

*An Appreciation of*

# AFRICAN RHINOCEROSES

By C. A. W. GUGGISBERG

*Nairobi*

**P**ROBABLY NO ANIMAL, with the possible exception of the giraffe, has caused such wonder in the civilized world as the rhinoceros. The Romans may have been acquainted with the African rhinoceros, but 16th century Europeans only knew the one-horned, "armour-plated" Indian species. When travelers brought back accounts of two-horned African rhinoceroses, the artists illustrating their accounts obligingly drew animals with two horns on the nose, but with the "armour-plating" of the Indian Rhino. In 1653, Jan van Riebeck, the founder of the Dutch settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, noted rhinos as being common on the Cape Flats and the slopes of Table Mountain. James Bruce, the 18th century explorer of Abys-



sinia, saw the Black Rhino in the Sudan and gave a long account of its habits. At that time this species could be found over practically all the open plains, savannahs and bushlands from the Cape to the southern fringes of the Sahara, its area of distribution extending as far westwards as Lake Chad, northern Cameroon and northern Nigeria. It never occurred in the vast rain forests of West Africa and the Congo Basin, even though it is a common inhabitant of East African mountain forests.

At about the time that Bruce studied the Black Rhino in the Sudan, the existence of a second African species was vaguely hinted at by several South African travelers, but the White or Square-lipped Rhinoceros became definitely known only in 1817, through the efforts of William Burchell, the famous naturalist. He got his first specimen near Kuruman in 1812, and he described it in a scientific periodical after his return to Europe, naming it *Rhinoceros simus*, the blunt-nosed rhino, "from the flattened form of its nose and mouth." For a time the White Rhino was considered as sufficiently different from its black cousin—which had meanwhile had its name changed from *Rhinoceros bicornis* to *Diceros bicornis*—to merit inclusion in a separate genus, *Ceratotherium*. At present there is a tendency to consider *Ceratotherium* as a sub-genus only and to call the Square-lipped Rhino *Diceros simus*.

The White Rhino, being an exceptionally harmless and docile animal, simply lent itself to mass slaughter, and by the end of the 19th century it had become practically extinct in all Africa south of the Zambesi. Just as the species was being written off by most authors, a hitherto unknown area of distribution was discovered in western Uganda, the northern Congo and the southern Sudan. Shortly after the turn of the century a few specimens of the southern form were found to have survived in the Umfolozi area of Zululand. They were given complete protection and made a splendid recovery. There are now over 500 White Rhinos in the Umfolozi and Hluhluwe Reserves.

**An alert Black Rhinoceros in the Serengeti National Park, investigating some suspicious circumstance. Its sight is poor, but the head is held high, ears are turned forward, nostrils sniff the tainted air.**

*All photos by the author.*

Of the two African rhinos, the black one is the smaller, a large bull standing about 5 ft., 6 in. at the shoulder, as compared to a very big White Rhino's 6 ft., 6 in. The latter species may therefore be considered as the bulkiest land animal next to the elephant. Its color can be described as somewhat lighter than that of the Black Rhino, but it is by no means "white." The Square-lipped Rhino is a grazer and tends to carry its head very low. While the animal is slowly advancing, the broad mouth works like a lawn mower, literally cutting a lane through the grass. The Black Rhino usually carries its head high or only slightly inclined and feeds on branches, twigs, young leaves, roots, weeds and succulents, grasping the food with its pointed, prehensile upper lip. The branches, through which its teeth cut like garden shears, are often studded with thorns several inches long and so hard that they will serve as "ersatz" gramophone needles, but this does not affect the rhino in the least. It chews a mouthful of the most vicious thorns as if they were the tenderest of shoots.

Walking on an elephant track in the forest of Mount Meru in northern Tanganyika, the sound of a rhino chewing branches saved me from blundering right up against the animal, which was standing well hidden behind a thicket. The ominous sound sent me scrambling up a steep slope just before the rhino came round the bush. The ground being very wet, it slipped and completely overturned, thus giving me a very good start. I should like to mention that this particular rhino was fully justified in taking a dim view of human intruders, some natives having wounded it with a spear a few months previously.

