

# THE WILDERNESS IS FREE

C. A. W. GUGGISBERG

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## FOREWORD

All over the world wildlife and wild places are threatened by man—the cleverest, the most enlightened and the most destructive animal of all. Yet the very processes of his evolution which have given him such sweeping destructive power have also given him a conscience and a sense of moral responsibility. This is the dominant dilemma of the human species upon which hang all the major issues of today from nuclear war to freedom from hunger, from the population explosion to the freedom of the individual. One facet of this vast dilemma is man's attitude to wild animals and the world of nature, and although this is a world problem, it is nowhere better illustrated than in Africa where the last remnants still exist of what is perhaps the most spectacular fauna on earth. Today it is still possible to see—from a very few special vantage points—up to a dozen species of large mammals at a time, and to see them in herds of many thousands. Yet only 30 years ago these same species were something like a hundred times more numerous; and still the downward trend continues.

At last it seems that significant numbers of people are becoming aware of this and care enough to do something about it. The feeling of responsibility in the matter is not confined to people who have been to the far places of the earth and seen the animals at first hand. Many of them only know them from photographs such as these magnificent ones by Mr. C. A. W. Guggisberg and yet feel strongly that they have a right to a place in the sun. Others realise how important wildlife is to man both aesthetically and economically and how foolish it is to let it disappear.

But unless all these people band together now in a great concerted effort, the photographs in such books as this, together with a few films and a few stuffed specimens in museums, may be all that our children's grandchildren will have to remind them of these lost treasures. Surely it is just as important to preserve the rich variety and beauty of nature as it is to preserve man-made works of art. Surely the best examples of the world's wild and unspoiled places *must* be saved for future generations to enjoy. It is worth remembering that the preservation of the Dodo or the Great Auk or the Quagga or Steller's Sea Cow, all now extinct at the hands of man, would not have delayed the progress of the human race by one iota.

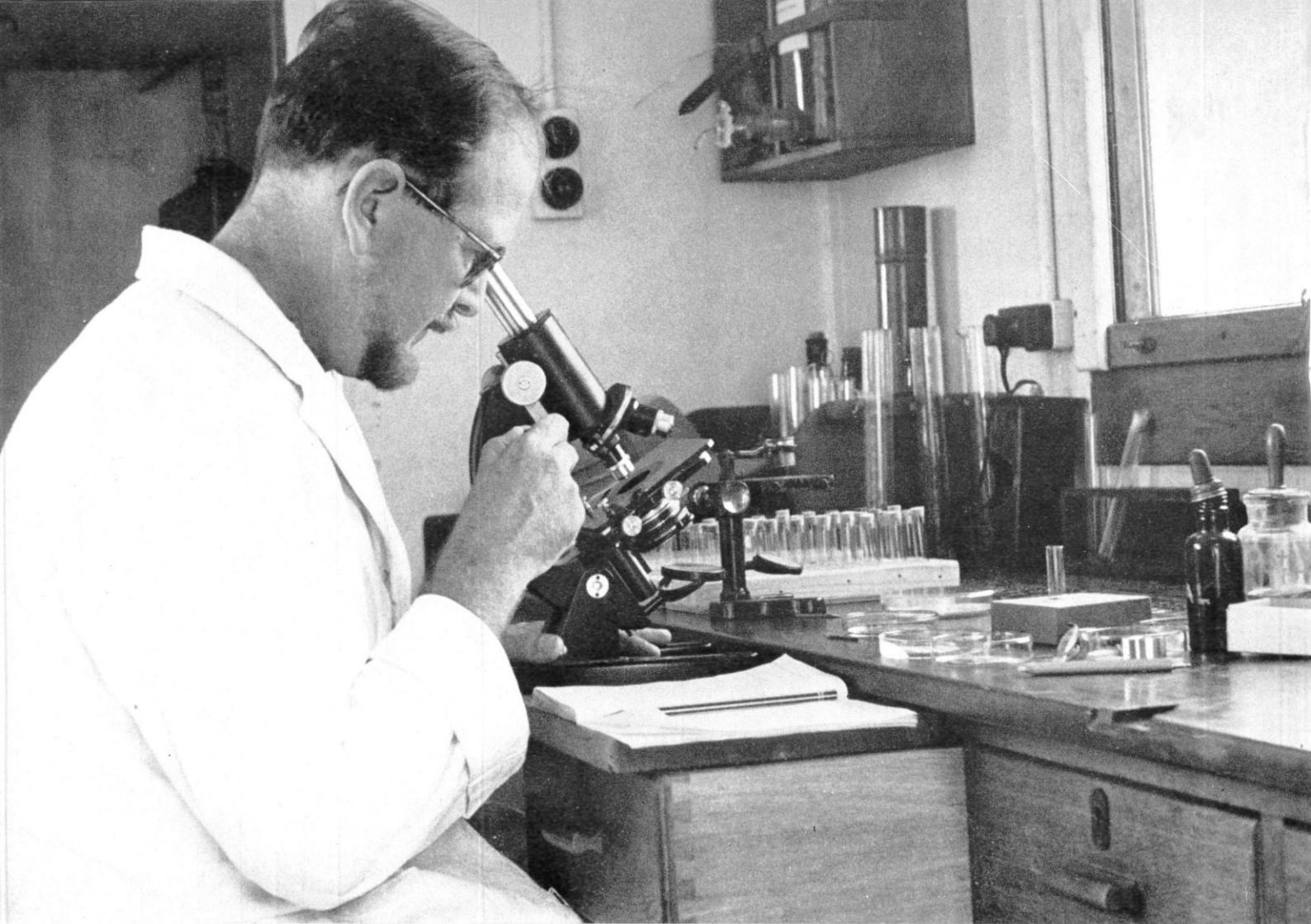
The World Wildlife Fund, in close collaboration with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the International Council for Bird Preservation, is trying to draw together all the strands of effort for conservation into a great world-wide co-ordinated campaign to save wildlife. It is in this context that the appearance of this book at this particular time is of special value and significance.

