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AN ANGRY LIONESS

A GAME WARDEN TAKES STOCK

By

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she would stand and hoot with mirth at the fury of the servants.

I sometimes receive enquiries suggesting that a pink-faced, in addition to the normal black-faced, species occurs in Uganda. Pink-faced specimens do occur, but are mainly juveniles. Sometimes adult females at the time of breeding assume a pinkish face. I am indebted to Mr. David Seth Smith, of the Zoological Society of London, for the information that the chimpanzee is adolescent when 9 years old, and that the period of gestation is approximately 35 weeks. The photograph (taken by a District Officer) reproduced, of a dead juvenile supported by a grinning savage, is a wonderful study in expressions. It is most convincingly suggestive of a common origin! Sometimes the motorist has the singular good fortune to see a chimpanzee on the road when traversing a forest. I have only once been lucky enough to have such an experience. It was in the Ituri forest in the Congo. An enormous male suddenly appeared out of a devastated banana patch which he had evidently been raiding. The sight of the car bearing down rapidly upon him must have filled him with dismay. He stood in the centre of the road blinking at the strange object. From his behaviour he must have been separated from the rest of the troupe and he was uncertain what to do. It was not until the car had started to slow down that he shuffled off in the direction whence he had come.

Ten years ago I wrote a whole chapter on that comical creature, the white rhinoceros. Much can happen in a decade, for better or for worse. Therefore it is most gratifying and heartening to be able to record that nowadays the lot of this rare species is far, far better than it was. Although for many years the white rhinoceros has been afforded complete protection by the law of the land, it has not been possible until recently to set aside specific areas in which it could in addition be protected in terms of territory. Recently, in con-



A GROUP OF THE RARE WHITE RHINOCEROS—A BIG BULL ON THE LEFT

junction with legislation reserving Crown forests in certain localities, it has been possible to create white rhinoceros sanctuaries coincident with these areas. A recent review of the situation by a Game Ranger, who ten years ago undertook a white rhinoceros census, indicates that there has been an increase of fifty per cent. in this relatively short period. The outlook for the future is, accordingly, decidedly hopeful. This happy state of affairs is a great tribute to the loyal co-operation of the African, who is wholeheartedly backing the unremitting efforts of the local Administration to perpetuate so noble a species. In fact, eyewitnesses have told me how amazed they are at the extraordinary solicitude of a certain Sultan for the white rhinoceroses in his domain. So much so, that he is as anxious for their welfare as he is for that of his own domestic stock, and when sightseers turn up he shows off his great charges with the utmost pride.

One must expect some mortality annually from natural causes, though in recent years reported deaths have been few. There is little to add to my previous comprehensive notes, but from time to time new facts worth mentioning come to notice. Residents of the West Nile district are accustomed to meeting these enormous brutes as part of the daily round, but even they have their moments of doubt as to their in-offensiveness.

A District Officer, while following an elephant, met a white rhinoceros cow and a calf. Being accompanied by an armed African game guard he warned him on no account to fire, and then waited quietly for the animals to get out of his way, intending to demonstrate to his followers that the local rhinoceros was quite harmless even when with a small calf. In his own words : " The mother saw us almost at the same instant as we saw her and (presumably) cautioning the child to keep on its way, for it did so, she turned towards us with her head down and no diminution whatever of her speed

which appeared to be rather faster than a trot. I may confess at once that, in spite of what I had just said to the game guard, I slipped a cartridge from the magazine into the chamber of my rifle, but remembering also all that I had been told about these beasts and not at all wishing to lose my game and elephant licences, and perhaps district into the bargain, I had enough faith to shift my rifle to my right hand and gesticulate wildly with my left, uttering loud shoos at the rhinoceros as I did so. It was not until she was eight yards away (paced subsequently) that she took any notice of the invitation which had by now swelled to a chorus, but when she did she acted promptly and turned off after the young one and was rapidly gone. I must admit that if I had not had it so well drilled into me that white rhinoceroses are not dangerous, I should unhesitatingly have classified this as a charge."

Another Officer confessed to me that he had been saved from perpetrating the unpardonable crime of deliberately shooting a white rhinoceros by the fact of his unintentionally omitting to load his rifle. He put up his rifle to fire at what he believed to be a charging rhinoceros, but fortunately the striker clicked harmlessly on the empty chamber. The huge animal when a few paces distant swerved and passed by. He told me that it still makes him sweat with fear to think of what might have happened to him if his weapon had been loaded. I think these episodes prove that nowadays there is every persuasion to spare, instead of molest, the white rhinoceros.

