

If a Puma Leaped on Your Back What Would You Do?

You may never have to soothe a nervous puma, while it sits on your unwilling neck but you can learn, from this story of adventures with wild animals, some things that will come handy when you deal with human beings

An Interview with Herbert Lang, Assistant Curator of
Mammalogy, American Museum of Natural History

By M. K. Wischart

Photographs by H. Lang, American Museum of Natural History, New York

SOME years ago, while making photographic studies of wild animals for scientific purposes, I happened one day to be in the cage of a large puma in the Bronx Zoological Gardens, in New York City. The keeper was behind me, between me and the door. The puma on which I was focusing my camera, was five or six feet in front of me—and showing signs of nervousness.

I had got the camera in focus and was about to snap the picture when the puma suddenly ran around behind me, then leaped—landing on my back, with one of its fore paws at the base of my neck, the other on my shoulder.

I steadied myself, taking care to make no unnecessary movement. My sole thought was to keep from exciting the animal further; and I remained bent over in the position I had been in when it landed on me, because I wanted to make the puma just as comfortable as I could, so long as it wished to stay there.

Fortunately it did not choose to stay very long. After a moment, it jumped off with a clean leap, and alighted on the floor of the cage in front of me.

Had I struck at it while it was on my back, or tried to fight it off, I should only have increased its nervous fright to rage. Then I should probably have been badly lacerated and might have had to fight my way out of the cage. As it was, the puma seemed satisfied that it was in no danger from me and I got good photographs.



This curious animal is the skapt. The full-grown one (above) was "posed" for the picture after it had been killed by natives. The little cub (below) was captured alive. Mr. Lang says that the skapt is the most elusive animal in the world. He never has seen a grown one alive, although he once got within a few yards of two of them. Read his story of the experience

In letting the puma stay on my back, I was guided by long previous observation and experience with wild animals; for I had been studying them since I was a boy.

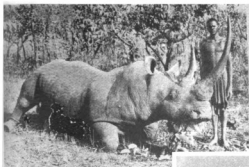
In the town where I went to school,

there was an old taxidermist who used to go on by bringing him squirrels, chipmunk field mice, and other small animals. Sometimes, I wanted snakes but few of the boys liked to hunt for them. Anything the taxidermist wanted however, I was glad to try to get it when he was called on me. One day I brought him snakes; he was pleased to see them and he promised to use them for me some day.

He kept his promise, when I had school, by teaching me taxonomy. I studied four years under him and in the course of this work, became so interested in the big mammals that I began to dream some day being able to study that in their native haunts.

IN TIME, this dream was realized. But before that I had a good deal to do with wild animals in captivity, making pictures of them in some of the largest zoological gardens in Europe as well as in America.

This experience taught me that when a man is dealing with an excited animal—and this applies to tame ones also—the first business of the man is to keep cool. Loud words or quick and violent movements only enrage the animal and drive it to the breaking point. If it is in a cage, give it a chance to quiet down; if in the wild, give it a chance to make off, unless it is a specimen you want and you are in a position to get it.



Here is the finest specimen of a white bull rhinoceros ever obtained, the great front horn being 42 inches in length—16 inches longer than the best one obtained by Roosevelt. Below is an African buffalo. Notice the horn ears. The bulls fight for supremacy over the herd, their ears often being torn to ribbons. They are the most persistent duelists among wild animals.



The other day I overheard a judge explaining how he had come to grant a divorce to an unhappy married couple. "In time," he said, "you are able to tell by studying a man and a woman whether they can ever get on together. Of some couples you say, 'They'll always quarrel more or less, but they'll stay together and never break.' Of others you say, 'They'll never get on together. They'll become desperate from quarreling. The marriage will end in a tragedy. Better for them to separate.'"

Sometimes in the same way, if a man is facing a wild animal he must rely on experience when he has to judge whether

the animal has become enraged to the point where it will attack.

Many people think that a hunter, especially in Africa, is in constant danger. My experience is exactly the contrary. I have hunted rhinoceroses, lions, leopards, buffaloes, and many other species. By some of these, in my turn, I have been hotly pursued. But I have yet to meet the wild animal that will not run if a man comes up so that he can be seen.