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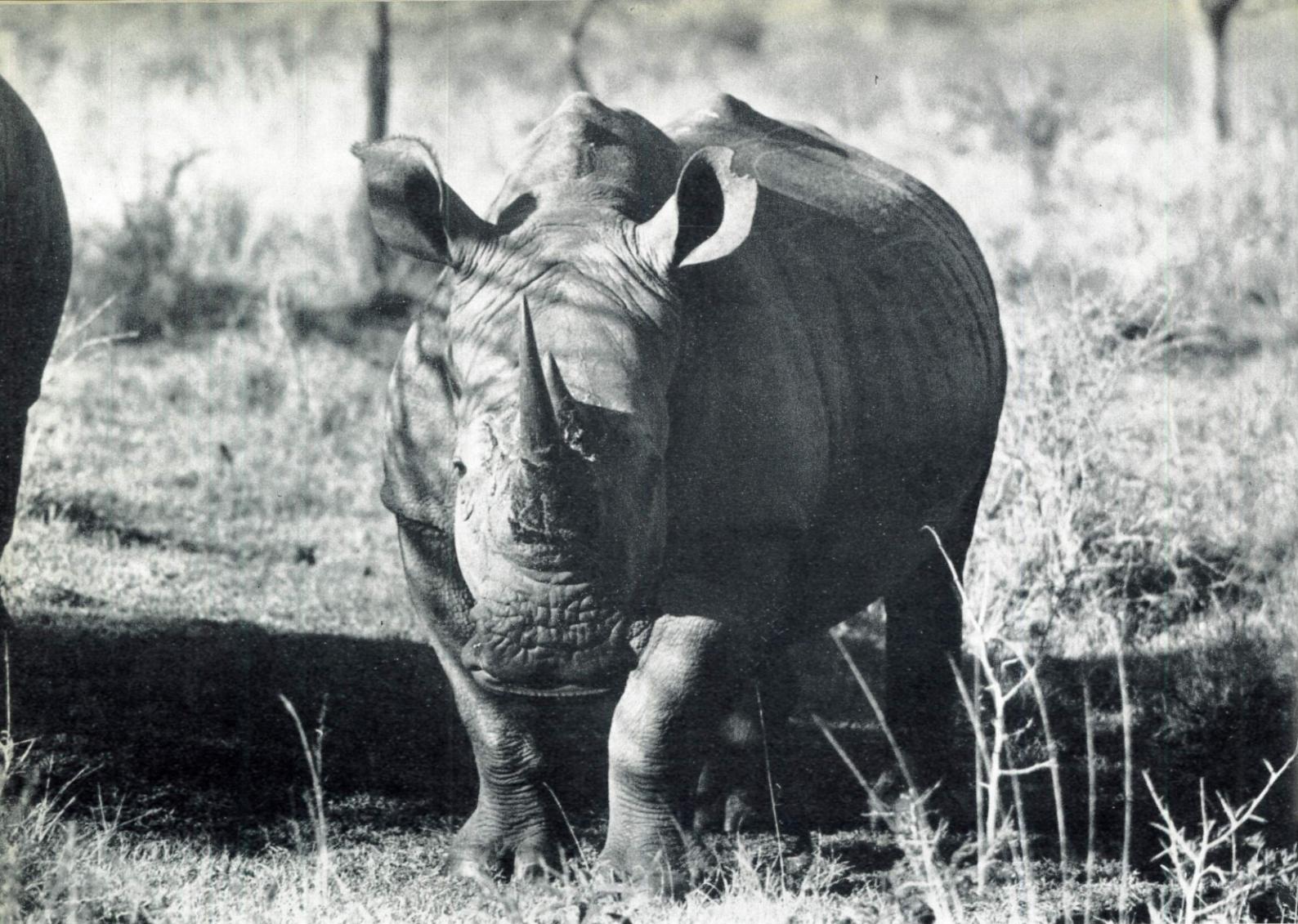
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With colonial administration came medical services, and for the first time in history the tropical diseases which for so long had decimated and weakened the African peoples, were studied scientifically. Ways and means were found to cure and even eradicate many of Africa's scourges. Population figures began to climb in a steadily steepening curve. New land had to be found for the growing multitudes, and the game was pushed out of vast areas. Security, more food, better health and the introduction of politics led to a general decline of discipline. Poaching, formerly a harmless enough occupation meant only to fill the poacher's own larder, became big business. Tens of thousands of animals were slaughtered, not so much for the meat, as for skins and tails, from which fly-whisks are made, and for tusks and horns.



