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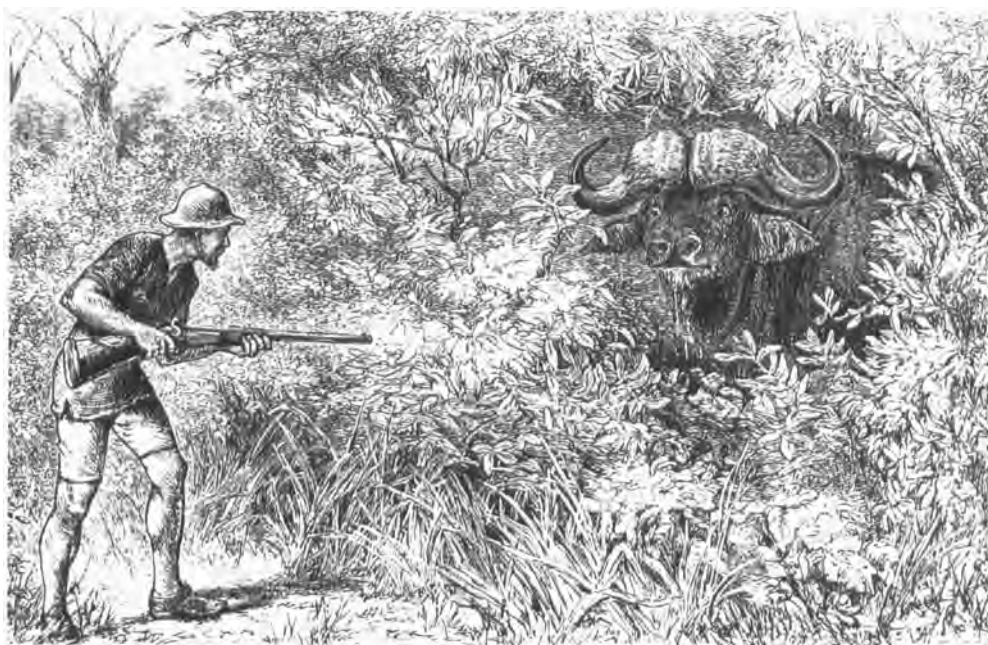
Frederick Courteney Selous

A recess in the wall beside the left hand (west) flight of the main staircase of the Natural History Museum houses a bronze bust of F.C. Selous. He is wearing a bush hat and carries his hunting rifle at the ready. Indeed, he looks rather as he appears in the plate: 'Following a wounded buffalo in thick bush' from his book, *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* (1881). The inscription below the bust reads as follows: 'Captain Frederick C. Selous D.S.O. Hunter, Explorer & Naturalist. Born 1851. Killed in action at Beho Beho, German East Africa 4.1.1917'. According to R.I.P. (Reginald Innes Pocock, Director of the Zoological Gardens, Regents Park), the author of his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1912–1921), Selous 'repeatedly repudiated the false praise of his friends in styling him the greatest hunter of all time; and he would have been the first to protest against the mistaken estimate of his contributions to science which led to the placing of his memorial tablet and bust alongside the statue of Darwin and the portrait of Alfred Russel Wallace in the British Museum at South Kensington'.

The bust, by W.R. Colton R.A., was unveiled on 10 June 1920. I can dimly remember my father pointing it out to me when, in 1927, at the age of six, my parents took me to the Museum for the first time. My father was particularly interested in Frederick Selous whose nephew, Gerald Selous, had been a close friend of his at Pembroke College, Cambridge, in the years before the Great War. Gerald Selous was British Vice-Consul in Saffi during the War, was awarded the M.B.E., and remained in the Consular Service throughout his career. He married a Belgian princess named Camilla and was godfather to my eldest sister Joan (now Mrs M. J. Hacon of Strete, Devon).

When I was young, my parents gave me for Christmas and birthdays a number of books including *Tommy Smith's Animals*, *Tommy Smith's Other Animals*, *Tommy Smith at the Zoo*, and so on, by Edmund Selous, younger brother of Frederick and father of Gerald. Edmund had also been to Pembroke and was called to the Bar on 17 November 1881. A field naturalist and ornithologist, he was the author of *Bird Watching*, *Bird Life Glimpses*, *Realities of Bird Life*, *Thought Transference (or What?) in Birds*, *The Romance of Insect Life* and *The Romance of the Animal World* – in addition to his numerous children's books.

