Charles Sweeney grew up in England and as a young man worked at the British Museum of Natural History. The work interested him, but his eventless life did not, and in 1949 he took a job as an entomologist in what is now Tanzania. He remained in East Africa for many years, working also in Sudan and Malawi. He is the author of the two-volume *Animal Life of Malawi*.

In this book, Sweeney makes occasional passing reference to his work as an applied entomologist, but this is peripheral to the real subject, his life as an amateur naturalist in a part of the world that never ceased to fascinate him. The main foci are arthropods and reptiles, but he was very much an all-around naturalist of the Victor Quesnel variety. The main research reported here is on the habits and life cycle of bush-babies, a group of prosimian mammals found throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa.

Aside from the broad, enthusiastic and generally knowledgeable account of East-African wildlife, there are two attractive features of this book that especially caught my attention.

First, Sweeney's treatment of his African assistants is more human and sympathetic than one might expect from someone so embedded in the colonial system. They often accompanied him on his extracurricular jaunts, so that much is said about them. They all have names, and if you think this is inconsequential, look in other colonial-era naturalists' books about Africa. While Sweeney is quite open about their individual foibles—in his last encounter with one valued assistant, the man was in prison for his part in a drunken brawl—there is no cross-cultural caricature here. As an example, they spent a great deal of time in the wild, uninhabited Mkulumuzi River gorge, and Sweeney remarks vividly on the varying degrees to which his assistants relucted or refused to go to particular places because of fear of spirits. However, this is not to say that they are cowardly or foolish, just that they see things differently.

Second, while there is much attention to crocodiles and venomous snakes, and an occasional encounter with a lion, Sweeney does not make a big deal of the dangers involved. Too be sure, there are risks, but these are noted without chest-swelling bravado. At one point he says plainly that a man can handle even a grown Nile crocodile if he knows what he is doing, and then he goes about doing it. It is all part of the working and living conditions of being a naturalist in East Africa, of which this is such an engaging, readable account.

Reference

for the Publication of Textbooks  235+212 pp.

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