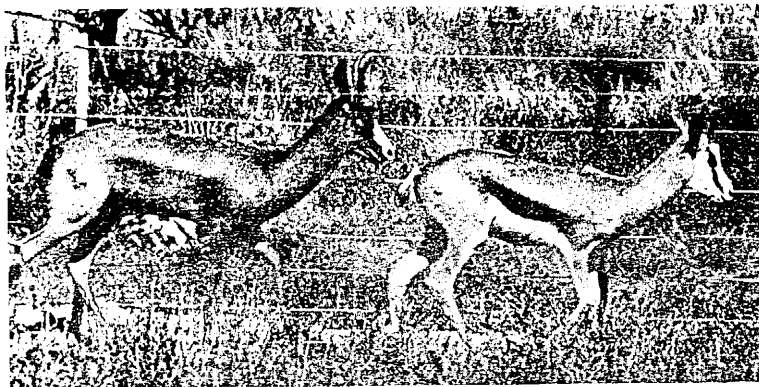


The Nairobi National Park

Written and illustrated
by C. T. ASTLEY MABERLY



The black and normal springbuck proceeding along beside the fence at Skietkuil.

called Bamby. These two mated and produced black kids. Hendrik was then mated to Gracie, a normal ewe, and produced first two black kids, next two normal kids. This breeding investigation continued until we decided to experiment with entirely new blood; a friend gave some of his normal springbuck from Prieska. The outcome of this research work is to be published in one of the S.A. Scientific Journals as it is too lengthy to be included in this article.

The most interesting fact, and one which proved that the buck are not melanistic, is that the white bles on the face of the buck starts to develop at the age of two to four months. It first starts with a greying of the upper lip and by the age of one year the bles becomes pure white. The ewes grow their horns at the age of 3 to 3½ months, the rams from 2 to 2½ months. There are other differences which we have noted but these, too, will be dealt with in the final write-up when full details and measurements will be included.

Summing Up

I believe, and I do not think I am wrong, that this is an entirely new race of springbuck, occurring in that particular area of Southern Africa. Its occurrence is too persistent, having existed since 1888, and that they were the animals known and referred to by early settlers in this part of South Africa as Bontebok leaves little doubt in my mind; an area where bontebok never could have survived; and that thanks to Mr. P. J. van der Merwe's wise actions of preservation he reinstated a buck which in a few years, had the killing been continued, would have become as extinct to South Africa as the blaauwbok and quagga of Southern Africa are today.

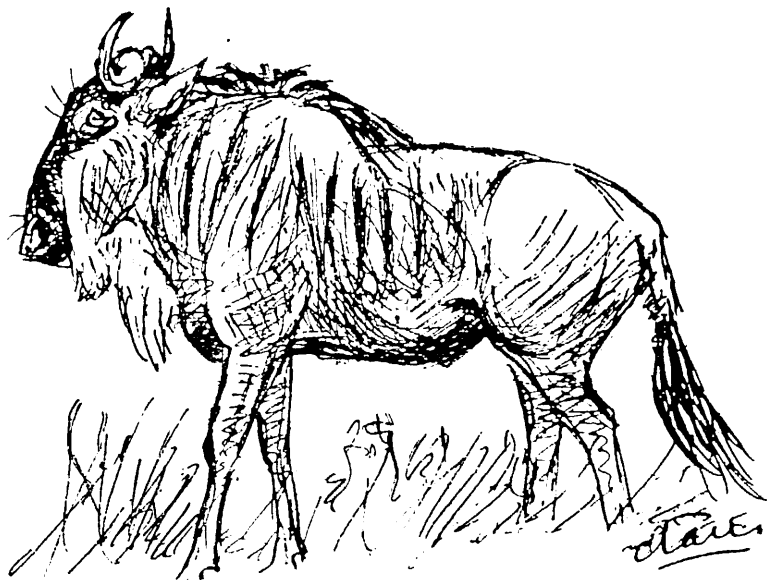
This article is written in gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. P. J. van der Merwe and Mr. and Mrs. J. H. van der Merwe for their unfailing assistance and co-operation in making the study of these animals possible.

MUCH has already been written about the Royal Nairobi National Park of Kenya, because, in its way, it is a unique institution. It is an amazing thought that, within about three miles of the heart of modern Nairobi, lions, leopards, cheetahs and other carnivora, together with a varied assortment of typical East African ungulates, flourish as they have done over the past centuries. While you and I sip our morning tea or coffee on the stoep, many residents of Nairobi take it with them for an early morning run through the Park, before the business of the day! In this way the Nairobi National Park has become a source of joy and pride to the residents of the town. It is of great value, too, to travellers in transit, who can perhaps only spare a few hours away from essential business: enabling them to view a typical assortment of African fauna in ease and comfort. The significance and importance of this small, forty-four square mile park is therefore obvious.

