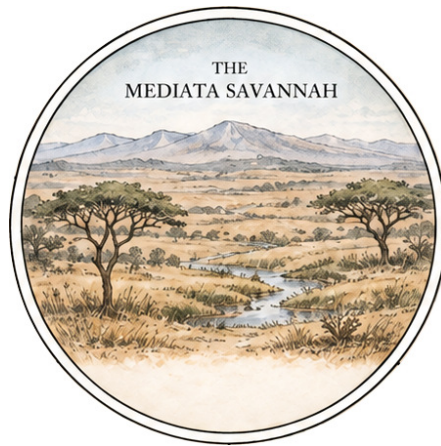


A NATURAL HISTORY
of the
Mediata Savannah

*Being a Systematic Account of the Flora, Fauna, and Ecological Character of
the Lufhan and Its Adjoining Waterways*



by
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With illustrations from field sketches by the author and her assistants



THIRD EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED

Arakcadian Royal Library Press

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Preface

to the Third Edition



IT is now thirteen years since the first edition of this work was set in type, and the luphan has, as it always does, continued to reveal itself in ways that humble the observer. The second edition corrected several embarrassing errors of classification — most notably the mistaken identification of the Banded Dust-Adder as a juvenile form of the Greater Savannah Python, an error which my colleague Relshan Kortis was kind enough to point out only in private — and added entries for seventeen species previously unrecorded in the Institute’s catalogues.

This third edition incorporates the fruits of three further field seasons, including an extended survey of the Dassea Shallows margins undertaken in 585 NA and a Poorneet-season expedition along the upper Bronze River corridor in 586 NA. Forty-nine new species entries have been added. Several existing entries have been revised in light of better observation, and I have expanded the sections on seasonal behaviour and ecological relationships between species, which were rightly criticised as thin in earlier editions.

I have also, at the urging of my editors, added brief notes on the practical uses of various species where these are well-established in Mediataan tradition. I remain a naturalist first and an herbalist never, and readers seeking medicinal or culinary guidance should consult the appropriate specialists. But to describe the luphan’s living things without acknowledging how its people live among them would be, I have come to believe, its own kind of incompleteness.

A note on terminology: I continue to use Mediataan common names throughout, with formal classification names where these have been agreed upon by the Institute. Where a species is known by different names in different settlements, I have listed the variants. The Lexicon of Mediataan compiled by Relshan Kortis remains the definitive reference for the language itself and I commend it to any reader unfamiliar with the tongue.

My thanks are owed, as ever, to the Institute for its continued support; to the Bronze Track caravan-eers who tolerate a naturalist’s pace; to the farmers, herders, and fisherfolk of every settlement between Arakcadia and Easthills who have shared their observations with patience and good humour; and to my field assistants Emik Toravel and Josa Duneï, without whose steady hands and sharp eyes this work would be much poorer.

Any errors that remain are, of course, my own.

Introduction

The Luphan as a Living System



THE Mediata Savannah—the luphan, in the language of its people—is the great central grassland of Canaan. It stretches from the margins of the Enchanted Forests in the west and northwest to the foothills of the Itumue Mountains in the east and northeast, and from the northern coastal reaches southward to the transitional scrublands that give way, eventually, to the Destitute Lands and the territories claimed by the Veurim Empire. Arakcadia Bay cuts deeply into its western flank, and the Bronze River—the luphan’s most important watercourse—threads through its heart before emptying into the bay.

It is a landscape that appears, at first encounter, to be simple. Grass and sky, the traveller says, and nothing else for days. But this is the impression of someone passing through on the Bronze Track at mid-day in Biderap, when the dry heat flattens everything into a haze of gold and dust. The naturalist who stops, kneels, and looks will find a system of extraordinary complexity: hundreds of plant species adapted to the severe oscillation between drought and flood; a web of animal life from the great nakva down to insects smaller than a grain of lushin; soils whose character changes over distances of a few hundred paces; and relationships between species that have been shaped by the luphan’s rhythms over millennia.

The savannah’s character is defined above all by its seasons. The seven-season Canaanese calendar maps closely onto the luphan’s ecological cycles. Biderap, the dry season, is the time of golden grass, dust, and fire—both natural and managed. The savannah contracts to its waterholes and river margins. In Poorneet, the rains return with force: torrential thunderstorms, flash flooding, and an explosion of green growth that transforms the landscape utterly within days. Buath Gurru, the flowering season, is when the luphan is at its most visually spectacular, carpeted with wildflowers whose colours and densities vary year to year in ways that remain only partly understood.

This book attempts to catalogue the living things of this landscape. It is not complete—I doubt it ever will be—but I hope it is useful.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

This work covers the Mediata Savannah proper: the central grasslands, the Bronze River corridor, the margins of Arakcadia Bay, the shores of the Dassea Shallows and the Jade Oasis where these border savan-

nah habitat, and the transitional zones where grassland meets forest or mountain. I have generally excluded species found only within the Enchanted Forests, the Iridescent Woods, or the Itumue Mountains proper, except where these species are also reliably observed in the savannah's edge habitats.

A NOTE ON NATURAL MAGIC

The reader will observe that certain species described in this book exhibit properties that might, in common speech, be called magical. I use the term “veshric” throughout—from the Mediata *veshkam*—to describe these properties, as it carries fewer political connotations than “magical” in current Arakcadian usage. The Institute's position, which I share, is that veshric properties in flora and fauna are natural phenomena: they are intrinsic to the organisms that exhibit them, they follow observable patterns, and they are subject to study. They are not the practice of magic and should not be confused with it. The savannah lion does not choose to be tawny; the moonbloom does not choose to glow. These are simply what these organisms are.

PART I

Flora



1	Grasses and Ground Cover	11
2	Trees and Woody Plants	23
3	Aquatic and Riverside Plants	35
4	Flowering Plants and Herbs	47
5	Fungi, Mosses, and Ground Organisms	61

Chapter I

Grasses and Ground Cover



The luphan is, fundamentally, a grassland, and its grasses are the foundation upon which every other form of life depends. The savannah supports a far greater diversity of grass species than is commonly appreciated, and their distribution is governed by soil type, drainage, proximity to water, grazing pressure, and fire history.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Savannah Speargrass <i>Luluphan vulgaris</i>	12
Redthread Grass <i>Luluphan krularis</i>	14
Whispergrass <i>Luluphan susurrans</i>	16
Ironmat <i>Dumaluphan ferrea</i>	18
Ghost-grass <i>Luluphan noctiluma</i>	20

Savannah Speargrass

Luluphan vulgaris



THE dominant grass of the open luphan and the species most responsible for the savannah's characteristic appearance. Savannah speargrass grows in dense tussocks to a height of roughly one to one and a half metres in good conditions, with stiff, upright stems terminating in narrow, pointed seed-heads that give the species its common name. In Biderap it dries to the familiar golden colour that defines the dry-season landscape; in Poorneet it greens rapidly from the base, and new growth can be observed within days of the first substantial rain.

Speargrass is well-adapted to fire. Its growing points sit at or below ground level, protected by the dense tussock base, and established plants recover quickly after burning. Indeed, the species depends on periodic fire to prevent encroachment by woody plants, and areas where burning has been suppressed for several years show a marked decline in speargrass vigour and an increase in scrub cover. The Mediatan practice of managed dry-season burning, far from damaging the luphan, is one of the principal mechanisms by which its grassland character is maintained.

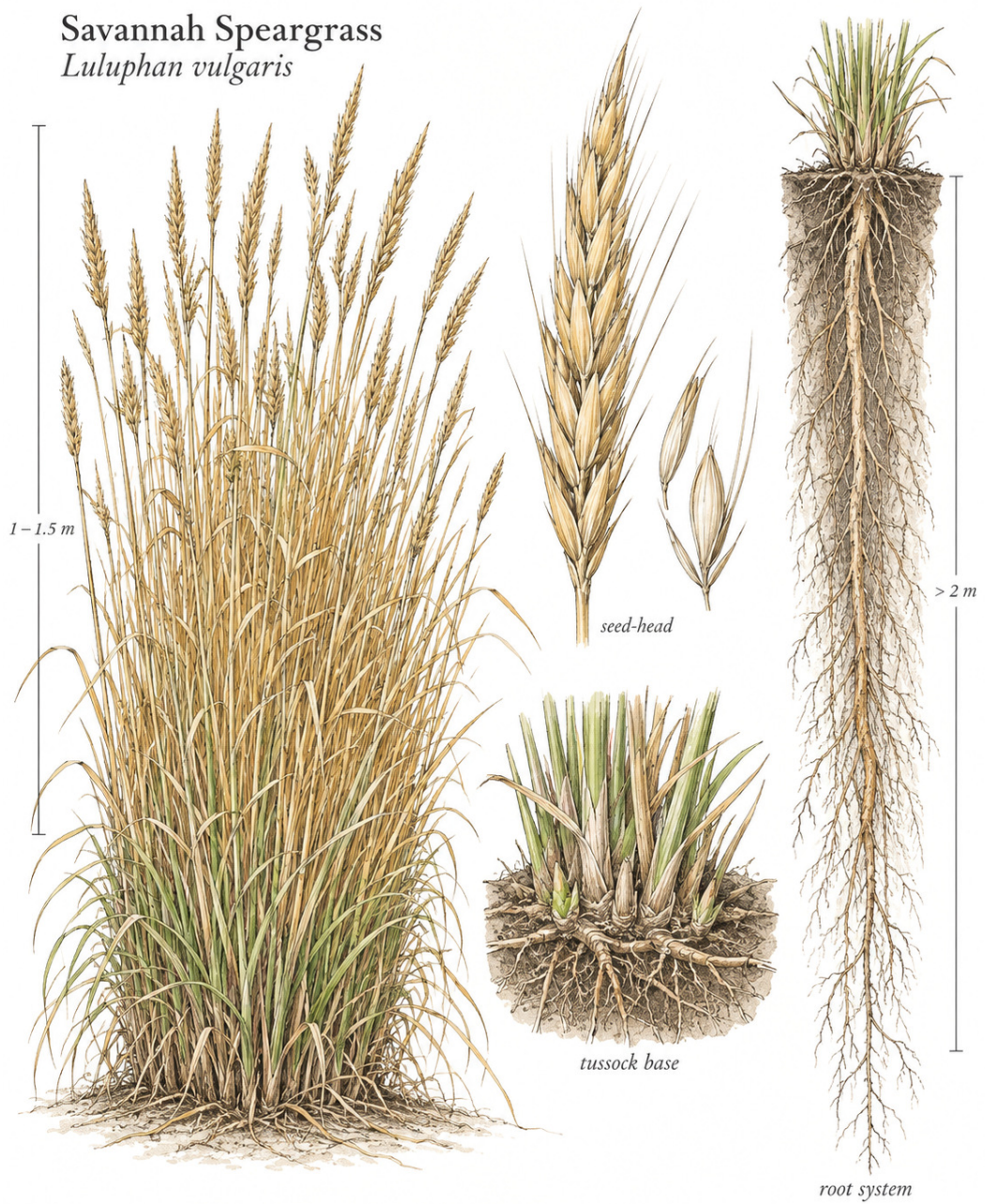
THIRD EDITION NOTE

Analysis of root systems during the 585 NA Dassea survey confirms that mature speargrass tussocks maintain living root tissue to depths exceeding two metres, substantially deeper than previously estimated. This likely explains the speed of post-fire recovery.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Savannah Speargrass

Luluphan vulgaris



SAVANNAH SPEARGRASS

Luluphan vulgaris

Redthread Grass

Luluphan krularis



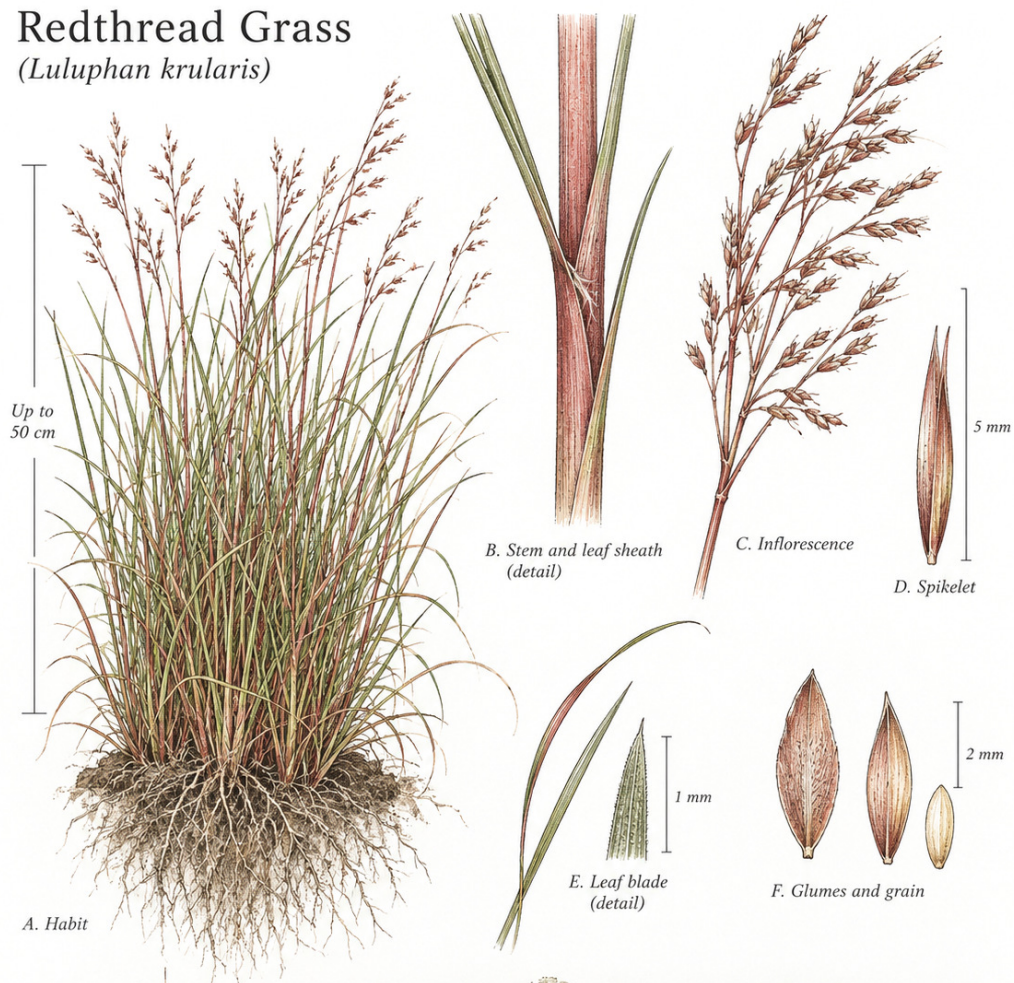
A shorter grass, seldom exceeding half a metre, distinguished by the reddish tinge of its stems and the fine, thread-like quality of its leaves. Redthread grass favours the heavier clay soils of the lower floodplain and is an indicator of seasonal waterlogging. It is less tolerant of fire than speargrass and tends to dominate in areas where standing water during Poorneet suppresses burning.

Herders regard redthread as good early-season fodder—it greens before the larger grasses—and its presence is taken as a sign of reliable water access nearby.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Redthread Grass

(*Luluphan krularis*)



G. In habitat — seasonally waterlogged floodplain

REDTHREAD GRASS
Luluphan krularis

Whispergrass

Luluphan susurrans



A fine-leaved grass found in loose, low-growing mats along exposed ridgelines and hilltops. Whispergrass is named for the distinctive soft rustling sound it produces in even light wind, caused by the unusual flattened cross-section of its leaves, which vibrate at a frequency slightly below that of other grasses. In stronger winds, large stands of whispergrass can produce a continuous murmuring tone that is audible at some distance.

Mediatan herders have long claimed that changes in the pitch and character of whispergrass sound predict shifts in weather, and there is some observational basis for this: the grass's response to humidity-driven changes in air density does appear to produce subtly different tones in advance of rain. The effect is modest and unreliable as a forecasting method, but it is not imaginary.

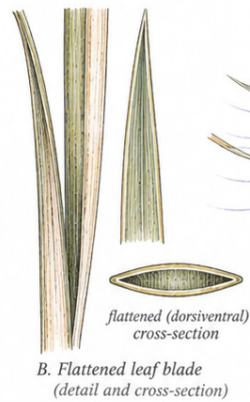
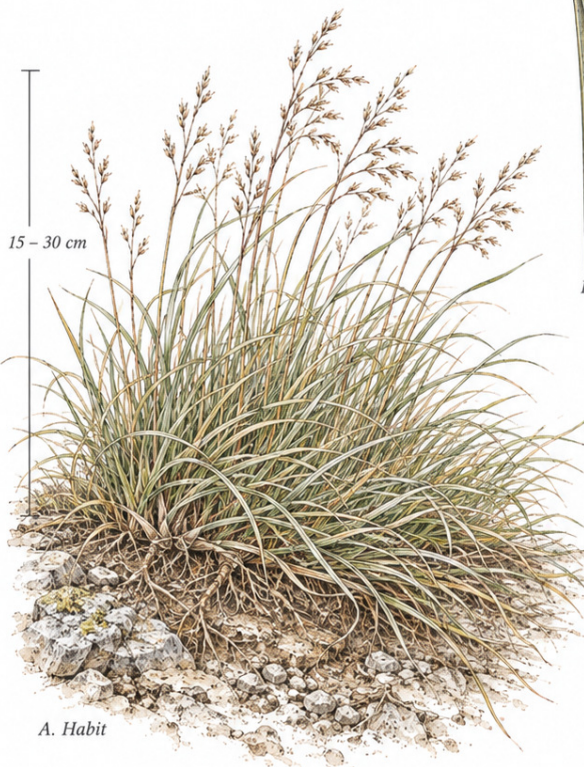
SECOND EDITION CORRECTION

The first edition listed this species as *Luluphan ventosa*. The name has been revised following the Institute's 578 NA nomenclature review.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Whispergrass

Luluphan susurrans



WHISPERGRASS
Luluphan susurrans

Ironmat

Dumaluphan ferrea



A tough, low-growing ground cover found on the hardpan clay soils of the western savannah, particularly in the areas surrounding the upper basin. Ironmat forms dense, almost impenetrable mats of wiry stems and small, hard leaves that resist both drought and grazing with equal stubbornness. It is of little use to livestock and is generally regarded by farmers as a nuisance, though it plays an important role in preventing erosion on exposed clay surfaces.

The roots of ironmat produce a faint reddish dye that leaches into the surrounding soil, contributing to the characteristic colour of the arlak silt deposits in the upper farmland zone.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Ironmat

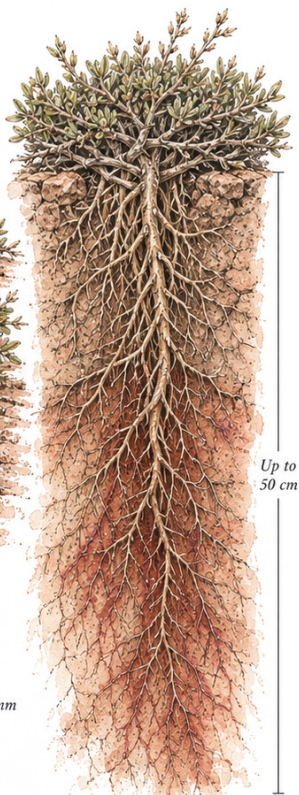
Dumaluphan ferrea



A. Habit



B. Stem and leaf detail



C. Root system and red dye staining



D. In habitat — hardpan clay of the upper basin

IRONMAT
Dumaluphan ferrea

Ghost-grass

Luluphan noctiluma



A species of considerable botanical interest, found in scattered patches across the central and eastern savannah, most commonly on well-drained sandy soils near termite mounds. Ghost-grass is unremarkable by day — a modest clumping grass with pale, slightly waxy leaves — but at night, particularly in the still hours before dawn, its leaf surfaces emit a faint, cold luminescence. The light is subtle: visible to the adapted eye on a dark night, but easily overlooked. It is most pronounced during Buath Gurru and weakest in Biderap.

The mechanism of this luminescence is not fully understood. It does not appear to be bioluminescent in the manner of certain fungi; no luminescent organisms have been found on or within the leaf tissue. The current hypothesis, proposed by my predecessor Welseris, is that the waxy coating of the leaves slowly absorbs and re-emits light over the course of the night, a form of phosphorescence. I am not entirely satisfied with this explanation, as it does not account for the seasonal variation in intensity, but I have none better to offer.

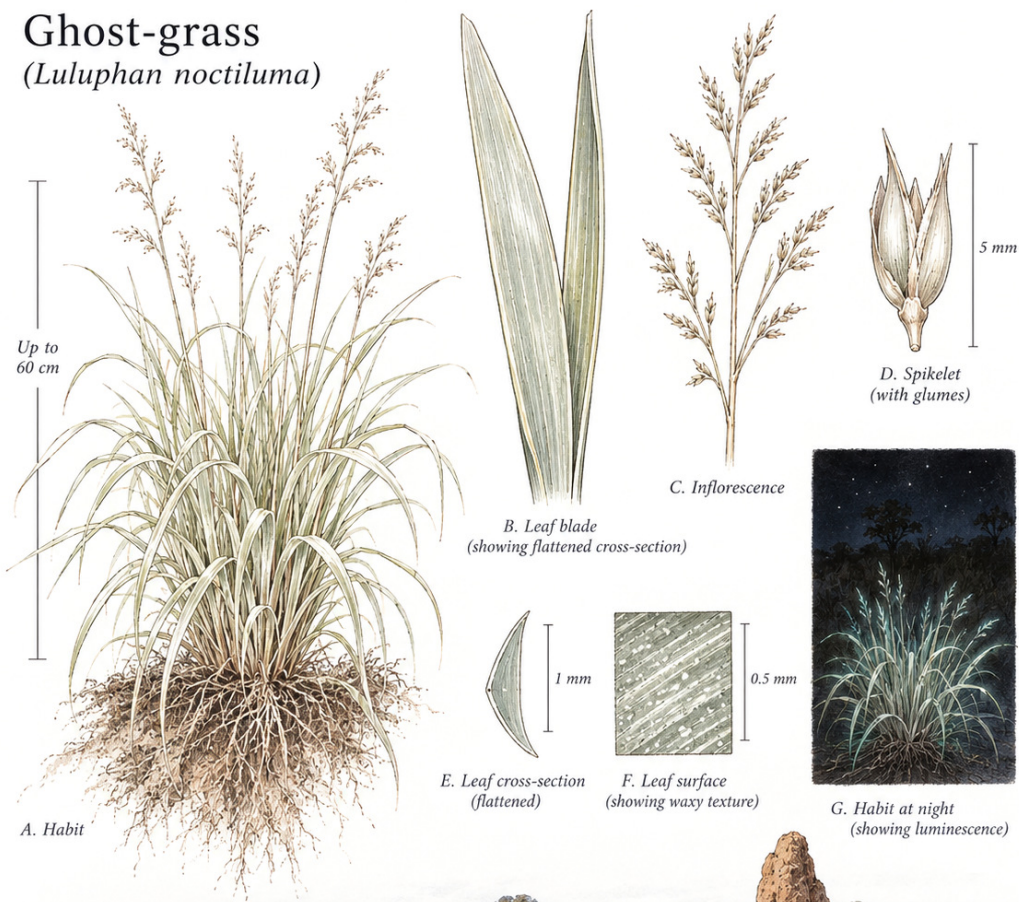
Mediatan tradition holds that ghost-grass marks places where the earth's *kam* — its life-force or spirit — is close to the surface. Herders avoid camping on ghost-grass patches, not from fear but from a sense that such places should be left undisturbed.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

Josa Dunei's field observations during the 586 NA expedition recorded ghost-grass luminescence persisting for up to seven hours after sunset on warm, humid nights in late Buath Gurru, considerably longer than previously documented. The seasonal peak appears to correlate with the flowering period of the species, suggesting a possible reproductive function — perhaps attracting nocturnal pollinators. Further study is warranted.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Ghost-grass (*Luluphan noctiluma*)



H. In habitat — open savannah on sandy soils, often near termite mounds

GHOST-GRASS
Luluphan noctiluma

Chapter 2

Trees and Woody Plants



Trees are the exception rather than the rule on the open luphan, but where they occur — along watercourses, around permanent water sources, on rocky outcrops, and at the forest margins — they are of considerable ecological importance, providing shade, shelter, food, and structure for a wide range of dependent species.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Bronzebark Acacia <i>Lutanshola akacea</i>	24
Drought-thorn <i>Lutanvesh karaduma</i>	26
Riverblood Willow <i>Lutanaru sanguinea</i>	28
Stonebark Fig <i>Lutankara magna</i>	30
Candlewood <i>Lutankemu lucens</i>	32

Bronzebark Acacia

Lutanshola akacea



THE most characteristic tree of the Mediatan Savannah and the species most frequently meant when Mediatan speakers refer to *lutan* without further qualification. Bronzebark acacias are medium-sized trees, typically five to eight metres tall, with broad, flat-topped crowns that cast the wide pools of shade that are so valued by travellers and livestock alike. The common name refers to the distinctive bronze-gold colour of the bark, which flakes in papery strips and is particularly striking in late afternoon light.

