The world of Jan Brandes, 1743–1808

DRAWINGS OF A DUTCH TRAVELLER IN BATAVIA, CEYLON AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Editors
Max de Bruijn and Remco Raben

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Mammals

INTRODUCTION (PLATES 157–165)

Although Brandes had a great fascination with nature, he was not trained as a naturalist. His interest in the natural world is evident from the number of drawings present in the sketchbooks which depict animals and plants. It also emerges from the observations in his notes, which often show a good grasp of the behaviour and habitat of the animals depicted in the drawings. His lack of training is most visible in his choice of subjects.

Brandes liked to take out his sketchbook and while away a long evening drawing and colouring. He sketched what he found in his environment, in his house, in his garden, in his immediate surroundings. The subject matter was secondary to the pleasure he took in sketching. There is hardly any rhyme or reason behind the selection of the animals shown on his drawings. If his goal had been to contribute to the advancement of knowledge of the natural world or to inform scientists at home, he would have been far more methodical and would have tried, for instance, to depict all the animals in his own garden. There is no indication that he tried in any way to be comprehensive; even the larger, more conspicuous animals are absent from his drawings, except, of course, the elephants of Ceylon. This can hardly be seen as a shortcoming. It would take a long time before scientific expeditions comprising a range of scientists and draughtsmen would attempt to portray the entire fauna or flora of a certain region.

Engraving of a slender loris, from an article by S.I. Ljung, after a drawing by Brandes. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

There are only eight drawings of mammals in the sketchbooks, besides one of a whale and those portraying how elephants were captured in Ceylon. Out of those eight, one was done in Batavia, four in Ceylon, one aboard ship and two at the Cape of Good Hope. As he drew only this very small number compared to all the animals which he must have seen during the time he spent in those countries, his interest must be classed as incidental rather than in any way co-ordinated.

Only later in life were Brandes' drawings introduced to scientific circles. Brandes made the acquaintance of Sven Ingemar Ljung in Sweden in 1794. Ljung's interest in natural history is evident from the fact that he had a collection of several thousand insects and an extensive library. He liked the drawings which Brandes had made during his time in Batavia, Ceylon and at the Cape of Good Hope. At some stage he borrowed them and he took the time to compare the animals in the drawings carefully with the species recorded in the existing literature. The Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus had compiled a system of classification, which allowed unknown species to be added to the list of the known fauna, thus providing a great impetus to the study of nature at the end of the eighteenth century. Not that this was always an easy job. Linnaeus presented his method in the *Systema naturae*, which he updated regularly after its first appearance in 1735. In this book, the animal world is divided in orders, then in families, then in genera and finally in species. He introduced the system of nomenclature in which every kind of animal is designated by a double name, like *Homo sapiens*, where *Homo* is the genus and *sapiens* the species. Every species was characterized by a short diagnosis and an indication of its country of origin. These descriptions were very short, usually not more than one or two lines of Latin text. The tenth edition of the *Systema naturae* appeared in 1758, by which time the system had matured and consolidated enough to allow future use along similar lines, and later it was decided to take this landmark publication as the basis for zoological nomenclature.

It is not always an easy task to compare an animal, whether it be stuffed, alive or sketched, with the diagnoses provided by Linnaeus in the *Systema naturae*. There were no illustrations at all in this famous work. It is like trying to identify an

animal in the forest using a field guide without pictures. That process obviously grew easier with practice and increased knowledge. Ljung not only used the books by Linnaeus himself, but also those of later authors who worked using the same method, and which included the thirteenth edition of the *Systema naturae* edited by the German professor, Johann Friedrich Gmelin, in 1789. Ljung did not have particular problems with any of the mammals and soon decided that none of these represented unknown species. However, he still chose to write about the squirrel from Batavia, which he called *Sciurus plantani*, in 1801, and about the loris of Ceylon, which he called *Lemur tardigradus ceylonicus*, in 1808. The animals were known, but Ljung was correct in his belief that illustrations were very much needed.

