

Zandi Folklore

By P. G. MOLLOY.

Zande folklore is particularly rich in tales of animal and bird life, which unlike most African animal myths, are a combination of accurate observation and ingenious fabrication. For the following delightful tales I am indebted to Commandant Micha, Conservateur du Parc National Garamba, Belgian Congo, who with patience and cajoling has extracted them from a few ancient Zande.

It would be interesting to know whether other tribes tell the same stories or whether these are peculiar to Zande inventiveness.

THE RHINO.

In the beginning of the world, the Creator gave every animal a needle and thread with which to sew up his skin. But the fumbling Rhino dropped his needle before the job was finished, leaving his skin hanging in untidy folds. He searched high and low but nowhere could he find it until he could only believe that he must have swallowed it.

And to this day the Rhino scatters his dung with his horn and peers short-sightedly into it in search of his needle.

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THE HIPPO.

In the beginning of the world, the Creator wanted to make the Hippo a land animal, but the Hippo begged to be allowed to live in the water. In the end the Creator relented on making the Hippo promise he would never, never eat fish.

The Hippo has kept his promise and to this day he raises his stern above the water and scatters his droppings with his stubby little tail, to show his Creator that it contains no fish-bones.

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THE GIANT POUCHED RAT.

The Giant Pouched Rat who lives in the forest has a white end to his tail. One day the Leopard was out hunting and chased the Rat who ran down a hole, but the Leopard just caught him by end of his tail.

"Aha!" cried the Leopard, "now I have you!"

"Oh, no, you haven't!" answered the Rat, "that is a root you have hold of—look at the colour of it!"

And sure enough, the Leopard found what he had in his paw was white like a root so he let it go. The Rat whisked his tail down the hole and lives at liberty to this day.

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The same Rat is very partial to the fruit of a certain liana which grows in the forest. One day to his distress he found the Elephant eating his favourite fruit and feared there would be nothing left for himself and his family.

"Come children," he said when the Elephant had gone, "lie down all around the liana with your paws in the air and feign dead."

When the Elephant came back he saw all the little rats lying around apparently dead after eating the fruit. And he was so frightened that he too would be poisoned that he has never touched the fruit again to this day.

And so it is that only Man and the Rat eat the fruit of this liana.

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THE CUCKOO AND THE HORNBILL.

One day the Cuckoo and the Hornbill started an argument as to who had the loudest voice. Eventually they agreed to put it to the test and started out together on a hunting expedition. When they had gone a long, long way, their hunt was successful and they were ready to return home.

Then the Hornbill flew up high into the sky and called out in his great, raucous voice telling his wife to prepare a feast to celebrate his return. But the Cuckoo sat on a low branch and called out in quite a soft voice.

On their return home the Cuckoo found everything prepared by his wife, but the Hornbill's wife had nothing ready, for she had never heard him.

And so the Cuckoo won the wager. But the Hornbill never knew that a Cuckoo never calls but his call is taken up by another, and passed on and on. And thus it was his wife received the Cuckoo's message.

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THE CRICKET.

When the first Cricket died, his sons were very sad and that night they gathered round their drums and lamented their departed father. Next day Man, who lived near by and had been kept awake by the drumming, came to them and said,

"Last night my father died; lend me your drum so that I can

mourn him." The Crickets were very reluctant but Man took away their drum and has kept it ever since.

When the Crickets found they had no drum they were sad and worried because they had no means to mourn their relatives. Then one day one of them spread his wings and found to his surprise and delight that he could make the chirring noise that Crickets make.

"Listen!" he cried to the others, "never mind about the drum. Here is a way we can mourn our relatives that Man cannot take from us!"

And that is the origin of the Cricket's song.

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THE BAT.

A long time ago there was a war between the Birds and the Animals. But the Bat decided he would remain neutral. He was first captured by the Birds but to them he protested,

"Look, I have wings and feet like you have; I am no Animal!"

And so they let him go.

Next he was captured by the Animals, but to them he protested,

"Look, I have ears and teeth like you have; I am no Bird!"

And so they let him go.

After the war, both sides called their forces together in order to decide who should be rewarded and who should be punished for his conduct. But the Bat was ashamed and hid himself for he had not fought at all.

And to this day the Bat ventures out only in the hours of darkness.
