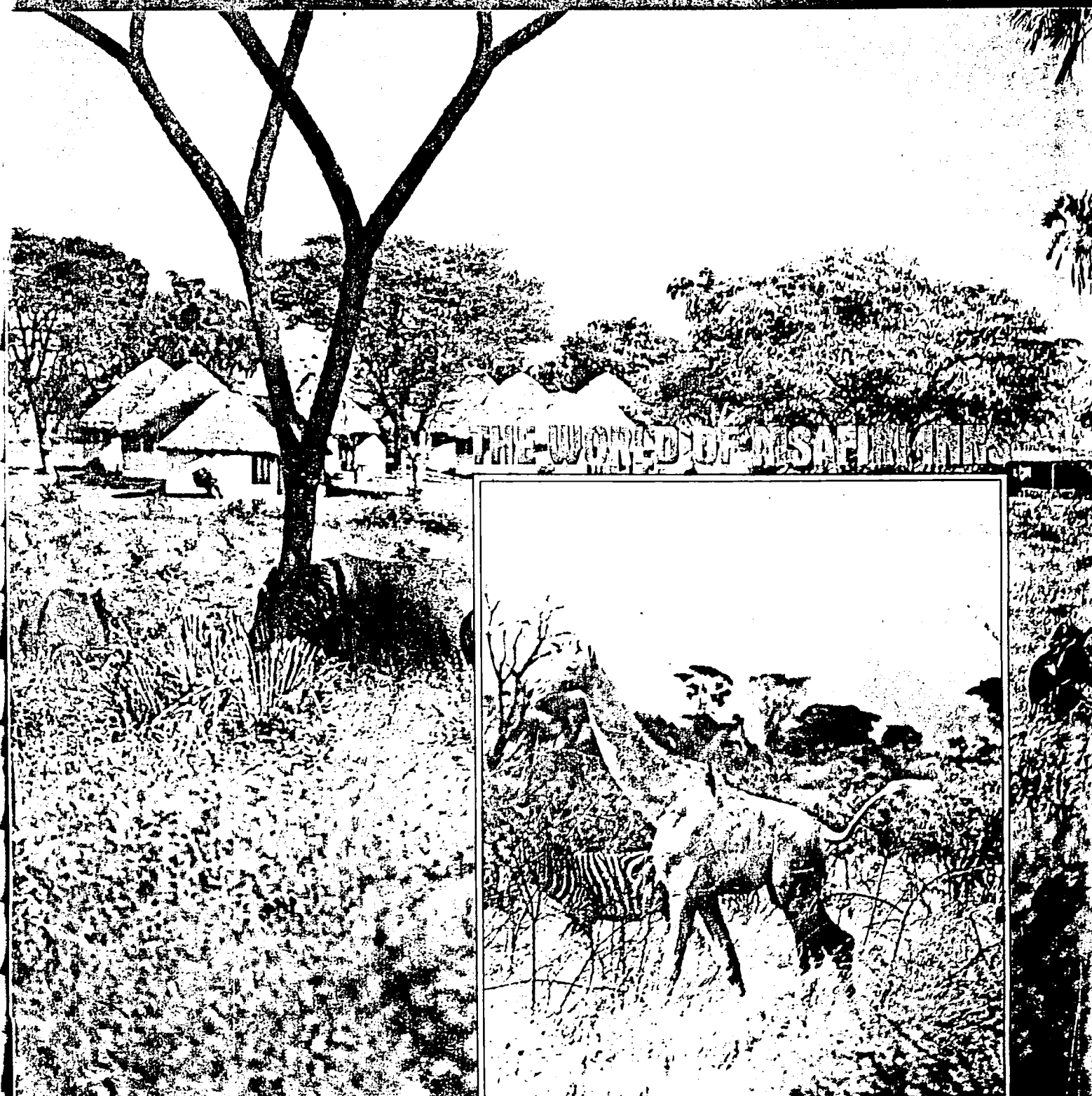


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KENYA'S TOURIST MAGAZINE



THE WORLD OF MSAFIRI

Kenya goes to the ITB Fair in Berlin

EFFORTS TO SAVE AFRICA'S RHINOS

by Lucy Vigne

IN RECENT years, the widespread poaching of rhinoceros in Africa has brought the animal to the verge of extinction. Both the black and the white rhino have been virtually eliminated from several countries and those that remain are mostly scattered in small populations of less than 20 animals. The number of black rhinos has fallen from 65,000 in 1970 to about 4,000 today. The white rhinos in southern Africa are relatively safe and number over 4,000 but those in the north have been practically obliterated by poachers except for 17 known individuals guarded in Zaire. Nevertheless, there are now signs that the rhino could be saved.

