

LONDON  
BIRDS AND BEASTS.

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WITH A PREFACE

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Birds

## RHINOCEROSES.

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RHINOCEROSES are now so common in menageries and so many have been seen at the Zoo that it is difficult to realise that until the early years of this century only about half a dozen of these animals had been seen in Europe since the time of the Roman Empire. Yet so it was, and consequently the accounts of the earlier authors teem with the most marvellous stories, not only of the appearance, but also of the manners, of these creatures. But, if their stories were marvellous, their pictures were even more wonderful, most of them representing an impossible creature clothed in what was apparently intended for a highly ornamented suit of armour. The first of these wonderful drawings is said to have been made in Lisbon in the year 1513 from a rhinoceros sent from India to Emmanuel, King of Portugal, and was engraved at Nürnberg by Albert Dürer; and here we may add that the King, after trying all sorts of experiments to prove the ferocity of this rhinoceros, sent the unfortunate animal by sea as a present to the Pope; but "in an access of fury it sunk the vessel



on its passage." The following are examples of the stories to which we refer.

One veracious author informs us that "a full-grown rhinoceros measures fourteen feet from the ground to the highest part of the back, and the legs are so remarkably short that, with all this height, the belly comes near the ground." It is, perhaps, hardly surprising that an animal of this immense size should be able to "toss up a large bull," as we are told the "old ones" were in the habit of doing whenever opportunity offered.

From another source we gather that the rhinoceros—the African black rhinoceros, apparently, in this case—was most distinctly an animal to be avoided, as "when he attacks a man he lays hold of the middle of his body, and throws him over his head with such force that he is almost always killed with the fall. This done, he come and licks him, and his tongue is so rough and hard that it brings off the flesh from the bones. He likewise serves other animals in the same manner after he has killed them." This being so, it is reassuring to learn that "he very rarely attacks mankind, unless he is provoked or meets with a person with a red garment," and that "when he is seen running along, it is pretty easy to avoid him, because he cannot turn about very readily, so that when he is about eight or ten feet distant, a man needs only go one side, and then he will be out of his sight." The rhinoceros, however, though so fierce and untameable, had apparently one soft



spot in its heart, which often led to its destruction, for "it is said by Albertus, Isidorus, and Alumnus that above all creatures they love virgins, and that unto them they will come, be they never so wilde, and fall asleep before them, so being asleep they are easily taken and carried away."

Finally, the horn of the rhinoceros was supposed to possess wonderful medicinal properties, and to be an antidote to poison—a belief which held its ground until quite the end of last century, for Dr. Brookes, writing in 1763, says: "It has been usually said that the horn of a rhinoceros will fall in pieces when poison is poured therein. At the Cape they have cups made of the horn, which are mounted in gold and silver. When wine is poured therein it will rise, ferment, and seem to boil; but when mixed with poison, it cleaves in two, which experiment has been seen by thousands of people."

Rhinoceroses, of which five or six species are known, are found only in the African and Indian regions; and though they vary much in appearance, they all of them have large unwieldy bodies, supported on short legs, with three toes on each foot, skins which are thick and unyielding—so much so, in the Asiatic species, as to "necessitate the formation of deep folds to enable them to move their limbs with any facility"—and either one or two horns, which differ from those of other mammals not only in their position (placed as they are on the animal's nose), but also in their structure, as they are "composed of modified and



agglutinated hairs." At the present time there are five individuals at the Zoo, representing three species, one African and two Asiatic, namely, one common African black rhinoceros (*R. bicornis*), two hairy-eared rhinoceroses (*R. lasiotis*), and two Indian rhinoceroses (*R. unicornis*). Three of these are old inhabitants of the Gardens, one of the Indian rhinoceroses having been presented to the Society so long ago as July 25, 1864, while the female hairy-eared rhinoceros was purchased in 1872. This animal, "Begum" by name, is said to have been captured in rather a curious way, having had the misfortune to walk into a quicksand, from which it found it impossible to extricate itself. And, lastly, the African black rhinoceros has lived in Regent's Park since 1868. This animal is specially noticeable as being, to quote the official "Guide to the Gardens," "the first specimen of this animal brought to Europe since the days of the Romans."

Though a far larger number of Asiatic than African rhinoceroses have been seen alive in Europe, the latter are, we imagine, far better known in this country—by report, at least—than are their Asiatic congeners, the result of their being found very plentifully in what was, without exception, the finest game country in the world, and thus, naturally, being fully described in every book relating to travel or sport in South Africa.

