

Oryx

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The Society was founded in 1903 as the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, and subsequently named the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society. Fauna & Flora International is conserving the planet's threatened species and ecosystems – with the people and communities who depend on them.

Oryx - The International Journal of Conservation, is now published quarterly by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Fauna & Flora International. It is a leading scientific journal of biodiversity conservation, conservation policy and sustainable use, with a particular interest in material that has the potential to improve conservation management and practice.

The website, <http://www.oryxthejournal.org/>, plays a vital role in the journal's capacity-building work. Amongst the site's many attributes is a compendium of sources of free software for researchers and details of how to access Oryx at reduced rates or for free in developing countries. The website also includes extracts from Oryx issues 10, 25 and 50 years ago, and a gallery of research photographs that provide a fascinating insight into the places, species and people described in the journal.

The [Rhino Resource Center](#) posted this PDF in June 2009. We are grateful for the permission.

WITH THE WHITE RHINOCEROS IN
ZULULAND.

By C. T. ASTLEY MABERLY.

To meet the great Square-mouthed or White Rhinoceros (*R. simus*) in his native habitat surely ranks as one of the greatest thrills for an enthusiastic naturalist. I happened to be so blessed by Fortune recently, and perhaps a brief account of these rare mammals as they may be seen in Zululand may prove interesting.

Last August I was privileged to accompany my friend, Mr. P. W. Willis, into the Hluhluwe and Umfolosi game reserves of Zululand, where Willis hoped to secure cine-film of both the common Black and the White Rhinos which have been so admirably preserved there. Although there is a certain number of each species of Rhino in both these reserves, the Umfolosi is still, at present, the main stronghold of the White Rhinoceros; while the Black species mainly favours the Hluhluwe.

The White Rhinoceros is, of course, a *grazer*: and consequently the more sparsely wooded Umfolosi reserve possibly suits it better than the areas of extremely dense thorny scrub which cover a large proportion of the Hluhluwe—so appropriate for the *browsing* Black Rhino. At any rate the Umfolosi reserve is now reputed to harbour close upon 200 White Rhinos, while about fifteen are said to be present in suitable portions of the Hluhluwe. The two reserves are in close proximity to one another, and it would be pleasing if the narrow intervening strip of barren country could be included so as to form one complete sanctuary.

At present there is a limited amount of motor-track constructed in both reserves, so that it is possible to travel round a considerable area by car, while the undulating nature of the terrain provides wide ranges of view. A great attraction of these reserves, however, lies in the fact that one can hire reliable native game-scouts to guide one up to the animals

on foot, thereby obtaining excellent opportunities for study and photography at close quarters. Besides Rhino, there are Buffalo, Blue Wildebeeste, Zebra, Kudu, Warthog, Leopard, Bushbuck, Reedbuck, Natal Duiker, and last but not least the beautiful and rare Inyala; while the bird-life is superb, including Crested Guinea-fowl.

We had very satisfactory results in both reserves, but, the White Rhino being the more interesting of the two species, I will confine this account to experiences with him!

Having arrived in the Umfolosi reserve fresh from adventures with Black Rhino in the Hluhluwe, opportunities for comparison between the two species proved most interesting. Approaching the Black Rhino on foot with nothing more formidable than a camera and sketch-book is always an exciting affair; and in bush-country there is a certain amount of nervous strain which is relieved only when the great snorting brute finally decides to crash away through the scrub, yielding to the warnings of his faithful tick-birds.

The kindly, good-tempered White Rhinoceros, however, entirely lacks the impetuosity of his smaller but more irritable relative. Standing approximately 6 feet at the shoulder, with an amazing hump on the back of his neck, he moves about with a gentle, ponderous dignity that swiftly puts the peacefully disposed "hunter" at ease with him. Provided you are careful about the wind, and are reasonably quiet in approach, you can advance to within 20 yards or so with little risk of danger excepting that which may arise from a suddenly startled and bewildered creature.

