

BIG GAME
AND
BIG LIFE

BY
J. MOREWOOD DOWSETT
"

With a Foreword by **R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM**

WITH 174 PHOTOGRAPHS, DRAWINGS AND MAP

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ERRATUM.

Page 81, line 13, "besa" should be "bessa."

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE RHINOCEROS.

THERE are two species of rhinoceros, the black and the white; the former is the common type, the latter is now difficult to find and only a few remain. The name "white," as applied to a beast which is practically the same colour as the "black," is difficult to understand. The finest specimen of a white rhino which I have seen is in the Cape Town Museum, and which was purchased by Mr. Cecil Rhodes, who presented it to the museum. I forget its height, but a white rhino bull will stand up to six feet eight or nine inches at the shoulder. The rhino is not an intelligent beast, and can be stalked up-wind if he is unaccompanied by the birds which feed upon the ticks, of which he carries a liberal supply, and in return for which the birds give warning to the rhino of the approach of the hunter, which in a measure compensates for the weak sight of the rhino. But although his sight is weak and his intellect is dull, his sense of hearing and smelling is particularly acute, and directly he is alarmed he is off at a trot, followed by a gallop—according to circumstances—and as he can go through any rough country at a good pace it taxes a horse's speed under such circumstances. Like other beasts they will get away if possible, but will not hesitate to charge, which they will do more than once, emitting loud grunts or snorts as they do so. I have known of some extraordinary escapes from an oncoming rhino. One man I know, who was without a rifle, stood like a rock without a movement, and the beast stopped, inquired, wheeled round and dashed off in another direction. This experience was related to me as a "charge,"

but although I made no comment at the time I do not consider this—and many somewhat similar experiences—were really charges, but the customary habits of this stupid beast when alarmed. The brain shot will bring a rhino down quickly, providing you can reach it according to the position of a beast if he is standing still, but with the constant shifting of the head you may strike the horn and go wide of the brain. Again, they are constantly flicking their ears on account of the troublesome flies which torment both elephant and rhino. If you shoot through the heart or lungs, either shot will prove fatal; or you have the throat (rather near the chest), the neck or shoulder shot, but with the latter you will find he rarely drops on the spot. When they are shot they spin round and round, which is common to both species, and then rush off in any direction. When they are racing towards you and snorting violently as if annihilation is certain and sudden, they will sometimes when within ten or twenty yards of you turn off and run from you.

The natives fear a rhino more than other animals, as they have no effective weapons with which to pierce this pachyderm, whose armour-plating renders him immune from the attacks which would be effective upon other beasts, and a heavy rifle is necessary. When a rhino is well under way he is a difficult beast to stop even with a heavy rifle, but you *may* turn him. They can travel great distances after being rather badly wounded. The black rhino carries his head high when travelling, but the white carries it low, and if you want to get an effective shoulder shot when he is in motion you should be within eighty yards of him. If you can approach to within thirty yards or so you can get the neck shot, two or three inches behind and a little below the base of the ear. In taking this shot you hope to break the vertebræ, and the reason of planting your bullet on the low side is that in failing to break the vertebræ you will cut the jugular vein, or the principal arteries of the neck. A rhino sleeps heavily, and you can sometimes pass fairly close in conversa-



Typical Rhino. country.



Caught in the open.

tion without waking him, providing he has no birds to give him warning. They feed during the night and drink early in the morning before going into their shelter during the heat of the day, and they drink again after sundown before it is dark as less likely to be attacked by hunters at the water-hole. They travel considerable distances for both food and water. The black rhino feeds exclusively on the bush, mimosa being most desired, and he uproots the cactus trees and feeds upon the branches. They rest and sleep, say, between nine and five, then move towards their drinking place, and then go to where they intend to feed, and after browsing throughout the night they again drink, and maybe have a mud bath, and then return to cover where they wish to rest and sleep during the day. But if a rhino has been far afield for his food in dry districts you may find him even drinking at mid-day. The white rhino has a square-shaped mouth and feeds principally upon grass, but the black has a prehensile lip and feeds upon a variety of growth. The feet of the white rhino are considerably larger than the black, and he is not so active as his congener and is also more fond of company, as they are, or were, found in parties up to half a dozen. The shortness of the legs makes a chest shot in the grass not too easy, as is the case with the buffalo. If you find a rhino in open country with little cover, and if accompanied by birds, you should lie still and wait until he lies down before you attempt to creep up to him.

The rhino generally comes out of his cover over the same ground he entered it. He lies down to sleep, generally on his belly with his legs tucked up under him and his head on the ground, and if he hears any sound of which he is suspicious he will prick up his ears and sit up like a dog and listen. Sometimes they appear to hear a slight noise, while at other times they sleep so soundly that you could approach quite closely. When they are alarmed they generally travel up-wind so that they can use their most highly developed senses, hearing and smelling, which is one of the most sensible acts to

record of this rather stupid animal. It is not easy to photograph a rhino unless you have other hunters with you, because you cannot get very close without danger, when your hands are wanted for other purposes, and furthermore, the grass and bush make a photo useless, although you see the animal quite plainly yourself when using your camera. Sometimes when disturbed they come out of their cover and look round, and at other times will trot up and down not knowing which way to go. The flesh of the rhino is good eating, especially the tongue when well boiled; the tail makes nice soup; and lions will finish anything that is left behind. Sometimes by shouting at them you can scare them away, if they happen to be cows with calves and you do not want to shoot them. They look rather comical as they go off tossing their heads and twisting their tails into knots. When they fight between themselves they fight very viciously and do considerable damage, although not fatally so. They hang their heads low so that their opponent cannot pierce the throat, which it would be possible for a rhino horn to do. With their heads lowered they roar at each other and charge—which charge is met by the opponent backing away from it, and after a time they come to close quarters and thrust their horns viciously into each other, and when apparently wanting to get their breath they draw back and again face each other, and after a lapse of time will again violently attack. Such opportunities are good, for the hunter can creep up while they are so engaged. Both sexes of rhino carry horns, the cows' horns being thinner and longer than the bulls', and some have been found with three horns. He is of an inquisitive, irritable and vindictive temperament, and his intelligence is dull, but not so dull that he will not actually hunt out a man who has wounded him and kill him unless the hunter is able to use his superior skill in bringing him down before he gets through to him. You can follow a wounded rhino for miles, but he may run till death claims him, and this may be many miles from where you shot him.