The white rhino of South Africa, once plentiful between the Orange River and the Zambesi, became practically extinct 80 years after it had been made known to science. A few specimens miraculously survived in the Umfolozi area of Zululand, where asylum was granted to them.

They did well under protection, but for some time conservationists found it necessary to keep their true number from the bloodthirsty public. A count in 1936 revealed the presence of 226 animals. In 1959 no less than 567 were counted, with at least another 40 thought to occur outside the counting area. It is now possible to transfer white rhino from the Umfolozi Reserve to other sanctuaries within their former area of distribution.

Cotton's white rhino of western Uganda, the northern Congo and the southern Sudan, which became known at the turn of the Century, is threatened by poachers. Some specimens have recently been moved to the Murchison Falls National Park.



The Amboseli Reserve is an excellent place for elephant and black rhino, the latter being easier to approach there than almost anywhere else. Two rhino cows—known as Gladys and Gertie to their friends—have achieved world fame in the course of the last ten years or so. Both of them had exceptionally long front horns, and being very good-natured creatures who stuck to one small area, they have probably been photographed more often than any other individual animal in East Africa. They also appeared in various films.

In 1959 they both lost their spectacular horns, and in January 1962, while heavy rains interfered with regular patrolling of the reserve, poor old Gladys was foully murdered by poachers, to the great sorrow of all who knew her.

