

# Oryx

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SOME NOTES ON THE GAME OF THE  
BRITISH SOMALILAND BOUNDARY.

By Dr. D. P. TURNER.

(East African Medical Service.)

The following notes are the result of seven months spent travelling up and down and near the Somaliland Ethiopian boundary, from October, 1935, till May, 1936. A Ford lorry was my usual conveyance, and the animals being unaccustomed both to trucks and to Europeans, showed little fear and could be easily approached. I also stayed at eight Camel Corps posts and four intermediate places. At each halt I had several opportunities of shooting the surrounding country, all of which I took, I was also able to hear the comment of the officers stationed at these places, nearly all of whom were keen shikaris. I have, unfortunately, lost the notes I took at the time, and in consequence my spelling of place-names is my own. I may also be a pillar or two wrong in the number of the boundary pillars (referred to by B.P. numbers).

Starting from B.P. 71, the old tri-junction point between Italian, British Somalilands, and Ethiopia, the country is densely bushed and consists of low hills carrying very little grass for grazing, and inhabited only after rain. I do not know of any water-holes nearer than 40 miles. Proceeding westwards towards B.P. 79, Bohotle, these hills gradually peter out and the soil becomes sandy, a grey red sand, still with rocky outcrops, but bearing more grass, mostly daremo (*Andropogon aucherii*) and having open grassy meadows interspersed with dense bush.

I think I should state here that between B.P. 71 and at roughly 1,800 feet above sea-level, and B.P. 112, at about 5,000 feet above sea-level, the rises and falls of ground are so gradual that from each pillar the next is visible, and they are spaced nearly exactly 6 miles apart.

Bohotle is a fort which was abandoned between 1904 and 1935. The present post was sited 6 miles from the old fort.

Here there were many shallow "ballehs" (holes holding water for a few days after rain) and two shallow rain-filled wells. I don't think these held water for more than a week or two after rain, possibly they contain water from May till September, but I do not know. The country is still densely bushed. As we proceed westwards there is a preponderance of a small bush bearing reddish berries (possibly a species of *Cordii rothii*) of which the Somalis are very fond, and they say the game like them too, and we begin to get wide, open plains, covered with daremo grass. At B.P. 84, Tallybur, there is one large "balleh" and several small ones, these are some 12 miles from the boundary; they are worked night and day as long as they hold water, and I doubt if any wild animal can water from them. West of B.P. 84 is a large plain extending some eight miles along the boundary. I cannot say how far it extends on either side. It is dotted with clumps of thorn bush, and coverts of the tall "durr" grass (*A. cyrocladus* and *kelleri*), beyond this plain comes the Haud, a wilderness of red sand and ant-hills covered with the umbrella-like "Khansa bush" (*Acacia nubica*), and other species of thorn-bush. There are innumerable coverts of durr grass here, and daremo also occurs. The sand covering this does not hold water many hours after rain, but in a day or two after good rain the leaves open, and the plain becomes green with grass, and this verdure may last for a fortnight. About B.P. 96 the Khansa becomes uncommon and a tall thorn-bush takes its place. These thorns grow at intervals like the trees in an apple orchard. Among them there are very big coverts of durr. About B.P. 111 we find the sansiviera fibre aloe and the red soil gradually gives place to black cotton soil. B.P. 113 is near the edge of the Marar plateau, about 6,000 feet above sea-level, which runs about 15 miles along our boundary. It is followed by a range of broken hills, fairly well watered and stretching as far as the French boundary. I had little opportunity of seeing this country being there only twice for a few days. On the Marar plateau is the Tug Wajaleh, marked by a series of water-holes, neutral to both sides.

## ANTELOPES

*Greater Kudu*.—These only occur west of the Marar plateau in the broken hills where they can always find water, they feed by night in the valleys, and move up to the hill tops in the early morning when they are disturbed by the sheep and cattle. I saw a small herd of cows and young bulls feeding at about 10 a.m. near the top of a hill. A little later they lay down on the top, and I was fortunate enough to get a photograph of a cow lying across the boundary, half in Ethiopia and half in Somaliland.

