

Lion—Pare Mountain District, Tanganyika

# Dangerous Animals of Africa

by W. J. WILWERDING

*Illustrations by the Author*

MANY MEN have been killed by animals in Africa. A veteran hunter, tired after a long day and not so alert as he should be, is suddenly confronted by an infuriated animal. Confused, he tries to pull his rifle's trigger without first throwing the safety catch, and when only seconds stand between life and death the slightest delay may prove fatal. Some men go hunting dangerous animals who are unacquainted with their ways. Others are distracted by sounds and sights in the bush—they fail to keep their minds on what they are supposed to be doing. Still others are just plain fools.

An incident occurred near Moshi that illustrates what may happen through sheer ignorance. It was shortly after I had made that place my temporary headquarters on one of my expeditions to paint portraits of African wildlife. A man came from England to photograph animals. Most of all he wanted motion pictures of elephants and he induced a friend of mine to go on safari with him in search of the huge beasts. He was advised to take a white hunter with him, too, but he passed off this suggestion with the remark that he was not going to harm the elephants and that they would not harm him. Some days later they came upon a female accompanied by two young. The photographer went close and began taking pictures. Alarmed for the safety of her offspring, the mother charged. Grasping the camera's tripod and using it as a flail, she smashed the operator to a pulp.

There used to be a herd of elephants on Mt. Kenya that became so dangerous from repeated hunting that even the most courageous white men would not go near it. At the first slight scent of such a person the animals would charge. Yet, natives had their shambas all over the place and went about their work without being molested. The elephants knew the difference in odor between the negroes who did not hurt them and the white men who brought pain and death. If the herd had not been hunted it is rea-



Buffalo

sonably certain that its members would have tolerated the close proximity of men of all races.

This illustrates one reason why animals are dangerous to human beings. Usually they are content to mind their own affairs. Continued wounding and killing by hunters, however, soon teaches them that they must either run or fight when a white man comes near. Timid ones run. The less timid fight and, although the score continues to be very uneven, the animals do succeed, now and then, in avenging themselves for past wrongs.

## Bad Actors

Buffaloes have a bad reputation and many experts give them top rating among the dangerous game of Africa. From my own experiences, I think they are naturally no worse than domestic cattle. I once hunted a herd that was rated very hazardous and yet, when I shot over the massed animals for fear of being trampled and gored if they charged, all turned tail and ran away.

I did have a very close call with a bull of this same group—not as a result of my own carelessness, but because I followed the lead of a companion who had hunted buffaloes many times and who should have exercised more care. He had wounded the animal and I went along to help dispatch it. For hours we followed in the stifling heat, while the bull took refuge in one cluster of vegetation after another—only to move on as we came close.

At last we arrived at a dense thicket of trees, all overgrown and entangled with vines. It was impossible to see two feet into the heavy growth. A tunnel showed where the buffalo had entered. Our tracker, a very able and intelligent native, told us that marks on the flintlike ground entered but did not emerge. My companion laughed at this and walked into the green tunnel. I followed, though I was none too keen about the business. Suddenly my companion changed his mind, saying that maybe it



"The rhinoceros is one of the few beasts that will attack without apparent provocation. In my opinion this bulky animal is a dullard that charges when it smells anything to which it is not accustomed."

would be better not to burrow into the tangle. To my great relief we retreated.

Going around to the other side of the thicket, we waited while the tracker threw sticks and stones into the mass. One missile struck something alive which erupted violently and came bursting out after us. Of course, we stopped it with our rifle fire. Had we continued into the thicket, where the bull was silently waiting, one or the other of us might have been killed.

Just before the present war began I was in correspondence with a white guide in French Indo-China. I had the idea in mind of going there to obtain material and sketches of the animals of the region. The guide wrote that in the jungle there were many gaurs—big bovines which are considered to be as bad as African buffaloes. He expressed the belief that, if gaurs were not hunted so frequently, they would be no more dangerous than domestic stock. That was the opinion of a man who had lived among these wild cattle for many years and who had studied them intimately.

