

At Close Quarters With LEOPARDS

By
HUGH PRIOR



Illustrated by
LYNN BOGUE HUNT

THOUGH the smallest of Africa's dangerous game, the leopard is as ferocious, and in certain circumstances as formidable, as anything in the jungle. Unlike the lion, he is most vindictive. A wound, instead of turning him, is much more liable to drive him to attack with fury and determination. If his wound is not a disabling one, he will fight to an absolute finish, biting and clawing with lightning speed.

His method of attack is to fasten teeth and fore-claws in throat and shoulder. Then, with his powerful dagger-sharp hind claws, he will try to dig out his victim's interior. And to do so is a matter of seconds if he can secure the right grip.

Hand-to-hand encounters with leopards are not uncommon in East Africa. And seldom indeed does the man who wins the fight escape without ugly and disfiguring scars. Carl Akeley, the great hunter and naturalist, figured in one of the grimmest of such battles. Only great physical strength and dogged courage pulled him through.

Akeley was not hunting leopards at the time. He had shot a hyena near the sandy edge of a former stream bed. Finding, however, that the beast was a poor specimen, he decided that the skin was not worth removing. Late in the evening, as he was returning to camp, he passed the spot where he had left the carcass. It was gone, and a ragged furrow in the sand showed that it had been dragged into the scrub bush, with which the place was thickly dotted.

The sun was setting, and Akeley's sal-

est course was to continue his way to camp. But he was curious to see what beast would make a meal of a hyena, and followed the track into the sparse cover. He had gone only a short distance when he caught a fleeting glimpse of some small animal slinking behind a bush. Thinking that it might be another hyena, he fired into the bush.

Instantly there arose a harsh, guttural snarling, which the hunter knew could come only from the throat of a leopard. It was so fiercely menacing that Akeley was pretty sure he had scored a hit. But also it was strong enough to warn him that the beast was neither down nor out.

With the swiftly closing dusk all in favor of the leopard, Akeley, wide awake to his danger, retreated at once. He and his gun-bearer had reached the bottom of the donga when they saw a shadowy form streaking down its sloping side after them.

Near the opposite side of the donga was a sandy spit. Up that Akeley dug his way. At the top he turned to shoot, though by then the swift African sundown had all but blotted out his sights.

He fired, and saw a spurt of sand jerk up beyond his swiftly moving target. Again he fired, with the same result. A third time he pulled the trigger, but there followed only the light click of the hammer. The magazine was empty.

To gain the few seconds necessary to slip a cartridge into his barrel, Akeley slid down the other side of the spit. He got the cartridge in, and was swinging up the rifle when it was knocked out of his hands by the hurtling leopard.

Luckily for the man, he did not go down under the impact of the ninety or so pounds of clawing fury—probably be-

cause the leopard had landed on him from a higher elevation. Luckily, too, for him the fangs of the beast fastened not on his throat, but high up on his right arm. That meant that the knife-like hind claws were flying past his side, missing his stomach, for which they were trying.

Then began a bitter battle. In an effort to free his arm Akeley gripped the leopard's throat with his left hand and squeezed with all his strength. Under the choking pressure the jaws relaxed, but only enough to enable the hunter to draw the arm back a couple of inches. They closed again, and again Akeley tightened his grip on the throat, freeing another few inches of his arm. In that way the whole arm was drawn, bit by bit, through the leopard's mouth. In its passage it was, of course, crushed and badly lacerated by the powerful jaws.

FINALLY only the hand remained imprisoned. The shifting weight of the leopard had been gradually bending the man forward, and at last he over-balanced and went down. The beast was underneath, and Akeley, instantly sensing both his danger and his advantage, drew his knees up and dug them into the squirming body. By that swift move he had his midriff protected from the deadly hind claws.

He still retained his vital left-hand grip, but now, instead of trying to tear his right hand free, he thrust it forward until it was right down in the snarling throat. At last he had swung the odds in his favor, if only his strength held for a few minutes longer. For the leopard could not now close its jaws, and Akeley's throating left hand had all but cut off its breath.

As soon as the leopard went down it squirmed and twisted in an effort to brace its body against the ground and turn over. But it could get no grip in the



fine, shifting sand for leverage. It succeeded only in scooping a hollow for itself that was an additional help to the man.

Akeley had shouted repeatedly to his gun-bearer, who was armed with a serviceable knife, to come and help. But, as sometimes happens in such crises, the boy had completely lost his head with fright and run off to a safe distance. He had even dropped his knife in his flight.

