

WILD LIFE

AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY

MUSEUM

Edited By DOUGLAS ENGLISH



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IN THE HIGH GRASS

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NOTES ON SOME AFRICAN BIG GAME

I. The African Elephant

THE notes which I have been asked to contribute to *WILD LIFE*, on the habits of some African Big Game, are the outcome of many expeditions through East and West Africa, through the countries of the Great Lakes from the Nile to the Zambesi, and in Somaliland and Senegambia. The photographs which illustrate them were all obtained by stalking the animals, and represent work accomplished within the last year or two.

The actual shooting of big game fails to satisfy indefinitely those sportsmen in whose temperament the love of wild life is stronger than the lust of blood.

The killing instinct is soon satiated, and is succeeded by a desire to secure certain trophies, which have a special value in the eyes of the hunter by reason either of their novelty, of the difficulty in obtaining them, or of the excitement and possible danger of their pursuit. In Africa the variety of game is so enormous that one is often in a position to make a bag of half-a-dozen or more different species in a day; and this without the slightest trouble. Soon the desire to be continually getting some new thing is engendered, with the result that, after several trips, one is left with little to shoot, and little desire for shooting, except at the more sporting animals, Lions, Buffalo and so forth; since the opportunities of adding a *fresh* kind to one's list necessarily become scarcer every trip.

This is the moment at which one begins to seek for some means of prolonging the pleasure one gets from watching the wild creatures in their natural haunts—one longs to obtain a permanent impression of them, so as to be able to share it with appreciative friends who have not been so fortunate as to see such sights for themselves.

Photography is the natural outcome of this desire. Unfortunately wild animals are not at all amenable to this form of sport, and a great deal of trouble and hard work is necessary to obtain good results. I first started photographing wild animals on the West Coast, but, as the whole country there consists of bush, I got practically no chances of a good view of the game. In British East Africa, the conditions are, as a rule, ideal. The country is more open than any part of Africa I have visited, and the game is so plentiful that one has always something to pursue. Also, as a rule, the light is fairly good. When using a telephoto lens this is half the battle, for the light is cut down by the magnification to a point at which one cannot take a quick exposure. I found that when using four diameters magnification with full aperture, *viz.* F/4, one twentieth of a second was about the quickest I could risk to obtain a good result. This means that the camera must be held very rigid, and that some form of support, either legs, or the trunk of a tree, or something similar, is absolutely indispensable to avoid blurring. There are many occasions on which one could get splendid pictures, if one could take a snapshot without any waste of time. One can frequently stalk up to within a hundred yards or so of a herd, but when it is necessary, before being able to take a picture, to prop up the camera, to align it, both rigidly and correctly, and after

that to focus, the herd is nearly always in full flight before the operations can be completed. I used only one camera, a Reflex, with portrait lens, working at F/4, and a telephoto attachment. I used both plates and Premo film packs, and on the whole did not find much to choose between them.

The Elephants and Rhinos, and some other species, were usually taken with the portrait lens alone. One can approach much nearer to these big but blind beasts than to the timid Antelopes, and very much better pictures, or at any rate more good pictures can be got with the plain lens than with the lens and telephoto attachment. A further advantage of the plain lens is that being much smaller, and not requiring the camera to be racked out, it is not so much in the way in the event of these large animals taking a dislike to photography. As I very seldom had any one but a native with me I had to manœuvre a rifle at the same time as the camera, for the noise made by the shutter often precipitates an unwelcome adventure, entailing quick running or quick shooting.

