

## Module # 4 - Component # 2



## Mammals Part # 2 - African Folklore

### Introduction

The content that follows is written from transcribed tapes recorded by **Credo Mutwa**. Credo Mutwa is one of Southern Africa's most celebrated **Sangomas** or **witchdoctors**. The content therefore is not scientific but rather represent the feelings , beliefs and experiences of this exceptional man.

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***These stories are written in precisely the same way that Credo tells them, with all their original colloquialisms and styles.***

## Eland: Animal of Myths

The eland was viewed by Africans as an animal **closely associated with the sun**. The creature's **colour** suggested sunlight to Africans of all tribes and all races. And, in the language of many tribes, the eland is called by a name with two meanings - in the language of the **Zulu** people the name for the eland is *Impofu*, a name which means both 'the **light-skinned one**,' 'the golden-skinned one' and 'the humble one.' In ancient times, during sacred games in honour of the sun, brave African youths used to **summersault** over the back of a tamed or half-tamed male eland. In fact there is a painting showing such a sport in one of the caves in the Cape Province.

The eland is a **gentle animal, which is very easy to tame**. It has a love for human beings and will allow them to touch it. In olden days, even right up to the coming of white people to South Africa, our **kings used to keep** one or two tame elands - a male and a female. They did this for the sport that I had mentioned before, and also for the important fact that **the milk of an eland** is very, very rich - much richer than the milk of a cow - and it was used to give strength to sickly children. Many a princess or a prince with a delicate constitution, as a baby was brought to full strength by being given the milk of an eland and not that of a cow. **Eland milk** is very creamy and is **gladly tolerated by African babies**. And it was the milk that we used in the days when I was a young shaman in helping children with malnutrition.

When the milk of an eland had been **used to save the life of a human child**, that female eland would afterwards be trussed up and gently taken back, usually on a sled drawn by warriors, to the bush where it had come from, and **released unharmed - as a sign of gratitude** towards the entire eland race and to the sun god to whom all elands are sacred. If you are lying sick in an African village and you **dream of an eland, it is a good sign**. We are told it means that a great **healer will arrive** from far away, who will heal you from your illness, bringing you complete recovery.

An eland is a **symbol of freedom, also of enlightenment and courage**. If one is undergoing initiation and one dreams of an eland, one must **thank the ancestral spirits** for this, by **depicting the animal** either in clay or in wood or as a drawing or a painting, inside the initiation hut. Dreaming of an eland was taken to mean that one's **period of initiation has ended**, or was about to end, and that the gods and the ancestral spirits had accepted one as an initiate.

If an **initiate** has **difficulty** in dreaming or **seeing visions**, the teacher of that initiate must, once each month, **burn a bundle of eland tail hairs**, the smoke of which the initiate must inhale together with a **mildly hallucinogenic herb**. This will bring back the dreams of the initiate, because dreams are very, very important when one is a shaman, a diviner or a sangoma.

## The Eland and the Sun God

**Aside from the giraffe**, there was one animal that was regarded as very sacred by all tribes throughout southern and eastern Africa. This animal was **painted** inside the ancient caves hundreds of times. It was **engraved** on flat rocks far out in the open scores of times. This animal was the eland. The eland is known as the **animal of a thousand legends**, so many are the stories that have been woven around this beautiful antelope.

Amongst the legends of the Great Earth Mother's journey into the underworld, the **eland is mentioned next to the elephant** as being one of two animals that went into the underworld to bring back the Great Earth Mother. This was an act of bravery, which caused the eland to endure extreme danger, terror and hardship as it laboured to return back to the earth's surface with the Great Mother goddess riding on its back. The eland is seen as an **animal of self-sacrifice**, an animal that is always ready to give its life for the benefit of other animals as well as human beings.

