

The World's Work



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JULY, 1926

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Shooting Rhinos With a Flashlight

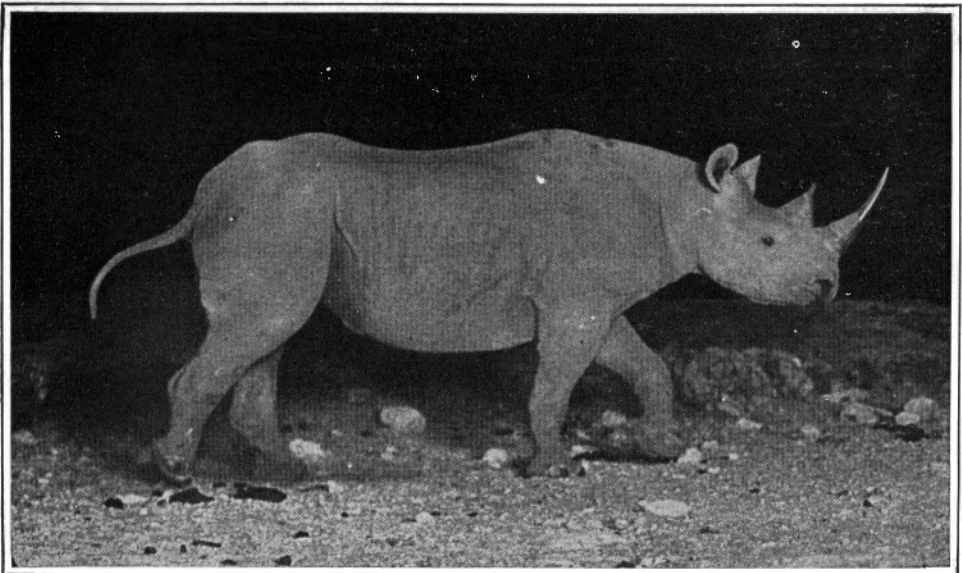
A Thrilling Sport in Africa

MARTIN JOHNSON

In the last issue of the WORLD'S WORK Mr. Johnson told of his experiments and thrills in taking flashlight photographs of lions at night, and in this article he tells of the no less thrilling and dangerous work of taking photographs of rhinos and elephants. Some of the most exciting experiments were carried on among the animals in his "backyard" at Lake Paradise.

FIFTY-FOUR miles from Lake Paradise, on the Kaisoot Desert, is a small water-hole which during the dry season is densely surrounded with rhino, lions, leopards, and the common game, but rhino outnumber all the other kinds of game. It is almost impossible to get a good night's sleep near this water-hole because of the rhino, and many a rhino we have had to shoot as he came charging into us in the dark. In this dangerous studio we started making our flashlights of rhino.

In preparing to take the first pictures I had my boys cut poles and set them in the ground near a trail used by the rhinos at night in traveling to the water-hole. We placed the flash lamps on the poles and the cameras were focussed on a rock in the trail. After an early dinner of sand grouse Mrs. Johnson and I went to our posts just before sundown—she on top of a rock about fifty yards from the apparatus, and I near the cameras. From the rock she could see for a half-mile, as it was bright moonlight, and she was to whistle when she saw rhinos



Martin Johnson Photograph

© Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

THE RHINO PICTURED AT THE WATER-HOLE ON THE KAISOOT DESERT

Mr. Johnson calls this number one in his narrative and remarks: "On he came, doubling in size every step, until I would have sworn that he was bigger than any elephant I had ever seen."

coming—one whistle if a rhino was coming in front of me, two if from the back, three from the left, and four from the right.

I lay down in the sand ten feet behind the cameras. From where I lay I could see only about thirty yards in each direction on account of the up-slope of the sandy ground. I could see well by standing, but I wished to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, and relied on Mrs. Johnson to keep me informed. Alongside me I had two .470 elephant guns, double-barreled.

For an hour I was kept busy slapping mosquitoes and sand flies. Then two whistles informed me that a rhino was coming up from behind. I stood up and saw a mother and a half-grown *toto*. I threw stones at them and frightened them away before they were close enough to be dangerous. In thirty minutes three whistles told me of a rhino coming from the left. I stood up again with a gun ready, but the rhino passed up-wind and went on undisturbed to water; for fifteen minutes I could hear him wallowing in the small mud-pond about fifty yards away.

