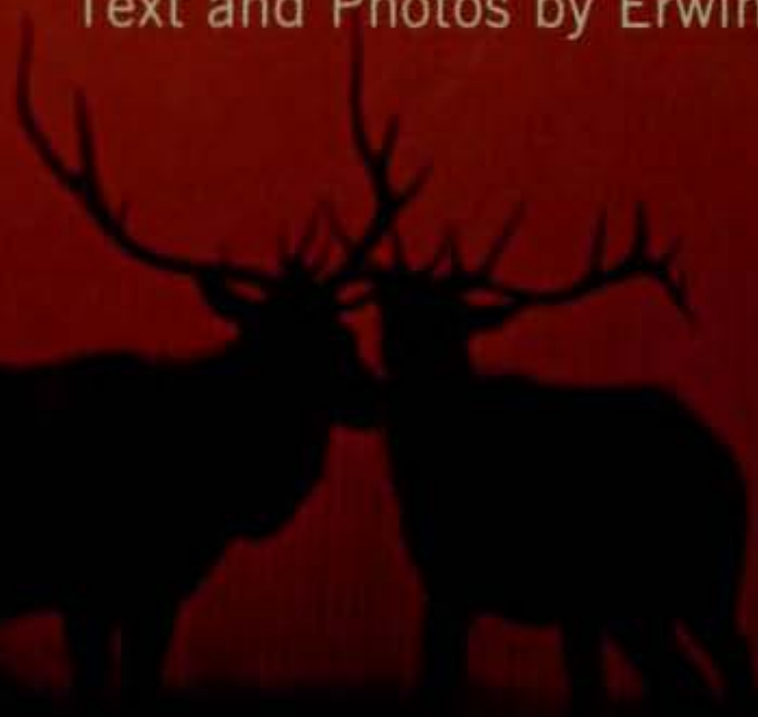
An Outdoor Life Book

Treasury of

Big Game Animals

Text and Photos by Erwin A. Bauer



A famous photographer-author presents the great game animals of North America, Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe.

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Big Game

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Animals

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At times every outdoorsman becomes too careless for his own good and suddenly discovers he is in trouble. It can happen without warning when he climbs to a place on a mountain from which it is almost impossible to descend. Or precarious predicaments can result from overconfidence, or underestimating a wild animal. Both have happened to me, the latter during my first trip to Africa years ago.

At the time, I already had considerable experience hunting and photographing big game in North America, all of it without incident. Then came a thirty-day safari in (then) Tanganyika which was a great adventure, but where nothing of a perilous nature happened. At the conclusion of the safari, Keith Cormack and I drove to visit some of the game parks of Kenya with photography in mind.

In what is now Amboseli National Park we photographed several black rhinos, and a cameraman isn't likely to find any more docile, willing subjects than these. I was amazed at how undisturbed they were at the approach of our vehicle; even a female with a very small calf only stared dully at us. If the pictures lacked anything, it was motion or excitement rather than close-up detail, which I got.

Several days later we were in Tsavo Park, and driving along a lonely road we came upon another rhino. This one was lying down beside a mud hole in which it had been rolling. The mud was a brick red color and so was the rhinoceros. Any rhino is strange and prehistoric in appearance, but this dripping red one was pure nightmare, and I had to have pictures.

At the time I was using a 35mm camera with a 400mm follow-focus lens. The latter is long, heavy and cumbersome compared to newer

gear, but with that equipment in hand I stepped from the car and walked closer and closer to the rhino, stopping to make exposures at intervals along the way. Like the Amboseli rhinos, this one seemed to pay little attention to me, only standing and walking away when I was thirty to forty yards distant. So I grew careless and hurried my pace to get a little closer, at the same time trying to focus the long lens.

Next thing I knew the rhino was pounding directly toward me!

It is lucky that he did not trample my photo equipment, which I dropped on the ground while climbing the nearest tree and driving a thorn into my hand in the process. The rhino ran right beneath the tree and kept on going.

What I will always remember about that encounter, however, is neither being treed nor the puncture in my palm. It is the astonishing agility and speed of that rhino. It still does not seem possible that an animal of such size and structure could swap ends and shift into high gear so suddenly. But many times since then I've seen rhinos repeat the performance—and each time was another valuable lesson.

