

Two ways to catch a rhino

With a truck and a lasso . . .

By WILLIAM TULLOCK

THE Karagwe District of Tanganyika is separated from Ruanda-Urundi, part of the Congo, by the Kagera River. On our side of the river rhino were as plentiful as goats, whereas in the Ruanda National Park they had all been poached out. Monsieur Haezeart, the Warden of the National Park, had arranged with the Tanganyika Game Warden for a famous trapper, Willie de Beer, to catch three pairs of young rhino in Karagwe and release them in his park. As District Commissioner, my job was to lay on guides and advise Willie on the best catching country.

Willie kindly invited my wife and I to join him for a week-end's hunting, and we jumped at the chance. We camped along a chain of lakes where the rhino came down from the hills to drink in the early mornings and evenings. My idea had been to follow the catching truck at a safe distance in the Land-Rover, so as not to be in the way, but Willie insisted on our going with him. The old Dodge which he used had not even got a door on the passenger side. Only the spare wheel lay between us and the prospect of a rhino's horn. The body was riddled with holes from previous encounters, and we set off at dawn feeling distinctly nervous. The boys in the back checked the catching noose, which was mounted on a pole.

We saw half a dozen rhino in the course of an hour, but none had a suitable calf. Then suddenly we flushed one from a thicket. The mother came charging at us, and Willie had to jink to avoid her. Mother and calf came pounding along behind us. Willie deliberately went slowly so as to draw them out of the valley and on to the open plain beyond. Once there he accelerated, swung away and left the rhino stamping the ground in bewilderment. Then came the tricky part. He had to separate the mother from its calf without allowing her to hit us full tilt. The truck was built to take a glancing blow, but a full-blooded charge from the front or side could wreck it—and us, too.

Willie drove slowly towards them and then swung to one side as the cow charged; she missed and went careering past with the calf at her side. Willie pushed the truck between them. This unsighted the cow, who circled round looking for her calf. Meanwhile, Willie edged the calf away with his mudguard as fast as he could. Never once did he touch it, although it was galloping within a foot or two of the truck. Rhino have such poor sight that if one gains 50yds. on the mother, she often loses one completely. This time, however, mother was astute and came roaring after us. Our speed was dictated by the calf, and although Willie urged it on as quickly as possible, it was soon obvious that we were going to be rammed.

... with a cross-bow and a hypodermic dart

By TONY IRWIN

THROUGHOUT Africa, south of the Sahara, the control of wild animals in any area in which they have clashed with expanding human interests has in the past meant their widespread destruction. Man has had no way of helping game surviving close to centres of human habitation to reach the still vast tracts of uncultivated country in which they can live in comparative peace other than so terrorising them that survivors have fled in disorder.

Rhino have posed a particular problem. They are hard to move, difficult to scare and a menace to society. Man has therefore attacked them to such effect that the species is becoming increasingly rare and pugnacious.

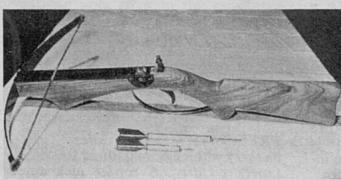
Attempts have been made to capture rhino by chasing them in a truck and lassoing them—a hazardous operation for both man and beast—and to knock them out with drugged arrows fired from gas-guns or cross-bows, so that they might be moved. Three drugs—nicotine, curare and succinyl chloride, all of them muscular paralysers—have been widely used, with some excellent results on smaller soft-hide game, in particular a herd of 30 Uganda kob which were "shot," drugged, carted and moved by lorry to a National Park. But against these successes were to be set tragic failures with rhino, almost every one of which died after being injected with a muscular paralytic.

The reason is a simple one. The safety margin between the effective and toxic effects of these drugs is too narrow, and the weight assessment of a rhino by the man-on-the-spot is too haphazard. Fire in too little of the drug and you have a maddened rhino; fire in too much and you have a dead one. Any drug used must therefore have a wide margin between its anaesthetic and toxic effects.

Such a drug has been found in sernyl, a small number of doses of which were sent by the American makers to Kenya for experiments against heavy-hide animals. Mr. Nick Carter, of the Kenya Game Department, Mr. Chris Archer, a "bowman," and Mr. Ted Monks, a Nairobi chemist, set off to try it on a bull rhino, which had been severely injured in a lassoing attempt.