A beautiful story is told of how, one day, the **young son of the sun god** visited Earth against his father's wishes. The sun god had warned his son not to come down from heaven and visit human beings because **human beings were dangerous and unpredictable**. And although his father had warned him, the young sun god surreptitiously visited humankind on Earth one day and was promptly **murdered by a group of jealous wizards**. The great sun god was torn with grief and was very, very furious with the human race for what it had done. He **increased the ferocity of the heat of the sun** so that, instead of giving life, the sun gave the earth death and destruction. Fires erupted all over the land. **Rocks melted** in the furious heat of the sun. **Rivers boiled** away and so did the ocean. Human beings died in their thousands, and only those that succeeded in reaching deep caverns under the earth survived.

The sun god told human beings that he would **not stop** destroying them until one of the **most beautiful of them had sacrificed himself or herself**, by jumping into a fire of molten rock from the top of a mountain. A beautiful princess was about to sacrifice herself for the salvation of human kind, when, out of the burning bush there appeared a beautiful eland, which galloped towards her, and **stopped her from jumping** into the fire pit.

“Great god of the sun,” cried the beautiful female eland. “I, *Pofana*, the beautiful one, am more comely than this fat human being. Accept my soul, Lord of light. Accept my body, and remove your angry hand from the head of humankind.” It is said that the **beautiful animal jumped into the boiling rock and was immediately consumed by the blue flames** that roared upward. And stricken with guilt, the beautiful human **princess also threw herself into the fire** pit, dying together with the eland for the sake of humankind. It is said that the sun god was so moved by this double sacrifice that immediately he halted the fury of the sun and once more soothing rain clouds swam across the skies and blessed the earth with rain.

## Giraffe: The Seer

Africans of all tribes regarded the **giraffe as one of the holiest animals** on Earth. In fact, its name in the Batswana language, *Thutlhwa*, is a word that means **'the honoured one,'** or 'the one to be respected.' The giraffe was regarded as an animal that was able to **foresee the future**. It was in fact the symbol of all seers and all prophets and diviners. In the language of the Zulus, the giraffe is called *Indula-minthi*, and this name means 'the one who is taller than the trees.' Our people believed that a giraffe **could foretell the coming of veld-fires**, and that by its actions it would warn other animals of the coming danger. And again and again, in places where I was initiated in many parts of Africa, I found likenesses of the giraffe. Even in ancient caves where **Khoi-San people** used to live, you find many paintings of giraffes on the walls of those caves.

The giraffe is a **quiet animal by nature**, and quietness is regarded as an important characteristic of a seer. Our people say, "He who sees into the future must have lips that do not speak." When we are undergoing deep initiation into the mysteries of African healing, we are **always told by our teachers to think very deeply about certain animals**. And amongst these animals is the giraffe, and if an initiate is praying for the intensification of his visionary powers, he is told to either draw, or paint, or even carve out of soft wood, the likeness of a giraffe.

Because of its very long neck, the giraffe is capable of seeing danger far away, long before the other animals with it see or sense that danger. When a gang of hunters approach, the giraffe will always be the **first one to start moving**, slowly at first, and then galloping away at a speed that warns the other animals around it that there is danger afoot.

Giraffes **sometimes behave strangely** in the bush. Male giraffes will sometimes mount other males, and thus the giraffe is viewed as **the animal that protects** those men and those women who fall in love only with members of the sex to which they belong - namely **homosexuals** or **lesbians**. In ancient Africa, such people were viewed as holy people, whose life energy was not dissipated in heterosexual activities. Some of the wealthiest and most influential women amongst many tribes were lesbians, who mined and processed several important metals such as copper and silver, which were regarded as female metals.

According to our people's religion, **if one dreams of a giraffe peacefully drinking** water in the bush, this was said to mean that one shall soon have the **calling to initiation** and shamanism within a short time. Should you however, dream of a **giraffe galloping away**, this was seen as a **warning sign** that danger was stalking you, and that one of your ancestors or ancestresses has come to warn you, in the form of a giraffe, that you must take evasive action immediately!