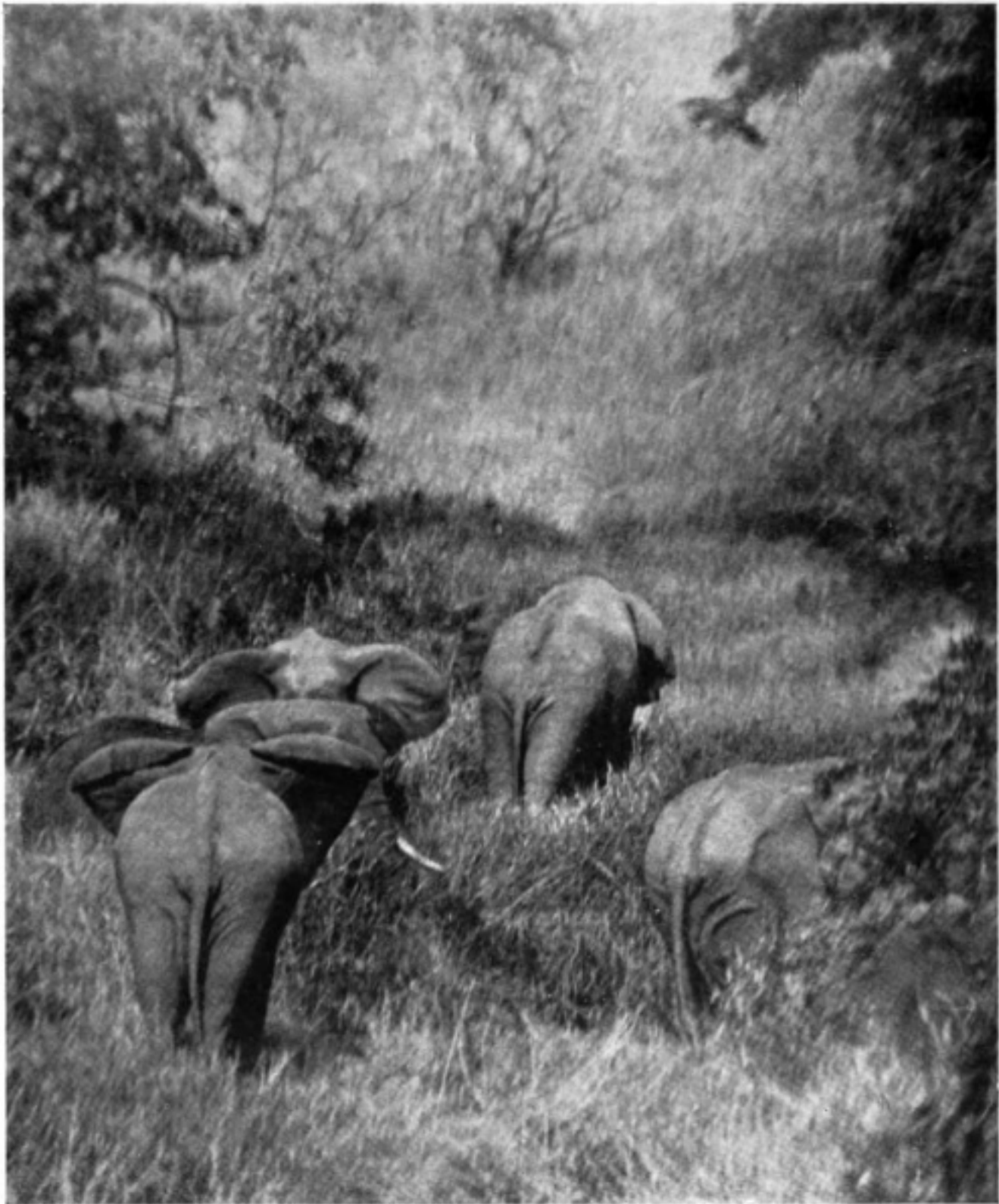
I used to develop at night in my tent, and found hydroquinone more satisfactory than pyro, but am not convinced that this was not through my ignorance of the subject, for I really know little or nothing about photography.

The water was usually so dirty that I had to clear it with alum, and I always had to wipe the plates clean with cotton wool after washing. Having no running water I took comfort in a piece of advice I found in a book on photography, namely, that by allowing the plates to stand in three changes of water, the hypo would be completely removed. I used no dark room unless the moon was very bright, but I usually took the precaution of covering up the plates with a piece of card whilst developing. I used an ordinary flash light electric lamp, and covered the glass with red light-proof fabric.

