

Notes on a Solitary Black Rhino

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In the late 1960s it was estimated that there were between 50 and 60 Black Rhino in the Mara Triangle - eight were once seen on a single walk by one of us (KN) - but severe poaching took place in the early 1970s when large numbers were shot by poachers. Poaching was eventually brought under control but the number of rhino had been greatly depleted and just a handful survived in the Ngama Hills.

A single female Black Rhino returned to the Mara Triangle in September 1997 and has been seen regularly ever since. This lone rhino occupies an area of about 30km² and has a fixed daily routine. She spends a large part of each day (7h30 to 18h00) at a place we call 'Nyumba ya Faru' in the shade of *Croton dichogamus* thickets. In the very early morning, she is regularly found in the vicinity of a Salt Lick, and then crosses the Sabaringo River onto the plains to browse. She was once seen to swim across the Mara River in July 1999, even though the water level was high, but soon returned to our western side. Kimani Swamp is a favoured wallowing site. She has never been seen to move up the Oloololo escarpment. The rhino's diet includes *Solanum*, *Capparis*, *Acacia* and *Eleaodendron* but surprisingly, the animal has not been seen to feed on the abundant *Croton*.

This rhinoceros is extremely aggressive and has had numerous encounters with other species, even killing the dominant male lion of the Kichwa Pride on 16/11/98, and an injured Common Zebra foal on 26/10/98. A female leopard with two cubs was chased for several minutes by the rhino (Lucas Leboo:12/98) and a newly born Eland calf was harassed before fellow guide Stephen Owino intervened. Warthog have often been seen to run away at the sight of this rhino. Whenever the rhino is seen on the move, other animals appear to be watching it closely, as if unsure of its intent. Two other eye-witness account attest to the aggressive nature of this rhino.

A herd of 38 African Elephant, with numerous youngsters, were feeding alongside a group of five Giraffe. The Black Rhino then came running from a nearby *Croton* thicket, as though it was being pursued. It came to within about 50m of the elephant and giraffe before coming to a halt. An adult female giraffe then walked towards the rhino, apparently very inquisitive. When the rhino picked up its head and stomped a few paces in the direction of the giraffe, it cantered off, with the other four giraffe on its heels. The rhino then walked towards the elephant herd and some of the youngsters were seen to raise their trunks in a bid to try and smell what for them appeared to be a unfamiliar animal. The young elephants trumpeted when the rhino moved closer, but to our surprise, the whole herd turned tail and moved rapidly away (Stephen Owino:3/99).

As the Black Rhino emerged from a Euclea thicket along the Mara River, it was met by two African Elephant bulls. One elephant rushed towards the rhino, but the rhino stood its ground and there was a stand off, with the elephant trumpeting loudly. After about three minutes, the elephants moved off in another direction, and the rhino kept on its course (Joseph Ole Kima:10/99).

As a mature and apparently healthy animal, it is surprising to us that no males have moved across from the Ngama Hills in an attempt to join her, or that she has not moved back east to seek out male company. We continue to watch this rhino with great interest.