

THE FISH RIVER BUSH SOUTH AFRICA

AND ITS

WILD ANIMALS

BY

W. T. BLACK, M.R.C.S., L.S.A.,

ASSISTANT-SURGEON, ARMY MEDICAL STAFF.

ILLUSTRATED WITH FIVE FULL PAGE PLATES

EDINBURGH AND LONDON
YOUNG J. PENTLAND

1901

CHAPTER II.

THE HERBIVORA.

BUFFALO—KOOODOO—BUSHBUCK—DUI-KER—GRIESBUCK—STEENBUCK—WILD PIG—HORSES—HARES—ROCK RABBITS.

THE *Elephant* and *Rhinoceros* have years ago left the retreats of the Fish River Bush. The present Colonel Armstrong, Cape Mounted Rifles, recollects, when as a subaltern stationed at Fort Brown, of passing through a herd of elephants on the Koonap Hill; and it was the common practice for the men of the detachment there in his time to hunt them on the Committee's Flats in the valley of the Ecca. A solitary sea-cow, or *Hippopotamus*, here and there, still lingers in the Fish River, below Trumpeter's Drift, and there still remain several of them in the Keiskamma River.

The Buffalo (*Bubalus Caffer*) still haunts, though in few numbers, the bushy kloofs and sides of the hills between the Grass-Kop and Committee's and Double Drift, and one or two have been killed in that neighbourhood, since the last war, by some Boers living between the two posts. They are hunted with dogs, which bring them to bay, so as to afford a good shot behind the shoulder, or about the ear. The forehead is impenetrable, the brain being there protected by an enormous thickness of bone, forming the standing for the horns. They are excessively savage when wounded, and sometimes they evince a cunning which will prompt them to feign death, so as to delude the unwary to venture too near, when the infuriated brute summons up his strength, and rushes on his adversary, to his almost certain destruction.

The fawn-coloured Koodoo (*Antelope Strepisoceros*), with its

spiral-twisted horns—absent in the female,—one of the handsomest of the large bucks, may be observed in small herds, or solitary, about the Fish River Rand, where they graze in the open glade, on the summit of that range, but their refuge is in the bushy kloofs of the Kinga. Their spoor, horse-shoe shaped, and with the cloven mark in its axis, may often be seen leading from thence to the banks of the Fish River on one side, or the Koonap on the other, in search of water; though the gratification of this appetite does not appear to be daily necessary in any kinds of buck. They also frequent the country between Double Drift and the Grass-Kop, and that eastward of the Fish River, and some have been seen up as far as Liewfontein, on the road to Fort Beaufort.

They come out to feed in the early mornings and late evenings in the open spaces of the bush, and also browse on particular kinds of delicate shrubs, while their spoor may be seen covering the ground in such spots. During the heat of the day, they lie down in the recesses and cool shade of some bushy kloof, near where they had been feeding. In wet and cloudy weather they are less shy, and, like most bucks, seem then to dislike the shelter of the bush, it is said from the dripping of the water through the foliage. In such weather the sportsman can easily follow the spoor, and need not desist from his toil during the day, as probably he may at length come upon the animal or herd feeding. In dry weather it is rather arduous sport. Sometimes they may accidentally be discovered about sunrise out feeding; and in such a case great caution must be used in approaching them, from their acute sense of smell and hearing.

Its ear is large and lobed, and well adapted for detecting the approach of danger, especially from windward. Various covers of small bush, hillocks, ant-heaps, etc., may be employed to obstruct their seeing your approach; and some people have actually taken off their shoes and crept on their hands and knees to get within gunshot. Should the animal, however, get

alarmed, his bound is fine, clearing the bush to his own height, and dashing down thus by repeated leaps, deep into the hollows of some contiguous kloof, whence, being in a state of alarm, it would be vain to follow him.