The lesson, simply, is do not underestimate or take for granted *any* big-game animal. You might make the mistake only once.

Black rhino, looking like an apparition from prehistoric times, squints at the world through little nearsighted eyes. Unexplained is the pugnacity of the black, the docility of the white rhino.

Standing anywhere in the east or south African bush, the black rhinoceros, *Diceros bicornis*, looks every inch the prehistoric monster. A full-grown animal probably weighs a ton or more. It is five, maybe six feet high at the front shoulder and twice that long from nose to tip of tail. The skin, which is an inch thick, wrinkled, scarred and armor-like, is the same color as the earth on which it lives. That is usually some shade of gray and despite the name is seldom black. Two pointed horns, the front one longer than the other, protrude out and up from an enormous piglike head. Viewed suddenly or for the first time, the rhino appears more an apparition than a flesh and blood animal.

No matter from which angle it's viewed, the rhino looks like a mistake. Its legs are too short for the long heavy body. At times its eyesight is so bad that it borders on blindness, and this may account for much of the animal's unpredictability and generally truculent behavior. The black rhino is often considered the only animal which will charge without provocation, although whether it is actually charging has often been questioned.

Professional hunter Brian Herne believes that a black rhino's nearsightedness is so acute that it permits a person who takes advantage of wind and travels quietly enough to approach too close before the rhino realizes it. The animal reacts by charging, or at least bluffing, mostly from fear or uncertainty. Herne may have something there. But how about that close cousin, the equally myopic white rhino, which is as docile as a barnyard milk cow?

No matter what the reason, black rhinos have a long history of taking on all comers, and that includes elephants, trucks, tractors and trains as well as hapless humans walking through rhino country. The Mombasa-to-Nairobi train has been derailed by a combative rhino, and each year in the national parks a number of passenger vehicles are overturned, sometimes with the passengers inside. There is a record of one animal battering itself so re-

Horn of the black rhino has unwarranted reputation among Orientals as an aphrodisiac and youth restorer. Illicit market in horns has caused poaching and a depletion of rhino herds.

peatedly against a farm tractor (which the driver deserted in panic) that it died from the injuries. Another fought a five-minute draw with a Chevy truck on the Mombasa highway.

In Kenya a game warden found a rhino hopelessly bogged down in a mudhole and unless rescued, doomed to die there. Using the winch on his land rover, the warden tossed a loop of rope over the rhino's horn and towed it out of its deathtrap. The rhino responded by smashing the land rover. Another rhino ended the life of Bwana Cotter, an Oklahoman who became famous as a professional hunter in east Africa. Still another killed four natives near Ole Debesse wells. So the record reads.

But it is not the rhino's bad temper which has reduced it to endangered species status. Rather, it is the usual combination of clearing the land for agriculture and the demand for its horn, which has no value at all (except to the rhino) but which nevertheless may sell for several hundred dollars a pound in parts of Asia.

It is now known that many Orientals consider ground rhino horn to be both an aphrodisiac and a restorer of lost youth. Although it is neither, it has created such a flourishing illicit market and has encouraged so much poaching that in the past, plains have been littered with decaying carcasses and bleached bones left behind after obtaining the horn.

The horn isn't actual horn. It is closely packed, hairlike fiber which grows out of the skin to almost the hardness of horn. An aver-

Cattle egrets often visit a black rhino and eat the grubs on its back—an arrangement that is most satisfying to both parties.

age-size front spike is about two feet, but it may grow to nearly four feet. Two very famous black rhinos of Amboseli Park, Gladys and Gertie (mother and daughter so named by park wardens), which have been photographed by thousands of tourists, both had front horns nearly four feet long.

Equally unusual is the black rhino's prehensile upper lip which is triangular in shape and very mobile. The lip is perfectly adapted for browsing on twigs and stripping the bark from the acacia and euphorbia trees that the animal relishes.

