

WITH A CAMERA

The Story of a Two Years' Trek



Mr. Martin
Johnson.

Told by
**MARTIN
JOHNSON**
and
Set down by
**H. W.
ELLIOT.**

on the spear-points indicate that the bearers are on a peaceful mission.

with motor-cars, ox-carts, mule teams, and a hundred and ten native porters set out on our chosen route. We were not quite certain how long the cars would prove useful, but we meant to take them as far as we could. One difficulty that took some getting over was the fact that many of the natives are vegetarians, which greatly complicates the food question while on *safari*; it is, indeed, absolutely necessary to include a certain number of meat-eaters. Each porter carries sixty pounds of food-stuffs, enough for a whole month for one man, the rate of consumption being two pounds a day.

The first illustration shows the porters of the expedition lined up just before the start, and it is interesting to note that the ball seen on the top of the hunting poles of the two fellows in the foreground has a symbolical significance. When the ball is removed, it is a sign of war; when in its place, it means peace.

One of our early camera successes was to photograph a herd of Thomson's gazelle, the commonest of all antelopes in "British East," which is found throughout the Kenya country as far north as Lake Rudolf. Both male and female have horns, those of the former sometimes measuring over

fifteen inches. Like all antelope, it is excessively timid, but a "close-up" picture of one of these graceful little beasts is here shown. Timid as they are, however, most antelopes, when wounded, will defend themselves if there is no means of escape, often making short charges which are by no means devoid of danger to the hunter.

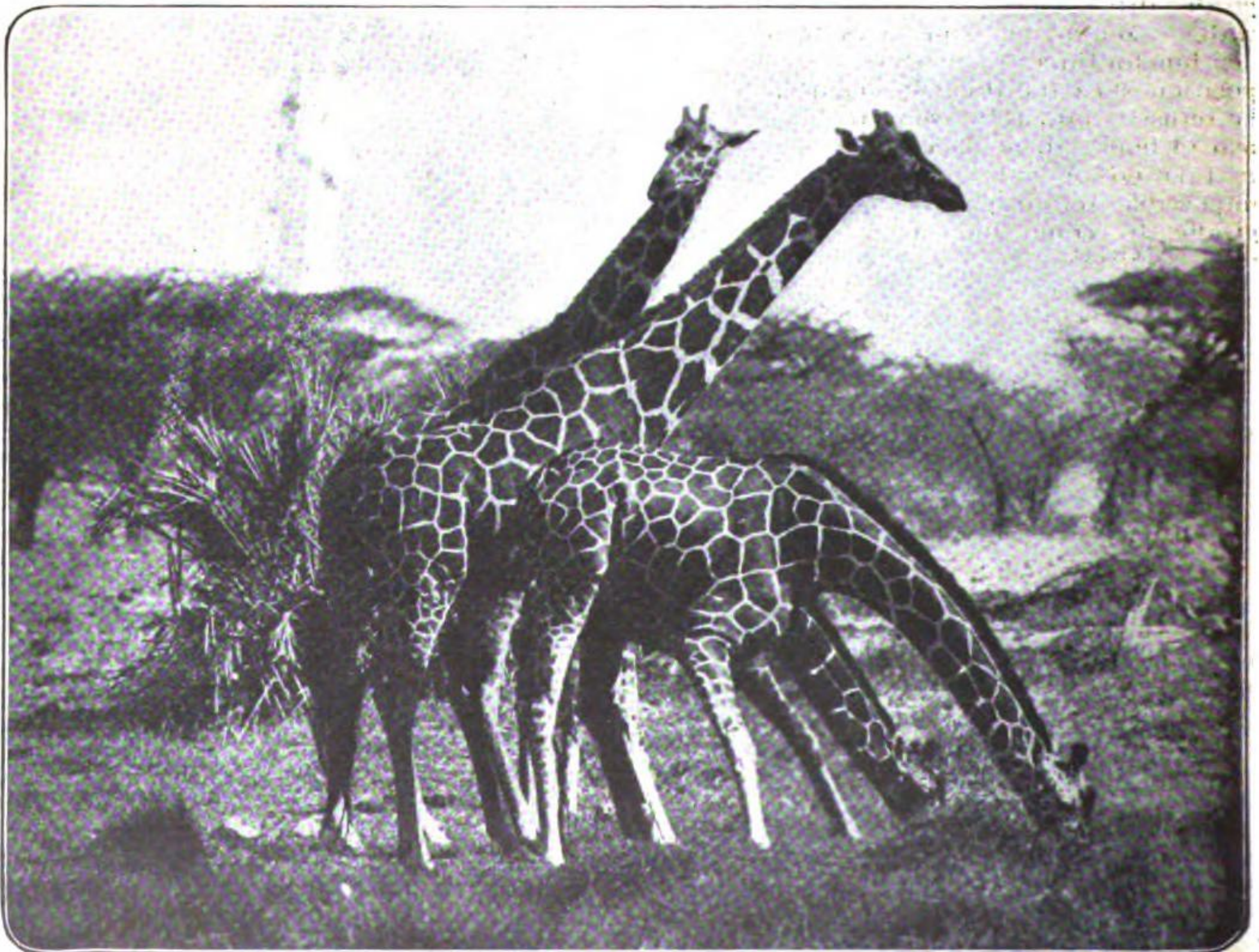
Most amazing of all the animals, perhaps, were the giraffes. This animal is said to be getting rare, but we saw no indication of the fact. Indeed, they seemed to be



