

WILD LIFE



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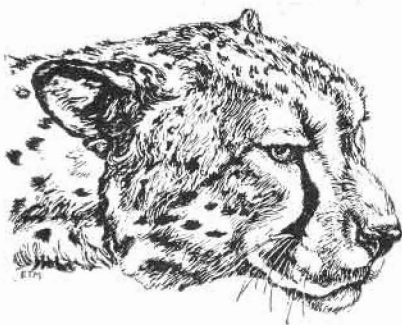
WILD LIFE

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Alan Root

IN September we carried a short pictorial article on the famous Amboseli rhinos, Gladys and Gertie. Here Major W. H. M. Taberer, Warden of the Amboseli National Reserve, gives a much fuller account of their lives, and describes many more of the famous animals which can be seen there. This article also tells the full details of how Gertie's world record-breaking horn came to be one of the shortest in the rhino world.

Our coloured front cover picture this quarter is

AMBOSELI -

unique as Gertie no longer sports the fantastically long horn depicted there. We are deeply indebted to Mr. C. A. Spinage for this unrivalled study of Gertie before her catastrophe.

The Amboseli National Reserve has always been recognised as one of the best wild life sanctuaries in Kenya but until the Royal National Parks took over the administration and developed the area for tourists, comparatively few could get in to see the game, as it meant organising a large and expensive safari to do so. Now a well equipped lodge has been built and two reasonable roads of access constructed, making travel much easier and even the smallest car can enter and move around the area. Thousands of visitors attracted by the many facilities offered at the lodge come each year to Ol Tukai to see and photograph the wonderful display and variety of game.

When the area was first opened to tourists the animals were inclined to be a bit shy due to having been shot from time to time either for their trophies or to make biltong, but with closer control they have come to realize that they are not being hunted and have gradually, over the past 10 years, accepted that man, with all his strange smells and noisy devices, means them no harm. Today after many years of peaceful existence and close protection some will barely raise a head at the approach of a car.

So peaceful is everything that some of the more regular habitues are known by sight and even by name and several through press and film have achieved fame and become wild life personalities, and as a result of this tameness the staff have found them easier to study and got to know more about them and their breeding habits. Most of the better known individuals are still with us, a few have passed on to better grazing grounds, but all have played a part in making Amboseli one of the most wonderful wild life sanctuaries in East Africa.

There is "One Tusk Charlie" the old bull

elephant with only part of his left tusk remaining, who still roams the forests; and "Kania" the great lioness with a blind blue eye. She led the family of 16 living near the lodge which now, after her untimely death have taken her name and are known as the Kania Pride.

Mr. "Cutty" was the first of the rhino to get accustomed to cars and settle down. Always fighting with others his cuts and bruises were responsible for his nickname. He too is no longer with us.

"Tukai", was a near full grown rhino who, quite unconcerned about the noises of the camp, took up his quarters in front of the lodge. He excelled the day Her Royal Highness The Princess Margaret came to stay at Amboseli by standing in full view of the royal party just beyond the garden fence. Unfortunately he fell to the lions and was eaten after he was killed in a remarkable battle by the two full grown sons of Kania.