As members of the mammalian order Perissodactyla, the African rhino's only living relatives are the Asian rhinos, zebras, horses and tapirs, all of which also have odd numbers of toes on the foot—three for the rhinos. The black prefers dry bush country, particularly a thorn scrub habitat, but will live in open forests and has been found as high as 11,500 feet on the cloud-covered moorlands of Mt. Kenya. Whatever its environment, the species is crucially important to the other wildlife which share it. If rhinos exist to near-capacity of their range, they browse the scrub thorn heavily enough to permit other succulent plants and other animals to exist there. When the rhinos are eliminated, as has happened in too many and too vast areas, the thorn becomes so dense that few animals can live in it.

Once the black rhino's range included nearly all of sub-Saharan Africa, except the jungles and rain forests. But now there are only pitifully small pockets in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and South Africa, the vast majority in national parks and sanctuaries.

Ironically, during the 1950s and 1960s there was worldwide concern for the white rhinos, which had been reduced to less than 400 head, all except a handful concentrated in Zululand, South Africa. What followed was a splendid conservation effort which has not only rescued the white from oblivion, but has also permitted restocking the animal to areas where it formerly existed. However, during all the concern for the white rhino, the black became equally imperiled.

A fairly recent black rhino slaughter took place between 1946 and 1959, when 50,000 acres of land in Kenya's Makueni District was cleared for agriculture by Wakamba tribesmen. The animals had to be removed, and John Hunter alone exterminated 1,088 black rhinos. But the farming was a failure, and the rhino killing served no useful purpose.

Anyone who has spent much time with or near black rhinos gets the strong impression that they are never happy. They are territorial, marking their areas with rubbed places on trees and piles of dung which grow huge from daily defecation in the exact same place. Rhinos eat tremendous amounts of browse, thorns and all, which are often passed through the body undigested and onto the dung piles.

"This," an African tracker once pointed out to me, "is what gives faru the ugly temper." Faru is Swahili for rhino.

An example of their extreme territorialism occurred when during a 1960-61 drought, 282 rhinos died of malnutrition in Kenya's Tsavo National Park. Almost all the casualties were sustained along the Athi and Tsavo rivers. These rhinos could have saved themselves by moving only a short distance over the Yatta plateau to the Tiva River where food was relatively abundant. But they preferred their established territories to the most bitter end.

If a rhino is ever happy, it is during its daily bath when there is enough water in the mud holes for that purpose. After feeding most of the night, the animal may wallow for an hour or two and snort (which suggests contentment) before emerging to bake in the sun. I once watched a black rhino emerge from its bath and trample down a few small trees, but not eat them, maybe just to show his happiness.

Even the black rhino's courtship and lovelife are all aggression. During mating, most wild-life parents are inseparable and at least do not appear angry at one another. But it is common for the female to attack her suitor, sometimes until he is so bruised and battered that he can barely stand on four feet. Bachelorhood seems much more attractive, and it is no wonder that the animals breed only every third year. About eighteen months after the nuptial battering, a single calf (rarely twins) is born in a lonely thorn thicket.

There is nothing cuddly about a black rhino calf, which is only slightly less homely than its mother. The female defends the little one at any cost, against any enemy, as long as the calf is still suckling, which may be as long as two years after birth. The baby always travels behind the mother rather than in front. Otherwise, a tracker assured me, the mother would charge it. Black rhinos do not reach maturity until five or six years, at which time they begin their own solitary and sullen lives.

It is much easier to describe the white rhinoceros, *Diceros simus*. Although the white is superficially similar in appearance, its behavior is exactly the opposite. For example, a white rhino calf almost always walks in front of the mother. And to provoke a charge from the white is virtually impossible.

There is no mistaking the white rhino for the black. The white reaches much larger size, up to seventy inches at the shoulder and from three and a half to five tons in weight, making it second (to the elephant) in size of all land mammals. The head is longer, heavier, and carried lower than the black rhino's, and it terminates in a broad square muzzle with no trace of protruding lip. The white rhino is rarely white. It is the same dark color of the mud in the nearest mudhole. The word "white" is an erroneous adaption of a Boer word meaning "wide," to describe the mouth. In fact, the name "wide-mouthed" rhino is still occasionally used for the species.

Whites are more social than their smaller and solitary relatives. They often move in family groups of four or five, and I once counted eleven in a herd. They are placid and even-tempered, traits which any wildlife cameraman will appreciate. During mating they become very aggressive, occasionally ferocious, among themselves and even the cows seem pugnacious.