I HAVE come upon lions lying in the grass not ten feet away; and not once has the lion delayed in rising and dashing off. Under cover of a fog in the highlands, I have found myself in the midst of herds of hartebeests and zebras, some of them only a few yards from us. They were so alarmed we had to stop our caravan for fear of being run down in a wild stampede.



These men said they had two wonderful escapes the day this picture was taken. First, they escaped death in their encounter with the great leopard shown here. Then Mr. Lang photographed them. They thought the camera was a deadly weapon, and they were overjoyed when they again came through alive. On one occasion, Mr. Lang made a model of the head of a native chief. Later, he discovered that the chief had stationed six of his men, with drawn bows and poisoned arrows, with orders to let fly at Mr. Lang if the chief seemed to be in danger. Mr. Lang got them to show him how they had stood guard, and took their pictures (below).



One afternoon when we were approaching a river in British East Africa, we discovered a lioness with her young in a reed bed on the bank. Seeing us approach, the lioness abandoned her young ones and swam across the river. There were two baby lions in the reed bed, and I went in to bring them out. Just as I stooped to pick up one of the cubs, a bullet pierced its brain, and it dropped from my hands to the ground—dead. A companion of mine, on a cliff above the river, had become excited and, perhaps fearing that I was in some danger, had fired. Happily, even in his excitement, his aim was true.

WHEN I say that wild animals are afraid of man I do not mean that you can cow an enraged or wounded animal by the "power of the human eye." I mean that no wild animal is likely to take the aggressive, except on great provocation. If driven by pain and rage, the animal will attack in self-defense; yet I have known even an elephant, in a moment of fear and excitement, to make off on finding himself face to face with human beings.

One morning, in the southern Sudan, I set out with my gun-bearer and two other natives in quest of giant elands. In the course of the morning we ran into a herd of giraffes, led by such an enormous bull that we gave up pursuit of elands to go after the giraffes. Presently, in the deep bush, the giraffes ran through a herd of fifteen or twenty elephants, and almost before we knew it we were in the midst of these elephants, which got our scent. Though we could not see them, we could hear them charging in various directions, crashing through the thicket, causing the very ground to quake under them.

The only thing for us to do was to make for an open space. I succeeded in reaching a clearing about fifteen feet in diameter. Just as I arrived, a native came up from a slightly different direction. And almost at the same moment one of the elephants came crashing through the underbrush on the opposite side. He stopped, his upraised trunk tossing above our heads not four feet away.

I gripped my high-powered rifle harder, but without any intention of firing unless forced to. The native, too, kept his head. Quietly, steadily, he raised his lance, leveled it, and held it in position to use in case of an infuriated charge.

His trunk still tossing about, the elephant contemplated us with the same watchful concern, I dare say, with which we were contemplating him. Then, for reasons known only to himself, he crashed off at one side of the clearing. We were glad to see him go, for he was big enough to be formidable but not big enough to be of value to our collection.

Many encounters with wild animals end in that way—in nothing—if the hunters keep their nerve. "Accidents" happen when a man, finding himself in a tight place, gets excited, moves, makes a noise, or does something else that makes the animal still more terrified.

My narrowest escapes have come, not when I was hunting with a rifle, but when I had been out to get photographs of living wild animals. One day, accompanied by my gun-bearer, Matari, and two other natives, I located a troop of four full-grown white rhinoceroses and a calf. From behind the shoulder of a small hill, I tried

to focus my camera on the troop at a distance of about eighty yards. Before I could get the picture the herd moved out of sight; so I waited, hoping they would come into view again.

A few moments later, without the least warning, the troop appeared around the end of the hill that had been shielding us—and faced us at a distance of eight yards. They snorted angrily, came nearer, as though to charge, but stopped, swinging their heads and tossing their horns. It was a nerve-racking moment; and Matari, who was usually very steady, lost his head and fired, the worst thing he could have done. The troop did charge then; but in avoiding an ant hill, three of them went to the right, while the mother rhinoceros and her calf went to the left, passing us by unharmed.

One of the natives asked why I had not killed the beasts with my camera, for he believed the camera was some sort of powerful weapon. This particular native had been standing two feet behind me all the time, *entirely unafraid*, trusting in my "magic cannon."

