

418 c 93.214

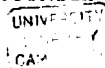
THE SPORT OF A LIFETIME

By
EUGENE DE HORTHY

WITH 139 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



BARON BÉLA WESSELÉNYI, FOUNDER OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN HUNT.



LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD & CO.

1939

1-351

The reeds were full of lion tracks in all directions, every few yards there were skeletons of antelopes. Slowly we followed the blood-marks, growling lions to the right and the left. I may say that this growling was anything but pleasant, the more so as in a thicket such as we were in I could not have shot in time had one of the fellows chanced to attack me. But then the saving moment came. Our man lost the track. I must admit I was rather pleased about it.

A new idea had come into my head: to let my men try to drive the lions out of the reeds. This was an area of about ten acres, and I was certain there were at least four or five lions in it. We got to a place near which I thought the lions would come out. The drive lasted for about an hour and a half, and at the finish half of my men appeared on the right side of the reed-bed, the others on the left. Not a single one had gone through.

They were quite justified: they did not appreciate the unfriendly growling any more than I did. There was nothing to be done but to wait a few days and renew the search when sure that the growling lions were no longer there. This happened three days afterwards, when we succeeded in finding the carcase of the animal I had shot, unfortunately in a very advanced state of decay.

The following year I left a waterbuck I had shot lying on the spot with the intention of finding out whether some beast of prey visited it during the night. Next morning we found only the skeleton and lion tracks all round it. As the going was very hard and dry there could be no question of tracking, and I thought it advisable to stalk the surrounding country, which was covered with grass about a yard high and bush.

Our search did not last above an hour. I spotted a lion as he was jumping up from his resting-place and quickly shot at him. As he disappeared Osman caught hold of my arm and, pointing to the left, said: "There is the lion."

I saw it rather late. It was just disappearing and I had

the feeling that I must have been too late in aiming as I did. Suddenly, however, he turned round and came straight at us. At the same time, from the direction in which I had shot the first one, a female approached with long jumps.

The situation was becoming somewhat critical, though I was convinced that neither of them had the intention of attacking. They just did not know in what direction they were to make their escape. However, under the circumstances I found it more important to finish off the wounded animal, as he was probably inclined to be nasty. His affair was soon settled by one shot. When I turned towards the lioness she was not to be seen. Probably at the report of my gun she realized that she had taken the wrong direction and had turned another way.

When I was discussing the skinning with Osman, he would speak about the lion; he did not believe I had shot two of them. He had not seen my first hit and could not see the animal later as it had dropped down dead and was covered by grass.

That very week I shot two rhinos which I found lying side by side. We were camping quite near and were kept awake by the roaring of lions which came from that same direction. Returning to the rhinos in the morning we found lion tracks all round them.

Taking the wind into consideration we started without any other reason in its direction. With the grass reaching to our waists we advanced a few hundred yards until we came to an ant-heap, where a lioness was sunning herself. I took aim and she rolled off the mound. At the same moment lions seemed to arise out of the grass on all sides.

A little way off I saw two black ears disappearing, somewhere else a tail was flourished; finally one lion of better nerve turned to examine me. I aimed below his head into the grass and at my shot he disappeared without a sound. We were right in the middle of a bunch of lions.

huge lizard is such a disgusting animal that one is compelled to shoot it at sight. In Africa every sweet water lake or river teems with them. The main reason for hating them is that they make bathing in the open air an absolute impossibility. How many of them I shot goodness alone can tell. There were, however, only very few that I could actually bring home. However you kill this animal, when sunning itself on a sandbank or otherwise, there is always enough life left in it to enable it by reflex movements to throw itself into the water. And who would feel inclined to look for it there, with its kin waiting around?

The examination of the crocodile's inside is just as interesting as the actual shooting of it is uninteresting. It is rare not to find a huge collection of native jewellery and trinkets in its stomach.

On the shores of Lake Victoria near Entebbe there is a small native fishing-village renowned for having possessed for more than a hundred years its own private domestic crocodile: a huge ancient beast which never goes far from the village and comes shuffling out of the water when called. This performance has generally a number of white spectators and is the source of a tidy little income to the inhabitants. Needless to say a fish or chicken is in readiness as the actor's fee.

