

THE WHITE OR SQUARE-MOUTHED RHINOCEROS

RHINOCEROS SIMUS

THE white or square-mouthed rhinoceros was, within my own experience, an exceedingly common animal less than forty years ago in many parts of South Africa to the south of the Cunene and Zambesi rivers, but already at that date the species had been exterminated throughout all the south-western portions of its original range. I believe there is no authentic record of the occurrence of the white rhinoceros to the south of the Orange River, but in the early years of last century it was met with by Burchell and other travellers in Southern Bechuanaland not far to the north of that river. The emigrant Boers first encountered the white rhinoceros just north of the Vaal River on the open grassy downs, where the towns of Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom now stand, and I have had the actual spots pointed out to me by old Boer "voortrekkers" where they averred they had seen or shot individuals of this species, and I have no doubt that it was the circumstance that the first square-mouthed rhinoceroses seen by the Boer pioneers must undoubtedly have looked very white when seen standing sunning themselves in the early morning on these open grass plains, which gained for them the name of "white" rhinoceroses in contradistinction to the prehensile-lipped species which had been previously met with, and which, being a bush feeder, had always been seen amongst trees and bush, where it looked perhaps darker than it really was, and had already been named the "black" rhinoceros. As a matter of fact, both species of African rhinoceroses—the square-mouthed and the prehensile-lipped—are of very much the same colour—a uniform dark grey. In 1836 Cornwallis Harris and Sir Andrew Smith found the white rhinoceros extraordinarily plentiful in the north-western districts of what is now the Transvaal State, and at that time it was doubtless almost equally plentiful from Zululand in the south-east to the Cunene River in the north-west, wherever the country was suitable to its existence. In those days these huge pachyderms were practically without enemies, for, with the exception of the small number which fell into native pitfalls, very few could have been killed, and before the advent of the European hunter with his death-dealing fire-arms, the species must have increased almost to the limit of its food supply. Within fifty years, however, of the

F.C. Selous, B.G. Millar & A. Chapman
The big game of Africa & Europe 1914

Photos by J

WHITE RHINOCEROS.

From Bahr-el-Ghazal, showing long extension at back of skull.
In the Collection of Sir Edmund G. Loder, Bt.

WHITE RHINOCEROS.

From Sebakwe River, Matabeleland.

Shot by Mr F. G. Schous.

PLATE II.

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time when Cornwallis Harris had met with the white rhinoceros in almost incredible numbers, in what is now the Magaliesberg district of the Transvaal, thousands upon thousands of these huge creatures were killed by white hunters, and natives armed with the white man's weapons, and the species had become practically extinct. A few still lingered, possibly a few may still linger, in the neighbourhood of the Angwa River in Northern Mashonaland, and a small number also survived in Zululand. These latter have been carefully preserved of late years, and in 1909 were supposed to number about twelve, including two or three calves. Shortly before that date, however, five of these most rare and interesting animals had met with their death by misadventure in the Zululand reserve. One was killed by a solitary old bull elephant—the only elephant still existing in Zululand. Another fell over a cliff and was killed; whilst a third died of some unknown disease, and two others, which had wandered out of the reserve into an inhabited part of the country, were killed by the natives.

Up to a very recent date it was always supposed that the range of the white rhinoceros was entirely confined to the southern portion of the African continent, and that with the final extinction of the small number of these animals still surviving in Southern Rhodesia and Zululand, the species would vanish from the face of the earth. A few years ago, however, Major (now Colonel) A. St Hill Gibbons shot and preserved a square-mouthed grass-eating rhinoceros in the neighbourhood of Lado, on the west bank of the Upper Nile and about five degrees north of the equator. Since then it has been found that these animals exist in considerable numbers all along the western bank of the Nile, from Lake Albert to Shambé in the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province and probably further north still. Although the most southerly limit of the range of the northern white rhinoceros is separated by some 2,000 miles from the nearest point where the southern race of the same species has ever been known to exist, whatever differences there may be between the two forms appear to be very slight and of little importance. However, in point of size, the white rhinoceroses found along the west bank of the Upper Nile certainly seem to be smaller than their relatives of South Africa. Mr Roosevelt found by actual measurement that the largest black rhinoceros he shot in the Sotik district of British East Africa actually stood higher at the shoulder than some of the adult white rhinoceroses he shot in the Lado Enclave. I imagine therefore that adult male white rhinoceroses on the Upper Nile do not as a rule stand higher than 5 ft. 8 in. at the shoulder. This is ten inches to

