"Dicksi" African Elephant



# A Wanderer in the Wind

The Odyssey of an Animal Collector

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With 51 Illustrations



HUTCHINSON
Stratford Place
London

1953

as the Karati Bush, was more interesting, and after a good deal of exploring one could get glimpses of that charming bird the Purple Grenadier Waxbill, which belongs to the same genus as the Violet-eared Waxbill from South Africa, but is even more beautiful. These may sometimes be seen in semi-bare places in the bush, apparently pecking in the soil. There are no seeding grasses in such places, and probably never were, and it can only be concluded that they are eating minute wind-borne seeds, which are more easily found where the ground is bare.

In the tropics, where the hot air is constantly causing miniature whirlwinds, dust and small seeds and leaves, etc., are carried high into the skies, and in this way the small dust-like seeds of many weeds travel tremendous distances. This is particularly noticeable where a clearing has been made in the middle of a big forest, where under ordinary circumstances none of these weeds and plants can grow, but immediately there is sufficient air and light they spring up in a few days, although there may be no similar things growing within many miles. It has been recorded that, after fields have been cultivated and sown with grain, there has been an invasion of doves, which have been duly slaughtered. Later someone with knowledge has shown, by examining the stomachs, that they were not eating grain at all, but were devouring the wind-borne seeds of obnoxious weeds carried from fallow native lands many miles away. It is a great pity that some birds which are really of great economic value are persecuted because of our scanty knowledge of their feeding habits.

Interesting sunbirds to be found in the Karati Bush were the Kenya Highlands Scarlet-chested Sunbird, the Kenya Highlands Amethyst Sunbird, the Bronzy Sunbird, the Kenya Malachite Sunbird, and the Falkenstein's Sunbird already mentioned, all of which looked unbelievably beautiful in their natural surroundings.

Other birds that caught the eye were Long-tailed Rollers, the rare d'Arnaud's Barbet, and the beautiful little Red-fronted Tinker-barbet. In the bush there were still plenty of buffalo and that graceful antelope, the impala.

On climbing the escarpment to the open highland plains (8,000 feet) the air was noticeably cooler and invigorating. At that time this was a vast grazing ground for game, and great herds of Burchell's Zebra, kongoni, and Thompson's Gazelle wandered about with little fear of man. On occasions I saw a mixed herd of these animals, the numbers of which were so great that it was almost impossible to count them. One of the finest sights was a herd of sixty-four eland—the largest of the African antelopes and as big as any ox—the old bulls making a wonderful contrast to the females and calves.

Needless to say the most conspicuous form of bird-life on these plains was the ostrich, which was then quite plentiful.

The base of the forest-clad Aberdare Mountains is a very peculiar formation. Looking across the open country it seems for all the world like rolling plains,

C. S. B. M.

Uganda Leopard "Sandy"

Black Rhinoceros, Kenya Colony

C. S. B. M.

but the stripes, though less pronounced, were more numerous than in the sire.

Up to this time the London Zoo had never had a specimen of the Reticulated Giraffe, though it is by far the most attractively marked of the many so-called races of the common giraffe. As its name implies, this animal has network-like markings, these being of white on a darker background, whereas the others in varying degrees have the yellowish ground-colouring broader, thus giving the whole more of a blotched effect. The Reticulated Giraffe is regarded by systematists as a distinct species, with all other giraffes races of another species. The validity of this seems doubtful in view of the fact that there is no natural barrier or dividing line between the Reticulated Giraffe and races of the other species, such as Cotton's Giraffe and the Baringo Giraffe, that come nearest to it, and undoubtedly the two so-called species intergrade.

