

Injuries by Rhinos

In zoos and circuses, we do not hear much about attacks by rhinos in contrast to other large herbivores, particularly elephants. This is partly because of the small number of rhinos imported to Europe and North America. While a large number of elephants, mostly Asians, arrived in the last two centuries for circuses, menageries and zoos, with increased number of Africans in recent decades, the number of rhinos has remained relatively small. Also the husbandry methods are different. Handling of elephants has almost always required close physical contact (although the approach has changed in zoos in the last two decades), thus increasing the chances for accidents and attracting concerns for workplace safety. This is not the case with rhinos. Recently, a small, international circle of men participated in an e-mail discussion on this subject and here follows a summary. The data are not based on organized questionnaires or other form of surveys, thus the real number of injuries could be much higher.

Non-zoo Incidents

Richard Reynolds supplied most non-zoo cases (14 January 2014), beginning with a male Indian rhino named Old Put. “According to the eminent circus historian, the late Stuart Thayer, Old Put had been brought over from England in late 1850 or early 1851. He and other animals were said to have been obtained at auctions of the Wombwell Menagerie and the Estates of the Earl of Derby. During 1854, Old Put was shown by a number of traveling menageries/circuses including Barnum’s Asiatic Caravan, Museum and Menagerie,” Reynolds writes. Then in December 1855 or early 1856 while Old Put was in an exhibition on the corner of Bayard and Bowery Streets in Manhattan (New York), he was said to have killed his keeper. Ownership of this rhino changed again a couple of times and in 1856, he was sold to Dan Rice, a clown, satirist, political commentator and one of the most famous Americans at that time.

Rice placed the rhino in his quarters in Girard, Pennsylvania. “There he was trained by a skilled animal man, Charles Noyes, to appear un-caged in the circus ring. Rice presented the rhino and had it do a number of tricks, as described by Reynolds (after Kunzog) in *Der Zool. Gart.*, 1967. The *Brooklyn Eagle* for September 26, 1857 said that Rice’s rhino was ‘A Monster taken from the jungles of India.’ Earlier, at an afternoon performance in Buffalo, New York on August 7, 1857, Old Put suddenly charged Rice and threw him through the air, injuring him. This ring appearance was the first for a rhino in America and perhaps in Europe as well.”

Moving from animal exhibits to motion pictures, Hollywood’s Metro Goldwyn Mayer produced *Trader Horn*, filmed on locations in several colonies in Eastern Africa and the Congo, costing some three million dollars and was released in 1931 (Reynolds adds that there was a real Trader Horn, the African adventure born Alfred Aloysius Smith, 1861-1931). Two native extras were killed by animals, one by a

Nile crocodile. “Another, a Kikuyu bribesman was run over and killed by a black rhino. That took place as the cameras were rolling. The scene of the death remained in the film as released.”

Kees Rookmaaker (10 January 2014) also added that in the wild, Charles Cottar of Kenya and the researcher John Goddard were both killed by rhino in Kenya.

Injuries in Zoos

At Antwerp Zoo, on 10 July 1885, keeper Wannas Stevens (who had just started working at the Zoo) was crushed to death by a rhino... It was the first lethal accident in the history of Antwerp Zoo (there were only 2 more in the Zoo's 170 year history, both with elephants). The 1885 rhino case is reported by Roland Baetens in his book “*The chant of paradise – The Antwerp Zoo:150 years of history*” (Tielt, Lannoo, 1993), and the author refers to documents of that date (possibly daily keeper reports?) in the zoo archives (now in the custody of the City of Antwerp's Archives <St Felix Warehouse>). (Harry Schram, 23 December 2013. Kees Rookmaaker later confirmed that it was a male Indian rhino, 10 January 2014).

Christian Schmidt reports (11 and 17 November 2013): “I am not aware of any fatal accident of a keeper with a rhino in European zoos. However some 20 years ago a mentally disabled lady jumped into the enclosure of a female Indian Rhino with calf in Basel Zoo. This lady approached the calf inspite that the mother rhino threatened her. Finally the mother rhino attacked the lady, bit her and she finally died. Later Gunther Nogge reminded me of a rhino accident in Leipzig Zoo: On 1 August 2011 the Leipzig and IZW teams tried to anaesthetize a male Black Rhinoceros to get semen for an artificial insemination. During this process the bull injured severely one vet.”

