"What Joy Adamson was to lions, Dian Fossey was to gorillas, and Jane Goodall is to chimpanzees, Anna Merz is to rhinos . . . I can promise you that, after finishing this book, you will never see rhinos in quite the same light again."

DESMOND MORRIS

ISBN 0-00-219920-3

RHINO

ANNA MERZ

EX AFRICA

ANNA MERZ

RHINO

AT THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION

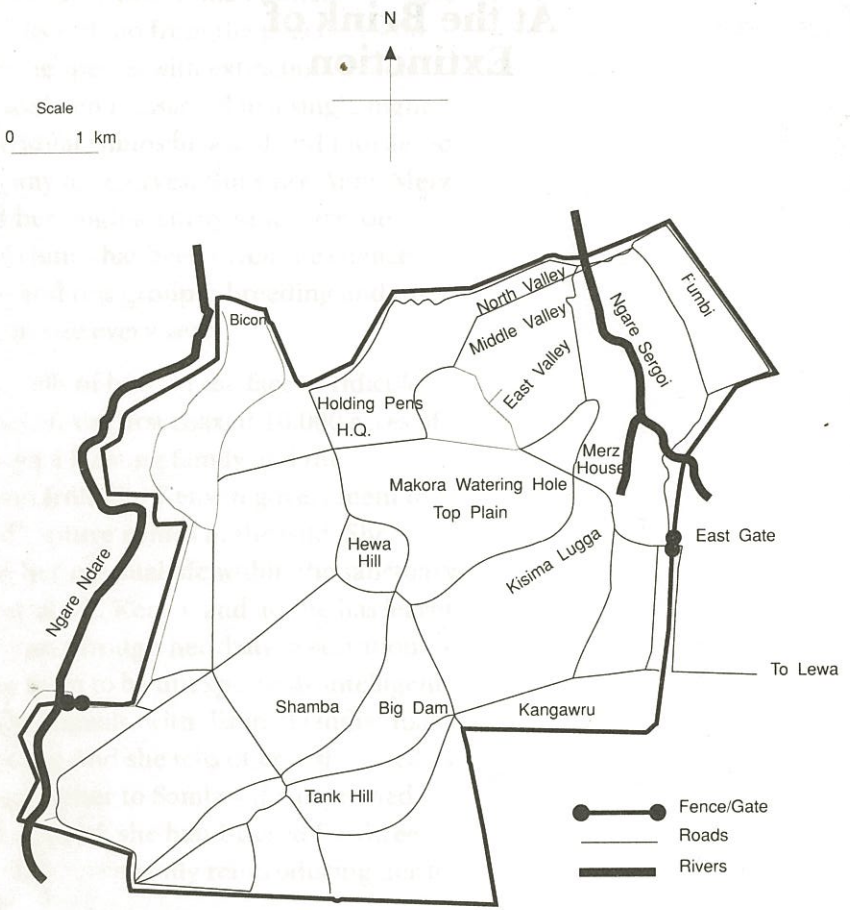
FOREWORD BY DESMOND MORRIS

Rhino is the story of a woman's attempt to save Kenya's black rhino from the poachers who threaten the species with extinction. Whole herds have been massacred in a single night and individual rhinos hijacked and murdered on their way to reserves. But since Anna Merz founded her high-security sanctuary, one group of rhinos has been given the chance to survive – and this group is breeding and increasing in size every year.

Here she tells of how, in the face of ridicule and disbelief, she first coaxed 10,000 acres of Africa from a farming family and then permission from the Kenyan government to hunt and capture rhinos in the wild. She describes her unusual life within the sanctuary at the foot of Mt. Kenya, and all she has learnt about rhinos through her daily observations – revealing them to be unexpectedly intelligent and gentle animals, with distinctly individual personalities. And she tells of how she acted as substitute mother to Samia – the orphaned baby rhino which she hand-raised for three years, before successfully reintroducing her to the wild.

