

Popular Natural History

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THE RHINOCEROS.

In common with the lion and the elephant, the rhinoceros frequents the vast deserts of Asia and Africa. Its appearance is chiefly remarkable, from possessing one solid conical horn on the nose, sometimes three feet in length, and from having the skin disposed about the neck in large plats or folds. The body of this animal is little inferior in size to the elephant, but he is much shorter in the legs; his length, from the muzzle to the tail, is nearly twelve feet, and the girth about the same measurement; and, from the shortness of its legs, the belly nearly touches the ground. The pendulous upper lip of the rhinoceros assists it in a great measure to collect its food.

The Indian rhinoceros, without being ferocious, is very intractable and rude. It is subject to paroxysms of fury, which nothing can appease. It frequents moist and marshy ground, is fond of wallowing in the mire, and seldom quits the banks of rivers. It inhabits Bengal, Siam, Java, Sumatra, Ceylon, and many places of Africa. It does not seem a numerous species, and is less diffused than the elephant. The female produces but one at a time. The sense of smell in the rhinoceros is said to be exquisite, and hunters are in consequence always obliged to keep to the windward of him. They follow him unobserved, till he lies down to sleep, then steal close to him, and discharge their muskets in the lower part of his belly, where the skin is soft. The rhinoceros can run with great swiftness, and, from his strength and hard impenetrable hide, he is capable of rushing through the thickets with resistless fury; almost every obstacle is quickly overturned.

The first rhinoceros which was brought to England was in 1684. The next we have any distinct account of was imported from Bengal about the year 1743. Another was brought from

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Atchaws, in the dominions of the King of Ava, and was exhibited at Paris. He was exceedingly docile, and showed great fondness for some of his attendants. He was fed upon hay, corn, and sharp prickly plants, of which he was excessively fond.

Three of these animals have been brought to Britain within the last sixty years. In 1790, one arrived in England, about five years old, and was purchased by Mr Pidcock of Exeter Change, for seven hundred pounds. He was very mild, and allowed himself to be patted on the back by strangers. He was quite obedient to the orders of his keepers, and would move through the apartment to exhibit himself. His daily allowance of food was twenty-eight pounds weight of clover, besides an equal allowance of ship biscuit, and a great quantity of greens; and he drank five pails of water every twenty-four hours. He liked sweet wines, and was sometimes indulged with a few bottles. His voice resembled that of a calf, which he usually exerted at the sight of fruit, or any favourite food. This animal suffered much from a dislocation of the joint of one of his fore legs, which induced inflammation. He died nine months afterwards. It was remarkable with what facility incisions made in this limb healed: in these openings, to endeavour to effect a recovery, they were always found to be closed up in twenty-four hours.

The following particulars of a rhinoceros, exhibited at Exeter Change, was obtained by the late Sir Everard Home, from the person who kept him for three years, when it died; and published in the 'Philosophical Transactions' for 1822. "It was so savage," says he, "that about a month after it came, it endeavoured to kill the keeper, and nearly succeeded. It ran at him with the greatest impetuosity, but, fortunately, the horn passed between his thighs, and threw the keeper on its head; the horn came against a wooden partition, into which the animal forced it to such a depth as to be unable for a minute to withdraw it, and, during this interval, the man escaped. Its skin, though apparently so hard, is only covered with small scales, of the thickness of paper, with the appearance of tortoise shell; at the edges of these the skin itself is exceedingly sensitive, either to the bite of a fly or the lash of a whip. By this discipline, the keeper got the management of it, and the

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animal was brought to know him; but frequently, (more especially in the middle of the night,) fits of frenzy came on; and, while these lasted, nothing could control its rage, the rhinoceros running with great swiftness round the den, playing all kinds of antics, making hideous noises, knocking every thing to pieces, disturbing the whole neighbourhood, and then, all at once, becoming quiet. While the fit was on, even the keeper durst not make his approach. The animal fell upon its knee to enable the horn to be borne upon any object. It was quick in all its motions, ate voraciously all kinds of vegetables, appearing to have no selection. They fed it on branches of willow. Three years' confinement made no alteration on its habits."

The AFRICAN OR TWO-HORNED RHINOCEROS differs materially from the Indian rhinoceros in the appearance of his skin, which is devoid of the large folds and wrinkles of that species, having merely a slight plait across the shoulders, and some fainter wrinkles on the sides, being comparatively smooth, when opposed to the Indian species, having no hair on any part of it, except at the edge of the ears, and extremity of the tail. Mr Burchell ascertained that musket balls, composed of lead and tin, easily penetrated the skin of this species, though they were flattened by striking against the bones; but he is of opinion, that balls of lead alone, or, if fired with a weak charge of powder, might possibly be turned by the thickness of the hide. The flexible upper lip in this animal, like that of the former species, is of great use in collecting its food.

At first sight, this animal has much the appearance of an enormous hog, which it resembles, not merely in its general form, but also in the con taper of the head, the smallness of its eyes, and size of its ears; but, in its clumsy and rudely formed feet, it is more allied to the hippopotamus and elephant. Mr Burchell measured an African rhinoceros, which was eleven feet two inches from the point of the nose to the insertion of the tail, following the undulations, but, in a straight line, was only nine feet three inches; the tail, which was flattened vertically at its extremity, was twenty inches; and the greatest girth of the body was eight feet four inches. The organs of smell, and other senses in this species strongly resemble that of the Indian rhinoceros, and its habits are so nearly allied, that a repetition of them is unnecessary.

Some years ago, a party of Europeans, with their native attendants and elephants, met with a small herd of seven of them. These were led by a larger and more powerful animal than the rest. When this large leader charged the hunters, the first elephants, in place of using their tusks as weapons, which they are generally in the practice of doing, wheeled round, and received the blow of the rhinoceros's horn on their hind quarters; and, so powerful was the concussion, that it brought them instantly to the ground, with their riders, and as soon as they could get on their feet again, the brute was ready to repeat the attack, and was certain to produce another fall; and in this manner did the contest continue, until four of the seven were killed, when the rest made good their retreat.

THE HIPPOPOTAMUS.

THE hippopotamus is larger than the rhinoceros, with a spacious head and mouth, and a hide of two inches in thickness. It is an inhabitant of the countries bordering on the larger rivers of Africa, and generally where the banks are muddy. It spends the greater part of its time under water, feeding on water plants and roots, at the bottom of rivers. It seldom quits the water, except during the night, in quest of food; but whenever it hears the slightest noise, it betakes itself to that element, and dives instantly to the bottom; and when it ascends to the surface to breathe, the nostrils only are above the level; hence, it is very difficult to kill it.

The hippopotamus is a gregarious animal, and used to be seen in early times in Egypt. It is now seldom to be met with in that country, its ranges seeming to be confined to Southern Africa. Bureckhardt says,—“ It is very common in Dongola. It is a dreadful plague there, on account of its voracity, and the want of means in the inhabitants to destroy it. It often descends the Nile as far as Sukot. In 1812, several of them passed the Bakrel Hadjar and made their appearance at Wady Halfa and Den, an occurrence unknown to the oldest inhabitants. One was killed by an Arab with a musket ball, over his right eye. The peasants ate the flesh; and the skin and teeth were