



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!

