



CHAPTER FOUR:

WHITE RHINOCEROS

(*Ceratotherium*)

This genus derives its name from two Greek words, “*keros*” for horn and “*therion*” for beast or animal. This genus name means horned animal or beast. The common name of this Rhinoceros, is also derived from two Greek words, “*rhin*” for nose and “*keros*” for horn. Thus an animal with a horn on its nose, Rhinoceros.

GENUS TAXONOMY

Ceratotherium was named by John Edward Gray (1800-1875), in 1868. In 1878, Brandt proposed *Atelodus*. In 1945, Dietrich suggested *Serengeticeros*.

SPECIES

There is only one species encountered in this genus:

White or Square Lipped Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*)

WHITE or SQUARE LIPPED RHINOCEROS (*Ceratotherium simum*)

William John Burchell (1781-1863), on his explorations into the interior from the Cape, in 1817, described it scientifically for the first time as *Rhinoceros simum*. *Simum* means flat nose. Linnaeus had already described the Black Rhinoceros, in 1758, as *Rhinoceros bicornis*, the two horned Rhinoceros.

The Black was known and the White was not known, to early Dutch settlers. The White was encountered north of the Orange River, in South Africa. It is most unlikely that early Dutch settlers had come into contact with the White Rhinoceros, certainly not often, if ever, until the early 1800's. They had been at the Cape since 1652 and would only have come into contact with the Black Rhinoceros.

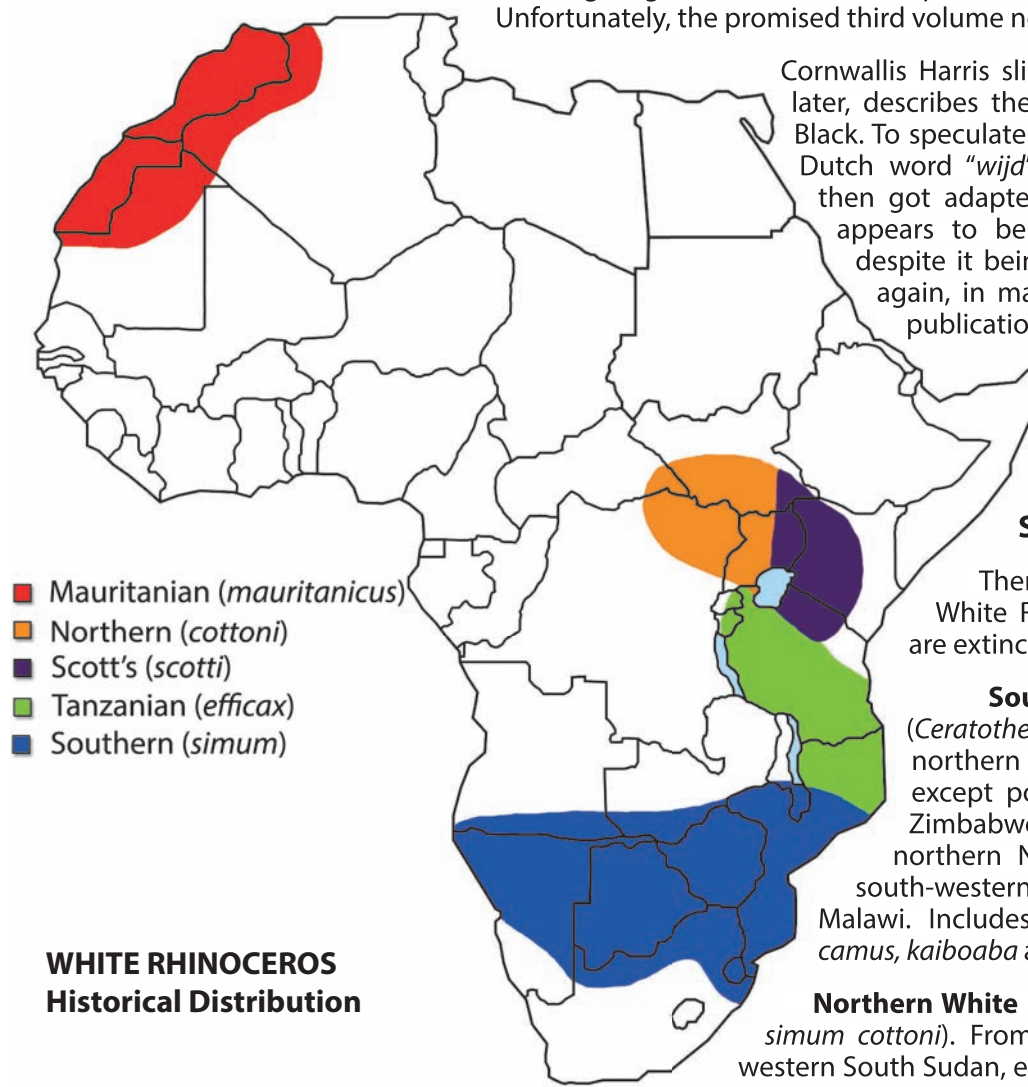
This brings us to the myth of its name as the White or “*Wijd*” Rhinoceros. No search of old Dutch or Afrikaans writings has ever revealed a reference to the name or word “*wijd*”, in connection with this Rhinoceros. The word “*wijd*”, meaning wide, is supposedly a reference to the wide square mouth of this Rhinoceros. It is believed that it was picked up into the English language, becoming “white” and then as a natural consequence the other was called “black”. Neat, but most unlikely and without any supporting information. In the absence of any support for the above naming, the logical choice is to revert to another explanation. It was likely based on perceived colour differences. Perhaps, due to the colour of mud used to wallow in or dust colour, in a particular area.

