

THREATENED QUICK EXTINCTION OF THE WHITE RHINOCEROSES

By W. T. HORNADAY

UP to yesterday, American zoologists generally, and also many elsewhere, had been resting optimistically in the belief that in North Central Africa, the great white rhinoceros is in no danger of extinction, either in the present, or in the near future. And more than this, we have believed, just as our South African colleagues have believed, that even the very small remnant herd in Zuzuland was so well protected that its end was not in sight. Naturally, we were greatly shocked and amazed by the recently published statement of Henry A. Snow that he had slaughtered *four* members of that remnant herd of 26 animals, for a "habitat group" for the small Oakland (Calif.) Museum. It transpires that Snow actually received a "permit" for the killing of three of those animals, and the logical conclusion is that the fourth was killed contrary to law.

The issue of that permit to Snow was a horrible blunder on the part of the Natal government, the like of which never should be repeated. "Permit" or no permit, it is now a crime against a vanishing species of great value to kill even one of those Southern white rhinoceroses, no matter what the purpose or excuse may be. There is a point at which even "scientific purposes" must stop; but H. A. Snow, the game-butcher, seems never to have realized it. It is a great pity that he can not be adequately punished for his crime.

We are now in receipt, from two sources, of most alarming news regarding both the northern and southern white rhinoceroses. The former were brought into world-wide notice through the collecting work of Col. Theodore and Kermit Roosevelt. Finding white rhinos really plentiful in the Lado District, on the west bank of the Nile between Khartoum and Gondokoro, they took seven specimens, and bestowed all of them in four American museums. Westward of the Lado Country, Messrs. Lang and Chapin eight years ago found plenty of white rhinos in the Belgian Congo territory, and collected specimens for the American Museum, in New York. Mr. Lang's excellent and illuminating article on that species in the *Zoological Society BULLETIN* of July, 1920, contained a map of distribution that was quite reassuring. In fact, we were led to feel that at

least the northern species was fairly secure against extermination. In 1920, Mr. Lang estimated that there might be between 2000 and 3000 northern white rhinos alive.

But the lapse of half a dozen years has changed all that. The abundance of modern high-power and long range repeating rifles in the hands of natives is now a curse to all the big game of the whole world, and now nothing killable is secure. I have now to present two pieces of evidence of a most alarming nature:

THE WHITE RHINOCEROS

To the *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the British Empire*, just off the press, Dr. Cuthbert Christy contributes an article on this species from which we must reproduce the following paragraphs:

"The case of the white rhino, as most people seem to realize, is a pretty hopeless one. He obviously belongs to another world, and his extinction in this is fairly certain in the near future. In the British Sudan, very few individuals remain. Those along the west bank of the Nile can, I should fancy, not exceed half-a-dozen pairs.

"In 1916, on the Congo side of the divide, especially in the district opposite the Meridi-Yambio section, I found the species individually was much more common than anywhere on the British side. On the morning of my arrival at Aba on the motor road, early in that year, the natives had speared two rhinos within sight of the station. The animals were both young males, and in the neighborhood I saw quite a number of rhino skulls bleaching in the sun, conspicuous objects in the recently burnt-off bush. In a Greek store at Aba, on the same occasion, I was shown a pile of at least a hundred rhino horns, worth from £1 to £3 apiece, I think the trader told me, but which he could not sell owing to the restrictions put upon their sale in, or transit through, the Sudan.

"Compared with the common rhino this species, in my experience, might almost be described as harmless, and nothing could be easier for the native, I should think, than to spear him; hence, I fear that his extinction is within sight. The only question now is, How can his existence best be prolonged? In the

British Sudan he can be and should be protected, and if his name has been allowed to again appear upon the 'Game List,' I hope every endeavor will be made to induce the Sudan Government to reverse their decision, and place it again upon the 'protected list.' Success in this direction, however, is not sufficient to have much real effect in prolonging the life of the species. It is with the Congo authorities in Brussels that action should be taken. The small region in the Congo in which the animal is commonest is almost uninhabited, and it would not be difficult for the Congo administration to enforce upon Chief Bwendi, and one or two other small chiefs of the region, a prohibition in favor of this interesting species, forbidding at the same time the sale of rhino horns throughout the Congo. The authorities of the Nbangi Shari district of French Equatorial Africa should also be asked to participate, in order to make the Congo prohibition effective."

THE SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS

This extract from a letter received on October 12th from Major J. Stevenson Hamilton, Warden of Government Game Reserves, Province of Transvaal, tells what possibly may be Part I of the last chapter of the Southern species.

"Your mention of white rhino brings me to what I have been intending to write you about for some weeks.

"We are now faced with the imminent destruction of the very last of this splendid species. I hear on the very best authority that in spite of official statements, there are today certainly not more than sixteen, and probably not more than twelve of them left in the Reserve set aside for them. Moreover, recognizing that so long as these white rhinos are in existence the Administration will refuse to throw the area open for settlement, the neighboring farmers have decided, deliberately, to completely exterminate the animals, since they all cover the land. To this end they watch their opportunity, and from time to time one or the other enters the reserve stealthily, and shoots any of the animals he can see, leaving the carcass to lie where it falls. A few months ago a young man was convicted of having shot two and was fined the ridiculous sum of £25, remarking that he had deliberately killed them, and that he and his friends intended to 'finish the lot.' There is not the smallest doubt that unless we get to work at once, and effect some-

thing in the coming year, by the next one the species will be extinct for ever.