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a foot less than the standing height often attributed to white rhinoceroses in South Africa. Having myself measured only one white rhinoceros in South Africa, I have in some of my writings acquiesced in Harris's statement that these animals stood 6 ft. 6 in.; but as the only animal I actually measured—a very large male—only reached a height of six feet at the shoulder, I have always privately doubted the accuracy of the very much greater measurements which have been recorded. From information given me by Mr. Roosevelt I have, however, no doubt that in South Africa the white rhinoceros was, on the average, a bigger animal, carrying finer horns, than the northern representatives of the stock from which all the white rhinoceroses in Africa were originally descended. The better feeding and cooler climate that the white rhinoceroses which had ranged down to South Africa undoubtedly enjoyed, are quite sufficient, I imagine, to account for this difference in bodily size, and in the development of the horns. One very remarkable point about the white rhinoceros in South Africa—a point which I think was first recorded by Gordon Cumming—was the way in which when moving a small calf always preceded its mother, which appeared to guide it by pressing with the point of its horn on the little creature's rump. On several occasions I have galloped after a cow white rhinoceros with a small calf, and have been astonished at the precision with which on any sudden change of pace, from a trot to a gallop or vice versa, the relative positions of the two animals were always exactly maintained. During the rainy season in South Africa white rhinoceroses became excessively fat, and often retained their good condition till far on in the dry season, and their meat was, I think, held in higher estimation than that of any other animal in the country. It was strong dark red meat like beef, but with a peculiar flavour of its own. White rhinoceros hump was considered a great delicacy by old South African hunters. This hump was situated not on the shoulders, but on the back of the neck, in front of the shoulders, and was always cooked in its skin in a hole in the ground. Although a few accidents have occurred in the course of the extermination of the white rhinoceros in South Africa, they have been very few and far between, and I have never heard of a human being having been killed by one of these animals. Speaking generally, they were most inoffensive creatures, and there was no sport or excitement in shooting them. Of all the very considerable number I encountered I am glad to say I killed very few, and these only when I required food for myself and my native followers. As all the white

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rhinoceroses still surviving to-day, both in Southern and Central Africa, are in British territory—unless, indeed, there are a few in the French Congo—it is to be hoped that they will be afforded a measure of protection which will save them for a long time to come from final extinction.

In South Africa white rhinoceroses were accustomed to feed during the night and in the early morning and late evening, and lay asleep in the shade of trees or bushes during the heat of the day, looking for all the world like gigantic pigs. In that part of Africa I certainly thought that these animals were accustomed to drink regularly every evening, but those inhabiting Central Africa may be capable of going without water for a longer period, as when I was recently in the Bahr-el-Ghazal province, Captain Collum, with whom I was travelling, shot one of these animals near the well of Gemaiza, eighteen miles from Shambé, the nearest point on the Nile, as far as we could discover, where it could have got water. The white rhinoceros is a pure grass feeder, and where undisturbed was accustomed to deposit its dung day after day in the same place. Though very keen-scented and fairly quick of hearing, the eyesight of these animals always seemed to me to be extraordinarily dull. They were often warned of danger by the rhinoceros birds—*Buphaga erythorhynca*—which were accustomed to run all over their heads and bodies in search of ticks, and they would at once stand up and very soon run off when these birds showed any excitement, as they always did at the approach of human beings. Their pace was a long ground-covering trot, which soon left all pursuit from a man on foot far behind; but if chased on horseback, they could gallop at great speed for a considerable distance. In my experience, whether walking, trotting or galloping, these huge animals always held their great square noses close to the ground. When mortally wounded, they would often stand and beat their noses on the ground many times before falling down. This was indeed a piteous spectacle even to the eyes of a hungry hunter. White rhinoceroses, though they will quickly succumb to a shot through the heart or through both lungs, will travel very long distances before halting or lying down after having received anything but an absolutely mortal wound. They may be killed undoubtedly with small-bore rifles, but it would be a most unsportsmanlike proceeding on the part of anyone to risk wounding one of these rare and wonderful animals, and either a heavy cordite rifle ought to be used to secure a specimen or they should be left alone.

