

CATCHING WILD BEASTS ALIVE

by
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WITH 16 ILLUSTRATIONS



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weighing 500 kg. and containing a load of 2500 kg. vertically without motor power and often even without animal power, is no small task, but what a tremendous expenditure of force is required to transport this whole load for miles through pathless country to the water-course no one who has not taken part can realise. Not until the giant, swinging from chain and slings, is seen disappearing into the hold of a ship, can his captor and carriers breathe again.

In addition to the large bull, which had to make the journey to the Chicago Zoo, I captured three young animals, one of which died on the way.

Thus, in brief, is effected the capture of the hippopotamus, sometimes known as the river horse, or water-pig.

II

THE RHINOCEROS

It will probably be known to few people that in dim primeval ages the rhinoceros existed in Europe, where the remains of these great pachyderms have often been found, even in German soil. The climatic upheavals of many thousands of years ago banished to tropical countries this strange animal, which is to be included as little as the elephant among the fauna of the present age.

Innumerable stories are told about the rhinoceros, but a good half or more belong to the realm of legend. Hunters are especially prone to fable, and nothing is more unsafe than to base data on their reports. I have, in Africa, Asia, and in the islands of Java, Sumatra, and Malacca encountered large numbers of nimrods who all told contradictory stories about the rhinoceros. A clear picture of these animals is only to be arrived at by years of observation.

Several times I had the doubtful pleasure of the society of rhinoceros hunters. I found it interesting, however, to see how these animals are killed.

I did not once see a rhinoceros fall to the first shot ;

two or more always being needed before he was mortally hit. I have many times had to watch the quarry, wounded in the body—generally in the lungs—dash away maddened with pain. Often it would require days of search before the dead or still suffering animal could be found, and sometimes he could not be found at all, despite the easily recognisable trail. Who knows how far the wounded rhino had run or swum through forest, thorn-bush, and river before he died a miserable death ?

An eloquent example of how terrible the death of a clumsily hit animal may be came to my notice by chance. I was on the march with my men, when my attention was attracted by the screaming of vultures and snarling of four-footed beasts of prey to the side of our path. A black, whom I had sent to investigate, soon returned in a great state of excitement and signed to me to come quickly.

I reached the spot in a few minutes and a terrible sight met my eyes. In the dry grass a colossal buffalo lay kicking frantically. It was defending itself against two great hyenas, which had torn lumps of flesh from its side and were again attacking, while long-legged birds stalked up and dug their sharp beaks into the ghastly wounds.

A shot drove off the assailants, and then the sky became almost black with flocks of vultures wheeling in the air. I walked round the raving, struggling buffalo, placed my rifle against its forehead, and put an end to its sufferings. An examination of the carcase showed that it had been hit in the spine by a bullet. As the vertebræ were not broken, but only dislocated, the wounded animal had still been capable of flight. He must have suffered for days before collapsing. The hyenas and vultures had not patience to wait for the end and had begun to devour the defenceless victim while he was still living.

A week later I met the bold sportsmen responsible, and from what they told me I was able to estimate that the poor buffalo must have been suffering for fully six

days. Such tragedies are of frequent occurrence in the wilds.

Good shots with iron nerves and sure hands are rare. Even the best are often seized with nervous excitement in the presence of the quarry and lose control of eye and hand. Hence the frequent erratic shooting even by expert hunters.

It is, of course, a point of honour with sportsmen never to admit misses.

A wounded rhinoceros is an extremely dangerous beast, and many a big-game hunter has paid for his clumsiness with his life. To hit the tough animal once, even in a vital spot, does not by a long way ensure death. Often the quarry sights his pursuer immediately after the first shot, and then dashes upon him with lowered head. It fares ill with the sportsman if the second shot misses the mark, or if no opportunity for escape presents itself. He is lost. Death is certain. He will be caught on the horn, hurled into the air, and then trampled to pulp by the animal's hoofs. Many a big-game hunter has lost his life in this appalling way.

I have also heard tell that starving hyenas will attack a living rhinoceros. They sink their jaws firmly into the belly of the animal and go on repeating their onslaught until the rhino is brought to the ground with protruding intestines. As I never saw such a thing happen, it is impossible for me to confirm this. It is certainly difficult to believe, but in view of the terrific voracity of hyenas it is not incredible that they may be capable of such exploits. But I rather think the rhino would put up a very stout defence against such an attack.

