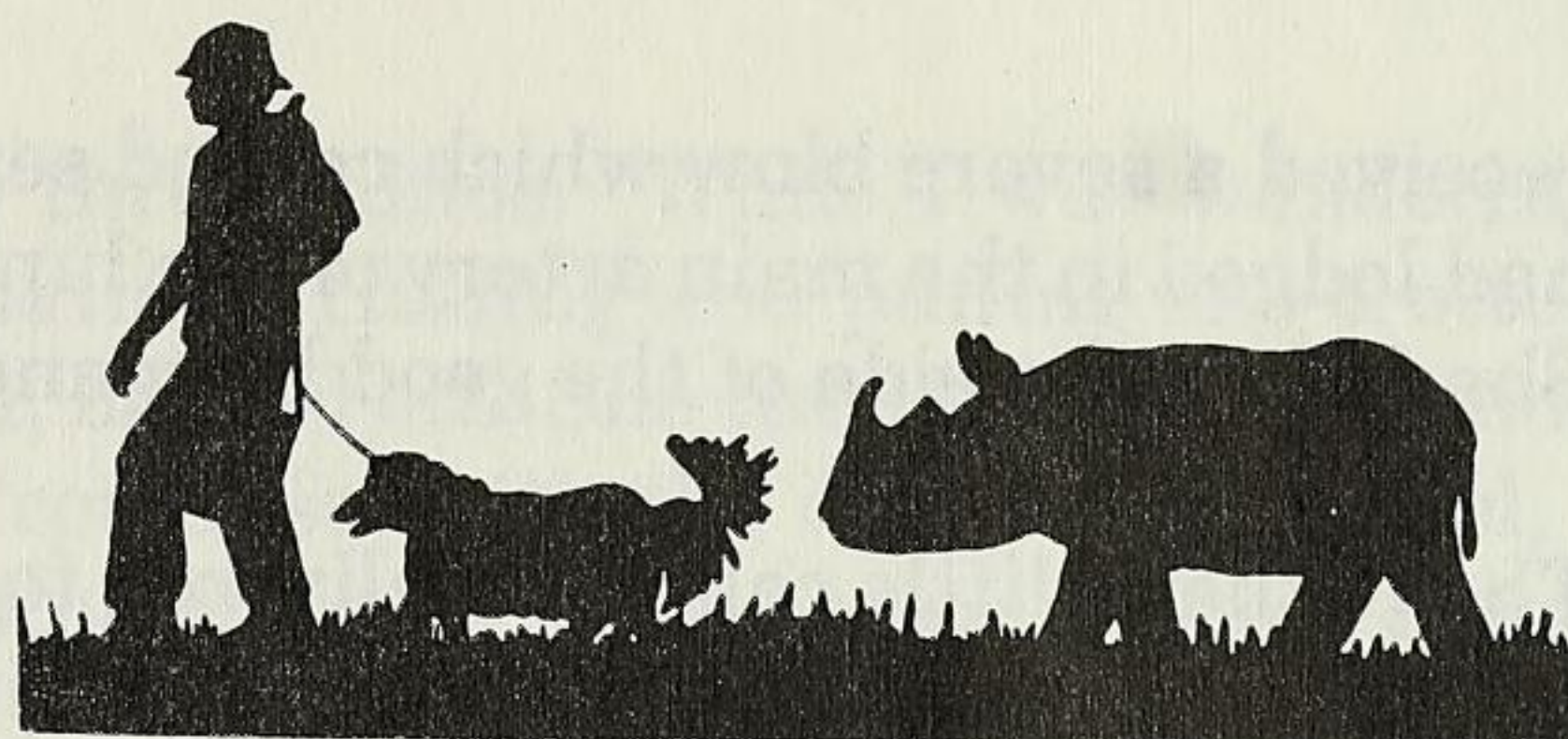


# Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary Annual Report



The closing months of '94 have brought to us here more than their usual share of drama and tragedy. It has also been a period of quite incredible natural beauty. The rains, which started late in October, continued for an incredible six weeks and have turned Lewa Downs into a lush green paradise. The dry river bed below my garden became, for a few days, a raging torrent and the sound of the waterfall filled the house with its music. Flowers blossomed in delicate profusion and the bird life is incredible as, at the time of writing, the grass plains are alive with huge flocks of European white storks searching for grasshoppers, and the air is alive with bird and insect song. The less said about the roads the better; they became a nightmare and we were all more or less grounded for considerable periods of time.