On another occasion, after many months of hunting in the Belgian Congo, I set out with a white companion and two natives to get photographs of live white rhinoceroses. My companion had his rifle, but I had left mine at camp and carried only my camera. It proved to be a day of surprises.

AGLORIOUS sun had swept off the last tropical vapors, and by ten o'clock it was intensely hot. So we felt certain that the rhinoceroses we were following must have settled down to rest. The trail showed that the herd had lingered in a swamp and then had reveled in the mud of a nearby wallowing place. We took a short cut to the next plateau, where we hoped to find them fast asleep. Nearing the plateau, we advanced cautiously, exchanging only a few low words. But these words cost us heavily! For our quarry, nearer than we had supposed, took alarm, and the whole troop started off with a wild rush.

Now that their vigilance was aroused we knew we should have a long chase. It still lacked an hour of noon, but we halted for a bite to eat, supposing that we were quite safe. Suddenly, Matari, the gun-bearer, looked up in consternation.

The rhinoceroses had returned! That was our first surprise. Ten yards away we could see their dark gray backs. If they should take alarm and charge in our direction, with their two tons of weight and armor-like hides, only good luck could help us escape. Still, it was a wonderful chance for photographs—or seemed so.

My companion, standing ready with his rifle, motioned me to make the most of this opportunity. But I could not get a picture, because of the tall grass between us and the animals. However, the wind favored us; and without taking alarm, the rhinoceroses passed by.

We immediately took the trail after them. And finally my companion ventured on alone, intending to turn the troop so that they would confront my camera again, perhaps under better conditions. I had waited half an hour when a shot rang out, followed by the uproar of stampeding rhinoceroses. It had not been my companion's intention to fire; but, as I learned later, he had been advancing upon

two cows and a calf, when suddenly he had come upon a bull at close quarters and had been compelled to fire.

On hearing this shot, I started to rejoin my friend, when suddenly a terrific racket came from a clump of trees a short distance ahead. I advanced and beheld an amazing sight.

The wounded bull, seized with blind fury, and starting off with a terrific rush, had jammed his head between two tree trunks. He was struggling wildly to release himself, but instead of succeeding he finally forced his front legs through, so that he was caught and held as if in stocks.

The trees were shaking with his violence. His feet dug out the ground beneath until he was suspended with nothing to support him except the tree trunks. Matari and I worked frantically to tear away grass so I could focus the camera. But before we were ready, the rhinoceros ceased his struggles. There was dead silence. The enraged bull had slipped down so that he could feel ground under him. And now he gathered his strength, reared upward—and when he came down he was free; for one of the trees, weak at the base, had given way. Off he started, at full speed, and vanished with his tail in the air.

It was no longer a question of getting photographs. We could not abandon an animal that might die a slow death from his wound. From waterhole to waterhole we followed him that afternoon, and twice sighted him.

Night was at hand, and we had been on the move for nearly twelve hours, with one short rest. There was to be no more that night and we were far from camp, but it was decided to continue the hunt for a half-hour longer. Ten minutes later, my white companion and Matari, with their rifles shouldered, were forging on ahead. I was very tired; and, feeling certain that no wounded rhinoceros would lie down in that short-grass region, I had just given my camera to the native who was with me, when suddenly the wounded bull rose from the short grass and made straight at me!

It was the opportunity of a lifetime—not to make photographs, but to show how fast I could run! Sixty yards off there was a cluster of four or five trees, the largest of them only five or six inches in diameter. As I looked over my shoulder at the avalanche hurtling after me, I saw my camera dancing on the monster's back; for the native had thrown it at the bull in an effort to distract him from pursuit. But the bull refused to be distracted. If anything, he seemed to be gaining speed.

I REACHED that clump of hardwood trees not an instant too soon. In fact, rhinoceros and I landed there at the same instant. But I was on one side of the tree, and he on the other. I looked down and there was his horn extending an inch beyond my ankles. In his terrific rush he had rammed his horn between the tree trunks; and for the second time that day he was caught.