The idea of being a professional elephant hunter and shooting for sport is, today, an anathema to many people. But it should be remembered that, unless controlled or able



Following a wounded buffalo in thick bush (Selous, 1881)

to migrate, elephant populations tend to outgrow the available resources and devastate their environment. Around 40,000 years ago, the large mammals of Australia and New Guinea were exterminated by human beings. The same thing occurred when North and South America were colonised, while the mammoths and woolly rhinoceros probably became extinct shortly after modern peoples expanded into Siberia. In contrast, most of the big mammals of Africa and Eurasia survived into modern times because they had co-evolved with human beings for hundreds of thousands or even millions of years. They thereby enjoyed ample time to evolve a fear of humans while our ancestors' initially poor hunting skills were slowly improving. The faunas of other parts of the world had the misfortune suddenly to be confronted by invading peoples possessing fully developed hunting skills (Diamond, 1997). Until comparatively recent times, human and game populations have maintained a balance in Africa, and it was not until the introduction of firearms that this balance was upset and game populations threatened (Cloudsley-Thompson, 1967). With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that Frederick Selous, like other hunters at that time, shot far too many elephants and other game; but these were plentiful then in many regions of Africa and most people thought they would last for ever. Nevertheless, Selous never shot an animal except for a definite purpose. If he made a mistake, it lay in publishing the list of game that he shot between January 1877 and December 1880. As he himself pointed out then, 'it must be remembered.... that I was often accompanied by a crowd of hungry savages, exclusive of the men in my employ, all of whom were dependent upon me for their daily food, whilst in some of my expeditions my rifle supplied me almost entirely with the means of obtaining from the natives corn, guides, porters, etc., which better-equipped parties

would have paid for with calico, beads, or other merchandise' (Selous, 1881).

Frederick Courteney Selous was born in London on 31 December 1851. The Selous family were originally French Huguenots who settled in Jersey after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Annoyed at his ancestors being evicted from France, Gideon Selous, a man of violent temper, dropped the 'e' from his surname; but this was later re-adopted by his son Frederick Lokes Selous, father of Frederick Courteney and Edmund. Frederick Lokes had a successful career in the London Stock Exchange. A fine whist and chess player he was at one time regarded the best amateur clarinet player in England. His wife, Ann (née Sherborn), Frederick Courteney's mother, was also very gifted – a poet with a great feeling for and interest in plant and animal life. According to his brother Edmund, Frederick may have inherited from her his interest in natural history and travel and, from his father, his patriotism and love of truth (Millais, 1919).

At the age of nine, F.C. Selous was sent to school at Bruce Castle, Tottenham and thence, in 1866, to Rugby where he distinguished himself chiefly by his proficiency in games and his interest in birds: his list of species noted there exceeded 90, and he was a prominent member of the school Natural History Society. In August, at the age of 17, Selous left Rugby and went to Neuchâtel where he studied French and the violin at the Institution Roccolet. He also commenced his studies to be a doctor, for which profession he showed no enthusiasm. His ambition had always been to be a hunter and explorer. From Switzerland he moved to Wiesbaden to learn German.

Then, with £400 in his pocket, he travelled to southern Africa, landing at Algoa Bay in September 1871. Determined to earn his living as a professional elephant hunter, he made his way to Kimberley – only to learn that the right season of year for a trip to the interior was not due for some months. So he joined a trading expedition to Griqualand, and it was not until the following year that he finally set forth into the region that is now Zimbabwe. In those days, the country was terrorised by the Matabele and it was necessary to obtain permission from their chief, Lobengula, to enter Matabeleland and the neighbouring territories. This was given, however, and for the next ten years Selous traversed the interior from east to west, hunting elephants and trading in ivory. At the same time he acquired an intimate knowledge of the people, the animals, and the topography of the country.

