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In this issue: **SAVING UGANDA'S WHITE RHINO**

The fight to save Uganda's

WHITE RHINO

IN THE WEST NILE DISTRICT of Uganda lives a population of white rhino—those relics of a past age, cumbrous, gentle creatures despite their huge bulk—which estimates only 10 years ago, put at 500.

But poachers live in the area, too, and official counts showed that white rhino were being reduced alarmingly. By 1959, they were believed to be diminished to 300.

But in a recent hurried survey, the Indi White Rhino Sanctuary was estimated to contain 50; Kei sanctuary, nil; Lafori Sanctuary, a reputed 15, and Lemunga Game Reserve a possible six—a total of not more than 71 left alive. There were none found naturally east of the formidable barrier of the Nile.

A 1961 expedition, mounted by an expert trapper, spent some months in the West Nile area and caught 10 white rhino, moving them to Murchison National Park. None had bred in the new surroundings—another alarming factor.

PROPOSITION

Thus, when Nairobi executives of the East African Wild Life Society visited Uganda earlier this year, they learned just how worried Game Department Officials had become about the situation. A grant from the World Wildlife Fund had been used by the Society to station a Warden at Arua and this had certainly saved the situation in certain areas; but in others—more remote and difficult of access—it looked as if the poachers were winning.

The Wild Life Society executives put up a proposition: "Let us enlist the services of the Kenya Game Department's Capture Team and let us make a joint all-out effort to save what we can of the remaining creatures."

The new Uganda Game Department chief and his officers were enthusiastic about the idea and the Wild Life men returned to Nairobi. Funds could be made available to finance the operation, they found, and Capt. Nick Carter, leader of the Kenya Capture Team, was approached.

Carter—47, red-bearded, a former Tank Regiment officer who won a Military Cross in the Western Desert in 1942—had spent four years in testing the Parke Davis drug Sernylan and in perfecting the techniques of the crossbow from which the drug-dart is fired.

He had learned the ways of the black rhino in a way which few others have had the opportunity to do. The Kenya Government was willing to release him. And Nick Carter recommended enlisting the aid of a British Army unit, stationed in Kenya and equipped with helicopters.

The rescue of *Ceratotherium Simum simum burchelliensis* was under way.

THE WHITE RHINO is becoming rare in East Africa, for this timorous, inoffensive pachyderm is the prey of poachers.

For them, its horn means an easy source of money and a life taken is unimportant.

For conservationists, the alarming killings represented a chance to do battle against a grisly trade, explains

CHARLES
HAYES

ONCE funds became available, the whole operation slicked into action.

The interest of Brig. Lloyd-Owen, 24th Brigade Commander, was assured; General Freeland, General Officer Commanding British Troops in Kenya, readily agreed to helicopters of the 8th Independent Reconnaissance Flight being used; final permission for the project was obtained from Britain's War Office.

Officers of the Kenya Game Department, the Uganda Parks and the Uganda Game Department concerned were briefed. In the United States, Parke Davis and Company were contacted and rushed fresh supplies of Sernylan specially for the operation.

Recalls Carter: "In spite of the number of officers and offices involved, coordination was excellent and all cooperated fully and helpfully."

But the problems of transportation, servicing and refuelling were great and there were significant distances involved.

Early in June, the Kenya Capture Team moved out of its Kiboko base, picked up stores in Nairobi, was joined by a Royal Corps of Signals detachment with a radio communications link and two Army Land-Rovers, and set off on the 800-mile trip to the West Nile.

The column arrived in Lemunga Camp on the evening of 13th June, having winched and dug itself through the last few miles of soggy black-cotton soil bush track.

Uganda Parks' John Savidge, motoring with his wife Yvonne, pitched up at the camp in the middle of the night, having also bogged down many times in the swampy bushland.

The airstrip had been completed, they found, and, next morning at Arua, John obtained and flew the Wild Life Society's aircraft back to camp. Meanwhile, Carter and his companions put the finishing touches to a rhino-pen erected by local labourers.

"It had worried me, for it was so constructed as to raise doubts whether it would hold a savage rabbit," says Carter, with heavy irony. "In any case, the locals had by now struck, wanting higher wages."

WITH everything readied, the hunt began. John Savidge took off in the Piper Cruiser, searching the swamp and then circling over a group of six white rhino he located. The Capture Unit drove to the spot Savidge was indicating and closed with a big bull.

