

# The Most Dangerous Beasts

A famed writer and big-game hunter gives you his rating of game animals and his reasons for fearing them

BY EDISON MARSHALL

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**W**hat is the most dangerous animal in the world?

This question always starts an interesting argument when propounded around campfires and at outdoor men's gatherings. It means, of course, what big animal—tsetse flies, malarial mosquitoes and poisonous snakes are barred—is the most dangerous opponent to well-armed, skilled hunters?

Luckily, it can never be answered positively—always remaining full of interest—because the experts do not agree. Stewart Edward White put his money on the lion. The late Martin Johnson backed the leopard. "Bwana" Charles Cottar, an American who became a famous African "white hunter," picked the elephant as far and away the greatest fighter. But almost always the candidate for the honor is

one of eight animals of widely different habits and personalities. My own experience in the back countries of Alaska, Africa and Asia convinced me that these eight lead the field as the most dangerous animals in the world.

The big, formidable beasts on this list are the African elephant, the tiger, the lion, the Cape buffalo, the rhinoceros, the leopard, the sladang and the Alaskan brown bear.

The last named wins a place only by a nose. Many outdoor men well acquainted with him do not consider him as dangerous as several animals not on this list. Maybe some of us are prejudiced in his favor because he is the only American in the running. But not for nothing have grizzly bears won their fame, and the Alaskan brown bear is king of the grizzly clan—heavier, taller, stronger-lived, and usually more belligerent than his Rocky Mountain cousins. The largest land beast of prey, a big specimen weighs twice as much as an old tiger and occasionally tips the beam at three-fourths of a ton. This predatory heavyweight isn't a cunning fighter, but an all-out slugger, hard to stop with

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*Illustrated by Courtney Allen*

With every attribute of a killer, the African bull elephant is six tons of fighting demon.



a high-powered bullet. His weapons are his big fangs and huge front paws. Alaskan bears do not bug. They bat, right and left, veritable sledge-hammer blows, fast enough to whiz out darting salmon from the shoals of the streams. His charge is amazingly fast for such a heavy, lumbering-looking animal. I had to stop one in alder thickets under the snows of Mount Pavlov and my hat has been off to Alaskan brown bear ever since.

In the dense forests of southeastern Alaska his nerves grow jumpy and his disposition mean. Females with cubs encountered at short range and big males feeding on a kill are especially prompt to attack. Several straight-shooting soundblows have been killed by the shaggy brutes.

The sladang of southeastern Asia is little known to Americans. His other names are seladang or gaur, from native languages. Only the biggest zous have specimens, and all I have seen exhibited were puny wretches compared to the solitary bulls I met in the jungles of Burma and French Indo-China. Occasionally they stand six and a half or even seven feet at the shoulder—the biggest horned bovines on earth. They are true wild cattle, and a big, mad, domestic bull pawing and snorting in the field gives one a greatly reduced but recognizable picture of a sladang. Tar-black except for white shanks, his heavy head with a Roman nose ominously lowered, he fights in bull fashion—sudden charges and quick lunges with upcurved, heavy horns.

He deserves a place on the list of champions because of his belligerency—solitary bulls have frequently charged at sight of a hunter—his might and his cunning. When hard-pressed he circles back on his own trail to rush out upon his enemy. This means close work in the dark, thick jungle that is his habitat, and the hunter has little time to shoot and no room to maneuver.

An officer serving in Burma told me that his commander forbade the men to hunt sladangs because their army rifles proved no match for the pugnacious beasts. Any big-game hunter could have told him so beforehand.

I once sought the big horns of a solitary bull sladang in the beautiful jungles of southern Indo-China. He ran a distance, came to bay, and attacked by surprise. He had

chased one of my two Moi trackers up a tree and was hooking at the other when my snap shot at his shoulder made him turn on me. He was only ten feet away and I will never forget the glare of his eyes and the swing of his big horns as he lunged. A lucky quick shot into his brain saved me from being brought to camp slung on a pole.

The only other animal on this list not well known to the American public is the Cape buffalo. The toll he has taken among big-game hunters and old Afrikaners throughout the continent south of the Sahara wins him the solid place. Not quite so large as a sladang—the biggest bulls weigh 1,400 pounds—he has longer, heavier horns down-curved with lifted points and an even uglier temper.

The wet, densely thicketed ground in which he lives helped to make him a killer. The blind reeds part and he lunges out with sweeping horns. If he misses his target, he will whirl and rush in again. Few men have survived an attack that has gone home—the crazed beast goring and tossing his victim repeatedly.

Perhaps not quite as dangerous in a finish fight, but with far more notches in his horn, is that long-on-monstrosity, the rhinoceros. When he makes his bad-tempered entrance out of the antediluvian age, every boy not honor-bound to stick to his bwana shinies up a tree.

A rhino attacked an auto on the Nairobi road; tipped it over, and killed its two occupants. I heard that one challenged and rammed a locomotive on the Unganda Railroad; it would be quite in character. He is not so fast or persistent as a buffalo or, as Cottar put it, as "previous" as a lion, but neither of these animals barges about spoiling for a fight as does this blustering behemoth.

