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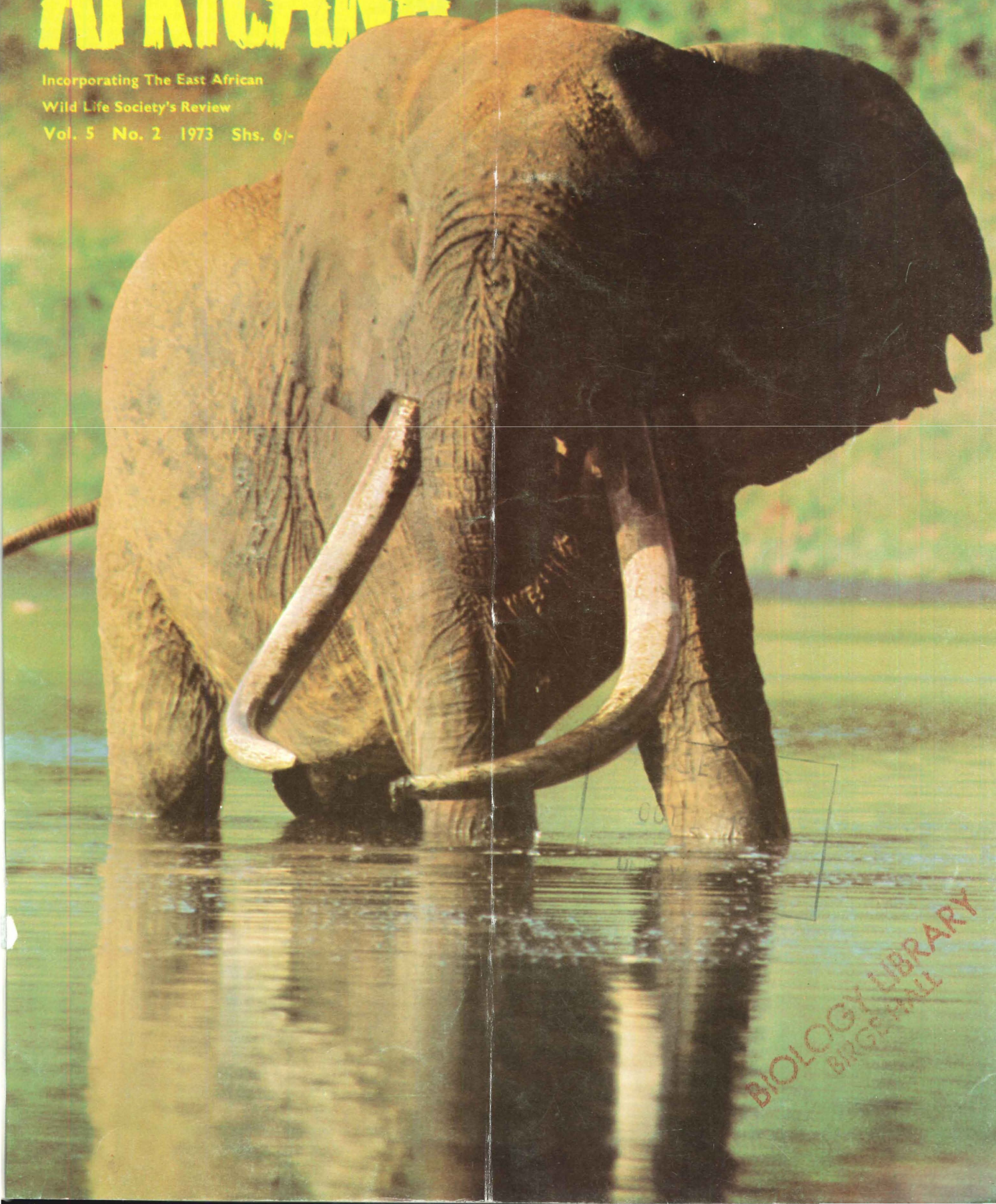