Sensing victory, Akeley made a supreme effort. Still grimly maintaining his hold, he heaved down with all the weight of his body on the leopard's chest. Under his knees he felt a rib crack. Again he bore down, and another rib cracked. And presently the clawing and writhing of the beast grew less furious. It was weakening, but still far from beaten. And since its death alone could end its struggles, the hunter continued to grind his knees into its chest.

Under the incessant crushing its efforts gradually grew weaker, and finally ceased altogether. Akeley let the throat go, withdrew his torn hand from the now motionless jaws, and staggered to his feet, very nearly exhausted himself.

But life still flickered in the leopard. When the frightened boy approached in answer to his calls that *rai* was dead, it stirred and began to gasp. Akeley yelled for the knife, which the boy had to run back and retrieve. That ended the affair.

It was found that the first bullet, fired into the bush, had torn through one of the hind paws and smashed it. That wound gave the hunter his initial advantage, and probably saved his life, for it caused the leopard to miss its aim when it sprang, and brought the open jaws down on his shoulder instead of his throat.

Akeley had a second ordeal to face when he reached camp. The biting antiseptics his companions squirted into every wound caused more pain, now that the anesthesia of excitement was gone, than the fangs of the leopard. But they were necessary, for a leopard's jaws, like those of a lion, are almost always laden with poisonous germs.

The leopard is the most expert stalker

Dropping his rifle, he pulled an automatic pistol, a powerful weapon holding eight cartridges, and began to fire

in the jungle, and the most resourceful in secreting surplus food. He will return again and again to a cache, coming and going like a shadow, until the last scrap is gone.

That thrift in the matter of food led to the unusual and nerve-racking experience of a young Assistant District Commissioner, D. C. Brooke, in Uganda, where he was stationed. Brooke was out on official duty, with only a few askaris. His route took him past a great spread of low, rolling bush, where game was scarce. The larder was low, and when he halted one afternoon a bit earlier than usual he went out along the winding edge of the bush with his rifle. He went alone, telling his gun-bearer to follow after he had helped patch camp.

ABOUT a mile out he sighted a "tommy," grazing close to the edge of the bush. Risking a long shot, he fired. The buck staggered, swiftly recovered and streaked like an arrow for cover. A second shot missed him as he vanished.

Though there were plenty of blood marks on the grass, Brooke knew how dangerous it was to enter the bush alone. But figuring that the buck might be hard hit and unable to go far, he decided to risk it.

The bush was heavy, but broken by frequent small clearings. The blood trail was easy enough to follow for several

hundred yards. Then, in a clearing, there were signs that the buck had gone down. The grass was flattened, and there were two or three big splashes of blood on it. A few more marks led across the open space, and then the trail suddenly vanished.

Brooke went on, zigzagging about for quite a distance, but could not pick up the trail again. When he realized how far he had gone, he wheeled to return. He had not taken a dozen steps when he halted, feeling foolish and a bit scared. He had no idea in what direction the open lay. For the moment he was lost. He knew little bushcraft then, but quite enough to realize how fatally easy it would be to march into the heart of that jungle. Then, with what haste the thickness of the low-growing bush allowed, he blundered this way and that, searching

for the blood trail that had led him in.

Up to then Brooke had heard nothing but the swishing of branches as he shouldered through them. But suddenly, as he stepped into a clearing, from one side of the dark circle of bush rose a harsh grunting, like the sound of a saw going through a tough piece of wood. It was the snarling of a leopard.

Brooke knew there was little danger of a leopard attacking unless wounded or cornered. But he also knew the unexpected might happen, if the beast were hungry enough. He plunged into the bush on the opposite side of the clearing, doubly anxious now to find the lost trail. At

or fifteen feet above the ground. At the same moment the most savage snarling he had yet heard broke out below.

Settling into a safe shooting position, he happened to glance upward. He nearly fell out of the tree when he saw, wedged between two sharply forking branches, the carcass of the lost buck. Staring at it, he saw that most of the throat had been torn away. And with that enlightenment came. The leopard's work, of course.

The disappearance of the buck's trail and the big blood splashes in the clearing were now explained. So was the presence of the carcass up there, for he remembered that it is a common practice of the leopard to hide his prey in a tree. He cannot devour a whole carcass at once, and he has no better way of outwitting that keen-nosed thief, the hyena.

So, after all, the beast had been stalking him merely to see that he did not interfere with its dinner. But in doing so

hanging his rifle stock against them. His snarls answered him. Keeping up the noise, he studied the top of the undergrowth, trying to guess the leopard's position. While mentally plotting the surface of the tangle below, he thought he noticed a faint business creeping over it. He raised his head and looked around. The sun had begun to dip.

