

Beetle collecting in Kenya (Coleoptera)

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Abstract

In October-November 2001 the author visited Kenya for extensive beetle collecting on Mt. Elgon, Mt. Kenya and the Kakamega forest. He also visited the major beetle collection of the country, hosted in the Department of Invertebrate Zoology of the National Museum in Nairobi. The process of obtaining Kenyan collecting and exporting permits is described. Three collecting sites are described: Mt. Elgon, Kakamega Forest and Mt. Kenya. Kenya is recommended for perspective beetle studies as a researcher-friendly country.

Key words: Coleoptera, beetles, East Africa, Kenya, collecting, permit, Museum.

Introduction

Study of beetles very often involves beetle collecting abroad. This activity, however, has gotten more complicated over the last few decades. The difficulties are mainly due to the increasing complexity of obtaining collecting and exporting permits. While originally designed to regulate, register and facilitate the activities of international scientists, collecting and exporting permits have become, in some countries, expensive, unpredictable and years-to-wait-for documents. Another drawback, particularly in Africa, is that many places are inaccessible due to political instability and/or economic chaos. Moreover, in highly populated countries most of the land is extensively cultivated and therefore access to protected areas is essential for productive collecting of indigenous species.

From October 23rd to November 24th, 2001 I was on a collecting trip in Kenya. The main aim was extensive beetle collecting on Mt. Elgon, Mt. Kenya, and in the Kakamega Forest. I visited also the major beetle collection of Kenya hosted in the Department of Invertebrate Zoology of the National Museum in Nairobi. The trip was rather successful and I hope that my recently obtained experience will be of general interest to colleagues.

General Overview

Kenya is a country in East Africa, a former British colony. English is widely spoken with Swahili as the second official language. The equator divides the country almost equally. Northern and north-eastern borders with Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia are currently hardly penetrable due to political instability in those countries. On-land travel to Uganda and Tanzania is rather straightforward. Two rainy seasons occur: a major one in March-May and another smaller one in October-November. Well-preserved forest and alpine zones might be found on two extinct volcanoes, Mt. Kenya (5199 m) and Mt. Elgon (4321 m), as well as on the nearly equally high Aberdare Mt. Range.

Kenya has had a long history of nature-oriented expeditions with hunting safaris gradually transforming into eco-tourism. Tourist facilities, however, are rather expensive and the itineraries of company-organized safaris are not necessarily flexible. Hiring a vehicle is an option allowing more freedom, however a 4WD would cost around 120 Euro per day. Alternatively, an extensive

and very cheap network of public transportation might be an ideal way for a single traveler. I used exclusively public transport and can recommend it without hesitation. Carrying a tent, weekly supply of food and a portable butane cooker will reduce travel expenses greatly. It should be mentioned that when in Nairobi one has to be careful, because the city has a reputation of one of Africa's most lawless places and is frequently referred to by tourists as "Nai-robbery".

Collecting permit

Foreign scientists are expected to apply for a "Research Permit" from the office of the President. They are required to submit a proposal showing the methodologies to be used in the research. If the methods include collecting samples in the natural habitats, they are referred to Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS, P.O. Box 40241, Nairobi, Kenya; Tel. 254-2-501081/082, 602345, 506671-4, Fax 254-2-505866, 501752, E-mail: kws@kws.org, URL: www.kws.org). About six months prior to my trip I applied for and was appointed as a Visiting Scientist with the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE, Duderstadt, Kisaarani, P.O. Box 30772, Nyayo Stadium, Nairobi, Kenya; phone: +254-2-861680-4, 801501/3/9; Fax: +254-2-860110/803360, E-mail: icipe@icipe.org; URL: <http://www.icipe.org>). This affiliation allowed me to do my research under ICIPE mandate and ICIPE applied on my behalf to KWS for the collecting permit. The permit was issued and I received it in ICIPE immediately upon arriving into Kenya. The conditions of this permit were that I should deposit holotypes and some paratypes of new species and some voucher specimens of other identified species in the National Museum of Kenya. The collecting permit stated that an additional "exporting permit" should be issued when the field-collected material is examined by specialists from the National Museum of Kenya.

Collecting Sites

Mt. Elgon National Park. Mt. Elgon (4321 m) is the fourth-highest mountain in Africa after Kilimanjaro (Tanzania), Mt. Kenya (Kenya, see below) and Ruwenzori Range (border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The border between Kenya and Uganda goes through Mt. Elgon leaving most of the forested slopes and the *caldera* (basin-like depression resulting from explosion or collapse of the center of volcano) covered with characteristic alpine vegetation in Uganda. On the Kenyan side National Park covers only a narrow strip of the slope, dividing the rest of the Kenyan side of the mountain between two forest reserves. Park HQ (01°02'27.6"N 34°47'24.9"E, 2200 m) and the main camp-site are located near a single operating gate "Chorlim", which is easily accessible from a small town named Kitale, via the village of Endeless ("Enderless" is another spelling). Both forest reserves bordering the park on either side are theoretically free for access. Both have overgrown roads through the forest towards the *caldera*, one of the roads starting from the small village Kapsakwany. However, over the last few years both roads have been closed for visitors and both have rangers from the park permanently guarding the entrances.

