

ARNOLDIA

SERIES OF MISCELLANEOUS PUBLICATIONS
NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF SOUTHERN RHODESIA

No. 13

Volume 1

29th July, 1964

ANIMALS IN SOUTHERN RHODESIAN ROCK ART

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INTRODUCTION

The following series of papers was written after an extensive examination of all the known copies of rock art by many workers in this field. Photographs and slides in the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo, the coloured slide and black and white photographic library of the Historical Monuments Commission, were also examined. The writer has also drawn from his knowledge of the paintings which he has been studying since 1929 and, at the same time, paid visits to many sites, not previously exhaustively examined, to check on old written records and visual memories. In all, 1,200 sites are included in this survey.

Very few drawings or photographs of paintings have been included because most types have been profusely illustrated by authors in the past. The bibliography gives details of the works to which reference has been made whilst carrying out this synthesis.

The distribution maps give a good idea of the scatter, but because of the scale of reproduction, the symbols cover a far bigger area than they do in actual fact.

A paper is being prepared dealing with human types and movements and it is hoped, from time to time, to cover many things shown in the paintings which have not yet been itemised.

Received 18th June, 1964.

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pp. 1-22, figs. 1-10

The zebra is shown with and without stripes, with an even distribution over the whole country. In three paintings, one zebra is shown next to two patterned giraffe, but this animal is, in each case, in one colour and without stripes. The giraffe, when drawn in polychrome, is usually shown galloping, although there are static drawings as well.

I can find no explanation for this distribution and can only guess that the difference in drawing is of a tribal significance. The one instance away from the main area cannot, at the moment, be explained.

LARGE ANIMALS

(Figures 7 and 8).

ELEPHANT, *Loxodonta africana*. This animal was painted on more occasions than most and, at the same time, is widely distributed in all areas where there is suitable granite. This is not unexpected because the elephant could be found in practically every area of Southern Rhodesia within living memory. An occasional elephant can still be found wandering in the most unexpected areas.

