

A SPLENDID RACE NOW DWINDLING TOWARDS EXTINCTION: THE WHITE RHINOCEROS.

By P. C. R. SENHOUSE.

IT is probable that at no very distant date the world of natural science will be mourning the loss of yet another link with the past in the guise of the huge land mammal known to present-day sportsmen as the white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium Cottoni*). The term "white" was evidently applied to this species by the Cape Dutch of South Africa, where this animal abounded several decades ago, in order to distinguish it from its smaller cousin, the "black" rhinoceros. I should imagine that the description of "white" probably referred to this animal's appearance when seen



THE LARGEST FAMILY PARTY OF "WHITE" RHINOCEROS SEEN BY THE AUTHOR: FIVE OUT OF A GROUP OF SEVEN, WITH AN OLD BULL ON THE LEFT.

"One comes across numerous groups, such as two cows, each with a calf, three bulls, or a collection of family parties. The greatest number I have seen together is seven."

at a distance on the open South African veldt, for it has been recorded that its comparatively smooth hide glistened in the sunshine—a fact which would readily distinguish it from the smaller species with its rougher skin.

This rhinoceros is really of a dark greyish colour, described by F. C. Selous as a "neutral grey" or "uniform grey"; but, as members of the species, in particular the old bulls, are addicted to wallowing, specimens are more likely to be encountered plastered with the colour of the last mud-wallow they have indulged in, which, from my experience in Uganda, may vary from black, through several shades of brown, to a bright, rusty red. In fact, the single specimen portrayed is of a bull caked with mud of a vivid red-brown hue. (See opposite page.) Of the larger land animals there can be no such placid and inoffensive creature as the white rhinoceros; but, owing to its present restricted habitat, it is only the privileged few who are likely to come in contact with it and have an opportunity of studying its habits in its native haunts.

A full-grown bull attains a shoulder-height of nearly seven feet, and the whole animal bulks largely as compared with the black variety. There are certain characteristics which should readily distinguish the white from the black in the field, irrespective of the marked difference in size, such as the great ridge, or hump, in front of the withers, the curious habit of keeping the head almost touching the ground when at rest or on the move, and the heavily fringed ears. There can be no possibility of confusion of identity when a specimen is actually examined, as the broad, truncated muzzle, denoting the grass-feeder, and the square-based horns, unlike the rounded ones of the black species, are unmistakable.

The white rhinoceros was abundant a century ago all over South Africa north of the Orange River, except in waterless or mountainous districts, but the advance and spread of white settlement sounded the death-knell of the species, and at the present day the once multitudinous South African race is represented only in Zululand by a herd of less than three dozen animals, two of which were recently killed by an unknown person. All possible data must be secured at once. For the moment, the northern race is in a more flourishing state, and it is probable that nearly 150 animals still exist in Uganda, in the southern portion of what was once the Lado Enclave, situated on the left bank of the Albert Nile and to the north of Albert Nyanza, and now known as the West Nile district. There are plenty more in the desolate regions

of the south-west Sudan and in the north-east portion of the Belgian Congo, as well as in the vicinity of the Franco-Belgian boundary running westerly to the Cameroons, but their numbers are difficult to estimate.

There can be no sport in shooting a white rhinoceros, yet these splendid animals have been mercilessly harried by museum collectors and so-called sportsmen, even at a time when the race was believed to be on the verge of extinction. France and Belgium are endeavouring to afford adequate protection to the survivors in their African possessions, while in the British territories the race is now completely protected from the activities of the museum collector and trophy-hunter.

It is not many years ago that this species was unmolested by the natives inhabiting the Lado, but a sudden demand from India and the Far East for rhinoceros horns, which are highly valued for medicinal purposes, put a different complexion on matters, and the hunting of the white rhinoceros speedily became an extremely profitable pastime. Latterly, the remarkable prices which have been paid per pound for rhinoceros horn have been an added incentive to the poacher and smuggler. The restrictions on general game-killing, in an area peopled with tribes who suffer periodically from inordinate meat-hunger, have naturally resulted in the surreptitious destruction of considerable numbers of these great beasts for the sake of their meat.

The front horn of this species is often of great length, but those in the northern race have not been known to exceed 42 inches, though in South Africa I believe there is a record of a horn which attained a length of nearly seven feet (quoted by C. G. Schillings as 6 ft. 9 in.). Authenticated measurements of horns taken from the southern race are 62½, 56½, 54, 52½, 52, and 50½ inches, all doubtless being those of cows, the sex which usually produces the longer horns.

Owing to this animal's habit of carrying its head low, the tip of the front horn is often considerably worn through constant contact with the ground. This defect is accentuated when, as not infrequently happens, the horn curves forward instead of backwards, and I have come across several animals with horns of this nature, giving the creature a decidedly grotesque appearance. The slender portion of the horn is usually flattened on either side for some distance from the tip, and resembles a blade: this is possibly caused by rubbing the horn against termite heaps.

