



Two rubbing-stones standing against the wall of the old Port Elizabeth Museum in Bird Street. Circa 1954.
(Photo: C. J. Skead.)

Letters to the Editor

PUZZLE OF RUBBING-STONES

I ENCLOSE a photograph of two rubbing-stones which used to stand beside the old Port Elizabeth Museum in Bird Street, Port Elizabeth. The narrative on the label accompanying the stones stated that the stones had been rubbed smooth – well shown in the photograph – by generations of wild animals. Unfortunately the details of the history of these stones have been mislaid, but I think they are of sufficient interest to warrant the wider scope which your magazine can offer. I hope, therefore, that you will be able to help me enlarge on this subject of rubbing-stones by asking members of the Society to send in their knowledge of similar objects, perhaps from many different parts of the country.

The two stones are of dolerite. From memory, and by using the air-vent between them as a guide, I should say that the right-hand stone is about five feet (1.5 m) high and the left-hand one about three feet (0.9 m) high.

Dr. J. A. Pringle, now Director of the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, but formerly Director of the Port Elizabeth Museum, drawing on his memory, feels fairly confident that the two rubbing-stones were collected and donated by a Mr. Katzenellenbogen in about 1910. These were said to be the only two prominent stones on a small hill between Mafeking and Vryburg in the Northern Cape, and it was Mr. Katzenellenbogen who stated that they were animal rubbing-stones.

Dr. G. R. McLachlan, also a past Director of the Port

Elizabeth Museum, thinks they came from Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape, but is by no means sure.

An examination of the two stones reveals some interesting effects of the constant rubbing which must have taken place over many years, dolerite being the hard stone that it is. Note, for instance, that the smaller stone is worn smooth over its whole dome, whereas the top of the larger one still has the rough weathered markings of the original dolerite. This effect suggests that the animals concerned might not have been very large.

Another feature shown in the photograph is that the sides of the stones are smooth down to about the same distance from the ground in both cases. Mammals like nothing better than to lean against a stout object and rub their necks up and down its length: or to lift the chin over an object and rub the throat up and down, and back and forth, to bring relief from ticks, etc. They also like to place the front of the head against an object and bring their weight to bear on it in playful pushing attitudes.

The stones were presented to the Port Elizabeth Museum during the directorship of the late Mr. F. W. FitzSimons. I have examined his books on the Mammals of South Africa without finding any reference to the stones. What seems strange to me is that so few instances of rubbing-stones have come to be known. Do any other museums in South Africa have specimens? If so, from which part of the country did they come? Or, does anybody know of rubbing-stones still standing at their original sites in the veld, now, of course, on farm land and probably being used by domestic animals?

It has been suggested to me that the abrasion may have been the work of Bushmen sharpening their arrow-heads, but it

Letters to the Editor (Contd.)

seems improbable that the degree of smoothness would have been achieved by this means because the sharpening of a tool needs a greater abrasive action than the smoothness on these stones would provide.

Any further information on rubbing-stones will be of great interest and I hope that members will come forward with their ideas.

In conclusion I may say that Dr. John Grindley, the present Director of the Port Elizabeth Museum, has kindly agreed to my bringing this matter to public notice.

Kaffrarian Museum
King William's Town

C. J. SKEAD
(Biologist)

INFORMATION WANTED

I AM endeavouring to compile a history of the region known as the Gona-Re-Zhou, which is a fascinating tract of Lowveld stretching along the Mozambique border in the vicinity of the lower Lundi, Sabi and Nuanetsi Rivers. Like many others I am confident that this area will soon be one of Africa's great national parks.

I should be grateful if you would publish this letter as an appeal to your readers to make available to me any information they might have concerning the area. I am interested in anything to do with European or African occupation or use of the land, hunting, labour recruitment, policing, wild life, poaching, exploration or even folk-lore or anecdotes of personal interest. All contributions will, of course, be acknowledged.

Lowveld Lodge, Box 17, Triangle DR. C. R. SAUNDERS

SAVE THE LIONS

WHEN THE many thousand visitors to the Etosha Game Park observe and film lions, probably few are aware how much the lions' existence is threatened even there. They have been nearly exterminated in all other parts of South West Africa, including the northern and eastern tribal areas.

Our Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism estimates that on the 8 600 square miles of Etosha Reserve there are at present about 200 lions. Last year alone over 80 lions, which had trespassed on to adjoining farms, were shot or poisoned. Numerous reports in the local press have for years told the sad and alarming story of this destruction.

