

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

1. STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF MONKEYS IN THE PRESENCE OF A PANTHER

This incident dates from the time when I was employed on the personal staff of the Maharaja of Dholpur. Just after the Holi in March 1944 I was asked to investigate the rather mysterious disappearances of some of the langur monkeys in the wild life sanctuary at Kesarbaug, where they usually enjoyed a peaceful and sheltered existence.

On that particular day I was on duty at the Palace which stands in the midst of fairly wild and dense mixed jungle, some six miles from the town of Dholpur. One early morning, while having my breakfast on the verandah overlooking the western slopes of the Kesarbaug Hill, I saw a vulture landing on a grassy patch about 600 yds. away. Suspecting a kill of some animal I went there to investigate, and to my surprise found the mortal remains of one of the missing pet monkeys. There was not much left except the head severed from the trunk, the tail and arms, with palms untouched, and the intestines. The grass on that spot growing rather tall, about 3 ft., was pressed down by some animal over an area of approx. 4 ft. radius. Following the traces of a drag towards a stream I noticed on the soft ground pug marks of a full-grown panther. On the other side of the stream the rest of the langur's body was thrust inside a thick thorny bush. There was of course no sign of the panther, so after duly noting the place I returned to my quarters determined to destroy the beast when the opportunity came. Four days later, sitting on the same verandah at 10 p.m., I was admiring the beauty of moonlight shining on the jungle when I was suddenly alerted by the warning barks of a male langur. Suspecting the presence of the panther I seized my 12-bore shot-gun with L.G.s and a strong battery spot-light and cautiously climbed down towards the trees whence the warning was sounded, some 60 yds. at the foot of the hill. There, on a group of three trees just behind the servants' quarters, the monkeys were in the habit of gathering for the night. I took up position below a pipal tree under an awning projecting from the building. The moon lighted up the ground very clearly. There were many monkeys on the tree in an extremely excited condition, jumping from one branch to another, shrieking and shaking the foliage and emptying themselves so as to produce a regular shower of droppings. The ground under the trees was flat and devoid of any vegetation. In spite of straining my eyes I failed to discover the cause of their fright. The line of the jungle bushes was some distance away and it is possible that the panther had taken his ambush there unseen by me but detected by the monkeys.

The excitement in the tree did not seem to subside and the monkeys were becoming more frantic every minute to the extent of running around the crown of the tree in mad circles. Suddenly one of the crowd of monkeys came crashing down through the branches under the tree, either through loss of balance or some other cause, and remained there some 10 ft. away from me, perfectly immobile. At the same time a dark elongated form shot out from above the very awning under which I was standing and landed on the langur prostrated on the ground. For a brief moment I was uncertain what was happening, but soon realized that it was the panther attacking his prey. I took quick aim and fired two shots in rapid succession. Meanwhile three more monkeys dropped to the ground and stayed similarly motionless. I switched on the light and approached the scene of the tragedy. The panther was duly killed. The other langurs strangely enough did not move but remained lying on the ground as if hypnotized. The same shot which killed the panther was also responsible for putting an end to the life of the unfortunate langur. The report of the gun, of course, attracted the servants who removed the bodies of both animals. The other langurs came to only rather slowly, and in due course moved away.

I thought much afterwards about this peculiar behaviour of langurs in the face of danger from a panther, and would put forward the following observations:

(a) Normally, in daylight, the langurs are generally excellent informers regarding the whereabouts of their enemies. They give instant warning and even follow their enemy's progress keeping him under continuous observation from a safe distance.

(b) At night, when the danger is sensed the langurs do not attempt to leave the safety of their tree, but try to locate the enemy. If the latter is not visible and yet known to be in the proximity they become very nervous and imagine the worst, that is that the enemy may have climbed the tree and be somewhere among them. This uncertainty seems to work on their nerves and produces a state of restlessness and excitement.

(c) The prolonged suspense and fear may induce a state of trance or nervous exhaustion under which the langurs are unable to control their movements.

I should very much like to hear comments on the above story and to know if similar observations have been recorded.

SANDS FORT, DHOLPUR,

RAJASTHAN,

October 6, 1954.

SIRDAR BHUPENDRA KUMAR

[In a note 'How do the larger felines secure nimble prey' (Vol. 51, No. 2, p. 493) Mr. R. C. Morris describes similar behaviour on the part of langurs in the presence of panther—'a form of mass hysteria'—causing the animals actually to jump to the ground, and 'so play into the feline's paws'.—Eds.]



Kumar, S B. 1955. "Strange Behaviour of Monkeys in the Presence of a Panther." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 52, 913–914.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/186987>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/153413>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In Copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions/>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.