

THE WELFARE CAMP AT AMBOSELI, ESTABLISHED FOR SERVICEMEN IN THE EAST AFRICAN COMMAND

WILD LIFE CLOSE-UPS

By MAJOR G. H. ANDERSON

An Area, North of Kilimanjaro, containing, within a radius of ten miles, an unparalleled variety of African Fauna

SINCE June 1st, 1945, I have had a permanent camp at Amboseli, part of the Southern Masai Game Reserve of Kenya, and situated near the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro, on the Kenya-Tanganyika borders. The camp was established for Army Welfare in the East African Command with the sole object of showing members of the Forces some of the plentiful wild life of Kenya under the most ideal conditions imaginable. The camp is sited on the Kenya side of the border, about 145 miles from Nairobi along the Longido road and approached by a 41-mile track leading off the main roadway.

Amboseli (shown on maps as Lake Amboseli) is on the southern edge of the Nyiri desert and north of Mount Kilimanjaro, with Mount Longido to the westward and Mount Meru south-westward. The countryside around the camp is partly the remains of an old soda-lake, several large swamps (now practically no open water and that brackish) covered with long grass, light forest and open plains.

On and off during a period of 40 odd years, I have had the luck and opportunity to travel and hunt over more than nine different countries in Africa—north, south, east, west and central. I can claim, therefore, to have had a good deal of experience of the continent and its big game animals. Most of my early safaris were made with native porters off the beaten track and in some parts still untouched by civilization. I can, therefore, testify that nothing I have ever seen has compared with the great variety of game which can be viewed within a radius of ten miles of Amboseli camp; and I do not believe any country in Africa, including National Parks or otherwise, carries such a variety of fauna in so small an area. Amboseli also possesses the great advantages of a healthy climate, fine scenery and, at most times, a magnificent view of snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro.

In the early mornings it is nearly always possible

to obtain a superb prospect of Kilimanjaro. Cars can travel practically all over the countryside for the purpose of observing the wild animals; and, what is even more remarkable, close-ups of all the game can be secured from a car with comparative simplicity. If anyone can tell me where it is possible to find a country with the same variety of game in such a small area, then I should much like to know about it. I have never come across Amboseli's peer.

The Game Warden of Kenya, Captain A. T. A. Ritchie, takes an immense interest in all his animal charges and is doing his utmost to convert this



THREE BULL ELEPHANTS CROSSING THE OPEN PLAIN FROM A BELT OF FOREST TO THE SWAMP AT AMBOSELI

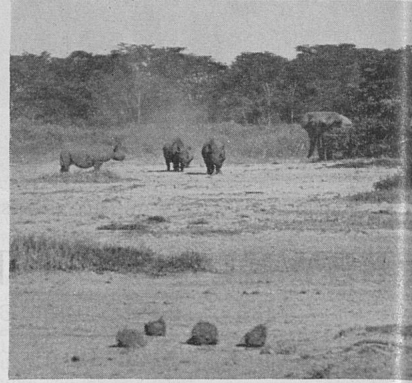
wonderful region into a National Park of the Colony. That is a worthy ambition. It is hoped that success will crown his efforts.

The following game can be seen at Amboseli: Elephant, rhinoceros, lion, buffalo, cheetah, wildebeest and zebra (in great numbers), giraffe, waterbuck, Grant's and Thomson's gazelles, wart-hog, a few eland (not always visible), oryx, impala, dik-dik,

gerenuk, a few hartebeest, Lesser kudu (only occasionally), hyena, jackal, bat-eared fox, and innumerable baboons as well as monkeys.

A great variety of bird-life is found, including geese, duck, teal, marabout, white stork and pelican. There are also hippopotamus in the swamps, but these are practically never observed during daylight though quite frequently heard bellowing at night. Elephant and rhinoceros are seen in the open-country, the former species more especially during early mornings and evenings; and they can be approached quite close, if reasonable precautions are exercised.

