

KOFFLER, Camilla.

# ANIMALS IN AFRICA

Books By Ylla

ANIMALS  
DOGS  
CATS

*for children*

THE SLEEPY LITTLE LION  
TICO-TICO  
THE DUCK

Photographed by

YLLA

Text by L. S. B. Leakey

Director of the Corydon Museum, Nairobi

QL  
336  
.K6

HARPER & BROTHERS NEW YORK

## RHINOS

In East Africa today there is only one species of rhino, the so-called black rhinoceros pictured in these pages. The white, or square-lipped, rhino is now only found in certain limited areas in South Africa and in parts of the Sudan, though in former times it ranged over the whole continent from Algeria to Cape Town, wherever a suitable habitat could be found. This is shown by its fossil remains in regions where it has long since disappeared. Some think that the common or black rhinos of Africa will soon suffer the same fate, for, unlike the elephant, their numbers do not appear to be markedly increasing and their survival now frankly depends upon the security they will gain from the creation of the national parks.

While the elephant is hunted for his ivory, the rhino is subject to incessant attacks by African poachers because of the great value of his so-called "horn". Actually rhino horn is not true horn at all. It is not attached in any way to the bony structure of the skull and is composed solely of compacted fibers that must be regarded as a form of hair. The main value of rhino horn lies in the belief of many Eastern races that it provides a very powerful aphrodisiac. Consequently, rhino horn fetches very high prices which more than offset the risks of punishment entailed by poaching.

There is a great deal of disagreement as to how dangerous a rhino is, more disagreement perhaps than about any of the other big animals. I had a friend — who has since been killed by an elephant — who maintained that the rhino was one of the most harmless beasts in creation. To prove the point, he was always willing to find a rhino drowsing under a tree in the midday sun and literally slap it on the hindquarters. Others, and I admit I am among them myself, regard the rhino as the most dangerous of

all, simply because he is so unpredictable in his reactions to humanity. In all probability, if we knew more, we would find that the rhino was no different from other animals and was not really aggressive toward man.

I can think of three different occasions when I have been "attacked" by rhinos. On two of them what might be called "unprovoked attacks" were in fact very fully justified from the rhino's point of view. In the first case I was walking along a narrow path in thick bush country when a rhino charged at me from point-blank range. He had *apparently* been hiding behind a bush waiting to attack me and in self-defense I was forced to shoot and kill him. Examination showed that he was suffering from a very bad and painful wound in the shoulder, apparently caused by a soft-nosed bullet, and it was not in the least unnatural that, associating man with this pain, he tried to kill the next man that came across his path. Had I not been forced to destroy him to save myself, his charge would have become one more piece of evidence to add to the long list of so-called "unprovoked attacks".

In the second case my wife and I were traveling in our car along a bush road when I saw a big bull rhino standing right in the middle of the narrow track. I stopped the car, waited till he finally ambled off into the bush, and decided we could proceed safely, keeping my eye on him the while. We passed quite easily when, to my horror, we were charged by a cow rhino who had been standing close to the roadside, hidden by some bushes. We had to drive at furious speed to get away from her unpleasant attentions and from those of the bull who had joined in. Had I not noticed that there was a very young calf with her in the bushes, that attack, too, would have been marked down as plain aggression when in truth it was nothing more than natural defense of a newborn young. On the third occasion that I was charged I have no knowledge as to what the reason was, but I suspect that, from the rhino's point of view, there was adequate justification and that there was nothing malicious about it at all.

Whereas the tribes that specialize in killing rhino for the sake of their horn hunt with poisoned arrows — a method in which the hunter is relatively immune from danger, I know of a number of cases where natives have fought with a rhino singlehanded, a feat which must certainly require extraordinary courage.

Rhinos figure quite often in paintings on the walls of caves and rock shelters of prehistoric man, especially under conditions which suggest that the painting is linked with some magical fertility rite. People sometimes wonder why, in such scenes, the female is shown following the male instead of vice versa. The truth is that Stone Age man was a very good observer, for from what I have seen for myself it is the female that is the active partner in rhino mating ; only a few months ago members of my party on the Serengeti watched a female chasing a reluctant husband all over the countryside to get him to accept her attentions.

Rhinos, unlike most other animals, seem to be strictly monogamous. Except in the case of young beasts who have not yet formed an alliance, it is rare to find a male without a female somewhere near and very common to see a family party of father, mother and child. The fact that such a group seldom, if ever, includes a half-grown rhino with the most recent offspring suggests that births are fairly widely spaced so that a new baby is not born until the previous one is old enough to be sent off alone into the world.