While the White Rhino fell a victim to its inoffensive ways, the black species often came to grief because of its unpredictable temper. The animal's sight is very bad, but it hears well and has an acute sense of smell. A strange sound or a suspicious whiff make it rush forward in a ponderous effort to investigate. A man armed with a rifle usually considers such an advance as a charge, which means the death of one more rhino. If he has the nerve to hold his fire, the forward rush more often than not comes to a sudden halt. The rhino stands with its head high and swaying from side to side, ears forward, the nostrils sniffing the tainted air. Suddenly,



it turns around and lumbers off in the direction it came from, its little tail curled up like that of a pig. Having gone 30 or 40 yards, it runs in a half circle to the left or right and faces back toward the intruder for another sniff or two. After a few moments it completes the circle and continues its retreat. This manoeuvre may be repeated several times before the rhino is finally swallowed up by the bush.

Most encounters with Faru — as the rhino is called by the natives of East Africa — will terminate in this way. But occasionally an animal does charge, especially when the smell of a human being dimly reminds it of some painful and highly unpleasant experience. In 1685 Simon van der Stel, one of the Dutch governors at the Cape, had his traveling coach upset by a charging rhino, and since then the big, blundering pachyderm has acquired quite a reputation for running down people and scattering spans of trek oxen, for charging right through porter caravans and, more recently, for attacking railway engines and motor cars. Black Rhinos came to be known as "dangerous" animals and were shot at whenever there was an opportunity, a practice which,

***White Rhinoceroses in the Umfo-  
lozi and Hluhluwe Reserves have  
recovered under protection; now  
there are more than 500 of them.***

***A Black Rhinoceros and her calf  
in Ngorongoro Crater. Typically  
the calf runs beside its mother  
and keeps a little to her rear.***

of course, made them even more dangerous. It was only with the establishment of national parks and game reserves that man finally had a chance to get properly acquainted with Faru and to discover that it really is a very pathetic prehistoric creature, quite unable to adapt itself to modern times, and by no means the vicious brute it has been made out to be.

Unfortunately a new menace now arose to threaten the existence of the Black Rhino, still common in many parts of East and Central Africa. For centuries the Chinese and other oriental peoples have believed in the aphrodisiac properties of rhino horn. This ridiculous superstition is quite unfounded but it has already



brought the Asiatic rhinos to the verge of extinction. When Asiatic horns became increasingly rare, merchants switched their attention to Africa. Gangs of poachers were promised high rewards and an unprecedented slaughter of Black Rhino began. This is unfortunately still going on, for buyers are ready to pay fantastic sums for a few ounces of rhino horn. With Hongkong quotations at 80 shillings (1958) and 85 shillings (1959) per pound, poaching and smuggling have become a most lucrative business. Black Rhinos have almost gone from Cameroon and Nigeria, from the Chad and Ubangi areas, as well as from Uganda. They are disappearing from vast areas of Kenya and Tanganyika, the poachers even operating within game reserves and national parks. When elephants are shot at, they immediately leave the danger area, not to return for a long time. But rhinos are stubbornly sedentary, have very set habits and are thus extremely easy to find and to kill. Their protection must be awarded top priority among the many problems facing wild life conservationists in present day Africa.

