

# WILD GAME IN ZAMBEZIA

*Rogers*  
*Charles*  
*Fulke*  
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## CHAPTER IV

### RHINOCEROS—HIPPOPOTAMUS

THE eminent French naturalist Cuvier describes the black rhinoceros, the only variety existing in the districts to which this book devotes itself, as an animal of solitary habits, and much fiercer than the other four known members of this unlovely and unnecessary, if interesting, family. Speaking of these beasts as a whole, the authority mentioned draws particular attention to the singular peculiarity, not widely known, found in the so-called horns. As a matter of fact, the terrible weapons which the rhinoceros carries upon his thick nasal bone are not composed of horn at all. They are formed of hairs—long, coarse hairs glued, as it were, together by some curiously powerful conglutinating substance, and presenting, except at the base, all the appearance of horn of the hardest description. If, however, a section of this substance be examined under a microscope, the capillary tubes composing it, glued together, are at once readily discernible. The foregoing is perhaps the chief peculiarity of this remarkable animal, the singular position of whose defensive weapons doubtless inspired the legends of ancient times which con-

nected themselves with that fabulous form, the unicorn.

The variety found throughout Central Africa, and, I believe, as far south as the North-Eastern Transvaal, is identical with that known to all great game hunters as the "Black Rhinoceros," although its colouring is not strikingly dissimilar from that of the so-called "white" variety. It was, I think, at one time supposed that its horns were equal in point of length, and several old writers on the fauna of Africa have adopted this impression, of which I have, however, never yet seen an instance. As a rule the horns found on the Zambezian rhinoceros are smaller than those carried by animals found farther north, the largest shot by me within the district we are considering measuring  $25\frac{1}{4}$  and  $12\frac{5}{8}$  inches anterior and posterior respectively. This, for the Zambezia region, was an exceptional measurement, anterior horns as a rule seldom exceeding—or attaining—20 inches. I remember reading in one of Mr. F. Vaughan Kirby's books a statement that this at one time prominent hunter had found in some village, in a neighbouring territory through which he happened to be passing, a pair of horns measuring  $29\frac{1}{2}$  and  $19\frac{1}{4}$  inches. This measurement I have never seen approached, and, if no mistake was made, I can only regard it as probable that the horns were brought from some distant part of the country. In British East Africa, however, specimens of this animal have been shot possessing horns greatly exceeding in length those I

