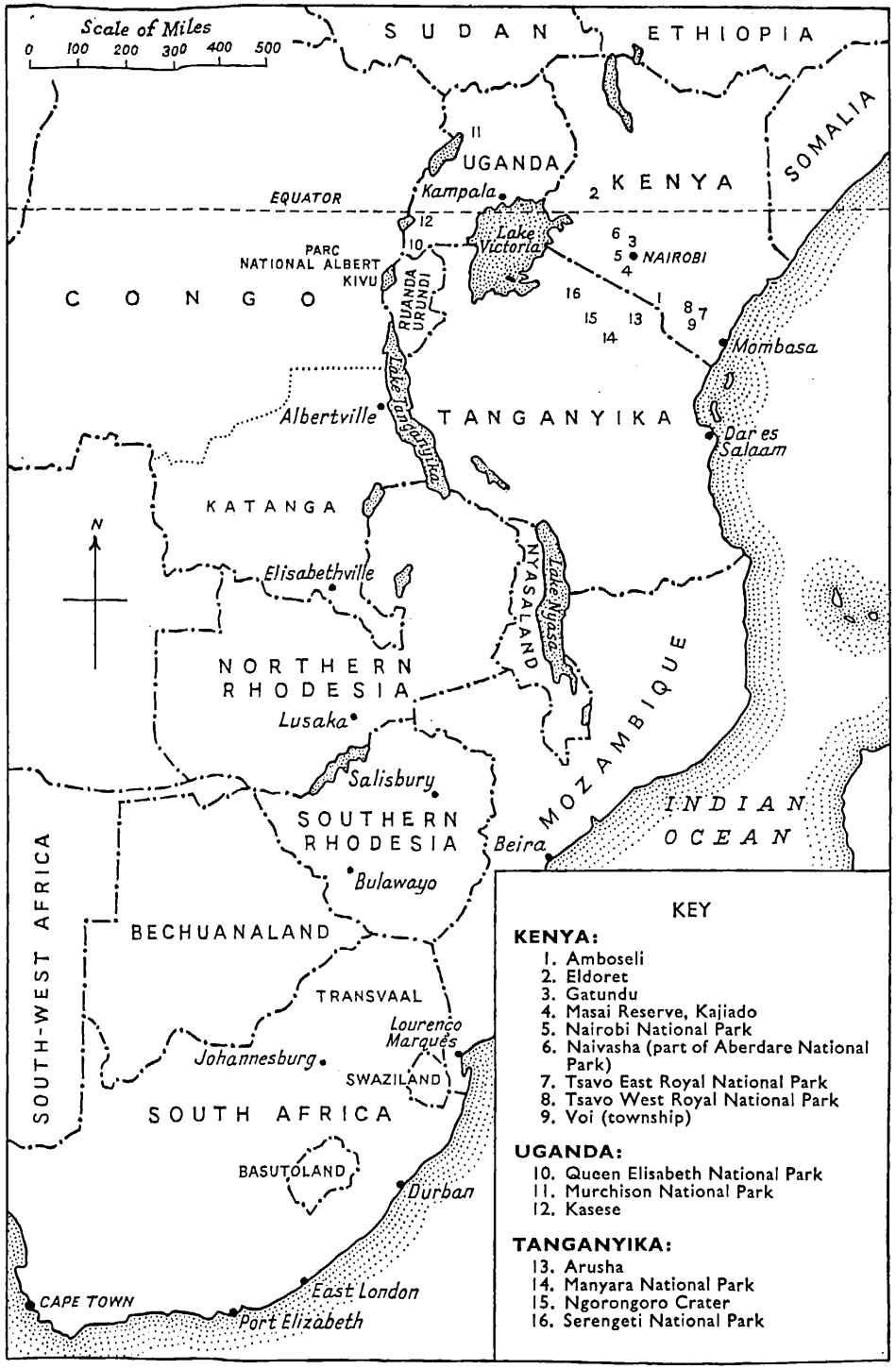


NATIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES VISITED BY THE AUTHOR

AFRICA'S WILD LIFE

Survival or Extinction?

ERIC ROBINS

WITH A FOREWORD BY
H.R.H. PRINCE BERNHARD
OF THE NETHERLANDS,
PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

TAPLINGER PUBLISHING CO., INC
New York

1963

First American Edition published by
TAPLINGER PUBLISHING CO., INC., 1963

TO BRIGITTE

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number:
63–19628

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

CONTENTS

The dead elephant's ears and the tusks, which were later sold by auction for £30, were hacked off with pangas and axes by Parker's black game scouts and loaded into the truck with thick cutlets of the trunk, a delicacy which they claimed as their right.

At a nod from Ian, the tribesmen went to work, slashing up the body while their wives and children stood by with enamel bowls in which to carry off the meat on their heads. One exuberant elder, bathed in blood, crawled into the beast's stomach and peered out from among the entrails. Trains passed by unheeded as the tribesmen chanted happily, "Uhuru Na Kenyatta, Uhuru Na Ndofu"—"Freedom and Kenyatta, Freedom and Elephant"—until little but a tall cage of bones was left for the vultures and kites.

* * *

I returned to Voi to meet the legendary David Sheldrick at his headquarters there. These were the formal biographical details I had been given of the man by his superiors in Nairobi; "He was born in Kenya in November, 1919, and was educated at a school in Britain. After spending some time as a farmer, he joined the glamorous team of professional hunters and earned for himself a good reputation as a keen hunter, able tracker and a first-class shot. The war then intervened during which he served with the K.A.R. in the Middle East and Burma, retiring with the rank of major. Soon after the war, he decided to abandon the pursuit of professional hunting and joined the National Parks service in 1949, going to the Tsavo Royal National Park where he has been ever since. During the Mau Mau Emergency he rendered valuable service with tracker teams and in hunting down terrorists as a member of the Kenya Police Reserve. He subsequently returned to the Tsavo Park where he organized, and successfully concluded, a campaign against the poachers in recognition of which, and of other services, he was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire. He is an accepted authority on poaching and elephants."

David is Warden in charge of the eastern section of Tsavo Royal National Park. This Mau Mau rebellion hero and fabulous white hunter turned game warden is as handsome as any matinée idol, and to strangers appears faintly arrogant in a typically British way in his devotion to his work.

He was coldly angry when I arrived. For at his feet, in handcuffs, squatted a puny, phlegmatic rhino poacher surrounded by his bow and poisoned arrows, gourd, metal cook-pot, and a blood-stained, fibrous rhino horn.

"He'll probably go to prison for a good long term," muttered David, smoothing down his immaculate bush-shorts. "But that means nothing, except regular meals for once and a roof over his head. These chaps still call gaol 'King George's Hotel'."

He walked off back to his office, leaving the poacher to the African guards and his fate.

In a wooden cage near his house at Voi David Sheldrick had a young lioness which he had found on the plain, weak from hunger. A porcupine quill in her nose had prevented her from eating. I watched the lioness being fed on a diet of raw meat and glucose before being trucked to Nairobi to be released in the Royal National Park there. In a pen close by was an affectionate baby rhino rescued from the bush a few weeks before after its parents had died of starvation in the worst drought in the history of Tsavo East. It shared the pen with three buffalo orphans, all thriving on bales of dried lucerne. They were happy and contented in the hands of man, safe from the grim and stark reality of the ravaged wilds into which David took us that morning.

It was a dusty, fifty-mile ride through a Valley of the Doomed. Everywhere was arid, sandy soil. On the "battlefields" of dead, dying and smashed down trees the bitter-sweet stench of putrefaction pervaded.