The Boer proceeds to hunt him otherwise, by traversing the country on horseback, till he finds a fresh spoor, which is followed through every difficulty of ground and bush, at the imminent risk of the clothes of an unaccustomed stranger being torn into shreds by the prickly thorns of the shrubbery. When the morning's spoor is traced, or the animal has been seen unalarmed on entering a kloof, the dogs are fetched, and some of the hunting party enter and station themselves about the head of the kloof, while the dogs are led by another of the party into the bottom, and are driven up so as to turn out the animal, which flies before them, and passes, perhaps, within gunshot of some of the former party.

A well-known Boer was accustomed in this case to follow on the spoor alone, being stripped to the skin, and carrying merely his bandolier round his waist, and his gun in his hand, with his tobacco-pipe, which he lit every now and then to observe the wind set. Should it be with him, he rested till it took a more advantageous direction, when he carried on the track farther through the bush. As the breaking of a twig might be heard by the wakeful animal, or the rustle of the thorns on his clothes, he had stripped himself naked. So, following on by cautious degrees, every now and then lighting his pipe and ascertaining the course of the wind, he would at last come right upon the koodoo, lying in repose in his cover in the bush, and have ample leisure to take a fatal aim.

The flesh forms the richest venison of any of the bucks of this part of the colony, and what is not required for immediate use is cut into strips, hung up, and dried in the sun, forming excellent biltung. The skin, as large and longer than an ox's, is cleaned and pegged out on the ground to dry in the sun, and is afterwards used for various farm purposes by the Boer, or

sold,—chiefly being useful for vorsklahts, the lash of their great waggon whips. Its value may be about £1 a skin, which further makes excellent leather when dressed, etc., for shoes.

The next largest buck frequenting this bush is the powerful Bushbuck (*Tragelaphus, A. Sylvatica*), of a dark brown colour, having black spiral horns with a ridge, the number of twists corresponding to its age. It is further recognised by half-a-dozen white spots on the hind quarters, and one on the cheek, a short tail, white underneath. He wants the usual lachrymal sinus, like the koodoo, the large lachrymal line of the buck's head here being quite flat on its aspect to the cheek. The female has no horns, like all those of that sex of the antelope kind inhabiting the Fish River Bush, and she is seldom seen. The rump and mammary region are white. The male and female of all the smaller bucks are distinguished in the country as ram and ewe, while in the koodoo and other larger ones they are called bull and cow. Inguinal sacs are also possessed by the male bushbuck.

It frequents the deepest and thickest kloofs and bush, and is very shy, though extremely ferocious when wounded, and can inflict serious wounds with its sharp-pointed horns. The Hottentot or Boer, knowing the habitat of any animal, as they are generally solitary, stations himself by dawn in some little krantz or rock, under cover of a bush, overlooking a kloof, and silently awaits the buck coming out to feed at sunrise at the edge of the bush, in the open space or glade, and perchance may obtain a view within gunshot. In very dry weather, they come down from the higher kloofs, and live in the thick lofty bush on the banks of the river, so that the water is nearer: and here the spot they frequent on the banks may become known to the hunter by the frequent spoor, which is lancet-shaped, and marked with the cleft in its axis, which he takes advantage of by stationing himself within proper range on the opposite bank, and awaiting the buck's time of repairing to drink in the even-

ings. They may also be started by following a morning's fresh spoor to their cover in the bush, either with or without dogs : and an opportunity for a shot may be obtained as the buck rises and bounds off, which he does with remarkable power and speed, clearing much over his own height.

A favourite plan of hunting bucks in Lower Albany, adopted by the English farmers, where a kloof can be found separate and surrounded by open country, is in stationing the party with their guns around it at various distances, and sending in beaters up from the bottom of the kloof to scare the game, which rush out according to their number from the edge of the bush, and afford fine practice.

A common plan adopted by the Hottentot in the shooting of smaller bucks of all kinds, is in discovering an open spot of ground which, from the spoor and quantity of fresh dung, he judges is a favourite feeding ground, and excavating a hollow in a close bush within range of this with his knife, wherein he conceals himself before sunrise with his gun, ready on the watch for a buck displaying himself in the open glade which he commands. These coloured people are peculiarly expert in this stealthy kind of sport, which skill their rebel brethren have turned to a too fatal use in the war ; they otherwise will walk cautiously over a favourable tract of bush country, where there are clumps and open glades, and taking views every now and then from behind different shelters, till they, by good fortune, espy in the morning or evening some unwary buck out feeding on the edge of a clump, and are almost certain to bring back one or two on such favourable occasions.