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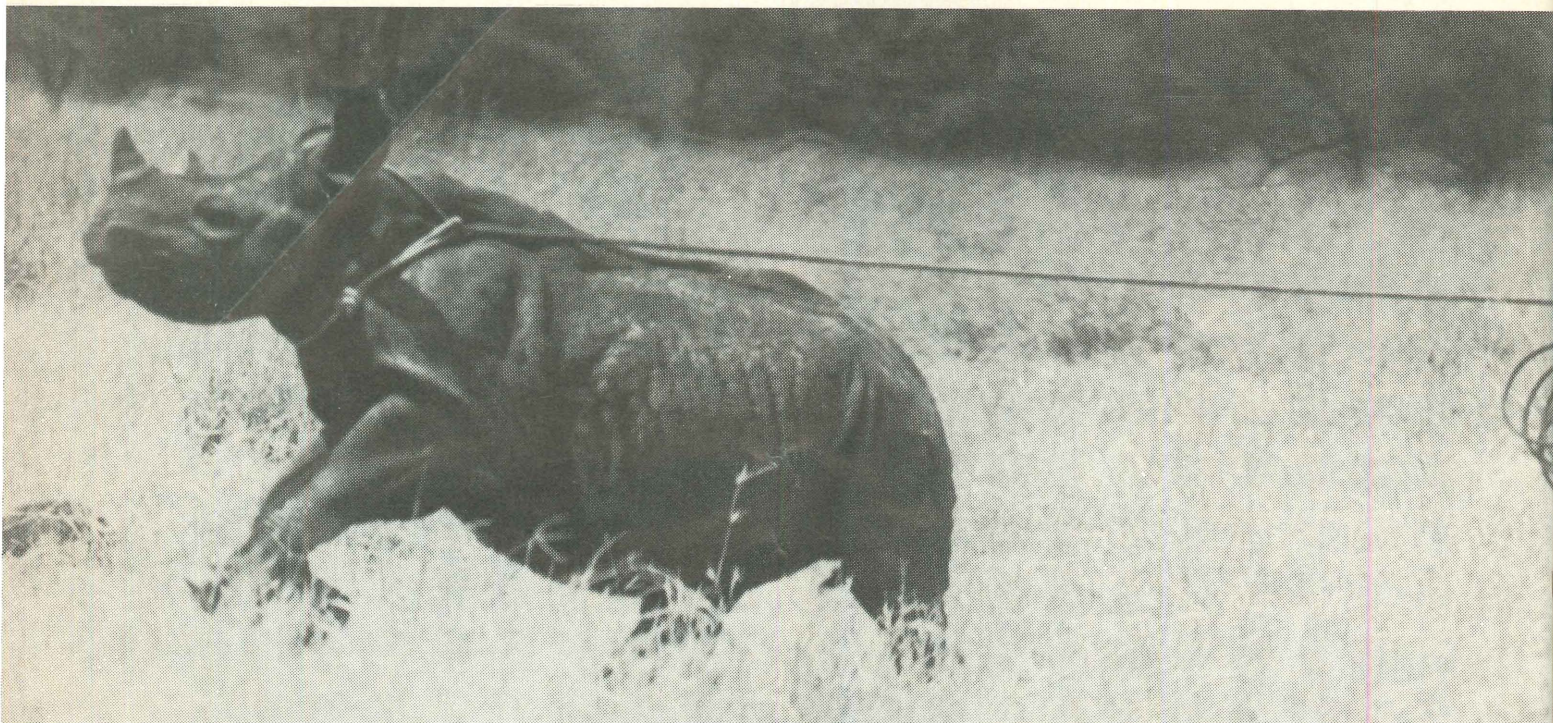


