

# THE ZOOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA 1650-1790



L.C. Rookmaaker

THE ZOOLOGICAL EXPLORATION  
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA  
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*by*  
L.C.ROOKMAAKER



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# Table of contents

Introduction	IX
Acknowledgements	XI
Abbreviations	XI

## PART ONE: REPORTS ON SOUTH AFRICAN ANIMALS

1. Introduction to the reports		3
Nomenclature	5	Systematic list of animals 5
2. Reports on South African animals 1650-1700		12
2.1 Hondius, 1652	12	2.24 Bolling, 1678 16
2.2 Van Riebeeck, stay 1652-1662	12	2.25 Schreyer, 1679 16
2.3 Blank, visit 1652	12	2.26 Hoffmann, 1680 17
2.4 Heeck, visit 1655	12	2.27 De Lacombe, visit c.1680 17
2.5 Gabbema, stay 1657	12	2.28 Nieuhof, 1682 17
2.6 Van Herwaerden, stay 1658	12	2.29 Bergh, stay 1682-1683 17
2.7 De Flacourt, 1658	14	2.30 Van Reede, visit 1685 17
2.8 Danckaert, visit 1660	14	2.31 Wurffbain, 1686 18
2.9 Cruythoff, visit 1661-1662	14	2.32 Tachard, 1686 18
2.10 Saar, 1662	14	2.33 De Chaumont, 1686 18
2.11 Merklein, 1663	14	2.34 Ten Rhyne, 1686 18
2.12 Van Hoorn, visit 1663	15	2.35 Van der Stel, journey 1686 18
2.13 De La Guerre, visit 1663	15	2.36 De Choisy, 1687 18
2.14 De Beaulieu, 1664	15	2.37 Hesse, 1687 19
2.15 Dapper, 1668	15	2.38 Masurier, visit 1687 19
2.16 Herport, 1669	15	2.39 Schweitzer, 1688 19
2.17 Andersen, 1669	15	2.40 De Rennefort, 1688 19
2.18 Croese, stay 1669	15	2.41 Schryver, journey 1689 19
2.19 Ogilby, 1670	15	2.42 Frik, 1692 19
2.20 Van Overbeke, 1671	16	2.43 Meister, 1692 19
2.21 Schouten, 1676	16	2.44 Ovington, 1696 19
2.22 Tavernier, 1676	16	2.45 Dampier, 1697 20
2.23 Verneulen, 1677	16	
3. Simon van der Stel		21
3.1 The expeditions	21	3.2 The associated drawings 22

