

# CHAPTER 8

## THE MEERCATS

### - THE ORGANIZED ONES

*Matthew 20: 28 – Jesus said, "If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest." (Good News Bible)*

*Mark 9:35 – Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all." (Good News Bible)*

As they drove along they watched the sun rise in the east, putting on another display of colour. The landscape on the northern part of the reserve became dryer, with fewer trees and more rocks. There was less grass for grazing herds, so there were fewer animals to be seen.

"If you look carefully you might spot a meerkat colony," said Dad. "This is the type of country they like – desert type country. This is the time of day you might see them too. They're up with the sun looking for food."

"What do they eat?" asked Serena.

"They have a very good sense of smell," explained Dad, "and can follow the scents of their favorite foods - beetles, caterpillars, spiders, and scorpions. They'll also eat small reptiles, birds, eggs, fruit, and plants."

Dad was familiar with the territory and remembered where he had previously seen a colony.

"Look over there," he said. "See those little hills coming out of the ground? That's a meerkat colony. They make their homes underground by digging holes and tunnels. I'll stop for a moment and you can use the binoculars. You might see something. Serena, you go first."

Serena took the binoculars and focused on the little mounds.

"I can see some!" she shouted. "They are so cute! They have brown-stripes, a tail, and big eyes with dark patches around them."

She watched for a couple of minutes and gave the binoculars to Samson. He could see that they were very busy little animals, all running around doing different things.

"I think I can see one standing on top of a mound keeping guard," he said.

"Yes, that would be right," said Dad. "That's the sentry. To survive, meerkats must live in groups for protection. The meerkats are the most organized animals on earth. Each meerkat has an important job to do. There is a male leader and a female leader of the group. They give out the jobs to the others. Some are sentries, or guards, like the one you've just seen. They stand on the mound and watch out for enemies, like eagles, hawks or jackals. At the first sign of an enemy, the sentry lets out a high-pitched squeal, and all the meerkats go scrambling deep down into their burrows."

"What other jobs do they have," asked Samson.

"Well," continued Dad, "there are baby sitters who mind the young ones, foragers who look for food, excavators who keep the burrows in good shape, trainers who train the pups, and groomers who take the insects out of the meercats' furry coats."

"I guess meercats can teach us a lot of things," said Samson.

"Yes, the meercats can teach us about working together," explained Dad. "When God's people work together it is important to have leaders who can help organize the jobs that people must do for God. Some people are very good at leading. But God tells us in the Bible that if a person is a leader, then they must also be a servant. That means they should do more than just give out jobs to people. They have to get in there and help. For example, if you're a leader, you can't just tell someone to go and clean your toilet because you don't like doing it. You have to clean it yourself. A leader has to be kind and friendly, not bossy. A leader has to be prepared to give up their own comforts to make someone else comfortable. So being a leader is one

of the hardest jobs. Jesus was the greatest leader that ever lived. He could have had a very comfortable life, but he chose to travel around with His twelve friends, without a home or a bed. He did something that no other leader has ever done – He died for us.

*John 15:13 – Jesus said, “The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them.” (Good News Bible)*

## **MEERKAT FACTS**

- Meercats dig their burrows with their long, sharp claws. Living underground keeps mob members safe from predators and out of the harsh African heat. These burrows can be 16 feet (5 meters) long and contain multiple entrances, tunnels, and rooms. A group will use up to five separate burrows at a time.
- A meercat is 25 – 30 cm. long, (head and body), with a tail 17 – 25 cm. long.
- A meercat weighs 620 – 960 grams.
- They have a variety of calls such as chirrups, trills, growls and barks.
- A meercat can live up to 10 years.
- A meercat is related to the mongoose.
- Soil erosion is the biggest threat to the meercat’s habitat.
- Meercats make themselves look as big and fearsome as possible when confronted by an enemy. They stretch their legs to stand tall, hold their tails up and lower their heads.
- A meercat uses its tail for balance and as a way of signaling.
- When defending itself a meercat throws itself on the back of its enemy, and uses its teeth and claws.