When a rhino is standing facing the hunter, the two horns mask the middle of the forehead, which is the best target. In order to get the bullet into the brain, which is very small, it is necessary to hit the forehead exactly in the centre. Any uncertainty of aim endangers the hunter's life, for the smoke shows the rhino where the shot has come from.

I once hit in the nostril, at a distance of 10 metres, an attacking rhino which I had not already fired at, but

which suddenly discovered my presence as it raised its head above a bush. It fell back as though it had been struck by a lump of rock; but it was not dead, only stunned for a moment, and I had time to clamber into a mimosa tree with my natives. I knew for certain that my bullet had passed through the wide nostril into the brain and that it could only be a matter of seconds before the animal died. Yet how easy it is to underestimate the toughness of such a monster!

With one bound, the animal was on its feet again, its little eyes glaring angrily towards the trunk below us. I do not know whether it had discovered us, but with the full weight of its huge body it charged the trunk, and, with the exception of one small nigger who clung to the tree like a monkey, we were all flung down into the grass.

I landed on my right shoulder and the right side of my head. Like a flash the thought shot through my brain that this was the end. Fortunately the onslaught on the tree-trunk was the animal's last effort. It lay dead on the roots not two metres away from me.

I was not hurt, and am obliged to believe the report of the little nigger who had remained in the tree. He told with excited gesticulations and rolling eyes how the master—myself—had fallen head first on top of the body of the fallen rhinoceros and from there into the grass. For several days I suffered from a very sore head and stiff neck, and my right shoulder was painful and turned black and blue.

The caprices of the rhinoceros when it has sighted a real or imaginary foe are incalculable. Sometimes it will rush round like a circus horse, make off at a tangent to windward, and then charge at incredible speed back at the enemy.

The rhinos of the Kilimanjaro district have the worst reputation, which must be attributable to the constant tormenting they have to suffer at the hands of the natives. But I have never succeeded in obtaining proof of these reports.

Like many other animals of the wilderness, the rhino

can stand a number of well-aimed shots without being brought down. At first I gave no credence to stories of rhinoceros keeping their feet in spite of shots in the belly, lungs, and neck, but I soon had an opportunity of convincing myself of the toughness of these animals.

Wadding, an old African who was a sure shot and had killed many lions, elephants, and other beasts of the wilds, fired at a rhinoceros cow in my presence. It was at once obvious that the giantess had been hit in the right spot in the neck. After circling round us several times, she stood for a moment with her side exposed to us, and Nadding gave her a bullet in the belly. Even then the animal did not come down, but, at last discovering her enemy, charged us. A third bullet struck her behind the left shoulder and must have penetrated the lungs; but still the cow came on a few yards before she fell.

As the meat had been promised to the natives, the rhino was at once cut open; and then I was able to convince myself that each bullet had reached a vital spot, and there could be no doubt that each individual shot had been mortal.

In connection with the pugnacity of these easily infuriated pachyderms, I may remark that not only the bulls, but also the cows are savage fighters among themselves. But what is even more interesting, and what I have myself observed, is that a cow and a bull will fight together; and it is not always the male who is the attacker. There are cantankerous ladies even among rhinos.

The rhinoceros is found over wide areas of Africa. It is quite wrong to suppose that they may be divided into several species. In reality there are only two species in the whole of the Dark Continent: the black and the white. But even here it is difficult to say whether these, living in widely separated areas, do not spring originally from the same stock. Animals living under different conditions do change in outward appearance in accordance with their power of adapting themselves to changed surroundings and modes of life.

It is a different matter when we come to the Asiatic



Neville Kingston

RHINOCEROS IN THE WATER



rhino. For one thing there are marked diversities of outward appearance and scale between those living on the continent and those on the islands. Again, the former are distinguished from the African beasts by the number of the horns and many external features, whilst the island types vary strikingly in colour and size.

Up to ten years ago no naturalist mentions the scaled rhinoceros (*Schuppenrhino*) living in the inaccessible mountains and fever-swamps of South Java. It is only during the last few years that reports of this almost mythical monster began to be published. There were doubts, however, about its actual existence until two specimens were shot by bold hunters, and then stubborn denial of its existence had to be dropped.

