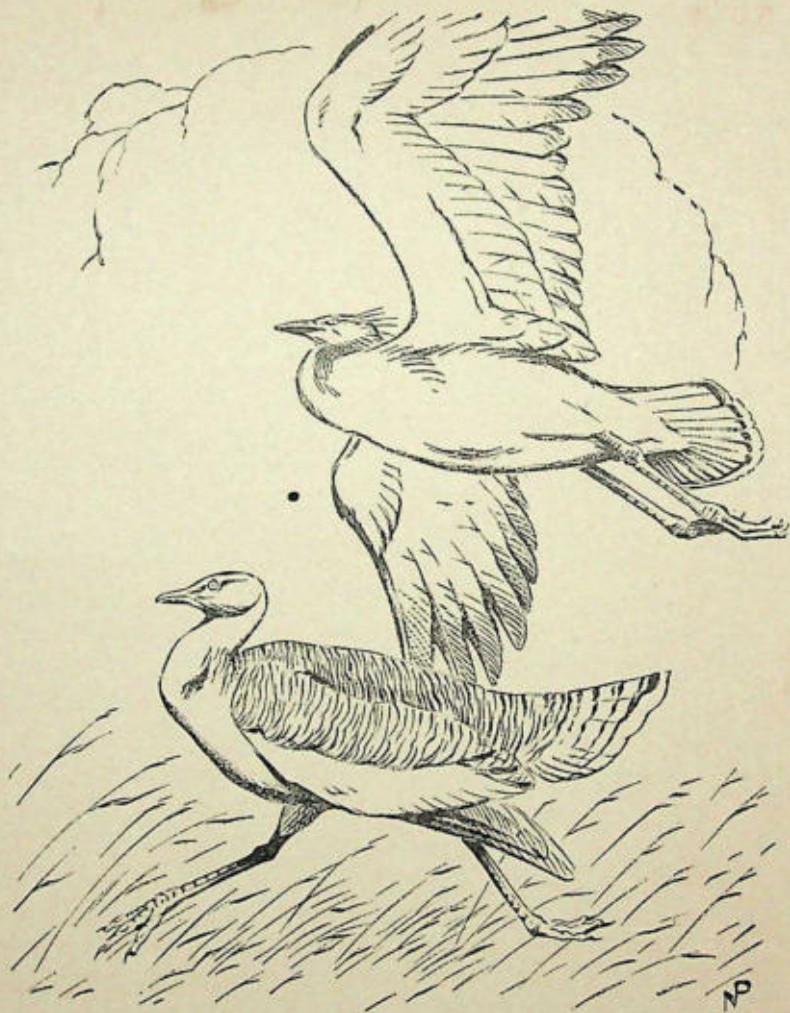
and deflecting it. Even more remarkable, it caught several pebbles I threw to distract it in the same way and swept its horns back in time to ward off the spear. In the end I had to send the tracker back all the way to the camp for ammunition.

The Greater Bustard

The Greater Bustard is a huge bird, three foot tall and immensely heavy. It is equipped with a pair of wings that look big enough to lift a man from the ground. Its legs are thick and strong like those of a land bird such as an ostrich. It has a clumsy big beak and large round eyes, yellow and solemn. At close quarters its feather pattern is intriguing. It has an untidy crest of feathers, greyish in colour, on the top and sides of its head. The neck feathers are grey, long and ruffled, and all the underparts are white. The light and dark brown tracteries of its back feathers are especially beautiful.

The Bustard seems to live largely on grass seeds, much as guinea-fowl do. Nowadays it has to range far and wide for food, as the encroachments of civilization are gradually limiting its feeding grounds. As a result it is getting very rare and is in danger of becoming extinct. For this reason it is rightly protected.

I came upon a pair of Bustards once in the Northern Frontier District of Kenya. They were about a hundred yards apart, up-

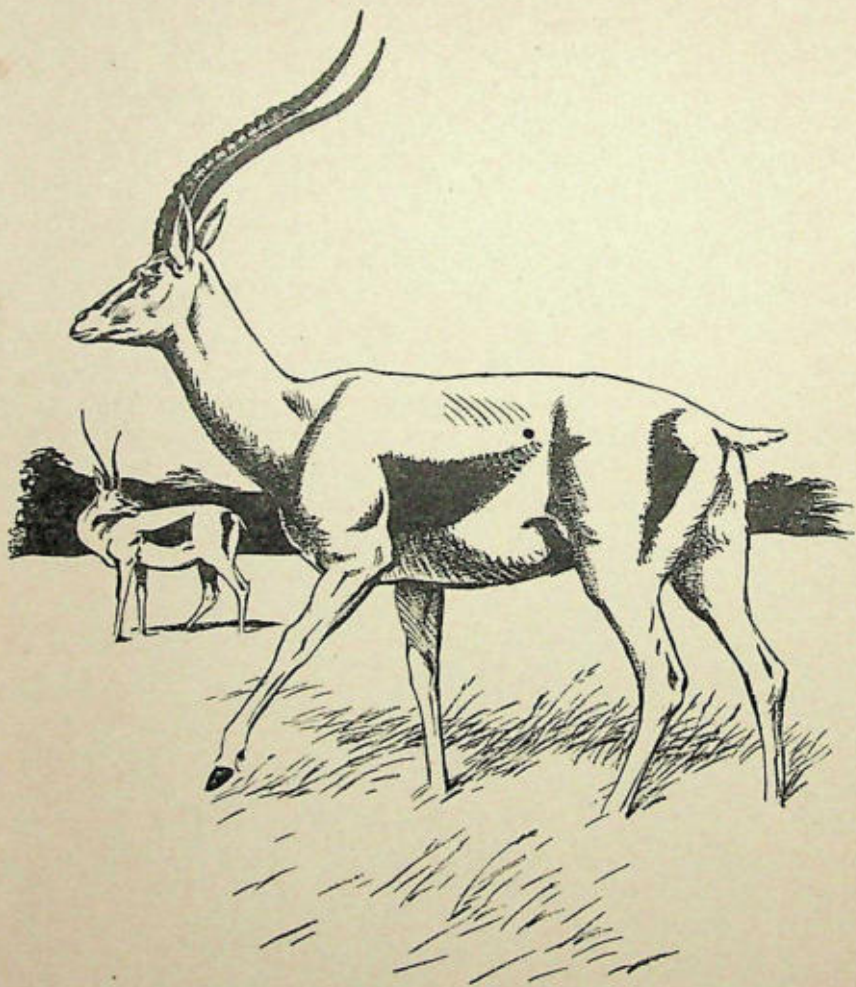


right and immense, in silent abstraction. They eyed me uneasily but made no move to depart. I was anxious to see what they looked like in the air and approached too close for their comfort. The next few seconds have stuck in my memory since that day. They took off at once, like heavy bombers, running to get speed for the take-off, thundering their tremendous wings and flattening the dry grass-stems with the wind of their passing. It was many yards before they were airborne, but once in the air they were graceful, all the clumsiness of their efforts on the ground vanishing as though it had never been. A few oarlike strokes of their wings and they were hundreds of yards away, not climbing very high, but moving with astonishing speed. One by one, in the far yellow distance, they planed down again to land, running swiftly to break the shock of contact with the earth—great birds out of a forgotten past.

Grant's Gazelle

Grant's Gazelle is a large, light-fawn-coloured animal about the size of a reed buck, its impressive lyre-shaped horns giving it a regal dignity which is enhanced by its proud way of standing. Its massive and beautifully curved horns are the largest of all Gazelles' horns. Unlike the bushbuck or the duiker, these Gazelles are never alone. They spend their whole lives in herds, grazing quietly when undisturbed, all heads facing one way. The males fight fiercely for the leadership of the herd, and if the leader is shot there is a puzzled second or two while the rest try to work out the next mob action, fluttering their tails nervously so that the white under-fur flashes in the sun. Thunder and lightning has a startling effect on them. They run in a blind unreasoning panic until they find their way blocked by some obstacle. Immediately then they turn and run as hard again in the opposite direction.