Hungry rhino and their calves were seen desperately searching for food among gaunt, dust-whitened trees on the skyline of this 4,000-square-mile Animal Graveyard.

As we pitched our tents by the sluggishly-flowing Athi River,

an elephant herd, which had trekked some thirty miles across the dead land to drink, wandered off in line ahead and a male rhino, its flanks bearing the broad, black patches of malnutrition, the fatal stigmata, staggered through the tinder-dry brushwood.

"They are dying at the rate of two and three a day," said Sheldrick. "Tsavo once had Africa's biggest concentration of rhino, but they may soon be as extinct as the dodo."

African game rangers called to him from the bush. They had found the emaciated body of a newly-dead female rhino, and 300 yards away was another rhino drought victim lying in a pit of sand created by its death agonies. We moved on to find the hyena-torn carcass of a baby elephant which had dropped dead of hunger and exhaustion after crossing the parched terrain with a herd making for the river.

"When they go down, they stay down," said Sheldrick brokenly.

No vultures wheeled in the cloudless sky. "There are too many dead for the vultures to need to fly in search of prey," he added.

We found three more dead rhino that afternoon within a radius of three miles. One, still alive, was trapped between two tree stumps, its head hanging a few feet above the river. Pretty Mrs. Sheldrick soaked her cardigan in the river and sprinkled the stricken animal's snout with water in an effort to revive it. It died seconds later with a convulsive shudder.

"Heart breaking," she said tearfully. "For years my husband has been trying to stop people killing these creatures—and now all this."

There was a rustle in the undergrowth and, as David strolled towards the spot, a young rhino burst into view and charged straight at him. He dodged quickly aside and his game rangers fell on the squealing, terrified animal, throwing it expertly like a steer. Its left hind leg had been badly mauled by a lion. With a glance, Sheldrick assessed the tragedy. The calf, lying beside the body of its dead, starved mother, had been attacked by a lion, but had managed to escape despite its injuries.

From his bush-kit Sheldrick took out a hypodermic which he filled with a tranquillizer and gave her two shots in the flank as the Africans continued to wrestle with her. At the first bid Sheldrick bent the long, tough needle in half on the armour-plated hide. Soon, however, the rhino was inert. It was lifted bodily into the truck by a dozen Africans and taken off to the river camp. Given grass, dried milk and shots of penicillin, it lay in the stockade of branches and thorn bushes. After several attempts to break out, as lions roared and growled along the river bank, the rhino died during the night from the shock of its capture, exhaustion and the effects of its wounds.

With the stunted bushes on which rhino feed cropped bare all around, Sheldrick, his bush radio-telephone crackling, decided to mount a simple mercy operation of beating Nature in the hope of saving these animals.

Working an average of twelve to fourteen hours a day, which, like most wardens in East Africa, he considered normal, Sheldrick, set up quick-linking sections of light metal pipeline, to pump water at 8,000 gallons an hour, 200 yards from the River Athi to a seven-foot tall sprinkler standing among the brown bushes. The circling 150-ft. jet of artificial rain from the sprinkler created a rainbow of hope in the morning sun, the dry earth gave up a smell of ambrosia, and birds circled overhead in wonderment as David offered a silent prayer that the bushes would be brought to leaf within a few days. It was a vivid illustration of the maxim that water is more precious than gold in Africa.

As we prepared to set off to the dried-up Tiva River in another section of the Park we found that water—and humans—could also be a curse. One of the Land-Rover's four-gallon jerrycans had been filled at a garage in Voi with water by an unscrupulous attendant. "And dirty water at that," exclaimed my companion in his rage. The tank and carburettor had to be drained and David gave us fresh supplies of petrol from his precious stock. To be stranded in Tsavo can be a matter of life and death. One party of visitors whose car broke down in the Park actually were

preparing to commit suicide when they were found nine days later.

On the way to the Tiva we passed hundreds of "skeletons" of giant baobabs in the petrified forests, their trunks ripped bare of bark by herds of ravenous elephant. Others had provided lions with lairs by boring gaping holes through the baobabs in search of sap and water.

It was part of the grim irony of Nature in Tsavo East that, in contrast to the arid area bordering the Athi River where there was water in plenty, there was rich and abundant vegetation for many miles around the Tiva, a two-hour drive from our camp. Yet the river itself was bone dry, its bed pitted with deep holes made by thirsty elephant digging three or four feet into it with their trunks for trickles of water. We sat beside that river bed unarmed, playing a card game known appropriately, perhaps, as "Idiots' Delight", while waiting for animals to come in from the surrounding country, which abounded with lion, rhino and buffalo. The river bed had been churned up as a result of frequent battles for water between enraged elephant and rhino.

On the journey back to the Athi River camp our African guide —these men and the white wardens throughout Africa have binocular-power eyesight—spotted yet another dead rhino lying beneath a tree a quarter of a mile away from the dusty track we were following. Its horns had already been cut off by tribesmen. Within half an hour we found another, lying exhausted and dying but still game enough to attempt a feeble attack on us, among the rocks of the Athi River itself and near the body of an elephant victim of the drought.

These were the first glimpses of the horrors of Tsavo East. There were many more to come.

* * *

I always endeavour to keep a respectful distance from buffalo. They have earned the reputation, which, according to some authorities, is not fully justified, of being among the three most dangerous types of animal in Africa, cunning, cruel and relentless.

We had returned to Voi headquarters and were chatting sombrely to balding, curly-haired Denis Kearney, an Assistant Warden, on the effects of the seemingly everlasting drought when there came a call for help.

Twenty miles off a buffalo cow was trapped in the thick, black mud of a dried-up lake in which two of the animals had died in suffocating agony the previous night. Ropes and a length of chain were tossed into a Land-Rover and we followed Denis's dust-trail in another vehicle as he careered away with a team of Africans. We found the vicious, terror-stricken animal in the last stages of exhaustion. With only her head and neck clear of the treacherous mud, she was still sinking slowly and there was not time to be lost if the cow was not to share the fate of her two companions.

The rescue called for that cool courage with which game guardians are so well endowed. Denis set out planks across the quagmire up to the stricken buffalo while I drove to a visitors' lodge to fetch a jerrycan of water and a tin bowl. By the time I got back Denis had roped the animal's head and horns, and crouching down he gave the parched and struggling beast a drink from the bowl and cooled and cleaned its mud-caked jaws with a rag soaked in the water. The beady-eyed, raw-necked vultures waited, ruffling their feathers in the hot sun.

The end of Denis's lasso was tied to a chain attached to the Land-Rover, and at a signal from him the African driver slipped into first gear and slowly took up the strain. Aided by a daring shove from Denis, the prostrate buffalo was dragged bodily past him out of the deadly mud trap on to hard ground. As Denis unslipped the noose and squeezed water from the rag over its distended nostrils, the buffalo staggered, snorting, to her feet.

Whatever the merits of a buffalo's reputation, gratitude does not seem to be part of its make-up—even when you save its life and stand it a drink. I had to dash to the Land-Rover as she charged erratically before climbing the bank of the lake to set out in search of the herd. "Let's hope it hasn't all been in vain and she

isn't dragged down by hyenas," said Denis as we drove back. On the drive we passed a sick rhino covered in brick-red dust and two forlorn elephant calves weakly searching for food.

* * *

From Voi we again travelled up country in Tsavo East to meet another of David Sheldrick's assistant wardens, hawk-eyed and hairily-blond, Peter Jenkins, who is Kenya-born and had been fourteen years in the Park. I found him seated on a log in his bivouac camp by the dry Tiva River, briefing a patrol of African game rangers about to set out on a raid against elephant and rhino poachers. On some patrols camels are used. At Jenkins's feet were the horns of a rhino killed by elephant battling for waterholes in the river bed, and the tusks of an elephant fatally injured when it pulled down a baobab tree with its trunk.

