

Wild Life in the Sudan

Part III

WHITE AND BLACK RHINOCEROS AND GIANT ELAND

By HANS W. SCHOMBER

IN two previous issues of the magazine I have described the position of the wild animals and the present nature conservation situation in the national parks and game reserves of the Sudan. The exceptionally wide range of topographical and climatic conditions of the country provides habitats for an equally varied and comprehensive range of wild animal life. In many cases only very little is known of the distribution, habits and appearance of some of the more rare larger animals, so that certain observations concerning them should prove of interest to readers of this magazine.

1. The Nile Square-lipped rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*).

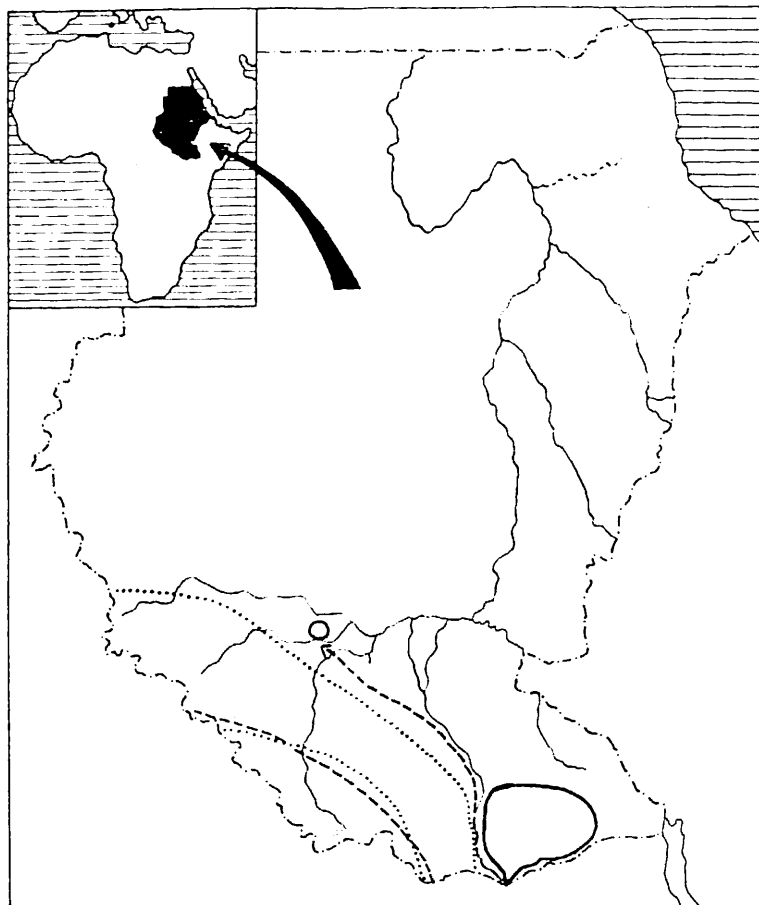
In the year 1900 Major A. S. H. Gibbons shot a rhinoceros while on a hunting expedition on the Upper White Nile. On examination of the trophy by an English zoologist, Thomas, the animal proved to be the Square-lipped rhino. But beyond this there was no authentic proof to support the existence of a second isolated distribution area for the species. Between 1904 and 1907 Major Powell-Cotton undertook an expedition in the then Lado-Enclave and obtained certain proof of the existence of White rhino in the Southern Sudan. This discovery caused quite a sensation in scientific circles. Had it not been accepted for several decades that the distribution area for White rhino had always been confined to South Africa? Now a second habitat for this giant land mammal had surprisingly been discovered, more than 3,000 kilometers from the southern surviving herds in Zululand.

A distance of 2,000 km. lies between those in Western Uganda and the Zambesi river, the northern border of the former known distribution area of the South African Square-lipped rhino (about 1,800). In this far-flung territory there had hitherto been no trace of an earlier existence of this thick-skinned mammal. There must certainly at one time have been some connection. In all probability the separation commenced in the more recent geological times, during the floods of the Pleistocene period and the following expansion of the primaeval forests. Thus two isolated, clearly defined distribution centres came into being in East and South Africa. (See Vol. 12. No. 4. p. 273).