Then one whistle. This was what I wanted, and in a couple of minutes I saw

first the big horns and then the entire body of the rhino as he came over the little ridge and walked down the trail toward me. I don't mind owning that my heart was beating a mile a minute. This was my first flashlight of a rhino and I did not know whether he would come or go, and I had to let him get within forty feet of me before making the picture. There I was lying in the open sand with no shelter of any kind. On he came, doubling in size every step, until I would have sworn that he was bigger than any elephant I had ever seen. Mosquitoes had settled all over me but I did not dare move. Then he stopped a couple of feet before I wanted him to. His nose touched the ground and I thought he was coming. He had seen the cameras standing out in the bright moonlight and he moved off the trail a few feet and started to run, but still toward water. He was not where I wanted him, but I took a chance and pushed the button—*Boom!* a report like a cannon! I forgot to close my eyes and for three minutes I was blinded. Bright lights danced before my eyes. I could not see my hand before me, and the rhino was snorting and running

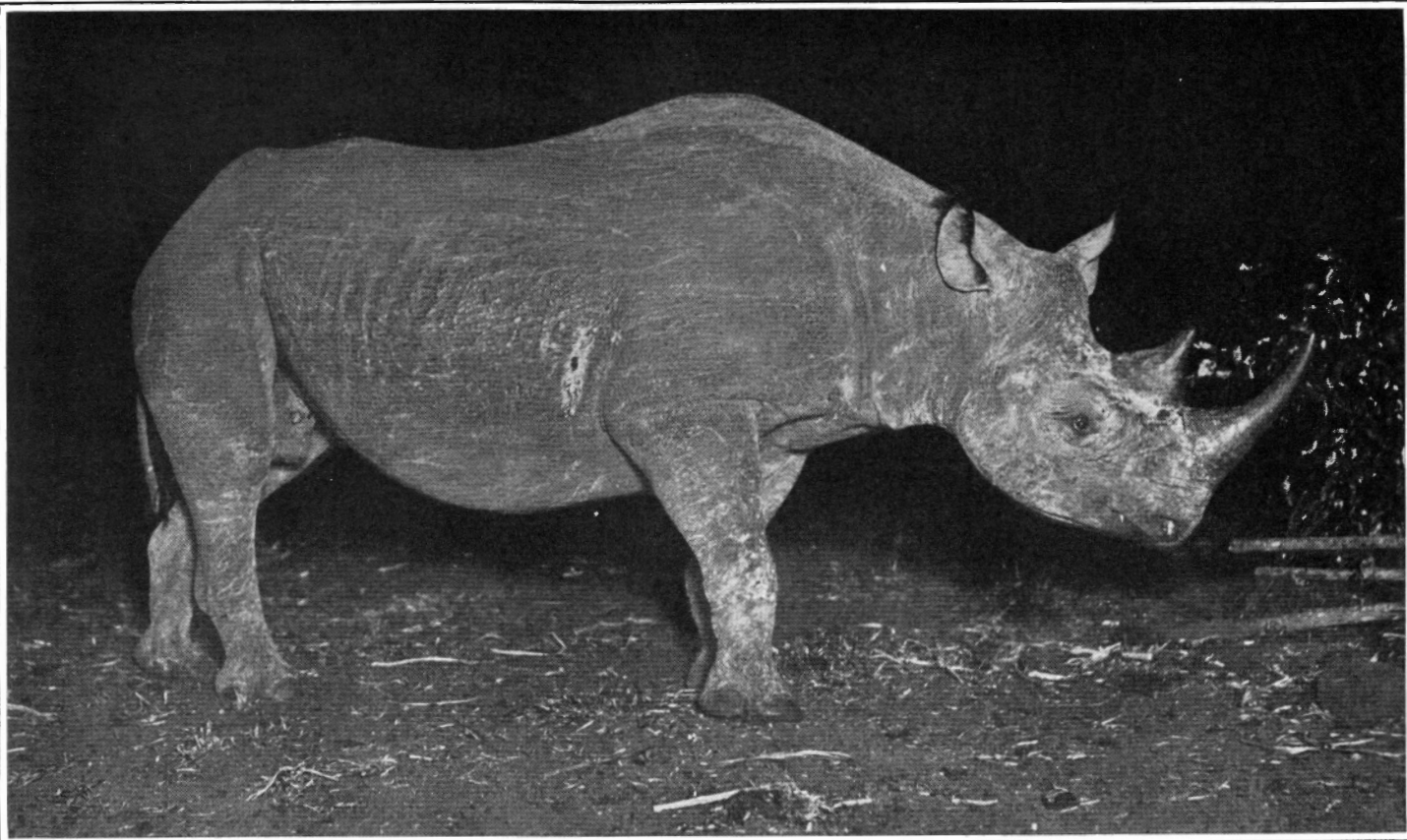


Martin Johnson Photograph

© Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC LABORATORY AT LAKE PARADISE

It is made of logs, with a grass roof.



Martin Johnson Photograph

©Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

A BATTLE-SCARRED RHINOCEROS PHOTOGRAPHED AT NIGHT ON THE SHORES OF LAKE PARADISE
Mr. Johnson calls this photograph number nine in his narrative.

in circles somewhere close. He, too, was blinded. I stood up and waved my gun in circles around me, figuring I would feel him if he came close. I could not run, for I had lost all sense of direction. I shouted to Mrs. Johnson that I was blinded. She came running to me and said the rhino was off at a safe distance but still going around in circles. In about three minutes I could see, and that darned rhino evidently got his sight at the same time, for he was again coming down the trail, this time in little goose steps, as though he was looking for trouble. We stood still and waited for him, but he turned when he came close to the cameras again and ran back a hundred yards, giving me time to insert the slides, change the plate holders, and place new flash cartridges in the lamps. Mrs. Johnson went back to her post on the rock and I lay down again in the sand. We had obtained photograph number one.