At that time, in late 1961, Peter Jenkins and the other white wardens in the Colony were tirelessly carrying on their work in a vacuum of the transition from a predominantly European to an African government.

"Some Africans in Kenya today are killing elephant out of sheer bloody-mindedness aroused by nationalist politics," said Peter. "They do not even bother to take the tusks. African politicians should realize they are sitting on a gold mine in our wealth of big game and wild life in general."

Kenya, he said, would be obliged to take full, properly financed conservation measures to save the game. The alternative was to destroy the lot. It was all or nothing.

"We have got to get it over to the tribesmen, particularly those on the verges of national parks, the vital need for game conservation. Tsavo has been a National Park for over fifteen years and yet a chief on the edge of the Park who wanted to send in his tribal cattle for grazing the other day did not have a clue what went on here or why."

The secret of putting down poaching, Peter emphasized, was to get at the middleman or the receiver. The police, with limited

personnel, were busy with other tasks, and to help effectively in the elimination of poaching was a full-time job for a special C.I.D. squad.

"And we in the field badly need aircraft for anti-poaching operations—for spotting and to give greater mobility to the wardens and game rangers."

Peter told a horrific story of three years before when 1,200 elephant were slaughtered by poachers in one area of Tsavo. There was one dead elephant to every square mile.

Late that afternoon the ubiquitous Land-Rover, with Peter at the wheel, took us for a mile on a serpentine course along the sandy Tiva bed until we came in sight of a large herd of elephant digging for water. The carcass of a buffalo which had died in the river bed, lay in the middle of them covered in vulture droppings. A big bull elephant fought off a calf which tried to edge in at his waterhole, smacking it across the head with his trunk; over another hole two young tuskers fought. The elephant were so thirsty that they went on drinking with us in full view fourteen yards away. Others patiently waited their turn.

This was the closest he had ever been to them in a Land-Rover, said Peter.

The elephant's method of digging a waterhole is first to scrape away the sand with its front feet like a cat before the final shaft is made with the trunk. The sand is packed hard with circular motions of the trunk to prevent the hole caving in. Elephants blow out the sandy water through their trunks and drink only the clear, deeper water. "It takes a bull elephant several hours to get his fill of water from a dry river like this," explained Peter. "His average intake is thirty-eight gallons."

That night we dozed fitfully in the open on a rocky hill overlooking the Tiva. From dusk to dawn, as elephants and rhinos fought frantically over the waterholes in the river bed one hundred yards below, there was an incredible cacophony of grunting, squealing, snorting, trumpeting and clashing of horns, intermingled with the roar of lions and the coughing grunts of

leopard. Sleep, except in snatches, was impossible, and Peter, stretched out on the rock in his sleeping-bag, kept a grip on his loaded rifle.

The tea-rose dawn came with the crescent moon still in the sky, and Peter pointed out several pairs of rhino still fighting over waterholes. Throughout the night they had been charging and counter-charging without either antagonist having had a drink. "How stupid can you get?" Peter asked.

A cloud of dust swirled up from the river bed as an elephant cow chased a rhino which was moving in on the waterhole where her calf was drinking. We scrambled cautiously down the rock to a two-foot-high stone wall on the river bank where we were able almost to reach out and touch the animals from what in effect was a ring-side seat at a fantastic jungle circus.

I had chosen Tsavo East as the most graphic area to highlight the disastrous, recurring impact of drought on wild life. Such are the savage contrasts of Africa that a few weeks after I had left Tsavo East, like the rest of East Africa, was blanketed by unprecedented torrential rains and floods which burst the banks of our Tiva and many other rivers. Drought-weakened cattle perished in large numbers in the deluge.

Temporary floods in no way menace the survival of game on the same scale as do persistent drought conditions. The large majority of animals merely get wet and miserable. The important factors are the conservation and supply of water for game. Kenya Game Department officials confirmed that in these floods at the end of 1961 the big game and buck headed unerringly for high ground and survived. Only rodents and lizards died.

John Collier who flew over Tsavo East at the time told me that parts looked like the original Noah's Ark scene, with dejected wild animals huddled close together on islands. "What we want now is a 'Gum-boots for Wild Animals Fund'," quipped a game warden in his plane.

When the flood-waters subsided and the toll of erosion could be seen from the air, Tsavo East looked as though giant forks had

been scraped across the earth. There were tragic instances of buck bogging down fatally in the soggy fringes of waterholes.

Chapter 5

MOUNTAINS OF IVORY

IN the Arabian Nights seaport of Mombasa the Kenya Government's Ivory Room in a narrow back-street is guarded day and night by an armed, uniformed sentry. The game warden in charge there is Mr. Stanley Morris-Smith who invariably wears neatly-laundered white bush kit. He is forthright and lively-minded. Twice yearly he holds official auctions of ivory, rhino horn and hippo teeth. There were nine tons of ivory and three-quarters of a ton of rhino horn, worth in all some £30,000, stacked high in the Ivory Room when I arrived.

"Smuggling out ivory—nothing easier," Morris-Smith told me. "There are no Coast Guard systems or patrols or other watches on the seaward side. The coast is heavily indented with lonely creeks."

Ivory and rhino horns, he said, are brought down to the coastline, hidden in the bush, or buried under the floors of African huts by the poachers themselves or middlemen. Later they are collected by other persons, taken out to sea in dug-out canoes and loaded into dhows for Zanzibar, bound for the Orient. Rhino horn found its way by devious routes to China and Hong Kong where in powdered form it is sold as an aphrodisiac. The horns are also sent to Arabia where they are used to make half-pound handles of Arab daggers. There is an increasing demand for them there as a result of the country's wealth from oil. The local value of each handle is about £15.

Poached ivory is not cut up by skilled persons so the value of tusks can be reduced by at least thirty per cent. In a normal year Morris-Smith sells between 80,000 and 90,000 lb. of ivory and rhino horn. The Ivory Room houses elephant tusks and rhino

Colonel Cowie added: "I foresee that the only way to preserve a reasonable variety and quantity of wild animals in East Africa will be to direct effective protective measures to defined areas which will have to be carefully managed and may eventually have to be fenced. Outside of such areas there is little prospect of preserving wild life at all, and probably rightly so if one recognizes that wild life is a natural resource which must be related to the correct use of land.

"I am not convinced that game farming has any great prospect in East Africa because, although in theory it has infinite merit, in practice I see many difficulties. On the one hand it is perfectly logical to convert surplus animal meat into useful protein for starving millions, particularly when it can be drawn from areas which have little hope of supporting either crops or livestock. On the other hand, there are many traditional, religious and tribal prejudices against eating certain kinds of wild animal. Moreover, there are such insuperable problems in transporting the products, either in a dried or canned form, to their markets that I cannot see such a scheme working on a big scale without infinitely more market research and a great change of outlook in many of the dense centres of African population.

"As to the future, I believe there is a hope that the emerging African governments in this part of Africa may see the sense of safeguarding one of their main sources of national income, with the consequential prospect of money being made available from other countries and international sources for scientific research. Without its wild life, East Africa would have to be downgraded to an inferior tourist market; it would be like a river without water, or a garden without flowers."

* * *

At Rumuruti, close by Mount Kenya, a European farmer, Mr. F. G. Seed, who is also an honorary game warden and a prominent member of the Kenya Wild Life Society, had set aside part of the estate for the use of wild animals. This provided a practical

example to his neighbours that it is possible to farm and still keep some game.

