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*by the same author*

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

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# LAKE CHAD

*Foreword by*  
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Beid delta areas and hinterland, a very noticeable and significant recovery of wildlife has resulted from stringent and progressive wildlife conservation measures, affecting many species but in particular the West African giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*), the black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) and Derby's eland (*Taurotragus derbianus*), as well as the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*).

More recent conservation measures in the Republic of Tchad may be expected to result in a recovery of the scimitar or white oryx (*Oryx algazel*) (Diag. 25) and the addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*)

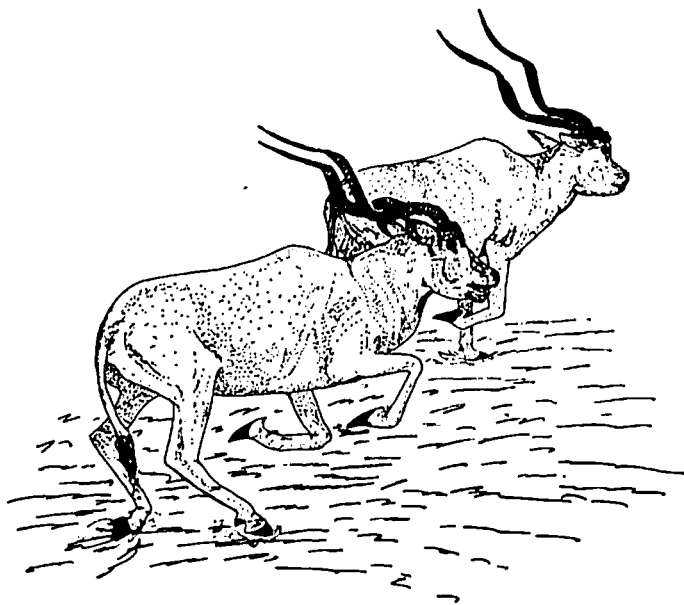


Diagram 26 Addax, *Addax nasomaculatus*, the fleetest of all the antelope to be found around Lake Chad

(Diag. 26) in Kanem. No comparable modern conservation measures have yet been undertaken in Nigeria and Niger, and it seems doubtful that the full range of species formerly found on their shores of the lake can now be recovered naturally.

Three groups of red-fronted gazelles lived in the bush within a ten-mile radius of Minetti. One of these comprised a male, two females and a calf, while in each of the other two there was just one male with one female. On various occasions also we saw red-fronted

gazelles between Kauwa Cross\* and Baga, but these were always shy and kept far away from the road. We also saw several between Gajiram and Malamfatori on the sand road. In September, the District Head of Kukawa presented me with a young female red-fronted gazelle which I called 'Twinkle'. She was already quite tame, having been hand-reared by the women in a local Kanuri compound. The District Head himself also had two tame situtungas in his own walled compound at Kukawa. These are beautiful marsh antelopes still found in certain places in the lake swamps.

Twinkle was a very prim little gazelle, always reminding me of the product of a 'best English girls' finishing school' of the 1930s. As more wild orphans joined the little collection at Minetti, Twinkle always remained at the head of the peck order, assuming a delightful 'head girl prefect' attitude and taking pains to ensure that her senior status was clearly understood on arrival by each newcomer.

The second ungulate to arrive was 'Star'. She was a very young, very weak situtunga calf. A hunter had found her hidden by her dam in the marshes and brought her first by canoe, and later by lorry, to Minetti. She was so weak and dehydrated that I was doubtful if she could possibly survive. It was difficult, even assisting her, to get her to swallow the warm, diluted milk that I prepared, but, with constant attention over the first few days, she began to pick up and became strong enough to share the improvised pen with Twinkle and two other orphans, Pumpkin (a leopard cub) and Ginger (a patas monkey).

The situtunga (*Limnotragus spekei*) is a beautiful antelope specifically adapted for life in tropical African marshes. The hooves are elongate, and may be widely splayed as the animal walks over deep, soft mud. The habits of the situtunga recall those of the North American moose, that huge semi-aquatic cervid, that loves to stand for hours submerged under water with only its head showing. The situtunga also likes to stand in deep water among the reeds and papyrus, and does not hesitate to swim when necessary (Diag. 27). Its preferred food consists of marsh grasses and other soft herbs, and each pair of situtungas occupies a well-defined territory. Usually only one calf is born at a time, but twins are not unknown. During the 1969-70 expedition I saw wild situtungas on three occasions, and each time was absolutely enraptured with the beauty of this creature

\* The small village and roundabout where the Maiduguri/Malamfatori and Kukawa/Baga roads cross each other.

on the basis of skin pattern in both the situtunga and the bushbuck, but it is quite evident, when one sees the variation in individual pattern in hides collected in the same locality, that there is no sound basis for this type of classification.