In Kenya, the government is engaged in a concerted effort to save its rhinos, which have declined by 95 per cent during the past twenty years. When heavy poaching was underway, efforts to raise money by various conservation bodies to equip anti-poaching units proved to be fruitless. Only private rhino sanctuaries remained safe from poachers. Solio Ranch now holds 25 per cent of Kenya's rhinos in an electrically fenced sanctuary of 15,000 acres. Black rhinos caught on game patrols from surrounding farming areas were brought into the sanctuary during the 1970s. Their numbers have increased threefold to about 90 individuals and not one has been poached. Also, over 40 southern white rhinos inhabit this sanctuary.

Recognizing the success of the sanctuary, the Kenya government has devised a national strategy aimed at translocating threatened rhinos to safe government sanctuaries bordered by well-patrolled electric fences. In Tsavo National Park, a small sanctuary already holds several rhinos, and it will be expanded as more rhinos are introduced. Nakuru National Park has been made into a rhino sanctuary with 140 km² surrounded by 74 km of electric fence. The fence is seven feet high and consists of twelve strands of wire, six of which carry currents of 5,000 volts. About fifteen black rhinos are to be moved to the Nakuru rhino sanctuary this year from the now over-stocked Solio ranch. Funds for this sanctuary have been raised by Rhino Rescue mostly in England. Funds must continue to be raised for the upkeep of the sanctuary, and the effective management and protection

of the rhinos. An individual contributor to the saving of Kenya's rhinos is a young man from Mombasa, Michael Werikhe, who has walked across much of East Africa raising money for and interest in rhinos. This concerned individual is planning a similar walk in Europe; he is already known as the 'Rhino Man'.

Meanwhile, efforts to close down the international trade in rhino products and reduce the demand for the horn have been increased and a specific World Wildlife Fund project is underway. WWF consultant, Esmond Bradley Martin visited eastern Asia in December 1985 and for five months he had meetings in 13 different countries with senior officials, traders, doctors and pharmacists who deal in rhino horn, encouraging them to use substitutes such as water buffalo horn and saiga antelope horn which are acceptable in Chinese traditional literature. WWF President HRH Prince Philip sent letters to certain heads of state asking their governments to stop importing rhino horn. The international press criticized those governments which were still allowing the international trade in rhino products. By October 1986, the five major importing or re-exporting countries had stopped the trade.

South Korea, as one of the five, was using large quantities of rhino horn in a traditional drug called Chung Sim Hwan. This is a medicine for treating a wide variety of ailments, from nosebleed to paralysis. Rhino horn was just one of its 30 ingredients. But traditional doctors were reluctant to introduce substitutes. Now they are using water buffalo horn and are beginning to comply with the law which banned any more imports of rhino horn.

Taiwan agreed to stop rhino horn imports in 1985. Taiwanese ministers have shown a keen interest in adopting methods of combating the illegal trade; they are making a determined effort to bring it to a halt.

Macao became a leading entrepot for rhino horn in 1984 because it could still be legally imported and re-exported, which was very convenient for traders in China and Hong Kong. In January 1986, government officials in Macao were convinced of the need to refuse all import licences, with immediate effect.

Although Hong Kong banned imports of rhino horn in 1979, stocks held prior to that time were allowed re-export licences and 2,092 kilos were sold abroad. In March 1986, following pressure from conservationists, the authorities stopped sales of so called 'old stocks'.

Singapore was the fifth and final rhino horn importing country in eastern Asia to ban imports. In September 1986, a Congressional Hearing was held in Washington DC which criticized the Singapore government for its continued role in the rhino horn trade. At the same time, the American government banned all imports of wildlife products from Singapore. Increased pressure was mounted in the international press, and from CITES, the Convention which bans all trade in endangered species. Finally, Singapore banned all imports and exports of rhino products in October 1986, and the following month agreed to join CITES.

A further country involved in the rhino horn trade is China. Although a member of CITES, it takes advantage of a legal loophole which allows exports of manufactured medicines containing small quantities of rhino horn which are not readily visible amongst the other ingredients. A recent CITES conference held in Ottawa, Canada in July 1987 discussed ways of closing the loophole, since it is important that the Chinese pharmaceutical factories which produce these patent medicines find substitutes for the horn.

The other major use of rhino horn, that of making dagger handles in North Yemen, is also finally coming under control. Conservation organizations pressurized North Yemen to ban rhino horn imports in 1982, since it had become one of the world's largest consumers of rhino horn in the 1970s, but smuggling of many commodities was rife and the law could not be enforced. Since 1985, however, the country has been suffering an economic recession due to the fall in the oil price. This has prompted the government to increase the number of its customs officials in order to stop the smuggling and prevent further loss of hard currency. Rhino horn has thus become harder to import. From 1982 to 1984 about 1,700 kilos of rhino horn were imported each year; the figure fell to less than 1,000 kilos in 1985, and in 1986 imports did not reach 500 kilos. During this period, the value of the Yemeni rial fell against the US dollar forcing the wholesale price of rhino horn up 2.5