

THE 10 BLACK RHINOS WERE THE LARGEST NUMBER EVER BROUGHT TO THE UNITED STATES IN A SINGLE OPERATION.



Harry Tennison, right, and Norman Travers feed a black rhinoceros at the Imire Ranch in Zimbabwe.

A RARE TREAT

Only about 3,000 black rhinos survive in the world today, but Harry Tennison and other Fort Worth conservationists have joined the fight to stave off extinction. Three rhinos have just been added to the Fort Worth Zoo, one having been born there about a month ago.

By Cissy Stewart



A Fort Worth Zoo attendant gives a black rhino a welcome shower.

TEXAS MAY WANT to update "Home on the Range" some day soon. In the new version, the song would begin: "Oh give me a home where the black rhinos roam..."

The Pied Piper of the movement to save the endangered species by breeding rhinos in Texas is Harry L. Tennison, a Fort Worth man with electric blue eyes and the dedication to fight hell with a bucket of water. Tennison is president of Game Conservation International, the Fort Worth-based organization which paid the bills to bring a pair of rhinos to the Fort Worth Zoo in July.

Game Conservation International also picked up the tab for eight other animals in the black rhino airlift from Zimbabwe. Two rhinos went to the Dallas Zoo, two to the Milwaukee County Zoo, and one to the San Diego Zoo. Three rhinos went to South Texas Ranches — a pair to the ranch there owned by Lee and Ramona Bass, and one to the Calvin Bentsen ranch — home of the first "ranch" rhino calf that can be called native Texan.

The 10 black rhinos were the largest number ever brought to the United States in a single operation. The division of the animals between outstanding zoos, which received seven, and South Texas ranches, which received three, represents two philosophies of preserving an endangered species. One group

holds that rhinos should be kept in zoos under close supervision in quarters that closely resemble their native habitat; the other group is convinced that rhinos, which are by nature solitary animals that only mingle during the breeding season, will reproduce best when permitted to roam on vast ranches.

"By November of next year — 1990 — we should have three more rhino calves," Tennison says. "If that happens and those calves are healthy, there is no question that our program is working."

The program got a head start at the Fort Worth Zoo. Ngwetwe, a female rhino who arrived in the July contingent, was pregnant when she was captured, crated, flown some 30 hours from Zimbabwe, sprayed with pesticides as required by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and trucked to her present quarters in the Fort Worth Zoo. The calf, appropriately named "Harry," was born Aug. 18, weighing in at about 90 pounds.

For the present, the female and the male rhino, GotaGota, seem to be settling into their new quarters. They are being kept in the area formerly occupied by the zoo's white rhinos who are "vacationing" at Fossil Rim Wildlife Center near Glen Rose. Eventually, both the white and the black rhinos will be housed in the zoo's new rhino exhibit scheduled to be completed in October or early November.

The white rhinos were a gift to the Fort

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Little Harry, born at the Fort Worth Zoo, snuggles up to Ngwetwe, his mom.

Worth Zoo from the Tennison family. In 1972, Harry and Gloria Tennison and their daughter, Kit — now Mrs. Charles B. Moncrief — helped capture the two white rhinos and presented them to the Fort Worth Zoo where they have been a major attraction.

The black rhinos, the new arrivals, have been viewed by zoo-goers only on closed-circuit television. Harry Tennison cautions viewers not to worry about those color designations. "A rhino's color depends on what it has been rolling in recently," he explained. The white rhino averages something like 6 inches taller than the black species.

The black rhino is the more aggressive of the two species. Rhinoceros experts point out that the black rhino has a prehensile lip — a lip adapted for wrapping around an object such as a small tree limb.

There still is some concern about what kind of small tree limbs the two black rhinos in Fort Worth will consume. So far, they have rejected hackberry, pecan, even endive. Both animals accept an occasional apple but the young male displays typically male behavior and refuses to eat his raw carrots.

Tennison hopes to persuade an airline to transport huisache from South Texas to the rhinos in Dallas and Fort Worth. Huisache, a native Texas plant, is a member of the genus *Acacia* which provides one of the rhinos' major foods in the wild. Rhinos on the South Texas ranches consume up to 90 pounds a day of the thorny native plant. "Rhinos crunch

their foods — thorns and all," Tennison explains. "The roughage keeps their gums healthy."

Tennison, Fort Worth Zoo Director Elvie Turner Jr., Assistant Zoo Director Dudley Brown, zoo attendant Jeanne Jacobsen, the entire staff of the zoo and many people in Fort Worth kept a careful maternity watch as the birth of Harry approached. Turner had gone to Zimbabwe to inspect the rhinos prior to their shipment to Texas, and Tennison spent a day and a half talking to the two animals. When Jeanne Jacobsen took over as the rhino attendant, Tennison's first instruction was, "Talk to them. Your voice will imprint the animals."

