



The David Sheldrick WILDLIFE TRUST

Newsletter 2011

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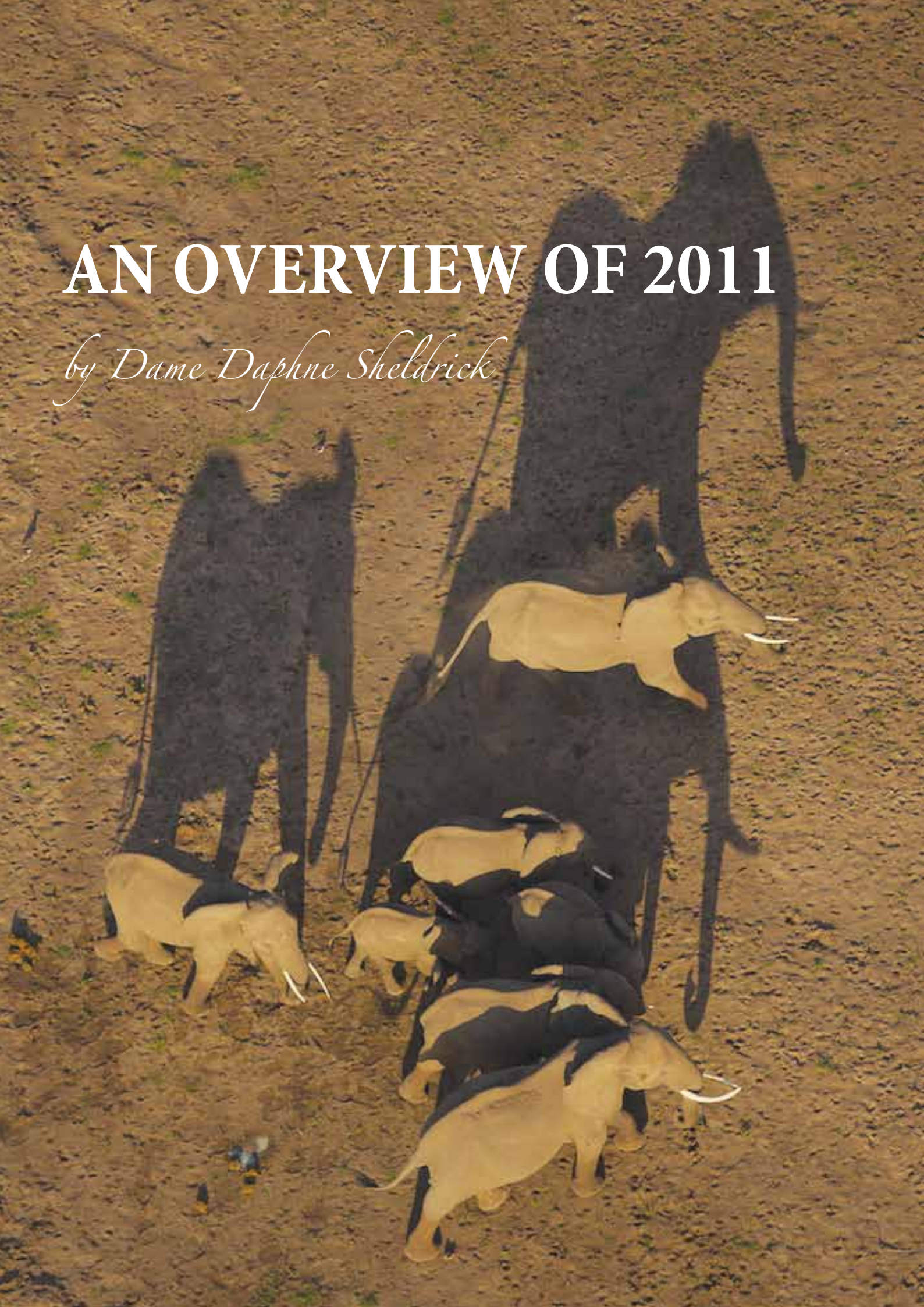


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AN OVERVIEW OF 2011

by Dame Daphne Sheldrick





What a year 2011 has been. Amidst strife in North African and Arabian countries, unrest in neighbouring Somalia and relentless global financial concerns, reports of repeated hauls of illicit ivory and rhino horn intercepted en route to China have been endless. These illegal activities represent the death of not only hundreds of elephants but possibly the ultimate extermination of the rhino. It could perhaps be a year best forgotten, but there are always positives to temper the bad news.

