

# THE 3 Little Dassies

Hi Everybody! On a trip to Namibia, in Southern Africa, we camped near Twyfelfontein. The Rock Dassies who lived in the rocks would dive into their stone houses whenever the eagle flew overhead. When I returned home, I couldn't get the cute Dassies out of my mind. "they're like the Three Little Pigs", I thought, and they really do live in stone houses! At that moment, my book began.

JAN BRETT

## Petroglyphs

Twyfelfontein is named for clearwater spring that flows from the rocks in this desert like place. When the unstable rockshelf broke off, ancient petroglyphs were revealed. Africans had been visiting the spring for 12 thousand years. Petroglyphs is the name for artworks made by chipping away the surface of the rock to reveal the contrasting color underneath.

We climbed over piles of boulders that crumbled off from the cliffs called "Scree" a word I used to describe them in my book.





The stars of my book are Rock Dassies, or Hyrax. I first saw them around our camp near Etosha Pan in Namibia. They weren't hard to spot because they liked to sunbathe on our outside daybed. I discovered Dassies are descended from an ancient group of near-undulates (mammals with hooves) that includes elephants and armadillos. To me they looked like a cross between a woodchuck and a koala, because of their droll expression. We spotted families on high outcroppings of rock where they could hide in caves and crevices.

On our travels across Namibia we saw cattle herds and nimble brown-headed white goats. When I asked about the goats I heard a strange story. In the olden days, it was common to capture a baby girl baboon and bring it up drinking milk from a nanny goat. As she grew up, she thought of the goat herd as her extended family. When grown, she would live in a tree next to the farmer's house, and in the morning she would lead the goats to grazing land, often riding one of the goats. All day she would be on the look-out for leopard or large eagles, and if she saw one, she would scream for help. In the late afternoon the baboon would herd the goats home. Here, the story gets even stranger. First the baboon would separate the mothers from the kids (baby goats). After the milking, the baboon would reunite each mother with her kid, remembering 30 to 40 pairs of goats. When I questioned this story, I heard many others about intelligent trained baboons, including a railroad switch operator! Now that's a story!