In about thirty minutes Mrs. Johnson crept down to me and whispered that she thought there was going to be a rhino fight near by. We crept to the crest of the little hill and lay down about fifty yards from three rhino. The rhino we had photographed was mad. Two others were coming down the trail and our rhino was disputing the right of way. They stood facing each other, snorting and pawing up the earth. About twenty feet separated them. They came closer and closer and

it looked as though we were to have ring-side seats for some fun, but when they drew together they rubbed noses, stopped snorting, and the three walked off the trail and went to water together.

Hyænas by the score came along, but their eyesight is too keen to allow us to make pictures by moonlight in the open. A hundred zebra came along, but not close enough. Lions roared in the distance, but did not approach our cameras, so we returned to camp and I developed the plates and was mightily pleased with my first flashlight pictures.

Next day we returned to Lake Paradise. It was very dry at the time, not having rain for over four months, and the lake shores were covered with big-game footprints. On the night of our arrival Mrs. Johnson and I sat down on a rock near the lake's edge and in the moonlight watched a parade that would drive Charley and Al Ringling to drink. First came fifteen elephants, old bulls, cows, and little *tolos*. They pulled up swamp grass and grazed

around underneath us. Then twenty buffalo joined them; then two rhino. Hyæna slipped down to water, drank, and trotted back in the forest. Across the lake we saw a beautiful male greater kudu drinking. The forest was in an uproar with the barking of thousands of baboons. I am sure there are more baboons here than any other place on earth.

