

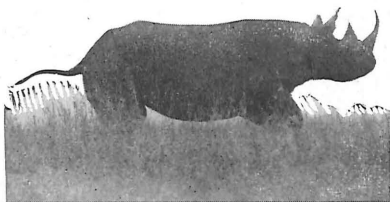
BY THE WATER-HOLES OF NORTHERN KENYA

Nature's Magic on the African Veldt—The Drama of the Desert Water-Hole—
Watching the Magnificent Pageant of Animal Life.

By MARY L. JOBE AKELEY, F.R.G.S.

Photographs by Carl Akeley

Courtesy American Museum of Natural History



The rhinoceros with his massive horns and heavy skin is a veritable armed cruiser among wild beasts.

On his last and most important trip to Africa, Mary L. Jobe Akeley accompanied her husband, Carl Akeley, as field assistant, safari manager and secretary to the expedition. After Carl Akeley's death on the slopes of Mt. Mikenno she remained for five weeks in his last camp determined that her husband's plans be carried to completion. The following article records the impressions gathered during a month's sojourn in Northern Kenya. She has written a vivid account of this beautiful and still remote section of Africa during the rainless season when the wild life of the veldt is dependent upon the water-holes.



The parasite birds that feed upon the rhino's hide serve as danger signals when enemies approach.

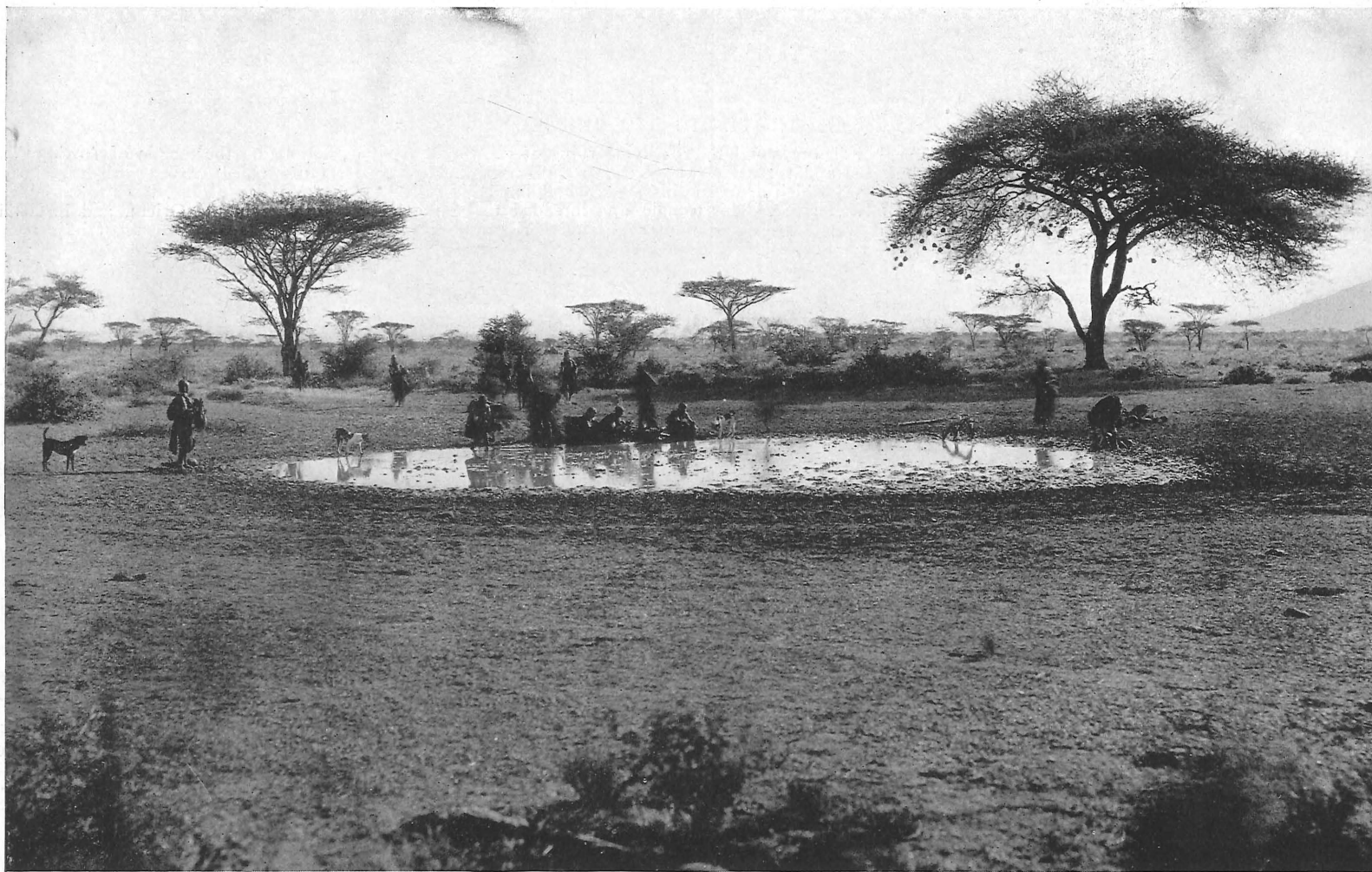
—EDITORIAL NOTE.

