



THE RHINOCEROS.

Of all the South African animals, not the least curious, perhaps, is the rhinoceros. He inhabits a large portion of the African coast—such localities, at least, as are suitable to his habits. Formerly, he was commonly found even in the immediate vicinity of Cape Town, but, owing to constant persecution, is now rarely met with farther to the southward (I speak of the west coast) than about the 23rd degree of latitude. In the interior, however, the tribe is still very numerous.

"On one occasion," says Captain Harris, "whilst walking from the waggon to bring the head of a koodoo that I had killed about a mile off, I encountered twenty-two rhinoceroses, and had to shoot four of them to clear the way."

The rhinoceros is, moreover, an inhabitant of Bengal, Siam, China, and other countries of Asia, as also of Java, Sumatra, and Ceylon. But the three species indigenous to this quarter of the globe would seem to be quite

different to any yet found in Africa. Almost all the Asiatic species have an exceedingly coarse hide, covered with large folds not unlike a coat of mail; whilst that of the African species is comparatively smooth. Two of the Indian Rhinoceroses have only one horn; whereas all the African ones are provided with two. The third Asiatic species, which is found in the island of Sumatra, resembles the African in having two horns, but in other respects differs considerably. Though the rhinoceros is abundant in the interior of Africa, it is described as far from numerous in Asia, and is less generally distributed than the elephant.

Four distinct species are known to exist in South Africa, two of which are of a dark colour, and two of a whitish hue, whence they are usually called the black and the white rhinoceros. One of the two species of black—the Bozele, as it is called by the Bechuanas—is the common small rhinoceros; the other (called Keitloa), is the two-horned black rhinoceros, as it is termed by naturalists. The latter differs from the Bozele in being somewhat larger, with a longer neck, in having the horns of nearly equal length, with a lesser number of wrinkles about the head, and it is of a more wild and morose disposition. The upper lip of both, more especially of the Keitloa, is pointed, overlaps the lower, and is capable of extension; it is pliable, and the animal can move it from side to side, twist it round a stick, collect its food, or seize with it anything it would carry to its mouth. Both species are extremely fierce, and, excepting the buffalo, are, perhaps, the most dangerous of all the beasts of Southern Africa.

Of the white species, we have, 1, the common white rhinoceros, called Monoohoo by the Bechuanas; and 2, the Kobaaba, or long-horned white rhinoceros.

It is with regard to their horns that the two species chiefly differ from each other; for, whilst the anterior (or foremost) horn of the Monoohoo has an average length of two or three feet, curving backwards, that of the Kobaaba not unfrequently exceeds four feet, and is slightly pointed forward. This rhinoceros is also the rarer of the two, and is only found in the more interior parts of South Africa.

The chief characteristics of the white rhinoceros are its superior size, the extraordinary length of its head (which is not far from one-

third of the whole length of the animal's body), its square nose, and the greater length of the anterior horn.

The black and the white rhinoceros, though so nearly allied to each other, differ widely in their mode of living, habits, &c. The chief subsistence of the former animal consists of the roots of certain bushes, which are ploughed up by its strong horn, and the shoots and tender boughs of the wait-a-bit thorn; whilst the white rhinoceros feeds solely on grasses. In disposition there is a marked difference between them; for whilst the black is of a very savage nature, the white is of a comparatively mild disposition, and, unless in defence of its young, or when hotly pursued, or wounded, rarely attacks a man.

The body of the rhinoceros is long and thick; its belly is large, and hangs near the ground; its legs are short, round, and very strong; and its hoofs are divided into three parts, each pointing forwards. The head, which is remarkably formed, is large; the ears are long and erect; its eyes small and sunken; the horns, which are composed of fine longitudinal threads, forming a beautiful hard and solid substance, are not affixed to the skull, but merely attached to the skin, resting, however, in some degree, on a bony protuberance above the nostrils. It is believed by many, that when the animal is at rest the horns are soft and pliable, but that when on the move they at once become hard and solid; moreover, that it can at will turn the posterior (or back) horn, the other horn meanwhile remaining firm and erect: but there can scarcely be sufficient foundation for such notions.

