

# The Premature Natural death of our Friend, Samia the Rhino

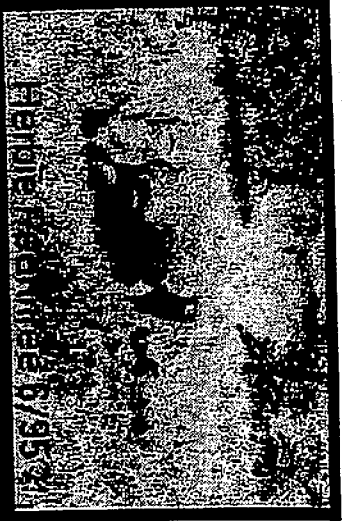
by Patty Pearthree: Bowling For Rhinos Coordinator



Anna Merz and Samia at Home, photo Gerry Ellis

I am sorry to report that Samia, the Black rhino hand-raised by Anna Merz died on Wednesday, November 23. The ten-year-old rhino and her seven-month-old son died from injuries sustained after being chased over a 40 foot cliff by a male rhino at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (partially funded by AAZK Bowling for Rhinos fund raiser). Samia was one of the most famous rhinos in modern conservation. Many conservation articles and video documentaries have been made on Samia due to her friendly tolerance of strangers and photographers.

Anna Merz began raising the orphaned rhino in 1985 when Samia was only 3 days old. From her relationship with Samia, Anna has gathered an extraordinary amount of valuable new information about rhino behavior that has been useful to researchers both in the wild and in captive situations. Anna has published a book, *Rhino at the Brink of Extinction* with HarperCollins Publishers, which gives tremendous insight on the complex social lives of these wonderful animals. In fact, Anna claims to understand over 60 different grunting and snorting sounds as rhino vocabulary!



The birth of Samia's son Samuel, presented a unique and unprecedented opportunity to closely witness the maternal behavior of a rhino raised with substantial human influence. Anna's painstaking efforts to help Samia adapt to life in the wild proved successful. The rhino provided a model for examination of many of the behaviors which might be anticipated if a captive bred rhino were released to the wild. It was hoped that Samuel would also adjust and adapt naturally, completing the circle and the dream of returning creatures back to the wild if their habitat is protected. The experiences at Lewa prove that this concept can be a reality.

I was able to see Samia and Samuel almost daily during my stay at Lewa from May - August of 1995. While staying with Anna, I was routinely awakened to the squeaks of Samuel as he followed mom through the tall grass just outside of Anna's guest house. Samia bedded down each night close to the safety of Anna's house but as soon as she woke and showed off her calf to Anna, she wandered into the brush to become just like all other rhino - wild but protected in the safe haven of Lewa. However, all the efforts of the folks at Lewa couldn't save these rhinos from this natural death. When Samia began to cycle once again, it attracted an aggressive male to the area. He chased Samia over the cliff and Samuel, who never left mom's side, followed.

As you can imagine Anna, who spent 7 years of her life teaching Samia all she could to be able to survive as a wild rhino, is devastated by this tragic loss. Although Anna knows that they died of natural causes and an incredible amount of knowledge was gained from Samia and Samuel, it was an incredible blow to her personally. She will be happy to know that the 1996 Bowling for Rhinos event will be dedicated to the memory of Samia and Samuel. With continued support, only natural deaths will occur at Lewa rather than deaths due to poachers.