The next day the boys cut bushes and

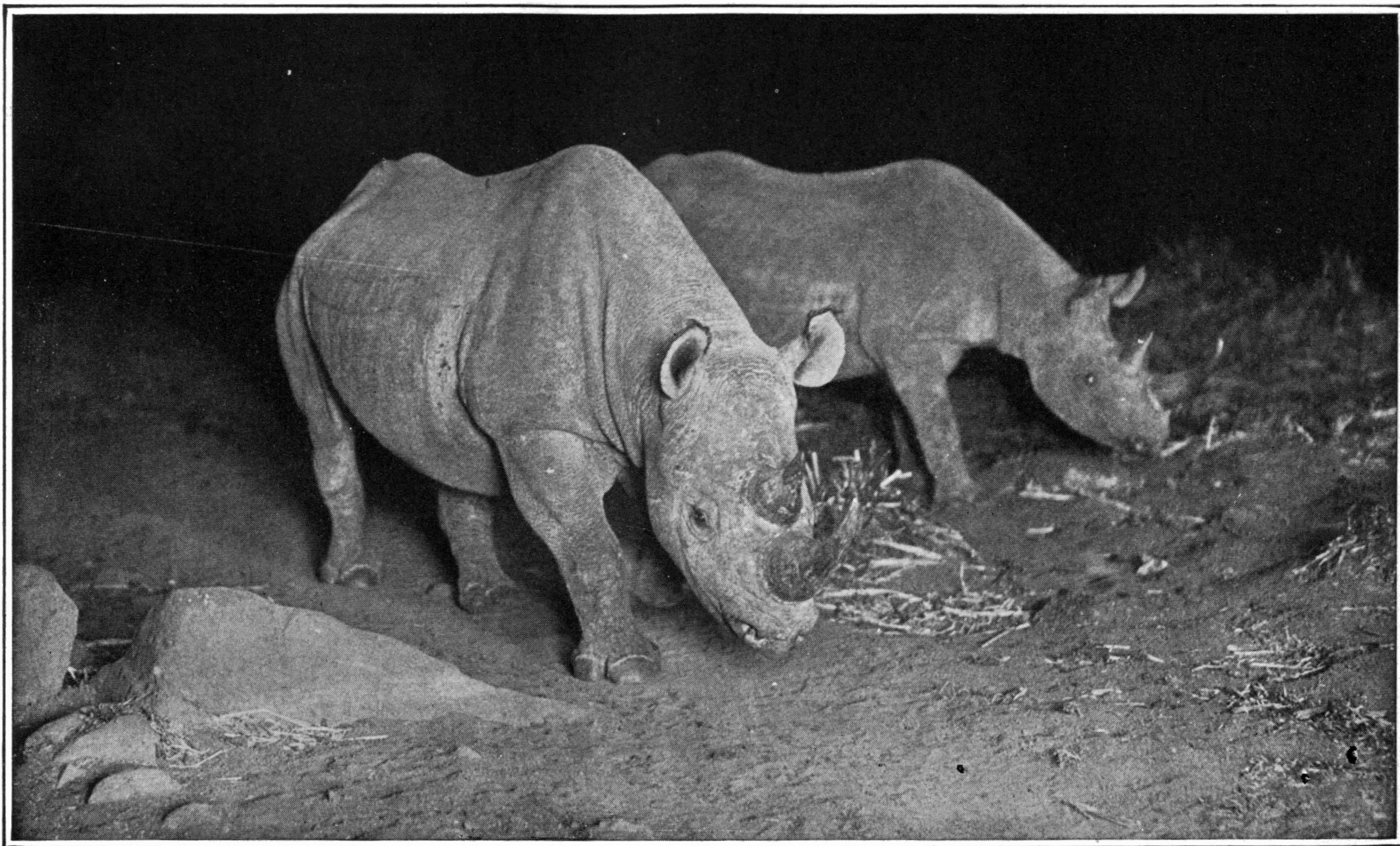


Martin Johnson Photograph

©Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

AN OLD BULL BUFFALO

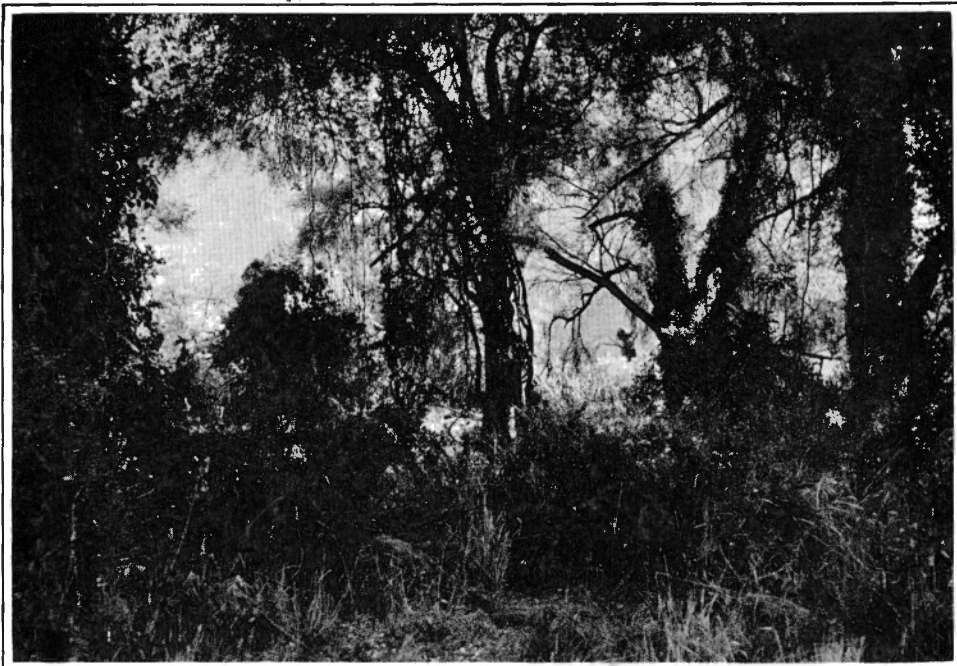
He caught his horns in the flashlight wire and carried it away with him.



Martin Johnson Photograph

©Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

MR. RHINO TOOK THIS PICTURE BY TOUCHING THE WIRE WITH HIS EAR
 The wire hooking up the flashlight apparatus and camera is plainly visible in the photograph.
 This photograph is number eleven in the narrative.



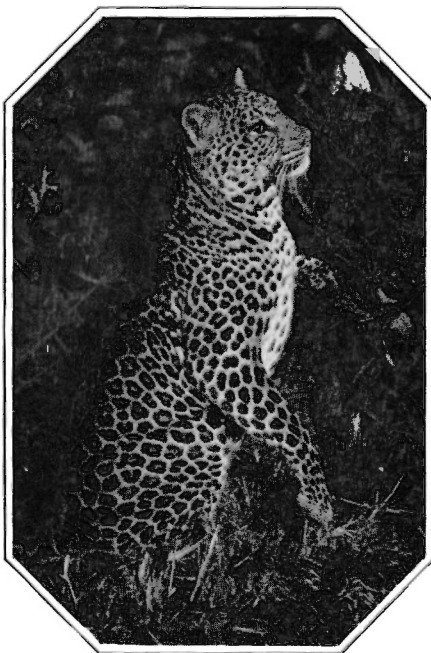
Martin Johnson Photograph

© Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

WHERE THE BABOONS ABOUND IN A VERITABLE BANDAR-LOG PARADISE

In the jungle near Lake Paradise the chattering beasts make a fearful clamor, just as the Bandar-log did in Kipling's "Jungle Book."

I made a *boma* about a hundred yards in the rear of our house. I placed a large piece of meat on a cross pole about five feet above the ground; I ran a wire through small pulleys from the meat to the camera, and from the meat I also suspended a small piece of skin. My idea was that the animal would smell the meat, strike at the piece of skin with its paw and thus jerk the meat, which would set off the flashlight and snap the camera. It sounds like an idea for one of those cartoons by Rube Goldberg, but it is what I did,



Martin Johnson Photograph © Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

A LEOPARD AT PLAY

This is photograph number two, and Mr. Johnson describes how it was taken.

nevertheless. It worked, in a way—I set the apparatus four times and each time got a Gennet cat, but never a whole cat. The cats did not understand my apparatus as I wanted them to, and they went right up the poles after the meat. As a result, all I got was cat's tails—and they don't make especially interesting photographs.