4. Reports on South African Animals 1700-1750		27
4.46 Tappen, 1704	27	4.56 Bogaert, 1711
4.47 Langhansz, 1705	27	4.57 Wintergerst, 1712
4.48 Starrenburg, journey 1705	27	4.58 Buttner, stay 1713-1730
4.49 Maxwell, 1707	27	4.59 Vogel, 1716
4.50 Funnell, 1707	27	4.60 Beeckman, 1718
4.51 Leguat, 1708	27	4.61 Silleman & Thysz, 1718
4.52 Ziegenbalg and Plütscho, 1708	28	4.62 Kolb, 1719
4.53 Cnoll, journey 1710	28	4.63 Valentijn, 1726
4.54 Van Putten, journey 1710	28	4.64 Barchewitz, 1730
4.55 Lockyer, 1711	28	4.65 Schröder, 1749
5. Reports about South African animals 1750-1790		32
5.66 Schwarz, 1751	32	5.79 Wikar, journey 1778-1779
5.67 Coetsé, journey 1760	32	5.80 Sonnerat, 1782
5.68 De la Caille, 1763	32	5.81 Wolf, 1782
5.69 Houckgeest, 1767	32	5.82 Sparrman, 1783
5.70 Banks, visit 1771	32	5.83 Hornstedt, visit 1783
5.71 Forster, visits 1772, 1775	33	5.84 Boos, visit 1786-1788
5.72 Gordon, visits 1773, 1777-1795	33	5.85 Mentzel, 1787
5.73 Ekeberg, 1773	33	5.86 Thunberg, 1788
5.74 Masson, 1776	33	5.87 Paterson, 1789
5.75 Swellengrebel, visit 1776-1777	34	5.88 Euphrasen, 1789
5.76 Kindersley, 1777	35	5.89 Levaillant, 1790, 1795
5.77 Van Plettenberg, journey 1778	35	5.90 Von Wurmb, 1794
5.78 Hop, 1778	36	5.91 Collins, 1798
PART TWO: THE MAIN EXPLORERS		
6. The Forsters		43
6.1 Background	43	6.5 Zoological drawings and plates
6.2 Biography	43	6.6 Two catalogues of drawings
6.3 Visits to the Cape of Good Hope	44	6.7 Collections
6.4 Publications and manuscripts	44	
7. Robert Jacob Gordon		60
7.1 Background	60	7.6 The Gordon Atlas
7.2 Biography	60	7.7 The expeditions
7.3 The history of Gordon's scientific legacy	65	7.8 Specimens sent to Holland
7.4 Gordon's preserved manuscripts	67	7.9 Communication with Vosmaer
7.5 The Gordon Manuscripts	73	7.10 Communication with Allamand
8. Francis Masson		129
8.1 Background	129	8.4 Masson's drawings
8.2 Biography	129	8.5 The three expeditions
8.3 Bibliography	130	8.6 Collections
9. Anders Sparrman		135
9.1 Background	135	9.5 The Museum Carlsonianum
9.2 Biography	135	9.6 Drawings
9.3 Bibliography	136	9.7 Travels in Southern Africa
9.4 The publication of the <i>Resa</i>	137	9.8 Collections

10. Carl Peter Thunberg			148
10.1 Background	148	10.6 Short contributions on South African animals	152
10.2 Biography	148	10.7 Manuscripts	154
10.3 Bibliography	149	10.8 The expeditions	156
10.4 Thunberg's <i>Resa</i>	149	10.9 Collections	159
10.5 Dissertations	150		
11. William Paterson			163
11.1 Background	163	11.5 The Paterson Albums	167
11.2 Biography	163	11.6 The four journeys	173
11.3 Bibliography	164	11.7 Collections	175
11.4 The Brenthurst manuscript	166		
12. François Levaillant			177
12.1 Background	177	12.13 The atlas supplémentaire in Yale	244
12.2 Biography	178	12.14 The expeditions in South Africa	248
12.3 The travel accounts	182	12.15 The animals collected by Levaillant	257
12.4 The <i>Oiseaux d'Afrique</i>	186	12.16 The collection of Temminck	259
12.5 The illustrated bird books	207	12.17 The collection of Joan Raye	262
12.6 Six collections of watercolours	210	12.18 The collection of L.F.Holthuysen	264
12.7 Joan Raye and his library	210	12.19 Levaillant birds in the Leiden museum	266
12.8 The watercolours in Cape Town (CT)	212	12.20 The collection of Louis Dufresne	266
12.9 The watercolours in Leiden (UBL)	214	12.21 The collection of Lafresnaye	269
12.10 Raye's copy of the <i>Oiseaux d'Afrique</i> (RMNH)	235	12.22 The collection of Abraham Gevers	270
12.11 The watercolours in The Hague (KB)	240	12.23 The collection of Boers	270
12.12 The watercolours in Amsterdam (RPK)	243		

### PART THREE: SPECIES ACCOUNTS

13. Mammals		275
Species accounts	275	
14. Birds		308
Species accounts	308	

### PART FOUR: SOURCES

Manuscript sources		333
Bibliography		335
Index		355

ern and north-western Cape Province, as well as across the Orange River in southern Namibia.

Due to the elephant's bulk, complete specimens were rare in Europe. Sparrman (1783:327, 347) took a molar and a tail to Stockholm. In the list of specimens transferred from the old collection of the Leiden University to the RMNH (in 1834) there was mentioned a skeleton (or part of it) of *Elephas africanus* – but it was not necessarily from the Cape of Good Hope. Accurate details about the animal's morphology were therefore hard to find. Most authors, at least implicitly, assumed that the African elephant was conspecific, or at most an aberration, of the Indian species, *Elephas maximus* (Linnaeus, 1758). The elephant in general was so well known that there was little incentive for further investigation. This may also explain the lack of pictorial material. Levaillant's drawings show the Indian species. Gordon did not leave a separate elephant drawing, but there is a small representation on his large map of southern Africa (reproduced in Forbes 1965 and Willcox 1986:36), but even here the smallish ears remind one of the Indian counterpart.