Opposite: Southern White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum simum*)

Giving credence to the argument, that the names are derived from the perceptions of colour, due to the mud they wallow in, is this extract from the unpublished work of Robert Jacob Gordon (1743-1795), the Commanding Officer of the Dutch Garrison in Cape Town. On 2 November 1778 he hunted a Black Rhinoceros in the interior from the Cape and described it in the following manner, "...but, it often wallows in mud and so resembles the ground on which it lives." The Black Rhinoceros, in these times, was referred to as the African Rhinoceros, distinct from the Asian Rhinoceros.

In fact, the great naturalist/explorer, Sir William Cornwallis Harris (1807-1848), in his 1838 publication, describes the White Rhinoceros as being a "whitish grey" in colour and the Black Rhinoceros as being "blackish" in colour. This is somewhat surprising as he observed both species and hunted a number of them. In reality there is no discernible difference, in colour, between the two. The description of the White Rhinoceros was done, in 1817, by Burchell. He makes a reference to the "new" species of Rhinoceros, in his 1824 publication, "Travels in the Interior of South Africa", giving no detail, but with a promise to elaborate at a later time. Unfortunately, the promised third volume never materialised.

Cornwallis Harris slightly more than a decade later, describes the Rhinoceros as White and Black. To speculate that in that time span, the Dutch word "*wijd*" was in general use and then got adapted and adopted as "white" appears to be without any foundation, despite it being repeated over and over again, in many field guides and other publications. It must be remembered that the Dutch only entered the interior at about that time.



SUBSPECIES

There are five subspecies of the White Rhinoceros, three of which are extinct and a fourth about to be:

Southern White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum simum*). From northern South Africa, Mozambique, except possibly the extreme north, Zimbabwe, Botswana, central and northern Namibia, southern Angola, south-western Zambia and southern Malawi. Includes the synonyms *burchellii*, *camus*, *kaiboaba* and *oswellii*.

Northern White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*). From west of the Nile, south-western South Sudan, eastern C.A.R., north-eastern D.R.C. and Uganda.

Mauritanian White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum mauritanicus*). From western Algeria to Mauritania. **Extinct.**

