

Game in Northern Darfur

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During my service in the Sudan I was lucky enough to spend some 24 years in the Provinces of Kordofan and Darfur where I collected all available information about game, especially that of the Northern desert districts. I made eight camel trips into their country and was acquainted with many of the tribal hunters. There appears to be no doubt whatever that the large herds of Oryx (Bugar el Wahash) and Addax (Um Kabetchu) which roamed the north deserts of these two provinces in the early years of this century have dwindled considerably and in 1937 their numbers were dangerously low. If this discrease has continued to date both these species must now be considered rare animals. Any attempt at protection would have been very difficult and expensive to carry out. Game reserves would not have worked without intertribal supervision and the migratory habits of both species would have added to the difficulty. The sale and barter of (Sharmut) dried meat and (Reem) hide ropes could not be controlled. Something might have been done by the combined efforts of the tribal heads but that again would have been difficult—meat and hides being looked upon as a yearly harvest. Hundreds were killed on their southern migration by the northern tribes. In spite of this slaughter, both these animals being prolific breeders, were to some extent capable of keeping up their numbers. Up to some 35 years ago few hunting parties dare go very far afield, there was always the danger of meeting stronger parties from other tribes—a fight would take place, camels, horses and probably lives lost. Therefore there were many miles of no-man's-land on which the game could roam unmolested.

It is safe to say that the oryx disappeared from Kordofan province many years ago. In 1912 a herd of about 40 spent a few weeks thirty miles west of Bara. Up to 1928 several herds came south of the Nahud—Fasher road in the Um Kedada district. In 1924, driven south by drought and hunger, large numbers came to the outskirts of the villages and wells East and West of Melleit. The reasons for the present day scarcity are not easy to explain. The oryx is essentially a desert animal and will not remain long in the vicinity of human beings and their stock. He has been driven further

and further west by the camel nomads, by hunters and riflemen etc. Since the first world war many northern arabs became the owners of rifles and ammunition. The Kabashish were the chief culprits. Only very few are trapped as the country and their habits are unfavourable. Unlike conditions in other game districts of Africa the white man cannot in any way be held responsible for their decrease. In the early years only very few keen hunters were prepared to face the hardships of the desert. It was an expensive and big undertaking with a certain amount of risk and entailed travelling some hundreds of miles on camels. Dongola, Omdurman, El Obeid and Nahud being the kick off places. In more recent times the trip has been made much easier by the fact that the hunter can now be taken to convenient places by car and can start his camel trip from an advanced base within a few days of his quarry. Hunting and shooting from cars is not allowed. During my time I have only known three parties who abused the law. I visited their hunting grounds a few weeks later. The diary of the desert gave me a true account of what happened. The car tracks and the slaughter sites told their own story. It is no easy matter to judge the length and quality of an addax head at a distance and the fact that these "sportsmen" had many very good heads rather proved that these were the ones selected after the massacre.

In an average year the migration starts in March and reaches its southern limit at the end of April and May where the herds stay, if unmolested until the first rains, when they immediately start north again. It is during this period, April to the first rains, that the great majority are killed. Many small organised parties set out from their villages and camps from the extreme western border to Kordofan. A typical party consisting of 6--8 camels, one or two horses and three or four men will leave for the hunting grounds and camp until they get well into and on the north of the herds. A permanent camp is not made until after the first kills. Some of the camels are sent back for water. The party only returns home when they have obtained full loads of "sharmut," dried meat, and hides, or when their horses have become incapable of further hunting. Few horses can stand more than half a dozen long hunts. The rider, leading his horse and his mate with one or two camels, march until a herd is sighted. He then waits until the sun is well up and in the heat of the day starts the herd galloping. After a mile or so he forces the pace until the oryx are exhausted and come to a stand still. He then closes in, picks out a bull, (the bulls are much heavier than the cows and their hides are almost twice as thick), dismounts and attacks with his spear. His object is to cut both ham-strings and pierce both eyes. He then leaves the maimed helpless bull and goes on to the next. As many

as half a dozen or so are thus accounted for in one hunt. The camel man during this time is following the horse tracks until he comes up with the maimed animals and hunter. The distance between the first and last may be anything from a hundred yards or so to a mile. The horse, tired and exhausted, is led home. The rider and camel man set about killing by cutting the throat "hallal" and haunching. The carcases are then collected and a semi-permanent camp is made, where the meat is cut into strips and hung up to dry. The bull hides are cut into long thongs "reem." A hide will make some 40 feet of rope.

Both male and female oryx are dangerous and will always put up a fight using their long horns to some effect. Much care and skill is necessary to put them out of action with a spear. A party such as described will probably account for twenty during one trip and some three trips are made during the short season which lasts approximately six to eight weeks—i.e. until the first rains, when the ground becomes soft and trecherous.

The Addax (Um Kabetchu) meets the same fate as the oryx, lives under similar conditions but in the more remote areas, never comes as far south; has neither the stamina nor the speed and is much easier though less valuable quarry. He never moves with the oryx herds. Desert travellers occasionally come on piles of broken bones and skulls which supply proof that they have been hunted and killed by northern hunters. The horns are of no value to the native, although some are used for digging salt at places like Bir Natrun. The finest pair of oryx horns obtained in the Sudan measure 46 7/8th and 46 1/4 inches. The Addax 39 inches.

The Wild Sheep (Kabish Mai). Many of the northern hills of Darfur hold sheep. In the more remote districts they are not often disturbed. They can only be hunted by riflemen and dogs. The dog method being to drive the sheep from one hill to another. When they cross the wadi the hidden dogs are let go. Old rams can more or less take care of themselves. The ewes and lambs are killed. In the inhabited hills of Meidob there were many scattered small flocks. During my visits I noted that there were a very small number of ewes compared with rams. The rams were fighting and the few ewes were being severely harassed. I found two dead rams which had been killed in combat. If immediate action had not been taken the sheep population would most probably have died out. The late Charles Dupuis, Governor at the time, a keen and knowledgeable game preserver, got into touch with the head men and made plans for their protection. Hunting was stopped. A well known local hunter and his son were appointed keepers for which duty they were

paid a small wage. A few permits were given to officials and others to shoot on conditions that these men were employed as guides and a fixed fee paid to them for each ram shot. This scheme worked well and produced good results. On my last visit to the gebel I saw some small well balanced flocks. Twenty-eight inches is a good head. A ram in the Khartoum Zoo measured 31 inches.

Kudu (Nyellat) are to be found in small parties in any suitable places, but do not extend into the far north. The horns are somewhat inferior to those in the centre and west of the province. They are occasionally hunted by dogs and when exhausted and brought to bay, speared or shot.

The Addra gazelle (Ril) are to be found in all oryx districts and their range extends east to west north of parallel 13. A few isolated flocks existed in the gebel Schwi area in Eastern Kordofan some thirty miles west of the White Nile. They appear to be capable of keeping up their numbers, but do not favour the vicinity of humans and stock.

Black Rhino. I saw seven while sitting up for lion. This was on the Wadi Maarna some 40 miles south of Lake Keilak in Kordufan—date March, 1914.

Sommeerings gazelle (Ariel). Several flocks were seen on the West bank within a few miles of the river near Shat, south of Dueim, in March 1917.

Editor's Note:

I wonder if Major Audas was sure that these were black rhino. Up to 1947 it was thought that there were no black rhino west of the Nile. It will be remembered that Dr. Benzon's Copenhagen Museum Expedition got a black rhino near Gogiral.

I wonder if there are any Ariel on the West bank now?

A. F.