The Trust has experienced great successes over the past twelve months and has this year evolved to carry the heavy burden of not only protecting Kenya's elephant populations and its diverse wildlife, but vast stretches of fragile land and threatened habitats. Whilst expanding our conservation efforts and undertaking these ambitious new projects we continue to stay true to our core values, principles and ideas remaining a sustainable and flexible organisation and in doing so we are achieving visible results.

Project Amu and the Kibwezi Forest are two initiatives, which work towards preserving irreplaceable and precious environments essential for the future of wildlife and mankind. All of our eco-tourism ventures go hand-in hand with sustainable conservation and have been another great success for the Trust; the Ithumba camp and the new Umani Springs property are both proving extremely popular, whilst a new camp is also in the early stages of creation in northern Tsavo East to share the popularity of the original Ithumba camp. Our Nairobi Nursery has also received a healthy number of visitors this year encouraging awareness and providing much needed support. Within the huge landscapes of Tsavo, the Mara Triangle and its neighbouring areas, the Trust's field teams have had a challenging year facing many obstacles, yet our mobile veterinary and anti-poaching units have soldiered forwards in the face of adversity saving countless lives of wild animals and preventing even further atrocities. Without the support and participation of the local communities entwined with in all of our projects we would not be able to achieve our visible and long-lasting results and it is for this reason that we continually invest in community outreach and development, ensuring that future

generations are prepared to protect and conserve their environment and wildlife.

Here in Kenya, as in many other countries there are precious wild corners where nature still remains intact in all its mysterious magnificence. This is where one can escape the hustle and bustle of a troubled world and listen to the heartbeat of nature, which uplifts the soul and calms the psyche. Just contemplating the struggles of a tiny ant as it heaves a huge grass seed ten times its size over insurmountable obstacles with perseverance and persistence - never giving up, makes human trials and tribulations retreat into perspective against the bigger picture of survival within the natural world around us.

One thing that the Trust will never forget is to thank all of our faithful supporters world-wide who have enabled 2011 to be a year of achievement, despite the doom and gloom. We are most deeply grateful and touched by this support and hope that 2012 will be, by and large, a good year that will bring positive changes and above all a reprieve for the beleaguered wildlife who have the misfortune of sharing the planet with over 7 billion homo sapiens.

