



## High mountain wanderings

I greatly enjoyed Adrian Burton's recent essay about "Icy Mike" and the other elephants of alpine Mount Kenya (Burton 2023). I agree that the presence of large vertebrates – as indicated by direct and indirect evidence of elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*), leopards (*Panthera pardus*), and buffalos (*Syncerus caffer*), to which one could add bush duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*) (Young and Evans 1993) – at elevations so high on the mountain (all at or above 4600 m) is a bit of a mystery, and a related must-read (about a frozen leopard) is Hemingway's epigraph in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (Hemingway 1938). However, these taxa at least are open country (savanna) species that, along with plains zebras (*Equus quagga*) and elands (*Taurotragus oryx*), are common visitors to or even residents of Mount Kenya's alpine zone. More mysterious (and perhaps more instructive) are

the discoveries of several dead individuals of strictly forest-affiliated species (bongo [*Tragelaphus eurycerus*], 4300 m; Sykes' monkey [*Cercopithecus albogularis*], 4800 m; black-and-white colobus [*Colobus polykomos*], 4700 m) thousands of feet above the tree line (3300 m) (Young and Evans 1993). I have long wondered whether a subset of dispersing mammals (which certainly were able to move between distant mountains in the past) simply get "caught out" in their wanderings, with supra-alpine environments being rare anomalies in their evolutionary histories. Perhaps parallels could be drawn with multiple lepidopteran species found on the Lewis Glacier on Mount Kenya (>4700 m), frozen into the snow (Coe 1967; TPY, pers obs). Adult lepidopterans, including the tiger moth *Arctia virginialis*, are known to congregate on hilltops, in a behavior called "hilltopping" (Alcock 1987; Pepi et al. 2022), and perhaps this behavior becomes maladaptive when the nearby "hilltop" is 5000-m-high Mount Kenya!

### Truman P Young

Department of Plant Sciences, University of California–Davis, Davis, CA (tpyoung@ucdavis.edu)

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