

CHAPTER 9

MAMMALS, BIRDS, FISHES, REPTILES AND
INSECTS

MAMMALS

by Reay Smithers

IN spite of the increasing pressure of development the mammalian fauna of the Federation still ranks high in richness and variety with similar faunas in other parts of the African continent. On the whole, however, it is less well known and tends to be concentrated in areas difficult of access to the general public.

The provision of increasingly adequate conservation areas in the form of national parks, game reserves and other specially protected areas is being given attention and the development of these points to a growing realization of the value of this fauna, more especially the "big game", as a natural resource and a heritage that, within the limits of development, should be conserved for coming generations.

Among the major factors in the reduction of big game populations are the destruction of the natural habitat, which comes with agricultural and other forms of land use, and the indiscriminate shooting of the animals in areas where the indigenous people are armed or in areas being developed for settlement. In some part at least the former is inevitable—the latter becomes easier to control as conservation services grow with the development of the territory.

In the more densely settled areas of the Federation, such as in parts of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia and on the plateau of Southern Rhodesia, big game has largely disappeared on account of one or other or a combination of the above factors. It is surprising, nevertheless, how certain species, e.g., Kudu and Impala and some of the smaller species, e.g., Duiker and Steenbuck, manage to persist in spite of pressure, and all species of mammals found within the Federation can reasonably be expected to persist at least in the conservation areas. None, at the moment are in danger of extermination except on a local basis.

Owing to the size of the Federation and the wide variety of habitats encompassed within its frontiers, its faunal affinities are widespread, varying from elements of the West African in the presence of the Yellow-backed Duiker in the forested areas of north and north-western Northern Rhodesia; South and East African in the Impala; Central African in the Lechwe and Puku of the open flood plain areas of the Kafue River in Northern Rhodesia; with the incursion of such species as the Gemsbuck, of the arid areas of Bechuanaland, into the Wankie

National Park in the west; and the Inyala, of the heavily wooded areas of the east, into the riverine forests of the south-eastern part of Southern Rhodesia and the Longwe and Mwabvi areas of Nyasaland.

The largest living land mammal, the Elephant, is still widely distributed and plentiful in certain areas such as the Luangwa Valley in Northern Rhodesia, parts of Nyasaland such as the Mijeti, Kasunzu and Kota Kota areas and in the north-west, north and north-east of Southern Rhodesia where indeed they are probably more plentiful today than at the time of original European occupation. Black Rhino and Hippo are to be found in restricted areas, the White Rhino in spite of rumour to the contrary has not been proved to occur but if it does it will be found in the extreme north-east of Southern Rhodesia in the Zambezi Valley area.

Compared with the heavily forested areas to the north the Federation is poor in Primates, these being represented by two species of Baboon, one of which the Chacma persists even in farming areas where it is a pest; four species of Monkeys, one of which, the Colobus, has been recorded in the border area in the north-east, the Vervet being still common throughout, and the Blue Monkey in the eastern forested areas. Night-apes and the larger Bushbaby occur throughout, the latter more commonly in the eastern, better watered parts of the country.

The Carnivora are well represented by several families including the Aard Wolf which occurs commonly in Southern Rhodesia but rarer farther north, two species of Hyena, the Spotted and the Brown, Serval Cat, Leopard, now generally protected as a predator on Baboons, Cheetah and Lion, which has to a considerable extent been exterminated in developed areas to which, however, they occasionally find their way on marauding expeditions from more remote districts and which can be seen in numbers in national parks and game reserves. Although rarely seen, as they are predominantly nocturnal, Serval and Civet Cats, Genets and Mongoose are still widely distributed and plentiful throughout the territory and are notorious in farming districts for their predations on poultry. Wild dogs and jackals of two species, the Black-backed and Side-striped, occur in all three Territories of the Federation, both ranging widely into ranching areas where they are a menace to stock. The Black-backed Jackal in particular makes its way even into the peri-urban areas of the larger towns.

Among the lesser known carnivora, the Honey Badger or Ratel, the Zorille or "Skunk", as it is sometimes wrongly called, occur widely and in parts commonly, the Bat-eared Fox, however, being confined to the dry south-western areas.

The Ant Bear, the only living representative of the family Tubulidentata, which feeds predominantly on termites, and the scaly Pangolin, often wrongly called an "Armadillo", which lives on ants, occur widely.

In rocky country two species of Dassies or Rock Rabbits occur commonly.

Two of the three families of odd-toed Ungulates are represented by the Black Rhino and the Zebra, the latter widespread and in certain areas still in large herds.

