

V. *An Account of a Journey into Africa from the Cape of Good-Hope, and a Description of a new Species of Cuckow. By Dr. Andreas Sparrman, of the Royal Academy of Stockholm, in a Letter to Dr. John Reinhold Forster, F. R. S.*

DEAR SIR,

Gottenburg,  
Sept. 16, 1776.

Read Dec. 19, 1776. **B**EING returned to my native country after an absence of five years from it, I will endeavour to give you a short account of my expedition into Africa, which I undertook soon after parting with you at the Cape of Good-Hope. The voyage round the world, of which I shared the perils and pleasures with you, had only made me more eager to continue my rambles in quest of new discoveries. I set out therefore from the neighbourhood of the Cape-town in the beginning of August 1775, with no other company than the son of the Dutch lieutenant EMELMAN, who had formerly accompanied my learned friend Dr. THUNBERG on a similar journey, and some Hottentots who took care of my oxen.

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The first misfortune I met with was the loss of the thermometer which you had left me, and which broke before I had reached the hot-baths. This was only a prelude to greater distresses. The drought was so violent this year, that the like had not been experienced in the colony within the memory of man, and it obliged the inhabitants to leave their country-seats. A great part of their cattle perished for want of grass and water, and I have frequently suffered the most raging thirst in the hot desarts which I traversed; but I was too well seasoned during the voyage to dread the hardships of a scanty subsistence, the fatigues of travelling, or the power of the climate. The most sensible misfortune which the dry season brought along with it, was the desolation of the vegetable kingdom. Far from being so fortunate as Dr. THUNBERG, who has added above a thousand species to the *Flora Capensis*, I found every thing burnt up, and only in the thickest forests met with some perennial plants which were new to me, and which, upon a revival of that gentleman's herbal, I believe are likewise unknown to him. Of these I propose to send you specimens as soon as I can find time to bring my collection into some kind of order. On the other hand, I have been fortunate with animals, and especially in the class of quadrupeds. I shall not speak of lions and other beasts

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of prey, which I have frequently seen in broad day-light, and heard roaring about me at night, though they never ventured to attack our cattle. But it was chiefly among the antelopes and animals of that fort that I hunted. Mr. EMELMAN and myself, with nine hottentots, a wagon drawn by several pairs of oxen, and several hunting horses, happily traversed a desert of fifty miles, where we had greater sport than any German prince could ever boast of. On that route I penetrated farther into the country than any of my predecessors, having gone one hundred miles beyond the last Christian's or Dutchman's hut, into the district of the Yellow or (as they are vulgarly called) Chinese Hottentots.

The great buffaloes which inhabit the wilds of Africa, do not appear to me to differ in any respect from the North American *Bison*, although I have seen great numbers of them. I have likewise found a species of pole-cat on that continent which LINNÆUS calls *Viverra Putorius*, contrary to M. DE BUFFON'S opinion, who seems to confine this animal and its species to America. By the sea-side I was fortunate enough to catch a *Manatee* alive, notwithstanding the difficulty which must attend the capture of such an unweildy animal. There I likewise saw some islands, on which I was told an English ship had been lost. These I suspected at first to be the *Doddingtons*; but  
afterwards

afterwards had reason to doubt it, those islands being supposed to lie in a more southerly latitude.

I have had opportunities of making many curious and valuable Observations relative to the different tribes of Hottentots, their oeconomy, hunting-matches, and other customs; an account of which, together with some remarks on the natural history of the elephant, the rhinoceros, and other animals, I intend to prepare for the press. I am possessed of an accurate map of that part of Africa which I have visited, containing all the hills, together with the smallest rivulets, as far as the Bay de la Goa, which, I think, will be a great addition to the work. I only regret that I was not able to draw the objects of natural history, and have an hundred times wished that your son had been with me for this purpose.

As I had been upwards of nine months on this journey, at my return to the Cape I found that my acquaintance had given up all hopes of seeing me again, having had no tidings of me for so long a space of time. Notwithstanding the many dangers to which I had been exposed on this expedition, I assure you I was greatly tempted to stay another year, in hopes of being more successful in botanical discoveries. However, the prospect of securing the spoils which I had collected, prevailed on me to relinquish that scheme. Indeed I little thought at that time that the greatest

danger awaited my collection in Sweden. A few days ago a great part of it has been damaged here by fire, which has been particularly fatal to my stuffed birds, having destroyed some which were not yet described.