On my visit to Nanyuki I had the amusing experience of taking part in the attempted capture of some of the reticulated variety. My host had built a stockade in thorn-bush country where a small herd was in the habit of browsing. On the day in question a number of natives on horseback rounded up the herd, and as we saw the party heading towards us galloping all out, while we sat watching from the lower slopes of a kopje, it was as thrilling to me as any Grand National. As the troop stampeded past, followed closely by the horsemen, we took up the chase in Hook's rather ramshackle utility car in order to assist in heading off the herd in the right direction, and to get them between the converging 'wings' leading to the stockade. This was managed all right, and then came the final spurt to make sure the animals had no time to hesitate about going through the gate. This final phase was tense and, to me, somewhat painful, for my host let the old bus go all out, crashing between thorn-bushes, over pot-holes and ant-heaps, until I thought that some of my ribs must be broken. The leading bull was only twenty yards from the stockade gate when he broke through the wings, constructed of thorn-bush branches piled to a height of seven to ten feet, and the rest followed through the gap and got away. This was the disappointing end to a long and exciting chase.

A more up-to-date method of capturing giraffes is to drive the herd into fairly open country, then single out the one required and give chase in a high-powered light lorry. By this method the animal can be overtaken quickly, and it then comes to a standstill and can be easily lassooed. By the old method of rounding up giraffes on horseback the chase is often much too long and in consequence permanent damage may be done to the giraffes' hearts.

The transportation of giraffes by rail presents a problem in Kenya owing to the lowness of the bridges. For this reason capture is limited to animals of from seven to a maximum of eleven feet. It is surprising how quickly these creatures become tame, and once they lose their fear of humans show none of the nervous panicky mannerisms of some of the antelopes.



Giraffes, in spite of their great height, cover a very small floor space, and so a crate seven feet square allows plenty of room for moving freely around, which it should be able to do. It is a great mistake to box them like horses with no room to turn round; for one thing they need to be able to splay their legs in a rough sea to balance their great height. It is amusing to watch a giraffe when a boat has a heavy roll, for actually it remains bolt upright, usually chewing the cud with a rather supercilious look on its face, while the boat sways violently from side to side. To aid the giraffe in this balancing act the bedding must be kept very deep in the box so that the animal can get a firm purchase with its feet. A plain wooden floor in a rough sea can be very dangerous, for on it a giraffe will slip and injure itself.

Among other things I acquired here were three Ground Hornbills. These are large grotesque-looking birds with rather long legs and small feet and have a peculiar way of walking on their toes, giving the impression of a woman in high-heeled shoes that are too tight for her. To add to their bizarre appearance there are naked folds of red skin on the throat. Ground Hornbills are highly intelligent and amusing, but the feature that attracts most attention is their long upsweeping eyelashes, which are the envy of all beauty-conscious damsels.

The largest of these three specimens—the only adult—must have been really hungry when he arrived in my hands, for he devoured in quick succession six full-grown rats that had been killed in a nearby shed. These he swallowed whole, though the larger rats certainly took a lot of gulping before finally disappearing, tail last.

From Nanyuki I made the journey round the north side of the mountain to the eastern slopes and the town of Meru. Here I met the late Col. Abbay, who was running the local hotel. He was a great sport and went right out of his way to help me and in all was instrumental in getting me three East African Bare-throated Francolins, one Vulturine Guinea-fowl, six Kenya Crested Guinea-fowl, three Kenya Crested Porcupines, and a number of Jackson's Chamæleons —all of which he presented.

He had most of these on hand when I arrived, and I was particularly struck with the porcupines, which all had black-and-red quills instead of the usual black-and-white. It is known that around Isiolo, in the dry country, all the porcupines have this peculiarity, and Col. Abbay made a special effort to get some for me. The red in the quills undoubtedly comes about through the animals eating some local plant or root that is rich in a madder-like substance, for when these same porcupines shed their quills in captivity the new ones were of the normal black-and-white pattern. In the course of time the unshed red quills gradually became lighter in colour, and by the time I reached home the

three porcupines looked like any normal specimens except for a very few remaining red quills.

