

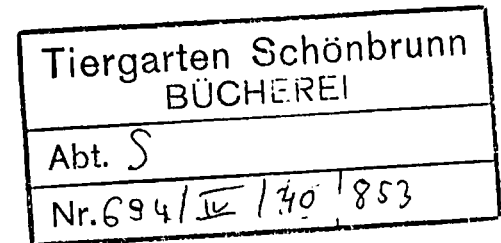
EAST AFRICAN NATURAL HISTORY SERIES

THE WILD MAMMALS  
OF UGANDA  
*and neighbouring regions of  
East Africa*

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LONGMANS

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## THE ODD-TOED UNGULATES (HOOFED MAMMALS) (*PERISSODACTYLA*)

The ungulates are the hoofed mammals, and among them we find the cattle, sheep, goats and horses, upon which man has made himself so largely dependent. Without them man could only have existed as a primitive hunter and certainly could never have developed as he has done. Before man domesticated these creatures, they existed in their natural state in something like their present form; and today they all have close relatives still living wild in some part of the world or other.

This Order, the *Perissodactyla*, and the following Order, the *Artiodactyla*, are quite distinct, but for the sake of convenience are sometimes grouped together under the single name, *Ungulates*. Ungulates are large, hoofed mammals which live on a vegetable diet, and again are sometimes referred to as the larger *Herbivores* (that is to say, mammals which exist on a herb or vegetable diet). The primary difference between the two Orders is that the feet of the *Perissodactyla* have an odd or uneven number of toes and those of the *Artiodactyla* an even number of toes.

The odd-toed ungulates are divided into three families. These are the *Equidae*, which include the horses, asses and zebras; the *Rhinocerotidae*, which includes the rhinoceroses; and the *Tapiridae*, the tapirs, which occur only in tropical South America and South-East Asia. The *Equidae* are all single toed and are wholly confined (in the wild state) to Asia and Africa. The true wild horses are found only in Asia; there are wild asses in northern Africa but not in East Africa. Asses, horses and zebras all interbreed with one another, and are therefore grouped together in a single genus.

The rhinoceroses, like the tapirs, have three toes and occur in southern Asia as well as in Africa. In addition to the African rhinoceroses, there are two genera of rhinoceros found in India and South-East Asia. These are the one-horned rhinoceroses (*Rhinoceros*), of which there are two species: the great Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros*

*unicornis*) and the lesser or Javan rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*). The other genus is the Asiatic two-horned rhinoceros (*Didermocerus sumatrensis*), a smaller animal confined to Sumatra and Borneo. All these Asiatic rhinoceroses are in serious danger of extinction.

East African Burchell's Zebra (*Equus burchelli*).

There are two distinct types of zebra in East Africa: the common Burchell's zebra (illustrated: p. 74), of which there is more than one sub-species, and Grevy's zebra, a beautiful animal with narrower and more vivid stripes, which is confined to the dry, arid country of northern Kenya. The common zebra stallion weighs some 700 lb. and stands about five feet at the shoulder. They normally have splendid manes, but a maneless race, previously thought to exist only in the Sudan and Somaliland, has recently been noted in South Karamoja. In Uganda zebras are numerous in Karamoja and are found in relatively small numbers in parts of Acholi, Ankole and the Kagera valley, where they used to be much more common than they are now. They are not found in either of the two national parks.

Zebras are extremely gregarious, forming large herds, and they often join up with other animals such as giraffes, elands and hartebeests. They prefer open, grassy plains and do not need a great deal of water. While they usually eat grass, they take to browsing on leaves and scrub when the grazing is poor. Zebras have acute hearing and good eyesight. The period of gestation is about twelve months.

The stallions fight among themselves, and when wounded may sometimes attack a hunter, rising up on their hind legs, biting and kicking out most savagely with their fore legs. Lions are very inclined to a diet of zebra, but many a lion has found to his cost that a zebra's kick is very powerful; woe betide the lion that misses its spring. The now extinct quagga (*Equus quagga*) should be mentioned; it was closely related to Burchell's zebra, and used to be very common in South Africa. The quagga was exterminated during the past century, when it was hunted and harassed to extinction. This is a warning which should not go unheeded.

The Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*)

This is the common African rhinoceros (illustrated: p. 74), smaller than the great one-horned rhinoceros of India but much larger than the Asiatic two-horned rhinoceros, which in any case is an entirely distinct animal. The black rhinoceros has two horns, the front horn being the larger; measurements of over fifty inches have been

*The Odd-toed Ungulates (Hoofed Mammals)*

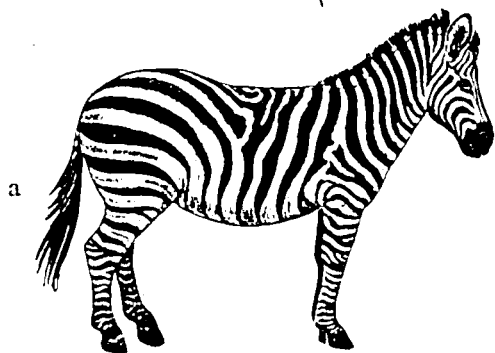
recorded. The horn (as of all the rhinoceroses) is not a true horn, but consists of a tightly packed conglomeration of hair.

The rhino lives in dry bush country and is particularly partial to thorn scrub. Normally a browser rather than a grazer, it does eat grass at times. The black rhino is found in Karamoja and Acholi with a few individuals still left in Lango. They are quite plentiful, and frequently seen, in the Murchison Falls Park, but so far as is known have never crossed to the west of the Nile. In fact, it would seem that large, deep rivers present an impassable barrier to the dispersal of these interesting animals. We have no proof that they have ever crossed the Kagera river from Tanganyika, where they are quite common, into Ankole; or that they have crossed the Victoria Nile from Acholi and Lango into Bunyoro. The rhino is usually a solitary animal and does not seem to have much liking for other members of its kind. At times one meets a pair, when the male is seeking a mate, and of course a mother rhino is accompanied by her calf. After mating the bull stays alone. The gestation period is twelve or thirteen months and rhinos breed every three years or so. Only one calf is born at a time; it reaches maturity in six or seven years.

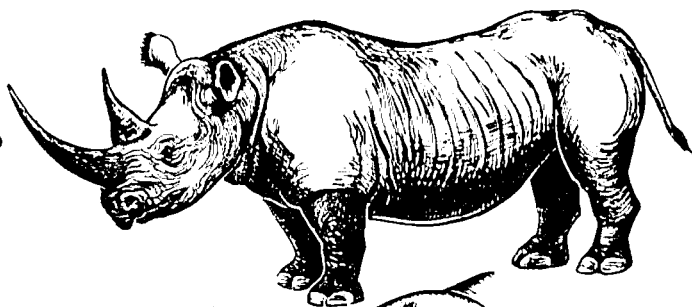
The rhino has very poor eye-sight but a good sense of smell and excellent hearing; these senses, however, do not seem to be good enough in themselves to enable it to identify correctly objects of which it is suspicious. Being completely fearless, as well as unusually bad tempered and almost without natural enemies, a rhino not infrequently charges (or at least rushes towards) an object that it may think of as an aggressor without any apparent reason. This is why the black rhinoceros must be considered among the more dangerous of wild animals although it seems as liable to get itself into trouble as to damage its enemy. There are many stories to this effect, the best known of which is that of a rhino in Kenya that attacked a moving train on the Uganda railway, not far from Nairobi. Both suffered. A full-grown bull rhino weighs over one ton, stands a little more than five feet at the shoulder; and from nose to tip of tail measures about eleven feet.