As I am well acquainted with the pleasure which every new discovery in the history of nature gives you, I take this early opportunity of expressing the readiness with which I wish to contribute to your satisfaction, and have subjoined to this letter an account of a curious bird, a species of Cuckow, which I have saved out of the fire. I only beg that you will consider it as an earnest of more important communications, as soon as the hurry of my affairs will permit me to bring my papers into order. In the mean time if you should think that account, and the annexed drawing, worthy the attention of the Royal Society, I should be greatly flattered if you would do me the honour to lay it before that learned Body.

With the greatest esteem I remain, &c.

THE HISTORY OF THE HONEY-GUIDE, OR  
CUCULUS INDICATOR.

THIS curious species of Cuckow is found at a considerable distance from the Cape of Good-Hope, in the interior parts of Africa, being entirely unknown at that settlement. The first place where I heard of it was in a wood, called the *Groot Vaader's Bosch*, the Grand Father's Wood, situated in a desert near the river which the Hottentots call *T'kaufkai*. The Dutch settlers thereabouts have given this bird the name of *Honig-wyzer*, or Honey-guide, from its quality of discovering wild-honey to travellers. Its colour has nothing striking or beautiful, as will appear from the description and drawing annexed; and its size is considerably smaller than that of our Cuckow in Europe: but in return, the instinct which prompts it to seek its food in a singular manner, is truly admirable. Not only the Dutch and Hottentots, but likewise a species of quadruped, which the Dutch name a *Ratel*<sup>(a)</sup>, are frequently conducted to wild bee-hives by this bird, which as it were pilots them to the very spot. The honey being its favourite food, its own interest prompts it to be instrumental in robbing the hive, as

(a) Probably a new species of badger.

some scraps are commonly left for its support. The morning and evening are its times of feeding, and it is then heard calling in a shrill tone *cherr, cherr*, which the honey-hunters carefully attend to as the summons to the chase. From time to time they answer with a soft whistle, which the bird hearing, always continues its note. As soon as they are in sight of each other, the bird gradually flutters towards the place where the hive is situated, continually repeating its former call of *cherr, cherr*: nay, if it should happen to have gained a considerable way before the men (who may easily be hindered in the pursuit by bushes, rivers, and the like) it returns to them again, and redoubles its note, as if to reproach them with their inactivity. At last the bird is observed to hover for a few moments over a certain spot, and then silently retiring to a neighbouring bush or other resting-place, the hunters are sure of finding the bees nest in that identical spot, whether it be in a tree, or in the crevice of a rock, or (as is most commonly the case) in the earth. Whilst the hunters are busy in taking the honey, the bird is seen looking on attentively to what is going forward, and waiting for its share of the spoil. The bee-hunters never fail to leave a small portion for their conductor, but commonly take care not to leave so much as would satisfy its hunger. The bird's appetite being only whetted by this parsimony,

it is obliged to commit a second treason, by discovering another bees-nest, in hopes of a better salary. It is further observed, that the nearer the bird approaches the hidden hive, the more frequently it repeats its call, and seems more impatient.

I have had frequent opportunities of seeing this bird, and have been witness of the destruction of several republicks of bees, by means of its treachery. I had however but two opportunities of shooting it, which I did to the great indignation of my Hottentots. From those specimens (both of which are supposed to be females) I have made the subsequent description. The inhabitants in general accuse the same bird of sometimes conducting its followers where wild beasts and venomous serpents have their places of abode: this however I never had an opportunity of ascertaining myself; but am apt to believe such cases to be accidental, when dangerous animals happen to be in the neighbourhood of a bees-nest.

Whilst I staid in the interior parts of Africa, a nest was shewn to me, which some peasants assured me was the nest of a Honey-guide. It was woven of slender filaments or fibres of bark, in the form of a bottle. The neck and opening hung downwards, and a string in an arched shape



shape was suspended across the opening, fastened by the two ends, perhaps for the bird to perch upon.

DESCRIPTIO CUCULI INDICATORIS.

**ROSTRUM** crassiusculum, versus basin fuscum, apice luteum.

*Angulus oris* usque infra oculos extensus.

*Nares* postremæ ad basin rostri, supremæ vicinæ ut carinulâ dorsali saltem separarentur, oblongæ, margine prominulo.

*Pili* aliquot ad basin rostri, præcipuè in mandibulâ inferiore.

*Lingua* plana, subfagittata.

*Oculorum* irides ferrugineo-griseæ.

*Palpebræ* nudæ, nigre.

