

# HUGHES'S

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## Anecdotal Natural History.

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No. XII.—THE RHINOCEROS, HYRAX, AND  
HIPPOPOTAMUS.

THE RHINOCEROS is connected with the elephant by a number of links, such as the Tapir, in which a small and imperfect proboscis is present, and the various swine, in which the proboscis is modified into a very mobile, blunt-tipped snout, with the nostrils at the extremity. Geology, too, has revealed traces of many animals which are now extinct upon the earth, and which render the transition between these animals very much less abrupt, conclusively proving their approximate position in the scale of creation.

The rhinoceros, of which several species are known, is found in various parts of the African and Asiatic continents, preferring those neighbourhoods in which water is easily to be obtained. Although the various species differ in several minor characteristics, they are sufficiently alike in their chief peculiarities of structure to allow of a single description sufficing for the whole.

The so-called 'horn' is naturally the first point to attract our attention; and a very curious and wonderful object it is.

Notwithstanding the powerful shocks it is called upon to bear, and its uses as a weapon of offence, it is not in any way connected with the skull, as is almost universally imagined to be the case. It is, in fact,

merely a growth from the skin, from which it may be removed by a few cuts around the base from a keen-bladed knife. An ordinary penknife is quite sufficient for this purpose. This horn must be ranked in the same category with hair, spines, and quills, the structure being precisely similar in all. This may be at once proved by an examination of the horn, which, although smooth and polished at the tip, is separated at the base into a number of filaments, the hair-like formation of which may be easily seen.

In order to avoid the effect upon the brain of the violent concussion caused by the headlong charges of the animal, the bones of the face are modified in a very remarkable manner, forming a kind of broad and strong arch, one end of which is left free and unsupported. Above this end the horn is situated, the elasticity of the bony arch effectually breaking the force of the shocks. The horn does not attain its full dimensions for several years after the birth of the animal.

In olden times, the horn of the rhinoceros was held in great estimation on account of its supposed poison-detecting powers, and bore a fancy value in consequence. Eastern monarchs, for example, were accustomed to have their drinking-cups formed from the horn, the superstition being that any poison introduced into the vessel would cause the contents to bubble violently, and so bring about a discovery of the attempted assassination.

At the present time the horn is still of considerable value, being largely employed in the manufacture of umbrella handles and various other articles.

The skin of the rhinoceros is of great thickness, and of so tough a nature that it will resist any but a specially hardened bullet. The balls used in the chase of the animal are therefore alloyed with solder or tin or mercury, in order to supply the requisite hardness.

By the natives of both Africa and Asia the skin of the rhinoceros is greatly prized, being largely utilised in the manufacture of shields, which form a most effectual protection from spears, no matter how keen their points or how great the force with which they are hurled. Even a rifle bullet, indeed, unless fired at close quarters, would probably be checked or turned aside in its flight.

Yet, stout as is the skin in most parts of the body, there are places where its character seems to be altogether changed. In the Asiatic species of rhinoceros, for instance, the skin falls in heavy folds upon the neck, shoulders, and flanks, forming flaps which may be lifted up with the hand. Beneath these folds the skin is of a much softer and more delicate nature, and may be pierced without any very great difficulty. This fact is taken advantage of by the various parasites which infest the tropical forests, and which insinuate themselves beneath these folds, directing their attacks upon the thinner skin lying beneath them, and driving the animals almost mad by their incessant persecutions. Upon the under side of the body, also, the skin is comparatively soft.

Here we find a reason for the fondness of the rhinoceros and its allies for wallowing in the mud, the thick tenacious substance rapidly hardening beneath the rays of the sun, and affording an impenetrable barrier to the tiny assailants.

The eyes of the rhinoceros are by no means large, and are placed rather deeply in the head, the sight consequently being of a rather imperfect nature; in fact, the animal is unable to see any object directly in its front. The senses of scent and hearing are, however, developed to a considerable extent, and fully compensate the animal for its partial lack of visual power.

The INDIAN RHINOCEROS (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is chiefly remarkable for the comparatively small size of the horn, the height of which sometimes little exceeds the diameter. It nevertheless forms a most effectual weapon, a well-known traveller stating that this animal is able to hold its own against an adult male elephant.

