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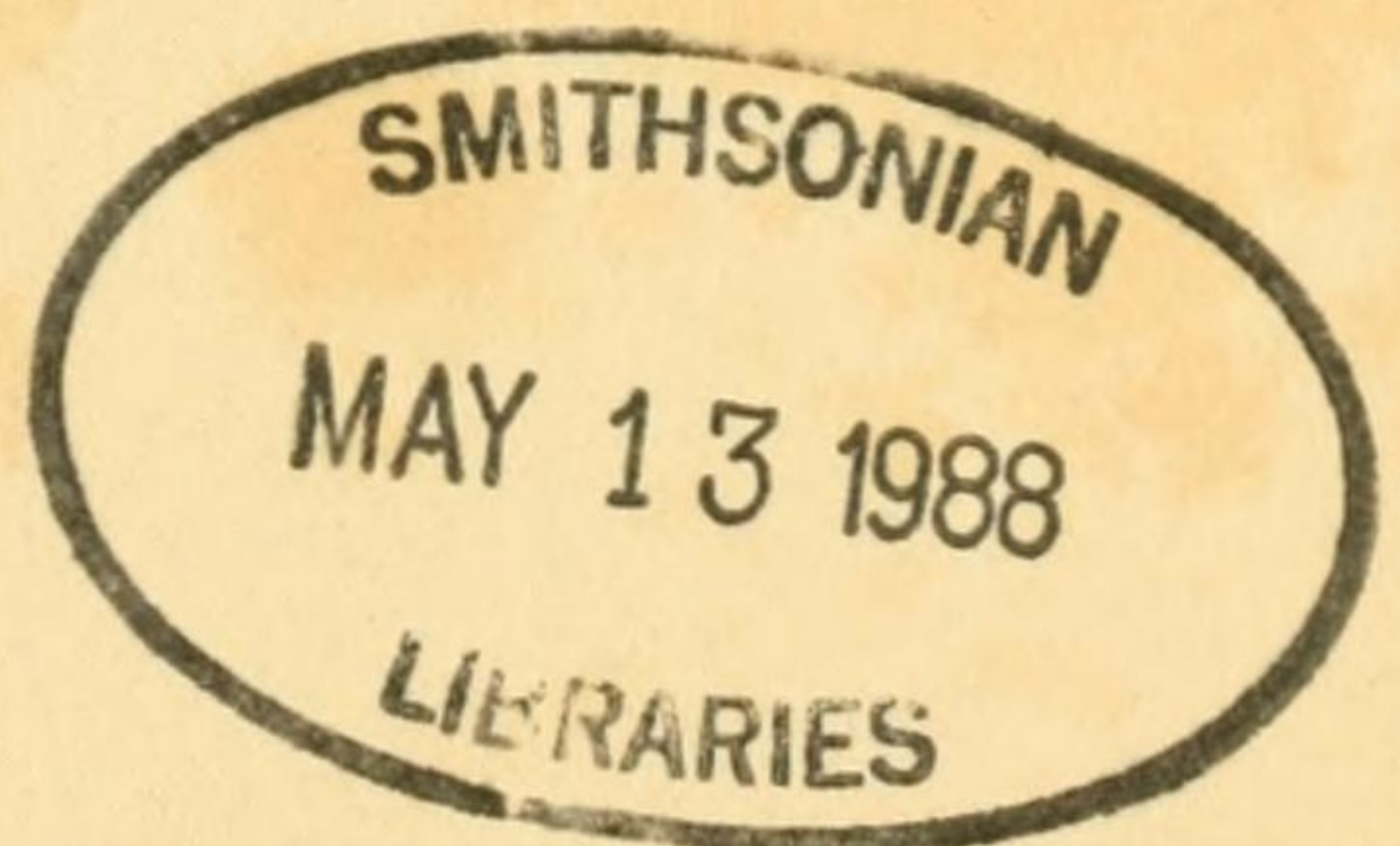
WILD ANIMALS
IN AND OUT OF THE ZOO

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CHAPTER XVI
SOME RHINOS THE PARK
HAS NOT HAD

THE history of the rhinoceroses that we have had at the National Zoological Park is very short. The temporary deposit by the Forepaugh Circus of its animals at the National Zoo afforded an opportunity for the only time in our history of exhibiting a Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*). Later on, an African black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) was purchased. It was never in good health and died after a year and seven months at the Zoo. A post-mortem showed an abnormal structure of the teeth and jaws, as well as the intestinal trouble which had caused its death.

