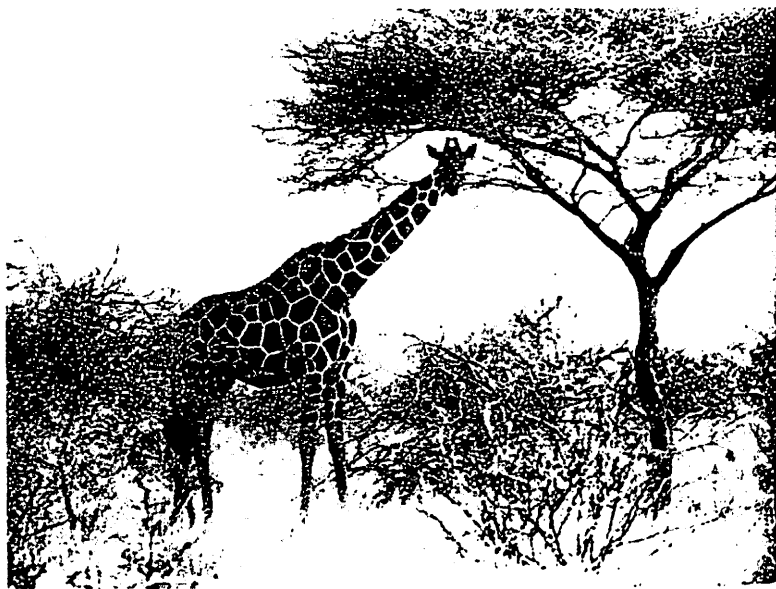


Country to the north of Samburu Game Reserve

(Photo: F. Bourlière)



Reticulated Giraffe browsing on the leaves of an Acacia

(Photo: F. Bourlière)

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Some Mammals of the Samburu Reserve in Northern Kenya

By DR. F. BOURLIÈRE

THE Northern Frontier Province, that vast region lying between the Highlands of Kenya in the South and of Ethiopia in the North, and the ex-Italian Somaliland in the East, has always been a buffer zone between the (one-time) British East African colonies and the neighbouring countries. Not easily accessible it is relatively recently that it was explored by Europeans, and that somewhat superficially. It was late in 1888, for instance, that Count Teleki discovered Lake Rudolph. British occupation was slow and limited to the establishment of a few military posts, to guard the main caravan routes and to check the raids by the Abyssinian or Somali pillagers or poachers. Inhabited by nomad peoples, fanatically tied to their traditional way of life—Suks, Turkanas, Wanderobos, Samburus, Borans—a permit was necessary to visit it. Actually only the Marsabit mountain region, the Valley of the Uaso Nyiro and the Lorian Swamp have been visited by a number of game hunters and only too rarely by field naturalists. In the South and in the East the vegetation is sahelian, passing quickly to an *Acacia* and *Commiphora* steppe around Lake Rudolph and even into pure desert between Lake Rudolph and Mount Marsabit. Here and there, however, on the higher points of the picturesque mountains, which add much attraction to the countryside, (Mts. Marsabit, Julal and Matthews Range), there are remnants of mountain forests of *Juniperus procera* (African pencil cedar), which owe their survival to the sustained efforts of the British Forestry Department.

Since 1899, that great naturalist-Governor, Sir Harry Johnston, had the wisdom and foresight to establish on the Uganda side of the frontier (which in those days was much further east than it is now,) the Sugota Game Reserve, 33,250 square kilometres to which, quite soon, was added the Jubaland Game Reserve, the two forming an impressive ensemble of some 95,750 square kilometres—protected theoretically. For want of effective supervision this desolate region continued to be the favourite hunting ground of poachers, which according to the other famous naturalist-Governor, Sir F. J. Jackson, collected in this region four-fifths of all ivory from Kenya. In 1906, and again in 1908, the boundaries of this Northern Reserve were modified and its total surface considerably reduced, without, however, increasing the supervision adequately. During the Second World War the troops en route from the North of Kenya to Somaliland and Ethiopia wreaked further havoc amongst the fauna.