The Jackson's Chamæleons in the Meru district have particularly long horns and are most striking creatures. As soon as I got back to Nairobi I sent them off by air to the London Zoo and they were all on show in perfect condition two days later.

At first Col. Abbay had great difficulty in getting the Meru natives to bring in these creatures uninjured, and most of them arrived with broken jawbones. Nearly all tribes fear the chamæleon, but can usually be induced to bring them in uninjured on long sticks. However, the Meru have a definite hatred for the animal, due to a legend which blames the chamæleon for their backwardness and troubles, and consequently they have an urge to mutilate every one they see.

The legend runs that in the dim past a witch doctor told the Meru people about a lake situated on the slopes of Mt. Kenya whose waters were supposed to have magical powers. (It is today a sacred lake.) He said that if the people bathed in these waters they would turn white, but the tribe was so large that there was not enough water for them all to bathe in. Some method had to be devised to decide who should be the fortunate people, and it was eventually agreed to split the tribe in two and each should choose a representative, in the form of some animal, to run a race. One side chose a dik-dik because it was a speedy runner and was small enough not to be impeded by thick bush. The other side chose the chamæleon, for it was thought that speed might be a handicap and would bring about disaster on the rocky course to the sacred lake and back. However, the speedy dik-dik made it without mishap, so the winning side went to the sacred lake, bathed and all turned white. Then they left their black brethren and migrated northwards and thus became the forerunners of the white race. When the losers visited the lake it was practically dry and there remained only sufficient water to wet the soles of their feet and the palms of their hands, which alone turned white. So the existing Meru people blame the chamæleon for their own colour and any imaginary troubles that go with it.

Various donors and white hunters had helped to get together a large collection of animals which were distributed over a wide area on various farms.

Cleland Scott, from whom I had previously purchased Straw, now presented me with another lion and two lionesses—all about three-quarters grown—which he called the three Bs, signifying Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered. The middle name is not as I heard it, but I changed it for the sake of propriety.

Altogether it seemed that the collection was becoming too large for a single person to cope with on the way home. I therefore cabled to the London Zoo for assistance and they responded straight away by sending out Bill Harwood of the Zoo staff.



The collection was probably one of the largest ever shipped on the high seas, and to give the reader some idea of the magnitude of the operation I quote the list in full:

2 chimpanzees
6 Brazza's Monkeys
2 Mount Elgon Colobus Monkeys
1 Stuhlmann's Monkey
1 Gelada Baboon
1 Ring-tailed Lemur
3 Silvery Galagos (black var.)
3 lions
1 leopard
1 Caracal Lynx
4 cheetahs
6 Neumann's Genets (2 black var.)
4 Egyptian Mongooses
6 White-tailed Mongooses
3 Black-tailed Mongooses
1 Marsh Mongoose
1 Spotted Hyæna
2 Black-backed Jackals
5 Bat-eared Foxes
2 Kenya Ground Squirrels
3 Kenya Crested Porcupines
1 Crested Bush Rat
2 Rock Hyraxes
1 Grevy's Zebra
1 Black Rhinoceros
1 Cape Buffalo
1 duiker
3 Kenya Oribi
1 Northern or Defassa Waterbuck
1 Impala Antelope
1 Thompson's Gazelle
3 Lord Delamere's Bush Buck
1 Lesser Kudu
2 Baringo Giraffes
1 Cotton's Giraffe
3 Reticulated Giraffes
2 Kenya Bush Pigs
1 wart-hog
3 antbears

