

The American Museum Journal

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MARY CYNTHIA DICKERSON, *Editor*

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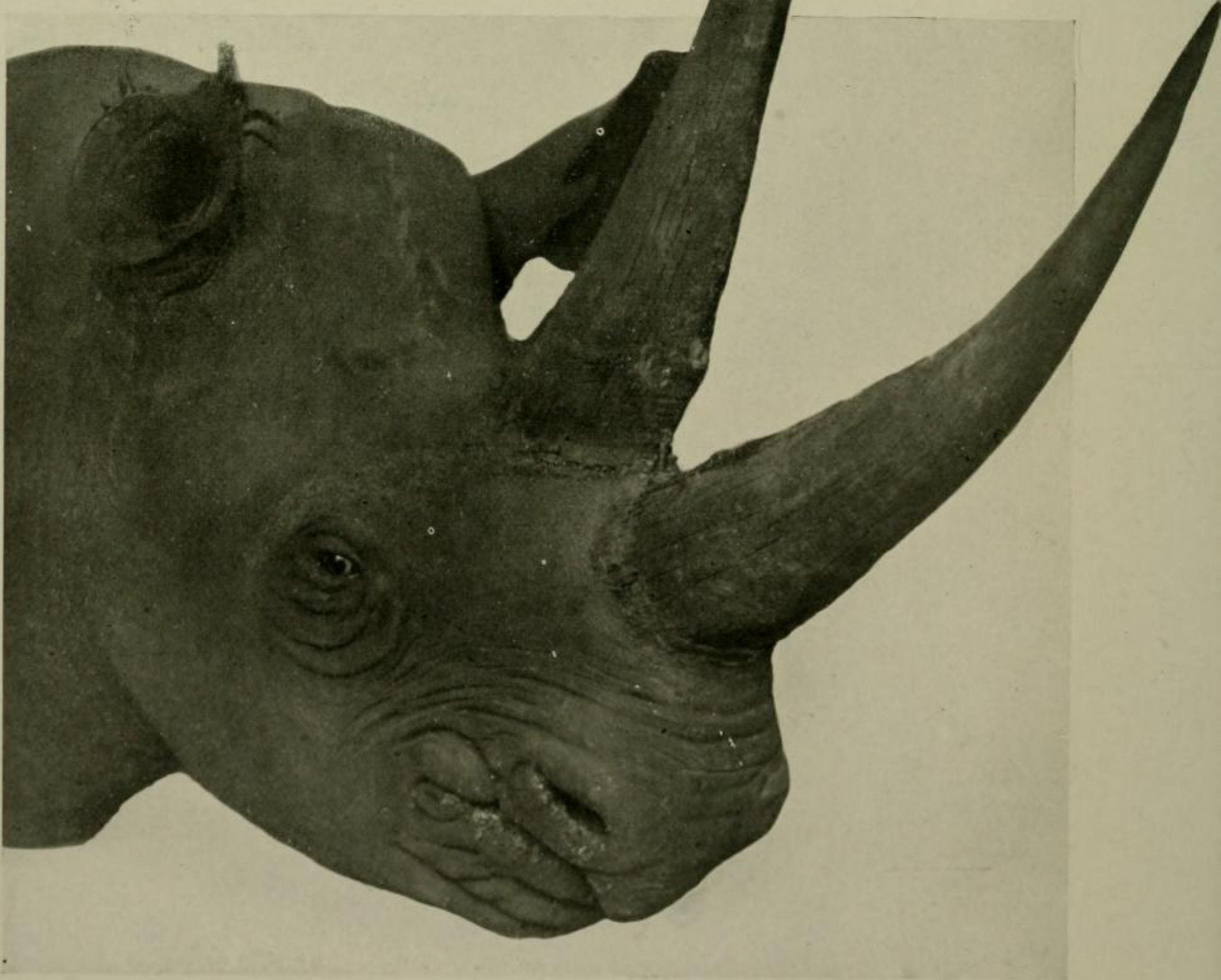
RHINOCEROS-HUNTING—A SPORTSMAN'S AFRICAN NOTES

By E. Hubert Litchfield

Those who have visited the African hall during the past two years will have observed on its walls more than three hundred heads of the large game of Africa. These constitute a collection of unusual value mounted by Rowland Ward of London and loaned to the Museum by E. Hubert Litchfield, Henry Sampson, Jr. and Bayard Domfield's article which follows is of interest because of his conclusion as to the rapid personal observations to differ among sportsmen and naturalists as to the habits or the dangerous character of any given wild animal and every new reliable record of habit accompanied by a statement of the conditions of the animal's life, the character of the season of the year, helps to reconcile these different opinions in an accurate knowledge of the species.—Editor.

