

# A NATURALIST IN RUSSIA

*Letters from Peter Simon Pallas to  
Thomas Pennant* edited by Carol Urness

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PALLAS

give me leave to tell you that Mr. Forster has been very wrong, to make the Sevruga of the Russians the same fish with the young Sturgeon of which you have given a figure, & to assert that the true Sturgeon is not to be found about England. Young Sturgeons have always that very appearance, your figure exhibits, and the older they grow, the more they become bluntnosed & round backed the scuta diminishing in proportion. Whereas the Sevruga is a very constant species, much more slender, never growing to the full weight of a Sturgeon, and with a nose much longer than their heads. I have exceeding good figures of all the species of Sturgeons, which will be published as soon as other occupations permit. If the Hudson's bay Sturgeon (Phil. Trans. vol. LXIII. p. 150.) resembles your figure, there is no doubt but that the true Sturgeon goes up Hudsons river, as it does also in the rivers that flow into the Northern Ocean. And now I think you will be as much tired of reading as I am of writing; therefore conclude with assuring you of the true respect & attachment with which I will ever remain,

Dear Sir

Your most obedient & much obliged humble servt.

PS Pallas

S. Petersburgh

August 2/13 1778

P.S. Pray what is become of Mr. Drury? I hear he is bankrupt. If you see him in London, whenever you go there and his affairs are not too much disorder'd, pray remind

concern Russian discoveries in the North Pacific, and this section was translated into English by Thomas Jefferys as *Voyages from Asia to America, for Completing the Discoveries of the North West Coast of America* (London, 1761). In 1766 a French edition appeared in Amsterdam, and these two editions were standard narratives for Western scholars interested in Russian exploration.

11 The plants requested are the Scottish lovage, pipewort, and St. Dabeoc's heath.

him of the Insects he promised to send me in return for what he received. —You would oblige me very much, by procuring occasionally specimens of the Ligust. cum Scoticum, Eriocaulon decangulare, Erica Dabaecii,<sup>11</sup> & any other plants peculiar to the British Islands.

*Some Remarks on the Synopsis of Quadrupeds*

Pag. 4. There is no wild Catle in any part of Sibiria; Some are say'd to be found in Mount Caucasus, but there is no more of it to the Eastward of Persia & the Caspian Sea. What is found wild in the desarts & mountains toward Tybet & India is —

Pag. 5. The Box grunniens or Bugha [yak] of which the Mongols have a tame race, that breeds even in Sibiria, & which I account to be the Buffalo in its wild State, and more hairy in these northern climates.

Pag. 8. Some Skulls of the American Bison which, you have given the first figure of, have been brought to me from the Arctik mossy plains near the river Oby, where they had been found not very far from the Ocean. I have described them in the XVII. Volume of the Nov. Comment. Petrop. together with the Head of a Rhinoceros, that had been found with its Skin & tendons preserved, in a frozen soil upon the Banks of the river Witim, that flows into the Lena.

Pag. 9. I think however Buffon was right in giving the curious horns he had from La Caille,<sup>1</sup> as belonging to an animal of the Cape of Good Hope. This animal is the

1 Nicholas Louis de La Caille (1713–1762) was a French traveler who wrote an account of his voyage to South Africa, *Journal historique du Voyage fait au Cap de Bonne-Esperance* (Paris, 1763).

Gnou, now described by Allamand in a Supplement to the Dutch Edition of Buffon; & Dr. Sparrman also has observed it.

Pag. 13. In the XIth Fascic. of my Spicilegia you will find the account of a peculiar Goat (Aegagrum) [wild goat], that should be added after the Ibex. The Capra caucasica [Caucasian tur] of Gùldenstaedt<sup>2</sup> is truly different from both, & seems a medium between the Ibex & Musimon [moufflon]. It will be described in the Second Volume of the acta. Acad. Petrop. which make its appearance about the End of this Year.

Pag. 20. I never remarked a third tubercle on the head of the Giraffa at Leyden. [There is often a third horn, also skin-covered, in front of the giraffe's paired horns.]

Pag. 27. Kaempfer's<sup>3</sup> Capricerva [antelope] is to be referr'd to the abovementioned Capricerva.

