



# IN PRIVATE —KENYA RHINO SANCTUARIES OFFER LESSONS IN SURVIVAL

*The big beast stood like an uncouth statue, his hide black in the sunlight; he seemed what he was, a monster surviving over from the world's past, from the days when the beasts...ran riot in their strength, before man grew so cunning of brain and hand as to master them. So little did he dream of our presence that when we were a hundred yards off he actually lay down.*

Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, 1910.



The elephant group has since been expanded by a Brat Pack of seven youngsters, and 46 year old Bibi, an elephant born in Africa but who has spent most of her life till now in Sri Lanka. They are based at Ker & Downey's Abu Camp in the Okavango Swamps. From here, Randall takes tourists on unique elephant back safaris among the beautiful and impressive, unchanged African wilderness.

DEAR ELEPHANT, SIR  
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*Dear Elephant, Sir* is Clive Walker's tribute to the grey giants that have become synonymous with his role in southern African conservation. These essays trace the development of Clive Walker's perception of elephants – from that of the hunter to that of a champion and friend. *Dear Elephant, Sir* is a celebration of wild African elephants, but it also sounds a warning about their future in the face of increased population pressure. This is a personal account of conservation in southern Africa – touching on issues such as the formation of first the Endangered Wildlife Trust and then the Rhino & Elephant Foundation and controversial matters such as the CITES ban on trade in elephant products.

*Dear Elephant, Sir* will fascinate conservationists, game rangers, those who have followed Clive Walker's endless fight to highlight the plight of southern African wildlife and those who, like Clive himself, are drawn to the majesty of the African elephant.

The essays are illustrated with Clive Walker's evocative line drawings and black and white photographs of the characters who people the text.

Sally Antrobus is an environmental writer, resident in the United States, who has been working with Clive Walker for many years. Available, Hard cover, 120 pages, from the Foundation at a cost of R59,99.

## OBITUARY

It is with great sadness that the Trustees of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation learned of the tragic death of KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources' Warden, Graham Wiltshire, in an aircraft accident that occurred in the Ndumu Game Reserve in July 1992, whilst Graham Wiltshire and pilot, Vernon Love, were searching for a snared black rhino.

Graham Wiltshire directed the operation to capture ten black rhino from the Polwe area of Ndumu, in collaboration with the Kruger National Park in 1990, in an effort to rescue a potentially threatened population of black rhino from poacher incursions from Mocambique.


The Foundation and Trustees extend their condolences to Graham's wife and to the Director and staff of the KBNR. 



Photo: Africana Museum



Once upon a time, rhino were so numerous in Kenya that they were shot to clear land for settlement and were barely regarded as a desirable big game trophy. They were too easy to kill and gave up without much of a fight when hit with a heavy calibre bullet. When I first visited Kenya in 1960, there were still probably in excess of 20 000 black rhino in the country, perhaps half of these to be found in Tsavo National Park, where I spent five days.

Not long after my first visit, however, political awakening heralded a violent change for Kenya. Rhino were about to face a catastrophic collapse. Through the 1960s and 1970s a combination of rapidly increasing human population expanding into traditional game grounds, severe drought and corruption in government placed enormous pressure on game populations, especially elephants and rhinos. Somali *shifita* (bandits, in Swahili) and other poachers joined in the carnage and levelled the once enormous numbers to a remnant quantity.

The fate of the rhinos was all but sealed. By the late 1980s, only a few pockets of rhino were to be found in conserved areas like Tsavo, the Amboseli and Aberdare National Parks, the Masai Mara and one private ranch – Laikipia, which has a resident indigenous population. Overall numbers were so low that they could be recorded in the low hundreds.

Our report is not about why it happened or who was responsible, but about what is happening now. In early 1992 Peter Hitchins, warden of Songimvelo Game Reserve in KaNgwane, and I went to Kenya to see for ourselves what Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) and, in particular, the private landowners are now doing to conserve their rhino. We went not to criticise, but to learn from the Kenyan experience and to meet the people who are at the forefront of conservation there.

