

## An Important Zoological Discovery

*Extracts from The Times, London, 1901*

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That extraordinary new mammal, the okapi, discovered by Sir Harry Johnston in Central Africa, is now to be seen at the Natural History Museum, on the ground floor. The skin brought home by Sir Harry has been admirably mounted by Mr Rowland Ward, and the public now have the opportunity of forming their own conclusions as to this singular animal which, after remaining hidden from the gaze of naturalists, hunters and the civilised world generally until the beginning of the 20th century, has suddenly been brought to light.



*Sir Harry Johnston's painting of the Okapi © Zoological Society of London*

Sir Harry Johnston had fallen in with a party of the dwarfs that inhabit the Semiliki forest, who were being taken to be shown at the Paris Exhibition by a German speculator, and, thinking that a visit to Paris would not be specially good for them, had conducted them back to their own district. Travelling with them, he took the opportunity of asking them about the animals of the forest, in particular enquiring about an animal which had been heard about by H M Stanley.

It is beyond all doubt a curious beast, one of the very oddest forms of animal life in a country teeming with strange and singular creatures. To anyone who knows the fauna of Africa, the okapi gives at once the impression of being a blending of three different mammals – antelope,

giraffe and zebra. Yet the okapi is, beyond doubt, a true species and is not a hybrid or a sport of any kind.

Ages ago Pliny remarked that from Africa there is always something new. The Dark Continent continues, to the latest hour of its history, to maintain this pre-eminence. It will be extremely interesting to hear further facts concerning the habits and life-history of this strange mammal. At present we are very much in the dark as to the range and manner of life of the new species. It may be hoped that Sir Harry Johnston, to whom we are all indebted for this new and interesting form of animal life, will shortly be able to procure what the lawyers term 'further and better particulars'.

Upon the whole *Okapia johnstoni*, as the scientists have labelled it, can scarcely be called a handsome contribution to the fauna of Africa. It lacks the magnificent appearance of the eland, the koodoo, the sable and roan antelopes, the gemsbok, and others of the nobler forms of antelope. It lacks too, the unique and stately beauty of the tall giraffe. Its prototype would seem to have been some creature of the long remote past, when the ancestors of the giraffe and antelopes were much more nearly allied than are those animals at the present day. It may, perhaps, like the tapir, be looked upon as a singular and bizarre instance of arrested development.



*The original strips of hide collected in 1900 by Sir Harry Johnston which were identified at the Natural History Museum (London) as a relative of the giraffe and named *Okapia johnstoni* © The Natural History Museum*



Painting by W Smit completed soon after the 'discovery' of the Okapi © Zoological Society of London