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157–158
Pigs without hind legs

Monstrosities and abnormalities in men and animals have always fascinated the general public and scientists alike. Alive, they were exhibited at fairs and in menageries, when dead they were added to the collections of amateurs and scientific societies. There were many explanations of why monstrosities occurred. Some thought they were the result of divine interaction, while the Romans were sure that the abnormal was created for the pleasure of men. In the early nineteenth century, the French medical doctor, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, put the study of the abnormal on a formal basis and introduced the term teratology, from the Greek *teras*, monster and *logos*, study. As pigs are domesticated animals, any abnormality would quickly be noticed and publicized. In a recently published catalogue of old prints, for instance, there are examples of pigs with two heads, or with one head and two bodies, or with heads shaped like that of a man, or like an elephant, all dating from the period between 1500 and 1800.[1]

The pigs drawn by Brandes in Ceylon in 1785 were certainly unusual. No other examples of pigs without hind legs have been found. Depicting them with their hind bodies floating in the air, Brandes is really far from convincing that this was the way he saw them. He stated that the two animals were caught in the forest, in two separate locations, in the course of 1781. As they had obvious value as curiosities, the Dutch VOC official Cornelis de Cock decided to buy them. One would imagine that these piglets would never have survived had they been left alone in the wild. When Brandes stated that the two animals had been caught in the forest, he definitely implies that they were wild animals, not domesticated pigs raised on a farm. The animals in the drawings confirm his statement, because they show the hairiness characteristic of wild pigs, as farm animals are almost bald. There is only one species of wild boar on Ceylon, called *Sus scrofa* by Linnaeus. This species has a very wide distribution in Europe and Asia, and is the common wild boar known in Holland and Sweden.

Brandes saw the two abnormal pigs alive and well on De Cock's estate just outside Colombo on 15 October 1785, when they were supposedly about four years old.[2] We are certain that De Cock took the two pigs with him when he returned to Holland, because Brandes mentioned that he saw them again on board the ship in February or March 1786. We do not know if De Cock managed to keep them alive during the journey. There is no trace of them afterwards, in fact, had it not been for the drawings by Brandes, their existence would not have been known. He provided a rare glimpse in the type of curious pets people used to keep.

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1. Faust, *Zoologische Einblattdrucke* III, 3.
2. JBD, Oct. 1785.

159–160
Squirrels

There could be a good reason why the only Indonesian mammal represented in the sketchbooks is the squirrel from Java. Brandes obviously saw plenty of them on his estate near Batavia, where he learned to appreciate them as a source of food and, probably even more, to loathe them as raiders of his crops. The three-coloured squirrel is a common animal in the western part of Java where Brandes lived and was (and still is being) called *bajing* by the local people. It lives in trees, which Brandes depicted rather nicely in the background of the drawing. The squirrels come down from the trees to eat and they are said to be especially fond of bananas and coconuts. Although Brandes referred to this habit of eating coconuts in his notes, the fruit in the sketch seem to be a bit small in comparison to the size of the squirrel.

