

# ANIMAL PORTRAITURE

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BEING  
FIFTY STUDIES  
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# THE INDIAN RHINOCEROS

(*Rhinoceros unicornis*)

**A**LTHOUGH formerly ranging a considerable way down the peninsula, the great Indian rhinoceros, as this species should properly be called, is more or less completely restricted to Nepal and the country east of the Tista valley, especially the plain of Assam and Kuch-Bihar. Here the mighty beast, which stands over 5½ feet in height at the shoulder, dwells in the tall grass-jungles, where it is as completely concealed as is a rabbit in a meadow ready for mowing. The rhinoceroses, in fact, make for themselves in this giant grass, tunnels, or "runs," in which they move from place to place perfectly secure from observation, and likewise protected from the direct rays of the sun; and it appears that, except to drink, they seldom leave this wonderful covert. To attempt to shoot such enormous beasts on foot in jungle of this description, where escape from the beaten track is well-nigh impossible, would be little short of madness; and the Indian rhinoceros is therefore always hunted on elephants.

In old books on Indian sports the rhinoceros is depicted as charging the elephants, and attempting to spear them with its horn, if not in the act of goring their bodies. This is, however, erroneous, as none of the three named species of Asiatic rhinoceros use their horns in this manner, but employ for offence their sharp, triangular lower tusks, with which they make lateral thrusts and lunges after the manner of a wild boar. African rhinoceroses, on the other hand, have no tusks, and consequently have to rely on their horns—always two in number—for both attack and defence.

It must not, however, be assumed from this that the absence of tusks is compensated by the development of two horns, for there is one Asiatic species, commonly known as the Sumatran rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sumatrensis*), which has two horns combined with lower tusks; this species thus being the most formidably armed member of the whole group. This so-called Sumatran rhinoceros also occurs in some of the eastern districts of India, as does likewise the third Asiatic species, commonly known as the Javan rhinoceros (*R. sondaicus*), which resembles the great Indian species in carrying but one horn.

A satisfactory and easily recognised distinction between the rhinoceroses of south-eastern Asia and the two African species is afforded by the circumstance that while in the former the hide is thrown into a number of deep folds dividing it into separate areas, in the latter these folds are more or less lacking, so that the skin is comparatively smooth like that of a pig. The shape of the skin-folds serves to distinguish the species forming the subject of the plate from the other one-horned







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Asiatic species. Among the distinctive features of the present animal may be noted the coif-like expansions of skin at the sides of the head, the large tubercles, recalling the heads of the rivets in an iron boiler, on the shoulders and hind-quarters, and the somewhat triangular shape of the great shield on each shoulder, the fold forming the upper border of which does not extend across the back.

By the older naturalists, rhinoceroses, elephants, and hippopotamuses were grouped together under the title of pachyderms,—a name which has completely dropped out of use in natural history. And very rightly, since the three groups of animals brigaded together under that designation have but little in common with one another. Elephants, for instance, form a group by themselves; hippopotamuses are cousins of the pigs, and thus related to deer and cattle; while rhinoceroses, together with tapirs and horses, form a third group by themselves.

There may seem to the man in the street little in common between a great lumbering brute like a rhinoceros and a Derby winner; but the difference is due solely to the one being a modern specialised type cut out solely for speed, and the other an old-fashioned creature suited for wallowing in marshes or wandering on open plains where it is sufficiently protected by its size and ferocity. Take away the two side-toes from each foot of a rhinoceros, lengthen its limbs, lighten its head and body, modify to a comparatively slight degree its cheek-teeth, and replace its bare "pachydermatous" covering by a thinner, hairy skin, and we should have a horse. Fortunate it is for the naturalist that such primitive creatures as rhinoceroses and tapirs have survived to the present day to afford us an adequate idea of what their numerous extinct relatives looked like in life.

Rhinoceroses are purely herbivorous animals, but whereas the great Indian species subsists chiefly on bamboo-leaves and other grasses, its two Asiatic relatives depend more upon boughs and roots; this difference being correlated with the structure of their teeth. Producing but one offspring at a time, and that at long intervals, these animals apparently live to a very great age, although by no means so long as elephants. The idea that the hide of the Indian species is bullet proof is altogether erroneous.