This autumn the Natal Parks Board, with considerable generosity, donated 20 white rhinos to the Kenyan Government. We also were the beneficiary of their largesse and received a lovely white female called Natal who has settled in well and joined up with Jagwai and N'Juku. Sungari and Gororika's calves, born May and June, are flourishing on the abundant grazing and eight months after giving birth, Sungari has been mated once more by Makora with her baby plus her previous calf, Lari, in interested attendance. Lari left his mother for seven months after the birth of her new calf and joined up with Marembo and Baraza but on the third week of December he joined her once more.

Tragedy has struck two of our black rhino cows. Twice during November one of our young translocated bulls, Ekili, attacked Narasha and her calf born in late September. Why did this happen? I do not know. Has this sort of behavior been reported in wild populations? Translocated animals sometimes behave in aberrant ways. Recently I read a report that in Pilanesburg, South Africa young males from a translocated group of elephants attacked and killed ten white rhinos, some of whom had calves that also died. The second time Ekili attacked Narasha, the animals were out on a big black cotton soil plain where, because of the rains, there was no hope of getting a vehicle anywhere near them to try and separate them. With considerable personal courage, Ian took the "Bowling for Rhinos Supercub" and succeeded in driving off Ekili but not before he had seen the calf being flung up into the air by Ekili's horn.

He reported to all of us that the calf had landed with such a crash that he did not believe that it could survive. But it did, though three weeks later a huge swelling had developed under her armpit. These rhinos are the property of the Kenya Government and any mishap that befalls them, natural or otherwise, has to be reported to the K.W.S. Both fights had been reported as was this swelling. The K.W.S. vet came to have a look and decided that it required urgent attention. This, of course, meant that the mother had to be darted in order that her baby could be treated. What no one realized was that she had also been badly wounded in the fight. When the drug took effect and she went down, she died almost at once. The postmortem revealed that in the fight she had



received a severe blow which caused serious internal bleeding and a large clot of blood had lodged in the main artery of one lung. The lung had consequently filled with liquid. She fell on the side of the good lung and asphyxiated.

The pathetic little calf was delivered to me in the back of a truck together with Dryan, the tracker who had such an extraordinary relationship with the dead Narasha. For eight days she was kept in Samia's stable where her wound was treated and she was introduced to a bottle formula. Dryan stayed with her the whole time. But as a long-term solution this was not possible. My home is also Samia's home. She is believed to be highly pregnant and in the past has proven very jealous of interlopers. Visions of her chasing off the huge Makora and persecuting the baby eland I tried to hand-raise floated before my anxious eyes and I did not dare let the baby Tasha out of the stable lest further disaster follow. Now she is stronger and installed with Dryan over in Halvor's stables. From there she will be reintroduced to the wild.

Alas this has not been our only tragedy. The old female Juno disappeared over Christmas. The grass is incredibly high and the roads still very bad so searching for her was more difficult than usual. No vultures were flying and they are the normal sign of trouble. Eventually we found her below a high cliff in a narrow tree-shrouded part of the east valley. With her were the remains of a newborn calf. Juno was said to be old when she came to us in 1984. Out of the three calves she had here, she lost two. We must presume that she was simply too old to give birth again and this last baby killed her. Her horns, lower jaw and part of the baby's skeleton have gone down to Nairobi for analysis. Juno I shall miss sadly. She was one of my oldest friends here. I shall remember the time I hid behind a tree and she walked right up to me, touched me lightly with her nose, gave a disgusted snort and walked off. I shall remember the time my idiotic little collie, Remus, tried to round her up. She was a huge, gentle and beautiful rhino and I loved her and mourn her passing.

On a lighter note, I had two incredible encounters shortly before Christmas. One day, wholly unable to get out by car, Daniel and I walked down the valley below the house. Leopards here are heard with regularity but seldom seen. As I find the look in their eyes somewhat terrifying, I don't go searching for them. On this morning the strange behavior of a troop of baboons alerted Daniel to their presence. Sitting on a rock for 40 minutes we had the incredible good fortune to watch three adult leopards socializing in the valley just below us, a very large male, a smaller male and a female; it was both awe-inspiring and very beautiful.

The second encounter was wholly unexpected and with one of my favorite animals and one I have never before seen here. It was early morning and I was going to walk up the hill accompanied of course by the dogs, to call Francis on the radio. Round the bend we walked and there, sitting on the track with their backs to us were 11 hunting dogs. They were gazing intently at Samia who was on her way home but had stopped to look at these dogs she had not met before. Alas, my dogs barked at this unexpected encounter and the hunting dogs departed. As well as the 11 on the road, at least five more were in the long grass. These fascinating wild dogs are almost as endangered as rhinos throughout their range in sub-Saharan Africa.