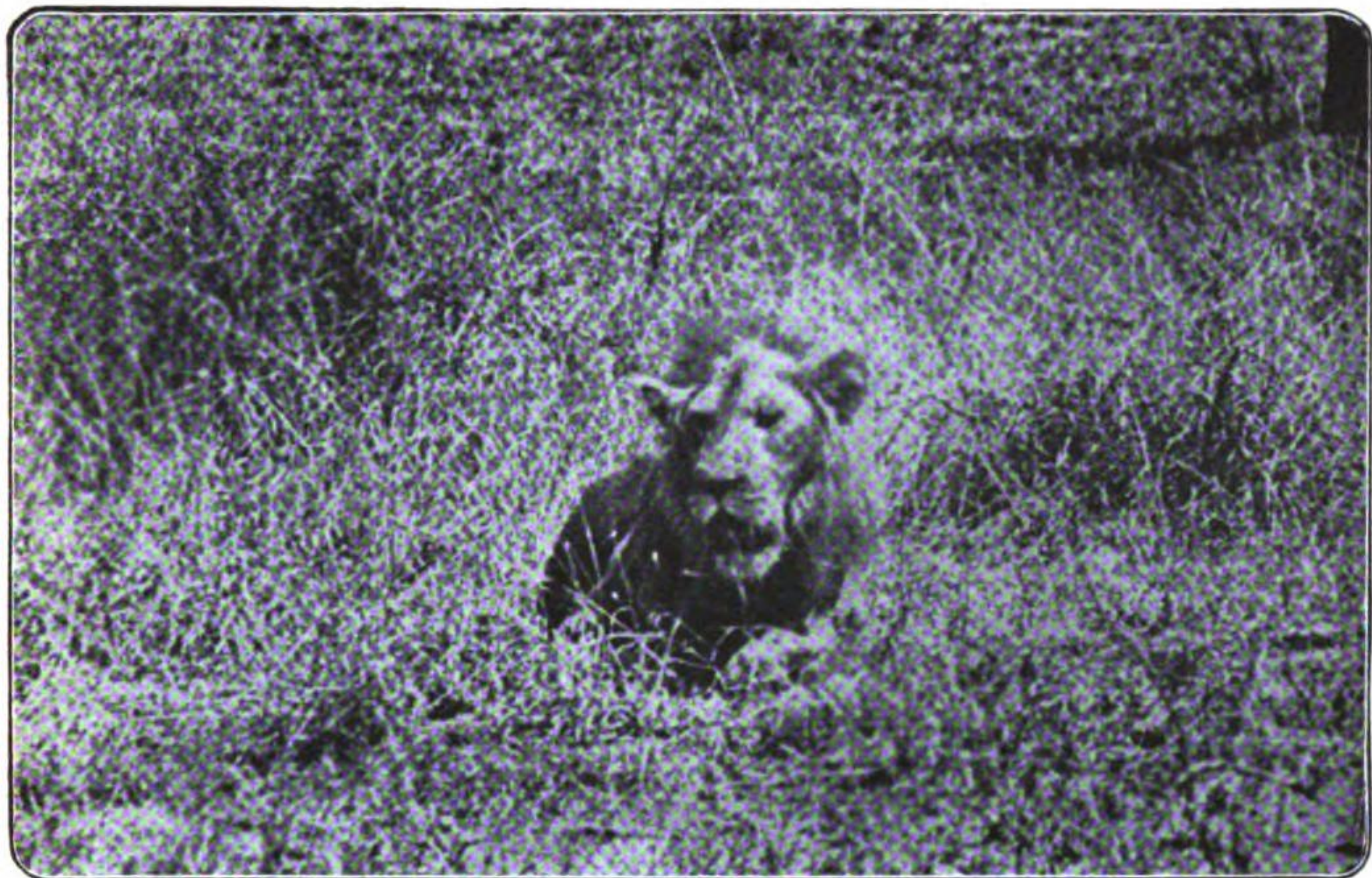
A "close-up" of a Thomson's gazelle, the commonest of the antelopes.