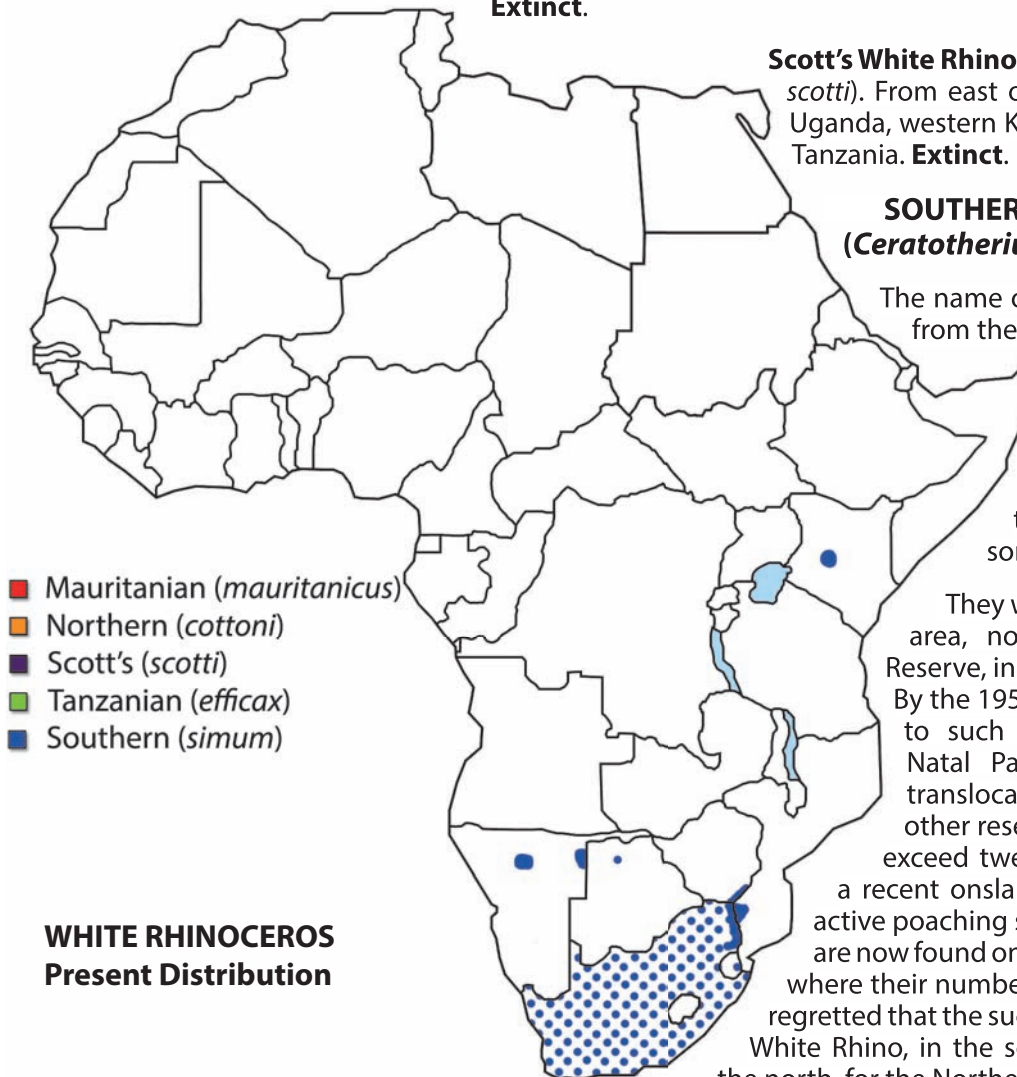
Tanzanian White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum efficax*). From Tanzania, except possibly the extreme north, possibly eastern Rwanda, eastern Burundi and possibly extreme northern Mozambique. Although this animal has been extinct since, at least, the late Pleistocene, it does indicate the one time contiguous population, of the White Rhinoceros. **Extinct.**

Scott's White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum scotti*). From east of the Nile, in South Sudan, Uganda, western Kenya and possibly northern Tanzania. **Extinct.**

SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS (*Ceratotherium simum simum*)

The name of this subspecies is derived from the geographical location of its range. This subspecies is one of the great success stories of conservation. By the late 1800's, it was down to considerably less than a hundred animals, some say sixteen.

They were located in the Umfolozi area, now the Hluhluwe/Umfolozi Reserve, in South Africa and protected. By the 1950's numbers had recovered, to such an extent, that the then Natal Parks Board could start to translocate many of these animals, to other reserves. To-day, their numbers exceed twenty thousand. This despite a recent onslaught, on their numbers, by active poaching syndicates. Many thousands are now found on private land in South Africa, where their numbers continue to increase. It is regretted that the success of saving the Southern White Rhino, in the south, was not replicated in the north, for the Northern White Rhinoceros.