Nick Carter looked over the enormous bulk and loaded his dart with a heavy dose of Sernylan, adding some hyaluronidase for good measure. With its slight "clack", the dart sped from the crossbow into the rhino's tough hide.

REACTION

John Savidge kept watch from his place up aloft and Carter, crashing over the bumpy country in the Land-Rover, followed the bull into the tall, matted grass.

"He was out on his feet, but he refused to go down," says Carter. "I injected a further quarter-gramme of the drug and the scouts then roped and threw him without difficulty."

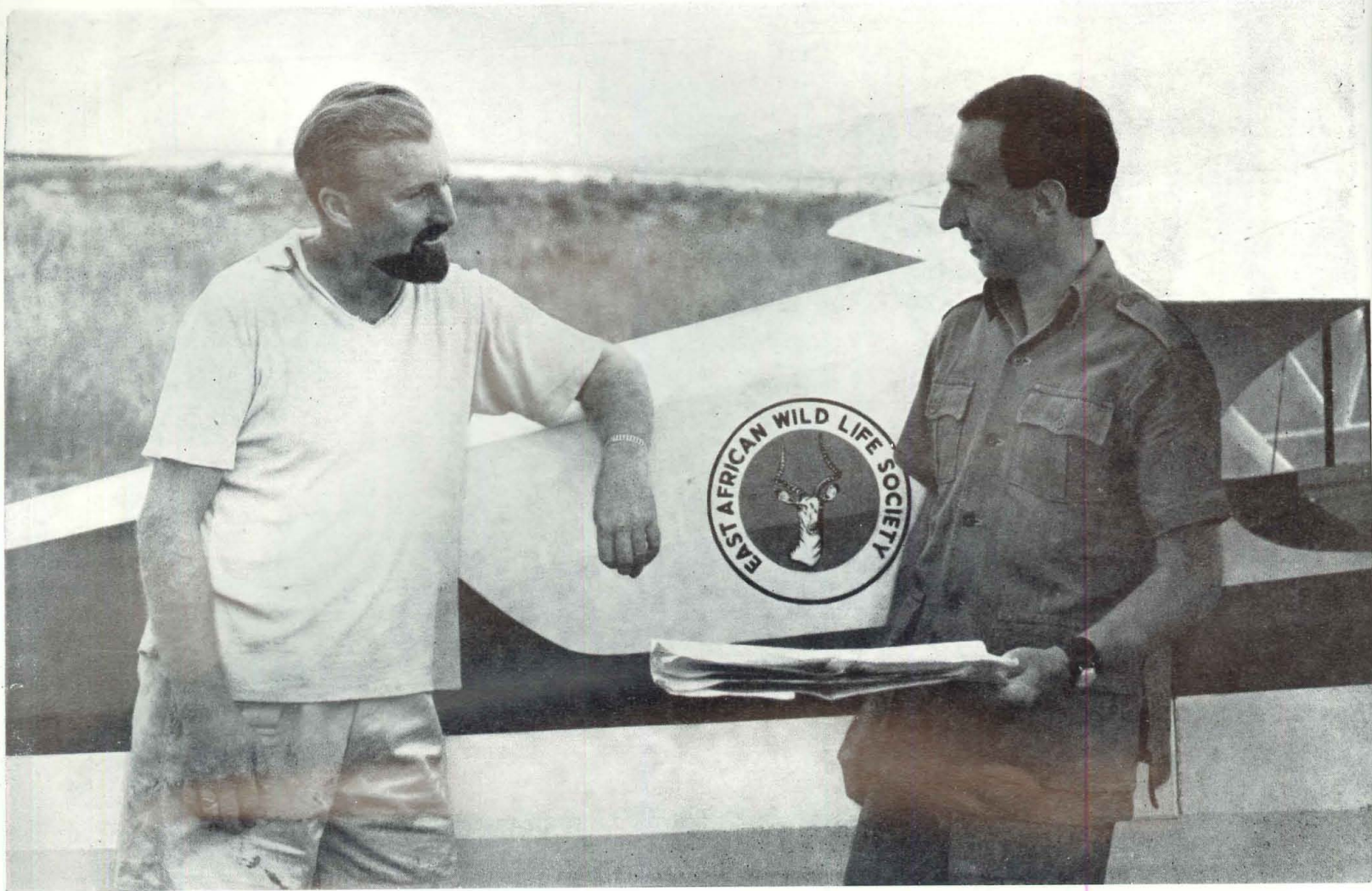
The behaviour of the white rhino under the drug had now to be studied intently. Would he react differently from the black?