everywhere, and on several occasions we saw as many as a hundred of them in different herds. One of the most beautiful sights of the whole trip was thirty-seven of them passing along a ridge, silhouetted against the sky, and from first to last we must have encountered many thousands. There are, however, districts from which they are gradually disappearing, although once plentiful, and north and east of the Zambesi River there is a large area where none can be found.

Like the camel, the



A group of giraffes feeding. These animals stand seventeen or eighteen feet high, and are said to drink only twice a week.



Mrs. Martin Johnson's first lion.

giraffe drinks only about twice a week, the water taken in each time being sufficient to last him for three or four days. His drinking position is extraordinarily ungainly because he refuses—probably owing to his ingrained fear of lions—to go below the level surface to take either water or food. It is quite impossible, too, to get the giraffe to come out at night to drink.

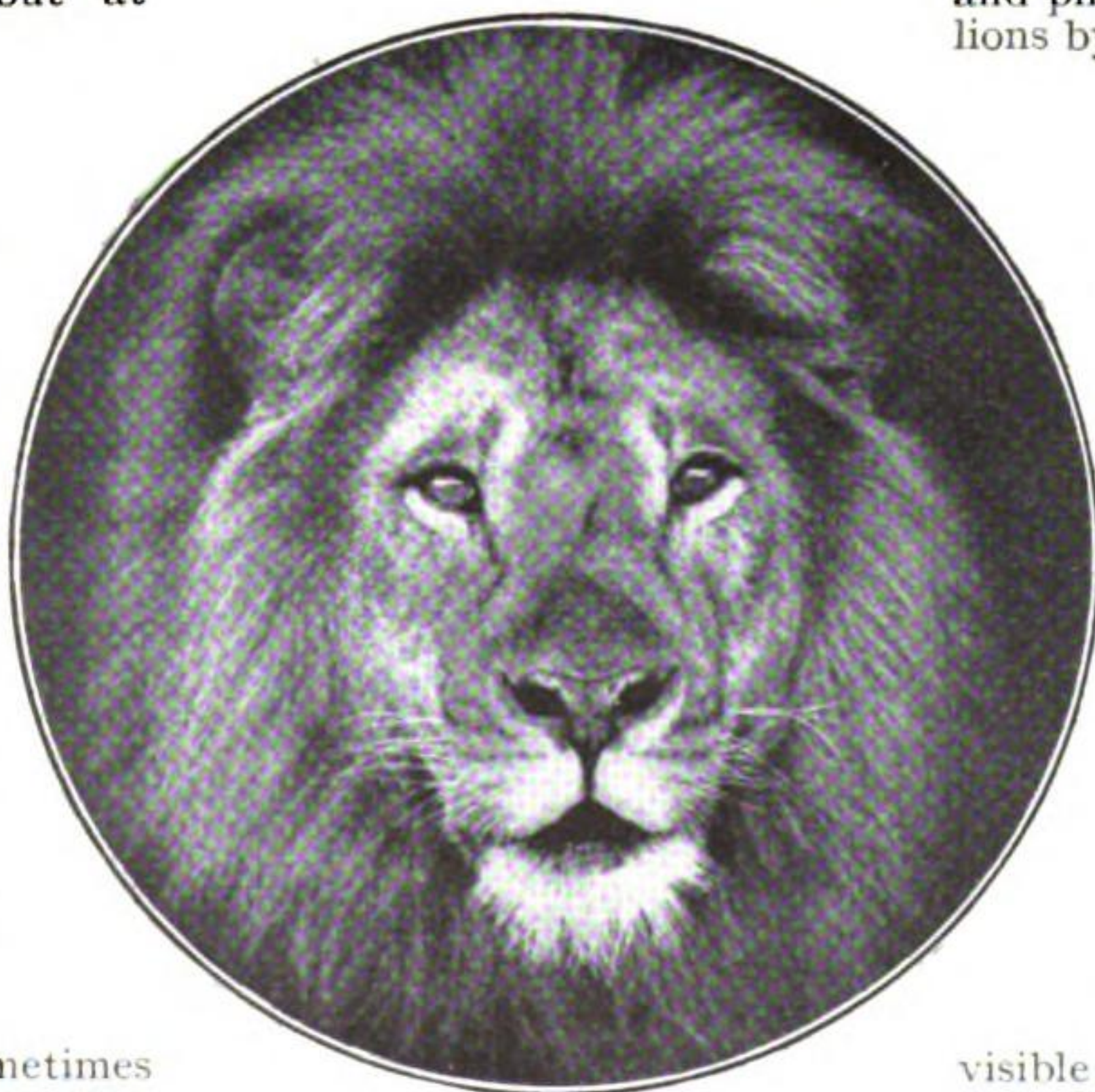
Having no vocal cords, neither male nor female can utter a sound. Both have the same small horns, covered with skin, and in addition a small bone protruding from their foreheads, resembling a third horn. The height of an average giraffe, measuring from its head to the ground in a straight line, is seventeen to eighteen feet, and its colour varies with the locality—sometimes bright yellow, sometimes almost black. Dry, open country, with vegetation

plentiful and unobstructed, is the giraffe's favourite haunt.

Pushing on into the interior, we crossed the Mount Kenya range on the Equator, and on the plains at the farther side made our first close acquaintance with lions. We had erected a "blind," and from behind it were fortunate enough to see, and photograph, a herd of lions by daylight.

First one and then another crossed in front of us, until ten in all had gone by like a parade. The sight was too much for Mrs. Johnson. She had never shot a lion in her life, and she decided that if there was an eleventh she was going to get him. There was, and she stepped from the shelter.

The lion heard her and stopped, crouching low with an angry scowl plainly visible on his face. It did not disconcert my wife, however. Her shot sped



A magnificent lion.

true, and he fell dead in his tracks. He was a fine fellow, as the photographs show.

It is very important to take correct aim when hunting lions, for a good deal depends on the position of the shot. A bullet behind the shoulder, for instance, does not have immediate results, even though it may pierce the heart. The animal may still be able to leap upon the hunter, and, maddened by his injury, can inflict punishment that is often fatal.

