

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE RHINOCEROS IN CAPTIVITY by L.C. Rookmaaker. SPB Academic Publishing bv, 1998. iv + 410 pp., illus., hardback. ISBN 90-5103-134-3. Dutch guilders 225.00 or US\$128.00. Available through booksellers or direct from the publishers at P.O. Box 97747, 2509 GC, The Hague, The Netherlands (Tel.: +31-70-3300-253; Fax: +31-70-3300-254).

RHINO RANCHING: A MANUAL FOR OWNERS OF WHITE RHINOS by Dr J.G. du Toit. Published by Africa Publishers, Pretoria, for the South African Veterinary Foundation and the African Rhino Owners Association, 1998. 64 pp., paperback. £25 post paid from SAVA Wildlife Group, P.O. Box 12900, 0110 Onderstepoort, or African Rhino Owners Association, P.O. Box 381, 2008 Bedfordview, South Africa.

L.C. Rookmaaker is one of those dedicated researchers whose unpaid labours contribute so much to the sum of knowledge within the zoo community. Rhinoceroses and zoo history are two subjects each of which has its own devoted following, so by combining the two in one magnificent book, he deserves to achieve a wide readership (at least by the relatively modest standards of specialist zoological publications).

Any rhinoceros studbook keeper knows how difficult it is to keep track of even the living rhinos in captivity, so Mr Rookmaaker's aim – 'to collect information about each individual rhinoceros which has been kept in captivity from the earliest times to the present' – was, as he admits in his introduction, 'a quite impossible task'. Rhino enthusiasts will probably be kept busy for years to come trying to find records he missed! (That is, those rhino enthusiasts who had not already helped in the compilation of the book: Marvin Jones of San Diego, Heinz-Georg Klös of Berlin and Richard J. Reynolds III of Atlanta – whose articles in *International Zoo Yearbook* 2 and 4 were forerunners of the present work – receive special mention on the title page, but many others appear in the acknowledgements.) The number of rhinos documented is certainly impressive – 2,439 animals 'from Roman times to 1994'. (The species breakdown is interesting – Indian, 397; Javan, 22; Sumatran, 96; black, 775; white, 1,105; unknown, 44.) Regular zoo visitors will enjoy checking up on animals they remember seeing in the past – I looked up my own earliest rhino acquaintance, Lorna, a *D. bicornis* who, as I now know, was at London Zoo from 1947 to 1964.

But *The Rhinoceros in Captivity* is much more than just a list. The book is a mouth-watering repository of zoological and zoological information of all sorts. In 1544 the Tartars besieged Peking with an army said to include 80,000 rhinos, but sadly the amazing picture this evokes – worthy of Cecil B. de Mille at his most expansive! – is overturned by a modern translator who has decided that yaks, not rhinos, were the animals involved. Bishop Heber noted in the 1820s that the Indian rhinos of the kings of Oudh at Lucknow 'seem to propagate in captivity without reluctance', but did not enlarge on this tantalising comment; what did the kings of Oudh know that we don't? A rhino at Belle Vue Zoo, Manchester, in the mid-19th century had the run of the zoo, and frightened no one, but did annoy the laundry-maids by chewing the washing on the line. I could go on and on. . . The book also provides a valuable collection of rhino pictures – 166 in all, ranging from modern zoo photos to earlier depictions of great historical or artistic interest, including a Roman statuette unmistakably depicting a black rhino, and an early Chinese wine container in the form of a two-horned rhino of uncertain species.

One small regret, to end with – why does so confirmed a rhino-lover as Mr Rookmaaker regularly refer to any individual animal as 'it', even when its sex is known? I realise that this usage is common when writing about animals, but it always irritates me (and, as some attentive readers may have noticed, I do my best to eliminate it from the pages of I.Z.N.). To apply the pronouns 'he' and 'she' to animals is not anthropomorphism, merely a recognition that they are living individuals rather than mere objects. But this is a very minor criticism: I'm sure the writer meant no disrespect, and probably few readers of his book will share my hypersensitivity on the subject! I am grateful to Mr Rookmaaker for a splendid tribute to a group of animals which have always been among my favourites. I hope his years of work, and the confidence of his publishers, will be rewarded with the sales the book deserves.

It is rather startling for a European reader to see a 64-page booklet, of the sort which over here might be a guide to the care of budgerigars or golden hamsters, directed instead at informing would-be owners about the rudiments of the husbandry of the world's third largest species of land mammal. But *Rhino Ranching: a Manual for Owners of White Rhinos* was evidently produced to meet a real need. The astonishing success of the captive-breeding programme for the southern white rhino means that in South Africa restrictions on its ownership have been relaxed, and anyone with enough money and suitable land to spare can go out and buy a few. Private rhino-keeping is now sufficiently well established for the owners to have formed their own association (which, with the South African Veterinary Foundation, sponsored the publication of this book) – indeed, in his foreword the chairman of the African Rhino Owners Association claims that the number of privately-owned rhinos (presumably mostly white) in South Africa is equal to the total number of rhinos of both species, captive and wild, in the rest of the continent. I can see no good grounds for objecting to this development, provided only that the owners are responsible and competent – which is where *Rhino Ranching* comes in, as a handy guide to the essential facts every aspiring rhino-owner should know.

Can 64 pages contain those essential facts? Possibly it can; the history of white rhino husbandry since the early 1970s, when Whipsnade and San Diego took the – then – pioneering step of setting up large ex situ breeding herds, seems to prove that this really is a relatively easy species to maintain in captivity. Their main requirement – large areas of suitable land – is certainly more easily met by South African landowners than by Western zoos. Dr du Toit suggests stocking at a rate of from one to four animals per 100 hectares (250 acres), much the same density that is found in favourable, undisturbed terrain in the wild. A typical white rhino ranch is from 1,000 to 5,000 hectares in extent. (For comparison, fewer than ten British zoos have a total area greater than 100 hectares.) Keeping rhinos on that scale has more in common with game management than with zoo husbandry.

But *Rhino Ranching* certainly doesn't advocate just letting loose a few rhinos on your land and leaving them to get on with it. Separate chapters outline the species' habitat requirements, social behaviour, reproduction and management, with notes on the practical implications for the rancher. There are good accounts of capture and transport, and of the natural and unnatural causes of mortality, with an excellent couple of pages on poaching, why it happens and what to do about it. (If it's really true that in Africa today you can get an AK-47 in exchange for a packet of cigarettes, it's a miracle that any wildlife survives.) There are also chapters on the politics and economics of rhino ranching – most of the ranchers, obviously, aren't in the business solely out of love for the animals. The pros and cons of trophy hunting are discussed (yes, there are some pros). There is even a sensible discussion of the controversial issue of marketing the horns of ranched rhinos, which left me undecided but

more open-minded and better informed. Zoos holding white rhinos don't need this book to tell them how to look after their animals; but I'm sure they will find it interesting to see the species viewed from such an unfamiliar angle.

Nicholas Gould