If we want to find the most foolish animal in the universe we need not waste much time in looking, for undoubtedly it is the rhinoceros. This creature has the worst possible reputation. The natives fear the *kifaru* more than any other animal. I must admit I myself felt nervous, not at the possibility of being eaten by it, but because if the rather pungent smell of my passing safari reached its dear little nose this stupid animal, either in fear or surprise, would start rushing at us. This means a great catastrophe. Every porter flings down his load without considering its contents,

and escapes to the safe cover of the nearest tree-top. Afterwards in camp you have the great pleasure of surveying a wonderful mixture of preserved fruit, salt, tea, honey and every other kind of provision.

When I was looking for my first rhino out in the bush, I took a lot of men in order to have plenty of help with skinning the animal as well as for carrying back the skull, in case I was lucky enough to shoot one. Our search lasted a long while.

Walking in front with my shikari I suddenly became aware of whispering going on at the back. I turned round but could not see a soul. Looking about rather more intently a peculiar sight presented itself to my eyes, which might almost be numbered among the physical wonders of the world. On top of a flat-crowned acacia tree, the trunk of which was no more than eight inches in diameter, the whole company was hanging. There were some who had to be satisfied with the tiniest outside branches and kept on swinging backwards and forwards. Holding on with one hand they pointed to the bush underneath with the other. And there the rhino actually was. How they could possibly have seen him is still a puzzle to me. Maybe, out of spite for his having always scented them first, this time they scented him.

One is always reading about the *Lebensgefahr* (danger to life) in connection with rhino, especially in German books. I won't say that he is absolutely harmless, but I maintain that there is absolutely no ill will in him. He is stupid to an extreme degree, that's all. For instance, he always lies with his head towards the wind. If any unknown scent reaches him, he is so scared or nervous that he rushes at it. If he is not stupid, why does he never turn back when once he has missed the object of his attack? As soon as he gets beyond the reach of the smell, he takes no more notice. His sight is not very good, but he cannot be so blind as not to see when one jumps aside to get out of his way, only a few yards off.

The Sport of a Lifetime

After an unsuccessful charge he puts down his head and, tail in the air, rushes straight on.

I am not sure if the following will be confirmed by other hunters: though I have seen scores of rhino I never met a so-called attacking one that, in altering its direction, ever went to the left; it was to the right in every case.

When I arrived in the Kitui district in 1906, the whole place was crowded with rhino. Stalking any other game was almost impossible. One of them would always jump up at the most inconvenient moment, rushing at you with loud snorting and much ado which disturbed the whole neighbourhood. I cannot remember a single day when I did not see at least ten to twelve rhino. On top of that I had unfortunately already shot the two for which I had a permit before we got to these parts. I could do nothing about these animals. The only sport was a sort of bull-fight, jumping to one side when they came tearing at me. For a man with tolerably good nerves, on open ground, it is quite a simple affair. The only thing is to be very patient and wait till the animal gets to about ten paces from you. Then you jump to the right. This huge idiotic machine is not capable of altering its direction so quickly and, puffing, he rushes on.

Besides his bad sight, his hearing cannot be very good either. After returning home one evening from a long tiring day of elephant tracking, my gun-bearer was walking along about 10 yards in front of me, as lazy and inattentive, listening to nothing, as only a tired negro can be. I won't say that I was paying much attention either to what was going on. So near our camp we did not reckon on meeting any sort of game.

Looking ahead I noticed a huge stone near a shrub which the native was going straight towards. On a second look, I discovered that this stone was really a rhino which the man was just about to step upon. With a couple of strides I



WHITE RHINO SHOT IN THE WEST NILE FOR THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM



A HIPPO CONFERENCE

UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
1912



KITTENBERGER AND THE AUTHOR IN TORO



MY NEPHEW, PISTA, WAITING NEAR ELEPHANTS' SALT-LICK



THE GREAT RIFT VALLEY OF EAST AFRICA



RHINOS IN THE FOREST OF THE RIFT VALLEY

UNIVERSITY
OF CHICAGO
EJ



COUNTESS WENCKHEIM WITH HER BIG RHINOCEROS



AN ASTOUNDINGLY BIG SECOND HORN

reached him, caught hold of his shorts and quite silently pulled him back. We passed the rhino without its taking the slightest notice of us!