Wangari Maathai

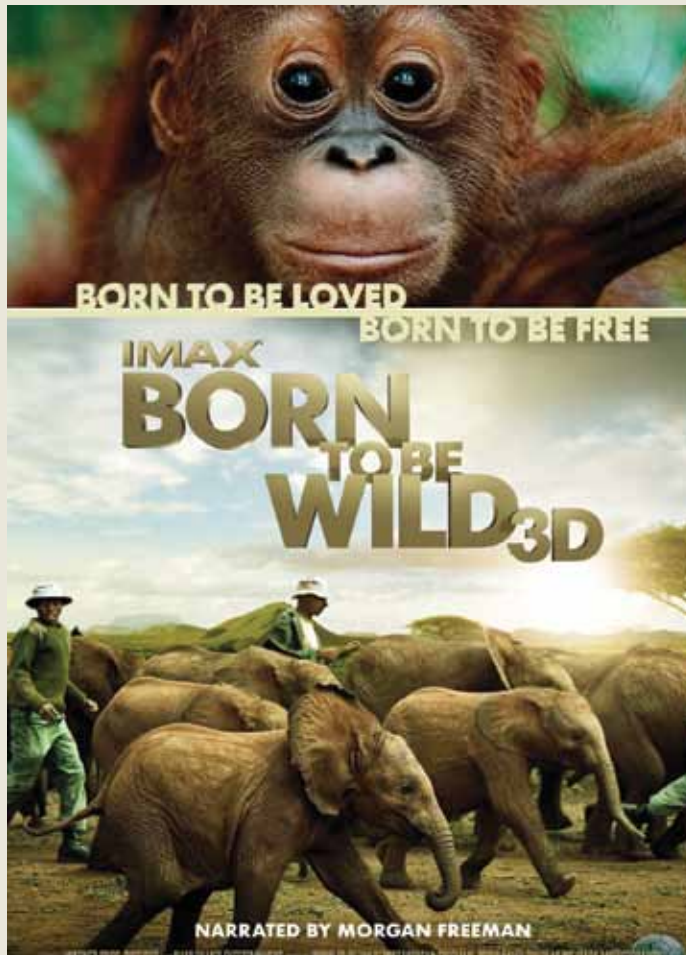
A great loss to the country was the death of Wangari Maathai, Kenya's Nobel Peace Laureate and a brave environmental champion who succumbed to cancer on the 28th September. Founder of The Green Belt Movement, she was a fearless crusader who campaigned tirelessly for the protection of natural forests, which are so crucial to precious water resources and soils, upon which all life depends. Often against all odds Wangari spoke up bravely against the evils of corruption, urging better governance and accountability. In death she leaves a lasting legacy of which Kenya can be justifiably proud, even though in life she was often targeted as a trouble-maker when trying to counter the illegal grabbing of forests.

By example she did her best and that is what everyone can and should do, irrespective of however modest, for the reward of being at peace with oneself is a rich one, knowing that your conscience is clear and that you have tried to do what you can. Perhaps the most meaningful memorial to greatness is the length of time a person is remembered after they are gone. The memory of Wangari Maathai and what she stood for will live on in the history of this country. She said "Without the mirror that the natural world presents to us, we no longer see ourselves..." And the ability to "see ourselves" warts and all is vital.

BORN TO BE WILD

A special event for the Trust this year was the new 3D IMAX film 'Born to be Wild', featuring the Trust's orphaned elephants and the orangutans of Borneo. The film premiered in Los Angeles, Washington and New York during the first 10 days of April and then in London in June and later in Paris. Narrated by Morgan Freeman 'Born to Be Wild' has apparently been the most successful IMAX production ever made and will be showing at science venues throughout the world, including China, for a very long time to come. An IMAX sequel again involving the orphaned elephants is being planned.

We thank Drew Fellman and all the IMAX team for the wonderful hospitality extended to Daphne, Jill and Robert Carr Hartley during the IMAX Film Premieres in Los Angeles, Washington and New York and for making us so welcome at every venue. We thank Richard Leakey for the kind words he spoke about the Trust and the need to protect elephants at the New York Premiere of Born to be Wild.



