LETTERS

with a needle in his backside and let a chimp pry open his mouth to look at his teeth or clamp a steel tag in his ear. He may find the experience unpleasant.

There has been enough darting of animals to last a million lifetimes and the accumulated notes of dartings, radio collars and stomach tests, would probably reach clear around the world if the papers were put end to end.

Let's save a little knowledge about animals for future animal observers. But let's save the animals first by protecting, not shooting them and by increasing the carrying capacity of their range by irrigation and extension of the range.

When a forest fire is raging, it makes more sense to put out the fire, not do a detailed study of it. We must protect the habitat of animals as well as the animals themselves. We must protect virgin wilderness before man arrives to turn it into corn fields or housing projects or cattle ranches.

Ten years from now it will be too late. We will see beautiful wild areas denuded of their trees, not by elephants, but man will do it, with the slash and burn method, so common in the tropics.

The precious funds donated to the preservation of wildlife should be used for JUST THAT. Certainly we need some scientific study and this can still be done, but at a much reduced level. Instead, use the monies for more land, more wells and waterholes, high capacity water sprayers which are mobile and can be moved about as needed, restocking of areas devoid of game and the trapping and relocation of animals in areas where they cannot live.

Isn't this a good alternative to shooting them. Let scientists OBSERVE animals with binoculars to study them. If they must look inside a stomach, let them accompany a hunter and examine his kill. They will get just as much scientific knowledge from this animal without disturbing or killing an animal in a game reserve.

Let the game reserves and national parks become the haven for wildlife for which they were originally established. Let's spend our conservation money wisely.

Robert P. L. Straughan,
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MYTHS ABOUT RHINO

Sir—The Rhinoceros holds a strange fascination for many visitors to Africa; and perhaps your readers might like to know something more about them.

But for its horns, of course, the Rhino (both Black and White) would survive in far greater numbers. Poaching is still heavy, though fierce regulations and the existence of reserves and National Parks have at least ensured the survival of both these species for the time being.

Throughout history, rhino horn has been coveted, especially in the Far East, for its supposed aphrodisiac quality when taken by mouth, after being ground to a powder and mixed with coconut oil or water. (Scientific opinion holds that this belief is entirely fallacious.)

Various Far Eastern peoples have also believed that this mixture would protect the user against poisoning, ease pain in childbirth, destroy infections, speed the healing of broken bones, help to remove thorns and splinters and cause lumps to shrink.

As well as being used for medicine, rhino horn has for centuries been used in the making of small, carved objects. The Chinese used to make buttons and buckles, and the libation cups they used in religious ceremonies. In Africa itself, the Masai and the Wachagga used to make 'knobkerries' (hunting sticks with knobs on one end, used for throwing) and in Ethiopia rhino-horn sword hilts were greatly prized.

Today it is still the most highly-priced animal commodity in the world, and as the rhino population decreases it becomes steadily more valuable.

In 1933 Lee Talbot noted in Sumatra that a horn fetched nearly £500; an American tourists was once offered a new car for the rhino he had just shot! China is still by far the main market, Singapore being the major collection centre.

Contrary to popular myth, the rhino's horn does not consist of "matted hair", but rather of true horn—a hardening of the epidermis, closely related in growth and composition to hair (composed of about 50% carbon, with hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and sulphur) but in fact a solid, keratinized mass of skin, like the fingernails of man, horses' hoofs and tortoises' shells, porcupine-quills and the outer covering of the "horns" of antelopes such as Wildebeest and Thomson's Gazelle.

The difference between the horns of antelopes and those of rhino are that the rhino's grow from the skin, with no inner core of bone, and are attached to the skull only by the skin.

Horns were removed simply by cutting through the skin around the base and lifting them away, revealing a spongy, pink circle of tissue.

They grow throughout the rhino's lifetime, at an estimated rate of about three inches per year. In the earlier literature, there are records of rhinos with three horns, the third being little more than a bump; but nowadays two are the rule, the front almost invariably longer than the back. They are ideally placed and shaped for a vicious "uppercut", which is the rhino's favourite means of attack and which is capable of piercing the bodywork of a stationary car, or of overturning a moving one.

Males are usually more aggressive than females, and their horns thus get worn down and are characteristically shorter. Both sexes can sometimes be seen sharpening their horns (especially during the rains) on stones, anthills or fallen trees. Sometimes the long, thin horns of the females break, and are then gradually sharpened to a point again.

