



The Avocet. Photo: V. Van Someren

such as the seeds of sedges.

Although the Stilt's long legs are attractive to look at they cause complications when the bird sits down! This is accomplished by carefully folding the legs double, at the same time attempting to keep on an even keel. At the very last second the Stilt pitches gently forward on to the breast, and then indulges in much shuffling and shaking of feathers. Like the Avocet, the Stilt can often be seen resting by standing on one leg with its bill tucked snugly into its "shoulder" feathers.

Our bird has a wide distribution and is found in most countries of Europe, the Middle

East, Africa and Asia, including Burma and China. Besides being a breeding bird in East Africa it is believed that we receive many migrants from the northern winter. As the residents are identical in appearance to the visitors one can never be certain if a bird we are looking at between October and March is a visitor or not!

When you are next at Lake Nakuru do not forget to look for this lovely bird, quite as graceful and interesting to look at as the more famous Flamingo.

D.K.B.

RHINOCEROS

THE Black or Hook-lipped Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis*, Linn. is so unlike a horse superficially that one would not expect him to be related, but the Rhinoceros is a member of the Order *Perissodactyla* which means it is an "Odd-toed Hoofed Mammal" and is therefore closely related to the zebra and the horse. However, unlike the latter which have one toe, it has three toes on each foot.

The living representatives of the Family *Rhinocerotidae* are now confined to the continents of Africa and Asia and include five species, differing greatly in size and external features. Of all these five species the African Black Rhino is the most common. The other African species, the White or Square-lipped

Rhinoceros is now rare and, like the Asian species, its numbers are approaching the level where extinction is possible in the near future. Both African Rhinos differ from the Asian by having smooth skins and no front teeth.

The Black or Hook-lipped Rhinoceros is widely distributed in Africa and ranges from the Sudan to South Africa, in suitable localities. The favourite habitat is dry thorn bush but it is also found in the forests on mountainsides. In the days of the early explorers rhinos could be seen out on the open plains, but increasing populations have driven them into the arid uninhabited thorn bush.

These large and cumbersome looking animals may be over 10 feet in length, over five feet high at the shoulder and weigh over two tons. There is no hair on the tough skin except for a tuft on the tail and a fringe on the ears.

The horns, two in number, situated in line between nose and eyes, are not composed of horn but compressed hairs, attached to slight prominences on the skull. The horns of a female are usually longer and more slender than those of a male. The feet have three toes.

Thorns provide the bulk of the food, for the rhino is a browser, feeding on leaves and twigs, mostly at night. The pointed, prehensile upper lip is used for stripping the branches. During the day the rhino rests, usually standing but occasionally lying down, in the shade of a tree.

Two signs of the presence of rhino are the bare dusty hollows used for rolling, and the deposits of dung kicked around by the hind feet. The rhino loves to wallow in mud with the result that it is usually the same colour as the ground in that locality, varying from red or dark grey to almost white.

Like most of the game animals, the rhino has large numbers of parasites, both internal and external. Ticks infest its hide and mud-wallowing is one way of combating them. In some areas tick-birds are constant companions of the rhino and provide a foolproof alarm system when danger threatens the dozing animal.

The senses of smell and hearing are very acute but sight is poor and a stationary object is not easily seen. This is one reason for the black rhino's bad reputation, for the animal

will blunder off if suddenly disturbed, sometimes straight towards the danger spot as though it is charging. Nevertheless its moods are unpredictable and it can be vindictive especially if it has a young calf, when it will deliberately charge. This unfortunate trait has been the main cause of the rhino's reduction in numbers, for vast numbers have been mercilessly wiped out in areas opened up to expanding African populations resulting from the advent of the Europeans.

Rhino horn is greatly prized

Added to this is the value attached to the "horn" which is greatly prized as a medicine in the Far East. Poachers, encouraged by ruthless dealers, find the great beasts an easy target for their poisoned arrows and take only the horns leaving the great carcass to rot in the bush. Apart from man, the rhino has few enemies. Lions occasionally take young and have been known to attack and kill an adult, but this is rare.

The Black Rhino is normally a quiet animal but will sometimes make a grunting noise, snort like a steam engine when charging, and squeal.

The single young is born after a gestation period of approximately 18 months and the calf follows the mother at all times until old enough to fend for itself.

J.D.L.F.

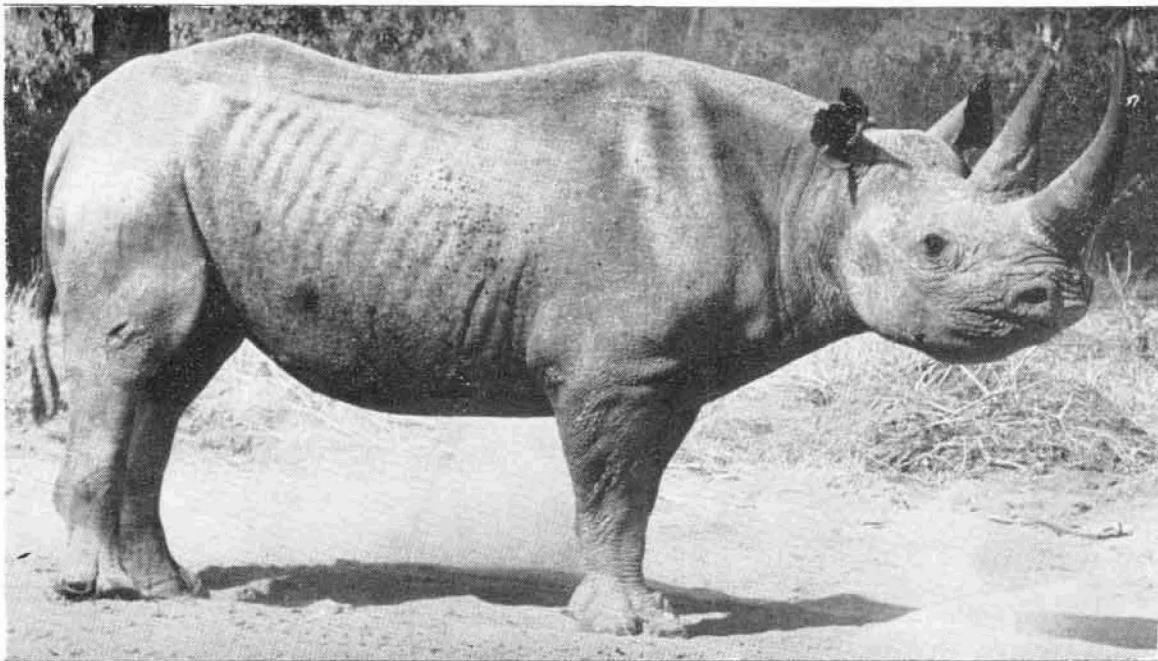


Photo: D. I. Ker