

ON SOME UNIDENTIFIED BEASTS.

BY C. W. HOBLEY.

In No. 4 of the Journal Mr. G. Williams described a strange animal which he had seen on the Uasin-Gishu Plateau, and since then I have made extensive inquiries in various parts of the country, and, through the kindness of various gentlemen, have been able to accumulate a considerable amount of evidence which all goes to show that some curious beast does exist. Up to date, however, it still eludes the collector, but the circle is narrowing. I will now detail the various accounts which have come to hand.

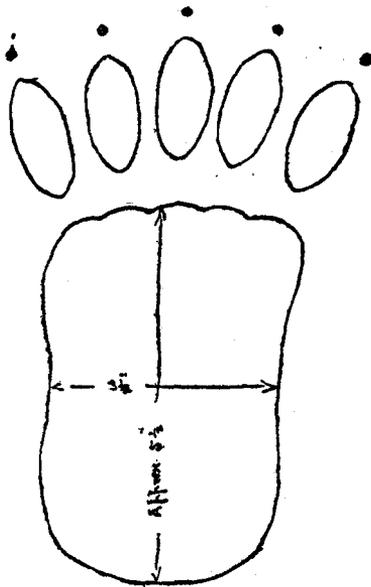
Major Toulson, a well-known settler on the plateau, saw one of these animals some time ago and his account is as follows: 'It was getting dark when one of my boys came into my room and said that a leopard was close to the kitchen. I rushed out at once and saw a strange beast making off: it appeared to have long hair behind and it was rather low in front. I should say it stood about 18 in. to 20 in. at the shoulder; it appeared to be black, with a gait similar to that of a bear—a kind of shuffling walk. Unfortunately it was nearly dark at the time and I did not get a fair view of the head.

'Several Dutchmen had asked me a few days before what the strange animal was on the plateau; they said it was like a bear, but they had only seen it at dusk; it turned on their dogs and chased them off. They described it as a thick-set beast and it was making a peculiar moaning cry.'

The next bit of evidence came from engineers and others on the Magadi Railway who stated that they had seen the spoor of a curious beast on the rough cart-track which preceded the railway. Mr. F. Schindler states that he saw this track in some dried mud at the end of the pipe-line, and sketched it out for me. The woodcut opposite is a reduced copy of the alleged foot-print.

In March last Mr. N. E. F. Corbett, District Commissioner, Eldoret, actually saw what he believes to be the beast, and his

account is as follows: 'I was having lunch by a wooded stream, the Sirgoi River, just below Toulson's farm, and afterwards went a little down-stream to fish, and to my surprise I walked right into the beast. It was evidently drinking and was just below me, only a yard or so away. I heard something going away and it shambled across the stream into the bush. The place was overgrown and I was without my specs, so could not get a very good view, but am certain that it was a beast I



SUPPOSED FOOTPRINT OF STRANGE BEAST,
LOCALITY: MILE 74 MAGADI RAILWAY.

have never seen before. Thick, reddish-brown hair, with a slight streak of white down the hind quarters, rather long from hock to foot, rather bigger than a hyena, with largish ears. I did not see the head properly; it did not seem to be a very heavily built animal. The annoying thing was that I had been past exactly the same place half an hour before with my gun after a duck, and when I returned I had nothing but a fishing-rod. I saw it about 12.30 midday—almost the same time that Mr. Kennet saw one at another place.'

A few days later I heard that Mr. Hickee, engineer in charge of the construction, Magadi Railway, had seen it, and he has kindly sent an account of it which is given separately.

What can it be? Some sceptics are inclined to think that the beast is only the hairy ant bear, *Orycteropus*, but most of the persons who have seen it are well acquainted with the ant bear, and it is an almost unique phenomenon for an ant bear to be seen about in broad daylight.

There is a certain amount of variation in the accounts, but that is to be expected, and of course the beast seen near the Magadi Railway may not be the same as that seen on the Uasin-Gishu.

The circle is, however, narrowing and it cannot be long before one of these creatures is bagged. My only hope is that it may fall into the hands of some one who will measure and photograph it and preserve its skin and skeleton for description by a qualified zoologist, for there is a story that one has been shot by a Boer, but that he left it and later on could not find it.