I secured photographs of the following species :

Elephant	Wildebeeste
Rhinoceros	Eland
White Rhinoceros	Oryx
Hippopotamus	Roan
Buffalo	Impala
Giraffe	Gerenuk
Zebra	Grant's Gazelle
Grevy's Zebra	Wart Hog
Waterbuck	Steinbuck
Cob	Klipspringer
Reedbuck	Oribi
Bushbuck	Duiker
Coke's Hartebeeste	Ostrich
Jackson's Hartebeeste	Baboons
Topi	Crocodile

I propose to utilize the most successful of these photographs to illustrate my notes on the habits of the animals, and incidentally to give those who have never had the opportunity of observing big game in their wild state, some idea of the country in which they are to be found, and of their appearance as they roam at large, which, as the photographs show, is very different from their appearance in menageries and zoos.



MISPITS IN TROUSERS. THERE ARE THREE ELEPHANTS TO THE LEFT, ONE BACK VIEW, ONE FULL FACE, AND ONE BETWEEN THEM SIDEWAYS.

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LAZILY, DROWSILY. THE REMARKABLE, BUT CHARACTERISTIC POSITIONS OF THE LEGS SHOULD BE NOTICED.

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To begin then with some notes on My Lord the Elephant—as I know him.

Although I have been up to Elephants in such widely distributed parts of Africa as Senegambia, Nyassa, Somaliland and several countries between, I have had no experience of them in densely forested countries, or in mountains. On Kenia and Kilimanjaro in East Africa, they appear to spend the dry season in the forests at high altitudes, probably more for the sake of water and food than for coolness, leaving for the plains and lower lying parts to roam the country during the rains, when the abundance of water throughout the country makes them independent. But I should think none of the African Game are so catholic in their choice of locality as Elephants. There are places both on the East and West Coast, where they live right on the coast-line; on the West Coast I know of a place where they have frequently been seen from passing steamers, bathing in the surf. These Coast districts are about the hottest in Africa, yet one finds them choosing Kilimanjaro and Kenia also as their homes, and living up these mountains at an altitude of ten or twelve thousand feet.

Old bulls like to choose some out of the way place, where the necessities of life abound, and to move as little as possible, selecting some little valley on a mountain, where their existence will remain unknown to hunters, very likely for years. In a certain nearly waterless district, I knew an old bull Elephant who apparently went every few days to drink at the river, contenting himself between times with some small puddles which he knew of in his remote wilderness. In all probability an old bull would require to drink every day, but would often put up with a very poor water supply to save himself the trouble and risk of a journey to the river.

The younger bulls accompanying herds roam much more, and are therefore in much greater danger, as their tracks cover so much ground that the hunter is pretty sure to come across them sooner or later.

Elephants are, in fact, usually credited with the character of being great wanderers—here to-day, miles away to-morrow. Where water is plentiful, I think there is no doubt that they do wander a good deal, but where water is scarce, and only obtainable in certain places, they become wonderfully regular in their habits. In certain parts of Africa, the country during the dry season is absolutely devoid of water, except for large rivers. To these they commonly come down to drink every night, and retire early in the morning, moving slowly along, feeding, resting at intervals, and going ultimately to some place where they can find shade. Although they like shade, and make for it when they can, they will spend the heat of the day standing under a tree which only gives enough shelter to keep a few of them partially cool; and, during this time, perhaps twenty of them will huddle up together, looking very much more as if they were trying to get warm than as if they were trying to cool themselves.

Where there are large swamps, Elephants show a predilection for standing all day long in them, keeping themselves cool by occasionally squirting water over their backs, and by rolling. Here, also, they seem to like to be huddled up in a mass. I do not remember ever seeing more than one Elephant lying down in the water at a time, and I have seen one, who evidently thought his turn for a bath had come, prod his recumbent neighbour and help him up with his trunk, as though he considered it unsafe to lie down until the other was standing. I have never come across a case of one lying down to sleep.