The Seago-Parkinson capture team in action
photo by Liza Ruben

THE ANIMAL CATCHERS

by TONY PARKINSON

PEOPLE today are becoming more conscious of wild animals than ever before, partly because of the diminishing wildlife the world over. Many thousands visit the zoos and animal parks annually which are springing up all over the world. This in turn induces people to take an interest in conservation and quite often leads to a desire to see the animals in their natural environment. In any case there would be millions of people who would not be able to see wild animals if it were not for such institutions as parks and zoos.



Above: Rhino secured—photograph by Liza Ruben. Right: Rhino capture by means of a tranquillizer dart has developed into a sophisticated and safe procedure. A leading specialist in this technique, Dr. John King, Senior Scientist with the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation, is pictured in action by Vic Tomasyan.

Few people have any concept of how an animal is supplied to a zoo. They just accept the fact that it is there and cannot visualise the difficulties and infinite care which is required before it is possible to put an animal on display. Unfortunately because of a few ruthless dealers and trappers scattered throughout the world who seem to have very high losses, the catching and transporting of animals to zoos is frequently frowned upon.

This is largely because of the adverse publicity these people attract to the business, and also a total lack of understanding by the public as to how animals are acquired in the first place.

So often the good work being carried out by other organisations and the care taken by the bigger and better zoos largely goes unheard. The tremendous strides which have been taken such as the new parks where animals are free to roam in large areas and the breeding successes speak for themselves.

Of course these new open parks are encountering numerous problems such as the re-infestation of internal parasites and the control of other diseases, and the damage that results to trees and flora within the park.

But these are being dealt with and are only of a temporary nature. The main thing is that a major breakthrough in the exhibiting of wild animals is in process.

There is of course no substitute for animals in the wild, but with the new forward-looking trend in zoos and parks they could well become the custodians of some of the rarer species of the world thus ensuring their survival for at least a while longer, and I foresee the day when our own role will be reversed and that certain animals from zoos will be reintroduced back to the wild to their former habitat.

First, of course, animals have to be caught and there are many ways in which this is done. Quite often there is a particular catching technique for each species of animal—a few of these methods I will try to explain.

In Kenya the trapping of animals is strictly controlled by Government and this country sets an example to the rest of the world. A Capture Committee consisting of leading conservationists meets once a month to discuss applications put before it for capture of any animal.

An application for capture must be accompanied by an order in the form of a letter from the approved zoo. The Committee quite rightly will refuse an application to a particular zoo if they do not have sufficient information about the zoo concerned. When, and only when, they have satisfied themselves that the animal will be properly looked after do they approve the order.

Only trapping organisations which are licensed and approved of by the Game Department are then allowed to carry out the capture and export, but before this can be started licences have to be bought from the Game Department and these are only issued against an Application for Capture Form approved by the Committee.

The trapping concern is directed either to private land where animals are making a nuisance of themselves or to a particular

hunting block as in the case of rhinos where quite often they are causing trouble in new Settlement Schemes either by chasing and killing people or by trampling down the crops.

The Game Department prefers rhino caught on a 'one for one' basis with no licence fee involved. In other words the trapper moves into the area and catches two rhino—one belongs to Government and will be released into a National Park, the other the trapper will be allowed to export against an approved order recovering his costs of the operation.

In this way all concerned are satisfied, since the animals which were giving trouble have been removed, the National Parks gets an additional rhino and the trapper fulfils an order to a zoo bringing in valuable dollars for an export.

There is an old saying that any fool can catch an animal; this may be partly true though I certainly do not agree since the condition of the animal after capture will depend on the ability of the catching team to carry out the operation quickly with as little stress being put on the animal as possible. So the work is done by a well-trained team; also the construction of the holding pens for after-capture is enormously important. These must not be too big or too small,—and of course, so constructed as to convince the newly caught animal that he cannot jump out.

The pens should have grass tied on the sides to a height of at least seven feet. This has a definite salutary psychological effect since an animal assumes that if he cannot see out, he cannot get out and nothing outside can see him. This usually keeps a newly caught animal very quiet.

