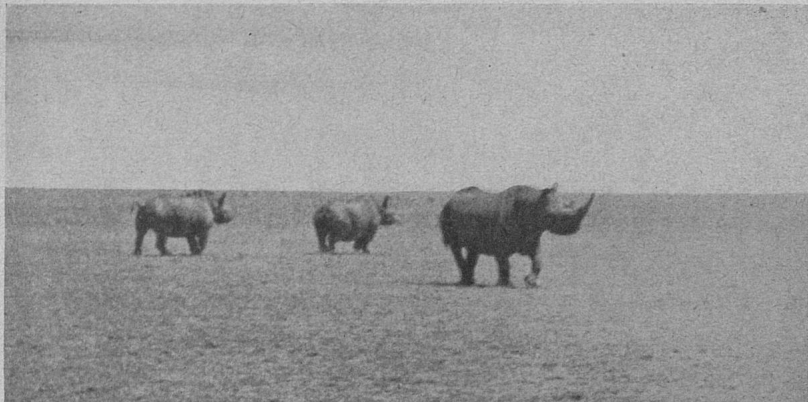


THE WILD LIFE OF THE WIRRAGOI PLAINS

By COLONEL B. N. ABBAY



In a branch of the river Balagalgi is a spring of slightly saltish water. It is known to the natives of the area as Loito Getto. Rising out of a mound about 5ft. high it is surrounded by luscious grass, has precipitous sides, and is said to be bottomless. It was in the past, and is still, the cause of the countless deaths of game, from the rhino to the dik-dik.

The Wa N'Derobo, the wild men of the district, regard Loito Getto as their permanent larder and pull out animals which have been drowned, and not sunk, and eat them. The approaches to the spring are littered with the bones of its victims and, as native tradition says that it has always been there, a death trap for animals, it is a matter for speculation as to what relics of the distant past lie in its muddy depths.

The eastern side of the plains is bordered by the Guaso Nyiro river in which live all the ordinary East African fish except the horned or rhino fish, and eels. The latter's absence is accounted for by the fact that the Guaso Nyiro does not flow into the sea but is lost in the Lorian Swamp.

Both elephant and rhino have in the past been

THE THREE WITCHES

SEVENTY miles north-west of Narro Moro, a small township on the western side of Mount Kenya, lie the Wirragoi Plains where game can still live the life which they lived centuries ago. It is probably the only place in the world where buffalo and rhino can be seen lying or standing in the wide treeless plain during the day.

If herds of buffalo—there is one of over 130 in number—are disturbed during one of their infrequent visits to the bush or forest country, they rush to the plains and form line, with bulls on the flanks and calves behind their mothers, ready to repel any enemy. They appear to spend most of their time in this formation and only straggle if frightened by human beings and compelled to move rapidly away.

Riding round the plains on a mule it is a common sight to see at least a dozen rhino in the morning. Occasionally a group of six is met, but generally they are to be found in two's and three's. If disturbed, they stand tail to tail, looking in opposite directions but if they decide that danger threatens from one particular side they swing round and face it, side by side. If they decide to attack, they do so side by side. In the heat of the day they are somnolent and it is easy to approach to within a few yards of them, but, if roused, they stand no nonsense at all. There are several herds of zebra on the plains and amongst them is that great rarity, a pure white one. It is not an albino.

I'LL SOON SETTLE THAT PHOTOGRAPHER



—WELL, NO, PERHAPS I WON'T

much harassed by the Wa N'Derobo, a wild tribe living largely by hunting and using poisoned arrows. Formerly the arrow heads were chipped out of stone, then out of iron smelted by the wild men themselves. But now the tribe has a few skilled men who can make practically any shaped arrow-head out of a 5in. wire nail.

Recently an elephant, whose tusks weighed a trifle under 200lb. the pair, was found dead by Game Scouts and a post-mortem examination showed that the cause of death was a 5in. nail which was found in the elephant's stomach.

A pathetic tragedy occurred a short time ago on one of the roads leading from the plains. The wife of a Game Scout was walking along the road, carrying her baby, when she met a lion. Without hesitation she climbed a tree, but unfortunately dropped the child, which fell to the ground and started crying. The child's screams attracted the attention of the lion and it walked to the foot of the tree to investigate. Apparently considering the baby a dainty morsel it picked it up in its mouth and disappeared in the bush.

The Game Department was gradually gaining the upper hand on these wonderful plains, but I hear, since writing the above, that the Commissioner of Lands, Nairobi, has decided to hand over the Wirragoi Plains to a tinned meat company.

Thus will pass in a few months a survival of the past, a plain, unique in this modern world, with all its wonderful wild life.