Gertie's horn is thought to have measured  $54\frac{1}{4}$  inches. The horn Gladys carried on her nose was certainly longer than this when I photographed her for the first time in 1954. I saw her again in October 1955 and noticed that the very thin, sharp-pointed tip of her weapon had been broken off. Her horn was then somewhat shorter than Gertie's.



No animal—with the possible exception of the giraffe—has caused as much wonder as the rhinoceros. The Romans may have been acquainted with the African rhino, but 16th Century Europeans only knew the one-horned “armour-plated” Indian species. When travellers brought news of the two-horned African rhino, the artists, who illustrated their accounts drew animals with two horns on their noses, but with the “armour-plating” of the Indian rhino.

Of the two African species, the black rhino was the first to become known. The early Dutch settlers found it on the Cape Flats and on the slopes of Table Mountain. A rhino attacked and upset Governor Simon van der Stel’s coach near Piquetberg. James Bruce, 18th Century explorer of Abyssinia, found the black rhino in the Sudan and gave a long account of its habits. He notes that . . . “in the evening he goes to welter in the mire. He enjoys rubbing himself there so much, and groans and grunts so loud, that he is heard at a considerable distance.”

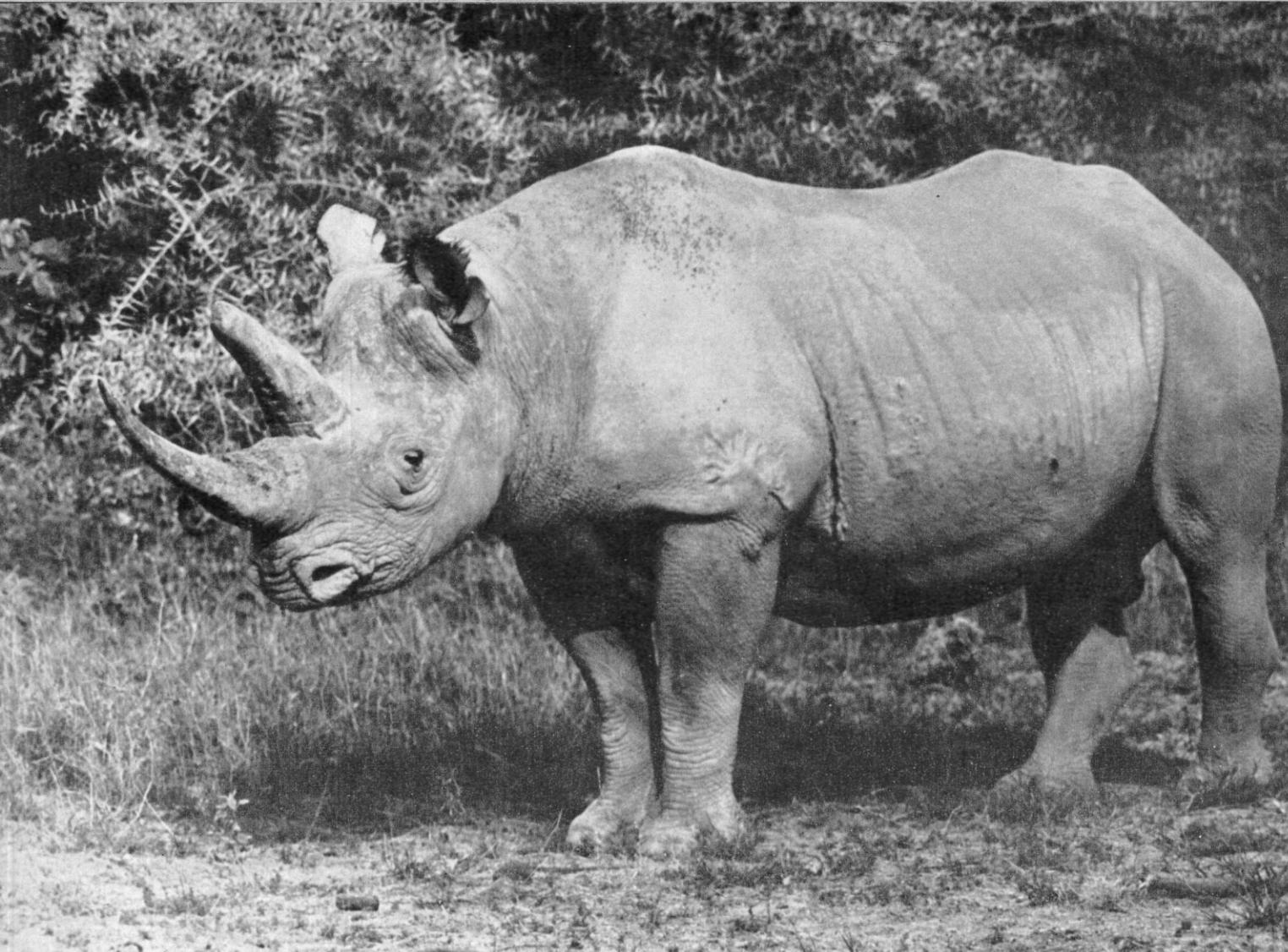
This habit of rolling in the mud gives the rhino the colour of the soil predominant in its habitat, be it black, brick-red, or light grey, as in the case of the “black” rhinos on our plate, which appear whiter than most “white” rhinos.