After a few days the grass starts to get eaten off the sides or knocked off and the animal is slowly introduced to people and usually becomes tame after a few days.

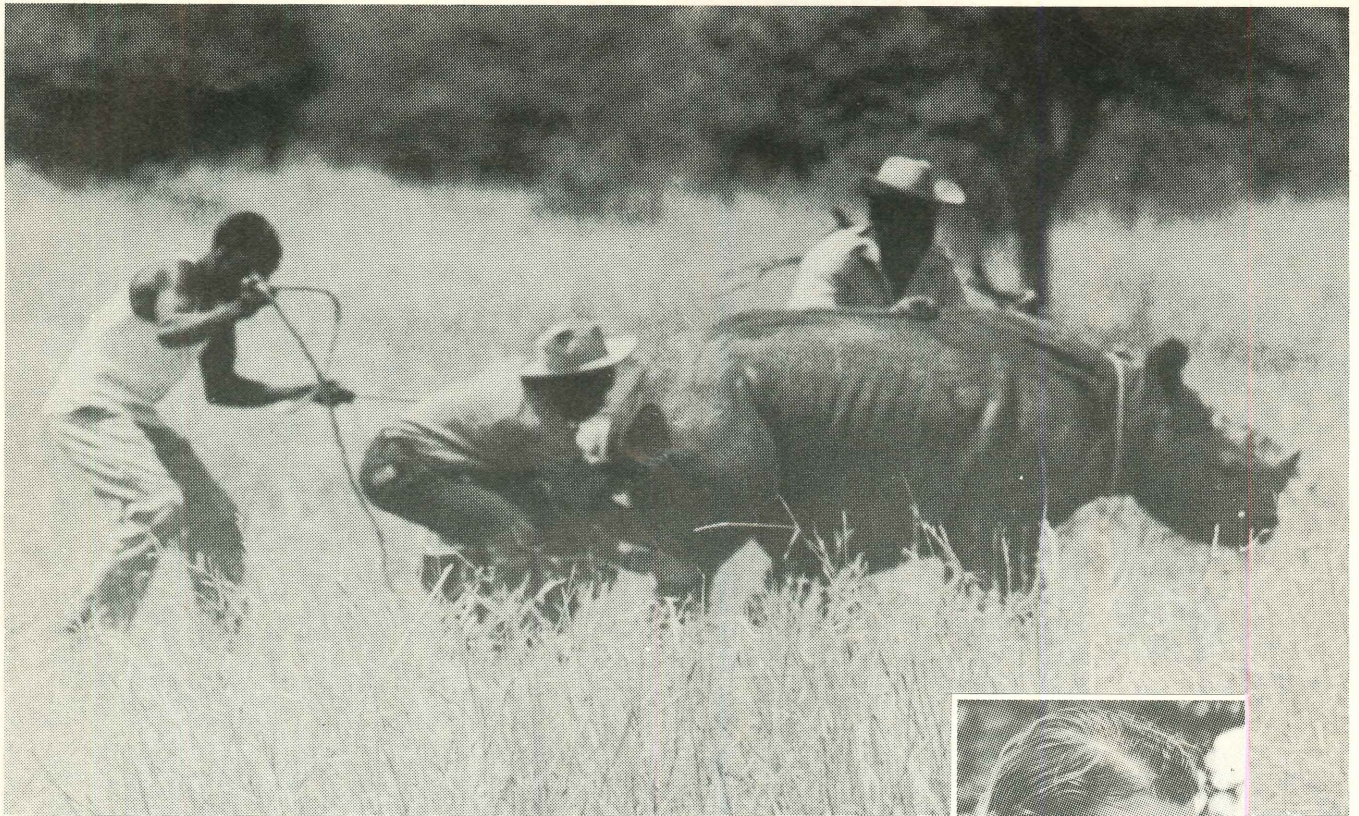
Quite often we mix in one or two tame animals which quickly teach the newcomers to eat and accept captivity.