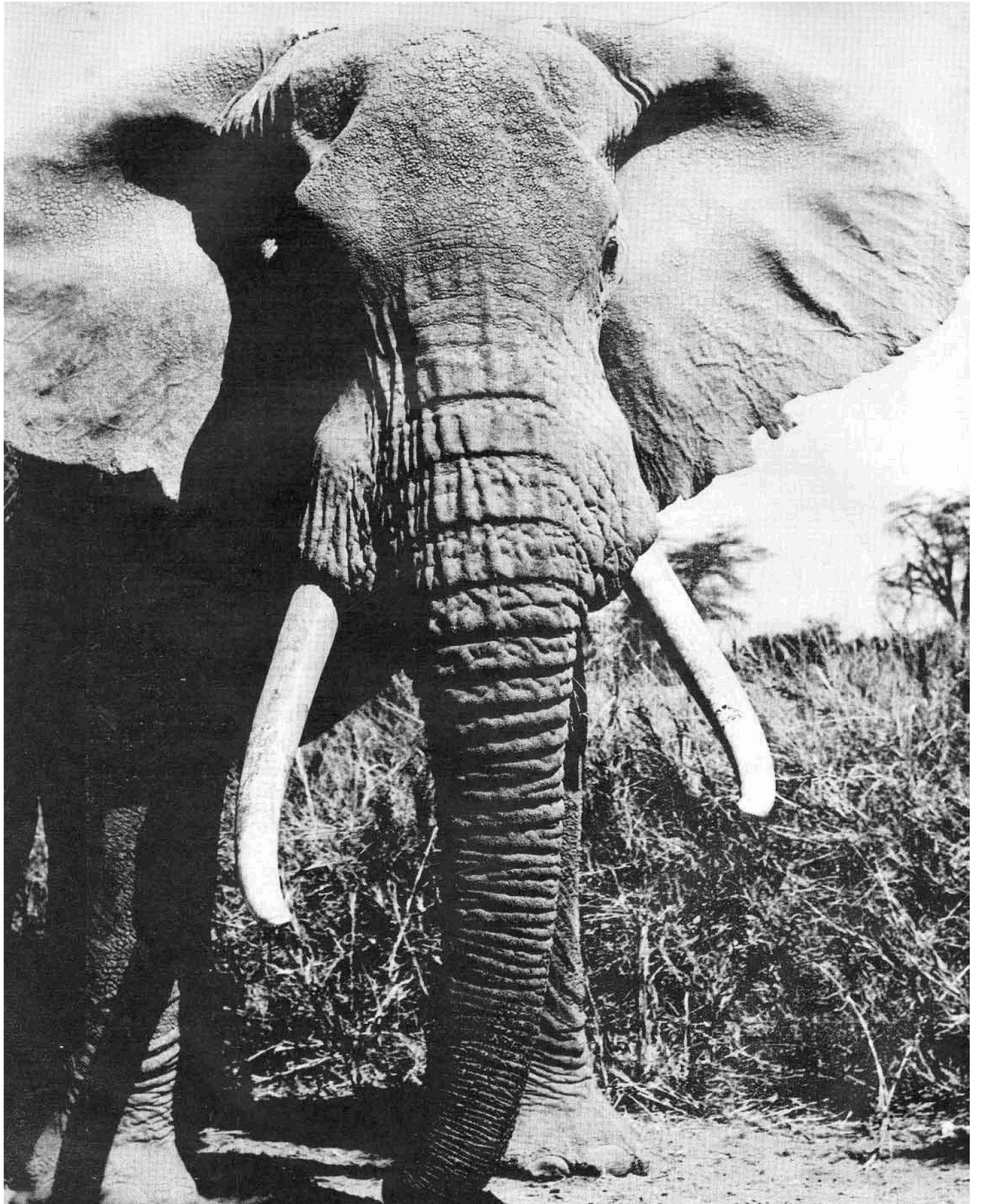
"Ndundu", "Mjinga" and "Pixie" are all rhino with certain characteristics and about whom there is a story; and "Sinya" the lioness who, because she was misbehaving, had to be trapped and was released after being held six days.

Those are just a few of the better known personalities; there are others, but of them all "No. 1" and "No. 2" the two old rhinos with enormously long horns and better known to visitors as "Gladys" and "Gertie" must be recognised as the two most photographed and spectacular animals in the Reserve. These two fabulous creatures carried longer front horns than any other rhino known to be living and it is quite possible that both at one time or the other bettered the world record for a black rhinoceros.

They were christened Nos. 1 and 2 by the

unique and wonderful game reserve

full of animal personalities



rangers at Ol Tukai. Gladys by virtue of having the longer horn by several inches was No. 1. Unfortunately in 1955 she lost nearly 18" off the tip so Gertie took over pride of place as her horn was now the longer, though the Rangers continued to, and still do, call her number two. After this sad accident Gertie became the most sought after animal in Amboseli. Almost every visitor to Ol Tukai lodge would on arrival enquire of her whereabouts and would depart with a happy sense of having seen her or captured her picture or perhaps with a feeling that the trip, was not after all, quite complete as Gertie was in a mood and would not show herself.