Five miles from Mr. Seed's house there is a small spring, surrounded by fever trees, which has been led into a one-acre dam and game of many varieties abound in the area.

I had a very cordial invitation to go to Rumuruti, but unfortunately, I was unable to visit Mr. Seed who subsequently provided me with extracts from a record book kept in a lodge, suitably camouflaged and roofed, set fifteen feet above the ground in a large fever tree in the game section of the farm. During the two-and-a-half years he had been operating the sanctuary, he and his guests had seen the following animals of interest; lion seventy-two times; rhino eight times; buffalo "too often to be counted"; elephant ten times, and on one occasion a herd of fifty-six and a herd of twenty-four both in one night; waterbuck at every visit; impala, Kenya hartebeest, eland, zebra, honey badgers, wild dogs, warthog, giraffe, baboons, vervet monkeys, the rare aardwolf, an occasional jackal and a white-tailed mongoose.

Mr. Seed, as a result of his observations from the tree-lodge, claims that a pride of lion on the hunt, making low grunts to one another, sometimes like a suppressed moan, have uncanny powers as ventriloquists to outwit their prey.

Chapter 8

BEHIND BARS

WITHIN ten years there may not be a single rhino left in Kenya —that is in an area which is as big as France and Belgium combined. And all because of a myth. Rhino horn is not horn, but thick, matted hair fibre and hide. Powdered and taken like snuff, it has the false reputation among wealthy old men of Far Eastern countries of being a powerful sexual stimulant and elixir of youth. This illusion, created by the phallic symbolism of the rhino horn,

has persisted for decades and is bringing these giant African survivors of the Prehistoric Ages to the brink of extinction.

Each horn ranges in weight, according to age and type, from 3 to 12 lb., and on a shrinking market the price paid to poachers or Asian and Somali middlemen in Mombasa before the horns start their voyage across the Indian Ocean is now as high as £6 or £7 a pound, a rich reward for the risks of rhino killing taken by the tribesmen to whom as little as £50 is considerable wealth.

Some professional hunters say that the rhino, being myopic and a sound sleeper, is the easiest of the big-game animals to kill.

"If he doesn't get wind of the hunter, the chances are he knows nothing at all until it is too late," said the well-known Nairobi hunter, Sydney Downey.

In 1960 the carcasses of 135 poached rhino were found by Kenya game wardens, although it is believed the number lost to spears and poison arrows was in the region of 300. The poacher makes a daring rush and thrusts his spear through the animal's shoulder into its heart, taking only the horns and spurning the meat. During 1961 poaching was officially described as "very much worse every week and increasing all the time". Major Ian Grimwood said then: "In some areas rhino won't last another year. In others rhino may hold out for a while, but I will be very surprised if there is a rhino alive in Kenya in ten years time."

On the Kitui-Machakos border thirty rhino carcasses and skeletons had been found in June and July of that year. One pitiful survivor, in pain from a deep spear-wound which failed to kill, attacked and gored an African woman. In Kamba, Meru, Embu and Theraka country the rhino had "almost gone". Outside the parks, game wardens reported up to ten dead rhino each month. Because of a financial crisis, Game Department funds had been cut, leaving some stations without wardens and providing poachers with free fields of operation.

The Game Department could not afford to pay informers for information to smash the trading syndicates and put the poaching gangs out of business. One man visited the Department and

offered to provide evidence to convict an Asian ivory horn trader. It could not afford the sum he named, and he went away—only to return several days later to boast that he had been given double the amount he had asked by a traders' ring to keep silent.

Because of their plight and swiftly dwindling numbers, rhino are the principal targets in various types of trapping and rescue operations in East and Central Africa.

Professional trappers who capture the temperamental and aggressive beasts for zoos in America and Europe, using nets of thick rope or lassoing them from lorries, justify their operations with the pessimistic claim that the day is not far off when many of Africa's animal species will be able to be seen only behind bars.

Since Rhodesia's "Operation Noah" on Lake Kariba showed the way, considerable progress has been made with drugs which can be used to render animals unconscious long enough to truss them up or crate them. Early experiments with drugs like nicotine and curare produced a certain measure of success, it is stated, but the margin between the toxic and the anaesthetic effects was usually too narrow. The result was that an overdose would kill while a weak injection would merely make a rhino more truculent towards its would-be captor.

Kenya Game Department wardens successfully tested a new drug, sernyl, in the field. An entire herd of Uganda kob was transferred to a new area by this means, while in the gameland between Nairobi and Mombasa rhino have been drugged and captured. The weapon used is a modern version of the old-time crossbow developed by a Nairobi architect appropriately named Chris Archer and used by men like ginger-bearded Warden Nick Carter to fire drug-laden syringes with accuracy into the weak spots in the animal's armour just below the shoulder.

An effective range of up to 100 yards can be reached by this powerful, precision crossbow, firing a "dart" which consists of a plunger and needle combining to make a sturdy syringe-missile. Animals can be rendered unconscious for several hours or even longer, depending on the dosage.

Sernyl generally anaesthetizes the animal long enough for it to be trussed up and crated before it wakes up, and then there are several more hours before full consciousness is regained.

Nick, swinging his crossbow and looking like the modern version of a medieval soldier of fortune, showed me round his five tree-trunk stockades in the game country 100 miles from Nairobi. There was a crate, each bearing a painted nameplate, at the entrance to every stockade or *boma* which housed a male or female rhino trapped by a shot from Nick's crossbow. One animal, because of her comparatively shapely lines, was named "Diana" after Diana Dors. Another had escaped the day before and been recaptured five miles away.

"These are all being shipped from Mombasa to the Republic of South Africa where they will re-stock Addo Park in the Cape," said Nick who talks to his charges like children. "They are getting more and more difficult to preserve in this part of the world and I am only too glad to find a safe new home for them."

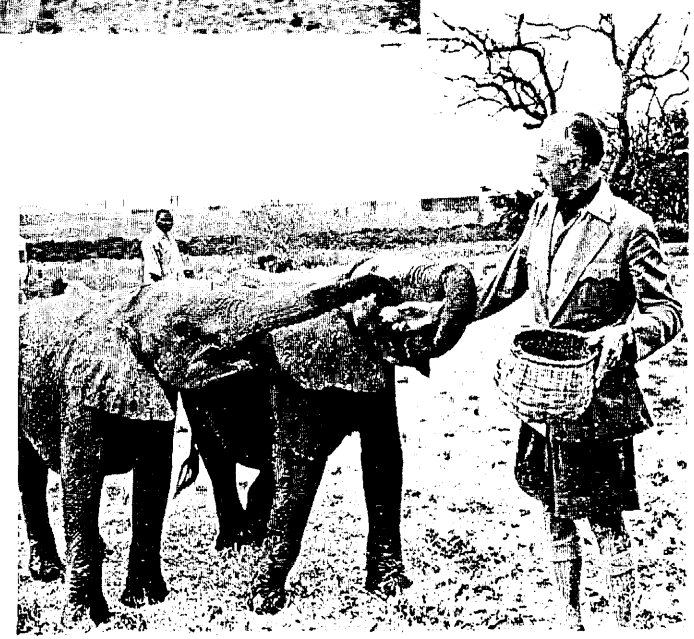
In many parts of Africa it has become necessary to move animals, like those for Addo, to new areas where they will be afforded protection or to new grazing grounds where there is still freedom of movement and room for the breeding herds.

The ground-grazing, square-lipped white rhino, which are grey and not white, are in any numbers now confined to parts of South Africa and the Sudan, but a colony of about twenty was found in northern Uganda's Madi District of the West Nile, hard by the Congo and Sudan borders, and it was decided to transfer these survivors from poachers' raids to the Murchison Falls National Park some 200 miles away.

