

Animals

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Darting Rhinos (see page 214)

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cover picture

The harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*), which lives in cornfields, pastures, and hedgerows, feeds on seeds and fruits as well as the grain it is nibbling here. It has a prehensile tail as long as its body, that helps it climb among the vegetation. Weighing about half an ounce, the harvest mouse is the smallest British rodent



Photograph: Jane Burton

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RHINOCEROS HORN fetches a high price in the Far East where it is believed to be medicinally effective as a 'love-potion' when powdered. As a result rhinoceroses are hunted to such an extent that the five species in the world are threatened with complete extermination, although the horn has no real medicinal value. In Africa there are two species: black rhinos and white rhinos. The black rhinoceros is the most common and is found southwards from Lake Chad and the West of the Nile, but even its numbers are being considerably reduced both by the native poachers who kill it for its horn, and by the increase of human population and agricultural activities. In Kenya the black rhino is being protected by transferring it to special Game Parks.

One place where this valuable and exciting task is being carried out is a small game camp in Kenya called Kiboko. This is about 100 miles east of Nairobi in the centre of the Tsavo area which was once notorious for its man-eating lions. The camp is surrounded by rhinoceros country: dry bush with numerous lava flows and volcanic hills.

There used to be so many rhino in this area that over 1000 had to be shot so that the land could be developed by the local tribe, the Wakamba. Today the population of rhinos is estimated at 50 and this number is being rapidly reduced by poaching for the illicit traffic in horns.

In charge of these operations is Game Warden Nick Carter, a tall, powerfully built, ex-military man who is approaching middle-age. He has a high regard for every kind of animal life and demonstrated his great patience with animals by successfully rearing a three months old rhino; a difficult and tedious job.

Obviously there are many difficulties involved in catching a one-and-a-half ton rhinoceros. The animal has to be found, anaesthetised, loaded on to a lorry, taken to the camp where it is temporarily settled into a sturdy stockade, and then, after observation, transported to the chosen game park.

Rhino may be hunted in two different ways: by Land Rover and by helicopter. It is far more efficient to use a helicopter, but this is only possible on rare occasions as one has to be borrowed from the 8th Reconnaissance Squadron of the Army

Air Wing and can only be used when the voluntary services of the crews are available as well. However, hunting by helicopter is comparatively easy and much less exciting than by Land Rover.

The standard method of hunting is to patrol a chosen section of the district called 'Pincushion Country' by the team. This is an affectionate term derived from Nick Carter's occupation of darting the rhino which are known as 'pincushions' as a result.

The rhino are shot with an anaesthetic dart fired from a crossbow which was developed locally. This method has been very successful and, in the hands of experts such as Nick Carter, the cross-bow is accurate at up to 80 yards, which is remarkable considering the conditions under which it is fired: from a Land Rover bounding over rough ground at 30 mph, or a helicopter swaying from side to side along river beds or between trees. The dart is made of a metal hypodermic syringe with a gas-driven plunger.

With Nick Carter standing on the passenger seat, his head and the cross-bow out of the porthole in the roof, and the driver held firmly in his seat by a safety belt, the Land Rover is ready for action. Both of them wear protective helmets in case of accident, but fortunately these are remarkably rare.

The team then sets off on their wild chase. Throwing caution to the winds they race across valleys, lava flows and bush covered plains, relying on sheer speed to draw up on the rhino which heads off as soon as it senses danger. The Land Rover speeds recklessly on, dodging trees, rocks, and holes until it is travelling abreast of the rhino, when Nick Carter chooses his moment between bumps and jerks and shoots a dart into the rhino's rump. Even then it is easy to lose the rhino in the bush and the chase must be kept up until it eventually drops perhaps eight or ten minutes later.

The transport lorry is called up over the long wave radio and the rhino is loaded on to it. This involves problems that have been admirably overcome by using a tray on to which the rhino is rolled. The tray is then winched up on rollers which are arranged like the rungs of a ladder.