The methods of capture vary. Giraffe, zebra, wildebeest and eland can be caught very easily with a specially adapted motor vehicle. If large quantities of animals are required, such as for translocation to National Parks, then it is possible to drive large herds into a specially built trap which has wings leading out from it and the driving is done with the use of a helicopter and horses.

Other methods are by the use of spotlights at night time, traps whereby the animal catches itself, and of course the use of drugs which immobilise the animal, though strangely this method is really only successful in my opinion on the larger animals such as rhino, elephant and maybe lion. But then lion will usually walk into a box trap in any event.

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The technique most used in our work is with the catching car. This only requires four or five people—the driver, two ropers whose job it is to put a noose over the animal's head, and two others who help collapse the animal on the ground once caught.

Having selected, for example, a herd of giraffe—by driving slowly we manoeuvre them on to a chosen piece of ground. During this time we will have noted the number of animals in the herd of the required size and sex.

We usually like to catch giraffe which are not more than 9½-10 feet tall since bigger animals are difficult to transport on the roads with so many low wires and power lines.

When the giraffe are in the right position the chase begins. We cut out the pre-selected animal and drive it at high speed away from the herd. We then allow it to make a turn back towards the herd at which time he will run in a straight line.

We now close in on him and the roper puts the noose over his head. The driver slowly brings the animal to a stop with gentle pressure on the brakes at which time the other members of the catching crew get off the truck and hold the rope which is then released from the catching car. The animal is quickly collapsed on the ground and a head cover is put over his eyes to cut out any unnecessary shock. The team now work quietly and secure his feet.

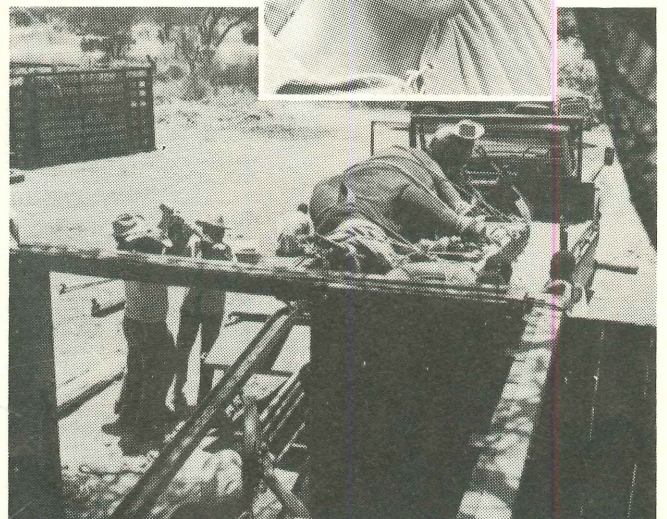
The total time from the start of the chase to the moment the animal is collapsed on the ground should never exceed three minutes. An average chase runs out at about two and a half minutes and if an animal is chased beyond this damage could result.

A special crate which has two compartments is then brought to the scene of capture. The animal is stood on his feet with the head cover still on and pushed into the crate. When the doors are shut and bolted and the animal cannot see out we take off the head cover. Usually the animal stands quietly.

Since giraffe are inquisitive animals the rest of the herd in most cases can be found watching this activity some few hundred yards away and it is quite a simple job to select another giraffe and catch him in the near vicinity of the first one.

When this is done the second animal is put into the crate alongside the first giraffe, separated by a partition and they have a calming effect upon each other. They are then loaded on to the lorry by the use of ramps and transported back to base and to the holding pens which are in normal circumstances less than one and a half hours drive away. It only takes three or four days before the animals are coming to the front of the cage to see people.

Too much emphasis has in the past been given to the actual capture of animals, probably because it makes for exciting reading and has a romantic touch to it. Many people seem to think the capture is the beginning and end of our work. This is, of course, quite wrong.



