

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

INCLUDING THE HARTEBEESTS, WILDEBEESTS, DUIKERS, STEEN-
BOKS, WATERBUCKS, REEDBUCKS, IMPALA, SPRINGBUCK,
GEMSBOK, BUSHBUCKS, KUDU, ELAND, CAPE BUFFALO,
GIRAFFE, HIPPOPOTAMUS, BOSCH VARK, QUAGGA,
ZEBRAS, RHINOCEROS, KLIP DASSIE, AND
AFRICAN ELEPHANT

BY

F. W. FITZSIMONS, F.Z.S., F.R.M.S., &c.

DIRECTOR, PORT ELIZABETH MUSEUM

MAMMALS

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOL. III

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

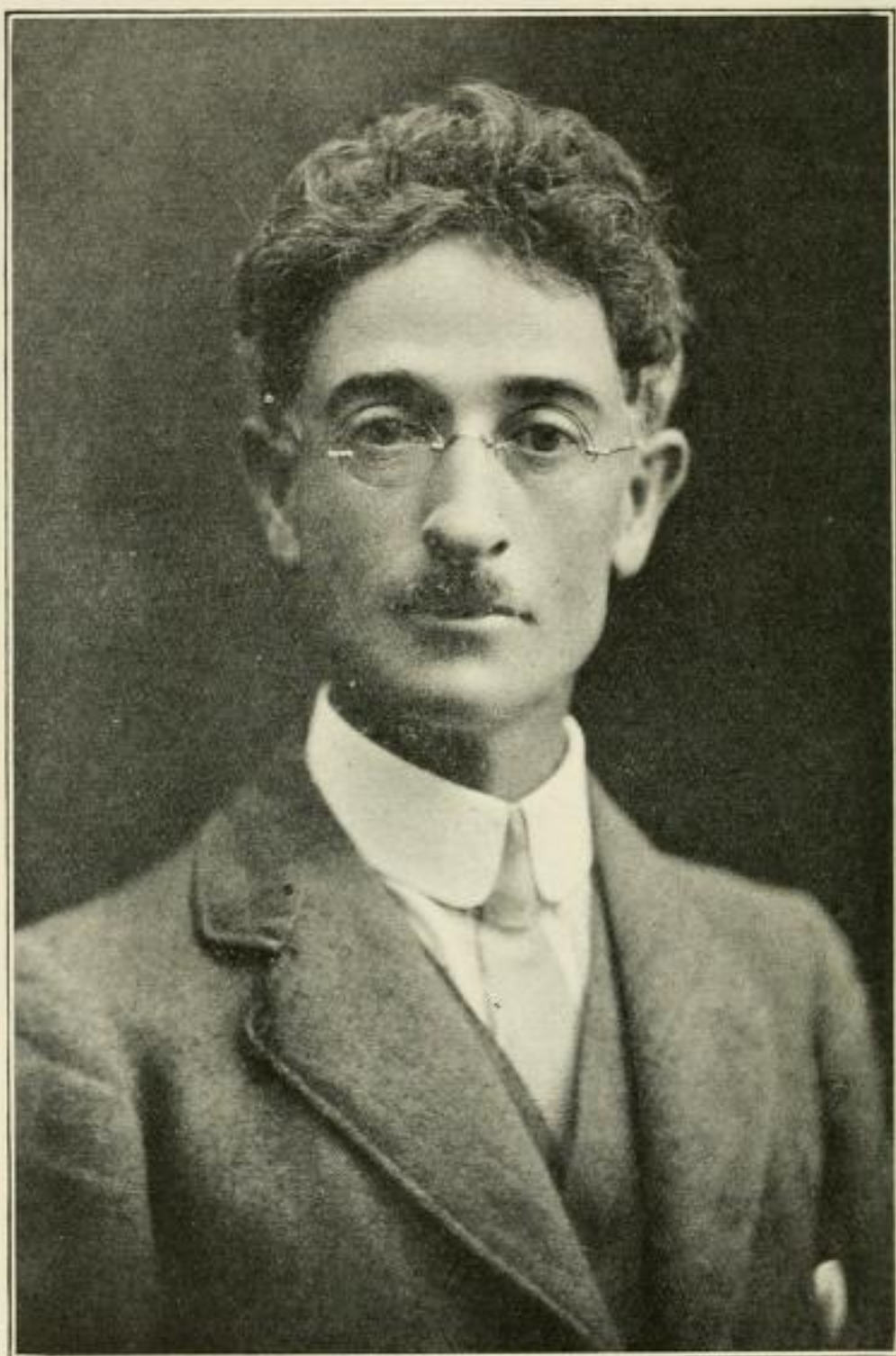
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C. 4