Another of the Asiatic species is the Sumatran Rhinoceros, which is provided with two horns upon the head instead of one. It does not appear, however, to make use of its formidable weapons, for its disposition is very quiet and timid, the animal flying from the presence of danger, and seldom facing even a single dog.

FOUR distinct species of rhinoceros are at present known to inhabit Africa, and it is yet uncertain whether still others do not exist.

The best known of these is the Rhinaster, Borele, or Little Black Rhinoceros of Southern Africa (*Rhinoceros bicornis*), which may be known by the shape of the horns and the upper lip.

The anterior horn is long, pointed, and curved backwards towards the head, while the posterior one is small and conical, closely resembling the weapon of the Indian rhinoceros. The upper lip, which is sharply pointed, overlaps the lower to a considerable extent.

The Borele is usually considered to be by far the most savage of all the species of rhinoceros, and the natives are said to fear the animal far more than they do the most infuriated lion. When wounded it is a truly dangerous opponent, and will attack its foe with a ferocity and determination which render escape a matter of considerable difficulty.

During the day-time the animal is seldom to be seen, selecting some secluded retreat in the thickest part of the forest, and there passing the hours of daylight. When night sets in, however, he awakes, and

at once sets out for the nearest pool, in order to slake his thirst before prosecuting his search for food.

This he generally finds in various roots, which he ploughs out of the ground by means of the powerful horns, and also in the young shoots of the 'wait-a-bit' thorn. Clumsy as it is in appearance, this rhinoceros is yet active and agile to a wonderful degree, possessing considerable speed, and severely trying the powers even of a good horse when attempting to escape from its furious onslaught.

Another well-known African species is the Keitloa or Sloan's Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros keitloa*), which may be readily distinguished from the borele by its horns, which are of considerable and almost equal length. It is altogether a larger animal than the preceding, and is, if anything, even more to be dreaded as a foe, owing to its superior strength and length of horn.

Both the borele and the keitloa are black in colour; there are, however, two African species of rhinoceros in which the colour of the skin is a greyish white.

The first and more abundant of these is the common White Rhinoceros, or Muchuco, as it is termed by the natives (*Rhinoceros sinus*), which differs considerably in appearance from the two above-described species. Setting upon one side the colour of the skin, the chief differences may be summed up as follows. The muzzle is square instead of pointed, the head is elongated, and the anterior horn attains to considerable dimensions, three feet being by no means an uncommon length. The second horn, however, is of far lesser size, and closely resembles that of the borele.

In disposition, also, the animal is very different, being as mild and peaceable as the borele and the keitloa are fierce and savage. Even when attacked it seldom assumes the offensive, but generally seeks

safety in flight instead of endeavouring to revenge itself upon its pursuer. Should its young be assailed, however, it will fight with great fury, and is then to the full as dangerous an opponent as either of its relatives.

The second of the white species, viz., the Kobaoba, or Long-horned White Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros Osweillii*), is a very much rarer animal, and is far less generally distributed.

The anterior horn of the kobaoba is of considerable size, sometimes exceeding four feet in length. Owing to the manner in which the head is carried, this horn, which is almost straight, and is directed forward instead of backward, is generally found to be more or less worn away by the friction with the ground. In consequence of its length and straightness the horn is of great value in the market.

A walking-stick made of a single piece of this horn will fetch almost any price in London or Paris. In the old days of muzzle-loading rifles, a ramrod made of rhinoceros horn was invaluable, as it was almost unbreakable, and yet was tolerably light to carry. A large knob was left at one end, and so it became not only a loading rod, but a formidable weapon. Short clubs of similar form are much used by the Kaffir tribes in hunting, and are called knob-kerries.

All the African species of rhinoceros are occasionally to be seen in small herds of eight or ten specimens, but can yet be scarcely described as gregarious, each animal in time of danger separating from his companions and selecting his own path. They are not prolific animals, a single young one only being produced at a birth.

#### THE HYRAX.

We are told in Ps. civ. v. 18, that 'the rocks are a refuge for the conies,' and in Prov. xxx. v. 26,