The total dosage in the bull was almost double that normally given to the black rhino and was greater than the dose which would kill an elephant.

The big bull's temperature was 100.1 Fahrenheit, which was reasonable; it increased after he had been hoisted aboard the "tray," winched up on the lorry and decanted into the pen. But, in the main, his beha-

WHITE RHINO mother with her calf, in the Lemunga pen. The animal is not "white", of course, and the name is said to have come from the Afrikaans description "weit", meaning "wide"—in the lip. The picture opposite shows how true the description is.





THE OPERATION COMMANDERS: Capt. Nick Carter (left) and John Savidge, with the Wild Life Society's aircraft

SAVING WHITE RHINO

(Continued from page 6)

viour was very similar to that of the black rhino under similar circumstances and he took four hours to regain full consciousness.

"He is an impressive animal," the Capture Unit diary records, "over six feet high at the shoulder, nearly 13 feet long and weighing perhaps 3000 lbs. He has a horn 32 inches long and is massive in proportion."

RAIN CLOUDS

A fastidious feeder, back in the pen the bull had to be tempted with short sweet grass; but, three days later, he was eating normally—reassuring evidence for his captors that the drug-dart technique would be satisfactory in the case of the Uganda white rhino, too.

More pens were built and the team anxiously watched the gathering rain clouds.

At dawn next morning, from the hilltop on which the Capture Camp was pitched, the remainder of the white rhino family group was sighted. In his pursuing Land-Rover, Carter loosed off three darts in rapid succession.

Before becoming ataxic, the quarries ran in opposite directions, into the thick bush. The youngest cow—a 900 lb. three-year-old—dropped; the next was roped and thrown; the largest cow needed another drug-filled dart in order to make effect upon her.

In the greasy black mud and the rain, the Capture Team worked fast, transporting the drugged rhinos to their pens, making them comfortable, watching them anxiously and tending the largest cow as she became ill from excitement. She was pregnant, Nick Carter found; he worked frantically to save her.

Her death was a blow for the whole camp staff and it was with weary bitterness that Carter closed the Capture Team diary that night with the sentence: "In the confusion, some taxpayer has stolen our one remaining roll of wire with which we fasten the logs of the pen together."

Next day, spirits rose again as the camp heard the scream of Major Stuart Whitehead's 8th Recce Squadron helicopter, "Alouette", flying across the cloud-laden sky.

Now the difficult Lafori Reserve country could be tackled.

HUNTING rhinoceros from helicopters had never been attempted until Major Whitehouse and Nick Carter experimented with the idea two years ago.

The technique which they evolved is unique and helicopter pilots are enthusiastic about it—because of the practice in complicated flying manoeuvres which it affords. But, by any standards, it requires skill and courage.

COURAGE

Major Whitehead has both; the Air Force Cross he was awarded earlier this year confirms that.

As Whitehead fastened his bulky white helmet, Nick Carter swung in behind him. They have found it necessary for pilot and bowman to sit in tandem—one behind the other—so that both can observe the country simultaneously.

When a rhino is spotted in thick bush, they each use their separate knowledge in order to coax him out of it. Naturally enough, the rhino turns away from the whining noise of the blades of the machine; the art

is to use this characteristic and to encourage him towards open country.

The pilot tries to fly the right-hand skid of his "copter" on to the left buttock of the animal. The bowman then extends his safety belt to its extreme limit, cocks the crossbow, fits the dart and moves out to stand on the landing skid, crooking one leg round the seat stays to steady himself.

From 30 feet up, the bowman can fire his dart with reasonable exactness. But if the "chopper" is operating in country where there are tall trees, the pilot brings it down as close as he dares, directly over the back of the animal—who becomes a much more difficult target in this position because he is jinking to and fro. Bushes and branches intervene and the distance is often greater between bow and target.

ANXIETY

As soon as the dart has been launched and is seen to strike into the animal's hide, the pilot zooms the helicopter skywards—"until the rhino looks like a mouse," as Nick Carter puts it.