Then we had a visit from A. Blayney Percival, ex-game warden of British East Africa, who is one of the best of animal photographers because he knows the



Martin Johnson Photograph

© Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

OUR BACKYARD AT LAKE PARADISE
Where the elephant ate up the sweet potatoes.

habits of the beasts. We set up our apparatus several times one night and next morning I was up early developing the pictures. I will never forget the thrill I had as I watched the spots of a leopard show up on the photograph I call number two. If you notice the picture closely you will see that both front feet are off the ground—the animal struck the small piece of string with its paw as a kitten will in playing.

We then went on *safari* with Percival. The first night out he shot a gerenuk and we took the best parts for our own meat and threw the rest in a small gulley, first setting up the cameras and flash apparatus. We dragged the carcass for half a mile down the gulley, and Percival and I sat down beside a tree only about ten feet from where we wanted the animal. We had no more than sat down when we heard a hyæna coming up the gulley, running as fast as it could as it followed the scent. With a bound he came in view and stopped above the meat. I pressed the button and got a fine picture of a spotted hyæna—picture number three.

On the first night back at Lake Paradise I tried a new idea. I placed a disc switch in the ground just under the meat, for the animal to step on and make the picture. Before it was thoroughly dark the flash went off and made picture number four. You will notice the jackal stepped on the disk while looking up, wondering how to get to the meat. I set the apparatus again and in an hour had made picture number five of another spotted hyæna. We have very few striped hyæna in this district.

Elephants were getting bolder and bolder as their food dried up in the forest. Every night we would see them and they would trumpet as they came alongside our house and got the human scent. Many a night I have stood in the door and expected them to come for the house, and Mrs. Johnson and I would stand ready with guns, but they always ran away. One night I stepped out of my laboratory door to go to our house twenty-five yards away, and almost ran into a herd of buffalo. Another night Mrs. Johnson came over



Martin Johnson Photograph

© Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

A SPOTTED HYÆNA—WITH A BOUND HE CAME IN VIEW AND STOPPED ABOVE THE MEAT

This is photograph number three in the narrative.



Martin Johnson Photograph

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A JACKAL LOOKING UP AND WONDERING HOW TO GET THE MEAT
Picture number four in the narrative.

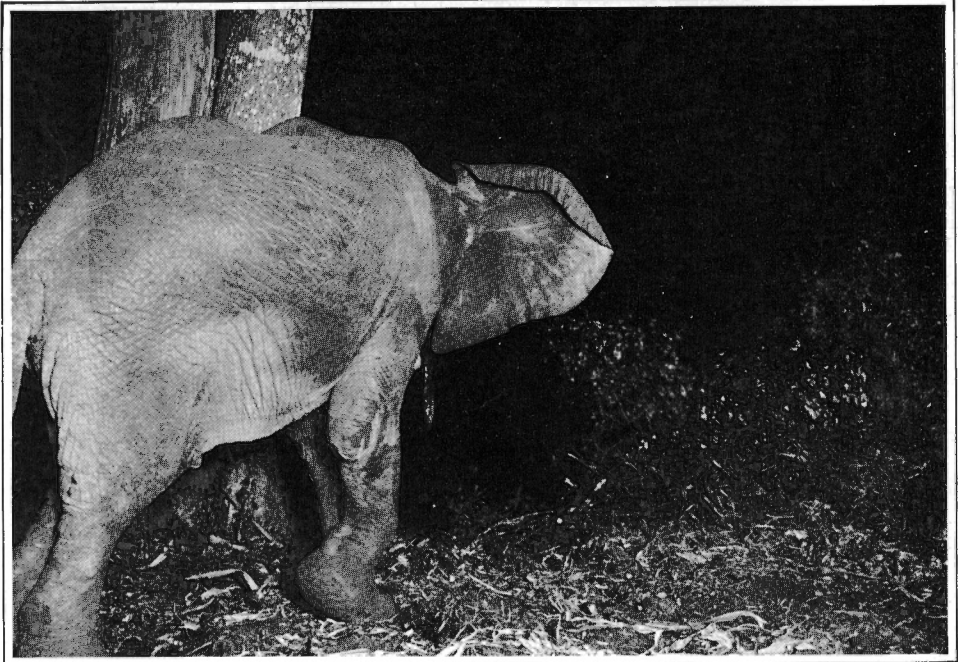


Martin Johnson Photograph

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ANOTHER SPOTTED HYÆNA LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO EAT

Picture number five in the narrative.

*Martin Johnson Photograph*

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SHE TOOK HER PHOTOGRAPH AS SHE LEFT THE SWEET POTATO PATCH

Number seven in the narrative.

to my laboratory, where I was working, and there sat a leopard just outside.