Grant's Gazelles suffer severely from a parasite under the skin which emerges from an insect's egg laid in the fur. The larvae of these parasites develop under the skin and disfigure a badly-



afflicted animal so seriously that the lumps are visible from a distance. It is ironic that the main reason why these very decorative creatures are not relentlessly hunted is because of this serious parasitic infestation that they are prone to acquire. Thus the parasite in a sense protects the animal from the bullets and traps of hunters and poachers.

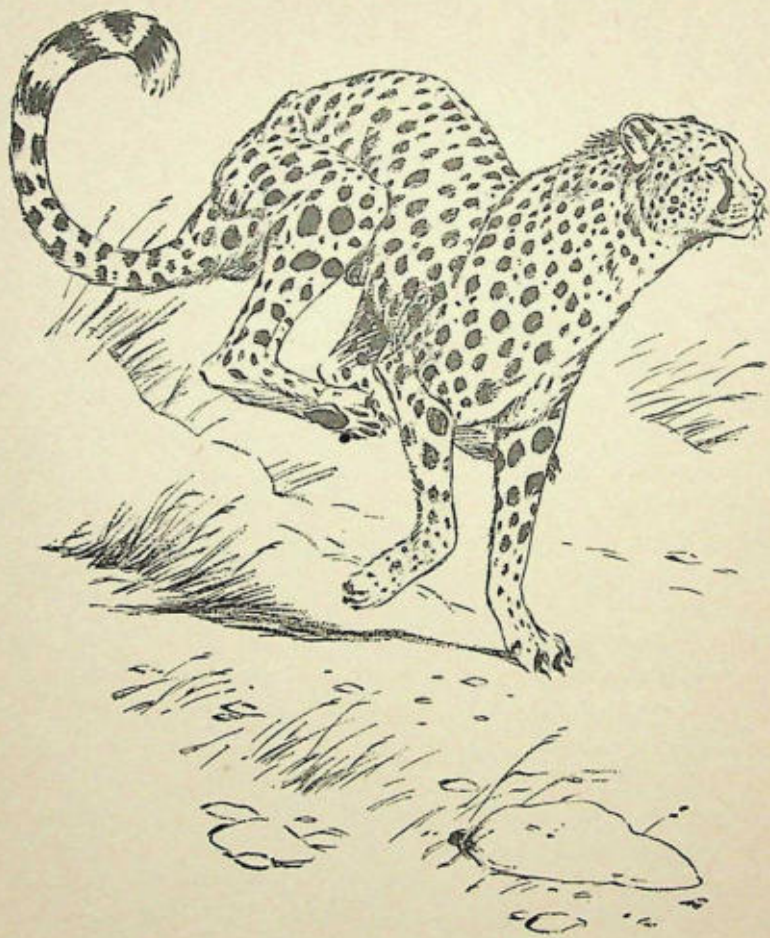
Grant's Gazelles are not much bothered by predatory beasts because they are too small to tempt a lion to essay a very difficult stalk in open country, while the leopard likes to do all his hunting under cover. For this reason they prefer the wide acres of grazing offered by the Kenya highlands and the less-populated plateau of the northern frontier districts east and north of Mount Kenya.

The Thomson's Gazelle shares these plains with the Grant's, but it is easily distinguished by a long black stripe running across its sides from front to rear and by its smaller size.

The Cheetah

The Cheetah's name—usually pronounced 'chittah'—is of Indian origin and means 'spotted'; in East Africa it is often known as the Spotted Lion. The Cheetah is found in India and widely distributed in Ethiopia, Uganda, East and Central Africa. It is often confused with the leopard although there are very marked differences between them.

The Cheetah is built for speed—it can run at 80 m.p.h.—and has long legs and very high hindquarters. Its head is small in proportion to its body and its neck is long. Its claws, unlike the leopard's, are unretractable, that is to say, they remain 'stuck out' and are therefore worn and blunt. The expression of its face is of bland, amber-eyed dignity, while the leopard's expression is evil. The Cheetah's spots are solid, the Leopard's are not unlike the pattern of its own pawmarks. The solid black rosettes on a background of chrome yellow make the Cheetah a wonderful sight as it flashes across the open. It is the mildest of all the big cats and becomes a nuisance to livestock only when pot-hunting



farmers have wiped out the small game that is the Cheetah's natural feed.

The Cheetah hunts with its eyes and runs down its prey. For this reason it is by no means an uncommon sight in daylight. It feeds on such things as small game, steenbok, duiker, hare or guinea fowl.

The Cheetah, being so often mistaken for a leopard, is frequently obliged to pay for the other's crimes, and while this is recognized as a fact, the excuse is still used in order to kill this particularly handsome animal for no reason at all. What makes this offence especially heinous is the Cheetah's lack of any fear of man. This is a curious characteristic of the Cheetah, and I know of no instance where one has attacked a human being. The Cheetah is therefore caught under conditions where no leopard would ever be apprehended.

It is for these reasons that the Cheetah is now very scarce in South Africa. Even in the great elevated plains of Central Africa which are its natural home, the Cheetah is becoming more and more difficult to find.

Cheetahs can be tamed and once tamed, have an embarrassing desire to please, and frequently—and in all innocence—bring their masters the neighbours' fowls.

The Hartebeest

There are many varieties of Hartebeest. It is an antelope, but lacks the soft-eyed appeal and graceful lines of the rest of its kind: indeed, it is a most ungainly beast. It is high at the shoulder and its back slopes sharply down to the rump in the unsightly manner of a giraffe. It has a long lugubrious face, a short, sheep-like neck and horns as ugly as those of the tsessebe, which it closely resembles—except that it is heavier and much bigger. Like the tsessebe, however, it is very fast on its feet. In one form or another it is found from Abyssinia to the Cape, usually in herds on the open plain, although one kind, the Tora Hartebeest, likes bushy or broken country.

I once came upon one of those rare sights that make a hunter's life worthwhile. I found a huge herd of Jackson's Hartebeest—the reddish-brown variety—at least three hundred strong, consisting of adults and young ones. They were obviously migrating and I watched the movement for an hour. They were grazing north across the shoulder of Mount Elgon, bound for some



pastures far away. There was no concerted movement. Now one animal advanced, now another. In the same strange way none was ever left behind. The last stragglers, seldom fewer than a score at a time, would become conscious that the familiar press of bodies round them was thinning out and first one, then a



few more, would stop grazing, look up for a second and move quickly forward to the body of the herd. I saw only the young ones actually running, in little spurts to catch up with their mothers. This shuffle movement, from front to rear, gave the impression of a reddish-brown flood flowing over rocks. In the centre of the herd at one stage was a great conical anthill of almost the same colour as the Hartebeest. Round this the flood parted—and daintily poised on its crest was one fine male, head erect, like a general controlling the advance of an army. The late afternoon sun gilded him, sentinel lord of the tremendous throng—and not until the last dozen beasts had passed him did he leap nimbly down, with a flash of heels, to join his battalion.

The Antbear

The Antbear is a strange nocturnal creature, like something from the primordial past. It has a long, low body about six feet in length, covered with leathery grey skin and sparse black hairs; its ears, tongue and snout are abnormally long. The front feet end in curved claws, long, sharp and tough, and the foreleg is very short and immensely powerful. The hind leg is longer and heavier and powered by round, muscular haunches and the tail is a short, fat wedge, coming to a point; it is used mainly for balance while the Antbear ducks and dodges to safety. Its hearing is so acute that it is aware of termites rustling and scurrying along their secret passages far below the ground; at the same time, the long, attentive ears are for ever moving to pick up any sign of danger in the night around it. At the first hint the Antbear wheels quickly, rather like a kangaroo, and lollops off clumsily but with surprising speed for the nearest burrow, long cavernous holes, which are scattered strategically over the veld in the neighbourhood of the anthills.



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The Antbear lives, not on ants, but on termites—commonly called 'white ants'—whose iron-hard, conical hillocks often reach a height of fifteen to twenty feet. Cemented together with the secretions of the worker termites, they are so hard that a pick just bounces off them, although the Antbear manages to break in. It digs patiently, night after night, in short spasms of activity, until it has breached the defences of the termites. At once the workers rush to repair the damage, only to meet the long, inquisitive snout and the pink, sticky tongue that flicks and curls, engulfing the defenders by the hundred; still the hordes swarm to the breach, and still the long, clever tongue devours them until, replete, the big clumsy animal hops away into the night and the safety of its own deep burrow. And there it is only the terrible wild dog of Africa that has the persistence to dig it out.