From a little distance I watched him groan and rage until, with a final effort, he broke free. My friend, rushing up, fired and brought the beast down in a flash. We were still watching him as he struggled on the ground, when, to our



Herbert Lang (it is hardly necessary to state that Mr. Lang's picture is the one at the left) is a big-game hunter for scientific purposes. He was in command of the expedition sent by the American Museum of Natural History — of which he is one of the assistant curators — to the Belgian Congo, where he remained from 1909 to 1915. He brought back 6,000 specimens of wild animals, 7,000 birds, and 15,000 photographs. The expedition was composed of only one white man besides Mr. Lang. The beard with which Mr. Lang is shown here was a mere accompaniment of jungle life; but the astonishing creature in the picture at the right — the female white-whiskered Colobus — wears its marvelous hirsute trimmings all the time



amazement, he rose, shook himself, and again started to run! With every step, he gained in speed and finally disappeared in the jungle.

THIS was the end of that day's work. At ten o'clock that night we reached camp. But at day-break, with gun-bearers, porters, and skimmers, I took up the bull's trail again. An hour before noon we found him—dead. After leaving us, he had gone more than three miles. Two days later, horns, hide, and skeleton were on their way to Faradje. Ultimately, the prize will form one of a habitat group in the Museum of Natural History, in New York City.

The rhinoceros I have been telling you about are known as the "white" or "square-mouthed" species, and live in the northeastern savanna of the Belgian Congo. They are called "white"—although their hides are naturally a dark slate gray—for this reason: the animal depends for its comfort upon a mud bath. After plunging in a wallow, the mud gradually dries on its hide. The bulk of this dirt is rubbed off against trees or bushes or when the animal rolls about on the ground around the wallow. But the rest dries out, and the blaze of the tropical sun adds a glare to the light tones.

The rhinoceros is really a living "steam roller." Hooped by broad ribs and a hide of great thickness, his motive power is generated by the coarse grass of slight nu-



In this country, we climb the bare trunks of trees by hugging them with our knees; but the African natives use the soles of their feet, which are so tough that the skin is half an inch thick! The picture of the shoes above shows the basic wrought in the white men's stout footwear. Yet the natives went barefooted without injury

tritious value which he eats. To dispose of the great quantities of this grass that are necessary to him, he has an enormous digestive apparatus.

It is strange, but not far-fetched, to say that this steam roller moves on rubber

heels. The animal really walks on tiptoe, its full weight resting on a pad of resilient tissues which absorbs every jar in the same way as a rubber heel does, but far more efficiently.

AT NIGHT, rhinoceroses graze, or wallow in their favorite holes. Early in the morning they may rove about, like nomads; or you may see them standing still, doing off the effects of late hours. In the heat of the day, they rest wherever they happen to be, in the open or in dense thickets. If you succeed in stalking them, you may see them lying around heter-akster. The shifting of a bulky head, or the sidgy turn of a body will not disturb the others. But at the slightest sign of your own approach, they sit up, dog-fashion, on their haunches, listen, and sniff. If they conclude that all is well, they lie down and doze again.

The mother rhinoceros, in defense of herself and her calf, takes alarm on slight provocation and charges recklessly. The calf shows great fondness for its mother. Once, when its mother had been killed, I saw a calf take up its stand as a guard over the dead body. He showed the greatest anxiety, rushing forward and trotting around, snorting and whistling like a steam engine. When chased away, he returned, but was finally driven off. In two cases, I have known orphaned calves to join other rhinoceroses and to be adopted into the herd.

Rhinoceroses (Continued on page 155)

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If a Puma Leaped on Your Back What Would You Do?

(Continued from page 62)

gather in troops of five or six, and live in a state of domestic peace. Doels between rhinoceros bulls are of rare occurrence; much less frequent than among antelopes—and less frequent, also, than between bull elephants.

The most persistent duelist among wild animals is probably the short-haired African buffalo. The victorious buffalo may attain leadership over several hundred cows as a result of continuous combat and desperate rivalry with other bulls. To keep his position, he must meet contestants head on in a fight with horns. In these fierce encounters the animal's ears are sometimes torn into strips. The older he grows and the larger becomes his herd, the more difficult is his position to maintain, and finally he is driven out. These are the solitary bulls one meets; very dangerous are they when enraged.