Present conditions in East Africa tend to prove the point that buffaloes will behave themselves when they are not persecuted by gunners. Since the war began there has been very little hunting and the game departments estimate that, in numbers, the herds are back where they were about twenty-five years ago. Just recently I received a letter from a former guide in which he relates how he approached a large number of buffaloes grazing in the open not far from Arusha. At first they raised their heads to

watch him, but, since nothing disturbed them further, they soon went back to grazing.

Even the elephants have a much greater feeling of security than they have had for years. The same guide writes that it is now easy to approach a herd of elephants to take pictures—without fear of being charged and without the chance that the pachyderms will leave for another district as soon as they scent a white man.

#### The Shy Become Curious

The more timid of the veldt creatures know, too, when they are free from harm. Animals that have not been hunted are curious about man rather than afraid of him. In regions where giraffes have been rigorously protected and where lions are few, I have found it possible to approach within a few feet of the tall fellows. In one district, where gazelles enjoyed a closed season for five years, I could walk very close to the herds and they made no attempt to run away.

Just last year my guide friend ran into a pride of lions that simply lay looking at him as he approached. He shot into the air to see what they would do, but they made no move to depart. Not until he had fired six times did they finally become nervous and retreat. Apparently the shooting meant nothing to them—no one had shot at them before. It was the noise, perhaps, that finally disturbed them and caused them to leave the scene.

Lions, in spite of the fact that they are carnivores and belong to the cat family, are, in my opinion,

an even-tempered lot, content to hunt game for a living and to let men alone. Even in the wild they can be taught to come to food, like squirrels in a park. On the Serengeti Plains it was the custom before the war to take tourists to see and to photograph lions. The procedure was to kill an antelope or zebra and leave it as a lure. A guide usually preached a short sermon on the very pretty lions and the bad hunters who shot them. (He avoided mention of slaughtering a harmless animal for bait.) The great cats became accustomed to the business and would appear on the run when a car approached. Many of the pictures of lions that one sees in the movies were taken at the place.

#### Beware of Angry Lions

I must add that once the even-tempered lion is aroused it becomes a piece of living dynamite. Also, there are exceptions to every rule, as is shown by the following case.

Not many years ago a lioness entered a district in northeastern Tanganyika that was almost devoid of game. She gave birth to a litter of cubs; they grew and soon needed meat. So she went to the nearest source of supply, which was a native village. When she raided a flock, she was set upon by herdsmen and one of them was killed. That kind of hunting was easy and, later, more men were slain. When the cubs were large the mother took them to the village where they attacked en masse and tried to scratch their way through the flimsy thatches on the roofs of the huts. In this they frequently succeeded and they even laid siege to barricaded doors. Finally, one of the group was killed by white hunters and one was run down on the road at night by an automobile. The remaining ones scattered. It is highly probable that, when they reached better game country, they went back to their normal type of securing a living. At least no man-eaters were reported from surrounding districts.