The fact that, as I have already mentioned, the district in which the scaled rhino lives is almost inaccessible, explains why so little has been heard of this strange mammal.

As early as 1900 a Dutchman told me of the existence of this rhinoceros. This traveller had in 1894 equipped an expedition to bag one. He set out with a hundred natives and returned months later, seriously sick and having lost more than half his men. Of the rest, thirty-two deserted, and only three escaped the fever.

Jungle, swamps, and impenetrable wilderness were the obstacles upon which the enterprise was wrecked.

The first instance of a scaled rhino being shot was in 1921; the second in 1924; both by American sportsmen. All doubts were silenced by the hide of the second animal being brought in as a trophy. The men who killed the first had been so seriously weakened by sickness, which had attacked both themselves and their men, that they had been compelled to abandon the hide on the return journey.

With modern means of communication, and certainly with seaplanes, it should be possible to come down on one of the large lakes that lie among the swamps, and so, avoiding the long marches through the pestilential areas, reach more rapidly the haunts of the scaled rhino,

study him, and shoot him. Naturally several planes would be required to transport the necessary labour and supplies.

I doubt whether it will be found possible during the next ten years to capture a living specimen, as the difficulties of transport may prove insuperable.

The African white rhinoceros is a huge beast. Its length from the nose to the tip of the tail runs up to 4 metres, and its weight to 2500 kg.

Osborn once shot one which measured 4 m. 32 cm. and weighed 2630 kg.

I do not wish to cast doubt upon the bold Englishman's measurements, but it puzzles me to know how he was able to fix the weight to the exact kilogram. My doubts are strengthened by the fact that Osborn gives the animal's height as over 2 metres, for I have never heard of a greater height than 1 m. 70 cm. The usual height of these animals is only 160 cm.

The ugliness and repulsiveness of the rhinoceros are of course a matter of taste. Anyone who, like myself, has had repeated opportunities of studying the animal closely will soon discover the attractions of this giant.

An imposing effect is produced by the two horns standing up one close behind the other from the skin of the nose and 50 to 90 cm. in length. But it is not only on the head that these horn-like formations occur; with older animals horny excrescences up to 10 cm. long are to be found distributed over the head, neck, back, and even on the legs. These are never pointed, but are blunt and highly polished.

In young rhinos the horns are quite straight. It is friction against tree-trunks and stones during growth that causes the horns to bend upwards.

It is wrong to distinguish species according to the length of the horns. I have observed rhinos with the two horns of equal length, and others with the lower horn longer than the upper (this is the general rule); but on the other hand I have frequently seen the posterior horn rather longer than the anterior. It is difficult to say what factor determines these variations, but un-

doubtedly play and rubbing contribute towards the stunting of one of the horns. The fact also that when charging the rhino tears up the ground with its horn also influences their relative size. These points can best be studied in the species known as the Keitloa.

The most incredible stories are current concerning the temperament of the rhinoceros; but here again we find lamentable generalisation. The reports of untrustworthy people find their way into newspapers and books and are accepted at their face value. The chief responsibility for this state of affairs, which often leads to the distortion of natural history, lies with the sensation-loving Press which does not care in the least whether such reports are the truth, exaggeration, or merely hunters' yarns.

The rhinoceros is not a herd animal like the elephant. It generally lives alone and is rarely to be seen in groups. Sometimes one sees pairs living devotedly together.

With regard to the temperament of the rhinoceros, it is first of all to be remarked that these animals, in spite of their unwieldiness, are extremely active. They run at a speed which one would never expect from their build. The swiftest runner cannot keep pace with them.

The spectacle of an attacking rhino is one that will never be forgotten. With its massive head lowered, and its horn ripping up the ground, it hurtles forward on its bandy legs, trampling down everything in its path. There is little chance for anyone who fails to get out of the way. The victim is gored by the horn, hurled into the air, and then trampled to pulp by the hoofs.

Rhinos live together peaceably as a rule, yet I have often witnessed battles between them. Usually there is no bloodshed, or very little. The hide is tremendously thick, elastic, and tough.

