



A WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER'S DIARY — 22

A Day's Span Of Life

by M. KRISHNAN

Kaziranga Se., Assam, February 5, 1968: This baby rhino was born this morning—and was dead by nightfall.

Last evening, scouting around Mt. Himukh on elephant back, I saw the mother, obviously far gone in calf and about to deliver. Rhinos in the wild are not fat, and I observed the somewhat caved-in appearance of the tumid stomach, typical of a mammal about to give birth. I asked the mahout if that rhino was about to calve, and he nodded his head emphatically in agreement. I asked him again if he thought it would take a few weeks, even

months perhaps, and again he nodded his head energetically. We had no language in common and he was taking the shortest way out of an incomprehensible interrogation.

At dawn today I passed the rhino cow, resting in a clump of tall grass, and she had still to deliver. But on the way back, nearing noon, I saw she had the baby with her, and approaching gradually so as not to panic her, tried for some pictures.

She was visibly uneasy, even after I had the elephant backed a little, and

halted. Like all infants, the baby rhino was blissfully unaware of danger, and moved on still-wobbly feet around its mother, and when it got in front of her, she nudged it to take the line she wanted it to, but just walked ahead when it was behind her, and it followed her.

The sun was fierce and I was sure it did a newborn rhino no good to be forced away from the shelter of the tall grass. I believe fiercely in a sanctuary being primarily intended for its animals and not for photographers, and so left that mother and child in peace, and went back to the rest-house. It is also true that I had skipped breakfast, and was feeling ravenous.

By sunset the baby had disappeared. The cow rhino was still there, circling the covert disconsolately, but the infant had been taken away by a tiger. There was a puddle near that covert, and on its muddy rim there were fresh, clear pugs, and a few yards further a little blood on the ground. The evidence was conclusive.