On arrival at the camp, perhaps some 20 miles away, the unconscious rhino is

How Kenya Saves Its Rhinos

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



1



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1 A rhino in the compound at the game camp gets accustomed to a crate at the entrance

2 The cross-bow mounted with anaesthetic dart ready for firing

3 A Land Rover damaged by a charging rhino

4 Loading the crated rhino on to the lorry

Wherever rhinoceroses live they are faced with complete extermination unless constantly protected. R. W. SUTHERST describes how Kenya deals with the problem by transferring black rhinos to game parks



4



Black rhino in the safe surroundings of the Amboseli Game Reserve

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put into the stockade, which is referred to by Nick Carter as the 'Members' Enclosure'. The rhino is given a tranquillizer while it is still unconscious to reduce the shock and help the animal to become gradually accustomed to its new surroundings.

Rhinoceroses are notoriously unpredictable animals and their reaction to captivity is a good example of this character. Most of them settle down remarkably quickly, taking only a few days to do so, while others go nearly wild trying to batter their way to free-

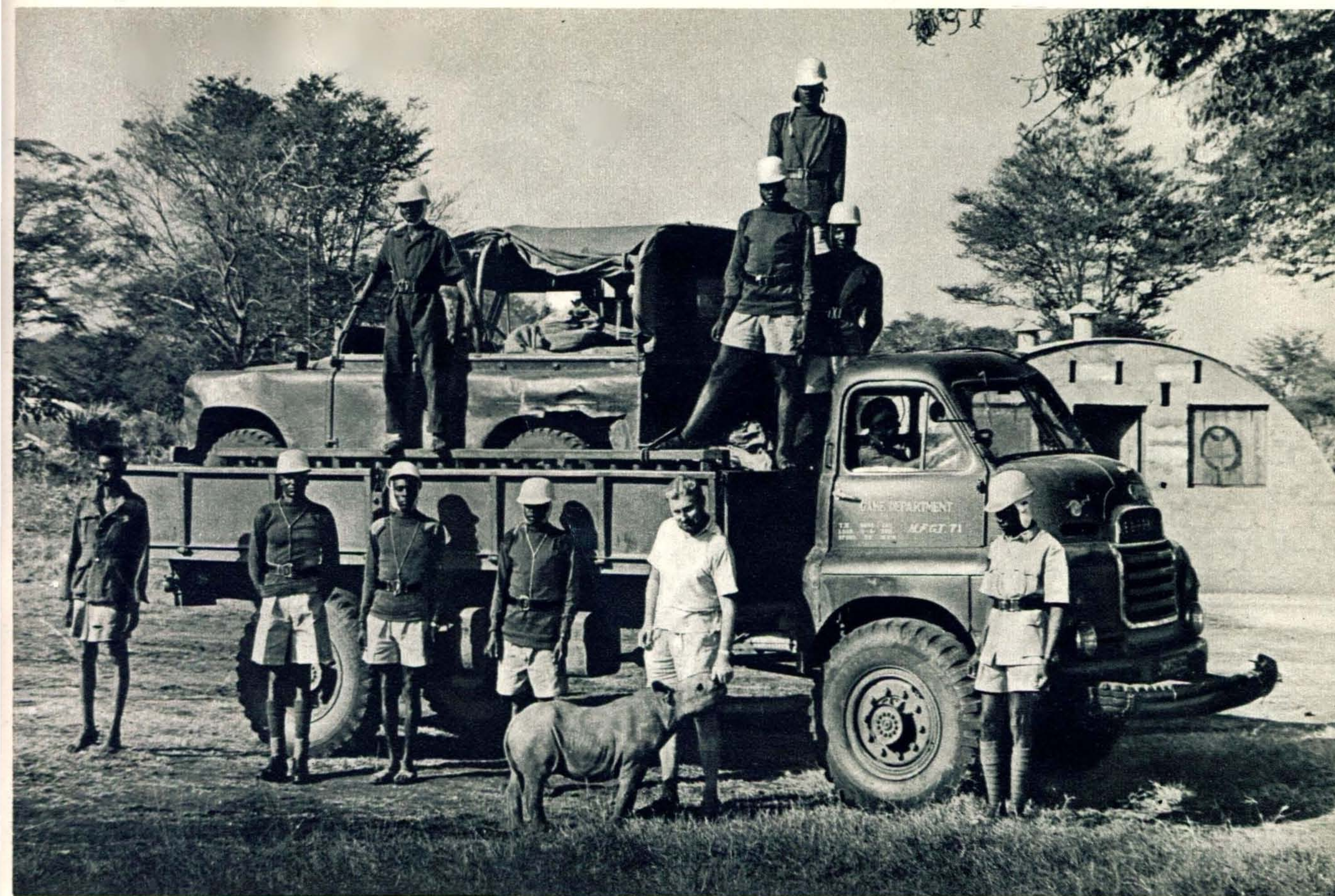
dom. However, the latter behaviour is rare and the animal is released immediately if it is in any danger of injuring itself. They eat branches of euphorbia, and thorn bush and rapidly develop a taste for lucerne.