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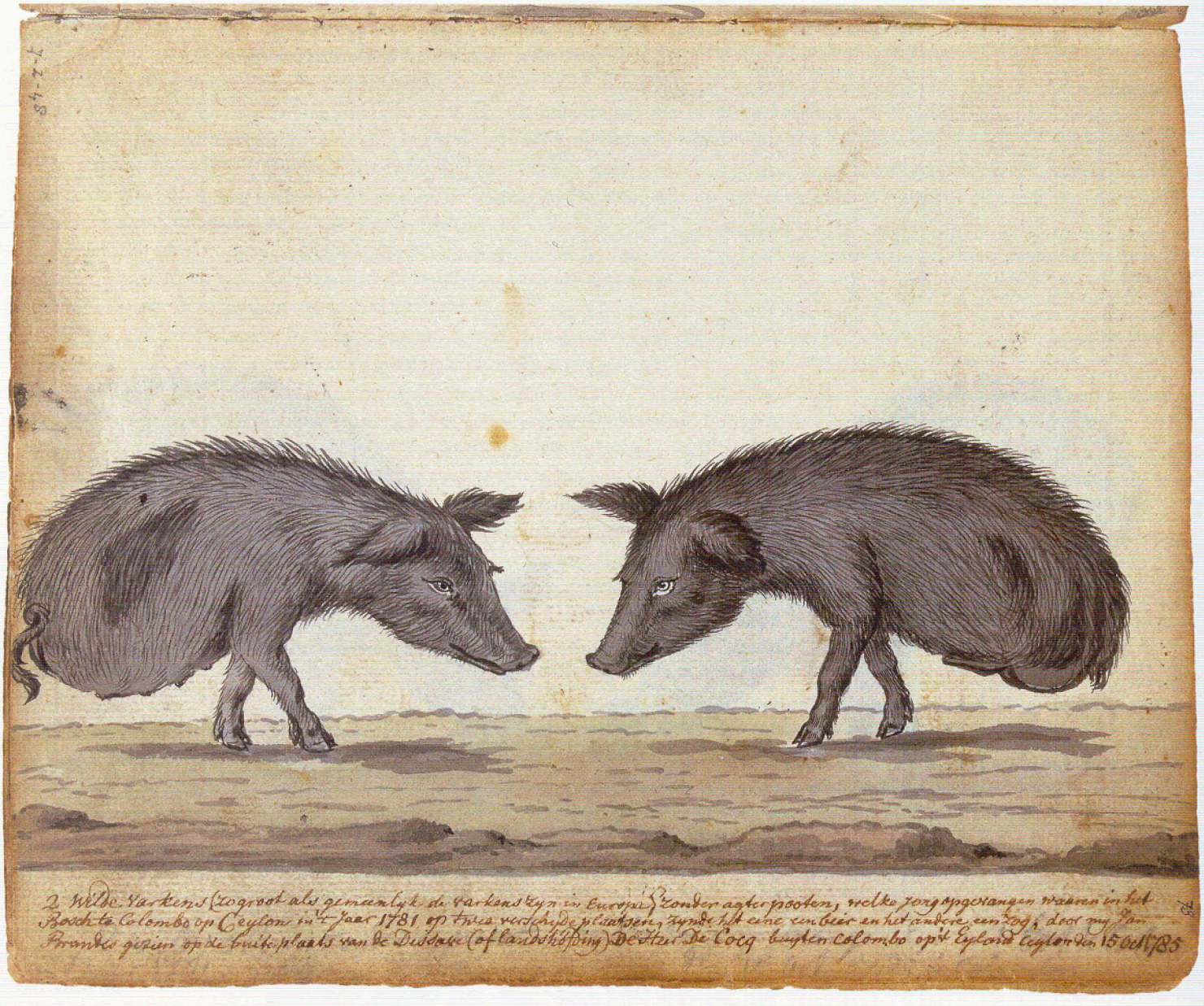
Pigs without hind legs

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-2-48.

Squirrels were part of the local diet, a happy coincidence, because the animals that had to be killed to reduce the damage to the plantations, could afterwards be cooked and consumed. We know that Brandes himself must have eaten them too. He recorded in his diary for 3 November 1780 that he roasted a *bajing*, but when it was served, he found a red substance in the dish. Fortunately, he refused to eat it, although the danger came not from the squirrel meat itself. Two months later, on 3 January 1781, his slave Moela ran away and when he was returned, he confessed that he was the culprit guilty of buying poison at the local Chinese shop and putting it in the roast squirrel. Moela was punished on 5 January for his murder attempt.

There are seven species of squirrels listed in the *Systema naturae* published by Linnaeus in 1758. When Ljung compared the drawing Brandes had made on his plantation in Batavia with the



'2 wilde varkens (zo groot als gemeenlyk de varkens zyn in Europa) zonder agterpooten, welke jong opgevangen waaren in het Bosch te Colombo in't jaar 1781 op twee verschyde plaatsen, zynde het eene een beer en het andere een zog, door my Jan Brandes gezien op de buiteplaats van de Dessave (of landshöfding) De Heer De Cocq buyten Colombo op't Eyland Ceylon den 15 oct 1785'

Two wild pigs (as large as pigs in Europe usually are) without hind legs, which had been caught at a young age in the forest at Colombo in the year 1781 in two different places, one being a male and the other a female, which I, Jan Brandes, saw on the estate of the Dessave (or landshöfding) Mr De Cock outside Colombo on the island of Ceylon on 15 October 1785.

