



### PYTHON EATS FRUIT BAT

The Editor, "African Wild Life",

Sir,—On 18th February, 1964 a small Python (2 ft. 7 ins.) was killed at Falcon College, Essexvale. Its killer most unfortunately mistook it for a Puff Adder! This was a great pity as it would have made a welcome and valuable addition to the School's "Snake-Pit". As it had recently fed, and had a strange jagged bulge, I dissected it with considerable interest. To my surprise I found that it contained a full-grown Epauletted Fruit Bat (*Epomophorus*) some 6 ins. in length. The accompanying illustration shows the Python and its prey.

These Fruit Bats are common at Falcon College, and are to be found in the topmost branches of the Jacaranda trees. The Python must have obtained an easy meal before its untimely death—all that was needed was for it to slide along a branch and pluck off the bat like a ripe plum! What interests me, however, is how it managed to locate this easy source of food supply in the first place. I would certainly be interested to hear if Pythons have been recorded as eating bats.

Falcon College, Essexvale, S.R.

PETER STEYN

### THE SPEED OF THE CHEETAH (*Acinonyx jubatus*)

The Editor, "African Wild Life",

Sir,—It is becoming customary, even in official wild life publications, to state that the cheetah is capable of attaining a speed of seventy miles per hour for a short distance. While it is generally agreed that over a short distance the cheetah is the fastest mammal on four legs, there is a very grave doubt about its ability of running at seventy miles per hour. In instances in which this speed is quoted, it is probably based on what Howell has written in his book "Speed in Animals". There he states that "it seems certain that it can travel at the remarkable speed of 65, and not unlikely that for a short space even 70 miles per hour, but it is soon exhausted". But it must be emphasised this is merely his opinion, since he says nothing about such a speed having been actually measured.

In zoological literature I have come across only three instances in which the cheetah's speed was actually measured, all of them by means of the speedometer of a motor-car.

Thus Pocock (Fauna of British India, Mammalia, Vol. 1, p. 329, 1939) writes as follows:—"As regards the actual speed of the cheetah, Mr. Gandar Dower, who

recently imported trained specimens from East Africa and tested them against a motor-car, found that they travelled at the rate of 45 miles per hour when apparently going at full speed, that is to say, they can cover a quarter of a mile, nearly the full distance they can keep it up, in twenty seconds, and 100 yards in about 4½ seconds, faster than the best greyhound and twice the speed of the fastest human sprinter".

In his book "Serengeti shall not die", Grzimek could not confirm the alleged high speed of cheetahs. He quotes one instance in which the animal ran only 29 miles per hour and lay down exhausted after a few hundred yards. As this cheetah might have been ill, he did not press it harder. Another specimen ran at 30 miles per hour and disappeared in some brushwood before he could test it at higher speeds, but he does not believe that this is the top speed for cheetahs, since their common prey, Thomson's Gazelle, can achieve 37 miles per hour. In both cases the animals were tested by means of the speedometer of a motor-car.

A speed of 70 miles per hour for the cheetah cannot be accepted until such time as measurements by means of a motor speedometer or some other satisfactory means show that the animal is actually capable of such a speed. In the light of present knowledge, 45 miles per hour must be accepted as the maximum speed of this nimble animal.

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(Dr.) R. BIGALKE

### BIRD-EATING DUIKER

The Editor, "African Wild Life",

Sir,—Mr. Astley Maberly's letter in the June issue tells of a chicken-eating duiker. He may be interested in the following tale of a red duiker.

This animal had been rescued from a river in spate in South West Africa. As they are protected game a permit was obtained to keep it.

It was offered to me on one of our trips through the territory, and I was very pleased to buy it, as an addition to our private zoo in Pretoria North.

When I went to the owner's house to collect it, I noticed that it had on a collar with a long light metal chain attached to the wall. Thinking nothing of it, I crated the beautiful little creature, and placed him in our forage truck, for our return to the then Union, releasing him from the crate and removing the collar and chain.

A few days before, I had been given two beautiful comic-looking ostrich chicks, who were also placed in the forage truck at night with its deep warm litter of teff.

The first night after the arrival of the red duiker all went well, but the morning after the second night, the groom in charge of the truck came running for me to come down and see what was happening. When I got there I found the one ostrich chick dead with its head partly severed and the little corpse completely bloodless, the second chick, with a similar gash in its neck, was just dying with the duiker still busy sucking the last of its blood. He had not eaten the flesh of either bird.

I may add that I had often watched my grey duikers chasing and eating grasshoppers in the free range camp at home. There were two springbok in the camp as well, which I watched closely but I never saw them eat anything but grass and their regular food.

I feel that the collar and chain on the red duiker may have been to stop his depredations amongst the poultry, as there were quite a few turkeys, ducks and fowls running loose in the yard where he was chained, and possibly the owners knew of his "predatory" habits.

Needless to say he was never again placed where he could get at and kill birds of any kind.

Escombe, Natal.

(Mrs.) C. PAGEL

### AFRICAN INSECT LIFE

The Editor, "African Wild Life",

Sir,—I am trying very hard to obtain a copy of *African Insect Life* by S. H. Skaife. I understand the book is out of print, but I am very anxious to purchase a copy if any member would be able to furnish me with it.

P.O. Box 40, Cradock, C.P.

J. H. NEETHLING