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2 Masai Ostriches
3 East African Bare-throated Francolins
2 Vulturine Guinea-fowl
2 Uganda Crested Guinea-fowl
6 Kenya Crested Guinea-fowl
12 Common Quail
2 Grey-necked Crowned Cranes
2 Secretary Birds
1 kestrel
1 Woodford's Owl
2 Black Crakes
2 Striated Colies
4 Ground Hornbills
8 Superb Glossy Starlings
7 Green Glossy Starlings
11 Amethyst Starlings
2 Wattled Starlings
4 Spot-backed Weavers
1 Chestnut Weaver
2 Red-billed Weavers
1 Red-headed Weaver
12 Grey-headed Social Weavers
4 Chestnut Sparrows
1 Green Singing Finch
2 Streaky Seedeaters
6 Jackson's Whydahs
2 Red-naped Whydahs
2 Purple Indigo-finches
5 Bronze-wing Mannikins
17 Kenya Firefinches
13 Masai Waxbills
3 Purple Grenadier Waxbills
5 Kenya Red-rumped Waxbills
1 Melba Finch

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2 African pythons

Finding a ship to transport the animals home was now becoming a race against time, as with everything on the open deck I had to arrive in England by the autumn if I was to avoid losses through cold. Things came to such a pass that there was only one boat with sufficient space that could get me home before the winter, and that was the S.S. *Urlana*. The captain of this slow-going cargo boat was enjoying the tranquillity of the Indian Ocean when he received a wireless communication from the agents asking him if he could accept the above deck-cargo.

He must have been shattered to the core, probably on account of the lions, for he replied that he could not accept such a cargo. Well, a captain is master of his own ship and no one can force him to take cargo of this nature if he is unwilling. If this opportunity failed it meant that I would probably be stranded for six months in Kenya with all the animals. Sensing that the captain's first reaction was one of concern at the responsibility that would be thrust on him if he accepted the animals, I cabled the Zoo to ask the head office to bring pressure to bear on him. At the same time I got the agents to contact him, reassuring him of the tameness of all the animals, and letting him know that he would be relieved of all responsibility as there would be two alleged experts travelling home in charge of the collection to do all the feeding, etc., during the voyage.

By the time all this had taken effect the *Urlana* had reached Mombasa, and one day when I thought it far too late for anything to happen I unexpectedly received a telegram saying that the captain had decided to accept the consignment.

It was now my turn to be shaken, for there were only four clear days to get everything assembled at Nairobi station. My assistant was up-country, and all the giraffes and other large animals were scattered around Kenya hundreds of miles from Nairobi, being kept by various collectors until such time as I wanted them. Thus I had to send all these people telegrams to crate and deliver the animals immediately. Their difficulties were no less than mine, for they in turn had to get rail-trucks at short notice, and some had to be brought in by lorry.

It transpired that I could not take the whole consignment to the coast on one train as it was too large, so it was decided to send the smaller stuff on hand the day before the others, and this went off in charge of Harwood. This arrangement allowed the maximum amount of time for the giraffes to arrive, which they did, but only just in time.

Tons of foodstuffs such as hay, lucerne, maize, bran, groundnuts, fruit and vegetables had to be arranged for. All except the perishable produce I had taken the precaution of having on hand. But this was at a time when Kenya was experiencing one of its worst droughts and the purchase of most farm produce required a permit. The thousands of pounds of meat necessary had to be ordered well in advance because of the necessity of slowly deep-freezing it before shipment.



Imagine my consternation when I learnt just before leaving that the boat was capable of only five knots and that after leaving Mombasa she had to go to the Seychelles Islands to collect a large cargo of copra. These two factors upset all my calculations, and in fact doubled the estimated length of the voyage. One of the greatest problems on a cargo ship is the limited refrigeration space, as this is merely sufficient to keep such perishable foods as are required by the crew. Apart from such items as meat, which must be kept frozen, there is no cool spot for extra fruit, which may all ripen overnight going through the tropics. Another concern, which may worry the captain, is the fresh-water supply. A great deal is required daily for such a consignment, especially when the iron decks become so hot that they have to be hosed down with sea water, for then the animals, like the crew, develop a thirst that is almost unquenchable.

The first half of the collection went off by goods train from Nairobi without a hitch, but to get everything settled—paying bills, making final purchases, juggling with shipping, rail and other documents, and coping with lorry-loads of animals—was something of a nightmare.