There are brave, swashbuckling men in East Africa who cherish wild animals and make a precarious living, physically if not financially, out of handling such perilous and merciful jobs. Their stock-in-trade is a souped-up truck or lorry, a noose on the end of a wooden pole, coils of stout rope and an iron nerve. The Nairobi team which transferred the Madi white rhino to Murchison were typical, using a catching truck which had been charged so often

Alexander Douglas (*left*) owns an 18,000-acre cattle ranch in Kenya. In 1953, when giraffe were ravaging agricultural crops, he bought 72 of the animals to save them from shooting. Today there are more than 120 giraffe on his land: but whereas ten years ago the area abounded in game of many kinds, now almost the only wild animals there are those to which "Dirty Douglas" gives protection.

See page 55.

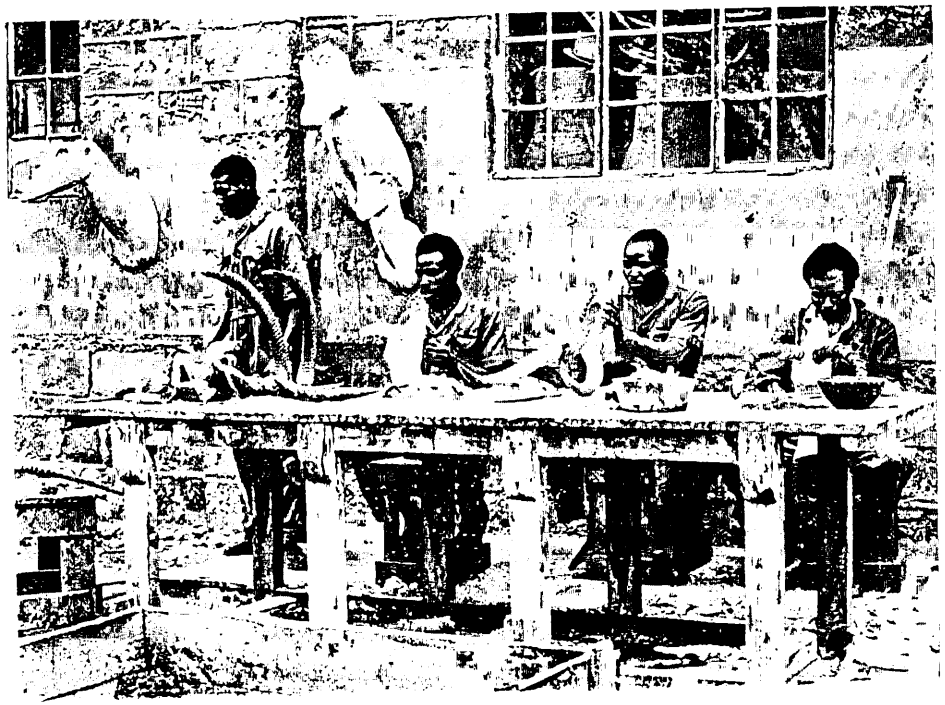


Right: Colonel Mervyn H. Cowie Director of the Royal National Parks of Kenya, feeding oranges to two orphan baby elephants. An account of his views will be found on

pages 57–60.

Above: Paul "Zimmy" Zimmerman is a taxidermist. He came to Kenya in 1929 and now has some 130 trained African assistants in his workshops near Nairobi. See Chapter 9.

Below: Some of Paul Zimmerman's skilled African assistants at work.



by rhino travelling at anything up to twenty miles an hour that the bodywork, bonnet, mudguards and tyres were so full of holes made with their horns that it resembled a mobile pepper-pot.

The technique in these rhino rodeos is first to "hook" the animal from the open truck by slipping the noose over its horn, drawing the rope tight by lashing it round a tree-trunk bolted to the side of the bouncing vehicle and then for one of the team of catchers to leap off and secure the fury's hind legs. After the animal has been thrown by the drag of the truck, the rhino's forefeet are fettered and the captive is drawn up along the steel rollers of a ramp into a carrying truck by a winch. It all sounds reasonably straight-forward and simple in theory, but scarred men and vehicles bear testimony that Hell hath no fury like a rhino snared.

Five thousand miles away from us a keeper in the Bristol Zoo—the first man in Britain to do so—was nervously milking "Stephanie", a two-ton common or black rhino, in her pen while her young calf looked on. This was part of an experiment to try to save East Africa's stricken rhino population. "Stephanie's" milk was analysed in a bid to find a substitute which could be used to feed baby rhinos whose mothers have died.

Chapter 9

MUTE MENAGERIE

A LARGE plot on the outskirts of Nairobi was the end of the trail for tens of thousands of wild animals—the single-storey brick-and-wood workshops of Paul ("Zimmy") Zimmerman, a gnome-like figure with spectacles pushed back on to the crown of his balding head. Into the skilled hands of 65-year-old "Zimmy" come most of the hunters' trophies shot in East, Central and West Africa by Eastern maharajahs, international statesmen, British millionaires, American film stars, dukes and

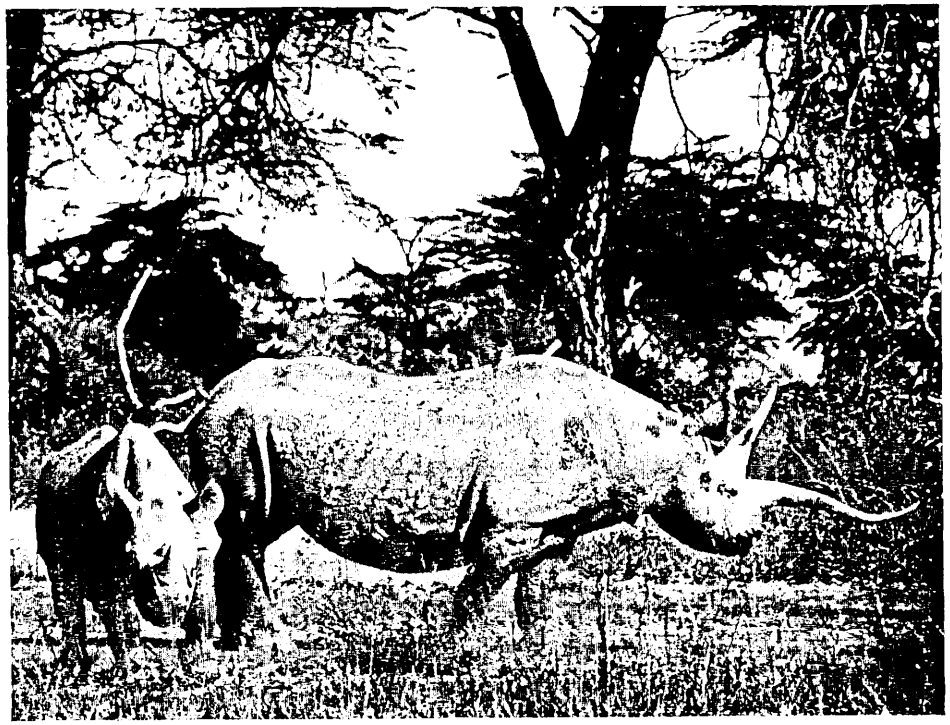
there and have not yet succeeded in breaking into the tough hide —or perhaps they are waiting for the bigger scavengers, the hyena and jackal, to do their work, leaving the inner flesh exposed.