27. *Diceros bicornis* (Linnaeus, 1758) Black rhinoceros  
(Perissodactyla: Rhinocerotidae)

Drawings: GA 205, 206, 207, 208, 210, 211, PA 17, CT 101, UBL 210, Swellengrebel SP 21, 22, 22a.

Localities: Gordon 12, 32, 45, 61, 70, 71, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 83. Sparrman 36, 43. Thunberg 34, 35. Paterson 16, 30, 32, 33, 35, 46. Levaillant 62, 65, 66. Gabbema (2.4). Herwaerden (2.6). Cruyloff (2.9). Schryver (2.41). Starrenburg (4.48). Coetsé (5.67). Swellengrebel (5.75). Hop (5.78). Wikar (5.79). van der Stel (ch.3).

References: J.Blank (v.1652, 2.3). A.Gabbema (v.1657, 2.5). J.v.Herwaerden (v.1658, 2.6). de Flacourt 1658:378. P.Cruyloff (v.1661, 2.9). Dapper 1668:641. Herport 1669:15. Ogilby 1670:588. Schouten 1676(B):185. Bolling 1678:23. Hoffmann 1680:33. de Lacombe (v.1680, 2.27). Nieuhof 1682:9. Tachard 1686:42. Ten Rhyne 1686:19. Hesse 1687:80. Schweitzer 1688:14. de Rennefort 1688:218. I.Schryver (v.1689, 2.41). Meister 1692:244. Tappen (1704, 4.46). J.Starrenburg (v.1705, 4.48). Maxwell 1707. Leguat 1708,II:145. Ziegenbalg & Plütscho 1709:31. Lockyer 1711:296. Bogaert 1711:104. Wintergerst 1713:208. Buttner (v.1713, 4.58). Vogel 1716:57. Beeckman 1718:179. Kolb 1719:159. Valentijn 1723. Barchewitz 1730:65. Schröder 1749:238. Schwarz 1751:30. Coetsé (v.1760, 5.67). De la Caille 1763:157. Swellengrebel (v.1776, 5.75). Hop (5.78). Hop 1778:37-38. Wikar (v.1778, 5.79). Mentzel 1787:392.

The treatment of the black rhinoceros here will follow the structure established for other species. I have dealt with various other and partly overlapping aspects of rhinoceros history and biology earlier, i.e. the taxonomy of the extinct Cape subspecies (Zukowsky 1965:15-37, Rookmaaker & Groves 1978), the significance of Gordon's drawings (Cave & Rookmaaker 1977, all illustrated), the strange circumstances leading to the naming of *Rhinoceros gordonii* Lesson, 1842 (Rookmaaker 1983b:55, 1983c:44), the first naturalistic representation of the black rhinoceros by Jan Wandelaar in the Dutch edition of Kolb (Rookmaaker 1976) and the iconography of the double-horned rhinoceroses until 1800 (Rookmaaker 1985a).

Apparently the black rhinoceros once occurred in large parts of the Cape Province. There were early records even from the vicinity of the Cape. In the second half of the 18th century the species was only found in the eastern Cape Province and in the area just north of the Orange River in the west. It has been accepted that the nominate subspecies *Diceros bicornis bicornis* was restricted to the Cape Province and southern Namibia.

Judging from the few available specimens, it appears larger than the rhinoceroses in surrounding areas, allocated to *Diceros bicornis minor* (Drummond, 1876), for instance in Meester et al. (1986:172-173).