*Klipspringer*.—These should occur in the same country as the Greater Kudu, as they need water, but I neither saw nor heard of any.

*Beira (Dorcotragus melanotis)*.—These occur close to the French boundary. I saw none but was told that I was unlucky. They do not appear to require water.

All the following antelopes and gazelles, unless stated otherwise, are able, without inconvenience, to do without water.

*Lesser Kudu*.—I saw these and found their tracks at places between B.P. 71 and B.P. 96, they were uncommon, but I think they occur all along the line, and should also be found in the sansiviera country.

*Oryx*.—These occur from B.P. 71 to the hills on the west of the Marar plateau. They live in small bands from two to thirty, each band having its own grazing area and appearing to take two or three days to cover it. The Somalis say they suffered heavily from a disease some ten years ago, and since then it has been unusual to see herds of more than ten head. I think there are plenty of them but they prefer the bush and so are not easily seen.

*Swayne's Hartbeeste*.—These are very rare, and only come into our territory at certain times of the year. In recent years only two have been shot; I think that these were on our side of the boundary. I saw none during my trip.

*Soemmerring's Gazelle or Aoul*.—This is the common gazelle, occurring in large numbers wherever there are open plains.

In January we saw a vast herd on the big plain near B.P. 84, which I estimate contained about a thousand animals. This herd stayed together for about fourteen days, and then separated into groups of about fifty head. I do not think they left the neighbourhood.

*Clarke's Gazelle or Dibatag*.—Those I saw ranged from B.P. 79 to near B.P. 96, where the trees become bigger. They appear to like open plains with scattered bush, as well as the thicker bush. Compared with Waller's Gazelle I should say that they prefer more open country. At any rate are more likely to be found in such country. I saw one herd of fifteen adults of both sexes, but mainly does.

*Waller's Gazelle or Gerenuk*.—This species occurs everywhere, except in the open plains. In some areas they are found with Clarke's Gazelle, the latter being probably the more abundant. I saw one herd of fourteen, this consisted of one adult bull, several cows, and half-grown young of each sex.

*Speke's Gazelle or Dhero*.—I saw only a few parties of this species and those in the orchard bush country near B.P. 100. They are common over the rest of the country.

*Dik-Dik*. — Guenther's Dik-dik (*Rhynchotragus guentheri*) occurs in the shaley hills near B.P. 71, and appeared to be fairly common ; it was not seen elsewhere. *Madoqua phillipsi* is a common species until the bush ends at the Marar plateau. West of the Marar plateau another species occurs, probably *Madoqua swaynei*, but only a few were seen.

*Wart-hog*.—Only a few were seen, one on the open plain at B.P. 84, one near B.P. 94, a sounder near B.P. 100. With the possible exception of the first, they could not possibly have obtained any water, and the young in the sounder were obviously only just, or about to be weaned.

*Rhino*.—Tracks of these were seen occasionally near B.P. 84.

*Lion*.—These occur everywhere, but not in great numbers. Tracks were seen 60 miles from known water. This water was in a well, and so not very accessible. Lions undoubtedly drink, but in Somaliland I think they probably do a round

of perhaps 150 miles and lasting perhaps ten days before going to water. A pride of three lionesses is said to have been traced by tracks from the air over 150 miles in seven days, but I am not convinced of the accuracy of these observations. The Somalis told me of a place in the Nogal valley about 30 miles from B.P. 84 where all the lions working in the Haud come regularly to drink.

*Leopard*.—Two varieties occur, the larger spotted (*Felis pardus suahelica*) according to Somali report occurs in hill country where there is water, the other, the small spotted Somali variety (*F. p. nanopardus*), occurs in the dry country. I shot one at B.P. 71, it had been living there for at least three months and several attempts had been made to kill it, and there was no water. A leopard was seen at B.P. 79 and tracks were seen at B.P. 94. The Somalis say that this is the common Haud leopard.

*Cheetah*.—These were fairly common in the Haud and were seen at various points between B.P. 79 and B.P. 110. I see no reason why they should not also occur on the edges of the Marar plateau.

*Caracal*.—The lair of one was found on the top of a hill west of the Marar plateau, five years earlier I saw one near Burao. It is doubtful if they need water, they are distinctly uncommon.

