

Daphne Sheidrick

P.O. Box 15555, Nairobi, Kenya

PREAMBLE

Being mother to a wild animal is undoubtedly a most enlightening and rewarding experience, but it is not always quite as simple as it might at first appear. It is not just a question of finding the correct milk formula, shoving a bottle into the animal's mouth,

slotting the animal into a human routine, and devoting to it only the time one can spare now and then. In order to be successful and to be able to derive most benefit from this unique opportunity of close contact with a wild animal, one must be a mother more than just in name. One must be wholly committed, understand certain truths about animals in general, and be totally sincere in one's love. For an animal can gauge such things with an uncanny and almost eerie accuracy. There can be no pretence. What one is prepared to put into the relationship will be the measure of what one will reap in return.

There are sacrifices that must be made, too. No matter what your experience, never presume to know all the answers, because you never will. Humility is a valuable prerequisite to being a successful foster mother.

The first basic fact one must understand is that each animal is an individual in its own right, with its own unique temperament, its own special idiosyncracies and peculiarities, its own very special personality. No two are exactly alike just as no two people are quite the same. Forget doubts about being labelled anthropomorphic in one's approach. Such scientific dogmas are not only being proved outdated and incorrect, but shutter an ability to probe the thinking and the mind of an animal. Anyone who subscribes to this philosophy will never be able to penetrate the barrier that isolates human from animal, for absent in their makeup will be some of the vital ingredients for opening the door to confidence, sympathy, compassion and an ability to project oneself beyond human ignorance and arrogance, and see things from the other side. This, I suppose, is what is meant by the term "an empathy for animals". An empathy for animals is a must.

One should understand that animals are "different" to ourselves – not inferior. Therefore one should never gauge their intelligence by human standards. They have evolved in an older world than us and along a different branch of the tree of life. They are endowed with mysterious – "senses" that we have either lost, or never had. Whereas we communicate by the power of speech and the written word, animals communicate no less effectively by much more subtle means; by telepathy, by ritual, by scent, by body language and by instinct; that in-born "memory" inherited over eons of evolution that is the blueprint that dictates certain actions, survival tactics and aspects of social behaviour. So, it is necessary to understand that animals are not always masters of themselves; that instinct might intervene at any moment. However, although raised by a human, it has been my experience that most wild animals know exactly what they are. They know what and what not to eat, what and what not to fear, where and where not to venture. But, instinct is something that needs honing by exposure to a wild situation, and it is vital to understand this simple truth when raising a wild animal.

Don't mete out "smother-love". Don't shelter the animal too much. As it grows up it MUST be allowed freedom and the space to venture into its own world in its own time; to be actually exposed to all that the world harbours; to hear and under-

stand the language of the birds, explore the events of yesterday on the grasses and scent trails; interpret the different messages borne on the wind, and "know thine enemy". Never assume that a wild animal belongs to you, or is a pet. Regard it as being only "on loan" and be happy that you have been privileged to share its life until it responds to the call of the wild and takes its rightful place amongst the natural order. You must learn to say "goodbye", and very often, if one can do this, a goodbye turns into an "au revoir". The animal will remember you with affection, and return periodically to re-establish contact. Never confine a wild animal for selfish reasons. This is unforgiveable, and if one cannot offer it some form of freedom and a near natural life, it is better not to raise it in the first place.

It is also important to know the social characteristics of your charge. Is it, for instance, from the ranks of the gregarious types, or one of Nature's "loners". Does it seek seclusion and solitude when young, or is the constant companionship of others a basic need for its psychological well-being. An animal's psychological well-being is equally as important as its physical, so one must try and simulate what it takes to give the baby a sense of security. If it "lies out" during infancy, for instance, provide the necessary cover to enable it feel hidden. Understand animal codes of behaviour too; what are aggressive actions and what are subservient signals. Never stare at a primate, for instance, or hold the head or horns of an antelope. Above all, know that ALL animals have very long and unforgiving memories. One must respect this, for an unkindness or cruelty will be remembered, and perhaps a grudge harboured until an opportunity presents itself to get even. I have raised most antelopes, and 22 buffaloes, over the years, and never has there ever been an accident. Remember that animals have feelings and emotions, likes and dislikes. Like us, they sorrow and are happy, they have loved ones, and deep loyalties too.

Rhino babies are, strangely enough, one of the easiest and most uncomplicated of wild infants, and perhaps also one of the easiest to rear when one knows how. However, rhinos are delicate in many aspects, and when subjected to any kind of trauma, tend to go down to pneumonia and tick and fly borne diseases normally latent in their blood. Even a very young rhino will fight and charge its captors with all the aggression for which its species has been labelled, and if this be the case, be warned that within about four days of capture, the baby will become very ill, even though it has settled down and tamed easily.