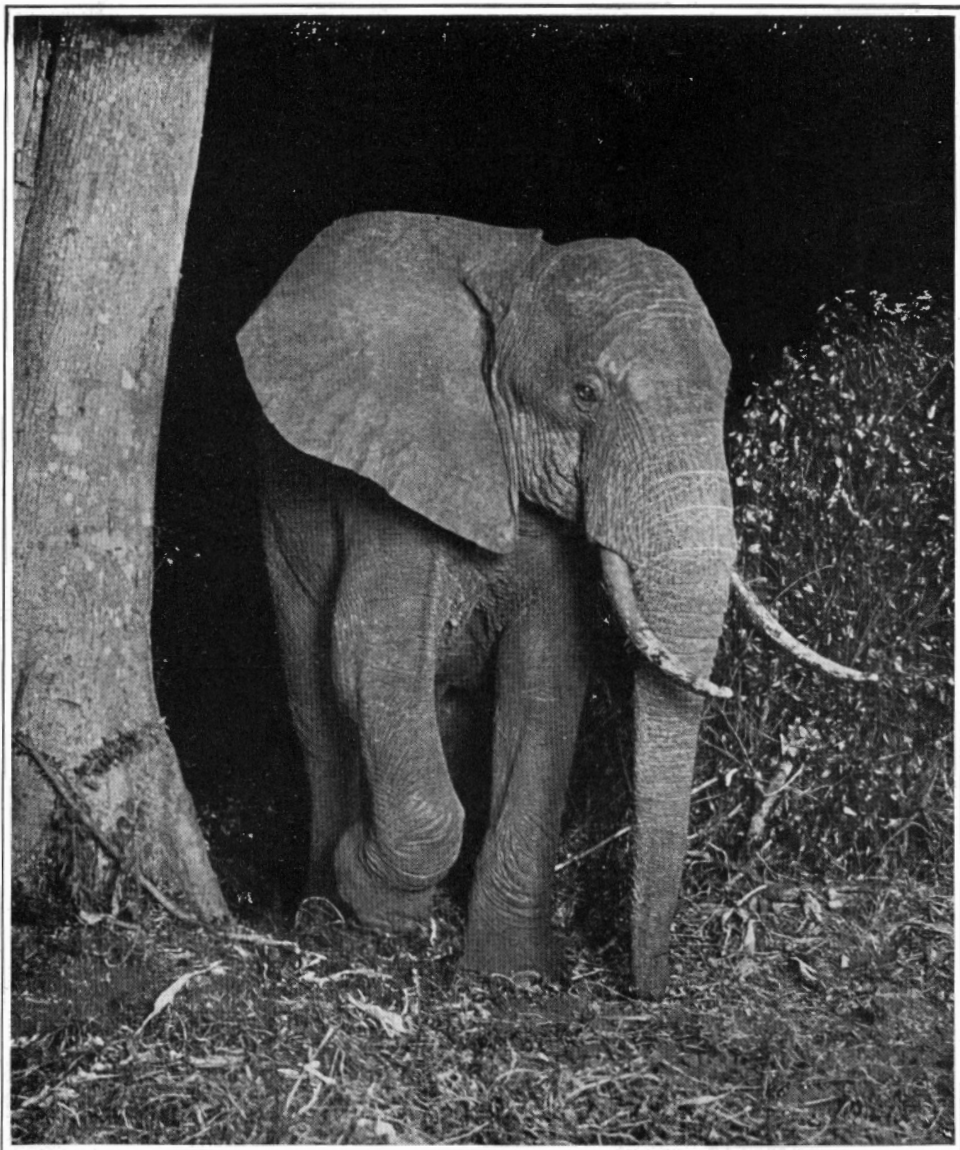
One elephant had the habit of going into our garden every night. The drouth had dried up almost everything except the sweet potatoes, which seem to be able to live without water. This elephant thought they were great. Each night she would eat a space about ten feet square, pulling up the sweet potatoes and eating the vines as well. I must say she was an orderly elephant, for she seemed to stand in one space and feed and go out when she had enough without destroying the rest of the potato patch as most animals would have done.

She used to come in at one place alongside a big tree, so I set up the apparatus there and stretched a fine brass wire across from the tree to a pole and to the battery. About nine o'clock it went off. Mrs. Johnson and I had just gone to bed. (Yes, nine o'clock is bed time in Africa.) I jumped up, grabbed a gun and a small electric torch lamp, and ran to the garden, but stopped before I had gone far, for I

heard a terrific thrashing among the bushes at the side of the garden. Then all was quiet and I went on and took in my cameras. The elephant had been blinded and next morning we found she had gone away with a ten-foot space of our *boma* fence. Our fences are made by cutting branches from trees and sticking them in the ground so close together that none of the smaller animals can get in.

In our pajamas we went into the dark-room and developed. Look at picture six and imagine the thrills we got as this wonderful elephant came into view in the developer, as clean cut and sharp as any we had ever made.

We figured that the elephant would never come back again, but on the following night we set up again on the off-chance, and at about eleven o'clock blamed it if it didn't go off again! Again we rushed to the garden; no sign of the elephant. Mrs. Johnson held the light while I placed the slides in the plateholders. Then there was a crashing of our fence a few yards away and that crazy elephant went away again



Martin Johnson Photograph

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A CLOSE-UP PICTURE OF OUR BACKYARD VISITOR

Number six in the narrative.

with another part of the fence. She had not gone away as she should have done, and even now we are trying to figure out what happened, for when we developed the picture it showed her going out of the garden. By all elephant psychology she should have kept going, but she must have turned and come back in the garden and stood still wondering what happened, and then when we came down she got

frightened and went away. We call this picture number seven.

