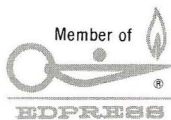


- 3 Turtle Tale
- 7 When is a Fly Not a Fly?
- 10 Ollie Otter's Fun Pages
- 14 Waterspouts!
- 16 Nature Club News
- 17 Hit the Trail!
- 22 Gulls on the Go
- 29 Ranger Rick & His Friends
- 33 Happy Bee
- 34 Seashell Hotel
- 36 Hollow Oak Book Nook
- 37 Poetry
- 38 The Flying Lemur
- 40 Wise Old Owl
- 42 Kifaru, The Black Rhino

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*I give my pledge as a member of
 Ranger Rick's Nature Club*

*To use my eyes to see the beauty
 of all outdoors.*

*To train my mind to learn the
 importance of nature.*

*To use my hands to help protect our
 soil, water, woods and wildlife.*

*And, by my good example, to show
 others how to respect, properly use
 and enjoy our natural resources.*

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KIFARU

THE BLACK RHINO







As tick birds eat parasites, a black rhino's upper lip curls around food like a finger▲. The white rhino's

by Fred Johnson

Have you ever watched a scene on TV or in the movies where a giant black rhino charges a Land Rover car and batters it into tin cans? Then it charges Dan Dashing, the brave white hunter who shoots the animal to save the lady tourists, who only wanted to take pictures.

It's very exciting, I'm sure, but this gives the black rhino a bad reputation which he really doesn't deserve. What the film doesn't tell you is that the dreaded black rhino charge is, more often than not, just a lot of bluff and noise. And the rhino isn't

even black. His hide is gray.

The local Africans call him *Kifaru* (*Key-FAR-roo*), which means stupid one in an African language. Actually, though, Kifaru really can't help looking stupid at times. The poor animal is so near-sighted, he is almost blind.

Some Africans have an old story they tell about Kifaru. Once, long ago, animals had no fur or hides, so they were given needles to sew their coats together. Kifaru dropped his needle, and in pawing and peering around to find it, he kicked it under a bush. He had to sew his

coat together with a thorn, and it came out all baggy. Then he decided that someone had stolen his needle. So to this day he charges things—still trying to find the thief who took his needle.

Kifaru's hearing and sense of smell are keen. Since he can't see very well, his world is one of sounds and smells. If a twig snaps (he may have stepped on it himself) or a rodent scoots off in the grass, he is alarmed at once: *What was that? Better have a closer look.* So he advances like a runaway dump truck. This is what is usually mistaken for



Photos by Wildlife Photographers/Bruce Coleman, Inc. (42); M. Philip Kahl, Jr./Photo Researchers

He twists his great head from side to side to let one eye or the other peer ahead.

When he finally decides that he might have something lined up, he may charge and at the last minute lower his head and run blind! He also kicks up a lot of dust and snorts to appear extra frightening. Generally, though, he misses his target by as much as ten feet (3 m). Sometimes he stops short after running only a few feet. He peers around as if trying to remember what he was charging. Or he may panic and flee, snorting and thumping away.

If he really puts his dim-witted mind to it, Kifaru can flee (or charge) as fast as 28 miles (45 km) an hour. That's partly because Kifaru gallops on one toe—the wide middle one that presses the ground and bears his great weight. Two smaller toes at the side seem to be of little use to him.

It takes about eighteen months before a pregnant Kifaru gives birth to a baby—a 50-pound (22-kg) fatty standing about 20 inches (50 cm) high. About an hour after his birth he is on his stubby legs. He staggers about, sniffing and listening to a world he can barely see.

The baby stays close to Mom for two to four years.



Photo by Marilyn K. Krog

the dread black rhino charge.

Of course, an angry black rhino may not be bluffing. He may charge a car or truck and can do a great deal of damage. But so may a Cape buffalo and several other hoofed dwellers of Africa. However, a black rhino is also likely to charge trees, bushes, campfires, people, rodents, toads, butterflies and rustling leaves.

He often misses his target. His little “pig” eyes are on the sides of his head. He gets only a fuzzy idea of what is on either side of him, and he can't see anything up front.

At first he nurses often. Then he eats more and more of the food his Mom eats. It must be good for him. By the time he is full-grown at five years he may weigh 2000 pounds (950 kg), be 12½ feet (3.75 m) long and stand 5 feet (1.5 m) high at the shoulder.

Rhinos seem to have metal-lined stomachs. Leaves of the fat euphorbia (you-FOR-be-uh) tree have a sap that will seriously blister the skin of a human. But Kifaru munches them with enjoyment. Heavy thorns that will rip the toughest cloth he

Please turn the page



Horns start to grow when the rhinos are about 5 weeks old. Mud-rolls are great for cooling off and keeping away pests.

crunches up like crackers. The sap of a candelabra (can-duh-LAH-bra) tree is used by some natives to make poison arrow tips—with which to kill rhinos! In Kifaru's blood stream it would do its deadly work. But in his iron stomach it is just part of his dinner.

Like many African hoofed animals, Kifaru feeds mostly in the cool of the early morning and early evening. In between he is likely to flop down in the dust and snooze. About the only thing that can wake him is the ear-splitting noise that his friends the tick birds make when something gets too close. These birds feast continually on the ticks that live on his thick hide. They make a big racket which warns the rhino

that something is coming. Then Kifaru struggles up and prepares himself for the famous rhino charge. Or, more likely, he rushes off in panic.

One of Kifaru's several relatives also lives in Africa. Called Abu-Garn by the Africans, he is the so-called "white rhino." He isn't white, though. He is just a bit lighter than the black rhino.

But Abu is larger than Kifaru and has a bigger head. He is less excitable and more friendly to other rhinos. He hardly ever charges. Aside from these things, the two rhinos are very much alike. When adult they have only one enemy—man!

For centuries some people have believed that a rhino horn is a powerful medicine.

When powdered and taken in a drink, it is supposed to make old men more lively. Silly people! It doesn't work as a medicine at all. The horn isn't bony like a cow's; it is more like tightly matted hair. So the joke is, what they think is medicine is only powdered hair!

Nevertheless, poachers, when no one is looking,



Photos by Marilyn K. Krog; Norman Myers/Bruce Coleman, Inc.

continue to sneak around killing rhinos just to get the horns. The rest is left to rot or be eaten by vultures and other scavengers.

Kifaru can be found wandering in his African world, mostly in the Ngorongoro crater, the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania, and in Tsavo Park East in Kenya. He is not yet in danger of extinction, but

he will be if more is not done to protect him.

Abu is in far worse shape. He is found only in a few areas in southern Africa, Uganda, Zaire and the Sudan. Some white rhinos have been put under strong protection in Meru National Park in Kenya. There they seem happy and are breeding well.

Some people are in daily

touch with black rhinos in reserves and zoos. They say that, once Kifaru learns to trust a human, he seems to want to make friends. In Africa, Jean-Pierre Hallet, a wildlife conservationist, managed to make friends with one. It followed him around like a dog. Imagine a one-ton rhino wanting to be your friend! *The End*