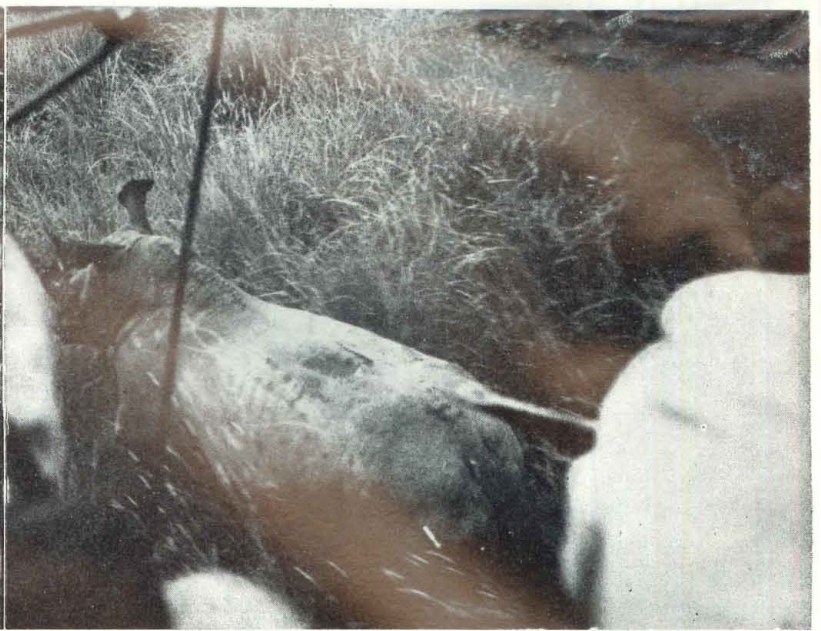
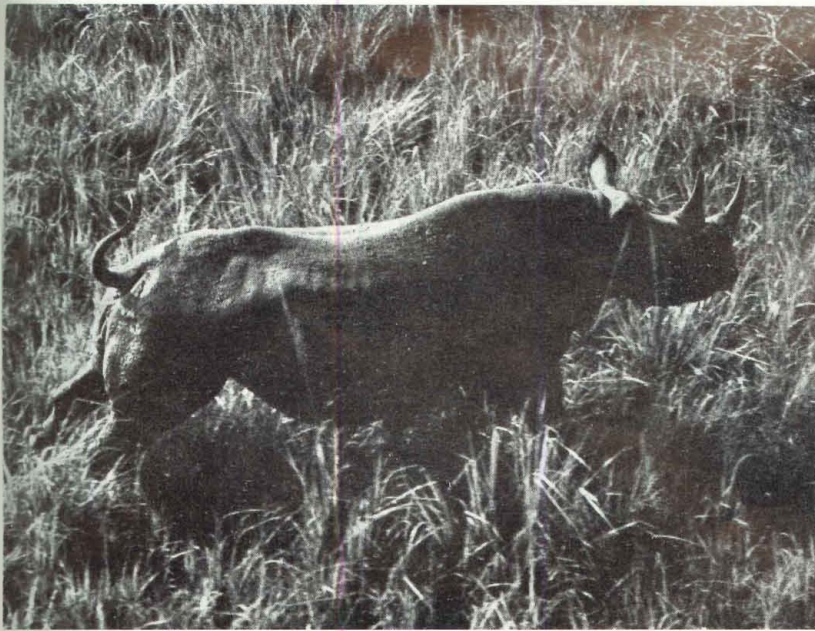
Hanging in the air, the team watches the functioning of the drug—waiting sometimes 20 minutes before the animal is seen to stagger.

"Each such period of 20 minutes seems the longest ever," says Carter. "I am wondering if the dart has pierced the hide correctly and if the drug has entered the bloodstream. The pilot is watching his fuel gauge.

"Only when it is clear that the rhino has become ataxic is it safe to fire the Verey light pistol, signalling the Capture Unit lorry to the spot.