The giraffe was one of two animals whose **spoor was regarded as sacred** to the Great Earth Mother. It was also the symbol of obedience and of peace. When an **African child's grandparent blessed the newly born child**, he or she used to mention the giraffe, the wildebeest, and the buffalo in that blessing. The blessing went this way: "May you grow, child of my child. May you grow as tall as the giraffes of the wilderness, as mighty as the buffalos of the plains, and as wise as the wildebeests of the bush." This was an African grandparent's blessing to his or her child. Many, many times in my childhood, I heard our grandmothers, grandfathers and even great-grandparents uttering this blessing upon the offspring of their children or their children's children.

## Kudu: The Futility of War

Now, look my friends, **look at an animal from which our people learnt a very great lesson**, a beautiful, though clumsy-looking animal. An animal with behaviour that caused our people to **look upon it as the true symbol of the futility of war**. This animal is a kudu, one of the **largest and most beautiful antelopes in South Africa**. In the language of the Zulu people, the kudu is called by the onomatopoeic name of *Umgakla*. Now, this name is formed by the sound that the **clashing of the horns of two kudus locked in combat** makes: '*gakla, gakla*,' as the two great animals clash horns during the mating season.

Kudus fight ferociously at this time. You will see them charging each other like maddened knights of long ago, in the days of King Arthur's Round Table. But something tragic often happens in these sylvan battles. The two animals sometimes fight so ferociously that **their spiralling horns get locked into each other in such a way that the poor beasts can no longer disengage** from one another. And both of them locked this way can neither feed nor seek water and are helpless before the fangs and the claws of predators. Again and again our forefathers saw this tragic sight - two great animals locked together imprisoned by their spiralling horns and dying in the bush.

"**War**," my grandfather used to say to me, "**is a game of kudus**, grandson. In a war there are no winners really. Both victor and vanquished lose something precious, like two mad kudus fighting over females, ending up losing their lives in agony in the bush." When an African parent warns his or her hot-headed offspring not to dash into conflict without thinking, the parent will say, "My son (or my daughter), **remember the kudu**, always remember the kudu."

There is one thing that our people found in the kudu and it is that **the kudu's huge spiralling horns make amazing trumpets or bugles**, which are used either by praise singers in chanting praise poetry for a king, or they are used in tribal fights to sound signals to advancing or retreating warriors. Whenever an African king or chief **summons his elders and his warriors**, he used to use a trumpet made out of the horn of a mature kudu. And the sound from this trumpet is really beautiful. It sounds as if more than one bugle is being played. It is a vibrating, thundering sound that can be heard over a great distance "hawoooooooo... hawoooooooo..." through hills and valleys, across plains and up mountain slopes, **the sound of a kudu horn reaches everyone**.

Way back in 1934, I remember, I was a child. A strange tremor, **a persistent trembling shook the entire land of the Zulus**. And all people said that it was because God was angry with the Zulu people who had not, thanks to missionary intervention, celebrated the *Incwala* festival the previous year. On that day, when the sun grew dim in the sky, on that day, when mountains shook and valleys trembled, **our grandparents pulled out ancient bugles from the dark interiors of their huts and they began to play them**. From village to village, from kraal to kraal, went the sound of the kudu horn, “hawoooo... hawoooo...” People were pleading with God to be merciful towards them. People were appealing to the Great Spirit not to crack the earth open.

## The Sable Antelope – A True Beast of the Gods

The sable antelope is **one of the most beautiful antelopes that we find in Southern Africa**. It is a majestic animal that, when moving through the bush, does so like a creature born to rule, as if it is aware of the reverence in which the people of olden Africa used to hold it.

The sable antelope was esteemed, and sometimes **healers and shamans used its horns to make ritual bows** that were used to fire arrows on certain important occasions. Our people believed that the sable antelope was just as holy and as sacred as was the zebra. It was a creature of day and night, a creature of darkness and light. Its sleek, shiny black coat and the dazzling white of its belly filled our people with reverence.