I scrambled on to a truck just as the train was moving off. A number of animals had been thrust on me at the last minute, including a young Defassa Waterbuck and a young Delamere's Bush Buck that were still on the bottle and were due for a feed as soon as the train started. I had six giraffes, two Grevy's Zebras, the other larger mammals and all the birds, on this trip, occupying six open trucks, and among these there were certainly some characters. Some of them I was already acquainted with, but others which had been kept far from Nairobi I was now meeting for the first time. One of the former was 'Twiga' the giraffe, caught in north-east Uganda when only a day or two old and brought up on the bottle; children had ridden on his back until he became too tall. He was now about three years old and nearly eleven feet high and until he came on this train he had never been in the company of his own kind, except, of course, on the day of his birth. He was so accustomed to human beings that he was inclined to frown on his fellow creatures, and when liberated with his companions in the London Zoo he completely ignored them for a long time. Nature, however, eventually had its way, and Twiga became the proud father of two children at Whipsnade.

Perhaps the most amazing character was a giraffe called 'Midget', after my own nickname, caught only a fortnight before I left. To look after him and his companions on the train I had to jump from truck to truck and work my way along the edge of them, as each giraffe crate occupied their full width. To do

this while carrying a bucket of water or food as the train swayed round sharp bends was no easy task, and with only one hand free I might easily have been flung on to the track.

Midget at this stage was a mixture of hostility and friendliness, or perhaps the latter was merely curiosity. When climbing along the side of his crate he several times threatened to kick me off the train, but at night when I was so tired that I lay down on some sacks of corn near Midget and went fast asleep, he woke me up several times by stretching out his long neck and licking my face.

In passing under the lowest of the bridges the engine driver slowed down the train to a snail's pace as Twiga was very near the safety limit in height, and in fact the bridge cleared him only by a few inches.

The ship's captain greeted me by handing me a rifle and ammunition—just in case a lion escaped! But after introducing him to these animals and patting every one in turn, the rifles were put away and forgotten. Everything was finally slung on board and battened down. Truck-loads of food were somehow stored away and eventually the zoo ship left Mombasa harbour with a great crowd of onlookers to see us off.

The *Urlana* was constructed for carrying coal from one Indian port to another, a job for which speed was unnecessary, but she was now commissioned under the war-time transport control, and had to proceed where ordered to do so. Her engines were now chugging wearily as we steamed almost due east across the Indian Ocean to the Seychelles Islands about a thousand miles from Mombasa. The only compensation was that it allowed me to see a group of islands I had never seen before and would be unlikely to visit again.

We anchored two miles off Victoria, the port serving Mahé, the principal island of the group. Here we took three thousand tons of copra, or dried coconut, aboard, an operation which extended over eleven days.

The island of Mahé, with its plantations of coconut palms, lovely sandy beaches and mountainous scenery, is one of the most beautiful places imaginable. However, the wild-life is very poor indeed, and so there was tremendous excitement among the islanders, the children especially, when our boat arrived and they were given an opportunity of seeing our floating zoo and of gazing for the first time in their lives on such things as giraffes, lions, and especially chimpanzees, with their human ways and comic antics. Although, owing to shallow water, we were anchored some way out, numbers of people—including the Governor of the Seychelles—came out to visit us.

While the Governor was on board I had to fulfil an engagement ashore doing a broadcast at the local radio station. This was translated and rebroadcast in the local tongue immediately afterwards for the benefit of the non-English-

C S W.66

Grey-necked Picathartes, British Cameroons

"Cholmondley" the Chimp British Cameroons

C S W.6

Long Tailed Pangolin, or Scaly Anteater

Scaly Anteater coiled in defensive position



speaking community. The Seychelles, like Mauritius, are populated largely by Creoles whose language is based on old French, and as I listened to my own broadcast I did not understand a word, although fairly well up in modern French.

