LAST NIGHT I WAS A BANDED MONGOOSE

NATURAL TREASURES OF UGANDA
LAST NIGHT I WAS A BANDED MONGOOSE

by

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Illustrated by Nicholas Kagongo Arinaitwe
A banded mongoose is a small furry animal that is ruled by the ladies, chases snakes away from its babies, and loves eating juicy beetles. Last night, I became one. This is my story.

When mother sent me to bed yesterday, I never suspected that I was about to have the strangest dream of my life.

“Goodnight, mother,” I shouted down the hall as I made my way to my bedroom.
“Goodnight, Tony,” she replied. “Remember, more dreaming and less snoring.”

I laughed. I snored almost every night. This really worried mother although she’d never told me why. On the other hand, she encouraged me to dream. She was always eager to listen to the stories of my dreams.

Mother came and switched off the lights in my bedroom. I fell asleep shortly after that. I had played a lot that day and I was quite tired. Straight away, I started snoring, and soon after that I began to dream.

In my dream, I found myself in Queen Elizabeth National Park wandering the savanna as a banded mongoose. This discovery did not surprise me at all. It was as if I had been a banded mongoose all my life. All around me were my fellow banded mongooses.

We had just arrived in a new area in search of food but had been utterly disappointed. There was not a single insect to be seen! We were all very hungry. Even Sophie, the dominant female mongoose that led our pack, for the first time seemed at a loss.
Finding food can be difficult. It is never abundant throughout the year, yet it never completely disappears! One season you might have it in plenty, but the following season you may have to eat it sparingly to avoid starving. And I hear that it behaves the same way with humans too. Well, those are what I call the funny laws of nature.

“I want your opinion. Should we continue to search for scarce insects or do we begin to look for frogs, hares, or chickens, which are easier to find?” Sophie asked us. That was one thing I liked about her. She always asked us what we wanted before making a decision. She was a great leader.
"Insects!" we answered together. "We want dung beetles. We would rather continue to search the hard way. We want dung beetles!"

"Fine, fine, dung beetles you shall have. However, we must now look in another place. Let’s try out another area since we’ve lost hope of finding any food here,” she said.

We were able to find another hunting place almost as soon as we’d started our search, wow! This new place was the complete opposite of the old one. Dung beetles were everywhere! They ran up and down on the ground like termites on an anthill. We all smiled with delight. No meal equaled a juicy dung beetle meal.

“This is the way we do it,” declared Sophie. She was going to demonstrate how a dung beetle could be eaten. This demonstration was mainly intended for the younger banded mongooses. “While dung beetles are very tasty, eating then has never been easy,” she explained.

“First you find a hard surface like this flat stone,” she began, “then put the beetle on the stone. Square yourself off in front of the stone and with
great force, shoot the beetle through your back legs to crack the hard outer shell.”

Sophie’s demonstration had been clear and successful. We clapped our hands to thank her for her effort. We then did the same to our dung beetles before eating them.
In the middle of enjoying our meal, Sophie suddenly remembered something. “Please let me have your attention once again. I’m sorry to interrupt your meal but this is an important announcement. I want each one of you to catch and put aside three dung beetles. These beetles will be kept for the female mongooses back home, whom we expect to give birth anytime now.”

We were well aware that all of the females of our pack are encouraged to give birth on the same day so that all babies can be raised at the same time through cooperative breeding. We will have a lot of new and hungry mongooses soon, so we knew we needed to plan ahead.
At this thought, I looked around and realized that all of my mongoose friends were the same age as me. We had all been born on the same day. Banded mongooses live in a wonderful world of friendships.
“Excellent. Now that you have the message, you know what to do. Mmm, these dung beetles taste so… good!” Sophie added, after taking a mouthful.

We ate until our stomachs became round. It was starting to get late. Then we heard a warning call. It was Susan, a young mongoose, making a high-pitched sound. We knew exactly what that meant: danger. Suddenly we were all making the call. Apparently there were predators in the
neighborhood. This call was telling everybody to run and hide. We took off.

We were lucky this time. Indeed there had been a pride of lions in the place from which we had run. But the lions had become confused about how many we were and lost interest. I ran and ran and ran, following my friends back to our home in the side of an old termite mound. As I dove for the hole, I woke up.
It was morning and my mother was calling me to get up and ready for school. I walked into the kitchen where she was preparing breakfast and began to tell her my crazy dream. She was surprised by my mongoose story and all the vivid details I remembered. But it was only after I asked for dung beetles with my tea that she grew pale with astonishment.

THE END
1. Does a male or female lead the group of banded mongooses?
   A female.

2. How do banded mongooses warn others in their group that they should run and hide?
   By communicating with sounds or vocalizations, making different sounds to keep the group safe. They have a warning call that tells the group that they should run and hide.

3. What is cooperative breeding?
   A group of banded mongoose females all try to give birth on the same day so that they can raise all the offspring at the same time.

4. What is the plural of mongoose?
   The plural of mongoose is mongooses. One mongoose, two mongooses, and a group of mongooses.

5. What is the favorite food of banded mongooses?
   They love to eat Dung Beetles.
About the Author

Dennis Patrick Musisi Lubega began his interest in stories at the age of two. Then it was mostly children’s stories on TV and folktales told by his mother. Dennis has never lost this passion. Although he trained in business studies, the forty year-old recently decided to begin a new career as a writer for children and young adults. As a result of this decision, he has written several stories—The First Claim, The Laughing Lion, The Short Giraffe that Wanted a Little Respect, The Monkey Christmas Dinner, and Late on PLE Day, among others. The Natural Treasures of Uganda series of environmental education books is his first set of books to be published. Mr. Lubega lives in Kampala, Uganda, and is married with one child.

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