Delighted Totos.



"His last charge."

If you disturb a rhino and he goes off, he does not generally go very far in the day-time before stopping, and if satisfied that there is no danger will settle down again, but if alarmed at night may travel twenty miles or more. They are not fond of water but like rolling in the dust or mud. Most writers say he is a very dangerous animal to hunt, but I am not of that opinion. The white rhino is sluggish and easier to kill, and before they were hunted they were really harmless beasts, and their flesh is acknowledged as exceptionally good. They are not very prolific in progeny, and this, together with the quality of the meat, the ease with which they could be killed, and the number of hunters seeking a trophy, accounts for their scarcity to-day. The calf is difficult to separate from its mother; be the latter in life or in death it is all the same to the calf, until the carcass of the mother is no longer in evidence. The calf would charge viciously if anyone approached him; for he finds it hard to part with a mother who had tended and guarded him from danger, using her horns to steer him clear of pitfalls or other dangers, or to accelerate his speed when necessary. It is also hard for the hunter to watch such separations, but when it is the death of one or the other the hunter has to take the life of the mother. Natives use the hide for making shields, they also make nice table tops or can be used for a variety of purposes. The horns vary very much in length and shape. Sometimes the front horn is the longest of the two, sometimes the second horn—they can be cut off with a knife as they are not socketed into bone, but only rest upon the bone of the skull and have a shallow cavity at the base. The rhino's temperament is varied and you never know what he is going to do, and when you have hunted a certain number you will think you are quite sure of what to expect in future. This delusion is soon dispelled when the very next experience entirely upsets your views as to the action of the beasts before your eyes. Rhinos have charged trains, but came to the conclusion that it was bad business for them; they also charge safari, scattering

the porters in all directions, and they will charge a mounted hunter, but horses lose no time in getting under way without the use of the spur when these ungainly beasts rush towards them. When the rhino finds the horse's pace superior to his own, if in the open, he will give up the chase and return to cover.

But this is not always the case, as they have sometimes continued their charge persistently until out-witted by the hunter, assisted by the speed of his horse. He often appears to lose his head when alarmed, and does not as a rule wait to inquire where his enemy is, but bolts off at a great pace, which may happen to be in your direction—although his intention is not to charge but to get away—but these actions are described by some hunters as "charges." He would be easy to stalk were it not for the sentinel birds which immediately give warning, and should the rhino be asleep they will rise above him and emit a sufficiently shrill note to wake him—when he loses no time in getting into action. When shot he will go through anything and everything in retreat, and nothing will stop him as he goes forward with all his strength as a blind mad bull rushing to his death. You will find him both in cover and out in the open, and in the latter case generally under the shade of some tree or bushes, either lying down or standing with his tail to the wind so that his ears and eyes are towards the stalker, and this is another of the most sensible things he does. They swing their heads right and left, sniffing the air all the while to locate you—their head and tail cocked, they are ready for action; they are as agile as a cat in their movements at times, whereas at other times they are sluggish, and again sometimes will stand by a tree in which natives have taken refuge, showing thereby that they have some reasoning power. When they go to the water they fear no other animal, and some other species of game make way for them. They will fight among themselves for a water-hole, and roar at each other as they push their way towards the coveted pool—the leading bull being

in no hurry to give place to others after having taken his fill, although those behind may be pleading for a drink, which they eventually get. Solid bullets are wanted for rhino. Sometimes after killing one you find spear marks upon him, and you then know the reason of the bad temper he displayed as natives had tried to spear him and this had infuriated him directly he smelt or saw a human being. The sentinel birds which warn the rhino—or buffalo or other game—utter their screeching notes to warn them of the approach of their common enemy, man, and when the rhino receives this warning he bolts off in any direction without investigating from which direction the danger is approaching him. The black rhino is faster and more difficult to follow on horseback, as immediately he is approached for a shot he turns off with his rump towards you; this is repeated after you have ridden abreast of him again, and so your opportunity of using your weapon is again lost. They will often try and get away from you when wounded, and as their sight is so bad they will charge what is most clear to their vision. The bone surrounding the brain is considerable, but the brain area is so small that unless you are near it is a difficult shot to make. If you strike the vertebræ about half way down the neck it will prove effective, but if you can plant your bullet through the lump it is a better shot. If shot at the back or behind the shoulder it will badly shake a rhino if it does not fell him. He may run for a time, but will soon lose breath and come to a standstill; but will be able still to offer a stout resistance although bleeding from his nostrils as well as his wound. Rhinos do not travel the great distances an elephant does, but they keep more to a certain area which contains food and water, and they like a dry climate; I did not find one in Uganda.

Sometimes they will stare vacantly at you as if quite bewildered as to what to do. They are not gregarious, but prefer solitude, and are either found alone or with a cow, or cow and calf.