It seems to be working. The female, built like a Sherman tank with a huge head supporting a pair of wicked horns, maneuvers close to the heavy metal bars of her pen so Jacobsen can lean over to gently rub the side of her head. While she is being petted, the rhino closes her eyes.

She is shielded from the young male rhino by a tall plywood privacy fence. The playful male rhino comes to the fence, picks up the soft plastic tub holding his drinking water, and dumps water over the pen. "He does this when he is trying to persuade me to hose him down again," Jacobsen says. "They enjoy the water."

Rhinos, however, are not kittens. Tennison warns. He tells about the time he and a friend were riding in a Land Rover and encountered a rhino which charged, drove his horn up

TEXAS!

(Our TEXAS!)

Recalls an Earlier State

Fort Worth Zoo
visitors stroll into
the new Texas
Diorama.



WHILE THE acquisition of two black rhinos has been the most celebrated event at the Fort Worth Zoo of late, another recent development might loom almost as significant to zoo history in the long run.

Earlier in the summer, the TEXAS! exhibit, also known as the Texas Diorama, was opened to the public. And, as hoped, the \$2.3 million project is already earning acclaim as a unique and historical concept in wildlife park technology.

TEXAS! takes a new look at a traditional face of the Lone Star State — a state where buffalo roamed and small towns and cities shared the environment with the wildlife of the area. The exhibit is a replica of a small farm community typical of the period, complete with the animals that ruled the plains prior to the industrial revolution.

Inside TEXAS!, patrons can tour reconstructions of a stone ranch house and a 12-stall barn that houses the livestock for the exhibit's petting corral. Demonstrations of old-Texas traditions such as horse shoeing and sheep shearing take place in adjacent areas. Down the walkway, cleverly fashioned in Lone Star State-shaped bricks, there are other "Pure D Texas" remnants: a blacksmith shop, a schoolhouse, a working windmill and covered wagon rides.

In a few months, the exhibit already has become a popular attraction at the zoo, not only for its aes-

thetic qualities — even the plush foliage is vintage Texas — but for its educational value as well.

Still, as one of the more proud supporters of the exhibit points out, there is more to TEXAS! than meets the eye. "Not only is this a unique addition to the zoo," says Fort Worth Mayor Bob Bolen, "but it gives the city one more site for meetings. It's a haven for groups who are looking for a different kind of public forum."

Indeed, since its doors opened, TEXAS! has attracted an array of visitors who have parlayed the exhibit into an exhibit hall of sorts. Recently, officials from the International Sister Cities Association of Fort Worth, as well as Egyptian visitors in the state in conjunction with the "Ramesses The Great" exhibition, visited the Texas! exhibit. "I've been down there three times recently for meetings myself," the mayor says. "It gives a different flavor to the traditional meeting."

What it also does is give Fort Worth one more venue for one of Bolen's favorite pastimes: selling the city. "There's no question, the exhibit represents something unusual and educational with a Fort Worth flavor to it," Bolen says. "It's something we have used and will use to help visitors get to know the city a little better. You've got to give the Zoological Association credit. They came up with a winner with this exhibit. It's something all of Fort Worth can be proud of and use over and over again."

through the floorboard between the driver's feet and turned the vehicle over. Neither man was injured.

The horns are the primary reason for the endangered status of the rhino. Rhino horns sell for as much as \$100,000. They are an ultimate status symbol as a dagger handle, and are ground and sold as an aphrodisiac in much of Asia.

The last wild population is in Zimbabwe, where the government has

armed game wardens to protect the rhinos from Uzi-toting poachers. Regardless, the good guys and the rhinos are losing the battle.

Poachers kill a rhino a day. There were approximately 20,000 rhinos in Kenya alone in 1968. Today, there are fewer than 200 rhinos in Kenya, and less than 3,000 black rhinos in the entire world. In the past 20 years, an estimated 95 per cent of the black rhino population has been killed by

poachers.

Poachers are just part of the problem, however. The other part is habitat. The population of the young nations of Africa, most of them colonies of European nations until the 1960s, has been growing. The need for land for cultivation also has been growing. Wild animals, particularly larger animals such as rhinos and elephants, require miles of open land.

Elephants also are being poached

for the ivory of their tusks. Poaching, combined with the disappearance of habitat, has put the African elephant as well as a near relative, the Asian elephant, on the endangered lists. The Fort Worth Zoo is part of a breeding program for Asian elephants.

The position of the rhinoceros and the elephant in Africa is being compared by conservationists to that of the limitless herds of buffalo that roamed the western part of the United States in the 19th century. When people moved in and settled the West, the buffalo were massacred nearly into extinction.

WHEN THE United States proposed a complete ban on the importation of ivory in an effort to protect rhinos and elephants, Tennison went to Washington to argue against the ruling. Tennison points out that a ban on ivory would cost 15 million jobs in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Ivory brings in about \$20 million to \$30 million annually in those three nations, and a large portion of the income is used to preserve the animals' habitat.

If those nations stopped culling the herds of wild elephants, Tennison estimates, the animals would destroy their habitat in less than three years.