The greatest rarity which has not yet been bagged would appear to be the extraordinary creature which is said to inhabit certain of the rivers running into Lake Victoria and the lake itself. The evidence which I have been able to collect regarding this beast is as follows:

The natives both on the Uganda and Kavirondo sides of the lake have stories of a lake monster which the Baganda call the Lukwata. The Ja-Luo fishermen describe how it sometimes appears and attacks a fishing canoe, and so forth. For a long time I believed that these stories referred to large pythons which crop up occasionally in their folk-lore stories, but have come to the conclusion that there is something else not yet described.

Mr. W. Grant, late Provincial Commissioner, Jinja, once had his attention called to a beast which was swimming down the Napoleon Gulf with its head out of the water, but it was unfortunately too far away to describe. The late Sir Clement Hill was proceeding from Kisumu to Entebbe in a steam launch some years ago, and when off Homa Mountain a beast appeared out of the water and tried to seize a native sitting on the bow

of the launch. It did not succeed, and Sir Clement (who was under the awning aft) told me that he distinctly saw it some little distance behind the boat; only its head visible, it was of a roundish shape and dark in colour. He was quite certain that it was not a crocodile.

About three years ago a strange story was published in a book called 'In Closed Territory,' by E. B. Bronson (pp. 181-3).¹ Mr. Bronson was an American sportsman, and when shooting in the country west of Sotik he met a hunter named Jordan who described an encounter with a terrible monster—which he called the Dingonek—on the Gori River, which runs into Lake Victoria on the eastern shore near the Anglo-German boundary. This beast is described as fourteen to fifteen feet long, head as big as a lioness but shaped and marked as a leopard, two long white fangs sticking down straight out of his upper jaw, scaled like an armadillo, back broad as a hippo, spotted like a leopard, and a broad, fine tail; the imprints of its feet were as large as that of a hippo but clawed like a reptile.

At the time this story appeared it was considered that this was probably a traveller's tale, told to entertain a newcomer, but I have since met a man who a few years back was wandering about the Mara River or Ngare Dubash which rises in Sotik, crosses the Anglo-German boundary, and runs into Lake Victoria in German territory. He emphatically asserts that he saw this beast. He was at the time about where the Mara River crosses the frontier, and the river was in high flood. The beast came floating down the river on a big log, and he estimated its length at about sixteen feet, but could not be certain of the length as its tail was in the water. He describes it as spotted like a leopard, covered with scales, and having a head like an otter; he did not see the long fangs described by Mr. Jordan. He fired at it and hit it; it slid off the log into the water and was not seen again.

I made inquiries of the District Commissioner, Kisii, Mr. Crampton, and he wrote recently and said he had visited the Amala River and made inquiries from the Masai in the neighbourhood, and they knew of the beast, which they called Ol-umaina, and described it as follows: About fifteen feet

¹ McClurg & Co., Chicago.

long, head like a dog, small ears marked somewhat after the fashion of a puff adder, has claws, short legs, short neck, is said to lie in the sun on the sand by the river-side and to slip into the water when disturbed; when in the water only its head is visible. This story does not radically disagree with the others, so it would appear as if there was another zoological prize of a startling character awaiting collection. A survival of some extinct race of saurians is a thing to thrill the imagination of the scientific world.

In connection with this beast I would invite attention to the stories of the mysterious reptile, called Ndamathia, which appears in the description of the Kikuyu Itwika ceremonies, and which was formerly said to be found in the upper waters of the Tana River.¹

There are also stories of another unknown beast from the lower and middle valley of the Tana River. Mr. Cumberbatch, the District Officer of that region, tells me that the German missionaries who have lived for many years at Ngao state that the Pokomo natives know of a forest beast called the 'Koddoelo,' and one is said to have been killed near Ngao some years back. On one occasion one of the missionaries found that the whole population of the biggest Pokomo settlement in Kina Kombe district had deserted their village and crossed the river because this animal was roaming about in the bush near the village.

The animal was described to the District Officer by a Pokomo (who, however, admitted that he himself had not seen it) as being as large as a man, as sometimes going on four legs, sometimes on two, in general appearance like a huge baboon, and very fierce. The Pokomo native is not a highly strung or imaginative person, so it is possible that there is some undiscovered anthropoid beast in the dense bush which is found in the Tana Valley.

¹ *Vide Journal Royal Anthropological Institute*, xli. 421.