There were only few specimens in Europe. Sparrman brought a skull with the horns, a penis and vertebrae to Stockholm, where at least the skull, and probably the horns, are still preserved in the zoological museum (discussed and figured by Zukowsky 1965:22-27, fig.5). Thunberg did not have a specimen in Uppsala. Other specimens came to Holland. Petrus Camper received a skull and skin of the head in 1771 from the Cape of Good Hope (Rookmaaker & Visser 1982:123, Visser 1985:39 ff.). Gordon wrote to Fagel on 24 April 1779 that he was sending drawings, notes and a skin of the rhinoceros to Holland. Allamand (1781:9-13, pl.5) based his description on these notes and his plate was copied from one of the drawings. Vosmaer (1800:267) too possessed some rhinoceros drawings attributed to Gordon. The fate of the skin is uncertain, even if it arrived at all. There is no reference to suggest that it was kept in either The Hague or in Leiden.

It is unlikely that the white rhinoceros, *Ceratotherium simum* (Burchell, 1817), ever occurred in the Cape Province. The early references may be vague, but I do not believe that suggestions of the white rhino's presence even in the eastern Cape Province are based on fact.

28. *Equus zebra* Linnaeus, 1758 Mountain zebra,  
*Equus burchellii* (Gray, 1824) Burchell's zebra  
(Perissodactyla: Equidae)

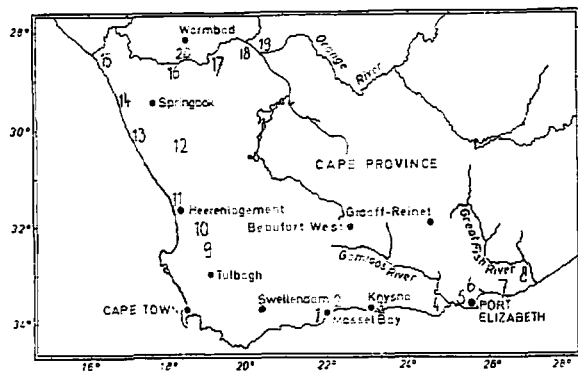
Drawings: GA 189, 191, 192, UBL 156, 157, van der Stel AM 5, IPA 419.

Localities: Gordon 7, 11, 12, 18, 47, 48, 58, 62, 63, 67, 71, 74, 75, 86, 87, 88, 90, 92, 96. Masson 12, 15, 16, 20. Sparrman 12. Thunberg 34, 35, 36, 44. Paterson 6, 7, 27, 29, 42, 46. Cruyloff (2.9). van der Stel (ch.3). Hop (5.78).

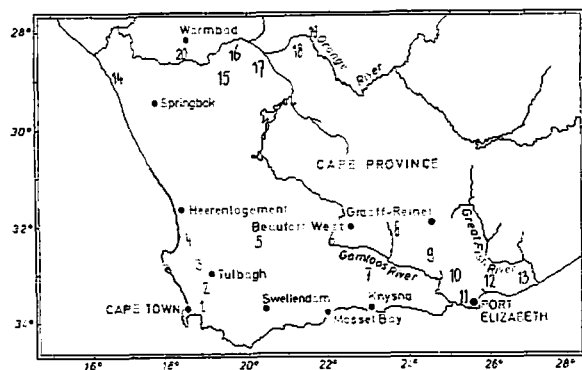
References: P.Cruyloff (v.1661, 2.9). Tavernier 1676:505. Tachard 1686:42. Ten Rhyne 1686:19. Choisy 1687:80. Schweitzer 1688:24. I.Schryver (v.1689, 2.41). Meister 1692:244. Dampier 1697:533. Tappen (1704, 4.46). Langhansz 1705:127. Maxwell 1707. Leguat 1708,II:145. Lockyer 1711:295. Bogaert 1711:104. Wintergerst 1713:208. Beeckman 1718:179. Kolb 1719:146. Valentijn 1723. Schwarz 1751:30. Kindersley 1777:54. Hop (5.78). Hop 1778:43. Wolf (v.1782, 5.81). Mentzel 1787:376, 411. Collins 1798:xxxiii.

