



Black Rhino

by Jimmy Shave

From the left: Navaisha with her daughter Arusha, Rukwa with her son Kingo

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During the months of June and July 1982 with the weather being most favourable, we were able to allow our male rhinoceros Baringo to graze in the large grass paddock all day and night with his two female companions, Rukwa and Naivasha. It was not long before we realised that mating had taken place on several occasions as both cows were nursing cuts and abrasions on their backs. At the start of autumn, Baringo was spending less and less time with his 'wives' and throughout the winter months no further interest was shown. It wasn't until a year later, however, when both abdomens began enlarging, that we were completely satisfied that two pregnancies were imminent, and confirmation of this was shown by the udder sizes increasing and their teats gradually filling with milk. Temperament and appetite did not alter and it was thought that Naivasha would deliver first. However, in the later stages it became obvious that Rukwa was more advanced and, in the last few weeks of September, her teats began leaking milk. Finally on the morning of Monday 3 October 1983, at 7.30, Rukwa gave birth to 'Kingo', a fine male rhino. She naturally became a very protective mother and was no longer the placid black rhino that we had grown accustomed to. It was almost two hours before the male calf took his first drink and, as it was very clear that our presence was not required, we decided to leave mother alone to become acquainted with

her offspring. Rukwa, exercising her maternal instinct, has proved to be an excellent mother giving no reason for concern.

Undisturbed by all the recent activity, Naivasha continued going about her business in the usual manner. By now she was beginning to show signs of labour and had reached the enlarged udder stage. We continued our 24 hour vigil and there were several occasions when we were convinced she was about to give birth at anytime. However, as is customary on these occasions, she kept us waiting a little longer. Then, during the very early hours of 11 November, we noticed she was more restless than ever, and continued fidgeting in her bedroom. At 9.20 the next morning she started contracting strongly, and by 9.45 the head and front feet were out. Finally, 35 minutes later, Arusha, a healthy female was born. During this magical hour, Naivasha was very calm and, unlike Rukwa, allowed us to remain in the rhino house to share this wonderful event. Within this hour, the baby was standing and had also taken her first suckle.

Both babies progressed famously and after about 3½ months, we put all four rhino into the large grass paddock together. This was a delightful sight and so successful was the introduction that Naivasha even allowed Rukwa's calf to feed from her.

Let's hope they will be friends for a lifetime.