The horns of white rhinos grow longer, thinner and straighter than the blacks' and may actually exceed five feet. The ears are large and fringed with stiff hair. The overall appearance is not one of grace and beauty.

Not long ago all of the surviving white rhinos (except for a dozen or so in Uganda) were in Hluhluwe and Umfolosi game reserves in Zululand. Soon after the animals were finally given complete protection from poaching, they multiplied beyond the carrying capacity of the two reserves. The government began a live-trapping program of surplus rhinos which resulted in stocking many areas (including Kruger National Park and several places in east Africa) where the species had earlier been eliminated.

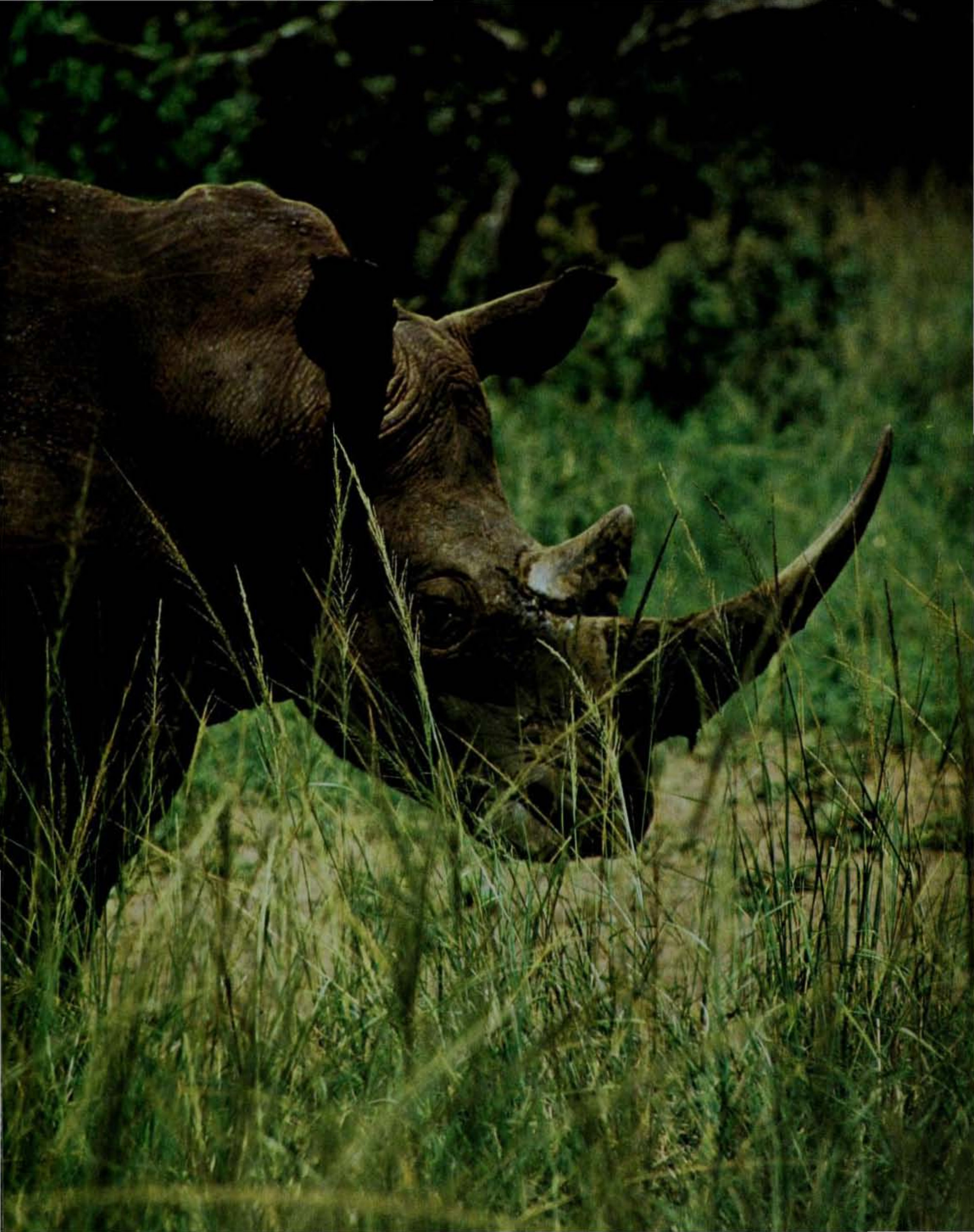
Docile white rhino, the larger of the two, can be identified by its longer, thinner horn which may exceed five feet. Head is larger and heavier, and is carried lower than the black's.