The longest horn ever recorded was that of the famous female, "Gertie" of Amboseli, which was estimated from photographs as about 39 inches.

Rhinos also use their horns to scatter their freshly-dropped dung, and to dig out salt for eating. On Marsabit Mountain, there is a whole cave dug out by them, the roof covered with indentations, for that valuable addition to their diet—proof of both their strength and their tenacity!

Rhinos are certainly among the most dangerous wild animals left in the world today. But without them the world would surely be poorer, not least because of the legends and myths that have grown up around those ferocious weapons: their horns.

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OBITUARY: IAN PRITCHARD

Sir—Perhaps you would publish the following tribute to Ian Pritchard who was for many years a member of the East African Wildlife Society and—among all else—a dedicated, practical conservationist. . .

Ian Pritchard loved the sea with an invincible love, and it was fitting that when he died, aged 45, on July 30th, it was in the Indian Ocean that they buried him.

For those to whom his name means nothing, spare a moment or two to hear about him, for they don't make people like Ian very often.

When I first met him, he was tall and very slender, very sunburned, a big Van Gogh hat on his head, his square jaw fringed with a reddish beard—always an active man, one of the finest underwater swimmers ever seen on East Africa's coast, with an unique knowledge of the Watamu area where he lived, some miles South of Malindi: he seemed to know every stone and piece of coral under those blue-green waters.

A gentle man, quiet and shy, but with a sharp, dry humour, Ian had served in the Royal Navy in many parts of the world, but now had settled at Watamu where he ran a small water-sports business, goggling, skiing and so on.

It was while water-skiing that he broke his neck and was instantly paralysed from the neck down: this was about ten years ago.

As we all knew, Ian was a courageous man; he had been awarded the George Medal for his exceptional bravery in the forests of Kenya during the grim years of the Emergency. Not that you could ever get the story from Ian himself, for he was perhaps the most modest as well as the bravest man we knew.

Anyway, here he was without a glimmer of feeling or movement in 90 per cent of his body: what would he do now? Operations and months in hospital came first; a fund was set up to help pay for a spell at Stoke Mandeville, and the Duke of Edinburgh stepped in to seek RAF assistance in flying him over to Britain.

And then, back to his beloved Watamu, and life in a wheelchair.

Of one thing we were all certain; Ian wouldn't stay idle for long. Sure enough, he was soon at work, a paint-brush clamped in his teeth, painstakingly pushing dabs of oil-paint onto a canvas propped up in front of him. We almost took it for granted that he would be good—and he was, very good.

He had a magnet strapped to his left wrist and little metal bands fixed to his brushes: then, with a flop of his arm he would somehow jerk the brush from its stand into his mouth, and off he would go again, slowly, imaginatively, creating pictures of his greatest love—the sea.

They sold rapidly, often to people who had no idea that they had been painted by mouth, nor of the immense effort that each brush-stroke had cost the artist.

Ian didn't just love the sea; he did something practical about it. He led a campaign to have "his" stretch of Kenya's coast made into a National Marine Park before its beautiful coral gardens were wrecked by souvenir-hunters, and overfishing deprived it of its greatest spectacle. He fought for it before his accident, and after it; and he won that battle too. Today there is a National Marine Park at Watamu.

Uncannily, he never forgot a single detail of this underwater world, and remained by far the finest oracle to consult before setting off on a goggling expedition. Being the sort of man he was, he actually managed a few journeys down there himself; he would be taken from his wheelchair, strapped onto a sort of underwater sledge, the mouth-piece of an aqualung held tight in his jaws—and, incredibly, down he would go to glimpse for just a few brief moments the world in which formerly he had reigned supreme.

Kind, compassionate, delightfully humorous, dedicated, unbelievably brave—such was Ian Pritchard.

In St. Paul's Cathedral one can read something like this of its architect, Sir Christopher Wren; "If you would seek his epitaph, look around you".

Next time we go goggling at Watamu, we should remember those words, and remember Ian Pritchard.

—name and address withheld by request.

THE SMALL PRINT

Sir—Since my trip to Africa, I have been a member of the East African Wild Life Society and hence a subscriber to AFRICANA. I love the magazine, but I do find the print is becoming increasingly difficult to read— it is too small!

I'm sure there are many like me who would like to have shorter articles but larger print. I'm having to sacrifice reading most of this last issue. It is too

Continued overleaf