WE came into our camp at the Wells two weeks ago. The long lush grass on our sand-river's edge, phenomenally thick because of the heavy and unusual rains, has begun to turn brown, and the whole camp area has the appearance of a wheat field ripe for harvest. In contrast the acacias are brilliant green. Their long graceful branches, their compact thorns and feathery leafage form a thin shade that is welcome indeed and give to our camp an appearance of friendly security. A few are bursting into masses of pale yellow bloom hiding entirely their poisonous thorn daggers. I often look at these trees—and fortunately there are many of them—and think how like they are to the great sprawling apple trees in some ancient orchard. It is impossible for me to realize the barbed hostility of their spikes. They are only benevolent shade, and the winds that blow for many hours of the day and night through their

branches make music which is always sweet and soothing.

This northern Kenya—"the Gateway to the Northern Frontier"—has a beauty that is wholly different from the other regions through which we had passed recently. On all sides are mountains. Some, near at hand, are dark bluish green with dense forestation. Others, far away, are just great upheavals of luminous opalescence. At sunset and at sunrise all the colors in the artist's palette run riot everywhere. But beyond it all and dominating the picture is the illimitable "blue." This is Africa untouched, unmarred.

I rise every morning at four-thirty, fortunate in seeing the passing of the night and in meeting the day more than half way. Nothing in the world is more divinely precious than that early morning hour. The night suddenly fades. A faint glow in the east, ever increasing in extent and intensity, foretells the dawn.



A WATER-HOLE ON THE NORTHERN FRONTIER

On the Northern Frontier man and beast alike must combat nature in their search for water. The natives must dig deeper and deeper into the mud of the water-pans as the drought descends. From the same water-holes where giraffe and oryx drink, nomadic Samburu, the desert's only native inhabitants, fill their calabashes and bathe their sinewy black bodies. The Samburu, living on the milk and flesh of their cattle, sheep and goats, are not great hunters. They employ their long, easily bent spears of native iron only against an occasional lion interested in their flocks.

At last the indefinable radiance is crowned by the swift on-coming of a brilliant burning sun. It is then that the mountains take on amazing colors. The atmosphere becomes prismatic in hue, while the veldt glows white as if covered with hoar frost. On all sides are masses of white campanulates, which unfold at twilight and bloom through the night, shriveled by the morning sun. At dawn the wind, which has blown softly but steadily all night, increases. Its crisp freshness makes me grateful for flannel shirt and big neckerchief close under my throat.

We leave camp before dawn and spend glorious hours collecting on the veldt and in the hills. Between nine and ten the heat of approaching midday begins and increases steadily until about two; though rarely, even in this high temperature, do the gentle breezes fail.

Sometimes we are able to be at lunch in our dining tent for the hottest hours of the day, between one and three. About three the power of the sun is broken, a brisk wind begins to blow, and we go out again to our work. We do not return until after nightfall. Before we realize it, the indescribable glory of the sunset is upon us. The whole circle of the heavens is transformed by this most stupendous miracle of the day. Each sunset seems more beautiful than the last; and as the final act of the day's drama is done, I feel as if a curtain had been softly dropped by gracious hands upon the unfathomable mysteries of the world and all that lies beyond. I am absorbing something I have not had before and learning much of Africa's moods through the changing hours of day. African mornings are glorious past all description. African evenings are a revelation and a benediction.

