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Strange alliance

Iris Hunt ponders another curious liaison, this time in the 'Mara Triangle' sector of Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve ...

Over the New Year's holiday, Don Hunt and I spent a few days in the Mara Triangle area. We had missed out on witnessing the [initial] strange alliance in Samburu between the lioness and the oryx calf [report on p. 12], but we did come across another, rather less publicised oddity.

In the Triangle, there is a female black rhino that has formed a friendship with a mature bull eland. The two seem inseparable. They roam the large plain in front of Kichwa Tembo mostly, going down to the river together at night. The pair stays out on the open grassland during the day, even though both animals are browsers. Often, while one takes a short nap – of less than an hour – the



other can be seen standing guard, then vice versa.

Over the time we were there, the female rhino looked dilated as if in oestrus. She seemed to want to be close to the eland. And, while he did seem to not mind too much, you could see that he was keeping a very watchful eye on *that horn*.

From the accounts of the tour personnel we spoke to, it was impossible to establish a consensus of hard facts. Some said that the pair had been seen together for several

months; others that they had observed the odd couple only for a week or so. Another story has it that the same rhino had previously befriended a buffalo, which had 'left' her.

Are there any SWARA readers out there who can tell us more about this curious alliance?

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