

THE RHINO AND THE LIONS

By W. M. TABERER, *Warden, Amboseli National Park*

The following interesting account will give some idea as to what extremes a lion will go when faced with hunger and man not being his natural food.

Some years ago a young rhino took up his abode at the waterholes in front of the Lodge bandas. When he first arrived he was with his mother, who a year later produced another calf. No doubt feeling a bit out of it now, he decided to stay around the camp, and not follow Mum and sister back into the covets after drinking. We christened him *Tukai*.

It did not take long before he was so accustomed to people and cars and the smells and noises of the camp, that he would remain on view all day out in front of the bandas, either lying in the wallow he had made at the nearer waterhole, or feeding up to the Warden's garden fence. In fact, he became the Lodge pet and show piece.

The Kania pride of lions frequently used these same waterholes, and it was quite common to see *Tukai* out in front lying under a tree surrounded by lions, some within fifteen feet of him and taking not the slightest notice of his presence, nor he the least concerned about their nearness. Vehicles and the public are normally kept out of the waterhole sanctuary, but I have taken the odd party in to photograph just such a scene.

Last November I returned after a long absence, and was delighted to see *Tukai* still around, and now about five years old he was weighing perhaps a ton and a half or more. I had also seen Kania and her bunch some distance from camp but looking in very poor condition.

A night or two after my return I was wakened by the most frightful wailing; thinking it was a hyena I tried to get off to sleep again, but the noise persisted and kept me awake. It seemed to come from the waterhole direction, so I decided to get up and drive out to investigate. Imagine my astonishment when I found *Tukai* had been set upon by the two males of Kania. They had got him down on his side, and one had hold of his throat while the other kept him there by lying across his ribs and was biting into his neck. He, poor chap, was squealing his heart out.

Hoping to keep our pet alive, I managed after a little trouble to drive the lions off, and was delighted to see *Tukai* get on his feet and show some fight. I backed away, and no sooner had I done so then one of the lions rushed in, reared up over the rhino, grabbed him across the back and pulled him down on to his side again, and with no apparent effort. Once he was down, the other lion tore in and grabbed *Tukai* under the shoulder and broke his leg at the joint. I realised then that he was done for, and that it was going to be a long and noisy job before they finally finished him off, as he was still screaming his head off.

I tore back to the house and woke up the Assistant Warden, David Lovatt Smith, and drove him back to the scene with a rifle. After driving the lions off a second time, I managed to manoeuvre so that he got in a good shot, and put poor old *Tukai* out of his misery. In the morning we went out to the scene of battle, and found the entire pride feeding on the carcass.

The amazing strength of a lion will always remain unchallenged, but for a single lion to be able to pull an almost fully grown rhino over on to its side, and without undue effort will, having witnessed it, always remain to me quite incredible.

At the time of this battle, there was very little game in the area, but some Masai herds were still using the swamps, yet the lions chose the more formidable task of tackling a rhino whose whereabouts they knew rather than the comparatively easy one of taking an ox or cow. Possibly their inherent fear of a show-down with the Masai was the influence behind their decision.

I would like to end this little account by mentioning that Tukai was the rhino browsing outside the Warden's house when Her Royal Highness The Princess Margaret arrived in October 1956 to visit Amboseli.

NATURE NOTES

Bite of Burrowing Viper (*Atractaspis*)

In early April I had the misfortune to be bitten by a Black Burrowing Viper (*Atractaspis*) 17 inches in length. The site of the bite was the tip of the thumb, one fang being driven fully in. An improvised tourniquet was applied. Immediate reactions were a smarting sensation and slight bleeding. 10 c.c. of Fritsimons Polyvalent serum was injected in the arm 1½ hours after the bite and another 10 c.c. three hours later. By this time the site of the bite was discoloured, the thumb and back of the hand was swollen.

Some six hours after the bite there was a slight spell of giddiness, nausea, cold sweat and inability to focus the eyes; all of which passed off after a few minutes. Recovery was uneventful, although the thumb was painful for several days. Despite penicillin injections the bite became septic and took about a month to heal completely, yet even now, four months later, there is still recurrent sloughing of skin. I think this indicates virulence of the poison and although never previously having come across a case of poisoning from this snake, I know the natives in the Sudan and the Wanyamwezi in Tanganyika hold the bite to be fatal.

Snake's Climbing Abilities

I recently came across a Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus Semivariiegata*), three feet in length, climbing up the corner of a vertical cement wall. It was captured when six feet above ground-level but I am sure it would otherwise have easily reached the top. I have not previously seen or heard of a snake climbing a comparatively smooth, vertical wall and I should be interested to hear of any other cases.

C. J. P. Ionides.