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East Africa — Game Garden of the World

A REVIEW OF ROOSEVELT AND HELLER'S *LIFE HISTORIES OF AFRICAN GAME ANIMALS*¹

By C. HART MERRIAM

Illustrations chosen by the Editor from the photographs, drawings and maps in the Roosevelt and Heller volumes and from cartoons of Roosevelt in McCutcheon's *In Africa*

IN North America less than a century ago the western plains supported vast herds of big-game animals — antelope, buffalo, elk, and mule deer — accompanied by bands of hungry wolves and usually also by a few grizzly bears. But the steadily increasing pressure of armed explorers, hunters, and fur traders, followed by stockmen and later by ranchmen, told heavily on the wild game, until at present antelope, except in the Yellowstone National Park, are reduced to a few small bands; the buffalo as a wild animal, except in the Yellowstone and the Canadian Northwest, has ceased to exist; the Plains grizzly has been exterminated; the elk and mule deer have been forced back into the less accessible parts of distant mountains or have taken refuge in our national parks, while of the original Plains animals the wolf alone remains in material numbers — and he has altered his habits to meet the changed conditions, keeping out of sight

in the daytime and preying at night on the settlers' cattle in place of the buffalo of bygone days.

In other countries, including South Africa, the course of events has been much the same. But in East Africa, owing partly to the astonishing tardiness of exploration and settlement, and partly to the foresight of the British Government in setting aside large areas as game preserves, wild beasts are still to be found in amazing abundance. The number of kinds is no less surprising than the number of individuals. Nowhere else on the globe exists an assemblage of game animals in any way comparable; indeed, the number is almost beyond belief. For instance, not fewer than thirty species of antelopes, gazelles, steinboks, hartebeests, elands and their allies, inhabit the region at the present time, besides giraffes, zebras, buffalos, elephants, rhinoceroses, hippos, lions, leopards, cheetahs, jackals and hyenas.

During the past half century this surprising wealth of game animals has attracted hunters from all quarters of the globe. In the comparatively brief period between the discoveries of Speke and Grant and the hunting expeditions of Selous, Harry Johnston, and Roosevelt,

¹ *Life Histories of African Game Animals* by Theodore Roosevelt and Edmund Heller, with illustrations from photographs, and from drawings by Philip R. Goodwin; and with 40 faunal maps. 2 vols. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons. 1914.

The account of the expedition, entitled *African Game Trails*, by Theodore Roosevelt, was published four years earlier (Scribner's 1910) and to lovers of wild nature is a book of thrilling interest.



Photo by Carl E. Akeley

Reproduced through courtesy Charles Scribner's Sons

IMPALLA ANTELOPE ON THE TANA RIVER

Among all the horned animals of middle Africa the impalla is the one which, when alarmed, takes the most extraordinary leaps and bounds; the animals go off almost like birds, springing over bushes, or many feet into the air if in the open



By courtesy Charles Scribner's Sons

DISTRIBUTION OF THE RACES OF THE WHITE RHINOCEROS

The localities occupied by this species are everywhere bounded by rivers. The Nile race (2 on the map) (*Ceratotherium simum simum*), the only one which still exists wild, is confined to a limited district west of the Nile and is never found on the east bank; while the southern race (1 on the map) (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*), formerly very abundant between the Zambesi and Orange Rivers — although now represented only by some dozen preserved individuals — has never been known to occur north of the Zambesi. The river boundaries illustrate forcibly the strong aversion of these great quadrupeds to crossing streams. During historic times the white rhinoceros has not been known to inhabit the region between its present ranges, although this is apparently well suited to its habits, and the separation must have been comparatively recent, since the races exhibit only slight structural differences.

Roosevelt and Heller's *Life Histories of African Game Animals* contains some forty maps setting forth the distribution of the big game of the continent

a literature on African game has sprung up and grown to voluminous if not formidable proportions. It has remained however, for Roosevelt and his field assistant Heller, as a direct outgrowth of the Smithsonian-Roosevelt African Expedition to write the *Life Histories of African Game Animals* — a book which for all time will stand as a treasure house of information on the geography and general natural history of the region.¹

In training, field experience, knowledge of animals, and in literary ability, the authors form a rather remarkable combination. Roosevelt had long been recognized as the most pleasing writer and highest authority on the habits and hunting of the big-game animals of North America; Heller had attained the reputation of being one of the world's most

experienced and successful mammal collectors, having previously worked in East Africa (on the Akeley expeditions), and in western North America from Alaska to the deserts of Southern California and Nevada. Hence in the writing, the life histories naturally fell to Roosevelt; the account of geographic ranges and the descriptions of species to Heller.