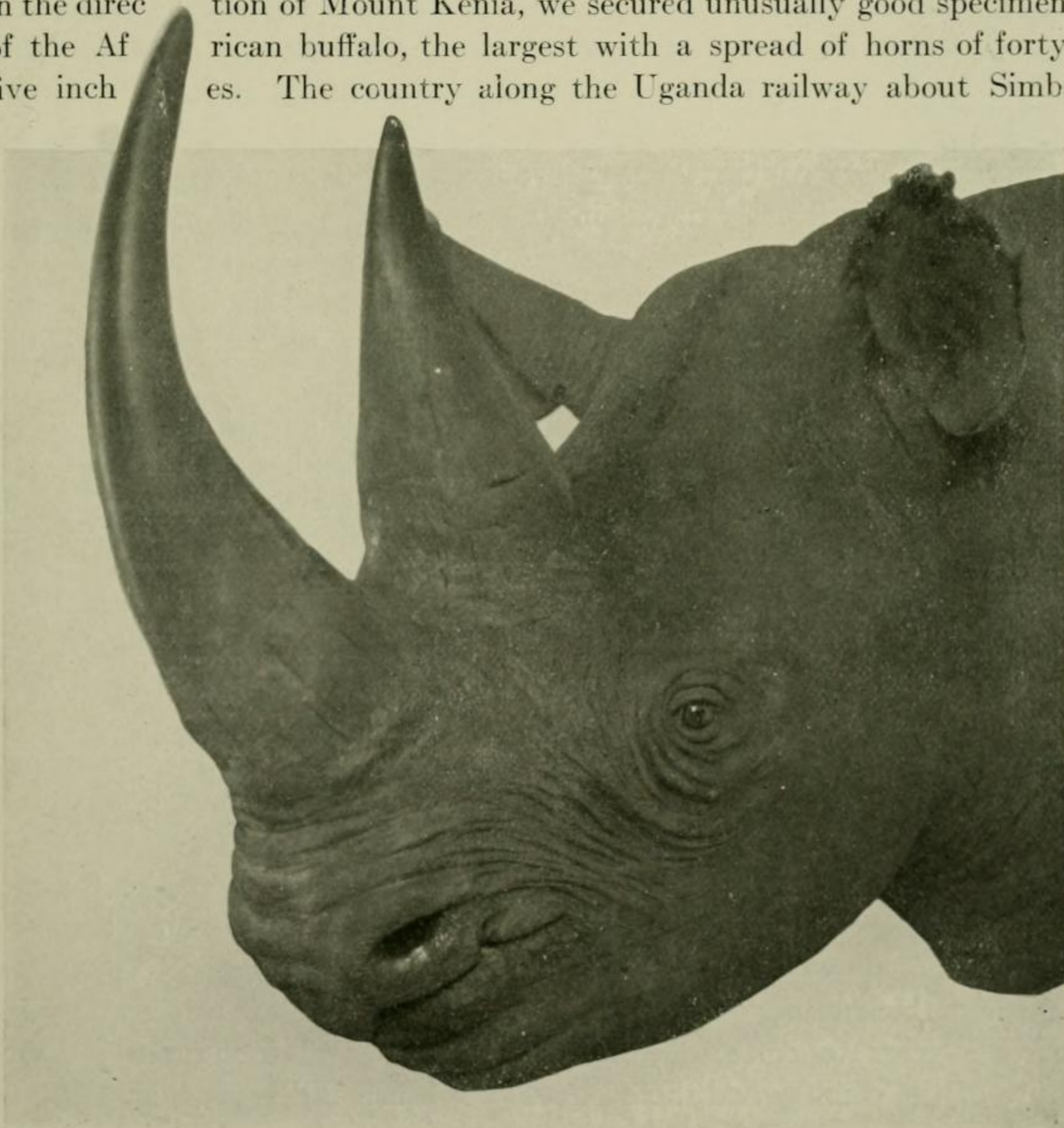
As a result of a four months' hunting trip in British East Africa in 1909, we were able to bring to New York some thirty-