Gertie's behaviour patterns

With all this attention Gertie became so tame that she would lie in a dust bath with her offspring and allow several cars at a time to approach within 30 feet and not bother to get up and often just continue to sleep. There have been incidents; when she refuses to move some unkind visitor, wanting action in his pictures, may deliberately drive his vehicle at her and on such occasions she will take her calf off and disappear into the bush to sulk for several days and not be seen. Such behaviour is as good as a report to us that there is, or has been, a hooligan in the area who has disturbed her, as she seldom otherwise hides herself except when calving or mating.

I first saw Gertie in 1947; she was then living round the Ol Toroto water holes in the vicinity of Kitirua and some 7 miles from her present habitat. She was running with a 2-2½ year old calf at the time and was most aggressive, practically unapproachable in a vehicle; she would either charge on sight or disappear in a flash. Gladys too was in the same area and the two would often be together. Gradually as the wells in the outlying areas began to dry up and more and more Masai brought their cattle in to the much needed waters of Kitirua the two old girls with a number of other rhino moved away and took up their headquarters near Observation Hill in which area they are now living and where they came in more frequent contact with motor cars and human noises. At first they were very shy and nervous and would either charge or hide but after a couple of years had settled down realising that the noisy monsters on four wheels presented no danger.

It was in 1953 that Gertie settled in at her new home bringing with her a newly born bull calf. This little oddity had only half a tail,

and no ears at all, and soon received the name of "Pixie". The two presented a rare sight. The mother with the incredibly long horn and the curious little son with just two holes where the ears should be. They were the real show piece of Amboseli and as a result took longer to settle down on account of being so much in demand. However, once they realised there was nothing to fear they became the tamest and most tolerant of all.

There was great consternation when at the end of April, 1956, Gertie suddenly disappeared leaving behind a forlorn Pixie who was then only 3½ years old. Gladys and family took the little chap over and allowed him to join them. However, only two weeks later and amidst great relief and excitement Gertie suddenly reappeared and was seen proudly displaying to a party of six others, including Gladys, a tiny and timid but nevertheless complete female calf. Pixie was allowed to join his wee sister and the three roamed together for two years.

On March 17th, 1958, Gertie mated with a bull strange to the area. Fortunately the event was witnessed by a party of visitors so we were able to keep a record of the date. March 27th 1959 was a sad day. Gertie and her calf had been seen at midday in a wallow; she was again seen at 4.30 p.m. that afternoon but minus about a foot of her wonderful horn. Between these two times she went to the swamp for a drink returning to the same wallow, and though we searched both ways along her tracks and for several days dug round the wallows with a tractor, and by hand, we never found the tip. Although this was a great loss we had expected it to happen as the end was wearing very thin through dragging when she was feeding low and no matter in what position she was lying the tip was always resting on the ground. Poor girl she did look odd, but only four weeks later she was to look even odder.

" . . . irascible gentlemen . . . "

About 18 months ago the swamp levels suddenly began to rise and spilled over to start the Semak River flowing again. This additional water had attracted a number of new males to the area and in an encounter with one of these irascible gentlemen Gertie lost the remainder of that beautiful front horn which broke off right at the roots. This was indeed a major tragedy. She was seen a day after the battle bleeding profusely from the hole where the horn had been. The entire Ranger force