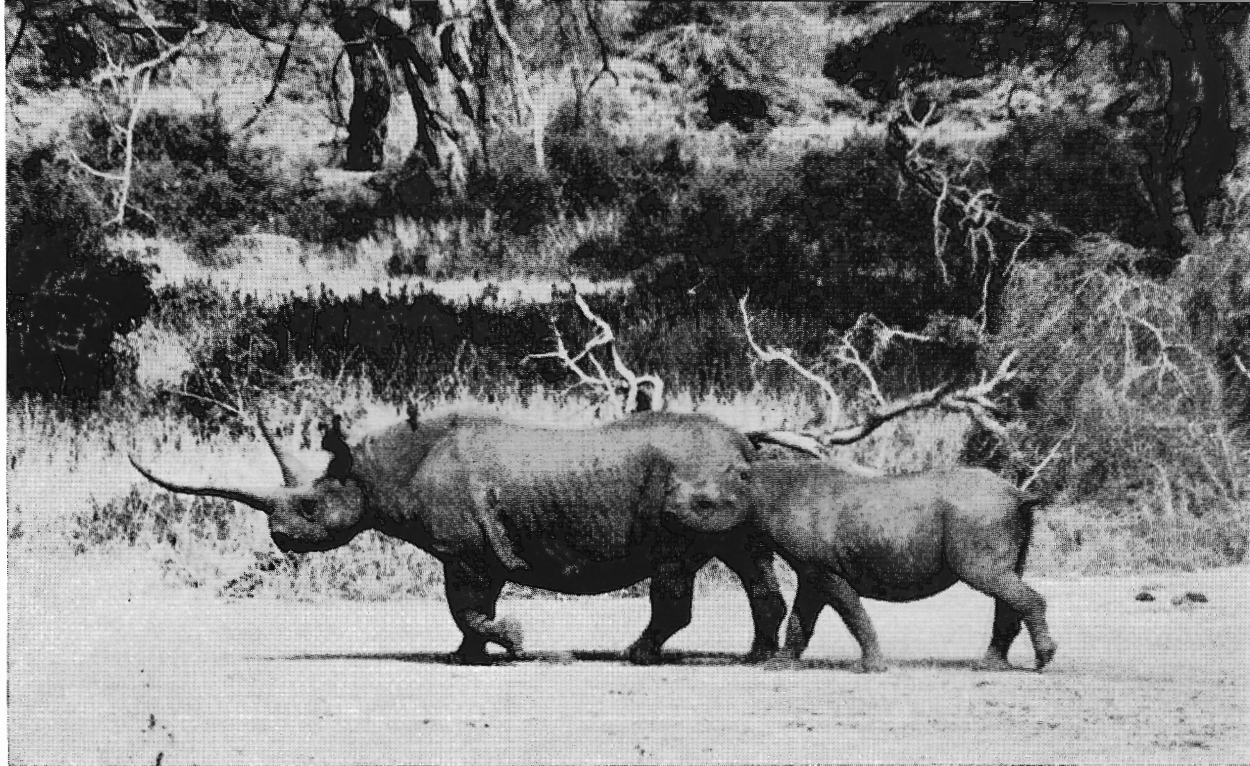
One of the best areas to study Black Rhinos is the Amboseli Game Reserve at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, where these animals are easier to approach than almost anywhere else. Two rhino cows of Amboseli — known as Gladys and Gertie

to their friends — have achieved world fame in the course of the last seven or eight years. Both had exceptionally long front horns, and being very good natured animals who, in true rhino fashion, stuck to one small area, they have probably been photographed more often than any other individual animals in East Africa. They also made appearances in various motion pictures.

I first saw Gertie in March, 1954, together with a very small calf that had been born during the last quarter of the preceding year. This calf was a remarkable creature, for it had no external ears and only half a tail. Had Pixie, as the calf came to be known, been born like that? Or did hyenas get at her when she was very small? Nobody seems to know for certain. I have come across another calf without ears and with only half a tail in Ngorongoro Crater, and one is said to have been seen near Banagi in the Serengeti. Thomas Baines, the explorer, mentions an earless rhino encountered in what is now Southern Rhodesia. I am inclined to think that in all those cases the mutilations were present at birth and were not inflicted some time afterwards.