Soon the Baila begin to load their gruesome prizes upon their shoulders. Some of the meat will be eaten fresh that evening, grilled by the women over bright fires, while the men drink beer and re-live the adventures of the day; the rest will be dried in the sun to make biltong for the weeks ahead.

As the spearmen make their way in cheerful groups towards their villages, the fire continues to spread and smoulder across the plain. The sun, now well beyond its zenith, is visible as a yellow glare, blurred and filtered by the heavy layer of smoke and dust. It casts no shadows and the earth is diffused with a uniform brassy glow. The heat is unabated and the wind blows in hot gusts, spiralling occasionally into furious dust-devils which spin and roar across the ground, sucking great quantities of ash and fragments of scorched grass into the sky where they hang in thick funnels, scattering the vultures.

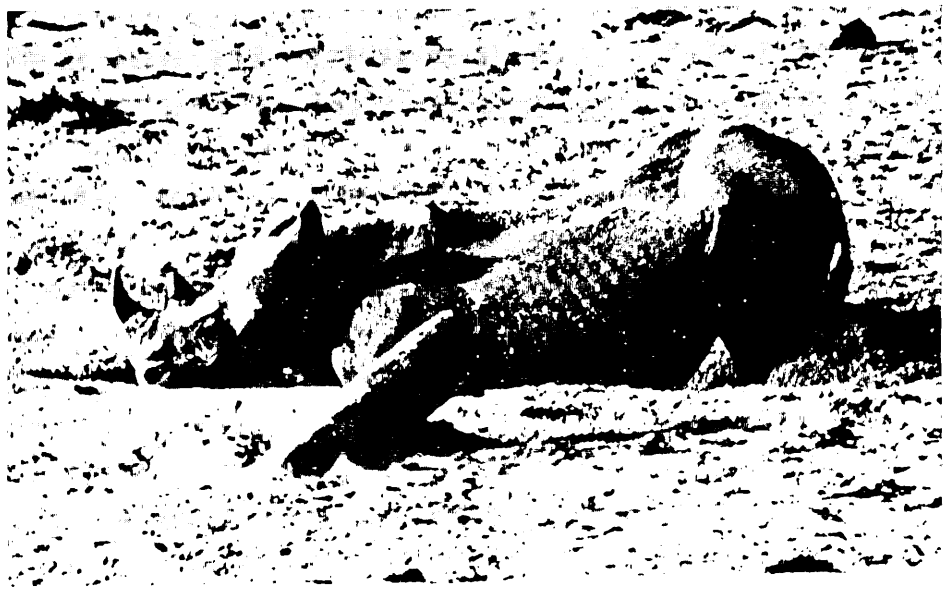
Though the hunting had ended the fires started by the hunters blazed on unchecked—as do hundreds of others which are started every year, heedless of eventual consequences, and not always only by uneducated tribesmen. These fires rage through vast stretches of sparsely populated terrain until their progress is checked by some natural firebreak such as a lake or river, rocky terrain or already burnt-off area, or perhaps by a man-made obstacle in the form of ploughed land, a dirt road or railway track, or perhaps one of the very few forest clearings which have been made to stem the roaring fury of the bush fire.

Creeping down mountainsides, turning valleys into "rivers" of smoky red and eventually leaving valley and *veld* alike a blackened desolation, these bush fires started by primitive peoples deep inside bushland or jungle, are all too often a part of the African scene in the dry season. For it is beyond the comprehension of the tribesmen to take precautions against a holocaust which can destroy not only the vegetation but the animals around them,



Above: Gertie the most-photographed wild animal in the world. For details of her magnificent horn see pages 22 and 25.

Below: Drought is the most terrible, and hardest to combat, of all the dangers facing Africa's big game. Here a rhinoceros digs deeply but unsuccessfully for life-sustaining water.



Top, left: These darts, which can be fired from a rifle or a specially-constructed crossbow, are hypodermic syringes through which a paralysing drug can be administered. *Top, right:* Once the hypodermic dart has struck the animals must be followed swiftly, for unless an antidote is administered, the drugged animal may die.

Below: Though the dart still sticks into its shoulder the rhino is lively; the men who have lassoed its legs are still a long way from its capture.

Above: The antidote is taking effect: until it is certain that the ropes will hold, a strong grip to keep down the rhino's head and so prevent it from rising, is a wise measure.

Right: Once the rhino is immobilized the heavy work of loading it for transport to an animal sanctuary can be undertaken.

Above: Rupert Fothergill was the senior game warden in charge of the rescue operations on Lake Kariba (see Chapter 16). When this rhino attacked, he hit it with his bush hat.

Below: On releasing the rhino in its new home the rangers daringly give its tail a valedictory pull.

so being a threat to the very existence of themselves and their families. The ranks of those with greater knowledge and experience are thin—far too thin on the ground as yet to be able to minimize the annual destruction of life and vegetation which can render the bleak livelihood of the native tribes more meagre than need be.

Chapter 16

RHINO ON A RAFT

"We spent a day with the Southern Rhodesian animal rescue team, and can testify to the adventurous nature of the proceedings and the zeal and gallantry with which they were carried out. There has been some criticism of the operation on the grounds that the rescued animals would be transported to areas already well stocked with wild life, and so would be unlikely to maintain themselves permanently: and that the large amount of money and skilled manpower employed would have been better expended on more constructive conservation projects. I do not agree. In the first place, to leave this assemblage of strange and beautiful creatures to drown was unthinkable, and would have provoked a formidable world outcry. And, on the positive side, it has helped the general public of the civilized world to realize both the unique richness of African wild life and the dangers with which it is threatened." Prof. Julian Huxley in his report on a mission undertaken for Unesco on "The Conservation of Wild Life and Natural Habitats in Central and East Africa".

WHEN Rupert Fothergill, 49-year-old senior game ranger in charge of the "Operation Noah" rescue operations on Lake Kariba in British Central Africa, announced that he would have a go at saving the larger animals—rhinoceros and elephant—marooned on islands created by the floodwaters of the Zambezi, eyebrows were raised in scepticism.

As one who had previously watched the rangers engaged in a task that has captured the imagination of people all over the world

through the media of books, newspaper articles, cinema and television screens, I shared the doubts. True, I had seen Fothergill and his team perform the most astonishing feats.

Men who will wrestle bare-handed in shallow water with frenzied baboons and fully-grown porcupines, lasso and tether swimming giant buck, clad only in swimming trunks climb trees to capture deadly black mambas, are obviously capable of almost anything. But it would require something more than superlative courage and resource to rescue the huge pachyderms from death by drowning or starvation. How could these enormous, ferocious brutes be caught and rendered helpless on their shrinking island homes, then conveyed across stretches of water sometimes several miles wide, and finally set free on the mainland?

Fothergill pondered the problem for a long time. Eventually he found the solution. It was one that enlisted the aid of science to supplement the skill and daring of the puny humans engaged in the task.

I was fortunate enough to be a member of a party that watched a rhino rescue and an abortive, but nonetheless exciting attempt to save an elephant. For sheer, blood-tingling thrills, it surpassed any experience that had come my way on *safari*. Both rhino and elephant behaved in a way that would have gladdened any Hollywood mogul's heart. If our quarry had been trained to act a part they could not have been more co-operative.

Archie Fraser, head of Southern Rhodesia's Wild Life Conservation Department, warned us before we set out that it was by no means certain that we should see what we had come to see; the reaction of the "big chaps" to a hunt was always unpredictable. At the end of two days, however, we fully endorsed the sentiment expressed by Southern Rhodesia's Minister of Lands, Reuben Stumbles, that we had taken part in an expedition that any wealthy *safari*-loving tourist would have paid a fortune to have accompanied.