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Pigs without hind legs

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-2-49.

short description of these animals, he could not find a match. He had, however, quite an extensive library and found an animal like the one in the drawing described by the English naturalist Thomas Pennant in the *History of quadrupeds* as a palmite squirrel.[1] When Ljung sent a communication about this squirrel to the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, published in their journal in 1801, he did not claim that he was describing a new species, he was merely adding to previous knowledge, and he was able to provide the first published illustration.[2] The plate which accompanied his article was an almost exact copy of the drawing by Brandes, but of course it was printed in monochrome and the engraver altered the trees in the background, deleting the small squirrels jumping about among their branches. Ljung named the animal *Sciurus plantani*, a new name, but today we call it the plantain squirrel, *Callosciurus notatus*, using a scientific name provided by

'2 wilde varkens zonder agterpoten gevonden in het woud by Colombo A° 1781 welke ik gezien heb den 15 oct 1785 en getekend by de dessave Kok'

Two wild pigs without hind legs found in the forest near Colombo A° 1781, which I have seen on 15 October 1785 and have drawn in the house of Dessave De Cock.

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Squirrel

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-27.

'Sciurus plantani'
'badging of surikatje Maart 5. 1784'
'01 eekhoorntje knaagde klappers stuk'

Sciurus plantani
Bajing or surikatje, 5 March 1784.
East Indian squirrel, chews coconuts.

160
Squirrel

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-37.

'Ceylons Eekhoorntje. den 17 Nov 1785.'
'Sciurus getulus.'

Squirrel of Ceylon, 17 November 1785.
Sciurus getulus.

Pieter Boddaert in 1785 because it is older and hence has priority according to the rules of nomenclature.

Maybe his experiences with squirrels in Batavia made Brandes pay more attention to such animals later in Ceylon. Here he saw a three-striped palm squirrel, but he did not tell us anything more about it. The species was named *Sciurus palmarum* by Linnaeus in the twelfth edition of the *Systema naturae*. This is a common species found in forests and plantations, and Brandes would have seen many of them during the time he spent in Ceylon.

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1. Pennant, *History of quadrupeds*, 416.
2. Ljung, 'Sciurus plantani'.

161–162

Langur

Brandes tells us that he saw these monkeys in Ceylon. This must be correct, as the purple-faced langur is known only from that island. Actually there are four subspecies, all different forms of the purple-faced langur, *Semnopithecus vetulus* named by J.C.P. Erxleben in 1777, as identified by Dr Colin P. Groves of the Australian National University, Canberra, author of the authoritative *Primate taxonomy*.

The animal is one of a family of over twenty species of langurs spread over most of South and Southeast Asia. While common in the wild, most of these species have rarely been kept in zoological gardens. They are difficult monkeys to keep in captivity, because they will only eat leaves from a very limited number of trees. If the right variety is not available, the monkeys will often refuse to adopt another diet. Brandes could have seen these monkeys in the forest during his stay in Ceylon. However, he would have had trouble making them pose for him for longer periods, as they are very active and like to jump around in the trees. It is more likely that they were kept as pets, and this impression seems to be verified in another drawing, where one of these monkeys is depicted with a chain around the belly, sitting on the balustrade of a rather grand building.[1] And, on closer inspection, one langur on the upper left of the second drawing (Plate 162) has a band around the waist with a cord attached. Brandes never revealed where he saw the animals, or how many there were, but it was probably in the estate of one of his Colombo friends, De Cock or Van Ranzow. As he made quite a number of different sketches, we may assume that he saw a group of them. Anybody keeping them in or near their natural habitat at least did not need to worry about the type of leaves that had to be provided.