Description: In 1908 the English zoologist R. Lydekker described the recently-discovered Square-lipped rhinoceros of Central Africa as a new geographical sub-species on account of its different skull-

Facing: Black-backed Gulls photographed by W. T. Miller at Langebaan, Cape Province.

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Distribution of large game animals in the Sudan.

Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis s. sp.*) —————
 Nile Square-lipped Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*). - - - - -
 Eastern Giant Eland (*Taurotragus derbyanus gigas*).

formation, and gave it the scientific name, *Ceratotherium simum Cottoni*. In general outward appearance the differences between the animals of the north and the south are not distinguishable.

Habits and Habitat:

In so far as habits and habitats are concerned they do not differ from their South African cousins. They live in savannah bush, where they are encountered singly, in pairs or in small troops of five or six head.

Distribution:

South-western Sudan, Western Uganda, north-east Congo, and eastern regions of the Central African Republic. The distribution

of the White rhinoceros in the Sudan is limited to the tree savannah of the Equatoria and Bahr-el-Ghazal provinces west of the Nile, which river forms the boundary for the species. They do not appear in the forest belt of the south-western border regions along the Congo boundary. It is uncertain whether there is any extension of the distribution to the north in the district between the Bahr-el-Arab streams and the Lol river. Tracks were found, it is true, here and there in the area, but it could not be said with certainty whether they were of the White or Black rhinos. It is probable, however, that Square-lipped rhino do exist in this region, since their presence has on several occasions been reported by certain authors on the other side of the border in the Central African Republic (previously Tchad and Ubangi-Chari).

Total Numbers, Preservation and Hunting:

Upon the Sudan gaining its independence, the Square-lipped rhino, as the "cream" of the Sudan fauna, was chosen as the heraldic emblem for the young country. This clearly demonstrated the importance attributed to the animal. In spite of the intensive hunting during the first thirty years of this century, which caused a considerable decrease in numbers and temporarily threatened its survival, the strict protective measures introduced during the past ten years have resulted in a gratifying increase. In the Sudan the Square-lipped rhino is numbered among the completely protected species of Schedule I of the Game Regulations and may only be shot or captured in exceptional circumstances with the special permission of the Ministry of Animal Resources. Cases of poaching,



Nile Square-lipped Rhinoceros near Rhino camp, photographed by T. Roosevelt in 1909.

however, may continue in the border districts of Uganda but are punished with exceptionally heavy penalties inflicted by the Sudanese government. Judging from replies to my enquiries, such encroachments occur very seldom today.

The estimated number of Square-lipped rhino in the Sudan is extremely divergent. Reliable estimates are not available since no survey has as yet been carried out. In general, from what I could gather, the number is depreciating. In regard to one habitat of about 200,000 sq. kilos. in area, I estimated the total number to be at least 1,000 head. On this basis, I gauge the following to be the distribution of the Square-lipped rhino in Central Africa:—

South-western Sudan	...	...	1,000	(Schomber, 1961)
North-western Uganda	...	...	300	(Brooks, 1960)
North-eastern Congo (Garamba)	...	...	1,000	(Grzimek, 1959)
Eastern part of Republic of Central Africa	...	...	80	(Grzimek, 1958)

Total 2,380

In the south-western Sudan there are two protected areas, the Southern National Park and the Nimule National Park, in which the Square-lipped rhino enjoys absolute protection. In view of the fact that those animals outside the reserve also belong to the fully protected species and that poaching is very seldom encountered, one can regard the position in the Sudan as being satisfactorily under control. Similar conditions obtain in Uganda. In the Central African Republic, the Square-lipped rhino is said to be present in the Goz-Sassulko National Park. The position is uncertain in the north-eastern Congo, where, however, it is hoped that the animals in the Garamba National Park have survived the chaos.

2. The Black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis* ssp.)

Whether the Black rhino of the Sudan, together with those in western Ethiopia, constitutes a special geographical sub-species has up to now not been definitely established. It nevertheless appears wrong to consider it as representative of the Somali rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis somaliensis*), which is a much smaller animal.