British East Africa in 1909, we were able to bring to New York some thirty-

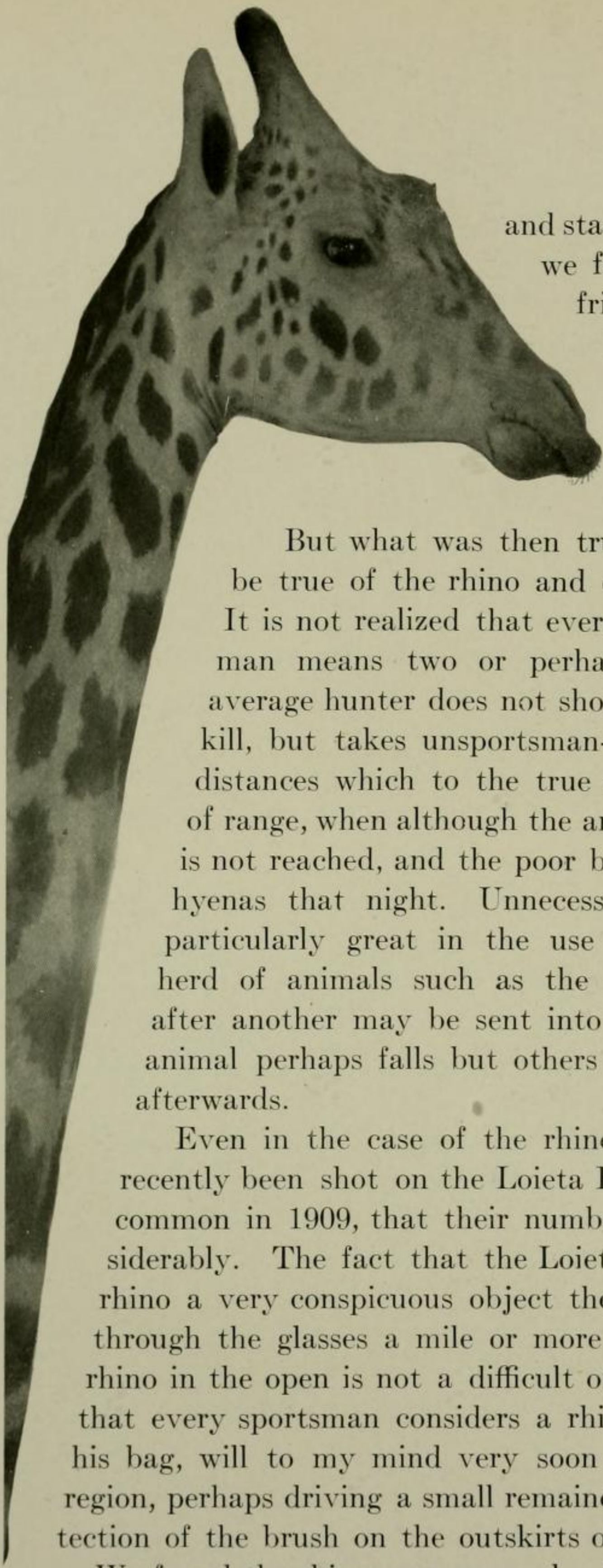


Female black rhinoceros (the horns are of unusual length) shot by Henry Sampson, Jr. on the Loieta Plains, British East Africa. Rhinoceros-hunting is dangerous in brush or tall grass country where the hunter may at any moment find himself confronted by a vicious-tempered rhino ready to charge. The rhinoceros is doomed to almost immediate extinction in the plains regions of Africa, since every sportsman considers a rhino a necessary part of his bag and the animals are easy to stalk in open country

eight different kinds of mammals, representing most of the African species with the exception of the elephant. That we were unable to bring back any elephants was due to the fact that large males with tusks exceeding sixty pounds in weight were very scarce. We saw three or four hundred elephants but not a single male large enough to shoot. Even on going to the Mount Elgon country, a region formerly noted for its great herds, and after remaining there a full month with the direct intention of securing specimens of bull elephants, we had to give it up, finding none large enough to furnish an excuse for killing. We did secure in the Elgon country, however, very fine specimens of the Sing-Sing waterbuck, some of the heads measuring thirty-two inches in length; and to the north of the Uganda railway in the direction of Mount Kenia, we secured unusually good specimens of the African buffalo, the largest with a spread of horns of forty-five inches. The country along the Uganda railway about Simba