Of course, accidents may and do happen in relation to this animal. One rhino was silly enough to charge an engine of the Uganda Railway train. Who got the worst of it, I need not say. But instead of an engine he might charge a human being and such a meeting generally ends with an unfavourable result for the poor man's state of health.

Commander Höhnel of the Austro-Hungarian Navy, who was one of Count Samuel Teleki's companions on his African expeditions, almost fell a victim to such an onslaught. Near the Lorian swamps in bush country a rhino ripped his back completely open with his horns. You could see a deep hole between his ribs. As he was the only white man on the expedition there was nobody to dress his wounds. The natives carried him with that open hole in his back on the journey, lasting weeks, to Mombasa.

On the way there, the safari was attacked by another rhino. The men carrying the stretcher put it down and rushed for the next tree. The animal, flustered, approached the ill man, whose feelings at the thought that this second rhino was coming to finish the work his brother had begun, could not have been very happy ones. Luckily he missed the stretcher. I must add that when Höhnel got to Zanzibar his wound was alive with vermin. The doctors prophesied months in hospital. However this verdict did not prevent Höhnel from boarding a steamer that left for Trieste in a week's time. After getting home he soon recovered.

In very dense bush the rhino becomes dangerous quite unintentionally. I was once stalking through bush with a small rifle whilst my shikari carried my heavy gun after me. A thorn bush prevented my going straight on. All I could do was to creep through on all fours. Coming out on the other side, to my great surprise, I found a rhino getting on

his legs just opposite me. Luckily the wind came from a favourable quarter and he could not see me with his blinking near-sighted eyes. I bent down and put my hand back for my heavy rifle, but nothing happened. My shikari had kept in the background.

There I stood spell-bound, not knowing what to do, but neither was the rhino quite sure of himself. When he noticed me he came a few steps nearer. With my small rifle I was helpless. Then in this great dilemma I decided to shoot into his horn. That will at least make him sneeze, I thought, and may divert his attention. After my shot he rushed off to the right as one possessed, and it was very pleasant to know that we should not meet again.

But how mistaken I was! His companion, who was resting at the bottom of a tree a few yards off, disturbed either by the shot or by seeing his friend rush off, jumped up to follow him. That would have been quite all right had I not stood in the direct line of his retreat. I was not able to move, thanks to the impenetrable thorn bush. He may have taken me for some kind of shrub, too, which was an easy thing to trample down. Without hesitating he rushed over me, that is to say not over me, luckily, but just by me, brushing against my shoulder. For a time I whirled round and round and was flung finally into the thorns, thus finishing my gymnastic exercise. Nothing more happened to me.

When we arrived at Kampala in 1925, we went across to Entebbe, the beautiful and picturesque residence of the Governor, built on the shores of Lake Victoria. We called on the game warden, who introduced us to the Governor. He received us with a most hearty welcome and at the end of our discourse asked me, whether, seeing that we were to shoot in the West Nile Province, I would not like to shoot a white rhino. I must mention that this specimen of broad-muzzled rhinoceros, which is a bigger animal than the ordinary kind, is on the verge of extinction in Africa and therefore

under the strictest protection. In those days in all Africa only two permits per year were issued and those by the Governor of Uganda. I saw him in the middle of December and was lucky enough to arrive when as yet he had only given one permit, so that he was able to give me the second one.

Our boat arrived at the West Nile a few hours before dawn. We unloaded our baggage in the dark—tents and innumerable cases—with the help of natives standing to the knees in water, forming a long chain from our boat to the shore. After counting everything, we started by torchlight to the rest camp a few miles off. Hardly were we there when Kittenberger collected all available experts and arranged the necessary meeting. These men spoke very reassuringly about elephants and still more reassuring was their opinion about the occurrence of white rhino, which was a great comfort to us, as it was most important that I should shoot the animal within my time limit.