FOURTH AVENUE AND 30TH STREET, NEW YORK

BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS

1920

All Rights Reserved



THE AUTHOR

(1922)

THE WHITE OR SQUARE-LIPPED RHINOCEROS

(*Rhinoceros simus*)

Burchell's Rhinoceros; Umkombe of Zulus; Umhofo of Matabele; Chukuru of Bechuanas; Um Girin of Sudani.

THE White Rhinoceros, or Witte Rhenoster of the Dutch hunters, was formerly common in the open grassy country in South Africa, between the Orange and Zambesi Rivers. It has never been recorded south of the Orange River. At the present time the only living specimens in South Africa number about twenty, which are strictly preserved in the Game Reserves of Zululand. It is possible one or two may still exist in the remoter parts of Southern Rhodesia. It was formerly believed that the Zambesi was the northern limit of the White Rhinoceros, but it is now known to be common in north-eastern Congo, the southern portions of the Sudan, west of the Nile, and some other parts of Equatorial Africa.

The northern race differs from the southern form in the proportions of the skull, and apparently the skin is somewhat different. It is known as *Rhinoceros simus cottoni*.

How the name of White Rhinoceros came to be

NATURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

applied to this animal is uncertain, for it is of a dark, slaty-grey colour, and certainly could not by any stretch of the imagination be called white.

Selous says that when standing in the open, with the sun shining fully upon them on a winter morning, they look white at a distance. Possibly seeing them thus, out upon the grassy veld, the Boer hunters bestowed the name of Witte Rhenoster on them—a name which is certainly inappropriate. Personally, I believe the name has arisen from the habit of the animal wallowing in whitish clay, which is so common on the bottoms of pools and water-holes. On emerging from its muddy-water bath the sun and air rapidly dries the film of clay on its hide, which at a distance shows up greyish-white.

Square-lipped Rhinoceros is a suitable name, for the upper lip of this great beast is square, and not of a proboscis-like nature as in the other species.

Before the advent of the European colonists to South Africa, the White Rhinoceros was quite common beyond the Orange River, and the writings of the early travellers and hunters teem with accounts of the slaughter of considerable numbers of these animals.

During the course of a day's trek with a wagon, it was a common occurrence to see from fifty to a hundred of them.

Between 1840 and 1850 these prehistoric-looking beasts were still abundant in suitable localities in the Limpopo and Lake Ngami regions.

THE WHITE RHINOCEROS

In former days, judging by their writings, the majority of European hunters slaughtered game animals for the sheer lust of killing. For instance, two hunters whose names are often quoted in natural history books, mention having, during one short hunting trip, killed ninety Rhinoceroses, the majority of which were of the square-lipped species. Another hunter killed sixty in a single season. Even in the remote districts where the European hunter had not penetrated, the slaughter was carried on by natives who had obtained possession of firearms.

The last living specimen in South Africa, other than those preserved in Zululand, was one which was shot in Rhodesia in the year 1895.

The White Rhinoceros is an inhabitant of the open grassy plains and wide valleys, and feeds chiefly, if not entirely, on grass. They associate in pairs or family parties; at other times they are solitary.

Although not associating in troops, they must have been quite numerous in restricted localities, for, during a day's march, it was seemingly a common occurrence to observe from twenty to fifty of these huge beasts. A day's journey in those times with a wagon and team of bullocks over the roadless veld was a very slow method of travelling, and if a score or more Rhinoceroses were encountered in a day's journey, they must have been very numerous. Harris mentions having seen as many as eighty in a single day.