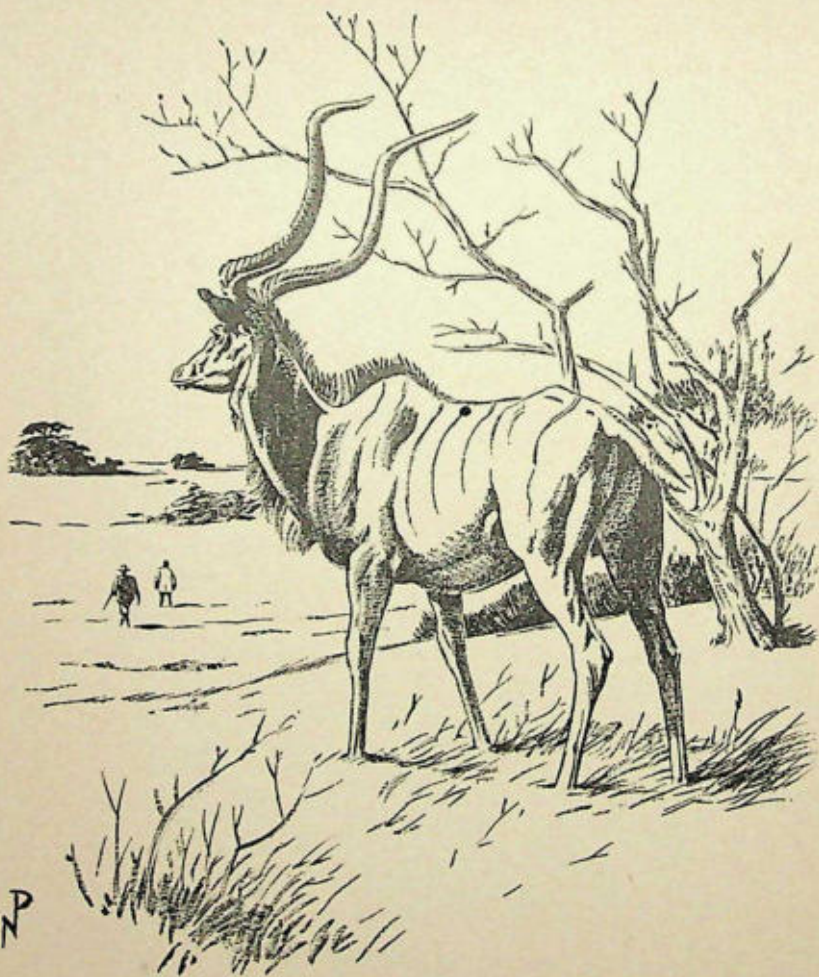
The Antbear has almost no means of self-defence other than its way of life. Yet these habits are such that it has spread successfully over the whole of Africa. Its very timidity is perhaps its best protection and it will certainly survive many species of fiercer creatures that now dominate the African wilds.

The Kudu

The Kudu is one of the most hunted beasts in Central Africa, for it will never move. Where it is born there it dies; it never migrates. There is only one way to clear an area of Kudu and that is to cut down all the trees which give it shelter.

The Kudu is a browser, not a grazer, and unlike grazing animals, is not radically affected by the inroads of civilization: when circumstances change, it adapts itself accordingly. Moreover, in one way at least civilization is an advantage to the Kudu: the presence of man keeps lions at a distance, and as the lion is more trouble to the Kudu than is man, the Kudu prefers the lesser of two evils.

The Kudu has very similar habits to the English deer. The males or bulls have a following of cows and fight very determined battles for the leadership of the herd. It is futile for an ambitious young bull to try and join a strange herd; it must stay near the home grounds, waiting for its strength to grow great enough to tackle the master bull.



The Kudu only runs when it is desperately afraid. Usually it much prefers to walk out of range, keeping a weather eye on the hunter's movements. It can keep this up all day until the hunter tires of the pursuit, for it has a cunning habit of standing still—blending perfectly into its natural background of tree branches while the hunt crashes noisily past. Then it turns and walks quietly away in the opposite direction. Only the movement of its horns gives it away, as it turns its head to watch the hunters. If it stood still, the horns would merge with the shapes of the twisted thorn branches and make it invisible. Almost the only way to hunt Kudu is to find fresh spoor very early in the morning: for Kudu feed at night, on the move all the time to avoid lions, but as soon as it is light they seek out some favourite sanctuary and it is here you will find them until after the heat is past.

I once found two sets of spiral Kudu horns, still attached to their respective skulls, on top of a heap of whitened bones—bearing witness to one of those bush tragedies that happen from time to time. The horns were interlocked like two corkscrews where the animals had fought and died, neither beast able to break away from the other.

The Okapi

The Congo certainly has more than its share of odd creatures; the pygmy elephant, the giant forest hog, the gorilla and the pygmies themselves. When you add the strange-looking Okapi, you get something of a nightmare picture of bizarre animals and humans which seems nothing less than a natural circus.

The Okapi is neither a gazelle nor an antelope, nor even a relation of the zebra. It is allied to the giraffe. It is an odd-looking animal, pale brown in colour with white markings on cheeks and legs and zebra-like stripes on the forearms and thighs. Its lips are elongated. The male only has horns and these are covered with skin except for the tips. A few specimens have been found in the Ruwenzori area of Uganda, near Toro, where forest conditions are suitable, but ordinarily the Okapi clings to the thick forest of the Semliki in the Congo, where the Semliki River runs from Lake Edward into Lake Albert. Its natural colouring blends ideally with the filtered sunlight of these little-known regions.



The Okapi is by nature a very shy animal and has been made more so by the activities of hunters from overseas—particularly during the days that followed the First World War. Expensive safaris were organized for the sole purpose of shooting a specimen,

but most of them returned without success and there is still much that is obscure in the life-story of the Okapi.

It survives by becoming a shadow among shadows, drifting like smoke, unheard and seldom seen. It actually tiptoes away from danger and is helped by its elusive light-brown colouring and the camouflage-striping on its legs. Its hearing, too, is probably phenomenal and even a pygmy hunter, slipping softly through the forests, can be heard by the Okapi.

The Congo is not really kind to humanity and here Africa's strangest beasts find refuge, depending on conditions that have remained virtually unchanged for thousands of years. Here, least of all other parts of the great and mysterious dark continent, have the inroads of mankind made any impression. The Congo Basin was probably the fount of all life in Africa long, long before the coming of the white man, back beyond the days of the Carthaginian and Persian adventurers. Here every blade of grass and quivering leaf is lush and fecund where much of Africa elsewhere is arid desert in comparison. The Congo, therefore, has remained well-stocked with exotic forms of animal life and nature has had to devise extraordinary schemes to enable each variety to keep alive and out of the jaws of its enemies. The Okapi has been designed accordingly and is only unique—when you think of it—out of its own natural setting, the humid forests of the Semliki. Even so, it is like some imaginary beast straight out of the pages of Alice in Wonderland!

The Tsessebe

The Tsessebe, like its larger brother, the Kongoni, is a dull reddish-brown in colour. The top half of the horns turns backwards and the Tsessebe uses them very effectively in a tight corner. It has a keen eye, good nose and large, attentive ears to spot danger; it is very tough and hardy. In silhouette it is one of the ugliest beasts in Africa. But its high shoulders and slow, ungainly quarters are deceptive, for it is by far the fastest antelope in the bush. In addition the Tsessebe has great endurance and is exceedingly wily. It sticks strictly to the open, using its drab colouring as camouflage, and is seldom to be found within a hundred yards of a forest fringe or belt of trees.

All this family, the Kongoni-Tsessebe clan, posts sentries in much the same way as baboons. The warning signal is a snort or a whistle, reedy and on a low note; then, with one accord, old and young, male and female, herd and sentry, turn and bolt in one movement without a single backward glance, away from the sound of the call. Several hundred yards away they halt and

spin round to locate the cause of the alarm, not out of curiosity, but because it is unsafe to run in one direction too long.