*“This,” our grandfathers used to say, “is a true beast of the gods.”*

*“This,” the grey ones of the past used to tell us, “is a beast that must never be hunted. This is a beast whose skin can only be worn by those who approach the great gods on humanity’s behalf.”*

Our people called the sable antelope by a strange name: *Inkolongwane*. And this name comes from another name, or rather another noun, ‘*umkulongwane*,’ which **means ‘ululation,’** a sound like “li-li-li-li,” which African women and Arabian women utter when they see something holy, something sacred... *umkulongwane*. Now, why was the sable antelope named this way? It is because it was such a **rare animal to see out in the open**, and in daylight the creature is a beast of beauty. Its black shiny coat, its long curving horns and the stunning white of its belly, made our people believe that this is not an animal, but a god. This is not a beast, but something more. And so, **whenever a sable antelope was seen near an African village**, women used to come out and line the fence of the village and **ululate in celebration** of the sacred sight: “li-li-li-li.”

Thus, Africa celebrated sanctity, be it a sable antelope, a zebra or even a mighty lion going past a village on a lonely journey into exile.

One of the greatest tragedies that occurred in South Africa was that when the white settlers arrived in the Cape of Good Hope, they immediately started hunting every animal they saw in the bush, not out of hunger, but for fun or greed. Their muskets roared at the mighty rhinoceros, their blunderbusses felled the mighty elephant, the tall giraffe bowed before their falconets. It was murder! **Amongst the animals that the white settlers slaughtered was the sable antelope, *Inkolongwane***. An animal that our people believed could only be

hunted by great kings, and then only on very rare occasions. It was a great shame, to threaten this 'true beast of the gods.'

### **The Blue Antelope**

There was also another animal, smaller than the sable antelope, but just as beautiful, an animal with a bluish coat and a snow-white belly. The animal was a **relative of the sable antelope**, which it resembled. The animal was called in Dutch '*die bloubok*,' which meant 'the **blue antelope**.' This antelope was also **very sacred**, together with the hartebeest. Again and again the **Xhosa** people and the **Khoi-Khoi people** of the Cape tried to warn the white settlers about the sanctity of these antelopes, that they should not just be destroyed like vermin.

But there was a huge communication gap between the white settlers and the native peoples of South Africa, a gap that still exists to this day. And as more and more of the sacred antelopes were killed, so grew a bigger hatred against the white men, in the hearts of the black people of the Cape. **And the *bloubok* was destroyed, never to be seen again on this Earth.**

## Springbok – Ray of the Sun

There is an animal in South Africa, a **beautiful little antelope of white and gold**: this antelope is known as the springbok. It is an animal that our people call *Insepe* in the **Zulu** language, and in the **Tswana** language this animal is called *Tsepe*. And both these words mean one and the same thing – ‘the ray of the sun.’ The springbok was one of the **holiest antelopes in South Africa**. It was believed to be specially favoured by the sun god. And the ridge of white hair on the rump of a springbok was believed to **possess magical qualities**, which **attracted sunlight and spiritual enlightenment**. When a hunter killed a springbok, he had to observe an important ritual - he had to tie a knot in the tail hairs of this sacred beast, and to **ask to be reborn as a springbok**.

One of the most beautiful dreams that an African can have, who still holds to his ancient religion, **is to dream of springboks, leaping and prancing**, especially a group of several springboks. It is believed that if you dream of springboks you are **going to acquire great wealth, and the horns of this sacred antelope - when found dead in the bush - are used as containers for a secret powder, mixed in order to promote good luck in money, love, as well as health affairs**.

During the Second World War, Batswana soldiers who had joined to go and fight up north, used to try and hide little containers of good luck medicine made out of springbok horn on their bodies. But all these things were confiscated by angry sergeant majors before the soldiers were shipped away. **This did a lot of harm to these black soldiers**, because in the heat of battle, whether with spears, bows and arrows, or modern machine guns, man needs a source of courage; man needs something to hold on to in the hour of the darkest peril.

At one time springboks were so plentiful in South Africa that Batswanas used to make dresses and other items of clothing out of them. Batswanas used to make trousers out of springbok skin, which kept the cold away when they were herding cattle out in the wilderness. **It is said that when the last springbok dies in South Africa, it will be a day of dark misfortune for all the people of this land**. This is why Batswana kings were guardians of the many millions of springboks that migrated through the land.

