



EANHS Bulletin

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COMMENT

NINETY YEARS OF NATURAL HISTORY

On 25 March 1909, a small group of naturalists gathered at the house of the Lieutenant Governor of East Africa, Frederick Jackson. Their objective: to create a Society that would promote interest in, and knowledge of, the remarkable flora and fauna of eastern Africa. Thus was born the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society. Its initial aims were to start a natural history museum and publish a scientific journal, and both of these were achieved by the end of 1910.

Still going strong ninety years later, the EANHS (the 'Uganda' having been dropped along the way) is Africa's oldest scientific Society. The museum it founded in Nairobi eventually grew into the National Museums of Kenya, an organisation whose scope is unparalleled in the region. The two organisations are still umbilically linked.

The initial membership reads like a 'who's who' of East African science and society in the early years of the century. The first Chairman, Frederick (later Sir Frederick) Jackson, was both a colonial administrator and renowned ornithologist (Jackson's Francolin and Jackson's Widowbird bear his name). The first Honorary Treasurer was the geologist C. W. Hobley, of Hobley's Volcano fame. T. J. Anderson, the Chief Entomologist in the Agricultural Department, took on the onerous role of Honorary Curator. A plot on Sixth (now Kenyatta) Avenue was identified as the site for the new museum, which was ready for occupation on 16 August 1910 at the monthly rent of two pounds and ten shillings. The embryonic Nairobi Museum was a room some ten by eight metres, which soon became crowded with specimens of all kinds sent in by members. Plants, fish, birds, mammals and molluscs arrived in quantities, not to mention a complete elephant skull donated by Mr H B. Dunham.

Membership of the Society continued to grow steadily, but the organisation was not without its problems. The Minutes of those early years make fascinating reading, not least because the kinds of difficulties that bedevilled Committees then have changed very little over the years. Shortage of space, shortage of money, shortage of time among

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During fieldwork, responsibilities were rotated among each team so we had a chance to participate in all the studies. Participation in all the activities exposed each one of us to the different methods and procedures. Simple and cost effective techniques were used while a high quality of data was gathered. It was usually exciting to move from one team to another working with a different scientist each and every day. I feel this is very important because at the end one feels that they have fully participated in the project as a whole.

The members of the scientific team are highly qualified in their specialised fields. Each one of them is a dedicated and hardworking individual but here they work as a team. Beside their specialised knowledge they have a knowledge of the park and its surrounding areas. During field work they took their time to explain things whenever necessary and were always ready to share their knowledge with the volunteers. They showed patience in answering our numerous questions. I will never forget those afternoons when we sat outside with Michelle around a big table, each one of us with a container of invertebrates from various sites. Our heads were fixed over the containers, sorting, identifying and counting those little creatures, most of them so tiny that we had to use hand lenses to identify them. A minute hardly passed before someone consulted Michelle about something that they could not identify even with the checklist in front of them. She never became tired of our questions and this is just an example that showed how the scientists were so dedicated and committed to their work and how patient they were with the volunteers. Also the park staff were very friendly and helpful.

I enjoyed most of the food I tried. I liked the way we shared all the responsibilities; this was done with teamwork. It was always so much fun doing things together.

The park and the surrounding areas were peaceful and quiet and therefore it was more enjoyable doing research with no obstruction. I was told that in the summer, thousands of tourists come to Mallorca from all over the world. During this period, hundreds visit S'Albufera everyday. I therefore prefer the timing of the project because the research is done when there is less pressure on the park and less disturbance.

Briefing before the actual fieldwork by the specialist scientist prepared us for the work involved. Also volunteers were usually given a chance to talk about what they did during the day. Every day after dinner, we shared our daily experiences and consulted with each other. This formed a vital part of the project's evaluation.

What did I not like about the project? It all went too fast! I remember the last Saturday when we all sat outside with a cup of coffee while we volunteers talked about ourselves and what we do in our own country. That was the time I felt that we were really soon to depart from each other's company, we had become friends. I just wished we could start all over again!

Dorice Agol, c/o EANHS, Box 44486, Nairobi, Kenya

BOOK REVIEW

The Rhinoceros in Captivity, by L.C. Rookmaaker, SPB Academic Publishing, The Hague, 1998. 410 pages.

Kees Rookmaaker has been extremely interested in rhinos his entire adult life. This book, a massive compilation of all known rhinos which have been in captivity from Roman times until 1994, would be a life's work for most people, but not for Dr Rookmaaker. He has also produced other tomes which have taken years to compile such as *The Zoological Exploration of Southern Africa 1650-1790* (A.A. Balkema, Rotterdam, 1989) and the only reasonably complete bibliography on the rhino entitled appropriately *Bibliography of the Rhinoceros* (A.A. Balkema, Rotterdam, 1983). Presently, Dr Rookmaaker is the Curator of The Rhino Museum in Vaalwater in South Africa. Some of his time is now being spent putting together in the museum the largest collection of articles, books and offprints on the five species of rhinos, over 5,000 items.

The Rhinoceros in Captivity is divided into ten chapters with the bulk of the text devoted to references of the five extant rhino species in captivity: the Indian, Javan, Sumatran, black and white. The author has been able to list 2,439 rhinos in captivity, from only 22 for the Javan to 1,105 for the white, despite the fact that the first specimen of a white rhino only arrived at a zoo as late as 1946 (p.245).

This book is not just made up of a list of rhinos in various zoos, safari parks and circuses. There is a large amount of descriptive text giving details of some of the individual animals. One of the more fascinating themes which runs through the volume is the importance of wild animal dealers; they were mostly Europeans who went to Africa and Asia to catch the animals. An interesting book could be written about these men, some well known and others obscure individuals. Perhaps Dr Rookmaaker could consider such a proposal for future work.