But the mystic charm of Africa is not for the eye alone. There are equal delights and fascinations for the ear. At the first faint glimmer of the dawn the voices of the morning begin. A little bird sings softly in the acacia sheltering my tent, a timid, bewitching melody. Other lustier voices follow. The steel-blue dawn is upon us. Our camp cock crows. The horn-bills begin their incessant calling to their little ones in their nests in the hollow trees. The morning is filled with singing, chirping and twittering. Weaver birds are sweetly vocal as they flutter about

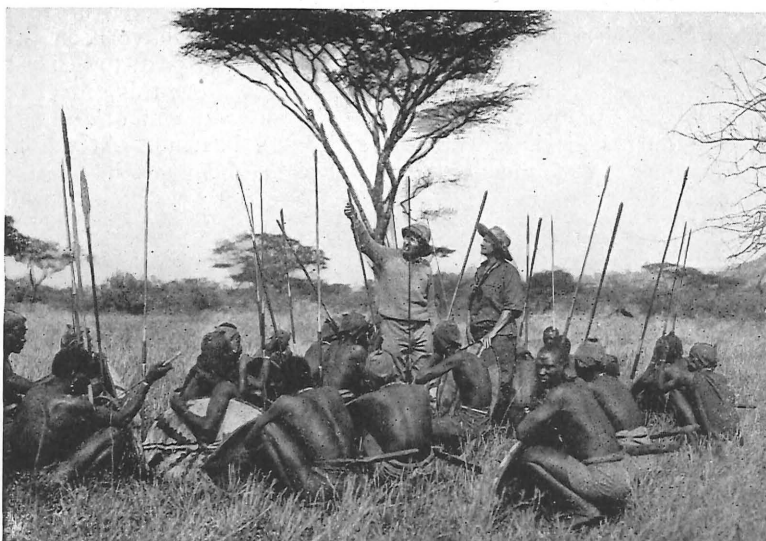
their pendant nests hung in the high acacias as close as the birds can crowd them. Finches, kingfishers, starlings, doves, join in the sounding chorus of the first hours of day. These bird voices continue in varying volume throughout the day, as their food-gathering permits. I always wish the songs were longer and more sustained—they are so sweet and brief. Hawks, cranes, vultures, kites, spur-fowl and guinea fowl add their harsh cries. They all flit from tree to tree among our tents, wholly unafraid and seemingly unaware of our presence.

The sounds of the night are also varied and numerous. If I were only less tired physically or had in less degree this feeling of overpowering contentment, I would stay awake for one

whole night. Then I could appreciate and describe them better. But I have persistently this wonderful sense of being at home after a long journey. I am sleeping in what seems to me a luxurious tent on a comfortable canopied canvas cot, and yet I have a feeling unbelievably similar to that I have experienced when lying on my blankets on a bed of boughs under a big sheltering spruce tree in my beloved Canadian Rockies. The glorious big white moon streams over me in my wide-open tent and I seem to be close to the blue dome through which it slowly moves. The soft medley of early night-sounds lulls me to sleep, and it is only when a hyena later on laughs hideously fifty feet from my tent that I come abruptly back into the African night. Half a mile away, the stallions in a big herd of Grevy zebra bellow, jackals bark, a frightened spur-fowl in the