Spearheading our visit was Kuki Gallmann, who chairs the Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries. I'd been a speaker at the South African launch of her book *I Dreamed of Africa*

in December, 1991, and she had paid a brief visit to the Lapalala Rhino Sanctuary shortly thereafter. Kuki set up our itinerary of five private rhino sanctuaries and Dr Rob Brett kindly arranged for us to visit three government reserves, namely Nakuru, Nairobi and the Ngulia sanctuary within Tsavo National Park.



*Under constant guard. White rhino on the private reserve Ol Jogi.*

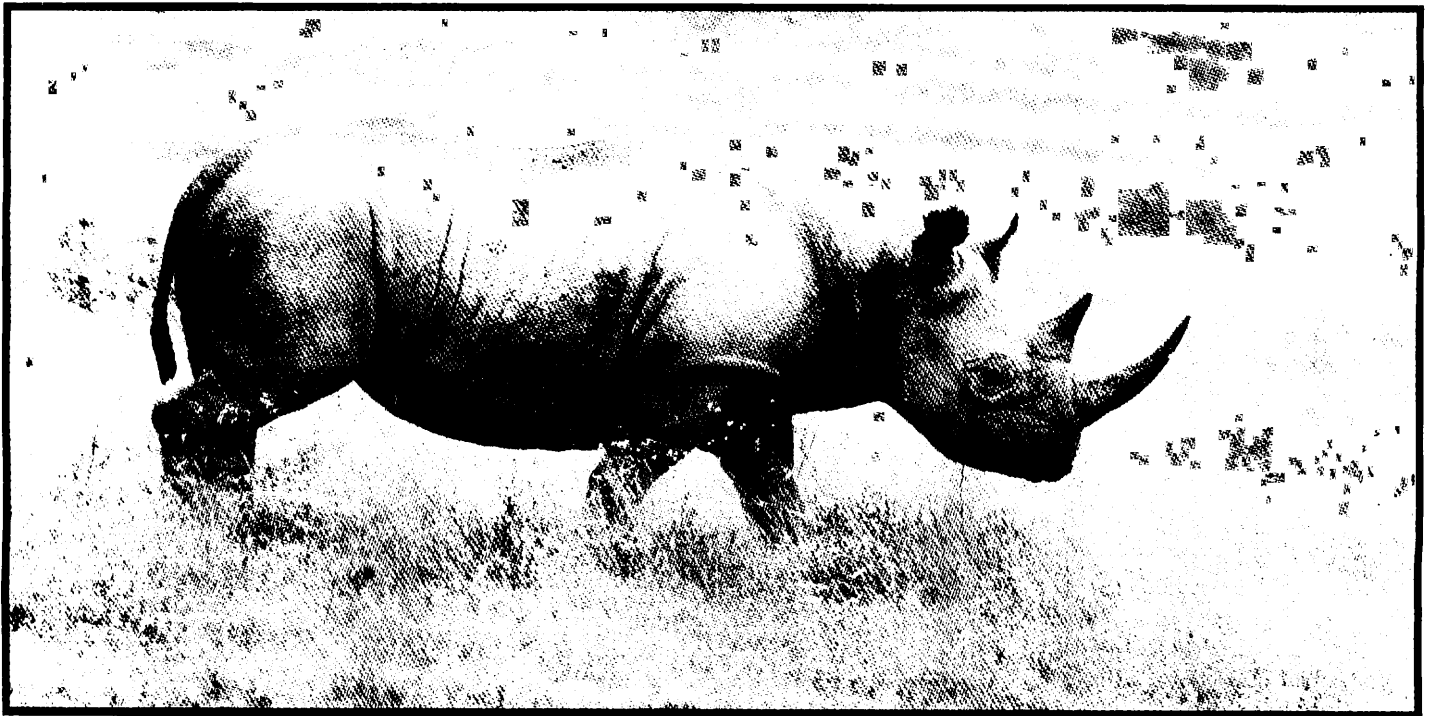


*Anna Merz, author of "Rhino – at the brink of Extinction", with Samia, raised from birth, at Ngare Seroi Rhino Sanctuary in the Kenyan highlands.*



*I do not see how the rhinoceros can be permanently preserved, save in very out-of-the-way places or in regular game reserves.*

Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, 1910.