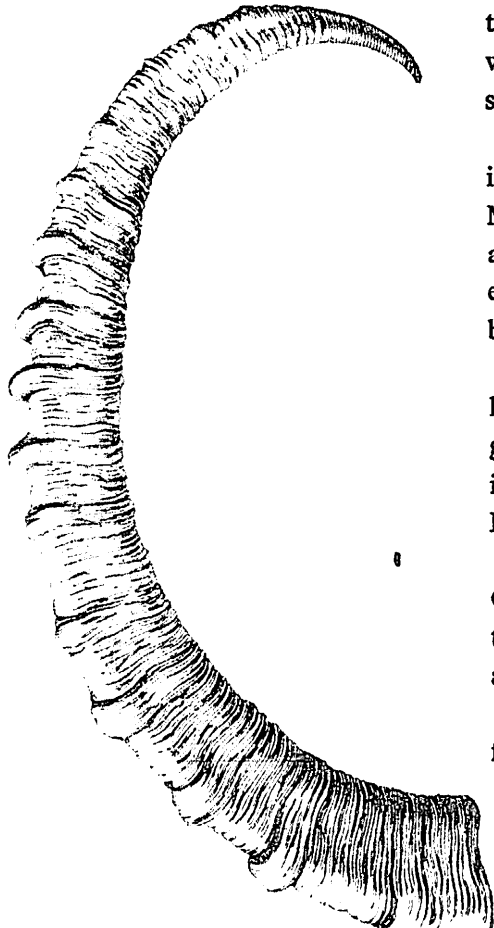
Pag. 29. Dr. Hunter says in his descr. of the Nylghaux [nilghai, a large antelope of E. India] that you intend to make a new genus of that animal in a future Edition of your Synopsis. I think this would be wrong as there can be no real distinction for it.

Pag. 212. The weesel in the North of Europe & through all Siberia grows white in Winter, & even resembles in that State the Ermine by a few blak hairs at the tip of its tail. The Mustela nivalis of Linné is nothing else but this winter variety of our common Weesel.

Tab. VIII. is a wrong representation of the Reindeer in gallop, which it never

2 Johann Anton Gùldenstädt (1745-1781), naturalist and member of the Academy. He was a junior member of the expedition headed by Pallas in 1768-1774.

3 Engelbrecht Kaempfer (1651-1716), a German physician and naturalist. In 1683 Kaempfer was in Moscow, then he went on to Persia, Java, Siam, and Japan, returning in 1694. His account of this trip was published as *The History of Japan . . . written in High Dutch by E. Kaempfer . . . and translated from his original manuscript, never before printed . . .* (2 vols., London, 1728).



betakes to, even when it runs full Speed. I communicated a fine figure of this animal to Dr. Schreber, who publishes that fine Set of Zoological Plates — in Germany, which will be the compleatest Set of this kind that ever was attempted. [The illustration shows the running animal with both front feet off the ground.]

Pag. 63. The *Camelus Bactrianus* [Bactrian or two-humped camel], far from being scarce in Asia, is the most common beast of burthen with all tribes of Tartars & Mongols, from the Caspian to the Chinese Empire, & bears even so rough a climate, as that of Siberia, about the Lake Baikal. In contrary the single lumped Camel [dromedary] is very scarce in Asia & found hardly farther than Persia, being too tender to bear the climate. It is even reputed scarce among the Crimean Tartars.

Pag. 71. The *Aper aethiopicus* [wart-hog] had no more foreteeth when he was killed some Years after we saw him (in 1767). Dr. Camper also writes to me that he got a large cranium of it from the Cape, which also wants the foreteeth. The cranium in the Ashmolean Museum may very probably belong to the *Sanglier du Capvert* of Buffon.

Pag. 83. The *Capyvar* [capybara, South American rodent] is certainly a true Cavy, only differing by being web footed. It is not hoofed, but has only long nails, threetoed behind; consequently it cannot be joined with the *Tapir*, an animal more akin to the *Hippopotamus*, *Rhinoceros* & *Hog*.