On these short safaris from Nairobi to Amboseli, the various parties taken out in my charge see elephant



AN UNUSUAL PHOTOGRAPH OF THREE BLACK RHINOCEROS AND A BULL ELEPHANT WHICH WAS TAKEN NEAR THE CAMP

rhinoceros, lion and buffalo (practically for a certainty); often, cheetah; very occasionally, leopard; and always the more common species of fauna. For example, I left camp about 6.40 a.m. (forty minutes after sunrise) with one party and returned just after ten o'clock. In that brief period (about three and a half hours) we first saw three rhinoceros, shortly afterwards five buffalo, and then ran nearly on top of two lion in light bush-country. Proceeding about another mile, we obtained a close-up view of a herd of elephant right out in the open and also a couple of buffalo standing on the edge of a swamp. On the way back to camp we had a splendid view of a good maned lion and an accompanying lioness. In addition, we saw practically all the more common species of fauna on the plain or in park-like country.

Again, on my last safari before closing the camp at the advent of the "Rains," the party under my care saw one very large herd of elephant (about 100 animals); another numbering 30 to 40; a smaller herd in a swamp situated about seven miles to the westward of the camp; and also a dozen or more elephant not in a herd. Furthermore, they also observed 25 rhinoceros (mostly in open-country), lion, buffalo, and all the common varieties of game. It is, however, somewhat unusual to see so many elephant during a single brief safari to Amboseli camp.

These week-end Welfare parties have proved exceedingly popular among the members of the Forces. There is a long waiting list to go out on them. I know of no other game country which is so entirely suitable for being made into a portion of the National Park of Kenya Colony. Amboseli is absolutely unique. These trips can all be undertaken by car and it is scarcely ever necessary to get out of it, except occasionally when I wish to obtain for the party a really good close-up view of elephant.

All the game at Amboseli is exceptionally tame. Elephant and rhinoceros can be seen right out in the open-country, which is most unusual elsewhere in Africa. It really gives people a very wrong impression of elephant-hunting when they observe these animals strolling about like cattle in the open-country.

The Amboseli area is, and has been for many years, a Game Reserve. As the Masai do not hunt game, the fauna has not been molested for a very long time and so does not associate the presence of human beings with deadly persecution or a serious



A GROUP OF GRANT'S ZEBRA ON THE EDGE OF THE PLAIN



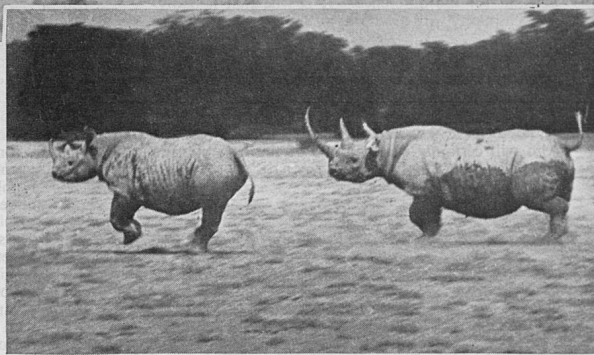
GIRAFFES TAKE AN INTEREST IN THE CAMERA NEAR THE FOOTHILLS OF MOUNT KILIMANJARO

threat to life. The manner in which elephant take very little notice of mankind at Amboseli is especially noteworthy. They practically ignore the Masai and their herds of cattle, even when the wind is blowing from the Masai directly towards the herd.

This indifference, however, does not always apply when elephant get the wind of Europeans. On one occasion, for some inexplicable reason, I was deliberately charged by a large cow leading a herd. Leaving it, she charged straight at me from a distance of about 75 yards. I secured a photograph of the start of the charge, and she still came on in a

they make off at once. A car can only be employed in photographing the plain-dwelling animals or through light bush-country. I should say that 90 per cent. of the photographs of lion are taken from a car; and these beasts, much in the same way as other species, do not seem to associate it with human beings.

