

# A prime mover's memoir

## WRESTLING WITH RHINOS The Adventures of a Glasgow Vet in Kenya

by Dr Jerry Haigh

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Reviewed by **Ian Parker**

**A**s animals cannot speak up and explain their symptoms, vets generally make better observers than doctors. People are unaware, when they take their animals to vets, that they are often just as closely observed as the patient. Consequently vets accumulate much material on their fellow humans which, when they care to write about it, usually makes for interesting reading. Jerry Haigh is no exception to this rule.

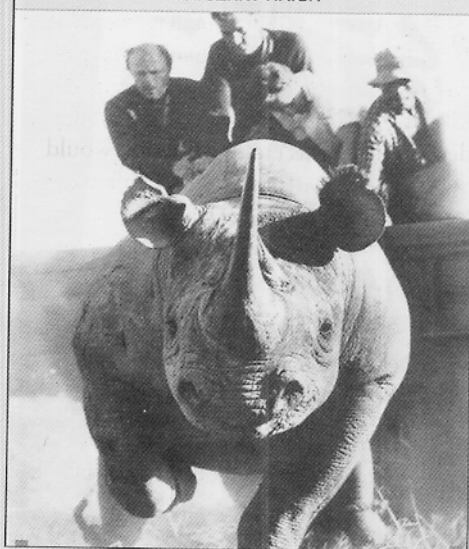
Born of military parents in Kenya, Jerry returned there from Glasgow University as soon as he had qualified in veterinary medicine. The book tells of his experiences over the next decade or so, of his meeting and marrying a Dutch Doctor, of starting a family and eventually of moving on to Canada, where he has spent the rest of his career.

Jerry's time in Kenya spanned the early post-independence years, when things still ran more or less with the order inherited from the colonial era. The country was full of enthusiasm and the cancer of corruption had yet to take hold at all levels of society. While he practised normal veterinary medicine with the full range of domesticants from household pets to cattle and horses, he also treated many wild animals and today would be referred to as a wildlife vet.

He was one of the small band of veterinary pioneers and wardens who developed the technology for capturing large wild animals through the use of tranquilising darts. Along with many of his peers at the time, he never really appreciated the degree to which they were breaking new ground. They all enjoyed the challenges involved, but failed to lay claim to the kudos that was rightfully theirs.

## WRESTLING WITH RHINOS

The Adventures of a Glasgow Vet in Kenya  
DR. JERRY HAIGH



In this respect, Jerry was the technical brain behind a conservation success in Rwanda that has still to be properly acknowledged. The Government had decreed that Rwanda's last surviving bush elephants should be exterminated. However, it conceded that all calves of between one and four years of age should be captured and transferred to the Akagera National Park where there were no elephants.

Thanks to Haigh's skills with darts and drugs, all elephants aged between one and ten years were caught. The largest were nearly seven feet at the shoulder, far larger than any caught and translocated in Africa before. This new population went on to triple in size over the next quarter century.

**H**ad no elephant older than four been captured, it is unlikely that any of the refugees would have survived. Today, when even fully grown elephants are tranquilised and whole herds are sometimes moved, this early and first success story remains largely forgotten. Haigh himself makes far less of the achievement than he might.

Therein lies the appeal of *Wrestling With Rhinos*. It is not an exciting book abrim with tales of derring-do. Instead, it is a rather more gentle, nostalgic set of reminiscences. The opening quotation: "I speak of Africa and golden days (*Henry IV, Part 2, Act V, Scene 3*)" sums it up nicely.

For many who enjoy memories of Africa, this book would make an excellent Christmas present. My single criticism is that it should have been hard-cased, as it is the sort of book that many will want to have in their Africana collections.

