

THE DASSIE

BY STRIPES THE ECO-CAT



"Help, Stripes! Help!"

"Oh my goodness, what's going on", I wondered. I soon found out. My friend Dennis the Dassie, came haring into my house - or shall I say 'dassyng' in. He scooted under a chair and sat there trying to catch his breath.

"What on earth is the matter, Dennis?" He looked quite pale for a dassie.

"Eagle", he gasped, "Black Eagle".

"Oops". Now I could understand his distress, because Black Eagles love to eat dassies - in fact, dassies are their absolute favourite



food. I looked out of the window, and sure enough there was the eagle slowly circling high above the hill where Dennis lives amongst the rocks. He didn't even flap his large wings as he caught the breeze blowing up from the hill.

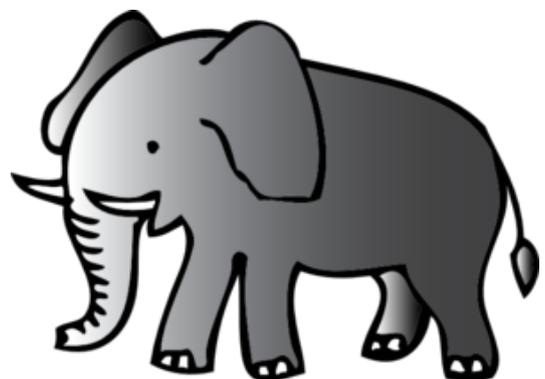
"Calm down, Dennis, you are quite safe here. But what were you doing so far from your rocky hide-away?"

"I thought it was safe to come down here to look for nice green grass to eat. The fynbos up there on the hill is very dry and tough in the summer."

The dassie looked wistful. "I wish I were the size of my very, very distant relation."

"Who's that", I wondered.

"It's an elephant", he said proudly.



"No! You must be joking! You don't look like an elephant at all. You should definitely keep out of the midday sun - it has fried your brain." I said, rather cross that my friend is poking fun at me.

"No, really", the dassie replied. "I have the same sort of teeth and feet as an elephant, so somewhere in the long distant past, we must have been family."

"Yeah, maybe just shortly after the dinosaurs my humans told me about", I said, still not quite believing him. "So show me those elephant-feet", I challenged him.

He lifted one paw and let me look underneath. It was soft and padded and quite moist, even though the ground was dry. "Why are your feet so sweaty?" I wanted to know.

"Oh that's to make them a little sticky so I won't fall off the steep rocks where I live. After all, humans also call me a 'rock hyrax'." He smiled so that his long front teeth looked quite fierce.

"But dassie, why are your teeth so long? I thought you only eat plants."

"Aha" he said, "you noticed. Those are my little tusks - just like a teeny-tiny elephant." He looked quite proud of his distant relationship with such a great animal.

But secretly I was really glad that my friend was my own size and there wasn't a real elephant in my house.

Text by Anina Lee

Illustration by Jacqui Rudling with colourist Dante Campbell