Therefore, upon capture, dose the animal immediately with one of the sulphur based drugs, and forestall babesia and trypanosomiasis with injectable Berenil. Guard against pneumonia by keeping the animal warm, if necessary by tying a small blanket around its body at night and during the cool morning and evening hours.

Rhino babies are very endearing. They quickly lose the head-heavy infant look, and but for a blunt nose and soft smooth

skin, become perfect miniatures of an adult, sturdy and rounded. At birth a rhino stands between 18" and 25" only at the shoulder, and weigh between 60 and 90 lbs. Rhinos tame quicker and easier than any other animal. Even an adult can be tamed within only a few days. They slot into a routine with philosophical ease, being very much creatures of habit. They love a comfortable "rut", and are content with less than most other orphans. Their food on time; a dry warm stable at night, a mudwallow and sandpit at their disposal, a patch of bush in which to hide, and a "friend" is all a baby rhino needs in order to be thoroughly content. Never do they shove or jostle for the bottle, as does a buffalo, but ask with a plaintive "mew", and gently take whatever is offered. They need a companion close by at all times, to replace the mother that would have been a part of their early life. And they thrive best wandering free with a human attendant and an animal companion, romping and playing, investigating the scents and sounds of the bush. All this avoids the tedium of boredom; another important aspect in the raising of young animals.

THE FORMULA

A "humanised" brand of baby milk is the key to raising a rhino. One must use a baby preparation with a full cream base. I have always used LACTOGEN, and on the following formula have raised four baby rhinos without any difficulty whatsoever; one from the day it was born, (Still in the foetal sac).

Feed four hourly during the day, i.e. 6 a.m., 10 a.m., 2 p.m., 6 p.m., and when the calf is very young, once at night, at 10 p.m.

INITIAL RATIO = 8 scoops milk powder to 24 fl. ozs. water.

Gauge amounts by appetite demand. All baby animals know what they want and know when they have had enough.

After a few days, increase the ratio to 10 scoops Lactogen: 24 fl. ozs., and aim for 1 scoop per 2 fl. ozs. You will then be mixing 12 scoops of powder per 24 fl. ozs. When the calf is having this ratio, that is FULL STRENGTH, and the milk base will be mixed according to this for the entire time it is on milk (about 18 months).

Because one will be soon dealing with sizeable quantities, it is much easier to do the scoops by measurement. At 4 1/2 months the calf will be taking 4 1/2 pints of milk 4 times a day. One can drop the night feed after a month.

At 5 months old the calf will be taking 5 1/2 pints per feed.

Having achieved FULL STRENGTH ratio, one then introduces the CEREAL. Start by adding 1 tablespoon of NESTUM baby cereal and 1 tablespoon ENERGEX wheat germ two times a day, then three times a day, and finally to all feeds.

At about 4 months each feed will be:

4 1/2 pints warm water: 7 ozs. LACTOGEN powder

(7 ozs. = 45 scoops)

5 tablespoons Nestum Cereal

2 tablespoons Energex

1 tablespoon Glucose

Pinch of Salt

At 5 months each feed will be:

5 1/2 pints Water

9 ozs. Lactogen

9 tablespoons Nestum Cereal

1 tablespoon Glucose

Pinch of Salt

The calf will very soon begin to browse a little, and at this time it can go onto 3 milk feeds per day. The cereal can also be changed to OATMEAL uncooked, and the calf will now have:

6 pints Water

10 1/2 ozs. Lactogen Powder

11 ozs. Oatmeal (15 tablespoons)

4 tablespoons Energex

Salt

This is the maximum milk feed. As the calf browses more, it will be noticed that its appetite for milk drops, and the lunch time feed can be dropped.

The calf will probably go off its food whilst teething. Don't be hasty to give drugs. Mix milk according to demand. Always allow some ticks, but not too many. It is important that the calf acquires an immunity to tick borne diseases, and the way to do this is to allow it to have some ticks on t. Feeding, and the quantities to give, is really a matter of common sense. A lot of cereal and a lot of Vitamin B is essential to the good health of a rhino calf. On the above formula, the calf will gain about 1 kg per day.

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Editors: Raoul du Toit and David Cumming.

AFRICAN ELEPHANT AND RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP, BOX 8437, CAUSEWAY, HARARE, ZIMBABWE