In size the rhinoceros—the white species, at least—is only exceeded by the elephant: a full-grown male measures, from the snout to the extremity of the tail (which is about two feet), between fourteen and sixteen feet, with a circumference of ten or twelve feet. To judge from these figures, and the general bulkiness of the body, it cannot weigh less than from four to five thousand pounds.

The general appearance of the African rhinoceros is not unlike that of an immense hog shorn of his hair, or rather bristles; for, with the exception of a tuft at the extremity of the ear and the tail, it has no hair whatever; and, as if in mockery of its giant form, its eyes are ludicrously small—so small, indeed, that at a short distance they are imperceptible. It is conjectured that the rhinoceros

noceros is among the most long-lived of beasts; indeed, it is probable that he attains the age of a hundred years.

In strength the rhinoceros is scarcely inferior to the elephant. It is on record that the rhinoceros which Emmanuel, King of Portugal, in the year 1513, sent to the Pope, destroyed, in a fit of fury, the vessel in which he was transported.

Ungainly and heavy as the rhinoceros looks, it is nevertheless so exceedingly swift of foot—at least, as regards the black species—that a horse with a rider can rarely manage to overtake it. Captain Harris, when speaking of the chase of these animals, says, “From its clumsy appearance, one would never suppose that it could dart about, as it does, like lightning.”

The rhinoceros is not a voracious feeder, but is rather fastidious in the selection of its food, in search of which it wanders far and wide. Water is indispensable to the rhinoceros; and even if his usual haunts be distant from the fountain, he seeks it at least once in the twenty-four hours, as well to quench his thirst as to wallow in the mud, with which his body is frequently encrusted, leaving to the thirsty traveller nothing but a mass of well-kneaded dough.

The rhinoceros is a very affectionate mother, and guards her offspring with the tenderest care. The young, in its turn, clings doatingly to its dam; and even for a day or two after the latter has been killed, the calf is frequently seen alongside the carcass.

The sense of hearing and smell in this animal is most acute. Even when feeding or reposing, he will listen with a deep and continued attention until the noise that has attracted his attention ceases. He winds an enemy from a very great distance; but if one be to leeward of him, it is not difficult to approach within a few paces. His sight, on the other hand, is not good. From the peculiar position of his eyes, which are deep-set in the head, and his unwieldy horns, he can only see what is immediately before him.

The black species, as before stated, are of a very sullen and morose disposition. They are, moreover, subject to sudden fits of unprovoked fury: rushing and charging with inconceivable fierceness animals, stones, bushes—in short, any object that comes in their way. Seen in his native wilds, either when browsing at his leisure, or listlessly sauntering about, a person would take the

rhinoceros to be the most stupid and inoffensive of creatures. Yet, when his ire is roused, he becomes the reverse, and is then the most agile and terrible of animals. He is not dangerous to man alone: all the beasts of the forest dread him, and none dare to attack this truly formidable animal. The lion, if they chance to meet, slinks out of his way; even the elephant, should they encounter, retreats, if possible, without hazarding an engagement.

The rhinoceros, though it cannot strictly be called a gregarious animal, and though most commonly met with singly or in pairs, would seem to be of a somewhat social disposition. Indeed, as many as a dozen have been seen pasturing and browsing together.

The animal is nocturnal in its habits. At the approach of dusk he commences his rambles, and, if not disturbed, generally visits the pool at an early hour of the evening; afterwards, he not unfrequently wanders over a great extent of country. Soon after sunrise, he seeks repose and shelter against the heat under some friendly mimosa, or the projecting ledge of a rock, where he spends the day in sleep, either stretched at full length, or in a standing position. Thus seen from a distance, he may easily be mistaken for the fragment of a rock.

The Asiatic species is frequently kept in confinement; but, though generally tractable, his morose and savage nature renders him rather dangerous. The least provocation often puts him in a tempest of passion, when he will not hesitate to destroy his best friend. In his rage he will jump about, and leap to a great height, driving his head furiously and with incredible swiftness against the partitions of his place of confinement. Three or four specimens are at the present day alive in England.

The horns of the rhinoceros, which are capable of a high polish, are a valuable article of commerce. At the Cape, this commodity fetches half as much as ordinary elephant ivory. It is extensively used for sword-handles, drinking-cups, and a variety of purposes. In Turkey, the rhinoceros horn is very much esteemed, especially such as has a reddish tint. These, when made into cups, the Turks believe to have the virtue of detecting poison, by making the liquor ferment till it runs quite out of the goblet.