Early in 1967 Karl Maslowski, a motion-picture producer, and I had an opportunity to photograph a white rhino capture at Umfolosi. Early in the morning we met the capture team, including the ranger in charge, a veterinarian, two Zulu game scouts mounted on horseback, and eight to ten other scouts. The animal for capture had already been selected and was a large cow of about four tons.

The actual shooting of the cow was to be done by the chief ranger with a Crosman CO2 gun, loaded with a heavy drug-filled dart. The maximum range with this was only twenty-five yards because of the bad trajectory; in other words, the ranger had to stalk within point-blank range.

The two horsemen wore crash helmets and heavily padded clothing all over. The horses also were protected with thick padding, and for good reason. Once the rhino was plunked with the dart, it would race away across country and far out of sight before the drug would take effect. The horsemen therefore had to follow right behind it, to pinpoint the exact location where it fell so that a large truck could be brought as near as possible for loading before the rhino revived. Without the padded protection, the riders couldn't possibly keep up with the rhino racing through thornbrush.

We found the cow lying down along with a large calf and a male in an island surrounded by open grassland. After carefully checking the wind, the ranger began his stalk on hands and knees, being careful to alarm none of the three. When only twenty yards away, he rose slowly



Enjoying a mud bath, their favorite diversion, two white rhinos display the sociability that distinguishes them from their relatives the blacks.

to one knee, aimed, and just as all the rhinos spotted him and suddenly stood up in surprise, the ranger fired. I heard the dart thump solidly into the flank of the cow.

Then all hell broke loose.

Rhinos were running in all directions, and I did not want to be in the path of any but did want pictures. I heard the horsemen shouting at their mounts. Suddenly everything was still again.

"Let's be ready to make tracks," the ranger said, "when a horseman returns."

We didn't have long to wait. The rider came back and reported that the cow was down in a fairly open area easy of access with the truck. A few minutes later we reached the spot and there, immobilized, the rhino looked even larger than it had in the field.

The next step was to back the truck as close as possible. The vet then injected a second drug to counteract the first and begin the rhino's revival. Gradually, the animal was able to stand up and while still in a stupor was half walked by the scout crew and half pulled by ropes and pullies into the padded bed of the truck. Not long afterward, it was well on its way to being released at Matapos National Park in Rhodesia.

Not all captures go as smoothly and without complications as that one. With so much practice the crews have become very efficient. But it is very hard, dangerous labor and there have been serious injuries. It is a wildlife conservation success story all too rare nowadays. Because of it, the world's population of wild white rhinos now stands above 4,000, and the animal appears secure. The ranger and game scouts of the Zululand reserves deserve an immense amount of credit for it.

Asian Rhinos

For several hundred yards the mahout had prodded our elephant through a swamp almost impenetrable to smaller animals or humans, where grass grew twenty feet tall. Visibility was zero. When we finally emerged into a clearing, we could hear the excited shouts of other mahouts coming from another direction, for this was a big-game drive. Next we heard the angry snort of the animals being driven toward us.

An instant later a huge female one-horned rhino broke out of the swamp grass, followed closely by a small calf. The two stopped and stood facing us, the female on the verge of charging. Even safely atop an elephant that was a chilling confrontation, because the cow was furious. Her huge body quivered.

My first instinct as a wildlife photographer was to focus a motor-driven Nikon on the pair and shoot. But our elephant had other ideas; it sensed that a mother rhino is nothing to trifle with. An instant later the elephant fled and the rhinos bolted back into the swamp. Later, the elephant pulled up trembling.

Ram Krishna, the young mahout, apologized for the animal's nervous behavior, explaining that at only twenty-one it was very young. "Don't worry," he said in accented English, "we soon see more rhinos."

