

Yale in Kenya

by Irene Morden

The Morden African Expedition of the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale has recently returned from Kenya, East Africa. Results of the expedition's work include picture material for a documentary film and over a thousand specimens of birds, mammals and reptiles which are now being catalogued for the collections of the Museum. The tabulated data will be recorded later when the facts have been completely assembled. However, it is already apparent that many specimens collected on this 1965 expedition are considered by experts to be rare and outstanding; we can say that certain yields of this trip are possibly not found in the collections of other natural history museums.

The Yale personnel who were with the expedition were David Parsons and Rollin Bauer, preparators in Vertebrate Zoology at the Peabody Museum. Charles Hawkins was photographer; John Sutton, John Fletcher and Tony Archer were the three professional hunters on the trip. In addition, for a short period the group was joined by Alec Forbes-Watson, ornithologist, and Andrew Williams, the capable seventeen-year-old son of John Williams, then Curator of Birds at the National Museum in Nairobi, capital city of Kenya. Ker, Downey & Selby, outfitters in Nairobi, provided skippers, cooks and porters, camp supplies, three Land Ro-

vers and three big lorries to transport field equipment and specimens.

This was to be a short six-week safari, and we had a complicated schedule to meet. John Williams suggested suitable locations for collecting and had worked out a program in connection with Ker, Downey & Selby involving four camps. It was proposed that we collect at sea level (the Sokoke), at high level (the Aberdares, 6,800 to 11,000 feet), and at two medium level camps (5,000 to 6,000 feet). After two crowded days of perfecting arrangements following our arrival in Nairobi, we were off!

Camp One, the Sokoke Forest. Our reason for going first to the Sokoke was that this *Brachystegia* forest was doomed to immediate extinction because of a resettlement program which would convert woodland to farmland as an economic measure. Once this has happened, the unique wildlife will quickly disappear.

Old maps show that these deep woods once extended to the very shores of the Indian Ocean, but they have been pushed back toward the semi-arid country to the west by the expanding population. Now, the easy-going, music-loving Giriama people, who have long lived in this coastal area with its dramatic history of slavery, war, famine and disease, must become farmers instead of free forest dwellers. As the forest cover is cut down, birds and

THE AUTHOR

MRS. WILLIAM MORDEN, a resident of Greenwich, Connecticut, is a Field Associate of the Peabody Museum. Under the aegis of the Museum she was instrumental in organizing and leading the African Expedition described in this article. With her husband (Yale '08) she has been on several long-term expeditions; has hunted extensively in Africa; was the first American to shoot in the Crimea since 1918; and collected chamois in Austria for the Peabody Museum. The Museum has her record cougar from Arizona, and she donated ethnological material from various African tribes, plus a round-the-world collection of headdresses, masks and costumes.



Mrs. Morden, Yale members Parsons and Bauer and chiefs of camp attendants, "Kipkaski" and "Windy."

animals must move on or die. Unfortunately, conditions are not favorable for moving on, so we were very anxious to obtain some of these rare wildlife specimens before their natural habitat was destroyed.

In the depth of the forest we set up black nylon mist nets fastened to ten-foot poles to catch birds and bats. A number of rats and mice were caught in small traps put out each evening. The friendly Giriama visited our camp daily, bringing in birds, snakes—including poisonous puff adders and mambas—and small creatures in bags or woven baskets. Interesting movie sequences of the live snakes were taken for our documentary film showing their coloration, movements and poison fangs.

A few side trips were undertaken. On one, our party journeyed to Mida Creek, an inlet, for some salt water birds and then went on to the Gedi ruins in the Gedi National Park where some of the buildings had been partially restored to give an idea of this old Islamic city of the 13th Century. In one dark enclosed place the men found many bats clinging to the

wood beams in great numbers or flying about in the gloom. Bauer and Parsons had been investigating bat caves at every opportunity and they now added many more specimens of these strange mammals.

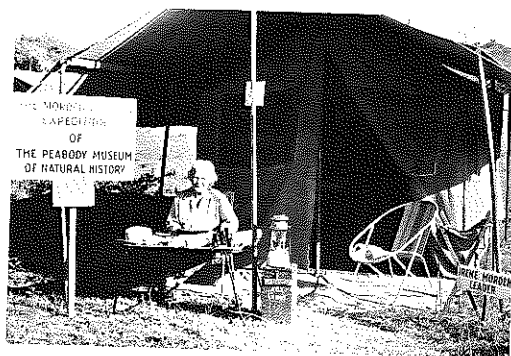
Our yield from Camp One was a fabulous collection of birds, reptiles and small mammals. Since returning home we have heard that, already, our campsite in the Sokoke has been burned over. We can realize how lucky we were to have had the privilege of seeing the life of the forest and of bringing back some of the wildlife specimens which will be of great value to science and to future generations.