These animals feed during the night, or in the

NATURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

mornings and evenings. During the heat of the day they retire to rest, and sleep under the shade of some solitary tree on the veld, or in a patch of bush. They appear to sleep very soundly, and their sense of hearing and sight are dull.

It is often possible to steal quietly up and take a photograph at close quarters as they lie like giant pigs soundly sleeping.

The Rhinoceros is usually accompanied by the Rhinoceros Bird (*Buphaga*). These birds feed upon the ticks which infest the skins of their hosts. They also render good service in warning their Rhinoceros friends of the presence of danger by their shrill cries. This animal progresses at a rapid trot, with the head carried low, and the long horn almost parallel with the ground. Although it can, at a trot, outdistance any man on foot, it is easily overtaken on horseback, hence the reason it falls so easy a prey to the hunters. When a mother Rhino is accompanied by a young calf, it always runs in front of her, and is guided in its course by the tip of her horn, which is gently pressed on the rump as occasion demands. In this way she is able to keep it in full view, and guard it at the same time from attack, at least by the larger carnivorous animals, such as the Lion.

The White Rhinoceros, when feeding, progresses along at a steady walk, cropping the grass as it goes. It drinks during the evening or at night, and is never found at any great distance from water.

THE WHITE RHINOCEROS

It has a rather remarkable habit of always depositing its excrement at the same spot, and this in time forms great accumulations. When the mass assumes an inconvenient height, the animal scatters the dry mound with its horn.

The White Rhinoceros is timid and inoffensive, although when wounded and brought to bay it will occasionally charge. An instance is on record of a hunter having his horse transfixed under him by an enraged Rhino of this species.

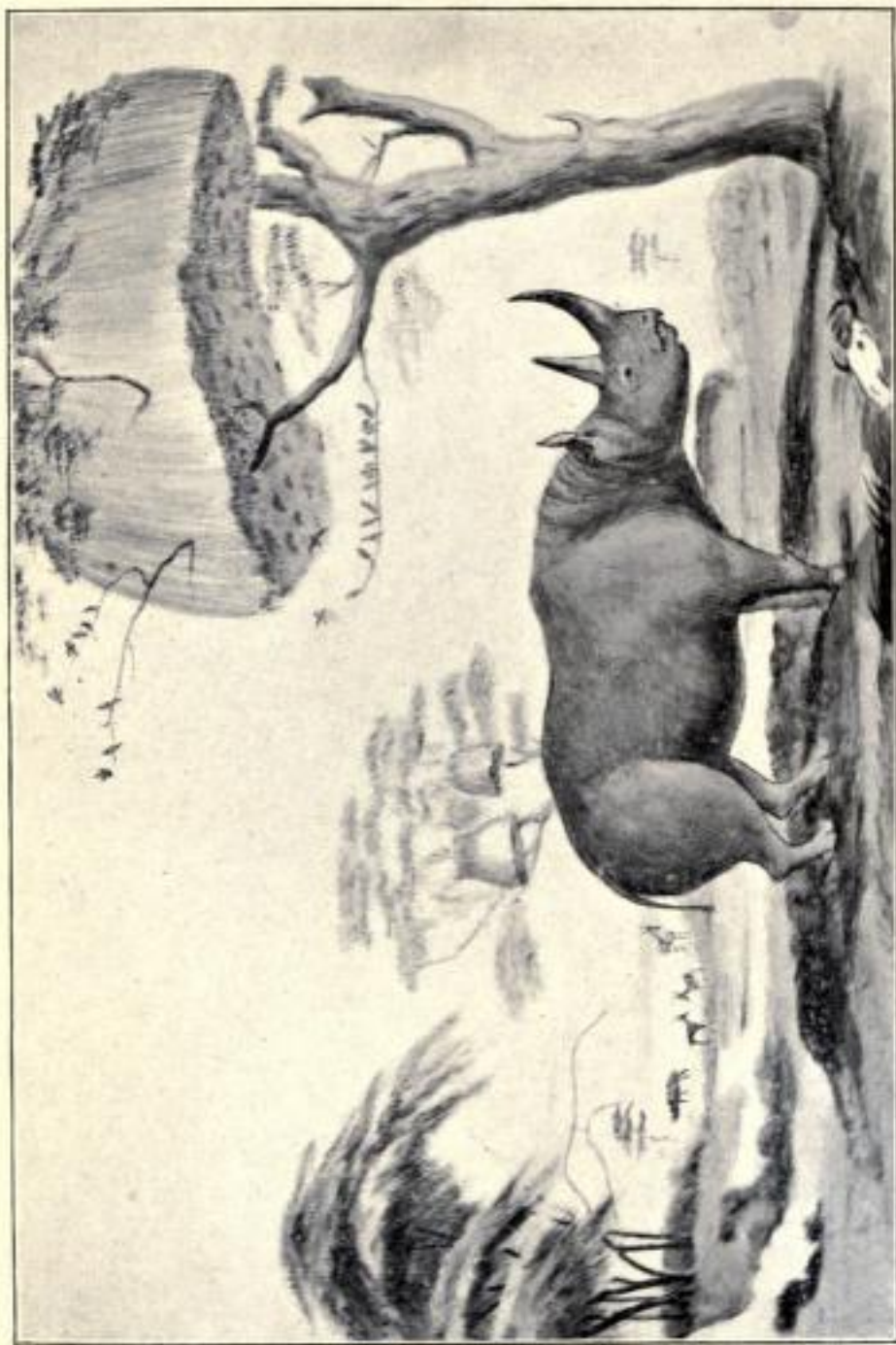
It seems a great pity that so harmless and inoffensive an animal should have been allowed to be almost exterminated in South Africa, especially so as it is one of our most interesting fauna.