The name roleway (correctly roloway) seems to have been the generally used name for the langur, although it originally referred to the West African *Cercopithecus diana*. Already described by Carolus Linnaeus in 1758, travellers thought they recognized the same monkey in Ceylon. Johann Christoph Wolf described the Ceylonese roloway extensively in 1782. Apparently the langur frequently used to forage in large family groups in and around human settlements. From Wolf's stories we learn that the langur was hunted by the Europeans, and was considered a difficult prey. In Wolf's days, in the 1770s, it was discovered that the langur's skin provided a durable leather and could well be used for shoemaking. Whether the discovery caused an immediate threat to the monkeys, is not known, but apparently they were still also caught alive and kept as pets.[2]

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1. RMA, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-65.
2. Wolf, *Reise nach Zeilan*, 130-133.

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Cape mole

The animal in this drawing is a molerat, not a mole. Like the mole known in Europe, molerats dig tunnels and live in burrows in the ground. This similarity in habits explains why these animals were called 'moles' by the inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope, who often liked to transfer names of animals known in Europe to the species found in Africa. On closer inspection, however, moles and molerats are easily distinguished. While moles are insectivores, molerats are rodents, which eat roots and bulbs, and they have two large incisor teeth, which project outside the mouth. In southern Africa, the distribution of molerats is restricted to the areas around the Cape of Good Hope and along the coast. Molerats were a great nuissance to travellers into the African interior, because the feet of horses often sank into their holes or the wheels of the ox-drawn wagons would sink into their tunnels.

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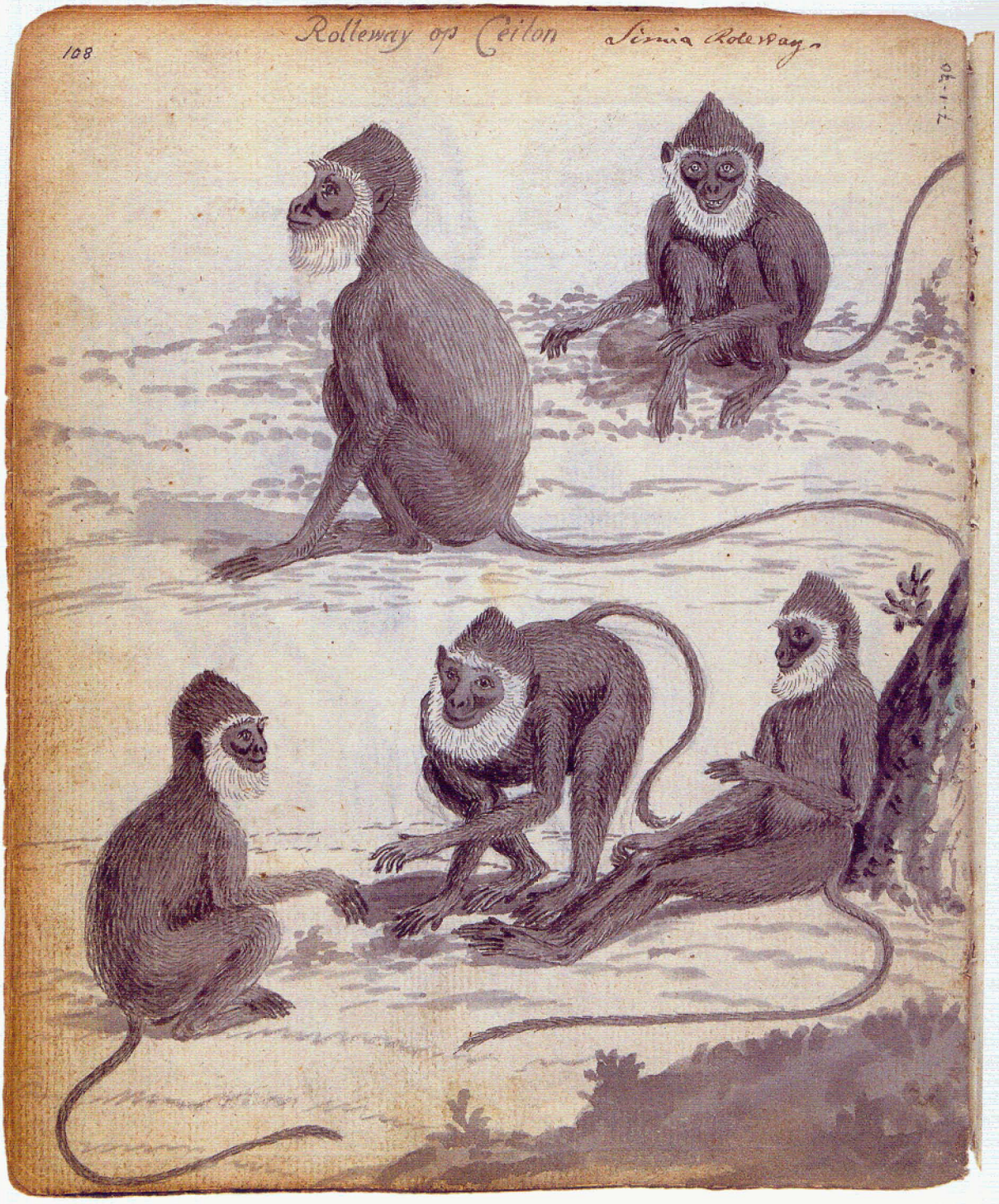
Langur