When 'Star' joined 'Twinkle' she was, even then, at only about a week or ten days old, taller and longer than Twinkle and much more gangly in appearance due to her long, flexed limbs, elongate hooves and head position. The head is generally held low and forward. She took long, low steps, or long bounds that looked as though they were performed in slow motion. Twinkle, on the other hand, adapted for life in the hard, dry savannahs, took quick, short, neat steps, flicking her tail constantly as if nervous. Her little hooves were dainty and trim, and she held her head high – a little haughtily, perhaps. Her eyes were small and sharp, her ears smaller in proportion to her head, and her nose a bit 'roman' in style; whereas Star raised her head only when she stopped and stood still. Then she would spread her great round ears and look out through large, limpid, shade-adapted eyes with a gentle, self-effacing look. Star was definitely more near-sighted than Twinkle, the gazelle of the open grasslands and savannahs. Then again, Twinkle's coat was short and very trim and neat, with its longitudinal black stripe, whereas Star's coat was long and a little shaggy, as if perhaps it needed brushing. Standing together in the pen, these two seemed to epitomise the perfection of their adaptation to their two completely contrasted environments existing within the same neighbourhood.

In late November another situtunga orphan joined our menagerie: this was called 'Minetti' after the name of our base camp. She was quite distinct from Star as she had a sorrel coat, whereas Star's was basically a light chestnut colour. Although younger when brought in, she was in much better condition and threw from the beginning. Both these situtungas later went to the Jos Zoo (Nigeria) to join 'Yobe', a much older male with a sable-coloured, pattern-free coat, caught near Malamfatori.

The dorcas, or white-rumped gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*), is generally smaller in size than the red-fronted gazelle, and typically lacks the longitudinal, black side stripe. Like the Thomson's (*Gazella thomsoni*) and Grant's (*G. granti*) of East Africa, the range of the red-fronted and the dorcas overlap and, moreover, intermediate forms occur. As in the case of Thomson's and Grant's gazelles, the occurrence of intermediate forms within mixed herds is suggestive of interbreeding,

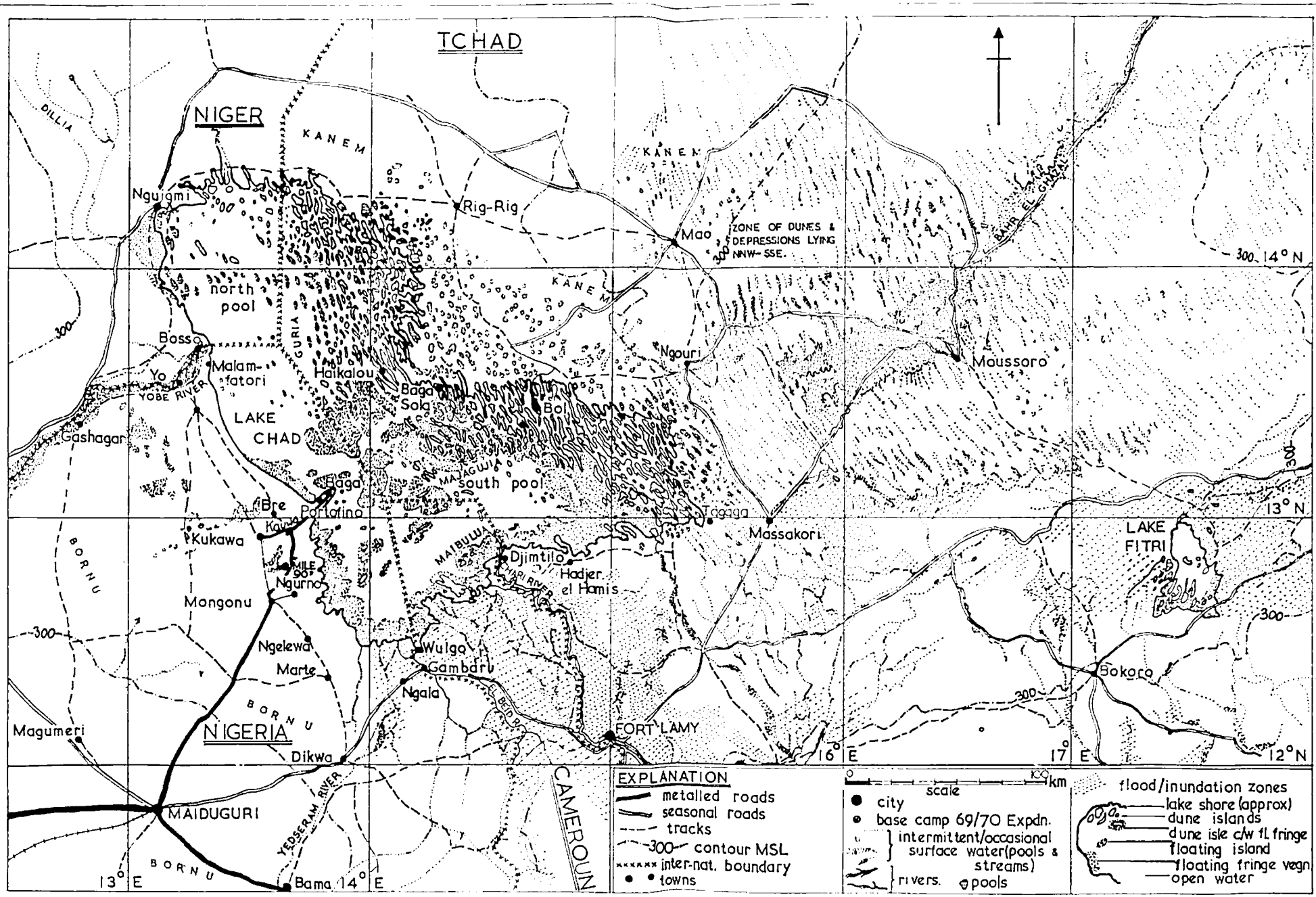
although convincing evidence to prove it is apparently still lacking.