Before that morning ended we flushed out three more and had a very close look at one large bull as it lumbered across a shallow stream. In succeeding days I had good opportunity to observe still other rhinos, as well as the lush environment in which they live.

Watching rhinos is no big deal nowadays. Anyone who joins a photo safari to eastern or southern Africa is certain to see many of both the black and white varieties. A black

rhino might charge the safari car and give everyone a thrill. White rhinos even roam freely in the new "safari parks" being established in the United States. But the Great Indian or one-horn rhino, *Rhinoceros unicornis*, is one of three members of the family Rhinocerotidae which is not easy to see. Probably less than 400 still survive on earth. For just brief glimpses of them, it is necessary to travel to Asia where 250 to 300 exist in the Kaziranga and Manas sanctuaries of troubled Assam state, India. The rest occur in the Terai, a portion of southern Nepal which few outside travelers have yet visited but which is now Mahendra National Park. Today it is high among the best places on the entire continent to see rare Asian wildlife, with emphasis on the one-horn rhino. The park, with its unique new accommodation for visitors, is certain to become very popular.

It is easy to think of Nepal in terms of picture postcard scenes of the high Himalayas and the mysterious city of Kathmandu. Indeed the 54,363 square mile kingdom includes nine of the eleven highest mountain peaks on earth and many more over 20,000 feet elevation. Less than one hundred miles as the crow flies from Everest or Annapurna, Nepal's most visible pinnacles, there is a lowland jungle, or Terai, not far above sea level. It contains about 1,200 square miles of uncut hardwood timber, and is probably the largest virgin forest left in Asia south of Siberia. This is fringed by the swamp habitat of the rhino, and the whole region is laced by clear cool streams which are headwaters of the Ganges River. Wildlife is wonderfully varied and abundant.

Until 1965 when the region was declared a wildlife sanctuary, poaching rhinos just to secure the horns was common. But that was stopped. At the same time, with an eye toward improving Nepal's balance of payments overseas, a facility was built to attract tourists to see the Terai wildlife. Completed in 1968 and called Tigertops, it is a good destination for anyone who enjoys the outdoors and watching big game.

Tigertops was modeled after Treetops in Kenya. It consists of twin lodges built on mahogany stilts at treetop level, with rattan walls and thatched roofs to best blend into the leafy environment. The showers are cold water and the illumination is courtesy of vintage Coleman kerosene lamps, but otherwise the place has everything—no telephones, no radio, no television, not even a portable power plant. A small concession to luxury is a circular dining room and bar, built of native stone and thatch beside a large fireplace. Surrounded by sal forest, it is a happy place to spend evenings, to listen to night sounds outside and to wait up for a tiger or leopard to visit baits placed nearby.

Just getting to Tigertops can be an adventure. It is first necessary to fly to Kathmandu from New Delhi or Bangkok, either way offering a breathtaking view of the main range of the Himalayas during the trip. From Kathmandu it is a forty-minute hop via Royal Nepal Airlines DC-3 to Meghauli "airport," which is nothing more than a level cow pasture at the edge of the jungle. Elephants are waiting at Meghauli to carry travelers and luggage to Tigertops, which is eight miles away. During the ride the first rhinos and several species of deer are likely to be seen.

All travel and rhino viewing out of Tigertops is done on elephant back for two good reasons. It is the best way to approach close to rhinos, which are far less suspicious of the tuskers than of four-wheel drive jeeps. And in some places it is the *only* way. Vehicles are

impractical without extensive road building, and that would destroy the wilderness atmosphere.

The riding elephants, most of which have been captured from the wild herds which still range in the Terai, are fascinating beasts. Most are very tractable (to the mahouts who must virtually live with them) and staunch when encountering any kind of game. The riding qualities vary a good deal from one to another; some give a very smooth ride, while others seem to be traveling on only three stiff legs. On the average, females prove easier to train and handle than bulls. Evidently the mahouts are very romantic fellows, having given the Tiger-tops elephants Nepalese names which translate into Pearl of God, Handsome Prince, Flower of Destruction, Mysterious Goddess, Rose Goddess and (no originality here) Elephant of Rajasthan, which is a state in India.