I saw Gertie and Pixie again in September, 1954, and got some good photographs of mother and daughter, even though they were not yet as tame as they became later on. On that safari I





met Gladys for the first time, and I marvelled at the size of her horn, which was quite a bit longer than Gertie's. Gladys had one ear hanging down, probably a souvenir of some battle, and she was accompanied by a calf. Her temper seemed somewhat frayed, for she chased Gertie and Pixie out of a clump of bush, this being the only incident of enmity between the two big cows I ever noticed. The Masai inhabiting the Amboseli Reserve always said that Gertie was the daughter of Gladys, and this may well have been so.

When I saw Gladys the next time, in October, 1955, she had lost the thin, up-curving tip of her horn, which was now shorter than Gertie's. The calf was still with her and she had, in addition, been joined by three older children, the five rhinos forming quite a formidable group. It is well known that White Rhinos tend to form small "herds" which may number from half a dozen to about fifteen animals. The Black Rhino is much less gregarious and mostly prefers to roam in solitude. If several individuals are met with together, they usually are a bull and a cow, a mother with calf, or a male, a female and a fairly big calf. Some authors have stated quite dogmatically that you will never see more than three Black Rhinos going together. The Amboseli animals show a definite tendency to congregate in groups, all members of which are probably

***The much-photographed Gertie and her earless calf in the Amboseli Game Reserve. The calf, named Pixie, was born late in 1953 and besides lacking ears had half a normal tail.***

more or less related to each other. Such groups may be formed around a cow of a certain age, as was the case with Gladys in 1955. But I have also known five to six youngish, though full-grown, animals to stick together for prolonged periods. Such a group was very much in evidence all through 1959 and 1960. The animals might wander off alone, in twos or three during day-time, but they always reassembled at about the same place for the night. One member of that group was our old friend Pixie, who, in 1955, was still sticking as close as possible to Gertie. Whenever she got accidentally separated from her mother, she uttered a plaintif "mfee — mfee," a most ludicrous little sound to come out of such a big animal.

In 1956 Gladys and Gertie had new calves in May and June respectively. I saw both offspring in September, the mothers being considerably more shy and nervous than they had been a year earlier, with their almost full grown calves tagging behind. Pixie, now almost four years old, had to fend for herself and looked pitifully forlorn.



I watched those new calves grow up in course of 1957, 1958 and 1959. When Gertie's calf was small, it did not like cars at all and usually took cover behind mother. Later, at the age of nearly three years, it once came trotting right up to my Land Rover, snorting defiantly. Suddenly it became frightened of its own courage and ran back to Gertie, who was placidly browsing not far away.

It has often been stated that a young Black Rhino always follows its mother, while a White Rhino calf precedes the cow, who directs its course by means of her horn. One should, however, not be dogmatic about what animals will "always do" or "never do." Both in the West Nile District of Uganda and in Zululand have I seen White Rhino calves follow behind mothers, even though I will admit that they more often walked ahead of her. A cow accompanied by a calf and a young but full grown animal, which