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-70.



'Rolleway op Ceilon'
'Simia Roleway.'

Rolleway on Ceylon
Simia roloway.

162

Langur

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-2-102.

Later, there were special instructions to watch out for molerat tunnels during the construction of the railways. They are considered a pest even today, because they do great harm to gardens and plantations.[1]

Three species of molerats are found in the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope, where Brandes lived for almost a year and could easily have seen them. The animal in the drawing is a Cape dune molerat with the scientific name *Bathyergus suillus*. This species was first recognized as a separate species by Johann Reinhold Forster, the official naturalist of the second voyage of Captain James Cook, who visited the Cape for three weeks in 1772. At that time, he noticed this peculiar animal, which he called a 'great mole', and wrote letters about it to two influential zoologists of the period, Thomas Pennant in England and Carolus Linnaeus in Sweden. The commander of the Dutch garrison in Cape Town, Robert Jacob Gordon, made drawings of this 'dune mole' in 1777 and 1778 and he forwarded at least one of these,

together with a skin, to J.N.S. Allamand, the first professor of natural history at the university of Leiden.[2] All this certainly shows that these molerats were quite common around the Cape and their appearance was curious enough to attract attention. Brandes indicated that molerats were known in a variety of colours. He saw specimens which were black, brown or multicoloured. The Cape dune molerats are known to show different shades of colour, linked to geography and humidity. However, two very similar species of molerats live in the same region, the Cape molerat or *Georychus capensis*, which is black and white, and the common molerat or *Cryptomys hot-*

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Cape mole

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-1-60.

'Caapsche Mol, zyn klijn en groot tot 1 voet lang, zwarte, bruyne, en bonte.'

Cape mole, they are small and measure up to one foot long, black, brown and variegated.

tentotus, which is quite variable in colour. We may assume that Brandes had seen specimens of all three species. He was also correct in the size of the animals, which generally does not exceed 33 cm.

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1. De Graaff, *The rodents of southern Africa*, 66 ff.
2. Rookmaaker, *The zoological exploration of southern Africa*, 304.

164
Cape draught ox

Very soon after the foundation of the Dutch settlement at the Cape of Good Hope by Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, the Europeans made arrangements with the local population concerning the sale of meat. Even at that time the Khoikhoi had large herds of domesticated animals. In the course of the seventeenth century, the Europeans introduced their own breeds of cattle and other farm animals like pigs and sheep, and of course very soon a mixture of the different breeds was inevitable. By the time of Brandes' visit, it was already very hard to distinguish between local and imported types of cattle, certainly nobody among the principal travellers in the late eighteenth century commented on this phenomenon.

We may assume that Brandes made this drawing of a draught ox when he lodged on the estate of Vergenoegd near Stellenbosch, where he was the guest of the German farmer, Johan Georg Lochner, for the greater part of a year. This was the usual type of ox used by the colonists near the Cape of Good Hope to plough and to draw their carts. The French ornithologist François Levaillant depicted a very similar animal laden with a load of timber during his stay in South Africa in the 1780s.[1] Robert Jacob Gordon included a range of domesticated animals in his collection of drawings which became known as the Gordon Atlas, preserved in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. On 12 October 1778 he sketched a Cape ox, which he gave the Dutch name 'Lieseman', and recorded its length as 275 cm with a shoulder height of 175 cm.[2]

While the ox sketched by Brandes resembles that of Gordon in appearance and shape of the horns, it also looks emaciated and may have had an oedema in the lower jaw. Perhaps this had been caused by starvation during a period of drought, or the animal could have suffered from trypanosomiasis, a tropical disease caused by a protozoan blood parasite which also causes sleeping sickness in humans. Otherwise, Brandes depicted an animal which was essential to all farmers in the south of Africa.