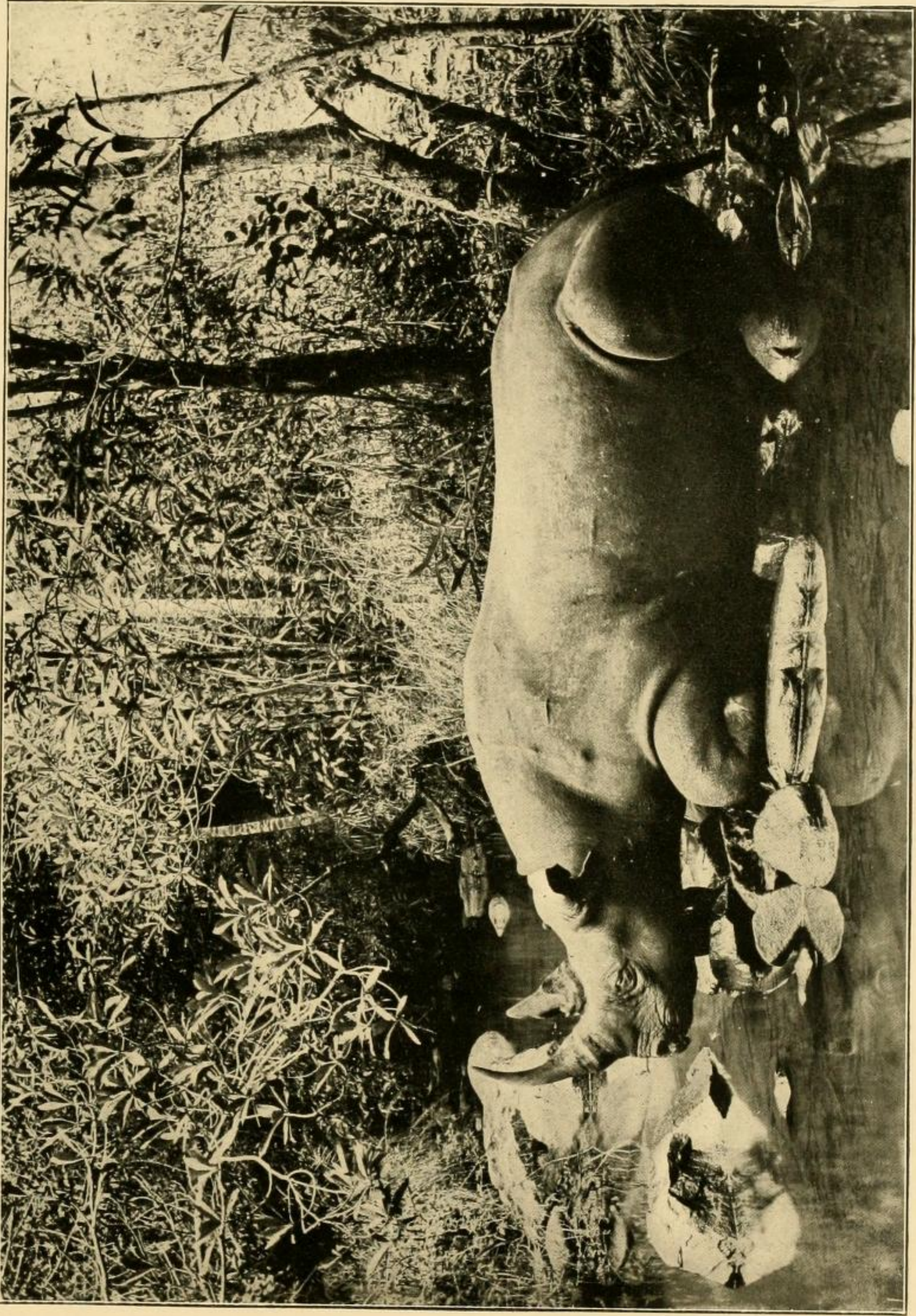
have mentioned. On the slopes of Mount Kenia, it is stated, a fine bull was recently killed with a horn measuring slightly over 40 inches, and even this measurement is said to have been exceeded in the same part of the country.

The black rhinoceros is a large and powerful beast, probably weighing at maturity almost if not quite three tons. Only one calf is produced by the female at birth, which takes place, it is believed, during the early rains. The little beast rapidly acquires the necessary activity to enable him to follow his mother at a great pace, and is a perfect miracle of disproportionate ugliness for several years. But, considering its immense and somewhat unwieldy size, the speed with which the rhinoceros can get over the ground is extraordinary. He moves at a bounding gallop, not unlike that of an immense pig. Baker points out in one of his publications that the length of the hind leg from the thigh to the hock is the factor which affords the tremendous springing power which is the secret of this animal's vast speed, and with this I quite agree, as otherwise it could never reach such rapidity of motion with the remarkable smoothness which is another of its peculiarities.

Possessing powers of scent almost if not quite as keen as those of the elephant, great quickness of hearing, unbounded irascibility, and the curiosity of an ill-regulated woman, the rhinoceros has nevertheless, fortunately for mankind, been furnished with very poor eyesight, a peculiarity to which many a hunter doubtless

owes his life. As a general rule he avoids swamps, preferring dry, somewhat elevated tablelands, or belts of thorny jungle at the foot of a mountain range. Of extremely regular habits, he drinks before dawn and after sunset, frequenting as a rule the same watering-places. After the morning drink he feeds until as late as eight or nine o'clock, or on wet or cloudy mornings somewhat later, and then, entering some dense jungle or thorny belt, he proceeds to take his midday siesta. In spite of this usual practice, however, I have seen rhinoceros lying asleep, stern on to the wind, under the shelter of a tree in open grass country as late as noon. Contrary to the universal habit of charging on scent with which these animals are usually credited, in the case I am referring to the animal jumped up and trotted briskly away down wind, his head and tail in the air, without any hostile demonstration whatsoever.

