

THE AUK, THE DODO
AND
THE ORYX:

Vanished and Vanishing Creatures



BY

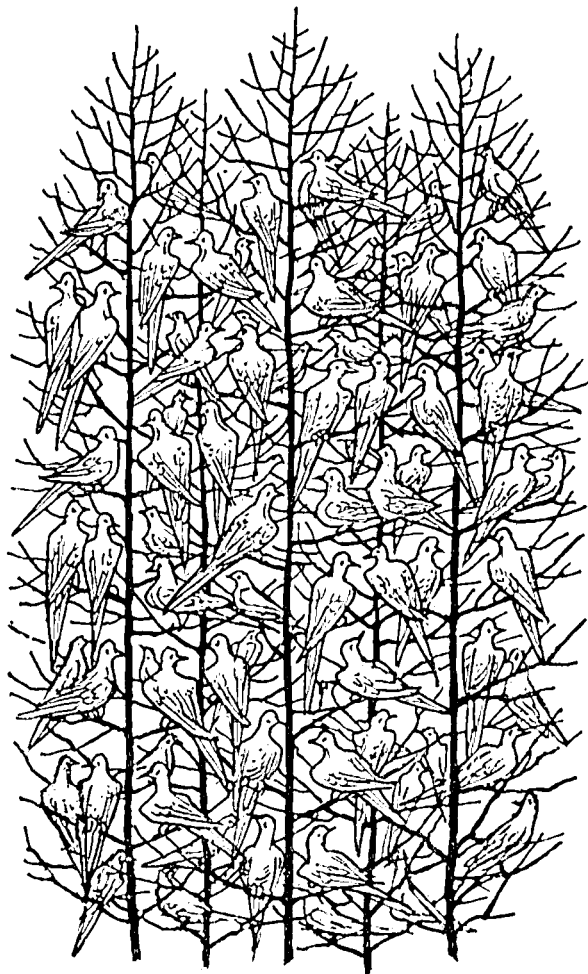
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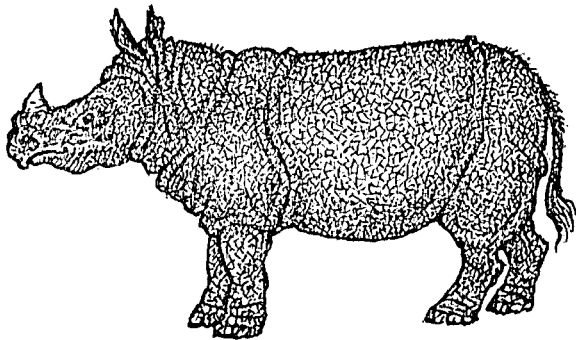


THE JAVAN RHINOCEROS

One of the rarest large mammals of the world is the Javan rhinoceros, of which less than twenty-four remain. All types of rhinoceroses are scarce and threatened with extinction, but the Javan species is closest to making its exit.

The rhinoceros is a relic of a vanished era of bulky mammals. Some 30 million years ago rhinoceroses of all sizes and shapes were found throughout the world, some as small as sheep dogs, other giants like *Baluchitherium*, which stood eighteen feet tall. There were rhinos in North America until ten or fifteen thousand years ago. Europeans of the ice ages hunted woolly rhinoceroses in the cave era. Most of the big rhinos, though, became extinct long before man appeared on the scene. The rhinoceros was an animal on a downward trend a million years in the past.

Man the hunter had little interest in eating rhinos, but man the healer found supposed medical uses for them. Chinese doctors came to use the powdered horns



Javan Rhinoceros

of rhinos as ingredients in drugs that were thought to cure epilepsy, stomach ailments, and dozens of other diseases. A cup made from rhinoceros horn allegedly rendered any poison harmless. As these superstitions took hold, the demand for rhinoceros horn became huge. Chinese pharmacists were willing to pay steep prices for the horns, since their patients would pay even steeper prices for the drugs made from them. All over Asia, rhinoceroses were mercilessly hunted. When sea trade began between Africa and China, the African rhinos became targets as well. One rhinoceros horn meant one dead rhino. The killing went on for centuries—and, since superstitions die hard, the killing is still going on. Though rhinos are protected by law in every land, poachers take the risk of arrest to shoot rhinos for their horns. The huge carcasses are left to rot, and the valuable horns find their way to the dark, antiquated druggists' shops of Hong Kong and Singapore, Shanghai and Peking.

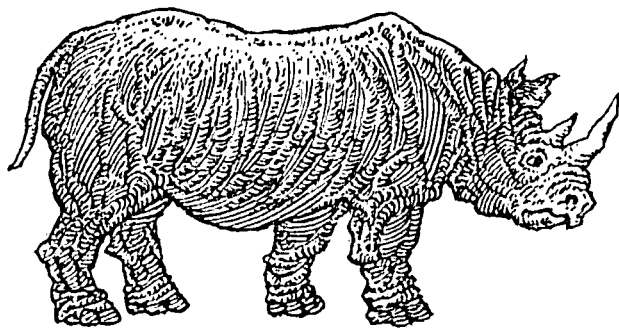
Of the surviving species of rhinoceros, the most numerous is the black rhinoceros of Africa. This is the rhino commonly seen in zoos. It is a large two horned animal with a dark brown or grey hide. Its temper is unpredictable and it can be a dangerous animal, charging men or motor cars at speeds that reach forty-five miles an hour. About thirteen thousand of these rhinoceroses live in eastern and central Africa.