The Redcat

The Redcat or Rooikat is a species of Lynx about the height and weight of a large bulldog. Unlike the domestic cat, it is very heavily built, with short, powerful legs and huge paws. It very closely resembles the lion, except that it has the Lynx's tufted ears. Its skin is rufous-mahogany in colour and for its size, it has the most terrible claws in Africa. Its eyes are quite yellow, its whiskers white and its tail thick like a lion's.

Though a small animal, weight for weight the Redcat has no equal as a beast of prey. It is powerful enough to pull down antelope much bigger than itself—like all the cat family—but it usually confines its hunting to stembok, duiker, rock hare, monkeys, guinea fowl, partridge and pheasant and the helpless young of the larger species when they are left unattended.

The Redcat is primarily a nocturnal animal. It is so seldom seen in daylight that many people in Africa do not know of its existence and blame many minor depredations on the leopard. The reason for this is that its paws are nearly as large as a leopard's,



and even sharper. Of course, the Redcat's jaw is much smaller but as the leopard does most of its damage with its claws, the results are much the same.

The Redcat frequently takes up its abode close to human habitations in order to live on domestic fowls, and is often flushed by roving dogs, which sometimes get badly torn in the process.

I once mistook a Redcat for a lion cub. It was some distance away and moved quickly into the shelter of some low thorns. I took a shot at the 'lion cub' and approached the spot with due care, rifle cocked and finger on the trigger, watching out for the lioness herself. It was just as well, for the wounded Redcat leapt out of the thick cover where it had laid hidden and crouched for a spring, all four sets of razor claws outspread to deal ruin.

The Dassie

It is surprising but true that the Dassie is the elephant's nearest relative, indeed, almost the only one. It is a small tailless rock rabbit which lives in the granite outcropping of the veld where the sun and cold has cracked the rocks and formed little caves.

It lives mainly on grass seeds and I am convinced that it is essentially, if not completely, vegetarian. I have occasionally found an eggshell in its runs, but whether this is mischief or appetite I do not know. It is largely diurnal, that is to say, it is active in daylight, but a full moon brings it out on the rock tops to whistle and chatter.

The Dassie has a high degree of intelligence for so small an animal and has adapted itself to circumstances very well. It cannot run swiftly or fight with any animal larger than a rat. At the approach of danger it scurries away down its subterranean runways into tunnels too small for anything but a snake. And it is too quick for a snake.

It has only one enemy—the small boy who cannot leave it



alone. When undisturbed it suns itself on the topmost rocks, chattering to its fellows, and when winter comes, lies snugly quartered out of the icy winds.

Rabies and plague occasionally clean out a colony, but the Dassie has little contact with other beasts and drives away the mice and rats which try to share its caves. It is therefore in a better position to survive these veld epidemics.

The Grey Monkey

The Grey Monkey is found throughout the whole of Africa, from north to south, from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, wherever there are water and trees.

For one thing Monkeys must have, more than any other animal of the African Bush, and that is water. The supply can be a long way away but it must be reliable. It is this need that is often a Monkey's downfall, for it is usually near water that leopards, redcats, crocodiles and men wait to catch it. The Monkey will eat anything, including insects, from the seed-pods of thorn trees to anything left lying about a camp.

The Monkey mother is very devoted to her young. She will hang back, shaking with terror, to let her half-grown baby catch up when the whole troop is flying across open country from danger. This crossing-of-the-open game is played to set rules. The leaders, the big males, come down first when they have had a thorough look round, especially for leopard. Next the not-so-daring younger ones sneak to the ground behind the muscular



backs of the elders. The mothers wait to the last, blinking anxiously at their menfolk on the ground, while the babies, well aware of what is going on, cling convulsively to their mothers' fur, burying their faces in it to hide from the frightening regions below.

When they are all out of the trees, there is a concerted rush. The fastest cross the open first, without waiting for the slowest. Now it is every man for himself according to tribal instinct. For this reason the courageous mother—already saddled with one baby—is worthy of much admiration when she stops, looks over her shoulder and shrieks to her other, half-grown child to hurry as it covers the ground in remarkable four-handed jumps. Then chattering and scolding one another the whole tribe scampers up into the safety of the cool green leaves—as often as not leaving a snarling, disappointed hunter leaping futilely against the trunk of the first tree.

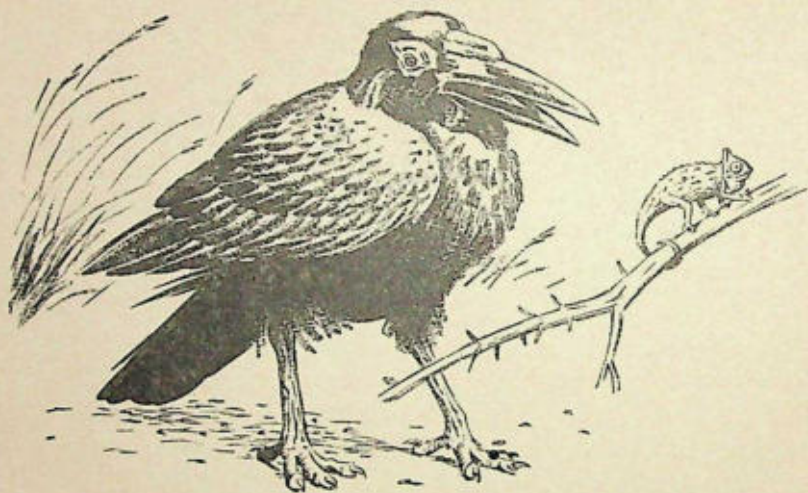


The Ground Hornbill

The Ground Hornbill is a very striking-looking creature with its bright-red wattles, jet-black plumage and huge, business-like bill. It is thick-legged and powerful, and about the size of a turkey. Whenever a lion or leopard makes a kill, the Ground Hornbill will be there—always in pairs, like anarchists at a peace conference. It hops heavily but athletically forward in great bounds, its legs braced for a bounce into the air and safety, and helps itself to the feast with greed mingled with unremitting caution.

Otherwise it lives by thievery: it steals eggs, raids nests, pounces on lizards, snatches the odd mongoose, an opportunist to the last, away on the wing with two or three quick flaps at the first sign of danger.

I have noticed that several pairs of Ground Hornbills may make a certain area a hunting preserve, food only controlling their numbers. They prefer thick woodland for such depredations and perhaps for nesting purposes, too, as they are seldom to be



seen in open country. Sustained flight cannot be easy for such a large bird and they are clearly afraid of being overlong on the wing. For this reason, too, they like the kind of country that offers big trees scattered here and there.

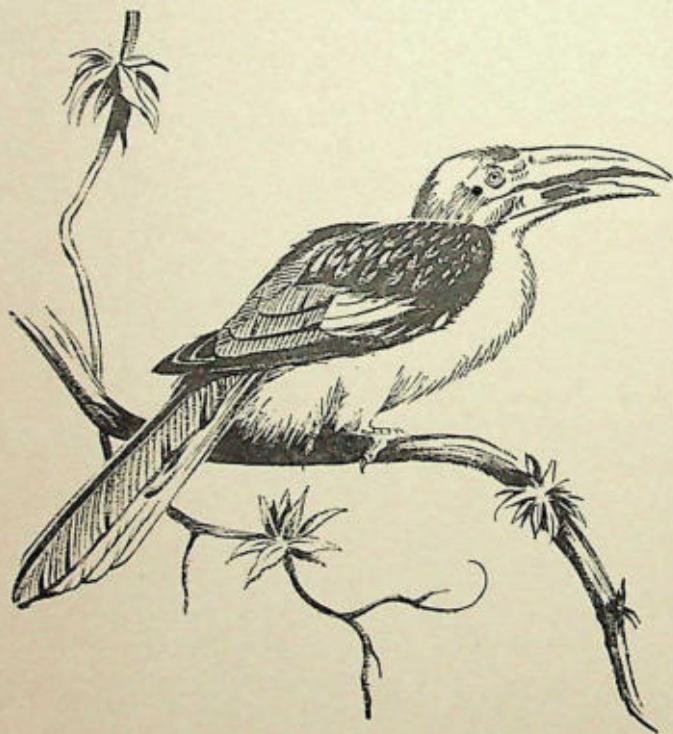
To keep alive the Ground Hornbill must live where game is plentiful and lions make regular kills; its days, therefore, are numbered, for Africa is shrinking day by day, year by year, and soon the Ground Hornbill—never very common—will be confined to the game reserves and those lonely pockets of wild life where mankind still leaves the creatures of the African bush to pursue their ancient ways in a vague and uneasy peace.