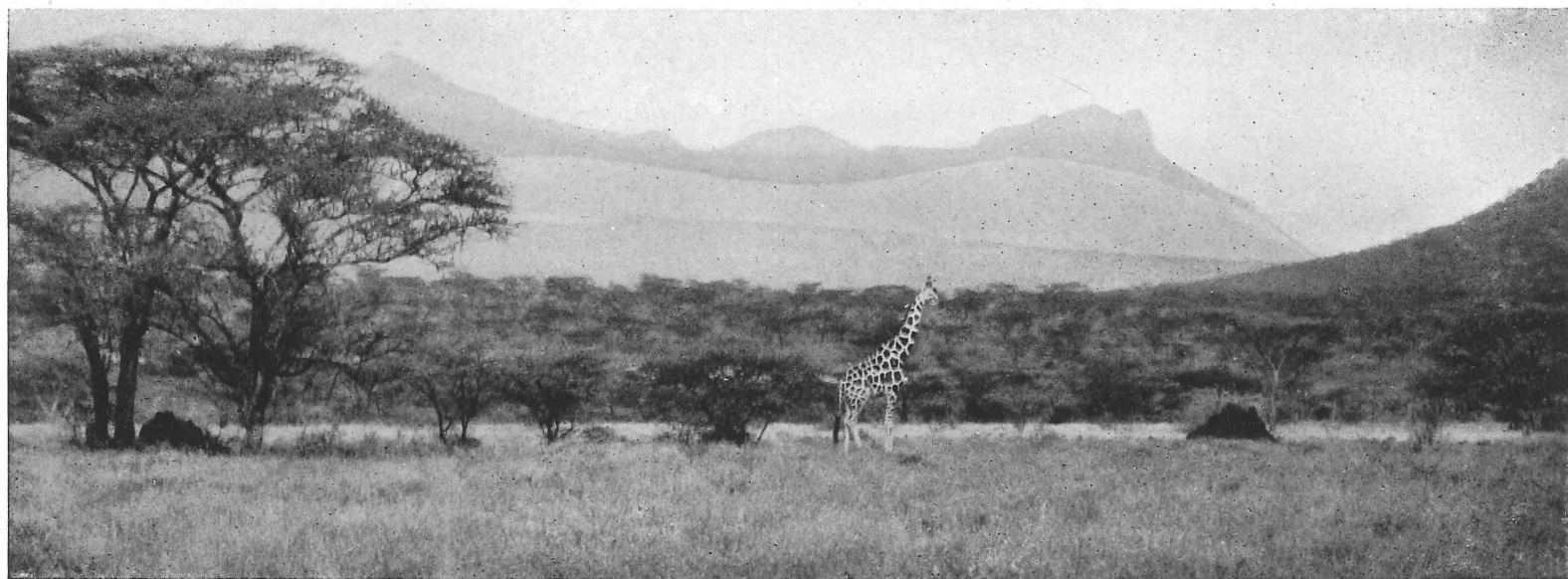
tree above my tent squawks, and far away by the Eusso Nyiro a lion speaks, bringing the sounds of midnight to a startling climax.

Throughout one dark night, Mr. Akeley and I lay on the ground in the shelter of a thorn-blind near a water-pan to listen to the murmur and the clamor of the night. First came the tiny pattering footsteps of the Grant's gazelle as they struck the hard outer edge of the water-pan, and a scurry of wings from the night birds disturbed in wading the shallow pool. Then the clattering of many zebra hoofs, putting to rout the Grants. The deep harsh call of the Grevy zebra stallion was unmistak-



CARL AND MARY AKELEY WITH LUMBWA SPEARMEN

For the Lumbwa tribesmen of Tanganyika the lion hunt is one of the supreme experiences in life. From boyhood each Lumbwa looks forward to the time when he will reach the age of manhood and take part in a lion hunt. When a hungry lion menaces their herds of cattle the chief details a group of men to hunt the enemy. They attack the lion with their long burnished spears using cow-hide shields for protection.



A LONE SENTINEL ON THE VELDT

Despite its apparent helplessness, the giraffe has managed to survive throughout countless centuries in a land of cruel and carnivorous beasts. The giraffe's unusual sight and hearing are its greatest aids in the struggle for survival. At the first suggestion of danger the creature strides rapidly to the nearest acacia tree where his spots serve as protective coloration and give the effect of light and shadow. In outwitting the lion he must often rely on his fleetness of foot. If he is overtaken he stands an excellent chance of killing the lion with a blow of his powerful hoofs.

able. A half dozen oryx joined them and drank with them as amicably as they graze together in the same pasture lands. Each is well matched in size and strength and speed and striking ability, and consequently theirs is a complete understanding. But soon all these animals made off over the veldt and the noise of their drinking was followed by a different sound. We crawled to our two little peep-holes. Filling our clothing and scratching ourselves with thorns we peered out into the darkness. A huge leaden shadow was trampling the water-hole to a ruin. Pawing, snorting, gulping, guzzling—only one beast could be guilty of such actions. His footprints next morning confirmed our identifications. We had seen the bulky form of a rhino. As he rampaged about, a hyena set up his dismal yodel and the jackals ran barking into the night.