I was "aboard" Rose Goddess during the closest encounter with a rhino. We were travelling along a well-beaten game path which paralleled a shallow water course when tall grass alongside us began to waver closer and closer. Then a loud snort, which was more of a snarl, and a rhino poked its ugly snout out of the grass barely twenty feet away. Just as quickly it vanished, only to reappear behind us. Apparently the mahout (this one couldn't speak English) was puzzled by that rhino behavior, because we turned and without explanation hurried away from that general area.

The Indian one-horned rhino is even more grotesque and intimidating in outward appearance than his African cousins. The skin of this massive animal folds and seems to overlap on its neck, shoulders and thighs. Its skin is entirely studded with masses of convex tubercles which resemble steel rivets. Except for the horn, the large head and face are pig-like; the eyes are small, and the upper lip is prehensile. But the low-slung armored body and short legs are deceptive, because the rhino is more agile than it appears.

One-horns are solitary, sedentary and almost entirely grazers. Mating takes place in late winter and gestation is about nineteen months. One newborn calf weighed 120 pounds, which probably is average. The average weight of an adult is less than the larger African white rhino's and greater than the black rhino's. Females mate only every third year, and maybe not that frequently.

Even in densest cover, rhinos are not too hard to find. They bathe or wallow daily in the same place as long as the water supply remains. Tramped-down trails lead from all around to these wallows. One-horns also defecate in the same place until a large pile of dung accumulates. When approaching these deposits, the rhino walks backward and so is a very easy mark for poachers-in-waiting.

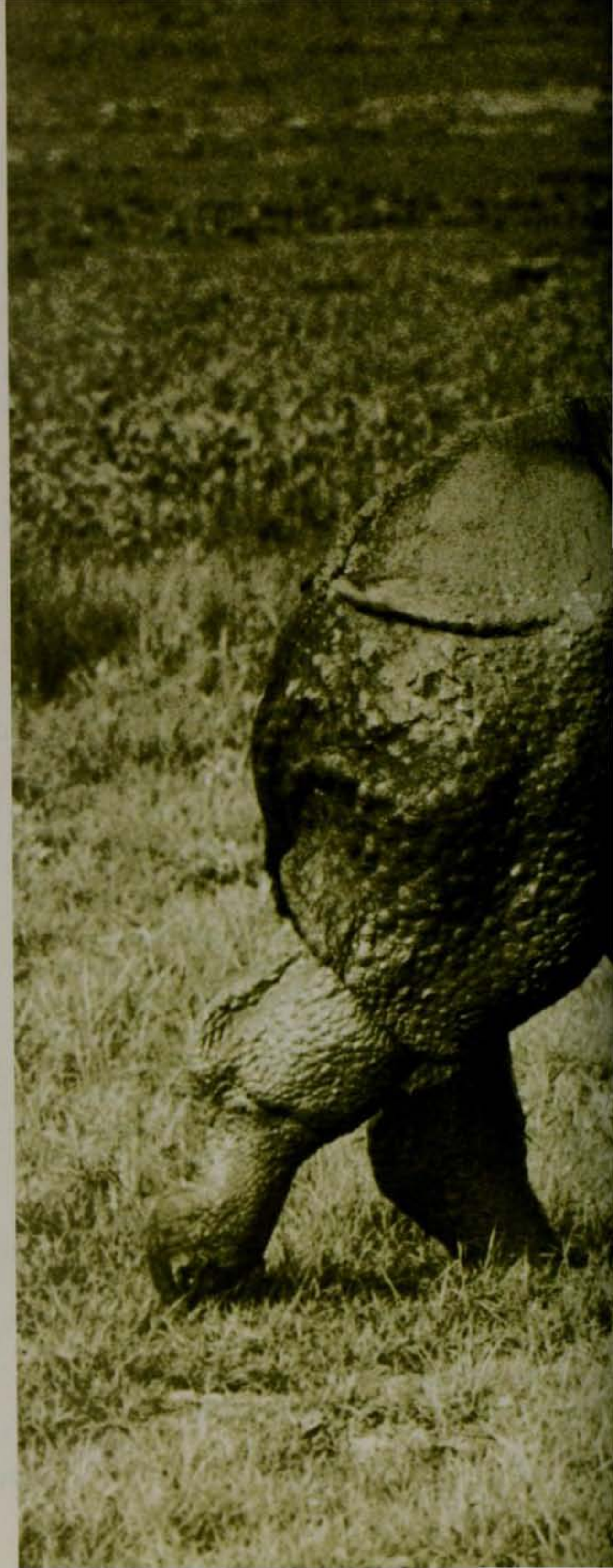
Before the European arrival in India, the one-horn rhino was abundant, ranging from Kashmir and Peshawar in the west, all along the Himalayan foothills, the Ganges and Brahmaputra headwaters to the Burma border. On the edges of the Terai, teams of farmers once used gongs, firecrackers, and other noisemakers to drive rhinos from their fields. At one time a bounty was levied on the beasts in Bengal. Today there is only the relict population already described in Nepal and India, and the rhinos of India's Kaziranga are by no means secure. Domestic stock still is permitted to compete for available food, and the small sanctuary staff cannot cope with the continuous poaching on the fringes. In 1966 thirteen rhinos were victims of poachers. And the toll continues. In 1971 there was talk of relocating