There is something extraordinarily elephantine about this huge creature—particularly as, when moving away from you, the prominent dorsal ridge is visible. The colour is certainly a lighter shade of slate-grey than that of the Black Rhino, though it cannot by the widest stretch of imagination be called white! Nevertheless, the smooth texture of the skin does produce a sort of "white shiny" appearance when noticed at a distance in brilliant sunlight. The droppings of the animal are very like those of a Cow Elephant in size

and form—quite different and much larger than those of the Black Rhino—and are black in colour.

The only sound I recorded (apart from alarm snorts) occurred when a bull and cow which we had been filming at 40 yards suddenly got our scent and rushed away at astonishing speed. One of them uttered a most peculiar noise, something like the deep, gasping final grunts of a stallion's whinny. They charged through the grass with the action of stampeding Clydesdales!

Only once did we experience anything in the nature of a "charge" from a White Rhino, and in this case I am of the opinion that the unusual behaviour of the beast was due to bewilderment and his defective eyesight. Startled at our approach, a pair of White Rhinos were trotting away in a direction which would take them past a certain large bush-clump, so, jumping out of the car, I followed our splendid Zulu guide to the cover of the clump, expecting to film them as they issued round the other side. Hardly had we taken up position than round they came, the cow leading. They passed at about 25 yards, and I commenced to film. Instantly the bull swung about and headed straight towards us! He came at a clumsy, shambling trot, and my guide promptly waved his arms and shouted. For a second the monster hesitated, and then to our amazement he came on again, while the guide now danced and yelled more wildly, finally clutching me hastily out of the way. At this demonstration the Rhino was clearly unnerved, for he swung round and rapidly galloped after his retreating cow. He was within about 10 yards of us when he finally turned. My impression was that he had been completely bewildered, firstly by the whirring of the camera and later by the noise, and that it was only when he became aware of our movements that he realized the cause of the hubbub, when he retired distinctly more quickly than he had advanced!

A most memorable occasion was that when the two guides who were accompanying us, located and led us up to a slumbering family of five White Rhinos at midday. They lay flat upon their sides—like gigantic pigs—amongst the



“THEN, TO OUR ASTONISHMENT, HE CAME ON AGAIN!”

Drawn by C. T. Astley-Maberley.

grass in the shade of a magnificent Umkudzlu tree. The family consisted of a fine bull, two adult cows, a half-grown individual, and a small calf with a quaint little "button" in place of his future formidable anterior horn. We crept up to within about 20 yards of them, and it formed a most interesting spectacle! The little calf was in the centre of the group, propped between the massive flanks of two adults, and it slept upon its haunches. Trumpet-like ears wagged sleepily backwards and forwards, and as the quiescent monsters breathed their grotesque square-lips puffed open and shut. As usual, tick-birds (*Buphaga*) hunted about the hides of their great hosts.

Suddenly one of these watchful birds noticed us, and, uttering a harsh, long-drawn "chirrrrr" it fluttered anxiously into the air. Instantly the monsters stirred restlessly: tiny, almond-shaped eyes opened: and the series of sensitive trumpets became tensely alert! What was going to happen now? We felt a little uneasy about the presence of that precious tiny fellow!

The birds, not seriously alarmed, had ceased their outcry, but the Rhinos—shy and timid in spite of their vast proportions—could no longer rest in peace. One by one they stood up, curling their tails in a loop over their rumps as is their wont when suspicious, listening, silent and statuesque. Then the mother gently touched the little fellow with her front horn, and guided him slowly away; following him closely with her great square mouth on a level with his little back. The whole group then walked away towards a quieter and more secluded spot. Even if their alert ears caught the soft whirring of the camera it apparently occasioned them no great alarm.

Like Elephants, White Rhinos are adepts at mysteriously quiet but rapid "get-aways". When their suspicions have been aroused, the beasts just quietly walk away—one moment they are perhaps in plain view, in the next they have completely vanished, and you may never locate them again!