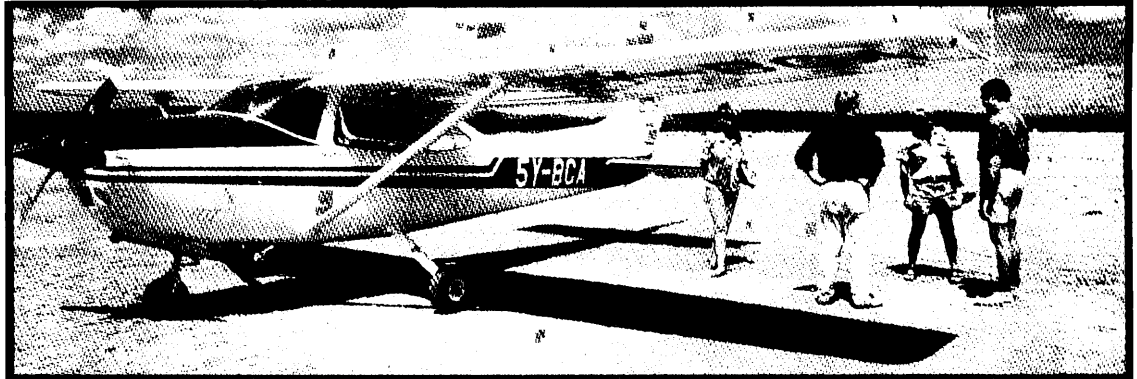
*A magnificent black rhinoceros bull of the Kenyan sub-species. Diceros bicornis Michaelii.*

The present state of rhino conservation in Kenya certainly reflects Theodore Roosevelt's observation of almost a century ago – except that there are no "out-of-the-way" places left today. In 1988, before the appointment of Dr Richard Leakey as Kenya's new director of wildlife, the position for rhino was bleak indeed. By then their numbers had declined so far that even poachers had largely lost interest, concentrating instead on elephants, which presented easier pickings.

Much has been said about Richard Leakey, both kind and harsh. Never one to take a low profile when it comes to defending his actions or his country's wildlife policies, he is on the receiving end of both criticism and praise. He is best known for his widely publicised ivory-

burning displays. Less well known is that when Leakey took over, he mobilised a guerilla force of well-armed game scouts and rangers to combat ivory poaching, and the impetus of his work signalled a new era in Kenya's wildlife conservation. Rangers had the authority to shoot to kill, and an unprecedented sense of pride and motivation developed.

The fight to save the rhino is not Leakey's story, but that of a whole range of individuals. Over a period of two and a half weeks, sometimes in light aircraft and sometimes in four-wheel-drive vehicles – much of the time on the most appalling roads I have ever encountered in Africa – we studied several examples of the sanctuary concept. The crux of it is that rhinos are being protected in relatively



Most private landowners have their own aircraft, which is an essential component allowing for quick transportation and is also extremely useful in surveillance.

Kenyan owners require at better prices they currently have to pay from Europe).

Possibly the best known of Kenya's rhino sanctuaries is Lewa Downs, owned by the Craig family. It was publicised through the efforts of Anna Mertz in her book *Rhino – at the edge of Extinction*. She has devoted herself to rhino conservation, backed by Ian and Jane Craig, who were also our hosts. We spent three superb days studying their project with "Fuzz" Dyer, manager of the rhino sanctuary. Lewa Downs is open to the public and has a lodge for visitors.

A second Kenyan sanctuary open to the public is Ol Pejeta, which has a 52-bed tented camp and a luxury lodge. This rhino sanctuary is run by a former SAS officer and gamekeeper, John Noble.

Ol Ari Nyiro (Laikipia ranch), owned by Kuki Gallmann, is 98 000 acres in extent, with the second highest population of black rhino, but still needs barriers to contain the rhinos within the ranch. Blessed with spectacular scenery, it is not unlike Lapalala, one of only two private rhino sanctuaries in South Africa. Kuki Gallmann with other landowners, has contributed enormously to Kenya's rhino conservation. Ol Jogi and Solio are private sanctuaries with no public amenities, as is the case with Ol Ari Nyiro for the present, as the principal activity is cattle ranching.