A knowledge of the habitats of the various smaller bucks can be readily acquired by observation of spoor and the presence of their dung—their freshness, or otherwise, leading one to form an opinion of the proximity of the game. During the day, when they are lying down from the shelter of the sun, they may be flushed by good dogs who understand them, when one may get a chance of a shot, as they rush out of the bush and

bound off; but this mode of sport requires a great rapidity of aim to be very successful, as their speed is very great.

Showery cloudy weather is the best to follow this sport; the bucks then leave the denser, cooler kloofs, and frequent the more open bush for the fresh grass and other green food. The breaking of a foreleg does not prevent the entire escape of a wounded buck, but injury to a hinder limb cripples it much more, though not to the extent but that probably a good dog would be required to capture him. From the nature of this part of the country, it is impossible to course them, and all common dogs cannot attain the speed of the buck, nor are they able to clear obstacles which the latter do by most astonishing bounds.

Next to the koodoo, perhaps bushbuck venison may be reckoned as palatable as any; but all these smaller bucks are devoid of fatty materials, and the flesh is very dry, so that to render the meat quite acceptable, it requires to be dressed in peculiar ways. The English farmers sometimes, when sport is no object, and the mere procuring of the skins and flesh for sale or consumption their aim, adopt a more wholesale method of capturing the smaller bucks of all kinds, and one that requires no expenditure of time.

The River Bush is the most frequented resort of these animals during dry seasons, and their resort in any favourable numbers is easily ascertained by the quantity of spoor. Certain narrower tracts of it are bushed in after the manner of a kraalfence, right across from the river bank to the outside edge of the bush, say for eighty yards, except a single narrow opening through which the bucks must pass when traversing the length of the bush to or fro. At this spot a trap is set, a hole is first dug, and a long spring of bush tree fixed in the ground close by, to the upper end of which is tied a *riem* or rope having a running noose at the lower end, which is fixed by a small easily-loosened stick, round the margin of the hole, the spring being then bent down to its utmost. The opening of the hole is covered by other smaller sticks, over which are placed loose

grass and rubbish to hide its artificial appearance. The buck in passing through puts his foot on the covering, which the pressure bruises down, the noose is liberated, the leg caught, and up springs the bender, and so holds the animal in spite of all his endeavours to escape till the poacher arrives. The plan is recommended from its not injuring the skin of the animal by any wound, so that its market value is not lessened.

The Caffres in this country sometimes use a nearly similar method, bushing across the space of the river bush, leaving a single opening where a deep hole is dug, in the bottom of which is fixed an upright sharp-pointed stake, and the opening of the hole is covered lightly with sticks and grass. The buck, instead of being ginned, is here staked. The skins of all these smaller bucks are valuable, being, when prepared with the panion, made into carosses, bed-covers, carpets, etc., for use in the colony, and further form very fine leather stuff. Their usual selling price in the Graham's Town market is from one shilling to one shilling and sixpence.

In all these smaller bucks the *stomach* has the four cavities of the ruminant. The paunch contains a large quantity of semifluid, half-digested vegetable matter, the reticulated cavity the same, which in the *manipulus*, however, is quite dry, preparatory to the chymification effected in the true stomach. The food in the fourth cavity is similar, but more liquefied than in the first two cavities. The *cæcum* is large, contains no formed *faeces*, and the small intestine enters into it at right angles to its axis by a small constricted opening, situated about three inches from the *cul-de-sac* extremity. The colon is much narrower than the *cæcum*, and at its commencement performs two complete circular folds in a separate plane of peritoneum, before becoming a movable free viscus in the abdominal cavity. The spleen is not larger than a crown piece, flat, and lies against the left surface of the stomach. The pancreas is also small and flat in shape. The smallness of the former organ is probably commensurate with the large circulation of the intestinal

tube, affording sufficient amount of portal blood for the liver, and with this circulation being in these animals in a state of almost constant activity, and thus affording a constant supply. The periodical state of these matters in the carnivora may afford greater ground for a larger supplementary organ to receive an unrequired influx on the stomach and intestines, and sustain a steady supply of materials for the liver to elaborate into bile for an ensuing period.

