

BATS IN THE ROOF

By C. A. SPINAGE, F.Z.S.

(PLATE II opposite page 135)

For some time I had been disturbed by noises in the roof of my cottage near Kikuyu. Thinking it might be a nest of owls I decided to investigate and discovered that it was due to a pair of bats that were in residence there. A large pile of droppings showed that they had been there for some considerable time.

As soon as I entered the loft and began to crawl towards them, no easy job balancing precariously on the rafters, they scurried as fast as they could for the deepest crannies that they were able to find. It was thus only after considerable difficulty that I was able to capture one of them. I did this by shining a torch at one that was hiding behind a beam and jiggling a stick near to it, whereupon it crawled out on the opposite side. After several unsuccessful attempts I finally managed to squirm round quickly enough to be able to dislodge it with my stick before it had time to crawl back in again.

My captive was removed to the Coryndon Museum where it was identified as a Yellow-bellied House Bat (*Scotophilus nigrurus colias*), which is perhaps the most common of the East African bats.

I then tried to photograph it, but here I experienced considerable difficulty as instead of remaining quiescent, hanging upside-down as they are popularly supposed to do, it insisted upon flying around the room. As is now well known, bats find their direction by emitting high-frequency vocal notes, some species doing this by means of an open mouth and others through the nose with the mouth closed. I was able to observe in its flights around the room that it flew with its mouth agape.

While I have been sitting in my cottage at all hours of the day I have heard them active in the roof, there was usually a 'plop' as one landed on the ceiling-board, and then a slow, scraping noise as it crawled across it. On a few rare occasions they gave vent to a terrific high-pitched squeaking noise, which went on incessantly for several minutes. It was some time before I discovered the cause of this extremely penetrating noise. Occasionally at night-time, particularly around electric lights where there is a profusion of insects, one can hear odd little squeaks that seem to emanate from bats, and this may be due to them swallowing a large insect and trying to squeak at the same time!

During the two days that I had this one in captivity it never emitted a sound that was audible to me, although it was always opening its mouth as if it were making a noise. After two days had elapsed I decided that it was time to release it and took it outside at dusk. It crawled to the edge of the box that it was in and sat there opening its mouth. After a short time it flew up into the air and was immediately joined by a companion that came from the direction of my roof, and the two flew off into the night air together.

The interesting points that arise from this brief observation are :

1. They do not appear always to remain completely dormant during the hours of daylight.
 2. The Yellow-bellied House Bat falls into the category of bats that emits its high-frequency notes through the open mouth and not through the nose.
 3. I think that there is every probability that the one that joined my captive upon its release was its original companion, and the pairs thus appear to lead a fairly attached life. As it was kept captive in my room, it may have kept in contact by means of sounds inaudible to me.
 4. They were intelligent in their efforts to avoid capture, and were not the sleepy, easily caught things that they are supposed to be in the daytime.
- I am pleased to say that I have heard them in my roof since.