Samia is looking to all of us, plus various vets, very pregnant but still nothing happens and still she is my friend, as was proved yet again on a recent evening walk. She had heard the dogs and come to join us on our way home but, to my considerable



consternation, the road home was blocked by three rhinos. While I was wondering what best to do, Samia took charge of the situation. Huffing and puffing she trotted toward them and they, all much larger than her, backed off. She then turned and came back to me, turned again and obviously said "come" so, with the dogs close at heel, I walked beside her and passed them. Having escorted us for what she considered a safe distance, she then went off on her own again. I wonder if anyone has ever had such a friend as I have in Samia.

I must end with a big thank you from all of us here to you for your continued support and a hope that we can continue to rely on you. We need your help badly to continue our work for the rhinos, for this whole ecosystem and the incredibly diverse fauna it supports. Our security can never be relaxed as long as rhino horn continues to be one of the most valuable and sought-after commodities on Earth. The future of these fascinating animals depends on your support and efforts.

*--Anna Merz  
founder Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary*

(Update: Narasha's baby, Tasha, died from her injuries. Samia has become a first-time mother to a healthy male calf that has been named Samuel. See details in the following article.)

## ***The Birth of Samuel***

Sometimes life in the sanctuary is a bit like living in a theater, only most of the actors on the stage are rhinos, and how inextricably entangled my life seems to have become with theirs and their dramas and disasters. The little Tasha, who seemed to be doing so well, died suddenly on the 21st of January of colic and pneumonia leaving a gap in all our lives. But since then two births have brought us great joy. On the 9th of April, the white cow Marembo gave birth to a male calf. Her previous calf, Baraza, stayed in her vicinity for two days, appearing increasingly perplexed by his mother's behavior towards him and her refusal to permit him to investigate his tiny sibling. Then he left her and joined up with Sungari who is nowadays accompanied by both her nine-month-old daughter and her older calf, Lari, who rejoined her in December having spent the previous seven months with Marembo and Baraza.

Hardly had we recovered from the excitement of this birth when, for me, the major event took place. My beloved handraised Samia produced a son whom I am calling Samuel. He is, to me at least, quite the most wonderful and enchanting baby and, more importantly, Samia is proving to be a wonderful mother. I was so afraid that having been handraised herself, she would not know how to look after or how to protect her child. This so frequently happens with handraised animals. But, happily, all my fears on this score have proven to be groundless and day by day her baby grows, and day by day I watch the bond between them becoming stronger. Samia's affection for her baby is something very beautiful to watch and I am quite ridiculously proud of her.

While our females have delighted us with their babies, some of our bulls have provoked contrary emotions by their violent behavior. That bull rhinos should fight among



themselves is to be expected, but why they should suddenly take it into their heads to attack females I do not understand. When Ekili attacked Narasha at least he was not her mate and the calf was not his. (see "Ngare Sergoi 1994 Annual Report" elsewhere in this issue). But when Kelele launched a violent attack on Solia's three-year-old daughter, Sonia, this excuse could not be offered. He is not only her father, but we believe that he has recently re-mated Solia. I was with guests when we saw four rhinos together, Solia and Stumpy and their calves, both nearly three years old and both fathered by Kelele. Onto this peaceful scene erupted Kelele who launched a violent attack against Sonia. Solia tried to protect her, but Kelele got his horn under Sonia's groin and hoisted her up onto her front legs. She then fell onto her side and he knelt on her. At this moment I lost sight of the proceedings as I negotiated a gully with the Landrover. When I emerged, Sonia was back on her feet and Kelele was attacking her again. I managed to chase him off and she and her mother departed at full speed. Thankfully, Sonia is alright. No sooner had they departed that the furious Kelele turned around and set upon his other daughter, Nyota, who had been watching the proceedings with her mother from under a nearby bush. Luckily, I could once again separate them before damage was done and they departed in opposite directions, Kelele obviously furious.



**Samia, the black rhino handraised by Anna Merz is shown above with her first offspring, a male named Samuel who was born on 19 April 1995. Photo courtesy of Andy Lodge, Ngare Sergoi Support Group, Inc.**

Then on the same day that Marembo had her calf, Samia's wild husband Kenu, decided to launch an attack on the huge white bull, Makora, who must be at least twice his size. Luckily for Kenu, Makora had been dehorned and a helicopter was in the immediate vicinity and could separate them or Kenu could have paid for his foolishness with his life. But two days later, just before I had news of the birth of Samia's son, Kenu had another battle. This time it was with the black cow Shaba, whom he is believed to have mated, and her sub-adult male calf Shimba. I was wholly unsuccessful in my attempts



to intervene in this fracas. I called Francis on the radio and he came over in the "Bowling for Rhinos Supercub" and separated them. Both these bulls have been dehorned by the Kenya Wildlife Service (K.W.S.) vet. Dehorning does seem to lower levels of aggression and is a management tool that seemingly has to be used to prevent disasters with introduced populations of rhino.