At the water-pans many tragedies of the desert occur. A jackal kills a baby gazelle; a pack of hyenas pulls down a large antelope, for we have seen them sharing a freshly killed animal with no sign of lion in the neighborhood. The lion himself takes Grant's and Grevy zebra for his nocturnal meal. Morning brings the vultures to polish off the fragments and the dainty little sand grouse fly in to quench their thirst in peace.

Unfortunately, a fortnight after our arrival at our desert camp the water-pans disappeared, and our thrill in fraternizing unseen with the midnight folk was all too short. Thereafter, the animals traveled to the big river to drink. Separated from our camp only by the sand river, trails of elephant and the wide footprints of the lion told me of their passing while I slept. I am glad they *passed*.

But the wild folk remained in great numbers on our veldt, and for many days I watched them and came to know some of them individually when we met. When, in our day's work far afield, we continually crossed the trails of many denizens of the desert, Africa became increasingly enchanting. By far the most interesting of all this unspoiled family of the wild is the reticulated

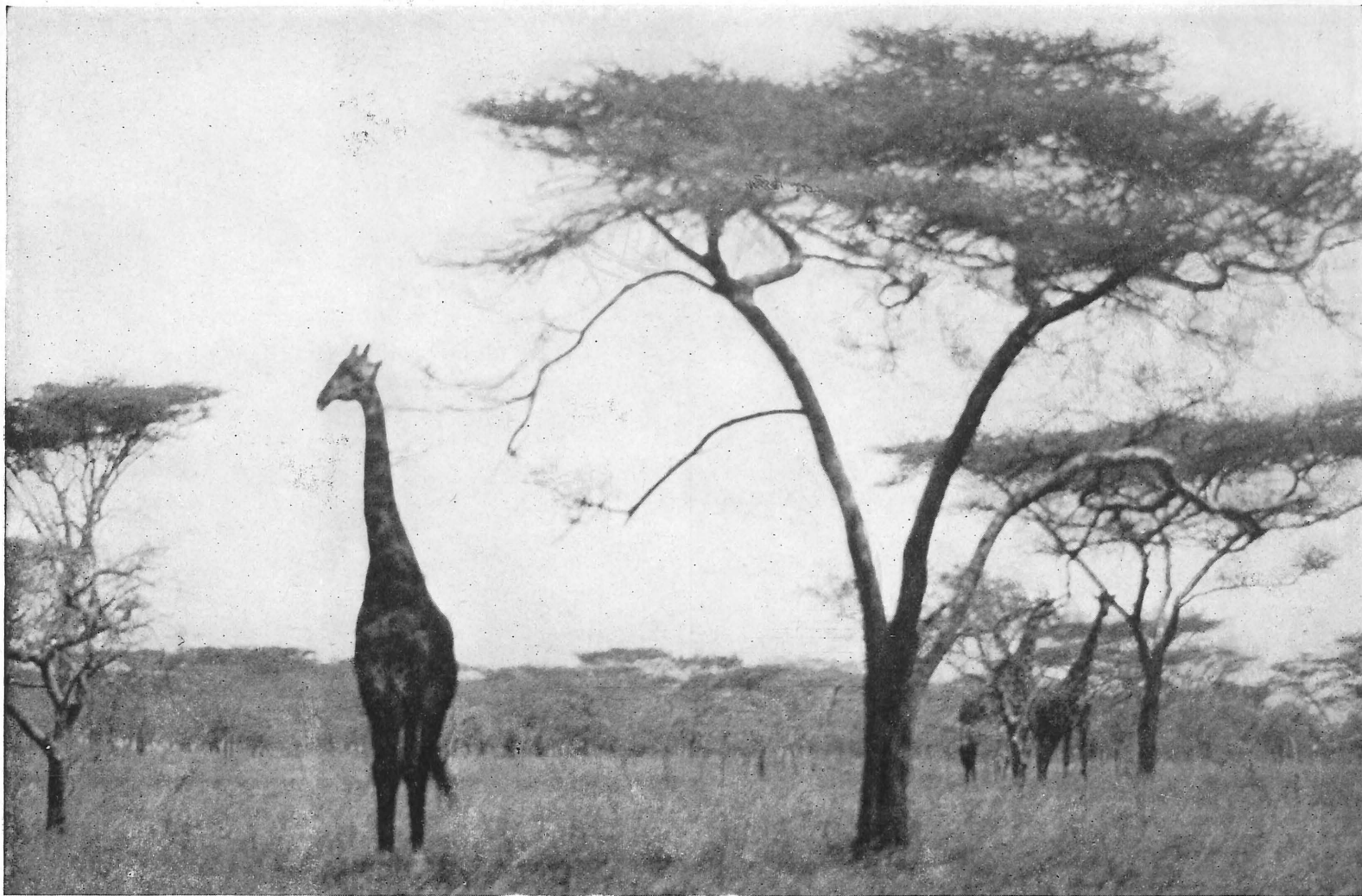
giraffe, beautiful and graceful, frequently conspicuous, voiceless, mildly child-like in the expression of his eyes. What a marvel that he, so unaggressive, has been able to survive. Here at twilight we see a superb lone bull browsing on an acacia branch seventeen feet above the ground on the warming veldt; at sunrise we surprise, not a quarter of a mile from our camp, a herd of nineteen—mothers, "totos", maiden aunts and young bulls. They hear, undisturbed, the sound of our cook's fry-pan breakfast gong. They merely amble off slowly at our approach; again we see at intervals along the way only mothers and babies of varying ages. Their size, their grace, their indescribable beauty of coloration, their unreality thrill me as nothing else has ever done. They are in truth prehistoric animals which through age-long isolation of Africa from the destructive glaciation of the northern world have been preserved here. Surely they belong to an age long past, to a life long extinct elsewhere.