While on the subject of lions, I might remark that it is incorrect to suppose that they are particularly fond of human beings as prey. Their ferocity is strictly governed by their hunger, and when this has been appeased they will pass without molesting animals one would expect them to pull down. On the plains, where zebra and

rifles, and, guided by the native, set out to find him. He was lying on the ground in a pool of blood, with just enough strength left to warn us to keep away from a nearby bush, in which a leopard was hiding.

The natives beat the bush, and next instant the leopard sprang out. The dog at once flew at him, seizing him by the jaw, the leopard promptly retaliating by taking a piece out of the dog's leg. I had my rifle ready, and the leopard received his quietus before he could do further harm. Later, we learnt the story of what had happened.

The unfortunate South American had shot at the leopard and missed him, and without more ado the beast had leapt upon him. For what seemed fully half an hour, he said afterwards, they fought a frightful battle, bare hands against fangs and claws.



A herd of "common" zebra, all unconscious of the neighbourhood of the camera.

antelope are in abundance, the animals in general do not seem to fear molestation because they know that usually the lion has had plenty of food.

Hereabouts leopards were also plentiful, and one of the saddest occurrences of our two-years' trip was connected with one of these animals. We had met a young South American, who was out collecting wild specimens for a Zoo with which he was associated, his only companion, besides his natives, being an Airedale dog.

One morning after he had gone out to get fresh meat for the camp one of the natives came rushing back, breathless and excited. All we could understand from his incoherent narrative was that his master was in serious trouble.

My wife and I promptly picked up our

The man tried to strangle the infuriated beast, but finally, terribly mauled, had to relax his hold. By this time the leopard had had enough for the time being, and crawled into the bushes, leaving his victim half-dead on the ground where we found him.

We did all we could for the unfortunate fellow, dressing his wounds and getting him to hospital. Later on we received a letter from his nurse saying that it was unlikely he would ever regain the use of his arms and legs, so badly were the muscles torn.

Pressing on into the Chobe Hills, within a radius of forty miles we built some fifty shelters for the cameras, and then waited several weeks for the animals to get used to them, before taking a single picture. For our patience we reaped a rich reward. Most of these shelters were near water-holes,



The stately eland, the largest of all antelopes.

the former are inclined to be fatter than the latter, which, however, are usually twice as large as their wide-striped brothers. We found the two varieties herding together, a most uncommon sight, since they live in different regions. It has been estimated that there are forty million zebras in B. E. Africa alone—and none of them are marked alike!

One of the most stately animals which came within range of our cameras was the

eland, the largest of all antelopes, weighing as much as a thousand pounds. The eland stands from five to six feet high at the shoulder, and its great horns measure twenty-five to thirty inches, those of the cow being larger than those of the bull.

and an endless procession of animals—jackals, zebras, ostrich, oryx, waterbuck, gnus, kongoni, wart-hogs, hyenas, and baboons—came down to drink. The zebras were, perhaps, the most suspicious of all, and would not come near for a long time. In the end thirst conquered them, but invariably the click of the camera sent them off again. It must be borne in mind, of course, that the long-focus lens enabled us to take the picture at a distance of a hundred yards or so, although in the pictures the animals seem to be just in front of the lens.

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Zebra, regardless of their variety, always feed, when in a herd, with their heads together, facing the same direction. The animals shown on the preceding page are of the "common" variety, a term used to differentiate them from the Grevy type. The common zebra has wide stripes, whereas the Grevy has narrow ones, and



The odd-looking gerenuk, which is said never to drink.

is excellent, and these factors together explain its gradual disappearance from many of the localities in which it could formerly be found in abundance.

A curious beast is the gerenuk, which resembles a giraffe in that both have a very odd gait and a neck that is far out of proportion to the rest of their bodies. It is said that the gerenuk never drinks, obtaining its moisture from grass and other substances. Found in bushy country from Kilimanjaro to Somaliland, it is thirty-nine inches high measured over the withers, and feeds on leaves. Only the male has horns, thirteen to sixteen inches long, and hooked and heavy. Its legs are long and slender.