The rhinoceroses that we have not had, but have tried to get, make a longer story. Year after year we have sought one from our Congressional Committee. This is no fun at all, but in Africa we had the most pleasant though most disappointing part of our trip while on the trail of the black rhino. After finishing a day's hunt one evening, George and I were returning to our camp on Lake Meru when a messenger came to us from Lyman, who had moved up the lake to a separate camp in order to hunt buffaloes to better advantage. The message he sent us read:

S. O. S. Rhino. Have just shot a female rhino and are trying to capture its rather sizable young. Come at once with ropes.

We started off at once accompanied by the guide to the other camp, only stopping in our tent for a moment to spread cheese on bread and smear jam on top of that

SOME RHINOS THE PARK HAS NOT HAD

for a quick lunch. We ate this as we hastened along what was at first a trail but afterwards petered out into a succession of elephant pug marks. During the rainy season when the ground is soft, the feet of the elephants naturally make deep impressions in the trail, which later on may dry out leaving ugly places to fall into as one hurries along a trail. Our guide cheerfully kept telling us that we were almost there now. It grew dark, and the trail got worse. Something snorted once in the high grass ten feet from us, and galagos chattered incessantly. We reached Lyman's camp at eleven at night. It had been a twelve-mile walk, and at the end of it we found that he had shot the rhino just twelve hours previously and the little one had disappeared into the bush. Early in the morning we started out and spent hours beating the bush in an attempt to locate the youngster, but never found him. Perhaps a lion got him during the night.

The district commissioner at Mbulu had told us of an area on the Masai Steppe that was "stiff" with rhinos, so when I returned to the base camp with two truckloads of animals I went ahead into this district where I was to join George as soon as possible.

Coming back we secured additional natives at Mbulu, and started on a four-day *safari* to where George was supposed to be, but at the end of the first day we met him coming back. In a week he had seen only four rhinos, and none of them had young. Mando, our head boy among the natives, told us of the Ja-Aida swamp country, where there were "*faro mingi sana*," which means "very much rhino," which corresponds to the Spanish "*hay mucho*," which really means nothing.

Two days' *safari* took us to the swamp. We camped at one side on an elevation, and near a plain three miles wide and perhaps seven or eight long, that was teeming with antelopes and zebras. As we came into camp on our first night's march, a rhinoceros darted out of a clump of bush on the other side and fled. On *safari* next

WILD ANIMALS

day a white-ant hill in front of us suddenly jumped up, and with tail up and head down charged off in the form of a 5,000-pound rhinoceros.

Once in camp we started out to follow day after day the trails made by the animals whose young we hoped to secure. We encountered during three weeks sixteen of them. Six times we crawled to within thirty or forty feet of them in the bush, attracted at first by the loud *zaa-zaa* of the rhinoceros birds, which the books say warn the rhino of his enemies. In the scrub it was necessary to get close to see if any young were there. George would usually whisper reassuringly, "When it charges, jump off the path," and invariably there was an aloe with sharp spines pointing at me from the only available place to which to jump. However, we were charged none of these times, thanks to keeping in the right relation to the wind, and finally after I had concluded that the rhinos were systematically practicing race suicide in this part of Africa, we came upon one with a baby. We peered into the bush, and George, who saw the *mtoto* (baby) first, made a grimace and elevated his palm, indicating that it was a very large one to attempt to catch. But we were getting desperate. This was the fourteenth rhino that we had seen and the first one with young, and after all, it gets tiresome spending day after day on trails followed 200 yards behind by a group of sixty boys—trained rhinoceros catchers (trained by ourselves at play in camp each evening after dinner, Mando being the rhinoceros and the other boys surrounding and roping him. This was a sort of drill which we hoped would be useful in case we ever did come across a young one). One of the boys carried a hammock. The thought of this hammock of burlap cloth on two poles—made especially for the rhino we did not catch—being carried patiently day after day over what seemed at the time like the whole of Africa, still fills me with sorrow. Anyway, there was a young one here. We saw the mother

