

Notes from Bahr El Ghazal Province

By T. R. H. OWEN.

I visited the Southern National Park in February as far South as Ngaringba. The one curious absence was Buffalo, usually an absolute certainty. Signs of them were everywhere, but mostly stale. Rains went on late and heavy and there was water up-country away from the river and they apparently were scattered there inland, particularly in the bamboo forests to the South.

Elephant had been around Gomuko in early February and we came on one track only a few hours old. Ordinary game was in satisfactory numbers and we saw four Tiang at Gomuko; is that their Southern limit on the west bank? Giraffe were seen twice.

News of giant eland is better. We saw two bulls, one of them magnificent, three miles up Khor Gomuko. He had a very heavy dew-lap, almost blackish, the dark colour turning to positive pink on the quarters, while the jet black fringe that runs all along under the belly was most striking. Ngaringba Shawish Andrea told me that six days before he had seen maybe twenty eland on the Northern of the two salt licks. We went there and found a dozen tetal and a giraffe. Next morning we did a walk up inland and soon came on eland tracks. Presently we heard a clicking noise and spotted a pair of eland, with their heads down and gently clicking their horns together. Other clicks were audible so this mild butting seems a favourite trick of theirs. I tried stalking, but they were moving and browsing, and though I got what may prove a bad picture of a young bull!; it was nearly impossible. Finally the wind gave me away and they stampeded past in a cloud of dust, perhaps twenty or over and a very fine sight, and they were followed by two roan which must have been grazing close by. The eland seems specially fond of the "abun gawi," the wild gardenia and other common plants.

I had no opportunity to go and hunt up the rhino in Khor Kalosso, which they say is about 4 hours from Gomuko police-post. These rhino are reported to be inoffensive but to browse on trees, so they remain an enigma.

We were at Aweng in early March coming back from the Bahr meeting. Population there is now so thick that it is a wonder any wild beast can live. One is never out of hearing of lowing cattle or people chopping wood. Yet we walked straight on to a pair of those black rhino. They were less than 30 yards off but behind a screen of thorn, whither they retire the moment dawn comes, and I know them too well to go and shake hands with them. One was lying asleep (half an hour after sunrise) and one standing. I noticed that their ears, though much smaller than the white rhino's, have the same fringe

of black hair all round ; I thought that this was a peculiarity of the white². Also have you ever known a white gallop? I have only seen them go at a rapid trot. Yet the black rhino which once charged me certainly did so at the gallop, and this pair also, when eventually they spotted us and went deeper into the thorn bush, made off at a clumsy gallop, not a trot.

Zebra have been reported on the west bank in the Nuong Nuer country north of Shambe. Had you ever heard this? I doubt it³.

-
1. Though unsuitable for reproduction owing to the natural camouflage, this is to our knowledge the first recognisable photo taken of gaint eland in a wild state. Ed.
 2. The Zoo's white rhinos had lost their ear-fringe by the time they went to Antwerp. Ed.
 3. Not previously recorded to our knowledge. Can anyone confirm this? Ed.
-

Ostrich of the Upper Nile Province

Whilst driving recently between Akobo and Pibor I came upon a female ostrich with a dozen or so young chicks. Whilst the latter took cover in some long grass the mother bird adopted the tactics that one associates with mother birds. She staggered off with sagging knees and one wing trailing and apparently broken ; she dropped flat on her face, and then, a few seconds later, dragged herself to her feet and repeated the performance. She led us on up the road for half a mile or so and then promptly recovered and raced back to her chicks. The interest of the performance to me was that after, I suppose, a good many thousand years of having only a rudimentary wing, the bird should still think it worth while to pretend that it was broken.

It may be that this incident is not a rare one. Personally I haven't seen it before in ten years of acquaintance with ostriches, but others of your readers may have done.

In passing, it might be of interest to mention another ostrich incident of this road. I was motoring by night and saw in the distance what looked like a couple of sticks stuck in the middle of the road. They were the necks of sitting ostriches and we drew up to within six feet of the birds without their moving. The horn, however, was too much for them and they sprang to their feet. As they rose a swarm of little chicks seemed to pour off each of them in all directions, like rats from a scuttled ship, or fleas from a scuttled rat. There were about fifteen of them altogether and they trickled along up the road for a bit, and then struck away into the darkness.—R. E. LYTH.