The enormous difficulties involved in the project have only been solved by hard experience. The first was to find a suitable drug to use as an anaesthetic: the dose calculated from weight ratios with domestic animals was found to be lethal and seven rhinos died before the correct drug in the right dose was

eventually developed. Since then only two out of fifty animals have been lost, both from disease.

When a helicopter is used the ground is quartered from a height of 300 to 500 feet until a suitable quarry is found. The helicopter is then used to drive the animal, before it is darted, into an area which can be reached easily by the lorry. This is one of the great advantages of a helicopter.

Then the helicopter descends to tree-top height and hovers like some enormous insect, hopping over the



Crew with lorry and Land Rover ready to set out on a rhino hunt. The baby rhino nuzzling Nick Carter's hand is being cared for at the base camp

larger trees if it cannot pass between them. Again Nick Carter chooses his moment and shoots a dart into the comparatively soft rhino rump. After the rhino has been darted, it is kept within the chosen area by continuous circling with the helicopter. This is another advantage of the helicopter: the animal cannot be lost and cannot leave the convenient area that has been chosen. Nevertheless, the helicopter has one big disadvantage for the casual spectator: it makes the hunt much too tame and easy.

After a few weeks observation and 'convalescence' in the 'Members' Enclosure' the rhino is taken to its new home. This observation period is essential to ensure that the animal is in good health and shows no after-effects of the anaesthetic. On the day when the rhino is to be released it is enticed into the crate at the end of its enclosure with euphorbia stems and the crate is then loaded on to the lorry and taken to the game park 100 or more miles away.

The lorry is met by the Warden on arrival at the park and immediately proceeds to the release area, where the rhino is then let out of the crate very cautiously.

A rhino's reaction to its sudden freedom is often dramatic and always quite unpredictable. Usually it goes wild at first and charges the nearest object in sight, whether it is the lorry, a Land Rover or just a fallen log. On the other hand, some have been known to wander casually over to a nearby thorn bush and browse peacefully.

Before the rhino is released its second horn is painted bright red to warn visitors to the park that the animal is unsettled and potentially dangerous. This precaution was taken after the Warden of the Amboseli Masai Game Park had received several complaints from visitors about bent mudguards, damaged radiators and shattered nerves.

The most spectacular release took place on July 5th, 1963 when a young male was set free in Amboseli, in the