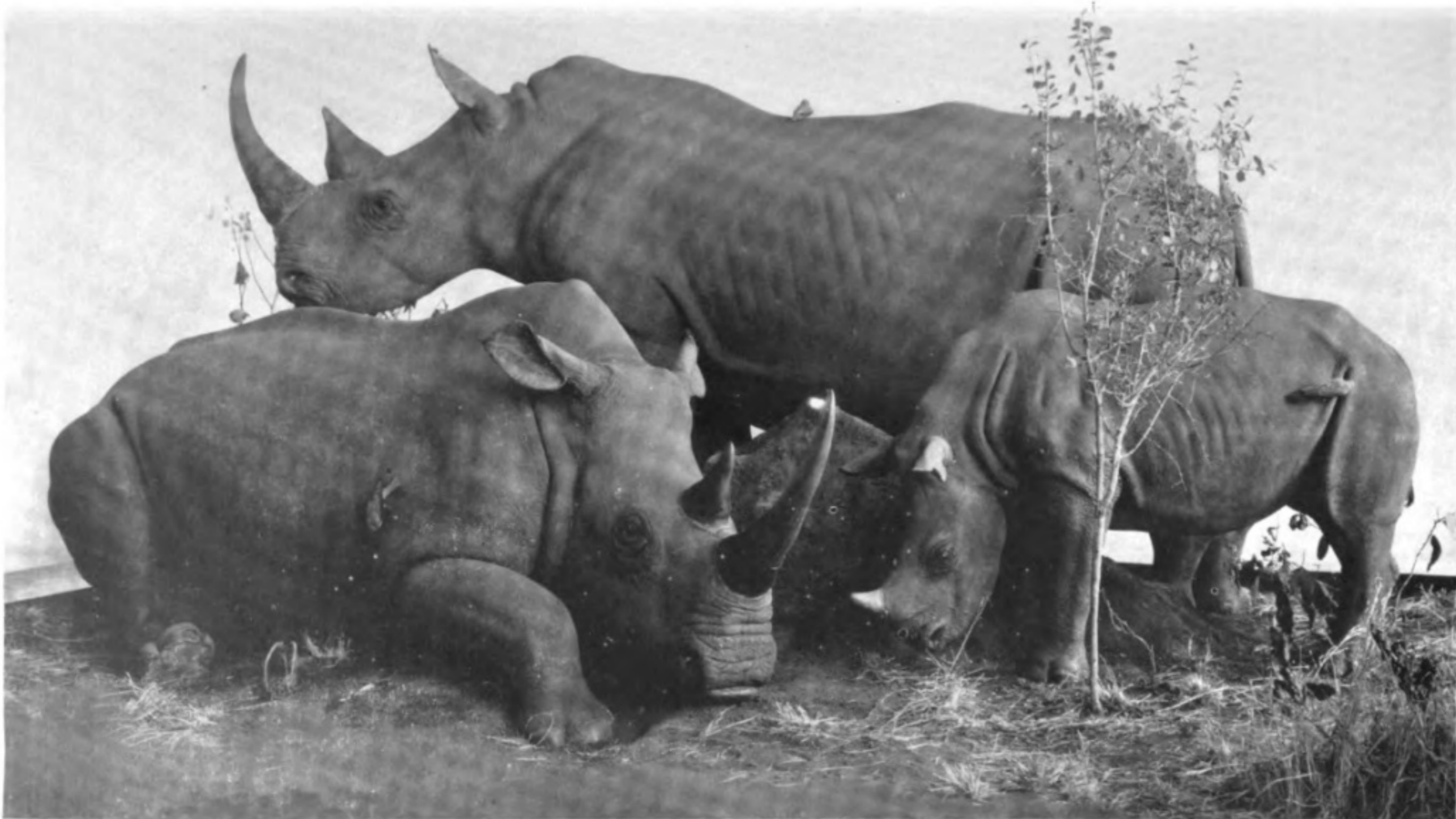
In the preface and early part of the book the authors outline the routes and geographic areas covered by the expedition, describe the natural features and dominant elements of the flora, give an admirable summary of the history of east and middle Africa, mentioning the accomplishments of successive explorers and hunter-naturalists, and digress far enough to discuss such general subjects as game preserves, the geographic distribution of animals, the systematic relations of genera, species and subspecies, the derivation of the fauna geographically and palæontologically, and the theories of concealing and revealing coloration in relation to natural selection.