I intended having it set up, bringing the skin, skull and legs home and presenting it to the Hungarian National Museum to have it stuffed and prepared, which did in fact happen. The old rhino is now parading in our museum.

Under cover of the darkness K.'s patrols started at once in diverse directions on the search. I went to my tent to have a good sleep. After barely an hour or two, K. mercifully dragged me out of my blankets, as the report had come that two gipsies had seen the rhino. One had come back to tell us, whilst the other stayed to watch the animal until we arrived.

Our guide declared that the place where they found him was quite near. We did not spare our legs but went off as fast as we could, through rough, uneven going and thorn bush. The animal was so near that after tearing along for two hours we had not yet caught sight of him. On our way we were lucky enough to meet the best elephant tracker, who lived in the next village and, having heard of our arrival, was

on his way to our camp to offer his services. Luckily we ran up against him here.

At last we found the shepherd that was to guard the sheep (in this case the rhino), but as he had no sheep-dog with him to take care of the flock, the rhino had disappeared. Awkwardly they searched the whole surroundings for tracks until the wise elephant-tracker, Langa-Langa, took the matter into his hands. He found the tracks at once and we started to follow them.

Very soon the native with his keen eyes perceived the animal, but it was quite a long time before K. and I could make out the dim figure he was pointing at. It was impossible to see whether it was a bull or female rhino or the size of its horns. K. was keen on photographing and I had to do the killing. He went round the bush on the left. The wind facing us, I went on the right. Mine was the better luck. The rhino's head was turned towards me and he helped me a great deal by making a few steps forward. (The photographer had to be satisfied with the view of the bush.) I instantly saw that it was a bull with good horns, well worth shooting. I hit him in his shoulder and as he moved on I repeated the manoeuvre. He toppled over after the second shot, but the worst was to come.

The flesh of the rhino is taboo to the Mahdi natives and that is the real reason of its not being exterminated. Otherwise that would certainly have happened, as the Government cannot provide the place with keepers. But, lucky as it is for the rhino that the natives do not eat his flesh, this was a misfortune for me. None of my men seemed willing to touch the animal. K., however, exerted all his power of persuasion and finally got a group together for skinning. This work went very slowly, and we had to be careful that the fellows did not abscond without carrying back the heavy skin and skull.

Suddenly they had a brilliant idea: the whole tribe would

go and find drinking-water to bring back for later on. K. soon found out what their game was. Under pretence of looking for water they were endeavouring to leave the rhino for good and all. K. sent a few of our own men instead. In this way we managed to get skin and skull safely to our camp by the late afternoon.

In 1929 when we were in West Nile again, we saw white rhino several times. I got the impression that they are more plentiful than the game warden believes. My nephew was lucky enough to be able to film a herd of six or seven. They came so close that part of the picture was taken at something like 10 yards.

This animal seems to be much tamer than his dark brother. I at least could never observe the slightest intention of attacking in any single case. Nor do the natives ever relate any of their ghastly fairytales about them.

That same year I was also hunting in the North Congo. The Belgians, too, had prohibited the shooting of white rhino and though not much notice is taken of their game laws I did not like to abuse them. Stalking along we found fresh tracks of white rhino which, having nothing else in view, I followed without intention of shooting but just to have a look at the animal. I caught it up: a white rhino, a bull, with horns such as I had never seen before, at least 30 inches long. My men, natives of the district, were Nyam-nyams.

I wished the Belgian Game Law to blaze. My mouth watered and the temptation to shoot the animal was enormous. Then I remembered "Self defence." There is no province in Africa that prohibits the shooting of a charging animal. I got as near as possible and when about twenty paces off I started to produce the wildest Indian war-dance imaginable. In the whole of my life I had never danced before and I am afraid my exhibition could hardly have been more graceful than the antics of a rhino baby. I hoped to infuriate the rhino by my grotesque hopping and skipping about.