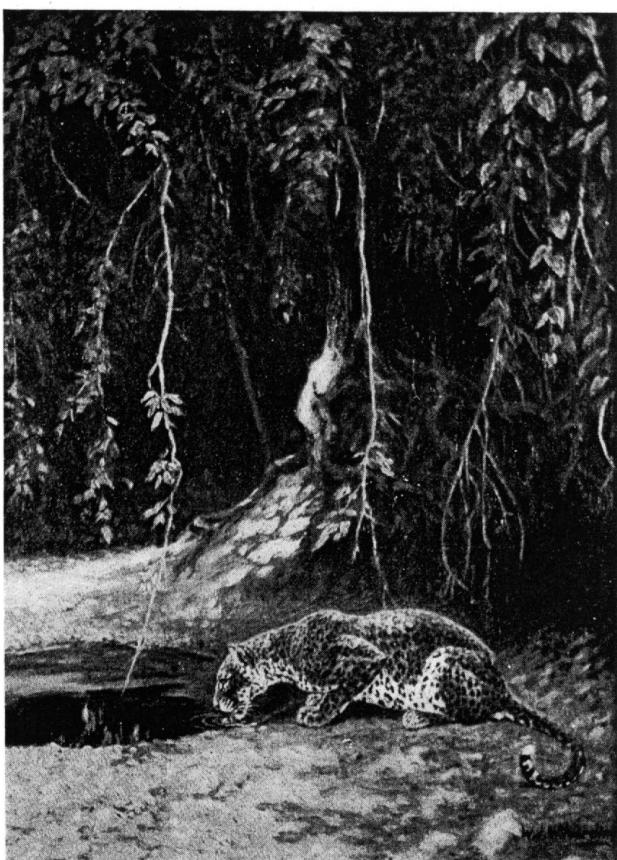
Usually a lion will make no attempt to attack if a person approaches its resting place in the daytime. I have on several occasions passed within a few yards of a lion lying down in bushes, only to have it rise and walk majestically away. Of course, if one were foolhardy enough to do any shooting in such circumstances and should wound the lion, he would have a very angry beast on his hands and perhaps in his hair. A lion at close quarters can charge with surprising speed, and even a bullet through the heart will not prevent it from mauling the hunter—if it should reach him before it dies.

Lions do strange things at times, which makes me wonder whether some of them are good sports or

just cannot be bothered with such weaklings as human beings. The father of my guide in northern Tanganyika—a man named Wilson—worked on the Uganda Railroad in Kenya during the time when there was so much trouble with the lions near Tsavo. One night a native came to report that a lion had stolen a donkey. Mr. Wilson told the man to lead him to the thief. With lantern and rifle he followed the native who stopped after a bit, pointed in front of him, and said, "There!"

The elder Wilson was amazed to see that the negro had taken him literally and that he was facing the lion—crouched at his feet over the dead donkey. Before he could make another move, the huge beast reared, placed one fore paw on each of his shoulders, gave a push, and sent him flat on his back. Then picking up the donkey, as a fox picks up a rabbit, the lion left the scene. Mr. Wilson was not even scratched during the incident. It seemed as though the lion just did not want to be disturbed and pushed the man out of the way so the meal could be finished in peace.

I had a startling experience one dark night at Lalgarjin among the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro.



"I believe that the leopard is crazy. Although beautiful, it is a confirmed villain at heart."

My assistants tied a dead buck to a stump to attract lions and had a machan (platform) built in a near by tree. I wanted a lion for several reasons. I could make close and detailed color sketches, then I could skin the carcass for anatomical studies, and, later, I could have the hide for a rug. I don't think any lion would have appreciated my desires, but animal drawing and painting is an exacting business and sometimes the result excuses the method.

We set forth from camp after dark to climb into the machan and wait for the moon to rise. Accompanied by two natives, who carried our guns and blankets (it was very cold at night in those parts), my guide and I were walking along a trail toward the place, and, to see whether we were near the spot where the bait was placed, we flashed our lamps. It was fortunate that we did, for two round lights appeared in front of us and at the same moment there was a rumbling snort. The intended victim had preceded us. Shooting would have been foolhardy, so we shouted loudly. The lion growled, reached down to tear a hindquarter from the bait, and bounded off into the bushes. It was a close call, for a lion is exceedingly bold at night and quite dangerous and apt to attack when disturbed at its feeding.

#### **Two Animals Are Different**

There are two exceptions to the general rule that animals which have not been hunted will not attack man. These exceptions, in my opinion, are the rhinoceros and the leopard.

I may wrong the rhinoceros by so thinking. It may be that many years of persecution by hunters have made it truculent, but I believe that this bulky beast is a dullard that charges when it smells anything to which it is not accustomed.

I once sent some natives ahead in the Pare Mountains to find a spring. They were gone only a short time when I heard them shouting and whistling for help. Two rhinos had driven them into a tree. Those men never had hunted the rhinoceros and their odor certainly could not have spelled danger to the ponderous brutes. Few natives, except honey gatherers, would venture into the region; they told me that the presence of many rhinos made the place too hazardous. One native reported that his father had been killed by a rhinoceros while he was seeking hives in the forest.