And how does this graceful, harmless creature defend himself in the environment of the carnivora? The giraffe has unusual sight and hearing. At the first suggestion of danger when in the open he moves in great strides to the nearest acacia tree, where to our eyes at least, he often becomes completely effaced, owing to his protective coloration, for his spots give the effect of mere splotches of light and shadow. But with the lion as an enemy the giraffe must also rely upon swiftness of foot; and if unable to outdistance his adversary, he turns, and when thus at bay he stands an excellent chance of striking the lion to death with his powerful hoofs. The female giraffes, more frequently than not accompanied by their young, are constantly on the alert, feeding only at short intervals and spending more than half their time in watching intently for enemies. It would be interesting to know just how they save their young from attack. Certain it is that the young are fleet and have endurance, which seems to be true of all young vegetable-eating animals. I have seen one calf, only slightly disturbed, run with its mother a dis-



A SUPERB SKIN

This is one of the magnificent skins secured by Carl Akeley for the Water-Hole Group at the American Museum of Natural History. Preparing the skin of the giraffe is one of the most difficult jobs known to taxidermy. The work must be done rapidly because of the large amount of water which the skin contains and the consequent tendency to disintegration and "the slipping of the hair". As soon as a square foot of skin is removed salt must be rubbed on both sides for the extraction of water. Even under the best of conditions skinning a giraffe is a Herculean task.



BROWSING AMONG THE ACACIAS

Giraffes must be constantly alert, feeding at short intervals and gazing about intently for signs of danger. In addition to all its other handicaps—its long neck, stiff legs and awkwardly proportioned body—the giraffe can make no sound to frighten its enemies or warn its distant comrades.



NOON-DAY REST FOR A RHINO MOTHER AND HER CHILD

Like so many other animals that inhabit hot countries, rhinos sleep during the greater part of the day. In the cool of the evening or even during the night they forage about for the herbage, shrubs and leaves of trees on which they feed. These huge creatures are dull of sight and hard of hearing, but they possess a remarkably acute sense of smell. The rhino mother keeps scrupulous watch over her little one. If her anger is stirred she will charge any living thing.



ZEBRAS ON THE RUN

On almost every sunlit slope along the Northern Frontier roam herds of beautifully striped zebras. The zebra's stripes are an excellent example of natural camouflaging. Frequently when the sun is high a herd of zebra will blend so well with the surrounding countryside that it is invisible. Unlike its cousin, the horse, the zebra has never been satisfactorily domesticated. Such efforts as have been made have met with only partial success. The zebra possesses little stamina and tires easily.

tance of two miles at the rate of fifteen miles per hour. The lion, though swift at the outset, is quickly winded and often loses his quarry. Furthermore, in regions of abundant game the lion feeds on antelope, which are both more numerous than the giraffe and more easily obtained.