It is a quaint sight to watch one of these tussles between two bulls or cows—for the cows also attack one another. The noise they make sounds like a loud snorting; then they scream and grunt, and from time to time one hears high-pitched shrieks and a powerful

roar like that of a lion. The combatants hold their heads deeply lowered, and for a special reason. The only easily vulnerable spot is in the neck, where the hide is soft and thin. This spot must be protected, for if the opponent's horn penetrates it the wound may be mortal.

With their huge clumsy heads to the ground, the giants rush at one another. From the crash one would think the skulls had been shattered; but nothing of the sort happens. Sometimes, however, the infuriated animals inflict horrible wounds on one another's bodies.

I once found a female which I had watched fighting and which had succumbed to a severe wound. I found a gash nearly 70 cm. long on the left side of the belly. Her opponent had driven its horn into the body of the fallen foe just in front of the hind leg. It had penetrated to a depth of nearly 20 cm. and had ripped the belly open to the middle.

Such wounds, however, are rare, for the elasticity of the hide makes it so difficult to pierce and its folds help to turn a blow.

Fighting rhinos possess extraordinary powers of endurance. I once followed a fight which lasted six hours, and in spite of the length and stubbornness of the struggle the two bulls only showed slight, superficial injuries.

It has been proved that fighting rhinos often bite off one another's ears. I have twice seen specimens with maimed ears. One of these I caught, and was able to ascertain that two-thirds of one ear had been bitten off.

Big-game hunters report having seen fights between rhinos and elephants, but in spite of the fact that I have often seen meetings between these two giant animals, I have always found them take little or no notice of one another. I once saw two rhinos trot past a herd of elephants feeding in high grass, which included several young bulls and, although the elephants followed closely every movement of the rhinos, nothing happened. If cases of fighting between a rhino and an elephant do

occur, I think the attack could only be opened by the rhino.

Rhinoceros are very easily roused. The slightest thing will lash them into fury, and then they are extremely dangerous. Unless you get out of the way promptly, death is inevitable. Anything strange is sufficient to disturb these animals. Their vision is badly developed and their sense of smell is by no means so keen as has often been stated; but when awake they possess extraordinarily sharp hearing. They are very alert, and at the slightest unusual sound will stand motionless, their slanting nostrils distended, seeking to discover the direction from which the sound comes; and only then do their olfactory nerves begin to function. When standing in the wind they quickly scent danger, and particularly from men.

Their sentinels, which always warn them of danger, are the great rhinoceros-birds. These birds, which find their food in the crevices of the rhino's hide, are watchful guards and betray the approaching enemy with loud screeching. They then leave the rhino's back and flutter over him in circles, uttering incessant cries of warning, and from time to time dropping on to the beast's head to warn him with vigorous thrusts from their beaks; then rising again to indicate the direction in which the pachyderm is to escape.

Hunters curse these birds, which in this way often thwart them of a certain bag. I myself have often been exasperated at seeing them head off an animal just as it was running into the trap. The intelligence and loyalty to their hosts is astonishing.

The high grass hides the hunter, often reaching over his head, and affording him good cover as, bowed forward or crawling, he stalks his quarry. The wind is favourable and the rhinoceros has no suspicion of the approaching enemy, as the grass also blocks his view. This, however, only makes the birds all the more watchful. From time to time some of them rise from their table, the rhino's back richly laid with a feast of succulent insects, and wheel in circles round the stirring

grass which has aroused their suspicion. When they discover the hunter and his bearer they fill the air with their discordant cries. The rhino stiffens to attention, takes the wind, glares round, and soon follows his sentries into the protecting bush.

The rhinoceros is a very heavy sleeper and his loud snoring betrays his lair. At these times even the rhinoceros-bird does not succeed in arousing him. The loud shrieks go unheard. They dive down again and again on to the sleeper; but even the most vigorous pecks fail to interrupt the rhino's slumbers.

Re-echoing snores once brought me right up to a rhinoceros. The great animal, a female, was lying in the shade of an isolated dwarf tree and the warning cries of the birds had attracted my attention. Cautiously I crept closer, and soon realised from what animal the discordant concert was coming. When I emerged from the bush, the lady lay ten yards in front of me. I approached her from behind, my rifle ready to fire. She was performing music which had affinities with the modern fox-trot and over her head the wheeling rhinoceros birds accompanied Mrs. Rhino's solo with the harsh tones of the saxophone.