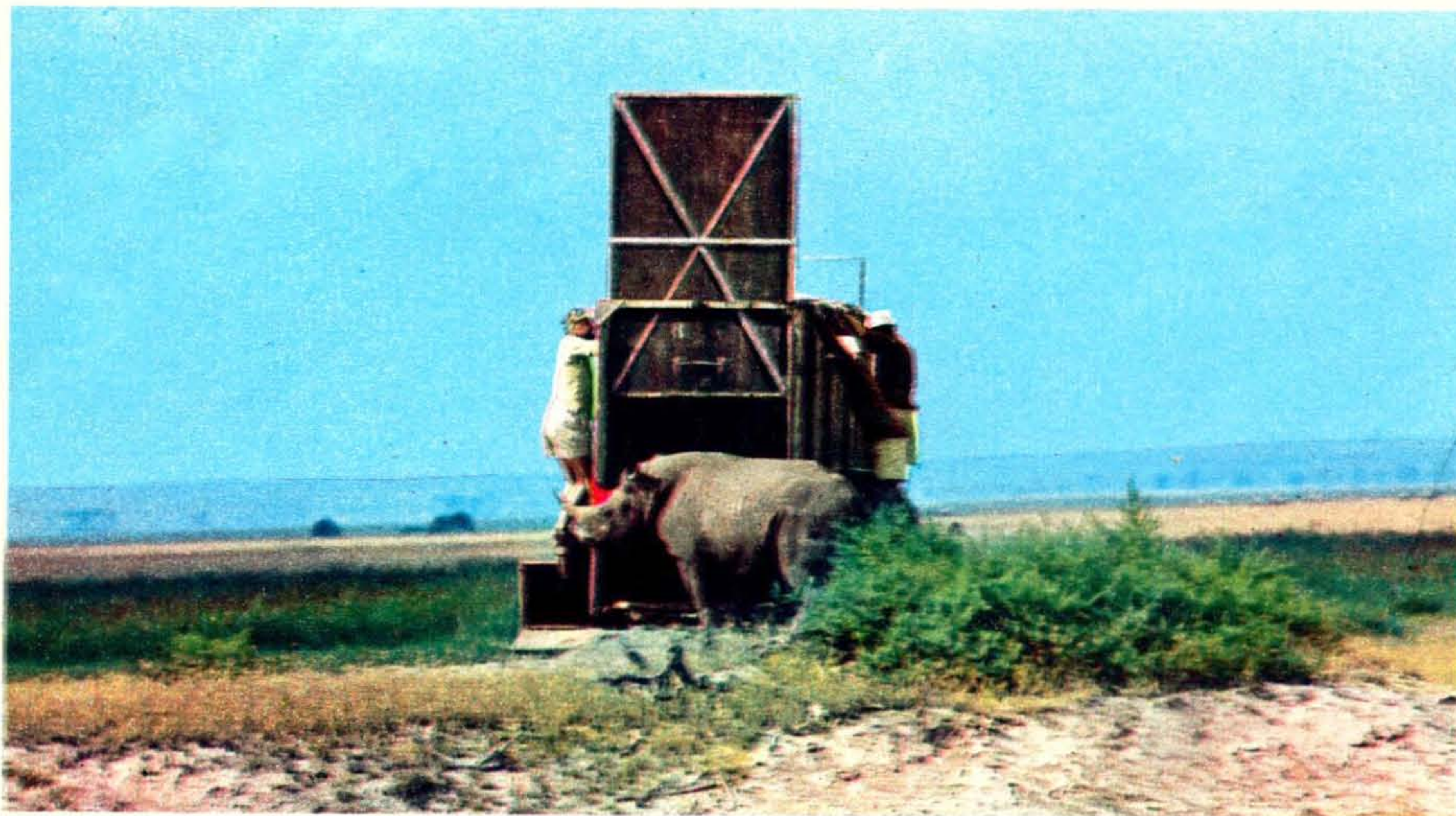
foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro. A visiting United Nations team was there to see the release. When the rhino, nicknamed Dennis, emerged from his crate, snorting and blowing violently, he paused for a moment as if to choose his victim and set off at full speed for Nick Carter's Land Rover, which was one of fourteen present. Three United Nations officials and a Game Warden's wife were sitting inside. Dennis set his sights on the radiator and after one head-on collision, proceeded to take a couple of short hooks at the offending vehicle with his horn. He was last seen giving chase to an unwary visitor a mile away.

Usually the release is more orderly and the rhino is drawn away in the desired direction by tempting it to chase a Land Rover which keeps a safe distance ahead.

The results of this work have been remarkably successful, but the team is hampered by a shortage of funds and the activities of native poachers.