Whether or not one always agrees with their conclusions it must be admitted that the discussions abound in interesting observations and entertaining comments and deductions. In many instances fundamental scientific truths are expressed with more than ordinary clearness. Thus, in speaking of the ranges of animals and plants we are told that every species has a tendency to enlarge



From *McCutcheon's In Africa*
By courtesy Bobbs-Merrill Company

Roosevelt showing his pigskin library to John T. McCutcheon, Fred Stephenson and Mrs. Carl E. Akeley in the Roosevelt African camp



WHITE RHINOS SHOT BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

This group, showing the White Rhinoceros of Africa, is made from skins collected on the Smithsonian-Roosevelt African Expedition, and mounted for the National Museum by James L. Clark



From McCutcheon's *In Africa*
By courtesy Bobbs-Merrill Company

Improving each shining hour

its area of distribution, and that "the distribution of each species marks the limits within which it is able successfully to compete with its environment. It would appear therefore a comparatively easy matter to determine the factors which are accountable for the distribution of any species; and yet no task in natural history is more difficult. . . . The distribution of one species may depend upon the distribution of its food plants or animals, of another upon its natural enemies, of another upon climatic conditions; while yet others may be limited in distribution by natural boundaries such as large bodies of water or high mountains."

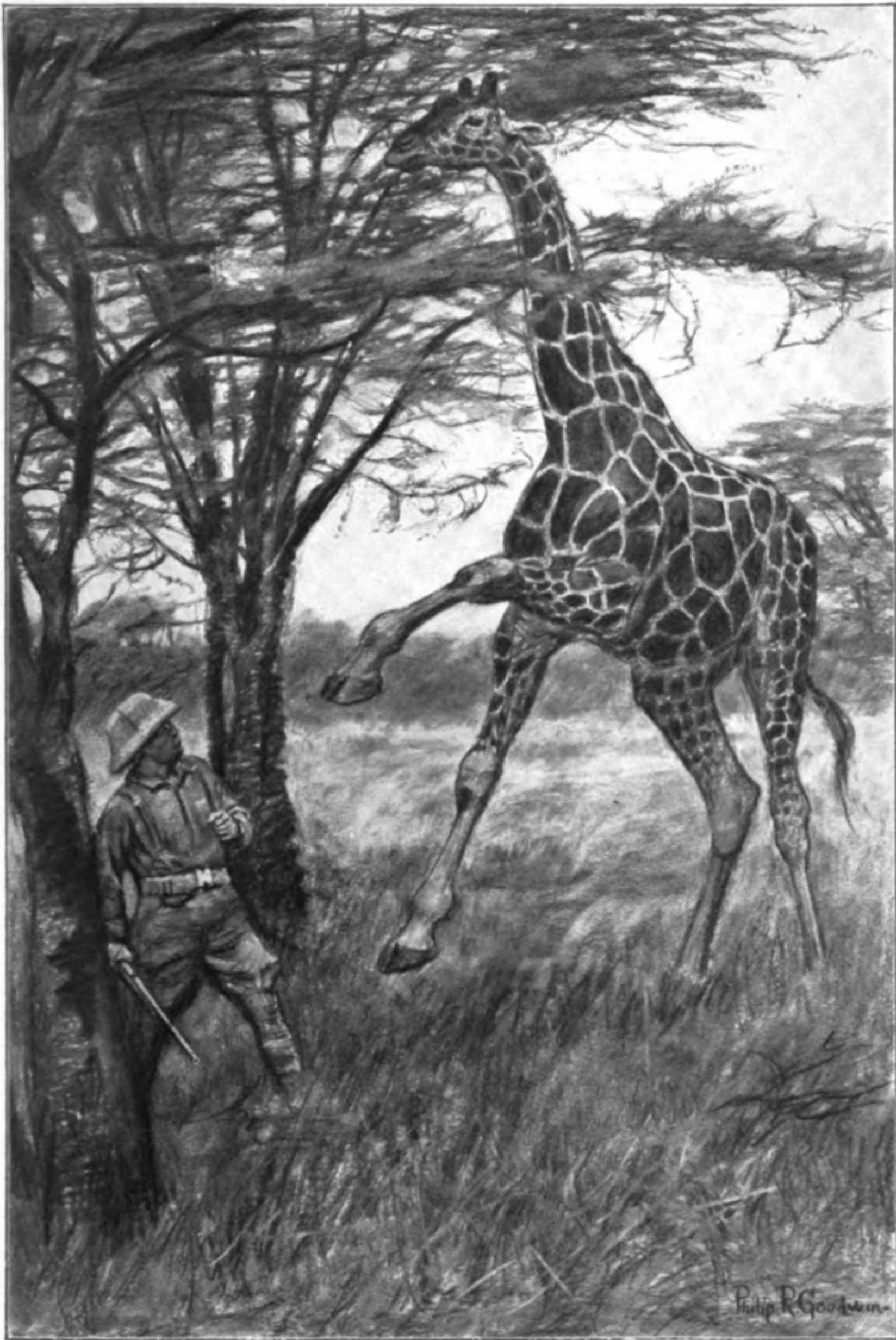
Later, the authors mention the physical obstacle imposed by the Tana River, which "acts as a barrier across the desert portion of the coast slope from Mount Kenia eastward to the sea," separating the ranges of a dozen game animals,