You were not allowed to kill these beautiful animals for fun. It was believed that they fertilise the land with their dung, that they brought light upon the land, and that their presence was pleasing to the gods. May the *Tsepe*, the *Insepe*, ‘the antelope of the sun’ yet survive in South Africa.

## Waterbuck

In South Africa, there is a strange animal known as a **waterbuck**. This animal can never be eaten by anybody because its flesh has such a **disagreeable** smell. It is an animal that you find wading in deep pools of water, sometimes with only its head and its great curved horns showing above the level of the water. Zulu people call this antelope "*Umziki*", which means the sinker. And the **Batswana** people call it by a very strange name indeed, "*Serwala-Botloko*". The word, "*Serwala-Botloko*" means the carrier of pain, the one who **carries pain away**.

Africans lived by symbols and even died by them. And ancient Africans unlike their modern descendants, used to see the sacred and the godly in even the most mundane of things. And in the waterbuck whose flesh is so smelly and unpalatable, they saw a **sacred creature** to be revered, to be adored and to be respected. If you look at a waterbuck from the rear you will notice that there is a design done in pure white hair in the rear of this animal. The design is **like a leaf** and this type of design is to the Africans the symbol of the **sacred genital organ** of the great earth mother. And when our people see this animal, they see a carrier of the holiest symbol that they know, namely a symbol that they draw inside huts in red or white clay, a symbol representing the vagina of the great earth mother.

This symbol is either shaped like a leaf or like a lozenge or a diamond shape and it is sacred to Africans who believe in their traditional religion as the cross is to confessing Christians. Furthermore when you look at the horns of a waterbuck when it is looking straight at you, the horns **resemble the sacred crescent** of the moon, another holy symbol. Because of these sacred things that are seen in the waterbuck from the earliest times, our people looked at the waterbuck as an animal possessing **great magical powers**. But what magical powers is the waterbuck believed to possess? Answer? The same powers that a zebra is believed to possess, **the power of healing**.

In olden days when a tribal chief was desperately ill, when all medicine had failed to help the sick man, the chief's warriors used to go in the bush led by the leading shaman. Using strong nets, made of fibre or even tanned leather, the warriors would **capture a waterbuck**, wrap it around in the net and tie its hooves together very firmly and then carry it on a sled drawn by the warriors to the village of the chief.

Great care was taken to ensure that the sacred animal was not in any way injured during its being captured. And the animal was given water in which dagga had been boiled to drink in order to sedate it and to keep it quiet. When the

warriors arrived in the chief's village the animal was dragged carefully into the chief's hut and then the sick chief was helped to a sitting position by his wives and his arms extended so that **he should touch one of the horns** of the sacred waterbuck. The chief would touch the waterbuck and hold the animal's horn very firmly and pray to the gods and the ancestral spirits to take away his illness. And he poured all his faith and his belief into this gesture and the **tribal shamans** would also do the same and hold the horns of the waterbuck together with their chief, filling or trying to fill the chief with the spirit of help and praying for the waterbuck to take the sickness away.

Then this done, the sacred animal would be pulled out of the hut and then once more loaded onto a sled and then taken back into the bush near where it had been found. And when the animal had been released, the people who are there, used to observe the creature very, very closely. What would the waterbuck do? They watched very carefully as the waterbuck rose onto its legs and then they watched where it would go. This was very important. Should the waterbuck **escape into the bush** away from the pool of water in which it had been found; the people would know that the chief **would die**. But should the waterbuck immediately seek its native water, then the people cheered and ululated believing that the chief would **recover**. And a runner would be sent ahead to the chief's village by the healers telling the chief and his people that the sacred animal had **taken his sickness into the water** and had waded across the pool and then gone into the bush to graze or to seek other waterbuck.