In March we were delighted to welcome the winners of last year's "Bowling for Rhinos"; Diane Vellafeurte and her friend Penny from Lincoln Park Zoo, Chicago and Christine Bobko and her friend Michael from the Denver Zoo. I learned so much from these dedicated zoo keepers and I hope they enjoyed their visit here as much as we enjoyed having them. Christine brought with her the ashes of two black rhinos whose deaths she had mourned at Denver and we scattered them on the grave of my much-loved dog, Sambo. I think we all wondered if, one day in the future, live zoo-bred rhinos would ever return to their African homelands.

Early in the New Year elephants in large numbers, about 185, moved into the area of the old rhino sanctuary and are still here. The damage they are causing to the trees is overwhelming and goes well beyond their recovery potential. On the rest of Lewa there are approximately 100 additional elephants and, there too, the tree destruction is very serious. It has been estimated that Lewa could carry about 40 elephants which means we have at present about 260 over our carrying capacity. All over Africa where elephants remain in reasonable numbers they are posing a major problem. For 40 million years these great creatures have roamed Africa and for them time is measured in centuries and a continent was theirs. In a little more than 50 years their wilderness has vanished; now small protected pockets remain surrounded by cultivation, fences or men with guns. Their migratory routes are cut and they are wholly incapable of adapting to these changed circumstances. Their appetites are vast but they destroy many times what they eat and herein lies the problem. Driven by who knows what urges and impulses of rage and sex, the destructive capacities of the bulls are boundless. One morning I watched a solitary bull push down 42 mature *acacia tortilis* trees. He ate from none of them but with a sort of inner rage moved from one to the other

*"In a little more than 50 years their wilderness has vanished; now small protected pockets remain surrounded by cultivation, fences and men with guns."*

knocking them down in turn. These acacia woodlands, once destroyed, do not recover quickly and though the seeds of the next generation are carried by the elephants in their droppings, they will only mature if the elephants migrate. If the elephants remain and eat all the seedlings, the trees will be lost and with the trees go other browsers, which include black rhinos.

Apart from their impact on trees, the elephants' impact on water pipes is time-consuming and costly. But this is mainly individual bulls who take a delight in digging up and smashing water pipes; some bulls also make a habit of breaking fences. On top of this, elephants do sometimes kill rhinos, and not only rhinos. Their reputation as gentle giants is somewhat of a misnomer. In Kenya their numbers are estimated at 24,000 as against perhaps 400 black rhinos, so the rhino must be



given priority here. But the problem, neither here nor elsewhere, cannot be easily solved. These animals are all the property of the State and have to be managed in conjunction with the K. E.W. who is aware of our troubles here and the tree damage that is being caused.

In the last issue of H.O.R.N., you may have read the article by Patty Pearthree on the Ujung Kulon National Park in Java which is the only place in the world where the world's rarest rhino, the Javan, is protected (see reprint of this article elsewhere in this issue). Within that park there are 45-50 animals. Possibly another 12-20 still exist in Vietnam, but at least the Javan rhino has one sanctuary where it is protected. The Sumatran rhino has none. No one knows how many of these animals survive, but not more than 200-300 widely scattered in fragmented pockets of inaccessible terrain in southeast Asia. All that is known with total certainty is that its numbers are declining rapidly and the population may already be too fragmented for breeding to occur. Trying to breed this species in captivity has also proven a disaster. But now at last there is a glimmer of hope for this beleaguered creature. In March I received a most unexpected and so welcome visit from Jim Jackson of the International Rhino Foundation. Accompanied by two Indonesian officials, Jim told me of the proposed establishment of the very first Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary of approximately 9,000 hectares (35 sq. miles) within the Way Kambas National Park in S. E. Sumatra. This has to be one of the most exciting developments for an endangered species within recent years. I believe it is the only hope for the Sumatran rhino to continue to exist into the next century. I hope so much that it will prove to be an outstanding success, but for it to succeed it will need all the support that we can rally for it. Please find out how best you can help this sanctuary and this animal to survive; its future depends on all of us. *by Anna Merz, Founder*

*Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary*



## *Rhino at the Brink of Extinction*

*By Anna Merz, Founder*

*Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary*

Enjoy and learn from Anna's story of the rhinos - how Ngare Sergoi was started and her adventures with the rhinos, including the heartwarming story of hand-raising Samia. Profits from this book go towards the operating expenses of the Sanctuary.

To Order: send \$20.00 plus \$2.50 s&h for each book ordered.. Make checks or money orders (U.S. Funds only) payable to: Ngare Sergoi Support Group. Please include your name and complete mailing address when ordering.

Also available is Anna's second book - *Golden Dunes and Desert Mountains* - which is available for \$12.50 plus \$2.50 s&h per copy.