



A RHINOCEROS PHOTOGRAPHS ITSELF: In this article Mr. Cherry Kearton describes an exciting night spent in the branches of a tree watching over a drinking-pool near which a camera and magnesium-flash had been set, with cord attached, for the animals to photograph themselves.

Nights in the Jungle

By Cherry Kearton

NIGHT! What a fascinating and frightening word—associated with mystery and merry-making through the centuries—the time when darkness reigns, and strange shadows hover over the world, gripping the imagination. Think, too, of the immortal tales—"Arabian Nights," "Decameron Nights," and again of the night life in great cities—Paris, which never sleeps—night clubs, night raiders—glamour—thrills—excitement!

But how many know of jungle nights, the most mysterious and dangerous of all, for Nature's creatures stalk during the dark hours through the endless forests. When one has been surrounded by that uncanny stillness and penetrated far into Nature's regions by night, startled perhaps by a stealthy tread, a broken twig—and then stillness again, shattered by a distant, sinister laugh, one has tasted the most terrifying experience in life.

I have spent many exciting nights in the jungles of India, Borneo and Africa, photographing animals by magnesium flashlight, and can recommend the pastime to anyone anxious to get a real kick out of life, providing he doesn't mind it being a kick from, say, a rhino. The method employed in night photography is to place the camera in position during the day, focused on, say, a pool where animals are sure to come and drink, and attach to it a thread drawn across the pathway, which any approaching creature is bound to touch, and in doing so will open the shutter and ignite the magnesium, thereby photographing itself.

This does not always work to plan, and once, in Africa, I was sitting in my camp nearly a mile away from the set camera, watching and hoping for the flash, and was delighted to see it occur. I lay awake all that night wondering what animal would be revealed when I developed the plate in the morning. At daybreak I hurried

to the pool, and my native boys were very excited, for footprints denoted that both a rhino and a lion had been there. However, imagine my utter dismay on developing the plate to find nothing but a perfect picture of the pool, with no sign of any animal!

This happened several times, and I was so bewildered that I decided to take up a position in a tree, within a few yards of the pool, to unravel the mystery. I soon discovered the trouble was created by two nightjars, flitting to and fro across the pool, apparently catching flies, for soon one of them caught the thread and released the shutter, but the mechanism was not quick enough to catch it in flight, for by the time the shutter had opened, and the flash had lit the scene, the bird was out of the picture.

"Ah, so that is why I have secured nothing but pictures of the pool!" I mused, sitting quietly up in the tree; when suddenly my thoughts were shattered as a bullet whistled over my head. I learnt later this was due to the Askari guarding the camp at night, who, on rousing himself from a doze, saw a big lion glaring at him by the camp fire, and taking a hasty shot, he missed it, so that I nearly got the lion's share!

Before the next night I erected a barrier to prevent those nightjars touching the thread, and then fixed up the camera. Night descends quickly in the regions a few miles from the Equator, for twilight is unknown. I resumed my position up the tree, and settled down to my vigil, hoping to keep still, for one quickly gets cramp lying in one position on a branch. A last glow from the setting sun cast a faint light on the pool, and I saw the nightjars flit

across, but not low enough this time to touch the thread.

