

WILD LIFE

AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY

Edited By DOUGLAS ENGLISH



THE BLACK RHINOCEROS.

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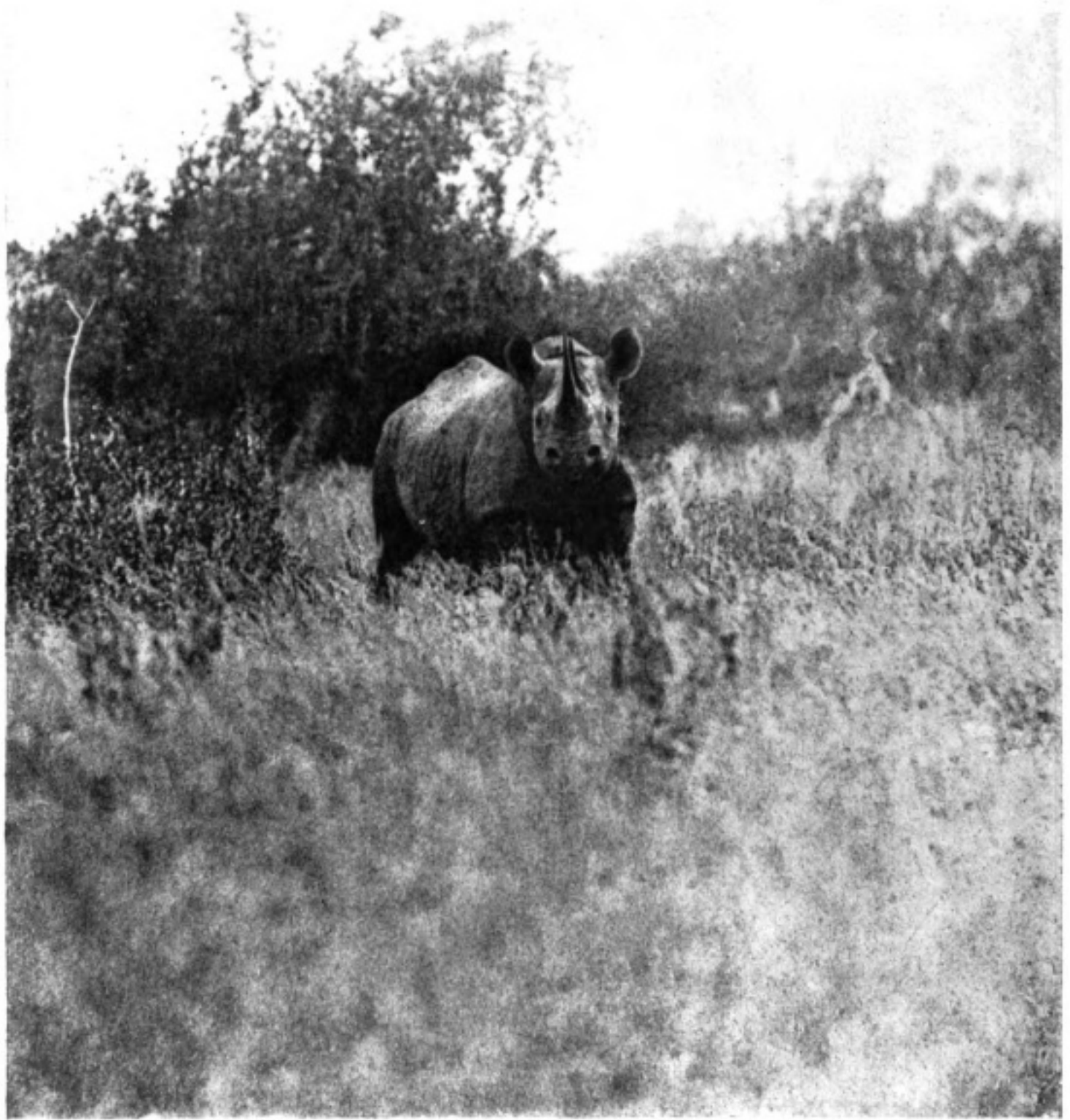
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READY TO CHARGE.

