

AMONG THE BONE EATERS

Encounters with Hyenas in Harar

BY MARCUS BAYNES-ROCK

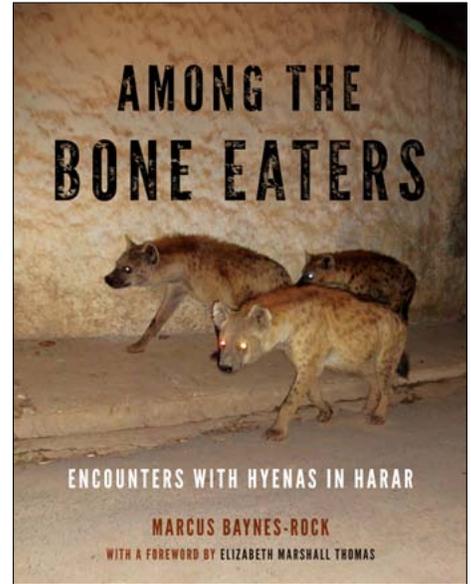
"I shouldn't say that I envy Marcus for his intimacy with hyenas, because intimacy is the world's best way of gaining knowledge of an animal, and there's no such thing as too much knowledge about hyenas. Instead, I should acknowledge the deep gratitude I feel, and that all of us should feel, about this work that he's done and the possibilities it offers. If we knew all animals as he knows hyenas, we'd save the world."

—Elizabeth Marshall Thomas

Biologists studying large carnivores in wild places usually do so from a distance, using telemetry and noninvasive methods of data collection. So what happens when an anthropologist studies a clan of spotted hyenas, Africa's second-largest carnivores, up close—and in a city of a hundred thousand inhabitants? In *Among the Bone Eaters*, Marcus Baynes-Rock takes us to the ancient city of Harar in Ethiopia, where the *gey waraba* (hyenas of the city) are welcome in the streets and appreciated by the locals for the protection they provide from harmful spirits and dangerous "mountain" hyenas. They've even become a local tourist attraction.

At the start of his research in Harar, Baynes-Rock contended with difficult conditions, stone-throwing children, intransigent bureaucracy, and wary hyena subjects intent on avoiding people. After months of frustration, three young hyenas drew him into the hidden world of the Sofi clan. He discovered the elements of a hyena's life, from the delectability of dead livestock and the nuisance of dogs to the unbounded thrill of hyena chase-play under the light of a full moon. Baynes-Rock's personal relations with the hyenas from the Sofi clan expand the conceptual boundaries of human-animal relations. This is multispecies ethnography that reveals its messy, intersubjective, dangerously transformative potential.

Marcus Baynes-Rock is a research associate with the University of Notre Dame. He divides his time between Indiana, Ethiopia, and northern New South Wales, where he lives with his wife and baby daughter.



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