In the West Nile district the calves are apparently dropped just after the grass-burning season (January and February), and prior to the first rains of the year and the advent of fresh grazing. Very tiny youngsters have occasionally been seen between the months of February and April. The stomach of a white rhinoceros hangs low, and is not raised much

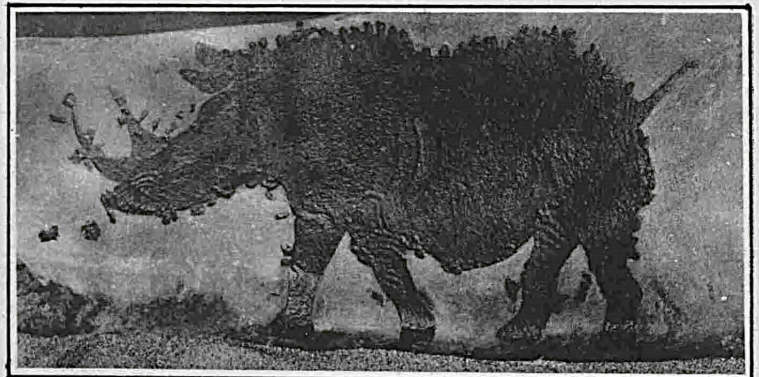
above the ground, so that a calf which can easily pass beneath its dam is exceedingly diminutive, and no bigger than a small pig. Little is known beyond conjecture of the breeding habits of this species. There seems little doubt, from the records of observers in the past and from my own observations at the present time, that the white rhinoceros is a slow breeder.

As this species feeds exclusively on grass, it is found haunting the open valleys and plains, or thinly forested country, or light bush with good pasturage between the trees and clumps. I never saw one drinking, but twice saw spoor leading from a river where the animal must have left the water in the early hours of the morning. It was noticed that the white rhinoceros scarcely ever went down to the Albert Nile, although its main habitat is situated in a narrow strip of country on the left bank of that river.

It seems to prefer the vicinity of swamps, water-holes, and the pools in the beds of watercourses, and I conclude that it is not particular in regard to the water it drinks so long as it can have a satisfactory wallow. In regard to suitability of habitat, one might sum up as follows: plenty of open grass for its feed, adequate shade from the midday heat, and mud-wallows for comfort. Water-barriers are evidently respected by the species, the occurrence of which has never been reported from the right bank of the Albert Nile, a river which is freely crossed by elephants and probably by buffaloes and water-buck. Also the white rhinoceros was unknown directly north of the Zambesi at a time when it was abundant to the south of that river. The bulls at times fight furiously, and one bearing the marks of battle is a sorry spectacle.

In general habits I would say that they are extremely bold and fearless, and the proximity of man is usually ignored. Hunting and incessant molestation makes them shyer and possibly savage. They are generally extremely sluggish, and when lying down look like enormous pigs. They are frequently attended by cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), slender-tailed crows (*Cryptorhina afer*), and more rarely by the ox-pecker or tick-bird (*Buphaga erythrorhyncha*). The flight of these birds, accompanied by harsh screamings and chattering, when an intruder approaches usually induces a reclining rhinoceros to stand up.

However, my experience has been that the great beast does not take much interest in the intrusion, and as soon as it is satisfied that there is no danger it sinks once more to the ground with a contented grunt. When fighting they squeal loudly, but otherwise are rarely heard making any noise,



A PREHISTORIC ANCESTOR OF THE "WHITE" RHINOCEROS, WITH PARASITE BIRDS ON ITS BACK, LIKE ITS DESCENDANTS ILLUSTRATED OPPOSITE: A PALÆOLITHIC ENGRAVING FROM THE TRANSVAAL, REPUTED 25,000 TO 50,000 YEARS OLD.

We reproduce above, for comparison with the living specimens shown here and on the opposite page, the wonderful prehistoric engraving of a "White" Rhinoceros illustrated in our issue of July 14.

though they often grunt when disappearing after being alarmed. The female pushes its calf in front of it, guiding the youngster with its long horn.

These creatures are quick of hearing and have acute powers of smell, but the majority that I have come across have been far too domesticated to worry, in spite of having got my wind, and seen me moving about at a distance of a few yards.

A DYING RACE OF INOFFENSIVE PACHYDERMS: "WHITE" RHINOCEROS.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY P. C. R. SENHOUSE. (SEE HIS ARTICLE ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE.)



BIRD PARASITES OF THE "WHITE" RHINOCEROS: PART OF A GROUP OF SEVEN OF THESE HUGE BUT "PLACID AND INOFFENSIVE" ANIMALS, IN THE WEST NILE DISTRICT OF UGANDA, WITH CATTLE EGRETS (*BUBULCUS IBIS*) AND SLENDER-TAILED CROWS (*CRYPTORHINA AFER*) PERCHED ON THEIR BACKS.



NAMED THE "WHITE" RHINOCEROS FROM ITS SMOOTH, GLISTENING HIDE (TO DISTINGUISH IT FROM THE SMALLER AND ROUGH-SKINNED BLACK SPECIES), BUT REALLY GREY, AND OFTEN COLOURED RED-BROWN BY WALLOWING IN MUD: AN OLD BULL WITH A CATTLE EGRET ON HIS BACK.

As explained in the article opposite, the so-called "White" Rhinoceros, which is really grey, takes on the colour of the mud in which it wallows. These great beasts are placid and inoffensive, hardly budging at the approach of man, and provide about as much sport as a domestic cow. Yet they have been mercilessly harried, both by white hunters and natives, and the species is in danger of extinction, though measures have been taken to protect it. In an additional note on the lower photograph of the two given above, Mr. Senhouse says: "The old bull was one of a group of seven. Note the huge hump in front of the withers, and the comically curled tail. This animal was of a vivid red-brown colour from

its last mud-wallow, the dried mud of which can be seen caked on his flanks. This picture was taken (at 11.30 a.m.) at a distance of less than twenty paces. After I had been hobnobbing with the animals for more than an hour and a-half, I could only get them to move off with difficulty; they never went more than two hundred yards, and often not as far as a hundred yards. Another point to notice is the somnolent cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) on the animal's back." Further particulars about these and other bird parasites are given towards the end of Mr. Senhouse's article. It is interesting to compare them with those seen in the prehistoric engraving reproduced on the opposite page.