No luck. I saw in the expression on his face a sort of contempt and disgust, but he would not honour me by an attack. With tail in the air he trotted away with great disdain. My Nyam-nyams thought this the right moment to run after him with their spears. I had to yell as loud as my lungs allowed and threaten them with my gun to stop them.

A nice business this Belgian Game Law! Everything is permitted to the native while the white man is molested with rates, shooting licences, elephant shooting permits, taxing of elephant tusks (ivory), and has merely the right to watch natives slaughtering without consideration of age or sex the very animal whose shooting in a sporting way is prohibited.

In Kitui the whole country was crowded with rhino. One day, as I was stalking along, my attention was drawn by a horrible grumbling and squealing on the other side of a small mound. Climbing up I saw a female rhino standing in the valley while her companion the bull was stamping round her, yelling and very excited, butting her sides every now and then. Leaning against a tree I watched the scene. At first I could not understand the reason of all this agitation, until I perceived a young bull rhino standing just above them. He looked very young and smart, with clean shoes, an easy manner and a nice appearance, and he was ogling the lady in the valley. This explained matters to me. The old gentleman was jealous. I flattened myself against my tree, as it would have been very unpleasant had the infuriated husband taken me for another of the lady's swains.

The game went on, but the young Don Juan did not pluck up courage to go any nearer. The old man must have looked very dangerous. What is more, after a while he just turned away, leaving the scene of his desires and probably saying to himself: "I'm blessed if I'll fight for the lady. After all, she is not very beautiful and has a kid to nurse at her side. It is really not worth while."

The old rhino bumped his wife a few times more, then drew away across the hillside, I following. In the next valley another lady was waiting for him, probably his first wife, with an ugly two-year-old baby. This first wife was ugly too, old and wrinkled. Surely such a lot of fuss would not have been made about her. The old boy must have been a Mohammedan.

to Handeni, where we spent the evening with a District Commissioner who had formerly been a physician and knew Budapest. He advised us to go about 80 miles still farther south, where sable was plentiful.

However we had trouble with this animal, or rather with the weather, as the short rainy season set in late that year. Instead of being over before our arrival, unfortunately the first downpour did not start until the beginning of December. Instead of green grassland we found no grass at all, only black bush parched to cinders, and no game, at least not where we looked for it. Our camp was beside a very steep rocky hill, scantily wooded, the climbing of which in the great heat and accompanied by the continual stinging of the tsetse fly was anything but pleasant. Besides sable, which is not very plentiful, there are also rhino, bushbuck, hartebeest and waterbuck to be found in these areas. We heard that the favourite food of a mission in the neighbourhood was sable. Not very promising news!

Here I must mention another of the many charming changes of recent days. The native, having digested his elephant meat, again goes to the District Commissioner with a complaint that baboons are damaging his plantations, whereupon he obtains a gun and cartridges to get rid of them. The cartridges are numbered but as he can get as many as he likes on the sly in Indian shops, this does not affect him in the least. It appears that in Tanganyika to-day there are about 17,000 such guns in native possession. And how many more will have remained there as a legacy from war times! Does one forget how dangerous these weapons may be to white man? I may not be able to judge of that, but one thing I am certain of: that this policy is the surest and quickest way of exterminating game in Africa. In all my life I never came across tamer baboons and more scared antelopes than in those parts overrun with "baboon-hunters."

After not seeing sable for several days we had again to give up hope and set out for a district where we could find kudu antelope, a very rare animal still absent from my collection of trophies. The place recommended to us was about 80 miles from our late camp and partly private property. The owner, a very kind-looking South African, gave us information about everything. The country was beautiful, wonderfully green, with no end of flowers. It lay so high and the evenings were so cold that we had to unpack our warmest wraps.

The going was very bad. In places the rocky slopes were so steep as to resemble the precipices of the Transylvanian Retezat—then again you would find yourself in impenetrable bush-covered low hills, riddled by deep perpendicular ravines made by water pouring down into the valley during the rainy season.