Around the northern and north-eastern shores of Lake Chad, both the slender dama (*Gazella dama*) and the larger, white, or scimitar oryx antelope (*Oryx algazel*) occur. The former stands some 90–100cms at the shoulder, with sturdy, annulated horns some 25–30cms long; while the latter stands 120cms at the shoulder and carries slightly curved, slender, sabre-like horns which may reach 115cms length. The colouration of the dama is red-russet on the back, flanks and part of the head, the rump, belly and part of the legs being white. The tip of the tail is black. The colour of the oryx is white with chestnut, brown or greyish markings on the face, neck, lower flanks and upper parts of the legs. The tail tip bears a tuft of long, dark hairs. It is interesting to note that these desert ungulates so often have a whitish general appearance and dark tail tip, whereas the underside of the tail in darker coloured, shade-dwelling, tail-raising types such as the bushbuck and situtunga are frequently white. The tail appears to be a communicatory organ in many ungulates, especially between parents and their young.

Both the dama and the oryx migrate along routes with a north-south alignment with the seasons, moving south in the drier weather and north in the rains, but, whereas the oryx prefers to live in small herds (a habit disrupted under heavy hunting pressure) not exceeding twenty animals, the dama gazelles may gather in herds of up to one or two hundred at certain seasons, while at other times they revert to groups of not more than two or three animals.

Antelope and gazelles typical of the Sudan and transitional Sudan-Sahel savannahs tend to occur more on the Cameroun side of the lake. These include a variety of species including the bubal hartebeest, duikers, waterbuck and, further south, giraffe, black rhinoceros, Derby's eland and elephant, for example, together with leopard, smaller cats, hyaena and even lion in the adjacent hinterland.

The common jackal (*Canis aureus*) is not infrequent around most of the lake shores, and the wild hunting dog (*Lycæon pictus*) is said still to occur in the Chari and Logone basins. The pale fox (*Vulpes pallida*) also occurs widely in the vicinity of the lake, and the fennec (*Fennecus zerda*), an insectivorous and frugivorous fox-like animal, is said to occur to the north and north-east of the lake. We frequently encountered civets (*Civettictis civetta*), white-tailed mongooses (*Ichneumia albicauda*), the wild African cat (*Felis lybica*) and the Lake Chad hare (*Lepus chadensis*) on the road at night between



**EXPLANATION**

- metallated roads
- seasonal roads
- tracks
- 300 contour MSL
- inter-nat. boundary
- towns
- city
- base camp 69/70 Expan.
- intermittent/occasional surface water (pools & streams)
- rivers
- pools

scale 100 km

- flood/inundation zones
- lake shore (approx)
- dune islands
- dune isle c/w fl. fringe
- floating island
- floating fringe vege.
- open water