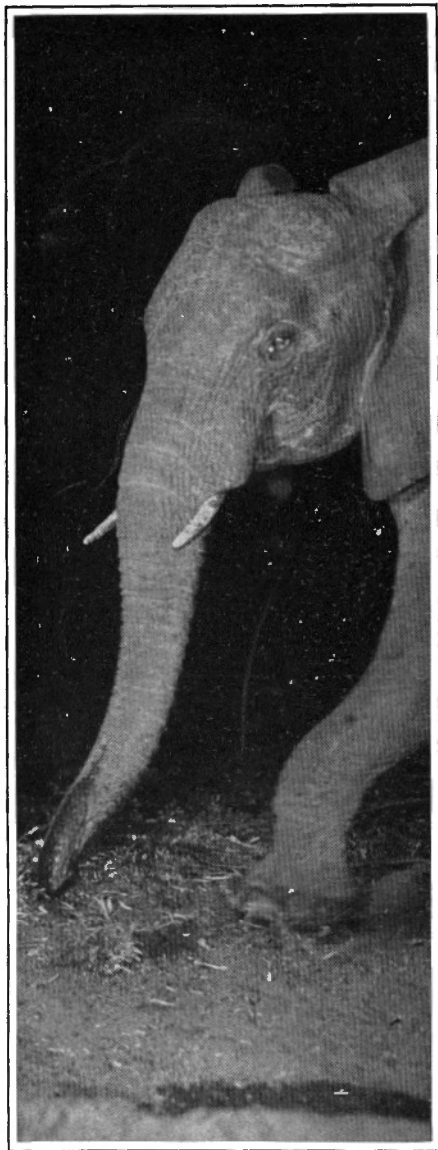
We talked it over while developing that night and decided we had seen the last of her, but next morning when I arose at daylight, there she was standing under a tree not more than fifty feet from my headman's house. I shouted to my headman, and he stuck his head out of the door, saw the elephant, and like a jack-in-the-box

jumped back and slammed the door, making so much noise that the elephant went away in the forest.

Then we were sure that we had seen the last of her, but at six o'clock that evening we heard a breaking of branches at the edge of the forest, and there she stood pulling down trees and eating as contentedly as though she had never been frightened, and to show that she had no fear she came walking slowly to the boys' houses, and stopped and pulled grass off the roof of one house while a black boy was cooking his *posho* inside. She then walked down the road past the houses, with fifty black boys silently watching her. I had given orders that every one was to be very quiet so as not to frighten her. After sampling the mules' corn, she went away.

For two weeks she kept coming back every night, and I am afraid big-game hunters who know elephants will think I am a liar when I tell of her wanderings about our camp. She went against all the habits elephants are supposed to have. The boys had from fifteen to thirty fires going each night; the scent of smoke and boys was all through the air. Mrs. Johnson suggests she must have been blind, deaf, and dumb. I think she wanted merely to be friendly. The boys say she was crazy. After two weeks she finished the potatoes and disappeared and we have not seen her since, but we think she will come back when a new crop of potatoes comes on.

The drought had continued so long that hundreds of animals were going to Lake Paradise to drink, and I set up two sets of flashlight apparatus near the water's edge. Flashlights were set to fire when the animal approaching on the trail pressed against a fine wire. First we got picture number eight, a fine buffalo. Then number nine, a battle-scarred old rhino. On the same night we got number ten, showing a young female elephant's head just coming into the picture; she had touched the wire with her trunk just a little too soon and part of her was left out of the picture. But not only that—the ground was trampled down to such an extent that we estimated that she was accompanied by



Martin Johnson Photograph © Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

IS SHE WEeping?

Mrs. Johnson said she was, but Miss Elephant merely touched the flashlight wire too soon and left most of herself out of the picture, which is number ten in the article.

at least ten other elephants. Think what a picture that would have made!

The second night we got picture number eleven, showing two rhino, apparently a male and female. The male's ear must barely have touched the wire, setting off the flash.