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THE BLACK RHINOCEROS

(*Rhinoceros bicornis*)

GREAT diversity of opinion has been expressed by various writers on the disposition and little temperamental failings of the Rhino. Broadly speaking, its ferocity would seem to vary inversely to the amount of experience of the hunter. It certainly is a very unpleasant experience to have such an enormous beast dashing in one's direction without provocation, and it is very natural for those who have been unlucky in coming across one of this character for the first time to take away an impression that he is a savage brute, lying in wait for man, and intent on wreaking vengeance upon him on every occasion. On further acquaintance, however, these feelings wear off, especially on seeing the ease with which the gigantic pachyderm is killed or turned with almost any modern rifle.

Practically all African sportsmen are of opinion that, provided the hunter is armed with a suitable rifle, and proper precautions are taken, there is little danger in its pursuit. But all agree that the Rhino should be treated with considerable respect. Cotton Oswell had many narrow escapes, and considered this animal to be very fierce. He did his hunting on horseback, which probably lessened the chance of trouble with this animal. But no writer puts the Rhino in the same category as the Lion, the Elephant, or the Buffalo.

Schillings, who probably had as much to do with Rhinos as most people, and who shot large numbers of them, gives the most blood-curdling accounts of hair-breadth escapes he had had with them. One might imagine from his book that to hunt this animal in its native haunts was tantamount to suicide. But he no doubt knew his public, and suited his accounts to their tastes. I suppose the German public, as well as the British public, likes to be thrilled, and to appeal to the ordinary reader little must be left to the imagination: the dangers, etc., must be emphasised, and even exaggerated, to produce the same effect on the reader that it did at the time on the author.

In England we have less of this effort at super-realism. The number of big game-shooters who really know is so large that their opinion is more important than that of the ordinary reading public. These would certainly view any suggestion of exaggeration as contrary to the spirit of good sportsmanship.

The greatest living authority, Selous, had few adventures with Black Rhinos, and emphasises the fact that between the years 1872 and 1890 he never heard of a single case of a hunter being killed by them, though thousands of Rhinos were shot during that time by white hunters and black. He says that they were stupid, blundering, bad-sighted, but keen-scented beasts; sometimes really bad-tempered and savage by nature, and ready to charge unprovoked at the sight or scent of anyone approaching. He concludes, however, by saying: "My own experience proves at least that it is quite possible to come across a great number of Black Rhinoceroses without ever encountering a really vicious one."

Vaughan Kirby calls him "irritable, nervous, inquisitive and churlish, unwary, and wanting intelligence; harsh and coarsely natured, as the thorny vegetation he feeds on; unsympathetic as the dry, arid district in which he lives." Coryndon remarks about him that he is "shy, quick to anger, very obstinate, inquisitive, and suspicious."

Personally, I would not venture anywhere near a Black Rhino without a rifle, unless I had a very pressing reason. I do not think he is a sporting beast to shoot. On exceptional occasions he will turn nasty, but, as a rule, unless followed up into thick stuff, he is brought to bag without any trouble, if shot in the right place. Even a small-bore rifle can be used with success.

WILD LIFE readers are not primarily interested in the killing of game, but rather in their habits, and the life they lead in their wildernesses. Looked at from this point of view, I should say the Rhino was far and away the most dangerous beast in Africa. Let an unarmed man wander through country infested by Lions, Buffaloes, Elephants, and Rhinos. It is the Rhino which makes him keep on the alert, and which may at almost any moment come thundering down upon him out of the bush. It is comparatively seldom one hears of unprovoked attacks by Lions, Buffaloes, or Elephants, though they sometimes occur. But it is not unusual for a caravan to be attacked and scattered by a panic-stricken Rhino. This is the more irritating, as, apart from any danger to life or limb, one's worldly goods are usually hurled to the ground by terrified porters anxious to gain a place of safety.