At about the same time that James Bruce studied the black rhinoceros in the Sudan, the existence of a second African species was vaguely hinted at by several South African travellers, but the white, or square-lipped rhinoceros became definitely known to science only in 1817, through the efforts of William Burchell, the famous naturalist. He got his first specimen near Kuruman in 1812, and after his return to Europe he described the species in a scientific periodical, naming it "Rhinoceros simus," the blunt-nosed rhino, "from the flattened form of its nose and mouth". Later the animal was found to be sufficiently different from the "black" rhino to merit inclusion in a separate genus, and it is now referred to as *Ceratotherium simus*.



There exists a very close association between game animals and the red-billed oxpecker. Oxpeckers can be seen climbing all over antelopes, zebras, giraffes and rhinos, searching for ticks. On occasion the birds also give their hosts warning of approaching danger. I personally have seen dozing rhinos take instant alarm when their oxpeckers objected to my approach and fluttered up screeching.



The black rhinoceros, once common from the Cape to the southern fringe of the Sahara, has become rare in many parts of its range, mainly because of the old Chinese superstitious belief in the aphrodisiac qualities of rhino horn. Buyers who are ready to pay fantastic sums for a few ounces of the substance which is supposed to rejuvenate them, bear the responsibility for having turned the trade in rhino horns into a most lucrative business. Heavy poaching is reported from almost all areas where rhinos still occur, and it is unfortunately very easy to murder these pathetic, prehistoric creatures.

The rhinos have become one of the main problems of African wild life conservation. They will have to be strictly protected throughout their range and everything possible must be done to curb the nefarious activities of those who line their pockets in the process of destroying an interesting relic of past ages. The black rhino feeds on twigs, young leaves, roots, and weeds, grasping the food with its pointed, prehensile upper lip. It inhabits bush country, but can also be found in open parklands and mountain forests. The fact that it is very sedentary, hardly ever leaving the locality it has chosen as a home, makes it very vulnerable.





The white or square-lipped rhino is much more gregarious than its black cousin, and can be seen in "herds" of half a dozen to fifteen or even more. It is a grazer and tends to carry its head very low. While the animal is slowly advancing, the broad mouth, lacking the prehensile lip, works like a lawn-mower. In contrast to the black rhino, which is known for its unpredictable temper, the square-lipped species must be considered as an exceptionally docile creature. Accidents have been very rare, and in the few instances of white rhinos attacking humans, the fault has usually not been with the animal.

A white rhino can stand over 6 feet at the shoulder and is therefore the bulkiest land animal next to the elephant. Its colour can be described as somewhat lighter than that of the black rhino, but it is by no means "white". While the black rhino calf usually follows behind its mother, a young square-lipped rhino often, though not invariably, precedes the adult animal, the mother sometimes guiding her offspring's course with her long front horn.