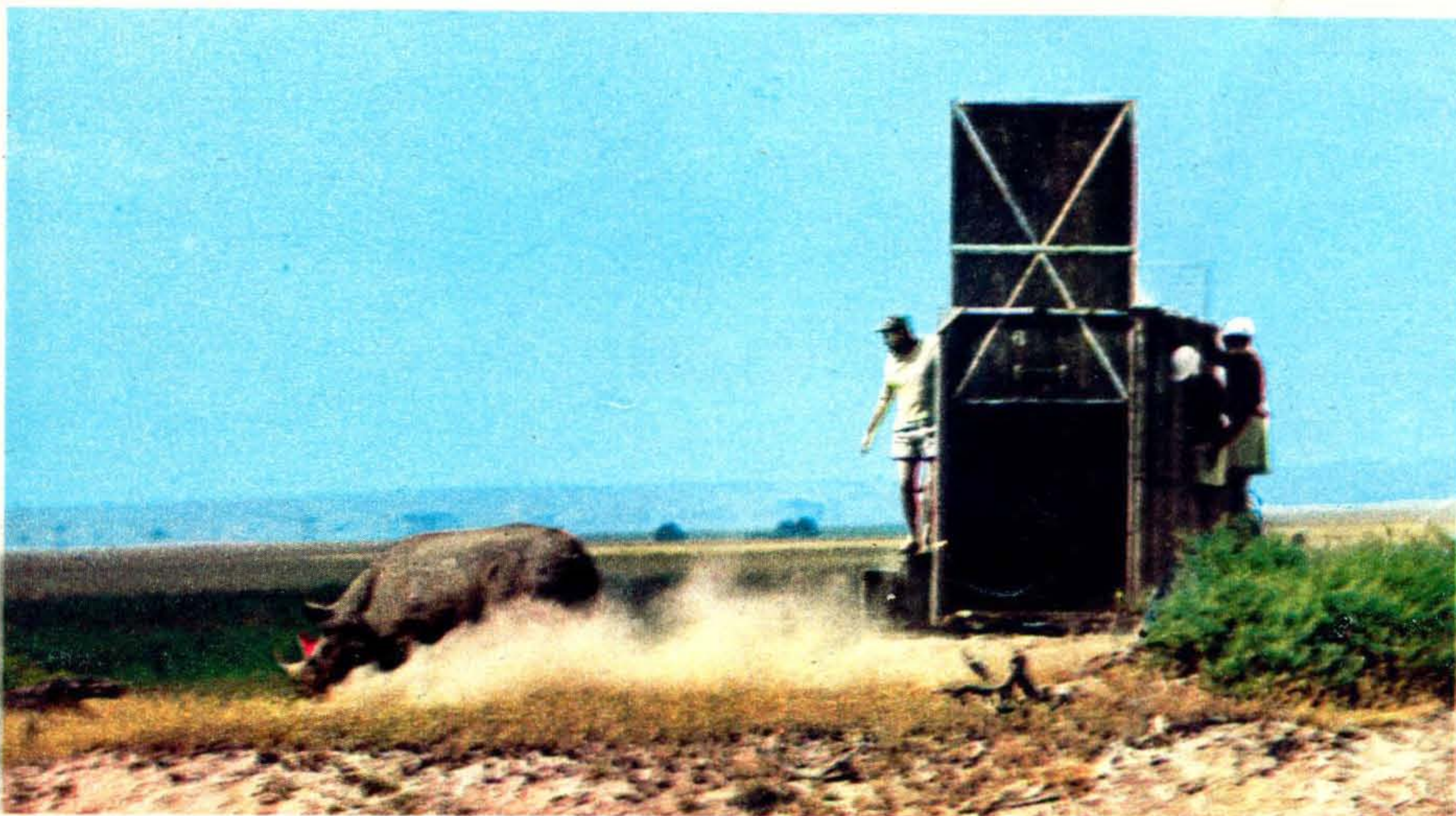
How Kenya Saves Its Rhinos

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A rhino's reaction to sudden freedom is unpredictable. Some go to a bush and browse, but usually they charge the first object in sight—in this case an unprepared Land Rover