Pag. 138. Tab. 16. The yellow *Maucauco* [Bosman's potto — a lemur], I am sure, for I saw it twice alive, is a true *Viverra*.

## VI

Decr. 27th 1778

DEAR SIR,

I make no doubt, but my Letter directed to your friend Edw. Darrell Esqr. is arrived safe & has informed You of the Mistake that has happened with the Parcels directed to you & Mrs. Blakburne, which I hope may be arrived safe before this, & certainly must be found out if Mr. White of London enquires at due time for it after the arrival of *Capt. Beddington* on board whose Ship, which I think is called *the Ann*, the Box was shipp'd for London. I wish the Content of it may prove agreeable to Mrs. Blakburne & to yourself. If it should be in your power to procure some Seaweeds & Corallines roughly dryed from the Coast of Wales or Cornwall, I should be infinitely obliged to you for them. Perhaps You could join them in the Parcell Mrs. Blakburne may intend for me next Summer. If you should happen to write to Lord Hope,<sup>1</sup> I would begg of you to remind me to his Lordship & to tell him, that I have not yet received any of the Leadores of His Lordship's mines, which he was pleased to promise me during his stay at Petersburg in the year 1777. tho' I should be very fond of receiving any specimens of Scottish ores that may come in H.L. way. Ores

1 This reference is probably to Sir Archibald Hope (1735-1794), a Scottish baronet who had extensive salt and coal mines on his estates.

2 Reverend William Coxe (1747-1828), historian and Anglican clergyman. In August of 1778 Coxe arrived in Russia as part of a continental tour he was making as tutor to Lord Herbert. While there, Coxe gathered information on the Russian people, history, language, religion, climate, botany and zoology, government, mines, arts, etc., that he used in a popular work, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark* (2 vols., London, 1784 and several later editions). The

one of which is split, no thumb; the foreteeth 4 above, only two below, formed as in Squirrels or Rats. A very odd species, mentioned by none before, excepted De Bruyn.<sup>10</sup> By Mr. Camper's observations it seems beyond doubt, that the African Rhinoceros is quite different, from the asiatick. I am very desirous of your new Synopsis, which certainly will be the best Book we have on Quadrupeds. If you have not yet consulted the Collection of Animals published by Prof. Schreber<sup>11</sup> in Germany, I think you should procure it, because it contains several peculiar figures & accounts. The odd animal with large Ears, figured in Buffon's Supplements & communicated to him by Sir—— Bruce,<sup>12</sup> had been lately confirmed in the Acta of the Swedish Academy, by one that had been consul at Algeer. I think we should not despair of finding out the Unicorn of the ancients in the inner Parts of Africa. Dr. Sparrman is really of opinion that such an animal exists, & believes it, he says, upon good authority. —I am with the truest esteem

Dear Sir

Your most obedient & much obliged Servant  
PS Pallas

ralist who wrote the *Naturgeschichte der Säugetiere* (Erlangen, 1775–1824).

12 James Bruce (1730–1794), Scottish explorer of Africa and British consul at Algiers. In 1768 he left Cairo on a famous journey which took him to Ethiopia in 1770 and

to the source of the Blue Nile. He returned to Scotland in 1774 and later published *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (5 vols., Edinburgh, 1790). The animal referred to here is the fennec, a creature which looks something like a miniature fox with long

ears. The Swedish consul at Algiers who sent a report of it to Sweden was a Mr. Brander, and apparently considerable confusion about the animal and just who had discovered it followed this report.

13 Sir James Howard Harris (1746–1820), 1st Earl of Malmesbury, English diplomatist. At the age of twenty-one he was appointed as secretary of the English embassy in Madrid; three years later he was acting chargé d'affaires. He was next sent as minister to the court of Berlin from 1771 to 1776, when he was called home to be appointed envoy plenipotentiary to the court of Catherine II. He remained in Russia from 1777 to 1783. He is the subject of a book by Isabel de Madarianga — *Britain, Russia, and the Armed Neutrality of 1780. Sir James Harris's Mission to St. Petersburg during the American Revolution* (New Haven, Conn., 1962). In 1784 he was minister at The Hague, and was instrumental in the overthrow of the republican party there in favor of the Prince of Orange.