Male black rhinoceros (note the curve of the horns and their thickness) shot by E. Hubert Litchfield. Rhino horns do not consist of bone or horn but of bristles closely compressed, and they are not connected with the skull. According to African superstitions, goblets made from rhino horns have been thought to have power to give health to him who drinks, even to tell him by a mysterious effervescence if any poison lurk in the draught



and stations toward the Tsavo River we found to be the home of the fringe-eared oryx and the lesser kudu. The Loieta Plains, where we did our first hunting, about fifty miles south of the Uganda railway, proved rich in black rhinos.

But what was then true of the elephant will soon be true of the rhino and of other large African game. It is not realized that every animal shot by the sportsman means two or perhaps several killed. For the average hunter does not shoot only when near enough to kill, but takes unsportsman-like chances. He shoots at distances which to the true sportsman are decidedly out of range, when although the animal may be hit, a vital spot is not reached, and the poor brute escapes to fall a prey to hyenas that night. Unnecessary destruction of game is particularly great in the use of the repeating rifle on a herd of animals such as the antelope—many shots one after another may be sent into the herd as it retreats, one animal perhaps falls but others are wounded to die shortly afterwards.

Even in the case of the rhinos, such large numbers have recently been shot on the Loieta Plains, where the species was common in 1909, that their numbers have decreased very considerably. The fact that the Loieta country is open makes the rhino a very conspicuous object there. He can usually be seen through the glasses a mile or more away, and the stalk of the rhino in the open is not a difficult one. This, added to the fact that every sportsman considers a rhino a very necessary part of his bag, will to my mind very soon kill them off in this plains region, perhaps driving a small remainder of them to seek the protection of the brush on the outskirts of the Loieta.

We found the rhinos numerous also, in fact too numerous for our comfort, in the country between the Athi and Tana Rivers about twenty-five miles north of Donya Sabuk Mountain. This country is one of tall grass and thick brush and it is my opinion that here the rhinos may last for some years to come; they are better protected from man by the nature of the country and there is plenty of brush and grass, their natural food.

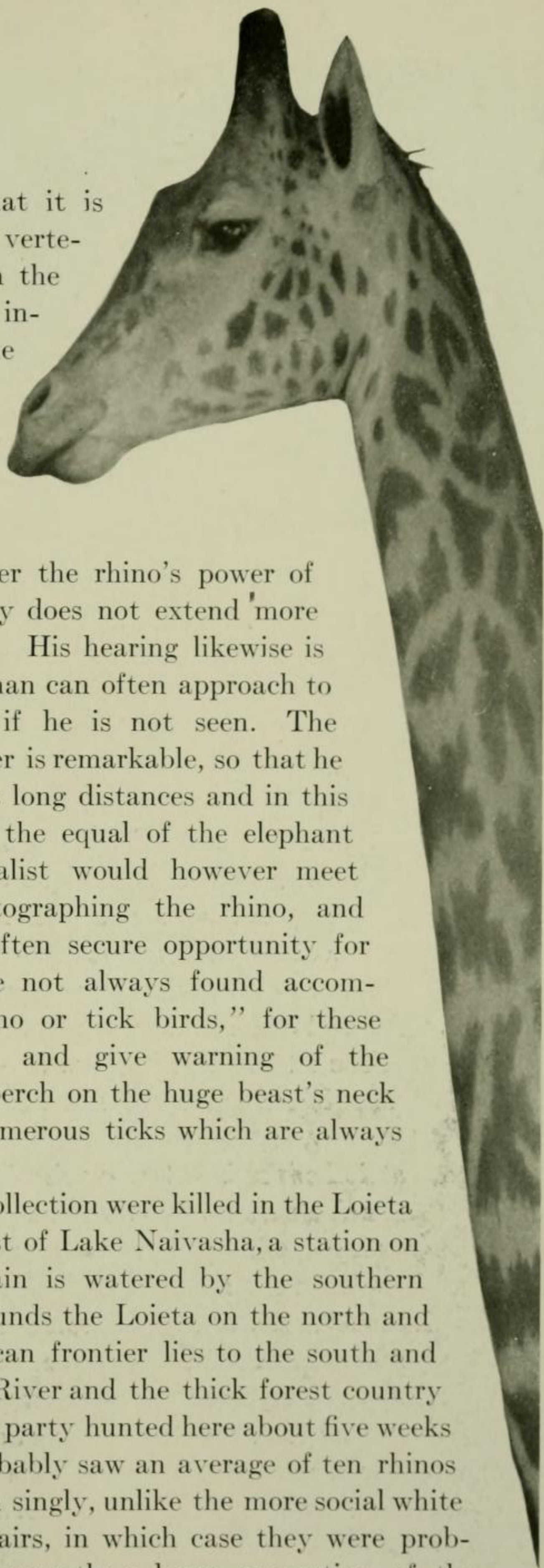
In such brush or in tall grass country the rhino is a dangerous animal to hunt, for one is apt to walk right on top of it unexpectedly and draw a charge before fully prepared. The presence of the rhino cannot be guessed till it rises in the grass or makes the puffing and