The White Rhinoceroses were usually hunted down and killed for the sake of their horns and hides. The latter were cut up and converted into sjamboks and wagon whigs, and the former were sold as curios or converted into walking sticks, whip and knife handles, combs, etc.

Selous mentions that the eyesight of Rhinoceroses is so poor that on many occasions he was able to walk up to within thirty or forty yards of them on the open veld, without apparently attracting their attention.

Their sense of smell is highly acute, but that of hearing seems to be rather indifferent.

When hard pressed this animal, whose usual pace is a swift trot, breaks into a lumbering gallop. If a hind-leg is broken, it is unable to run, but with a



The Black Rhinoceros or Zwart Rhinoceros.

The structures in the trees are great masses of grass built among the branches by colonies of Social Weaver birds. The underparts are honeycombed with cavities in which the birds rear their families.

From a painting by Captain W. Cornwallis Harris, 1840.

NATURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

broken shoulder it can progress for a considerable distance at a gallop.

The flesh was greatly sought after by the trek Boers for food, as it was considered to be much superior to the flesh of any of the antelopes. The hump was the favourite part. This was cut off with the skin attached, and roasted in a hole in the ground.

Towards the end of the rainy season these Rhinoceroses usually become so fat that a layer of it, an inch thick, is often found under the skin of the upper parts, and a couple of inches in depth all over the abdomen.

One young is produced at a birth. Should the mother be shot, the calf, if very young, refuses to leave her body, and stubbornly resists all efforts to drive it away. The little orphan boldly charges if either man or dog attempts to approach the body of its mother.

The White Rhinoceros breeds very slowly. Selous and others have often observed a bull and cow with a young calf, and another of quite a large size, the latter no doubt being the former calf.

It is, with the exception of the Elephant, the largest of all land animals. An adult bull stands from 6 feet to 6 feet 9 inches at the shoulder, and measures nearly 14 feet from the nose to the root of the tail. It is hairless, with the exception of a fringe along the edges of the ears, and bristles at the end of the tail. The skin is dark slaty-grey ;

THE BLACK RHINOCEROS

head, long and heavy; upper lip square; ears more pointed and of greater length than in the prehensile-lipped species.

Head with two horns. The front or nose horn is usually more slender, longer, and less acutely curved than in the other species of Rhinoceros. Sometimes the front horn is straight, or even inclined forwards. This anterior horn grows to a length of about 4 feet 6 inches. The longest on record is $56\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

The leading differences between the two species are:

(1) *Rhinoceros simus*—larger. Straight upper lip.