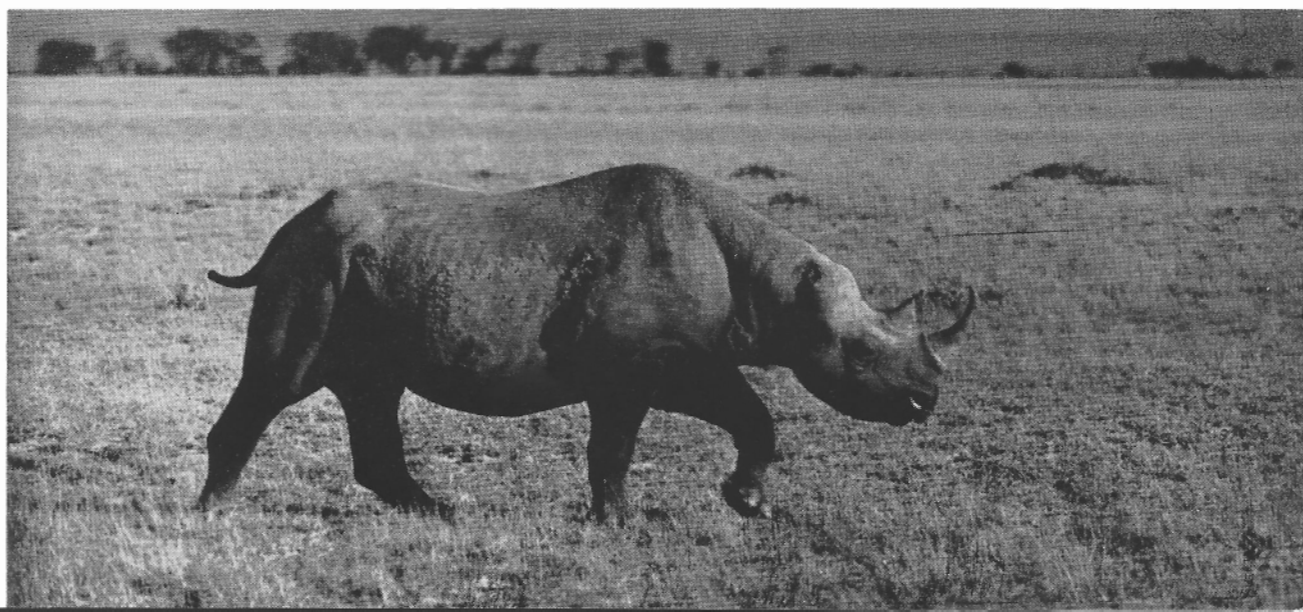
I surprised at a water hole in the Umfolozi Reserve, prodded both of them with her horn, which she afterwards used to guide them in the direction she wanted to go. I have seen less of the White Rhino than of the black species, but game rangers in Zululand told me that mothers frequently direct their young in that way.

Small Black Rhino calves sometimes run behind mother's broad stern, almost underneath her tail, more often at her side, though somewhat to the rear. Now and then they run ahead and I have photographs showing this. In February, 1959, I saw Gladys direct her three-year-old calf with her front horn, exactly as a White Rhino would have done. This is obviously not a common habit of the Black Rhino, for I have seen it only once, but it does happen occasionally.

In May, 1959, Gertie lost her spectacular horn. The major part of it was found and by fitting the pieces into a photograph blown up to life size, it was estimated that the horn must have measured  $54\frac{1}{4}$  inches. In July — just over four years after the birth of her previous calf — she produced another offspring which, as usual, she kept hidden in dense bush for some time. In October of the same year, Gladys, too, lost her horn. Even though the two cows were not as photogenic as before, they had by then so endeared themselves to the visitors of the reserve that they remained Kenya's most popular tourist attraction next to the Nairobi National Park lions.

It came as a great shock, therefore, when in

***Left—Gertie's abnormally long horn measured  $54\frac{1}{4}$  inches, according to estimates made after she lost it. Below — Earless, short-tailed Pixie is spectacular in her own peculiar way.***



January, 1962, while abnormally heavy rains interfered with the regular patrolling of the reserve, poor old Gladys was foully murdered by poachers. She was sincerely mourned by all who knew her.

Not long afterwards Gertie got into one of the usual rhino scraps and had an eye badly damaged. As it seemed to give her great discomfort, the game warden decided to have an operation performed on her. She was put to sleep, whereupon a veterinary surgeon carefully removed the damaged eye and stitched up the lid. When I visited her in October, 1962, Gertie had completely recovered and looked as fit as ever. At the time of writing (October, 1963), she is still doing fine. I saw her a few weeks ago, accompanied by her big calf and four other rhinos, with Pixie hovering around not far away. In the five years since she lost her weapon, some horny substance seems to have grown up from the fracture, but we can already be certain that the horn will never again reach anything like its former length and shape.