## VIII

April 19th 1779

DEAR SIR,

Luckily the messenger did not get away the day, I was told he would; so I got time to fulfill the other part of my promise, & to get you the List of our Birds,<sup>1</sup> along with that of the Quadrupeds, which is already in Mr. Shairp's hands. You may rely upon it's being full & faithfull, for I had the Manuscript on the Birds in perfect order. That of Quadrupeds was a little more scattered, whence the neglects, mentioned in the Letter joined to the figures, arose, to which I must still add the three following of our Quadrupeds,<sup>2</sup> not inserted in my list:

1. The *Lair* of Buffon. In the Southwest of Russia in woods, & found also by me in rocky caverns about the river Samara & Volga.

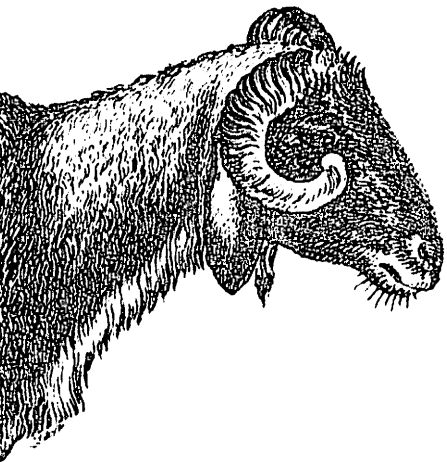
2. The *Lerot* of Buffon. In Magpye's nest & hollow trees, about the Volga & in other Southern & temperate parts of the West of Russia. Both these not found beyond the Uralian mountains in Siberia.

3. The *Mulot* of Buffon. Frequent in Russia & about the Uralian chain, but not far beyond it, & none more up in Siberia.

1 From references in the *Arctic Zoology*, it is known that Pennant did receive this list of birds from Pallas. Unfortunately, the list was apparently lost or destroyed.

2 The animals cited here from Buffon's works are the dormouse, the garden dormouse, and the fieldmouse.





6. It seems to me that the Chinese Hog is not a simple variety of the common, but derives from a peculiar wild Species, which I think Travellers have observed in Siam as being very distinct from the common wild Hog of Europe. In general I believe this genus will have several more recruits from Africa & America also.

7. With regard to the Cape Rhinoceros, the Didelphis & Myrmecophaga of India & Cape of g. Hope, the Tybet Buffalo & wild ass, you will be fully satisfied by the loose Sheets of the new volume of *Acta* of our Academy, which (tho' the Volume is not yet finished printing,) I will send you by the very first ship; and the volume which contains the descriptions of two new Seals comes by the same opportunity. —Of Bruce's longeared animal neither the teeth nor feet are well described in the *Acta Holmænsia*, only the author says, it seemed to belong to the Fox-family, & made its escape before it could be accurately described.

8. The Prints I send you here inclosed belong to Dr. Sparrmann's Travels in Africa from the Cape of Good Hope, which have not yet made their appearance. These have been communicated to me by a Friend of Stockholm: The Cape Buffalo, the



Gnou, & some other Antilopes, with the Cape Rhinoceros are represented by them. I have no account to add; but the Dr.'s observations will soon be published, when you may hear more of them.

9. The American Bison which I saw in Holland was the same animal, of which Count Buffon has given the figure in his 3d. volme. of Suppl. I found no material difference in his horns from a young Bullox, or the Lithuanian Urus; only that great part of them was hid by the woolly fleece, which covered the top of the head like a bonnet, & from which only the tips were eminent. I had a fine figure of the animal, drawn by Schouman but have sent it to Mr. Schreber, it being preferable to Buffon's. It is so very little different from the good figures of the Polish Urus, that I am nearly of Buffon's opinion, & think it does not differr specifically from the Urus of Europe. Its fleece & the form of the body very tapering towards the tail, makes the most material difference. I have mentioned it in the description of the horsetailed Tybet-Buffalo of which you will receive a copy, together with other books in Spring.

10. I see just now by the litterary papers of Goettingen, that Mr. Sparrmann has