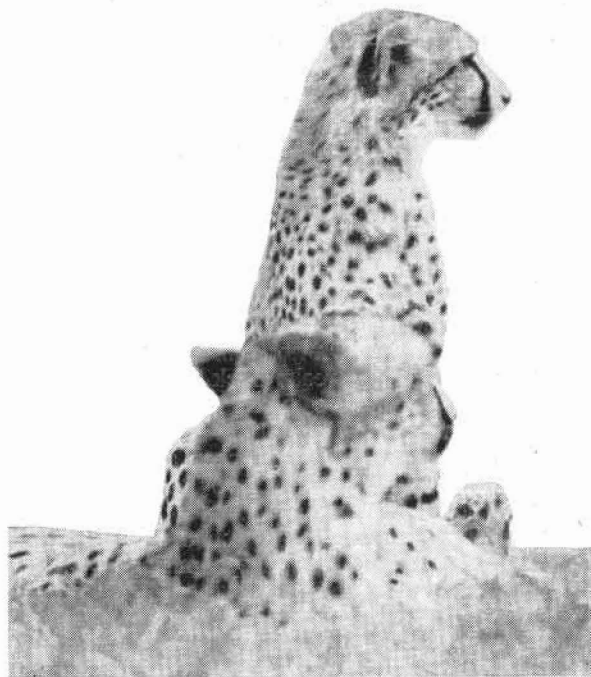
(continued on page 26)

ALL too often I have heard the comment "We never see anything in the Game Park" and I always wonder just what such visitors to the Nairobi Royal National Park expect. As a frequent visitor to the Park, both for duty and pleasure, I can recall scarcely any visits where there has not been at least one unusual incident which sticks in the memory and encourages an early return.

Other days are crowded with the unusual and one such day was a trip through the Park just before last Christmas. We had met a couple from Nigeria on a visit to the North Kinangop and as they had seen virtually no game throughout the journey by road from West Africa, we invited them to join us in an outing to the Nairobi Royal National Park. Their stay at the N. Kinangop was to have lasted three days, but it was three weeks later when they finally reached Nairobi so enchanted were they with both the country and the accommodation they had found. Such is the charm of Kenya!

We reached the Park entrance at about 8.0 a.m. on the Sunday before Christmas and had travelled less than a quarter mile before we saw two lionesses walking along, a few yards from the main road. Surely no one could have missed seeing them, and judging from the numbers who sit patiently beside the lions each day, this alone is a sight to remember.

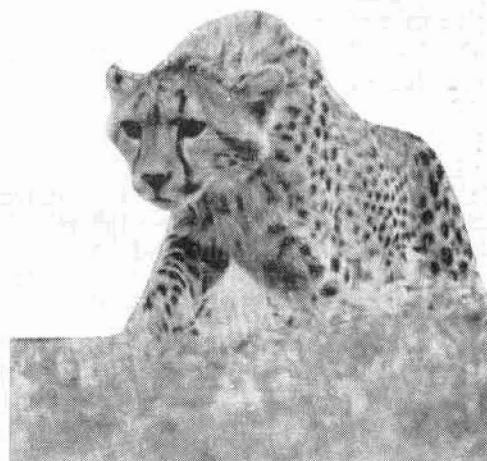
A few more hundred yards and a cheetah,



with three almost fully grown cubs, was seen walking away from the road on the other side. The cubs were playing together as they leisurely followed their mother across the plain and their antics were gratefully recorded by the cine camera of our guests. Breakfast was eaten a little later as we parked beside one of the well-known black-maned lions who lay with another lioness in sight of the main road.

Slowly we made our way to the hippo pools, not always by way of the main roads and seldom travelling above 10 m.p.h. but we were rewarded not only with sights of the more common game such as zebra, kongoni, wildebeeste, Thomson's and Grant's gazelle and impala, but also with views of the less frequently seen species including eland, a lonely reed-buck, and bat-eared foxes.

At the pools we strolled slowly and quietly



along the river bank and surprised two large water turtles which lay sleeping on the far bank but which slid into the water on our approach with scarcely a ripple to show where they had immersed. One of the crocodiles, well known to regular visitors to the pools, was sleeping with wide open mouth in full view, also on the opposite bank, and as we stood watching it, a malachite crested kingfisher flew by.

The hippos were also at their best for our guests and the three of them were frequently half out of the water as they played around. The bird songs at the pool are delightful, and although probably at their best in the early morning or evening, gave continual enjoyment as we strolled along. We had intended returning to Nairobi for lunch but so delighted were our guests that they were happy to make do with

the remnants of our breakfast in order to prolong our stay in the Park.