From the loan collection of more than three hundred heads on the walls of the African hall

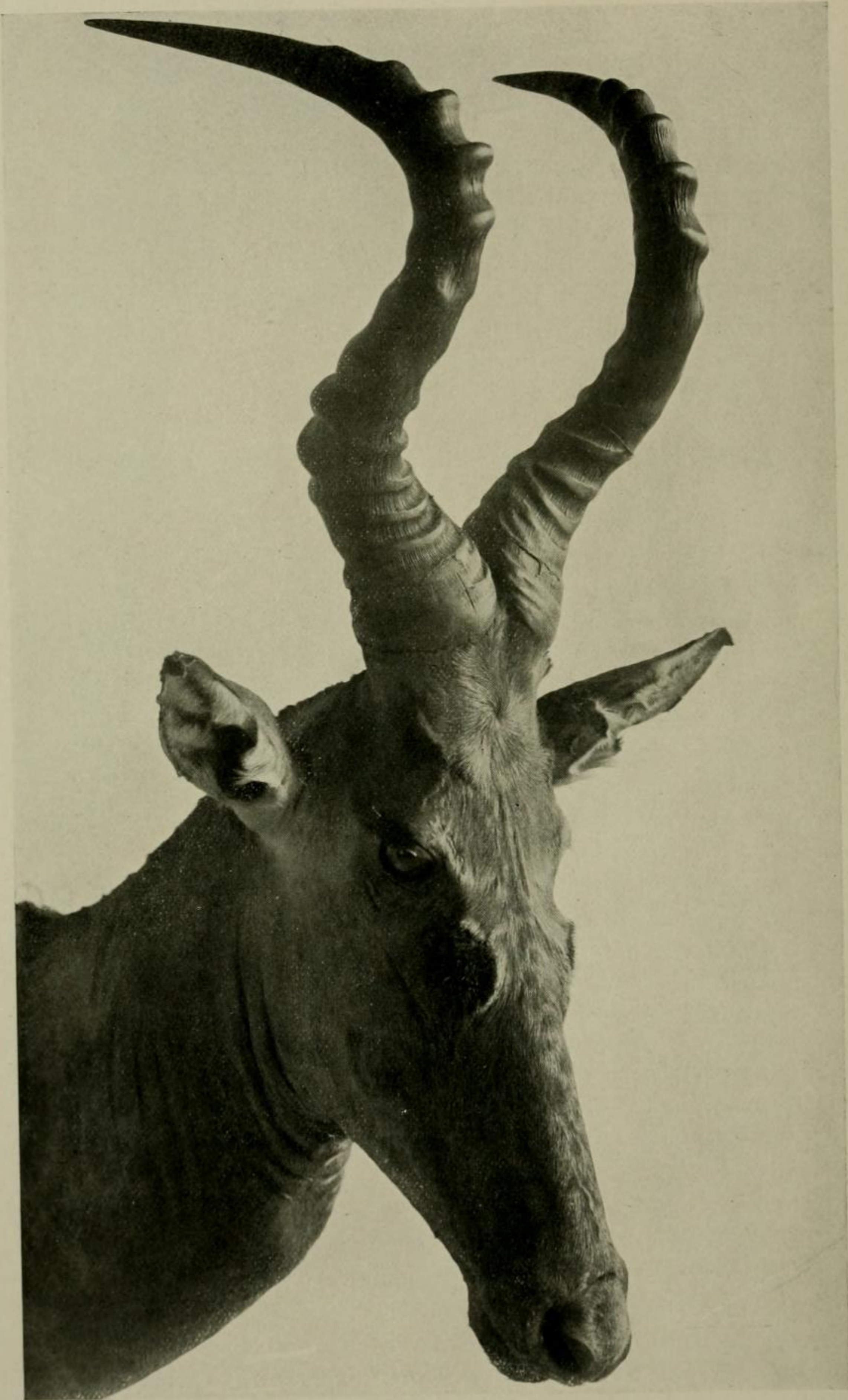
wheezing noises indicating that it is startled. A shot through the vertebræ of the neck or one through the brain will of course drop it instantly, while a shot behind the shoulder will cause it to die within a few moments. The difficulty however is to get in a suitable position to fire the fatal shot.