Poaching Epidemic



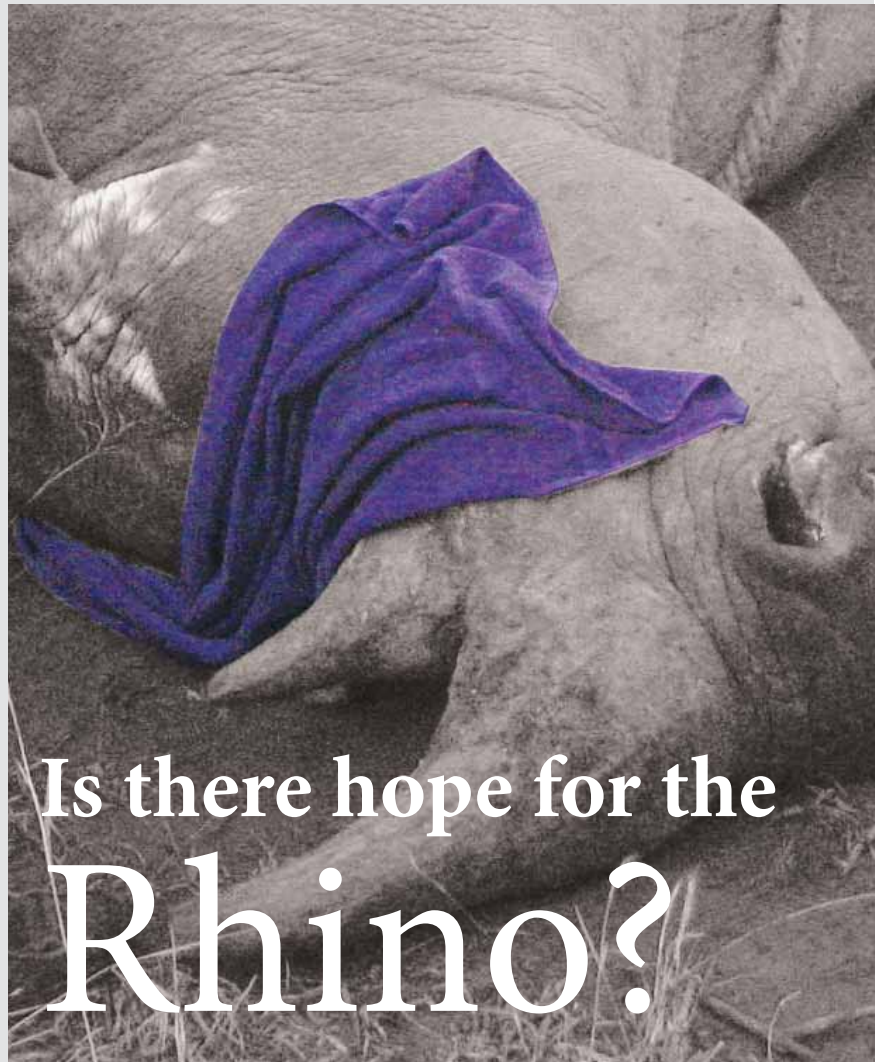
An extremely sinister threat to Kenya and its lucrative tourism industry, largely overlooked by the press, has been the serious escalation in the poaching of both elephants and rhinos for their ivory and horns, driven by the insatiable desire for these items from the newly wealthy Chinese masses as well as the growing populations of Vietnam, Thailand and other Far Eastern countries.

Informed sources believe the level of poaching is back to what it was in the 70's and 80's, with wildlife numbers down by 70% since the 1970's exacerbated today by the commercial aspect of the infamous bush meat poaching trade. In Kenya, the poaching problem has to be confronted and addressed at the judicial level rather than ignored with the usual impunity, "impunity" being a term levelled at this Coalition Government almost daily through the local Press. It is surprising that those who stand to benefit most from tourism, such as the tour operators themselves, have also remained mute when the bastion on which their business depends is being so latently and quietly eroded.

There was some consolation in the fact that a count of the Tsavo elephant population during 2011 within the entire Tsavo ecosystem (an area twice the size of the park itself - 16,000 sq. miles) revealed a slight increase in elephant numbers, 12,572 as opposed to 11,696 as counted in 2008 within the same area. At the same time one cannot escape the fact that the number of elephants within that same ecosystem pre-1970 was estimated at 45,000, a far cry from the 12,572 existing within this crucial elephant habitat today. Tsavo is a vital home to the country's largest single population of elephants and is the primary hope for the survival of not only elephants but all wildlife in the future.

The plight of Black Rhinos continues with the demand for rhino horn rising, yet a glimmer of hope to save these magnificent creatures could perhaps lie in the research being undertaken at Onderstepoort in South Africa. The researchers have taken the rhino horn and coated it with ectoparasiticides coupled with an indelible dye similar to that used in the banking industry, which is visible on x-ray scanners and cannot pass through security checkpoints unnoticed, even if the horn is ground to a powder. Although not lethal in small quantities, ectoparasiticides can produce symptoms of severe nausea, vomiting, convulsions and/or nervous symptoms in extreme cases. In the selection of acaracides for inclusion in the treatment compound, care is being taken to only consider substances that do not impart collateral damage to innocent oxpeckers and other organisms. Based on current research it is believed that the treatment could remain effective for approximately 3 – 4 years after which re-administration would be required. Whilst the animal is temporarily immobilized to treat its horn, DNA could be taken from the individual as well as implanting high-tech GPS tracking devices and microchips.