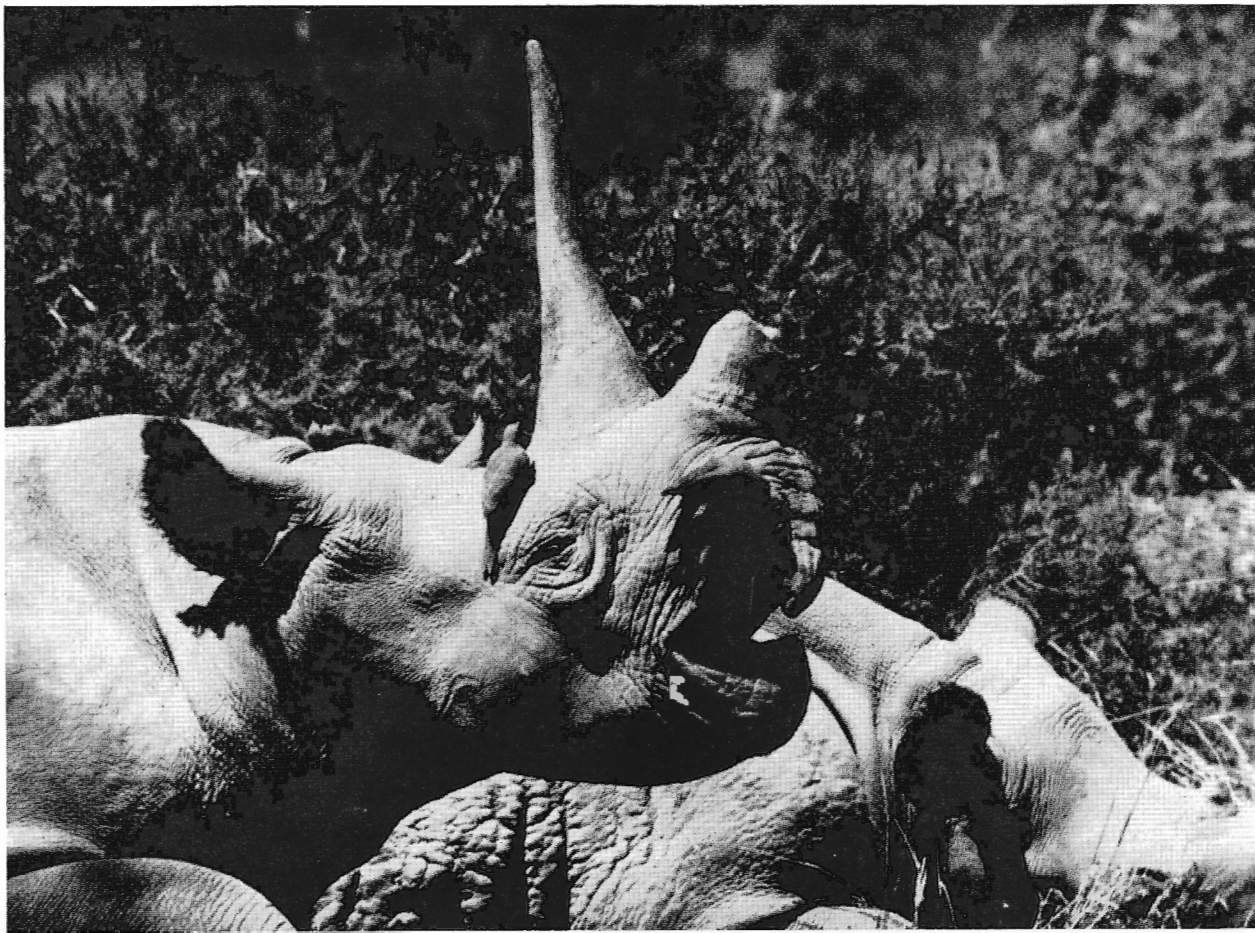
Rhino courtship is quite a noisy and boisterous affair, with the cow by no means entirely on the receiving end. It even looks as if she often had to stimulate the bull by means of violent attacks. In the Amboseli Reserve, early one morning, I saw a couple of rhino standing nose to nose,