Another time, in the Miwaleni River district where rhinos had been protected for many years, I was charged by two of them while I was engaged in the innocent occupation of walking through the bush toward a troop of monkeys that I wished to

observe at close range. I had left my rifle behind with my gunbearer, foolishly thinking that, since I was only going to watch monkeys, I would not need it. The rhinos missed me, but it was a close call, and I returned to a very white-faced black man who had been watching the affair from a near by elevation.

#### **Spotted Villain**

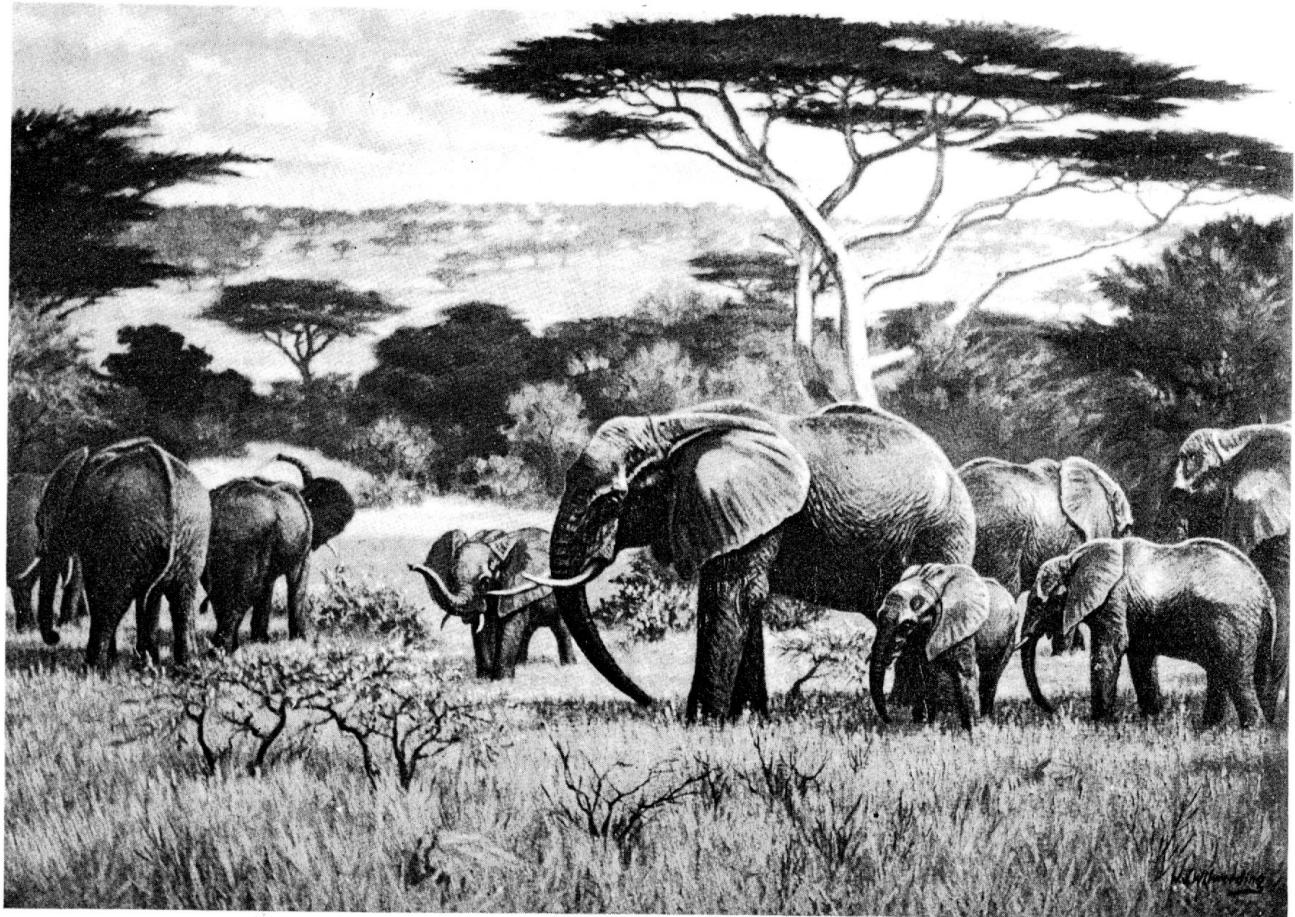
I believe that the leopard is crazy. Beautiful it is, without doubt, but it is a confirmed villain at heart. Many people have been mauled by leopards. Some have lived, but numbers have died of their wounds. It is an accepted fact among white hunters that a leopard, encountered suddenly, will attack at once if it thinks it has been seen. That it will not attack should it think itself unobserved I have reason to believe.