The huge beasts have somewhat melancholy ideas of amusement. They will stand idly for hours flapping their ears without cessation, throwing tufts of grass or earth



FOLLOW MY LEADER

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over their backs. I have occasionally seen one make shots at the Egrets sitting on its back with a squirt of water. Sometimes two engage in a fight, probably not altogether in earnest as it is so soon over. After one or two prods at each other, one turns hurriedly in flight, uttering piercing screams, but is not pursued, and both settle down within ten yards of each other quite comfortably. I once saw two babies playing. Their methods were as elephantine and ponderous as one would expect. One butted the other, which promptly fell over on its side, wagging its legs and trunk for all the world like a puppy. The other one gave it two or three friendly butts, taking plenty of time between each, and then walked away, as though feeling that its desire for frivolity had been satisfied. This was the nearest approach to skittishness I have ever observed in Elephants.

Egrets usually accompany Elephants in swamps, partly because the Elephants form a capital landing place, but chiefly because they supply the best part of the food of these birds in the shape of ticks and so forth.

These are the Common or Cow Egrets, which usually live round the villages, and follow the cattle about. They perform a very useful service to Elephants and Buffalo by ridding them of ticks and such like. Only once can I remember having seen an Elephant accompanied by Rhino birds (*Buphaga erythrorhyncha*); and this is somewhat remarkable, as one would have imagined that the Elephant was quite as attractive a host as the Rhino, Buffalo, Eland and Giraffe, all of which extend their hospitality to the "Beef-eaters." The case referred to occurred near Lake Nyassa a good many years ago. A large bull Elephant was standing mortally wounded in a swamp. Before being disturbed, he and his companions had been covered with Egrets, which took to flight at the sound of the gun. As soon as this Elephant was wounded, he appeared to exercise an irresistible fascination on the "tick birds," who arrived in dozens, and practically covered his back.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Elephants is their ability to travel quite noiselessly. On discovering danger there is very often a bit of a "hurrush," but it is followed by tense silence. One might imagine the whole herd were standing immovable, awaiting an attack, but no, they have gone off, perhaps a hundred or two of them, without making a sound.

Another thing which must always astonish anyone coming across them for the first time is the stomach rumble. It is generally the first sign that they are near, as one can hear it at a considerable distance, and except for the breaking down of trees with a crash, and an occasional trumpeting, it is the only noise they make. The "stomach rumble" resembles thunder, when heard from a little way off, and I have several times been deceived by it, when after Elephants during the beginning of the rains.

Under certain conditions, the tracks of Elephants are practically invisible. On one occasion, I remember, there had been a smart shower in the night, and the tracks of all hooped animals stood out clearly defined. I had two most excellent trackers with me, and one walked over an Elephant's track without seeing it, whilst the other had a good look before he was sure it was a track at all. We followed, finding a track here and there at intervals. When we ultimately got up, we found we had been following the tracks of a herd of about two hundred. The photographs of some of them are among the illustrations, and it was on the ground shown in some of these pictures that the tracks were so hard to see.

The habits of this particular herd were most regular during the drought. At night they came down to the river, and by dawn they were usually some way inland.



ELEPHANTS SUSPICIOUS OF MAN'S PRESENCE, AND FEELING THE WIND FOR HIM. IN BOTH PICTURES EGRETS CAN BE SEEN ON THE ANIMALS' BACKS. THE CHARACTERISTIC HUDDLING TOGETHER IS WELL SHOWN IN THE UPPER PICTURE.

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If one got on their spoor early, one could come up with them by about 9 a.m., and find them moving slowly along, pulling down trees, and eating them as they went. Elephants seem to eat most things, but have their preferences. Anything in the way of fruit is to them a great attraction. Africa is very badly provided with fruit, but the nuts of certain palms are a very favourite food. The nut of the borassus is as large as a cocoanut, and consists of a stone surrounded by fibrous pulp, flavoured something like pineapple. They eat these without taking the trouble to put out the stones, which pass right through them undigested. *Sansevieria cactus* is another favourite food.