The Yellow-billed Hornbill

The little Yellow-billed Hornbill—as far as the hunter is concerned—is nearly as bad as the dove-grey, crested 'Go-Away' bird; it serves as sentry for game, not with any sense of self-appointed officiousness, like the 'Go-Away' bird, but because it cannot keep its big mouth shut or its ungainly body still for a second at a time. It seems to be immune from the depredations of hawks and eagles, which is odd, as I cannot imagine it putting up much of a fight against them. At the same time its flight is no protection from predatory birds. The only conclusion I can come to is that it does not taste nice: I have only come across one African who ate it, an elderly, wrinkled Bushman.

It gives the impression of having been made up of spare parts, with a head much too big for its body and a power of flight quite inadequate for its unwieldy bulk. In colour it is grey and white with black markings. It has an unpleasant voice, harsh and petulant, a great clumsy yellow beak, a coldly calculating yellow eye and an appetite that passes all description. It is never satisfied,

always about, impudently familiar and unrepentant. In the wilds where there are no human habitations, it is a regular thief of other birds' nests, stealing the eggs and hanging about afterwards with brazen effrontery, waiting for the harassed owners to lay more. But like the jackal and the kudu, it thrives best near man's regular haunts; it now appears to have reached a stage of semi-



domestication and to have adopted as an unwilling provider and patron the man who grows crops.

The Yellow-billed Hornbill is hated by man and beast, but most of all by the African farmer's small sons who have to sit on flimsy platforms in the hot sun and scare it away from the succulent ears of corn. For negligence in this essential duty the punishment is swift and unmistakable, for it is one of the very few occasions when African fathers, notoriously tolerant, do not spare the rod. At these times the Hornbill, filled with stolen food, flaps awkwardly up out of reach and croaks huskily, turning its immense beak sideways for a calculating look out of an evil yellow eye.

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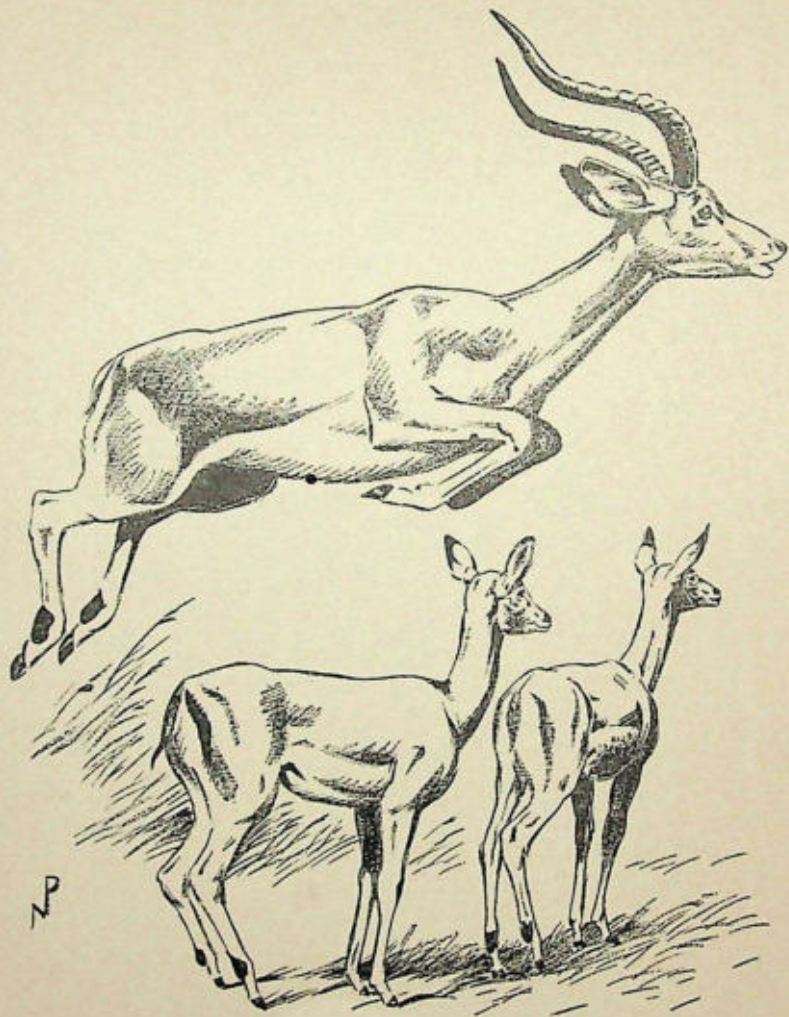
The Impala

The Impala is a graceful and exciting animal about the size of a springbok. It thrives best in country which is badly or erratically supplied with water, where plain and forest intermingle—that is, a primitive place where the carnivorous animals are shy of mankind and hunt mainly at night.

It has very regular and well-defined habits in country where it is not greatly disturbed. At midday, in the heat, it likes to find shade but it must be the fairly open shade of a kind that gives a view of approaching danger, for the Impala uses its eyes a great deal more than most hunted animals. For this reason a mopane forest is a favourite place.

The Impala has a regular trail to water and it is here that leopard, lion and cheetah like to lie in wait. It has other regular trails to and from food, shade and salt licks, but it always chooses high ground and fairly open bush where possible, for it is uneasy in thicket country.

When alarmed, every animal in the herd leaps madly and



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repeatedly so that all one sees at first is a crazy undulation of jumping red hides. Then the herd makes off in a kind of wild follow-my-leader, to the great confusion of the tracker.

I once came on a herd of Impala in an area of low mopane scrub. I could see over the scrub quite easily, but the Impala could not. One of them leapt up to have a look, apparently having heard or smelled me, and bolted in a series of magnificent jumps, right and left, causing the rest of the herd to panic. For half a minute it was like being inside a circus ring. I was surrounded by madly leaping Impala, jumping over one another in an indescribable fashion until one of the rams must have collected his wits and shot off in a straight line.

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The Jackal

The Jackal is a highly intelligent member of the dog family. There are a number of varieties, but the most outstanding is known as the Silver Jackal. It has an attractive pelt with a silver-white streak down the back flowing over the long, bushy tail. The sides of the body are reddish-brown and the belly and underparts are almost white.

The Jackal is probably the finest hunter in the bush and its sense of smell, sight, hearing and instinct are second to none. It is small, but courageous, a positive terror to all kinds of birds because of its liking for eggs. Where its own strength is inadequate, it has the ability to assess shrewdly the chances of successful hunting of lions and leopards, so that it is never far off when they make a kill. When this happens the Jackal invites itself to the feast, taking a tactful back seat until its host has eaten its fill. I have seen a lioness running at half a dozen Jackals in extreme annoyance—first this one, then that—while the others snatched a mouthful of her kill. Then back she would charge



again, tail up, to drive these others away, while the first two crept back to their original places. Finally, in desperation, she lay down half across the kill and blazed at them with furious yellow eyes, swearing under her breath.

The Jackal deals very cleverly with hares. It never wastes time chasing them, but listens for the thud of their feet as they run and crouches down in what it judges to be their path. Then it waits for them to pass. A lightning-quick spring and it is all over. This explains why Jackals are frequently to be found on roads and bush tracks where hares like to run unimpeded.

A Jackal has a social life and enjoys holding a very unmusical cisteddfod by the light of the moon. Otherwise it is quiet, especially when on the prowl, nose to the wind, bushy tail trailing, dainty paws silently picking a way from point to point.

The Stembok or Steenbok

The Stembok or Steenbok is certainly one of the most beautiful of the antelopes; it has the loveliest eyes in the bush. There are three varieties. The Rhodesian, the most common, is distinguished by dark markings on the head. It is a chestnut-brown colour with a fawn belly and straight horns up to five inches in length. It is less than two feet at the shoulder, yet even so, taller than its cousins, Sharp's and Neumann's Steenbok.