Another story is told by a Mission Father who was driving a car slowly along a bad road. A young rhinoceros suddenly came out of the bush, and, as he put it, "danced" in front of him. Knowing these animals are harmless he at once stopped in order not to risk injuring it. He was, however, a trifle perturbed when the mother appeared alongside the prancing child and sniffed at the car. Thereupon the Reverend Father drove slowly forward and as the calf gave ground in front the

parent fell in behind and followed snorting after the slowly moving car. The strange procession lasted for about forty yards, before the calf turned off into the bush whither it was followed by its clumsy dam !

At times the best of us have lapses from virtue. Not even the white rhinoceros is exempt from this affliction. One is often regaled with extravagant stories of this creature's truculence and ferocity. But when one is faced with the definite fact of a woman who was picking cotton being attacked and gored one cannot dismiss the incident as an idle tale. It has to be acknowledged as a serious lapse from grace by a member of this normally inoffensive species. According to native opinion in the locality referred to, a white rhinoceros suffering from wounds will attack human beings. In this particular instance there was no evidence available to support this theory as the victim was alone when she was attacked. In the mating season bulls sometimes fight furiously and often present a sorry spectacle after these encounters, so that a "wounded" rhinoceros is not necessarily a result of human action. A Game Ranger once saw a bull making up to a cow evidently with the intention of mating, but for the time being his advances were rudely rejected and the indignant cow prodded him severely with her sharp horn and chased him away.

The white rhinoceros is the only large land mammal which has never been kept in captivity. A juvenile once intended for shipment overseas only survived a few months at the Khartoum Zoo. Its death was not due to any particular difficulty in keeping it, but was almost certainly a result of ignorance on the part of its African captors.

CHAPTER IV

VANISHING SPECIES

BLACK RHINOCEROS, GIRAFFE, UGANDA KOB

PASSING on to that antediluvian oddity, the black rhinoceros, it is first necessary to explain that this is an animal diametrically opposite in its nature to its white relation. Once one is acquainted with its stupid, blundering attacks it is likely to be regarded as more of a fool than a danger. A good deal of personal experience of the black rhinoceros and its unpleasant ways in various parts of Africa suggests that in the first instance any intrusion on its domain makes it inquisitive, though I must admit that in some cases the reaction is unmistakable resentment. Inquisitiveness induces the lumbering brute to advance towards the object of interest, which it does not recognize as a potential enemy until it gets so close that it is seized with panic and immediately charges out of sheer fright. A charge can easily be avoided by stepping aside at the last moment, and unless the rhinoceros is really angered it passes on and does not return. I do not doubt that this creature is extremely short-sighted, a fact which would account for much of its apparent aggressiveness. Moreover, I think there is little doubt that the long horn at the end of its nose and the shorter one behind do interfere seriously with its vision, a disability which would accentuate defective eyesight. I once took the trouble to make a comprehensive collection of wild animals' eyes for a well-known ophthalmic institution. I had anticipated that

the recipients would be sufficiently grateful to give me details of the structure of the eyes in certain species indicating whether these animals were particularly short-sighted, whether they were specially adapted for vision under water, whether for use in the dark, or whether exceptionally keen sighted. To a game warden such matters are not only of interest, but also are of considerable practical value. Unfortunately my hopes were never realized. It is the only occasion during nearly forty years of scientific collecting on which field material prepared at my own expense, and moreover material which had been especially solicited, was not appreciated.

I had been particularly intrigued with the eye of the black rhinoceros, which is a disc about a quarter of the thickness of the human eye. With so curious an eye I can well imagine the black rhinoceros having defective vision. It was not so long ago that this species was widely distributed throughout the savanna regions of Uganda. Within the memory of the early residents a few were still left in the Masaka and Ankole districts, though I can find no record of its occurrence in Bunyoro within historical times. In the last twenty years the black rhinoceros, owing to the inflated value of rhinoceros horn—as an aphrodisiac believed to possess extraordinary virtues—in the Far East, has been singled out for ruthless persecution. In many parts of Eastern and south Central Africa the constant harassing which is the inevitable result of commercialization has hastened its extinction.

Uganda is fortunate in having no sea frontier with direct access to the Far East and in consequence control of illegal dealings in rhinoceros horn is relatively easy. I have no hesitation in claiming that nowadays if there is any local illegal traffic in rhino horn, it is insignificant. In 1934 the black rhinoceros was removed from the schedule of animals permitted to be hunted under a full game licence, and was elevated to the distinction of a special licence costing £5,

which allowed one to be killed. The holder of a full game licence, if he so wishes, is permitted to take out one such special licence only. This protective measure was not necessitated by a startling decrease in black rhinoceros numbers, but was considered advisable as it was realized that certain hunters, who annually took out a full game licence, regarded the black rhinoceros solely from the point of view of so many pounds, shillings, and pence. The sale of the valuable horns could be set off against the cost of the full licence (£5). As the Uganda representatives rarely grow heavy horns, pairs totalling 10 or 12 lb. are considered good, there is now little inducement except for the genuine sportsman to take out a costly special licence. The efficacy of this additional measure of protection is proved by the fact that in four years a total of four special licences only have been taken out.

