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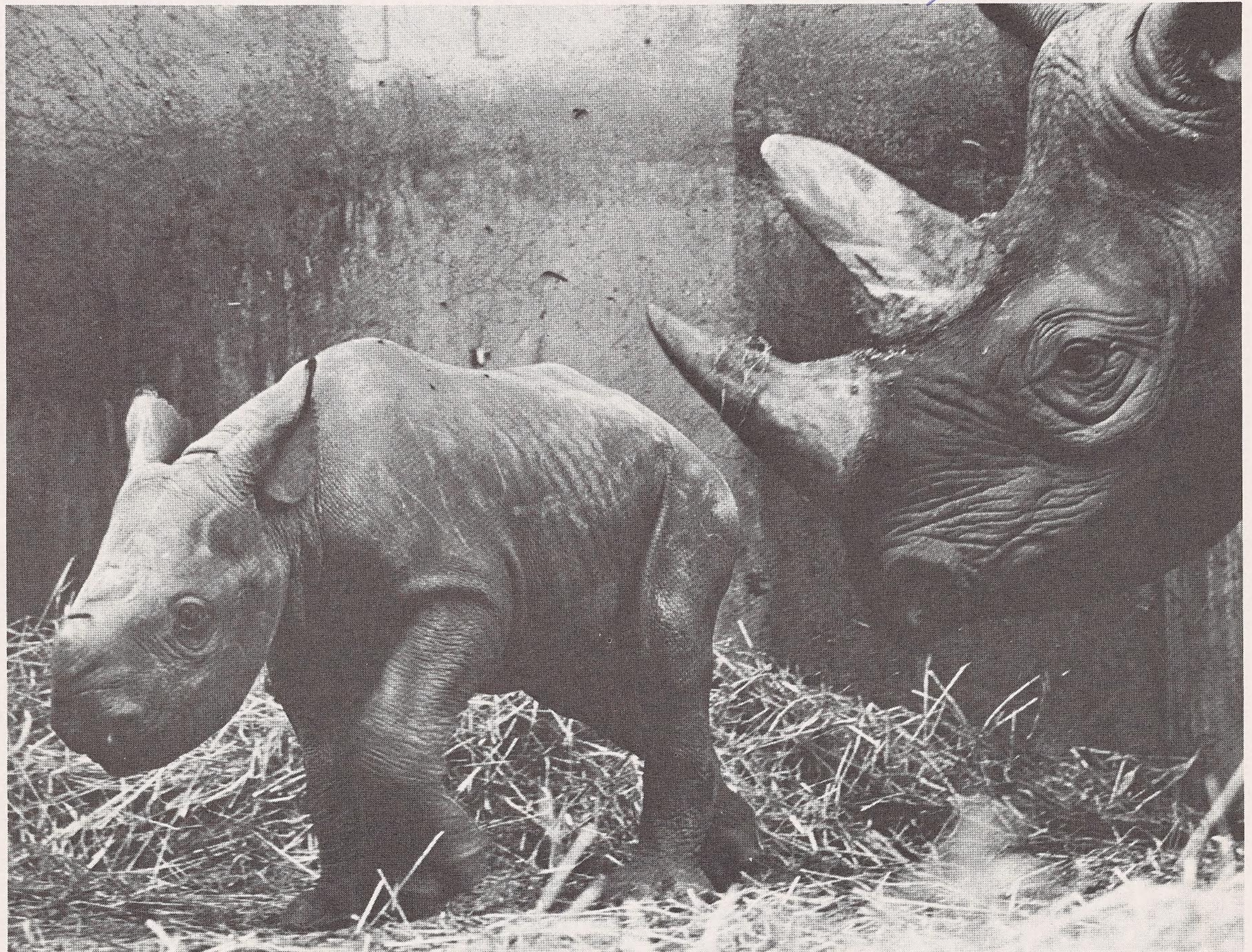


SPOTS and STRIPES

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Thelma keeps a watchful eye on her (and the Zoo's) first-born black rhinoceros.

Photograph from Smithsonian Institution.

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IT'S A BOY

The most important African black rhino in captivity was born in the National Zoo at 4:09 p.m. August 31. Name: Dillon.

A bouncing baby, in every sense of the word. His reluctant arrival kept us all on pins and needles from August 18 to 31, but Dillon finally popped into the world as if shot from a cannon.

Thelma gave birth to him standing – the case in four of the five documented black-rhino births, and if Dillon didn't actually bounce off the floor of the cage I'll eat the Pregnancy Watch Log.

Seventy pounds, 44 inches from nose to tail, and all boy! Thelma, some 2,500 pounds of maternal solicitude, took her front horn to Dillon at once, trying to lift him to his feet. In a few hours he had gained his wobbly legs on his own and was suckling like a veteran.

The blessed event was a somewhat public affair. The cheering section of about 35 excited people included Zoo Director Theodore Reed, Mrs. Reed, staff members and keepers, and a few lucky Friends of the National Zoo who'd gotten the word via the underground.

Like wise men from the east, well-wishers started coming to pay homage. In late afternoon, Dr. Leonard Carmichael, former Secretary of the Smithsonian, loped into the large mammal house with Mrs. Carmichael and a rhino-loving lady from California in tow. (Dr. Carmichael's National Geographic chauffeur appeared with a camera, and found a place at the guard rail with other photographers.) Next morning, Peggy Barrett brought daisies.