Nairobi National Park owes its existence of course primarily to the fact that, originally, it formed a corner of the great Southern Game Reserve; being a portion of the Athi plains. Thus, when the boundaries of the envisaged park were finally set in 1939, a fair nucleus of wild animals was already included. Behind the Nairobi park lies the 200 square mile Ngong National Reserve (in part of the Masai Land Unit), and it is no doubt the ability of animals to come and go from Park to Ngong Reserve at present that makes it possible for the little park to support such a large population of wild animals. Should anything occur to interfere with this present freedom of movement and feed resource, the Nairobi Park would be doomed. I need hardly say that present trends in East Africa cause grave concern in this respect.

The great wonder of this small park is that its area includes grassy, scrub-dotted plain, some forested patches, and a river (the Athi) with its riverine bush. There are bush-clad valleys, and within its small compass it provides habitats for many different kinds of mammals and birds, and also supports a varied and interesting vegetation. The greater part of it, of course, comprises undulating grassy plain with a sparse covering of scattered scrub, containing the odd "whistling" or "singing" acacias so typical of much of East Africa. This stunted thorn tree (*Acacia drepanolobium*) is conspicuous with its long white thorns and the numerous large round black ant galls which decorate every twig; and it is the wind blowing through the entrance holes of the galls which causes the thin whistling sounds always associated with these scrubby trees. Our familiar yellow-trunked "Fever" trees also occur in suitable places within the Park.

Among the larger mammals, Patterson's Eland (more richly coloured and striped than the South African race), Masai Giraffe,



East African White-bearded Wildebeest.

Boehm's race of Burchell's Zebra, East African White-bearded Wildebeest, Coke's Hartebeest or "Kongoni", Defassa and common "Ringed" Waterbucks abound: but buffalo occur mainly near the forest patches, and are regular migrants to and from Ngong reserve. A few black rhino lead a more or less hidden life in the forest area, only occasionally being seen by lucky visitors in the very early hours as a rule. Hippo occur in the Athi river, also crocodiles. Elephant have not been seen in or near the park for some years.

Among the medium and small antelopes, Thomson's and Grant's gazelles and impala (the largest and finest horned impala in Africa) abound. A herd of Chanler's Reedbuck (closely related to our South African Mountain, or Rooi Ribbok) can usually be seen in the Sosian Gorge; while Ward's Bohor Reedbuck, with shorter, more forward hooked horns than our common Reedbuck, occurs singly or in pairs in the more open country. Steenbok are common, but Klipspringer are rare here (incidentally, both sexes of klipspringer grow horns in East Africa!), and though the local race of Grey duiker is rare Harvey's Red duiker is plentiful in the wooded valleys and also the Bushbuck. The nimble, tiny little Kirk's dik-dik is common, and may be observed streaking in and out of the scrub.

Of the carnivora, lions are plentiful and usually fairly easily seen, and some forty are estimated to dwell in the park—though, like many of the other animals, they move in and out at times. Leopards and cheetahs occur, and are not uncommonly seen—particularly the more diurnal cheetah—while caracal (rare), serval, and grey wild

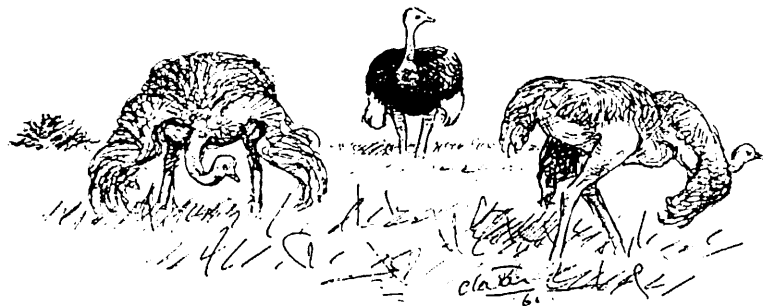
cat all occur. Black-backed Jackals, spotted hyenas (the Striped hyena is rare in the Park), Wild hunting dogs (generally much blacker in hue in East Africa than the South African races, and I think a bit smaller), and the attractive little bat-eared foxes (*Otocyon*) are all plentiful and often seen or heard: the little grey-brown foxes, with their enormous ears, often visible lying just outside the entrance of their burrows at dawn or dusk. Warthog are plentiful, and the large, shaggily maned Olive baboons are becoming as much of a problem, through being fed by tourists, as our Chacmas in the Kruger Park. Vervet monkeys are common, and in the more forested areas the beautiful Sykes variety of the Blue monkey, with its snowy white gorget, may be observed. In addition to the above, many smaller mammals, including several species of mongoose; civets, genets, squirrels (both bush and ground), ratels, porcupines, spring-hares, hares, otters, rodents and bats of all kinds, abound.