Rhinoceros can often be photographed similarly in areas where they have not been disturbed, as one finds them out in open country; but, here again, they display their customary ill-temper and will frequently charge the vehicle without any sort of provocation save its nearby presence. Very, very few photographs of elephant have been



TWO BLACK RHINOCEROS ON THE FLATS AT AMBOSELI



A TUFTED BEISA, OR FRINGE-EARED ORYX, GALLOPING ACROSS THE FLATS



"I RECORDED ANOTHER PHOTOGRAPH, THEN DROPPED THE CAMERA AND GRABBED MY HEAVY RIFLE"

part of Africa, the other being another old friend, Phil Percival. What they do not know about big game and all work connected with safari is really not worth knowing.

The camera, like the rifle, should always be ready for instant action, as so often one comes unexpectedly upon an animal; and then there is only a matter of seconds available to record a photograph of the beast. So many, when seeing close-up photographs of the bigger game, say that photographing them must be very dangerous and much more so than shooting. That is an entirely wrong idea; and for the following reasons. Very few animals will charge unless first wounded; also, and most important of all, photographs of dangerous game must nearly always be taken in open country so as to secure anything like a good picture. Then, if perchance the photographer is charged, a good view of the animal is possible and he should be able either to kill or turn it.

In bush or long grass country it is a very different proposition when hunting with rifle or camera, and a wounded or even unwounded beast will occasionally charge if persistently followed up or hustled. In terrain of that character an animal is often nearly upon the hunter before he has a chance to shoot. And that's the answer to that!

Within the past year I have recorded over a 100 photographs of elephant, rhinoceros, lion and buffalo; many of them from quite close range—that is to say, anything from 25 to 40 yards.

taken in this manner, as it is rarely feasible for motor-transport to travel through the type of terrain favoured by them. To a great extent, this equally applies to buffalo.

In order to approach close to game in a car, it is essential to drive up slowly and not directly towards them, but edging slowly and gradually up. If the animals should be at all restless, then halt every now and again until they have settled down once more; and in this way it is nearly always possible to approach within photographic range.

I do not pose as an expert photographer. It is only quite recently that I have taken it up at all seriously. Personally, I do not think that you can better the Leica camera with a 13.5 cm. telephoto lens; and have it screwed to a piece of wood made to resemble a short stock of a rifle, using it much in the same style as a rifle. It is thus both quick and handy in action. A stock like this was given to me by an old friend, Pat Ayre, who is rated as one of the two leading White Hunters in this



A LION AND LIONESS PHOTOGRAPHED DURING A SAFARI FROM AMBOSELI

most resolute manner. At a distance of 25 yards she was enveloped in a cloud of dust and still coming "all out" at me, but I recorded another photograph, then dropped the camera and grabbed my heavy rifle.

I had no wish to shoot her, even in self-defence, but it looked as if this would become an imperative necessity. Suddenly, however, she swerved away from me and made off. Thereafter she caused me no further anxious moments but rejoined the herd. It is difficult to account for that cow's sudden display of violent dislike to my nearby presence unless, possibly, she had recently been crossed in love.

When out with parties at Amboseli I always carry a heavy double-barrelled rifle in case it is needed in defence of my charges. On no occasion have I been compelled to shoot. The nearest I came to doing so was the unprovoked incident with the cow elephant which charged me deliberately. The tameness of elephant at Amboseli does not apply to that bad-tempered and lively old gentleman, the rhinoceros. This species never seems to learn any sense and is very much inclined to take offensive action if noticing a nearby car; and I have experienced sudden charges from rhinoceros, but resulting in no damage to the car, a member of the party, or the rhino.

Amboseli is unique for big game photography. The fascination in taking photographs of wild animals is that, no matter how many pictures are recorded of the same species, the creature always shows itself in a different position and action. The key of big game photography is, undoubtedly, the motor-vehicle. Wild animals do not appear to connect a car with human beings and it is only necessary to drive up near them; but the moment you get out,