Top: making fast!

Inset: Tony Parkinson

Bottom: Preparations for transportation

Pictures by Liza Ruben

The late Dr. Mann who was Director of the National Zoo in Washington D.C. came to Africa on several collection trips and when he returned to the States was inevitably questioned by reporters: "Did you have any problems when catching the animals?" Dr. Mann replied: "If we didn't catch the animals we had no problems; if on the other hand we did manage to catch them then we had many problems".

This seems to be our own attitude to our work. Once animals are caught, then the problems begin: the quiet handling that is necessary, the gentling down period, the transfer period from natural foods to artificial ones, and so on.

ANOTHER CAPTURE ...THIS ONE FOR A 'FLYING ARK' PROJECT FOR NIGERIA



Young animals are given milk, and while the animals are settling down they are given access to a travelling crate to walk in and out of voluntarily so that when the time comes to lock them in for shipment or translocation they regard it as home.

Crating the animals is probably the most difficult and skilled job that has to be done before they can be sent off. Each crate has to be tailor-made for an animal and usually each species has a different type of crate.

For zebra it is necessary to design a crate that is long enough so the animal can move back and forth, high enough so his head does not touch the roof, and wide enough so he can lie down and get up with comfort, but not turn round. If the crate is only two inches wider than it should be, then the animal will manage to do this and injure himself in the process.

So, as you can see, it is most important the crates are made to the correct specifications for a particular animal. The crate must also have a sliding door each end, one for giving food and water and the other for cleaning. A small window is left in the crate at the front for the animal to put his head out and see what is going on and this also serves as an inspection area for us to keep a constant eye on his condition.

Giraffe are given entirely different types of crates—we allow them to have enough room to turn around, lie down and stand with ease. There is also an adjustable roof to protect him from the weather.

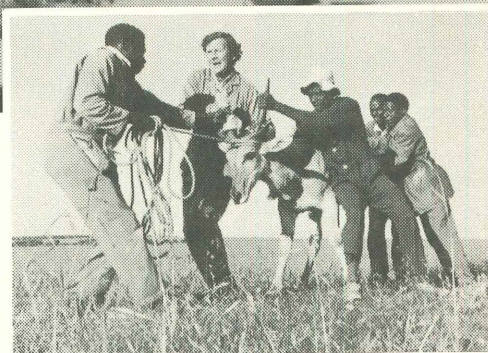
Rhinos have crates made with bars at the front so they can see out; this stops them suffering from claustrophobia and keeps them interested during the voyage.

Another job is to work out the exact amount of food that each animal will require during its journey and, usually, we allow about 25 per cent extra in case of delays at sea.

During shipment one of our own personnel usually accompanies the animals to their destination. This usually means very hard work, but it is also very rewarding in that the animals respond to the constant attention.

The business of capturing and translocating animals, if conducted by the right people who have been trained thoroughly, need not entail high losses—there should never be more than five to eight per cent loss from capture to delivery into a zoo.

However, as I have said, the business is so often abused by a few people out to make quick money that we feel the time has come for the capture and transport of wild animals to be under the supervision of some international body, such as I.U.C.N., whose job it would be to co-ordinate between the various game departments, zoos and parks of the world. ●



A special animal capture exercise was undertaken in Kenya recently by the Mount Kenya Game Ranch, specifically Don Hunt and his team, pictured above collecting immature antelope. Don was helping to fulfil President Kenyatta's promise to Major General Gowon to provide nucleus breeding species for hopeful re-generation of game animals in Nigeria. The exercise took more than six months in the bleak Leroghi Plateau, near Maralal, and almost 100 animals and birds were captured by the Game Ranch team with the assistance of Senior Game Department Officials, Michael Macharia and Henry Mulandi. The animals were dispatched to a zoological breeding station at Kano, Nigeria, in a special "Flying Ark" air charter operation at the end of May.