



WILDLIFE IN ACTION

In the winter of 1991 I had the good fortune to witness and photograph an incredible fight between two male giraffe at Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. At the time I was involved in a research project on oxpeckers, and my colleague, Ngoni Chiweshe, and I were spending our days observing the feeding behaviour of these birds at various locations in Hwange.

One day we arrived at a pan where, among the many other animals there, a lone male giraffe was roaming around. This male had a large flock of oxpeckers foraging through his fur, so we kept ourselves busy by watching them. Not long after our arrival at the pan, however, another male giraffe arrived on the scene. He headed straight for the first male and they quickly lined up side by side, facing in the same direction, and began walking forward slowly in time with each other. We watched the two giraffe pace about together for some time, curious as to what they were up to.

Nothing happened though, and we soon began watching oxpeckers on the other animals at the pan.

Suddenly there was a tremendous crash, and our eyes shot back to the two giraffe, in time to see a small cloud of oxpeckers rising above them in fright. Then we saw what had made the noise: the giraffe were swinging at each other with their necks! Alternating their blows, each giraffe would crash his neck and head into the base of his opponent's neck, producing a resounding *whack* on impact. They each struck at the other about five times and then, as suddenly as they had started, they stopped, and once again began pacing about in perfect synchrony.

After a few minutes, they started hitting each other, or "necking", again. This time, however, things got quite nasty; the giraffe that had been at the pan from the beginning hit the invading male so punishingly that his victim toppled over on to the ground. I'm not sure if it was from the blow from his opponent, or from the