Amongst the most hostile critics of the Rhino are the officials whose duties take them through country that they frequent. I know of several whose whole enjoyment is spoilt by the constant uncertainty as to whether, or when, one will appear. When the safari consists of camel transport it is doubly dangerous, as, if there be a stampede, the loads are possibly lost or broken, and often the camels are gone for good. I do not for a moment wish to suggest that all these are charging; but, as they usually run upwind when disturbed by the scent of a man, they may collide with the intruder before he has time to escape, in which case they will probably send him flying sky high out of sheer panic. For, as Selous says, the Rhino will charge anything it sees directly in its path.

This is one way in which accidents happen, and this is the theory which most experienced sportsmen accept, namely, that in trying to avoid the danger the Rhino runs into it, through his habit of running upwind. But I do not think this is all. I have several times seen a look in the eye of a Rhino which meant business; and I think this is most natural and easily accounted for.

Everyone who has had experience of Dogs knows that the dangerous ones are often the timid ones. I have known Dogs kept to guard pheasant-pens, and



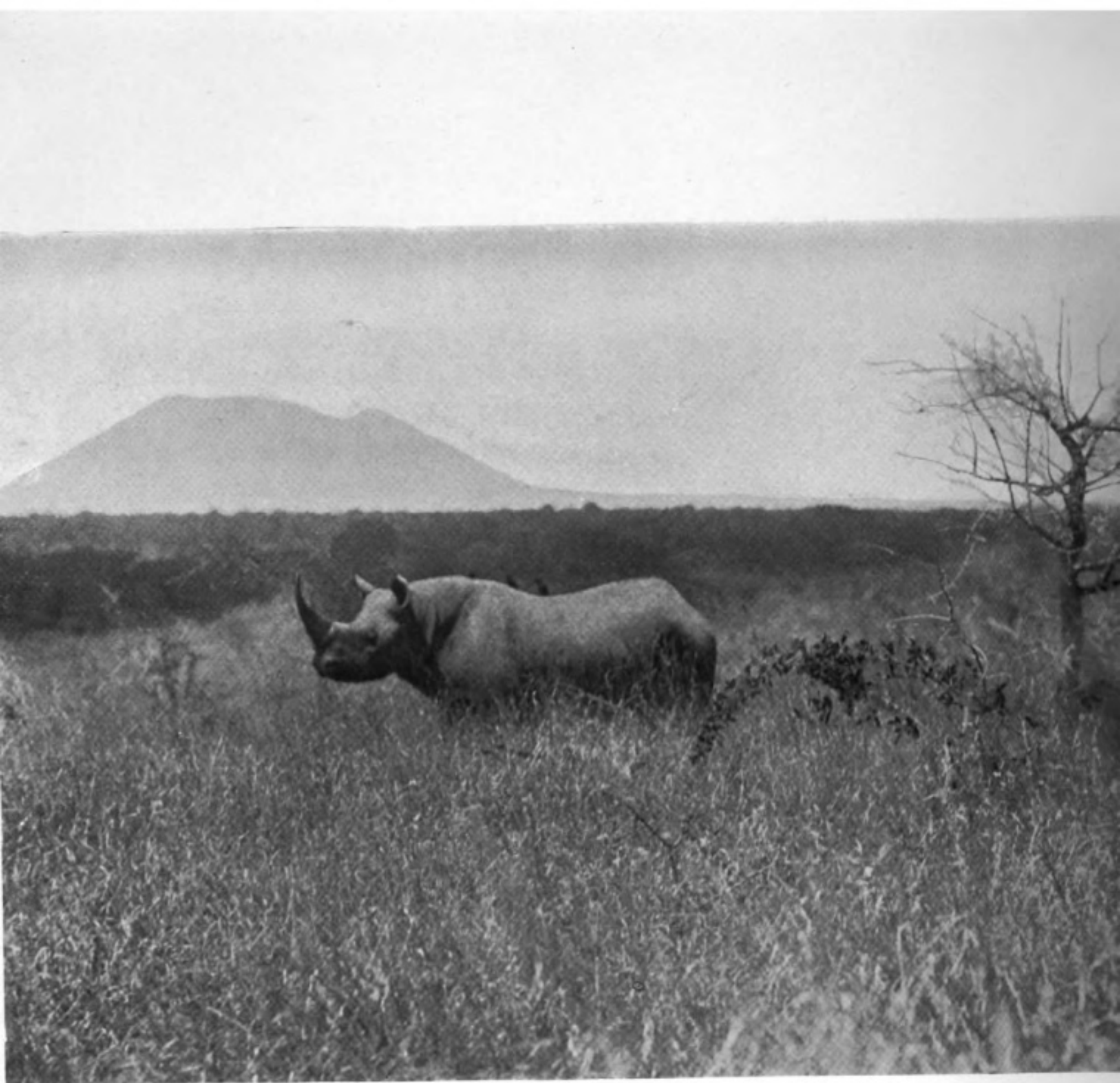
BLACK RHINO IN TYPICAL THIN THORN BUSH.