Fortunately for the hunter the rhino's power of vision is very bad and probably does not extend more than thirty-five or fifty yards. His hearing likewise is far below the average, and a man can often approach to within a few feet up wind if he is not seen. The animal's sense of smell however is remarkable, so that he is able to discover enemies at long distances and in this respect he is probably almost the equal of the elephant and the buffalo. The naturalist would however meet success more often in photographing the rhino, and the sportsman would more often secure opportunity for a correct shot if rhinos were not always found accompanied by the so-called "rhino or tick birds," for these birds are very clear-sighted and give warning of the approach of enemies. They perch on the huge beast's neck and back, and feed on the numerous ticks which are always to be found.

Most of the rhinos of our collection were killed in the Loieta some sixty miles south and west of Lake Naivasha, a station on the Uganda railroad. The plain is watered by the southern Guaso Nyiro River, which bounds the Loieta on the north and east. The German East African frontier lies to the south and the Amala or Olkeju Eugubi River and the thick forest country called Osero to the west. Our party hunted here about five weeks and during that time we probably saw an average of ten rhinos daily. Usually they were seen singly, unlike the more social white rhinos, though sometimes in pairs, in which case they were probably female and young. Apparently a large proportion of the animals seen were females. Why, I was unable to tell, except that possibly the males, having the larger horns had been more sought after by hunters. Of those shot by our party, five were females and one was a male. The horns of female rhinos are almost always thinner than those of the male, though sometimes fully as long. Our largest head, the one shot by Henry Sampson, Jr., was a female with an exceptionally long posterior horn. Horns of the males are usually much thicker at the base