Kenya used to be home to some 20,000 Black Rhinos country-wide, with Tsavo once holding 8,000 individuals, which in the sixties was the largest population in Africa. In those days on a game drive through the Park



Is there hope for the Rhino?

you were sure to encounter at least 2 dozen rhinos especially along the Athi and Tsavo rivers where rhinos were particularly prolific. Sadly the poaching holocaust of the late seventies, eighties and early nineties drove Tsavo's rhinos to the very brink of total annihilation until some lone outliers, far removed from one another, were retrieved and placed under tight security in the fenced Tsavo West Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary, which the Trust had a hand in establishing. Other individuals were free-released back into Tsavo East under tight security and should number approximately sixty individuals, yet today less than 20 remain. Rhinos are now also being targeted on private sanctuaries such as Lewa, Ol Pejeta, Ol Jogi, Mugie and even from their last bastion, Solio, all places where security is extremely tight; nor has the Tsavo West fenced Rhino Sanctuary escaped the wrath of the poacher. It is not inconceivable that rhinos could disappear entirely from the planet unless the myth surrounding their horns can be dispelled amongst Far Eastern people who regard it as an elixir of life with magical properties, capable even of curing cancer.



Shida when young

The Orphaned Rhinos

At the beginning of 2011 we had three orphaned rhinos, two of whom, Maxwell and Solio, were Keeper-dependent, but 8 year old Shida was now virtually a wild rhino, having been carefully reintegrated into the resident wild rhino community of Nairobi National Park. Solio was born on Solio Ranch on the 1st April 2010 and came as an orphan on the 24th September 2010 when only six months old, her mother having been shot apparently in self-defense. By year end she was already half the size of Max.

Maxwell, now in his fifth year, was born blind in Nairobi Park in December 2006 having been abandoned by his mother when he was just 3 months old. Subsequently an ultra-scan of his eyes by a South African specialist established that he had been born with no optic nerve, so there was nothing that could be done to restore his sight. Nevertheless, aside from being blind, he is a magnificent specimen. Sadly, however, he can never be set free to lead a normal wild rhino life, for he would be killed instantly, since rhino bulls fight for territory and rank upon which hinges the right to be a breeding bull, something to which all males aspire. With the poaching of rhinos as it is today, one could perhaps be forgiven for thinking that Max could be one of the few lucky ones, able to enjoy a sheltered and protected life in his enclosure rather than being brutally killed for the myth of a keratin horn, which in fact is identical to the substance of a fingernail. Were the Chinese and Far Eastern nations to bite their fingernails they would in fact be ingesting the selfsame ingredient, but apparently that is something of which they cannot be convinced of. Hence, every rhino carries a fortune on its nose.