Although horns of Uganda origin are normally small, I have known of pairs which totalled respectively 22 and 20 lb. Whereas in the white rhinoceros the base of the huge anterior horn is square, in this species it is round. The black rhinoceros sometimes grows a small third horn just behind the posterior horn. I was once shown the photograph of the head of a three-horned rhinoceros which had been shot in Northern Uganda. The tiny third horn which weighed approximately an ounce grew from a point on the face situated centrally between the two ears. When in Northern Rhodesia my attention was drawn to the occurrence of three-horned examples, and in the vicinity of Lake Young it was evident that a three-horned strain had persisted for some time.

Amplifying the previous brief remarks on the subject of distribution in Uganda, there are still plenty of these strangely primeval creatures in the northern and eastern regions, and the present situation, judged from the point of view of abundance, is considered most satisfactory. On the other hand, in several localities the ever-increasing numbers now in contact with

fairly dense settlement have become a source of considerable embarrassment. Moreover, this has been aggravated by a growing tendency on the part of these creatures to damage the cotton crops. This species, unlike the white rhinoceros, which is a cropper or grazer, is a browser. This would account for its taste for cotton bushes. Complaints of damage to cotton plots are unfortunately increasing. It serves to show how difficult it can be to try to preserve a species in spite of itself, and one must sympathize with a harassed District Commissioner's plea, "I would urge that the claims of *Homo sapiens* should receive more attention, even at the expense of the unduly favoured *Diceros bicornis holmwoodi*."

In a region several hundred square miles in extent on the right bank (east) of the Albert Nile and to the north of the Murchison Falls it is believed that there are now probably five or six times as many black rhinoceroses as there were twelve years ago. If this is indeed the case this uninhabited area, partially game reserve and partially a closed sleeping-sickness area, should harbour at least one hundred. Happily the black rhinoceros is not susceptible to the epizootics of rinderpest which frequently sweep through its habitat.

The general habits of this species have been frequently too well written up to bear repetition. But there are certain characteristics which it will not be out of place to mention and emphasize. Unlike the white rhinoceros, the herd instinct is absent and one usually comes across the black species solitary, in pairs or a cow accompanied by a calf. Nevertheless, it is possible to see quite a number of these creatures not far apart in the relatively restricted space of a favourite feeding-ground, lick or wallow. I have never come across a black rhinoceros unaccompanied by examples of the *Buphagidæ*, popularly called tick birds. These noisy feathered parasites, for parasitic indeed they are on their clumsy friend, are the bane of the hunter, who has little chance of approaching unobserved and

unheralded, for at the first suspicion of alarm up rise the birds from the monster's body, uttering loud cries. Whether standing dozing or sonorously slumbering on its side, the antics of the birds at once put the animal on the alert. In addition to the ticks on which they feed these birds obtain many a tit-bit from the maggot-infested sores which are usually plentiful on the lower portions of the rhinoceros' anatomy.

When asleep this animal snores loudly, when frightened or angry it produces an extraordinary whistling not unlike steam escaping under high pressure, but if fighting amongst its own kind it indulges in pig-like squealing. The effect is most comical when an alarmed rhinoceros peers stupidly towards a suspected enemy, whistling loudly. Man is this creature's principal enemy, primarily on account of the large supply of meat which it provides, and latterly specifically for the valuable horns, now a much-sought-after article of commerce. Lions have been known to prey on the youngsters, and there are cases on record in other parts of Africa in which a crocodile has seized a rhinoceros when it came down to drink and eventually by sheer tenacity has pulled in and drowned its huge victim.

Mention of meat invites a few remarks on the subject of weight, and there is no doubt that most of those that have been recorded are guesses and greatly exaggerated. Three tons seems to be a favourite estimate. I have always believed the weight of the black rhinoceros to be about $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons, but even this is too high. Science owes a great debt of gratitude to Colonel Meinertzhagen for his carefully tabulated lists of weights and measurements of the wild animals he has shot. Particularly valuable are the data concerning sixteen adult examples of the black rhinoceros obtained in Kenya. These appeared in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*, 1938. Eleven of the animals are males, the other five females. The average weight of the sixteen works out at just 2 cwt. over a ton. In the sixteen there is a range of variation of

7 cwt., though in ten it is only a little over 3 cwt. With one exception the females are the lightest. The two heaviest examples, one being a female, are just over $1\frac{1}{4}$ tons. Of the three lightest, one is just under, and two just over, a ton.