Our improvised lunch was eaten overlooking Leopard Cliffs, and although no game was visible at this time, the quiet grandeur of the scene was sufficient to prolong our stay out of all proportion to the meagre meal. We moved on once more, making now for the Langata Forest by way of the Somali Boma road. Not far beyond the bomas we came across a troop of baboons and watched several of the younger members fighting over the remains of a very young Thomson's gazelle.

Passing through the forest by the Kisenbe valley we saw many stately giraffe and had a brief glimpse of the shy bush-buck. We drove by the Impala Point salt lick at about 3 p.m. and made for the Langata exit—and the highlight of our day. Three rhino were grazing out in the open and sufficiently far from the forest to give us a reasonable view even though they made for cover immediately we came into sight.

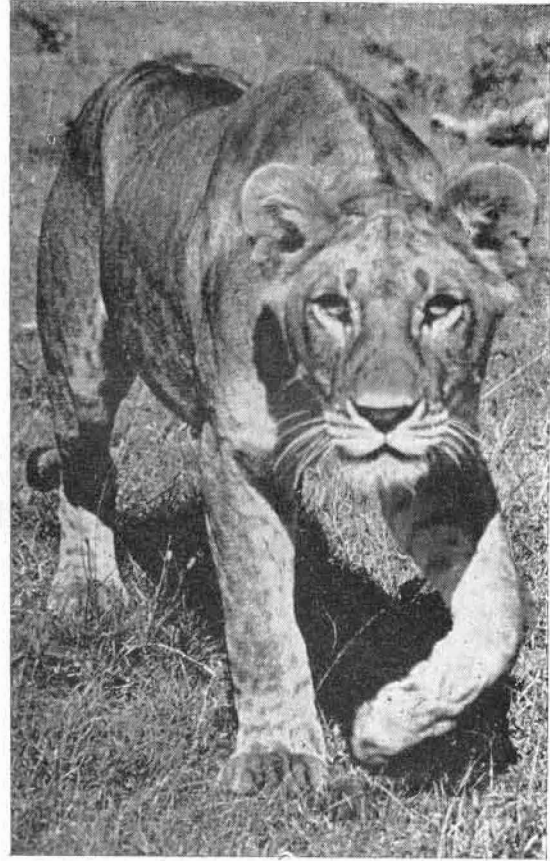
Rhino rarely seen

I must confess that this was only the second time in five years that I had seen rhino in the Nairobi Park but since then I have seen them once more and others have seen them at widely scattered points. Certainly judging by the droppings that are there for all to see, it would seem that there are far more rhinos in the Park than most of us suppose.

The remaining hour or so was possibly something of an anti-climax but certainly not dull as we watched stately water-buck beside the forest and traversed the road pitted with antbear holes. We didn't see one of these fascinating creatures but their holes reminded me of another visit when one had crossed our way giving a sudden prodigious leap as though pricked with a pin or stung by a bee on a tender part of its anatomy.

There are many who will say that this one visit as described above is quite exceptional; maybe it was but then so are all the other visits such as on a more recent Sunday morning when we watched two lionesses leisurely eating their kill—a wildebeeste—within sight of the main entrance.

Exceptional too was the visit when we watched ostriches mating and the subsequent visits when we watched male and female ostriches sitting on a nest of thirty six eggs until finally the young chicks hatched. The young are always pretty and ostriches are no exception so that the sight of nearly thirty ostrich chicks being shepherded along by three adults will



"... a lioness walking along by the main road." Photo: Charles Kimberley.

remain long in my memory. Pretty too is the young hyena—quite unconcerned, and looking rather like a panda bear; one came towards us as we sat watching their den but this of course was one of the few occasions when I was without my camera.

Many will have seen young buck sparring with their horns, but how many have chanced upon two fully grown kongoni really fighting as I saw them a few weeks back in the valley by Lone Tree? Other cars were watching also as first one was felled and then the other; they also heard the resounding crack as their heads met and finally saw the two kongoni racing away, both dripping blood from torn heads as vanquisher chased vanquished.