Shida was born in August 2003 and orphaned at 2 months old when his mother died of old age in Nairobi National Park, her teeth so worn that she was no longer able to feed. For three years he was diligently escorted around the dung piles and urinals of the resident Nairobi Park rhinos until accepted as rightfully belonging within the wild rhino community. He viewed the Trust compound as the hub of his territory and a safe retreat when threatened. On his way back to the Trust compound on the 9th February, orphaned elephant Tano in a playful mood gamboled up to Shida wanting to play and since this was unusual it startled Shida, something that is always the recipe for a charge where rhinos are concerned. Interpreting this as aggression Shida reacted instinctively, going into “auto defensive mode” tossing Tano high into the air several times and then rolling her along the ground as he attempted to skewer her with his sizeable forward pointing horn. Miraculously Tano emerged unscathed, although none of us can understand how. This incident could have ended tragically, not just for Tano, but also for the Keepers who had become involved to save her. Also having already had one Keeper killed by orphaned rhino Makosa several years ago, we could not risk another similar tragedy, so we requested that the KWS authorities move Shida. He was sedated on the 15th February and moved to Tsavo the same day, a radio transmitter having been inserted into his horn so that he could be monitored at the other end. With him went a Trust Keeper whom he knew well and who would be able to keep us informed about his progress. We suggested that he be released not within the enclosed Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary where he would be at risk from established residents holding territories, but rather outside where surplus rhinos from the enclosed Sanctuary had recently been set free and who probably had not yet established fixed territories. However, the Senior Warden, Daniel Woodley, decided otherwise and Shida was released at Goss Camp within the fenced Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary where KWS Rangers were based. Having heard this, we immediately sought and obtained permission from KWS to hurriedly establish a holding pen for Shida and work began on this enclosure immediately, hoping that the Trust Keeper would be in a position to protect him until the holding pen was ready. Shida in the meantime embarked on a quest to locate his territory walking dramatic distances from Goss Camp. Keeper Mishak would catch up with him

and lay a dung trail back to Goss Camp, but Shida was in no mood to pay attention to any human and merely kept on walking. However, after several days he did begin to return to the new stockade at night where a handout of Lucerne awaited him, and this routine seemed to be working well over the weeks, but very tragically one night he was trailed and killed by a wild rhino and found dead the next morning. News of his death on the 18th March was received with deep grief by all at the Trust Headquarters in Nairobi. We had invested eight difficult years in getting this orphan into adulthood and established within the resident rhino community of Nairobi National Park and we hoped it would represent a “mission accomplished” but tragically this was not to be, with Shida sealing his fate that day he so nearly killed Tano giving a graphic display of his incredible strength and unpredictable nature, which we had not seen up until this point. Everyone here felt responsible for his untimely end, having made the decision to have him moved afraid of the consequences if we didn’t act, which made his death even harder to take, for he was a much loved member of the Nairobi Nursery.

Blind Maxwell was distraught when Shida left. He missed Shida sorely, went off his food, was restless and vocalized his “wanting” by mewing and pacing up and down in his stockade morning and evening in a disturbed manner. But over time orphan Solio gradually replaced Shida in his mind. Today Solio is the light of Max’s dark world. He eagerly awaits interaction with her through the separating poles and sprays her stockade with urine to mark her as his own, something her attendant Keeper could do without, since rhino urine is extremely pungent.

Rearing these critically endangered animals is likely to involve a good deal of heartbreak since their reintroduction into a resident rhino community, which holds established territories, is extremely problematical involving some 3 years of contributions of the newcomer’s dung and urine

to established communal rhino dung “middens” and bush “urinals”. We learnt this lesson the hard way with orphan “Reudi”.

To date Dame Daphne Sheldrick has hand-reared some 15 Black rhino orphans amongst whom was Reudi, born in 1965 at a time when the rhino population of Tsavo National Park numbered 8,000. Having been so badly beaten up by other rhinos when we attempted to offer him a natural wild life, he was moved to Solio Ranch where he became the main breeding bull of a population of protected rhinos that multiplied until they numbered over 90. It was the Solio population that saved Kenya’s rhinos from extinction, rhinos taken from there to repopulate the areas from which they had been all but eliminated by poaching in the late 70’s, 80’s and early 90’s. Hence many of the rhinos currently living in Kenya today can probably be genetically traced to ex-orphan Reudi.

Ex-Tsavo orphans Stroppie and Pushmi were also moved to Solio Ranch, fearing for their safety following the transfer of David Sheldrick to head the Planning Unit in Nairobi. Already there were indicators that the poaching of rhinos was escalating. These two were enclosed in a 50 acre paddock abutting the main Sanctuary, which was where Stroppie lived until dying last year at the grand old age of 40 and Pushmi (Hoshim), now aged 38, lives still, arguably the oldest living Black Rhino in Kenya and possibly the entire African Continent.



Shida in Tsavo just weeks before his untimely death