

**WHERE ANIMALS  
TALK: WEST AFRICAN  
FOLK LORE TALES**

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Where animals talk: West African folk lore tales by Robert H. Nassau

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**ROBERT H. NASSAU**

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# WHERE ANIMALS TALK

*West African Folk Lore Tales*

By

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## PREFACE

**T**HE typical native African Ekano or legend is marked by repetition. The same incidents occur to a succession of individuals; monotony being prevented by a variation in the conduct of those individuals, as they reveal their weakness or stupidity, artifice or treachery.

Narrators, while preserving the original plot and characters of a Tale, vary it, and make it graphic by introducing objects known and familiar to their audience. These inconsistencies do not interfere with belief or offend the taste of a people with whom even the impossible is not a bar to faith; rather, the inconsistency sharpens their enjoyment of the story.

Surprise must not be felt at the impossibility of some of the situations; *e. g.*, the swallowing by an animal of his wife, baggage and household furniture, as a means of hiding them. The absurdity of such situations is one of the distinctive attractions to the minds of the excited listeners.

Variations of the same Tale, as told in different Tribes, were inevitable among a people whose language was not written until within the last hundred years; the Tales having been transmitted verbally, from generation to generation, for, probably, thousands of years. As to their antiquity, I believe these Tales to be of very ancient origin. No argument must be taken against them because of the internal evidence of allusion to modern things, or implements, or customs of known modern date; *e. g.*, "cannon," "tables," "steamships," etc., etc. Narrators constantly embellish by novel additions; *e. g.*, where, in the original story, a character used a spear, the narrator may substitute a pistol.

Almost all these Tales locate themselves in supposed prehistoric times, when Beasts and Human Beings are asserted to have lived together with social relations in the same



or, in forest camps where almost all the population of a village go for a week's work on their cutting of new plantations; or for hunting; or for fishing in ponds. The time for these camps is in one of the two dry seasons: where the booths erected are not for protection against rain, but for a little privacy, for the warding off of insects, birds and small animals, and for the drying of meats. At such times, most of the adults go off during the day for fishing; or, if for hunting, only the men; the children being guarded at their plays in the camp by the older women, who are kept occupied with cooking, and with the drying of meats. At night, all gather around the camp-fire; and the Tales are told with, at intervals, accompaniment of drum; and parts of the plot are illustrated by an appropriate song, or by a short dance, the platform being only the earth, and the scenery the forest shadows and the moon or stars.

The Bantu Language has very many dialects, having the same grammatical construction, but differing in their vocabulary. The name of the same animal therefore differs in the three typical Tribes mentioned in these Tales; *e. g.*, Leopard, in Mpongwe, equals Njĕgá; in Benga, equals Njâ; and in Fang, equals Nzĕ.



## PRONUNCIATION

In all the dialects of the Bantu language, consonants are pronounced, as in English; except that *g* is always hard.

The vowels are pronounced as in the following English equivalent:—

- a* as in father *e. g.*, Kabala
- â* as in awe *e. g.*, Njâ.
- e* as in they *e. g.*, Ekaga.
- ě* as in met *e. g.*, Njěgâ.
- i* as in machine *e. g.*, Njina.
- o* as in note *e. g.*, Kombe.
- u* as in rule *e. g.*, Kuba.

*A* before *y* is pronounced *ai* as a diphthong, *e. g.*, Asaya. Close every syllable with a vowel, *e. g.*, Ko-ngo. Where two or more consonants begin a syllable, a slight vowel sound may be presupposed, *e. g.*, Ngweya, as if iNgweya.

*Ng* has the nasal sound of *ng* in "finger," as if fing-nger, (not as in "singer,") *e. g.*, Mpo-ngwe.

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