THE BLACK OR PREHENSILE-LIPPED RHINOCEROS

RHINOCEROS BICORNIS

THE black or prehensile-lipped rhinoceros was once an inhabitant of almost every part of Africa, south of Egypt, and the desert of Sahara, with the exception of the great equatorial forests to the westward of the Ruwenzori range of mountains and the open grass plains lying between the Orange and Limpopo rivers. It was first met with by the early Dutch settlers in the immediate vicinity of Cape Town, but was probably nowhere very numerous to the south of Zululand and the northern districts of the Transvaal. In 1836, when Cornwallis Harris and Sir Andrew Smith penetrated to the valley of the Upper Limpopo, they found black rhinoceroses extraordinarily plentiful. With the spread of European settlement, however, and the acquisition of fire-arms by the native tribes these animals grew ever scarcer and scarcer, and over vast areas of country to the south of the Zambesi they have long ceased to exist, and to-day there can only be a very few localities in this part of Africa where any still survive. To the north and north-east of Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia there may possibly still be a few in out-of-the-way places, such as the neighbourhood of the Lower Umsengaisi River; but, speaking generally, the black rhinoceros is either extinct or on the very verge of extinction almost everywhere in Africa to the south of the Zambesi. To the north of that river this species is widely distributed, but is nowhere found in any great abundance to the southward of the territories lying round the base of Mount Kilimanjaro. From that point, however, throughout British East Africa, right up to the Abyssinian frontier, these animals are still to be found in very large numbers. Indeed, in certain districts they are probably as plentiful to-day as they ever were in Harris's time in the Northern Transvaal and the valley of the Limpopo. In Northern Nigeria the black rhinoceros does not seem to exist, except in the neighbourhood of Lake Chad and the valley of the Shari River. In South Africa this species was always a bush-loving animal, and did not often wander far into open plains, but in East Africa it is commonly met with in bare open country, far away from any trees or bush. In such localities, however, it will be found that the rhinoceroses feed on tiny little thorn bushes, which they

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have cropped to such an extent that they are altogether hidden by the grass, or on the fleshy leaves of a species of plant which grows amongst the grass. Although the point has not been quite satisfactorily cleared up, it is doubtful whether in these localities the black rhinoceros ever eats grass except by accident, and in South Africa these animals certainly never used to eat grass at all.

Speaking generally, it may be said that the black rhinoceros is never found at a distance of more than a few miles away from water, as, generally speaking, it requires to drink regularly every day; but it has been reported that in certain parts of Somaliland it is able to subsist throughout the dry season on a species of aloe, the acrid juice of which affords it a sufficiency of liquid to enable it to live. Such a case is, however, certainly very exceptional, as these ponderous animals usually drink at least once every twenty-four hours, and in hot weather both in the evening and early morning.

In the black rhinoceros the sense of smell is very acute, and these animals are also quick of hearing; but their eyesight is not at all good. They certainly cannot make out the details of a stationary object, even when quite close to it, but I am inclined to think that they can see anything moving at some distance away from them. In South Africa I always found black rhinoceroses very inquisitive animals. When hunting elephants in the country between Matabeleland and the Zambesi, in the early 'seventies of the last century, I often passed with my native attendants close to where one of these animals was lying asleep. On hearing us, it would at once get up, and, if it had not got our wind, would come trotting towards us, often snorting loudly. I was never, however, charged by one of these rhinoceroses. They all of them turned and trotted off sooner or later. If, however, they got my wind, even when they were several hundred yards away, they always ran off. When hunting rhinoceroses on horseback, I have been charged and chased, both before and after I had fired at them. The inquisitive disposition and truculent appearance of the black rhinoceros has, I think, undoubtedly often been taken as an indication of ill-temper and ferocity in all members of the species, which in many cases was probably quite undeserved. At any rate, in South Africa, thousands upon thousands of black rhinoceroses have been killed, and the species has been practically exterminated in that part of Africa, at an extraordinarily small cost in human life. Indeed, with the exception of one inexperienced sportsman who was killed a few years ago in Southern Rhodesia by a black rhinoceros which he had wounded and incautiously

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approached, I have never heard of the death of any other white man by the horns of one of these animals in that part of the continent. Amongst all the well-known English travellers and hunters of the last century in South Africa, Mr W. Cotton Oswell and C. J. Andersson are the only men who met with severe injuries in hunting these animals, and the last-named seems to have courted the accident he met with by going close up to a rhinoceros in the dark which he thought he had mortally wounded. However, although in my own experience in South Africa, I never found the character of the black rhinoceros to be as black as it had been painted, yet I am inclined to think that in some districts in East Africa a certain percentage of these animals may be expected to make themselves disagreeable. But opinions differ very much as to what that percentage of vicious and aggressive animals really is. Some sportsmen in East Africa aver that almost every rhinoceros they saw either charged them or was on the point of charging when stopped by a well-directed bullet, or would have charged if it could only have made them out. Others, again, consider that although some rhinoceroses in East Africa are really savage and dangerous animals, the majority will avoid all contact with human beings if they possibly can do so. My own experience with black rhinoceroses in East Africa has not been very large, and I cannot therefore give any opinion regarding the character of these animals in that part of the continent. My friend, Captain C. H. Stigand, however, who has had a very large experience with black rhinoceroses in East and Central Africa, and who is not only an expert hunter, but a very observant naturalist, has recently written as follows* on the much-disputed question as to the general character of the black rhinoceros:

“ My view is somewhat as follows:

“ First of all, there are the many rhino you see, but which do not perceive you either by hearing or smell. These can be practically put out of the discussion. So a man walking about in an open rhino country and having his wits about him may see many rhino and meanwhile himself be only in the slightest danger. But rhino often suddenly make up their minds to run in a certain direction, apparently for no object, and as suddenly decide to stop still or to run off somewhere else. Thus even some of these might have the appearance of coming for you or might run across the wind of a sportsman after he had taken every precaution.

* *The Game of British East Africa*, by Captain C. H. Stigand, F.R.G.S., F.Z.S.

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"Putting aside these, however, we have to deal with the rhino which have been made aware of your presence either by sound, smell, or possibly sight. These will, as a general rule, run away from you. About one out of five, however, will make as if he was coming for you. Of those which do this, the greater part will subsequently think better of it, and so, after coming towards you for a short distance, will swerve away and make off or will pass you at a distance to either flank. But about one out of five again, of these, will press straight on. Thus, out of twenty-five rhino which have got your wind or in some way perceived you, we have on an average one pressing home an attack. He may be shot coming at you, and he may be wounded. If he is wounded, it will probably alter his frame of mind according to the gravity or otherwise of the wound he has received and his individual temperament. He may also just miss you and then decide to go straight on without turning. Possibly he never really intended to hit you off.

"If rhinos were left alone and not fired at, I believe the greater number would be found to make a blind charge. That is to say, they would come straight for your wind, and if they did not actually run right up against something or some one, they would then rush straight through and off the other side, still going up-wind. If one met anything directly in his way he would toss it. The chances are, however, that he would just miss you by a few yards and go straight on. When you came into his range of vision he might also not like the look of you, and swerve so as to pass you.

"Out of these rhino who press home an attack, I take it that, say, one in ten again are really bad rhino and mean to do harm. Instead of passing by at a few yards, they will, directly you come into view, whip round on you with surprising agility, and they really mean business.

"So we get out of every two hundred and fifty rhino about one which is a really bad rhino, and which will, if he gets your wind, without any act of aggression on your part, try his best to do some damage."

This is the opinion of a very experienced hunter as to the character of the black rhinoceros in East Africa, but it is only fair to say that many sportsmen who have had considerable experience in that country believe that not a small minority, but a large majority of these animals are really savage and aggressive in disposition, and can give what seem to be very valid reasons for the opinions they hold; and it certainly will be advisable

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for young sportsmen when first making the acquaintance of these formidable-looking brutes, whose characters and tempers must always in the first instance be unknown quantities, to treat them with the caution and respect which is due to their tremendous strength and great activity, if these qualities should happen to be combined with a savage disposition. Some men of great experience in East Africa express the greatest contempt for rhinoceroses, whilst others again confess that they can never get over the nervousness they always feel in the presence of these always truculent-looking and sometimes really dangerous animals. The extraordinary diversity of opinion on the subject of the black rhinoceros in East Africa shows very clearly how impossible it is to lay down any hard and fast rules as to what the behaviour of one of these animals is likely to be under any given circumstances.

Like all other African animals, to be killed quickly, rhinoceroses must be hit in a vital spot. They can often be so closely approached against the wind that they can be killed on the spot with a shot just below the root of the ear, which will penetrate the brain, and for this brain shot a very small-bore rifle is just as good as the most powerful weapon, though for body shots it will always be advisable to use the heaviest rifle in one's battery. The heart and lungs are the vital organs to aim for; but, although a rhinoceros will quickly succumb to a shot which penetrates the large blood-vessels of both lungs, it is as well to remember that one of these animals, if only shot through one lung, or in any other part of the body other than the heart or lungs, is likely to travel many miles after having been wounded before halting or lying down. If the one foreleg or shoulder of a rhinoceros should be broken, it will gallop on three legs at quite a good pace for half a mile or so before stopping; but with a hind leg broken, or even a hind foot shattered by a bullet, it will at once come to a standstill.