Making a final burst of noise, he brought his rifle to bear on the bush. When the growling answered, he aimed at the spot where he judged the leopard lay, and let fly. A screeching snarl and a wild commotion in the undergrowth followed. He fired again, hoping to drive the beast into the clearing on his side of the tree. But it would not come out. And from the ominous silence, Brooke was sure it was preparing a lightning offensive of its own.

Dusk was falling so rapidly that the undergrowth was becoming blurred and dark. He kept his rifle leveled and waited.

For several minutes there was neither sound nor movement from below. Then, eight or ten feet from the spot at which he had fired, the undergrowth suddenly swished and the leopard shot upward.

TO Brooke, as it landed in the branches opposite, it was a black, squirming outline. He lost several critical seconds in trying to get his rifle leveled on it. But the thick, crooked branches held the barrel. Dropping it, he pulled his automatic pistol—a small, powerful weapon holding eight cartridges—and began to fire.

After four shots he paused. The leopard still kept threshing toward him. But he had slowed it, and it was close enough for him to see that one foreleg was dangling and useless.

At about four feet he fired two more shots into the chest. The throaty snarls ceased. The beast rolled off the branch to another a couple of feet below, where it lay still.

When he dropped to the ground, Brooke heard the hoarse voices of his boys calling to him. They had been out searching for him along the edge of the bush, and had just returned when the shooting began. His tree, Brooke found, was only a few hundred yards from camp.

There is a professional hunter in Kotsya, a man named Loney, who is a relentless leopard-hunter. With good reason, for he bears on his face what he always refers to as "the mark of the beast." The right side, from the forehead to the line of the jaw, is a mass of unsightly scars. They are bad enough when his face is in repose, but when he smiles he achieves merely a weird, lip-sided leer. His left arm also is laced and ridged with scars.

He got those scars, he told me, in a moonlight fight (Continued on page 79)



Next Month

UP AND UP FOR BIGHORNS

By H. H. SHELDON. In search of the desert rams of the Southwest.

ON LOCATION

By HORACE LYTLE. The moving-picture boys go quail hunting.

WHISTLING WINGS

By H. L. BETTEN. He has some pertinent things to say about the dove as a game bird.

EVOLUTION OF AN ANGLER

By HART STILWELL. An informative article that will help you tackle your fish right.



intervals he halted to listen. It was not long before the coughing snarl came again, quite close, sending him scuttling off in a changed direction.

When it broke out a third time, Brooke could no longer doubt that he was being stalked. His progress became a stampede. He tore through the close bush, heedless of the scratches and tears that the lashing branches dealt him, searching desperately for clearings. His best chance of picking up the buck's blood traces lay in the open spaces, and if an attack came in one of them he would have a chance to use his rifle. If it came to close-quarters work, he had his revolver.

For fully half an hour he battled through the tangled mass, the leopard's snarls breaking out at shorter and shorter intervals, sometimes to right, sometimes to left of him. He had not once caught as much as a glimpse of the beast, and he finally realized that he never would, in that smother of bush, unless he could get up above it.

He looked for a tree. There was none within his limited view. Then it dawned on him that in all his burrowing—miles, it seemed—he had not seen more than two or three real trees. Practically the whole bush was thick and low-growing, a dense scrub, none of it climbable.

But at last, when the leopard's snarling had become almost continuous, he blundered into a clearing and saw on the other side a stout tree with a mass of twisted branches. In a very few seconds he was up among those branches, twelve

it had shepherded him to the very spot where it was hidden.

Brooke was in a tough spot. The powerful killer, hungry and angry, was not likely to surrender its prey without a fight. And unless he could goad it into attacking, it was far too clever to expose itself. If it waited for darkness—the black darkness that envelops the bush between sunset and moonrise—his chances would be slight indeed, for a leopard is almost as agile in a tree as a monkey.

He began shaking the branches and



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get married. Only you know I ain't got any fifteen beaver skins. But the people will be pretty mad if they don't have a salmon to dance.

The medicine man looked up at the sky and down at the gravel at his feet. His lips moved soundlessly; he drew in a long breath.

"Give me the fish," he said finally. "That," I said, when Pitke had departed with the salmon, "was the sweetest bit of bulldozing I ever listened to. Boy, I'm proud of you! You sure took that old buzzard into camp."

"Huh? Took—him—into—camp. I don't understand." His eyes were wide and innocent.

"Don't let it throw you," I said. "Come on, let's head for home. I'm going to collect that jack-pot, then round up the boys and put on the kind of fish feed that hasn't been seen around here in many a long moon."

Mishkah nodded. "Yes," he said. "I got to get ready for a party too."