WHITE RHINOCEROS
Present Distribution

This raises another myth, that Rhinoceros horn is used as an aphrodisiac. This misinformation was put out as part of a campaign to raise awareness of the plight of Rhinoceros, due to poaching. It has become an accepted concept and no doubt, some of the outrage caused, has had some positive effect. However, it is what it is, a myth. Rhinoceros horn is primarily used in eastern medicine to cure fevers. Although, more recent claims of cures for cancer, and more, has fuelled demand. An aspirin, of course, would be greatly more beneficial, to cure fevers. It is unfortunate that Rhinoceros continue to be poached at a level that now starts to threaten their future.

Southern White Rhinoceros Taxonomy

Ceratotherium simum simum was named by William John Burchell (1781-1863), in 1817. In 1827, H. Smith, proposed *Rhinoceros camus* (some attribute this to Griffith) and in the same year, Lesson suggested *Rhinoceros burchellii*. Elliot forwarded *oswellii*, in 1847, and in 1866, *kiaboaba* was proposed by Murray.

Description

The differences between the two White Rhinoceros subspecies are not always readily observable. They are attributed to differences in the skin and due to certain cranial dissimilarities. The Southern White Rhinoceros does not have the very obvious, multiple folds of skin on the chest.

NORTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*)

Obviously this subspecies owes its name to its northerly distribution. Teddy Roosevelt with his son Kermit, very controversially shot five of these animals on their famous safari into East Africa, in the early 1900's. At this time it was already recognised that their numbers were under great threat. Juxtapose this situation with that of their southern cousin. At that time, there were considerably more Northern White Rhinoceros than the Southern White Rhinoceros.



Right: Southern White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum simum*). In typical, head down, grazing posture.

The Southern White Rhinoceros is a conservation success story. The world has stood by as, at the same time, the Northern White Rhinoceros has slid into oblivion. They are now extinct in the wild and the last few captive held animals, appear not to offer a viable recovery programme. This has happened at exactly the same time as world attention has been focused on the poaching problem in South Africa. It is right that attention should be on the poaching problem in the south. It is wrong that the more dire situation, in the north, has received hardly a mention.

A focus of this publication is on the subspecies status of our game. It is four to five times more diverse and interesting. We cannot, just look at things on a species level. The Northern White Rhinoceros illustrates this.

The Northern White Rhinoceros derived its scientific name, *cottoni*, from Major Percy Horace Gordon Powell-Cotton (1866-1940).

Northern White Rhinoceros Taxonomy

Ceratotherium simum cottoni was named, in 1908, by Richard Lydekker (1849-1915).

Description

As stated above, in the description of the Southern White Rhinoceros, the differences between the two White Rhinoceros subspecies are not readily observable. They are attributed to differences in the skin and due to certain cranial dissimilarities. The Northern White Rhinoceros has the very obvious, multiple folds of skin on the chest.

Below: Northern White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*). The folds of skin on the chest clearly visible.





CHAPTER FIVE:

BLACK RHINOCEROS (*Diceros*)

The origin of the name “Black” Rhinoceros is dealt with, in Chapter Four. It is incorrect to believe that the White Rhinoceros, was a “batardisation” of the Dutch word “*wijd*”, meaning wide. Later it was picked up into English as “white” and as a result the other became “black”.

It is more likely that local dust colours or mud that they wallowed in, led to the perceived colour differences. There is a description of the Black Rhinoceros as *Rhinoceros niger* by Heinrich Rudolf Schinz (1777-1861), in 1845. Of course, *niger* in latin means black. This was some twenty odd years after Burchell described the “White” Rhinoceros, for the first time. The great naturalist/explorer William Cornwallis Harris, in his 1838 publication, describes the White Rhinoceros as being a “whitish grey” in colour and the Black Rhinoceros as being “blackish” in colour. This is somewhat surprising as he observed both species and hunted a number of them. In reality there is no discernible difference, in colour, between the two.

The description, by Burchell published in French, of the White Rhinoceros, was done in 1817. He makes a reference to the “new” species of Rhinoceros, in his 1824 publication, “Travels in the Interior of South Africa”. However, he gave no detail, but with a promise to elaborate at a later time. Unfortunately the promised third volume never materialised.

Cornwallis Harris, slightly more than a decade later, describes the White Rhinoceros as “whitish grey” and the Black Rhinoceros as “black”. To speculate that in that short time span, the Dutch word “*wijd*” was in general use and then got adapted and adopted as “white”, in English, appears to be without any foundation. This has not stopped it being repeated, over and over again, in many field guides and other publications.