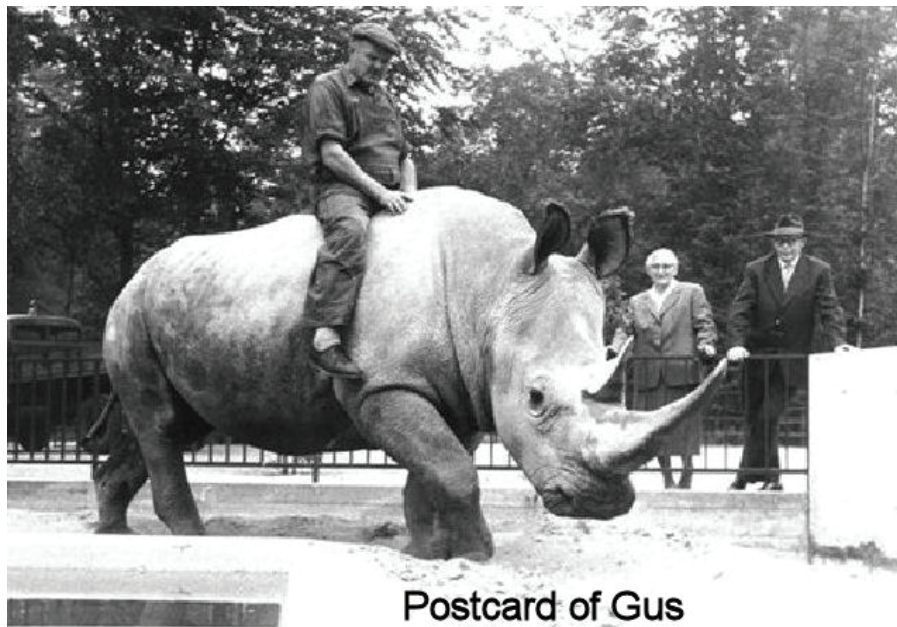
In Japan, at Izu Animal Kingdom, a tourist park, a male white rhino (estimated age 36, height ca. 1.6 m, weight ca. 3 metric tons) was under medication for cataract. Usually the keeper would administer an eye drop from outside of the stall. On 3 August 2010, the 38-year old keeper entered the enclosure (presumably because the animal was lying down) and dropped the drug into the eye. As the rhino suddenly got up and knocked him down unconscious with the horn, the back of the keeper's head was severely struck. (The keeper apparently recovered and now takes care of herbivores.) (From a newspaper account, Katsunori “Kats” Sotani of Tokyo, 26 November 2013.)

Mike Dee reports a case in Los Angeles Zoo: “We had a keeper injured by a female Indian rhino. She didn't secure the gate and the rhino pushed it open and came into the barn while the keeper was in the night stall. The keeper may have panicked and the rhino knocked her down and pushed her around. As I recall there were numerous broken bones and scrapes. Visitors saw the rhino in the yard and alerted other staff that the rhino was bleeding. Staff investigated and found the keeper on the stall floor unable to move. She was quickly transported to a hospital and now works in the research department.” (26 November 2013) Now we return to the e-mail of 14

January 2014 by Richard Reynolds and moving to Colombia, South America.

At Cali Zoo, in April 1998 Rina, a 30 year old female southern white rhino, killed a man in her pen. He had climbed over a fence into her enclosure after closing hours. His body was discovered the next morning. Details reported in *Reuters*, 7 April 1998, *Associated Press*, and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 8 April 1998. Kees Rookmaaker (10 January 2014) also mentioned this, stating that this rhino was not normally aggressive. Continuing on an African rhino, Smiles, a very aggressive female black rhino lived in New York's Central Park zoo from 1886 until about 1907. She once attacked Billy Snyder, her keeper, who managed to leap for a ladder just as her horn caught and ripped off his trousers. Details reported in *New York Times*, March 29, 1903. In his 1930 book, Dr. William Mann commented on Smiles' viciousness.

Back to a white rhino, this time a male northern white rhino called Gus. "He had an interesting 'career.' He was captured in April 1949 in southern Sudan by Carr Hartley. He was at Hartley's compound in Kenya until sent to Hanover Zoo in 1963. He remained there until September 1964 when he was sent to the Zoological Gardens at Southampton, U.K., a Chipperfield operation. Gus stayed there until May 1967 when shipped to Lion Country Safari, West Palm Beach, Florida in which the Chipperfields had an interest. Though ordinarily of good temperament, in August 1973 Gus attacked and injured Warner Andres, a German born keeper at Lion Country. Andres had tried to separate Gus from a young rhino, perhaps a female. Gus died around 1979."



Postcard of Gus

(Compiled by Ken Kawata)