As regards height, the average is 5 feet, and on the whole the females stand shorter than the males. The maximum height given is 5 feet 5 inches, the minimum $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches under 5 feet. When $3\frac{1}{2}$ years old the height is about 4 feet. The average length from tip of nose to end of tail is 11 feet 3 inches. It is again the females which are generally the smaller, though one is only half-an-inch shorter than the maximum, 11 feet $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The minimum is 10 feet 8 inches.

The period of gestation is believed to be about sixteen months, but this can only be in the nature of a guess as so far no breeding has taken place in captivity. According to Major S. S. Flower (*Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*, 1930), "Though most rhinoceroses had, in captivity, short lives of less than ten years, there is no doubt that these animals have great potential longevity, as is proved by those examples that have lived to thirty and even to forty years. Actually twenty-seven selected individuals show an average life of almost twenty-two years." One calf is born at a time, and as far as I am aware there is no record of twins. A description of the calf which can scarcely be bettered—"a perfect miracle of disproportionate ugliness"—will be found in *Wild Game in Zambesia* by R. C. F. Maugham. This species probably attains maturity when about seven years old. The three-toed hoof of the black rhinoceros leaves an unmistakable spoor. Being a browser it has a highly developed prehensile extremity to the upper lip which serves the purpose of a small seizing trunk. When alarmed its short pig tail is held erect, a characteristic not shared by its white relation, which prefers it curled. The remarkable loosely hanging hide, suggesting an ill-fitting garment the product of a second-

hand store, is responsible for some strange native legends. So, also, is the curious habit of dung scattering. The black rhinoceros usually resorts to well-frequented "middens" for its daily purpose. This is a common characteristic of many antelopes, as well as of some carnivores and certain other animals. But the rhinoceros, not content with this tidy habit which is to be commended has, for some unexplained reason, to scatter its dung. Sometimes it uses its hind legs for the purpose, at others it stirs up the heap with its anterior horn. This strange behaviour does not necessarily take place at the time of deposition, and I have more than once, when close to a well-used midden, seen a rhinoceros appear walking deliberately towards its evacuations and then start stirring the mass up with its horn.

An entertaining legend I heard in Northern Rhodesia explained that the rhinoceros developed this habit after losing a needle which it had been given by the Creator, at the time when all animals were made, in order to enable it to sew on its skin. It lost the needle and had to makeshift with a thorn, hence the ill-fitting hide. The rhinoceros was afraid it had swallowed the needle, and that is why it is always examining its droppings.

In the past in the Acholi country of northern Uganda the black rhinoceros has, to a great extent, been immune from molestation, as many were supposed to harbour evil spirits. Not all rhinoceroses were bad, but they were rarely killed if it could be avoided. The hunters generally climbed trees when a rhinoceros appeared. A bad rhinoceros would try to make a man fall down by bumping the tree. Generally speaking, the Acholi no longer believe in the bad spirits of various animals, though in the case of the black rhinoceros a great number of people do not eat the flesh as they believe it is the cause of leprosy. In the past some astonishingly lengthy horns, exceeding 40 inches, have been recorded from East

Africa. More recently a rhinoceros shot on the slopes of Mount Kenya was found to have an extraordinary anterior horn, not only 45 inches long but pointing *forward* instead of upward.

The giraffe is undoubtedly the greatest freak amongst the mammals, mainly legs and neck. Whenever I see a demure giraffe peering down at me over the tree-tops with an expression of inquisitive surprise, I cannot help thinking of that sensational picture in Theodore Roosevelt's *African Game Trails* which is apt to convey an entirely erroneous impression of this creature's true character. In it the great "Bull Moose" is apparently about to be struck down by the forefoot—nearly the size of a dinner plate—of an enraged, prancing bull giraffe. It is well known that the giraffe can deliver a terrific downward and forward blow with a forefoot, but it is purely a defensive measure and the very last thing one can accuse a giraffe of being is aggressive. I can claim intimate acquaintance with the giraffe, and I have on dozens of occasions wandered amongst the peacefully browsing herds. I have often been within a few paces of cows with calves and very close to the gigantic bulls, and never yet have I experienced a moment's disquiet. Their disposition has been friendly and peaceable, and on occasion timid. To suggest anything else is a gross libel on an extremely inoffensive species. It would be unreasonable to suggest that the giraffe never becomes angry, that would be too much to expect of any of God's creatures. One has only to visit the London Zoo and see the carefully preserved dent in a solid wooden pillar to realize what the giraffe can do when roused. It was made by an annoyed giraffe when it aimed a sweeping blow at a keeper with its head.

Excepting man the giraffe has few enemies, though it is not unknown for lions to act in concert and pull down an adult. The carnivores, however, usually confine their

Statute Miles