I was once following a rhinoceros trail up a mountainside in Tanganyika when I saw a crowd of monkeys jumping from tree to tree and scolding at something below. Looking closely, I saw a leopard winding its way through the dense vegetation. It was following a wooded ravine and apparently it did not see me. I could catch only glimpses of the yellow skin.

As I returned along the same trail—tired after the heat of midday—I sat down to rest. My gunbearer squatted beside me. A huge rock rose to our left. Suddenly the native pointed toward the base of the rock and remarked, "A leopard has been lying there."

We examined the place and saw the imprint of the body as well as fresh tracks where the killer had gone into the bushes. Moving brush below us showed where the leopard was stealing away. It had been lying there, without doubt, as we stopped on the trail just a few feet away. We had not noticed the beast and it had silently departed. I feel sure that, if we had seen it, it would have lost no time in jumping upon us.

My guide, Wilson, had a terrifying experience with a leopard one evening near the town of Tanga. Natives were clearing a place for a garden when a leopard suddenly sprang from hiding and mauled two of them. Wilson went over to see what all the shouting was about and would not believe that a leopard was holing up so near the town. Rifle in hand, he walked up an old ant hill which had already been cleared. Just beyond, the brush still grew and Wilson was poking about in this with the muzzle of his rifle when a leopard suddenly came out of a hole in the hill and jumped upon him. In the excitement he forgot to throw his safety catch. Pull as he



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would on the trigger, the gun would not fire. Lying on his back with the leopard upon him, he poked the barrel into the animal's mouth to hold it away from his throat, but the leopard succeeded in chewing his leg badly before it suddenly turned and jumped away into the bushes. It made good its escape into a planting of rubber trees.

That leopard was apparently disturbed because the natives were clearing the brush from its lair. Perhaps it thought it was being hunted. Wilson had nightmares about that for some time afterward.

Sometimes sheer ignorance or self-confidence gets people into trouble that might be avoided. Such was the case of a young Canadian trapper who came to Tanganyika to catch leopards for their skins. He proposed to go by himself, but was advised to take natives with him. He laughed at this, saying that he had always trapped alone in Canada and he could do the same in Africa.

One morning he found a leopard in one of his traps—caught by a hind foot. Picking up his camera, the young man walked close to take a picture of the animal. A trapped leopard is exceedingly danger-

ous when approached and this one became furious; it leaped and tore its foot from the trap.

The man could not reach his rifle, which he had set aside. He was strong and proceeded to throttle the leopard, but, in the meantime, his antagonist kept all four feet working furiously and literally tore him to shreds. He killed the leopard, but was so weak from shock and loss of blood that he could only crawl from the scene. Eventually he reached a near by road where he was picked up two days later by a passing car—travel is infrequent on Africa's back roads. He was able to tell his story, but he died on his way to the nearest settlement.

Vigilance in Africa is often the price of life. It does not do to be careless or absent-minded and, above all, foolhardiness does not pay. A man once went to Wilbur Wright in the early days of the airplane to recommend a young man as an aeronaut who, according to reputation, was a daredevil.

"Daredeviltry," responded Wilbur Wright, "is a sign of light-weight intellect."

It sometimes seems that animals know whether or not a man is a fool. Few animals are fools.