

# West African

## Proverbs

*Human figures:*

Man scraping bark from a tree:

When a man goes alone to scrap bark from a tree, it falls to the ground. (Do not refuse help when you need it.)

Man holding neck of a snake:

If you hold a snake by the head what is left is only a string. (If you catch the leader of your enemy his followers will be helpless.)

Man holding his stomach:

One should not bear one's stomach a grudge.

(Said of someone who, however unpleasant, is essential to you; since you have no choice you must put up with him.)

Man holding egg:

A man's honor is like an egg; if he does not hold it properly it falls and breaks.

Man blowing horn:

If a man is lost, the sound of his state horn will help him to be found. (A man is protected by his own people.)

Man carrying a basket with another looking in:

I am carrying an empty basket, why do you look in? (If someone is in trouble you should not try to rub it in with curiosity.)

## **Animals, reptiles, fish:**

### **Elephant:**

One who follows the track of the elephant never gets wet from the dew on the bushes.

(Follow an important man and he will protect you in time of trouble.)

### **Hippopotamus:**

A hippopotamus can be made invisible in water.

(Ignorance can lead to potential danger. It is important to be informed and alert.)

### **Antelope:**

Not all the forest hates the antelope.

(You should encourage someone after a dispute, to encourage him to persevere.)

### **Leopard:**

When the rain falls on the leopard it wets the spots on his skin but does not wash them off. (A person's nature is not changed by circumstances.)

### **Ram's Head:**

If the ram is fond of butting, its courage comes from the heart and not from the horns. (Strength is nothing without courage.)

### **Tortoise:**

Tortoise you are suffering in your shell.

(However secure a person seems, he has hidden troubles.)

## **Animals, reptiles, fish continued:**

### Crocodile:

The old crocodile swallows a pebble when the year ends. (*Misfortunes come each year; we must accept them as part of life.*)

### Two crocodiles joined in the middle:

Crocodiles share one stomach, yet when they get their food they fight over it.

(*Relatives should not quarrel for all belong to one family and depend on it for their well-being.*)

### Rats:

Rats don't dance in the cat's doorway.  
(*Don't invite trouble.*)

### Snake:

The cobra that blocks the path is going his own way, yet people run away when they see him. (*Once you get a bad reputation, nobody will trust you even when you intend no harm.*)

### Frog:

The length of a frog is known only after its death.

(*A person's worth is not appreciated in his lifetime.*)

### Fish:

If the fish comes out of the water to say that the crocodile is ill, no one should doubt it. (*Nobody will doubt what a close friend says about you.*)

## **Animals, reptiles, fish continued:**

### **Land Snail:**

When a child goes to the bush, it should look for snails and not for the tortoise. (It takes much experience to find a tortoise in the bush, but snails are common and any child can find them. Only do what is within your power or you may achieve nothing.)

### **Anyinaboa beetle:**

Anyinaboa, the fire will eventually reach you (when the tree in which you hide is burnt down). (The consequences of your bad deed will one day catch up with you.)

## **Birds:**

### **Sankofa bird looking backwards:**

When it lies behind you, take it.  
(Use the wisdom of the past.)

### **The Hornbill bird and the snake:**

The snake on the ground has caught the bird in the sky. (You should not despair of getting anything, however difficult it may seem.)

### **Birds in a nest:**

A bird's relative is the one with whom it shares a nest. (Common problems bring together those that are affected by them.)