(2) *Rhinoceros bicornis*—smaller. Prehensile lip.

The former grazes; the latter browses.

THE BLACK OR PREHENSILE-LIPPED RHINOCEROS

(*Rhinoceros bicornis*)

Upejani of Zulus and Matabele; Sipejana of Swazis and Matonga; Upelepi of Basutos; Borele and Keitloa of Bechuanas; Chipémbéri of Lower Zambesi natives; Muin of Masai; Wärtse of Galla; Shempola of Chila; Fava of Swahili; Gurhu of Danakil; Megi of M'Kua; Wil of Somali; Abu Gesn-Khartyl of Sudani.

THE Black Rhinoceros, or Zwart Rhenoster of the Dutch hunters, formerly inhabited Africa from the Cape to Abyssinia and Somaliland.

By retreating to the cover of the dense, thorny

NATURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

forests this Rhinoceros has, so far, escaped extinction at the hands of hunters. A few exist in the Zululand Game Reserves, and have of late years been steadily increasing in numbers. Isolated specimens still lurk in the dense, thorny bush in the north-eastern part of the Transvaal and Southern Rhodesia; and a fairly large number are known to inhabit the forests in the southern part of Portuguese East Africa.

These surviving specimens are now strictly preserved, and no doubt those from the different districts will interbreed when possible, and prevent the extinction of this animal in South Africa through inbreeding, as will probably happen with the few remaining survivors of the "White" species in Zululand.

The last Black Rhinoceros shot in the Cape Province, according to Hall, was an old bull, in the year 1853 on the Coega River, not far from Port Elizabeth. In the Orange Free State the last one recorded was shot in 1842 at Rhenoster Kop on the south side of the Vaal River in the Kroonstad District.

The Black Rhinoceros inhabits the bush-veld and scrub-covered rocky country, although in certain districts it is frequently seen feeding away out on the grass-covered, but treeless plains, upon a small plant of which it is very fond.

It feeds upon leaves, shoots, green twigs, shrubs, small plants and roots, but not grass.

THE BLACK RHINOCEROS

Its long, prehensile upper lip is admirably adapted for browsing, as the square lip of the other species is for grazing. It is a rather interesting fact that the White Rhinoceros should subsist entirely on grass, and the Black species on leaves of trees and shrubs.

Although met with in pairs or family parties, the Black Rhinoceros is generally solitary. It is somewhat more alert and suspicious than the other species, and is usually accompanied by Rhinoceros Birds.

The Black Rhinoceros rests during the heat of the day in the shade of a convenient tree, in a thorny thicket, on the shady side of a pile of rocks, amidst masses of reeds and in long grass; it sometimes lies out in the open, exposed to the fierce heat of the midday sun.

It feeds during the evening, night and early morning, but may occasionally be seen on the move on cloudy or rainy days.

Like the other species of Rhino, it is never found at any very great distance from water, to which it resorts in the summer time to drink during the evening and at dawn. After the early morning drink, this Rhino, like its bigger cousin, wallows in the mud, which subsequently cakes all over its body, and helps to smother the ticks which attach themselves to the softer or thinner portions of its skin.

In the winter season its visits to water are not so frequent or regular. When feeding, these animals are obliged to cover a great extent of ground to procure sufficient nourishment for their huge bodies.

NATURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

It is indeed surprising how they obtain a sufficiency of food from the stunted, sparse, scrubby, sun-parched bushes, which is the only vegetation in many of the localities frequented by the Rhino.

The Black Rhinoceros, in localities where it is not hunted, usually deposits its dung in shallow hollows, which it scoops out under a tree or bush. These spots are visited regularly until a great pile of excrement has collected, which the Rhino scatters at frequent intervals with its horn. Regular beaten tracks are often seen leading to these deposits, or from one to another. This cleanly habit, which is common to other species of Rhinoceroses and many other species of animals, tends strongly to keep infectious animal diseases in check.