It is often the most unpromising evenings that bring the biggest rewards. I still clearly remember my first view of the lions, some years ago now, on a dull evening which followed a day of intermittent rain. A friend was visiting from Uganda and we warned him as



These are black backed jackals, which inhabit open country and light forests. They are mainly nocturnal but are often seen in the daytime.

we left for the Park: 'don't expect to see much tonight'—and left our camera behind. We rounded the corner at White Grass Ridge and there before us was a pride of young lions. We sat for over an hour watching them playing together and not another car came into sight.

There were many cars in sight the day we saw the cheetah kill, but only one other party saw this unforgettable sight. We had spent the weekend at Amboseli and decided to pass through the Nairobi Park on our way home entering at the Athi River end around midday and passing by the hippo pools. As we drove up the hill towards the Ranger Post we watched a herd of impala on our right, then, sensing their uneasiness, looked around and saw a cheetah approaching from our left. It crossed the road ahead of us and, as we hurriedly turned the car around, stealthily moved towards

the alerted herd.

Suddenly the whole herd made for the river with the cheetah in pursuit. The kill was made and as the cheetah lay panting with one paw across the still twitching body of a young impala, at least 30 people, some less than one hundred yards away, carried on eating their lunch quite unaware of the sight they had missed.

The hunters are not always so successful, as we saw one evening when we sat with bated breath whilst a herd of zebra walked directly towards a pride of lions. The leading zebra was within 20 feet of the lioness which crouched directly in its path before it sensed its danger and yet the whole herd escaped as the three lionesses gave chase. I do not know whether the youngest of the lionesses in her inexperience sprang just too soon or whether the leading zebra sensed the danger just in time but I still



The handsome shaggy waterbuck is rarely found far from water. It frequents reedbeds, bush country and riverine forests, but may be met on hilly or even open ground. All black and white photographs illustrating this article are by Rolf Bjorndalen except where otherwise acknowledged.

marvel that I saw no kill that night.

As each incident recorded reminds me of yet another memorable event, I know that however often I visit the Park its appeal will never lessen. Can the Park possibly be dull to any of its visitors? Perhaps it could be to the couple who approached me as I was parked one afternoon on the outskirts of a ring of cars surrounding a pride of lions and enquired "What are they all waiting for?" meaning the cars and not the lions which they had failed to spot though they lay less than 40 feet away on a rise.