In some of these pictures just study the

*Martin Johnson Photograph*

© Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

BUFFALO ON THE SHORES OF LAKE PARADISE

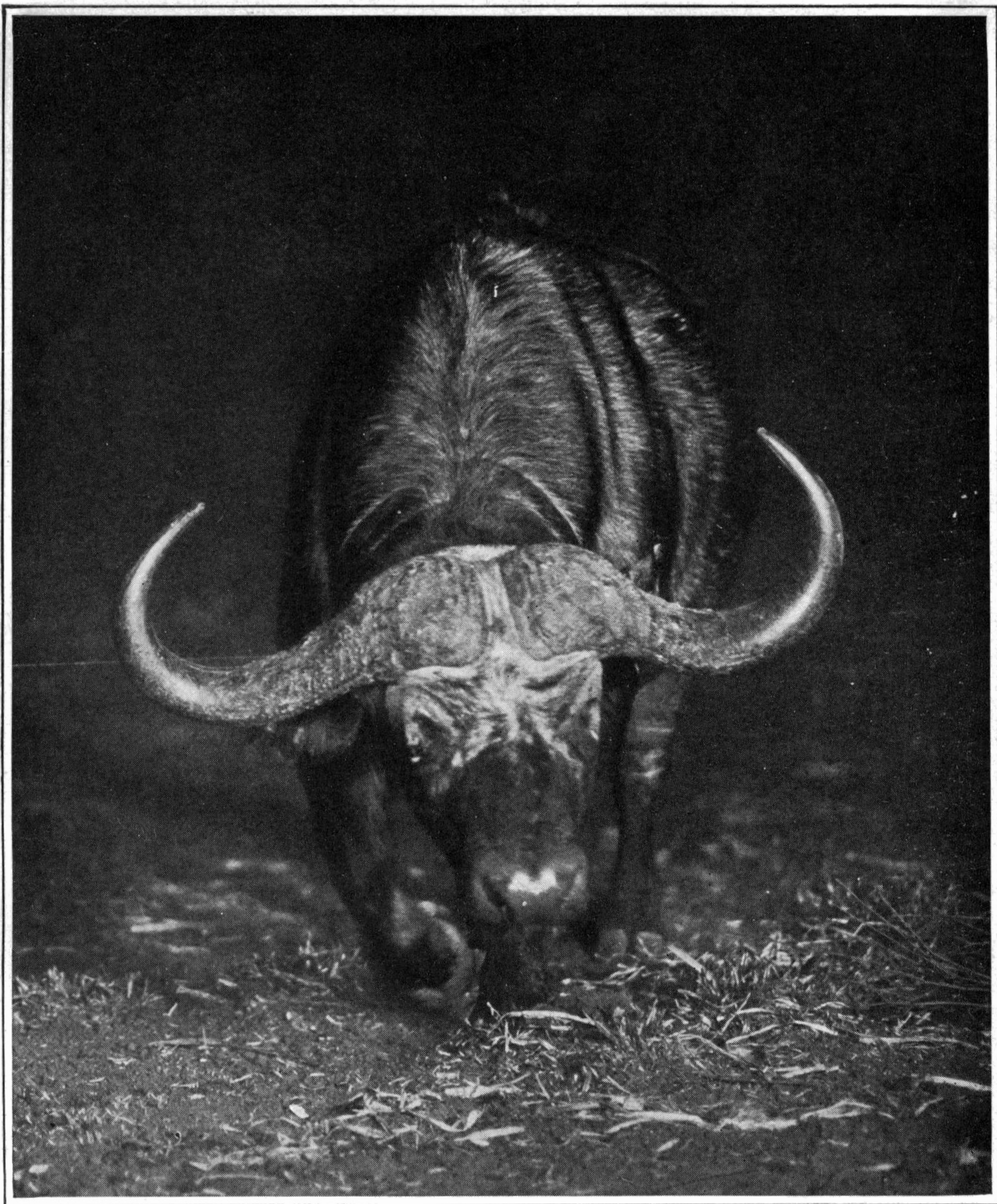
Mr. Johnson wrote that a young *toto* was barely visible by the side of its mother, which is drinking. In the background, however, is another buffalo.

darkness in the distance and think how you would like to be wandering around out here with all kinds of game ready to charge out of the night at a moment's notice. The trips to re-set the flashlights after they had been fired were not particularly pleasant; our boys certainly objected strenuously to running around in the middle of the night. The boys do not understand our enthusiasm for photography, anyway. It is peculiar, but they cannot see a picture. Even the most intelligent of them will turn a photograph upside down and cannot make it out even after several minutes' study. I have shown

them the best of my flashlights, and they cannot tell an elephant from a rhino.

I have one boy who has been helping me in the laboratory for more than a year. At first the pictures meant nothing to him, but the outlines and the shadows gradually made an impression on his brain, and now he is a picture fiend. He can even tell a good negative from a poor one, but it has taken months for his brain to adjust itself to the flat paper. I think it is the absence of depth and of stereoscopic effect that keeps the picture from meaning anything to them.

This holds true all over the world among

*Martin Johnson Photograph*

© Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

NOT A PLEASANT THING TO RUN INTO ON A DARK NIGHT

A buffalo on the way to drink, taking picture number eight on the way.

primitive blacks. I once heard of a story in the Solomon Islands—the missionary told it to me himself, so it *must* be true—of a new class of raw savages that he started to teach, first their A, B, C's on big hand charts. At first they insisted on holding the charts upside down; he got tired correcting them and figured it would make no difference until they were further along, and he stopped correcting

them. In time they learned their letters and learned to read, but always holding the matter upside down. Afterwards he could not break them of it. The entire class came to church and sang with their hymn books upside down and read from their upside-down Bibles. They could not read with the pages right side up. If you don't believe this story, don't blame me, blame the missionary.