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1. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, 80.
2. Rookmaaker, *The zoological exploration of southern Africa*, 93.

165
Slender loris

The slender loris shown in this drawing is classed among the primates, even though it is quite different from most apes in appearance. Brandes called it a 'luyaard' in Dutch, which translates as sloth in English. Today, we use the name sloth only for animals in the Americas, which spend most of their lives hanging upside-down in trees in search of their favourite food, and are related to anteaters and armadillos. Brandes was not the first to apply the same name to a monkey-like creature in the Asian jungle. When Martinus Houttuyn in 1761 wrote his natural history following the system of Linnaeus, he distinguished two kinds of sloths.[1] One of these was the *luyaard* or *traaglooper* (slow-walker) of Ceylon. Although Houttuyn probably confused a Ceylonese monkey with the two-toed sloth found in South America, it shows that Brandes (and Houttuyn) probably followed the common usage of the day among the Dutch in Ceylon by using the name *luyaard*. It is now distinguished with the scientific name *Loris tardigradus*.

The slender loris is inconspicuous in its natural habitat as it lives in the forest and is exclusively nocturnal. It will sleep during the day, and maybe at that time it can easily be caught to be sold in markets. There was a regular trade in these lorises in Ceylon and India, because the eyes were used in traditional medicine, although we are not told whether they were dead or alive when they arrived in the market. In any case, one of them was still alive when it was bought as a curiosity by the French military officer, De Saint Angel, one of Brandes' fellow passengers on the *Stavenisse*.[2] Brandes observed the animal carefully and could state that it generally slept during the day. These animals really suffer when they are exposed to bright sunlight. The animal was active by night,

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Cape draught ox

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-2-125.

when it ate the bananas and rice that were provided for it. It was still just over a month into the voyage and the animal had even produced a baby, either in Colombo or on the ship. Brandes said that the mother kept the baby hidden between her forelegs. Unfortunately, he did not try to incorporate the young one in his drawing.

When Ljung studied the drawings made by Brandes, he decided that the illustration of this loris would still be a welcome addition to the knowledge about the animal. He realized that it was hardly new to science, in fact he could list well over twenty authorities who had written about it earlier. The plate that accompanied Ljung's article is very similar to the drawing made by Brandes, in reverse and uncoloured. Ljung names the animal *Lemur tardigradus ceylonicus*, a combination of three names indicating a subspecies, but the name has not survived in scientific literature. Neither do we hear anything more about the mother and her young.

KEES ROOKMAAKER AND MAARTEN FRANKENHUIS

1. Jerdon, *The mammals of India*, 15.
2. Ljung, 'Anmärkningar öfver Lemur tardigradus', 59.

'Bos taurus, domesticus africanus.'
'Caapse trek os 30 oct 1786.'

Bos taurus, domesticus africanus.
Cape draught ox, 30 October 1786.

165
Slender loris

Water-colour over sketch in pencil, 19.5 × 15.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. nr. NG-1985-7-2-129.

'Lemur tardigradus.'
'waare groote Ceylonse Luyaard op 't schip getekend den 25 maart 1786 op Ryze sliep den gehelen dag met de snoet in de borst, s' avonds & s' nagts liep hy in zyn kooy rond, en klom onderste booven, hij at pisang & ryst. hy had een jong dat hy verborg tussen zyn poten voor'

Lemur tardigradus.
True large sloth of Ceylon drawn on the boat, 25 March 1786, during the voyage, slept the whole day with its snout resting on its chest, in the evening and at night it ran around its cage, and climbed upside down, it ate bananas and rice. It had a young which it hid between its forelegs.