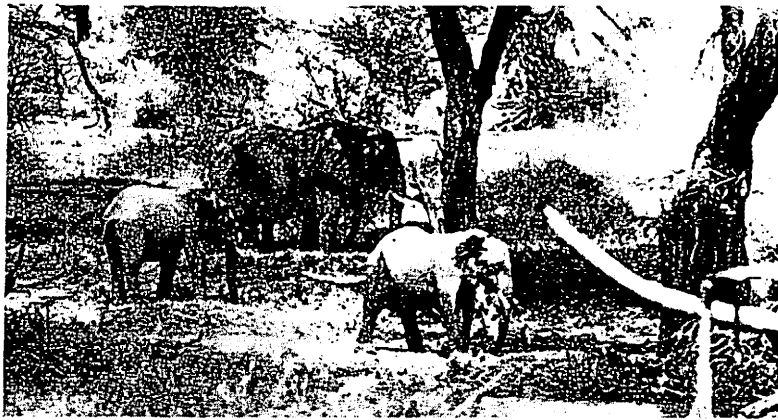
This strange plant photographed at Archer's Post is neither a cactus nor an Euphorbia, but an Aselepiad with a head of black, foetid-smelling flowers (*Caralluma retrospiciens*).

(Photo: F. Bourlière.)

In September, 1948, the Marsabit National Reserve of 25,700 sq. Km. was established, which for some years was the largest protected area in Kenya. Regrettably this protection was of short duration, for in 1961 the Marsabit Reserve was abolished, purely and simply. At present nothing is left of it but a few remnants, interesting remnants certainly, but quite insufficient to assure a future for the large ungulates of the region, many of which are migratory and which never stay for long in the areas arbitrarily set aside for them.

Before the proclamation of Independence in Kenya in 1963, only 97.5 sq. Km. of forest on Mt. Marsabit, 100 sq. Km. on the northern bank of the Uaso Nyiro River near the Samburu Game Lodge and a forestry reserve on the peaks of the Matthews Range, were out of bounds for the nomads and their herds. The whole of the rest of the one-time Marsabit National Reserve passed to the Game Department of Kenya, which wisely planned for cattle pasture rotation, zones for sporting safaris on foot and some areas for the exploitation of the wild game. At the time of my visit in 1963, the Samburu County Council, thanks to a generous donation from Captain Sorsbie, agreed to double the size of the Samburu Reserve as from January, 1964. Furthermore Captain I. R. Grimwood told me that the County Council of Isiolo, on the 11th November, 1963, also decided to add to this minute reserve, 250 sq. Km. which fronted it on the South Bank of the Uaso Nyiro, which would bring the total surface of the Samburu Reserve to some 450 Km². This is already an improvement on the 55 sq. Km. envisaged in 1961, but is not yet adequate ecologically to ensure the survival of the large nomad population of the large ungulates if the management of the surrounding hunting zones and the rotational grazing of the local herds of cattle do not remain under the strict supervision of the Game Department. Added to the above it must be remembered that at the moment the Northern Frontier Province constitutes "The apple of Discord" between the new governments of Somalia and of Kenya, in that Somalia is laying claim to the region. Let us hope that this quarrel between neighbours will not cause more ill-feeling in the years to come, for it will certainly be the fauna, peculiar to the region, which will be the greatest sufferer, without benefit to anybody.

This part of East Africa essentially forms a unique biogeographical entity; it is rich in endemic species, whose biology has hardly been studied and whose extinction would certainly be an irreparable scientific loss. Its dominant ecological characteristic appears to be its remarkable adaption to aridity. As yet there are few climatological records for the Samburu Reserve. All that we know is that there is an average rainfall of 295 mm. per annum at Archer's Post (15 kilometres to the East of the Reserve) 575 mm. at Isiolo, 25 Km. as the crow flies to the south, and 654 mm. at Wamba 65 Km. to the north west. To the north of the Uaso Nyiro the soil is stony, shallow, formed of a red friable clay, with numerous rocky eminences. The plains are covered with a very open sahelian savannah, the commonest grass is *Cynodon plectostachyus*; the dominant trees and shrubs are *Acacia tortilis*, *A. etbaica*, *A. mellifera* and *Newtonia hildebrandtii*. To the south of the river, lined with doum palms and acacias, the countryside and the vegetation are much the same as