This great beast invariably lies with its hind-quarters to the wind, and when alarmed makes off at a rapid swinging trot up-wind, with its tail twisted over its back. When closely pursued it breaks into a gallop, which can be kept up for a considerable distance, and a good horse is required if the hunter desires to successfully run it down.

The flesh of a Rhino, although coarse, is, when in good condition, considered very palatable. Like the other species, Black Rhinoceroses are quite easy to stalk if their bird sentinels do not happen to be present. The experienced hunter, before attempting to approach within easy range for a fatal shot, examines his intended quarry very carefully with a pair of good field-glasses, and should he detect any

THE BLACK RHINOCEROS

Rhinoceros Birds on it, he knows he must proceed to stalk the beast with the utmost caution. After a long and tedious stalk, the hunter is frequently detected by the birds, which at once give the alarm to their host. Should no birds be present, the hunter stalks the animal more rapidly, knowing that so long as he keeps on the proper side of the wind, and takes reasonable care not to expose himself, he will almost to a certainty get within easy shooting distance.

When disturbed, the Black Rhinoceros moves off with its head well elevated, and if a cow has a calf with her, it follows its parent instead of preceding it.

The White Rhinoceros, on the contrary, makes away with its head held low, and when a calf is present it always precedes the mother.

The Black Rhinoceros also differs from its meek and inoffensive relative in its temper, which is morose, irritable and uncertain. When wounded it frequently charges down upon its persecutor, but if he is able to get out of the way in time, it usually, but not invariably, passes straight on, and does not turn to seek him out. It has been known to charge without provocation through a team of oxen, donkeys, or a camp, meanwhile lunging right and left most viciously with its horn.

The eyesight of the Rhino is bad, otherwise it would prove a most dangerous antagonist. When wounded it will often charge blindly in the direction of the sound of the rifle.

NATURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

When warned of danger by its bird friends, the Rhino charges off more or less blindly, and as likely as not right in the face of the stalker, who usually imagines he has been observed by it, and that the charge is a deliberate one.

Major Stevenson-Hamilton relates an instance of a gentleman who obtained a permit to shoot one Rhino. The victim happened to be a cow; and its calf, infuriated at the death of the mother, charged down upon him. He secured a temporary sanctuary on top of a termite heap, and the youngster, which was as big as a donkey, ran to and fro from its dead mother to the heap, squealing with both rage and grief. Not having a permit to kill more than one Rhino, he hesitated to shoot, and it was only after both he and the party had been held up for two hours that he shot it through a non-vital, fleshy part. For some time afterwards it continued to threaten him, but eventually retreated, much to the relief of the party.

In former days, when this species of Rhino was plentiful, it was a constant source of annoyance to travellers, by suddenly jumping up and charging down upon them. The charge of so huge and clumsy an animal into the midst of a number of native carriers, and a team of donkeys or oxen, was most disconcerting and dangerous, for one stroke of the great horn usually results in death for man or beast.

The so-called horn of all Rhinoceroses is a collection of closely-packed fibres, growing from the skin;

THE BLACK RHINOCEROS

the slightly hollowed base of the horn rests upon a bony elevation which grows from the skull. When skinning the head, the horn can easily be detached from the skull.

Although one long, front or nose horn and a small back one is the rule, specimens have been obtained with both horns of equal length, and others with three and even five horns.

Formerly these varieties were divided into local races or sub-species, but they are now regarded as individual eccentricities, and in consequence only one species is recognised throughout the extensive range of this animal.

The Black Rhinoceros is dark slaty-grey, and is not noticeably darker than the so-called White species. However, it is smaller and lighter than the other; its length from nose to root of tail averages about 10 feet, and the height at the shoulder 5 feet. Its upper lip is elongated and prehensile, and the head is much shorter than that of the White Rhinoceros. The skin is hairless, thick and almost smooth, and the eye is small. An adult living female was weighed and scaled 1080 lbs.

In addition to the two species of Rhinoceroses which inhabit Africa, there are three other species in eastern countries, viz. the Great Indian Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), the Javan Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*), and the Sumatran Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sumatrensis*). The two former have a single horn each, and the latter two horns.