The favourite food of these beasts consists of the lower shoots and foliage of various trees and shrubs. Great predilection is displayed, in portions of the country where it occurs, for a kind of thorny acacia; he also devours certain roots, and a low-growing ground-plant found on wide, treeless plains. Acacias, however, often denote the presence of rhinoceros, exhibiting clean-cut depredations where the powerful, scissor-like teeth and prehensile lips have produced a topiary effect similar to that which would have followed the application of a pair of gardener's shears. With curious regularity,



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RHINOCEROS.

moreover, the rhinoceros, if undisturbed, visits, over considerable periods, the same places for the purpose of depositing his dung, which may sometimes be found in great piles, and forms another valuable indication of his presence in a district. It closely resembles that of a hippopotamus, but is somewhat darker in colour.

As I have already stated, the haunts of rhinoceros are to be found in sparse upland forest, on almost bare plains, and in rocky, thorny jungle. It was in such surroundings as the last-named that I came upon a very satisfactory bull in the beautiful Gorongoza region a few years ago. I was returning to my main camp on the Vunduzi River, after an unsuccessful search for elephants, and as usual was marching, with Lenço my elephant hunter, some few hundreds of yards ahead of my small party of native carriers. The Vunduzi, at the time of year at which the incident took place—namely, the middle of the winter season—is a small silvery stream of clear, cold water, splashing its musical way through a splendid confusion of big granite boulders, and under a leafy canopy of forest green. Here an open, grassy space where you could look upward at the mountain's scarred, precipitous sides; there a stretch of thin forest where the stony ground yielded but poor nourishment for the multitudinous grasses which struggled for life. Small tongues of glistening sand pushed their way into the crystal-clear water, and on one of these, at an early hour of the morning, we found the fresh spoor

of a passing rhinoceros, whose three-horn foot divisions rendered the identification of the beast a matter of ease. Lenço's eyes sparkled as he whispered "Pwété" (rhinoceros), and proceeded in his inimitable manner to take up the spoor. For some distance this led down stream, and here the great beast had evidently browsed his way leisurely along, morsels of leaves and twigs found in the track being still wet with his saliva. Noiseless as shadows we now struck into the woodland, passing through clumps of feathery bamboo, and skirting great earth-red ant-hills. Here and there, where we traversed hard, stony ground thinly covered with fallen acacia leaves, the tracking became difficult, even the great weight of the rhinoceros appearing to make little or no impression. Still the hunters held steadily on. An hour passed in this way, when at length, approaching a thick patch of thorny bushes, my dusky companion stopped and, head on one side, listened intently. As he did so his usually tranquil features leaped into animation, and, pointing a lean but authoritative finger at the cover, he nodded shortly to indicate that the beast had evidently fixed upon it for the enjoyment of his siesta. Upon this point we were not left long in doubt, for, with a sudden crash, he charged out of the bushes and passed us at a great rate, producing as he did so that curious whiffing sound which has been likened with some justice to the exhaust of a small steam-engine. As he appeared at first to be coming almost over us, Lenço evi-



dently thought, as most natives do, that he was attacking us, but the merest glance was sufficient to show that nothing was farther from his mind. I had just time to push up the safety bolt of my .450 cordite rifle, when he was almost abreast of us, and my nickel-covered bullet caught him fair and square in the shoulder. He fell heavily, squealing like an immense pig, whereupon a second bullet behind the ear put an end to his troubles for good. Luckily for us, this beast did not appear to be attended by the almost invariable rhinoceros-bird (*buphaga*),<sup>1</sup> or we should in all probability never have seen him. I concluded that he must have wined us when half asleep, and his invincible curiosity then got the better of him.