Bronzebark acacias are found throughout the savannah wherever soils are deep enough to support their extensive root systems, but they are most abundant along seasonal watercourses and in the scattered groves that dot the landscape between settlements. They are deep-rooted and drought-tolerant, maintaining green foliage well into Biderap when the grasses around them have dried.

The pods produced in Garrawang are an important food source for both wildlife and livestock. Lushu herds gather beneath fruiting acacias in numbers, and the competition for fallen pods between herd beasts, birds, and insects is one of the minor spectacles of the season.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Bronzebark Acacia

(*Lutanshola akacea*)

A NATURAL HISTORY
OF THE MEDIATTA SAVANNAH

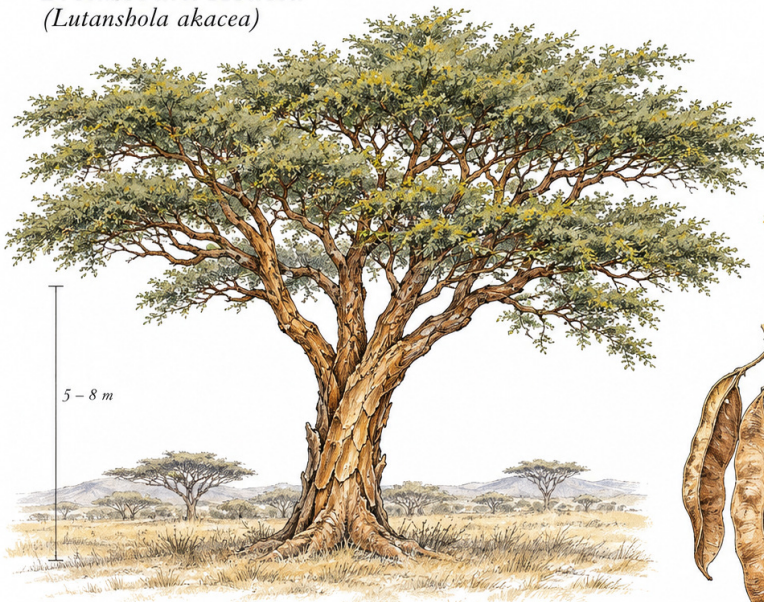


Fig. 1. Mature tree, habit



Fig. 2. Flowering branch



Fig. 3. Seed pods
(and section)



Fig. 4. Seeds



Fig. 5. Bark detail



Fig. 6. Leaflet detail
(underside and upper side)



Fig. 7. Root system
(partial, schematic)

BRONZEBARK ACACIA

Lutanshola akacea

Drought-thorn

Lutanvesh karaduma



A twisted, thorny shrub-tree that rarely exceeds three metres in height but can live to extraordinary age—specimens in the western savannah with trunk diameters suggesting centuries of growth are not uncommon. Drought-thorn favours rocky ground and exposed hilltops where competition from grasses is reduced. Its deep taproot can reach water at depths that would be inaccessible to most other plants.

The thorns are formidable—up to eight centimetres long, hard as bone, and slightly curved—and provide nesting sites for several bird species that use the thorns as protection against predators. The wood is extremely dense and is prized for tool handles and small carvings, though the difficulty of working it limits its use.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

The first edition's claim that drought-thorn produces no flowers has been corrected since the second edition. The species does flower, but only after heavy early-season rains following a particularly dry Biderap—a combination that occurs perhaps twice in a decade. The flowers are small, pale yellow, and strongly scented, appearing for only three to four days. I observed this flowering for the first time myself in 583 NA and can attest that it is easy to miss.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Drought-thorn
(*Lutanvesh karaduma*)

A NATURAL HISTORY
OF THE MEDIATTA SAVANNAH

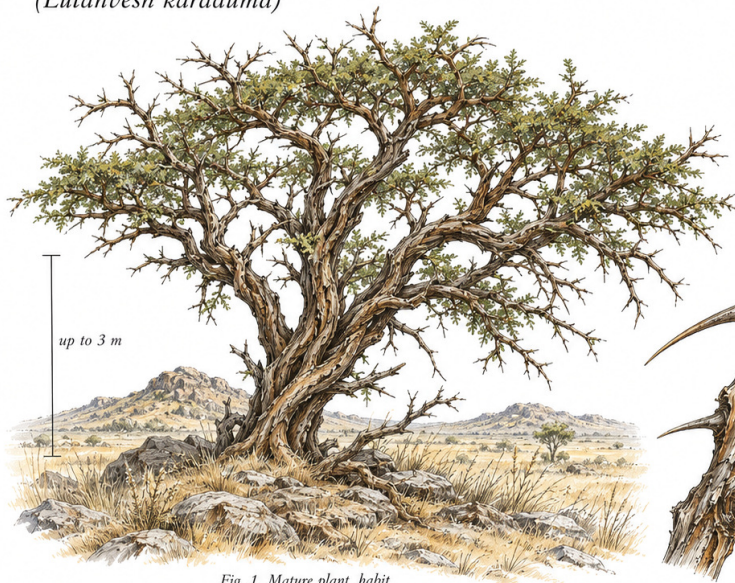


Fig. 1. Mature plant, habit



Fig. 2. Flowering branch
(rare; enlarged)



Fig. 3. Thorns
(up to 8 cm)



Fig. 4. Fruit and seeds
(rare)



Fig. 5. Bark detail



Fig. 6. Leaf detail
(upper and underside)

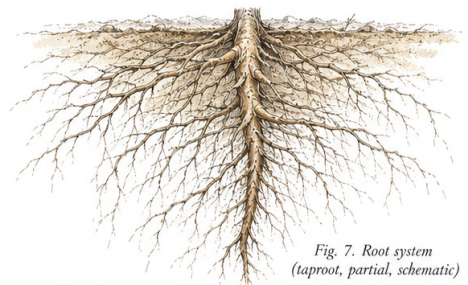


Fig. 7. Root system
(taproot, partial, schematic)

DROUGHT-THORN

Lutanvesh karaduma

Riverblood Willow

Lutanaru sanguinea



A graceful tree of the Bronze River margins and the shores of permanent water bodies, recognisable by the deep red colour of its inner bark, which is visible where the pale outer bark has cracked or peeled. Riverblood willows grow to six or seven metres, with long, trailing branches that sweep the water surface. They are entirely dependent on permanent water access and are never found more than a few dozen paces from a river, lake, or reliable spring.

The red inner bark is astringent and has been used in Mediatan folk medicine as a poultice for cuts and insect stings. The wood is soft, fine-grained, and easily worked when green, making it popular for rough furniture and temporary construction.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Riverblood Willow (*Lutanaru sanguinea*)

A NATURAL HISTORY
OF THE MEDIATTA SAVANNAH

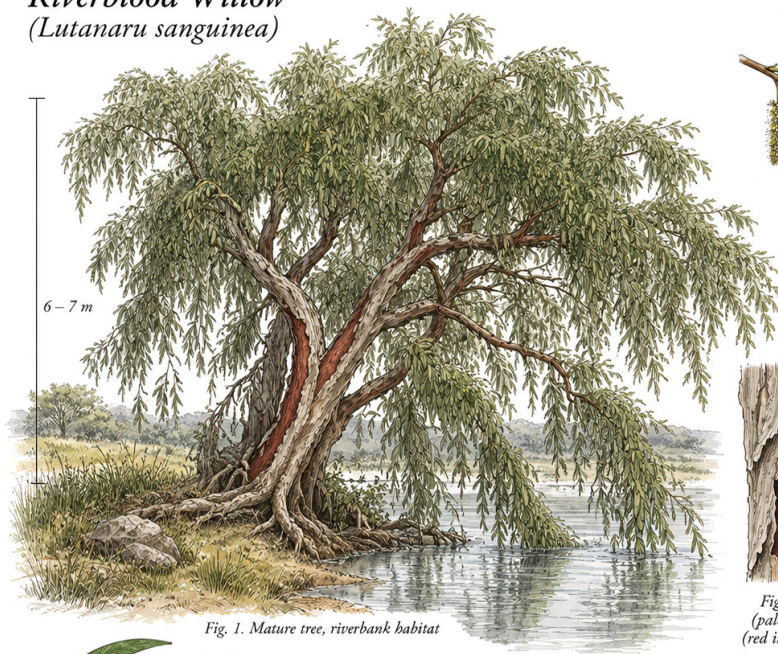


Fig. 1. Mature tree, riverbank habitat



Fig. 2. Flowering branch
(with catkins)



Fig. 3. Bark detail
(pale outer bark with
red inner bark exposed)



Fig. 4. Seeds
(from capsule)

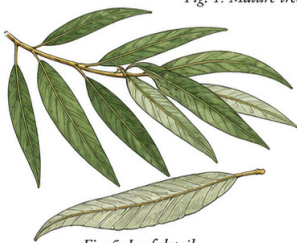


Fig. 5. Leaf detail
(upper and underside)



Fig. 6. Wood section
(showing red inner heartwood)

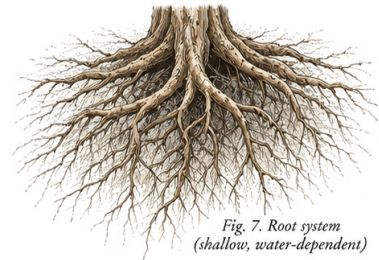


Fig. 7. Root system
(shallow, water-dependent)

RIVERBLOOD WILLOW

Lutanaru sanguinea

Stonebark Fig

Lutankara magna



THE largest tree regularly found in the savannah, capable of reaching fifteen metres in height with a trunk diameter of two or more metres in mature specimens. Stonebark figs are named for the extraordinary hardness of their bark, which develops a thick, mineralised outer layer over the course of decades. Striking a mature stonebark's trunk with a metal tool produces a ringing sound and leaves no mark. The bark's mineral content appears to be drawn from groundwater and deposited gradually in the outer layers — a process I have termed calcite accretion, by analogy with similar processes in marine organisms.

Stonebark figs are relatively rare, found primarily at the margins of the Jade Oasis and in sheltered valleys in the eastern savannah near the Itumue foothills. They are immensely long-lived; the largest specimens near the Jade Oasis are estimated, on the basis of bark-layer analysis, to be upwards of a thousand years old. Their root systems are extensive and support a complex community of fungi, insects, and burrowing animals.

The figs produced by these trees are edible, if somewhat gritty, and are eaten by a wide range of animals and birds. They are also the preferred roost of the Greater Canaan Fruit Bat (see Chapter 7).

SECOND EDITION NOTE

The mineralisation process of stonebark fig bark has been confirmed as genuinely vesbrie in character. Standard calcite deposition does not account for the density or hardness achieved, and bark samples analysed at the Institute show trace crystalline structures that do not correspond to any known mineral formation process. The trees appear to concentrate and organise dissolved minerals through means that are, for the present, beyond our understanding. This does not make the stonebark fig dangerous or unusual in the common sense—it is simply a tree that makes very good bark.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Stonebark Fig (*Lutankara magna*)

A NATURAL HISTORY
OF THE MEDIATTA SAVANNAH

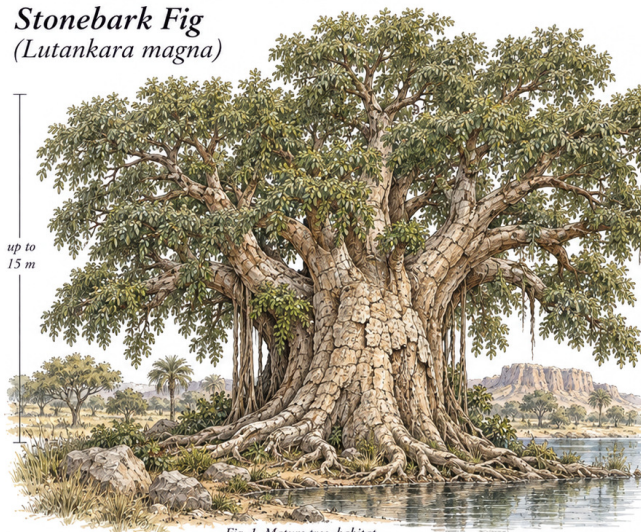


Fig. 1. Mature tree, habitat
(growing at the margin of the Jade Oasis)



Fig. 2. Fruiting branch



Fig. 3. Bark detail
(mineralised outer bark with
crystalline structure)



Fig. 4. Fruit and section
(edible)



Fig. 5. Leaf detail
(upper and underside)

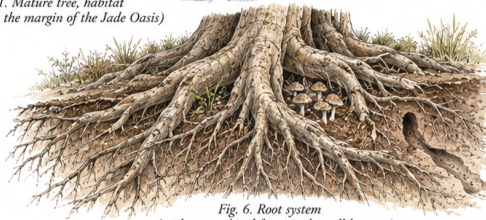


Fig. 6. Root system
(with mycorrhizal fungi and small burrow)



Fig. 7. Roosting detail
(Greater Caneen Fruit Bats)

STONEBARK FIG

Lutankara magna

Candlewood

Lutankemu lucens



A slender, straight-trunked tree of the eastern savannah margins, where grassland gives way to the scrub and broken ground of the Itumue foothills. Candlewood grows to four or five metres and is recognised by its pale, almost white bark and the fact that its heartwood, when cut and dried, can be ignited with remarkable ease and burns with a steady, bright flame and very little smoke for an extended period.

This property makes candlewood the preferred source of torches, fire-starting kindling, and lamp fuel throughout the eastern settlements. The heartwood contains a resinous oil with a faint, pleasant scent reminiscent of warm honey, and sticks of dried candlewood are burned in homes during Waring for both warmth and fragrance.

The ease of burning has an obvious ecological consequence: candlewood stands are highly vulnerable to wildfire, and the species survives primarily because its preferred rocky, sparsely grassed habitat at the savannah-mountain margin is less fire-prone than the open grassland.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Candlewood (*Lutankemu lucens*)

A NATURAL HISTORY
OF THE MEDIATA SAVANNAH

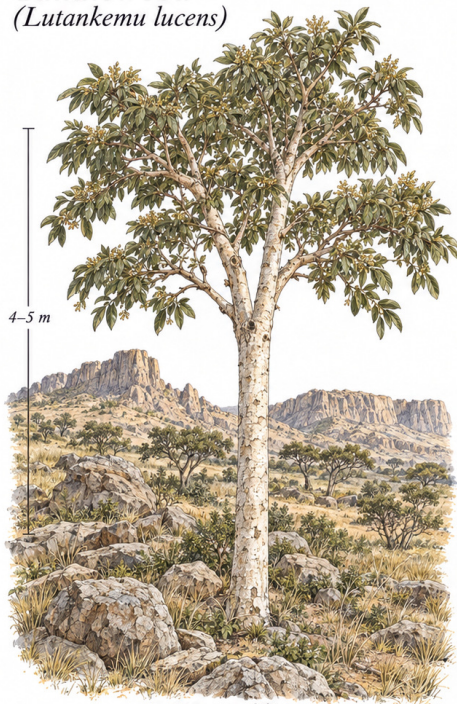


Fig. 1. Mature tree, habitat
(growing on rocky ground at the foothills of the Itumue range)



Fig. 2. Bark detail
(pale, almost white outer bark)



Fig. 3. Wood section
(resinous, golden heartwood)



Fig. 4. Burning candlewood
(steady bright flame,
very little smoke)



Fig. 5. Leaf and twig detail
(upper and underside)



Fig. 6. Root system
(adapted to rocky, well-drained ground)



Fig. 7. Dried candlewood sticks
(used for torches and kindling)

CANDLEWOOD
Lutankemu lucens

Chapter 3

Aquatic and Riverside Plants



The Bronze River, its tributaries, the shores of Arakcadia Bay, the Dassea Shallows, and the seasonal wetlands of the floodplain support a distinct plant community adapted to waterlogged or submerged conditions.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Bronze-reed <i>Arulutan aenea</i>	36
Singing Reed <i>Arulutan canora</i>	38
Jadeglass Berry <i>Arulutan vitrea jadensis</i>	40
Mire-lantern <i>Aruluvel palustris</i>	42
Dassea Lotus <i>Aruluvel dassea</i>	44

Bronze-reed

Arulutan aenea



THE ubiquitous tall reed of the Bronze River margins, growing in dense stands along quieter stretches and in backwater pools. Bronze-reed reaches heights of three to four metres and forms near-impenetrable thickets that provide essential nesting habitat for water birds and shelter for fish and amphibians.

The young shoots are a staple food item throughout the savannah. Harvested in early Poorneet when they are tender and slightly sweet, bronze-reed shoots are pickled in brine for preservation and used in stews, broths, and the ubiquitous scholar's bowl. The mature stems are used for thatching, mat-weaving, and the construction of fish traps.

— *Entry substantially unchanged from the first edition. Bronze-reed is bronze-reed; it has not surprised me.*

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Bronze-reed

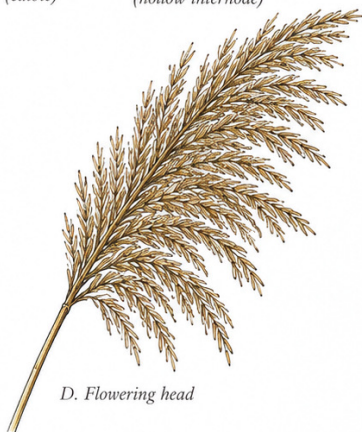
(*Arulutan aenea*)



B. Young shoot
(edible)



C. Stem section
(hollow internode)



D. Flowering head



A. Mature plant
(in habitat)



E. Typical riverside stand

BRONZE-REED

Arulutan aenea

Singing Reed

Arulutan canora



A close relative of the common bronze-reed, distinguished by the slightly wider, more rigid stems and, most notably, by the musical tones produced when wind passes over broken or cut stem-tops. The effect is caused by the reed's unusually regular internal chambering, which creates a series of resonant cavities. A stand of singing reeds in a steady breeze can produce a chord of overlapping tones that is, by common consensus, one of the more pleasant sounds the savannah has to offer.

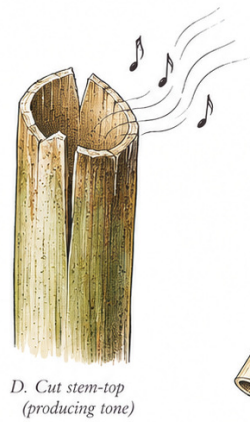
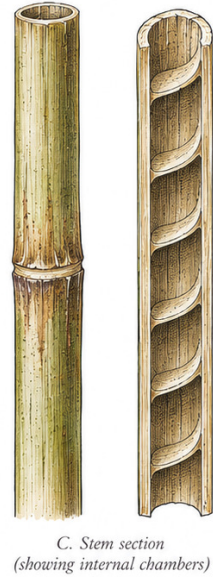
Singing reeds grow in smaller, more scattered stands than common bronze-reed, favouring slightly faster-flowing water. They are found along the middle Bronze River, around the eastern margins of Arakadia Bay, and at the Dassea Shallows outflow.

Children throughout the savannah cut singing-reed stems to make simple flutes, and the Mediatan musical tradition arguably owes more to this plant than to any human invention.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Singing Reed

(*Arulutan canora*)



SINGING REED
Arulutan canora

Jadeglass Berry

Arulutan vitrea jadensis

commonly *Glimmerberry*



A low, sprawling shrub of the wetter river margins and the bay shore, producing clusters of small, round berries with a distinctive translucent green colour that gives them the appearance of tiny beads of coloured glass. Glimmerberries are perhaps the most culturally significant plant of the Bronze River corridor, though their significance is not entirely straightforward.

The berries contain a compound — not yet fully characterised by the Institute — that produces, when consumed in sufficient quantity, a mild euphoric and perceptual-softening effect. In small doses this is experienced as a pleasant relaxation; in larger doses it produces visual distortions, a sense of time dilation, and, reportedly, a heightened appreciation for music. The effect is generally regarded as harmless if moderate, though habitual overconsumption can produce lethargy and a certain vagueness of manner that is not entirely unfamiliar in certain districts of Arakcadia.

Glimmerberries are a regulated botanical intoxicant within the Arakcadian Congress. Their sale is lawful but taxed, and consumption in public is frowned upon in polite society while being perfectly commonplace in less polite society. The berries are eaten fresh, dried, or brewed into a tea; the latter method is considered the most refined.

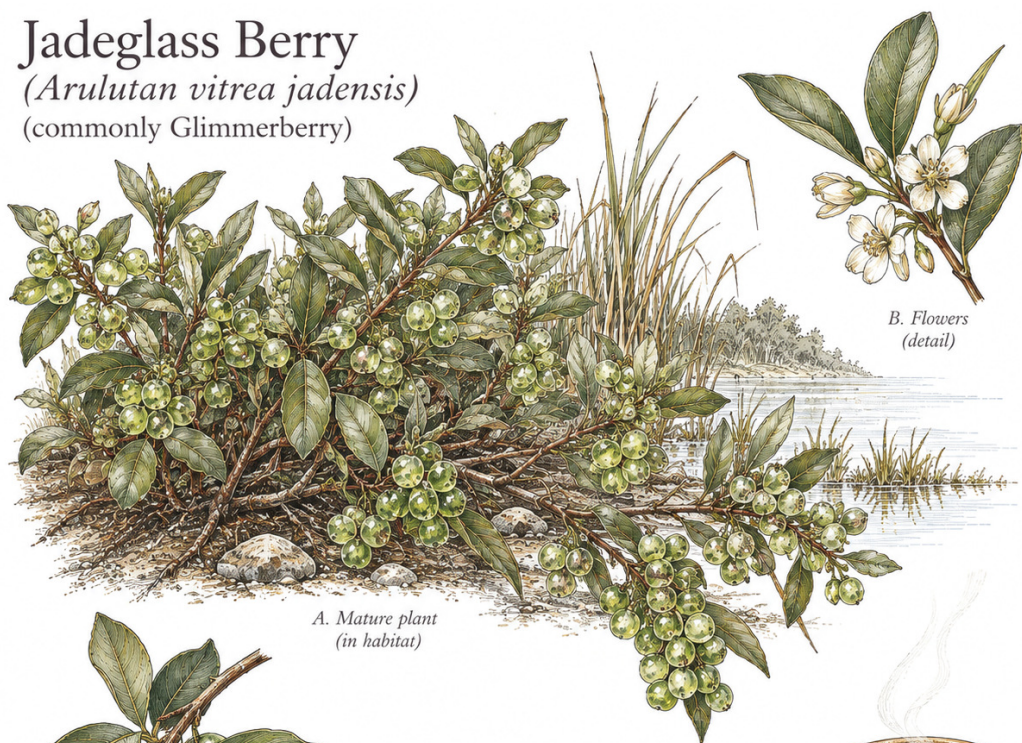
From a botanical standpoint, the mechanism of the berries' psychoactive effect is of considerable interest. The compound appears to be mildly veshric in character — it does not correspond precisely to any known class of ordinary plant alkaloid, and its effects are reported to be subtly different depending on the time of harvest relative to the lunar cycle. Whether this represents genuine veshric influence or simply the natural variation expected of any plant compound remains an open question.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

The 586 NA upper Bronze River survey documented glimmerberry shrubs growing at considerably higher elevations than previously recorded, including several substantial stands near the river's mountain headwaters. These high-altitude specimens produce smaller, more intensely coloured berries whose psychoactive compound is reportedly more concentrated. The local name for these berries, roughly translated, is "the ones that make you see two of the moon." I record this without endorsement.