All royalties from this book go to the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary

RHINO
At the Brink of Extinction



Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary

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RHINO
At the Brink of Extinction

by
ANNA MERZ

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To darling Ricky
and in memory of my parents
Leonard and Noel Fawell

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Contents

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1

The Idea

It would be just, most anything just, to man who speaks of vermin and destroys as never botfly nor bubonic plague.

Loren Eisley

How did I ever come to get involved with rhinos? I think my concern with vanishing species goes back many years. One of my earliest memories is of being taken by my father to the Natural History Museum to see a dodo, that strange and wondrous fowl, and of my father telling me that never, wherever I might go, could I ever see a real living dodo because they were all dead. Man had killed them all. This episode had a lasting impact on me.

Years later I married and went to live in Ghana. There, in front of my own eyes, I saw animal and plant species becoming extinct, and I began to realise how terribly quickly this could happen. Down came the forests. Torrential rains removed the soil. Rivers, which once ran with clear water through the forests all year, became seasonal. In the dry season they dried up and during the rainy season they became mud-filled torrents which carried the precious soil out to sea. With the forests went the creatures that lived in them. As the human population increased, so did large scale commercial hunting for food and the animals began to disappear from the savannah as well as the forest, and to reappear in the markets as 'bush meat'.

In 1958 we were living in a flat near the central Kumasi lorry park at which lorry loads of antelope arrived every morning. Many were carried alive with their legs broken, others arrived already smoked and salted. Meanwhile in the market leopard skins were stacked high, either for sale to the local chiefs or for export along with the country's two main products timber and cocoa. I was shocked but what could I, an ignorant stranger, do?

As the years passed the supply of bush meat in the market

dwindled. When we travelled up north we saw no more animals, not even footprints. The land which had once carried large herds of kob, roan antelope and hartebeest was empty. The wild animals had not even been replaced by domestic stock, for the tsetse flies, the scarcity of water and the coarse elephant grass made the area unsuitable for cattle. Greed and a total lack of forethought had killed the herds that, if properly managed, could have been of lasting value to the people both as a sustainable source of 'bush meat' and as a tourist attraction.

Later, when I was working as an Honorary Warden for the Game Department, one of the things I was asked to do was to travel around the country finding areas where wild animals still existed and where it might be possible to protect them. But when I spoke to the village chiefs I always heard the same story: ten or twelve years earlier there had been many animals and plenty of bush meat, but now the animals had 'travelled'. "Where?" I used to ask. The answers varied: across the Volta River, across those hills, into Togo, into Upper Volta. Anywhere but here. However, the true answer was that the wild animals had all been trapped, snared or shot and their 'travels' had been in lorries to the nearest big market towns.

In 1976 my husband and I came to Kenya to retire. At first I was overwhelmed with the amount of 'game' everywhere. We visited the parks and reserves and saw animals in abundance. There were wild animals outside the parks too, even near Nairobi – we ourselves met a rhino on one of our earliest walks on the Ngong Hills 6km from our house in the Nairobi suburb, Karen. However, it was not long before I realised that all was not well, for I began to recognise signs similar to those I had seen in Ghana. Shops in Nairobi were full of trinkets made from skins, dikdik horns, elephant tusks and lions' teeth; and I visited warehouses stacked with huge piles of zebra and colobus monkey skins. The trade in wildlife products was obviously out of control and this I had seen before.

It was then that I became particularly aware of what was happening to the black rhino. These great beasts were going and going fast. Unlike in West Africa, the animals were not being killed in order to feed an exploding human population. Their huge, pathetic corpses were being left to rot and be eaten by vultures. The rhinos were not dying for lack of habitat, for huge

areas of East Africa are arid, covered with dry thorn scrub and of little use to people, but provide all a rhino needs to live and reproduce happily. They were being killed for the most ridiculous reason imaginable – for the two horns the unfortunate beasts carry on their noses.