As he bores in, he lowers his horn in a blind lunge. He has no other weapon—I never heard of anyone being bitten by a rhino—and unlike an elephant or an ostrich he does not appear to kick his enemies—but that leveled lance of his, sometimes three feet long, with 2,500 pounds of galloping fury behind it, is a real killer. In fact, a six-inch horn will do the business. The newcomer to Africa is told that in case he cannot stop a rhino's charge, to side-step him at the

fateful second, whereupon the frustrated beast will often gallop on. In the first place, that kind of footwork is too fancy for everyone except gymnasts. In the second place, a big male rhino I encountered in Tanganyika had no idea of leaving the field until he had skewered somebody. He took two balls from an elephant rifle in a running fight in the thorn thickets before he gave up.

A rhino's hide is two inches thick and so tough that it can be used as shields for natives. His full-powered pumping gait equals a pony's. But the main reason all hunters count him one of the most dangerous animals in the world is his never-ending belligerency. His sight is rather dim, so rather than take a chance on a vague, unfamiliar form he goes for it.

"Bwana" Cottar, my old guide, had several narrow escapes from rhinos until his last meeting with one, which turned out fatally. He and his son Bud were on safari and became separated by heavy thickets. Bud heard his father's big, double-barreled express rifle roar twice, then an ominous silence closed down. He made his way to the scene to find a rhino dying from two bullet (Continued on page 80)



"I know about his good record, but we just don't have a parole board."

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wounds, and a few yards distant the other old Afrikaner passing out from a deep wound in his thigh made by the beast's horn. Bud reported that they were gazing quietly at each other across the bloody grass—two great fighters at trail's end.

The smallest of the three great cats on my list is the leopard. If he were a heavy-weight fighter instead of a lightweight, he might easily be the most dangerous animal on the globe. No other beast generates more ferocity per pound on the drop of the hat. He cannot be pursued or pressed very hard without soon coming to bay, then attacking by stunning surprise.

I can testify to the dangerousness of

leopards after an experience in East Africa. My guide and I passed unseeing a leopard in ambush in the grass, and so he let us pass, but my sharp-eyed gun-bearer Kinini followed sixty feet behind us, and the instant their eyes met, the beast sprang.

The leopard's favorite tactics are to cling with his foreclaws, scoop with his rear, and bite. Quick-witted Kinini dropped to his knees—so the leopard had less play—and covered his face with his arms. In three or four seconds the beast turned on me, but in that brief time he all but scalped the native boy and had given him at least twenty bites and deep lacerations with his infectious claws and fangs. Plenty of antiseptic and a 100-mile rush trip to a doctor saved his life. The guide had saved mine by quick shooting.

Nature devised the leopard to be a quick, efficient killer of deer-size prey. His projectile claws, kept sharper than

nails, are instrumented by extremely powerful leg muscles and his fangs are specially adapted to rend flesh. Frank Buck and other hunters believe that "black panthers"—ordinary leopards born with black hides—are even more aggressive, perhaps because they cannot do a Houdini disappearing act in the dappled light-and-shadow of the jungle. All five spotted leopards that I met at close range were plenty aggressive.

The greatest of the three cats is the tiger—Death in Fancy Dress. His beauty and his deadliness combine to fascinate big-game hunters and hold them to the tiger trail long after they have lost the zest for hunting less exciting game. Sometimes they follow that trail too long—and hence the tiger's reputation as possibly the most dangerous animal in the world, in my opinion the runner-up to the champion.

A big tiger weighs two or three times as much as a full-grown leopard. His

fangs and claws are in proportion, so where the leopard wounds, the tiger kills. Stalking on noiseless feet through dim jungles where he can instantly melt away, he develops a higher cunning than the other big cats. Generally he hunts alone, a killer by nature that he may live, and schooled wonderfully in the craft by his mother and by the long-tusked wild boars, horned stags and jungle bulls that are his natural prey.

Tigers come in three grades: man-eaters, cattle-killers and common jungle tigers. The last are the least dangerous because, unaccustomed to the sight of man, they more readily avoid him. Man-eaters, usually old and decrepit, are happy rare, but cattle-killers, too big and heavy to catch deer, making an easy living on the villagers' herds, have learned how to deal with men. Employing cunning or boldness by their killer's instinct, these are exceedingly dangerous beasts.

The largest I ever shot rushed nearly a hundred yards with an ounce ball in his heart chamber. This "grandfather of tigers" had just killed a bull buffalo, bigger than a big horse, and pulled it more than a quarter of a mile. When we came on the carcass, about a dozen native boys, helpers on the hunt, could not drag it.

A tiger "let alone" is not so dangerous as a rhino. A wounded or enraged tiger will invariably come to bay in blind thickets, where he watches his foe every second, changing ground in silence, until he sees his chance to rush in for the kill. In heavy cover he may not show himself until his last pounce.