"Last week we had a meeting, Dr. Haagner, Col. Reitz, (Minister of Lands) and others, and decided that a committee should be formed and funds raised in the hope of being able to catch as many as possible of the animals and transfer them to this Sanctuary, where they will be safe. Such a project, however, will cost anything up to £10,000, and is far beyond anything the government here can do, nor, I much fear, is public interest sufficiently keen on preservation to allow us to hope for anything material, especially in view of the present impoverished condition of the country.

"Great Britain is, I fear, also financially so embarrassed, and the people who in old days would have helped are now so poor, that we shall get little there but sympathy. America is our only hope. Do you think a call for a subscription for the purpose would meet with any response from the American public? I think even had we only £5,000 something useful might be done; but you see the capturing involves the employment of probably several thousand natives for several weeks, the building of a huge keddah and a driving 'funnel' more than 20 miles long, besides costly special vehicles, expensively paid experts, and many other items. Wages alone would run into thousands.

"But the position is really desperate. Lulled to rest by the assurance of the Natal Administration that there were 30 to 50 of the animals yet remaining, and that their reserve was not to be tampered with any more, I recently wrote you, I believe, that all was well. I only received this rude shock a few weeks ago, when Col. Reitz, who is keenly interested in Game Preservation, discovered the awful truth on his recently official tour through the locality."

After a careful survey of the situation (in South Africa) the following are my conclusions:

1. The remnant of from 12 to 16 southern white rhinoceroses are so scientifically valuable that they justify a great effort for their preservation.

2. It would be financially and otherwise impossible to carry out the great scheme of capture and transfer that Major Hamilton suggests. Even if money were available, it is highly probable that many of the animals would die during the operation.

3. The animals might possibly be saved by throwing around them a cordon of picked na-

tive game wardens, and the imposition of punitive fines and imprisonment that would make any farmer or other rhinoceros murderer afraid to look cross at any of these animals.

4. A special fund of \$5,000 should at once be raised in America, to organize a protective effort of the kind suggested and put it on its feet for two years. If done, this would give the government of the Union of South Africa time to organize permanent protective measures. It would be nothing less than a burning shame for those murderous farmer miscreants to be permitted to exterminate those grand and wonderful animals, that nature has been perhaps 10,000 years in developing, without at least one more effort for their preservation. To this end the Permanent Wild Life Protection Fund will subscribe \$1,000, and it now invites other subscriptions to make up the remaining \$4,000.

A Rare Pigeon.—No matter how many rare and beautiful species any collection of living birds may contain, there are always a few that excel in attraction to the general public. They form focal points of interest and their disappearance from the exhibition cages invariably incites so many inquiries that we are stimulated to make every effort to replace them. One of the most important of these birds is the bleeding-heart pigeon, a species which has seldom been absent from our collection. Its most conspicuous character is the wonderfully simulated blood-patch which it wears on its breast. The centre of this apparently fatal wound is formed by a dark red clot, the effect being perfected by lengthened and stiffened feathers. This patch is surrounded by blood-stains, which gradually fade to the pure white of the remaining portions of the breast. So perfect is this mimicry that kind-hearted visitors are constantly coming to us with the information that one of our birds has been badly injured and is in great danger of death from loss of blood.

That a bird so strikingly decorated could fail to take a prominent position in the folk-lore of its native land is quite impossible. As a matter of fact, there are many stories connected with it, one of the most interesting of which is given by Miss Rosie Alderson in "*My Foreign Doves and Pigeons*." Miss Alderson states that when the Philippines were visited by Christians in the 16th century, it was found that while the natives had no knowledge of Christianity, they never-

theless had the following legend: a cross having been erected, a dove settled on it and was shot by a soldier. The bird had a white breast but after this occurrence, the cruel wound was carried by the species ever after. Miss Alderson explains the existence of this legend by the supposition that Christianity had been preached long before by a ship-wrecked Friar, only this and similar tales surviving in the minds of the people.

The bleeding-heart pigeon is a hardy and long-lived bird in captivity. It has usually been fairly easy to obtain and when, in 1921, the last survivor of an aged flock was killed by accident, we had no doubt as to our ability to replace it promptly. Casual inquiry amongst the dealers, however, soon brought disillusion. No bleeding-hearts were to be had, nor were there likely to be any, since a new insular law, of which we had not heard, rigidly forbade their exportation from the Philippines.

When Ellis S. Joseph arrived, in 1922, with one of his usual caravans, his services were asked and readily given. Armed with an appeal to the Governor, Mr. Joseph swore to secure the birds. On his return to Australia, he obtained the necessary permission, and cabled a Hong Kong agent to get the birds from Luzon and forward them to Sydney. In course of time, this was safely accomplished, and on September 1, 1923, we were again able to exhibit the bleeding-heart pigeon. L. S. C.

Wood Duck Hunting Prohibited.—Wood ducks may not be hunted in Minnesota or in any other State at any season, according to the Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture, which administers the Migratory-bird Treaty Act. This is a Federal law under which the hunting, killing, or possessing of wood ducks is prohibited at all times throughout the United States and by treaty throughout Canada also. This game law, having been upheld by the United States Supreme Court, makes inoperative the amendment to the game laws of Minnesota passed at the last session of the State Legislature, providing an open season on wood ducks. Thus hunters will not be allowed to exercise the privilege accorded them by the State law, and persons found hunting, killing, or possessing wood ducks at any time will be subject to prosecution in the Federal courts.