Our venue on the first day was an island about three miles long and half a mile wide on which a 2,000 lb. female rhino was living.

The only other occupants were a leopard and a few kudu and impala. On the trip from the base camp at Kariba in the launch (suitably named *The Ark*) and accompanied by a little flotilla of three fast motor-boats, Fothergill explained the techniques employed in rhino- and elephant-rescues.

A ranger fires a dart containing a carefully calculated dose of a "knockout" drug from a rifle into the animal's hide. The rhino gallops away, but about fifteen to thirty minutes after being hit it drops to the ground insensible. The rangers then rope its legs together so that it cannot get to its feet. An antidote to the drug is immediately injected—the drug dosage would otherwise almost certainly kill the beast—and a tranquillizing drug is administered at the same time. The trussed rhino is heaved on to an improvised sledge and hauled on to a raft made buoyant with empty petrol drums and tractor-tyre inner tubes. The raft is towed to the mainland by a motor-boat.

Once the sledge has been dragged back on to dry land, the rangers untie the ropes—and stand well back. The rhino at this stage is conscious, but generally does not get to his feet until Rupert Fothergill flings a couple of buckets of water over it. As the rhino rises, Rupert runs for his life. The rhino invariably charges the first person or object it sees as it regains its feet.

A fully-grown elephant is too bulky to be manhandled on to a sledge, so the rangers drive it into the water by shouting, banging cans and the firing of rifles and Verey-pistol cartridges. The elephant is an excellent swimmer and will often make its own way to the mainland. Where the stretch of water is too great for its swimming capacities, the rescue team tows it by a rope thrown as a lasso over its head.

Even Fothergill's matter-of-fact tone as he outlined these procedures could not conceal the exciting potentialities of our trip. What we actually saw happen exceeded our highest hopes.

On arriving at Rhino Island, we were directed to a vantage point on a tree-lined height while Fothergill stalked his prey. Archie Fraser strictly forbade any of the spectators to accompany

Fothergill, not only because of the grave danger, but because a carelessly trampled stick or even the rustle of leaves could easily startle the rhino—an animal with extremely sensitive hearing—and scare it away before the ranger got in his shot.

Eventually African scouts reported that a rhino had made her way to a smaller island, only a few square yards in area, separated from the main one by a narrow strip of easily-fordable water.

So we shinned up trees and waited while two rangers took a boat to the far side of the rhino's new island refuge and, by shouting and banging cans, panicked her into rushing into the shallows. Sending up tremendous showers of spray, the rhino failed to see Fothergill, rifle at the ready, lurking behind a tree in the ford itself. The ranger shot his dart into her shoulder from two yards range as she plunged past him.

From my vantage point in the branches of a *mopani* sapling, about twelve feet from the ground, I suddenly saw a ton of enraged rhinoceros galloping full tilt at my perilous perch. As she approached it seemed impossible that she could manoeuvre her massive bulk past the tree, and I had a momentary horrifying vision of the slender trunk snapping like a match-stick and hurling me into her path. But, with a margin of a split second left, she swerved. As the tree shook violently from the impact of her flank, I looked down, clinging frantically to a branch, on to her back and saw her sinister curved horns pass just under my feet.

Fothergill streaked after her into the bush.

Half an hour later we heard Fothergill's whistled signal, repeated at intervals until we traced its source after running almost a mile across the island.

When we arrived, Fothergill and his helpers had trussed the rhino where she lay prostrate at the spot where she had succumbed to the drug. When the antidote was administered, the beast became frenzied, in spite of the injection of a tranquillizer. Repeatedly she bashed her head against the ground, damaging herself against rocks. She plunged her scimitar-shaped horns into a tree trunk. When a ranger tried to prevent her from injuring herself by

placing a straw-filled sack behind her head she twisted her neck and sent it hurtling thirty feet through the air.

The rangers and scouts had an almost superhuman tussle to haul the rhino on to the sledge. At one stage, in spite of the shackling ropes, she almost got to her feet and men, white and black, went hurtling in various directions. Eventually, however, the task was completed and the rhino was towed on the raft to the mainland.

There, she became even more angry. In her struggles while being released, her head became pointed towards the shore. By the time she had regained her feet, Fothergill, who had stood a couple of yards from her, sluicing her huge body with water from a pail, had taken refuge on the raft, moored a few yards from the shore. The first object the rhino spotted was one of the motor-boats, also moored in the shallows a short distance from the raft. Head down, she charged straight at it.

Some of my companions and I had chosen the boat deck as a platform from which to watch the final stages of the rescue. We instantly regretted it, for the brute hit the boat with the impact of a tank, hurling us backwards into the well. As we picked ourselves up, jarred and shaken, she plunged her horn three times into the boat's hull, making holes through the metal the size of a man's fist just above the waterline.

Then the rhino caught sight of Fothergill standing on the raft. At once she plunged through the water and stood alongside it, lunging at him repeatedly with her horn. Nonchalantly, Rupert stood his ground and calmly removing his bush-hat slapped the beast with it several times across the face. It was a superb example of cool nerve—almost as if it had been rehearsed. Spontaneously we burst into a round of clapping, and then, seeing that this distracted the rhino, began to shout at the top of our voices. She turned and took off in a bull-dozing gallop into the bush.

We set off from Kariba the next day for a more distant island—a mere strip of land thirty yards long by ten wide, where a great bull elephant had made his temporary home.

The plan was to drive him into the water, give him a "shot" of

knockout drug while he was swimming, then lasso and revive him so that he could make his own way to the mainland, half-a-mile distant.

This was a plan that went astray. With incredible cunning, our quarry managed to elude the rangers every time and return to his strip of ground above water-level. Eventually he was driven into fairly deep water and at one stage was actually swimming. *The Ark* manoeuvred alongside and a ranger threw a lariat. He missed. Four times the enraged beast drove his tusks into the boat's hull, leaving deep dents that almost penetrated the quarter-inch metal. Then he found the shallows again and clambered back on to his island strip.

We had to leave him there for another rescue attempt—another day.

By the end of 1961 a total of 3,685 animals, 402 reptiles and 52 birds had been rescued from the Southern Rhodesian half of Lake Kariba since the giant dam wall across the Zambezi was plugged in December, 1958. Of this total 17 elephant had been saved, 19 rhino, 288 bushbuck, 13 buffalo, 1,270 impala, 182 kudu, 477 warthog, 45 zebra, 10 night apes, 4 scaly ant-eaters, 169 monkeys, 5 squirrels, a black-footed domestic cat left behind in a doomed village by tribesmen, 32 porcupines, 36 antbears and many other species of game.

I returned to Kariba in June, 1962. That bull elephant had long since dog-paddled to the mainland, but, with the lake rising rapidly, Rupert and his men were hard at work, from dawn to darkness, seven days a week. On one dying island alone there were then estimated to be over 100 elephant, which swam to and from the nearby "coast", and an equal number of buffalo. Five hundred impala were trapped on another island.

Rupert, who had had a six-weeks-old orphan rhino he had saved named after him by a Salisbury family which adopted it, mentioned in passing that his five broken ribs had mended. I had heard nothing about his injuries. They arose from yet another encounter with a rhino. He had taken refuge behind a tree when

a fully-grown rhino charged, but the tree had been eaten through by soldier ants and collapsed under the onslaught. Spreadeagled, Rupert was pinned beneath the kneeling, panting animal yet, after what seemed the final, searing moments of his job, he was able to wriggle clear between its hind legs and was dragged away by his helpers.

Drinking morning tea at the Kariba base camp, I remarked that there had been no lion rescues throughout the years of "Operation Noah". There was a twinkle in his eyes and his leathery features cracked into a grin that for him was almost smug as Rupert took my arm. "Let's go," he said. "I want to show you a secret."