*White Rhinoceros (Ceratotherium simum)*

The white rhinoceros (illustrated: p. 74), which also has two horns, is somewhat larger than the black and more placid by nature. After the elephant, it is the largest of the land mammals. The white rhinoceros is not white in colour, the name being derived from the Dutch word 'weit' meaning wide and referring to its great square



a



b



c

- 16 a Burchell's Zebra (*Equus burchelli*)  
b Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*)  
c White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) (head only)

muzzle. For this reason it is, in fact, sometimes called the square-lipped rhinoceros. This points to one of the principal differences between the two types, for the black rhino has a long prehensile upper lip, suited to its browsing habits; while the white rhino has a square face like a hippopotamus, well designed for cropping the grass upon which it feeds. Other peculiar features are the enormous size of the head, which is usually held low on the ground, and the shoulder hump. While there is no great difference in this respect, the white rhino tends to carry the longer and heavier horn of the two. It is more often found in family groups than the black, and parties up to ten in number are quite commonly seen. They seem temperamentally much better suited to family life, being altogether more docile animals. The white rhino calf nearly always walks ahead of its mother, who guides it by prodding it with her horn. By contrast, the black rhino calf always follows its mother. The rate of growth of the two forms is much the same.

There are two races of white rhinoceros, one living in Natal in South Africa and the other in a comparatively small area in the western Sudan, North-West Uganda and neighbouring parts of the Congo and the Central African Republic. The race name of the Uganda sub-species is *cottoni*, after Major D. Powell-Cotton, father of Mr. C. Powell-Cotton the Provincial Commissioner of the Northern Province, who collected the type specimen in Madi over fifty years ago. In Uganda it is limited to a small section of the West Nile District and Madi. The white rhino, like the black, seems to be checked in its dispersal by large rivers and appears never to have crossed to the east bank of the Albert Nile.

The white rhino is among the rarest animals in the world, and although much has been done in the way of giving it protection (and for many years it has shown signs of healthy increase) it definitely lacks sufficient space to enable it to develop properly. If one wants a species to survive it is necessary to protect not only the animal itself but also its habitat, and the white rhinoceros in Uganda lacks a home of its own. Alas it has also been the victim of poaching in recent years. Under these circumstances it may be necessary to move a number of these great creatures to the Murchison Falls National Park in the hope that they may be able to establish themselves there.<sup>1</sup> But, better still, one would like to see a true and permanent sanctuary developed in the West Nile.

<sup>1</sup> The transfer of a small number of white rhino to the Murchison Park was begun early in 1961.

## EVEN-TOED UNGULATES (HOOFED MAMMALS) (*ARTIODACTYLA*)

SOME brief mention of this great group of animals was made at the beginning of the last chapter, and its enormous importance to man will have been realised. The Order includes a very large proportion of our game animals. These, above all, need protection and conservation, for their number has been decreasing steadily in recent years.

The first need is a change of mind towards these friends of man. Our domestic cattle, sheep, goats and pigs are all members of this group, and from them we obtain much that is necessary for our lives. We should learn to think of the wild game animals as something more than a mere supply of meat, to be slaughtered indiscriminately without any thought for the future. Of course there are times when they have to be killed, and their value as a possible supply of food cannot be questioned. But the killing of animals should always be done as humanely and efficiently as possible, with due regard for the future welfare of the breed.

It is, however, not just as food, or objects to be made use of, that we should consider these animals but as individual creatures of great beauty. Among them are animals of perfect form, covering a great range of colouring, and the harmony of their movements is quite exquisite. Nature at its most beautiful is equal to any work of art which man is capable of producing; and this is truer of the antelopes than of any other group. To watch the herds of kob and the little groups of oribi at Pakuba in the Murchison Falls Park or the topi on the plains near the southern shores of Lake Edward is a most moving experience. All this is not ours to destroy, but ours to conserve for future generations. And if we do not realise this and act upon it now, we shall be too late.

All the animals in this Order have hoofs with an even number of toes and, with the exception of the hippopotamuses, all are cloven-hoofed. Indeed, the hoof of the hippopotamus can be described as cloven although four toes touch the ground not two. All have teeth