

Oryx

The International Journal of Conservation

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The Society was founded in 1903 as the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, and subsequently named the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society. Fauna & Flora International is conserving the planet's threatened species and ecosystems – with the people and communities who depend on them.

Oryx - The International Journal of Conservation, is now published quarterly by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Fauna & Flora International. It is a leading scientific journal of biodiversity conservation, conservation policy and sustainable use, with a particular interest in material that has the potential to improve conservation management and practice.

The website, <http://www.oryxthejournal.org/>, plays a vital role in the journal's capacity-building work. Amongst the site's many attributes is a compendium of sources of free software for researchers and details of how to access Oryx at reduced rates or for free in developing countries. The website also includes extracts from Oryx issues 10, 25 and 50 years ago, and a gallery of research photographs that provide a fascinating insight into the places, species and people described in the journal.

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THE WHITE RHINOCEROS OF THE SUDAN

BY ABEL CHAPMAN

MAY I draw attention to the case of the white rhinoceros of the Sudan and the imminent danger to which that rare—now almost vanishing—animal has been exposed by a recent change in the game regulations of that protectorate? During Mr A. L. Butler's direction of the Game Department of the Sudan Government the white rhinoceros was placed on the "Protected List"—that is, the killing of it was absolutely prohibited. But since his retirement the poor remnant of rhinos that still survive along the west bank of the Upper Nile have been replaced on the "Game List," in respect of a paltry premium of £5. Unless that wicked action is reversed it spells the death warrant of the few white rhinos that remain on the Nile—and practically they now exist nowhere else on earth.

Within the lifetime of many of us still living the white rhinoceros literally abounded throughout the whole southern half of the African continent—from the Vaal to the Zambesi. To-day it is virtually extinct—extirpated within sixty or seventy years. Thus in the Transvaal, in 1836, Cornwallis Harris records having counted eighty in one day; on another occasion, in the Limpopo, he saw twenty-two within half-a-mile, of which he "was obliged in self-defence to slaughter four." During the fifties of last century Gordon-Cumming, Oswell, Vardon, Murray and many other pioneers found these rhinoceroses so abundant over the whole sub-continent that some of them seem to have shot them wholesale, as we go out to shoot rabbits. In the seventies Selous found them still plentiful enough, though the continuous and sickening massacre of these stupid, ill-sighted and unsuspecting beasts was already telling its tale. In the eighties the white rhinoceros was fast disappearing—all but exterminated within forty years, and that over half-a-continent.

By the middle of the nineties it was, to all practical intent, extinct. Surely the above is a barbarous and dishonouring record ?

Up to that period no one dreamt of the existence of white rhinoceros anywhere outside of South Africa. It was not till the end of the century—after the reconquest of the Sudan—that a little segregated band of these great beasts was unexpectedly discovered inhabiting a narrow belt on the Upper Nile—a thousand miles or more to the north of any previously known haunt. This northern race, few in numbers and incredibly stupid in character, is restricted to a mere strip along the western bank of the Bahr-el-Gebel or Mountain Nile, perhaps two hundred miles in total length.

Now since, as above shown, the white rhinoceros was totally exterminated over half-a-continent within forty or fifty years, it is not difficult to calculate how long it will take to destroy this last surviving remnant in a space hardly bigger than two or three English counties.