Although our visit to the Seychelles meant such a long delay and therefore a lot of extra work and anxiety—as well as extra foodstuffs for the animals—we were more than compensated by the knowledge that our stay had meant so much to these lonely islanders.

We had plenty of time to become familiar with the ways of our large and assorted family. 'Garbo', the tame Bush Pig, was found frequently wandering around the deck, for she soon learnt to lift the drop-door with her snout. However, if one swore at her in a really convincing manner she had the good sense to let herself in again.

'Jimmy', the baby rhino, was happy in a pig like fashion as long as he had plenty to eat; 'Peter', the Gelada Baboon, threatened to murder anyone who came near him, but was fortunately docile with me; the leopard was so full of *joie de vivre* that he spent most of the day tossing up an old sack I had given him and turning somersaults; 'Prince', the cheetah, was the essence of dignity and friendliness (he has since appeared in films); the chimps, if nothing else, kept the crew in a good mood; the three Bs were extremely friendly towards the white members of the crew but got really angry if an Indian came near them; but the most fascinating of the whole crowd were, to my mind, the giraffes. They have an irresistible appeal to me, probably on account of their calm camel-like expressions and lovely eyes; in spite of their powerfulness and great height, they are remarkably docile. They are certainly the strong silent men of the animal kingdom, for one kick from a bull would send any lion into the next world.

Often while working on board we were stripped to the waist, and then Midget loved to lick our backs, whenever a member of the crew was working near his crate oblivious of the fact that a head was towering above him. Midget would startle him by lowering his head from the heavens and licking the back of his neck. One might almost suspect a sense of humour here and certainly Midget had ideas never thought of by his companions, but I imagine the real reason for this licking habit was that he had found the skins of humans in the tropics to be moist and to have a delicious salty flavour.

Extra supplies of fruit and meat were taken on at Alexandria and after what seemed an age we reached Gibraltar. On the last lap the *Urlana* developed engine trouble in the Bay of Biscay and we were lucky to be able to make Falmouth harbour under our own steam. This meant a further delay while spare parts were being fitted. Meanwhile, I think every Press photographer and reporter in England made for Falmouth, or so it seemed to us.

As we finally made our way up Channel to the Thames the chilly October winds howled around the deck, though all the crates had been protected as far as possible by nailing strips of canvas over cracks and ventilation holes. It was indeed a relief when the zoo ship docked at King George V dock in London seven weeks after leaving Mombasa.

*Chapter Twenty-Two*

## BRITISH GUIANA (II)

AS a result of my expedition to Kenya, the Zoo was by now well stocked with a wide range of East African animals, but wild-life from tropical America was poorly represented. With the idea of remedying this defect it was agreed, in February 1947, to send me to British Guiana.

The snowy spell of that season had already lasted three weeks when I boarded the train for Liverpool, consoled by the thought that in less than a fortnight I would be in tropical seas.

Liverpool, no doubt, is the centre of the universe to those born and bred there, but to a visitor who has to while away a day when the city is under snow, there is little to recommend the place. So utterly dejected was I by the chill of the arctic wind and by an attack of sciatica, that I visited one of the leading hotels twice within a few hours to take a hot bath in the hope of thawing out.

The small Booker Line boat fought its way for days against a strong south-westerly wind and the Atlantic swell, but one morning we awoke to see calm waters glistening in the sunshine. The contrast was wonderful, and my sciatica disappeared under the magic influence of the sun's rays.

Georgetown, the principal port and capital of British Guiana, had changed but little since my visit seventeen years previously. On the whole, the largely coloured population seemed to take life in a leisurely happy-go-lucky manner, though it was noticeable that there was a distinct anti-white attitude on the part of a certain section of the community, fostered largely by the local Press, which employed much of its space harping on the colour-bar—not in Guiana, but in England.

A lot has been done for the Colony in the way of providing up-to-date hospitals and schools, in blotting out malaria, and in generally raising the