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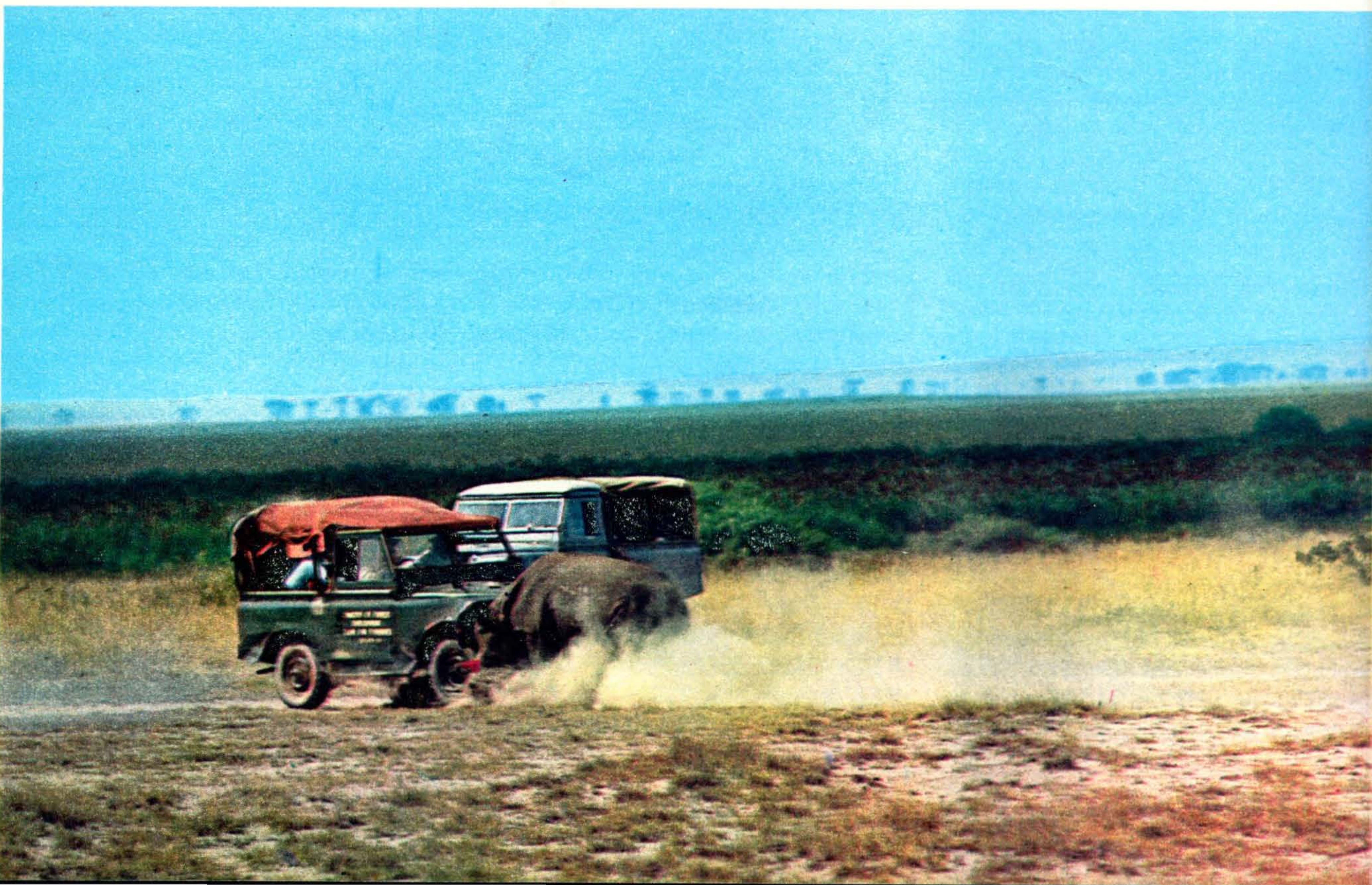