Jadeglass Berry

(*Arulutan vitrea jadensis*)
(commonly Glimmerberry)



A. Mature plant
(in habitat)



B. Flowers
(detail)



C. Berry cluster
(ripe)



D. Berry (whole and section)

1 cm



E. Dried berries
(common form)



F. Glimmerberry tea
(infusion)

JADEGLASS BERRY
Arulutan vitrea jadensis

Mire-lantern

Aruluvel palustris



A floating aquatic plant found in still or slow-moving water throughout the savannah, most abundantly in the seasonal pools and backwaters that form during Poorneet. Mire-lantern produces broad, flat leaves that lie on the water surface and, during its flowering period in late Poorneet and early Buath Gurru, a single spherical flower-head on a short stalk that rises just above the water.

The flower-head is the plant's notable feature. It is bioluminescent, producing a steady, warm yellow-orange glow from dusk until the early hours of the morning. The luminescence is generated by a symbiotic colony of microorganisms living within the flower tissue — one of only a handful of confirmed cases of bioluminescent symbiosis in Canaanese flora. The effect, when hundreds of mire-lanterns are in flower across a flooded plain on a still night, is remarkable. Travellers encountering it for the first time frequently describe it as one of the most beautiful sights in Canaan.

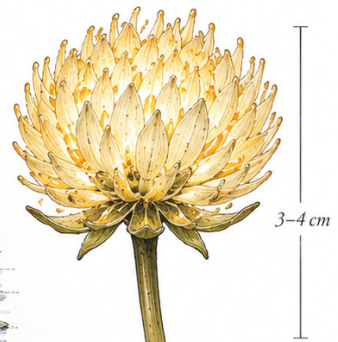
The luminescence serves an obvious purpose: it attracts the nocturnal insects that pollinate the flower. Less obviously, it also attracts small fish and amphibians that feed on the gathered insects, and whose waste products in turn fertilise the water around the plant. The mire-lantern thus engineers a small, self-sustaining ecosystem around itself — a quality I find endlessly admirable in a floating weed.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Mire-lantern (*Aruluvel palustris*)



A. Plant in habitat (flowering)

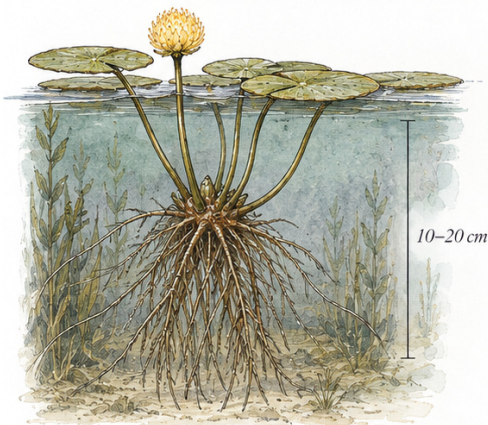


B. Flower head
(luminous, night view)



C. Floating leaf (upper surface)

5-12 cm



D. Plant structure (side view)



Symbiotic luminescent
microorganisms
(within flower tissue)

E. Flower head (section)



F. Flower head at night

MIRE-LANTERN
Aruluvel palustris

Dassea Lotus

Aruluvel dassa



FOUND exclusively in the Dassea Shallows and the immediate surroundings, this large aquatic plant produces broad, waxy leaves up to half a metre across and spectacular blue-white flowers during Buath Gurru. The flowers open at dawn and close at dusk, tracking the sun's position across the sky.

The *Dassea* lotus is of particular interest because of its root system, which extends deep into the lake-bed sediment and appears to play a role in water purification. Water near dense lotus stands is noticeably clearer than in other parts of the shallows, and local fisherfolk have long maintained that fish caught near the lotus beds taste better. Analysis of the root exudates during the 585 NA *Dassea* survey confirmed that the lotus secretes compounds that bind to and precipitate suspended sediment and certain dissolved minerals, effectively filtering the surrounding water. Whether this constitutes a veshric property or an unusually efficient form of ordinary biological chemistry is, I confess, a question I have not resolved to my own satisfaction.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Dassea Lotus

(*Aruluvel dassea*)



A. Plant in habitat
(Dassea Shallows)



B. Flower (open)
(morning)



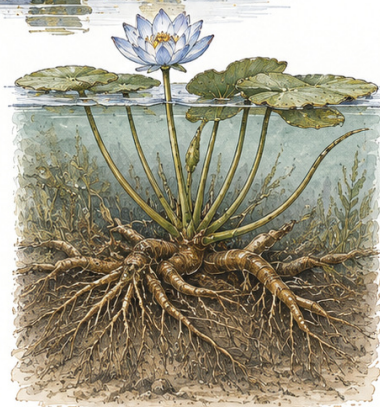
C. Flower (closed)
(evening)

15–20 cm



D. Leaf (upper surface)

30–50 cm



E. Plant structure (section)



F. Rhizome and roots
(section)

DASSEA LOTUS

Aruluvel dassea

Chapter 4

Flowering Plants and Herbs



Beyond the grasses and the aquatic plants, the luphan supports a diverse community of flowering herbs, many of which are most visible during the spectacular wildflower displays of Buath Gurru.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Firecrown <i>Luvelkemu regalis</i>	48
Moonbloom <i>Luvel nelaris</i>	50
Dustwort <i>Luvel dumaris</i>	52
Bloodroot <i>Luvel krularis profunda</i>	54
Velvet Burr <i>Luvel mollis spinosa</i>	56
Sorrow's Wisp	58

Firecrown

Luvelkemu regalis



THE signature wildflower of the Mediata Savannah and arguably the most visually striking plant in the region. Firecrown produces dense clusters of vivid orange-red flowers atop tall stems that rise above the surrounding grass during mid-Buath Gurru, creating swathes of colour visible from great distances. In good years, the firecrown bloom can turn entire hillsides red-orange, an event that draws appreciative comment even from those who ordinarily pay no attention to plants.

Firecrown is a fire-adapted species whose seeds require exposure to heat or smoke to germinate. It is therefore most abundant in areas with a regular burning history and may be entirely absent from areas that have not burned for several years. This is one of the clearest examples of the savannah's dependence on fire as an ecological process.

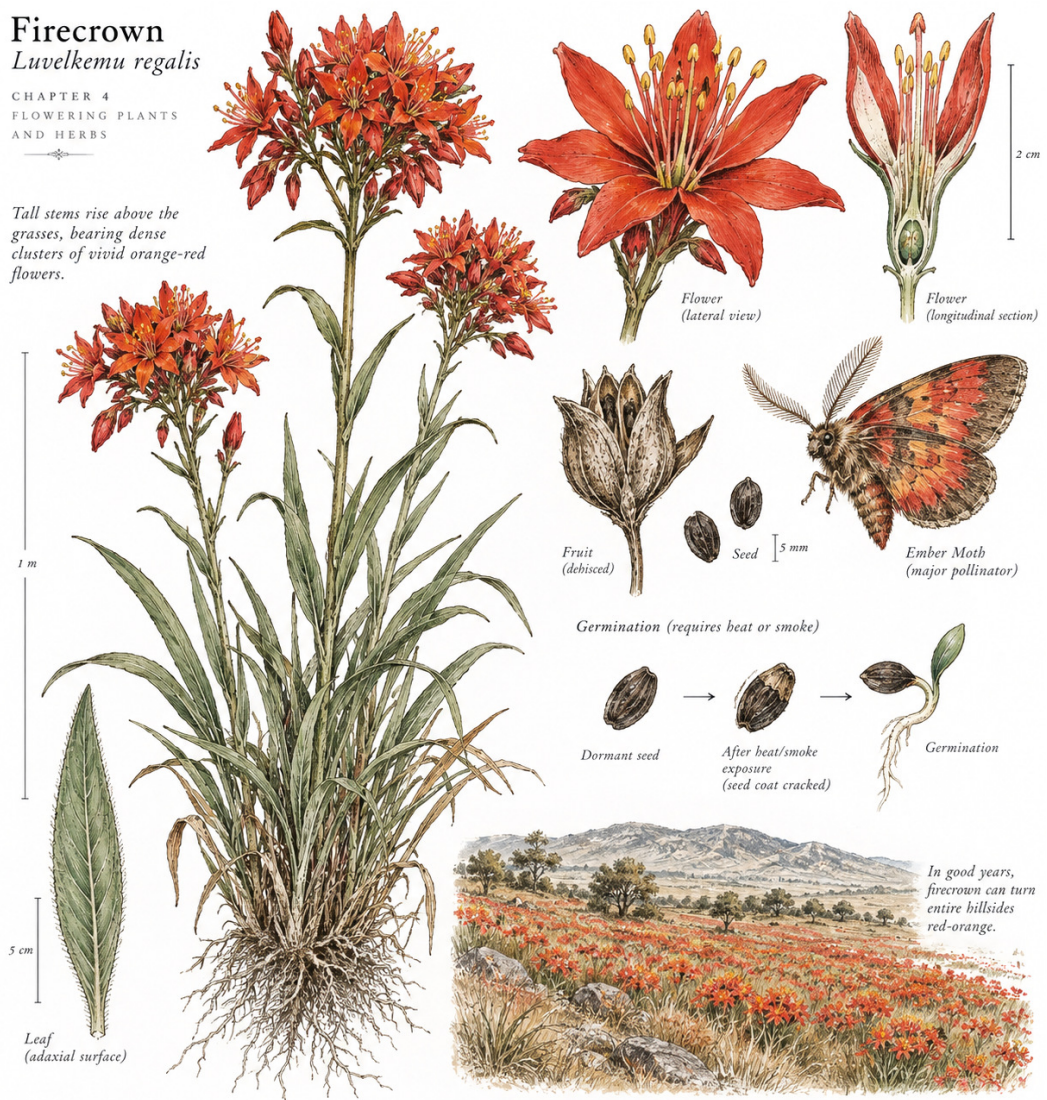
The flowers are visited by a wide range of pollinators, most notably the Ember Moth (see Chapter 10).

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Firecrown *Luvelkemu regalis*

CHAPTER 4
FLOWERING PLANTS
AND HERBS

Tall stems rise above the
grasses, bearing dense
clusters of vivid orange-red
flowers.



FIRECROWN
Luvelkemu regalis

Moonbloom

Luvel nelaris



A low-growing herb found in scattered colonies across the savannah, most commonly in the partial shade of bronzebark acacia groves. Moonbloom is unremarkable during the day — a rosette of soft, grey-green leaves pressed close to the ground. At night, however, it produces small, delicate white flowers that open after sunset and close again before dawn, emitting a faint silvery luminescence that is visible in the same manner as ghost-grass, though the effect is distinctly different in character: softer, cooler, and more diffuse.

The luminescence is strongest under full moonlight and appears to be stimulated by it, leading to the common name. Moonbloom growing in deep shade or on overcast nights produces little or no light, though it still opens its flowers. The mechanism is poorly understood but is generally classified as mildly veshric.

Moonbloom has a long history of use in Mediatan folk medicine. A tea brewed from the dried flowers is widely taken as a mild sedative and sleep aid, and is one of the few herbal remedies whose efficacy is acknowledged even by the more sceptical members of the Institute's medical faculty. The active compound has not been isolated.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

I have received multiple reports, which I have not been able to confirm personally, that moonbloom colonies growing near the margins of the Enchanted Forests produce significantly brighter luminescence than those in the open savannah. If confirmed, this would be consistent with the general pattern of veshric intensification near areas of high ambient magic.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Moonbloom

(*Luvel nellaris*)

Family: Luvianthaceae



A. Daytime rosette



B. Flower
(side view)



C. Flower
(top view)



D. Flower
(longitudinal section)



E. Seed capsule
(dry)



F. Seeds



G. Leaf
(upper surface)



H. Leaf
(underside)

2-5 cm



I. Moonbloom in flower (night)

MOONBLOOM

Luvel nellaris

Dustwort

Luvel dumaris



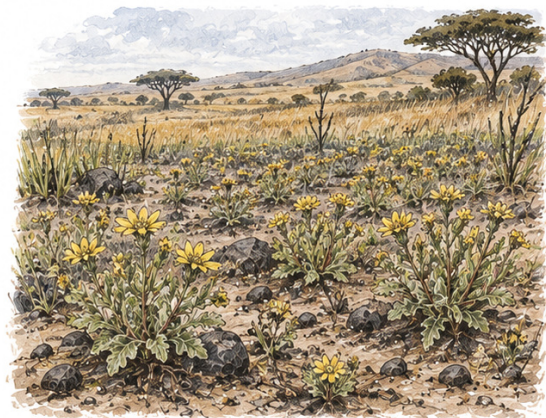
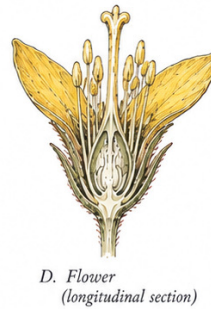
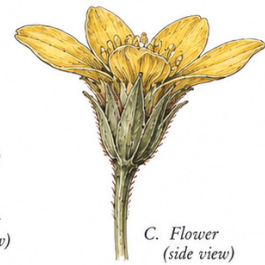
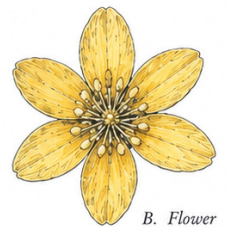
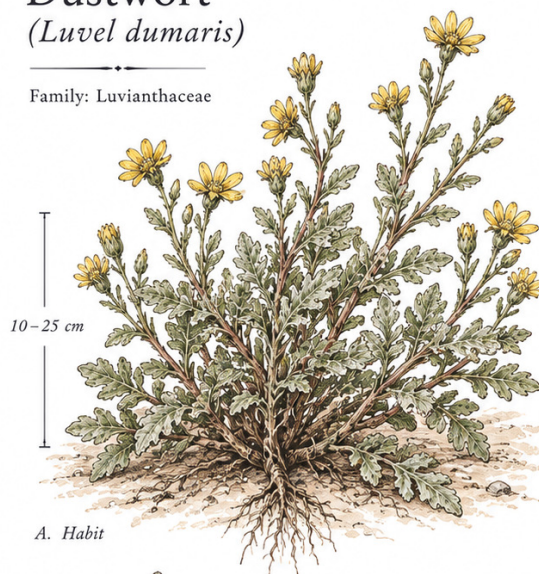
A hardy, drought-resistant herb found on dry, exposed ground throughout the savannah. Dust-wort is one of the first plants to flower after the dry-season burns, producing small yellow flowers within days of the first rain. It is of no culinary or medicinal significance, but its ecological role as a rapid coloniser of bare ground is important: it stabilises exposed soil, fixes atmospheric nutrients, and creates conditions for the subsequent establishment of grasses and other species.

Dustwort is so common and so unremarkable that it rarely merits mention, which is precisely why I mention it here. The luphan's recovery from fire and drought begins with this small, plain-flowered weed, and it deserves recognition.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Dustwort (*Luvel dumaris*)

Family: Luvianthaceae



DUSTWORT
Luvel dumaris

Bloodroot

Luvel krularis profunda



A stout, deep-rooted herb of the clay soils, producing a rosette of dark green leaves and a thick, tuberous root that is bright red when cut. The root has strong astringent and coagulant properties and is widely used in folk medicine as a wound treatment—a poultice of crushed blood-root applied to a cut will slow or stop bleeding with noticeable speed.

The efficacy of bloodroot as a coagulant is well-established empirically, whatever the underlying mechanism. Every caravan that travels the Bronze Track carries dried bloodroot, and field workers throughout the savannah keep a supply on hand. The Institute's medical faculty has attempted to isolate the active compound without complete success; it appears to lose effectiveness when separated from the raw plant material, suggesting either chemical instability or, as the herbalists insist, a veshric component that does not survive extraction.

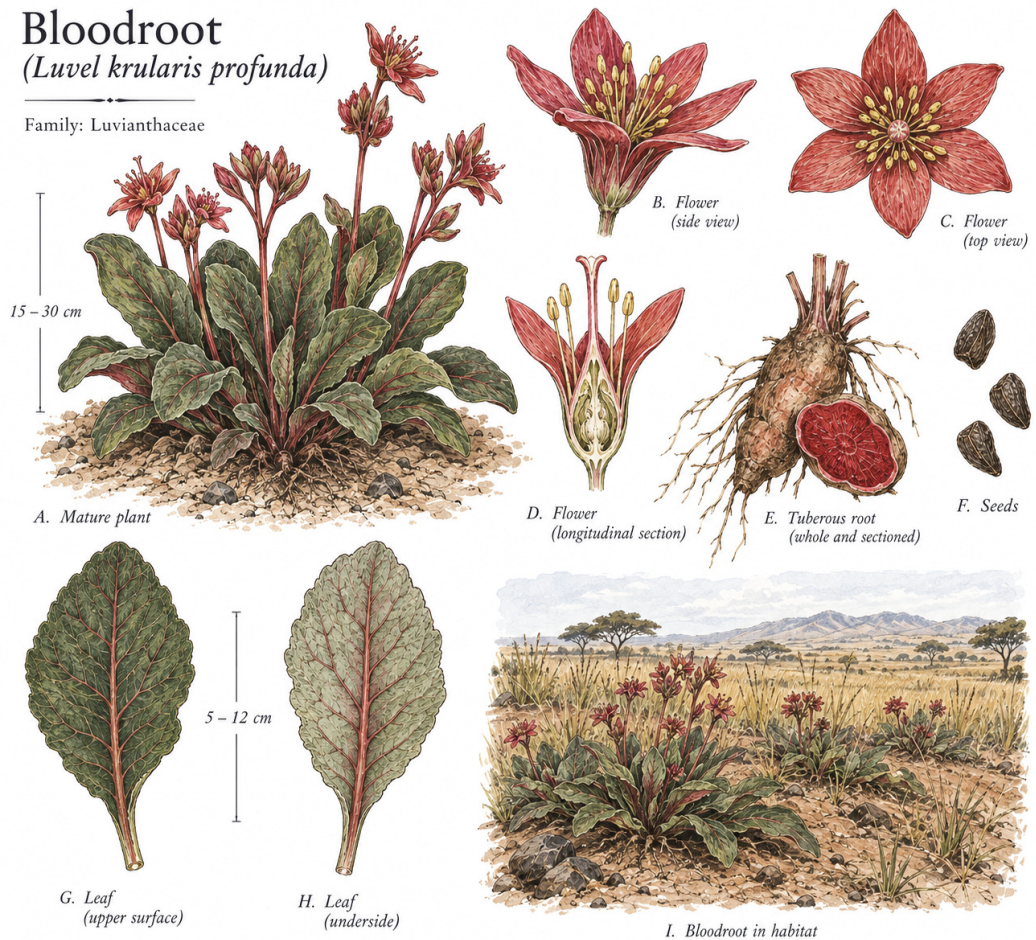
SECOND EDITION NOTE

Bloodroot should not be consumed internally. I should not have needed to add this note, but experience with readers has taught me otherwise.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Bloodroot (*Luvel krularis profunda*)

Family: Luvianthaceae



BLOODROOT
Luvel krularis profunda

Velvet Burr

Luvel mollis spinosa



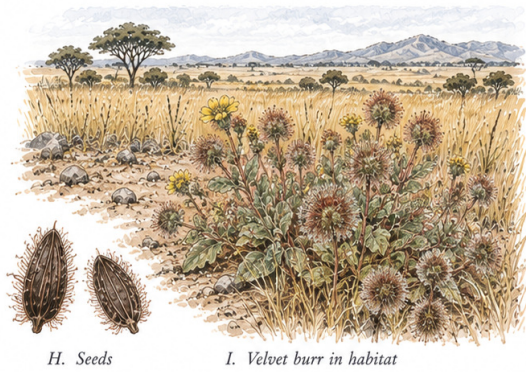
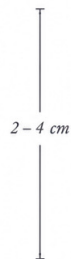
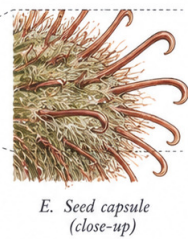
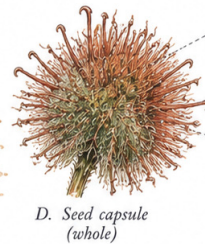
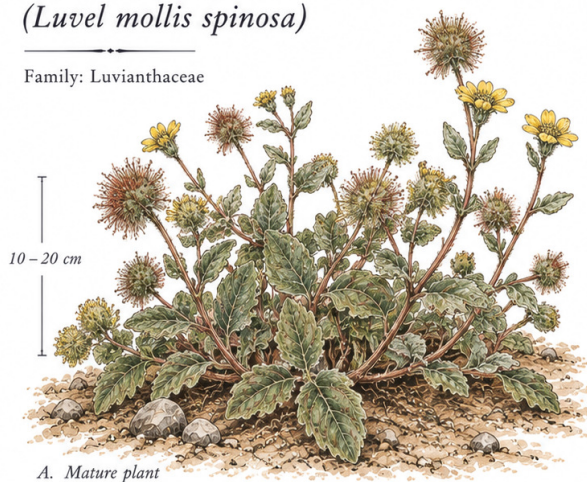
A small, spreading herb of the grassland, notable primarily for the seeds it produces: round, soft-textured capsules covered in thousands of fine, barbed hairs that cling to anything that brushes against them — clothing, fur, skin, hair — with extraordinary tenacity. The seed capsules are dispersed entirely by attachment to passing animals and humans, and they are, from the perspective of anyone who has walked through a stand of velvet burr in seed, intensely annoying.

Despite its nuisance quality, the velvet burr's fine barbed fibres have found practical application. Weavers in the eastern settlements harvest the seed capsules and process the fibres into a material used for securing bandages and wrappings—an early and simple adhesive fabric. The fibres lose their barbed quality when washed in hot water, allowing easy removal.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Velvet Burr (*Luvel mollis spinosa*)

Family: Luvianthaceae



VELVET BURR
Luvel mollis spinosa

Sorrow's Wisp



I include this entry with some hesitation, as I have never personally observed the plant and know of only a handful of credible accounts of its existence. Sorrow's Wisp is described as a small, bulbous fruit-bearing plant, blue in colour, which emits a faint, steady, pulsating glow. It is said to grow only in the remote southwest wastelands near the coast, far from the savannah proper, and to be extraordinarily rare.

