

# Man is the Prey

*an investigation into the motives and  
habits of man's natural enemies*

JAMES CLARKE

19p. 1-272

4372



ANDRE DEUTSCH *London*

1969

powerful trunks, tossed them aloft into the air, or dashed them against the walls and pavements. Of the garrison, which comprised 8,000 Rajaputs and 40,000 inhabitants, 30,000 were slain.'

Apart from their role in war, elephants have also been used from time to time as executioners. There is a seventeenth-century account by Edward Terry whose evidence must be accepted with reservations for he declares that 'the male's testicles lye about his forehead'. Terry spent three years in the Great Mogul's court in India from 1619 when, he claims, the Mogul's elephant herd numbered 14,000. Although this herd would need at least 4,000 tons of fodder a day it is quite possible that he was accurate.

'They are the most docile creatures . . . some elephants the king keeps for the execution of malefactors; who being brought to suffer death by that mighty beast, if his keeper bid him despatch the offender speedily, will presently with his foot push him into pieces; if otherwise he would have him tortured, this vaste creature will breake his joynts by degrees one after the other, as men are broken upon the wheele.'

Carrington quotes Paul Edward Pieris Deraniyagala as saying that elephants (obviously Indian) were used in the East as executioners. They were trained to pick victims up in their trunks, place them upon the ground, put a foot on them and then pull them apart. They were also trained to pull two trees together while a man was tied between them. The elephant would then let go and the victim would be split apart.

## The Rhinoceros

'The arm'd rhinoceros . . .'

*William Shakespeare*

Long after Africa's black rhinoceros is extinct hunters will be arguing its merits and demerits as one of 'the big five' dangerous big game animals. Is it really the most dangerous of them all? There are experts who say 'yes' and there are men of equal experience who say it is the least dangerous, putting the lion, leopard, elephant and buffalo before it.

The fact that the black rhinoceros, *Diceros bicornis*, is the most bad-tempered animal in the African bush is common cause and nobody would argue that when approached it is the animal most likely to charge – and that goes whether one is on foot, on a bicycle, on a horse, in a car or a truck. In East Africa they occasionally charge trains. While it is true that almost all the world's animals have to be sorely provoked before they will attack man, in the case of the black rhinoceros provocation can be the slightest of sounds including the click of a camera, or it can be a gentle movement or a strange scent – or even a bird rising out of the grass is sometimes enough to cause it to lower its ugly head and come charging down.

There is a theory held dear by a surprising number of big game hunters that one can sidestep a charging black rhinoceros and it will then go trundling past and eventually stop and begin browsing again. One of our best hunter-authors states: 'the black rhino can be sidestepped with comparative ease'. This is a fallacy: the 1½-ton rhinoceros can turn on a dime. Ian Player, Zululand's chief nature conservator and one of the world's top experts on rhinoceroses, told me: 'I have known several Africans to be killed by black rhino over the years and I doubt whether there is a game ranger in these parts who has not been charged by one. The only sensible thing to do when confronted by a charging rhino is find a tree and climb it – even four feet from the ground is usually safe enough. You can forget trying to sidestep a rhino. The best trick is to

chuck your hat or bush jacket – or anything – in its way and hope it will take it out of that.’

C. A. W. Guggisberg, the East African wild-life writer, says that a number of people who claim to have been charged by black rhino have in fact merely been the subject of ‘an exploratory advance’. This is quite true; the black rhino will, if he senses something suspicious, throw up his head and trot towards the source of his annoyance. He might then trot round in a half circle and test the wind or he might retreat, turning now and then to face the direction where he suspects somebody is standing. But if you know your rhinoceros it is best to assume that he is going to cut up rough and therefore look for a tree to climb. Occasionally a shout or violent action will cause the rhino to rush off in a state of high alarm. Then again it might make him charge. No other animal is so magnificently unpredictable.

It is my experience that a black rhinoceros will almost always advance if he suddenly senses you are near. Although he has extraordinary poor sight he has very acute hearing and sense of smell. If he detects a slight movement or catches your scent he will more likely than not charge with lowered head and when a 1½ ton animal comes towards you at 20–25 mph he looks like a locomotive. At the end of his charge he usually hooks left and right with his horns and many a hunter bears the scars from such an experience. Unlike the buffalo the rhino will often be satisfied with tossing a man high into the air (one can reach a height of twelve feet according to Captain C. H. Stigand who once took such a journey) – but just occasionally he will whip round and then bore his victim into the ground or even gather him up on the end of his horn and toss him again and again. Eastwood, chief accountant for Uganda Railways in its pioneer days, had a remarkable escape when he approached a rhinoceros which he thought he had shot dead: the ‘dead’ rhinoceros rose to its feet and then fell on him cracking four of the man’s ribs and breaking his right arm. Then it impaled him through his thigh and threw him high into the air. Twice more it tossed him. Eastwood was alone at the time and was left groaning in the long grass. Had it not been for his African assistants who saw vultures circling the spot he would have died. His arm had to be amputated.