The Rhodesian Steenbok is found anywhere south of the Zambesi River, into Bechuanaland and as far north as Portuguese Angola in the west. I myself have seen it in the swamps of Ngamiland in north-western Bechuanaland, where the dry short-grass savannahs adjoin the country's waterways. Here, oddly enough, where mankind is more or less absent, the Steenbok is much shyer than in places where generations of white men established homes, farms, cities and suburbs.

The Steenbok has a curious habit of standing still. It quickly gets used to human beings in its feeding area and runs, in a



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bounding sprint, only a short distance—to stand again and stare, often with no cover, no camouflage, no protection as a result of its immobility. To a real sportsman this is disconcerting; it is no test of markmanship and therefore no temptation. Combine this with the appeal of its splendid eyes and you can understand why Rhodesians have many a Steenbok as neighbours for years, until some fate harder than man—a leopard or farm dog—destroys the association.

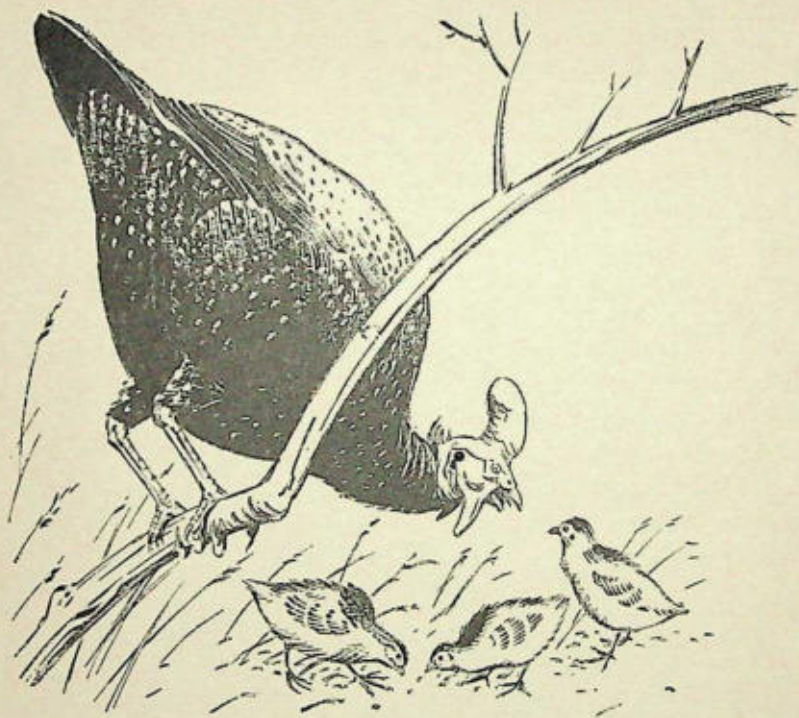
The Steenbok has no lateral hooves, which may be the reason that it can jump in the air like a javelin—true and straight as a flash of tawny lightning. Its nervous system is so ultra-sensitive that it lives in a state of high tension, so abnormally alert and wary that it actually appears to thrive on fear. This is borne out by the fact that various attempts to transform Steenbok into household pets have ended in failure. The beautiful creature invariably wilts and dies after six months or so in captivity.

The Guinea-fowl

The common variety of Guinea-fowl is a slate-grey with a barred effect, the head crowned with a horny excrescence like a miniature night-cap. There is another, rarer variety in the Sabi Valley in Southern Rhodesia, which has no headknob, but instead a most attractive crest of blue feathers. The plumage is almost sky-blue. This species is very shy and elusive.

The Guinea-fowl is the most intelligent bird of the bush, and knows the exact range of a shot gun. It much prefers running to flying and is wonderfully adept at weaving and dodging. It will run a little way—till out of range—then turn and eye you. But if necessary it will take to the wing and make a short, curving flight, calling to its fellows in the air. The Guinea-fowl is completely bewildered by the darkness and only extreme urgency forces it to abandon a roosting-place after it has settled for the night.

Sometimes in country where they are little disturbed, like that of the north-eastern part of Bechuanaland, the flocks are



very big, often as many as two or three hundred birds. Where the flocks are worried, they break up into much smaller groups and become cunning and shy.

The Guinea-fowl is very tough and strong, and full-grown has few enemies other than man. Most of the casualties are among the chicks—on the ground from jackals and wild cats and in the air from hawks or eagles.

Guinea-fowl hens do not make nests, but hatch their eggs out in the long grass. As soon as the young chicks can move about easily they stick together in a flock. The chicks feather quickly and soon take to the air for short escape flights. They scatter on the ground afterwards and reassemble when the mother bird calls them. Like hens, the mothers do not know how many chicks they should have. They do know, however, when a chick is lost, and mother and chick call back and forth cautiously.

Guinea-fowl can be domesticated and if you set some of their eggs under a hen, the chicks that emerge will behave just like ordinary farmyard fowls, except that they have the power of flight.

The Porcupine

The Porcupine grows very big, about the size of a bulldog. It very much resembles a guinea pig, with a nasty, snarling temper and cunning little brain. It has a piggy snout, drab brown quills ending in white tips which cover the whole of its body and tail, and paws remarkably like little black hands. The quills have a series of serrations on the white tip something like a fish-hook barb. These work their way into the flesh and it is easier to push them right through than to try to pull them out.

The Porcupine's main diet is roots, but it quickly learns to like mealies, pumpkins, water-melons and sweet potatoes and once it has acquired these tastes, is very loth to leave native gardens alone.

It usually hides up during the daylight hours in nooks and crannies in the rocks, in old antbear holes or under the roots of trees, by a cutting or river bank, though it is occasionally seen in the daytime when disturbed.

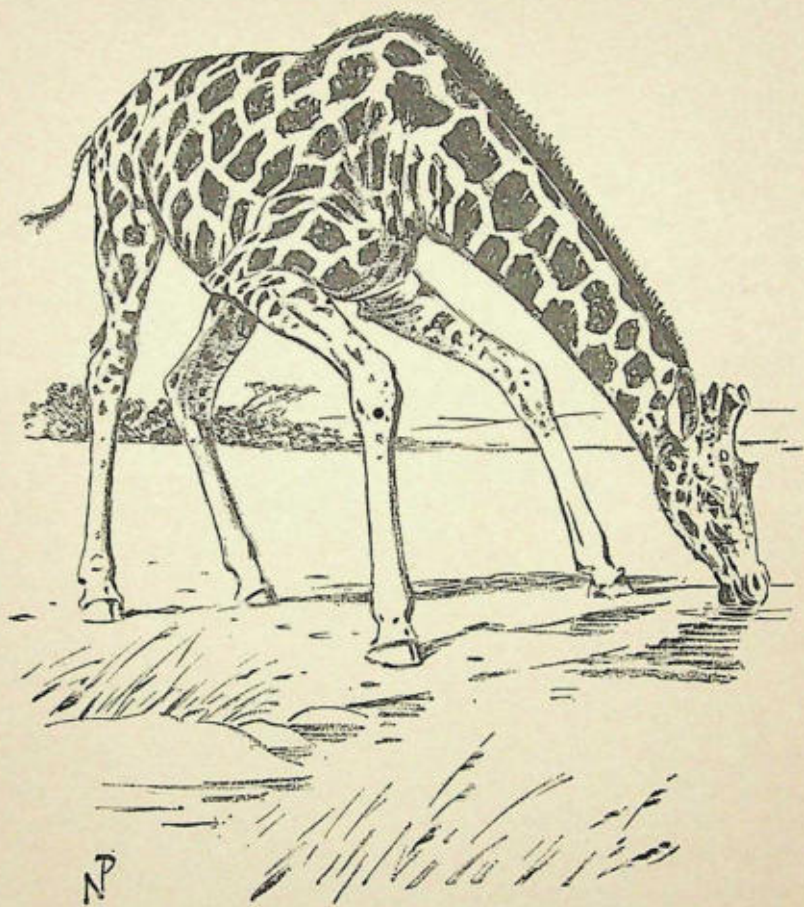
Most predatory beasts leave the Porcupine alone, although it

is very good eating—it is a favourite food of the Bushmen—for the simple reason that they cannot get past the quills. Jackals have the knack when they catch a Porcupine out in the open. If one jackal can tip it up, the other nips in like lightning and bites the belly which is free of quills. Sometimes a lioness with her cruel streak of playfulness will try the same trick, but as often as not, in spite of her unbelievably swift action, she gets a quill in her tender pads.