The policy of the park is that visitors have to be accompanied by an armed ranger. In my case this service was free of charge, however it might not be the rule. Wild buffalo is the most dangerous large animal in forested mountains and it has to be treated with great caution. Close to the border there is a chance of facing Ugandan cattle smugglers. Rangers almost unavoidably get bored during the collecting hours and were producing all sorts of reasons why we should walk back just after a couple hours in the field. Rangers would normally walk well behind on the way to the collecting spot and equally well ahead on the way back to the HQ. During my five-day long stay in the alpine zone two rangers refused to escort me for the daily walks and remained in the camp constantly eating. In two days they ate all their food and insisted that they have to descend; two

other more experienced rangers were sent from the HQ to stay the remaining days. For the trip to the *caldera* one either has to hike about 25 km from the HQ (which is hardly possible with ill-prepared and not willing rangers), or get a car (4WD is absolute necessity; park authorities might supply one). The best place to pitch a tent to explore the highlands is the clearly visible end of this road (01°05'34.9"N 34°37'39.1"E, 3500 m). A hiking trail starts from this locality up towards Koitoboss Peak (4187 m) and further to Uganda. There is running water there and the night temperature normally does not get below freezing. This place is within a daily return walk to the Koitoboss or Lower Elgon (4301 m) peaks. Mt. Elgon has no permanent glaciations or long-lasting snow. An international border goes through Lower Elgon and it is not advisable (and illegal) to cross it into Uganda.

Park HQ has a generator to supply electricity from sunset until about 9 p.m.; light traps may therefore be used. The forest surrounding the park HQ has a rather poor layer of leaf litter; the layer gets thicker, however, higher with altitude towards the bamboo zone. The alpine zone has characteristic *Lobelia* and *Senecio* giant plants and may be walked through without a trail. There is danger in the *caldera* of getting lost when sudden fog comes down reducing visibility to a few meters. During my trip (small rain season) the mornings were clear and sunny, while the mid-afternoons were invariably rainy.

Mr. Peter Leitoro is Warden (Director) of the Mt. Elgon N.P.; a competent and very helpful person. A map of Mt. Elgon by A.L. Wielochowski published by WestCol is recommended and may be obtained for about 15 Euro in Europe or North American bookshops (see, for example, Stanfords in London, URL: www.stanfords.co.uk or Freytag & Berndt in Wien, URL: www.freytagberndt.at, email: shop@freytagberndt.at). The same author, together with M. Savage, produced a map for Mt. Kenya (see below).

Kakamega Forest Reserve. This primary tropical rainforest is surrounded by a densely populated and intensively cultivated area. The forest might be explored from two distantly separated camp-sites, "Udo's Bandas and Campsite" in Buyangu (northern part of the forest) and Forest Rest House in Isecheno (southern part). I stayed in Buyangu (00°21'38.2"N 34°51'24.9"E, about 1500 m), which is located two kilometers from the main road connecting two major towns, Kitale (base for climbing Mt. Elgon) and Kakamega. Solo walks are permitted in the Forest Reserve. There is a network of poorly maintained trails from "Udo's Bandas and Campsite" going through the dense and otherwise nearly impenetrable forest, the longest trail is about seven kilometers along the Isiukhu River.

This area is rich with fallen trees in different stages of decay, good leaf litter and other indications of a good primary forest. During the week I spent there I met no other people while collecting in the forest. There were heavy rains every afternoon with an average of about 10 - 12 mm per day. Experienced guides, cooks and field assistants may be hired (contact Caleb Ihaji Analo at HQ or E-mail: ihaji@webcenter.swiftkisumu.com).

Mt. Kenya National Park. Mt. Kenya (5199 m) is the highest peak in the country and the forest is easily accessible from Nairobi in less than a day. The mountain is encircled by a tarmac road with few trails leading up to the top. The most popular one starts from Naro Moru village going through the Park HQ (00°10'32.7"S 37°08'48.6"E, 2400 m) on the western slope of the mountain. There is no electricity supply at the park HQ. Park regulations prohibit solo walks, two or more people are permitted to follow any route without a ranger within the park boundaries. Dense primary rainforest starts at the park entrance along the Naro Moru route and goes up to the Meteorological Station (00°10'30.6"S 37°12'48.4"E, 3400 m). Further up the alpine zone starts with its characteristic *Lobelia* and *Senecio* giant plants and continues along Teleki Valley to Mackinder's camp (00°09'42.4"S 37°17'22.6"E, 4300 m). Mt. Kenya has permanent glaciations and snow.

Beetles in the National Museum of Kenya

The Department of Invertebrate Zoology of The National Museum of Kenya hosts the major beetle collection in the country. The whole entomological collection in general has about two million specimens with beetles making up about a quarter of this. The main part of the collection was accumulated between 1920 and 1970. Beetles are kept in horizontal uniform drawers and identified, mostly, to species or genus level. The collection is properly maintained. The most collected group is Curculionidae and other plant-associated families. Loans may be requested by writing to Dr. Wanja Kinuthia, (Department of Invertebrate Zoology, National Museums of Kenya, P.O. Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya; E-mail: eafrinet@africaonline.co.ke), Head of the Department and Curator of Coleoptera.

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