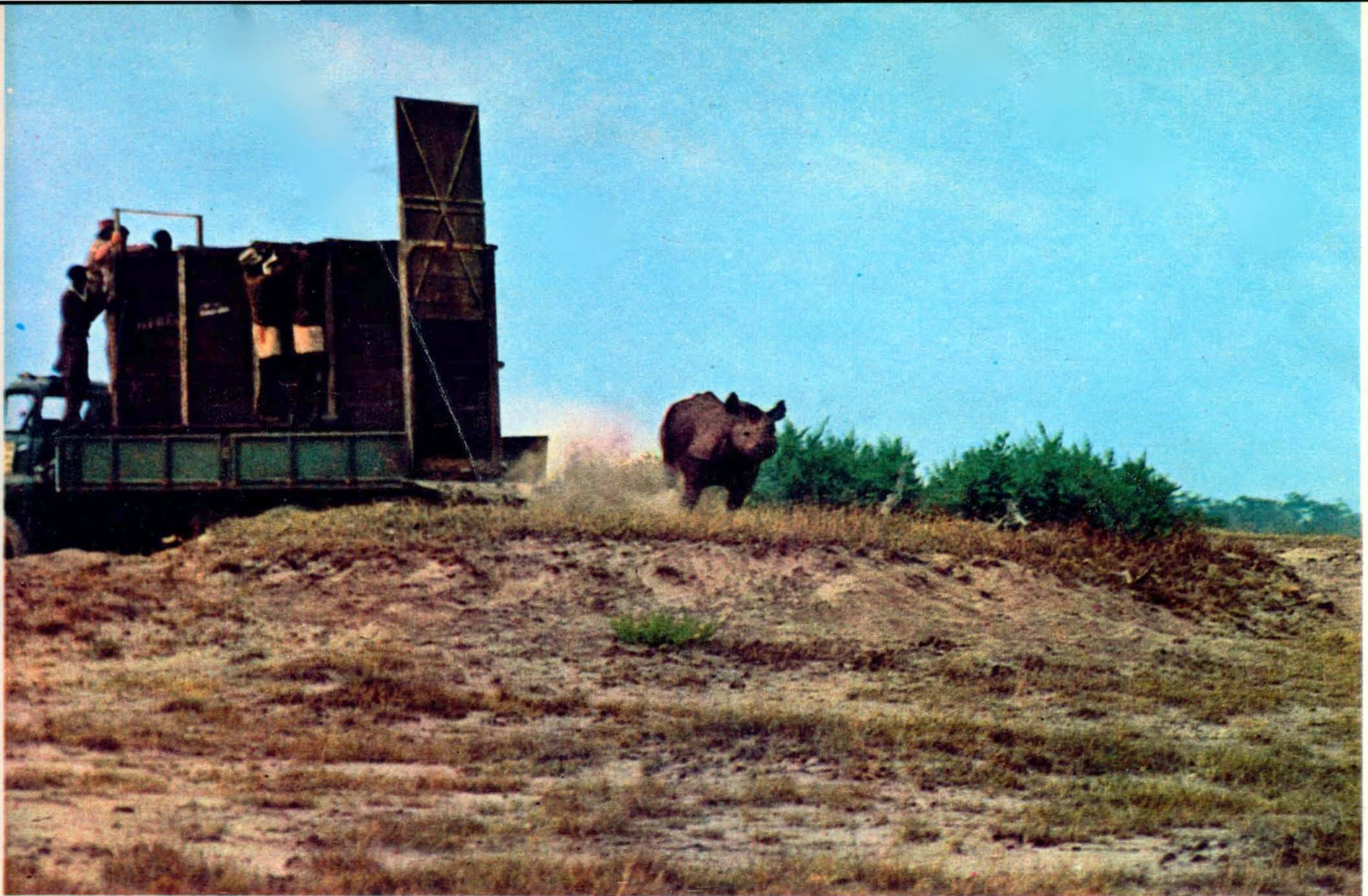
1 The animal is released. It backs out, as the crate is too small to turn round in. The horn is painted red to warn visitors that it is unsettled and potentially dangerous

2 It starts to charge

3 Head-on collision with nearby Land Rover

3





1

In a more satisfactory release the rhino follows a Land Rover that has been waiting with the engine revving ready to draw the animal away from the scene of release

1 The animal is released

2 Choosing its victim

3 In pursuit of the Land Rover



2



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