Copyright, Fred Russell Roberts



RHINO RUBBING AGAINST A PALM TREE.

Copyright, Fred Russell Roberts



"HALT ! WHO GOES THERE ?"

Copyright, Fred R

Note the Tick Birds on
the Black Rhino's back.



THRUSTERS THREE !

Copyright, Fred Russell Roberts

chosen for their ferocity. When loose these Dogs were so terrified that they were scared at the slightest thing; the point of view of both Rhino and Watch-dog is, in my opinion, the same. Both are timid animals, and prefer to run away; but when the danger is so sudden or so near that they have a feeling of being cornered, they go for it out of sheer desperation.

I think in such cases they do mean business; but, being hopelessly blind, they often pass the object of their wrath without seeing it, and are thankful to be allowed to go on their way.

When taking the photographs shown here, though on several occasions the "sitter" resented my efforts at photography, only twice was an attack pressed home to a finish.

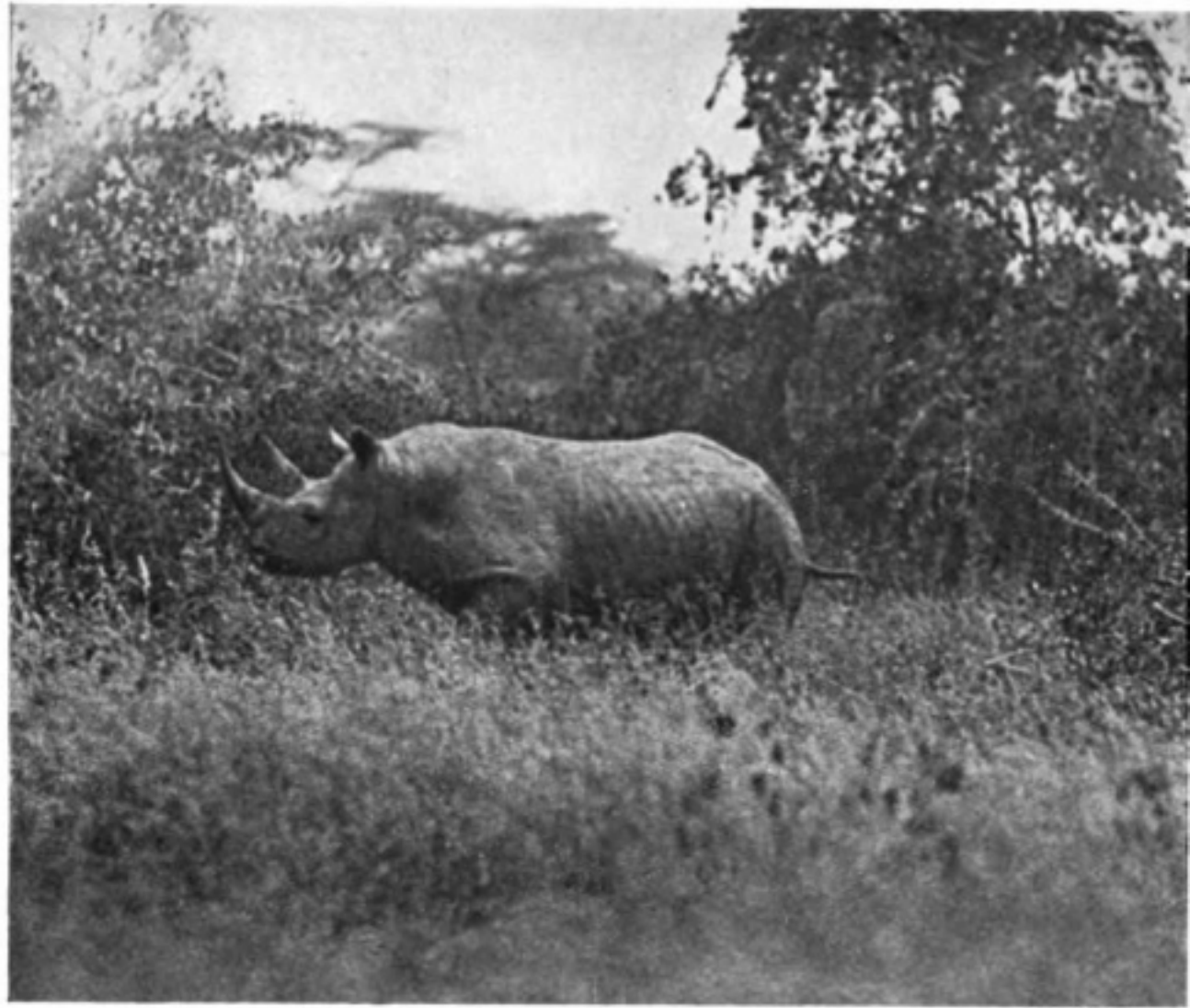
The gentleman who is seen rubbing against a palm tree was one delinquent. He was one of the least wary and most obtuse specimens I have met with. We were able to approach behind cover to within thirty yards, at which distance this photograph was taken. He soon after walked across the open to another palm tree. By walking parallel to him, I took a photograph at about twenty-five yards. I had no cover at all, and was accompanied by a friend of mine and his gun-bearer. This picture appeared in the August number. I finally took another picture of him at about twenty yards, when the click of the camera caused him to wake up suddenly. I had not quite time to get ready for another snapshot, when he came straight for us. My friend put a bullet into his brain, and he sank down within a few yards, a victim to his misplaced objection to posing for his portrait.

