

## Rhino at the brink of extinction by Anna Merz

Harper Collins, London 1991, Ksh 450  
ISBN 0-00-219920-3

*She is indeed 'the best friend they ever had.'*

When Anna Merz first announced her intention to write a book about 'her' rhinos, I was a little nervous. Could a monologue devoted entirely to the discussion of one animal species not be perhaps a little boring devoid of interest to the general reading public; the kind of book that once skimmed through is consigned to the rear shelves of the library together with a plethora of other such volumes, classed 'dry as dust'?

These doubts were gloriously disproved, and Anna's rhino story joins Cynthia Moss's on elephants, Jane Goodall's on chimps and Shirley Strum's on baboons as altogether readable, amusing, and interesting from beginning to end. Although she boasts no scientific degree, Anna's intense involvement with her chosen animal has yielded hitherto undocumented data, thus earning her a place alongside more technically qualified conservationists.

In his Foreword, eminent animal behaviourist and author Desmond Morris states "Rhinos need all the friends they can get, and she is the best one they ever had".

Ann's involvement with rhinos has not been all that long - she founded the Ngare Sergoi Sanctuary only eight years ago. Determined to get things right from the beginning, she went off to India, Nepal and South Africa to see how they did things there, and how other rhinos behaved.

Having tackled the problems relating to land, Wildlife Department permission, housebuilding, staff, fencing, roads, and management, the intrepid Anna launched herself into the exercise of catching her rhinos. Her tales of these adventures



among the wild mountainous terrain north of Lewa Downs are as stirring as any deriding-do, with helicopter chases, long hauls through dense prickly bush following spoor, pursuits in and out of hot ravines, crashed aeroplanes,

Eventually the first breeding core of the Ngare Sergoi rhino population was secured.

In ensuing chapters, Anna creates pen-portraits of specific animals, and these cameos clearly illustrate the differing characteristics and behaviour of individuals. From later chapters dealing with their feeding, mating, breeding and social behaviour the Black Rhino emerges as an animal of considerable sagacity and varying temperament, giving the lie to the generally-held opinion that they are inevitably aggressive and stupid.

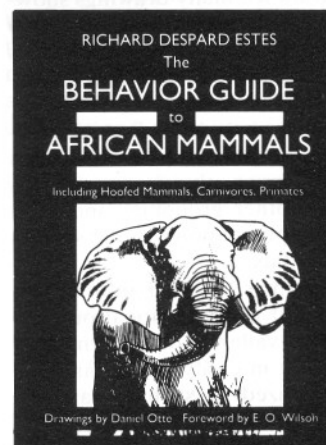
One of the most touching episodes in Anna's interactions with the Ngare Sergoi rhinos is the story of Samia, the infant animal which she hand-raised from two days old. To-day the huge creature moves freely among the other rhinos of the sanctuary and lives a normal wild life while simultaneously maintaining the bonds of trust and friendship with her human mentor. To witness Anna and Samia strolling through the bush side by side is a remarkable experience! From her extremely close relationship with Samia, Anna learned about the 'breathing' language of rhinos, and has documented for the first time an analysis of these communication patterns.

Anna continues to live inside the sanctuary, and pursue her daily hikes with a tracker to count and record the behaviour of the rhinos. She is as tough as they come, down-to-earth and pleasantly eccentric, but also disarmingly caring and emotional when it comes to rhinos. She is indeed 'the best friend they ever had.'

The book is copiously illustrated with both colour and black-white photographs of high quality. It is a good, easy read and is as much the story of an unusual, dedicated and determined woman as it is a study of the Ngare Sergoi rhinos.

By Fiona Alexandar

*All royalties from the sale of the book go to the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary.*



## The behaviour guide to African mammals

Richard D. Estes. Illustrated by Daniel Otte

University of California Press  
Price US \$75.00

*I find this an admirable work, very useful to anyone interested in how mammals live, be he an intelligent tourist, a resident of Africa...*

This is a new type of guidebook, one that has never before been attempted. As the author explains in the Preface, he tried to produce a book equally useful for the layman and the professional biologist, which many said could not be done in a satisfactory way.

Although the title describes it as a behaviour guide, it does in fact more than the title promises. Especially in the Introductions to the various sections anatomical, physiological, evolutionary and ecological aspects are discussed.