RHINOCEROS

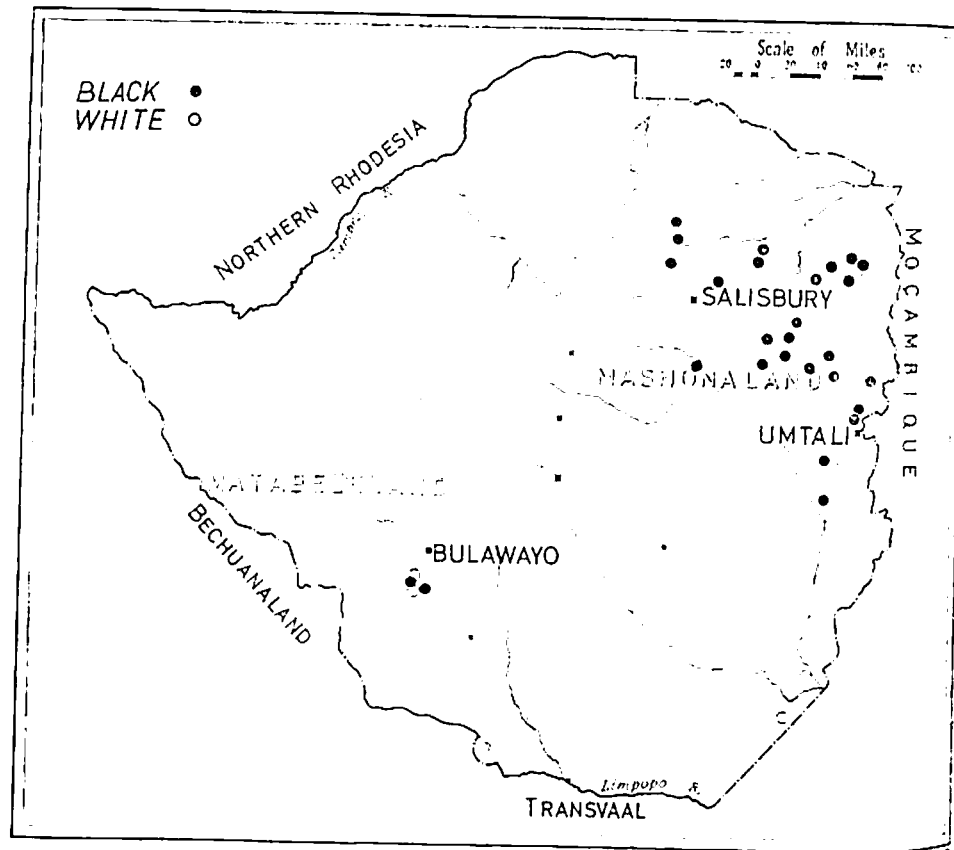


Figure 7

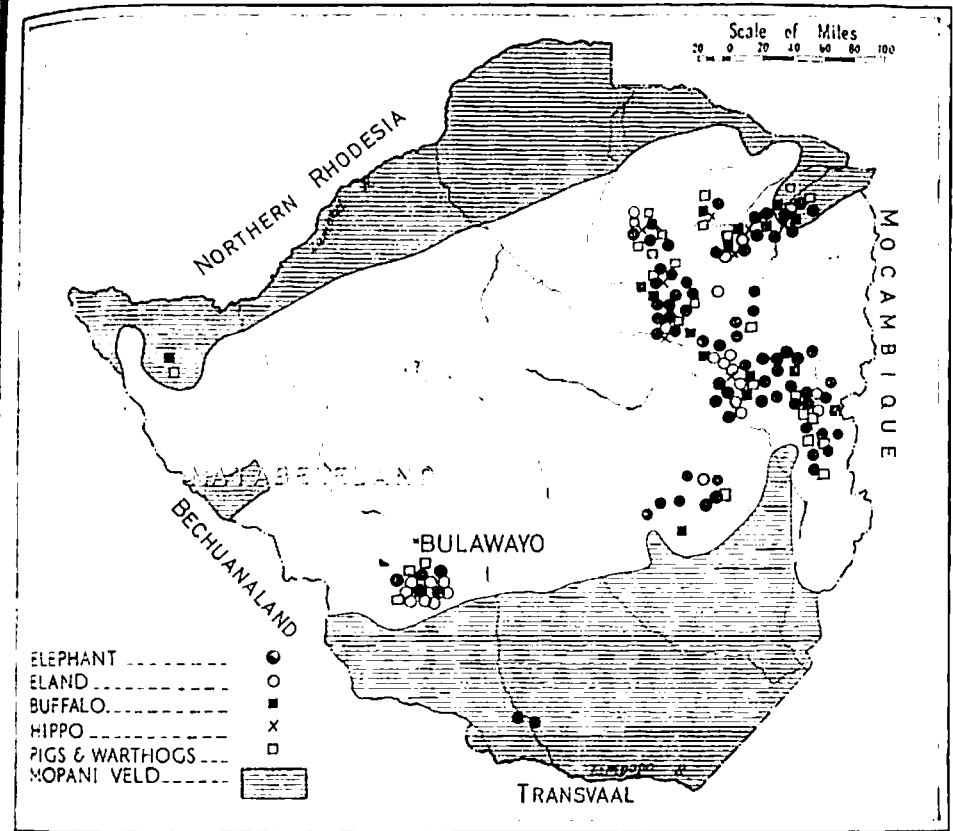


Figure 8

ELAND, *Taurotragus oryx*. The painting of eland, the largest of the antelope, are uncommon in Southern Rhodesia when compared with the enormous number of paintings which have been discovered in the Republic of South Africa (Willecox 1963). It is thought that in the southern area eland have some tribal significance. The *Mutopo Shawa* is very common in Southern Rhodesia, it therefore seems that this tribal surname could have had no connection here. The eland also appears commonly in mythology amongst the Cape Bushmen. The distribution in Southern Rhodesia is consistent with the availability of habitat suitable for this animal.

