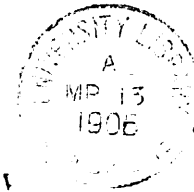


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THE EAST AFRICA  
PROTECTORATE

BY

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*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS*



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full of complaints about the injury done to their wires, because monkeys will swing on them, or thoughtless giraffes walk across the line without making allowance for the length of their necks.

Africa south of the Sahara, excluding the northern part of the continent, but including southern Arabia, forms the zoological district known as Ethiopian, and characterised both by the absence of many well-known families, and by the remarkable development of some groups of mammals. Bears, tapirs, deer, wild sheep and goats, and typical swine are entirely, or almost entirely, absent; and the same is the case with several less conspicuous classes, such as shrews and beavers. On the other hand, apes, carnivora, and some classes of ungulata are represented very largely, and often by forms unknown in other parts of the world. Peculiar to Ethiopian Africa are the two great anthropoid apes, the gorilla and chimpanzee, as well as a host of smaller monkeys and baboons. Among the carnivora, lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas, jackals, wild cats, and wild dogs occur in inconvenient abundance. But most remarkable and conspicuous of all are the huge and sometimes beautiful ungulata—the elephants, rhinoceros, giraffes, hippopotami, zebras, buffaloes, and all the host of antelopes. As these latter are sometimes erroneously called deer, it may perhaps be well to remind the reader that deer, which do not occur in the Ethiopian region, have antlers, which are usually branched, and which periodically fall off and are renewed, whereas the antelopes have simple permanent horns of quite a different structure, which never fall off.

Explanations of zoological distribution are peculiarly speculative, and therefore changeable. In order to account for the habitat of the existing fauna of the world, naturalists have turned the ocean into dry land, and submerged or fished up continents and islands as often as suited their theories. The main facts connected with the Ethiopian region are that its fauna presents marked resemblances to that of south-eastern Asia, as, for instance, the presence in both of

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ANIMALS

ONE of the striking and unique features of East Africa is the extraordinary abundance of large game. Taking the animal kingdom as a whole, it cannot be said to show extreme exuberance. Snakes, centipedes, and scorpions are less heard of than in most tropical countries; though mosquitoes and flies are a nuisance here and there, they are local, and large districts are free from them. One does not feel, as in some parts of South America, that one is surrounded on every side by the brilliant fluttering life of birds and butterflies, and that every flower and plant is teeming with insects. Water-birds are very plentiful on the banks of lakes and rivers, and the Coast offers a fair show of bright plumage; but the dense forests of the Highland hills are remarkable for their deep, dead stillness, unbroken by any sight or sound of living things. Much the same may be said of all Uganda and the countries by the Upper Nile, except on the banks. High grass grows everywhere, and the cover which it affords creates an impression, in this case undoubtedly erroneous, that it contains few animals.

But in the uplands of the East Africa Protectorate, particularly in the Rift Valley and the plains between Nairobi and Makindu, all the conditions are favourable to spectacular effect. The animals are large, and, as there is hardly any vegetation except short grass, nothing interrupts the view. Beasts which are generally thought of as the rare possession of some fortunate zoological garden, here walk about in flocks as numerous as ordinary cattle, and not much more disturbed by the passing trains. The reports of telegraph officials are

the lion, elephant, and rhinoceros, and marked differences from that of Madagascar. The idea that there was once a continent where is now the Indian Ocean seems to be abandoned, and the hypotheses now in favour to explain the above coincidences and differences are two, the first that Equatorial Africa was the centre where many prominent types, particularly the larger ungulata, were developed, and whence they radiated; and the second the exact opposite, namely, that these forms were originally developed in Europe or Asia and penetrated to Equatorial Africa, where, owing to their being relatively unmolested by man, they survived longer and in greater numbers. This latter theory was originated by Huxley, who had not before him all the data now available, but saw his way to his conclusions with the prevision of genius, and the tendency of the most recent biological research, influenced specially by the discovery of various extinct mammals in the Libyan desert, is to revert to it rather than to the hypothesis of equatorial origin. It is, in fact, thought that there are only three primary zoological regions, Australia, South America, and the third comprising all Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. In this latter region, the original productive centre was in the northern rather than in the southern hemisphere, and the peculiar fauna of Madagascar is explained on the supposition that it had already been severed from the mainland when the larger apes, carnivora, and ungulata migrated into Africa.

In many parts of Africa indiscriminate destruction has rendered game scarce and shy, even where it has not been actually exterminated, and, as far as I know, it is only in the East Africa Protectorate that one finds this remarkable combination of numbers, fearlessness, an open country, and comparative accessibility.