The *Dui-ker* (*Cephalophus Maxwelli*), so called from its bounding mode of progression, is a species of antelope, and rather numerous in the Fish River Bush, where it inhabits the darker-coloured ground covered with clumpy patches of bush. Both its spoor and dung are peculiar from the others, and its habitats consequently become known by these means. It has beautiful shining dun-coloured hair, short erect horns, with three or four annulations at the base, and is marked by a black stripe on the forehead and nose, and an S-shaped streak beneath each eye, indicating the situation of the orifice of the lachrymal sinus. It has a short tail, white underneath. Its speed is very great, in fact swifter than any other kind of the smaller bucks of the colony, which is attained by its numerous bounds, each clearing about thirty feet of level ground. As an object of mere sport, it has very great chances in its favour for escape. Its skin forms good carosses, and its capture for this object is effected by the various means above detailed.

The *Griesbuck* or *Griessteenbuck* (*Tragulus*), rather smaller than the *dui-ker*, takes its colonial name from the reddish-grey coloured skin. Its horns are short, straight, and smooth, and it possesses no tail. Inguinal sac in the male, four teats in the female, and a lachrymal sinus, are further characteristics of its antelope species. It inhabits a part of the bush-belt where the ground is sandstone and clayey, and of a colour apparently assimilated to that of the fur. It is far inferior to the *dui-ker* in speed, being apparently only gifted with running. Its skin is scarcely so valuable as that of the *dui-ker*.

The Steenbuck or *Bleekbuck* (*Tragulus*) is about the size of the *dui-ker*, and frequents bush growing chiefly on sandy clay ground. Its fur is of a shining reddish-yellow colour, the belly white, and the mammary region bounded by a black border on each side. It has two black stripes on the forehead and one on the nose. The horns are erect, short, and smooth, and there is no tail. It partakes in a great measure of peculiarities proper to the *dui-ker* and *griesbuck*. Lachrymal sinus also is present. Its fur is less valuable than either of the other two, from the coarse nature of the hair, and in consequence little employed for carosses, but the skin makes as good leather as the others. Its speed is intermediate between the two former, but its appearance in a natural state is prettier than either. Pairs are generally found together, or may be started by the dogs from bushes not far separate; in the totality they are not so numerous as the other two.

The excretory orifice of the *lachrymal sinus* is single in the *griesbuck*, and opens in a black spot beneath the eye on the cheek. The buccal aspect of the lachrymal bones in this and *dui-ker* and *bleekbuck* is hollowed for the reception of the black-coloured lachrymal sinus, which appears to abound in dark pigmentary matter like sepia, but the excreted fluid when seen is colourless. This gland has no connection with the orbit or eye, and its excretory ducts are single in the *griesbuck* and *bleekbuck*, but open by many pores in the S-shaped black stripe on the cheek of the *dui-ker*. If any use is to be assigned to it as possessed by these three species of antelopes, on what grounds is it dispensed with in the bushbuck and koodoo, which inhabits this bush-belt also? It cannot be for any object connected with the lubrication of the eyeball, as it is placed underneath it, so that its anatomy throws no light apparently on its function.

The *Wild Pig* of the Fish River Bush (*Sus Larratus* and *Phaseochærus*) is seen in two varieties, the larger of a dirty white colour entirely, and possessing three excessively developed

cartilaginous tubercles on the face on each side, two nasal, in appearance like horns, two orbital, and two buccal, which probably serve as fenders from injury to the eyes, in its progress through the thorny dense underwood. These prominences do not exist in the sow, which has a smaller head, but is otherwise similar to the boar. This variety goes by the appellation of *witkop* amongst the Dutch farmers. The smaller variety, called *roewitkop*, is of a dirty reddish-brown colour on the body and limbs, but the hair of the head becomes grey in the older individuals. The young of this kind have a general brown colour, with two or three longitudinal reddish stripes on each side extending from the head to the tail.