All this is rather remarkable when you come to consider that the tall skyscrapers of a modern business town are visible in the distance of only a few miles. Visible also in the distance on a clear day are the snowy summits of Mounts Kenya and Kilimanjaro.

The bird life is equally varied and interesting, and though space forbids me to go into details about this, I must just mention some interesting observations that I made on ostriches, which are very plentiful.

Here, of course, one gets the Masai Ostrich (*Struthio camelus massaicus*): in which the bare neck and limbs of the male are fleshy pink: becoming quite rosy when he is excited! The females are coloured similar to the ladies of the South African species.

We were in the Nairobi Park in September, and this is evidently the courtship season for the Masai ostrich, since display and courtship were in evidence daily. The interesting thing to me was that the females also perform a sort of display to a male, and this I have never seen described before.



Masai hens displaying before a cock ostrich in Nairobi National Park.



A group of lions sketched in the Nairobi National Park.

This feminine display was extremely graceful and beautiful, and I tried to catch the attitudes in many sketches. In most cases the thus complimented male adopted a rather bored, indifferent attitude! Probably thinking it a trivial performance compared with his own spectacular show, or perhaps preferring to court the lady of his own choice. We were not in the park long enough to be able to make lengthy observations about this.

Sometimes two or more females would thus coquette before a male as he appeared in their vicinity. As he approached, salmon-pink head and neck and roseate naked thighs flashing in rich contrast to his jet-black body plumage and snowy wings, two hens, cropping the herbage close to us, erect their heads and necks excitedly to glimpse him, and then immediately walk away from each other in front of him, with a curious crouching gait.

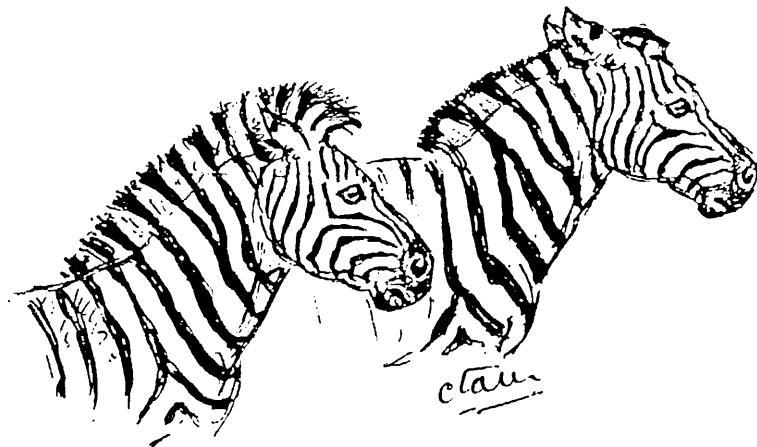
As they proceed, their long necks are outstretched gracefully and lowered almost abasingly as they proceed in mincing steps; and their curling wings are held widespread, the drooping tips brushing the grass tops. As the splendidly arrayed cock arrives close to them, pacing along at his bouncing, haughty stride, the hens lower their heads and necks even more bashfully, agitating their drooping, widespread wings in their excitement, and they seem almost to crouch along with their inviting homage. In most cases the cock insolently marches past them, apparently taking no interest at all, and the disappointed ladies resume their normal attitudes and continue their abrupt pecks at the grass.

With their wings thus partially raised, revealing the bare pale thighs and "under carriage", together with the graceful mincing gait and provoking pose of the dark fluffy bodies, the resemblance to a ballet performance was remarkable! My wife managed to take quite a good piece of coloured cine-film of one such performance.

We watched this feminine display on nearly every occasion when a cock ostrich passed close to a group of hens, or perhaps just a single one. On one occasion we saw a cock in full display, crouching down in the grass, swaying grandly from side to side with gracefully waving plumes, his rosy gullet distended with air, as his neck reclined back among his back plumage: one of the most marvellous displays in nature. The tables were, apparently, completely turned this time, for the lady of his choice was seemingly more interested in the succulent herbage.