During the seven-mile trip in *The Ark* from Kariba to an island two miles long and a few hundred yards wide Rupert gave no clue as to the purpose of our mystery expedition, and when we had landed, followed by two African game scouts with rifles, he merely glanced over his shoulder and remarked: "We'll take a stroll."

The stroll, a strenuous march with thorns ripping my bush-shirt, lasted two hours and in that time we criss-crossed the brooding island. Vultures led us to a stinking buffalo carcass. With every rustle in the thick undergrowth, the gun-bearers stiffened. Rupert "froze", crouched, then shook his head and smiled as a wart hog scampered off. He is no showman although on this occasion he obviously enjoyed the staging of this private drama.

Finally, in a clearing by the water's edge, we came upon a cupola of branches hiding compounds of tall, stout logs. In one were a dozen sable antelope. A sheep and its lamb bleated incessantly in another, against which had been set a large cage made from steel girders, piping, and stout wire. A wooden platform on the floor of the cage near the live bait operated a trip lever to release a trap door at the other end.

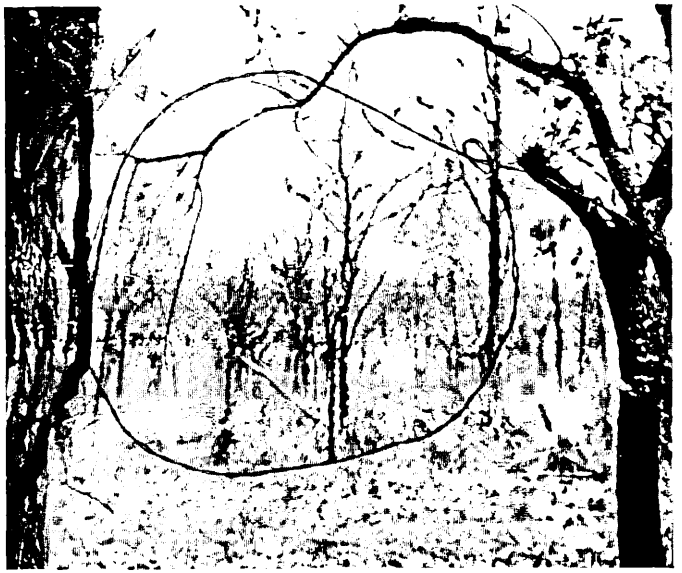
On the island on which we stood were five lions, two male and three female, and three leopards which, with the mainland too far away for them to swim for it, had to be saved by trapping. A

Pretoriuskop in the south-west corner of the Park is a model for camps in other parks in Africa. Summertime is lambing time, when Pretoriuskop is the haunt of a wide variety of game easily spotted against the vivid green background. And: "When the sun sinks slowly to the western horizon one becomes conscious of an uneasy silence, and as twilight gathers, tension mounts higher and higher until the descent of darkness suddenly alerts every beast of prey to his cunning nightly errand. In the next few hours death will strike swiftly at many places, but within the safety of the rest camps, by flickering fires and singing kettles—you must reach the camp before the gates close—only the roar of the animals beyond the fence provides a reminder of the drama outside."

Family groups of white rhino, rare in Africa since they were hunted out north of the Equator by nomadic tribes, live with little danger from poachers and other predators in reserves in Natal. Best-known of these reserves is tropically picturesque Hluhluwe where the white rhino, less fierce and more predictable than their lighter-in-weight black cousins, have become so docile and accustomed to man that African guides and visitors are able to walk up close to them in safety.

For some of South Africa's white rhino, Christmas, 1961, was hectic. They were shot with a drug-dart gun, hauled on to a truck and carted from the Native Reserve lands into which they had strayed to the Umfolosi and Nduma game reserves in Natal.

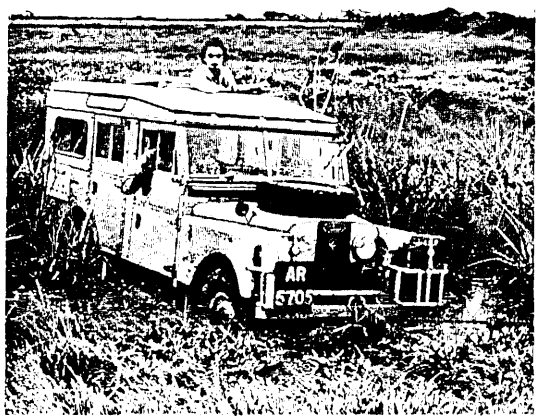
During this operation in the sweltering Mona River Valley Senior Game Ranger Ian Player spotted four square-lipped rhinos facing a group of snarling, half-starved African mongrels. The rhinos, a bull and three cows, trotted off in a temper until they deemed it safe to resume their grazing away from the dogs. Down wind, Ian stalked from bush to bush. Suddenly he stood up and, aiming at the 4,000-lb. bull, squeezed the trigger of his gun. With a "plop" a six-inch dart was buried deep in the animal's side. The bull and cows surged forward and Ian slipped behind an acacia tree as the rhinos thundered past. Darting out of hiding, he signalled to two horsemen to pursue the bull—because



Right: A running noose of wire, one of the most deadly of the poachers' traps.

Left: A young antelope killed by a poacher's snare of wire in Southern Rhodesia.

Right: This duiker was caught in a poacher's wire noose but was not moving fast enough to be killed. It might have strangled itself in efforts to escape, died from thirst or met its end from the poacher's spear. This animal was lucky; game wardens found it and released it uninjured.



To obtain revenue tourism is encouraged. In the vast areas of the parks there must be bases where visitors can sleep in safety and cook where their fires will not create danger. Such bases are provided by *safari* lodges, of which that shown *above* is on the Ngorongoro Crater.

Left: Much of the "going" in the parks is rough; spare parts and plenty of petrol and drinking water are essential.

a rhino "shot" in this way will run for anything up to half an hour. After the drug had taken effect, the bull lay motionless and a lorry brought a crate up close to the inert beast. An antidote shot, which Ian gave to revive the rhino partially, worked almost immediately. After a few seconds the animal snorted, struggled forward and was bundled up a ramp into the crate by Ian and his assistants. Tall Zulu tribesmen crowded round with cries of amazement and unmistakable gestures which questioned the sanity of white men in wasting time and money protecting animals which the Zulus clearly felt should be tracked down, killed and eaten.

Some of the few elephant that remained in South Africa after the Boers' orgy of destruction were concentrated in the Addo district of the Cape near Port Elizabeth. They became a special breed, living in the jungle from which they would emerge all too frequently to pillage the surrounding orange groves and fruit farms. Angry farmers shot so many of the raiders that there were less than a dozen left when the Government stepped in and erected a stout and high, twelve-mile-long steel fence behind which the scared and evil-tempered survivors eventually settled down to breed in peace. Oranges, fed to them in barrel-loads, still remain the favourite delicacy of the Addo elephants.

South Africa, as if to redeem its early history of destruction, has long shown the way in game husbandry. Some ten years ago the Government was becoming increasingly worried over the scarcity of wild animals. As a result farms were established on which they could multiply without being preyed upon. To farmers who thereafter became interested in stocking game, animals were supplied; sometimes beasts were carried 1,000 miles or more from their normal habitat to their new homes, where they formed the nucleus of herds. In the Transvaal alone hundreds of farmers have made money by raising game commercially.

Some of the Government and municipal game farms are concentrating on building up the rarer species like the hartebeest and black wildebeest. Pretoria Municipality, for instance, has a