In appearance, habitat and general habits, the Sudan Black rhino differ in no way from their brothers in other parts of Africa.

Distribution, Numbers, Preservation and Hunting:

The number of the Black rhinos has been severely decimated by intensive hunting in past decades by both the Europeans and the natives. Many early travellers (e.g. Baker, Heuglin, Brehm, Marno) state that they were comparatively numerous in the north-eastern part of the Sudan near the Aethiopian-Eritrean border, towards the end of the last century. Today it has completely disappeared from these districts and, except for an isolated record, it is restricted to the south-east tip of the land between the White Nile and the Aethiopian border.

It is a very interesting fact that some Black rhino are living in a small area on the Lol river, near the village of Aweng. This locality



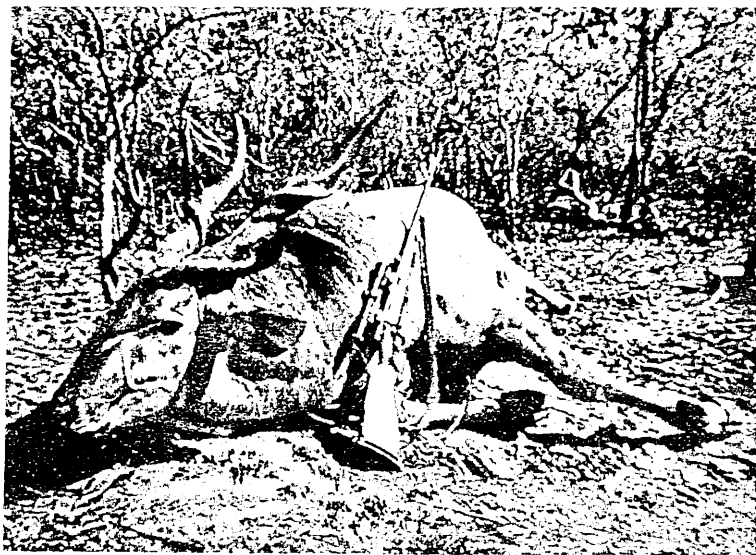
Square-lipped Rhinoceros in the Nimule National Park (Photo: H. Schomber).

is exceptionally thickly populated and is covered with very thick bush. The first European to encounter one of these animals was immediately attacked and compelled to fire a number of shots in self-defence. He had no time to make any observations and due to the thick bush was unable to recognise whether it was a White or Black rhino. It was only in 1947, that a Danish Expedition published the news that it had met with a small herd of Black rhinos that lived, completely isolated, in a narrow confined area. The animals appeared extremely aggressive and constituted a permanent danger for the Dinkas living in the vicinity. Shortly thereafter a few further specimens were discovered near the settlement of Tooralay in the neighbourhood of Aweng. Certain remarks by the natives support the conjecture that a small number of Black rhino are spreading along the tributaries of the Bahr-el-Arab in the neighbouring Central African Republic and indeed this report is worthy of further close investigation. The Black rhino enjoys just the same absolute protection in the Sudan as does the White. It is listed on Schedule I of the Game Regulations and may only be shot in exceptional circumstances with the special permission of the Ministry of Animal Resources. To what extent the animal is affected by illegal trapping I cannot say, but very heavy punishment is prescribed for this offence.

In spite of the protective measures, the position as regards the Black rhino is, in my opinion, not nearly so secure as that of the White. In the Eastern Equatoria Province there is no protected area where the animal could be assured of sanctuary. In the recently established Boma Reserve there are no rhino. The total number of Black rhino in the Sudan can only amount to a few hundred.

3. The East Sudan Giant eland (*Taurotragus derbianus gigas*).

Description: The Giant eland is the largest and strongest of all antelopes. The average weight is between 700 and 800 kilogrammes, although old bulls can scale up to 1,000 kg. Both sexes have massive



Eastern Giant Eland shot in Eastern Oubangui (Photo: G. Wolske).

thick-set spiral horns, which can be more than a meter long. The record trophy in this respect was obtained by a Frenchman in the Ubangi region in 1954. It measured 121 cm. The height at the withers lies between 170 and 180 cm. The animal has a bright reddish-yellow basic colour with striking patterns of black and white.