Here in grassy pockets we come upon herds of oryx, the fabled unicorn of ancient times, whose spear-like horns show in vivid contrast to his gray body. Sometimes a lone bull stands sphinx-like in the shade of a thorn tree; again, they mingle with the zebra herds in groups of twos and threes. Twice I have seen bands of sixty—bulls, cows and fawn-colored totes, whose pretty gentle faces remind us of little Jersey calves.

The oryx has two methods of defense. His long, spiked and powerful horns, often measuring thirty-six to forty inches long, he uses in charging and striking; his speed in running is great. One can search the gray veldt with glasses and will frequently pass over an oryx standing in the shadow of a tree. Sometimes appearing like a spot of light, sometimes like the shadow, his gray, black and white markings aid largely in his protection.

Almost every time I look off into the sunlit slopes above a tree-lined nullah I see Grant's and Grevy's zebra. Like the oryx they vary in the numbers of animals herding together. Only occasionally a stallion grazes far away from his herd. Yesterday one decided to run a race with the heavy motor truck I am compelled to drive in this collecting expedition. He kept his handicap over me at twenty miles an hour for about a mile, and then suddenly crossed the ox-cart road in front of me. Sometimes a herd of ten or fifteen will line up in military formation as if inspecting us as we pass. Again a larger herd will stampede in a whirl of dust and almost invariably cross ahead of us. But by far the most desirable view of the Grant or Grevy zebra is when in herds of twenty or thirty, some grazing peacefully, others in groups of twos or threes stand absorbing the sunshine, and when

the young of varying ages and sizes frisk about their mothers, like young colts in daisy-filled meadows in May. In contrast with Grant's zebra, the Grevy zebra is heavy, ungraceful and lumbering. The Grant's bark is a definite thing; the Grevy's bray is one of the indescribable sounds of Africa.

The zebra's stripes are another good example of protective coloring. When the sun is high, even though not far distant the Grevy's stripes are often invisible; and frequently he disappears entirely. Zebras run at fair speed, the Grant running in a straightforward way like a horse, the Grevy doubling up and galloping laboriously and clumsily over the veldt, covering the ground at a fair speed, but seemingly a doubtful runner-up to the Grant.

Mingled with all these larger mammals are herds of Grant's gazelle and small groups of gerenuk with here and there tiny dikdik in pairs. Any day that we go out from camp we can see these herds and the gazelle have grown so accustomed to seeing us that they gaze at us for a few minutes and then continue their feeding. The gerenuk are more wary and will stand only a limited amount of inspection. Standing on his long slim hind legs with his lanky forelegs up in a thorn bush, a gerenuk is a strange sight indeed as he culls a few moist leaves from among the thorns. It is reputed that he never drinks. His habitat is in dry country from Somaliland to Lake Rudolph, in the north to Kilimanjaro and the Serengati in the south.

The Grant's gazelle and the gerenuk rely for their safety upon their fleet feet and their protective coloring. Certainly no native could easily get within spear throw of these agile antelope.

Frequently we happen on flocks of ostrich, half a dozen brilliant black and white velvety cocks with gorgeous white plumes tipping wings and tail, and with them their numerous family of drab-colored hens with broods of fluffy, dust-colored chicks.

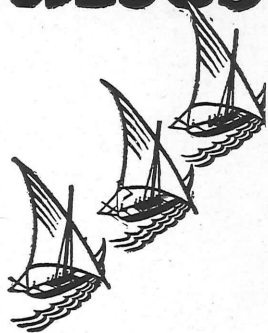
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A HORNBILL BESIDE ITS NEST

The hornbill builds a tiny stronghold for its young in the side of a tree. The opening to the nest is sealed with mud until the little birds are strong enough to break their way out and fly. A small aperture is used by the mother bird to give food to her young.