BUFFALO, *Syncerus caffer*. The distribution pattern shown by plotting the known painting sites, closely follows that of the eland, although in the Matopo Hills, the evidence is very sparse indeed. Buffalo spoor can be seen amongst the engravings in the Wankie area.

WHITE RHINOCEROS, *Diceros simus*. Five of the sites known contain paintings which can be definitely identified as representations of the White Rhinoceros. These are widely spread, appearing in the Chindamora Reserve, the Matopo Hills, at Melesanga in the Triangle area, and one in the Lower Sabi Valley. How these animals were distributed several hundred years ago, is not known. The late Mr. Macdougall, founder of the Triangle Sugar Estates, told me that when he entered Southern Rhodesia, circa 1920, he saw three White Rhinoceros near the junction of the Sabi and Lundi Rivers. He also told me that two of these had been shot soon afterwards, but

he had lost track of the third one. This record is after the last one published, which was shot by F. C. Selous in the Angwa River Valley during 1911.

Mr. Graham Child, Keeper of the Department of Zoology in the National Museum, Bulawayo, is of the opinion that this animal probably occurred in all areas of suitable grassland throughout Southern Rhodesia.

BLACK RHINOCEROS, *Diceros bicornis*. There are 26 sites containing one or more paintings of this animal. These are spread evenly, but sparsely, throughout all the painted areas of Mashonaland from Umtali to Salisbury, in Wedza, Marandellas, Concession and Arcturus Districts. There are two occurrences between Fort Victoria and the Sabi River and only two are recorded from the Matopo Hills. The type of country required is varied, the only constants being good browsing, good shade and areas of swamp suitable for wallows. The present distribution of this animal bears little relationship to that in the past.

HIPPOPOTAMUS, *Hippopotamus amphibius*. This animal is shown more frequently in the better watered areas of Southern Rhodesia, but paintings do appear in the Matopo Hills near to suitable rivers. All perennial rivers do support herds of hippopotamus today unless they have been recently destroyed because of the danger to crops.

PIGS AND WARTHOGS. These, because of the difficulties of definite identification, have been plotted using the same symbol. The paintings are not as numerous as one would expect, especially as the pig is ubiquitous today. Nevertheless, the coverage is very wide, paintings appearing in every district. The spoor engravings near Wankie include the foot-prints of pigs and warthogs.

CONCLUSIONS. Generally the conclusions to be reached are the same as those for the rarer animals. Zebra, kudu and sable have not been plotted because they can be found at practically every painted site. This general distribution is to be expected because these animals are adaptable to all types of terrain where there is sufficient water.

SNAKES AND FISHES

(Figure 9.)

In only 39 shelters known to the writer do snakes and fishes appear in the paintings; in only 3 instances do both fish and snakes appear in the same shelter. Several shelters contain more than one snake; fishes are usually in groups.

Ten shelters contain actual drawings of snakes in various attitudes, one is of a puffadder, and four examples are definitely cobras, because they are shown rearing with hoods extended. One near to the Sabi River is undoubtedly a python.

Twelve shelters contain snakes with buck-heads and tails whilst there are two instances of snake-like bodies with a head at each end.

Gulubahwe Cave in the Matopo Hills has the most complex creature, the head of which has ears, teeth like a feline, a short tail like that of an adder, and numbers of people and animals on the humps of its back. Only two others known have humans and animals on their backs, but these are smaller than the one in Gulubahwe.

The buck or giraffe-like head is the commonest feature, fins or wings and teeth only appear in one example.

The buck-headed snake appears in all styles of painting except those attributed to Style 5 (Cooke 1959) and the outlines of Style 3 (Cooke 1959). Therefore whatever this type of painting represented it was something that the painters knew about for a very long time possibly as much as 5000 years.

