

ENCOUNTERS OF A RHINO KIND

by Liz Stone

Black rhino are notorious for their temperament, quick to charge at the slightest provocation—for this reason it comes as no surprise that they are well-respected inhabitants of the bushveld.

One seldom has the opportunity of coming face to face with a live black rhino but, in December 1992, Liza Sutcliffe, her daughters Olivia and Georgie,* and I visited Bwana, the black rhino calf at the Animal Rehabilitation Centre (ARC), Pretoria.

The week before our visit Bwana had just settled into a new boma and it took some coaxing from Karen Trender of ARC before he emerged to see exactly what all the fuss was about. When it became clear that he was on his best behaviour, we went into the boma for a closer black rhino inspection. Bwana good-naturedly tolerated our petting and took the opportunity to use all available knees and legs as rubbing posts—participation in this vigorous activity is definitely not recommended for anyone wearing shorts!

After a while the little rhino began to frisk about totally unaware of his tank-like strength—the bull-dozing game was on! We soon realised we were no match for the playful youngster and made a hasty retreat to the safety zone, outside the boma.

The visit was both a privilege and an enlightening experience for us all. Bwana constantly made an almost pathetic bleating sound, described as "mfee", also made by adult black rhino. To the touch, the skin on a rhino's cheek is velvet-like, in total contrast to the thick, rough hide which covers the rest of its body. The prehensile lip is extremely mobile, rather like a finger, and Bwana had no problem in using it to manoeuvre a human finger into its mouth! If one considers that this young rhino weighs in at only 164 kilograms and is already so powerful, the effect of a charging



adult weighing 900-1200 kilograms is not difficult to imagine. Although reared in captivity, we were reminded that this small package of dynamite deserves to be treated with the

same degree of respect as any other wild black rhino.

Perhaps the most fascinating was Bwana's behaviour. He exhibits the typical, playful behaviour of any young animal and is obviously very intelligent—as an example, we bore witness to him "asking" Karen for his bottle (for the record, Bwana now drinks 18-21 litres of special rhino milk formula a day).

April 1993 will mark the start of another chapter in Bwana's life—he is to be relocated back to Lapalala where he was born and placed under the watchful eye of the resident staff.

*Liza, Olivia and Georgie Sutcliffe are co-authors of a delightful educational black rhino story book, "Romeo the Rhino", which they have generously offered to REF for the raising of funds specifically directed at black rhino conservation. Watch this space!

LIFE AND DEATH DECISIONS

by Gary K. Clarke

It seems to me that there are a number of parallels between the management of wild animals in an African National Park and the management of wild animals in an American Zoological Park.

Both a Game Warden and a Zoo Director are dealing with animals: in the National Park it is with large populations of indigenous species; in the American Zoo it is with select individuals of a representative species. Both are dealing with people: visitors, staff, administrators and superiors, even governmental authorities. Both are dealing with budgets: operating budgets and capital improvement budgets, and usually funding is in short supply. Both are dealing with outside interested parties in a variety of projects: the news media, film crews, feature writers for magazines, students, scientists, and potential donors. Both depend upon public support, and both are dealing with difficult decisions and with emotional issues, sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

The uninitiated tend to think of animals in Africa as roaming, uninhibited and free, with nature taking its course. Wherever humans have set their foot they have left an indelible mark upon the habitat and thus the animal populations in that area. Animals

are just as managed in many National Parks in Africa as they're in the Zoological Parks of America.

I remember a situation at the Topeka Zoo when we had to make a difficult decision with an aged male Polar Bear. He was showing many signs of senility and had been under continuous veterinary treatment, possibly living another six months, but during that time he would be suffering. Death was inevitable, and that presented the following dilemma, should we euthanize the animal in his interest or make him as comfortable as possible and let him die by "natural causes"?

After much soul searching and careful deliberation the decision was made to euthanize the animal. This was not just "a Polar Bear"; it was an individual animal that we had known on a personal basis for over 20 years. It was an animal that had fathered a number of offspring in our Zoo. This made it not only a difficult, but painful decision as well.

A few months later in Zimbabwe I received word that an unusual situation had developed in Hwange National Park and I had been granted permission to be present on the scene.

At an established waterhole that had been frequented by a