These horns are the rhinos' undoing, for they were and still are being massacred for them. In the last century there were hundreds of thousands of black rhinos in Africa, south of the Sahara. In Kenya alone there were tens of thousands. Between 1944 and 1946 a man called Hunter was employed by the colonial Game Department to clear the rhinos from 50,000 acres of Kamba tribal country. He killed nearly a thousand of the poor creatures. Despite such slaughter, by the end of the 1960s there were still possibly 20,000 black rhinos left in Kenya, but during the next decade 90% of these animals were killed.

When we came to Kenya in 1976 I knew nothing about rhinos, but I had fought a losing battle against similar destruction in Ghana for twenty years and felt strongly on the subject. An animal that has survived the vicissitudes of forty million years of evolution should surely not be dispatched by *Homo (not so) sapiens* in half a century. I attended a lecture given by Dr Esmond Bradley Martin, the world authority on the trade in rhino horn, who has perhaps done more to try and save the world's rhinos than anyone else. From Dr Martin I learned that most of Kenya's rhino horn was going to North Yemen; that the price was sky-high and rising; and that rhino horn was at least four times more valuable than ivory and, weight for weight, one of the most valuable commodities in the world. Kenya's remaining rhinos were all too obviously very, very endangered.

There are stringent laws against hunting in Kenya, but they are hard to enforce, especially when it comes to animals as valuable as rhinos. There is virtually no security, even in the government parks and reserves poaching is rife. In the northern and eastern parts of Kenya in particular, this poaching is mainly carried out by bandits known by the Somali word 'shifta'. Large bands of shifta from Somalia, armed with submachine guns, join up with the local Kenyan Somalis to poach on an unprecedented scale. The name 'Somali' has two different connotations, one national and the other ethnic. Unfortunately for the peace of the Horn of Africa, the two do not coincide. A 'Somali' can refer either to an in-

habitant of the modern nation of Somalia, whose citizens include a minority of Bantu speaking tribes; or it can refer to an 'ethnic' Somali, a member of any of the closely related Somali speaking tribes whom colonial boundaries divided between Somalia, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and northeast Kenya. Poaching by Somalis has political overtones. Rhino horn and elephant ivory are their main objectives.

In the Middle East, and in North Yemen in particular, rhino horns are used as status symbol dagger handles – nearly all are made in Sana (North Yemen). In the Yemen ownership of such a dagger is equivalent to that of a black Mercedes car in Ghana. Meanwhile, in the Far East there is a traditional belief that rhino horn can cure a very wide range of diseases and disabilities; and in a few places in India it is used as an aphrodisiac – although in South East Asia, contrary to European popular belief, this is just about the only thing it is not used for. In China beautiful cups and bowls were carved out of rhino horn as it was believed they were effective against poison. These incredibly lovely and antique works of art – some of them dating from the Ming dynasty and made before 1644 – are now being ground up to provide powder for a medicine which, if it works at all, can only be by an act of faith. The highest price of all for rhino horn is in Taiwan where it is used as bullion to back the currency. All research on the uses of rhino horn has been conducted by Dr Esmond Bradley Martin on behalf of the W.W.F. and appears in his book "Run Rhino Run" and in numerous articles.

Everyone I spoke to in those early years described rhinos not only as short-sighted but also as bad-tempered, stupid and solitary. I began to be brain-washed on the subject. Surely all those who lived in the land of rhinos must know what they were talking about. However, I still had the conviction that even stupid, bad-tempered, solitary animals should not be driven over the brink of extinction, especially by something as idiotic as a lust for carved horn dagger handles and medicine of dubious efficacy. I have no children, but if I had I would not wish them to grow up in a world where my generation had been responsible for the extinction of so strange and wonderful an animal. Surely somehow, somewhere I could do something to help the black rhinos of Kenya.

Now, several years later, I know a little more about rhinos, enough to view them as fascinating and to see them as beautiful.

There is still much to learn, but I hope I know enough to write this book. I hope too that by telling of my personal experiences, I can make a few more people care sufficiently to arouse public opinion and put pressure on their governments to act on the rhinos' behalf. Even at this late hour, when their populations are a tiny remnant of what they were in the early years of the century, their race towards the final precipice of extinction can be halted if only enough people care.