The other case was, I think, a real bad character. He had been walking about uneasily, and charging imaginary enemies for some time, but never locating us. I was successful in getting pretty close up, whilst he had birds on his back, as seen on page 62. I had taken several photographs, when, without any apparent reason, he suddenly located us. I had only my native boy with me, and by arrangement we both shouted loudly when the beast was about fifteen yards off. No result! So I put a bullet into the middle of the huge mass, hoping I might turn him without killing. No result again! I was hiding behind a thing rather like a gooseberry bush, and keeping fairly still to avoid catching his eye. As he came level, I edged round a bit, and, before he could turn round the bush, was able to get a shot into his neck, killing him instantly. This was the last Rhino I photographed for a long time. He fell only two or three yards away, and I did not like it.

However, the majority ran when they were satisfied that the danger was real, but, as a rule, they spent some time first alternately advancing and retiring, not at all sure which to do. On three occasions we succeeded in turning a Rhino when it was coming straight for us by shouting. One Rhino we saw was fast asleep on an open plain. A friend was with me and a few natives. When within twenty-five yards we whistled, and the huge mass rose to its feet and looked hard in the wrong direction. Then he looked in front, as seen in the picture, and finally at us. After a snort or two, like a railway engine, he finally decided we had no business there, and down he came straight for us. When within about fifteen yards, we shouted in unison as previously arranged. This brought him up suddenly; he looked for one moment, and then went as if the devil were after him.

F. RUSSELL ROBERTS.

(To be continued.)



DISTURBED.

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BLACK RHINO STILL GLISTENING
AFTER HIS MATUTINAL BATH.

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