

# Spirit of Enterprise

## The 1987 Rolex Awards

Foreword by

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Van Nostrand Reinhold (UK) Co. Ltd

# Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary

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British and Swiss, born 17 November 1931. Collaborator in the running of the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary. Educated in UK; B.A. (Philosophy, Law and Economic History) from Nottingham University.

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Demand for rhino horn as a decorative material and as an ingredient of "medicinal" potions is high in a number of countries – and the supply is often met from the horns of illegally hunted animals. When my husband and I moved to Nairobi from Ghana in 1976, rhinoceros poaching in Kenya was at its height. Its horrors left an indelible mark on my mind and made me determined to do something about this traffic as soon as circumstances permitted. Later when my financial situation improved, I undertook to help protect these animals by constructing a sanctuary; however, my funds were not sufficient to buy land, and even if they were, non-Kenyans are not allowed to own more than about four hectares.

Nevertheless, in September 1982, I was fortunate enough to meet the Craig family, owners of Lewa Downs, a 20,000 ha cattle ranch in the arid north of Kenya, where game, other than rhino, is both abundant and well protected – an ideal rhino habitat. Moreover, with great generosity and trust, the Craigs agreed that I use some 2,800 ha of their land to try to create a rhino sanctuary, provided I agreed to act on the advice of Peter Jenkins, Senior Management Officer of the Game and Wildlife Department. For my part, I fully admitted that I knew nothing about rhinos except their urgent need for help, and willingly accepted this condition.

## **Starting a sanctuary from scratch**

The first requirement was an electrified fence to delimit the sanctuary. This was designed by Peter Jenkins and, in January 1983, work started on construction of the fence and all the other infrastructure required, such as roads, water, staff quarters, etc. We moved in January 1984 and, in March 1984, our first rhino was brought to the holding enclosure, to be released in April 1984 when the fence was completed. We now have 12 rhinos, including two calves born here; one of these was deserted by her mother at birth and I am consequently raising her by hand.

The object of the sanctuary is to breed black rhinos and allow them to lead natural lives protected only from poachers and restricted only by the fence but, as a spin-off, the project also provides paid employment for the local Ndrobo tribesmen who act as our security force and take a great pride in their work and a great interest in the rhinos. With the aid of my Ndrobo tribesmen, I usually manage to see all the rhinos daily and make notes of where they are, what they are doing, and whether they are alone or with other rhinos. In this way, I am building up a picture of their ranges, feeding habits and companions, and am increasing my general knowledge and understanding of their behaviour.

### Learning about rhino behaviour

I have found that, like all the other great mammals, they are highly intelligent and neither antisocial nor aggressive unless they are wounded or frightened – in fact, the two that have never been hunted are incredibly gentle animals. It is interesting to note that one male, probably between six and seven years of age, is still with his mother, which must indicate that learning how to behave in rhino society is a prolonged affair.

The abandoned female calf, Samia, that I am hand-raising is now one year old; however, my intention is that she should lead a normal life with the other rhinos and consequently she is free by day although confined to a stable by night. Each afternoon, I take her out to allow her to get to know the area around the house, to introduce her to as many food plants as possible and, above all, to get her acquainted with the scent and scrapes of the other rhinos; when encouraged, she will deposit her droppings on these scrapes so that the other rhinos become accustomed to her scent, and I have noted how other rhinos listen when she calls. There have been reports on the number of vocalizations made by the Indian rhino; our rhinos, however, are normally silent with the exception of Samia, who has an ever increasing vocabulary of sounds. I have been trying to



*Samia, a female calf that Anna Hepburn Merz is raising by hand, is free by day but still confined to a stable by night. She is providing an interesting insight into rhino behaviour. (opposite)*

*Morani, an adult male black rhino quenches his thirst at a watering spot. One of Anna Hepburn Merz's objectives is to bring more water into the Ngare Seroi Rhino Sanctuary to provide more pools and wallows for the inmates.*



understand their significance and hope that when Samia reaches adulthood and is leading a normal life with the other rhinos, I may be able to follow her on moonlit nights and learn more about the behaviour of these animals during the period when they are most active.

### **Plans for the future**

My plans for the future fall into three parts. First, I wish to obtain financial support to enhance the sanctuary's facilities and capacity by improving the water supply to provide water holes and wallows so that the whole area can be used more efficiently. At the same time, the water would allow me to replant a variety of local acacias, either by seedlings in the traditional manner and/or by placing goat and elephant manure (which contains acacia seeds) into furrows and growing the plants from seed.

Secondly, I wish to undertake some sound behavioural studies on the black rhino but I would need some help from a scientist in analyzing my notes and pulling my findings together. Finally, I feel it necessary to increase public interest in and sympathy for rhinos in general and the black rhino in particular. If it were realized that the rhino is intrinsically as beautiful and intelligent as other great mammals and if the general public had the same attitude to the rhino as it does to whales, tigers and pandas, public opinion might prove strong enough to force the horn-consuming countries to control this traffic. That a magnificent animal should be rendered extinct because of loss of habitat is bad enough but that it should be obliterated to satisfy the lust for a status symbol dagger handle or a medicine whose efficacy is dubious is, in my opinion, utterly shameful.