Even more quaint than the gerenuk is the gnu, which has a mane like a horse, a tail like a cow, and a body like an antelope. He might be said to be made of "spare parts"! Many of the animals we met—giraffes, zebras, and so on—had the well-known "tick-bird" perched on their backs. He is a welcome visitor, since he helps to keep their bodies free of insects.

Very eerie and fascinating were the nights we spent in this district, miles from the camera shelters, with fires and flares lighted to keep away the lions, and all around us the wonderful stillness of the star-lit African darkness, broken now and then by the weird laugh of a hyena, and the more impressive symphony of a lion's roar. By daylight, however, we were back at the cameras again, and once in the misty light of morning we surprised a herd of plain-buffalo, who dashed

past us in great excitement, leaving behind them a little calf which our natives chased and caught.

Alluring as our photography round these water-holes was, we could not stay there for

ever, and before long we trekked on again, crossing the Guaso Nyero River, and pitched our camp on the borders of the great Gazoot Desert. Here we ate our Christmas dinner—a thirty-five-pound bustard, shot by Mrs. Johnson, which tasted like turkey—and then began the task of traversing the several hundred miles of desert to the wild Marsabit country beyond, where we hoped to get in touch with rhino.

An arduous and yet unforgettable experience was this desert journey, but it proved the Waterloo of our cars, for the sand eventually became so soft and deep that we were obliged to abandon them and proceed by camel caravan. Apart from this, water, or rather the lack of it, was the chief difficulty. Oases were few and far

between, and the getting of water generally meant digging deep into the desert soil at night. In the morning we would find water seeping through, and after being treated with various chemicals it would be fit for consumption. Our glimpses of the desert people were most interesting, and again and again we saw sights which might have come straight out of the Old Testament. The next illustration shows our camels gathered round a water-hole, amidst the scanty vegetation of an oasis.

The desert, however, was only a means to an end; it was towards the rhino country



Mrs. Johnson with the thirty-five-pound bustard which served as a Christmas turkey.

that our faces were set, and eventually we reached it. Our first glimpse of the great black rhinoceros—a ton-weight of bad temper—was thrilling indeed, for of all the beasts we had set out to photograph he was perhaps the most dangerous, and certainly the most vicious. Yet for a time all went well; we got our pictures with ridiculous ease. Fortunately for us, the rhino cannot see farther than about thirty-five yards, so that, although we erected the camera in the open to film them breaking cover, they took not the slightest notice of us. This was too good to last, though, and it was not long before we got a hint to that effect.

A rhino had just broken clear of the bushes—a fine specimen with wonderful horns, sharp as spearheads. Instead of moving off to the right or left, as they usually did, he came lurching on straight towards the camera. Then all at once his tail rose in the air—a sure sign of anger and an indication of the deadly charge. I was working the camera on this occasion, and my wife was standing by my side. We had both read somewhere that a shot at the base of the horn would stop a rhino without hurting him seriously, and now seemed the time to prove it.

"If he really gets going," I told my wife, "give him one in the forehorn." She nodded cheerfully. I really believe that

she was hoping he would charge, but I wasn't.

If so she had her desire. Down went his head, and he came on snorting furiously, while I turned the camera handle for dear life, knowing that I was getting a wonderful picture, though at what cost remained to be seen. Dimly I was aware of my little eight-stone wife raising her rifle. Then, cool as a cucumber, she fired, the bullet striking the beast's horn in exactly the spot I had indicated. Should it fail to stop him, I had told her to put a second bullet into his forehead, but this was not needed. With a snort of fright and disgust he swerved and tore away, while I went on photographing his ignominious rout. He never stopped until he was out of range. No doubt he had a "head" for an hour or so, but he was otherwise unhurt, though I shudder to think of his temper.

I glanced at my wife, and found her laughing.

"Some joke!" she said.

