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N. M. Casperd tells how a Uganda White Rhino escaped poachers when it was released

OUT OF THE SNARE

A CHANCE MEETING one morning with Dr. Williams, of Kuluva Mission, in Kampala, revealed that he had just received a telegram from the Game Department to the effect that one of the eighty-odd White Rhino living in Ajia's Sanctuary, West Nile, of which Dr. Williams is an honorary Game Warden, was snared tightly round the muzzle by a loop of steel cable and would die of thirst or starvation if not released within the next day or so. Could we help?

I made no promises, but said that I would discuss it with Professor Lock, head of my department, and see what we could do.

Returning to the Medical School, Professor Lock, myself and Mr. Wellingham, head of the Photographic Department, held a hurried consultation and, after contacting the Chief Game Warden, Mr. L. Tennent, it was decided that we would start for the Sanctuary, about 300 miles north of Kampala, early the following morning.

The remainder of the day was spent in hectic preparation. Drugs to be made up, doses worked out, cross-bow and darts to be prepared, plus the hundred-and-one other things necessary for a safari.

The next day, Saturday was spent travelling, and by 6 p.m., we had comfortably installed ourselves in the Kuluva Mission rest house. Mrs. Williams very kindly provided much needed baths and food, leaving us free to concentrate on our equipment.

Professor Lock had decided to try a combination of M99, a relatively new and extremely potent Morphine-like drug, and Hyoscine. This should have the effect of bringing down the rhino quickly and keeping it in a tranquil frame of mind after regaining consciousness.

The actual amount of drug used would have to be decided after seeing the rhino and estimating its weight.

Early Sunday morning, we left for the Sanctuary to meet the Game Warden and his staff. They had been out since first light trying to locate the animal but unfortunately had drawn a blank.

By late afternoon, with still no sign of it, we decided to return to the Mission and try again the following

morning. Dawn on Monday found the Rangers out searching again, but when we reached the rendezvous the story was the same, no rhino.

One Ranger however had not yet returned. Later, the missing Ranger arrived and reported that he had located the animal on a small hill nearby. In 10 minutes, we were 50 yards up wind of the rhino, which stood in the shade of some trees, completely unaware of our presence.

The rhino, although an adult bull, was not large — compared with others in the Sanctuary — and its weight was estimated at about 3,500 lbs. Accordingly, we filled the dart with 1.75mgms of M99 and 100mgms of Hyoscine.

Professor Lock loaded his cross-bow; we kept our fingers crossed and watched. Slowly the Prof. edged forward, and at about 30 yards range from the rhino — which was conveniently standing broad-side on — he fired and hit the animal in the left shoulder.

This was ideal, as the drug was injected into a large muscle, from where it would be rapidly absorbed. The rhino trotted off for about 20 yards and then stood; six minutes later it was unsteady and, after a further half minute, rolled over on to its right side, unconscious.

We allowed five minutes grace, and then moved in with wire cutters, penicillin, and sulphonilamide powder. The snare had caught behind the rear horn, passed in front of the eyes, just missing them, and beneath the lower jaw. There was a deep cut caused by the animal forcing the snare into the flesh, in a futile attempt to feed.

The snare was quarter-inch stranded cable and was quickly removed

with the aid of wire cutters; the wound was dressed and a massive dose of penicillin injected into the rump. One hundred mgms of Nalorphine, the antidote to M99, was injected and we all stood by.

The animal's respiration rate had fallen considerably during this time and was at its lowest point, 6 to the minute. This was slightly worrying. However, in about 10 minutes, the rate increased to 8, then to 14 and finally 18 to the minute, which was reassuring.

The rhino sweated profusely the whole time; to reduce dehydration,

we covered him with grass and poured water over him. The sweat was not blood coloured as had previously been reported, but it was a definite orange.

Whether this sweat colouration was due to murrum dust or not, is difficult to say, but as the groin sweat was the same hue as the rest, I think it unlikely.

Three hours after the initial injection of M99 and Hyoscine, the animal showed signs of movement. These took the form of paddling with the fore legs and attempts to lift the head.

They were repeated at about five-minute intervals, but the rhino was completely incapable of co-ordinated movement. At this point, it was decided to try to roll the animal onto its brisket, and after a super-human effort by nine men, this feat was accomplished.

The rhino was now in a state of semi-consciousness and, although aware that unusual things were happening, was completely disinclined to move. The patient was obviously recovering and comfortable, well attended by Dr. Williams, the Game Warden and three Rangers.

There being nothing further we could do, and having commitments back in Kampala, it was decided to leave the animal in the competent hands of our helpers and return to civilisation.

Four days later, a letter from Dr. Williams successfully concluded our expedition. Apparently the rhino had remained on its brisket throughout the night, and the following morning had risen unsteadily to its feet. About mid-day it moved off; towards evening, closely followed by a Ranger, it made for water and, after a long and much needed drink, contentedly started to graze.

Credit for the successful accomplishment of this rescue must go to Professor J. A. Lock, Department of Pharmacology, Makerere Medical School. Without his experience and specialised knowledge the attempt would not have been made.

(See also article by ANTHONY LAVERS, overleaf, with another photograph of this rescue operation).



IN A FEW MINUTES, the drugs have taken effect and the rhino has keeled over. (Photographs which were supplied by the article by Mr. Casperd were the joint work of the author and Mr. Wellingham, Head of Makerere's Department of Photography).