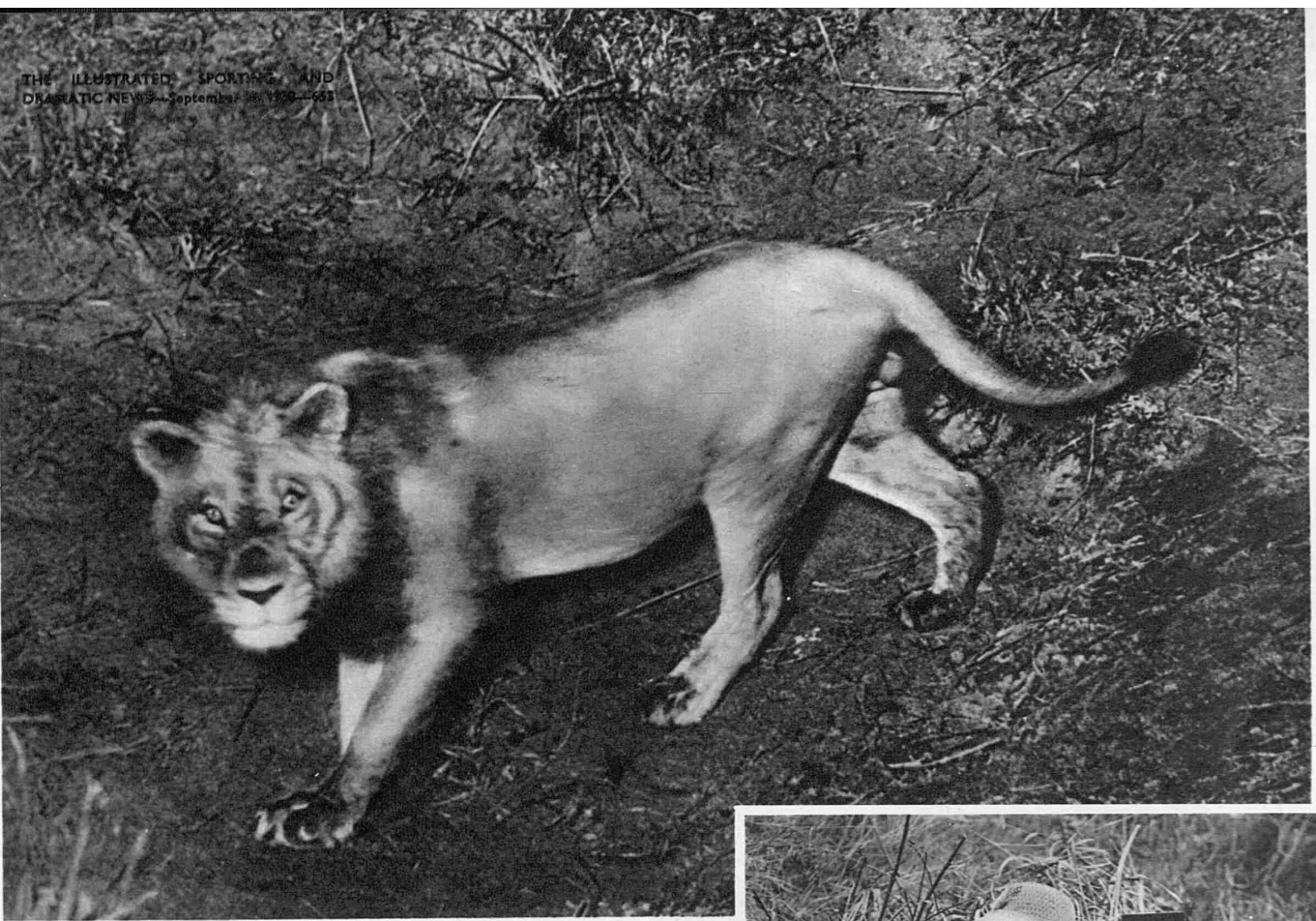
The intense silence was broken by the dismal howl of a hyena, and immediately afterwards a jackal yelped hungrily. Some rock-rabbits then added to these "pleasant" sounds with their weird little noises somewhere in the darkness, after which all was quiet again until a zebra began calling. Each cry and call cut through the stillness like a knife, seeming to pierce one's brain.

Suddenly I saw two huge black forms silently advancing towards my tree, beneath which they stopped. Rhinos! For several seconds they stood perfectly still, and then, to my surprise, the huge, lumbering beasts began to play, leaping gaily round the tree like kittens. This went on for about ten minutes, and then one stopped and stood motionless, for a slight breeze had blown in his direction, and he had scented me. Never shall I forget the terror which filled me as that sinister-looking rhino stood just beneath me, his nose pointing upwards, sniffing and blowing like a steam-engine, and the branch upon which I lay, swaying slowly up and down, so that I could almost touch him. Then the two rhinos took fright, and, with terrific snorts, charged away into the jungle.

Half an hour later, although I could see nothing, my instinct told me something was lurking in the vicinity, and then I perceived a slender, dark form moving stealthily towards the pool. It was a leopard, and, although I made no sound, it sensed danger, possibly spotting the dark patch of my shadow on the branch, for it stopped, looked up, and then, with one mighty bound, disappeared into the darkness.

Had it sprung at the branch it could easily have pulled me down, so that you can imagine my relief when it leapt away instead, particularly

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A LION BY FLASHLIGHT: "I have spent many exciting nights in the jungles of India, Borneo and Africa, photographing animals by magnesium flashlight, and can recommend the pastime to anyone anxious to get a real kick out of life."

Right: WHEN A LION ATTACKED THE CAMERA: After the flash went off (the pan is seen to the right), the lion charged, seized the legging which was over the camera to protect it from rain, took it twenty yards, shaking it and biting a piece right out. Cherry Kearton is holding up the legging.

Below: ZEBRA IN CENTRAL AFRICA: It is most interesting to note how the heads are pointing in every direction on the look-out for danger.