Habits and Habitat:

Being predominantly a browser, the giant eland lives in the tree savannah or open forests, where the higher branches are knocked down or broken with the horns. Restless and constantly on the move the animals cover considerable distances. They feed as they go, and rest in the shade only during the hottest hours of the day. They are to be seen in small troops of from 12 to 20, as well as in larger herds of 40 and more. Single animals, in most cases old bulls, that are very cautious and on the alert, are often seen.

Distribution:

The distribution of the giant eland, comprising three sub-species, extends from Senegal (where its survival is in danger) across Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic to the Sudan. The White Nile constitutes the eastern border of the distribution area. It favours the same habitat as does the White rhino and inhabits the western Equatoria and Bahr-el-Ghazal provinces as far north as the vicinity of the headwaters of the Bahr-el-Arab.

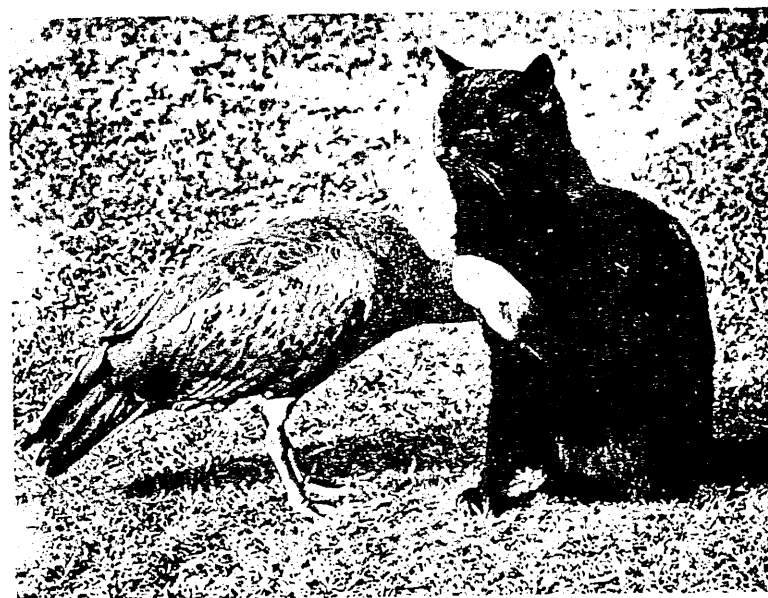
Total Numbers, Preservation and Hunting:

Since the London Convention in 1933 the giant eland has been afforded special attention. In every country it has been placed on the protected list. Besides hunting and poaching, this species also

suffers heavy losses from diseases, such as rinderpest to which it is particularly susceptible. It is pleasing to record that as a result of protective measures, the position has improved in recent times.

The migratory habits of the Giant Eland make it extremely difficult to estimate its numbers, hence it is not possible to give even an approximate estimate. In the Sudan it is included among the protected species in Schedule II of the Game Regulations, and hunting it is only possible with permission of the Ministry. Hunting it is quite free of danger, since the animal is not known to adopt a defensive attitude even against dogs. Nevertheless, it causes hunters a considerable amount of strain and fatigue, since as a result of its very keenly developed senses it is extremely shy and wary as well as being constantly on the move. The survival of this wonderful species in the Sudan is assured, particularly as it possesses a sure sanctuary in the Southern National Park and in certain reserves in the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province.

All in all, one can say that all three of the large mammals enjoy excellent protection in the Sudan, and their survival there appears to be assured. The Black Rhino, however, demands further attention from the Game Department. A step in this direction, offering every prospect of success, would be the proclaiming of a well-guarded reserve in Eastern Equatoria.



This Hadedah Ibis was found by Mr. L. Woolridge of Harding, Natal, with a broken leg. The leg was duly set by him and the bird adopted by the family. It formed a close friendship with the family cat and spent hours each day de-fleaving the cat much to the latter's delight. (Photo: D. S. R. Moon).