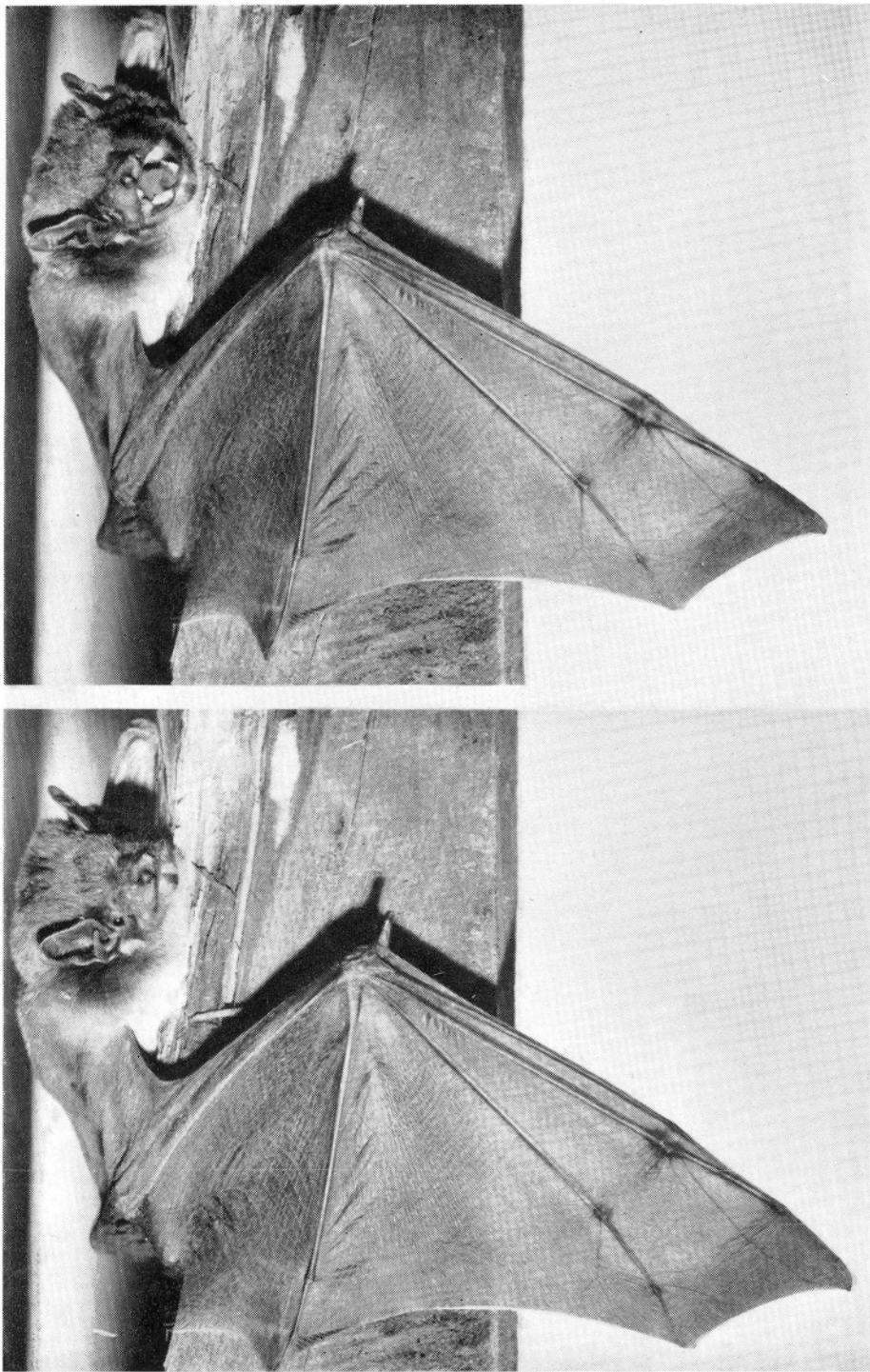
MASAI SAFARI

By ROGER BROWN

In the great area of African veldt to the south-west of Narok district lies a country visited only by the migrating Masai shepherds and inhabited by game and tsetse fly. Vague tracks exist made by tsetse investigation and game officials, but they soon peter out and the whole brooding land seems unfriendly to human beings and vaguely oppressive to the one European who lives there.

Leaving his camp one day, we moved west towards the Mara River along a faint game track and at one point came through a hilly bent of close-standing whistling thorn. Looking down across another sheet of waving grass we could see, far away, other similar patches of thorn showing the dry course of a stream, or rocky donga. As usual, the grass teemed with great herds of plains game: topi, kongoni, wildebeeste and tommy spaced out here and there with bat-eared foxes, jackals and warthog, all excited and inquisitive to see a vehicle and not really frightened at all, for there is no shooting there.

One pair of warthogs, father first and mother second, followed by a litter of eight little replicas, trotted stolidly across the track—tails and snouts up. Father, however, forgot that the babies could not trot so fast. Before he knew it, there he was ahead with mother and three little *totos*, while the others turned back by the Land-Rover and fled in confusion the way they had come, followed by our little



1. The yellow-bellied House Bat. Its wide mouth gives it a comic appearance

2. The yellow-bellied House Bat with mouth open in attitude of emitting high-frequency sound waves. Note the ears

Photos: C. A. Spingale