The medicinal properties attributed to Sorrow's Wisp are extraordinary: it is reputed to be the sole effective treatment for the Gnawing Plague, a disease of terrible virulence. The preparation is said to require harvest during the dark moon, prolonged boiling in purified spring water, and stirring under moonlight—a process that sounds more like ritual than botany, but which I record here because the Gnawing Plague is real and terrible, and if any preparation can treat it, that knowledge should not be lost.

I have included Sorrow's Wisp in this work not as a confirmed species but as a matter of record. I would welcome any verifiable observation from readers who have encountered it.

— *New to the third edition.*

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Sorrow's Wisp



A. Whole plant



B. Fruit
(side view)



C. Fruit
(front view)



D. Fruit
(section)



E. Flower
(top view)



F. Flower
(side view)



G. Seeds



H. Leaf
(upper surface)



I. Leaf
(underside)



J. Sorrow's Wisp (night)

SORROW'S WISP

Chapter 5

Fungi, Mosses, and Ground Organisms



The luphan's soils support a rich community of organisms that are neither plant nor animal in the conventional sense, and whose ecological importance is disproportionate to their visibility.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Termite-crown Mushroom <i>Dumavel termitaris</i>	62
Ashcap <i>Dumavel cinerea</i>	64
Dew-moss <i>Dumavel roscida</i>	66

Termite-crown Mushroom

Dumavel termitaris



A large, conspicuous mushroom that grows exclusively on and around the bases of active termite mounds. The cap is broad and flat, typically fifteen to twenty centimetres across, with a distinctive reddish-brown colour that closely matches the surrounding termite-mound soil. The mushroom fruits in early Poorneet, shortly after the first rains soften the mound surfaces.

The relationship between the mushroom and the termites is mutualistic: the fungal mycelium helps regulate moisture within the mound, and the termites' cultivation of underground fungal gardens provides the substrate on which the mushroom feeds. The mushrooms are edible and are gathered widely, though one must contend with the termites to harvest them—a transaction that the termites do not always view favourably.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Termite-crown Mushroom (*Dumavel termitaris*)

PLATE V.I
FUNGI OF THE MEDIA TA SAVANNAH



Fig. 1 Termite-crown mushrooms growing on an active termite mound.

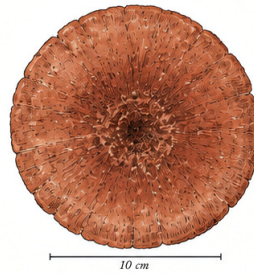


Fig. 2 Cap (top view).

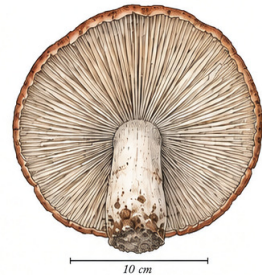


Fig. 3 Cap (underside).



Fig. 4 Cross-section.



Fig. 5 Developmental stages
(from left to right: button, juvenile, mature).

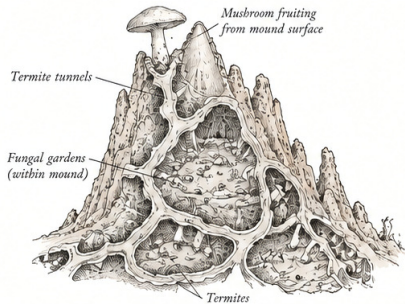


Fig. 6 Section of termite mound showing fungal gardens.

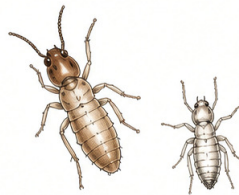


Fig. 7 Termites
(soldier and worker).

TERMITE-CROWN MUSHROOM
Dumavel termitaris

Ashcap

Dumavel cinerea



A small, grey mushroom that appears in enormous numbers on burned ground within days of a fire, often before any green plant has emerged. Ashcap mushrooms are the first visible stage of the soil's biological recovery from fire, and their mycelial networks play a critical role in stabilising ash deposits and making nutrients available to the plants that follow.

Ashcap mushrooms are technically edible but taste of very little, which is perhaps appropriate for something that grows on ashes.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Ashcap (*Dumavel cinerea*)

PLATE V.2
FUNGI OF THE MEDIATA SAVANNAH



Fig. 1 Ashcap musbrooms on recently burned ground.



Fig. 2 Cap (top view).

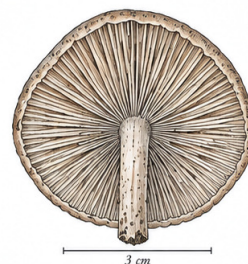


Fig. 3 Cap (underside).



Fig. 4 Side view.



Fig. 5 Developmental stages
(from left to right: button, juvenile, mature).



Fig. 6 Section of ash-rich soil showing mycelial network.

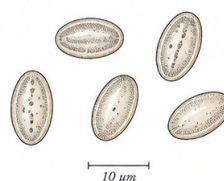


Fig. 7 Spores (magnified).

ASHCAP
Dumavel cinerea

Dew-moss

Dumavel roscida



A soft, bright green moss found on the shaded sides of rocks, tree bases, and termite mounds throughout the savannah. Dew-moss has the remarkable property of absorbing and retaining moisture from the air with extraordinary efficiency, remaining visibly damp even during Bid-erap when all other vegetation is dry. A clump of dew-moss squeezed firmly will yield several drops of clear, clean water.

This property makes dew-moss a survival resource of some importance. Travellers and herders who know the savannah use it as an emergency water source during the dry season, and its presence on a rock or tree indicates that the local microclimate retains enough moisture to be worth investigating for a more substantial water supply.

The mechanism of moisture retention is at least partly veshric: the moss's absorption capacity exceeds what can be accounted for by its physical structure alone. It appears to draw moisture from ambient humidity at concentrations that should not support condensation under prevailing temperature conditions.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Dew-moss (*Dumavel roscida*)

PLATE V.3
FUNGI, MOSSES, AND GROUND ORGANISMS
OF THE MEDIATA SAVANNAH

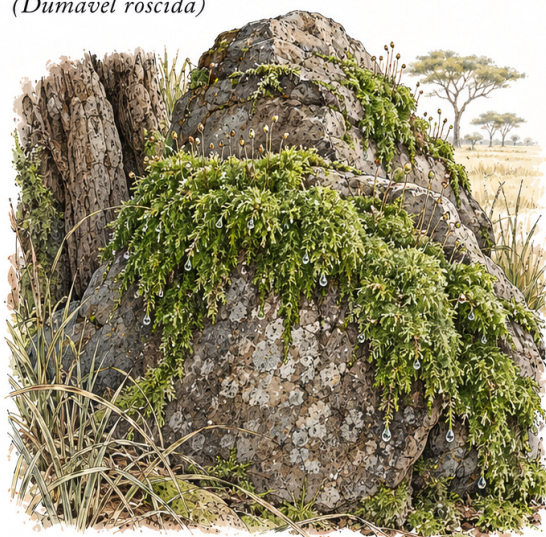


Fig. 1 Dew-moss growing on a shaded rock.



Fig. 2 Habit (actual size).



Fig. 3 Spore capsule.



Fig. 4 Capsule (open) releasing spores.



Fig. 5 Leaf structure (magnified).

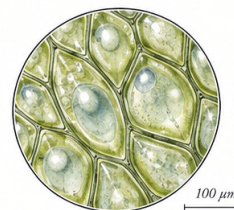


Fig. 6 Leaf cells with retained moisture (highly magnified).



On rock

At tree base

On termite mound

Fig. 7 Habitat variations.



Fig. 8 Section through moss cushion.

DEW-MOSS
Dumavel roscida

PART II

Fauna



6	Large Predators	69
7	Large Herbivores and Herd Beasts	81
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Chapter 6

Large Predators



SPECIES DESCRIBED

The Savannah Lion <i>Nakva luphanis</i>	70
Dusk Prowler <i>Nakva crepuscularis</i>	72
Brindle Hyena <i>Shuvakru striata</i>	74
Savannah Jackal <i>Shuvakru luphanis minor</i>	76
Savannah Wolf <i>Shuvakru lupus luphanis</i>	78

The Savannah Lion

Nakva luphanis

THE nakva is the apex predator of the Mediata Savannah and the animal that, more than any other, shapes the behaviour of every creature that shares its range. It is a large, tawny, maned cat—the males standing roughly a metre at the shoulder—whose presence is felt along the grassland’s edges and near the waterholes at dusk.

Nakva are social hunters, operating in prides of typically four to eight adults with associated young. They favour ambush hunting in the taller grasses near water, where lushu herds come to drink, but they are also capable of sustained pursuit over open ground when necessary. Their prey includes virtually every large herbivore on the savannah; they have also been known to take rivermouth crocodiles, which speaks to either remarkable courage or remarkable hunger.

Encounters between nakva and people are rare but not unknown, and the lion is both feared and deeply respected in Mediata culture. The word *naksha* — courage, boldness, the willingness to face what is dangerous — derives from *nakva*, and to be called *naksha-ful* is among the highest compliments the language offers.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

Pride territories appear to be larger than previously estimated. Observations during the 586 NA expedition suggest that Bronze River prides range over areas of approximately thirty to forty square kilometres, substantially more than the fifteen to twenty kilometres suggested in earlier literature. This may reflect reduced prey density in the upper river corridor rather than a general pattern.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

The Savannah Lion (*Nakva luphanis*)

A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MEDIATA SAVANNAH
PLATE VI

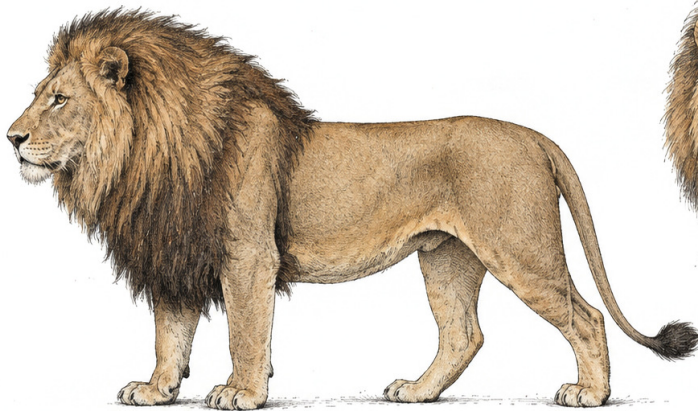


Fig. 1. Adult male (lateral view).



Fig. 2. Male head (frontal view).

Thick mane, varies in colour from tawny to dark brown. Fulltest in prime adults.



Fig. 3. Adult female head.

Females lack a mane, with more streamlined features.

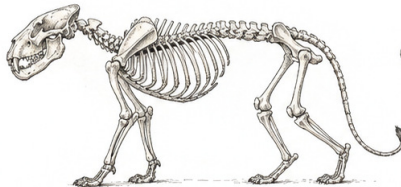


Fig. 4. Skeleton (lateral view).



Fig. 5. Skull (lateral view).

Powerful jaw musculature allows for a crushing bite.



Fig. 6. Front paw (actual size).



Fig. 7. Hind paw (actual size).



Fig. 8. Pride group.

Prides typically consist of four to eight adults with associated young.



Fig. 9. Ambush hunting near a waterhole.

Nakva favour ambush hunting in taller grasses near water, but are also capable of sustained pursuit over open ground.

THE SAVANNAH LION

Nakva luphanis

Dusk Prowler

Nakva crepuscularis

A smaller, solitary feline predator, roughly half the size of the savannah lion, with distinctive dark-grey fur marked by irregular pale spots. The dusk prowler is primarily nocturnal and crepuscular, emerging at twilight to hunt small mammals, ground-nesting birds, and reptiles. It is an ambush hunter of considerable patience, capable of remaining motionless in tall grass for hours.

The dusk prowler's most notable feature is its eyes, which exhibit a vivid amber reflectance at night — the “twin fires” familiar to anyone who has sat by a campfire on the savannah and seen the reflected glow at the edge of the light. Despite its predatory nature, the dusk prowler is not considered dangerous to humans and will avoid contact when possible.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Dusk Prowler (*Nakva crepuscularis*)

A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MEDIATA SAVANNAH
PLATE VII

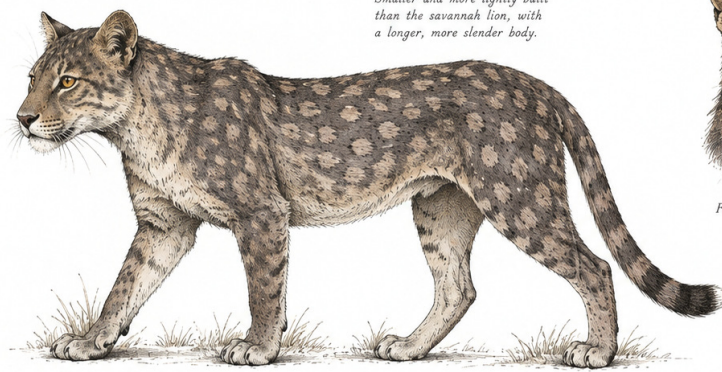


Fig. 1. Adult (lateral view).

Smaller and more lightly built than the savannah lion, with a longer, more slender body.



Fig. 2. Head (frontal view).

Eyes exhibit a vivid amber reflectance at night — the "twin fires" of the savannah.



Fig. 3. Head (profile view).

Ears are highly mobile, allowing for acute hearing in low light conditions.



Fig. 4. Pelt pattern (detail).

Dark-grey coat marked with irregular pale spots. Pattern varies between individuals.



Fig. 5. Skull (lateral view).

Slender skull with well-developed canines, adapted for small to medium prey.



Fig. 6. Front paw (actual size).



Fig. 7. Hind paw (actual size).



Fig. 8. In ambush at twilight.

An ambush hunter of considerable patience, capable of remaining motionless for hours in tall grass.



Fig. 9. Nocturnal hunter.

Primarily nocturnal and crepuscular, hunting small mammals, ground-nesting birds, and reptiles.

Will avoid humans when possible and is not considered dangerous.

DUSK PROWLER

Nakva crepuscularis

Brindle Hyena

Shuvakru striata

A heavy-set, powerful scavenger-predator found throughout the savannah, recognisable by the irregular dark stripes on its sandy-brown coat. Brindle hyenas are primarily scavengers, cleaning up after nakva kills and taking carrion wherever they find it, but they are also capable pack hunters in their own right, particularly during Biderap when food is scarce.

Brindle hyenas are the luphan's most effective waste disposal system, and settlements tolerate their presence on the outskirts for this reason despite their unsettling vocalisations—a rising, wavering call that carries for great distances at night and which is, by universal agreement, the most unpleasant sound on the savannah.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Brindle Hyena (*Shuvakru striata*)

A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MEDIA TA SAVANNAH
PLATE VIII



Fig. 1. Adult (lateral view).

Powerful jaws and neck muscles allow it to crush bone and consume carrion others cannot.



Fig. 2. Head (frontal view).

Broad head, rounded ears and distinctive dark muzzle.



Fig. 3. Head (profile view).

Strong, crushing jaws adapted for bone. Teeth show little specialisation for slicing, reflecting a scavenging diet.



Fig. 4. Coat pattern (detail).

Sandy-brown coat with irregular dark stripes. Patterns vary considerably between individuals and tend to fade with age.

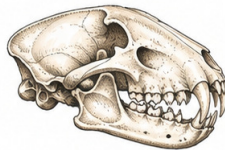


Fig. 5. Skull (lateral view).



Fig. 6. Front paw (actual size).



Fig. 7. Hind paw (actual size).



Fig. 8. Feeding at a nakva kill.

Primarily scavengers, but capable pack hunters, especially during Biderap when food is scarce.



Fig. 9. Calling at night.

Their rising, wavering call carries for great distances and is, by universal agreement, the most unpleasant sound on the savannah.

BRINDLE HYENA

Shuvakru striata

Savannah Jackal

Shuvakru luphanis minor

A lean, opportunistic predator-scavenger found throughout the open grassland, typically in pairs or loose family groups of four to six. Savannah jackals are smaller than brindie hyenas but considerably more versatile: they hunt small prey — hares, ground birds, lizards, large insects — with quick, darting strikes, and they scavenge from nakva kills with an audacity that belies their modest size. They are among the first animals to arrive at a fresh kill, often before the hyenas, and their sharp, yapping alarm calls serve as a reliable indicator of predator activity in the vicinity.

Jackals are common near settlements, where they exploit refuse and unattended food stores. They are generally tolerated — their appetite for rodents and ironclay scuttlers makes them useful neighbours — though poultry-keepers regard them less charitably. They are intelligent, wary, and difficult to trap, and they habituate to human presence with remarkable speed.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

Reports from the eastern settlements describe individual jackals that exhibit unusual behavioural sophistication — apparently coordinating with one another through vocalisations of unexpected complexity, and in some cases displaying what observers describe as an unsettling awareness of being watched. I include this note without interpretation, though I observe that the boundary between an intelligent animal and something else entirely is not always as clear as we might prefer.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Savannah Jackal (*Shuvakru luphanis minor*)

A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MEDIA TA SAVANNAH
PLATE IX

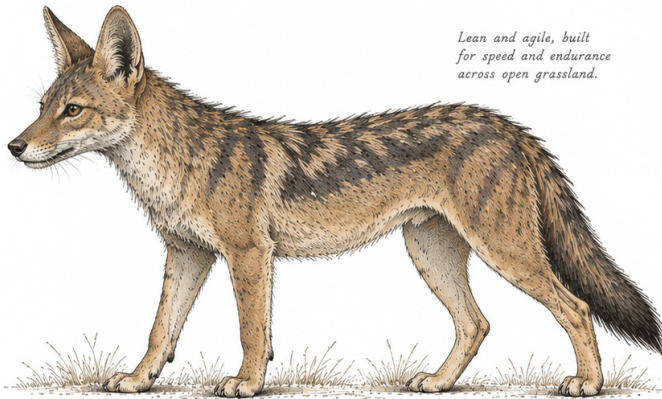


Fig. 1. Adult (lateral view).

Lean and agile, built
for speed and endurance
across open grassland.



Fig. 2. Head (frontal view).

Large ears and
keen eyesight
make the jackal
an exceptional
scavenger and
opportunistic
hunter.



Fig. 3. Head (profile view).

Acute hearing
allows them to
detect predators,
scavenging
opportunities,
and human
activity from
great distances.



Fig. 4. Coat pattern (detail).

Tawny coat with
darker dorsal
markings. Colour
varies between
individuals and
regions, from pale
sand to rich russet.



Fig. 5. Skull (lateral view).

Narrow skull with
sharp teeth, suited
for small prey
but capable of
processing carrion.



Fig. 6. Front paw
(actual size).



Fig. 7. Hind paw
(actual size).



Fig. 8. Family group.

Typically found in pairs
or loose family groups
of four to six.



Fig. 9. Among the first to arrive at a kill.

Quick, opportunistic
and bold, jackals
often arrive at
carrion before
hyenas, relying
on speed and
numbers.

SAVANNAH JACKAL
Shuvakru luphanis minor

Savannah Wolf

Shuvakru lupus luphanis

A large canine predator found at the margins of the savannah, particularly where grassland transitions into the scrublands approaching the Destitute Lands and in the broken country near the Itumue foothills. Savannah wolves are pack hunters, typically operating in groups of six to twelve, with a social hierarchy centred on a dominant breeding pair. They are taller and rangier than their forest-dwelling relatives, with long legs adapted for sustained pursuit across open ground and sandy-brown coats that blend with the dry-season grass.

Wolves generally avoid the central savannah, where the nakva's dominance leaves little room for a competing pack predator, but they are a significant presence at the edges. Their preferred prey is the bronzehorn antelope, which they hunt through coordinated relay pursuit—one group driving the prey toward another lying in ambush. This cooperation is impressive to observe and distressing to witness if one has any sympathy for the antelope.

Encounters with humans are rare. Wolves avoid settlements and the Bronze Track, and attacks on people are virtually unknown. They are nonetheless feared in the eastern communities, where their howling at dusk carries a weight of superstition that the animals themselves have done nothing to earn.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Savannah Wolf (*Shuvakru lupus luphanis*)

A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MEDIATA SAVANNAH
PLATE X

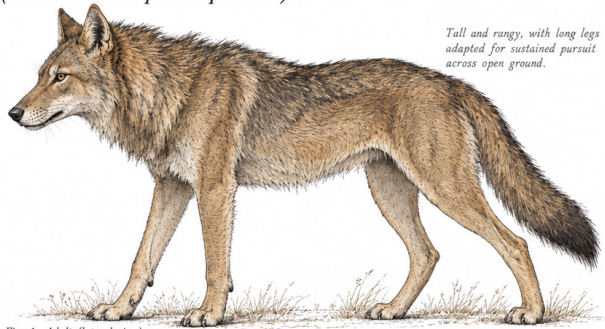


Fig. 1. Adult (lateral view).

Tall and rangy, with long legs adapted for sustained pursuit across open ground.



Fig. 2. Head (frontal view).

Primarily found at the margins of the savannah, especially near scrublands approaching the Destitute Lands and in broken country near the Itumue foothills. Generally avoid the central savannah, where nakua dominance leaves little room for a competing pack predator.



Fig. 3. Head (profile view).

Narrow muzzle and powerful jaws, built for pursuing and dispatching large prey such as the bronzehorn antelope.



Fig. 4. Coat pattern (detail).

Sandy-brown coat blends with dry-season grass, with darker guarding along the back. Colour varies between individuals and regions, from pale dun to richer ochre-brown.



Fig. 5. Skull (lateral view).

Strong jaws and sharp carnassial teeth, adapted for taking large, fast-moving prey.



Fig. 6. Front paw (actual size).



Fig. 7. Hind paw (actual size).



Fig. 8. Pack group.

Pack hunters, typically operating in groups of six to twelve, with a social hierarchy centred on a dominant breeding pair.

Their howling at dusk is much feared in eastern communities, giving rise to superstition despite the animals themselves having done nothing to deserve it.



Fig. 9. Coordinated relay pursuit of bronzehorn antelope.

Hunt through coordinated relay pursuit, one group driving prey toward another lying in ambush. Preferred prey is the bronzehorn antelope. Encounters with humans are rare; wolves avoid settlements and the Bronze Track, and attacks on people are virtually unknown.

SAVANNAH WOLF
Shuvakru lupus luphanis

Chapter 7

Large Herbivores and Herd Beasts



The lushu — the generic Mediatan term for grazing animals — are the most visible and numerous large animals of the savannah. The Mediatan language, as Relshan Kortis has documented, maintains many words of fine distinction for its grazing herds, reflecting the central importance of these animals to savannah life.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Bronzehorn Antelope <i>Lushu aenecornis</i>	82
Savannah Strider <i>Lushu magna ambularis</i>	84
Dustback Bison <i>Lushu dorsum pulverea</i>	86
Ridgeback Boar <i>Lushu cristata porcina</i>	88
Striped Wildebeest <i>Lushu migrans striata</i>	90

Bronzehorn Antelope

Lushu aenecornis



THE most common large herbivore of the open grassland, found in herds ranging from a few dozen to several hundred individuals. Bronzeshorn antelope are elegant, long-legged grazers standing roughly one metre at the shoulder, with a tawny coat that blends with the dry-season grass and, in both sexes, a pair of gently curved horns with a distinctive metallic bronze sheen. The horns' colouration is caused by a high copper content in the keratin, which is presumably derived from copper-rich groundwater in the savannah soils.