The nasal tuberculations seem only here to attain any size in the male, and are entirely, as in the other variety, deficient in the sow, which is also somewhat smaller than the male, but otherwise similar in appearance. The ears in both are erect. The distribution of the teeth in both varieties is as follows: incisors 2/6, canines 1/1-1/1, molars $5\bar{5}/4\bar{4} = 30$. The upper canines rest on their sides, and, directed outwards, seem merely for the purpose of keeping the two edges of their opposites in the lower jaw sharp by their grinding action, as their fibres will act perpendicularly against those of the lower tusks longitudinally.

These animals afford excellent sport during the day, when the Boer hunts them with a pack containing a few strong plucky dogs which have been accustomed to the sport. They frequent the dense bush and thickets, seldom the River Bush, and during the day may be turned out of these retreats, where they repose, by dogs knowing their scent. They then immediately make off, and in difficult thick country give a long chase to the pack, but in more open country are soon run into, as they cannot keep up any lengthened speed, though rapid for short distances.

When they have taken to the dense bush the hunter waits, listening from some overlooking spot to the bark of the dogs,

and hearing how matters are going on, till he becomes aware by the sound that the pig is brought at length to bay, when he then endeavours to get as best he can through the bush, to the assistance of his dogs, who would in a long contest most probably lose some of their numbers. The best of the dogs, when the pig is brought to bay, run up at once, and fasten upon him by the ears, snout, lip, etc., the others assisting, and thus hold him fast, and prevent him doing much mischief, till the Boer's knife between his ribs or a bullet puts a termination to a struggle, which, if not thus interfered with, most likely would end in the defeat of the pack, and death of some of the dogs.

In every seizure, generally one or more dogs get wounded by the formidable tusks, and some are killed altogether, either by the belly being ripped up, or the vessels of the neck in front of the chest lacerated and pierced. Hesitating dogs are liable to suffer most, as may be inferred. By moonlight the wild pigs come out of their retreats, especially during and after rainy weather, when the ground is soft, to feed on the roots, bulbs, etc., which they fancy, and large pieces of ground may sometimes be seen ploughed up by them after a single night's ranging. They may then be hunted very successfully, and sometimes shot when discovered out alone feeding. The flesh of the young is fair pork, but not very fat, and the skins of the older seem the only valuable part, of which the Boer makes his veldschoons, or covers his saddle with.

The flesh of these pigs is most frequently allotted by the Boer to feed his dogs, and is cut off the carcase on the spot, and devoured by them raw.

The common standard of *Cape Horse* remains the same, though good blood has been infused into the race from other parts; yet the native-born progeny sometimes naturally decline to the lower native standard—the horizontal or Y neck, the straight perpendicular shoulder, and the heavy under jaw and narrow chest. The same law would seem to occur in the *Ox* and *Sheep*, the straight back and short horns soon, in a genera-

tion or two, lapse into the hanging neck and hollow back, and long ponderous horns, sometimes six or ten feet between the tips; and the progeny of the well-bred woolled sheep, if let alone, change the curly thick-set coat for one hairy and shaggy and thin, and the small tail for the long pendulous and fat-laden one of the Cape sheep. This deposit of fat in the tail would seem to have some connection with the absence of the usual quantity of internal fat seen in the later breed.

Horses are affected in the lower districts with a congestive fever, implicating the lungs at particular times and seasons, which proves fatal to great numbers, especially such as are turned out to graze all day, whence some attribute the cause to the grass, especially with the dew on. Purging and the maintenance of profuse perspiration are the usual methods of alleviation of the fever. Some are cured, but the majority of cases are unsuccessful, especially with venesection.

