

NATURE NARRATIVES

By

AUSTIN H. CLARK

U. S. National Museum

AUTHOR OF: ANIMALS OF LAND AND SEA
THE BIRDS OF THE SOUTHERN LESSER ANTILLES
THE CRINOIDS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN
DIE CRINOIDEN DER ANTARKTIS
THE NEW EVOLUTION
ETC.

Volume II



BALTIMORE
THE WILLIAMS & WILKINS COMPANY
1931

THE RHINOCEROSSES

Largest of all the creatures living on the land, except the elephants, are the various different kinds of rhinoceroses. They are singularly stupid creatures, with little of what we call intelligence. Their sight is very poor, but their hearing and their sense of smell are remarkably acute. While naturally timid, they often show very great ferocity, especially when attacked and brought to bay.

The largest of all the rhinoceroses is the so-called white rhinoceros of Africa. But it is only slightly larger than the Indian rhinoceros, and not greatly larger than the common black rhinoceros of Africa. In the white rhinoceros the upper lip is straight and is not produced into a V as it is in all the other kinds. Incidentally, this beast is far from white—it is a rather darkish gray. But it is lighter than the other kind of African rhinoceros, and in certain lights it may appear quite pale, or even whitish.

It reaches a length of twelve feet or more, standing at the shoulders six feet six inches high. It has two horns. The first horn is usually about two feet in length, though sometimes reaching five feet. The record length is 62½ inches. Such long horns occur only in the females. The second horn, just behind the first, is very small, and is sometimes absent. This rhinoceros is entirely a grazer or grass feeder. It is not so nervous and irritable as the black African rhinoceros.

When disturbed it goes off at a swift trot, and if chased it breaks into a gallop which it can keep up for some distance. While considering its huge size and heavy build it runs with surprising speed, it is no match for a good horse. In walking and in running it holds its head very low, its nose nearly touching the ground.

When a small calf is with its mother it always runs in front, and she appears to guide it by holding the point of her horn upon its rump. Mr. Selous says that it is perfectly wonderful to note how in all sudden changes of pace from a trot to a gallop or *vice versa* the same position always is maintained exactly.

During the autumn and winter months (from March to August) the square-mouthed or white rhinoceros is usually very fat, and the meat is then most excellent, being something like beef yet having a peculiar flavor of its own. The part in greatest favor among hunters is the hump. According to Mr. Selous, if this is cut off and roasted just as it is in the skin in a hole dug in the ground, it is difficult to match either for juiciness or for flavor.

But few of us will ever taste this meat. Where the creatures used to be so very common, south of the Zambesi river, they have been killed out except for about a dozen individuals which are strictly protected on an estate in Zululand. In 1900 it was rediscovered in the region west of the upper Nile, and here it is still common.

The black two-horned rhinoceros still is numerous over a large part of Africa, chiefly in the drier areas. Colonel Roosevelt said that when compared to the mild and placid white rhinoceros this is a fidgety, restless, irritable, and at times dangerous creature. It has a disconcerting habit of charging without any provocation.

The two kinds of African rhinoceroses both have smooth skins and lack front teeth. All of those in southern Asia possess front teeth and have folded skins, so that they look as if they wore armor plates.

In Asia there is the great one-horned Indian rhinoceros,

found only in Nepal and in Bhutan and now very rare; the one-horned Javan rhinoceros, with a wide range in the Malay region; and the Sumatran rhinoceros, with two well separated horns, the smallest of all living kinds, also widely spread in the Malay regions.

THE HUNTING LEOPARD

Least cat-like of all the cats is the graceful hunting leopard, also called the cheetah, which is found throughout the whole of Africa, except in the few regions which are forest covered, in Arabia and Persia, and in India. It is a curious creature with a long and slender body and long legs, something like a greyhound, and a short round head. In color it is yellowish or pale buff with numerous small spots of black and an irregular black line from the inner portion of the eye to the upper lip making it look as if it wept tears of ink. The body reaches a length of four and a quarter feet, and the tail is about two and a half feet long.

In its form and in its habits the hunting leopard shows such a curious mixture of the greyhound and the cat that in the past it was considered by many zoologists as intermediate between the dogs and cats. It was especially noticed that its claws could not be drawn back into sheaths like the claws of cats, but were always exposed like the claws of dogs. But it is really a true cat with nothing of the dog about it.

The hunting leopard is easily tamed, and in confinement it soon becomes much attached to those who are kind to it, giving evidence of this attachment in a frank and dog-like manner. It is said to be entirely free from that sly and suspicious feeling of mistrust which is so strikingly evident in the manner and actions of all cats.