Generally speaking, Elephants are most destructive. They break down good sized trees in order to take a small mouthful of leaves or fruit from them, and pass on, leaving a tract of devastation behind them.

On the West Coast I once came across a very large tree which had been felled by Elephants, so large, in fact, that one would have thought it impossible for Elephants to accomplish such a feat. I had at the time a very experienced native hunter, and he showed me how it had been done. The Elephants had pounded the earth round the roots with their feet, and so loosened them that they were able, by combining, to knock the whole thing over. He showed me the tracks of each Elephant. Apparently three, perhaps more, had taken part, and while one or two had caught hold of the trunk on one side and pulled, the others had pushed from the opposite side. Whether his ideas on the subject were correct or not, I do not know, but as the tracks bore them out, I think they may quite well have been so.

To return, however, to the herd.

By about 10 a.m., they would stop under shady trees for perhaps a quarter of an hour at a time, after which they would go on again. By eleven they had taken up their positions for the day, standing in groups under any trees that afforded suitable shade. Their only movements then would be the continual flapping of their ears—though occasionally one would walk round looking for a better place. Most of them faced inwards, but there would be nearly always one or two facing outwards, doing sentry go, but with very little sense of responsibility, as they seemed as fast asleep as the rest. One of the favourite positions for a bull Elephant is to stand with its tusks propped up in the fork of a tree.

After being disturbed on several occasions this herd got much wilder, and retreated earlier each day, and further. Indeed, as the heat was terrific, I was compelled to give up following them; and turned my attention to a batch of about twenty cows with newly-born calves, who were unable to go long distances. These ladies were of a most truculent disposition, and I hardly got any chances to photograph them, the risk attaching to a near approach making it inadvisable to attempt it. Cow Elephants being protected, one had the choice between getting caught, or getting into trouble with the Government—if one saved one's skin at the expense of poor Mother Elephant.

At the time of the year I was in their country, the wind was most variable, and on some days it was impossible to approach them from any direction at all without their getting it. In the pictures on p. 119 the Elephants have got our wind, and are feeling it in order to locate the danger. When this occurs one has to be cautious, as they might have evil designs, especially when, as in this case, there is a female with a calf. However, I think it is rare for them to be truculent except when they think the danger is so close that they prefer not to turn their backs on it.



ON THE MOVE.



A HALT TO BATHE IN A PUDDLE

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The young ones felt the heat very much. One day, when the wind was particularly variable, the herd got my wind several times. Each time, as they made off, they shed one or two members whose calves could not keep up. So exhausted were the poor little things, after going about a mile at midday, that they lay down and refused to budge. At this juncture we left them, partly from compassion for the young ones, but not altogether for that reason, for the cows are most vicious when their young cannot comfortably run away, and with a shifty wind, their immediate vicinity is far from healthy. One day the whole crowd came for us in a bunch, but lost the wind when they got to where we had been standing. One cow began nosing along our line, but without much success; so to ease her feelings she pulled a fair sized tree up, and smashed it down and trampled on it. These cows kept getting our wind which changed every minute or so, and chased us for a mile or more. But what was our danger was also our salvation. Every time the wind changed our pursuers lost the scent, recovering it just when we had got to a distance which seemed safe. Of course our game was always to cut across the wind, and for this purpose we had to keep testing the wind every moment.

Fortunately Elephants are astonishingly blind. Several times we went up to within twenty yards of a herd almost in the open, without their seeing us, but I need hardly say these were not cows with calves.