## BUFFALOES

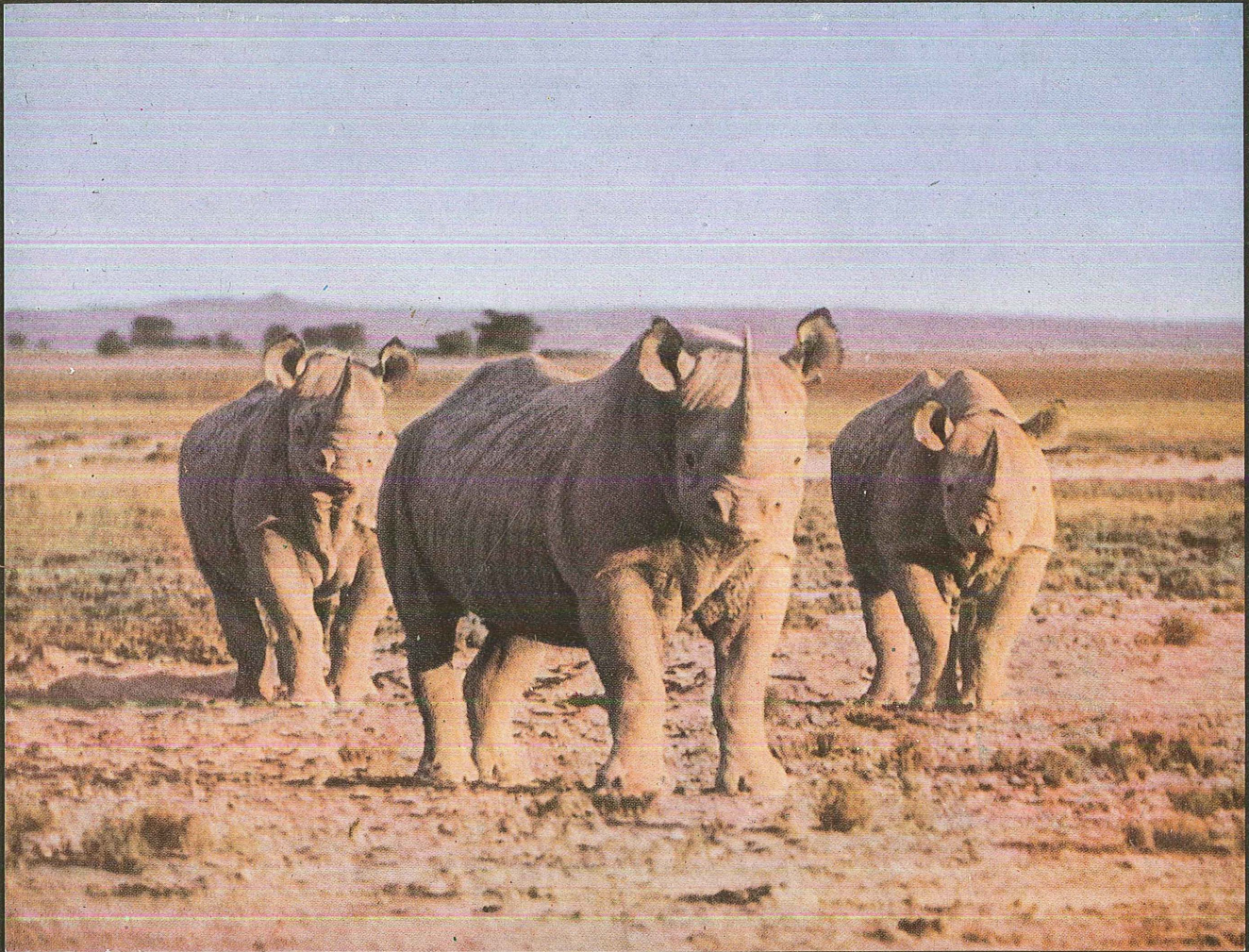
In the early days of intensive big-game safaris, with rifle rather than camera, the buffalo earned for himself a reputation of being among the three most dangerous animals in Africa. In point of fact this reputation would appear

to be, *prima facie*, justified ; certainly a considerable number of big-game hunters have met their death from this animal. Now that the camera is replacing the rifle as a hunting weapon, reports of hunters being gored by buffaloes are very much rarer and it thus becomes necessary to analyze the reasons why this early reputation was earned.

Any person who has unexpectedly come across a herd of buffalo quietly grazing has been more struck by the cowlike appearance and demeanor of the buffalo than by any resemblance to an angry bull. How then did the buffalo earn his reputation? Why are so many deaths of hunters to be laid at his door? The answer almost certainly is to be found in two facts. In the first place, the buffalo is so built that it is not at all easy for the inexperienced hunter to be quite sure of where he should aim to achieve a successful heart shot. A successful head shot is practically impossible because from the side the massive downward-curving horns protect the region of the brain, while, for a frontal shot, the development of the bone over the forehead gives a very deceptive appearance and masks the true position of the brain.

Thus in the first place it is definitely difficult to achieve a knockout blow even from a short range unless the hunter is very experienced. The second factor is to be found in a peculiar and almost universal buffalo habit when wounded. Like most other grazing animals, a wounded buffalo immediately rushes off in headlong flight, but unlike all the others, he almost invariably runs in a narrow circle, so that after a relatively short space of time he is back close to the point at which he was first wounded. This fact seems all too little known and, in most cases where a hunter has been killed following a wounded buffalo, the reports show that the hunter became the hunted, that he was attacked *from the rear* while his full attention was riveted on following a blood spoor in front of him. In other words, it is not easy to kill a buffalo outright and most inexperienced hunters immediately try to follow up their prey instead of waiting for it to return, which a buffalo will almost invariably do.













The color picture on the preceding page shows three rhinos on a driedout salt lake at Amboseli. During the heat of the day, rhinos stay in the bush. They come out in late afternoon and like to sun themselves. These were asleep when we sighted them. They got our wind, arose when we advanced, faced us for a few seconds trying to make us out with their poor eyesight, then decided not to attack and hurried away. The next color picture is of an excellent specimen of a rhino at Amboseli.

We were fortunate to find a rhinoceros (black-and-white photos) on the level terrain of a dried salt lake. He started to charge when we came near, and we retaliated by pursuing him. We alternately chased and were chased by him at a speed of about 25 miles an hour; he bore down on us, puffing like a big steam engine, touching the car twice (though we were going too fast for him to damage us). I missed some good shots by flinching instinctively when he came very close. He finally ran off into the bush. His horn would have been a trophy for a hunter — about 40 inches long.

