

FRONTISPIECE



The Author, with his pet Mongoose, "Horace, the Acrobat."

See page 152.

INTERVIEWING WILD ANIMALS

An Account of Travel
and Adventure incidental
to the pursuit of African
fauna with a cine-camera

BY

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With a Foreword by
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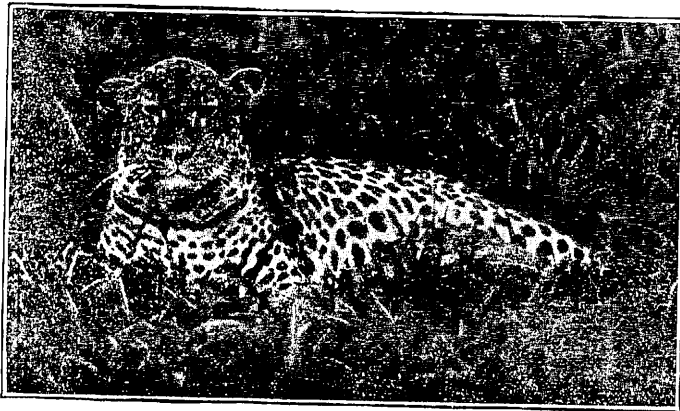
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The Rhino which charged.

See page 138.



"Darby," the male and larger of the two Leopards of Kinchoni.

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was one moment when, with ears extended and trunk waving above his head as he tried for scent, he started off on an advance which would have brought him straight to where we were. Just then I thought we should *have* to shoot, but suddenly he winded us properly, screamed angrily, and the next moment was off at full pelt in the opposite direction with the herd at his heels, going through the undergrowth like a hot knife through butter.

What the chief thought of us I dare not imagine—but his face was eloquent. What he said showed plainly enough that he considered us the merest novices, and it was only by assuring him that the instruments we had used were so terribly potent that never again would these elephant pillage his plantations that he was mollified. That, plus some two pounds in silver, and some small odds and ends of camp furniture which he much admired, did the trick; but there was a noticeable lack of cordiality when he bade us good-bye, and no suggestion that he should further interest himself on our behalf.

One more excursion we made into the wilds between the two great mountains, the lure this time being a herd of giraffe, warranted tame and easily photographed. We had already come across odd members of this herd and found them less shy of ordinary human beings than most of their kind. Ordinary human beings are one proposition to the giraffe mind, and people with queer three-legged contrivances such as cameras quite another, and in my experience giraffe are more difficult to "interview" than Mussolini or Bernard Shaw.

Our trip in search of this lot lasted a week, during which we fetched a great circle, coming upon them eventually not many hours from the point from whence we had started. For two whole days we kept them under observation from the top of a kopje, and though we often got quite close ourselves they would have nothing to do with the camera and went off immediately they spotted it with that curious lop-sided gait of theirs which is much faster than it looks.

Then we tried hiding the camera and persuading them towards it with a line of boys, which was very good fun—for the giraffe. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred they went anywhere except where required, but at last the hundredth chance came along, and a moment

was to pay a very big fee for an operation. The husband being laid low with a severe attack of malaria, his wife thought she would go out with one of the boys and shoot something. Quite unexpectedly she came upon a number of lions, and promptly shot at and wounded one. It charged instanter, knocked her down, mauled her severely, and would have killed her had not the plucky boy come up, and, pulling the rifle from beneath his mistress, shot the beast through the head. Somehow or other she got back to camp, where the medical skill of her husband thus quickly applied, saved her life, though for a long time she lay in hospital. This was not the worst, however. The husband, already run down by the effect of malaria and in a very highly strung and nervous condition, managed to dress his wife's injuries, but the shock to his system was so great that within a few hours he was dead. The best way for novices to shoot lions is to have them broadside on, not more than a hundred yards away, and anchored fore and aft.

All the foregoing refers to lions of the ordinary kind, which are not perpetually on the lookout for a chance of destroying human life, and may be regarded therefore as not really dangerous unless molested. Lions which are confirmed man-eaters are so entirely different in habit and custom as almost to form another species, and, without a doubt, provide the greatest degree of danger to humanity of all sorts to be found in Africa. Man-eaters will do everything which the more reasonable variety does not. They will lie in wait for people, stalk them, tear openings in native huts to get at them, and go to incredible lengths to obtain their favourite food. Many a man-eater has killed a score or more of people before meeting its doom, and the total number of natives destroyed by this terrible scourge every year must be very large. The existence of a man-eater in a district is generally known however, and the white man on *safari*, whether for sport or pleasure, being fore-warned, should be fore-armed against them. They are more to be feared by the native population than any other of the wild things; but to a white man's *safari* there are other animals which, because of the character and unexpectedness of their attack, afford a greater degree of danger.