Bronzehorn herds are migratory within the savannah, moving to follow the seasonal progression of green grass. During Biderap they concentrate near permanent water sources; during Poorneet they spread across the full extent of the grassland. The annual bronzehorn migration, while less dramatic than the movements of some larger species, is one of the luphan's defining ecological events.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Bronzehorn Antelope (*Lushu aenecornis*)

COMMON NAME: Bronzehorn Antelope
 MEDIAN NAME: Lushu
 SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Lushu aenecornis*
 FAMILY: Lushidae
 AVERAGE SHOULDER HEIGHT: ~ 1 metre
 HABITAT: Mediata Savannah
 DIET: Grasses and herbaceous plants
 SOCIAL STRUCTURE: Herds of dozens to hundreds
 RANGE: Throughout the Mediata Savannah
 MIGRATION: Seasonal (follows green grass)

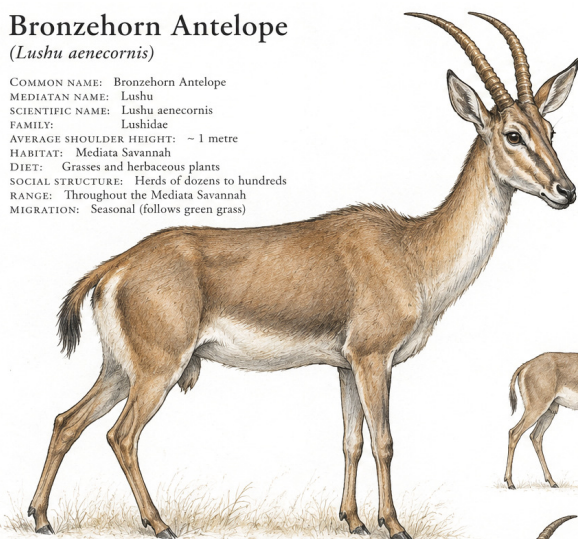


Fig. 1. Adult bronzehorn antelope (*Lushu aenecornis*), side view.



Fig. 7. Bronzehorn herd in the Mediata Savannah.



Fig. 2. Head detail, showing distinctive bronze-hued horns. Distinctive.

Fig. 3. Horns, frontal view.

Fig. 4. Horns detail, showing copper-rich keratin texture.

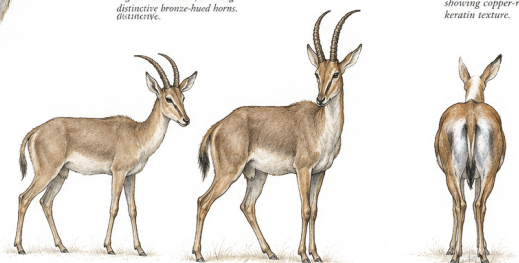


Fig. 5. Female (left) and male (right). Both sexes possess horns.

Fig. 6. Rear view, showing characteristic markings.



Fig. 8. Skull.

Notes:
 Bronzehorn antelope are the most common large herbivore of the Mediata Savannah. Their distinctive bronze-hued horns owe their colouration to a high copper content in the keratin, presumably derived from copper-rich groundwater in the savannah soils. They are migratory, moving seasonally to follow the progression of green grass. During Biderap they concentrate near permanent water sources; during Poorneet they spread across the full extent of the grassland. The annual bronzehorn migration, while less dramatic than the movements of some larger species, is one of the luphan's defining ecological events.

BRONZEHORN ANTELOPE

Lushu aenecornis

Savannah Strider

Lushu magna ambularis

THE largest land animal of the Mediata Savannah and one of its most culturally significant species. Savannah striders are massive, long-necked herbivores standing three to four metres at the shoulder, with thick, pillar-like legs and a distinctive rolling gait that covers ground with deceptive speed. Their hide is tough and grey-brown, and their broad, flat heads are equipped with bony ridges that serve, in males, as display structures during the mating season.

Striders are the principal mount and beast of burden across the Mediata Savannah. Their domestication is ancient — certainly predating any written record — and they are integral to trade, travel, and warfare throughout the region. A healthy strider can carry a rider and substantial cargo along the Bronze Track at a pace that exceeds a human's best walking speed by roughly half again, and they can sustain this pace for an entire day with adequate water.

Wild strider herds still exist in the eastern savannah and near the Itumue foothills, though they are much reduced from historical levels. Domestic striders are bred in every major settlement.

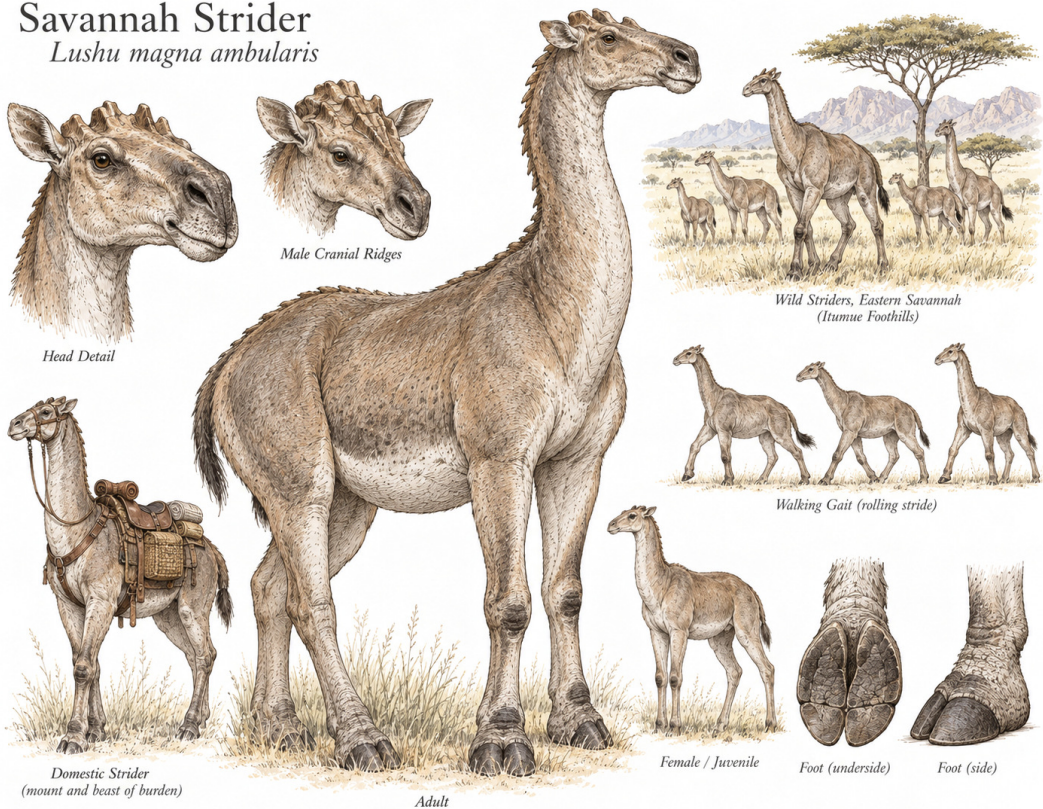
THIRD EDITION NOTE

Wild striders in the eastern savannah appear to exhibit seasonal territorial behaviour not observed in domestic populations. During Buath Gurru, dominant males establish and defend territories centred on particularly dense stands of bronzebark acacia, presumably because the pod-fall in Garrawang represents a critical food resource. This is the first territorial behaviour documented in the species and may reflect pressures absent in domestic herds.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Savannah Strider

Lushu magna ambularis



SAVANNAH STRIDER

Lushu magna ambularis

Dustback Bison

Lushu dorsum pulverea



A large, heavy-bodied grazer of the western and central savannah, recognisable by the dense, woolly coat on its shoulders and forequarters, which traps and holds the red dust of the luphan until the animal appears to be made of the landscape itself—hence the common name. Dustbacks are herd animals, typically found in groups of twenty to fifty, and they are considerably less tractable than striders, resisting all known attempts at domestication with a stubbornness that I find privately admirable.

Dustbacks are important grazers whose feeding habits help maintain the grassland's structure. They favour the taller, coarser grasses that other herbivores avoid, and their heavy trampling breaks up soil crusts and creates the small depressions that collect rainwater during Poorneet—microhabitats that support their own communities of insects, amphibians, and small plants.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Dustback Bison

Lushu dorsum pulverea



Adult Male



Herd



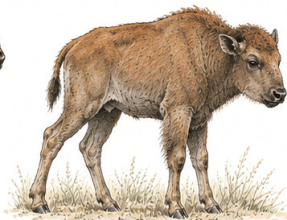
Head (front view)



Skull (side view)



Adult Female



Juvenile



Hoof (underside)



Hoof (side view)

DUSTBACK BISON

Lushu dorsum pulverea

Ridgeback Boar

Lushu cristata porcina



A stocky, omnivorous animal of the scrubby margins and woodland edges, with a ridge of stiff, dark bristles along its spine and a formidable pair of curved tusks. Ridgeback boars are solitary or found in small family groups, and they are aggressive when threatened—one of the few savannah animals that will charge a human without clear provocation.

Despite this belligerence, ridgeback boars are valued as a food source, and boar-hunting is a traditional pursuit in the eastern settlements. The meat is flavourful and the tusks are carved into ornaments and small tools. The bristles are used for brushes.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Ridgeback Boar

Lushu cristata porcina



Adult Male



Head Detail



Skull (side view)



Tusk Detail



Adult Female



Juvenile



Family Group



Hoof (underside)



Dorsal Bristles (side view)

RIDGEBACK BOAR

Lushu cristata porcina

Striped Wildebeest

Lushu migrans striata

A large, heavy-fronted grazer found in small groups across the open savannah, recognisable by the dark vertical striping on its grey-brown flanks and the shaggy beard of coarse hair beneath its jaw. Wildebeest are less numerous than bronzehorn antelope and less dramatically large than dustback bison, occupying a middle ground in both size and temperament. They are restless animals, seldom remaining in one place for more than a few days, and their small herds—typically three to fifteen individuals—move constantly across the grassland in patterns that appear to follow neither obvious food sources nor water access, but some internal logic of their own.

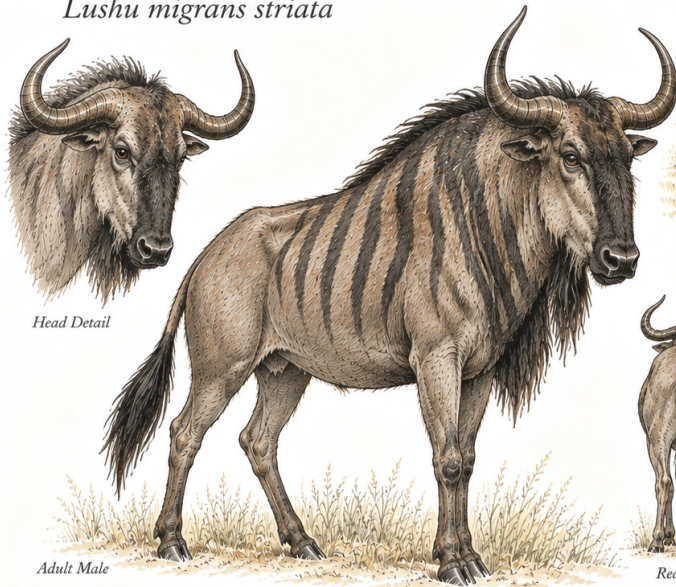
Wildebeest are grazers of the shorter grasses and are often found in mixed company with bronzehorn herds, where they appear to benefit from the antelopes' superior alertness to predators. They are capable of bursts of surprising speed when threatened, though their preferred defence is a tight, outward-facing circle with horns lowered—a formation that discourages all but the most determined nakva pride.

The meat is lean and somewhat tough, but widely eaten in the central savannah settlements. The hide is valued for its durability.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Striped Wildebeest

Lushu migrans striata



Head Detail



STRIPED WILDEBEEST

Lushu migrans striata

Chapter 8

Small Mammals



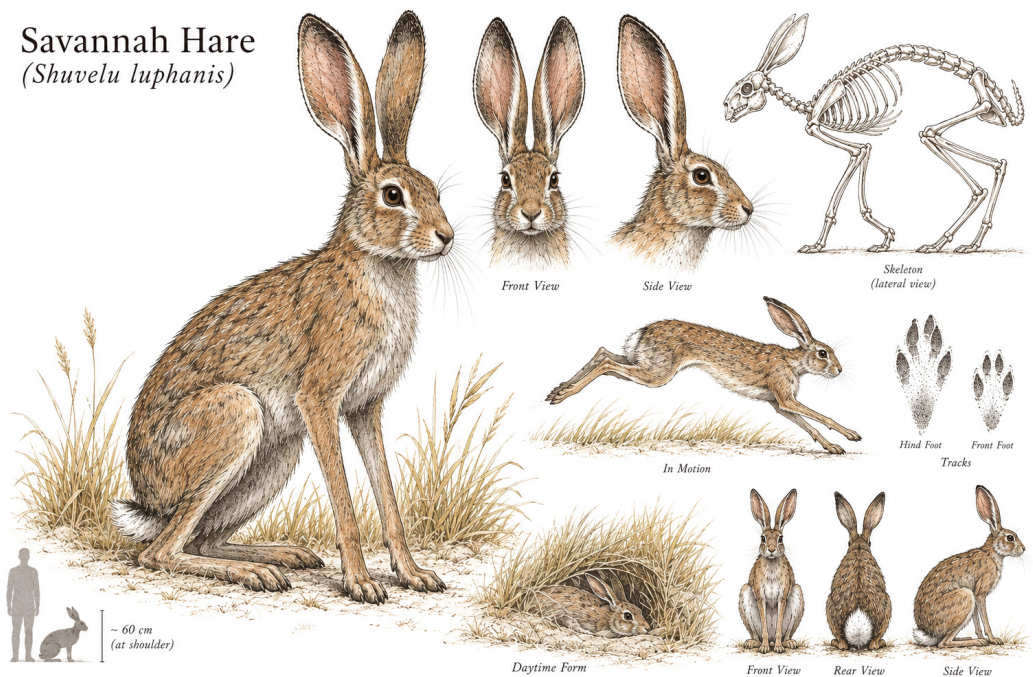
SPECIES DESCRIBED

Savannah Hare <i>Shuvelu luphanis</i>	94
Ironclay Scuttler <i>Shuvelu ferrea scutellata</i>	96
Honeymouse <i>Shuvelu mellifera</i>	98

A long-eared, long-legged hare found abundantly throughout the grassland. Savannah hares are crepuscular, most active at dawn and dusk, and spend the heat of the day in shallow scrapes beneath grass tussocks. They are the primary prey of dusk prowlers, raptors, and larger snakes, and their population fluctuates dramatically between seasons, peaking during Buath Gurru when food is plentiful and crashing during late Biderap.

94

Savannah Hare
(*Shuvelu luphanis*)



SAVANNAH HARE

Shuvelu luphanis

Ironclay Scuttler

Shuvelu ferrea scutellata

A burrowing mammal of the lower basin and western savannah, roughly the size of a large rat, with a distinctive armoured appearance: its back and flanks are covered in overlapping plates of hardened skin that resemble, and are approximately as tough as, the ironclay deposits in which it makes its burrows.

Ironclay scuttlers are a significant nuisance in settled areas, where their burrowing activity can undermine building foundations—a problem well-known to the architects and builders of Arakcadia. Their ability to excavate through hardened clay that would dull a steel tool is remarkable and may involve a chemical softening agent secreted from glands in the forepaws. The mechanism is under investigation.

Despite their nuisance status, scuttlers are ecologically valuable as soil engineers. Their burrow systems aerate compacted clay soils and create channels for water infiltration during Poorneet.

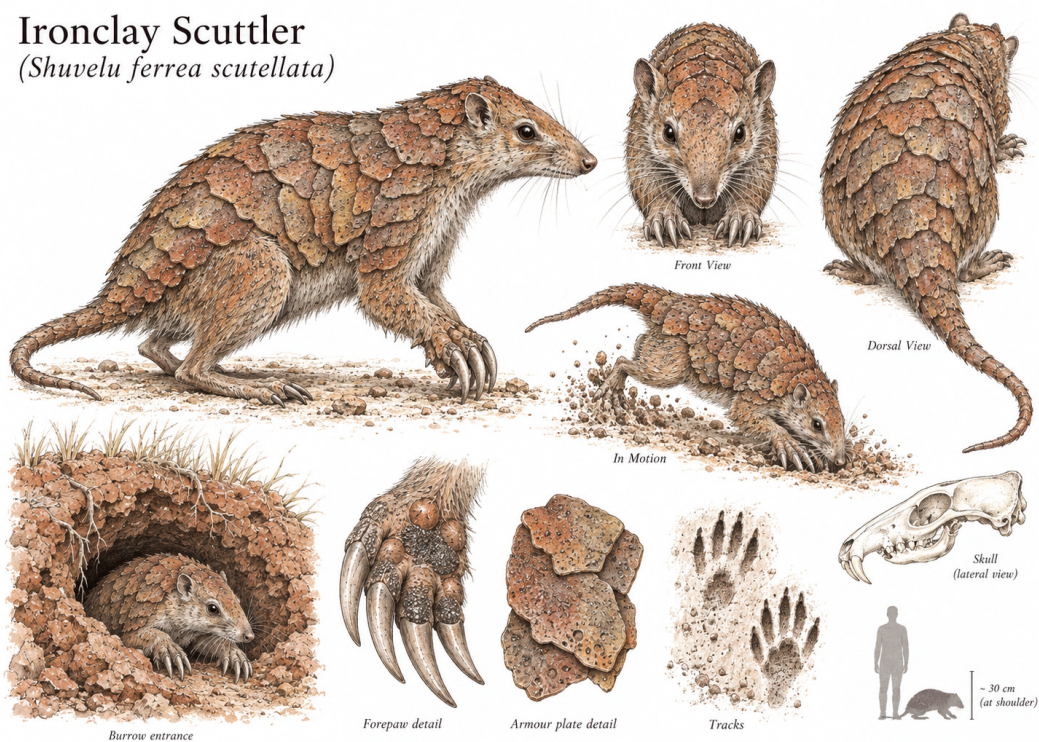
SECOND EDITION NOTE

The first edition described the scuttler's armour as "purely keratinous." Subsequent analysis has revealed that the plates contain a significant mineral component, similar in composition to the surrounding ironclay. The scuttler appears to incorporate minerals from its diet into its armour—a form of biomineralisation analogous to, though distinct from, the process observed in stonebark fig bark. Whether this constitutes a veshric property is debated.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Ironclay Scuttler

(*Shuvelu ferrea scutellata*)



IRONCLAY SCUTTLE

Shuvelu ferrea scutellata

Honeymouse

Shuvelu mellifera



A tiny, nocturnal mammal found in bronzebark acacia groves, where it feeds primarily on the sugary exudates of certain bark-boring insects. Honeymice are among the smallest mammals on the savannah — adults weigh no more than a few dozen grams — and they are notable for the golden-amber colour of their fur, which is caused by residues of the sugary substances they consume.

Honeymice are of no economic significance whatsoever, but they are charming, and I include them on that basis.

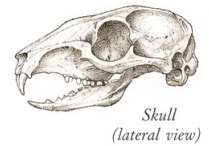
FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Honeymouse

Shuvelu mellifera

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Rodentia
Family: Shuvelidae
Genus: *Shuvelu*
Species: *S. mellifera*

Fur often takes on a golden-amber hue from sugary residues in diet.



HONEYMOUSE

Shuvelu mellifera

Chapter 9
Birds



The avian diversity of the Mediata Savannah is remarkable, encompassing grass-land specialists, waterbirds, raptors, and species that exploit the interfaces between habitats.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Dusk-Wing Grouse <i>Akva crepusculi luphanis</i>	102
The Mediata Crane <i>Sisva luphanis</i>	104
Sundagger Hawk <i>Akva solis acuta</i>	106
Greater Canaan Fruit Bat <i>Akva noctis magna</i>	108
Ash Lark <i>Akva cinerea cantrix</i>	110
Carrion Kite <i>Akva mortualis rapax</i>	112
Savannah Eagle <i>Akva aureus luphanis</i>	114

THE most common game bird of the savannah, found in small flocks throughout the grassland. Dusk-wing grouse are plump, ground-dwelling birds with mottled brown plumage and, as the name suggests, wings that display a striking deep purple-black colouration visible only in flight, when the bird's rapid wingbeats create a characteristic thrumming sound.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

DUSK-WING GROUSE
Akva crepusculi luphanis



DUSK-WING GROUSE
Akva crepusculi luphanis

The Mediata Crane

Sisva luphanis



THE great wading bird of the rivers and floodplains, and one of the most recognisable and culturally significant birds of the savannah. The Mediata crane is a tall, elegant bird standing over a metre in height, with grey-white plumage, long black legs, and a distinctive crimson patch on the crown. It is found along the Bronze River, around Arakcadia Bay, and at the Dassea Shallows, where it wades in the margins and feeds on fish, frogs, and aquatic invertebrates.

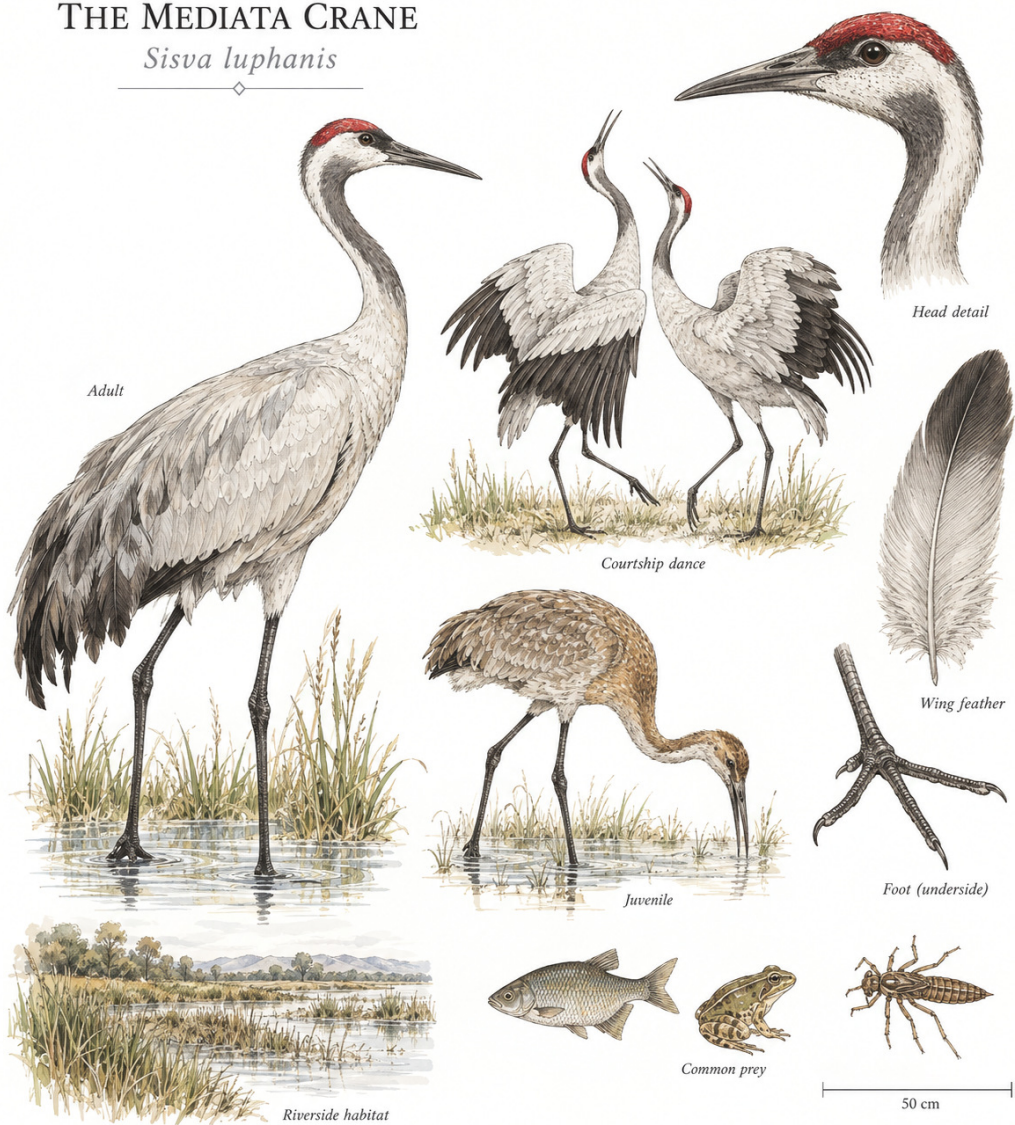
The crane is associated in Mediatan culture with peaceful steadiness, patience, and the liminal space between morning and the coming of the rains. Its graceful courtship dance, performed in pairs during early Buath Gurru, is one of the iconic sights of the savannah spring.