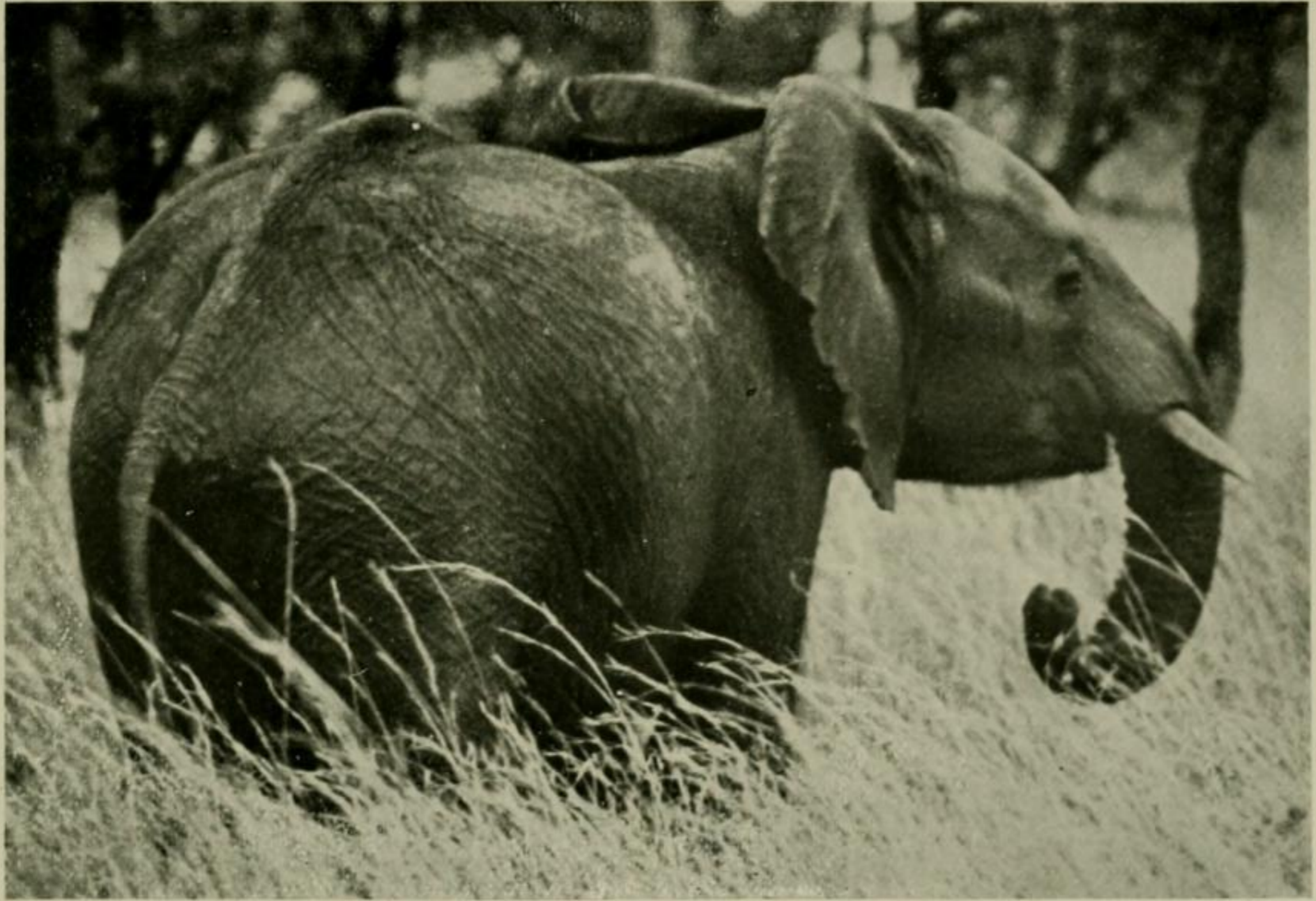


Field naturalists report that no other large game animal of Africa is more difficult to approach with a camera.



THE WORLD'S RECORD HEAD OF JACKSON'S HARTEBEEST

This animal was shot by Mr. Litchfield in British East Africa in 1909; the length of horn along the curve is 26 inches, the distance between the tips of the horns is $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Length of the horn differs greatly among the members of any species, and that certain specimens have horns of unusual length is interesting from the standpoint of individual variation and evolution, although the record head itself can have little more scientific value than any head with horns of good length



Copyright by Carl E. Akeley

Young African elephant

and more curved. In several of the so-called "Keitloa" type seen, the posterior horn was about as long as the anterior.

In this country we found that rhinos sleep during the day, usually many miles away from any drinking-pool or other water. They sleep however very intermittently, getting up every now and then to look around and then lie down again. They are likely to sleep with back to the wind which enables them to look down wind, their acute sense of smell protecting them to the rear. This habit of sleeping during the day is possibly due to their having been so persistently hunted. We were told that in unhunted countries rhinos feed a great deal during the day and sleep at night.

In the expedition of 1909 our party had permission to shoot in several districts which otherwise would have been reserved. This was through the courtesy of the officials of the British East African government. The permission was granted through letters which the American Museum of Natural History had kindly given to us and of course any animal shot in a reservation became the property of the Museum and devoted to scientific purposes. As a result of this agreement we secured some twenty specimens.

On the Usha Gishu plateau toward Mount Elgon, I believe rhinos were once very plentiful, but we saw few and a trip there would probably not now pay for the expense entailed. I understand however that rhinos abound in the Sugota and Jubaland game reserve, recently opened to sportsmen, and I am sure that a trip to the east and south of Lake Rudolf would result in securing large specimens. This ground has been very little shot over on account of its inaccessibility and the relative expense of an expedition.