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OBSERVATIONS IN TSAVO NATIONAL PARK, KENYA

by Evans E. Mgaah

Editor's note:

Evans Mgaah is a young game ranger who has been working at Tsavo National Park, Kenya, for the last four years. He was invited to join us for a dinner and social evening around the campfire at Mbiyuni (Chyulu) Gate Campsite, Tsavo West National Park, August 2, 1978, and related the following observations. (See following report by the editor.)

* * *

In 1975, while I was on a regular patrol in the park, we arrived at the famous Mzima Springs. (This is an oasis that gets its water supply from the Chyulu Hills, about 40 kilometers away. Some 50 million gallons of crystal-clear water gush out daily from below the lava ridge. Dense and luxuriant vegetation and wildlife, especially hippopotami and crocodiles, are an inseparable part of the scenery. These springs also supply Mombasa with its daily water needs.) A lone bull elephant arrived to drink at the other side of the pool. Suddenly, we noticed that the elephant struggled to free its trunk from the water. It pulled and pulled its trunk but was unable to lift it from the water. Then, with one strong jerk, it lifted its trunk and with it a good sized crocodile! The elephant then swayed its trunk to the side, trying to get rid of the beast. After two swings, it managed to release itself from the crocodile, throwing it about eight meters away. The elephant turned around and walked away; its trunk was covered with blood.

In 1976, again while I was on a regular patrol in the park, we came across a large pride of lions. Altogether there were 17 individuals: 11 adults and six cubs. An adult elephant came by, walking about 25-30 meters from the pride. The pride was between our vehicle and the elephant. The area was covered with medium-high grass. One of the lions (I think it was a lioness), approached the elephant while exposing her teeth. The elephant paused and looked in her direction but continued to walk slowly. Then, suddenly, other members of the pride, males and females, joined the first lioness and afterwards all together attacked the elephant and soon brought him down to the ground. There were some noises heard. Soon the cubs joined the adults and all fed on the elephant.

In the same year, I also witnessed three adult male lions attacking a mature or, maybe, a sub-adult giraffe. They ran behind her in frontal position (forming "T" shape, the horizontal line of the "T" formed by the lions and the vertical by the giraffe). When the giraffe got tired and slowed down, the middle lion jumped on her back and grabbed her by the neck. The giraffe soon stopped running and fell together with her predator to the ground. The other two lions joined the kill. It was spectacular!