These animals were originally placed in the genus, *Rhinoceros*, along with the Asian Rhinoceros. They are different and hence their removal, from that genus. The name for the species and genus are derived from two words. “*Di*” or “*bi*”, means two and “*ceros*”, from the Greek “*keros*”, meaning horn. The name “*cornis*” is derived from the Latin, for horn. Hence, a two horned animal as opposed to the Asian Rhinoceros, that are typically one horned.

GENUS TAXONOMY

This genus, *Diceros*, was named by John Edward Gray (1800-1875), in 1821. In 1828, Billberg suggested *Dicerus*. Gloger proposed *Opsiceros*, in 1841. Gray, in 1862 and 1868, proposed *Rhinaster* and *Keitloa*, respectively.

Opposite: *Black Rhinoceros (Diceros bicornis michaeli), from Kenya, in typically aggressive pose.*

BLACK RHINOCEROS (*Diceros*)

SPECIES

There is only one species in this genus:

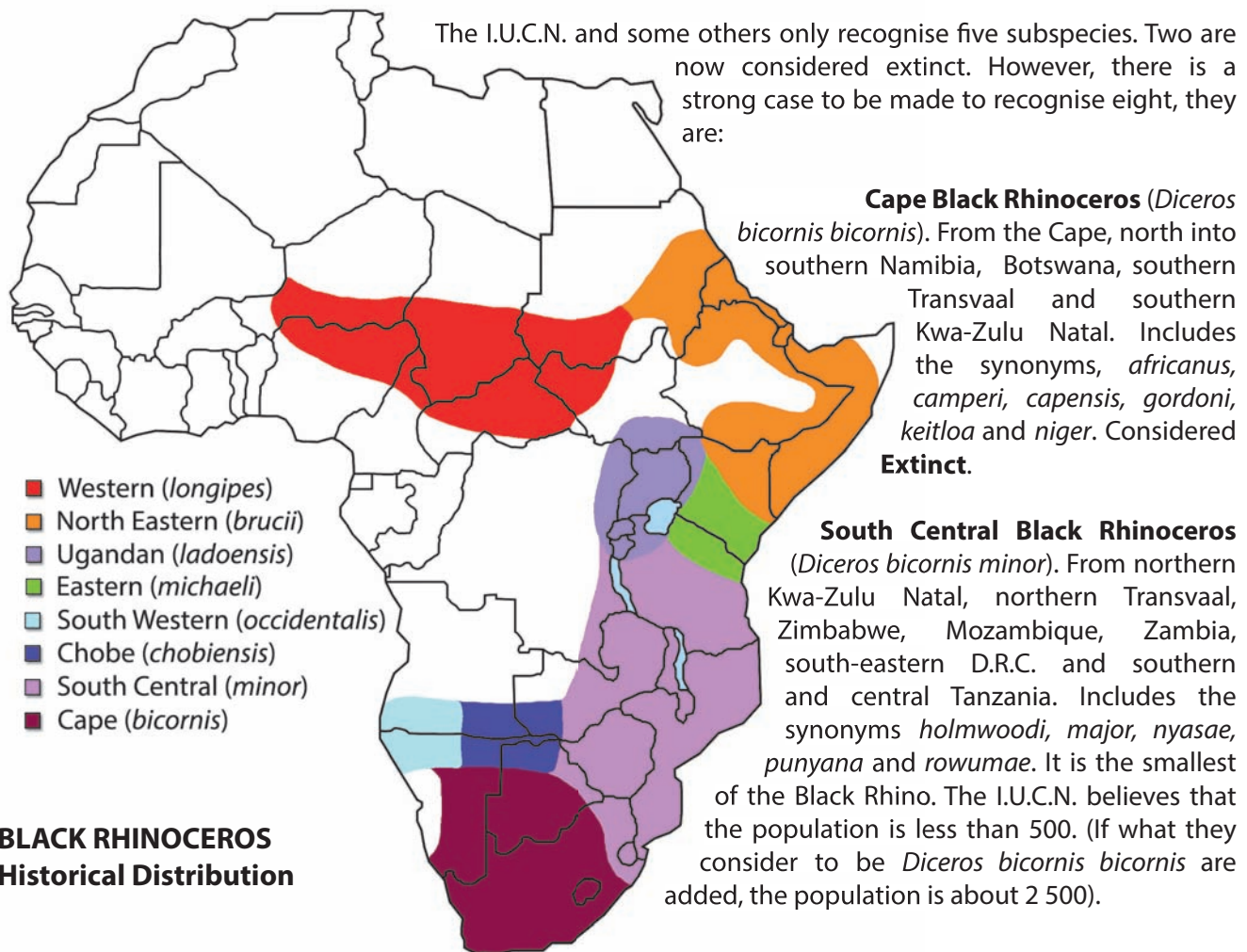
Black or Hooked Lipped Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*)