The other day a man asked me what I thought was the most intelligent wild animal. In the Belgian Congo, when anyone asks what is the wildest animal, the facetious answer always is, "The white man." Likewise, when anyone asks the natives what is the stupidest animal, the answer is the same, "The white man." The explanation offered is that he comes from so great a distance to suffer and "get sick."

THERE is a good deal of truth in these answers; for, in Africa, when confronted with unusual and unvarying conditions, a man may do or he may things that endanger his own life, or he may deal unjustly with the natives and excite their hostility, jeopardizing himself and others. Also, in coping with conditions there, the white man often shows himself absolutely inferior to the savage.

You might, for instance, be standing on a hill looking across a valley to the opposite hill. Over there you would see something gray. But you would be uncertain whether the object was a bush, a rock, or a mound of grass; while the native beside you would tell you confidently that there were antelopes on that hill. Even then, you would not be able to distinguish them without your field glasses.

You, a white man, would find it easy to trail the rhinoceros over soft ground. But if you came to a dry, hard-packed, age-old trail, you could detect no sign. Your native, however, goes right on without hesitation. He can follow the invisible trail unerringly; but of course it is not invisible to him. He sees a tiny scratch from the horny toe of the rhinoceros's foot; or perhaps a pebble that looks a little darker than other pebbles. But the dusty side of the pebble is down, the damp and darker side is up. So the native knows that a rhinoceros has passed that way, and that its foot has turned the pebble.

The legs of a rhinoceros terminate abruptly in clumsy, truncate feet, difficult to lift from the ground. Yet the creature is well built for making progress through



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the entanglements of a grass-covered country. The short, stout muscles are designed for the tremendous pushing effort required. The animal has poor eyesight, but it has highly developed senses of smell and hearing; and by aid of these senses it is not infrequently able to elude you all day long.

The antelope, on the other hand, is one of the swiftest animals we know. It has keen eyesight and also the speed with which to get away from an enemy. Its high-placed knees and hocks give it the maximum both of speed and of endurance. Leaping over obstacles is merely a pastime for these animals, with their long cannon bones, compact muscles, and repelike tendons.

One of the curious things I have observed is the different manner in which the various antelopes take to flight when alarmed. The antelope of the plains starts away in a straight line at express-train speed. But if you come upon the greater—a small antelope which relies a deal more upon concealment—you see him dart from behind a bush and zigzag across the open space to the next bush as quick as lightning.

The bush buck you often find in high-grass country, where he can browse on the foliage of bushes. To make speed in such surroundings, he clears the bushes in graceful bounds, taking fifteen or twenty feet at a leap.

The eland is a wonderful high jumper. The largest of the antelopes, as big and heavy as an ox and weighing about a ton, this creature is rather pliant in its ways. Yet, when you startle a herd, you see some of them jump clear over the backs of those next to them.

I AM sometimes asked which is to me the most interesting of all wild animals. My answer is, the okapi: the most elusive animal in the world and the most secluded in its haunts.

In the tracks of this noble creature I have walked for a thousand miles. Yet I never have seen a full-grown one alive. However, I can say that I have petted an okapi calf, and that for days I had time to study it, and to make the first series of photographs ever made of the animal. I am one of a very few white men ever to have laid hands on a living okapi.

The okapi is an animal of ancient lineage—a member of the giraffe group which flourished in southern Asia and Europe millions of years ago. It became known to science in 1901, when Sir Harry Johnston succeeded in getting a few pieces of the animal's hide. To-day, to escape destruction at the hands of advancing civilization, the okapi has retreated to a narrow strip of territory, seven hundred miles long and hardly a hundred and forty miles wide, in the forests of the northeastern Congo. This is the safest retreat from the white man, because it is the most unhealthy place in the world.

In quest of this animal I traveled fifteen hundred miles inland and made my base at Medje. First, I went to the village of Banda, a native chief, some of whose men are famous okapi hunters. For a time, I thought myself very popular. The natives came from surrounding villages, shook my hand, stroked my arms, and joyfully exclaimed, "Nyama mingi! Nyama nani!"

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