

from the archives

THE FIRST WHITE RHINOCEROS IN CAPTIVITY

As will be recounted below, the first White Rhinos of either species (or subspecies, if you prefer the traditional taxonomy) to be brought into a zoo did not enter captivity until 1946.

Quite why their arrival on the zoo-scene should have been so late is something of a puzzle. As Dr. Kees Rookmaaker states in his book *The Rhinoceros in Captivity* (1998), “the White Rhinoceros is an animal which is easily captured and which does not present major problems of maintenance in captivity. And therefore, it is remarkable that the animal was never kept in captivity before 1946.”



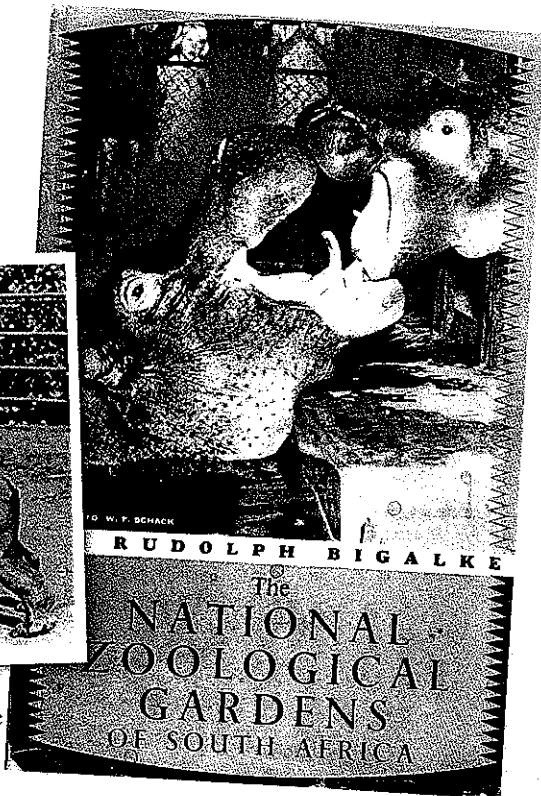
The Northern White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium cottoni*) was not scientifically described until 1908, but was relatively widespread at that time. Its range included South Sudan and western Uganda, from whence it might have been expected that some individuals would have reached European zoos. The Southern White Rhinoceros (*C. simum*) had been known to



science since 1817, but by the late 19th Century it had been hunted to the edge of extinction. It is sometimes claimed that the species was considered extinct, but this is not borne out by recorded facts. For example, a hunting party killed six White Rhinos in the Umfolozi region of Natal, South Africa, in 1894. As the species was certainly known to be rare, this event prompted the creation of the

Umfolozi Junction Reserve (30 April 1895). From 1912, the White Rhinoceros was included in South Africa's 'Royal Game' schedule, which meant that these animals could only be captured or killed under permit - which could only be issued for breeding, scientific experimentation, or for museum specimens.

Given this situation, it is perhaps no surprise that the first zoo to obtain Southern White Rhinos was the National Zoo of South Africa, in Pretoria: the surprise being more in the fact that it took them so long to do so. In 1954 a small history of the Pretoria Zoo was produced, written by Rudolph Bigalke (the



zoo's then-Director), in which he recounts the story of how the zoo's first White Rhinos arrived. Here we are pleased to quote from that account:

Bigalke relates that the possibility of getting White Rhinos for the zoo was first explored in 1928, when the prospect was raised of translocating some rhinos from the Umfolozi Game Reserve to the Kruger National Park. However, nothing came of this initial attempt, nor of another request for White Rhinos made through the Secretary of the Interior in 1933. Eventually, “success came unexpectedly and with dramatic suddenness.

“On 26th July, 1946, the Honourable D. E. Mitchell, Administrator of Natal, telephoned me [Bigalke] from Durban at 12.30 pm. and stated that a baby female Square-lipped Rhinoceros had been obtained in Zululand. He generously offered the animal for the national collection and suggested that a lorry be sent to bring it to Pretoria. This kind offer was promptly accepted, and at 5 pm. on the same day Keeper K. de Waard and Mr. R. Bruins-Lich left the Zoo by lorry to fetch the baby.

top: Female White Rhinoceros Zuluana is bottle fed by zoo keeper K. de Waard
above: Zuluana at the age of nine days. From left to right: Dr. R. Broom, Dr. R. Bigalke, Dr. V. Fitzsimons. Photo by Martin Gibbs