The chase of the rhinoceros is variously

conducted in South Africa. One of the most approved plans is to stalk the animal, either when feeding or reposing. If the sportsman keep well under the wind, and there be the least cover, he has no difficulty in approaching the beast within easy range; when, if the ball be well directed, the prey is usually killed on the spot. With a little precaution, this kind of sport may be conducted without greatly endangering a person's safety. But by far the most convenient way of destroying this animal is to shoot him from the "skarm," as he comes to the pool to quench his thirst. "In this way," says Mr. Andersson (to whom our boys are indebted for this account), "I have myself killed several scores of rhinoceroses."

Occasionally he is also taken in pitfalls. He is not often pursued on horseback, chiefly because his speed and endurance are such that it is difficult to come up with and follow him, to say nothing of the danger attendant on such a course. Many a hunter, indeed, has thereby endangered his life.

"Once, as I was returning from an elephant chase," said Mr. Osswell to the author of "Lake Ngami," "I observed a huge white rhinoceros a short distance ahead. I was riding a most excellent hunter—the best and fleetest steed I ever possessed during my shooting excursions in Africa; but it was a rule with me never to pursue a rhinoceros on horseback, and simply because the animal is so much more easily approached and killed on foot. On this occasion, however, it seemed as if fate had interfered. Turning to my after-rider, I called out, 'That fellow has got a fine horn. I will have a shot at him.' With that, I clapped spurs to my horse, which soon brought me alongside the huge beast, and the next instant I lodged a ball in his body; but, as it turned out, not with deadly effect. On receiving the shot, the rhinoceros, to my great surprise, instead of seeking safety in flight, suddenly stopped short, then turned sharply round, and, having eyed me most curiously for a second or two, walked slowly towards me. I never dreamt of danger" (the animal, the reader should remember, was of the inoffensive white species); "nevertheless, I instinctively turned my horse's head away; but, strange to say, this creature—usually so gentle and docile that the slightest touch of the reins would be sufficient to guide it—now absolutely refused to give me his head. When

at last he did so, it was too late; for, notwithstanding that the rhinoceros had only been walking, the distance between us was so inconsiderable that by this time I clearly foresaw contact was unavoidable. Indeed, in another moment I observed the brute bend low his head; when, with a thrust upward, he struck his horn into the ribs of the horse with such force as to penetrate to the very saddle on the opposite side, where I felt the sharp point against my leg. The violence of the blow was so tremendous as to make the horse throw a complete summersault into the air, coming heavily down on his back. With regard to myself, I was, as a matter of course, violently precipitated to the ground. Whilst thus prostrated, I actually saw the horn of the infuriated beast alongside of me; but, seemingly satisfied with his revenge, he started off at a canter from the scene of action, without doing any further mischief. My after-rider having by this time come up, I rushed upon him, and, almost pulling him off the horse, leapt into the saddle; and, without a hat, and my face streaming with blood, was quickly in pursuit of the retreating beast, which I soon had the satisfaction to see stretched lifeless at my feet."

It is generally received as a fact that the hide of the rhinoceros is impenetrable to a bullet, or even to an "iron ingot." But this is just as idle a notion (as regards the African species, at least) as that entertained respecting the softness and pliability of the animal's horns; for a common leaden ball will find its way through the hide with the greatest facility. It is true, one should be near the brute; for (says the author of "Lake Ngami") though I have known a rhinoceros killed at the distance of a hundred yards, it is an exception to the rule. Indeed, beyond thirty or forty paces one cannot make sure of the shot. Under all circumstances, a double charge of powder is desirable.

However severely wounded the rhinoceros may be, he seldom bleeds externally. This is partly attributable, no doubt, to the great thickness of the hide, and its elasticity, which occasions the hole caused by the bullet nearly to close up; as also from the hide not being firmly attached to the body, but constantly moving. If the animal bleed at all, it is from the mouth and nostrils, which is a pretty sure sign that it is mortally stricken, and the chances are that it will be found dead within a short distance.