puffing, swinging their heads from side to side, butting each other and scraping with their legs, throwing up enormous clouds of dust. The demonstration lasted for several minutes before one of the rhinos turned away and ambled off. In the Lake Manyara National Park I came upon a bull lumbering after a cow accompanied by a calf. She promptly turned round and went for him. The encounter was partly hidden by a thick bush, but there certainly was a considerable amount of snorting and snarling. Bulls sometimes fight over a cow that has come into season. Taking these rowdyish habits into consideration, one need not wonder at damaged ears and eyes, broken horns and the plentiful scars on a rhino's skin.

Rhinos drink regularly and they like to have a good wallow, often turning right over in the mud. This habit gives them the color of the soil predominant in their habitat, be it black, brick-red, or light gray. The "black" rhinos of Amboseli usually appear whiter than most "white" rhinos!

A rhino I saw coming to drink on several con-

***This is Gertie after she lost the greater portion of her horn. Here — her prehensile upper lip obvious — she is trying to shrug off the Oxpeckers that have perched on her head and neck and are bothering her.***







secutive evenings in the Tsavo National Park made itself a considerable nuisance to the other animals using the same watering place. One day it chased after a herd of waterbuck; on another occasion it drove away some buffalo before happily rolling in the mud. Whenever I have seen rhino and elephant in close proximity, the animals either ignored each other or the rhino beat an unwilling retreat. I was once shown the carcass of a rhino that had been gored and killed by an elephant; on the other hand I have heard of a rhino driving elephants away from a salt lick. At the famous Mzima Springs in the Tsavo National Park I saw a rhino which, in approaching the water at night, had collided with a hippo emerging from the pool for its nightly grazing. The hippo took umbrage, went for the rhino and killed it.

Rhinos are usually attended by whole flocks of Oxpeckers, red-billed birds which feed on the numerous ticks adhering to the thick skin. Cattle Egrets walk alongside the big animals, and snap up the insects which fly up under the ponderous tread. When the birds get tired, they fly up onto the rhino's back and let themselves be carried along. In the Hluhluwe reserve, where there are over 300 Black Rhino, I saw a Pied Crow perch on one of these animals.

Lions will kill a young rhino, if they get it away from a cow. This cannot happen too often, considering how tightly the calves hang on to mother's apron strings. Adult rhino and Lions are often found in close proximity and mostly pay no attention to each other. Photographs and movie films have, however, been taken in Ngo-

***Famous family group in the Amboseli Reserve — Gladys, in the center with one ear hanging down, accompanied by a calf and several former offspring. A poacher killed her in 1962.***

rongoro Crater, showing rhinos chasing away Lions, and a similar incident was recently observed in Nairobi National Park, when young Lions pestered a rhino which had left its usual haunt in the forest and come into the open plain. Just to keep us from setting up any hard and fast rules, two male Lions brought down a practically full grown rhino close to Ol Tukai Lodge in the Amboseli Reserve. They had not yet managed to kill it when the game warden drove them away, but one of the rhino's legs was broken and the animal had to be destroyed.

But man is quite definitely poor Faru's worst enemy. Of all East African game animals, the rhino is the least capable of adapting itself to intensive hunting. So let's stop hunting it for "sport" — it can, after all, be killed as easily as a cow, and who would like to have himself photographed grinning inanely over a cow he has shot? We must give full legal protection to the Black Rhino and put a ban on ownership and export of rhino trophies of any kind. After that, an all-out effort on an international basis will have to be made in order to deal effectively and adequately with the poachers and their slimy backers, who line their pockets in the process of destroying an interesting relic of past ages. It is our duty to save and preserve this short-tempered, prehistorically stupid but nevertheless so immensely lovable creature.