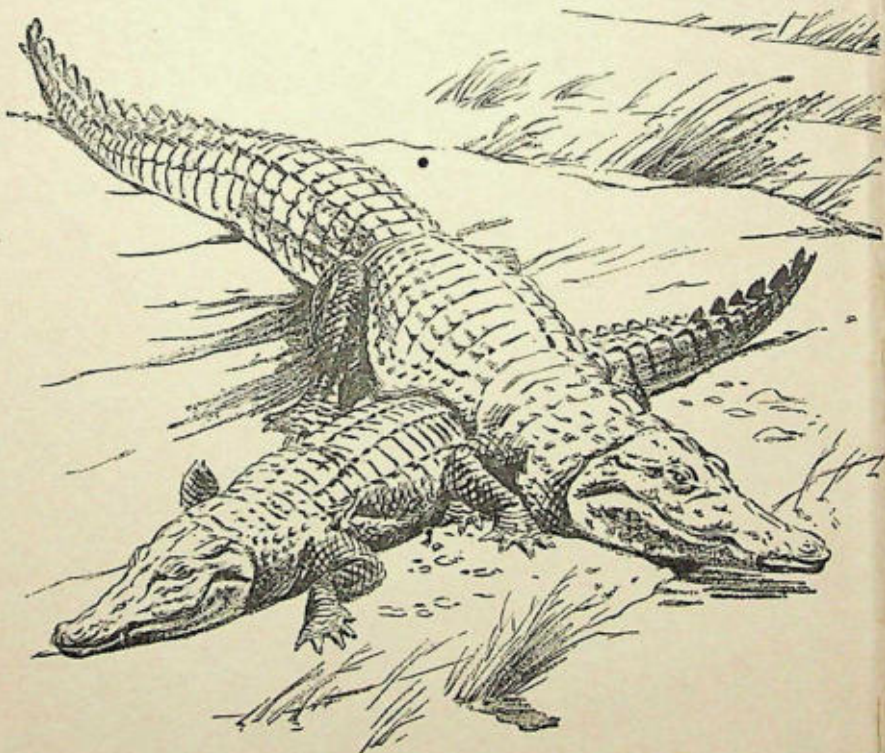
The Giraffe

The Giraffe is a shy, gentle beast with good eyesight and a very keen sense of smell. It is extraordinarily large: it weighs about 2,000 lbs, as against the Lion's 450-500 lbs., and yet a lion can bring it down. Its height is its greatest protection, yet its speed, about 35 m.p.h. for all its deceptive clumsiness, is not to be discounted. Its colouring provides ideal camouflage, for it merges perfectly with the hot black and white contrasts of noon, the long shadows of sunrise and sunset and the scattered thorn bush so typical of African plains country. Besides these three things, the Giraffe has little in the way of defensive equipment. Any predatory beast with a taste for giraffe meat—which is excellent—can leap in, strike, jump out again and be crouched for another blow before the Giraffe has completed a sweep of its short, round-ended horns. The Giraffe under these circumstances, attempts to defend itself with a downward, chopping blow of the forefoot. And if the blow lands, that is the end of the battle, for the foot of a big Giraffe is larger than a dinner plate. Giraffes

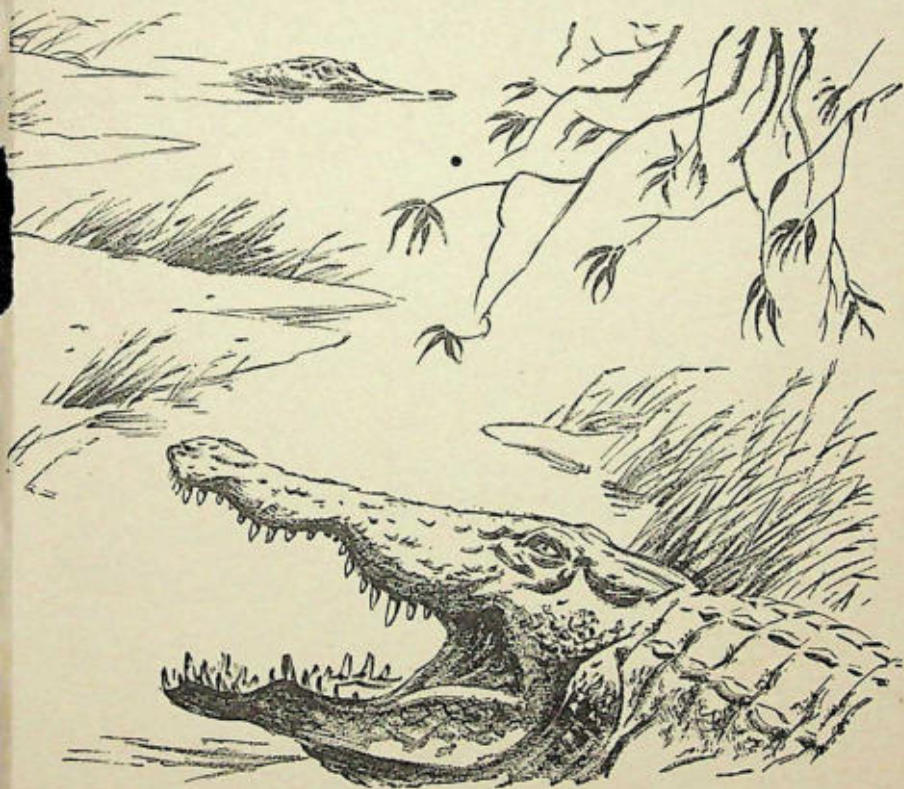


—the hippopotamus, whose cavernous jaws are too much for it.

The Crocodile has a nasty, but fortunately rare trick of wandering inland away from the river in which it was born and which it has known all its life. This may be due to a shortage of fish—tiger fish often clean the river out of other species and are much



too fast for a Crocodile—constant disturbances, such as power boats and bridge builders' blasting, a feeling that violent floods are due, or because the river has fallen very low and is unsafe to hide in. Whatever the reason these migrations do take place—usually from veld pool to veld pool—and it pays to consider all water crocodile-infested unless you know to the contrary.



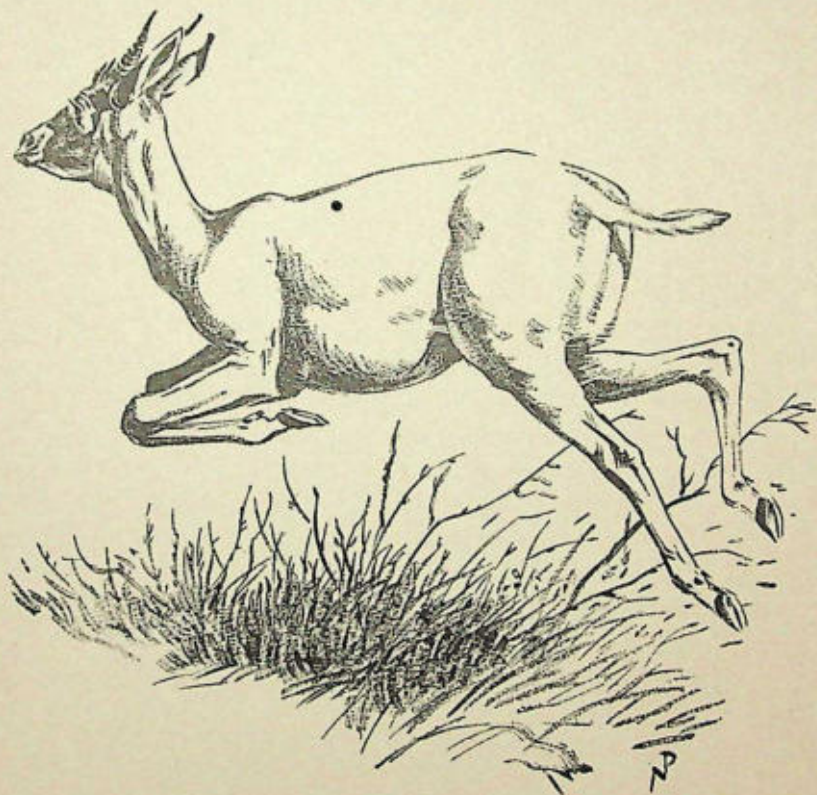
The Duiker

There are ten known species of Duiker spread across the country from the mountains of Abyssinia and the Bahr-el-Ghazal—Sennar, Kassala and Kordofan—right down to the Transvaal of South Africa. The species vary in size; the largest are the size of a large goat, the smallest no bigger than a hare. The common Duiker is about two feet in height, and in colour ranges from pale to dark brown. It is a dainty animal with horns three to five inches in length, both male and female having horns. Between the horns grows a tuft of hair—a distinctive feature of the Duiker—which at a distance gives the impression of a third horn.