SOME RHINOS THE PARK HAS NOT HAD

facing us. She did not see us, and we waited until she swung to one side, and then fired, taking the neck shot—eight inches back from the ear, and down. She fell to her knees, and then we discovered—a most hurried discovery—that it had been a family party of three, father, mother, and child, with the male asleep some twenty feet back of where the cow had been standing. He woke, jumped up, and charged, the young one following him. And so ended our one chance to get a young rhinoceros.

This *safari* was terminated suddenly by one of the rhinos that we did not get. This animal, as every one knows, is stupid and nearsighted, and when one is on his way to a water hole and suddenly finds himself surrounded by tents and native boys, he will charge through blindly. Our peaceful nights were interrupted four times in this way—the heavy rumble of a ponderous animal rushing into camp, and boys yelling, "Hia! Hia!"; one leaps out of his cot and into the open so as not to be caught in the same tent with the rhino. The boys, on the other hand, come rushing up to be near the white men and the guns. No harm was done until rhino number four came up. One had come through camp about eleven at night, and between two and three in the morning another, perhaps the same, came back. It was just as before, boys yelling and rhino charging, but Le Mesurier, awakened by the noise, saw his tent waving. A boy had tripped over one of the ropes, but Le Mesurier didn't know that. He jumped out and met a half dozen boys coming in, with the result that he was thrown down, caught his knee on a tent peg, and we had to break camp and take him to the Government station to get a doctor to perform a minor operation to save his leg.

One might truly say that the most magnificent animal in any zoo is an adult Indian rhinoceros, but few zoos have them. Magnificent in size, armor-plated with great folds of skin, it is as fantastic as the mighty animals of

WILD ANIMALS

the prehistoric Carboniferous swamps. From the standpoint of the zoo, it is also one of the rarest of all large animals in collections, and at present little short of impossible to obtain. There are three living in America, but none have been in the market in the hands of dealers for many years, and even the largest circus has been unable to obtain one to replace the historic specimen which lived and traveled with the show for more than twenty years.

Unlike the hippopotamus, rhinos do not breed readily in captivity, though they have done so once or twice. They have long been known in captivity, but never very many at one time. Always objects of superstition and fear, it may be that we see in the rhino the origin of the fabled unicorn. Its picture is found in ancient Chinese hieroglyphics. In the Roman arena they were pitted against lions, but we have no records of the results of these contests.

In 1517 a rhinoceros and an elephant were brought to Lisbon and presented to King Manuel. There was much discussion in the court and on highways as to "which could lick which," so the king decided to put it to the test. A city street was closed with palisades, the rhinoceros concealed behind a curtain, and the elephant brought in, whereupon the curtain was raised and the rhino began tugging at his chain. The attendant, an East Indian, loosened this, and the rhino advanced slowly toward the elephant with his horn lowered. The elephant stood still, watching his supposed enemy advance near him, then suddenly lose confidence in himself and flee, butting his head against the barrier. The elephant turned and went back to his stable.

John Evelyn, in his *Diary* (1684), records that he "went with Sir William Godolphin to see the rhinoceros, or unicorn, being the first that I suppose was ever brought into England. She belonged to some East India merchants, and was sold (as I remember) for above £2,000."

SOME RHINOS THE PARK HAS NOT HAD

At this time rhino horns were in great demand, due to the ancient superstition that a drinking cup made from one of them would reveal the presence of poison. A writer in 1762 stated that when wine is poured into a rhino horn, it will rise, ferment and seem to boil, but when mixed with poison it "cleaves in two." Evelyn saw in Italy a fountain kept free from poison by a rhino horn. This superstition prevails today, and accounts for the rarity of the animal throughout India. I have been told that a good horn from the Indian rhinoceros would bring as much as \$1,000 in China, where it is used, also, in the preparation of certain very valuable, very Chinese remedies.