It was amusing to observe the same enthusiasm over lions here as in our own Kruger Park. The same groups of cars, all congregated as close as possible to a disdainfully feeding pride.

The South African visitor who knows his animals will note with interest the rather paler, more "faded" hue generally of the Kenya wildebeest, with its yellowish white throat beard in place of the black one of the Blue wildebeest. The Giraffe, here belonging mainly to the Masai race (*G. C. Tippelskirchi*) has noticeably more split-up, "star-like" markings, and a greyer forehead than the Cape race. I say mainly, because here and there one notes individuals with darker and more oval blotches and there seems to be some doubt as to whether *Rothschildi* or *Cottoni* of western Kenya and Uganda do not intergrade with *Tippelskirchi*: or whether such markings are merely individual characters. This variation, incidentally, is featured admirably in the photograph by R. M. Shirley, taken in the Ngong hills, on page 116 in June 1960 (Vol. 14, No. 2) issue. But the caption to this picture is incorrect, as neither of these giraffes is *Reticulata*: a distinct species of giraffe, only occurring in Northern Kenya and Abyssinia. It is distinctly coloured: being dark liver red, or brown; overlaid with a fine "network" of creamy lines: its front legs, particularly, unmarked below the knees.



Sketch of the South African Burchell's zebra (left) and the East African species showing the more pronounced forelock in the former.

The East African races of Burchell's zebra, too, differ from those of the Transvaal, etc. Grant's race, typically from northern Kenya, but extending south too, is pure black and white, with no dusky intermediate "shadow" bands, its legs fully striped to the hooves. From southern Kenya, through Tanganyika, to northern North Rhodesia its place is gradually taken by Boehm's race; in which faint traces of shadow bands occur, though the legs are still fully striped to the hooves. Examples of both types seem to occur in the Nairobi park which might be in a merging area. I was particularly struck with the smallness, or comparative absence of, the pronounced, forward-curving "forelock" so conspicuous in our southern *Burchelli*. This is apparent in foals of the northern races, but the whole neck mane appears shorter, or more "cropped", in the majority of adults.

Finally, the Nairobi National Park must be one of the few areas in Africa where you can see, practically side by side, the two species of Waterbuck: our well-known old friend *Ellipsiprymnus* with the white "ring round his bottom", and *Defassa*, rather more richly coloured with darker legs and a white patch on the inner side of the rump in place of the "ring". The Nairobi park is said to be the only area where the two species are sufficiently adjacent to each other to interbreed; and gradations of each type can be noticed here and there. *Defassa* is usually considered to be more strictly partial to the neighbourhood of water than *Ellipsiprymnus*.

Wild Life Scholarship

THE Wild Life Protection Society of South Africa has decided to award an annual scholarship in the form of a grant-in-aid to suitable applicants desirous of undertaking special studies or courses dealing with wild life.

By devoting certain of its funds towards the encouraging of a closer study of wild life conservation in one or other of its facets, the Council is convinced that a useful purpose will be served.

Any persons, who are in a position to utilise additional knowledge so gained in the cause of wild life preservation, are eligible for the award, which will be made to correspond with the course of study undertaken, subject of course to satisfactory progress reports during the period of such course.

Eligibility for the award will not be confined to any specific class of individual but the type of applicants envisaged are those employed in Government or Provincial departments concerned with wild life preservation, game rangers and wardens, University Students or graduates, and others attached to any wild life association or scientific body dealing with the problems of wild life, or other persons who intend to be so engaged.

Intending applicants should write to the Secretary, P.O. Box 1398, Johannesburg, for further particulars.

The Lost Secretary

By R. J. AUSTIN

ON or about the 14th July, 1960, Mrs. Ernest Kavanagh of the farm Glenlyn, Bonza Bay area, had her attention attracted to an unusual happening as she drove up to her home. In the fast failing light of the early evening she observed an unusual movement in the vicinity of a fence which surrounds the homestead. She drew her husband's attention to this and he immediately procured an electric torch and investigated. Much to his surprise he came upon an exhausted and weak lone Secretary Bird. He approached the bird carefully in an effort not to excite or frighten it for fear of its injuring itself on the fence. His efforts were richly rewarded. The unfortunate bird allowed itself to be picked up and carried into a shed. The poor creature was just a bag of bones; not a vestige of anything in its crop.

Realising that the situation called for prompt action the family held a Council of War. Someone suggested a tot of brandy for the



"Jimmy", the rescued Secretary Bird, surveys his surroundings.