Ten years later, on a short visit to England, he wrote his first book (Selous, 1881). This was illustrated by his sister Ann. (His uncle Harry Selous was also an artist, as had been his grandfather, Gideon Slous.) A *Hunter's Wandering in Africa* was widely acclaimed and reprinted five times. Its success secured for Frederick a number of commissions from museums and from dealers in big game trophies, which stood him in good stead during the following years.

When Fred Selous returned to Africa, in November 1881, it was his first intention to abandon a wandering life and become an ostrich farmer. However, he soon discovered that the market for ostrich feathers had disappeared, game was already becoming scarce in many places (Cloudsley-Thompson 1967), and the ivory trade was no longer economic. He therefore spent the next few years fulfilling orders for museums and private collections, acting as a guide to hunting and prospecting parties and exploring between the Transvaal and Congo Basin. It was probably during this period that many of the finest specimens in the Natural History Museum were procured and he made his

greatest contributions to zoology. He had always collected butterflies, but he now made a very large collection which he presented to the Cape Town Museum. It contained several new species. His explorations also resulted in a number of interesting discoveries which were published by the Royal Geographical Society in 1888. Other reports followed, the Society assisted him with grants and, in 1892, he was awarded the Founder's gold medal. His activities during these years were described in *Travel and Adventure in South-East Africa* (1893). They include an account of the treacherous attack by Mashukumbwi tribesmen in April, 1888, when his caravan was plundered, many of his followers killed, and he himself escaped with difficulty.

In 1890, Selous entered the service of the British South Africa Company. He advised Cecil Rhodes that Mashonaland should be occupied to forestall annexation by Portugal and managed to persuade him not to attack the Matabele who were very much stronger than Rhodes realised. He then acted as an intermediary between Rhodes and Lobengula and succeeded in obtaining a concession for the mineral rights of Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Rhodes accordingly appointed him chief of the Pioneers who made a road that circumvented the Matabele further west, opened up Mashonaland (now northern Zimbabwe) and secured that country for Britain. Selous left the Chartered Company in 1892 but rejoined it the following year when the Matabele war broke out.

Between 1883 and 1890, Matabele impis had been attacking most of their weaker neighbours. In 1890, they almost completely annihilated the large Mashona tribe and war became inevitable. The campaign of 1893 was brief and completely successful. Selous was attached as Chief of Scouts to Colonel Goold Adams who commanded the British southern column. This reached Bulawayo without much difficulty, although Selous himself received a bullet in the right side of his body on 2 November: fortunately it was only a flesh wound and he was not severely harmed.

The wound healed, he was discharged from hospital in Bulawayo and arrived back in England in February, 1884. On 4 April he was married to Marie Catherine Gladys (daughter of Canon H. W. Maddy, vicar of Down Hatherly, near Gloucester) to whom he had become engaged the previous spring. Fred and his wife went abroad for their honeymoon, passing through Switzerland and Italy, down the Danube to Odessa and thence to Constantinople. On their return, finding life in England rather expensive, Selous accepted the invitation of an old friend, Maurice Heaney, to manage a land and gold-mining company in Matabeleland. Gladys accompanied him – a very courageous act for those days – and they settled in Essexville, his company's farm. A wire-wove bungalow was sent, in sections, from England for them to live in.

Before many months had passed, however, the flame of rebellion spread among the Matabele, and numerous European settlers, including women and children, were murdered. Frederick took Gladys into Bulawayo for safety before returning to his farm, only to find that all the cattle had been driven away. He was not long in discovering part of the stolen herd, however, burned the kraal at which they were found, and drove them back to Essexville. He did not take them to Bulawayo because he feared that they might be attacked by rinderpest, which was epidemic at the time. But an even worse fate befell him, because Inxozan, a Matabele warrior, with some 300 of his men, appeared a few days later, burned the farm and carried off all the cattle. There was no point in staying. Throughout the second Matabele war, appointed Captain of H troop of the Bulawayo

Field Force, Selous took part in a number of engagements which he was later to describe in *Sunshine and Storm in Rhodesia* (1896). This book was dedicated to his wife Gladys, and completed after the two had returned to England.