It has been given the name 'duiker' meaning 'diver' because of its sudden trick of diving for cover as soon as it thinks it has been spotted and plunging out of sight with a quick flick of nimble hind hoofs. In this it is unlike the steenbok, which it somewhat resembles at a casual glance, for the steenbok at the approach of danger will stand still at once.

The Duiker lives on grass and prefers the plentiful growths

found on the lush plains. But it is never far from cover and once out of sight is usually lost to the hunter. It breeds in captivity and is easily tamed. Its worst enemy is the wild dog, although



leopards take a fairly heavy toll, especially in the dry winter months when the baboons are elsewhere and no longer available as food.

The story is told of how old Khama, chief of the Bamangwato of Bechuanaland, took the Duiker as a national crest. The Matabele came storming, in crescent-shaped impi, across the sandy wastes of the country, driving the tribes before them like terrified game, until a number took refuge in the swamplands, as there was nowhere else to hide. The Matabele followed, but found nothing but a Duiker, standing stock still. 'There can be no people where a buck is standing,' said Nouna, the Matabele chief, turning his impi away. And the Bechuanas in gratitude to the unwitting Duiker who had saved them used it as their national crest.

The Rhinoceros

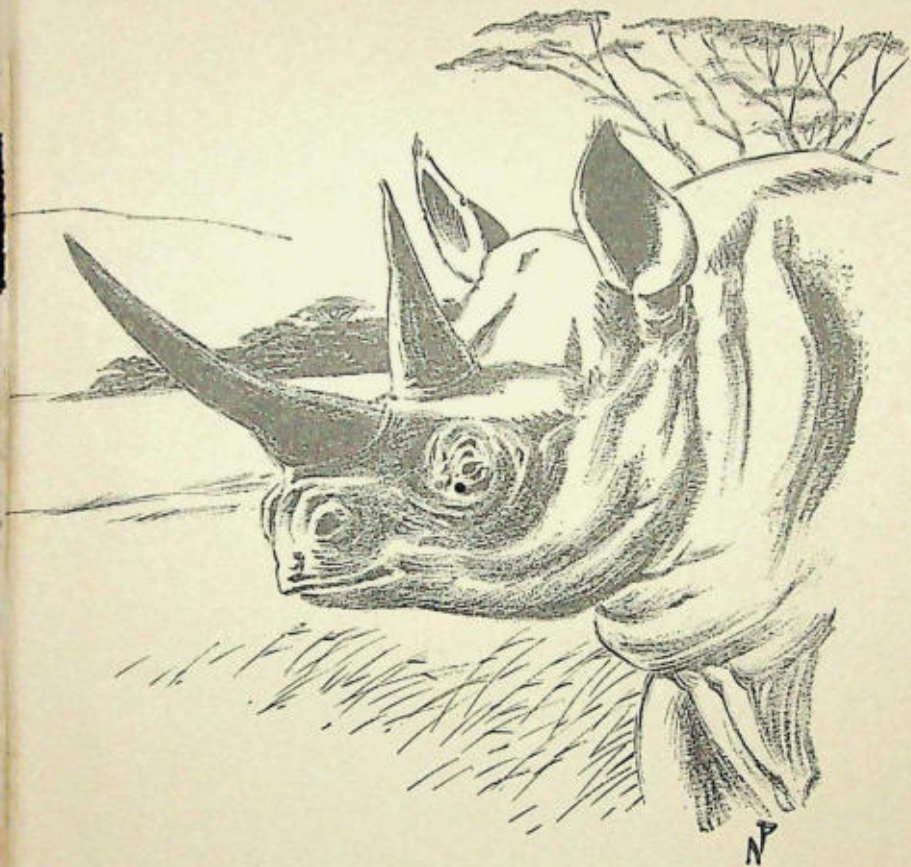
The Rhinoceros has the worst temper of any animal in the bush. There are three main reasons for this; the first is its eyesight. Beyond fifteen yards' range it cannot make out the shape or nature of the thing of which its nostrils have given it warning. Moreover, it is afflicted by a parasite which infests the eye-socket and the constant irritation makes its naturally bad temper worse. The third reason for its bad temper is its cowardice. It is fear that makes it put down its great snout and charge blindly with all its weight and strength behind the two nosehorns; its courage is that of a cornered rat. Yet the Rhino is prodigiously strong: I have seen a Rhino calf no bigger than a small pig pulling three men on ropes all over the bush. When fully-grown it is safe even from lions.

The Rhinoceros' horns grow on the skin and are not bone or ivory. They appear to be made up of minute hairs tightly compressed and solidified.

The Rhino has very fixed habits. A pair of them will haunt



a particular few square miles of bush all their lives until they are seriously disturbed, and will always go to the same part of



the river to drink. They drive tunnels through the thick bush and run up and down them out of sight. They are nervous and

ill at ease in the open. When caught their first impulse is to get back under cover, but if you get too close they will attack in one blundering charge. If they miss, however, they just carry on and do not make a second attempt.

There are two kinds of Rhinoceros, the black and the white. The latter is a sort of dirty grey in colour. It is very scarce these days and only to be found in certain districts in small numbers. It is a grazer, unlike the black Rhino—which is a browser and feeds on bushes, mainly thorns.

I think that the white Rhino is dying out because, owing to man's encroachment on the bush, the natural grazing is getting less every year. In addition, it is much less pugnacious than the black and therefore less feared and respected.

The Baboon

The Baboon is a very clever creature; it actually thinks. In its wild state this power of thought preserves it, but in close contact with man, gets it into trouble. For, unlike other wild animals generally, it is tremendously interested in anything unusual, especially in the movements of mankind. Instead of taking flight—though every instinct is telling it to run—it remains, fascinated, to watch and wonder. It is this curiosity which is often its undoing.

The Baboon realizes very quickly whether a man means mischief or not. The 'old men' Baboons have regular sunning-spots where they scratch and bask and blink in the sun, and if you leave them alone at first you can get within two or three yards of them later. Then they move off with a mere groan of complaint—like some aged member of a once-peaceful club compelled to leave his comfortable chair and seek seclusion elsewhere.

Baboons have a Spartan society and quickly desert or drive off very old members or any that are sick or abnormal. Farmers



have been known to catch and whitewash a Baboon. When released it tries to rejoin the pack, which flees in wild disorder on seeing the ghostly apparition. The harder it runs to join the pack, the harder the pack runs away.

In its wild state, away from the haunts of man, the Baboon lives mainly on thorn-tree pods and certain roots and tubers; in season certain berries vary its diet. It likes insects, especially locusts and is an inveterate robber of birds' nests. It needs water; indeed, it most frequently falls prey to the leopard—its only natural enemy—while going to and from a drink.

Nowadays the Baboon survives in probably greater numbers than ever before, since it is well-fed and well-protected by man. This is because the farmer has to choose between his mealies and his calves. If he lets the leopard have a calf occasionally without seeking vengeance, the Baboons will go away, but if he kills the leopard the Baboons rejoice and get fat on his mealies.