The even-toed Ungulates, which as a group includes the majority of species classed as "big game", are represented by four families; the first, the Hippopotamus, can still be seen in the major rivers as well as along the shores of Lake Nyasa and in some parts remains abundant. The second, the Pigs, are represented by the Warthog and the Bush Pig, the latter having, owing to its secretive and nocturnal habits, managed to persist and in some areas where the larger predators have been exterminated is even on the increase in areas where there is sufficient cover for them to lie up in and hide during the day.

The third, the Giraffe, has today a restricted and discontinuous distribution in Northern Rhodesia, being found only in Barotseland and in the Luangwa Valley, in Southern Rhodesia in the extreme west in the Wankie National Park and its vicinity and in the south-west part of the Territory.

The fourth and largest family, the Bovidae, includes the Antelopes and is represented by a wide variety of species including most of the animals classed under the heading "big game". The Buffalo is still widely distributed and in some areas numerous and where protected is on the increase. Eland, one of the largest Antelopes is, in parts of Northern and Southern Rhodesia, quite common but nowhere as numerous as formerly, although in Nyasaland on the Nyika Plateau occurring in herds of up to one hundred and fifty. Kudu and Duiker have managed to hold their own in the face of severe persecution even in farming areas and Bushbuck occur throughout where there is sufficiently dense underbush, especially in the vicinity of rivers. The curious Sitatunga, which live most of their lives deep in the larger swamp areas in Northern Rhodesia such as Bangweulu and Mweru, do not occur in Southern Rhodesia or east of the Luangwa Valley. Red and Black Lechwe are confined to Northern Rhodesia, the former with a range from the southern Barotseland border to Lake Mweru and the Puku with a similar distribution although extending farther north.

Blue Duiker are confined to the more heavily forested areas especially in the north and east, in Southern Rhodesia only in the underbush of montane forest on the border with Portuguese East Africa and the Yellow-backed Duiker, characteristic of the West African fauna, in the north and north-western forested areas of Northern Rhodesia only.

Two species of Waterbuck occur, the Common, with the white ring round the base of the tail, in Southern Rhodesia, parts of the Luangwa Valley and in Southern Nyasaland, the Defassa replacing it in the remainder of the area where it is localized and nowhere common. The Reedbuck is widely distributed on a localized basis as is the Impala, both having been exterminated in areas where they were formerly common.

The Impala is particularly scarce in the Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia but where afforded a reasonable measure of protection elsewhere may occur in quite large herds.

Klipspringer, with their spiny pelage, are confined to rocky country and consequently localized albeit of wide distribution. Oribi, although occurring widely are, in the western part of Southern Rhodesia, confined to a small area in the north-west on the Bechuanaland border and in Nyasaland predominantly in the Nyika Plateau area. Less is known of the range of the Steenbuck which is common in Southern Rhodesia but apparently otherwise only in Barotseland, parts of the Southern Province of Northern Rhodesia and in the Balovale area. Sharpe's Steenbuck, often wrongly called the Grysbeck, is more widespread throughout.

Sable Antelope are absent from large areas such as the valleys of the Luangwa and Zambesi Rivers, in the latter below the Victoria Falls, but otherwise like its near relative the Roan occurs sparsely throughout. Wildebeeste are patchy in distribution and Lichtenstein's Hartebeeste quite common in Barotseland and the western parts of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland but are now otherwise only found in a restricted area in the south-east of Southern Rhodesia. Tsessebe are in general confined to the western parts of Northern and Southern Rhodesia or on the flats south-east of Lake Bangweulu and in the Mpika and Serenje districts of Northern Rhodesia.

The tiny Livingstone's Suni occurs in Nyasaland and the extreme south-east of Southern Rhodesia in thick forest underbush.

Among the smaller animals, Hares, of the genus *Lepus*, are common everywhere, the Red Hare, however, being found only in the vicinity of rocky country and consequently of scattered distribution.

The Clawless Otter is common in rivers and swamps throughout, and the White-necked Otter has a more limited distribution in the west and north of Northern Rhodesia and in Nyasaland only.

Porcupines, Cane Rats, Spring Hares and several species of Squirrels, two of which are widespread and common, occur as well as the Scaly-tail, often wrongly called a Flying Squirrel, in the west and north-west parts of Northern Rhodesia. Dormice and a host of species of rats and mice including the Giant, Pouched Rat and the plague-carrying Gerbil, the introduced Alexandra Rat and House Mouse from Europe occur, the common "house-mouse" of the Federation being the indigenous veld rodent the Multimammate Mouse which has adapted itself to living with man. Mole Rats are common and, in a restricted area of the eastern border of Southern Rhodesia, the Golden Mole is found.

Insectivorous and fruit-eating Bats are abundant, many interesting and diverse forms occurring, less being known about this group however than most others.



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