

Baboon joins instructor for coffee

By Mary Klemic
staff writer

A baboon is an unusual breakfast guest, but not necessarily a dangerous one.

So says Schoolcraft College instructor Ralph Miller, who once lost a cup of coffee to a baboon who helped himself.

That was just one experience Miller had over the Christmas holiday when he was among five people from the area who traveled to Kenya on a 12-day, 13,000-mile safari.

Miller said the incident with the baboon was nothing to be alarmed about, "as long as you don't interfere with them. They're only out for food," he said. "It was quite safe."

MILLER, A geography instructor at Schoolcraft College, travels to a different part of the world every Christmas holiday. He has spent past yuletide vacations in Greece, Egypt and South Africa.

Accompanying Miller this last holiday were biology instructor Harriet Morgan, student Mark Stevenson (both from Schoolcraft) and a Warren couple. They left Dec. 22 for New York, where they joined 15 others. The group then headed to Africa via KLM Royal Dutch Airlines.

The first stop was for 18 hours in Amsterdam. There the travelers took a boat ride down canals and visited the Ryks Museum and a place where diamonds were cut and polished.

IN KENYA the group stayed at sev-



Ralph Miller

eral different hotels and campgrounds, always in a reserve area. The incident with the baboon took place at the Tree-top Hotel.

Martin said actor William Holden and Queen Elizabeth have visited this hotel. It is built on stilts over a small lake that is a watering hole for a variety of animals. Miller saw large herds of elephants and cape buffalo there.

Baboons, monkeys and birds were plentiful in the surrounding trees. "I had gotten up the morning we were leaving, and was taking photos of the sunrise over Mt. Kenya," Miller recalled. "I had put my coffee cup down.

A baboon came up and drank the coffee and put the cup back in the saucer, then took a cookie and left."

The group visited Nairobi, Aberdare National Park, the Samburu National Reserve, Mt. Kenya National Park and the Masai Mara National Reserve.

THE TRAVELERS journeyed in a van with a top that lifted up, enabling them to take photos. Each person had a window seat.

"It was a film safari," Miller said. "There is no more hunting in Kenya."

The drives were almost always filled with surprises, as when the group followed several elephants over a small round hill and suddenly found themselves in a herd of 70.

"It was wall-to-wall elephants," Miller said. "It was just magnificent."

Then there was the evening the van ran out of gas in the wilderness. The group waited six hours before they were found.

"There we were, with a few hyenas eyeing us," Miller said. "But there was a full moon and the birds were chirping — it was quite nice. We started to joke and sing songs and waited for somebody to find us. And they did."

MILLER SAID he did not expect to see so many animals on the trip. He estimated the group saw 50,000 animals in eight days, including gazelles, zebras, lions, giraffes, hippos and a leopard.

"It was like being in a zoo, except you were the ones in the cage," Miller recalled. "It really was a magnificent chance to see animals in their element."

"What you see in a zoo are rather frustrated creatures. (In Kenya) they were very playful."

The van got so close, Miller said, that he could have touched a lion's paw. In Masai Mara, the travelers stayed in cloth tents with grass roofs. Monkeys and baboons would crawl on top.

MANY ANIMALS weren't afraid of humans, according to Miller. He described how storks would approach and try to take sandwiches from people at tea time, and how the lions snored in the sun, only occasionally glancing at the visitors with one eye.

The warm local weather over the holidays was cool compared to that in Kenya, where daytime temperatures averaged 82 to 85 degrees. The only snow was on the top of Mt. Kenya.



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