Dillon arrived a celebrity, of course, the National Zoo's first-born rhino of any species. He is the 13th black rhino born in American zoos and the 37th in world zoodom.

Since no Dr. Spock exists for black rhinos (only five births have been fully documented), the Zoo staff was understandably prayerful about Thelma's interesting condition.

On August 18, some 15 months after Breeding Day, Thelma showed unmistakable

external signs of giving birth. It was a Friday afternoon. The weekend loomed.

Warren Iliff, secretary of the Friends of the National Zoo, quickly organized their second Pregnancy Watch. Some 25 veterans of the Lion Pregnancy Watch were on his list; 20 other people had volunteered in response to a notice in SPOTS AND STRIPES. Ultimately, the Pregnancy Watch involved 57 willing midwives and uncounted cups of black coffee.

Friends of the National Zoo sat with Thelma from 6 p. m. to 7 a. m. on weekdays and around the clock on weekends.

One doubts that any black rhino's actions during her final two weeks of pregnancy have been more closely observed – and with more sympathy – than Thelma's. While Tony slept like a peaceful mountain in the adjoining cage, Thelma suffered many restless nights. Her tiny, weak eyes seemed to recede ever more wearily into her circlets of wrinkles.

Here is a typical entry from the Pregnancy Watch Log, night of August 22, observations by Warren Iliff:

12:50 a.m. – Thelma up.
12:55 – Down.
1:00 – Up and moving about cage.
1:15 – Urinates.
1:20 – Lies down.
2:25 – Up.
2:50 – Lies down.

I served three of the late-night watches, once alone and twice with a friend, a young Brazilian naturalist named Arnold Queiroz.

It's a rare and wonderful experience to baby-sit a pregnant rhino in the great shadowed cavern of the large mammal house during the still hours of a hot summer night. The silence is heavy. You don't forget that the quiet dark masses behind bars are some of earth's most spectacular animals – rhinos, elephants, hippos, giraffes. Their gamy scent hangs like mist in the air. Flies buzz. At times there is no other sound. A cockroach scuttles across the damp concrete floor.

Some nights the animals were restless. This entry appears in the Log just after midnight on August 26:

1:45 a. m. – There's quite a lot of activity in the large mammal house tonight. All the rhinos are up. Tarun, the Indian rhino, is banging the metal sliding door at the back of his cage. Thelma has a noisy, sloshy drink of water; manicures horn against the wooden post in her cage.

On the evening of the 26th, Brenda Hall and Dana Horsemen made these observations:

7:35 p. m. – Thelma browsing with hind-quarters facing front of cage; kept standing in this position until 7:53, browsing once in a while. Noted secretion of white mucous from vaginal opening (small amount).

8:57 p. m. – Thelma finally lay down, heaved a big sigh.

That same night Sara Koonce, Howard and Caryl Clarke reported:

11 p. m. – Dr. Reed arrived, looked Thelma over and commented that it was difficult to understand how she could hold it in her any longer. He believes she will deliver in a standing position, and said that she may just give a grunt and deliver – it's possible for it to be that fast!

August 29, 8:02 p. m. (Gerry Kurula and Mrs. Audrey Habermann):

“Thelma gave two jerks as if in pain.”

The last entry in the Pregnancy Watch Log was at 6:45 a. m. on the 31st: “She's been pacing restlessly since 6 a. m. with tail erect. Now and then she paws the cage with her back legs.”

At 7 a. m. Zoo staffers began streaming into the large mammal house. Throughout the day Mrs. Sybil Hamlet, the Zoo's public information assistant, took meticulous notes on Thelma's actions. Everyone felt that August 31 had to be The Day – and it was.

Dr. Reed invited the Pregnancy Watch volunteers for a special preview of Dillon, named by Mrs. S. Dillon Ripley, wife of the Smithsonian Secretary, on the evening of September 1.

At one month, Dillon is the picture of health. He gambols like a lamb, weighs about

150 pounds, and nibbles hay. His front horn has popped through; the second, while still a button, is on its way.

Zoo Friends who missed taking part in the Rhino Pregnancy Watch can take cheer. Marg, the giraffe, is expecting soon. Smile, you may get a call from Warren Iliff:

“Say, can you help us out? How about tomorrow at 4 a. m.?”

–Matt McDade

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Nursery Chant of Dillon, the Baby Rhinoceros

Some worry lest our line go
Extinct just like the dino;
Man's habits aren't so fine though,
He may blow before the rhino.

–Jocelyn Arundel

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SEALS AND SEA-LIONS

The summer of 1967 was special for the National Zoo sea-lions. There were fun and games at meal time, and anyone knows that sea-lions like that. Friends of the National Zoo had arranged to operate a fish-vending cart. For a dime at feeding hours, zoo goers could have the rare opportunity of buying a fish, tossing it to the delighted barking sea mammals in their tree-shaded pond below the bear line. The sea-lions must have thought the human beings had at last come to their senses.

Most people who have seen “seal” acts performed by sea-lions are fated to a lifetime of confusion about the difference between seals and sea-lions. A few pointers follow.

Sea-lions belong to a general grouping of pinnipeds that have small external ears. Fur seals also belong to this group. These eared seals are especially distinguished by their manoeuvrable hind limbs which can rotate forward to help them move about on land with