Colonel Patterson tells an exciting tale of how he saw a black rhinoceros in East Africa and stalked it to within fifty yards of where it was resting. Patterson lay down in the grass to watch it and after a few minutes the animal began to suspect his presence for it rose and walked

round in a half circle trying to pick up his scent. Patterson recalled: ‘The moment he got wind of me he whipped round in his tracks like a cat and came for me in a bee-line. Hoping to turn him, I fired instantly; but unfortunately my soft-nose bullets merely annoyed him further, and had not the slightest effect on his thick hide. On seeing this I flung myself down quite flat on the grass and threw my helmet some 10 feet away in the hope that he would perceive it and vent his rage on it instead of me. On he thundered, while I scarcely dared to breathe. I could hear him snorting and rooting up the grass quite close to me, but luckily for me he did not catch sight of me, and charged by a few yards to my left.’ Patterson then rose and very stupidly sent a couple more bullets after the animal. They disintegrated against its thick hide and caused the animal to pull up in its tracks. He began to gore the ground viciously for he was too blind to see Patterson standing there and then he began moving round again in a semi-circle. ‘This proceeding terrified me more than ever,’ said Patterson. ‘I could scarcely hope to escape a second time.’ The rhino once again picked up the hunter’s scent and ‘down he charged like a battering ram. I fairly pressed myself into the ground, as flat as ever I could, and luckily the grass was a few inches high. I felt the thud of his great feet pounding along, yet dared not move or look up lest he should see me. My heart was thumping like a steam hammer, and every moment I fully expected to find myself tossed into the air. Nearer and nearer came the heavy thudding, and I had quite given myself up for lost, when from my lying position I caught a sight, out of the corner of my eye, of the infuriated beast rushing by. He had missed me again!’

One of the most devastating charges by a black rhinoceros must surely have been the one recorded by Patterson where the animal charged out as twenty-one slaves, who were attached by their necks to a long chain, filed down an East African bush track on their way to the coast. The rhinoceros impaled the centre man and the sudden jolt broke the necks of the others.

Whenever I see a black rhinoceros I always recall Murray Smith’s words: ‘It is a miracle that this prehistoric idiot still exists.’ It is indeed and it is conceivable that had the rhinoceros better eyesight it would have been an intolerable animal to have where there are people. But then, I suppose, it could be argued that if it were not so poor-sighted it would not be so bad-tempered. Its bad temper and aggressive habits when man approaches is probably its salvation in another way: it has

saved the animal to some extent from the ruthless African poachers who are paid £1 a pound weight for rhino horn by Asiatics who believe (quite wrongly) it has aphrodisiacal powers.

Most big game hunters agree that the black rhinoceros is easily killed with a medium or heavy rifle. It can often be effectively turned off its course during a charge by firing over its head or into the ground ahead of it and it is certainly easily felled when it presents a head-on aspect. J. A. Hunter would allow them to charge to within fifteen yards of his clients' cameras before felling them with a single shot.

Perhaps if the white rhinoceros, *Ceratotherium simus*, had the same bad temper as its cousin it would not now be so rare. It is a great deal bigger than the black, its three tons making it the second biggest land mammal on earth. The trouble with this enormous animal is that it is as docile as a jersey cow and I have often stalked them to within a few feet. According to Player they have killed only four people in living memory in Zululand where at least half of the last 2,000 white rhinoceroses on earth live. All four delinquent rhinoceroses were badly wounded and were driven to desperation before they charged. One had fifty spear wounds.

If historians are correct and the Indian rhinoceros was used in war as a sort of front line tank by the kings of ancient India then it does appear that *Rhinoceros unicornis* is more intelligent than he looks. The Indians are supposed to have lashed tridents to the horns of the rhinoceroses which suggests they must have been trained. It is hard to believe for the Indian rhinoceros with its single horn and heavily folded skin is every bit as stupid as the black rhino of Africa. Its method of attack is interesting in that it tends to use its lower teeth instead of its one-foot-long horn as offensive weapons and although it is said to be as aggressive as the black I have found no cases where it has killed a man although I don't doubt for a moment it has. It has frequently put hunting elephants to flight. Gee, in fact, says that annually the animal kills 'a few people'. There are probably not many more than 600 surviving today in their strongholds in the Assam, Bengal and Nepal.

There are two other species in the East, the Asiatic or Sumatran rhinoceros, *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, which has two horns and the Javanese rhinoceros, *Rhinoceros sondaicus*, which is one-horned. Both

are practically extinct and both are said to be short-tempered and aggressive and there are a few accounts of men being tossed by the latter but no actual fatalities. The Sumatran rhinoceros is said to be very aggressive and local natives are afraid of it.