The animals which appear in greatest numbers on the plains are zebras, hartebeests, and two kinds of gazelle, *Gazella Grantii* and *Thomsoni*. On a favourable day, it is hardly an exaggeration to say, that from the train one may see miles of

zebras walking parallel to the railway in long lines. Like all the game, they are not at all shy as long as the train is in motion, though it is said that they will make off if it stops and the passengers descend. I myself have seen a zebra approach the line, halt about twenty yards off while the train passed, and then cross with the utmost calm. This fearlessness is due to the fact that the whole territory to the south of the railway between Nairobi and the Tsavo River is a game reserve where shooting is absolutely forbidden, and the limits of this reserve are extended for one mile on the other side of the railway. The result is that animals have come to know that they are always safe near the line. It would seem that the zebra, like most horses, has not much fear of man. When young it is very easily tamed, and will follow its owner about like a dog, enter his house, and jump on his bed, signs of affection which are somewhat embarrassing in a hoofed animal, and make one realise what horse-play means. The adult zebra is also tractable, but has not hitherto proved of great practical utility on account of a certain weakness in the shoulder compared with horses or mules. Experiments in training them have been fairly successful, but hitherto better results have been obtained in German than in British territory, as the herd of zebras kept at the Government farm near Naivasha were attacked by intestinal worms, which occasioned very serious mortality. In their wild state they would probably have found some herb, which when eaten destroys the parasite.

Next to the zebra, perhaps the most numerous and conspicuous animal is the hartebeest (*Bubalis Jacksoni* and *Cokeri*), large, heavy antelopes of a somewhat bovine build, but with a suggestion of the giraffe in their appearance, as the back slopes downwards from the neck to the tail. The bases of the horns are close together, and set on a sort of pedestal rising from the forehead, which is characteristic of the genus. Near the hartebeest may sometimes be seen the less common wildebeest, or gnu, remarkable for the tufts of hair on its throat and face, which give it a strange appearance, and also

for the extraordinary antics and capers in which it from time to time indulges.

Slighter and more graceful than these great beasts are the beautiful gazelles, which are found in thousands on the plains. I have seen the country near Elmenteita, in the Rift Valley, literally covered by them, so that it appeared of a sandy yellow. The *Gazella Thomsoni* is small, measuring only about 25 inches in height at the shoulder, and has a well-developed dark lateral band. The *G. Grantii* is larger, about 34 inches at the shoulder, but the lateral band is indistinct.

As a rule, too, the traveller will see ostriches from the train in small families composed of a cock bird and two or three hens.<sup>1</sup> If he has luck, he may also see giraffes, lions, or rhinoceros.

The mention of this last word reminds me of a problem which has tormented me all the time that I have been in East Africa, namely, what is the plural of rhinoceros? The conversational abbreviations "rhino," "rhinos," seem beneath the dignity of literature, and to use the sporting idiom by which the singular is always put for the plural, is merely to avoid the difficulty. Liddell and Scott seem to authorise "rhinocerotes," which is pedantic, but "rhinoceroses" is not euphonious.

But whatever the plural of rhinoceros may be, most people are quite satisfied with meeting one of them. The creature is an exception to what I believe to be the general rule of nature, namely, that animals are good-tempered unless they are defending themselves or pursuing their prey. But the rhinoceros has a really bad, cantankerous temper, and that without much excuse, for his food is vegetable; he is so extremely ugly and well-defended, that he need not worry much about his enemies, and he is attended by a bird which makes it its special task to relieve him of ticks. The only infirmity from which he is

<sup>1</sup> South African experts report that the east coast or Somaliland ostrich has poor plumes, but that the northern variety, which is found in the Rift Valley, has very fine feathers.

known to suffer is short sight, and possibly the annoying surprises which he meets as he stumbles through life are a sufficient cause for his conduct. Occasionally one sees a shrub or small tree which has been battered down and knocked into the ground, and one is told by the natives that this is due to a fit of temper in a rhinoceros, which has taken a sudden objection to the plant's existence. It is also said that he attacks and gores ostriches and other animals. To mankind he is particularly objectionable on account of his habit of charging through caravans, when his formidable horn may do the most serious damage if it comes in contact with the human person. I do not know whether it is a mere coincidence, or whether the unreasonable animal has any special prejudice against pots and pans, but in two cases of which I know he attacked the cook's portion of a camp, scattered the utensils right and left, and pierced several by tossing them on his horn.

The giraffe is perfectly harmless in all its ways, but of all living creatures I have seen is the most grotesque, and, did it not really exist, the most improbable. When you first see them jogging across a plain, their necks held in a line with their sloping backs (not upright as in pictures), you rub your eyes and ask if you are dreaming, so strange are the creatures' shape and movements, as if they were visitors from another world or relics of some distant age when the principles of mechanics were different. They look perhaps most like telescopes set on four legs. Except for its extraordinary appearance, the giraffe appears to be a perfectly commonplace creature, and does nothing remarkable. The Masai quaintly call it "the beast that wants a long bed"—*Ol-o-ado-kiragata*.

Neither the hippopotamus nor the elephant, being sagacious beasts, are much given to showing themselves, though their tracks are common. The former is abundant in most places where there is water—in the rivers on the coast, whence they sometimes make short excursions into the sea, in Lake Victoria, and, above all, in the higher reaches of the Nile where it issues from Lake Albert. Elephants are perhaps commoner