Zebras, presently almost exterminated in the Cape Province, were a common sight in the 18th century. It has often been noted (eg. Skead 1980:312) that it is often impossible to be sure which species was meant. Even quaggas probably were called zebras, and vice versa. Smithers (1983) and Meester et al. (1986) recognise three forms: (1) the Cape mountain, *Equus zebra zebra* (Linnaeus, 1758) which lived in the Cape Province; (2) *Equus zebra hartmannae* Matschie, 1898 which may have occurred in southern Namibia, possibly extending to the N.W. and N. Cape Province; and (3) *Equus burchellii* (Gray, 1824) formerly present in the N.E. Cape province and in the Orange Free State. The available historical records discussed here do not allow suggestions even about tentative boundaries of ranges or other taxonomic comments. If anything, they are more confusing than otherwise.

Gordon's drawing GA 191 of a zebra would be expected to represent *Equus zebra*, but several characteristics are lacking: the legs are stripeless, the stripes on the rump are not noticeably broader than elsewhere, the 'grid-iron' pattern above the rump is invisible. The zebra drawing in the Brenthurst Library (see



Map 5. Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*): records of distribution 1650-1790. Approximate localities are indicated by the following numbers. 1. Outeniqua (Spartman 17, 35, Swellengrebel 5.75). 2. Outeniqua Mountains (Masson 9); Swart River (Levaillant 13); 3. Plettenberg Bay (Levaillant 14); Poort (Levaillant 15). 4. Gamtoos River (Levaillant 16, Masson 11). 5. Zwartkops River (Thunberg 35, Masson 14); Kraggakkamma (Thunberg 34). 6. Sundays River (Spartman 31); Paterson (Paterson 32); Coeney (Gordon 104). 7. Cafferland (Paterson 34). 8. Great Fish River (Paterson 33). 9. Elephants River (van der Stel, chapter 3). 10. Elephants River (Cruyffhoff 2.9, Coetsé 5.67). 11. Elephants River mouth (Gordon 52, Hop 5.77). 12. Ellenboogfontein (Levaillant 54); Groen River (Levaillant 71). 13. Kookfontein (Paterson 39). 14. Buffels River (Paterson 40, Gordon 58). 15. Orange River mouth (Gordon 62, Paterson 42). 16. Goodhouse (Paterson 21, 45, Levaillant 60). 17. Nanseep (Gordon 71); Kalagas (Wikar 5.78). 18. Aughrabies (Gordon 76, 77, 79, 85, Wikar 5.78). 19. North of Orange River (Gordon 78). 20. Warmbad (Levaillant 62).



Map 6. Black rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus bicornis*): records of distribution 1650-1790. Approximate localities are indicated by the following numbers. 1. Tierberg (van Herwerden 2.6, Cruyffhoff 2.9); Mosselbank River (Cruyffhoff 2.9). 2. Riebeecks Casteel (Cruyffhoff 2.9); Kleine Bergh River (Cruyffhoff 2.9). 3. Greys Pass (Cruyffhoff 2.9); Piketberg (Cruyffhoff 2.9, van der Stel chapter 3); Groene Kraal (Starrenburg 4.48). 4. Roode Klipheuvel (Starrenburg 4.48). 5. Rhinoceros Bosch (Paterson 16). 6. Gamka River (Gordon 45). 7. Kariëga River (Schryver 2.41). 8. Aberdeen (Gordon 12). 9. Melk River (Swellengrebel 5.75). 10. Sundays River (Gordon 32). 11. Coega River (Paterson 30); Paterson (Paterson 32); Kraggakkamma (Thunberg 34); Zwartkops River (Thunberg 35). 12. Kommedagga (Spartman 36, 43). 13. Great Fish River (Paterson 33, 35, Swellengrebel 5.75). 14. Holgat River (Gordon 61). 15. Kabas (Gordon 70). 16. Orange River (Wikar 5.78); Nanseep (Gordon 71, 73). 17. Aughrabies (Gordon 75, 76, 77). 18. Orange River (Gordon 79, 83). 19. North of Orange River (Gordon 78). 20. Warmbad (Paterson 46, Levaillant 62, 65, 66).

## 24. *Felis serval* Schreber, 1776

Serval

(Carnivora: Felidae)  
 Drawings: FC 5, FC 6.