Countess Wenckheim made a few excursions into the open country where she shot eland, oryx and steinbuck. I sweated unflaggingly on the kudu tracks. These animals were actually quite plentiful and I even caught sight of them, but the bulls were not big enough. At last I met some better ones. There were two, one of them a big one, and four or five females. After prolonged stalking I got very close, but they noticed my shikari and rushed off without giving me time to use my rifle. After several hours of climbing across fortresses of rock, we knocked up against them again, but they had already had the wind and raced off down the wooded incline. I also had to run in order not to lose sight of them as it was getting dark. Soon I discovered the bull standing still. Though at a great distance, I aimed. It was a beautiful shot, but it was not the kudu I hit, merely a rock, the kudu being somewhere else.

Next day Countess Wenckheim stalked the same herd very cleverly and with great perseverance. The two bulls were standing at a good distance in the thicket. She made a

place. Surrounding the lion in a circle they spear him as soon as he tries to escape on noticing their gradual advance.

This performance always ends with the wounding or killing of several natives, but it is worth the risk as the destroyer of the lion is entitled to the lion's mane which is worn as headgear. What an advantage to the hero's courting prospects!

The adolescents become the warriors, so-called Morans, and live apart in separate villages. Their food is milk, meat and beef blood; they are forbidden to drink alcohol or to smoke. Their love is cattle and their occupation, besides looking after and breeding them, is visiting the neighbouring alien tribes and stealing their cattle. That this change of ownership does not happen without bloodshed—of course generally on the side of the attacked—goes without saying. The British won't stand this kind of sport. Shortly before our arrival such a Masai raid had occurred, with a sequel of about 700 cattle stolen and eight or ten corpses on the side of the raided tribe.

The British at once started in pursuit of the robbers. The country was searched by aeroplane, soldiers in motor-cars followed and the sinners were caught at last. Those sentenced to death were hanged.

That was quite in order. But the question crops up—do the Masai understand why they are captured and hanged? For centuries raiding was their trade, the characteristic of the race. If the assault was too daring they would get the worst of it and their cattle would be driven away by the other side. Why then hang them just because they were successful? Also though it might be of no consequence to the authorities, it meant very much to a Masai whether he killed a man or not. A warrior who failed to do so did not get a wife and in those regions this is a real catastrophe as there are no music-halls or night-clubs to drown one's sorrows in.

I do not believe in any great necessity for the natives

becoming "coloured Frenchmen" to fight on European battlefields and die the death of heroes. It is cheaper to do this at home. As for robbery? Probably they have read the story of the European peace treaties.

A few years ago the Masai were deprived of their shining polished spears, with which they went to war. They were left with the dull ones with which they mind the cattle. Since then their warlike feelings have dwindled perceptibly. They are slowly becoming cowards. A film operator wanted them to perform a Serengeti lion-spearing hunt for the movies. He could not find a single Masai willing to do this and had to send motor-cars to a great distance for Nandi natives, with whom he succeeded in making his picture.

I hear there is even a plan for making a Masai Reserve after the pattern of the Indian Reserve! You no longer meet those well-grown Masai, their hair smeared with red earth, wearing brown wraps flung across the shoulders. They may soon turn into yellow-shoed, khaki-clad black apes!

To return to our expedition. We got down to the Serengeti Steppe, the home of lions. The road was in a terrible state, but luckily it had not rained for days and we mostly slid or rolled down the hill. Otherwise, who can tell how long it would have taken us to get there? In the rainy season Captain Hewlett only did the 20 miles in four days by motor-car.

On coming out of the wooded area we at once saw two lions, but still in preserved territory. We had to halt as soon as we were down the hill as it was getting dark. Next day we pitched camp on the site we had hoped to reach the night before, at the mouth of a Korongo—a very deep gorge covered by bush several miles long.

The next day Countess Wenckheim found plenty of opportunity for shooting to her heart's content—or rather not quite, for she never intended to shoot a zebra, finding them too gentle and too much like a horse. But she was