The 8 ft. 6 in. game-proof boundary fence of the Etosha Reserve will never prevent lions from trespassing on to adjoining farms. Warthogs, anteaters, hyaenas, wild dogs and other animals (and men!) dig holes under it, through which lions escape. Veld fires and elephants repeatedly destroy parts of the fence.

There is only one way to save our Etosha lions from extinction and at the same time to compensate farmers adjoining Etosha for losses among their stock, thereby preventing further indiscriminate slaughter.

Proclaim the Etosha lions protected animals, and simultaneously fix a compensation, to be paid by the Department of Nature Conservation, for losses which are proved to be caused by trespassing lions.

Swakopmund

JAN GAERDES

MEERKAT'S STRATEGY

I WAS sitting in a blackwood tree watching a nest of little red-winged starlings when, directly below me, I saw a small red meerkat running, nose in the air, towards a patch of wild scrub growing along the sandy banks of a stream. The meerkat suddenly stopped as if frozen, and looking towards the scrub, I saw a partridge hen leading five chicks to the sandy river bed where they all started scratching around.

The meerkat slowly came alive and stealthily moved to-

wards the partridge family. Reaching the last few tufts of grass on the bank, it stood watching the chicks for a while and then stealthily turned round and hid half its body in a tuft of grass, so that its hindquarters were facing the chicks. So it stood, tail in the air, not moving even an eyelid. It seemed to me as if it was looking at the partridges between its legs.

After a minute or two one of the chicks seemed to get interested in this red patch in the grass and walked boldly up to the still unmoving meerkat. It took a peck at the "object", retreated an inch, waited a while and took the last peck of its life, for the meerkat was on it like a whirlwind. The hen and other chicks just disappeared after a terrified "cluck" from the mother.

The meerkat had its dinner, because of some strategic planning, and happily trotted away with the bundle of feathers.

Sabie

H. F. ORBAN

UNWANTED TAPE RECORDER

THE POPULAR image of the hyena as a coward and furtive scavenger of discarded carrion is slowly dying. An incident we witnessed in the Gorongosa Game Reserve proves that this animal is no underdog.

A pride of lions with cubs of various sizes had killed a buffalo during the night and fed on it in the road. By the afternoon most of them were sated and rested in the grass round the kill, a couple of lionesses still fed lazily and the male came for a second helping. About a dozen cars were watching this peaceful scene, when an exuberant tourist with a tape-recorder arrived and switched it on to play hyena howls she had previously recorded.

The lions were electrified. They rose in concern, and, as the lionesses placed themselves between the sound and their young, the cubs unhesitatingly made their way into the nearest thicket. The male ambled off in disgust, the females walked away, too, and for a short time the kill was abandoned. This was all the more remarkable as the lionesses numbered eight or more and the cubs almost a dozen. Perhaps the cubs were the real reason for concern.

Incidentally, as the lions relaxed and returned to the kill, the lady with the tape-recorder asked whether she should play it once more. But as she looked round she realised that, if looks could kill, she would never wield a recorder again.

Johannesburg

Mrs. TUULIKE SHAW

SOMALIA WILD ASS EXTINCT?

I WAS much interested in the article entitled: "The African Wild Ass: Part I, by Ferdinando Ziccardi", published in Vol. 24, No. 3, of September, 1970.

I was last in Ethiopia during 1966 and saw several specimens of the Danakil Wild Ass, *Equus asinus taeniopus*, in the Sardo area. They are protected by the Ethiopian Government, but the enforcement of the law is rather difficult in those areas. I have seen the wild ass along the Awash River from the base of the escarpment below Batic as far as Sardo.

The author states that in his opinion little will have changed in 30 years in the area. This is not so, as the Government and Mitchell Cotts Ltd. have a large cotton scheme at Tendaho, on the banks of the Awash River, where some 30 square kilometres of cotton are irrigated from the river. Tendaho has, therefore, become quite a large town and this has driven the wild ass away from the area. I have a photograph of a large male taken near Sardo which may be of interest to the author.

The Somalia Wild Ass, I think, has disappeared, as over the ten years that I spent travelling all over the area from the Kenya border to Djibuti I have never seen a single specimen. There are some half wild donkeys, but these are only domestic stock which have escaped or are allowed to run free. I think that this sub-species may now be extinct in the wild state.

Kempton Park

D. J. WATSON COOK

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