African rhinos are captured by shooting the mother and then seizing and tying the young one with ropes. The small ones tame very quickly, and with proper care may be transported successfully.

Charles Mayer, well-known animal collector, describes a method used in trapping the adult Indian rhinoceros. The first step is to dig a pit about six feet wide, with sides gently inclining to the bottom. Rhinos particularly delight in wallowing in mire, so after the pit is concealed by a covering of boughs and branches, a coating of mud is laid and allowed to dry. When this has baked hard a pool is made. Care must be taken to give this as natural an appearance as possible, for the rhinoceros is a suspicious animal. After stepping on the trap, he slides to the bottom without damage to himself. Coolies then start a cage of rattan ropes, just large enough to hold the rhino, while others are building an inclined road towards the animal's head. This road is just wide enough to permit the cage to slide down on round logs. The door of the cage is raised to allow the entrance of the animal. A thin wall of earth has been retained between the end of the road and the rhino. When the coolies begin to push this wall into the pit on top of the animal, he rushes into the cage, and the door is dropped.

WILD ANIMALS

The rhinoceros is reputed to be one of the most dangerous of animals, although some of the Javanese variety are so docile that natives saddle them and ride them like horses. A. D. Bartlett states that when very young and small they have been known to toss and roll a ball about their paddock for hours, pushing it with the part of the head where the horn will be formed. Mr. Bartlett bore witness, however, to the ferocity of adult rhinos. The Indian animal in the London Zoo, he said, would have fits of rage during which it would dash its head against the walls of its paddock, sometimes tearing off a horn and leaving that part of the skull bare. The male is especially intractable. The female sometimes remains docile throughout life in captivity.

The horn is a mass of agglutinated hair which sometimes causes serious trouble to the animal. Mr. Bartlett tells of one instance where he was obliged to saw off the horn of a female which had grown forward so that it projected beyond the nose, making it impossible for the animal to get its mouth to the ground to eat. This beast would allow the veteran keeper to stroke its head through the bars of the cage, keeping its eyes closed during the petting. For several days he tried her out, patting her forehead just above the eyes with one hand and practicing sawing upon the horn with a walking stick with the other hand. On the morning of the experiment he went to the cage with another man, armed with a saw. The keeper started stroking the eyes while his companion sawed off the horn. Never once did the beast open her eyes and she remained perfectly quiet during the operation. The horn of another rhino grew back until it threatened to pierce the skin. This creature was not so docile. Its front feet were fastened by ropes to the bars and the sawing process started but three saw blades were snapped by the beast's struggles before the horn was amputated.

Mr. Bartlett's most thrilling experience with captive

SOME RHINOS THE PARK HAS NOT HAD

rhinos came one winter morning when the female mentioned above broke through the ice which covered a pool nine feet deep in the elephant paddock. The poor beast was struggling helplessly to gain a foothold on the steep and slippery bank. The entire zoo force at the time, twenty-six men, were hastily summoned. A rope was tossed around the animal's haunches and all started to pull. They succeeded sooner than they had expected. The rhino, with the help of the rope, managed to get out of the pool. It had been agreed that as soon as she secured a foothold which she could keep the men were to drop the rope and run. A narrow gate was open behind them. The first to reach it was a fat man who stuck fast in the narrow opening, thus penning his fellows in the inclosure with the excited beast. The animal, however, did not chase them. She seemed grateful to them for saving her life. If she had lost her head some of the men almost certainly would have been killed. The rhino, once it starts a charge, continues relentlessly in a straight line and jabs its horn into whatever it encounters, whether this be a man or a tree. It attacks with no more volition than a cannon ball, incapable of changing its course until it comes in contact with some exterior force. For this reason it is so dreaded by hunters and by natives.