I had another experience which necessitated taking sterner measures with my "sitter" for the time being. There was a certain tract of bush which seemed to be literally alive with rhinos, and naturally I took advantage of the fact, though it was ticklish work, for one never quite knew where one of the brutes would emerge, and



Watering the camels in the Gazoot Desert.

once they get your scent they charge right away. This time my wife was not with me. Suddenly a hefty animal broke cover, much as the other had done, and, like him, came straight on in my direction. Again came the ominous rise of the tail, the little pig-eyes glared, and once more I had the joy of turning the handle while a beast like a runaway locomotive bore down upon me. My film shows him apparently springing right out of the picture.

I confess I let him get a bit nearer than I ought to have done before forsaking the camera and picking up my rifle. There was just time for one shot, and one only, so it had to be a good one if I was to take any further personal interest in the expedition. Fortunately it *was* a good one; in the circumstances I look upon it as one of the best I have ever made. It took him through the head, and dropped him dead just six feet away. Believe me, I didn't want him any nearer!

Not to be outdone, apparently, my wife had her own private rhino adventure.

She had sent one of the native boys to deliver a message, and was awaiting his return. When he came back—several degrees quicker than he departed, by the way—he was not alone. Close on his flying heels was a rhino, and only Mrs. Johnson's nerve and shooting skill stood between that native and an unpleasant end. She dropped the angry monster with two shots—and was as elated as a schoolgirl about it.

I seem to have concentrated somewhat on the rhino we killed, but I should like to point out that we photographed a hundred and twenty of these great beasts, and in the case of these four circumstances rendered their shooting imperative. It was pictures, and not dead rhino, that we wanted.

He's a solitary fellow, the rhino, and you seldom see more than two of them together. Morose and unsociable, he does not seem to get on with his fellows, and his body is invariably scarred with the marks of battle. All things considered, he is distinctly an ugly customer to tackle.



Mr. Martin Johnson with the rhino that charged his camera.



Mrs. Johnson bathing in a water-hole, with her quaint native "maid" in attendance.

After leaving the rhino district we did another spell of desert travelling, until, reaching wooded country again, we found the tracks of elephants on the shores of a beautifully-situated lake. Desert travel, as has been indicated, is not all honey; bath water, for one thing, is at a premium. A touch of comedy, therefore, is lent to the narrative by the accompanying picture of my wife at her ablutions in a much-appreciated elephant-hole, assisted by a dusky "maid." The picture might almost serve to advertise a well-known brand of whisky!

Even greater than the thrill afforded by the rhino was our first glimpse of the wild African elephant across the lake. A noble-looking fellow is the African elephant, three feet taller than his Indian cousin, with long legs, enormous ears, and a very bad temper. Very few African elephants have been taken alive, and seldom have they been really tamed—the famous Jumbo was one of the exceptions.

It was a fitting climax to our journey, this sojourn in the elephant country, for we secured pictures which have been acclaimed as some of the finest ever taken of the elephant in his native haunts. Here again, although we did not seek them, we met with our fill of adventures. With one of these I will conclude, and I choose it because once more I owed my life to the courage and pluck of my wife.

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We came upon this elephant very suddenly, and were really unprepared for him. Elephants can detect a man's scent at a greater distance than any other animal—some authorities judge the distance at six hundred yards or more—and this huge beast must have winded us. At any rate, he knew just where we were, and promptly charged.

Frankly, it is an unnerving sight to see five tons of fury bearing down on one; one feels very small and insignificant, acutely conscious of one's physical limitations in comparison with those of the animal. Possession of a rifle only evens things up a little, for a rifle is of doubtful advantage unless the nerve and skill to use it properly are there also. With these absent, the quarry is likely to make short work of the hunter.

But to return to our elephant. I let him get close up, and then fired four times in rapid succession. To my dismay, he came on as if nothing had happened, and it was evident that all my forehead shots had been ineffective, for the elephant is vulnerable in very few places.

Then it was, fortunately for me, that my wife came into the picture. Raising her Winchester, she brought the monster down with a single magnificent shot through the heart—touch and go indeed, for he had almost got me.