For example, there are 50,000 elephants in the Zambezi River valley of Zimbabwe. In order to maintain the elephants' habitat, the herd must be culled by 3,000 or 4,000 animals a year. Sale of the ivory and hides from those culled animals makes maintenance of the habitat logical from an economic standpoint.

Tennison cites Kenya, a nation which sought to maintain 42,000 elephants in a habitat which could support a maximum of 20,000 elephants. Today, there are few elephants in Kenya. In that nation's Kruger Park alone, game control officials estimate, 700 elephants must be removed this year. That figure represents 10 percent of the herd of wild elephants in the park — and the birth rate among elephants there is high enough to replace the elephant population within a year.

"Texas ranchers always have known about culling herds of cattle. It works on the same principle with wild animals," Tennison adds.

Tennison didn't go to Africa initially as an animal conservationist. He went as a big game hunter. Harry and Gloria Tennison were introduced to Africa in 1948 by the late Fort Worth

oil man F. Kirk Johnson, who was first president of the Fort Worth Zoological Association. Harry Tennison became third president of the Zoological Association, and his son, Lee Tennison, is the current president. Also along on that initial safari in 1948 were actor Jimmy Stewart and wife Gloria, who were close friends of "Fran" Johnson and his wife, Bess Johnson.

Since that first safari, Harry Tennison has been going to Africa two or three times a year, usually accompanied by his wife and often accompanied by their children. Mrs. Tennison is the former Gloria Lupton. Her family were part owners of the Coca-Cola bottling company in Fort Worth, and co-founded the Brown-Lupton Foundation. Their three children, Lee Tennison, Kit Tennison Moncrief and Jill Tennison Barnes, grew up going to Africa.

In the early 1970s, the Tennisons took more than 200 teenagers to South Africa to attend the Wilderness Leadership School. Among the young people who went to Africa with the Tennisons were Lee Bass, on whose ranch one pair of the black rhinos are living, and Ben Fortson Jr.

Tennison studied the Swahili language and, after passing stringent requirements, earned a professional hunter's license. Then he realized that the wildlife of Africa was disappearing even as he watched. In 1966, Tennison and fellow sportsmen founded Game Conservation International, an organization dedicated to the protection, preservation and utilization of wildlife.

In addition to the preservation of the black rhino, the organization has funded anti-poaching efforts in Mozambique and Tanzania, research on both leopards and elephants in Kenya, research on the mountain lion, Ducks Unlimited in Mexico, and the Wilderness Leadership School in South Africa.

When the two Zimbabwean officials who accompanied the rhinos to Fort Worth prepared to return to Zimbabwe, Game Conservation International presented a check for \$30,000 to the officials. The money will be used in the Zimbabwean fight to stop the poaching of rhinos. This was in addition to more than \$200,000 the organization spent to bring the black rhinos to Texas.

His fight to save endangered animal species has brought Harry Tennison fast friends and bitter enemies. He no longer goes to Kenya because in 1977 at an international meeting of the

World Wilderness Congress, Tennison exposed a poaching operation in Kenya, naming names, times and dates and giving the documentation to back up his accusations. "I did it because I could see the end of the elephant and the rhino in Kenya — but I wouldn't dare set foot in that country today," Tennison says.

When Game Conservation International met in London, Tennison was invited to meet fellow conservationist Prince Philip. "It was supposed to be a 15 minute audience, but we visited more than 45 minutes," the Fort Worth man recalls.

When the black rhinos were successfully brought to this country, one of the first individuals to congratulate Tennison was the Chief of the Zulus, Dr. Ian Player, who recently retired from the board of directors of National Parks Board of South Africa. is a close friend of Tennison's. Dr. Player is the brother of golfer Gary Player.

TENNISON FIRST made an offer to bring rhinos to Texas ranches in 1980 at a meeting of animal conservationists in London. "They didn't understand what I was after," he admits. His suggestion not only was rejected, but people he didn't even know wrote Tennison nasty letters accusing him of trying to corner the market on threatened rhinos.

"No one could hire me at any price to go through what I endured for the next four years," Tennison says.

He finds Fort Worth people to be private people. "They are close to the land — most of them were raised on the land and grew up with an appreciation for it."

Tennison and his family are convinced that improvements under way at the Fort Worth Zoo are worth the efforts. Even without black rhinos, the zoo was visited by more than 200,000 people last year. On a recent rainy summer afternoon, Tennison pointed out that the zoo's parking lot was filled despite the weather.

Tennison celebrated his 70th birthday in July, and he plans to write his own story about animal conservation soon. His family is trying to persuade Tennison to slow down, but as he explains, "I can't sit still." In addition to writing a book, Tennison already is at work on another project to save yet another endangered species, but he "can't talk about that project yet."

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HARRY TENNISON

Saving Black Rhinos
in the Fort Worth Zoo

Richard C. Schaeffer, MD
1229 7th Ave
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60