From that time onwards Fred Selous gratified his ruling passion, big-game shooting, although more as an amateur than as a professional. He visited Asia Minor, made two trips to the Rocky Mountains, hunted in Newfoundland, in the Yukon territory of Canada and accompanied his friend Theodore Roosevelt to East Africa in 1909–10. *African Nature Notes and Reminiscences*, published in 1908, contains a foreword by President Roosevelt. Between whiles, he devoted his time to writing, birds' nesting and shooting at home. Wherever he was, he took the greatest interest in the habits and behaviour of all the animals he encountered. Keen observation, indefatigable patience and a retentive memory combined to make him a field naturalist of exceptional quality. His vast store of knowledge about the behaviour of large mammals is embodied in his accounts of hunting expeditions (1881, 1893, 1900, 1907) as well as in *African Nature Notes and Reminiscences*. The first two chapters of the latter are devoted to his views on protective colouration, and others are concerned with animal behaviour – including that of the man-eating lions of Tsavo. Selous condemned the senseless slaughter of both black and white rhinoceroses by Sir Cornwallis Harris in 1836–37 and William Cotton Oswell in 1844–53. He included photographs taken by Max C. Fleischmann on the Tana River (sent to him by President Roosevelt) showing a rhinoceros being caught and drowned by a crocodile which is invisible to the camera. A chapter on tsetse flies described their dependence upon different species of game. At his home in Worpleston he built a special museum for his numerous trophies. His personal collection was presented to the British Museum (Natural History) by Mrs Selous in 1919 (Dollman, 1921). He was a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London, but regrettably not of the Linnean Society.

A few days before the Great War began, the German light cruiser, *Königsberg* stole out of Dar es-Salaam harbour and, when Britain declared war on Germany, started raiding vessels off the coast of East Africa. She sank the British cruiser H.M.S. *Pegasus*, while her boilers were being de-furred in Zanzibar, then was driven by three cruisers of the South Africa station into the delta of the Rufigi River further south. Here she remained hidden in the mangrove swamps for 255 days until, on 5 July 1915, she was sunk by two shallow draft monitors, H.M.S. *Severn* and H.M.S. *Mersey*, armed with six-inch guns, which had been towed by tugs from Malta through the Red Sea. Her captain and crew then joined the forces of Lt Colonel (later General) Paul von Lettow-Vorbek, the talented and experienced commander of German forces in East Africa who, with 11,000 men, most of them Africans trained by a tiny cadre of German officers, held some 200,000 British troops at bay for the duration of the War (Mosley, 1963).

Ten 12.5 cm (4.1 inch) and two 10.5 cm (3.5 inch) guns from the *Königsberg* were dismantled for use as field artillery – an incredible feat of engineering – lifted by hundreds of askaris along elephant tracks and dragged on pontoons across rivers and bogs. Lettow-Vorbek put them to good use when he raided Kenya and Uganda and raised the German flag on Mt Kilimanjaro. It was whilst fighting against this force that Frederick Courteney Selous was eventually to die. When Lettow-Vorbek learned from an emissary of General J.C. Smuts (the Allied commander at the time) that one of his



FREDERICK COURTENAY SELOUS
Portrait study by Leo Weinthal – 1906.

pre-war friends, F.C. Selous, had been killed whilst fighting for the British, Lettow-Vorbek sent back a message of condolence and regrets.

In view of his knowledge and experience of Africa, Selous was naturally desperate to join up when war broke out; but his services were continually rejected on account of his age. Perseverance finally triumphed, however: he received a commission in 25th Royal Fusiliers and sailed to Mombasa to join the Legion of Frontiersmen in March 1915. He was promoted to Captain the following August and awarded the D.S.O. 'for

conspicuous gallantry, resource and endurance' in September, 1916. He had never believed that the war would be over quickly. Concerned that his elder son Freddy would be 18 in April and then sent to the front, he wrote in a letter to John Millais (published in 1918): 'If he goes out and gets killed it will break his mother's heart and mine too, if I should live to come home, and it will be the same for you and your wife if you lose Geoff'. Somewhat earlier he had written: 'If I should be eliminated it would not matter a bit as I have had my day'. In the event, Selous was shot through the head on 4 November 1917, whilst leading his company through the bush near Kissaki, against an enemy four times their strength. His son, Capt Freddy Selous, M.C., R.A.F.C., was also killed in action – on 6 January 1918, three months before his 20th birthday. (Capt G. de C. Millais, Bedfordshire Regiment, son of John Millais, was killed in action, 22 August 1918.)