BLACK or HOOKED LIPPED RHINOCEROS (*Diceros bicornis*)

It is an interesting anecdote to note that, in 1835, there was a description of the so called "Blue Rhinoceros". It was the belief that this was a separate species. Black rhino that had a longer posterior horn than the anterior one, were believed to make up this "species". A. Smith described it as *keitloa*. The great hunter and naturalist F.C. Selous, correctly, in the mid to late 1800's, disputed this at the time. It was not long after, that it was realised that this was merely a morphological aberration and the use of the name, Blue Rhinoceros, has since disappeared from use.

SUBSPECIES

The I.U.C.N. and some others only recognise five subspecies. Two are now considered extinct. However, there is a strong case to be made to recognise eight, they are:



BLACK RHINOCEROS (*Diceros*)

Right: *Black Rhinoceros*
(*Diceros Bicornis occidentalis*)



South Western Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis occidentalis*).

From north-western Namibia and south-western Angola. Includes the synonym *angolensis*. A very small desert population. There are a few in Namibian reserves and an occasional sighting in Angola.

Chobe Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis chobiensis*).

From south-eastern Angola, Caprivi in Namibia, south-western Zambia and far north-western Botswana). Restricted to the Chobe River Valley and environs.

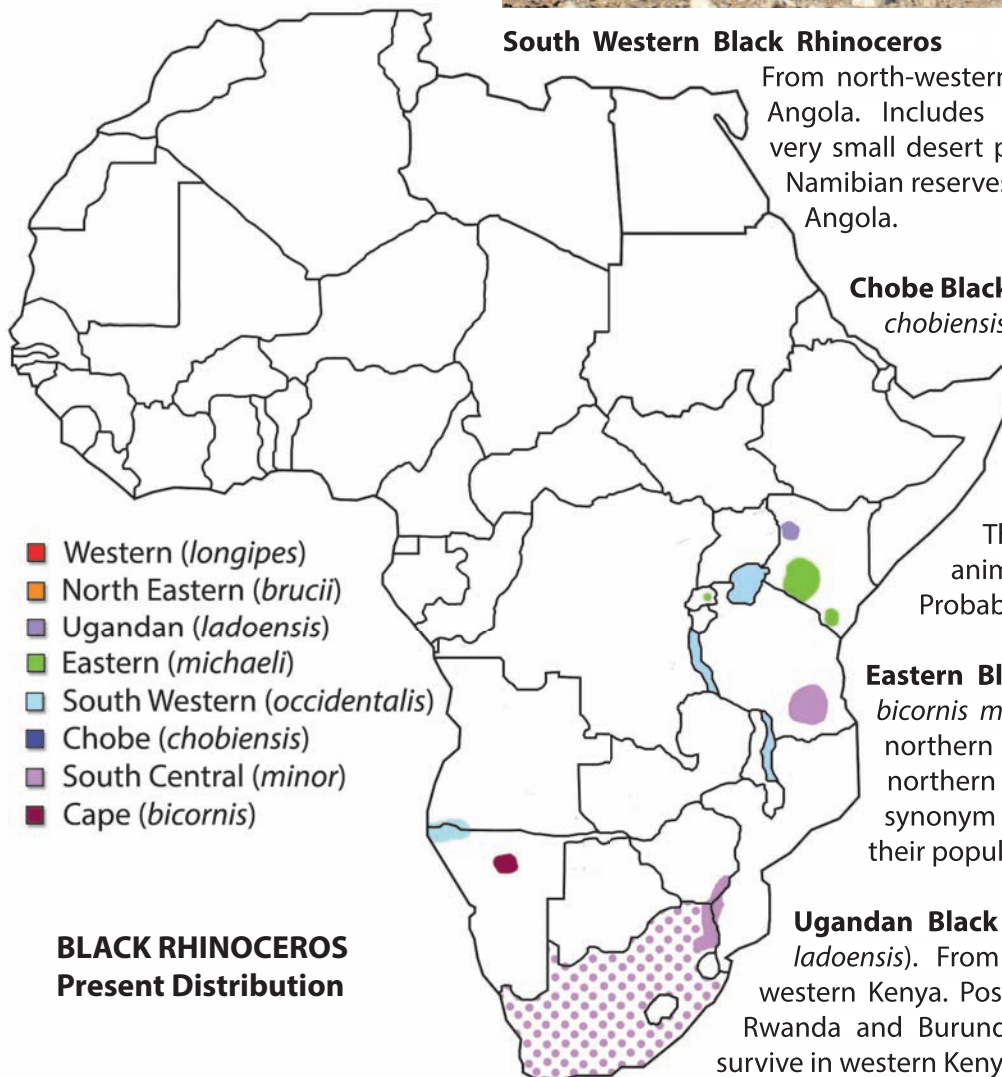
There is believed to be a single animal left, in northern Botswana. Probably now, **Extinct**.