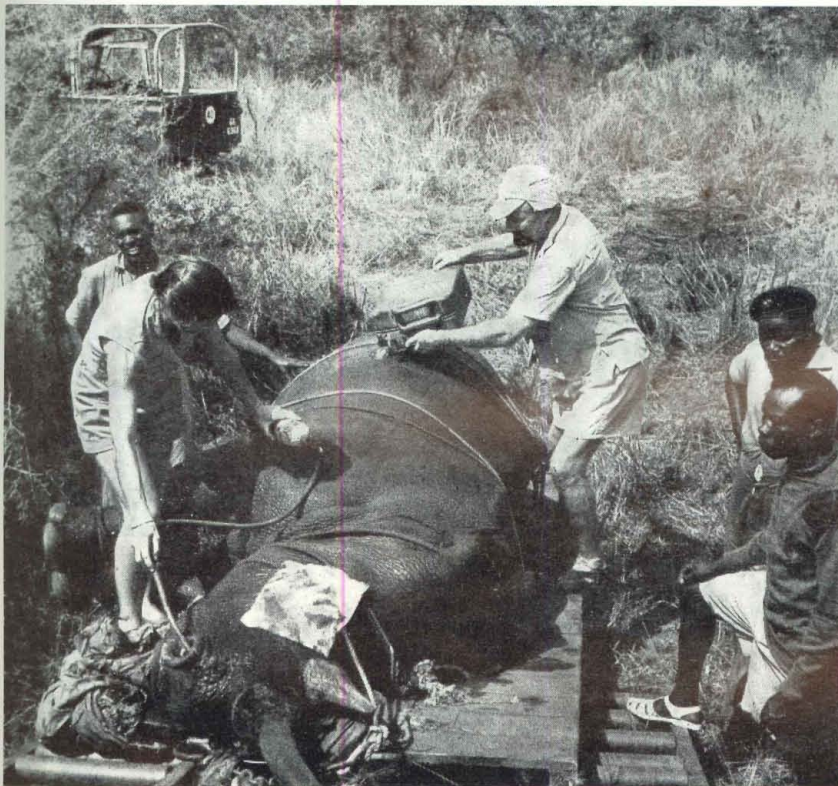
"And only when the rhino has been roped does Stuart Whitehead land beside it—because the animals

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FROM THE HELICOPTER, the huge pachyderms are sighted, then followed at a respectful distance until the right position has been reached. Then the bowman

steps out onto the skid of the helicopter, steadies himself, aims the dart at the vital point in the hide of the wildly-rushing animal.



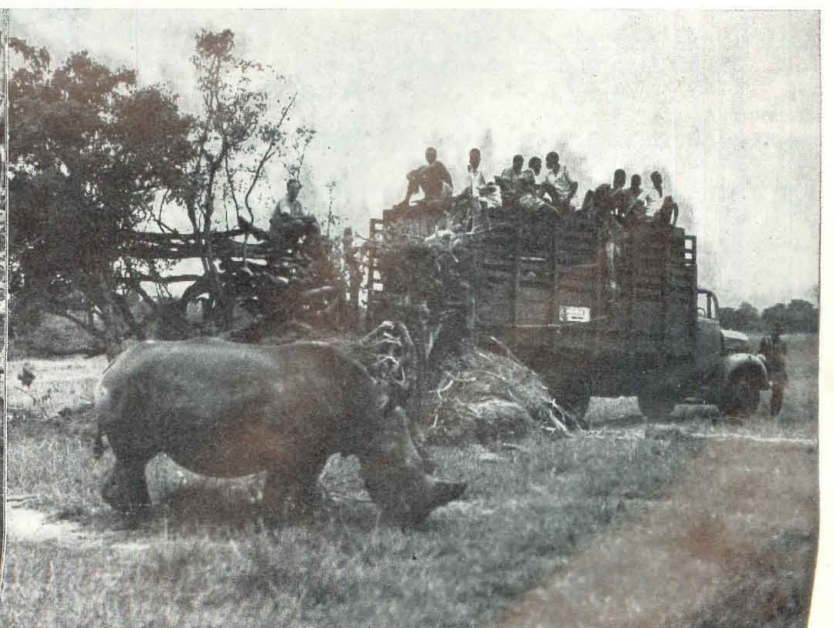
THE DRUG takes effect and tons of white rhino go tottering to the ground. Nick Carter—helped here by Yvonne Savidge—administers such further drug doses as are necessary and the huge bulk is loaded on the "tray." Slowly, the



"tray" is inched aboard the Capture Unit truck. In the pen, the still-unconscious animal must be moved into a comfortable position, until it recovers and it must be nursed carefully through the shock stage.



ONCE IN THE PENS, the white rhino settle down as if they had lived there all their lives. Separating partitions were broken down in their anxiety to remain close together.



