

THE FAUNA OF ABYSSINIA.

By R. E. DRAKE-BROCKMAN, F.R.G.S., F.Z.S., &c.

Having recently returned from a journey through Abyssinia and the north-eastern corner of British East Africa, I have had an opportunity of seeing with my own eyes what I had learnt some years ago from native reports, namely, the wholesale slaughter of the elephant by the natives.

Abyssinians, Somalis and Gallas vie with one another in the indiscriminate destruction of the greatest living pachyderm. The Abyssinians are the chief offenders, and their favourite hunting grounds lie in British territory.

During the dry season (November to March) large herds of elephants leave the Lorian Swamp and the country between it and Mount Marsabit, and travel north in search of greener food and water.

During this season they subsist almost entirely on the ever-green and succulent sansiviera, from which they express the pulp between their massive jaws, ejecting the fibre.

They wander in huge herds through this wide expanse of dense bush country, which is practically uninhabited until the Dawa River and the southern boundary of the Boran country is reached; this flat bush country south of the escarpment which forms the southern limit of the Boran Gallas is known as Golbo, and it is here that yearly a very large number of elephants are destroyed, chiefly by Abyssinians, who are said to be outlaws from Tigre. Their methods are as follows:—

As soon as a herd is reported, twenty or more, and frequently less men, well armed with rifles, partly surround the herd and fire indiscriminately at bulls, cows, and calves.

On examining their trophies I have seen tusks no longer than eighteen inches in length, clearly proving that it is immaterial as long as they kill an elephant.

On my way through Southern Borana in January I met several of these caravans, well armed and equipped, making their way in all haste to the Golbo.

If this slaughter is to cease and an attempt made at preserving the elephant, it should be done as soon as possible.

There is no reason why this vast inhospitable region should not be converted into an Elephant Reserve, as the tribes which inhabit it are nomadic and carry no firearms, so the elephants can in no way interfere with them, or they with the

elephants. As regards the prevention of Abyssinian outlaws entering our territory, this could only be done by policing the frontier, a matter by no means difficult owing to the watering-places in the dry season being few and far between.

Ivory is to-day one of Abyssinia's chief exports, and no small part of it comes from British territory.

I myself met a caravan of fair proportions which had come from the western shores of Lake Rudolf, where it had penetrated so far south as the Turkhana.

The Abyssinian fauna is, with few exceptions, similar to that found in the Somali country.

Excepting four species of antelopes peculiar to the Somali country, namely Pelzeln's and Speke's gazelles with the Beira and the Dilatag, and three peculiar to the Abyssinian highlands, namely, the Abyssinian oribi and reedbuck with Grant's gazelle, the remainder seem to be common to both countries.

Grant's gazelle replaces Soemmering's down the Great Rift Valley along the shores of the chain of lakes, while the Tora hartebeeste is said to meet Swayne's in the same place.

Owing to the ever-increasing importation of arms and ammunition through the port of Djibouti, the beautiful fauna is fast disappearing.

Plains which once teemed with Oryx Beisa, Swayne's hartebeeste, Soemmering's gazelle, and ostrich are to-day practically devoid of animal life, owing to the havoc played by Arussi horsemen, who venture forth in parties of a hundred or more to hunt where they never would have ventured fifteen or twenty years ago.

On one occasion I saw over a hundred Arussi leaving their country and trekking north for the plains in the Danakil country, and some days after saw a few of their number returning with their spoils, the skins of the Oryx Beisa.

To-day the game hugs the banks of the larger rivers and other unhealthy fever-stricken haunts, where its greatest enemy, man, dreads to go in quest of it.

Around Mounts Assobat and Fantali the plain-loving oryx and hartebeest only venture down under cover of darkness, returning at the first streak of dawn, high up the slopes of the mountain, where the Galla horseman is unable to hunt them.

I will now attempt to give very shortly some idea of the amount of each individual species to be met with in Abyssinian territory between the tenth and fourth degrees of parallel, and where the sportsman may still expect to meet the existing wild fauna in considerable numbers.

Owing to the greater population on the higher plateaux, little game can be expected, except those species which frequent the dense bush, where the Galla cannot ride them down and the Abyssinian is too lazy to hunt them; so the sportsman must travel south-east into Abyssinian Somaliland if he wishes to find

game plentiful; here, along the great rivers which drain the Arussi plateau, and farther west among the undulating forest and parkland of Jum-Jum and Sidamo, he will still find the commoner species in abundance.

The Abyssinian, owing to his great respect for the warlike Ogaden Somalis, seldom cares to venture east into their country except in search of elephants.

The dreaded 'Ba Menelik!' has little or no effect on the nomadic Somali at present, and as the latter are also gradually arming themselves with the same rifles as the Abyssinians they are not likely to be molested in their sun-parched haunts. At the same time their nomadic habits render them more or less immune from Abyssinian attacks.

ORYX BEISA.—The oryx is still to be seen in small herds of fifteen to twenty or less individuals around Mount Assobat and Mount Fantali, close to the caravan routes; from Mount Fantali he is to be found in small scattered herds down to Lake Zwai. On the Arussi plateau he is unknown, but as soon as the plateau is left at Ginir, oryx begin to increase, and as one passes down the river Webi, within easy distance of the river they are to be seen in hundreds. In Southern Borana small scattered herds are still to be found, but as one travels north they soon become scarce.

SWAYNE'S HARTEBEEST.—There are still a few on the slopes of Mount Fantali and down the Great Rift Valley around Lakes Zwai and Margherita and in small scattered herds through the parklands of Northern Borana and Southern Uruga.

GREATER KUDU.—Very scarce. A few still to be found along the Oboro and Gugu mountain ranges.

LESSER KUDU.—This antelope is still widely distributed and fairly common in the Danakil country south along the river Webi, and in Southern Borana.

WATERBUCK.—Still very common along the banks of the rivers Webi, Ganale, and Dawa.

BUSHBUCK.—Fairly plentiful in the forests of Jum-Jum and Sidamo; also on the wooded banks of all the Abyssinian rivers.

REEDBUCK.—Still to be seen in fair numbers on the slopes of Mount Fantali and the western part of the Arussi plateau.

ABYSSINIAN ORIBI.—I have only seen this little antelope on the Arussi plateau.

DUICKER.—Common in most of the valleys and in the long grass on the Arussi plateau; also in Sidamo and Jum-Jum.

KLIPSPRINGER.—Found on the precipitous sides of the chasms along the rivers and on some of the rocky hills in the Arussi country.

GREVY'S ZEBRA.—Rare on Mount Fantali, but still fairly common south-east of the Arussi country, in Abyssinian Somaliland.

GIRAFFE.—Common in Southern Borana, but getting rarer every year owing to their indiscriminate slaughter by the Boran

Gallas, who adorn their necks with necklaces made from the thick coarse hairs which constitute the brush of the tail.

ELEPHANT.—Few in the neighbourhood of El Dimtu on the river Webi, on the Dawa river, in Southern Borana, and parts of the Arussi country.

RHINOCEROS.—A few still to be found in Western Ogaden and Southern Borana.

HIPPOTAMUS.—Common in most of the lakes and in the rivers Webi and Ganale, also the affluents of the Webi Shebeleh.