Eastern Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*).

From Kenya, except northern and western regions, into northern Tanzania. Includes the synonym *rendilis*. The I.U.C.N. estimates their population to be about 750.

Ugandan Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis ladoensis*).

From South Sudan, Uganda into western Kenya. Possibly, north-western Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. It is believed that a few survive in western Kenyan reserves.



BLACK RHINOCEROS
Present Distribution

BLACK RHINOCEROS (*Diceros*)

North Eastern Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis brucii*). From south-eastern Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Ethiopia. Includes the synonyms *albarensis*, *cucullatus* and *somaliensis*. **Extinct.**

Western Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis longipes*). From south-western Sudan, western South Sudan, C.A.R., Cameroon, north-eastern Nigeria and south-eastern Niger. Includes the synonym *palustris*. **Extinct.**

Above: A closer view of the hooked lip of a Black Rhinoceros.



Black Rhinoceros Taxonomy

Diceros bicornis bicornis was named by Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), in 1758. In 1777, Camper suggested *capensis*, the first reference to the Cape Rhinoceros. In 1797, *africanus*, was proposed by Blumenbach. In 1835, *keitloa* was suggested by A. Smith. Lesson forwarded *gordonii*, in 1842. In 1845, Schinz proposed, both *niger* and *camperi*.

BLACK RHINOCEROS (*Diceros*)

Diceros bicornis minor was named by William Henry Drummond (1810-1886), in 1876. He also proposed *major* in the same year. In 1893, Sclater suggested *holmwoodi* and, in 1947, Potter proposed *punyana*. In 1965, Zukowsky suggested both *nyasae* and *rowumae*.

Diceros bicornis occidentalis was named by Ludwig Karl Zukowsky (1888-1965), in 1922. In 1965, he suggested *angolensis*.

Diceros bicornis chobiensis was named by Zukowsky, in 1965.

Diceros bicornis michaeli was named by Zukowsky, in 1965.

Diceros bicornis ladoensis was named by Zukowsky, in 1965.

Diceros bicornis brucii was named by Rene Primevere Lesson (1794-1849), in 1842. In 1835, Wagner suggested *cucullatus*. Potocki, in 1900, proposed *somaliensis* and Zukowsky ventured *albarensis*, in 1965.

Diceros bicornis longipes was named by Zukowsky, in 1949. Benzon, in 1947, proposed *palustris*.

There is one other description that needs to be accounted for, *Diceros bicornis kulumanae*. It is a 1972 description by Ian Player (1927-2014). It has incorrectly been claimed that this is of a White Rhinoceros. This is not so. Player attributes it to Drummond who uses the indigenous name "Kulumane", referring to *minor*.

Description

The Black Rhinoceros is two thirds of the size of its grazing relative, the White Rhinoceros. Of course it is not black in colour, but grey, virtually identical, in colour, to the White Rhinoceros. Characteristic is the prehensile lip. As a browser, it is used to break off leaves and branches.



Left: Eastern Black Rhinoceros
(*Diceros bicornis michaeli*)