Two of my men had followed me with reserve rifles, and one coal-black fellow who seemed on very familiar terms with sleeping rhinos, kicked the slumbering animal heavily in the hind quarters, but without awakening it. As I never shot animals except in cases of compelling need, I spared the sleeper's life, for to capture a grown rhinoceros in open country is out of the question.

The white rhino, which occurs in South Africa, is a most grotesque sight owing to its gigantic head, which forms almost a third of the animal's total length. This animal attains a length of 5 metres. It is much more alert than its northern cousin, feeds only in open country, and so is compelled to keep on its guard. It is said to be more vicious than the other types, but personally I have not observed this, although I have had many opportunities of studying the animal.

Unfortunately, in spite of indescribable effort and great expenditure of time, I have rarely succeeded in capturing a grown specimen. It was against my principles to shoot a suckling mother in order to capture the baby.

It is a mistaken assumption that the rhinoceros is only to be found in the plains. I have seen these animals at heights of more than 3000 metres and have captured a grown specimen in such a place.

Although the rhino has the thickest hide of all pachyderms it suffers a great deal from various kinds of pests. The hide is full of cracks and folds in which all kinds of parasites settle, eating their way deep into the skin. It is to rid himself of these unpleasant guests that the rhino tolerates the rhinoceros-birds; but these birds are not sufficient, and so the tormented animal often seeks out pools and wallows in the mud to stop up the crevices in his hide; so killing the parasites already there and preventing the entry of fresh ones.

The neighbourhood of swamps forms the favourite haunt of the rhinoceros. During the day the animals mostly sleep in the shade, and the nights are used for excursions in search of food and water. The rhino is an excellent and tireless swimmer.

Once aroused, the rhino is quickly on the alert. Where other animals take to flight, or contrive to conceal themselves, the rhino often shows unique stupidity.

There is no truth in the reports that the rhino is always the first to attack. After many years of observation, I am convinced that the supposed attack is nothing more than a flight. Strange though it may seem, I have almost always observed that the rhino flees with the wind; and as the hunter always tries to stalk his quarry from this direction, this accounts for the false reports of the rhino's aggressiveness. The result of my own observations indicates that this aggressiveness does not come into evidence until the moment when something strange opposes the beast's flight or stands in his path. I have often seen frightened or wounded rhinos in full flight. They prefer to avoid a fight rather than accept it.

Of course, cases do occur in which the rhino recognises man as the hunter, and then it is a question of your life or mine. I was once brought into a particularly dangerous situation by a rabid shot, a Belgian named Pirqueur. This man had already brought down a number of rhinos and was acquainted with their habits, whereas I at that time knew little of these beasts. It is a mistake to generalise about wounded rhinos. In these cases things generally turn out differently from what one would expect.

Pirqueur had hit a bull too high in the fleshy part of the neck. The animal, infuriated by pain and terror, dashed round in a circle a dozen times, and as, at the end of this circus performance, his nose was pointing in my direction—I was standing among some dwarf thorn bushes—he charged down upon me. I had just time to step aside as the colossus came hurtling past me with lowered head and horn ploughing up the ground and hurling roots and stones into the air. But the animal had seen me, and now an exciting game began. The bull chased me round in a circle. Several times I only just managed to dodge behind tree-trunks; but he always turned about and discovered me immediately. It would have been all over with me had not Pirqueur brought the raging animal down with a second shot. It took a third to end the monster's life.

From that day I have had a very great respect for rhinos. I was anxious lest these swashbucklers should get wind of what I was after and all the rhinos of the wild conspire against me.

Anything unusual rouses the attention or anger of the rhino. I once saw one infuriated by a tree which had been struck by lightning. The animal emerged from the bush and stood still at a distance of about 20 metres from the shattered tree. The strange spectacle dumbfounded it. Suddenly it hurtled forward, emitted a roar, lowered its head, and charged down on the charred trunk. The tree did not display discretion. It refused to yield, and not until the attack had been repeated eight times did the rhino leave it in peace. The impact

each time was terrific, and each time I thought the rhino must have crushed in its skull and would collapse. Nothing of the kind happened. When its fury had cooled, it trotted on and after fifty paces began quietly to crop the leaves of a mimosa.