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By the Water-Holes of Northern Kenya

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The ostrich cock, conspicuous at close range, fades into invisibility a hundred yards away. The females are blessed in the greatest degree with protective coloring, and at a few yards resemble clumps of dead or dying scrub. This may account for their greater numbers. In a flock of fifty birds I counted forty-two females, and in a flock of fourteen there were twelve. This is at least a wise balance in nature's provision for the perpetuation of the species.

I do not believe the hyena is ever in any danger; for surely no self-respecting animal, even though starving would attack this loathsome creature. He is seemingly a part of the rough thorn scrub he infests. The jackal is a swift brown shadow, venturing into the open only at twilight of nightfall. The fennec foxes resemble flashes of grayish golden light as they chase from sunlight to shadow, or efface themselves in the tall grass. Monkeys are a part of the gray tree trunks and the golden morning sunlight.

And as I follow these animals of the veldt or scrub or open forest day by day not wanting to follow too closely, lest I disturb or frighten them, I find fear written in the movements, the demeanor, even in the faces of all these wild children of God's creation.

Every one, from the largest to the tiniest, from the strongest to the impossibly fragile, is possessed with but one all-absorbing motive—the reflex of self-protection. Constituted as we are, it is enough to grieve the heart of a human being to witness this furtive feeding, the wild spasmodic gaze over the landscape, the elevation of head, the quickening of breath, the quivering of ear and nostril, the swift dash to doubtful safety. The enemy is abroad *somewhere*; and this little beast of the field is all vibrant nerve and tense brain, that his life, brief at the best, be prolonged.

Beyond our sand rivers and water-holes are the rolling park-land plains, dotted here and there with acacias of smaller size and with many low growing bushes, shrubs and grasses. Further is the denser scrub. The low bushes grow thickly; the higher scrub, double their height, overtops them; and the acacias reach the height, if not the circumference, of those on the rivers. From a distance the entire top of the scrub is like a gigantic flat table overspread with a green velvet cloth. It is thus that the "table top" acacia gets its name. Here walking is difficult or impossible. Tiny alleys of approach may admit one to the scrub, but on

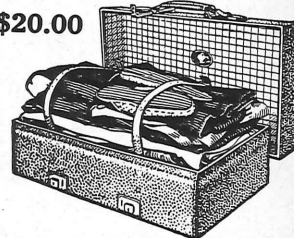
every side the branches reach out their thorns without vestige of leaf. Rope-like creepers trail to and fro studded thick with thorns. Each bush bears thorns on twig and leaf. The acacias are a canopy of long white thorn spikes, protecting tender green leaves or soft yellow flowers from devastation. Only the giraffe dares feed upon these tender leaf morsels and I wonder at their dexterity of feeding. Spiked thorns, curved hooks, like fish hooks, plainly visible, concealed hooks, flowers with a calyx of thorns, seed pods thorn-protected until the time the wind may scatter them afar, are some of the marvels of defense. I think one of the loveliest flowers I have ever seen was in the safest place I can imagine. It was a fragile campanulate of faintest lavender, mounted on a framework of thorns set high on a thorny shrub. When I first saw it, a tiny lavender butterfly of identical shade was poised so immovably upon it that I thought it a part of the flower, and it was only after some moments that the butterfly slowly rose and disappeared in the air. How strange and yet how necessary that the insurpassably lovely is so inseparably linked to the most hostile of nature's plant creation. Here on my sand river charming hibiscus blooms profusely. Each day promptly at four it opens gay petals of yellow and deep magenta to the fast sinking sun. It is easily a challenge to any passerby. And yet when I examined its leaves and stems, I found them filled with so many prickly thorns that either animal or man would think twice before despoiling. On the veldt the other evening I plucked a rather conspicuous rose-pink flower. Its stem was difficult to break and as I raised it to get its odor, I was pricked by a complete calyx of invisible protecting thorns.

Even the graceful waving palms that savor of rest and ease and festive decoration are strangely disillusioning on near approach. Each leaf segment has its sharp-knife-point tip; each stem has its row of defensive thorns.

One day many ages ago this strangely beautiful veldt was doubtless vastly different. Other fair trees and flowers may have graced its broad reaches or its rocky kopjes; other animals of larger size, but of duller brain and slower foot may have fed upon that vegetation; but certain it is that only those stubbornly persistent plant forms have endured which by some trick of nature have created their own weapons of defense, and only the animals who have learned the art of self-protection have survived.

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