Elephants along the Uaso Nyiro River

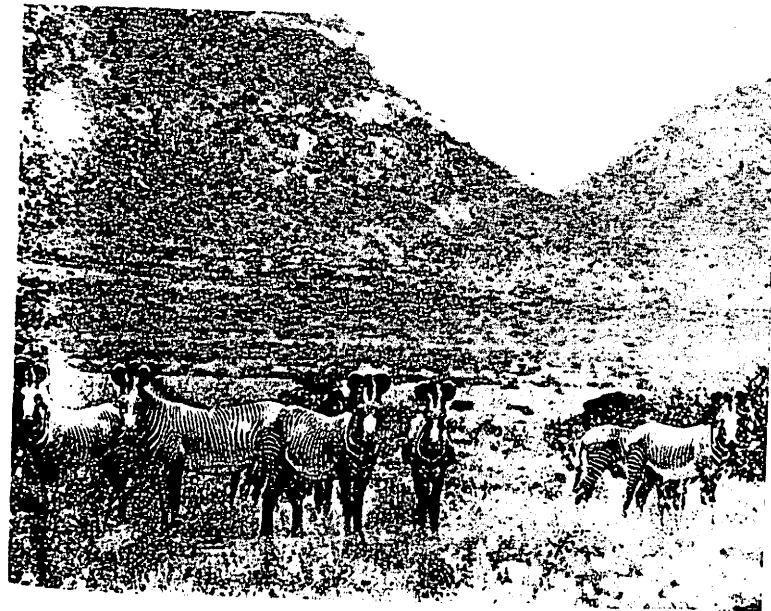
(Photo: F. Bourlière)

the north, except that one may find occasional spots covered with a dark brown clayey soil on which small groves of acacias have become established.

The ungulates include species widely distributed throughout East Africa such as the elephants, the black rhinoceros, the buffalo, the waterbuck (only along the rivers, all *K. ellypsiprymnus*) the impala, Grants Gazelle, and some Cape Eland (though I have not seen one). But it is not these animals, spectacular as they may be, which make the reserve important and valuable, greater numbers can be seen, and that more readily, elsewhere. The particular cachet of this sanctuary, as also its scientific worth, lies in the presence of species or races peculiar to this arid part of the continent and which one can easily admire and study here:— the reticulated giraffe, Grevys Zebra, the fringe-eared beisa, the Gerenuk or Wallers Gazelle and Guenthers Dik-dik.

The reticulated giraffe (*Giraffa reticulata*), with its extraordinary Chocolate-brown hide covered with a white reticulation of a large mesh, forms a population so homogeneous, so different from the others, and geographically so isolated, that one can almost understand why de Winton created a separate species for it. At all events it forms a valid sub-species of *Giraffa camelopardalis*, and may be met with as solitary individuals (in one instance a lone male, in another a female, both adults) as small unisexual groups (2 adult females together; 3 adult males together) or as bisexual groups of differing ages (7 to 8 head together). The foundation colour of the hide seemed to me to vary somewhat, especially amongst the juveniles where some are decidedly lighter than the rest.

In the Samburu Game Reserve the study of Grevy's Zebra (*Equus grevyi*) is particularly interesting in that it shares its habitat with Burchell's zebra, (*Equus quagga burchelli*). Larger than Burchells (385 Kg. as against 300 Kg. for adult males), it is easily distinguished by its large round ears, more numerous and finer stripes, as also by its white venter, all features easily seen on the accompanying photographs. The sounds they make are also said to be different, though I have never been able to verify this: Grevy's zebra is reported to bray like an ass, whilst Burchell's "barks". During my visit two types of social groupings were seen amongst Grevy's zebra: Lone adult males and bisexual groups of up to a dozen head; the group shown in the photograph is made up of 3 adult males, 8 females and one colt. Once I also saw two males together. This species never seems to form large herds as does Burchell's zebra. As I have remarked above, the two species cohabit in this region; as yet, however, it has not been possible to find out which particular feature separates them ecologically; I have seen 8 Burchell's grazing not far from 12 Grevy's zebra in the same type of steppe and at the same time of the day. It must be mentioned, however, that in this region, Grevy's zebra is much more numerous than is Burchell's. During the August 1961 aerial census, D. R. M. Stewart counted 1871 *Equus Grevyi* against only 97 *E. quagga burchelli* in the 1,175 sq.



A portion of a small herd of 12 Grevys zebra

(Photo: F. Bourlière)