

Saturday Review
17 May 1879
p. 611-612
Title: Jamrach's
Anonymous

[In stables at Jamrach's on 12 St George's East]

In a sort of exaggerated pif-pen was a double-horned rhinoceros sleeping tranquilly, and refusing to listen to the voice of the charmer, though he charmed him wisely to get up by kicking him in the eye. But then the rhinoceros is notoriously thick-skinned. Noticing that the huge beast was only kept in by a thin wooden bolt in a rickety wooden gate, we asked if he were tame and quiet. "Yes, pretty quiet" replied the attendant decidedly qualifying the adjective "pretty quiet for what he is. If he gets a bit wild, you have to look out, you know." And we did look out, but we were dismayed to find out that there was little opportunity for hurrying in an opposite direction, where we felt certain we should have had urgent business, had the two-horned sleeper shown any signs of "getting a bit wild."

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o Titel des Artikels:
Dampfadler's

Von Verfasser angefordert

...separated as a subspecies, the differences between them and others of the species are no more than could be accounted for by normal variation. The one subspecies that is acceptable, *capensis* of Africa, is slightly smaller than the nominate race and is also darker, with more narrow and irregular barring on the flight feathers (Chapin 1932).

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION

The Eurasian Bittern breeds in Algeria and over much of central and southern Europe from south Spain and northwest England eastwards through central Asia to the Pacific Ocean, reaching north to beyond 60°N in Siberia. In Africa it breeds in isolated pockets in the southeast, from southern Tanzania and Zambia to the Cape, but its exact distribution in that continent is very poorly known.

The subspecies *capensis* is confined to the southern African part of the range, the remainder of the range being occupied by the nominate race *stellaris*.

Formerly widespread and abundant, the Eurasian Bittern has suffered a steady decline in numbers, particularly in Europe since the 19th century. The major causes appear to be habitat loss, mainly through drainage, and human persecution. In some countries this trend has been halted by protection measures, and increases have been noted recently in some areas. In 1976 a census revealed a population in Europe, excluding the USSR, of 2,500-3,000 breeding pairs in that year (Day 1981). Severe winters, however, also reduce the viable breeding population, since those individuals that are forced to migrate may not survive. In the Norfolk Broad in England, possible causes of decline are thought to be habitat deterioration and increased disturbance, but principally pollution (Day & Wilson 1978). In Africa records of *capensis* are sparse, especially in recent years. The reasons for this would seem to be the continuing loss of wetland habitats.

post-breeding dispersal of immatures. In areas such as England and the Netherlands, where the population is largely sedentary except in prolonged hard weather, this dispersal may be the principal mechanism whereby untenanted sites become occupied or re-occupied. On the other hand, many of these dispersing individuals may not survive in hard winters.

The Eurasian populations are partially migratory, remaining in the breeding areas where the water does not freeze. In areas subject to hard winters, migration takes place. Western Palearctic individuals may travel across the Sahara, where they winter in Africa as far south as northeastern Zaire (Moreau 1972) and possibly to the Cape (Clancey 1965). Central and Eastern Palearctic populations move south to the northern half of the Indian subcontinent, Burma and throughout central China to the Chinese coastlands. Climatic variations in these areas cause widespread dispersal, and in very cold spells the bitterns move as far south as Indo-China.

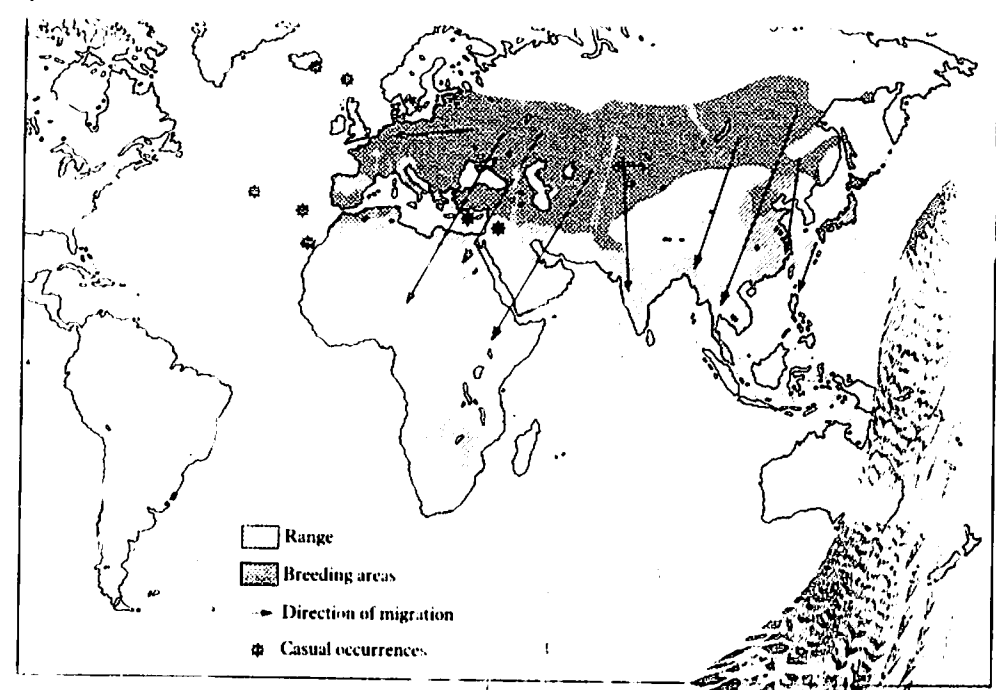
The African race *capensis* is mainly sedentary. Some movements take place, mainly to the southwest, and these are governed principally by rainfall.

HABITAT

Densely vegetated wetlands with tall growth and extensive beds of *Phragmites* are the favoured habitat of this bittern. Usually these habitats have large areas of shallow standing water of a stable level. In Hungary, however, many Eurasian Bitterns breed in pure stands of *Scirpus* (J Wilson *in litt.*). In very cold weather the species may occur anywhere near running water or fresh water, including small ponds, gravel pits and even in quite open situations. Brackish water is tolerated.

BEHAVIOUR

Flying The flight is markedly owl-like, with the neck retracted and the legs trailing behind. When the bittern first takes flight



the neck is extended, and over short distances it may remain so. **Feeding** The Eurasian Bittern is a solitary feeder. Although often reported to be mainly crepuscular, or even nocturnal, most hunting in fact takes place during the day. In Lancashire, England, it is all (J Wilson *in litt.*).

and birds, eels and insects, as well as worms and other invertebrates. Juveniles feed primarily on tadpoles, but also eat beetles, crickets and other insects. The diet varies with local conditions and the season. The Eurasian Bittern's breeding season is heralded by its booming Adversive Call emanating from dense reed or grass. This begins early in the season, depending to the climate, but even in the north of the range by early March. Booming in reeds early in January is quite normal in some areas. At first there is a 'runing-up' phase when the boom is more of a grunt across open spaces and also of swimming across open water between patches of reed and cover. In thick reeds it moves along over the stems, but will also fly over the reeds and sometimes swim while sunning itself.

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