Round about the southern slopes and foothills of Gorongoza Mountain, which I have endeavoured to describe in my book, *Portuguese East Africa*, there existed a considerable number of rhinoceros a few years ago, judging by the frequency with which their spoor was encountered, and only a few days after the incident I have just related, another very fine bull was lost by me in the same district. Curiously enough, on this occasion I had traced him for several miles down to high, reedy grass bordering somewhat swampy country, where, in the usual course of events, rhinoceros would not be expected to occur. Here the exasperating "rhino-bird" undoubtedly alarmed him, for I only got one glimpse of the massive body and horns before

<sup>1</sup> The Ox-picker.

he plunged into the undergrowth and disappeared.

I have shot several specimens of the black rhinoceros in the northern portion of the Quelimane district, where they are still to be found in considerable numbers. Here this animal displays to the full his annoyance at the proximity of caravans of natives, a peculiarity by no means confined, as supposed by some, to those of British East Africa. I remember a story, which was told to me by one of the Portuguese administrators in the Lugella country, of a misfortune which happened to his accompanying kitchen-staff on an occasion when he was travelling in the interior. The pot-carriers seemed to have got in the way of a large rhinoceros, which charged the *batterie de cuisine* to such purpose that, as the unfortunate proprietor told me almost with tears in his eyes, not content with breaking by his tremendous impact the greater part of the sauce-pans and kettles, he added insult to injury by retiring at full gallop with an unreplaceable aluminium stew-pan impaled securely upon his anterior horn. I have often tried, with but partial success, to picture to myself the dissipated appearance which the rash beast must have presented as he dashed through the forest thus Quixotically helmed.

Hunting some few years ago in the southern part of the Quelimane district of Zambezia, I encountered a very large bull, the possessor, indeed, of the finest pair of horns it has been my good fortune to obtain. His spoor was first per-

ceived close to water, and for a time I was uncertain as to whether it might be that of a hippopotamus. As soon, however, as I got on to drier ground I saw unmistakably the kind of beast we were following, and lay out along the tracks with an eagerness which my native companions—raw Zambezi villagers—were far from sharing. After a few miles of easy and rapid progress the spoor led us to the edge of the usual thorny grass patch, and one of so gloomy and forbidding an aspect that it seemed a likely enough resting-place for the animal's daily nap. It was very thick, and appeared to me to be one of the least desirable of places into which to follow a dangerous beast. I therefore swarmed up a neighbouring palm tree, and, having ascertained that the thicket was not one of very wide dimensions—apparently not much more than an acre—I resolved to set it on fire on the windward side, and sent men round for that purpose.

Presently a thin, blue smoke arose over the jungle, accompanied by the crackling of many exploding grass stems, then I heard a tremendous commotion and a warning shout. Following its almost invariable custom, the rhinoceros dashed down wind, and thus broke cover not much out of a straight line between me and his retreat. He seemed, indeed, to be coming almost straight in my direction as I stood in the friendly shelter of a good, thick tree trunk, but luckily sheered off somewhat as, in a few rapid bounds, he drew near. At a distance of about 20 yards I gave him a .577 solid bullet high up on the shoulder as he bounded

past. This brought him down squealing lustily, as they appear always to do. However, he speedily recovered himself, and made off at a great rate. Having only a single-barrelled rifle of somewhat antiquated type, I was unable to get a second shot in until he was well under way, when I fired again for the root of his tail, but apparently without result. Loading the rifle again, I dashed after him, and soon came upon a thick blood-spool which showed that the wound was a mortal one, its frothy appearance indicating that the animal's lungs had been pierced. After a short interval of sprinting and fast walking I came up with him going very groggily through open forest. I reached him just as he began to stumble, and as he was in the act of lying down I gave him a bullet in the neck which broke the spinal column. He was in very fine condition, and his horns,  $25\frac{1}{4}$  inches and  $12\frac{5}{8}$  inches, are the finest I possess.