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AT CLOSE QUARTERS WITH LEOPARDS

(Continued from page 40)

with a leopard. Returning from a safari, he camped one evening close to a rocky, winding donga. After dinner he was lying in his tent reading, his only companion a young colobus monkey which he was bringing back to a friend in Nairobi. Suddenly the little fellow became excited. He hopped about, springing on and off the cot and whining and chattering in very evident fear of something.

Knowing that the instincts of those creatures of the wild are seldom at fault, Loney took his rifle and went out to investigate. The moon was up, and the bare valley was flooded with light enough to show the smallest prowling beast. But he saw nothing moving.

The nearest bush was several hundred yards away, but the donga was quite close. It was mostly rock, but along its edge and in its hollow there were patches of bush dense enough to afford cover to any beast. As Loney reached the edge the rasping grunts of a leopard rose from a big black thicket at the bottom.

That accounted for the terror of the monkey, a favorite food of the leopard. The beast must have been nosing about the tent and discovered the presence of the colobus. Its angry snarls indicated that it would hang around until it got hold of the delicacy—or a bullet. Loney would have to supply the bullet, or remain up all night.

He took up a position directly above the thicket and prepared to wait for developments. The leopard elected to play a waiting game too. After those first snarls it remained quiet and motionless. Soon Loney's patience began to wear thin. He picked up some small pebbles and flung them down, one by one, on the bush. His object was to ease, not rush, the leopard out. Moving slowly enough, it would present a fair target against the grayish bottom of the donga. The hidden beast took no notice.

Loney used some bigger pebbles, and soon an angry snarl answered. He kept up a steady bombardment. More snarls followed, and at length the hunter noticed movement at one end of the bush. The leopard was out. It was moving slowly and silently, sinking close to the rough, rocky ground—just a hazy outline, visible only because it was an animal. A sharp sight is impossible in even bright moonlight, but Loney aimed as best he could and fired. The leopard, emitting furious snarls, made what Loney described as a kind of somersault, facing, as it landed, the cover it had left and immediately disappearing

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asleep under the table at which the men were sitting.

Suddenly, without the hostile grunt usually provoked by any warning sound at all—a leopard walked in through the open doorway, ignoring the men, it darted under the table and pounced on the dog. In an instant the air was filled with the snarls of the leopard and the howls of the dog, while the two threshed about the floor of the small room. In the struggle they rolled against the door, which was slammed shut.

Neither man had a weapon, and neither wanted to risk a brush with the leopard by crossing the room to get one. So both hopped up on the table. On that temporary shelter they realized that, when the leopard finished the dog, they would be shut up with very bad company. And if either got down to open the door, the beast would be liable to misinterpret his intentions.

With the leopard's blood up and his killing instincts roused, the cut-of-doors was strongly indicated. Without troubling about the dog, which was doomed after the leopard's first pounce, the men took the nearest and only way out—an open window close to the table. A couple of minutes later the leopard, with the dead dog in its jaws, emerged by the same route.

Another case of the leopard's disregard of man occurred at the small wayside station of Voi, on the Uganda Railway. A settler waiting for a train was sleeping in the dark bungalow, a kind of combined waiting-room and primitive hotel provided at such places by the railway people. He was awakened by a hubbub among some dogs he had with him which he had shut up in a shed beside the bungalow. He got up, lit his lamp and went out to see what was causing the row. The veranda was in darkness, except for what light shone through the window from his bedroom.

He had taken only a few steps when his eyes, not fully adjusted to the gloom, caught a hazy glimpse of some beast springing at him. Flinging out his arms, he closed with it, and the two crashed to the floor. As the man went down on top of it he found it was a leopard, and yelled to his boy to bring his revolver. He hung on until the boy brought the weapon, when he finished the invader with a head shot.

The settler, a powerful heavy man, received only a few scratches. He attributed his escape from a mauling to his weight, which he thinks broke the leopard's back when he fell on it, thus paralyzing its most dangerous weapons, its hind claws. Examination showed, too, that the beast was undersized and immature.

If man-eating lions are rare, man-eating leopards are rarer still. But they have taken their toll of human life. In the few cases recorded natives, nearly always women, have been the victims.

MARLIN BY THE TAIL

(Continued from page 37)

of gloves at the same moment. The fish pulled like a team of old-time fire horses.

"What is it?" I yelled. "Did you see the strike?"

"No," John said, his eyes on the racing line. "I think it's a big tuna."

At that instant the fish jumped, and we all yelled at once, "Marlin!"

It wasn't the arrow-like leap of a white marlin, nor the spectacular tail-walking of his smaller cousin. This black citizen just barged up out of the water and crashed down, but he gave an impression of power that made me tingle all over. A minute later he came out again, and then again.

"This," I thought, "is not going to be any picnic. I'd better rate myself for a long fight, and take it a little easy."



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