In Kenya, besides funding supplied by non-governmental organisations to the private sector, KWS has received good support from local and overseas funding agencies, specifically

for rhino conservation. The level of awareness about the animals is high and positive. In South Africa, by contrast, there is a tendency to apologise for overt attention to "single-species" conservation, arising partly from our political situation.

Kenya has been an independent, integrated society since 1963 and, having lost virtually all her rhino and most of her elephants, has come full circle. People now fully realise the value of these two species as regards tourism and are doing their best to restore some of the balance. The focus on rhino and elephant conservation is widespread. One cannot fail to notice T-shirts bearing slogans like "Ivory looks better on elephants", bumper-stickers and the like, testifying to the high level of awareness and concern for the survival of both these species. And it makes sense. Kenya is heavily dependent upon its tourist industry, quite apart from the importance of conserving rhinos.

We came away having learnt a lot and seen a great deal. The sanctuary concept seems to hold out the greatest chances for the long-term survival of black rhino. Black rhino conservation in vast reserves is impractical. Small, well protected areas, both government and private, in a continent with rapidly expanding human populations is, we feel, the best hope, and Kenya has been one of the first countries to recognise this.



small, fenced areas that lend themselves to ease of patrolling.

For security reasons, it is probably prudent not to give exact details as to the numbers of rhino. In Kenya rhino are not out of the red by any stretch of the imagination. During September last year, three rhino were speared and shot right in Amboseli National Park. Woeful though this was, at least the losses are down. Consider that last year Zimbabwe lost 149 rhino – that are known about – to poachers: Zimbabwe faces the worst present crisis of any country in Africa in this regard.

Amboseli is not regarded as a rhino sanctuary as such. For one thing, it is unfenced and is home to the Masai and their cattle, goats and sheep. Antagonism between people and wildlife in such a situation is a historical fact and here, Kenya Wildlife Services have embarked upon a programme whereby the local tribal people receive benefits from tourism, in the form of a percentage of park entrance fees. Much of the future of wildlife in Kenya, including on private land, will have to be on the basis of good neighbourly relations: neighbours will have to receive some form of benefit.

An important distinction between the circumstances of private landowners in Kenya and those in South Africa is that in Kenya all rhino belong to the state, regardless of where they live. In the case of the black rhino, at least a third of all the remaining animals are on private land. But since the rhino belong to the state, its agencies have complete say on management issues. The Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries has been formed to supply a representative body for liaison with Kenya Wildlife Services, and the state assists landowners by various means. South Africa has gone the other way: private landowners have to pay a hefty price for the privilege of having black rhinoceros on their property.

In both countries the private landowner must pay for the fencing (which in Kenya must be electrified), as well as the game guard force, radios, aircraft, uniforms, housing, equipment, etc. But because the landowners in Kenya do not own the rhino, public sympathy is in their favour. Those owners who have sought support have been generously funded, and deservedly so. The private landowner in South Africa, on the other hand, is by and large on his own after buying rhino. It is most unlikely that the South African public would support any fundraising effort to assist rhino conservation on private land, no matter how worthy.

Strapped for funding, the official agencies in South Africa see landowners as part of their salvation; the idea of custodianship, as applied in Kenya, does not come into the equation. Sadly, there are loopholes in this arrangement on both sides. Once rhino are purchased, the onus is on the landowner to manage them properly and the state has little effect on the standards he may or may not maintain – although it is likely that anyone who spends over R400 000 per rhino would do everything possible to ensure that the animals are well taken care of. Kenya Wildlife Services, having a vested interest, closely monitor the situation of rhino on private lands. This is the task at present of Dr Rob Brett, who arranged various aspects of our visit.

Because of Kenya's past heavy poaching record, one factor stood out clearly: in monitoring and surveillance, Kenya's rhino sanctuaries are impressive. People are all too conscious of what the past left in bloated carcasses. Round-the-clock monitoring takes place with a strong emphasis on keeping undesirable elements out – both the two-legged and the four-legged variety. Kenya's elephants range over much of the area where the private sanctuaries are located and every effort is made to keep elephants from breaking in. All the private sanctuaries are located within cattle ranches and four are totally ring-fenced.

Another strong point is the provision of weapons for the game guard force. Guards have been provided with .303 rifles by Kenya Wildlife Services. (Ammunition is scarce and expensive, and South Africa could well export all the