Camp Two, the Aberdares. The road into the Aberdare Mountains led past open meadows, yellow green in the sunlight and shadowed with patches of dark green forest. Wild coffee trees gave us shade and furnished shelter for the numerous "high habitat" birds flashing like bright jewels among leafy branches. We pitched camp at 6,800 feet on a gentle slope where we had a magnificent view of Mount Kenya. The snowy peak of this ancient volcano rises over 17,000 feet

above the plains and dominates the countryside for miles. Pink sunrise over the lofty mountain that gives its name to Kenya and sunset reflections on the frosty glaciers were beautiful as a dream. In the afternoon, however, gray clouds veiled the rocky tops and, later, gray mist and rain obscured the view as the mountain hid its face.

We started after the big animals from this camp without neglecting the small ones or the birds. The sturdy Land Rovers carried our party through the bamboo forests, which began at about 9,000 feet, up to the higher parts of the Aberdares at close to 11,000 feet. In the distance we saw elephant and giant forest hog, but they were far away and inaccessible. We did add impala, Jackson's hartebeest, duiker, mongoose, Thomson's gazelle, dik-dik, baboon, monkey, steinbok, bushbuck, jackal, hyena and bush pig to our quota. Bauer was kept busy taking measurements and recording information. Skins were stretched on the grass to dry, salted, and then rolled up for the taxidermist. The traps caught many more mice and rats, some with unusual parasites which Bauer collected. Innumerable birds dropped to the collecting guns. Parsons shot a Secretary Bird and a Greater Bustard on Government permit, as they are normally protected except when taken for a museum. Parsons also found the forest species of the Touraco, which lives only in Africa and is notable for its bright plumage and long tail. It was amazing to me to see our skimmers working on the tiniest of creatures, such as a sun bird or a wee mouse; the infinite patience and skill required seemed to make our collections even more valuable.

John Sutton's farm of 8,000 acres was in this area. His crops were fine, but the buffalo would come down the mountain at night and roll in his wheat fields. Game animals often run in fairly large herds on the farms and become a destructive nuisance.

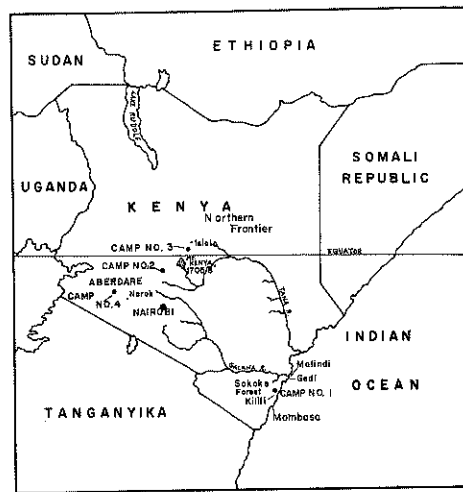


Mrs. Irene Morden sitting in front of her tent at Camp no. 4.

sance. To protect his crops, his fences and telephone wires, a farmer may hunt on his own farm. We hunted a little on John's farm and on another one of 44,000 acres where the wild animals were interfering with the sheep. Otherwise, our animals were collected in the open woodland, plains or forest.

Camp Three, the Northern Frontier. Again, the Government issued us special permits to hunt in this arid but far from lifeless country. We were the first hunting party allowed in the Northern Frontier during the past nine months, we were told. There was trouble along the Somali border and with the Shifta (bandits) who roamed north, east and west of the small administrative outpost, Isiolo.

Our tents were placed in a grove of yellow-barked fever trees on a small stream. The altitude was about 5,400 feet. Because of the security problem, our hunters set up the radio telephone immediately in order to report to Nairobi daily. Next morning we drove into Isiolo, passing army trucks with mounted machine guns and filled with soldiers carrying rifles. When we reached the police barrier with its sign stating that all areas were closed to travel, it was necessary to consult with the District Commissioner and the Game Warden, who told us where we might hunt in relative safety. Trucks with supplies for northern areas were lined up to wait for police convoy. We were the only ones free to go through unescorted.



As we zig-zagged over lava rock and through sparse, thorny bush, we startled dozens of tall, reticulated (northern variety) giraffe into taking off with their peculiar rocking-chair gait, and long-necked gerenuk ran for cover, but the ever-curious zebra stopped to stare at us. We had been looking for oryx, a large handsome beige, black and white animal, but we were getting dangerously close to Shifta territory. Suddenly we spotted some oryx ahead and were able to collect one specimen before turning back. Although we knew that the Special Police were aware of our whereabouts at all times, rumors of Shifta activity in the hills behind our camp unnerved us, as the situation was touchy. After due deliberation we decided to stay where we were and leave on schedule. At this point we did not know that the Battle of Mount Kenya was on—accounting for some of the army activity—three rebel chiefs were killed and many prisoners taken.

Camp Three produced hyrax, Chandler's reed buck, dik-dik, zebra (Grevy's and Burchell's), gerenuk, oryx, jackals, galagos (bush babies), tortoise, klip-springer, Jackson's hartebeest, rats, snakes and birds.