Localities: Spartman 17, 35, van der Stel (4.9.1685), van Putten (4.54).  
 References: Hesse 1687:290. Meister 1692:244. Tappen (1704, 4.46). Langhansz 1705:126. W.van Putten (v.1710, 4.54). Bogaert 1711:104. Buttner (v.1713, 4.58). Kolb 1719:154. Valentijn 1723. De la Caille 1763:292.

The serval occurred in most of the Cape Province (Stuart 1981:48), but there are few accurate records. Spartman saw it at Mossel Bay and near Port Elisabeth. He said (1783:161) that he took two skins to Stockholm. Thunberg (1811c:322, 1818) recorded a specimen in Uppsala. The first name in von Schreber (1776, III:407, 1776, pl.108) was based on a note in Buffon. The species was described in detail by J.R.Forster (1781) accompanied by a plate which has counterparts in the drawings by his son George (FC 5, 6) and in the engravings by Miller (1782, 1796, pl.39).

## 25. *Felis lybica* Forster, 1780

African wild cat

(Carnivora: Felidae)  
 Localities: Spartman 13.

References: Schreyer 1681:84. Tachard 1686:89. Ten Rhyne 1686:19. Leguat 1708, II:145. Buttner (v.1713, 4.58). Kolb 1719:179. Barchewitz 1730:65.

As suggested by Skead (1980:11), the name 'wild cat' was applied so liberally to all kinds of cats and even genets, that most references thereby become useless. Spartman (1783:153) shot a grey wild cat at Caledon and he recorded a few dimensions: tip of nose to anus 21¾ inches (55 cm), height about 1½ feet (45 cm). Thunberg (1811c:322) found it at the Cape and he took two specimens to Uppsala (listed as '*Felis chaus*' male and female).

## 26. *Loxodonta africana* (Blumenbach, 1797)

Elephant

(Proboscidea: Elephantidae)

Drawings: CT 96, UBL 153.

Localities: Gordon 52, 58, 62, 71, 76, 77, 78, 79, 85, 104. Masson 9, 11, 14. Spartman 17, 25, 31. Thunberg 34, 35, 40. Paterson 21, 32, 33, 34, 39, 40, 42, 45. Levaillant 13, 14, 15, 16, 51, 54, 60, 62, 71. Cruyffhoff (2.9). Coetsé (5.67). Swellengrebel (5.75). Hop (5.78). Wikar (5.79). van der Stel (ch.3).

References: Hondius 1652:24. de Flacourt 1658:378. Cruyffhoff (v.1662, 2.9). Saar 1662:158. de Beaulieu 1664:8. Dapper 1668:641. Herport 1669:15. Ogilby 1670:588. Bolling 1678:23. Schreyer 1681:78. Hoffmann 1681:33. de Lacombe (v.1680, 2.27). Tachard 1686:42. de Chaumont 1686:5. Ten Rhyne 1686:19. Choisy 1687:80. Schweitzer 1688:14. Frik 1692:29. Meister 1692:244. Maxwell 1707:293. Leguat 1708, II:145. Bogaert 1711:104. Wintergerst 1713:208. Buttner (v.1713, 4.58). Vogel 1716:57. Beeckman 1718:179. Sillemann & Thysz. 1718:14. Kolb 1719:148. Valentijn 1723. Barchewitz 1730:65. Schwarz 1751:30. Coetsé (v.1760, 5.69). De la Caille 1763:158, 292. Swellengrebel (v.1776, 5.75). Hop (5.78). Hop 1778:11-12. Wikar (v.1778, 5.79). Mentzel 1787:372. von Wurmb & von Wollzogen 1794:86.

Although the elephant today only survives in two places in the southern Cape Province, it was much more wide-spread before (Skead 1980:195-241). There is no evidence relating to the Cape Peninsula itself, but elephants were found in the vicinity. In the second half of the 18th century, the retreat had begun. Thunberg (1986:278) noted their extermination at the Piketberg, some 150 km north of the Cape. However, travellers like Gordon, Masson, Spartman, Thunberg, Paterson, Levaillant and others encountered them with some regularity in the south-