Whilst on the march in country inhabited by that

thick-skinned, thick-headed beast, the rhinoceros, a *safari* must always be on the look-out for trouble. The rhino charges without apparent rhyme or reason, often without having first been seen. The most favourable result is that the porters, in their haste to climb trees, will manage to drop heavily all the breakables, but there is always the risk that some unfortunate boy will not manage to get clear, and will be sadly trampled or tossed, and perhaps killed outright. During the hours when a *safari* is mostly on the march the rhinoceros is generally dozing in the bush, but one whiff of human scent is sufficient to set it on the move. The direction of that move depends upon the rhino's temper at the moment and the character of the prevailing breeze. As a rule it charges up-wind, not perhaps with the fixed intention of demolishing the cause of the hated smell which has assailed its nostrils, but with the idea of rushing through and beyond it, and so it often happens that a rhino passes through a line of porters without doing anything more serious than agitate them very strenuously. It is fear rather than hate which inspires the rhino, and as it can see plainly only for a very short distance there is generally more noise than wool about a rhino attack. If the creature has been recently wounded it is doubly dangerous, but there is little opportunity, before an incipient attack, to examine the beast carefully for bullet marks.

A rhino, of course, always charges when you least expect it, as the following little adventure will serve to illustrate. It happened whilst we were in the Rift Valley, and camped for quite a long time in a district where rhino were very plentiful, as their widespread spoor proved. Every time we went to and from our various hide-ups we expected to disturb one and be attacked, but for many days went scot free, and so became somewhat careless, rating the rhino of this district as more docile and slow to anger than the rest of their kind. On the very day when we were moving camp we learned otherwise. My colleague and I were trudging along, well ahead of the *safari*, puffing peacefully at our pipes, with our gunbearers just behind. The head of the main body was perhaps two hundred yards in the rear, the boys plodding along full of meat and good temper and chattering like monkeys about the wonders of the last camp and the possibilities of the

next. All at once there was a great commotion, and we turned and ran back towards a mob of loadless porters, dodging about this way and that in the bush. Then there appeared the figure of our small servant, Isa, the *toto* always to be found in such outfits. He was running towards us for dear life, making record time over the tussocky grass, and yelling at the top of his voice "A rhino is here, master. A rhino is here." But for the desperate nature of the situation one must have laughed, for that small boy presented a truly comical spectacle. His little black legs fairly twinkled; the tail of his little brown shirt, which he always wore outside his shorts for comfort, was flapping in the breeze, and a few feet behind it only was the wicked horn of a big bull rhino travelling at a lumbering gallop with all the grim determination of a bulldog. We ran hard towards the boy when we saw what was happening, shouting as we went, and the rhino pulled up short, providing Isa with an opportunity to dive headlong into the thickest bush he could see. That rhino was in a very evil temper and bent on murder. When it had located us properly with its nasty pig-like little eyes it selected its victim and came at him full pelt, only to get a solid .318 bullet in the shoulder from the other. It turned and charged this new enemy, and got another bullet in the opposite flank which brought it to its senses. Bent now upon escape, it dashed between us, but there could be no question of letting it go, and we both fired again at point-blank range. It crashed to its knees a few yards away, but managed to turn and make a brave effort to renew hostilities, dying with a bullet in its brain and the shrillest and most heart-rending scream I have ever heard.

It had probably been disturbed by our voices, fully awakened by the main body, and thus incited to charge. It hit the *safari* somewhere near the head of the line where the small boy was trudging along happily, and he, being too scared at first to move, had been picked out for definite attack. Quite frequently the rhino will mark down its quarry and hunt it like this, and to turn one's back and run is to hand it all the trumps in the pack. A heavy rifle and cool nerve are reasonable insurance against rhino, and though quite a number of people have been and will be killed through the loss or failure of one or other at the crucial moment, the

rhino must be classed as a dangerous nuisance, but one which may be avoided with care.

It is commonly said that all elephant hunters are certain to get killed if they only keep on long enough, which is more or less proved by the long list of good men who have been slain when, having emerged successfully from ninety-nine encounters, the hundredth brings its fatal mishap. Elephants always present danger because of their extraordinarily keen scent, and the fact that if they have been recently wounded or harassed they are as likely as not to charge the next party they meet, however inoffensive it may be. A striking illustration of this fact is provided by the very recent death of an official who was merely attempting to take a close-up photograph of an elephant in the Marsabit district, popularised by the pictures of Martin Johnson. The suggestion that the infuriated animal mistook its victim for that gentleman lacks confirmation.

Elephant, like rhino, do not possess keen sight, and if the first rush can be avoided, or the animal steadied by a shot from a really heavy rifle, the man who does not like seeing it through to the bitter end may then find a chance to dodge away and escape. In spite of its bulk, the elephant is capable of moving, when angry, at considerable speed, in the opinion of most hunters something like twenty miles an hour. The speed of which animals are capable is a subject for much argument and one with regard to which there is very little reliable proof. A lady motorist who was recently chased by a rhinoceros vows that her speedometer registered thirty-five miles per hour, which would mean that the animal is capable of travelling very much faster than anyone suspected. The figures would have been more reliable, I think, if the positions of hunter and hunted had been reversed.

Following wounded elephant, as hunters must needs do if they would get the ivory, is a very unhealthy pastime. Their cunning is only surpassed by their strength, and many men have been killed through the animal lying in wait for them, making a rush at such close quarters that escape was impossible, and killing them in a manner mercifully swift but horrible to contemplate, though themselves at the very point of death. To the hunter the elephant is always a source of very great danger, but mostly it is more anxious to avoid than