END OF THE STORY: John Savidge and some of his team watch as one of the captives tastes the grazing, at the end of the journey—in Murchison National Park. PICTURES (on these and other pages of this article) by Alan Root.



THE HELICOPTER took yards of poachers' snare-wire and dropped it into the middle of the Nile.

WHITE RHINO

(Continued from page 8)

are sometimes angry and helicopters are expensive things."

Carter then tends the rhino, administering tranquilizers and any antibiotics he thinks necessary; he sees it back to camp. The technique has cut down capture time by many days and has generally resulted in less fuss and fear for the animal.

SO, searching the forests and swamps of Lafori, the "Alouette" team soared and zoomed through the gorges, seeking the reputed 15 rhino. They saw three, in a group, and surmised that the family would stay in that spot until the Capture Team could return.

But they noted, too, that rain had turned the tracks into quagmires, making it difficult for trucks to follow. The hunt was called off, temporarily.

Two days later, the helicopter took to the lowering skies again and three rhino were sighted. Major Whitehead weaved his craft through the palm trees and, from his position on the skid, Carter loosed off four darts.

Each time, the drug-dart bounced off the tough hide of the animals. A fifth struck home, but as Alouette hovered above, it became clear that the drug was not working into the animal's bloodstream. Again the hunt had to be called off.

By afternoon, the helicopter was out over Lemunga, where a cow and calf had been reported near the camp. The cow was darted; but the calf peeled off from the trail taken by his mother and the hunters became anxious, for the "little feller" was soon lost to sight in the difficult terrain.

All resources were mobilised. Working on foot, with aircraft cruising overhead, John Savidge and Ian Parker (of a photographic team which had arrived) caught the two-month-old 150 lb. calf and restored it to its mother. Soon, it had resumed suckling, as if nothing at all had occurred.

A few days later, after "Alouette" had returned to base, the last two of the Lemunga rhino were captured. In two-and-a-half flying and six hunting days, eight rhino had been secured. Of the surviving seven, two were bulls and five cows, of differing ages—a fine breeding stud and one to be moved out of the vicious poaching area as soon as possible.

There remain only 60 more in the whole West Nile—sole remnants of the huge herds of yesteryear. Of these, 50 are protected in the Uganda Game Department White Rhino sanctuary at Inde.

To bring those at Lafori to safety will be an enormous task, for it is unlikely that British Army helicopters will ever again be available, once they have left Kenya.

According to Nick Carter, results can now only be achieved by patient slogging, hunting on foot, with the bowman seizing any chances he can obtain for his darts.

"We would need a special expedition, camping on the spot, with sleds and block-and-tackle equipment to move the animals out from the gorges," says Carter.

"But I would do anything to keep the 10 survivors out of the hands of those poachers."

TAKING the rhinos into the Murchison Park was John Savidge's job. He takes up the story:

"We released the white rhino into Murchison Falls National Park and there, before our eyes, was unfolded the old story of 'boy meets girl'. The new arrivals were seen by predecessors caught in the 1961 safari.

"Residents looked appraisingly over newcomers and made friendly advances. Within hours, each had selected a new partner and was happily browsing—as if they had grown up together like the kids next door," said John Savidge, whimsically.

Moreover, the old bull who was the first caught in the 1964 expedition suddenly took interest in the cow, who had been waiting near by—until then, uncharitably ignored.

"Murchison Falls Park will be ordering rhino marriage bells soon, it seems," smiled John.

THE OPERATION had been difficult and expensive, but very worthwhile. Moreover, some of the expense had been met by a contribution from Britain's East Anglia Television, which had sent ace wildlife cinematographer Alan Root to cover the capture of the white rhino and had then made a gift of £500 for the privilege. World Wildlife Funds had met most of the remainder of the cost—from contributions by people all over the world.

Unfortunately, the story was not all happy ending: of the eight white rhino secured, only five remain alive. Two cows had died and a calf (which had been shipped to Entebbe's new Zoo), contracted pneumonia and died.

And thus there was still some bitterness among the rescue team. Said Nick Carter: "We lost some of our charges, but we could console ourselves, I suppose, with the thought that the Lemunga white rhino were as good as dead anyway—because of the poachers. We have been able to resurrect five."

Almost the last act of the helicopter was symbolic: It lifted hundreds of yards of wire snares which had been found—and dropped them, right into the middle of the Nile.