*Wild Cat*.—Common everywhere, it is the only part of Africa known to me where one could expect to see them. They lie up in the bush and the durr grass, and were often beaten out. They live in places where there is no possibility of obtaining water for at least eight months of the year.

*Serval*.—This is reputed to occur in the hills west of the Marar plateau where there is water.

*Hyæna*.—Both the spotted and striped species were common wherever there were Somali karias. In the Haud they appear to follow the native caravans, if accompanied by stock. Our expedition was only bothered with them when the natives were living near, and then they were numerous enough to keep us awake. In an open plain on which I had my bed, I laid a trail about four hundred yards and leading to my bed.

There was a full moon that night, by eight o'clock I could see at the same time thirteen adults and two small ones with their mother, but none approached within a hundred yards, and so I could not get a shot. Later on the stomach which I put by my bed was taken by jackals without waking me up. The officers of the Camel Corps found the local ponies too slow to catch an empty hyæna, and so they wait for a full moon and if they have a camel which it is necessary to slaughter they kill it in an open space, wait till the hyænas are gorged and then ride them down with pig spears. I doubt if there is a more exciting sport anywhere, as even with a gorged hyæna it is very difficult to get alongside to stick them, and the going is pretty blind in the moonlight. In times of famine one may expect these brutes to take men. Even in ordinary seasons they are occasional man-eaters, one took three or four children near Bohotle while we were stationed there.

*Jackal*.—I believe three species of Jackal occur. *Canis variegatus* and *mesomelas* are the common species, but on the Marar plateau I saw what I believe to be a different species, larger than the two above mentioned, and a reddish foxy colour. The fur appeared to be very coarse; unfortunately I was unable to obtain a specimen, but I saw several.

*Wild Dog*.—I only saw three. I shot one which was mangy and very thin. I saw two one morning at B.P. 71. They were very confiding, allowing me to call them to within a few yards and they appeared well fed and fat; the nearest known water was 40 miles away.

*The Long-eared Fox (Otocyon megalotis)*.—Very few were seen and they occurred in waterless country.

*The Desert Fox (Canis famelicus)*.—Although this did not occur on the boundary it is interesting to note that in 1931 I found one family in the same place as Dr. Drake Brockman records their occurrence in 1910, and in spite of much searching could not find them anywhere else.

**BIRDS**.—I do not intend to say very much about birds in these notes. It is interesting, however, to note that at Burao, the Camel Corps headquarters, there is an artificial

pool and occasionally several natural ones, to which the sand grouse come for water every morning for some nine months of the year. These pools are well shot over—probably over shot—but I noticed no difference in the numbers frequenting them after an absence of five years.

On the Boundary the following birds were obtained: Vulturine, Guinea Fowl, Yellow-necked Francolin, a Red-legged Partridge, six species of Bustard, and also Sand Grouse. Several species of Duck were seen at the Tug and Wajaleh Tallybur, and Egyptian Geese west of the Marar plateau. I saw Quail at Bohotle and on the Marar plateau.

## LIST OF VANISHING GAMBIAN MAMMALS.

By Mr. ERIC JOHNSON, C.M.Z.S., J.P.

The following notes were compiled by Mr. Eric Johnson, C.M.Z.S., for the information of the African Committee for Wild Life Protection, at the request of the Gambian Government.

### PRIMATES

*Galagos*.—The long-tailed Gambian Galago (*Galago senegalensis*) inhabits nearly all parts of Gambia; being thoroughly nocturnal in their habits and of no special value to the natives, I reckon the number and range to be the same as it was ten years ago. A certain amount of these animals are, of course, destroyed by bush fires and snakes; I saw some remains of a Galago extracted from a Python sebæ. The specimens brought to me were caught in hollow trees, one was as large as a domestic cat, and the other just the ordinary *Galago senegalensis*.

*Chimpanzee* (*Anthropopithecus troglodytes*).—Does not now exist in the Gambia; every year, however, I reckon that about fifty animals are brought in for sale, from Futa Jalon, some 70 miles south-east of Fatoto, 280 miles from Bathurst.