A rare one-horned rhinoceros, browsing as it moves, trundles slowly across an Asian plain. In profile, this animal's resemblance to an armored vehicle is startling: its plates of tough hide seem riveted together by nodules called tubercles.

refugees from the East Bengal (Bangladesh) revolution in Assam near the sanctuary. That would be the beginning of the end for the rhinos and other wildlife.

Compared to that of the Javan (or smaller one-horn) rhino, *Rhinoceros sondaicus*, and the Asiatic two-horned (or Sumatran) rhino, the future of the Great Indian species is positively bright. The Javan once ranged widely across southeast Asia from Bengal, the Sikkim Terai, and Assam across Burma and the Malay Peninsula to Sumatra. As recently as World War I, the species was hunting in the Mekong Delta and in marshes near Saigon. The dozen or so left are all on the Udjong Kulon Reserve, a peninsular area of extreme western Java. During the last century alone, the human population has multiplied at least tenfold so that the rest of the island naturally is devoted to intense agriculture and thus the end of Javan rhinos.

Udjong Kulon is 117 square miles of undisturbed jungle (also containing the Javan tiger, probably the world's rarest predator) and should be a suitable stronghold for the rhinos. But the very density of the sanctuary's cover makes it difficult to keep out poachers, and they continue hunting the rhino for its horn. At one time rhino horn was valuable enough in southeast Asia to supply the annual tribute from princes and kings to more powerful Chinese emperors. It is still a valuable enough dowry to assure a rich husband for a poor girl in parts of Indonesia.



The Javan rhino is very similar to the Indian except that it is smaller and has a smaller horn. The cows have no horns (or almost none) and are the only females of the five rhino species which do not. The reproductive rate of the species is low because calves suckle for two years or more, and females are not believed capable of mating more frequently than every fourth or fifth year. Only stringent, unrelenting protection in Udjong Kulon can save the Javan rhinoceros from oblivion.

The one-ton Sumatran rhinoceros which stands only four to four and one-half feet at the shoulder is the smallest of all living rhinos. *Didermocerus sumatrensis* is also the only Asiatic species with two horns, the front horn always many times longer than the other. The skin folds of the Sumatran rhino are also less noticeable than those of the Javan and Indian.

The Sumatran rhino once ranged from wooded hill country of East Pakistan and Assam, throughout Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Sumatra and Borneo, where in areas it was fairly numerous. As late as the 1920s, good numbers were present in Cambodia and along the Mekong River. But except for very small and isolated populations which may or may not survive in remotest Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra, the species has been wiped out. The same senseless hunting for horn and the rapid pace of rural development have reduced the species to 100 to 120 animals, as estimated by the International Union for Conservation and Natural Resources in a report that the organization issued in 1969.

Dwarfed in a field of tall reeds, an Indian rhino listens for danger. And danger abounds; only some 600 animals of this species survive today. They have fallen victim to man's encroachments on open grasslands and to poachers who sell horns—considered to be an aphrodisiac—for upwards of $200 per ounce.