

FIERCE PANTHER-TIGERS.

HAR-BATING BEASTS IN SOME OF VENEZUELA'S MOUNTAINS.

They are Really Jaguars, and are Found in Lower Mountain Levels—Persistence in Striving to Take Some One Man as Prey—Notable Conflicts with Them.

Panther-jaguars they should be called, but in every Spanish-American country a jaguar is always a tiger, a tiger—so panther-tigers is their name in Venezuela.

This creature figures uncannily in many weird tales told by Venezuelan llaneros and montaneros—people of the plains and mountains. One story often told is of the traveller who rode from the pampas in among the foothills on the route from the Portuguesa River to Caracas.

The women of the little settlements that lie isolated in the wooded region at the eastern base of the Andes greatly dread the panther-tiger from his habit of carrying off children. Cunning, silent, and swift, instances have been known of his taking a child from the cradle in broad daylight and bearing it away unknown to the mother who was attending to her household work, only a few paces away.

His story, verified by men who had found him in the forest, was that he was gathering medicinal plants in the woodland when a panther-tiger sprang upon him from a tree limb. Catching sight of the tiger's moving shadow, the man, who was possessed of unusual strength and agility, jumped to one side, so that the beast missed his spring.

Clinging with teeth and fore claws to the man's shoulders, the tiger tore at him with his hind claws in the effort to be dis-embowelled. By a lucky blow, for he was blinded by blood from the wound in his forehead, the man cut one of the tiger's hind paws completely off. The tiger dropped to the ground, but reared at once and seized the man again by the shoulder.

men, lying unconscious where he had fallen with the tiger dead beside him. He was carried home where he hung for weeks between life and death, and he never fully recovered from the effects of his wounds received from the tiger.

Like other species of the larger felines, the panther-tiger has the unpleasant habit of stalking men—of following a man in the forest, throughout the whole day it may be waiting for darkness to fall, when it will attack him. This the beast has been known to do when there were several men together and in such a case nothing can draw the attention of the tiger from the particular man whom he has selected for his prey.

Believing that the tiger would not attack him while daylight lasted, the man hurried on to the camp. On his way he passed through a party of men gathering rubber and spoke with several of them. Further on he passed a boy who was herding a small flock of goats.

He reached the camp before dark, and after supper lay down in an open hut with twelve or fifteen men lying about him, having no thought that the tiger would venture among them. But as soon as the fire before the hut burned low the tiger, which must have been watching and waiting near the camp, came, and threading his way among the sleeping men without waking them, sprang upon the man whom he had been stalking through the afternoon and tried to carry him off. The struggle and outcry, of course, aroused the camp, and springing to their feet, the man's companions, with their machetes and live brands snatched from the fire, succeeded in making the tiger drop his prey and run off. But the creature prowled about the camp all the rest of the night, frequently coming plainly into view, and it was only by building several large fires before the hut, with a guard of men remaining awake to replenish them, that the tiger was kept away.

In the morning none of the men dared leave the camp. At about 2 o'clock the foreman, who had gone away the day before, taking with him the only gun in the outfit, returned to the camp. He wondered as he came near it that none of the men was at work, and hastened his steps to find out what the trouble was. Just before coming to the clearing he chanced to raise his eyes, and there, on the low limb of a tree overhanging the path he saw a panther tiger lying crouched, watching the camp so intently that it seemed not to notice him. The chance for a disabling shot was perfect, and at twenty paces away the foreman sent in an ounce bullet from one barrel and a charge of buckshot from the other, aiming first behind the tiger's left shoulder. The tiger came to the ground with a broken shoulder and a bullet in his body that must have reached the heart, but with these setbacks he was so lively that he kept the foreman dodging about behind trees, while the men at the camp stayed away at a safe distance, for several minutes before he dropped and died. I saw the tiger's skin a year after this occurrence, and heard the story I have just related from the foreman. The skin had probably stretched in the process of dressing it. At this time it measured 9ft. 2in. from tip to tip.

This sanguinary beast having fixed his eye upon the man who had gone to explore for timber, had followed him for at least six hours in daylight, leaving unmolested the scattered party of rubber gatherers, whom he must have turned aside to avoid, and the boy and herd of goats that offered him an easy and immediate victim. Never relinquishing his pursuit, he had waited near the camp until all was still and dark, and then from among fifteen men had searched and seized him, and was still watching for the selected victim when shot. It was a striking instance of the persistence in pursuit of a prey once marked for slaughter that characterizes all the members small, and great, of the feline genus.

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To try to hunt the panther-tiger as the lowland jaguar is hunted with tiger hounds is near to useless. In the rough, rocky country in which he makes his home he will travel away at a speed which leaves the hunters hopelessly behind, and it is rarely that the dogs can come up with him. If they do, it means some dogs killed, with the panther usually gone before the hunters can arrive on the scene. Sometimes the ranchmen trap or poison the panther tiger to stop his ravages among their stock, a thing, despite his cunning, not so difficult to do, owing to his ravenousness.

An Englishman named Turnbull who had a ranch east of Merida, being bothered by a panther-tiger which killed his stock, thought that he would hunt him after the method often employed in India with tigers and leopards. Taking with him two of his herders and a goat, he went at nightfall to a woodland which the creature was accustomed to visit. There he tied the goat to a stake and took his position behind a blind, fifty yards away, to wait for the tiger to come for the goat. The ranch- men sent a little distance back with instruments to await his summons.