Much has been written about the number of species of rhinoceroses found in Africa, some



authors contending for as many as five species; but the best authorities are satisfied with two, the black rhinoceros—so called, though in reality it is of a dark slate colour—and the white or square-mouthed rhinoceros; both of them are two-horned and smooth-skinned; but the former, among other points of difference, has a long pointed and prehensile upper lip, and feeds on leaves and branches, while the latter has a short upper lip and feeds on grass. The black rhinoceros is found all over the continent—the animal in the Zoo was captured in Upper Nubia—and is therefore in little present dread of extermination; but the range of the white rhinoceros is—or, perhaps it would be more correct to say, was—limited to Southern and South Central Africa, with the unfortunate consequence that it has been practically, if not absolutely, exterminated. On this subject Mr. Selous made some interesting remarks in an article which appeared in the *Field* on August 16 last. He says:—

It was within a mile of this spot (near the river Se-who-who, in Mashunaland) that two years previously (*i.e.*, in 1883) I shot two white rhinoceroses (*R. simus*), the last of their kind that have been killed, and perhaps that ever will be killed, by an Englishman. They were male and female, and I preserved the skin of the head and the skull of the former for the South African Museum in Cape Town, where they now are. I shall never cease to regret that I did not preserve the entire skeleton for our own splendid Museum of Natural History at South Kensington, but when I shot the animal I made sure I should get finer specimens later on in the season. However, one thing and another prevented my visiting the one spot of country where I knew



that a few were still to be found, and now these few have almost, if not quite, all been killed, and to the best of my belief the great white or square-mouthed rhinoceros, the largest of terrestrial mammals after the elephant, is on the very verge of extinction, and in the next year or two will become absolutely extinct; and if in the near future some student of natural history should wish to know what this extinct beast really was like, he will find nothing in all the museums of Europe and America to enlighten him upon the subject but some half-dozen skulls and a goodly number of the anterior horns. In 1886 two Boer hunters got into the little tract of country where a few white rhinoceroses were still left, and between them killed ten during the season; five more were killed during the same time by some native hunters from the Matabele country. A few were still left, as in the following year, 1887, myself and some English sportsmen saw the tracks of two or three in the same district, but could not find the animals themselves. Some of these last remnants of their race may still survive; but it is not too much to say that long before the close of this century the white rhinoceros will have vanished from the face of the earth. . . . The subject of the extinction of this huge quadruped has a melancholy interest for me, who remember that less than twenty years ago it was a common animal over an enormous extent of country in central South Africa.

The extermination of the white rhinoceros is, perhaps, not to be wondered at, as it is one of the inevitable results of the extension of the settlements in South Africa; but that no museum in Europe or America should possess a specimen—if we except the young mounted specimen, about the size of a large pig, in the British Museum—is curious, and very much to be regretted, and we are pleased to see that Dr. Sclater has called



attention to the fact in the columns of *Nature*, "in the hope that the attention of the several exploring parties now traversing Mashunaland and Matabeleland may be called to this subject, and that in case of a straggling survivor of the white rhinoceros being met with, it may be carefully preserved for the National Collection at South Kensington." He draws attention to the following differences in the forms of the heads of the two species. First, the different formation of the lips already mentioned; secondly, the size and shape of the ears; "in *R. bicornis* the ear-conch is much rounded at the extremity, and edged by a fringe of short black hairs which spring from the margin. In *R. simus* the ear-conch is much elongated and sharply pointed at its upper extremity, where the hairs which clothe its margin constitute a slight tuft. While the upper portion of the ear-conch is much more expanded in *R. simus* (than in *R. bicornis*), in the lower portion the two margins are united together for a much greater extent, and form a closed cylinder, which rises about three inches above the base." Thirdly, the shape of the nostrils, "which in *R. simus* are elongated in a direction parallel to the mouth, while in *R. bicornis* they are more nearly of a circular shape"; while, lastly, the eye in *R. simus* appears to be placed further back in the head than in *R. bicornis*. Another point of difference, mentioned by Mr. Selous, is that the square-mouthed rhinoceros walks and runs with its nose close to the ground;



while the black rhinoceros carries its head high in the air.

In conclusion, we can only say with Dr. Sclater that "the country in which alone (as it is possible, but by no means certain) the last stragglers exist being now within the British Empire, it is clearly our duty to endeavour to obtain and preserve examples of the great white or square-mouthed rhinoceros for the use and information of posterity."