While the rhinoceros shares little of the intelligence of the elephant, it is subject to the same paroxysms of rage which sometimes make that animal one of the most dangerous in captivity. The "bad" rhino is an ugly customer. A notable example was "Smiles," an African black rhino cow at the Central Park Zoo in New York. She was purchased from a circus. For ten years she had been cooped in a cage which was too small for the animal to turn around, traveling 5,000 miles a season. The real viciousness of the creature came out in the spacious stall provided for her in the elephant house—a viciousness hardly to be wondered at when we consider the conditions

WILD ANIMALS

under which she had lived. At first the slightest noise would excite her to a frenzy and she would rush like a mad bull, driving her fourteen-inch horn through the two-inch sheathing of her stall, and knocking the plank into splinters. In time, after the stall had been lined with sheet iron, she calmed down. She lived for nearly twenty years in her new home, but at any time during this period it would have been suicide to enter her stall without first roping and tying her. Early one morning her keeper was alone in the elephant house, forking straw into a corner of her stall. The rhino was straining furiously against the fetters around her neck and head. Suddenly one of the ropes parted. The man tried to make a rush for the door, but with a mighty twist of the head, the animal broke the remaining ropes. The keeper saw that he was not only headed off but cornered. The beast rushed with lowered head, horn tilted forward to run the man through the body. With a yell for help the keeper threw himself against the wall. About eight feet from the floor was a horizontal joist. With a frenzied effort he jumped for this, reached it and drew himself up in the nick of time. The rhino's horn caught his trousers leg and ripped overalls, breeches and drawers from ankle to hip. The skin, however, was not scratched. Other keepers had arrived by this time. The infuriated cow was driven off with pitchforks and iron bars and the man rescued from his perilous perch.

Visitors to the National Zoological Park used to wonder to see in one of the cages the curious combination of a young African rhinoceros and a goat. The rhino was pining away with loneliness when this companion was furnished him. They became very good friends, perfectly harmless to each other. The larger animal, however, could not be reared to maturity.



Baby African black rhinoceros, the National Zoo's only specimen

| NUMBER OF SPECIMENS | MAMMALS | LONGEVITY RECORD | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------|
| | | YEARS | MONTHS |
| | HYRACOIDEA | | |
| 5 | <i>Procavia brucei prittwitzii</i> (East African hyrax)..... | *2 | 4 |
| 4 | <i>capensis</i> (Cape hyrax)..... | 3 | |
| | PROBOSCIDEA | | |
| 2 | <i>Loxodonta africana oxyotis</i> (African elephant)..... | *15 | 6 |
| 4 | <i>Elephas maximus</i> (Indian elephant)..... | 25 | 11 |
| 1 | <i>sumatranus</i> (Sumatran elephant)..... | *10 | 2 |
| | PERISSODACTYLA | | |
| 1 | <i>Dicerorhinus sumatrensis</i> (Sumatran rhinoceros)..... | 2 | 4 |
| 1 | <i>Diceros bicornis</i> (Black rhinoceros)..... | 1 | 7 |
| 3 | <i>Acrocodia indica</i> (Malay tapir)..... | 7 | 4 |
| 16 | <i>Tapirus terrestris</i> (Brazilian tapir)..... | 20 | |
| 2 | <i>Elasmognathus bairdi</i> (Baird's tapir)..... | *4 | 8 |
| 3 | <i>Equus grevyi</i> (Grevy's zebra)..... | 15 | |
| 6 | <i>grevyi</i> x <i>asinus</i> (Zebra-ass hybrid)..... | *17 | 8 |
| 2 | <i>grevyi</i> x <i>caballus</i> (Zebra-horse hybrid)..... | *13 | 9 |
| 3 | <i>przewalskii</i> (Wild horse)..... | 6 | 8 |
| 1 | <i>quagga granti</i> (Grant's zebra)..... | 15 | 2 |
| 3 | <i>quagga chapmani</i> (Chapman's zebra)..... | *1 | 9 |
| 2 | <i>zebra</i> (Mountain zebra)..... | *1 | 11 |