He has one weapon that nature did not give his smaller cousin the leopard—his mighty voice. This has undoubtedly broken the nerve of many hunters and made them easy victims of his attack. When roaming about the jungle, bad-tempered and hungry, he will merely go *Ahrrowe—AHHOWRR—RRROW!* But when really mad he will frequently stand and roar a continuous thundering *Tak-WHOOM!* *Tak-WHOOM!* But the sudden silence as the hunter draws near is even more demoralizing, because he knows it will presently be broken by the full-throated coughing roar of the charge—a noise impossible to represent in type.

Tigers attack in a long, free gallop. In high grass they progress in a series of tremendous bounds. So the issue may become simply one straight, quick shot at the rushing beast's head or breast, or sudden death.

Lions are less secretive and subtle than tigers. They will frequently reveal their positions by raising their royal heads out of the grass and growling. Because they range the open veldt and thorn-patched desert they usually launch their charge from longer range. But there is nothing on four legs faster or more magnificent than a charging lion.

They attack with their feet under them in an almost terrierlike scuttle, low to the ground, their tails rammed out like broomsticks. In hunting game on the veldt they creep up within fifty or so yards and then step on the throttle. It is appalling to see one of them overtake a wildly running zebra, bear him to the ground, and kill him in a matter of seconds.

Lions usually attack the hunter before a shot is fired. At night the saying "bold as a lion" comes true—they appear the real king of beasts, massive shapes in the moonlight. Moreover, they are likely to hunt in ruffian gangs of ten or more.

They are always making surprise moves. A lioness is especially likely to stalk and then rush upon a hunter when he is off guard. One lion ran in and killed with frightful speed an American sportsman before his companion, one of the deadliest marksmen in the country, could get him under his gun. In such attacks, a lion rarely breaks his victim's neck in his way of killing zebra—evidently a man is of inconvenient shape for these tactics—and does not often bat him, his most terrible death blow. Instead, he clutches him with his forepaws, tears him down, and "mauls" him with claws and fangs, killing him on the spot or leaving him to die from wounds or blood poisoning.

Last but far from least on my list stands the African elephant. In life he occasionally stands twelve feet—twice as tall as a tall man.

Elephant ivory has been prized since history began and the hunters who have died under the big tusks and mighty feet must number many thousand. In modern times, elephants have killed more armed men than any other animal. Such a death is the logical end of the white hunter.

The African elephant has every attribute of a killer, including cunning. He cannot be put down in time except by a heavy ball straight into the brain through

immense plates of bone. The target is comparatively small. To reach it, hunters creep up within fifty feet—practically under the giant. Here is real peril in the dim light of the Congo jungles, for if wounded or merely angered by the hunter's smell he turns into six tons of fighting demon.

He has dim sight, but great sounding boards for ears, and quite possibly the keenest nose of any creature. When a hunter following elephant spore finds it suddenly turned upwind, he runs for his life "across the wind" because he knows that the monster is waiting in ambush close by the trail and at the first whiff of his enemy will burst out, reaching for him.

Only a fleet, active man can outrun an elephant on level, open ground. In heavy growth, no sprinter can hope to do so. For weapons the elephant has four feet, two tusks and a trunk, all of them invincible. His kick will break a rhino's back, and not even another elephant can survive the full-powered drive of one of his hundred-pound-plus tusks. With his trunk he can roll human enemies under his feet, dash them against the ground, or merely slap them down—a slap no man has survived.

The elephant is the real king of beasts in my opinion—the most dangerous animal on earth. But all eight of these animals are champions in their own right and add wonder to our world. Whether known in the wild or through fireside tales, they quicken the great adventure of human life.—Edison Marshall



## Is this your Dish?

### For the Elderly Fowl

Here's a way of roasting an otherwise tough fowl, originated by a friend of mine. It was designed for somewhat elderly pheasants. Under the fall treatment, the birds become something that delights the epicure, and calls for the cheers of just a plain trencherman.

The method works well with large chickens, too.

The secret is in the dressing, composed of equal parts of sliced onions and crisp shredded cabbage. Place ingredients in a wooden bowl and bruise with a wooden spoon until each takes on some of the virtues of the other.

This takes time, but it's worth it. Season with salt and black pepper only. Now add, for one bird, three lightly beaten eggs and enough evaporated milk to make a very wet mixture—that's important. Make plenty of this dressing, more than will be needed for stuffing.

Stuff your bird and sew it up. Rub the outside of the bird with a mixture of butter and flour. Pin slices of fat bacon over the breast and legs, and dust with paprika. Pretty, isn't it? Wait until you taste it.

Place in roasting pan in a 400-degree oven. Put a quarter-inch of hot water in the bottom of the pan. After 20 minutes lower heat to 300 degrees. Baste, if necessary, with melted butter. Roast until your testing fork tells you fowl is tender. When the bird is about fifteen minutes short of being done, take the remainder of the dressing and mold it around the fowl, basting the mixture with the pan juices. Remove and discard the strips of bacon. At the end of the quarter hour, the bird will be nicely browned and the dressing will be cooked—and you will need plenty of it to satisfy the demand.

When you serve the fowl—chicken or pheasant—you will be pleasantly surprised to find that the meat is tender and juicy. The wet dressing, as the bird roasts, generates steam and the steam serves to tenderize the meat.

—Harry Boesford