The only other African species is the white rhinoceros, also called the square-lipped rhinoceros. This, too, is a two-horned rhino, light grey in colour and much bigger than the black rhinoceros. This blunt-nosed eater of grass and shrubbery stands six feet high at the shoulders, reaches lengths of fifteen feet, and weighs as much as $3\frac{1}{2}$ tons. It is a sociable beast usually found in groups of six

or seven. About two hundred white rhinos are left in the wild, seventy of them in Uganda and most of the others in the Sudan. The front horn of a white rhino, which can be as long as three feet, fetches about £600 from a Chinese pharmacist, and this has led to considerable poaching on the remaining herds. African wildlife experts are trying to collect the surviving white rhinos and place them on protected reservations.

The rhinoceroses of Asia are of three main kinds. The Sumatran rhinoceros, the smallest living rhino, weighs about a ton and is three to four feet tall at the shoulders. It has two horns, and spends much of its time in mud wallows. Coarse black bristles sprout from its thick hide. These rhinos have been extensively hunted to supply the drug trade, and only about two hundred are thought to exist. They are found in Malaya, Borneo, Sumatra, and Burma.

Quite different is the Indian rhinoceros. It has only one horn and its skin is a thick, tough hide divided into



Black Rhinoceros

great rigid slabs that look like armour plates. Though smaller than the African rhinos, it weighs nearly as much. This strange beast, which has the look of some prehistoric monster, is found only in north-east India. A population of about six hundred is known to exist.

The white, Sumatran, and Indian rhinoceroses, numbering about a thousand for the three species, are commonplace creatures compared with the Javan rhinoceros. This one-horned, armour-skinned beast is similar to the Indian rhino, but smaller in size. Its horn is also smaller, and the pattern of its skin folds is different, being divided into small scale-like discs, giving it a cracked look.

The first Javan rhinoceros was discovered in 1811, and it was recognized to be a distinct species nine years later. Though scarce, it was observed in the nineteenth century in Java, Sumatra, Malaya, Burma, Siam, Borneo, and other parts of south-east Asia. Like all rhinos, it had strictly vegetarian habits, browsing on leaves and twigs in swampy regions. As late as the 1870's it was still relatively abundant, since its small horn did not have much value to Oriental druggists.

The white colonial masters of the countries of south-east Asia fancied themselves as rhinoceros-hunters, though. Life was dull for these English, French, and Dutch administrators, and they made their stay in the sultry tropics more lively by organizing jungle safaris. The sluggish, harmless Javan rhinoceros was very little like the swift, violent black rhino of Africa that has provided so much excitement for hunters on that continent, but it was the best that this part of the world had to offer. Determined sportsmen slogged into the rhino swamps and shot the animals down as they wallowed in the mud.

It was customary for Europeans who had hunted in

the tropics to publish memoirs of their adventures in slaughter. One such literary hunter admitted in print with some pride that he had killed up to 44 rhinos in a single day, letting about as many wounded ones escape. It took about thirty years of such exploits to exterminate the Javan rhinoceros throughout most of its range.

Only on Java and Sumatra did it still exist at the beginning of this century. The Javan rhino population was about fifty, and there were about a dozen on Sumatra. A white big-game hunter who lived in Sumatra in the 1920's made it a hobby to kill these rhinos, and personally accounted for seven of them in a few years' time. His friends dealt with the others.

In 1930 the Dutch authorities on Java ordered a halt to the carnage. The twenty remaining Javan rhinos were placed on the Udjung Kulon Nature Reserve in western Java, and further hunting was forbidden. Under police protection, the rhino herd slowly increased. Rhinos have long life spans—half a century or more—and like most long-lived animals produce relatively few offspring. However, at the outbreak of the Second World War there were about thirty rhinos in the preserve, a 50 per cent increase in a decade.

During the war, the Japanese drove out the Dutch administrators, and when the Japanese in turn were expelled, Java and the rest of Indonesia gained its independence. The new native rulers maintained the protected status of the Javan rhinoceros, but the early years of independence were chaotic and it was difficult to enforce the laws. Now that the Indian rhino was nearly extinct, the Javan rhino became valuable for its horn, and poachers broke into the reserve. Several of the rhinos were killed before order was restored.

Today no more than two dozen of the armoured one-horned rhinos still live in the sixty-five thousand swampy acres of the Javan sanctuary. By day they remain out of sight in the dense jungle vegetation, emerging at night to feed and bathe in the mud. Whether these rhinos still actually exist is open to some question, for Indonesia has been torn by political upheavals since October of 1965, and nature preserves are often left unguarded during revolutions and civil wars. Chinese merchants in Java are willing to buy rhino horns at a price of one half their weight in gold. Poachers may already have slain the last of these rhinoceroses.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Dozens of the world's large mammals are on the danger list, as well as many birds, reptiles, and fish. Year by year these imperilled species come closer to extinction. Many animals have vanished in the last several centuries. Good fortune has restored to us the cahow, the trumpeter swan, the nene, and a few other rare creatures. But we are not likely to get the others back. The great auk and the dodo are gone for ever. The oryx, the Javan rhinoceros, and the whooping crane may soon follow.

What can be done to save the animals now nearing extinction?

Man will not relinquish his hard-won domain. New roads will slash through fields and forests; houses and factories will rise in peaceful woodlands; waste products of all kinds will pour into streams and lakes and into the atmosphere. There are more than three thousand million human beings in the world today, and if present trends continue, there may be twice as many by the end of the