*Pedes* nigri, scanforii. *Tibiæ* breves; *Ungues* tenues, nigri.

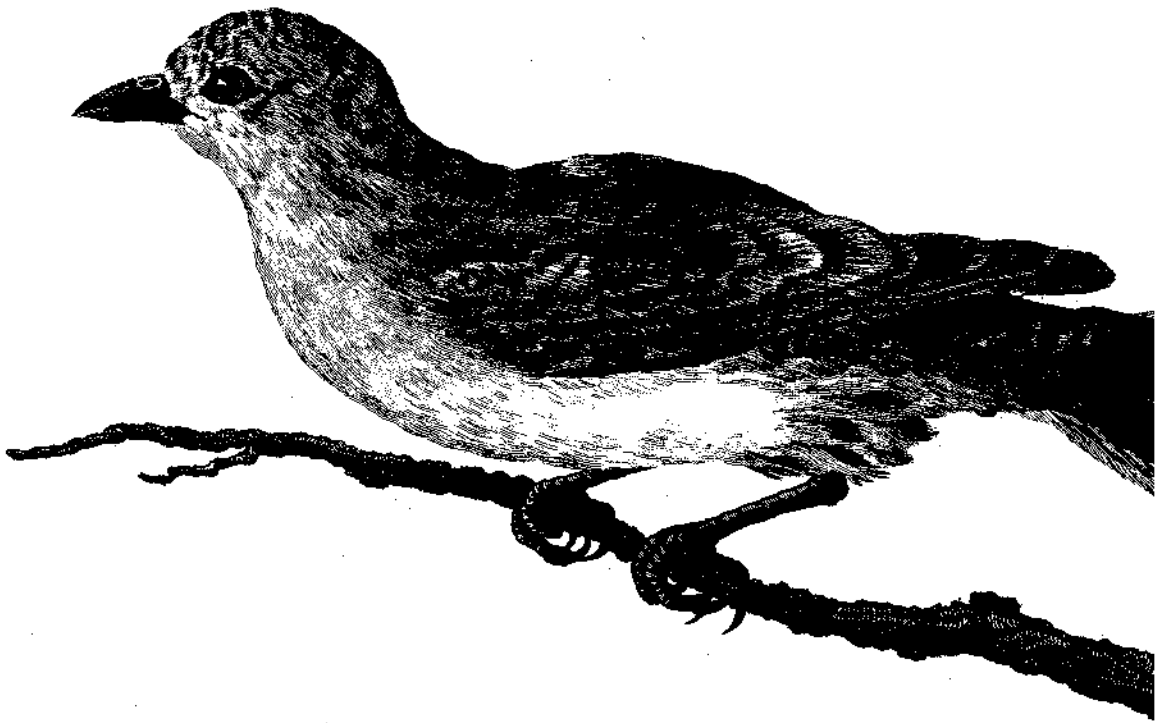
*Pileus* læte griseus e pennis brevibus latiusculis.

*Gula*, *Jugulum*, *Pectus*, sordidè alba, cum aliquo virore vix notabili in pectore.

*Dorsum* et *Uropygium* ferrugineo-grisea.

*Abdomen*, *Cristumque* alba.

*Femora* tecta pennis albis, macula longitudinali nigra notatis.



CUCULUS INDICATOR.

*The Honey*



*mev Guide.*

*Alarum rectrices* superiores omnes griseo-fuscæ, exceptis fummis aliquot quæ flavis apicibus formant *maculam flavam* in humeris, exiguam, et a plumis scapularibus sæpe tectam.

*Rectrices infra alam* albidæ, harum supremæ ex albido nigroque maculatæ.

*Remiges omnes* supra fusci, primarii octo, secundarii sex, subtus cinereo-fusci.

*Alule* griseo-fuscæ.

*Cauda* cuneiformis, rectricibus duodecim: Harum duæ intermediæ longiores angustiores, supra et infra æruginoso-fuscæ; proximæ duæ fuliginosæ, margine interiore albicantes; duæ utrinque his proximæ, albæ, apice fuscæ, et exterius ad basin macula nigra notatæ; extrema utrinque reliquis brevior, alba, apice fusca, macula nigra vix ulla ad basin.

*Alæ* complicatæ caudæ partem quartam attingunt.

*Longitudo* ab apice rostri ad extremam caudæ circiter septem uncias pedis Anglicani explet.

*Rostrum* a basi superiore ad apicem semunciale.