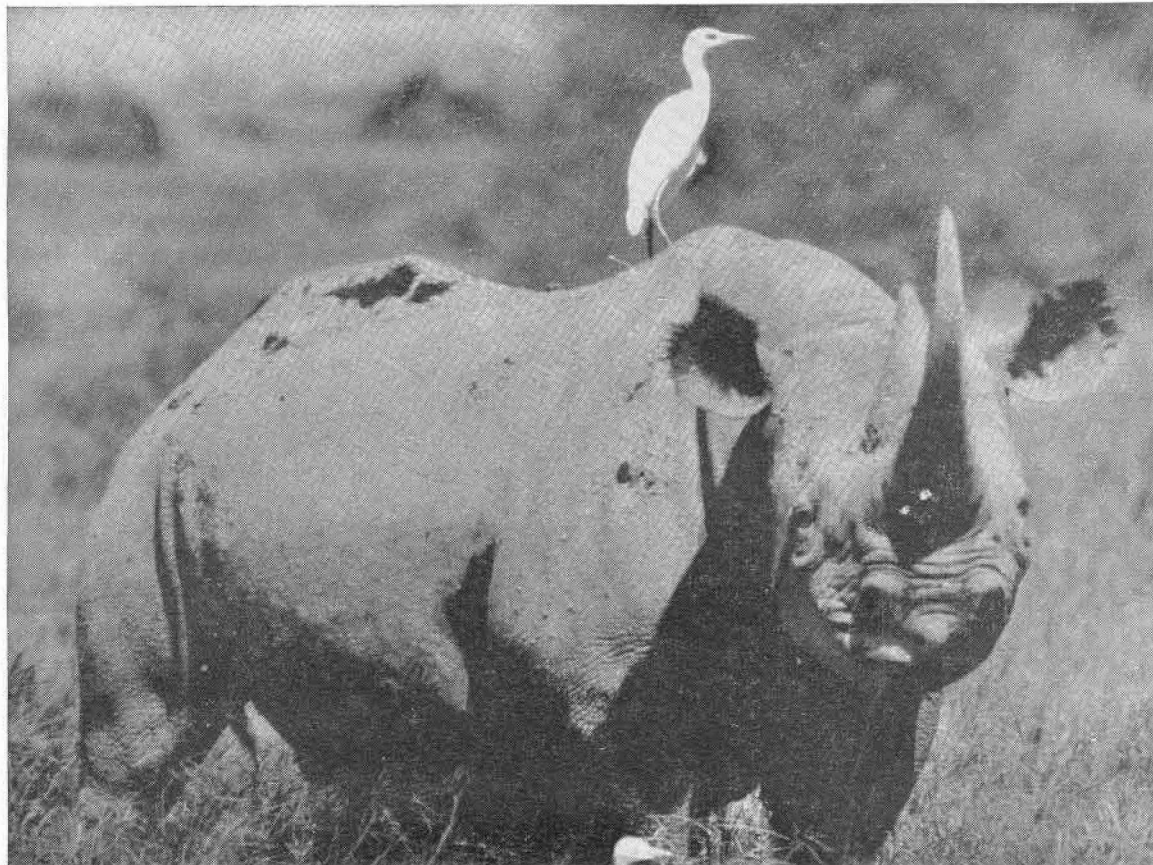
Dull also maybe to the party in the car who hooted impatiently behind me one day on the forest road as I watched and filmed a bushbuck having a mock battle with a small bush. These are in the minority, and I know that for most a visit to the Nairobi Royal National Park is a most memorable occasion.

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

The Editor will be on leave in the United Kingdom from December 24th 1959 until approximately 15th February 1960, and in Southern Rhodesia from February 18th until the end of March.

He would be delighted to meet members of the Kenya Wild Life Society in those two Countries, and his address will be:

- (a) 14, Oxford Avenue, Newlands, Salisbury, S.R.
- (b) Goodwins, Copthorne, Sussex.



Buss-backed egrets, or tick birds, can often be seen on the backs of rhinoceros and other animals catching insects. They also give warning to the short-sighted rhino that danger is approaching.

AMBOSELI (from page 19)

started at once on a search. Tracking back they came on the scene of battle and from there took up the hunt in earnest eventually recovering the horn several days later.

This unfortunate accident made not the slightest difference to her nature; she was as quiet and placid as ever. However, Gertie was to have her reward and to hold her head even higher. On the 13th July last about 2.30 p.m. she produced another little son exactly 16 months after she had mated. This was a great event and what a consolation prize for having become the ugliest rhino in the area where she not so long ago was the proudest and most picturesque of them all. She has now produced five calves since I have known her, and I sincerely hope she will have a lot more.

Gertie has featured in several films and papers in many parts of the world have reproduced photographs of her. Recently a very well known London illustrated paper showed a picture of Gertie and calf which achieved the distinction of being awarded the prize for the

photograph of the month. There is no doubt that she can lay claim to being the most photographed living wild animal in the world.

The broken part of the horn recovered measures $39\frac{1}{2}$ inches and by projecting a side view of Gertie on to a screen and blowing the picture up to a size that fitted the piece exactly I have been able to measure the missing bit as being $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches. If these measurements are correct, and I don't believe they can be much out, where, did she stand, with her $54\frac{1}{4}$ inches in the record list for a normal rhino horn and where in turn was Gladys whose horn was at one time several inches longer?

So much more has to be told of this magnificent creature whose existence dates back to before World War II when she was known to the Masai as "Koormi" (one with a long nose or someone with a long reach), but now there is only space to recount a few of the incidents during the life since 1953 of this most famous of all wild animal personalities, GERTIE OF AMBOSELI who once again becomes the true "No. 2".