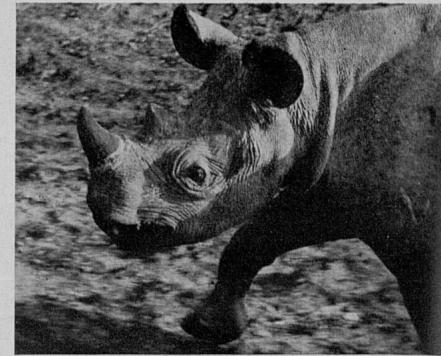
The animal was found and a dose was "shot" at a range of about 70yds. Working on American figures against baboon, and assessing the weight of the beast, Mr. Monks advised a 50 per cent. overdose, and the animal dropped within 10 minutes. The three men carried out a close examination of the rhino, cleaned up a deep wound in its head where the horn had been ripped out by a lasso, filled this with a vast quantity of penicillin and took a number of temperature readings. The rhino awoke after four hours, and within 12 was on his feet, browsing and completely recovered. The Game Department had brought off the first known and 100 per cent. effective drugging of a rhino.

Had this been other than an experiment, the animal would have been crated and would have recovered to find itself in the back of a lorry *en route* to a more peaceful land. Given unlimited supplies of sernyl—and the American firm which supplies it has promised a further 200 doses—and less commercial red tape, the uses to which it can be put open new and exciting fields of game preservation and wild animal control.



THE CROSSBOW and two of the drug-containing hypodermic darts which it fires.

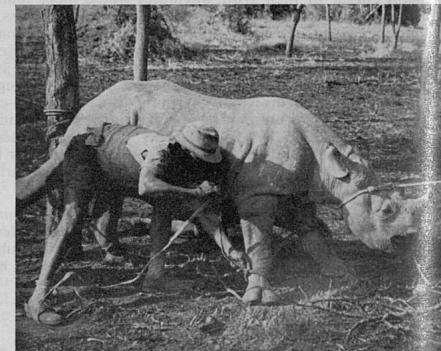
COURsing the young rhino. A close-up taken from the truck just before the animal was roped.



HOBLING the hind-legs. The animal is roped around the neck, not around the horn, which might be damaged.



NOW the forelegs, and then the final indignity of being thrown and crated in the truck.



"Hold hard," smiled Willie, gripping the wheel more tightly. We could hear the cow puffing and snorting with rage behind us, and next moment we felt an almighty smack. The rear of the truck was lifted clean into the air. Twice again she charged us, but each time Willie manoeuvred the truck so as to hide the calf from her. After a few minutes she stopped in her tracks, pawed the ground, spun three times on her axis, snorted and trotted off anxiously in the opposite direction. Now was the time for action. The calf had to be caught, tethered and loaded into the lorry before mother got on the scent and came back.

Willie drove alongside the calf while his nephew, Hans, dropped the noose over its head. As soon as the youngster felt the noose tighten it strained to break away. Two boys vaulted over the backboards and hobbled its back legs. Then came the terrifying job of running the rope from the back legs to the front. The rhino was small, but its horn was large enough to rip open a man's stomach. As it turned to gore one African holding the rope, another came from behind and grabbed its ear. In a matter of seconds all four legs were roped together. They gave a concentrated heave and flung the beast on to its side. Willie himself then sat on its head and whispered to it soothingly.

Meanwhile, we had been scanning the horizon for the cow. Had she caught up with us the ropes would have had to be undone in a flash and the chase would have started all over again. We bundled the calf into its crate and manhandled it on to the lorry. Twenty minutes later we were back in camp. The ropes were untied in the crate, which was placed flush with the entrance to a log corral. The rhino shot out into the corral and the door was dropped into place.

Imagine our astonishment next morning when we went along to the pen and found Willie inside teaching the rhino to suck a plate full of porridge while he gently scratched it behind the ears. It is this love and understanding of animals which has led to his phenomenal success. Other trappers are equally skilful at catching, but they lack his sympathy with the animals they have caught.

Sadly, I could not go over to Ruanda to watch the six young rhino released into the park, but apparently they trotted away quite happily. I saw M. Haezeart only a few weeks ago and he told me that at least four of them had survived, and that the biggest bull and cow had paired off. He had high hopes of their mating.