— *Entry substantially unchanged from the first edition. The sisva, like the bronze-reed, remains what it has always been.*

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

THE MEDIATA CRANE

Sisva luphanis



THE MEDIATA CRANE

Sisva luphanis

Sundagger Hawk

Akva solis acuta



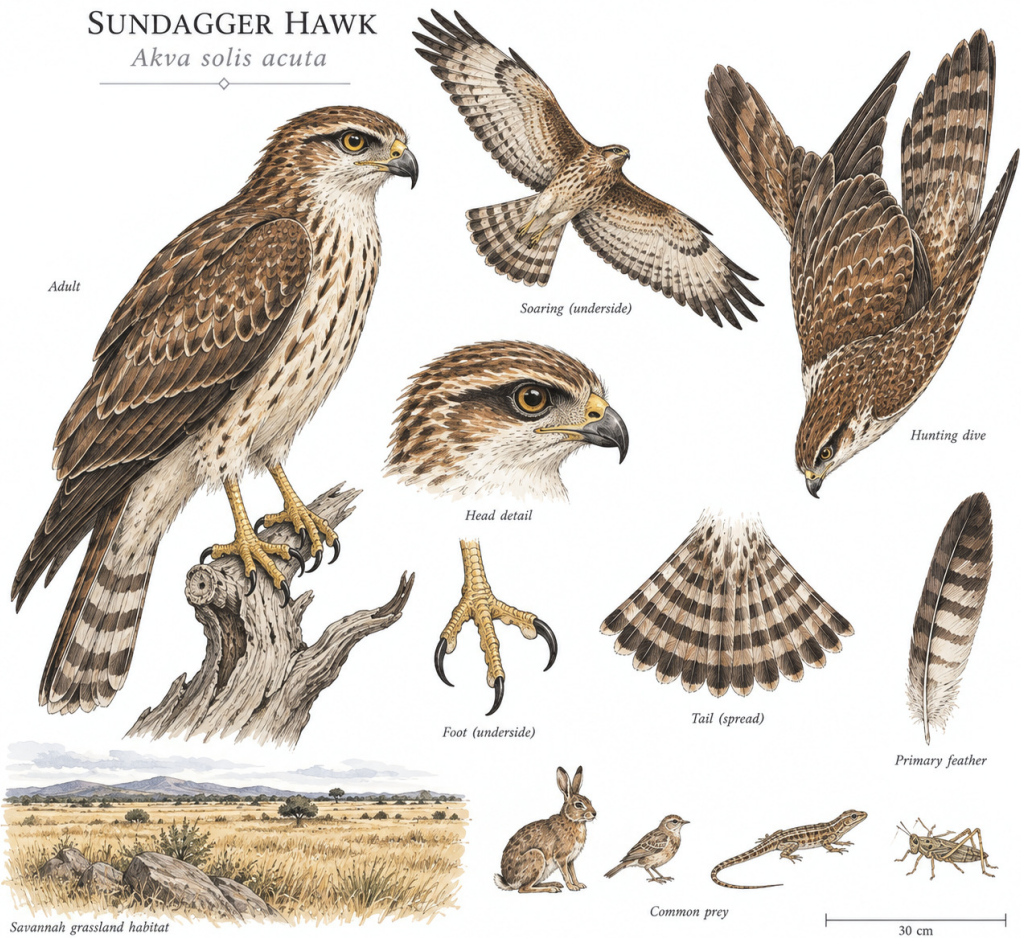
A medium-sized raptor of the open grassland, named for its hunting technique: a steep, fast dive from height directly toward the sun, which makes it nearly invisible to ground-dwelling prey until the moment of impact. Sundagger hawks are solitary hunters with large territories, and they take a wide range of prey including hares, small birds, lizards, and large insects.

The precision of the sundagger hawk's sun-aligned dive is extraordinary and suggests spatial and astronomical awareness beyond what is typical for raptors. Experienced birdwatchers can predict a sundagger strike by watching for the hawk's characteristic high circling, which always brings it into a position between its prey and the sun before the dive begins.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

SUNDAGGER HAWK

Akva solis acuta



SUNDAGGER HAWK

Akva solis acuta

A large bat — wingspan approaching one metre — found in the eastern savannah, where it roosts in colonies of several hundred in stonebark fig groves and cave openings at the Itumue foothills. Fruit bats emerge at dusk in spectacular formations, streaming out from their roosts in dense ribbons that can take several minutes to pass.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

GREATER CANAAN FRUIT BAT

Akva noctis magna



Roosting (hanging)



In flight



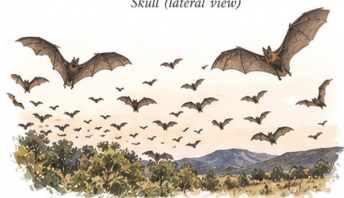
Head detail



Skull (lateral view)



Wing (underside)



Emerging at dusk



Roost site at Itumue foothills



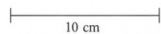
Stonebark fig
(*Ficus petraea*)



Pollination



Guano



GREATER CANAAN FRUIT BAT

Akva noctis magna

Ash Lark

Akva cinerea cantrix



A small, nondescript grey-brown bird of the burned grassland, notable entirely for its song: a complex, cascading sequence of notes delivered from a hovering position high above the ground. The ash lark is among the first birds to colonise freshly burned areas, arriving within days of a fire to feed on exposed seeds and insects, and its song from the blackened landscape is one of the luphan's most poignant sounds — life announcing its return.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

ASH LARK

Akva cinerea cantrix



ASH LARK
Akva cinerea cantrix

Carrion Kite

Akva mortualis rapax

A large, dark-winged scavenger bird found throughout the savannah, particularly abundant along the Bronze Track and near settlements where livestock slaughter provides reliable food. Carrion kites are recognisable by their broad, ragged-edged wings, hooked beak, and the distinctive pale patch at the base of the neck. They soar on thermals for hours with minimal effort, scanning the ground below for carrion, and their circling silhouette against the sky is one of the savannah's most constant sights.

Carrion kites are bold to the point of insolence. They will descend on unattended food, drying meat, and even personal belongings if these are left in the open — they appear to have a particular attraction to anything that glints or shines. Travellers on the Bronze Track learn quickly to cover their provisions. The birds are also aggressive in defence of a carcass, and a group of kites on a kill will challenge even a brindle hyena with spread wings and harsh screaming calls.

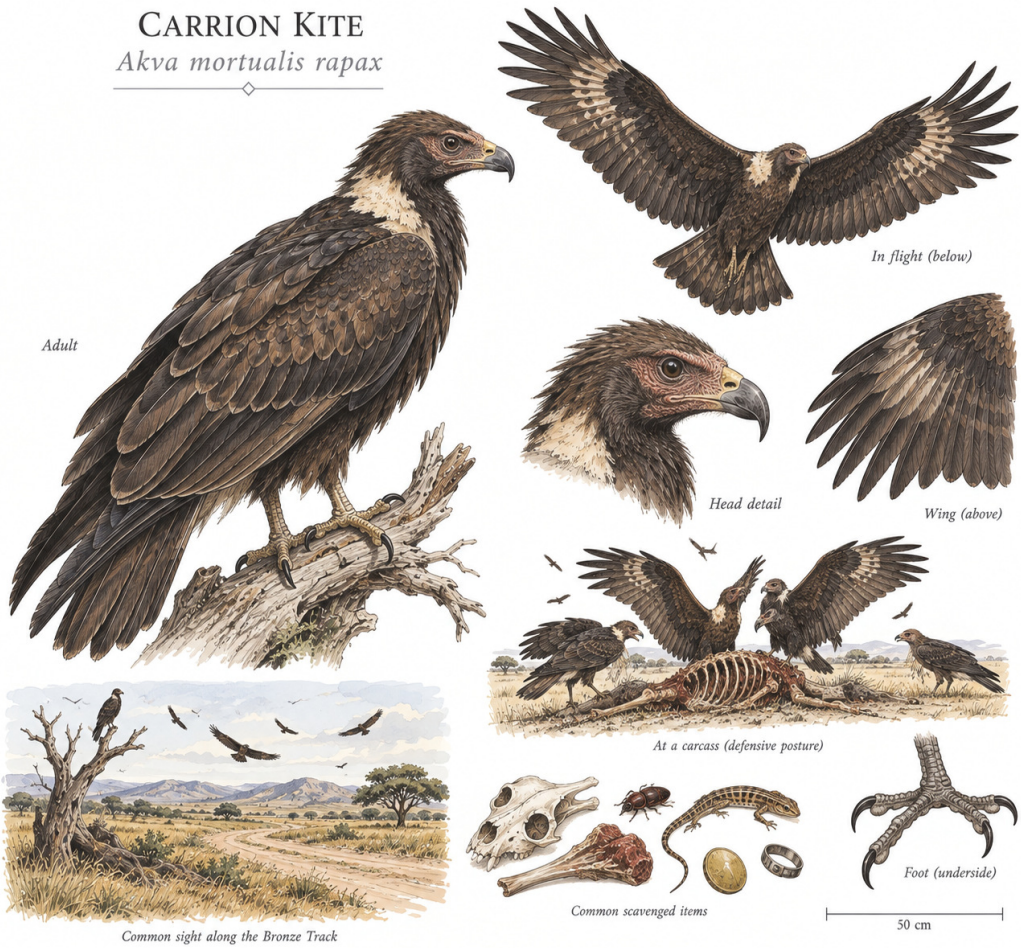
Their ecological role as scavengers is important, and they are generally left unmolested despite their thieving habits. The Mediatan attitude toward the carrion kite is one of exasperated familiarity — the bird is a nuisance, but it is *our* nuisance.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

Carrion kites have been observed following managed burn-offs at close range, apparently hunting small animals and insects flushed by the flames. They show no fear of fire and have been seen landing on still-smouldering ground within minutes of a burn passing through. This behaviour has not been previously documented and suggests a more active hunting strategy than the species' common name would imply.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

CARRION KITE
Akva mortualis rapax



CARRION KITE
Akva mortualis rapax

Savannah Eagle

Akva aureus luphanis



THE largest raptor of the Mediata Savannah, with a wingspan exceeding one and a half metres and powerful talons capable of taking prey up to the size of a savannah hare or young antelope. Savannah eagles are striking birds, with dark brown plumage above and a tawny breast, and they hunt from soaring height over the open grassland and the foothills of the Itumue Mountains.

Unlike the sundagger hawk, which relies on solar alignment, the savannah eagle hunts by pure speed and power — a steep, direct dive at tremendous velocity, striking its prey with an impact that is frequently lethal on contact. They are solitary and territorial, with mated pairs maintaining large hunting ranges that they defend vigorously against other raptors.

Savannah eagles nest on rocky outcrops and in the upper branches of stonebark figs, and their nest sites are used for generations. The eagles' presence is taken by herders as a sign of healthy grassland—where the eagles hunt, the prey base is sufficient, and the ecosystem is in balance.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

SAVANNAH EAGLE

Akva aureus luphanis



SAVANNAH EAGLE

Akva aureus luphanis

Chapter 10

Reptiles and Amphibians



SPECIES DESCRIBED

Rivermouth Crocodile <i>Vesbu magna riparia</i>	118
Greater Savannah Python <i>Vesbu constricta magna</i>	120
Banded Dust-Adder <i>Vesbu pulvereae fasciata</i>	122
Shimmerscale Viper <i>Vesbu iridescens</i>	124
Floodplain Chorus Frog <i>Vesbu canora inundata</i>	126

THE largest reptilian predator of the savannah, found along the lower Bronze River, in the quieter reaches of Arakcadia Bay, and in the deeper pools of the Dassea Shallows. Rivermouth crocodiles are formidable animals, with mature specimens reaching lengths of four to five metres and possessing crushing bite strength. They are ambush predators, lying submerged for hours before striking with explosive speed at prey that comes to the water's edge.

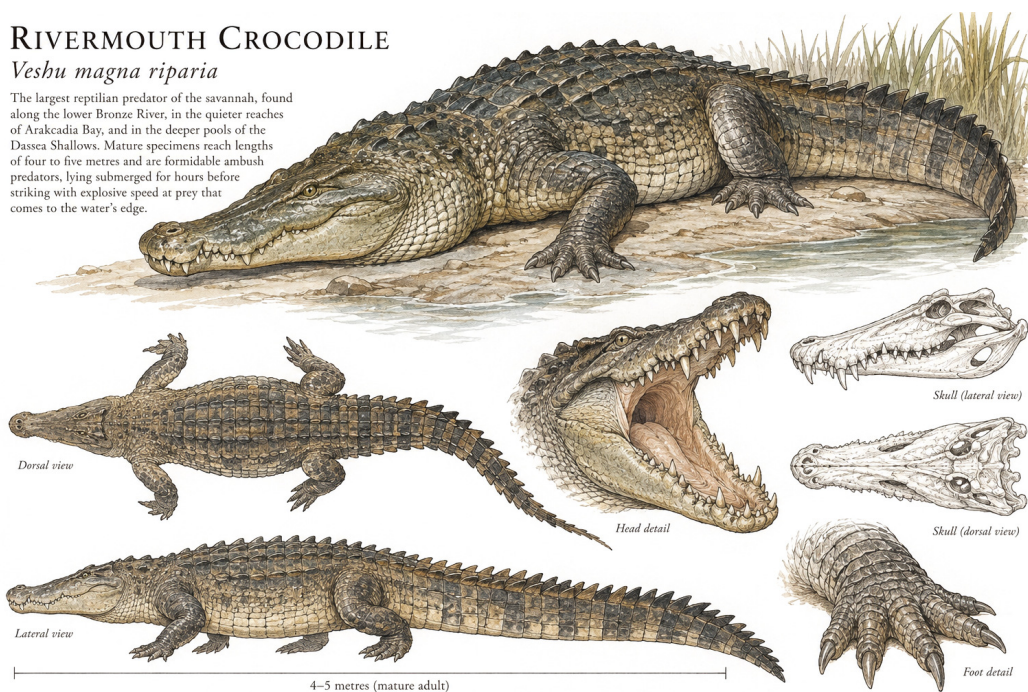
Crocodiles and humans coexist in the savannah with wary mutual respect. Attacks on humans are uncommon but not unknown, and river crossings in crocodile territory are undertaken with due caution. The crocodile's role as the river's apex predator is ecologically critical: by controlling populations of large fish and aquatic mammals, they maintain the balance of the river ecosystem.

118

RIVERMOUTH CROCODILE

Vesbu magna riparia

The largest reptilian predator of the savannah, found along the lower Bronze River, in the quieter reaches of Arakcadia Bay, and in the deeper pools of the Dassea Shallows. Mature specimens reach lengths of four to five metres and are formidable ambush predators, lying submerged for hours before striking with explosive speed at prey that comes to the water's edge.



RIVERMOUTH CROCODILE

Vesbu magna riparia

Greater Savannah Python

Vespu constricta magna



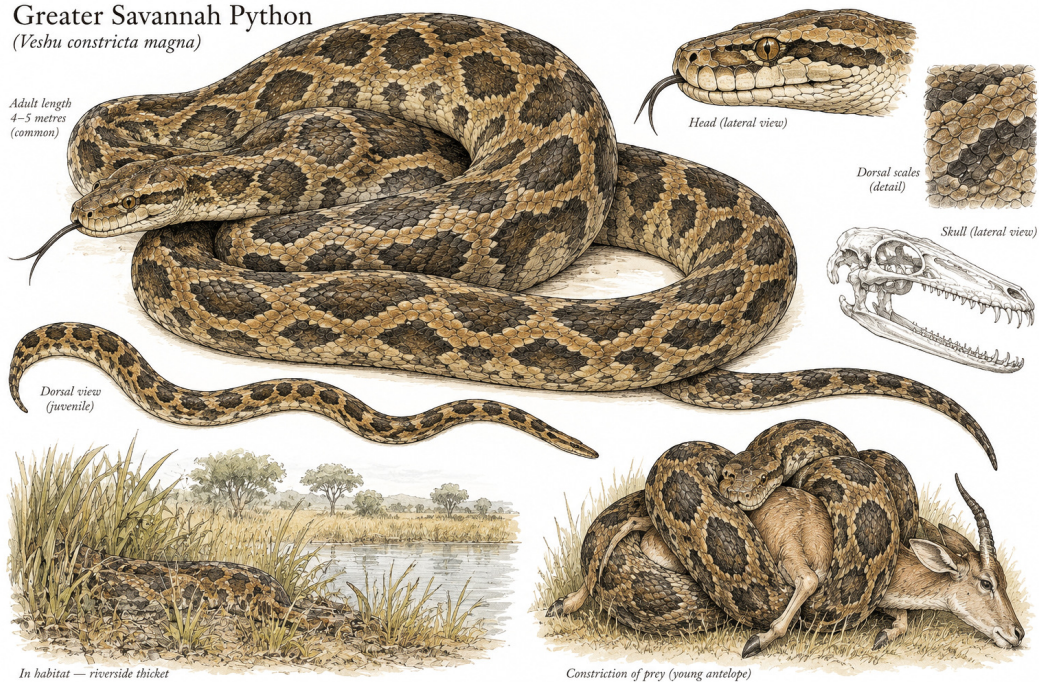
A large constricting snake reaching lengths of four metres or more, found in a variety of habitats from open grassland to riverside thickets. The greater python is a patient, ambush-oriented hunter that takes prey up to the size of small antelope, killing by constriction.

Pythons are not venomous and are not aggressive toward humans, though an encounter with a large specimen in tall grass can be startling. They are tolerated and sometimes encouraged near settlements for their effectiveness at controlling rodent populations.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Greater Savannah Python (*Vesbu constricta magna*)

Adult length
4–5 metres
(common)



GREATER SAVANNAH PYTHON

Vesbu constricta magna

Banded Dust-Adder

Veshu pulverea fasciata

A venomous snake of the dry grassland, typically half a metre to one metre in length, with distinctive pale and dark brown banding. Dust-adders are ambush predators that lie concealed in grass tussocks and leaf litter, striking at passing rodents, lizards, and ground-nesting birds.

The venom is painful and causes significant local swelling but is rarely fatal to a healthy adult human. Bites are most common during the early rains, when the snakes are flushed from their dry-season refugia by rising water. Bloodroot poultice is the standard field treatment.

SECOND EDITION CORRECTION

The first edition erroneously classified this species as a juvenile form of the greater savannah python. It is a completely distinct species in a different family. I have no satisfactory excuse for this error beyond the observation that they were both brown and I was tired.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Banded Dust-Adder (*Vesbu pulverea fasciata*)

Adult
(~0.5 – 1 metre)



Head (lateral view)



Dorsal scales
(detail)



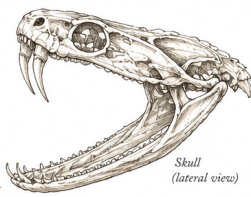
Ventral scales
(detail)



Juvenile



In habitat — concealed in grass tussock



Skull
(lateral view)



Head
(dorsal view)



Bloodroot
(*Argemone rubra*)
— used for treatment
of bites

BANDED DUST-ADDER

Vesbu pulverea fasciata

Shimmerscale Viper

Vespu iridescens



A slender, mildly venomous snake of the eastern savannah margins, included here primarily for its remarkable appearance: its scales exhibit a strong iridescent quality, shifting through blue, green, and violet as the angle of light changes. The effect is most striking in direct sunlight and is produced by microstructures in the scale surface that refract light in a manner analogous to the iridescent cloud layer visible in the upper atmosphere.

Whether there is any actual connection between the shimmerscale viper's iridescence and the atmospheric phenomenon is unknown and probably unknowable. The resemblance may be coincidental. The snake does not appear to use its iridescence for any obvious purpose — it is not involved in courtship display, threat behaviour, or camouflage. It is simply, as far as we can determine, a very beautiful snake.

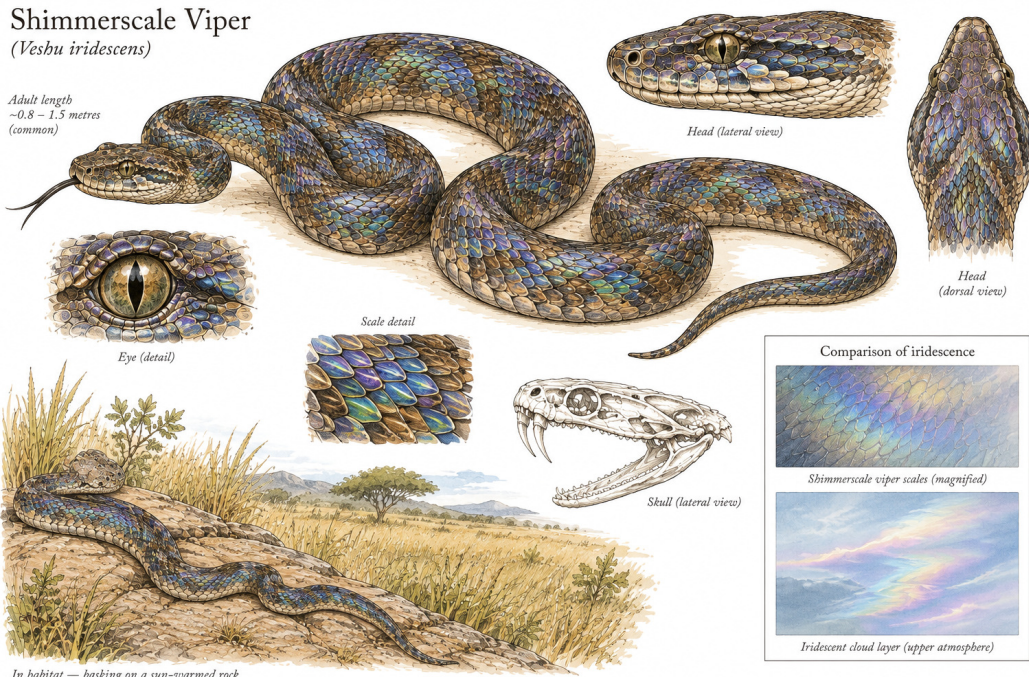
The viper is uncommon and retiring, and its venom is mild — roughly comparable to a wasp sting. It poses no danger to humans.