The Common Hare (*Lepus*) may be found and shot about the open thickets on stony clayey ground in the level parts of the Bush country, but its flesh is far inferior to that of the English hare, and very dry. It has a grayish fur, and is of considerable size.

Associated with it, but in more stony places, occasionally springs up, and darts off very swiftly and sharply, the mountain hare, Kliphaas, or *red hare*, about half the size of the common species, having a general silver-gray thick fur, red woolly tail, and red legs, and has long hairs round the nose and cheeks. Its skin is very difficult to take off, from its thinness, and slightness, and is difficult to preserve. The flesh is very similar to that of the large species.

Out feeding in the clear moonlight nights after dark, may often, in particular localities, be detected the pretty and singular Spring Hare, Cape Jerboa (*Pedetes Capensis*), in the neighbourhood of open sandy clay soil, interspersed with small bushes, which it browses on, standing on its hind legs. It has many of the peculiarities of the squirrel or sloth, in the shape of its fore

paws, which seem manifestly constructed for grasping branches or holding berries or nuts. Its powerful, strong, sharp incisors can easily bite the small twigs or cut off the wild fruit.

It does not seem adapted to climb trees, and therefore only obtains such food as is within reach of a standing posture on its long hind legs, armed with hoof-like nails on the feet. As the fore feet are made as prehensile organs, it would seem that it is chiefly enabled to progress by leaps, like the kangaroo, from its hind feet and tail, which is long, tolerably thick, and plentifully supplied with muscular power. When wounded it utters a peculiar shrill, melancholy cry. It betakes itself during the day to holes of its own construction in the sandy ground, running amongst the roots of the small thickets.

When in a sleeping posture, or reposing, the long hind legs are stretched out forwards, and between them it buries its head, enfolded at the sides by its fore feet, the tail either extended or sweeping round one side of the body. The tail has a knob-like termination covered with black hair, the remainder being of the usual fawn colour of the body, etc. It has a similar posture with its limbs when reposing on its side.

They are destructive to garden vegetables, and eat of the young mealies as they sprout forth. Its strong rodent incisors are very similar to those of the porcupine, and the fangs extend a long way into each upper and lower maxillary bone. The fur is bright and fulvous, and the hairy tail tinged black at its extremity. There is no external appearance of the testes, a peculiarity shared in by the elephant, seal, and cetacea, according to Professor Jones, who, however, does not allude to the spring hare in the paragraph in his *Comparative Anatomy*. These organs are both included in the abdominal cavity, but into the inguinal canal may be observed inserted the detractor ligament, the agent of the descent of the testes in the young of other animals. Each organ is suspended by its free extremity against, but free of, the anterior walls of the abdomen. The vasa deferentia pass from each testis to the corresponding side of the

base of the bladder, and the vesiculæ seminales exist as entirely separate glands, whose ducts enter the vasa deferentia.

Basking themselves on the sunny side of the krantzies in the evenings and mornings, may generally be seen several of the *Klipdas*, *Cony*, *Rock Rabbit*, or Cape Hyrax (*H. capensis*), sitting together on the stones, and when alarmed by the approach of a stranger, rapidly to dive like lizards into the cavities out of sight. They are of various sizes, from that of a rat up to a full-grown rabbit; their fur is very fine, and the skin soft.

They are classed as pachydermata, but are plantigrade, and the feet are formed similar to those of a monkey, having a cushiony leathery sole all over, extending along the lower surfaces of the fingers and toes, which are provided with little nails, evidently adapting them for their stony peregrinations.

They may be seen ascending up almost perpendicular faces of rock, and they can as rapidly descend without having recourse to a fall to hasten their descent. The distribution of the teeth are as follows: Incisors 2/6, canines 1/1-1/1, molars $\bar{5}$ - $\bar{5}$ /4-4 = 30. The lower incisors are small chisel-shaped, set together, and their edges indented like a saw transversely. The two upper incisors are longer, curved, triangular, pointed, and set apart, and look like canines in every respect as to appearance, and no doubt as to use, for they cannot cut, and are only serviceable to tear, and in fact are suitable tusks. The molars are all tuberculated. No tail.