Camp Four, Masai Country. We had to spend three days in Nairobi clearing up

many important details such as the packing and shipping of specimens and film, but our lorries went on ahead to set up camp in the Masai country. With the permission of Kenya's Chief Game Warden, Major Temple-Boreham, we were allowed to camp and collect in Kenya's most beautiful game sanctuary near the southwest border. This campsite was open on all sides with short grass and little shrubbery. It was comforting to see that there was no good cover for marauding lions. And lions there were! We heard them grunting from the very first night.

Tony Archer had left us for a few days to collect small mammals and birds in the Nyambeni mountains near Camp Three. Police ordered him out due to the Shifta troubles, and he now rejoined us in the Masai. We were out hunting almost every minute of every day, despite heavy rains. We did not have to go far to see masses of game. There were topi, wildebeest, hartebeest, zebra, Thomson's and Grant's gazelle, impala, warthog, buffalo, lion, leopard and elephant.

Our night hunting was equally impressive. Spectral shadows in the black woods turned out to be long strings of zebra, their eyes glowing red in the darkness. Like small jumping jacks, spring hares with red eyes hopped over the ground, and high above us the bush babies, also red-eyed, leaped among tree branches. Other ghost-like, nocturnal creatures roamed or stood and stared in the lights of our cars. The lions merely slipped away in the bush. Strange calls of night birds added an eerie quality to the African night.

One day Parsons and Bauer came on a dead elephant perhaps killed by poachers. They took the skull for our collections. On another day, a new-born baby eland was found in the grass deserted by its mother and the herd. It was only a few hours old and could scarcely stand on its wobbly legs. Sutton made a nursing bottle from a plastic container and worked out



Sutton bartering with Masai warriors.

a proper formula. Before long the baby was walking about and became pet of the camp. Sutton kept it in his tent and later took the eland home to his farm to raise with his cattle.

The sights of Africa are remarkable, and the sounds have their peculiar charm as well. We grew used to hearing the mournful wail of hyenas at moonrise. One, bolder than the rest, wandered among the tents at night scavenging for refuse as he moaned, groaned, chattered and laughed—a weird variety of sounds. Vultures made less noise and waited patiently in the trees or near the skinners' tents for odd bits to eat, and they, too, helped keep the camp clean.

Speaking of vultures, David and Rollin got a Nubian vulture with a wing spread of over nine feet, as well as kites, eagles and falcons at Camp Four.

The Masai people living nearby visited us daily. A few of them were always standing about in their beads, feathers and red blankets. Their hair was colored with red ochre and the Moran, or warriors, carried spears or wooden clubs. The women were shy until they saw me, then they would stroll over to my tent to stare.

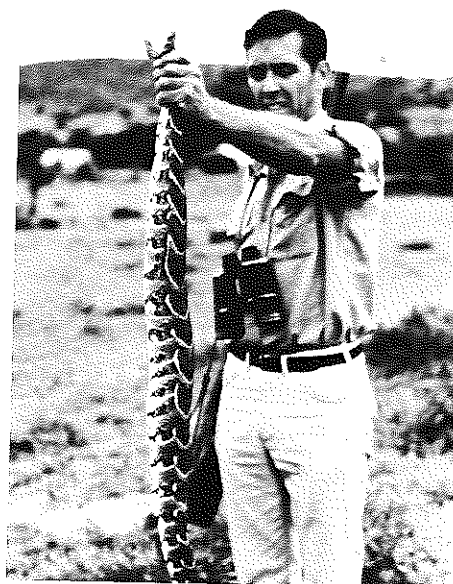
One morning as Sutton and I were returning for breakfast after an early hunt, we saw two Masai stretched out on the ground near our skinners' tent. They had been scored by lion teeth and claws. Sutton dressed their wounds and sent them off to the hospital at Narok. We were



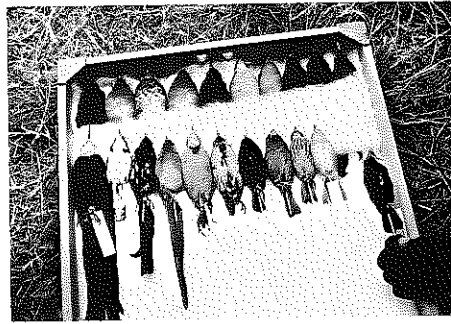
Parsons and Bauer in Land Rover.



Sutton with baby eland.



Parsons handling Puff Adder.



Birds prepared in trays for shipment to New Haven.



Bauer measuring bushbuck.

told that a group of Moran had followed two lions and forced them into a clump of bush. Each warrior wore a shield on one arm and carried a spear as they ringed the thicket. Stones were thrown in at the lions to precipitate a charge. With mighty roars the huge beasts sprang out to attack. It is considered an honor to be selected by the lion as a possible victim because then these fearless men can demonstrate their valor according to age-old ritual. In this case, the lions did considerable damage before they were killed by the spearmen. Torn hands, arms and faces meant little to the two Masai. They were heroes to their people!

At last, with birds and small mammals in their storage trays ready to be airborne to New Haven, and with the skins and skeletons of the large mammals packed in the lorries ready for the taxidermist and then sea freight to Peabody, our objective was in view. This was the end of a marvelous safari and a most successful collecting expedition.