There seems to be two possible explanations, one that it represents a mythical beast part snake and antelope or the large eel that is not uncommon in the rivers of Southern

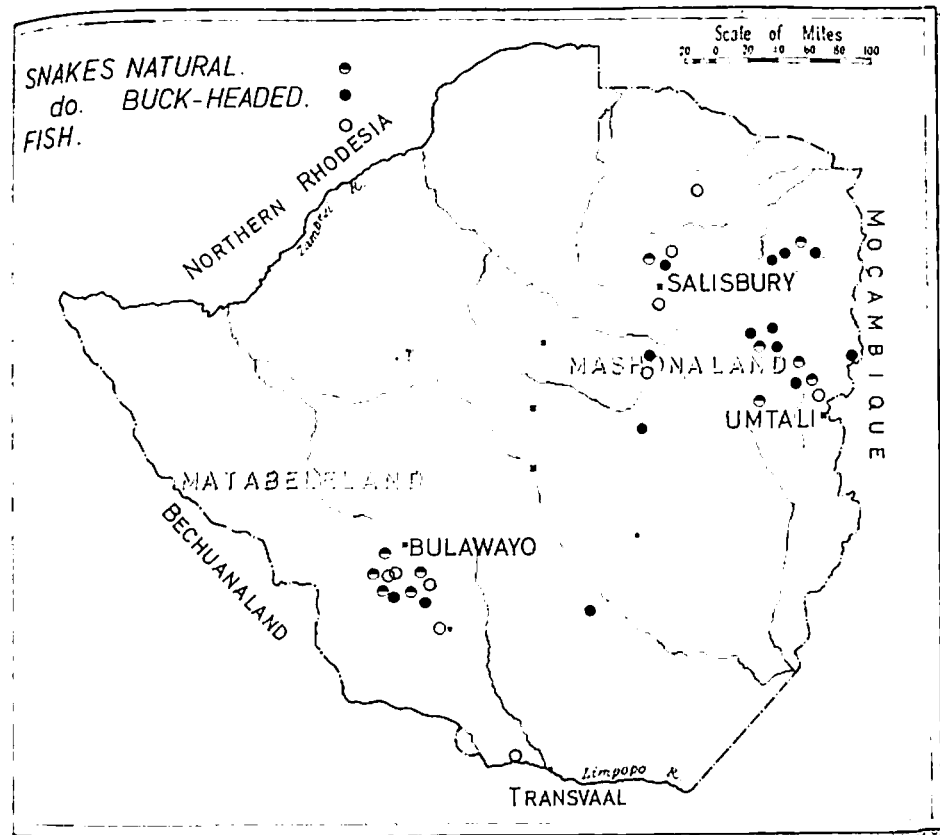


Figure 9

Rhodesia. The most likely explanation seems to be the Bush legend which tells of a snake longer than the rivers and higher than the mountains which has animals, people, and houses on its back. (Cooke 1963). The teeth in the Gulubahwe example give the animal a dragon-like appearance, but this is the only case in which this feature appears.

The one example with fins or wings make it a possibility that the animal is an eel. The wings if they can really be considered as birdlike appendages are far too small for the animal to have become airborne.

Fish drawings appear in 18 sites, most of these fish appear to be a species of *Labio* but there are two other types which are identifiable as species of *Tilapia* and the Catfish, *Clarias sp.* In two cases only do fish appear in the same shelter as the snake-like figures. The occurrence of the fish paintings do not appear to follow (Fig. 9). the larger rivers, in fact one painting at Gwanda is in a very waterless stretch of the low-land. The distribution map does not show any fish in the Chibi area. This may or may not be a true picture because so much emphasis has been put on the strange human polychrome figures from that area.

There are only two definite paintings of wicker fish traps, although some patterns of lines are thought by some workers (Goodall 1959) to represent water traps.

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