Before leaving the subject of these interesting animals I should like to remind those who may one day go in pursuit of them that various portions of their anatomy can be made into most fascinating trophies, of which, as a rule, the hunter does not make half enough. I have in my possession, fashioned from the feet of the black rhinoceros, cigar and cigarette boxes, match stands and a jewel case; whilst the hide of another furnished me with a most uncommon and really beautiful polished table, which would rather resemble old, semi-transparent amber if it were not for the surrounding edging of natural

skin, which proclaims at once the nature of the material.

Although the square-mouthed, so-called "White" Rhinoceros is not found at any point in the region of Zambezia, some passing reference to this remarkable form may not be without interest. Mr. Selous has informed me that when he was hunting in Matabeleland about the year 1872, these immense beasts—second in size only to the elephant—were still so plentiful that, once away from the inhabited areas, he found it not unusual, without any special exertion, to come upon as many as five or six a day. On one occasion he succeeded in killing a large male with a horn of the amazing measurement of more than 50 inches, whilst I have reason to believe that even this gigantic length has been greatly exceeded in other cases.

Up to about the year 1890, the white rhinoceros was found, although no longer plentifully, in Mashonaland between the Hunyani and the Angwe Rivers. A Mr. Coryndon, I believe, succeeded in obtaining one or two there a year or two afterwards, and the last of which, so far as I am aware, we have any record was killed in the same district about the year 1894. The only surviving members of this interesting family in South Africa are at present preserved in the Zululand Game Reserve, and are said to number rather less than a score. Of late, unhappily, these animals appear to have been dogged by the very genius of evil fortune, since, I learn, one very fine bull

was recently killed in a fight, which must have been worth witnessing, with the solitary elephant the Reserve boasts ; two more broke away from their sanctuary, and were speared by natives into whose gardens they had penetrated ; and a fourth fell over a precipice during a severe thunderstorm, and died of the injuries he received.

After many years of uncertainty—almost of despair—lest the great white rhinoceros should be upon the point of becoming extinct, it was suddenly rediscovered, I believe in the Lado Enclave on the Nile ; and it has since been ascertained that at this point, as also on portions of the Upper Congo and in the Western Soudan, it exists in such numbers as to set at rest for centuries to come all fear of its final extermination.

The extraordinary break which occurs between the two far-removed portions of the African Continent wherein the white rhinoceros occurs, extending, as it does, from the South Central Zambezi to the Upper Congo, is very difficult to account for. I have, however, sometimes thought that this animal may originally have worked its way down through the western central portion of the continent of Africa at a time when the great forests of the Congo were as yet undeveloped, and before they stretched so far to the eastward as they do at the present day. Spreading over Mashonaland, Matabeleland, and the country to the south, these animals were thus, in the course of ages, completely cut off from their northern brethren by the gradually eastward-spreading

forests of the Congo basin, into which, it is well known, white rhinoceros will not penetrate. After the lapse of many centuries, therefore, had they felt any disposition to return to mingle once more with their northern relatives, they would have found it impossible to pass round the vast expanse of dense forest, their path being barred by the upper waters of the Zambezi, at that time indisputably a much deeper and more important stream than it is at present. Complete isolation, then, for many centuries overtook these southern migrants, and whilst they grew dangerously near to extinction in the south, their kindred beyond the Congo forest lands tasted the sweets, had they but known it, of a peace and comparative freedom from danger to which those in the south have for many years been strangers.

Throughout practically all the rivers and streams of Zambezia, that immense aquatic form, the Hippopotamus, occurs still in considerable numbers. When I first ascended the Zambezi, nearly twenty years ago, that river, and its tributary the Shiré, were the abiding-places of many large herds of these animals. I have seen them sleeping on the sandbanks at the head of the Chinde mouth in the warm sunshine of midday, whilst in the Shiré they were so numerous, for some years thereafter, as to be a source of danger to the many native canoes which daily plied upon the river. Of late, however, in consequence of the increasing number of steamers and barges now running, and to the misplaced perseverance with which they have been fired upon,