Surely enough, the tiger came, but after reconnoitering the ground unseen, as was shown by his tracks next day, instead of pouncing upon the back of the hunter lying on the ground behind his blind. A heavy overcoat that he wore, the season being winter, when the nights are cold in the mountains, saved the hunter for the moment from the tiger's teeth and claws, and his shouts brought the two ranchmen to the rescue. They attacked the tiger pluckily with their machetes. The beast was loath to give up his prey. He drove the ranchmen back twice, returning to the Englishman each time and standing guard above him, with his forepaws on his body. At last one of the ranchmen threw a lasso over the tiger's neck and jerked it tight. The animal charged him at once, but the men got a turn of the rope round a small tree, and both pulling hard together, drew the tiger's head close to the trunk. Then as the tiger snapped at the rope with his teeth, one of the ranchmen severed his spine with his machete. The Englishman was badly shaken up by the unexpected out-come of his hunting scheme, but was not much injured otherwise. He finished the beast, which now, of course was help- less, with a shot in the head, and he always claimed the glory of killing him. But it was never heard that he tried East Indian haunting methods again with Venezuelan panther-tigers.

Several time panther-tigers have killed stock at camps where I was staying, and once a herdsman in my party was killed by one of these beasts within a hundred yards of the campfire. His body we found, partly eaten, a quarter of a mile from the place where he was struck down. Only once I had a brush with one of these animals. The encounter was a startling one, and for some minutes things looked equally for me and my native guide. But we escaped unharmed, and as the affair turned out the joke was on the tiger. It came about in this way. Antonio and I, in tra- velling on a by-trail out of the mountains, had stopped for the night in a deserted hut built against the hillside. The hut was a large one plastered with mud, and it had one door, with an unglazed window, about a foot and a half square, set very high in the wall. I had killed a deer that day, and when we went to sleep on the floor a quarter of venison was hanging on a hook on the side of the wall opposite the window. It was this that attracted the tiger. The first we knew of his presence he came through the window like a shot from a gun, passing directly over me and landing under the venison on the other side of the room. I heard him strike on the floor and instantly rear and tear down the meat from the hook. Not knowing for a moment what had broken loose, I wrapped my blankets round me for protection, grabbed up my rifle, and sidled along keeping close to the wall where Antonio had made his bed. It was pitchy dark, but I could tell that he was standing in the corner with his machete in his right hand and his blanket wrapped round his left arm to serve as a shield. He was standing steady, but his eyes were fairly ablaze with excitement.

What is it, Antonio? I asked. A tiger? Yes, senior they have come for the venison and cannot get out. No, do not fire, senior, for we are dead men if you fail to kill him. Give me a lumbre (match). I pray you. We could hear the tiger trying to leap up to the window, with the quarter of venison held in his teeth, and falling back to the floor. Whenever he turned his head towards us his eyes were like balls of red fire, but he did not offer to touch us his whole aim seemed to be to get out at the window with his plunder. I found a match and gave it to Antonio. He pick-

ed up a handful of the dried grass that his blankets had been spread on, twisted it into a torch and lighted it with the match. By its light we could see the tiger standing under the window glaring at us over the haunch of venison which he plainly meant to stay by. 'Come, senior,' said Antonio, and we edged along the wall towards the door. The tiger turned so as continually to face us as we proceeded, and growled, but, afraid of the fire did not approach us. Now, quickly, senior, Antonio said as we came to the door. 'Open it just wide enough that you may slip out and I will follow.' I opened the door a few inches and squeezed through sideways, with Antonio crowding behind me. He dropped his torch within as he slammed the door and I latched it. 'Now we can breathe easy, senior,' he said. 'We have the tiger captured.' 'We could hear the tiger within the hut leaping up to the window and sometimes scratching at the door. Evidently his whole aim now was to get out, but it seemed impossible that he could escape through the window the opening being so small and the mud wall within affording no hold for into the hut through so small an opening was not wonderful, but for that he had the advantage of the hillside from which he could spring at the level almost of the window. As we waited for daylight, when I intended to shoot him, I heard the tiger spring once more, and this time his fore- paws and head appeared at the window, while he struggled to draw his body up through the opening. With my rifle muzzle not three feet from his ear I shot him in the head, and the tiger, slackening his hold slipped back into the hut before I could pull back the lever and fire again. We found him dead on the floor under the window at daylight, and after all that had happened we had venison steaks for breakfast.

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three days without a bite to eat. Mauser bullets whistling all around us with a cold rain soaking us through, and it was hard to see the fellows we had learned to love as brothers jumping full length in the air and falling dead; but in the excitement you get used to seeing them fall. 'But what I shall never forget is the bugler trying to blow taps when we were letting Capt. Capron and Ham Fish and five others down in that wet mud. Tears were running down his cheeks, and he had to try it three times before he could make out the faint 'Taps.' It is those scenes I see every bit as clear as flashes of lightning. We loved Capt. Capron every man like a father, and big, rough, good-hearted Ham Fish, too. That was the hardest part of my experience,' he said, and there was a bit of hoarseness in the last few words, eyes a bit dimmed as he turned in answer to the station master's call 'All aboard for the Santa Fe,' and disappeared in the hundred plain people. [The Mr. Wesley referred to above is a son of Mr. A. Z. Wesley formerly of this city. The latter served his apprenticeship in McMillan's here, and was later foreman in Roger Hunter's printing establishment. His son who distinguished himself during the war was born in this city and went to Denver, Col., at the age of 17 years. At the time of his enlistment he was foreman of the Santa Fe New Mexican. Mr. A. Z. Wesley is foreman of the Waycross Journal, Georgia.]

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