Many chiefs were healed by this happening and yet another chief, somewhere in the early years of the nineteenth century was a victim of a **vicious deception** by a half-brother of his. The waterbuck had been captured, taken to the village of that chief; the chief had **touched the horn of the sacred animal** and then the animal had been released. The animal had gone straight into the pool of water and had swum around for some time, then had gone out to seek food in the bush. But the chief's half-brother forced the warriors under threat of murdering their families to **lie to the chief**, saying that the waterbuck had escaped straight into the bush and disappeared. And the poor chief now believed that he would die and when the sun had set, he actually did die because he believed the message of the waterbuck.

Even today many Zulu people who live next to game reserves regard it as **very, very unlucky** for anyone to kill a waterbuck. The creature's flesh is inedible and our ancestors had little reason to kill it because it was believed that if you killed a waterbuck you would yourself **die violently** by your **own** weapon.

## Zebra – Child of the Moon

The zebra is a **very sacred animal throughout Africa**, amongst people of many tribes. It is viewed as an animal that **symbolises human life**. The zebra is **believed to have marital problems exactly as human beings have**. It is also believed to **suffer loneliness and heartbreak** exactly as human beings do.

In the language of the Zulu people the zebra is known as *Idube*, a name that comes from the verb *duba*, which means '**to mix two or more colours together**.' And it is named in this way because of the black as well as white stripes on its skin. The zebra is a horse-like animal, and the **impression that each one of its hooves makes upon the ground, reminds our people of a waxing moon**, not a waning one. And because of this, the zebra is viewed as a moon creature, which is sacred to the Great Earth Mother when she is reborn as the waxing moon.

In olden days, the **zebra was regarded as a healer**. It was believed that if a person got to within twenty yards of a zebra, that person would be healed of any ailment from which he or she may have been suffering. In ancient times, women who suffered from womb trouble, used to drink herbal medicines that were intended to get rid of the womb ailment. And they had to go into the bush and there urinate **onto the track of a zebra**, in order to 'throw away' the illness. "Oh, zebra," the women used to whisper, "may your beautiful hooves take my sickness away; take my sickness away, oh child of the moon goddess."

There were great families in the land of the Zulus for which the zebra was a totem. One of these families was the Cele clan or family, and the other one was the Dube family. In olden days these powerful families used to protect zebras with their lives if necessary. But if you had such-and-such an animal as your totem in southern Africa, you not only protected that particular animal, but also any other animal or animals which were associated with your totem animal in the bush. Thus, in the bush, **the zebra is always seen in the company of the wildebeest**, and so a member of the Dube family or the Cele family not only had to protect the zebra in his or her home country, but he or she also protected the wildebeest, as well as the warthog - which were animals that often travel with the zebra as it grazes in the bush.

It was the custom, even not so long ago, for a member of either the Dube or the Cele family, **to acquire a hoof of a zebra that had died of natural causes or under the claws of lions in the bush**. I remember clearly members of these families coming to Johannesburg in the 1930s and buying, in what are called *Muthi* shops (**African traditional medicine shops**), pieces of zebra hoof to make into ornaments, which they wore around their necks in the very dangerous city known as Johannesburg. These bits of zebra hoof were worn as a protection, were worn so that the spirit of the zebra might be with its people in this dangerous place.

Like the eland, the zebra is an animal around which many fairytales and legends have been woven. Some of them, very beautiful and serious, and some of them rather silly - like this little fairytale, which tells us of what will happen at the end of the world when there is only one zebra left on Earth, and all other animals have become extinct.

It is said that at that time we shall **see the last pygmy**, and we shall also see the **last Khoi-San or bushman**. And both these people will capture the last zebra and keep it. But, as there will be no food in the land any more, as there will be no other animals left alive, the **pygmy and the Khoi-San will argue over the last zebra**. The Khoi-San will say: "I own all the **black stripes** on this zebra. They are mine." And the pygmy will say: "Good, and I own all the **white stripes** on this zebra. They are mine." And then as the days go by, both men will start to starve, and they will argue as to which one of them will be the first one to kill the zebra that he owns in this one animal. They will find that if they shot the zebra on the black stripes it would die, and the same if they shot it on the white stripes. They **will argue and argue until they both starve to death**, and the zebra will escape once more into the wilderness – to create new zebras.