Frederick Courteney Selous was very much a man of his time. Like H.W. Bates and A.R. Wallace before him, he was primarily a collector and a naturalist. Unlike them, he did not produce any novel scientific theory, nor did he pay much attention to invertebrates except for butterflies. But he enjoyed an even more exciting life than they did. His friend and biographer John Millais (1918¹) who was also a well known big-game hunter wrote of him: 'The best work that Selous did and the qualities for which the British Nation should be grateful to him are those which he displayed as a Pioneer.... in the life of any man it is character and example that count, and if Selous did nothing else, and had, in fact, never killed a single wild animal in his life, his name would still be one to conjure with in South Africa or wherever he wandered'. Perhaps he did merit that memorial in the Natural History Museum after all as well as the painting in the National Portrait Gallery!

An obituary published in *The Times* of 8 January 1917 is reproduced, with some omissions and verbal alterations, in the Preface (by C. Tate Regan) to Dollman's (1921) *Catalogue of the Selous Collection of Big Game in the British Museum (Natural History)*.

I would like to express my appreciation to Miss J. S. Ringrose, Pembroke College archivist, for much useful information, and to my sisters Mrs M. J. Hacon and Mrs H. J. Harvey for imparting their reminiscences about Gerald Selous and of events that occurred whilst I was away at boarding school.

J.L. CLOUDSLEY-THOMPSON
Islington, London

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1 Surprisingly, Courteney is wrongly spelled 'Courtenay' throughout this biography.

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Library

Visitors to the Library over the past few months will have found most available flat surfaces occupied by piles of publications. This is partly due to upheavals elsewhere in the building which meant that most of the contents of the bookcases in the Executive Secretary's office have had to be found temporary homes elsewhere. Other books are still "refugees" from their previous location which now houses the botanical monographs which were rearranged in subject order last summer. Meanwhile some welcome voluntary help with cataloguing has moved quantities of accumulated books from where they were hiding in boxes to more visible pyramids of books awaiting checking and shelving. We hope that with plans now in hand for reinstatement of cabinets elsewhere, we will soon be able to move things back into their new homes and reduce the visible piles of books and papers. Most visitors do not seem worried about the present situation, many seem to be reassured that they are not the only ones with heaps of things occupying every surface. We hope that with this added voluntary help we will gradually reduce the waiting time between receipt of publications and their display in the Reading Room.

Donations: September to end of December 1999

The items listed below were all received before the end of 1999. The 30 items presented in January and early February 2000 will be listed in the next Newsletter.

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| Dr J. Akeroyd | Bassler, M., <i>Flora de la Republica de Cuba</i> , Fasc. 2, Mimosaceae. 202 pp., illustr., maps, Koenigstein, Koeltz, 1998. |
| | Bennett, Andrew F., <i>Linkages in the landscape, the role of corridors and connectivity in wildlife conservation</i> . 254 pp., illustr., maps, Cambridge, IUCN, 1999. |
| | Maas, P.J.M & Westra, L.Y.T., <i>Familias de plantas neotropicales</i> . 315 pp., illustr., Vaduz, A.R.G. Ganter Verlag, 1998. |
| | SYMPOSIUM, <i>Morphology, anatomy and systematics</i> , Leuven 1997, Systematics and the geography of plants. 334 pp., illustr., 1999. |
| Valerie Baines | Jackson, Bernard & Baines, Valerie, <i>Mindful of butterflies</i> . 160 pp., col. illustr., Lewes, The Book Guild, 1999. |
| S.A. Baldwin | Baldwin, Stuart A., <i>A beginners guide to secondhand bookdealing</i> . 214 pp., illustr., Ipswich, Baldwin Books, 1999. |
| Bodleian Library | Lack, H. Walter, <i>The Flora Graeca story: Oxford's finest</i> |