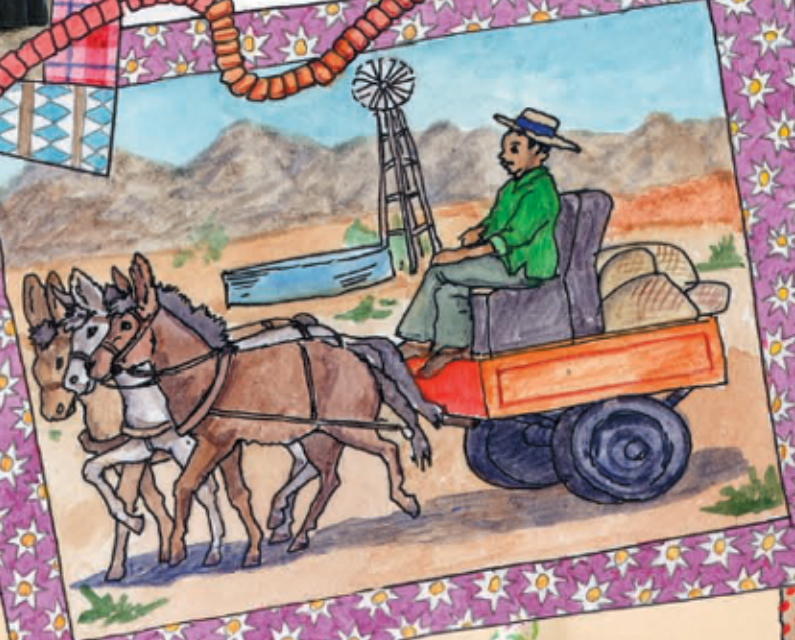






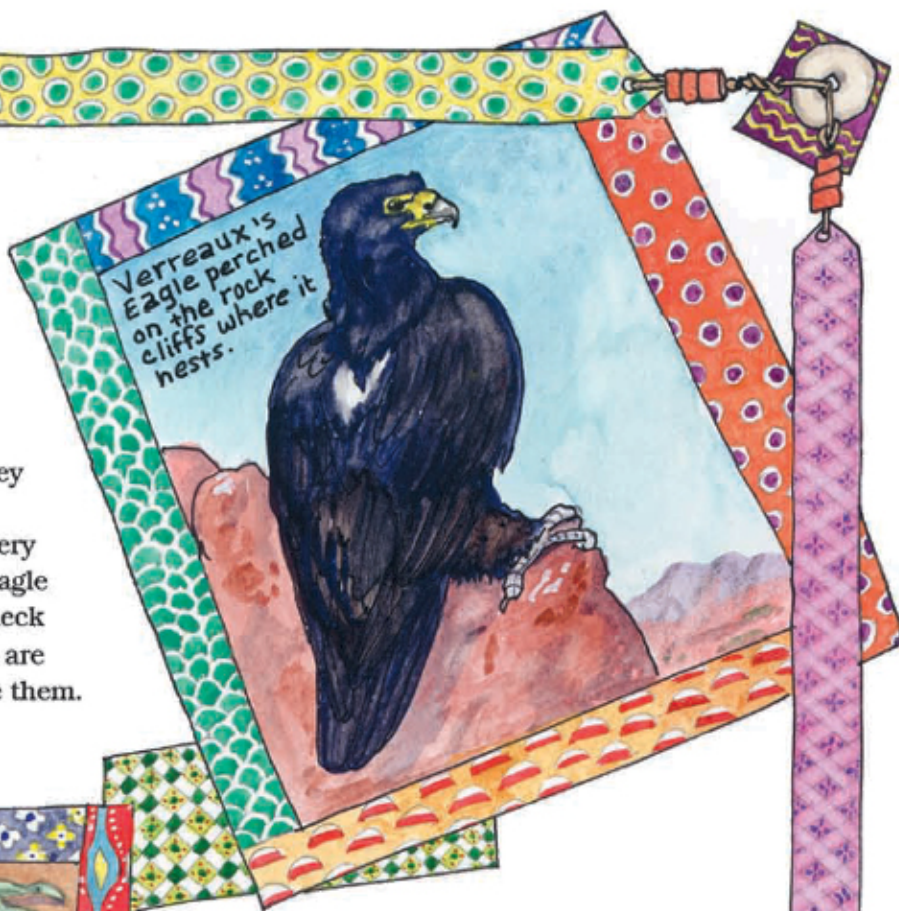
In Namibia, we visited the Herero people. The women of the Kandoni homestead in Otjongombe Village greeted us in their traditional dresses. I copied them for my Dassies. We admired their *Sanga*, their beautiful cattle. Our guide, Uanee Karuumombe, a Himba man, introduced us and arranged for us to visit the local school where his daughter attends. The women wear customary dress and hats, said to resemble cattle horns, and they also wear fragrant, reddish brown beads that smell like sandalwood.

When we saw the donkey carts that the Herero used on the farms, I thought my Dassies should have one too. Only theirs would be pulled by a tortoise! Most farms have a water tank and windmill. The Kandonis owned about 80 head of cattle and there are 36 different colors. They also have goats which until modern times would be herded by the family's baboon! On a previous trip to Namibia I saw dolls dressed like the Herero people at the airport shop. I was fascinated by the African calico and attractive combinations. Our South African guide, Martin, arranged for us to return to Namibia and meet Uanee. Uanee could not believe all the dolls I brought home with me!





The traditional Three Little Pigs story features a wolf who huffs and puffs and blows in the little pigs' straw and stick houses. In my story the bad guy is a Verreaux's Eagle, a huge bird with a wingspan of 8 feet. In Namibia, it's natural prey are Rock Dassies but they will also take young baboons and antelope! You'll have to read to the very end of my story to find out why the eagle starts out colored a tawney white. Check out this eagle's feathered legs. These are called "boots" and not all eagles have them.



The Tent Tortoise has striking geometric patterns on its shell. I haven't seen this one in real life, but I have seen many Leopard Tortoises which are also brightly marked. The funny dead looking plant in the background is a Welwitschia, a very rare plant that we did see. They are hundreds of years old.



Agamas can change their body color, but the guy I saw had a bright red head and blue body. They eat ants, termites and vegetation. There are many varieties of lizards in Southern Africa, but the Agama looks like a little person with its thin neck and muscled legs. Their eyelids close slightly, giving them a knowing look.