— *New to the third edition.*

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Shimmerscale Viper (*Vesbu iridescens*)

Adult length
~0.8 – 1.5 metres
(common)



SHIMMERSCALE VIPER

Vesbu iridescens

Floodplain Chorus Frog

Vespu canora inundata

A small, bright green frog found in enormous numbers in the seasonal wetlands during Poorneet, when its massed calling produces the continuous, pulsating chorus that is the defining soundscape of the rainy season. Individual calls are a simple two-note chirp, but the aggregate effect of thousands of frogs calling in approximate synchrony creates a complex, rhythmic wave of sound that can be heard at distances of several kilometres.

The chorus frogs' synchrony is not perfect — there is always a slight phase variation between individuals — and the resulting interference patterns produce the characteristic “beating” quality of the Poorneet nights. The frogs' breeding cycle is tightly tied to the rains; they aestivate underground during the dry season, emerging within hours of the first substantial downpour.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

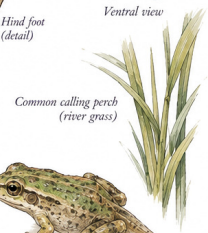
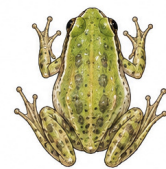
Floodplain Chorus Frog (*Vesbu canora inundata*)

Adult length
2.5 – 4.5 cm
(common)



Call (male)

"tik ... tok"



FLOODPLAIN CHORUS FROG

Vesbu canora inundata

Chapter II

Fish and Aquatic Life



SPECIES DESCRIBED

Lanternfish <i>Marva lucerna</i>	130
Jade Perch <i>Marva viridis jadensis</i>	132
Bayskimmer <i>Marva salsus velocis</i>	134
Bay Dolphin <i>Marva delphinaris arakca</i>	136

Lanternfish

Marva lucerna



THE most economically important fish of the Bronze River and Arakcadia Bay, and a staple of the regional diet. Lanternfish are medium-sized, averaging roughly the length of a forearm, with silver-bronze scales and — the feature that gives them their name — a row of small, luminous spots along each flank that glow faintly in dark water.

The bioluminescence of lanternfish is well-understood: the light is produced by symbiotic bacteria housed in specialised skin organs, and it serves primarily as a means of maintaining school cohesion in murky river water. At night, schools of lanternfish are visible as drifting constellations of pale light beneath the surface — a sight that is both beautiful and useful, as it tells fisherfolk exactly where to cast their nets.

Lanternfish are taken by net, line, and trap throughout the year, though catches peak during Poorneet when the fish move into flooded margins to spawn. They are the principal ingredient in the Bronze River stew that is Arakcadia's most characteristic dish.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Lanternfish (*Marva lucerna*)

FAMILY: MARVIDAE
ORDER: CYPRINIFORMES
HABITAT: BRONZE RIVER,
ARAKCADIA Bay
LENGTH: 25–40 cm
(average)

*A common and commercially
important species throughout
the Bronze River and
Arakcadia Bay.*

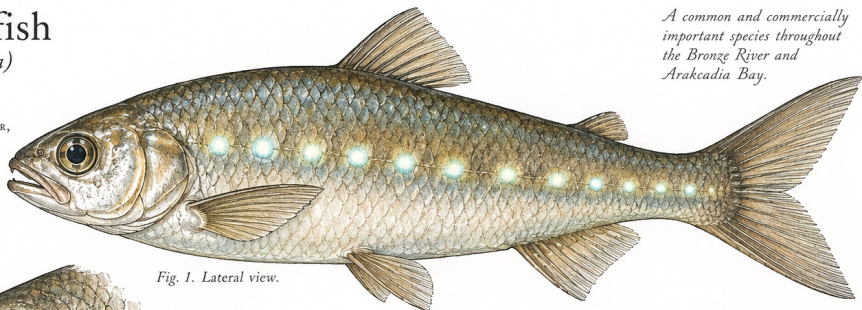


Fig. 1. Lateral view.



Fig. 2. Head detail.



Fig. 4. Scale detail
(showing luminescent organ).

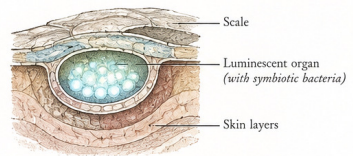


Fig. 5. Cross-section of luminescent organ.

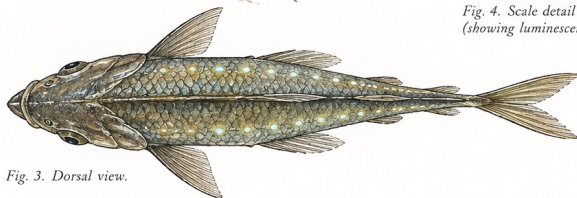


Fig. 3. Dorsal view.



Fig. 6. Schooling behaviour
(at night).

LANTERNFISH
Marva lucerna

Jade Perch

Marva viridis jadensis



A large, deep-bodied fish found in the Jade Oasis and the lower reaches of the rivers that feed it. Jade perch are named for the vivid green-blue colour of their scales, which matches the distinctive hue of the Jade Oasis itself. They can reach considerable size—specimens exceeding ten kilograms have been recorded—and they are prized as a food fish, with firm, white flesh and a mild flavour.

The green-blue colouration is caused by pigments derived from the algae and microorganisms that thrive in the oasis's mineral-rich water. Jade perch kept in ordinary river water gradually lose their colour over a period of several months.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Jade Perch

(*Marva viridis jadensis*)

FAMILY: MARVIDAE
ORDER: CYPRINIFORMES
HABITAT: JADE OASIS,
lower river reaches
LENGTH: up to 90 cm
WEIGHT: up to 10+ kg
(recorded)

A large, deep-bodied fish found
in the Jade Oasis and the lower
reaches of the rivers that feed it.
Prized for its firm, white flesh
and mild flavour.

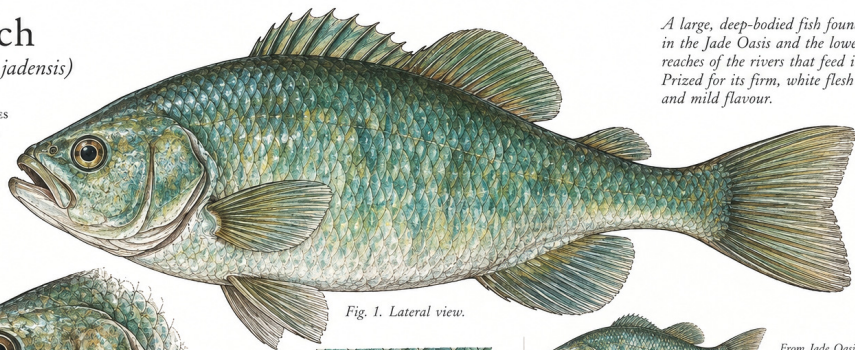


Fig. 1. Lateral view.

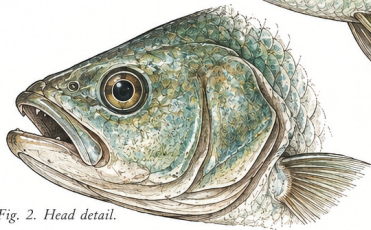


Fig. 2. Head detail.



Fig. 3. Scale detail
(showing green-blue pigmentation).

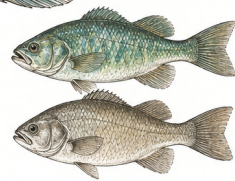


Fig. 4. Colour variation.

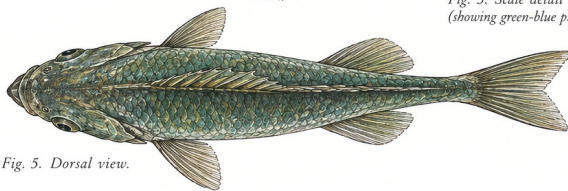


Fig. 5. Dorsal view.

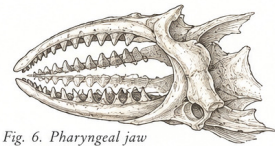


Fig. 6. Pharyngeal jaw
(for crushing harder food items).

JADE PERCH
Marva viridis jadensis

Bayskipper

Marva salsus velocis

A small, fast-swimming fish of Arakcadia Bay's shallow margins, found in dense schools that move as a single, shimmering mass. Bayskimmers feed on plankton and small crustaceans, and their rapid, darting movements create the characteristic flashing disturbance on the water's surface that is a familiar sight from the bay shore.

Bayskimmers are too small and too bony to be a primary food fish, but they are taken in quantity and dried for use as a seasoning and stock base. More importantly, their schools are a critical food source for larger predatory fish, seabirds, and river crocodiles, forming a link in the food chain that connects the bay's microscopic life to its largest predators.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Bayskipper

(*Marva salsus velocis*)

FAMILY: MARVIDAE
ORDER: CYPRINIFORMES
HABITAT: SHALLOW COASTAL WATERS,
ARAKCADIA BAY
LENGTH: 8–15 cm
(average)

A small, fast-swimming fish found in dense schools throughout the shallow margins of Arakcadia Bay. Though too small to be a primary food fish, bayskippers are vital to the bay's ecosystem.

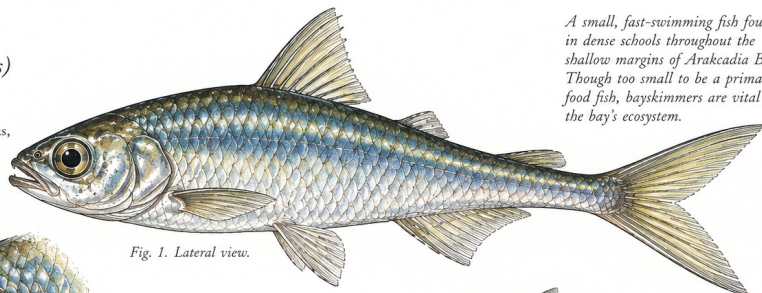


Fig. 1. Lateral view.

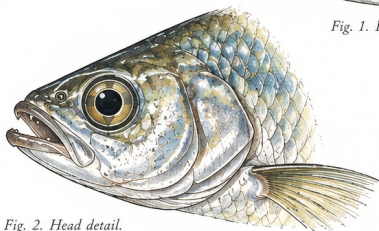


Fig. 2. Head detail.



Fig. 3. Scale detail (showing iridescent coloration).



Fresh coloration (live, in water)



Preserved coloration (after drying)

Fig. 4. Colour variation.

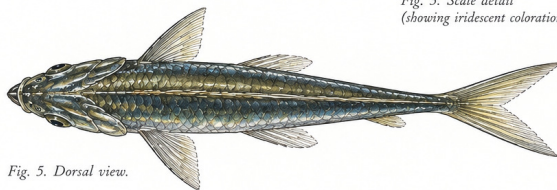


Fig. 5. Dorsal view.

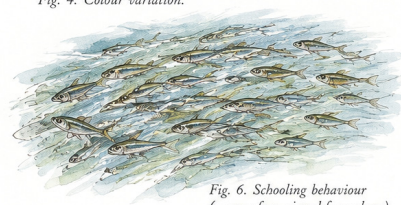


Fig. 6. Schooling behaviour (near surface, viewed from above).

B A Y S K I M M E R
Marva salsus velocis

Bay Dolphin

Marva delphinaris arakca



STRICTLY speaking not a fish—the bay dolphin is an air-breathing marine mammal—but I include it here for convenience, as fisherfolk regard it as part of the bay’s aquatic community and would find its absence from this chapter peculiar. Bay dolphins are found in the deeper waters of Arakcadia Bay and along the nearby coast, in pods of ten to thirty individuals. They are sleek, grey-bodied animals roughly two to three metres in length, fast swimmers, and highly social.

Dolphins are regarded with considerable affection by the bay's fishing communities. They are frequently observed driving bayskimmer schools into tight balls near the surface—a hunting behaviour that incidentally makes the fish easier for net-fishers to catch as well. Whether the dolphins are aware of this cooperation is debated; the fisherfolk are quite certain they are. Dolphins also have a well-documented habit of approaching boats, swimming alongside them, and occasionally breaching clear of the water in what can only be described as exuberance.

Their intelligence is apparent to anyone who has observed them for any length of time. They communicate through a complex repertoire of clicks and whistling calls, they coordinate their hunting with precision, and they display behaviour toward injured pod members—supporting them at the surface to breathe—that is difficult to interpret as anything other than care.

— *New to the third edition, at the urging of the Arakcadian fisherfolk's guild, who were vocal in their displeasure at the dolphin's omission from earlier editions.*

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Bay Dolphin (*Marva delphinaris arakca*)

ORDER: CETACEA
FAMILY: DELPHINIDAE
HABITAT: ARAKCAÜIA Bay
AND nearby coast
LENGTH: 2-3 metres
WEIGHT: 150-300 kg
(average)

Intelligent, social, and widely regarded with affection by the fishing communities of Arakcadia Bay. Often seen in pods, and frequently observed hunting alongside schools of bayskimmers.

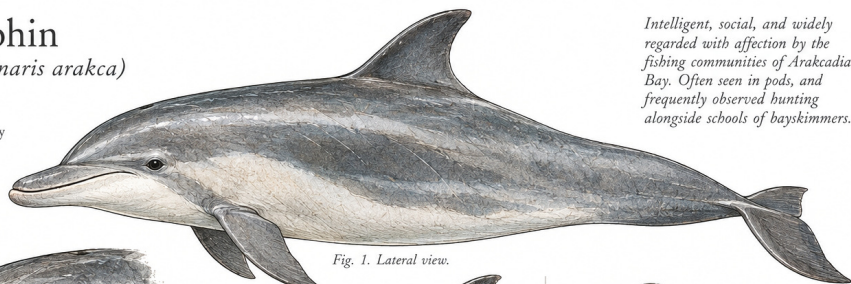


Fig. 1. Lateral view.

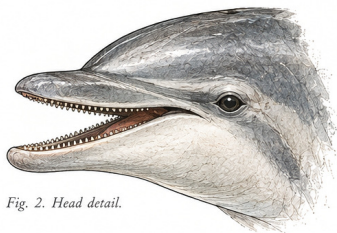


Fig. 2. Head detail.



Fig. 3.
Dorsal view.



Fig. 4. Dorsal fin variation
(from different individuals).

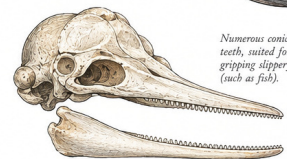


Fig. 5. Skull (lateral view).

Numerous conical teeth, suited for gripping slippery prey (such as fish).



Fig. 6. Pod at the surface.

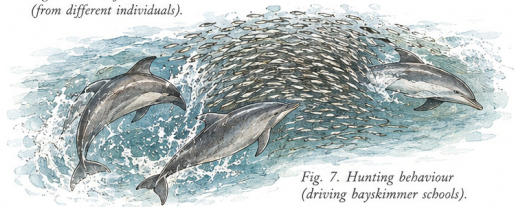


Fig. 7. Hunting behaviour
(driving bayskimmer schools).

BAY DOLPHIN
Marva delphinaris arakca

Chapter 12

Insects and Invertebrates



The invertebrate life of the savannah is vastly more diverse than the vertebrate life and plays ecological roles that are, if anything, more fundamental. A comprehensive treatment would require several volumes; I confine myself here to species of particular note.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Savannah Termite <i>Dumashuvelu architecta</i>	140
Ember Moth <i>Akashuvelu ignea</i>	142
Dust Dancer <i>Akashuvelu saltans noctiluma</i>	144
Scarlet Dung Beetle <i>Dumashuvelu scarlatina</i>	146
Savannah Scorpion <i>Dumashuvelu scorpialis</i>	148

Savannah Termite

Dumashuvelu architecta



THE unseen architects of the luphan. Savannah termites build mounds that dot the grassland in enormous numbers—thousands per square kilometre in some areas—and which range in size from modest hillocks to structures exceeding three metres in height. The mounds are sophisticated constructions with regulated internal temperature and humidity, ventilation shafts, fungal gardens, and water storage chambers.

The ecological importance of termites cannot be overstated. They process dead plant material on a scale that no other organism matches, recycling nutrients back into the soil. Their mounds alter local drainage patterns, create microclimates that support distinct plant communities, and provide habitat for dozens of other species—from the termite-crown mushroom to nesting birds to the small lizards that hunt on the warm mound surfaces.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Savannah Termite (*Dumashuvelu architecta*)

The unseen architects of the luphan. Found in vast numbers across the Mediata Savannah, these termites process dead plant material, recycle nutrients, and build complex mounds that shape the savannah ecosystem.



Queen



King



Soldier



Worker

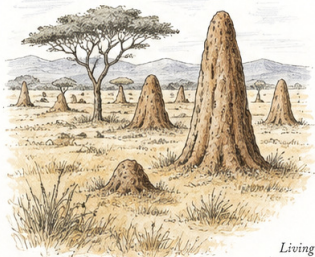


Nymph



Soldier Head
(front view)

0 5 10 mm

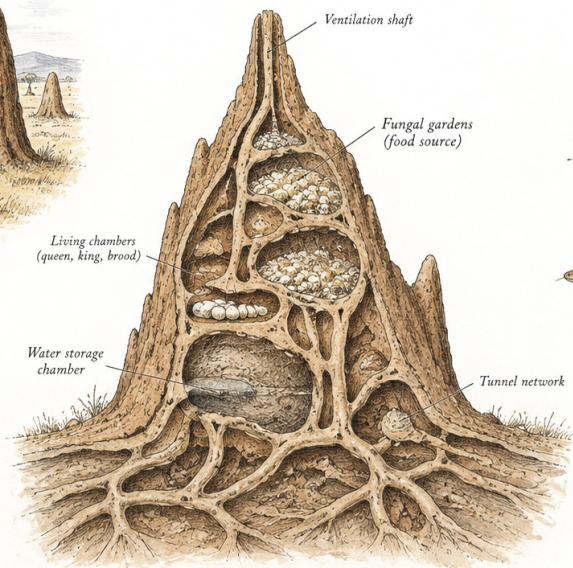


Mound in landscape



Mound material
(compacted soil and plant matter)

0 1 2 3 cm



Section through termite mound

0 1 2 3 m



Termite-crown mushroom
(symbiotic species)



Savannah lizard
(often found on mound surfaces)



Mound-nesting bird
(one of many species that use
termite mounds for habitat)

SAVANNAH TERMITE

Dumashuvelu architecta

Ember Moth

Akashuvelu ignea

A large moth, with a wingspan of eight to ten centimetres, found throughout the savannah during Buath Gurru, when it is the principal pollinator of the firecrown and several other flowering species. The ember moth is named for the colouration of its wings—deep orange with darker markings that give them the appearance of glowing coals—and for the remarkable fact that its thorax generates noticeable heat.

The heat production is genuine and measurable: an ember moth's body temperature is several degrees above ambient, even on cool nights. The mechanism is muscular—the flight muscles generate heat through rapid vibration—but the degree of heat produced exceeds what is typical for moths of similar size. The warmth may serve a thermoregulatory function, allowing the moth to fly and feed in the cool night-time temperatures of late Buath Gurru, but it also has the incidental effect of warming the flowers it visits, which may accelerate pollen development. Whether the moth and the firecrown have co-evolved this relationship is a question I find deeply interesting and cannot yet answer.

SECOND EDITION NOTE

Local reports of ember moths being attracted to campfires and occasionally igniting have been confirmed through direct observation. The moths' waxy wing coating is moderately flammable, and their heat-seeking orientation can, in unfortunate circumstances, bring them too close to open flame. This is not a useful adaptation.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Ember Moth (*Akashuvelu ignea*)

A large moth found throughout the Mediata Savannah during Buath Gurru, when it is the principal pollinator of the firecrown and several other flowering species. Named for the colouration of its wings — deep orange with darker markings that give them the appearance of glowing coals — and for the remarkable heat generated by its thorax.



Dorsal view



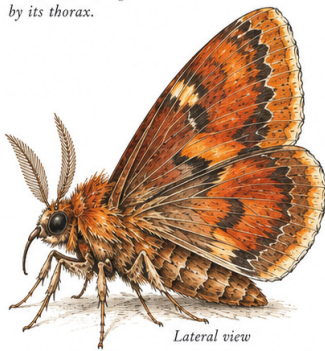
Head (front view)

0 2 4 6 8 10 cm

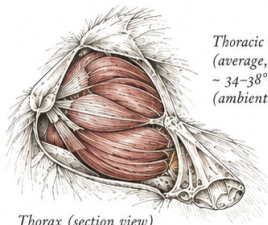
Wingspan (dorsal view)



Hindwing (ventral view)



Lateral view



Thorax (section view)
showing enlarged flight muscles

Thoracic temperature
(average, at rest):
~ 34–38°C
(ambient: ~ 20°C)



Firecrown
(one of the primary
plant species pollinated
by ember moths)



Feeding on firecrown
(note extended proboscis)

EMBER MOTH

Akashuvelu ignea

Dust Dancer

Akashuvelu saltans noctiluma



A small flying insect — technically a beetle, not a true fly — found across the savannah during the warm, humid nights of Buath Gurru and early Garrawang. Dust dancers are bioluminescent, producing a bright, cold green-white light from organs on the abdomen. On still nights, they gather in swarms of hundreds or thousands that drift slowly over the grassland, flashing in complex patterns that appear coordinated across the entire swarm.

The synchronised flashing is the dust dancer's most remarkable feature. Individual beetles flash at a rate of roughly once per second, but the swarm as a whole produces wave-like patterns of light that sweep across its extent in a manner that suggests coordination beyond simple mutual stimulation. How this coordination is achieved is not understood. The effect, seen from a distance, resembles a slowly churning cloud of pale green stars, and it is one of the quiet wonders of the savannah night.

Dust dancers are entirely harmless. They feed on flower nectar and contribute to pollination, though they are less efficient pollinators than the ember moth.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

Emik Toravel's careful observations during the 586 NA expedition documented an apparent correlation between dust dancer swarm density and lunar phase: swarms are largest and most active on the darkest nights, diminishing as the moon's wax. This makes ecological sense — the beetles' bioluminescence is most effective as a mating signal in darkness — but the precision of the correlation is striking.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Dust Dancer

(*Akashuvelu saltans noctiluma*)

A small, bioluminescent beetle found across the Mediata Savannah during the warm, humid nights of Buath Gurru and early Garrawang. Dust dancers gather in vast, synchronised swarms, producing waves of cold green-white light that drift over the grassland like a field of stars.



Dorsal view
(wings extended)



Dorsal view
(wings closed)



Lateral view

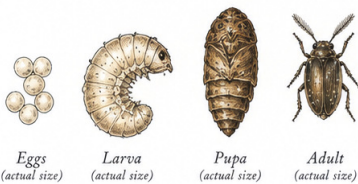


Bioluminescent organs
(abdomen, ventral view)

0 5 10 15 20 mm



Swarm at night (illustrative view)

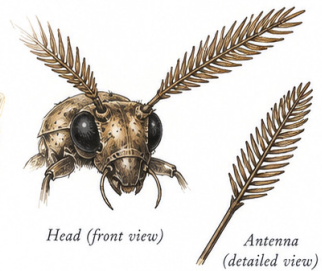


0 5 10 15 15 mm

Life stages (approximate sizes)



Feeding on savannah flower
(note pollen on body)



Head (front view)

Antenna
(detailed view)

DUST DANCER

Akashuvelu saltans noctiluma

A large, conspicuous beetle with vivid red-orange wing cases, found wherever large herbivores are present. Scarlet dung beetles are coprophages—they consume and process animal dung—and they are among the savannah's most important nutrient recyclers. Without dung beetles, the grassland would be buried in the waste products of its herds within a few seasons.