Obviously, with such an ambitious project to list every single rhino ever caught over 20 centuries there will be omissions. Dr Rookmaaker admits he has not found all the references (p.4). The most conspicuous oversight for Kenya has been the lack of any mention of Ol Jogi Ranch which has 16 black and three white rhinos. In a larger geographical context there is a shortage of data for rhinos in Russia; this is probably due to the fact that the author has spent little time in Russia and the zoo authorities there failed to communicate adequately with him.

I would like to disagree with Dr Rookmaaker on one point. He says on page 155 that "the black rhino is not easily tamed like the other species". However, wild black rhinos can be tamed in only a few days, unlike white rhinos which take longer. I remember visiting some white rhinos enclosed in bomas in Kruger National Park which had not become tame after one month in captivity.

For a reference book, the 166 black and white illustrations are generally outstanding and well printed with some published for the first time. However, there is not a credit for any photograph, which I find mildly irritating.

Dr Rookmaaker writes in the introduction: "Of course, this book will fall far short of your (and my) expectations" (p.4). I strongly disagree. I find the book a gold mine of fascinating and relevant information on all five species of the rhino. It is clearly written, skillfully organized, profusely illustrated and well printed. Anybody interested in rhinos must obtain a copy of this book. Unfortunately, it is expensive (over US\$ 100), but the book is well worth it.

Esmond Martin, P.O. Box 15510 Mbagathi, Nairobi Kenya

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

18 May 1999

Dear Madam,

The Greyheaded Parrot in East Africa: a plea for sighting records

I am a student at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, and am conducting a Masters project on the "Conservation Status and Biology of the Greyheaded Parrot *Poicephalus fuscicollis suahelicus* Reichenow in Southern Africa". Part of my study involves recording the historic and present distribution of the species in the wild. In doing so I am referring to museum collections worldwide, atlas data records and reports of ornithologists through the range of the species. The input of ornithologists in East Africa would be most valuable in this study. Please find attached an article for consideration in your quarterly Bulletin.

Please feel free to contact me either via e-mail or post, should you wish to know more about my project.

Yours sincerely

Craig Symes

Cape Parrot and Greyheaded Parrot (Brown-necked Parrot): valid separate species

In 1992 a study of the nominate race of the Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus robustus* (Gmelin) was initiated by the late Olaf Wirminghaus. This forest-specific species is confined to the afromontane forests of eastern South Africa and this long term study is continuing under the supervision of Dr Colleen Downs (wife of

the late Olaf Wirminghaus) and Prof. Mike Perrin (W.P.T. Africa; R.C.A.P.C.). In that study the taxonomic status of this species was reviewed using morphometric analyses, plumage colouration, habitat requirements and distribution, and two separate species were proposed; *P. robustus*, the smaller of the three confined to the fragmented afromontane forests of South Africa, *P. fuscicollis suahelicus*, with a wider distribution inhabiting woodland, and *P. fuscicollis fuscicollis*, similar to *P. f. suahelicus* in appearance, yet discontinuous in distribution and inhabiting a reduced range of woodland and forest in West Africa (Wirminghaus & Perrin, 1994; Wirminghaus *et al.*, in prep.). These findings support the proposal of Clancey (1997).

The Greyheaded Parrot *Poicephalus fuscicollis suahelicus*, is found from the Northern Province of South Africa south of the Limpopo River, north through Zimbabwe, Mozambique, the Caprivi of Namibia, eastern Angola, Zambia, to northern Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and southern Zaire (Fry, Keith & Urban, 1988; Forshaw 1989; Wirminghaus *et al.*, in prep). In East Africa it is an uncommon resident of woodlands being patchily distributed in some regions (Forshaw, 1989) and in the highlands of eastern Zaïre (now DRC) it occurs in montane forest up to 3750 m.a.s.l. (Chapin, 1939; Britton, 1980; Forshaw, 1989). In Zambia, where it is widely distributed (48% of Atlas squares) (Aspinwall, pers. comm.) it is nowhere common (Leonard, pers. comm.). In Malawi and Zambia it is generally uncommon in woodlands up to about 2000 m.a.s.l. where woodland tree species provide seeds for food and hole cavities for nesting (Fry *et al.*, 1988). Zambia is reported as one of its strongholds and seasonal movements are recorded (Aspinwall, pers. comm.). These movements are noted as being more nomadic than other *Poicephalus* species (Forshaw, 1989). In Zimbabwe it is widespread, yet uncommon, in woodlands along major river courses and scarce above 1000 m.a.s.l.

The Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus* is regarded as vulnerable in the *Red Data Book—Birds* (Brooke, 1984). Fewer than 1000 are estimated to survive in the wild today, hence making it highly endangered (Downs & Symes, 1998). Population declines have resulted through capture for the wild bird trade and aviculture, shooting as pests and destruction of habitat from agriculture and expanding human populations. As a result recommendations have been made for its conservation (Downs & Symes, *op. cit.*). Similar factors may result in population declines of the Greyheaded Parrot. Presently its conservation status is undetermined and very little is known of the biology of the Greyheaded Parrot in the wild. Although widely distributed, it faces similar threats as other parrots worldwide. The IUCN/CITES Significant Trade Review records a significantly high trade in *P. robustus* from 1991–1995. It is therefore proposed, under the auspices of the RCAPC that a study concerning the status, biology and conservation of this species in the wild be conducted.

As part of the study of this species I am investigating