The capture of the rhinoceros is easier than that of the hippopotamus or elephant. Rhinos wander but little, and only when drought compels them to go in search of water do they leave their accustomed feeding-ground.

The grown rhino is best captured by means of a pit. They can also be caught in an outstretched net, but this method is not very reliable and is very risky. I only once succeeded in capturing an island rhino with a net, and as the process cost me the lives of two men I was prejudiced against the method.

The first step is to discover the path from the feeding-ground to the water. This is not difficult, as the rhinos after treading out a path always use the same one. The tremendous weight of their bodies crushes everything into the ground and a path trodden by a rhinoceros would make an excellent cycling track. I have noticed that rhinos frequently use paths trodden out by elephants.

Frequently small clearings lie along these paths and these were the spots I always chose to dig the pits.

It is curious that although these animals do not live in herds one path is used by several animals. On the other hand I have noticed paths being used by one animal only, or at most a pair, or by a mother with her young one.

Before I discuss the capture, I should like to mention that Indian, and particularly island, rhinos are much more easily captured than the African kind. This is chiefly due to the differences in the vegetation among which the animals respectively live. In Asia, and especially in the islands, the rhinos live on the edges of luxuriant jungle and seldom wander far from the forest, which provides them with protection from the sun and their enemies. Moreover, they are night animals.

They sleep through the hottest hours of the day, and in the early morning trot down to their drinking-places to quench their tremendous thirst, and perhaps also take a mud bath, after which they retire to rest. The island rhinos also tread out paths, but they cannot be relied upon always to use the same one.

I caught my first rhinoceros in Java.

Watching a female for several nights, when I was out after monkeys, I noticed that each morning she sought a particular pool, where she drank and then wallowed in the mud. She would come a distance of 500 metres from the east, and then, after her bath, followed a short path only 100 metres long which led into the neighbouring forest. I was not equipped for the capture of rhinos, but was reluctant to miss this favourable opportunity.

The pit was dug in the scorching heat of the day on the short homeward path, not far from the edge of the forest, and was covered with foliage. I had little hope that the animal would fall into the trap.

I intended also to use the trick I have adopted in the capture of hippopotami. Shortly before the frightened animal reached the trap, I decided to fire a shot in order that the explosion might spur her on. I took no notice of the mocking expressions of my natives, but was anxious that the capture should not miscarry.

I spent the night on my high perch and awaited the dawn. Hunting-fever and malaria shook me when Mrs. Rhino, rather later than usual, at last loomed up. On her way to the pool she repeatedly halted to bite off succulent titbits. I could hear the loud sucking noise she made as she filled her belly with water.

But, contrary to all custom, she did not take a bath; probably because the day was already far advanced and she was anxious to reach the protection of the forest as quickly as possible. Or did some sense, unknown to us, warn her of danger?

With clumsy tread, the beast lumbered along her accustomed path. I was filled with excited expectation. The moment had come. The rhino was on the right

path. She seemed to me to be going more cautiously and slowly than usual. Now she was only 10 metres from the pit. Slowly I raised my gun.

What was that? Suddenly the animal paused, and stood motionless. She had detected something strange in her path.

Now was the moment to act, before she backed and turned about. She must have felt suspicious, must have noticed the strange green covering and the short branches scattered over her usually smooth track.

I fired both barrels in quick succession. The rhino dashed panic-stricken ahead and landed in the trap.

As in the case of the hippopotamus, it is very difficult to lift the rhinoceros out of the pit, and in addition the rhino is far wilder, more stupid and refractory. It takes a long time to quieten down.

I left the prisoner in the pit for fully a fortnight, giving it little food and even less water, in order to bring it to reason and accustom it to the sight of men. Only then did I dig a hole by the side of the trap and lower the extremely strongly constructed cage with its drop-door towards the trap.

It was three days before the rhino entered the cage. Here again hunger conquered. How great its thirst must have been is shown by the fact that it drank more than twenty buckets of water.

It took the full strength of a dozen zebus to raise the cage, and the transport to the coast occupied six weeks.

In the course of my expeditions I have enticed eleven rhinos into traps and caught one in a net. Three died, and nine found their way to the zoos and menageries of five continents.

The capture was not always effected so smoothly as was the case with my first. There were many more exciting, and also more tragic, adventures to be experienced, and several men lost their lives.