The beetles' habit of rolling dung into balls, burying them, and laying eggs within them is well-known and endlessly fascinating to watch. The adults navigate by the stars and moons — a navigational capacity that has been confirmed by experiment and which represents a genuinely sophisticated cognitive achievement for an animal with a brain smaller than a grain of lushin.

Scarlet Dung Beetle *Dumashuvelu scarlatina*

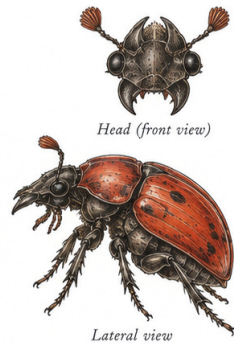
A large, conspicuous beetle found wherever large herbivores are present across the Mediata Savannah. Scarlet dung beetles consume and process animal dung, and are among the savannah's most important nutrient recyclers. Their habit of rolling dung into balls, burying them, and laying eggs within is well-known and endlessly fascinating to watch.



Dorsal view



Ventral view



Lateral view

Head (front view)



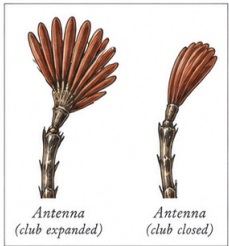
Rolling dung ball



Burying ball

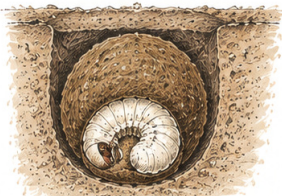


Navigating by the moons and stars

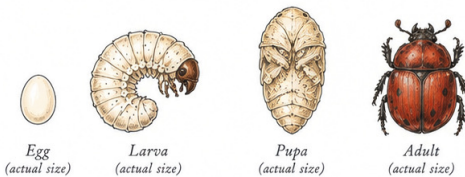


Antenna
(club expanded)

Antenna
(club closed)



Burial chamber (section view)
with egg



Egg
(actual size)

Larva
(actual size)

Pupa
(actual size)

Adult
(actual size)



Life stages (approximate sizes)



Tracks in sand
(with drag line from dung ball)

SCARLET DUNG BEETLE

Dumashuvelu scarlatina

Savannah Scorpion

Dumashuvelu scorpialis



A medium-sized arachnid, typically five to eight centimetres in length, found on dry, sandy, and rocky ground throughout the savannah, with particular abundance in the arid western margins and the transitional scrublands. Savannah scorpions are nocturnal hunters, spending the day concealed beneath rocks, in burrows, or within grass tussocks, and emerging after dark to hunt insects, small spiders, and occasionally other scorpions.

The sting is painful — roughly comparable to the dust-adder's bite in intensity — but not dangerous to healthy adults. Children and the elderly are at greater risk, and the standard treatment is a cold compress and rest, though bloodroot has been applied with mixed results. The sting is most commonly inflicted when a scorpion has concealed itself in a boot, a bedroll, or a fold of clothing left on the ground overnight — a hazard well-known to every traveller on the luphan.

Experienced savannah travellers shake out their boots each morning as a matter of reflex. This is sound practice.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Savannah Scorpion

(Dumashuvelu scorpialis)

A medium-sized arachnid found throughout the Mediata Savannah, particularly in arid regions and rocky ground. Nocturnal hunters, they emerge after dark to prey on insects and other small arthropods. Their sting is painful but rarely dangerous to healthy adults.



Lateral view
(defensive posture)



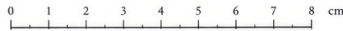
Lateral view
(normal posture)



Tracks in sand



Dorsal view



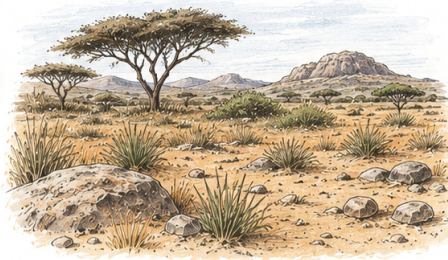
Ventral view



Head (front view)



Stinger (lateral view)



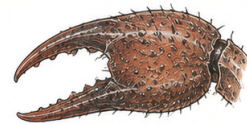
Typical habitat



Concealed during the day
(under rock)



Common prey



Pincer (detailed view)



SAVANNAH SCORPION

Dumashuvelu scorpialis

Chapter 13

Creatures of Unusual Note



This chapter collects species whose properties are sufficiently unusual — or sufficiently veshric — to warrant discussion beyond what is appropriate in a standard taxonomic entry.

SPECIES DESCRIBED

Stormcaller Cicada <i>Akashuvelu tempestatis</i>	152
Mirrorbeetle <i>Dumashuvelu specularis</i>	154
Stillwater Eel <i>Marva quiescens profunda</i>	156
The Roc <i>Akva titanis montanus</i>	158
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Stormcaller Cicada

Akashuvelu tempestatis

A large cicada found in the central and western savannah, unremarkable in appearance but notable for its relationship with weather. Stormcaller cicadas emerge from their underground nymphal stage and begin calling approximately twelve to eighteen hours before the first thunderstorm of Poorneet, with extraordinary consistency. They do this before there is any visible sign of approaching rain — no cloud buildup, no wind change, no drop in air pressure detectable by the Institute's instruments.

Mediatan herders have relied on stormcaller cicadas as rain predictors for as long as anyone can remember, and their reliability is well-established empirically. The mechanism by which the cicadas detect approaching rain at such distances remains unknown. It is not barometric pressure, humidity, wind direction, or any other meteorological variable we have been able to correlate with the timing of their emergence. The most parsimonious explanation is that they detect some environmental signal that our instruments are not designed to measure.

I have classified the stormcaller cicada's predictive ability as probably veshric, not because I can demonstrate a veshric mechanism, but because I have exhausted every non-veshric explanation I can think of.

THIRD EDITION NOTE

The interval between cicada emergence and the first storm has been recorded as ranging from ten to twenty-two hours across eight observed events. The variation may correlate with storm intensity—stronger storms appear to be predicted earlier—but the sample size is too small for confidence.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Stormcaller Cicada (*Akashuvelu tempestatis*)

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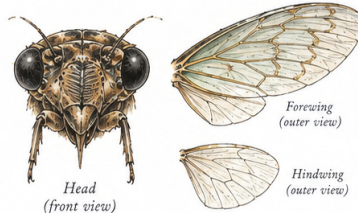
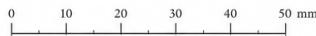
Dorsal view
(wings extended)



Dorsal view
(wings closed)



Lateral view



Head
(front view)

Forewing
(outer view)

Hindwing
(outer view)



Calling before the storm
(observational sketch)



Eggs
(actual size)



Nymph
(early instar)



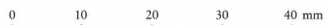
Nymph
(late instar)



Emergence
(from nymphal skin)



Adult
(actual size)



Life stages (approximate sizes)



Nymphal skin
(exuvia)



Nymph underground
(in burrow, section view)

STORMCALLER CICADA

Akashuvelu tempestatis

Mirrorbeetle

Dumashuvelu specularis



A small, rounded beetle found on exposed rocks and sandy ground in the eastern savannah. The mirrorbeetle is named for its wing-cases, which are polished to a mirror-like reflectance and which, remarkably, appear to display images that do not correspond to actual reflections of the surrounding environment.

This requires some explanation. The wing-cases of a living mirrorbeetle, when examined closely, show shifting patterns of colour and image that resemble, but do not match, the beetle's surroundings. The patterns are faint and abstract, more suggestive than representational, but multiple observers have independently reported seeing landscapes, water, vegetation, and sky in the wing-case surfaces — images that do not correspond to any visible feature of the immediate environment.

The effect ceases upon the beetle's death; the wing-cases of preserved specimens are merely reflective. This strongly suggests a biological or veshric process rather than a purely optical one.

I include the mirrorbeetle with full awareness that this entry will invite scepticism. I have observed the phenomenon myself on multiple occasions and am satisfied that it is real, though I am unable to explain it. Emik Toravel's sketches, made independently and without seeing mine, depict substantially similar patterns. The mirrorbeetle is harmless, uncommon, and very strange.

— *New to the third edition.*

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Mirrorbeetle

(*Dumashuvelu specularis*)

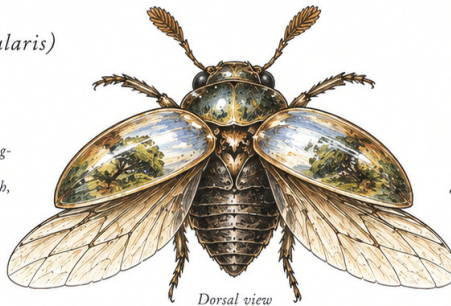
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New to the third edition.



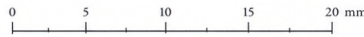
Dorsal view
(wings extended)



Dorsal view
(wings closed)



Lateral view



Head
(front view)



Left elytron
(outer view)



Right elytron
(outer view)



In habitat (eastern savannah)



Eggs
(actual size)



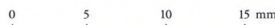
Larva
(actual size)



Pupa
(actual size)



Adult
(actual size)



Life stages (approximate sizes)



Multiple individuals
(variation in wing-case patterns)

MIRRORBEETLE

Dumashuvelu specularis

Stillwater Eel

Marva quiescens profunda



A large eel—specimens up to two metres long have been recorded—found in the deepest pools of the Bronze River and in the Jade Oasis. Stillwater eels are notable for the calming effect they appear to exert on the water around them. Pools inhabited by stillwater eels are consistently calmer—less turbulent, less disturbed by wind or current—than similar pools without them, even when environmental conditions are identical.

This effect has been observed by fisherfolk for generations and was long dismissed as folklore. However, systematic measurements taken during the 585 NA Dassea survey confirmed a statistically significant reduction in surface disturbance in eel-occupied pools compared to unoccupied control pools of similar size and depth. The mechanism is unknown. The eels secrete a mucus that forms a thin film on the water surface, which may contribute to surface tension effects, but this does not fully account for the degree of calming observed.

Stillwater eels are not eaten—their flesh is unpalatable—and they are generally left undisturbed by fisherfolk, who regard their presence as a sign of a healthy waterway.

— Entry expanded in the third edition with data from the 585 NA Dassea survey.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

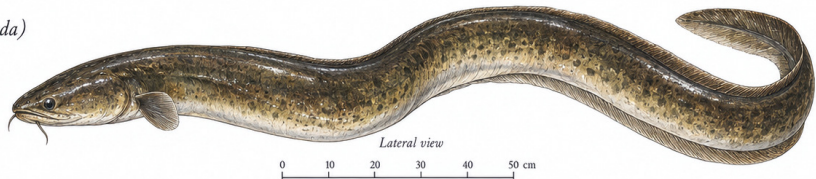
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Stillwater eels are not eaten — their flesh is unpalatable — and they are generally left undisturbed by fisherfolk, who regard their presence as a sign of a healthy waterway.

Entry expanded in the third edition with data from the 585 NA Dassea survey.



Head
(front-lateral view)



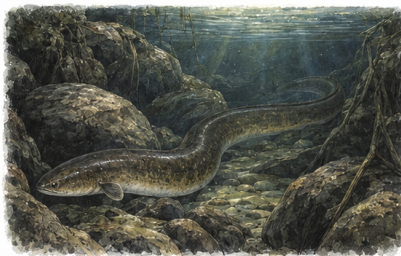
Jaw detail
(mouth open)



Skin and mucus layer
(detail, lateral view)



Surface film
(observational detail)



In habitat (deep pool, Bronze River)



Calm pool effect (observational sketch)

STILLWATER EEL
Marva quiescens profunda

The Roc

Akva titanis montanus

I have debated the inclusion of this entry across all three editions and have decided, in this final revision, that the weight of evidence warrants it—if only to establish what is known and separate it from what is legend.

The roc is a bird of gargantuan proportions, reported to inhabit the highest peaks of the Itumue Mountains and, by some accounts, the remote mountain ranges of Droschdech and beyond. Credible reports—and I use the word “credible” with care—describe a raptor with a wingspan approaching sixty metres, talons the length of a grown man’s arm, and the ability to carry off prey as large as a savannah strider. It is, if these reports are accurate, by far the largest flying creature in Canaan.

I have not seen a roc. Most naturalists have not. But the Institute’s archives contain three independent reports from mountain travellers and one from a Bronze Track caravan that observed what it described as an enormous shadow passing overhead in clear sky, accompanied by a wind like nothing any of them had experienced, and I have spoken personally with the caravan master, whom I consider reliable. Additionally, shed feathers of extraordinary size—fifteen to twenty-five centimetres, with a quill thickness consistent with a bird of implausible scale—have been recovered from the upper Itumue slopes and are held in the Institute’s collection. They are genuine feathers. They came from something.

The roc is not a savannah species. Its habitat, if it exists, is the high mountains, far above the luphan’s grasslands. But the savannah lies beneath the Itumue peaks, and if a roc were to hunt—and something that large must eat a great deal—it would hunt the luphan’s herds. The entry is included on this basis, and as a matter of scientific honesty: the evidence is insufficient for certainty but too substantial for silence.

— *New to the third edition. I expect correspondence.*

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Roc

(*Akva titanis montanus*)

A bird of gargantuan proportions, reputed to inhabit the highest peaks of the Itumue Mountains and perhaps remote ranges of Droshech and beyond.

Credible reports describe a raptor with a wingspan approaching sixty metres, talons the length of a grown man's arm, and the ability to carry prey as large as a savannah strider.

Most naturalists have not seen one; I have not seen one. The Institute archives contain three independent reports from mountain travellers and one from a Bronze Track caravan describing an enormous shadow overhead and a wind of extraordinary force.

Shed feathers of extraordinary size, fifteen to twenty-five centimetres long with unusually thick quills, have been recovered from the upper Itumue slopes and are held in the Institute's collection.

The evidence is insufficient for certainty but too substantial for silence.

The roc is not a savannah species, but if it exists it may hunt the luphan's herds beneath the mountains.

New to the third edition. I expect correspondence.



In habitat, Itumue Mountains
(observational sketch)



Shadow over a Bronze Track caravan
(from traveller's account)

THE ROC
Akva titanis montanus

Displacer Beast

Shuvavesh phantasma

A large predator of the forest margins and the transitional woodlands where the savannah gives way to the Enchanted Forests, known from scattered but persistent reports spanning several centuries. The displacer beast is described as a massive, dark-furred, cat-like creature — roughly the size of a large nakva — with the extraordinary and deeply unsettling addition of two long, muscular tentacles extending from its shoulders, tipped with barbed pads.

The displacer beast's most remarkable property is the one from which it takes its name: the creature is never quite where it appears to be. Observers consistently report that the animal's visual image is displaced from its actual position by a distance of roughly a metre — an illusion, or perhaps a veshric distortion of light, that makes the creature extremely difficult to strike or evade. The effect is apparently continuous and involuntary, not a behaviour the animal can turn on and off. Arrows aimed at a displacer beast will pass through empty air where the eye insists the creature stands.

This is, I am aware, an extraordinary claim. I include it because the reports are consistent across multiple independent sources spanning different decades, and because the tentacled body plan — which is verified by at least two preserved specimens held in private collections — is itself sufficiently unusual to establish that the displacer beast is no ordinary predator. If the anatomy is real, the veshric displacement may well be also.

Displacer beasts are rare, solitary, and confined to deep forest cover. They are not a savannah species in the strict sense, but they have been reported at the forest-savannah margin, and any creature capable of killing a nakva warrants the attention of those who travel the luphan's western edges.

— *New to the third edition.*

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Displacer Beast (*Shuvavesh phantasma*)

A large predator of the forest margins and transitional woodlands where the savannah gives way to the Enchanted Forests.

The displacer beast is a massive, dark-furred, cat-like creature, roughly the size of a large nakva, with two long, muscular shoulder tentacles tipped with barbed pads.

Its most remarkable property is that it is never quite where it appears to be; its visible image is displaced from its true position by roughly a metre, making it difficult to strike or evade. Observers report that arrows aimed where the eye insists the creature stands pass harmlessly through empty air.

Reports are consistent across multiple independent sources over several centuries. At least two preserved specimens in private collections verify the unusual tentacled body plan, lending some support to the reported veshric displacement.

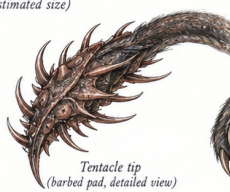
The species is rare, solitary, and confined mostly to deep forest cover, though it is occasionally reported at the forest-savannah margin.

Any creature capable of killing a nakva warrants the attention of travellers along the luphan's western edges.

New to the third edition.



Head detail
(lateral view)



Tentacle tip
(barbed pad, detailed view)



Fore paw
(ventral view)

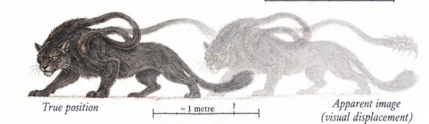


Track
(actual size)

0 5 10 15 cm



In habitat at forest-savannah margin
(observational sketch)



Displacement effect
(illustrative sketch - apparent image offset from true position)



Arrow passes through apparent image
(from traveller's account)

True position
(offset from arrow)

DISPLACER BEAST

Shuvavesh phantasma

APPENDIX A

Seasonal Calendar and Ecological Cycles



The seven Canaanese seasons drive the luphan's ecological rhythms:

BIDERAP*Dry Season*

The savannah at its most austere. Grasses dry and golden, water recedes to permanent sources. Managed burns clear dead growth. Wildlife concentrates at waterholes and river margins. Temperatures exceed 30 degrees regularly. Ghost-grass luminescence at its weakest.

IUK*Cooling Season*

Temperatures ease. Dew-moss production peaks. Some early-flowering species begin to bud. Migratory birds arrive from coastal regions. Stillest period for wind; singing reeds go quiet.

WARING*Frost Season*

The coolest period. Light frosts possible in the eastern savannah near the foothills. Candlewood burning for warmth. Nakva prides at their most active, hunting lean-season prey. Banded dust-adder dormancy.

GULING*Warming Season*

Rising temperatures and humidity signal the approaching rains. Stormcaller cicadas begin their underground preparation. Savannah hare populations begin to recover. Bronzebark acacia leaf-flush.

POORNEET*Rainy Season*

Torrential rains, thunderstorms, flash flooding. Explosive green growth. Chorus frogs emerge. Bronze-reed shoot harvest. Mire-lanterns bloom. Lanternfish spawning. Glimmerberry fruiting begins. The savannah's most productive period.

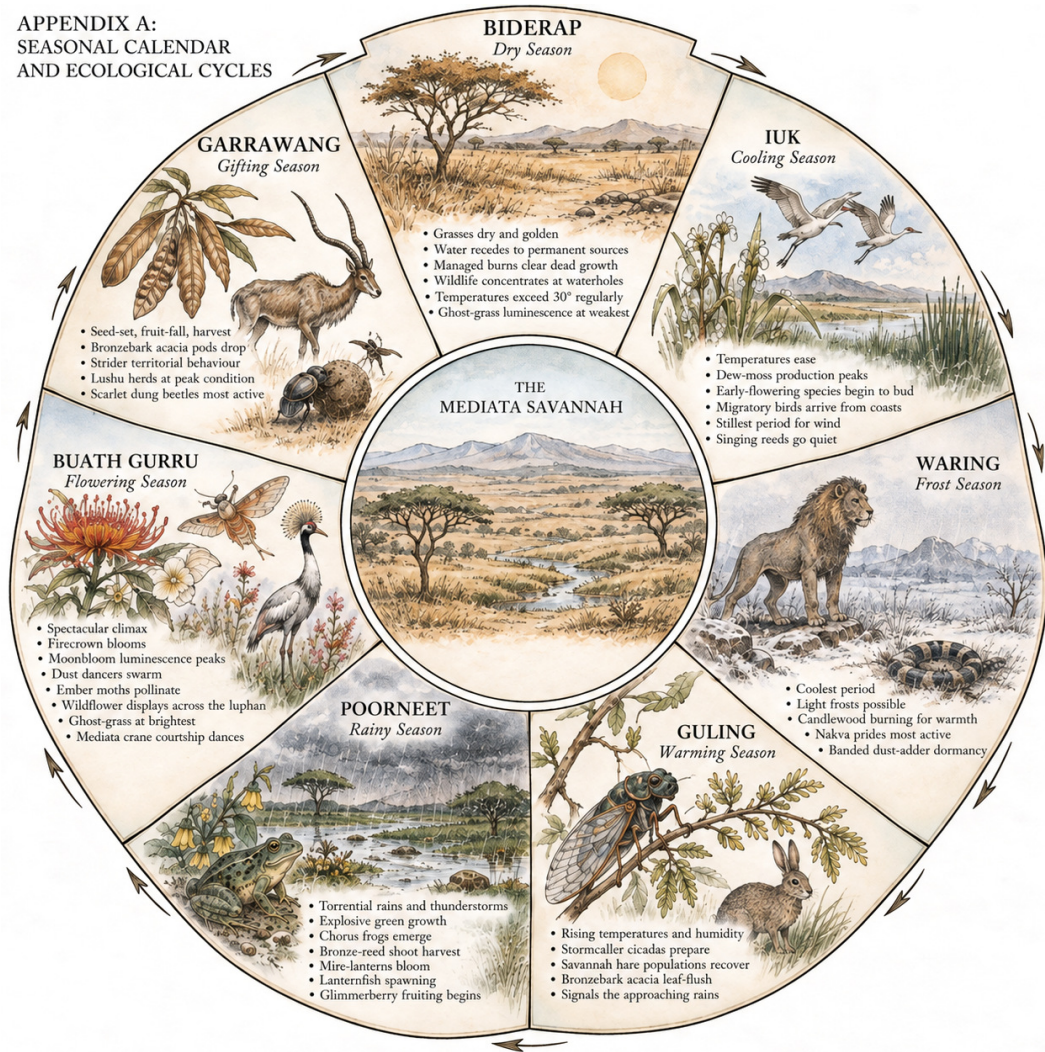
BUATH GURRU*Flowering Season*

The spectacular climax. Firecrown blooms, moonbloom luminescence peaks, dust dancers swarm, ember moths pollinate. Wildflower displays across the luphan. Ghost-grass at its brightest. Mediata crane courtship dances. The season most associated with the Child of All Life.

GARRAWANG*Gifting Season*

Seed-set, fruit-fall, harvest. Bronzebark acacia pods drop. Strider territorial behaviour in wild herds. Lushu herds at peak condition. Scarlet dung beetles most active. The season of abundance.

APPENDIX A:
SEASONAL CALENDAR
AND ECOLOGICAL CYCLES



APPENDIX A

Seasonal Calendar and Ecological Cycles

Glossary of Mediataan Natural History Terms

Terms used in this work, drawn from the Mediataan language. For a complete treatment of the language, see A Lexicon of Mediataan by Relshan Kortis (Arakcadian Royal Library Press, 584 NA).

akva a bird; from *akum* (sky), meaning “sky-thing”

aru water

arun rain

aruntira the wet season

arvan a river, stream

duma earth, soil

kam spirit, life-force

kara a stone, rock

kemu fire

luphan the savannah; open grassland

lushin grain

lushu a grazing animal, herd-beast

lutan a tree

luva a plant; vegetation; growing things

luvel a flower; a blossom

marva a fish; from *maru* (sea), meaning “sea-creature”

nakva a lion

shavu wind

shuva an animal, beast, living creature

sisva a crane

vesharu the dry season

veshkam magic; literally “spirit-without-proper-home”

veshric of or pertaining to natural magic (scholarly usage, derived from *veshkam*)

veshu a snake

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