

BOOK REVIEW

Encounters with the African rhinoceros: a chronological survey of bibliographical and iconographical sources on rhinoceroses in southern Africa from 1795 to 1875: reconstructing views on classification and changes in distribution

L.C. (Kees) Rookmaaker

Muenster, Schueling Verlag, pp. 1-148, figs. 1-157 [68 in colour], maps A-I [2 in colour], tables 1- 47.
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review by Esmond Martin

PO Box 15510-00503, Nairobi, Kenya; email: rhino@wananchi.com

Dr Rookmaaker, in this extremely detailed monograph, chronicles references, both published and unpublished, to rhinos from 1795 to 1875 in southern Africa. Most are from explorers, hunters, painters and government officers. There was a marked peak of recordings in the 1840s and 1850s. By 1875 the rhinos' range was much reduced, mostly due to hunting.

The author lists 47 sections recording travellers' accounts (starting with a brief biography) in chronological order, each giving the geographical locations, dates, numbers of rhinos seen, and other interesting information on rhinos. Some of the less well known earlier references, including brief biographies, are from John Barrow, Petrus Truter, William Somerville, Samuel Daniell and William Burchell who visited the Northern and Eastern Cape. Unlike many historians, Dr Rookmaaker has also examined hundreds of illustrations of rhinos with 157 produced in this monograph, many published for the first time, and some of significant artistic value. The largest number of illustrations shown, 31, are by Thomas Baines (1820-1875) mostly supplied by London's Natural History Museum and the Royal Geographical Society.

By 1875 most rhinos had been killed in southern Africa both for their horns (as trophies and for com-

mercial demand) and for meat. The monograph brings attention to the surprising popularity of rhino meat amongst travellers. The French animal collector, Adulphe Delegorgue (1814-1850) was particularly fond of white rhino meat and in November 1843 shot one daily for the pot. The explorer James Chapman (1831-1872) preferred the hump of the white rhino which he baked to become 'as tender as jelly'. Early European travellers also considered other parts of the rhino as delicacies, such as the tongue, marrow, heart and liver.

For rhino conservationists, perhaps the most important part of the monograph are the rhino distribution maps towards the end that Dr Rookmaaker has compiled based on historic sightings of rhinos. It is interesting to note where black rhinos were recorded, which is everywhere except: northern Namibia, Botswana's Kalahari region, the western part of the Northern Cape (except along the Orange River), the eastern part of the Eastern Cape, Lesotho, Swaziland, the southern part of Kwazulu-Natal, the western part of Mpumalanga, the Limpopo Province, south-east Zimbabwe and southern Mozambique. The author believes, however, that during this period there were probably black rhinos in some of these regions, such as northern Namibia, parts of Mpumalanga and Limpopo Province, parts of Swaziland, and south-east

Zimbabwe, based on vegetation types.

White rhinos were less widely distributed. None were recorded in the northern and southern parts of Namibia, the Kalahari in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique. Nor were there any in central or southern South Africa, although Dr Rookmaaker points out that the habitat was suitable in some places. As well as being historically interesting, these maps can be useful today for wildlife departments to show where rhinos in southern Africa of both species used to live to help suggest sites for future re-introductions.

This monograph is not only a contemporary guide as to where rhinos can be re-introduced, but it is also

an important historical document. Dr Rookmaaker, the foremost world authority on the history of the rhinoceros, is noted for his accuracy in his research and writings. He has a huge knowledge on references to rhinos in the major European languages and has compiled a bibliography for the Rhino Research Center with so far over 12,000 references on rhinos. His monograph is thus the most thorough ever written on this subject. I would like to see Dr Rookmaaker produce a later monograph based on a study of Africana items, such as manuscripts and illustrations, in private collections in the USA and archival sources found in US institutions which have yet to be examined. There is no better person for this work than Dr Rookmaaker.