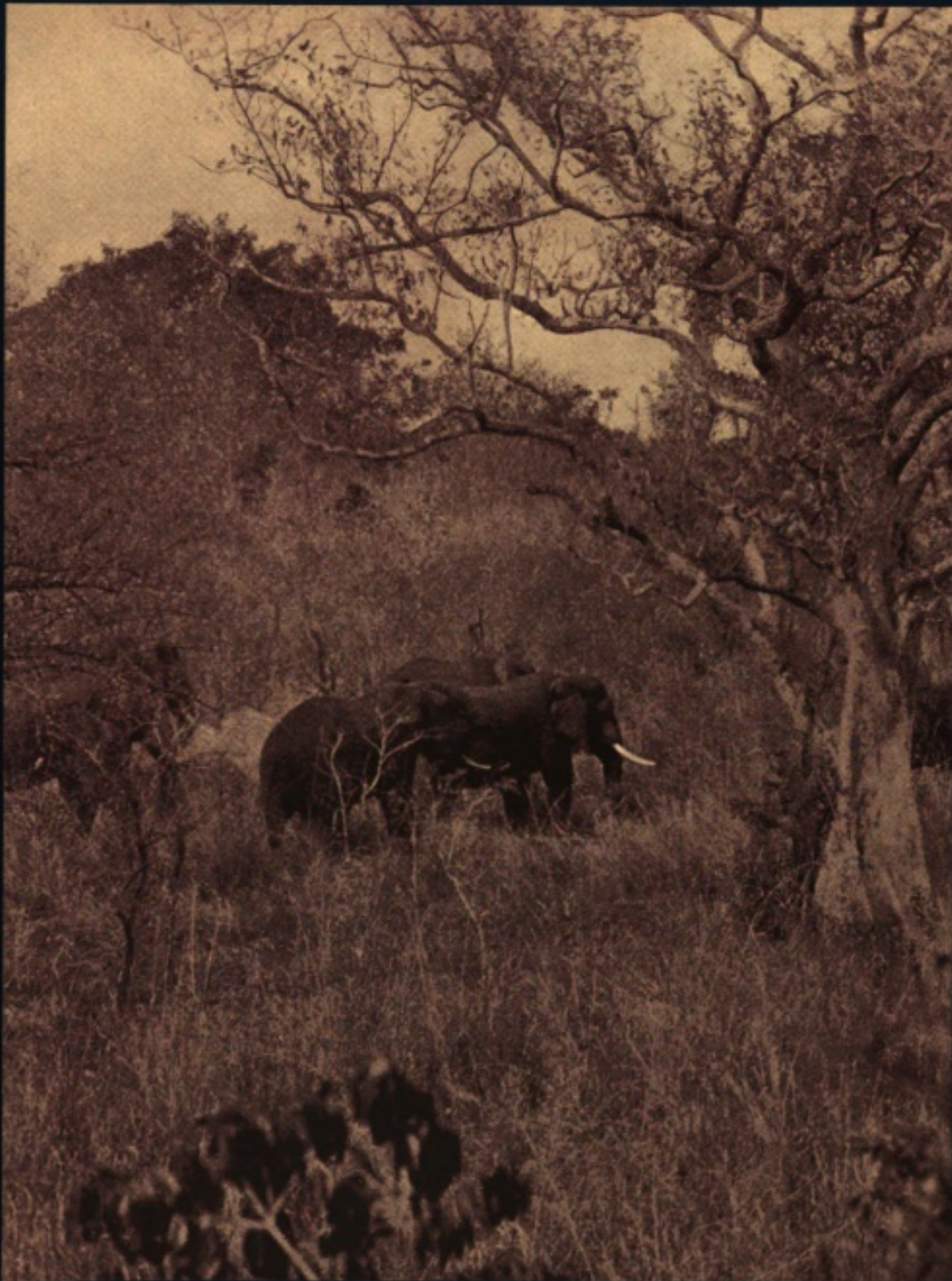
FRED RUSSELL ROBERTS.

(To be continued).



ELEPHANTS IN OPEN COUNTRY.

Copyright, Fred Russell Roberts





MOVING UPHILL.



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FEEDING AS THEY MOVE.