including zebras, giraffes, oryx, hartebeests, gazelles, antelopes and wart hogs. One's surprise at the effectiveness of a river barrier is relieved by the remark that "the aversion which most antelopes have for crossing rivers is due no doubt chiefly to the fear of attack by the crocodiles which haunt the streams."

Throughout the work the animals are discussed with reference to their environment — the features imposed by geography, vegetation and climate being kept constantly in mind.

We are told that the mammals of equatorial Africa, unlike those of northern regions, "have no definite season for shedding their coats, nor are they subject to any seasonal climatic change which would necessitate such a change." And further, that there seems to be no definite breeding season in East Africa, there being "no climatic necessity for such a habit."

Roosevelt's writings on North American game animals have proved him an unusually keen and accurate observer, eager to learn just what the animals are doing, and certain to record what he has seen while it is still fresh in mind. Hence it is not surprising that his accounts of hunting strange beasts in a new field, as told in his *African Game Trails* and *Life Histories of African Game Animals*, should abound in detailed observations, often enlivened with spirited scenes and thrilling incidents.



*Drawing by Philip R. Goodwin
Reproduced through courtesy Charles Scribner's Sons*

DEFENSIVE ACTION OF RETICULATED GIRAFFE

Giraffes make no effort to hide or escape observation, trusting to their own wariness, speed, and keen senses, especially sight, for protection. With the exception of the ostrich, giraffes are the wariest game in all Africa and hardest to stalk. This one was caught asleep by Colonel Roosevelt. When he was within a few feet of it, it reared and struck short and finally withdrew. The lion is the giraffe's only enemy among beasts



*Drawing by Philip R. Goodwin
Reproduced through courtesy Charles Scribner's Sons*

BLACK RHINOCEROS TOSSING A PORTER

The hook-lipped black rhinoceros is dull of wit and of eyesight, but its senses of smell and hearing are good. The sight of a man usually induces only bewilderment and curiosity; if the man is smelt, fear is the usual result; but in some cases either the sight or smell of a man arouses senseless rage

Heller's descriptions of the animals are clearly stated, easily understood, and may be regarded as models of their kind. The matter relating to geographic ranges has been written from the vantage ground of familiarity with the species both in life and in literature, and the text is supplemented by a series of maps showing graphically the areas inhabited. There are no fewer than forty of these maps, constituting, it is hardly necessary to add, a most valuable feature of the work.

Another commendable feature is the publication of the native names of the animals in the languages of several tribes. These names sooner or later are sure to be of assistance to ethnologists and are likely to be the means of avoiding errors in the transcription of animal myths and tales, for unhappily, ethnologists are seldom naturalists.

Heller has enjoyed rare opportunities and has accomplished what no other naturalist ever attempted; for in addition to the six hundred specimens of some seventy species brought back by the expedition, he has studied the W. L. Abbott and Paul Rainey African collections in our National Museum, the collections of the American Museum of



From McCutcheon's *In Africa*
By courtesy Bobbs-Merrill Company

Writing his adventures while they're hot¹

Natural History in New York, the Field Museum in Chicago, the Powell-Cotton collection in England, and the rich collections in the national museums of Great Britain, Germany, Belgium and France.

In comprehensiveness, thoroughness, popular interest, and in the scientific value of its contributions to knowledge, the *Life Histories of African Game Animals* is far and away the best book ever written on the big-game animals of any part of the world.

¹ The cartoons from J. T. McCutcheon's *In Africa* were chosen by the Editor to give, in the first and second, a flavor of the African camp, and in the third, to emphasize one of the most important principles in all natural history field work, namely — that for the sake of accuracy, observations should be recorded at the moment they are made, or at least "while they're hot."