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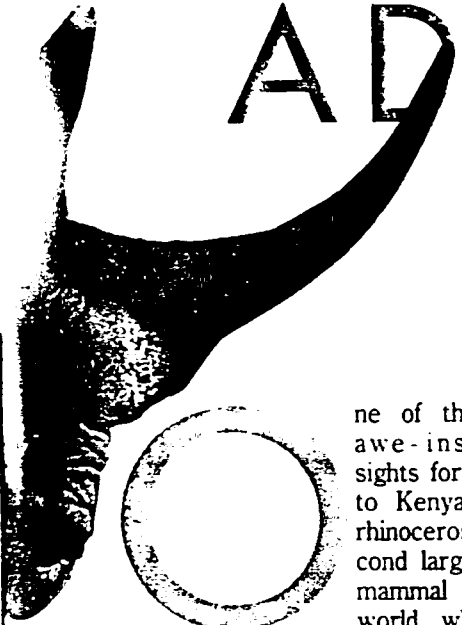
its alleged fever-reducing property, and in North Yemen for the making of the prestigious dagger handles. During the 1970s and early 1980s the demand for rhino horn increased as the economies concerned expanded. International pressure from conservationists mounted. Today, the countries which were the major importers of rhino horn have officially banned the trade, and a World Wildlife Fund project to encourage the use of substitutes is underway. But a serious threat remains.

New action to save the rhino in Kenya has therefore started. As well as the regular anti-poaching patrols, the

and Amboseli National Park, you can drive quite close to a rhino as it quietly browses or rests in the heat of the day under an acacia tree. A rhino with her baby, however, can be aggressive and it is wise to keep your distance so as not to upset her. Undisturbed, the rhino will plod slowly along, within its home range, carrying out its simple routine of resting, wallowing, drinking and eating. The black rhino's diet consists of a variety of favourite shrubs and herbs which it plucks with its pointed, prehensile, or moveable, lip, oblivious to the thorns and spines that many African plants grow as a defence.

Lucy Vigne reports on the national strategy aimed at securing a brighter future for Kenya's rhino

# THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA



One of the most awe-inspiring sights for visitors to Kenya is the rhinoceros, second largest land mammal in the world, which has inhabited Africa for 60 million years. Roaming among thickets, moving across plains or quietly drinking at a water hole, their massive bodies are formidable, and their two horns to be respected.

There are two species of African rhinoceros, the black rhino which exists across Africa in scattered populations, and the white rhino which is largely confined to southern Africa. Only about 4,000 of each species survive today, although as recently as 1970 there were 65,000 black rhinos alone. The largest concentrations are now in Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The reason for this sudden loss of one of the most impressive animals in Africa has been the heavy demand for rhino horn. The horn, made of keratin (the same substance as finger nails), is consumed in the Far East primarily for

Kenya government has developed a national rhino strategy to secure rhinos within special sanctuaries. Concerned visitors to Kenya have been generously donating funds to conservation organisations which have been supporting the new sanctuaries. The first government rhino sanctuary was completed at Nakuru National Park where a 74-kilometre fence, carrying 5,000 volts, surrounds an area of 140 square kilometres. This sanctuary has been so successful that no rhino has been poached since they were first introduced in the early 1970s, now the area is getting so overcrowded that some of the rhinos have had to be moved.

This example shows that well-managed sanctuaries do afford safety to rhinos. Another small government sanctuary protecting several rhinos has been constructed in Tsavo National Park, and its expansion is scheduled as more rhinos are brought in.

Apart from sanctuaries, rhinos can be seen in several of Kenya's national parks. Nairobi National Park, just 15 minutes' drive from the city centre, is easily accessible to visitors in Kenya only for a short time. About 30 black rhinos inhabit this open area where you can see far across the plains and valleys. Tourists often need to learn how to spot rhinos on distant hills, however, as distinguishing their greyish hide from the all-too-common rocks is not always easy. Binoculars can be invaluable.

In the Maasai Mara Game Reserve

The most recognisable differences between the two African rhino species is the shape of the lip and not the colour. The white, or "wide nosed", rhino has a broad muzzle which acts like a lawnmower, efficiently cutting grass. The white rhino is thus a grazer not a browser like its pointed-lipped cousin. The two species also have different behavioural patterns. While the black rhino is solitary, the white rhino is gregarious. White rhino are also more docile than the black rhino and will rarely charge despite its two-tonne bulk.

Rhinos can adapt to many habitats, ranging from deserts to thick forests. The Aberdare National Park, a forested region near Mount Kenya, is as much home to the rhino as the open savannah. Here, tourists have the opportunity to view the rhino that come down to the waterhole, right in front of the lodges. It is often possible to watch rhinos, elephants or buffalo interact just a few metres away, in the midst of thick highland forest.

Any visitor to Kenya should try their best to see rhino in one of these areas. Admittedly, today it is not easy. Gone are the days when you could drive beside the Galana river in Tsavo National Park and see a rhino at nearly every turn. No other animal, in recent years, has been so catastrophically slaughtered by man, purely for commercial greed.

The future for the remaining rhinos in Kenya is, however, looking brighter. It has been proved that well-patrolled and effectively managed sanctuaries provide good protection for the rhino from its arch enemy, the poacher. Anti-poaching patrols alone are often insufficient to protect them in the wide open spaces from well-organised gangs of poachers with modern automatic weapons, who may spend several weeks in the bush hunting out the last of the species. Let us hope that other tropical African countries may follow Kenya's example in securing their rhinos and allowing them to live and breed within sanctuaries, for the benefit of future generations.