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THE MAKING OF A HYENA FAN

(Written for "The Listener" by HELEN ROLLESTON, F.R.G.S.)

FOR its comparatively small area, 44,000 acres, Nairobi is very rich in game life. Within a mile or two of Nairobi centre you can see zebra, wildebeeste, Thompson's and Grant's gazelle, impala, and the lovely unbelievable giraffes stepping delicately across the Magardi road to change their feeding ground in the evening. More than these, you can see lion—the aim of all travellers. "I haven't seen a thing" from a disgruntled tourist means that on a lovely morning or evening he has seen a dozen varieties of antelope and gazelle, twice that number of birds, a hyena, a pair of jackals, but no lion. If lucky he has seen a bat-eared fox sitting outside his earth—a charming wide-eared creature with spectacled face. I saw a leopard one morning racing through the scrub in a gorge near Whitegrass Ridge.

But your traveller wants to see lion and he is not always successful for, except at the time when cubs have to be taken care of and moved slowly, lions move fast and far in a night, and, without luck and persistence, and you must have both, you may miss them every time. Some people have lived in Kenya 25 years and upwards and not seen a lion. I never saw them in the morning when I could have photographed them, but on several evenings I had wonderful views.

Once after dark when a rainstorm had swept the plains and the lions came down to the road for warmth four lionesses prowled about my halted car and a maned lion came nobly down to the bonnet in full headlights and passed along the side of the car close enough for a hand to touch. At present these lions do not seem to connect a car with humans.

Lion Families

In January three of the lionesses cubbed down and for some six or seven weeks they nursed the cubs on the grass slopes under the Langata forest. Then they decided to move and walked the cubs all through one night to a donga about three miles away. From here they moved to and fro to the forest. About this time the family was joined by three

young lionesses, "the maiden aunts" we called them, and they appeared to take on the duties of hunting for the mothers and cubs. One evening we saw them stalk a zebra. It was a definite plan apparently discussed by the trio. Two took up a position to windward and the other was sent to circle round the feeding herd till they got her wind. We saw them stampede at one point and then begin to feed again nearer the waiting two. So it went on in the quick falling dusk till darkness covered the final scene. It is curious how short the reasoning of the zebra mind appears to be. A 500 or 600 yards break, and then after a few sniffs and snorts they began to feed again, stampeding later further into the trap.

For nearly three months the family stayed about that area moving somewhere nearly every night and then back again to the donga. Nairobi turned out nightly to watch them at play. I have counted 20 to 40 cars frequently, and on a Sunday over 100. A furrow was run along in front of the donga beyond which cars might not go, and from that point we could observe the evening play of the growing cubs and their affectionate parents. The cubs would come to inspect the cars, even playing among them. One night a lioness came right up to the window of my car and, alarmed, I whispered to the boy to start up the engine, at which she withdrew a few yards.

Both the cubs and parents play charmingly. A teddy-bear-like cub will rear on his hind legs and put his paws round the neck of his mother as she walks. They climb on the backs of the grown-ups and push their faces with soft paws and roll on their backs waving furry legs. But at the word of command they are obedient, and when the order to move is given the cubs fall into single file and move off behind the parents to the night's location. I have seen the pride bring the string of cubs right through a phalanx of waiting cars, the rearguard turning to give a very nasty word to the warden who had indicated to her that she was dallying.

The evening seances at this time were carefully watched over by the warden, who turned out nightly to see that all cars left the Park at nightfall and that none pressed too near the cubs or did anything to disturb the elders.

The Park is best perhaps at dawn. Once I



LION CUBS play charmingly

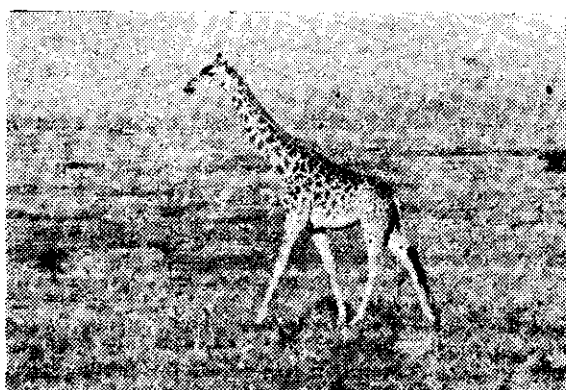
went when the moon was still the only light and watched it blend with the daylight and the sun rise over the Attie plains. In this mixed and lovely light 27 giraffe in lines and groups came up from the forest scrub and passed over rising ground—a perfect frieze. On the road to Ollege-salle in the Rift I have seen them grouped and watchful in the shade of forest trees. Such dappling! Such a vandyke brown of spots, such varied gold background. "Glory be to God for dappled things," said Gerard Manley Hopkins. There is a turn of the head in the female especially that is fascinating. There is a degree of supercilious gentility in the giraffe unequalled in the animal kingdom.

Even Hyenas Have Mothers

The hippo come out of their pool in the Attie river in the early morning and even a crocodile can be seen on the river bank. Mid-day is the better time for him when the sun is hot and other creatures have gone into hiding. Hyenas are abroad in groups in the morning after a night picking up the lions' scraps. With its spotted coat, clumsy body, ill-looking head and furtive gait, the hyena has had bad Press the world over. He deserves this for many horrible habits, but the maternal side of every creature has its appeal. One evening we watched a family for some time, three blackish brown cubs, about the size of a full-grown wire-haired terrier, playing about their mother while father lay about 20 yards away looking on.

Driving on into the sunset, pretending we did not care about lions, we passed close to a little mound rather suggestive of a low tumulus broken in at the top. "Perhaps there's a lion in it," we said, and then with the under-breath oh-oh of such a moment we saw that a female hyena was lying in the little depression at the top. For some ten minutes we watched her lying rather limp and quiet watching us with undisturbed alert eyes. We wondered if she was sick. Finally we decided to circumnavigate the mound in the car. Then the mystery was revealed. When we were halfway round she leaped up and hanging from her mouth was a new born cub about the size of a large rat. She took it into an earth hole made in the depression, and head and shoulders out of

(continued on next page)



A GIRAFFE—"supercilious gentility"