

THE NATURALIST.

THE WHITE RHINOCEROS.

IN THE OLD HUNTING DAYS in South Africa there used to be two species of rhinoceros inhabiting that wonderful shooting ground, the black and the white known also as Burchell's rhinoceros. While the former inhabited thick and bush-covered country, the latter used to wander on the open plain. Being, like most pachyderms, short of sight and, moreover, somewhat slow in its movements, it soon became exterminated by the white, half-caste, and native hunters once it became known that its horns were of marketable value.

The word "white" is really a misnomer, for the two species are much the same colour, though in bright sunlight the plain-dweller generally looked of a lighter colour than its shade-loving congener in the bush. Moreover, following the habit of all African pachyderms, it used to wallow in mud to such an extent that the real colour of the skin was seldom apparent. As the mud or clay with which it used to cover itself was often of a light hue this added to the light appearance of its hide. After the wholesale slaughter of Burchell's rhinoceros in South Africa this animal became practically extinct there, while its bush-dwelling and thorn-eating relative, the black rhinoceros, still survived, though in reduced numbers, owing to the greater difficulty and danger of approaching it. It was soon ascertained, however, that the black rhinoceros, although reduced in numbers in South Africa, was still plentiful in several other parts of the continent, especially in North-eastern Rhodesia and British East Africa.

It was believed that Burchell's rhinoceros was to be found nowhere else but in those parts of South Africa in which it had been exterminated. Subsequently, however, a similar animal was found in the Ludo Enclave on the Upper Nile, or Bahr el Gebel. This fact was known amongst officials and local hunters in this part of the world for some time before the news was made public. It was first exploited by Major Powell Cotton, who, hearing rumours of such an animal, proceeded to the Enclave and obtained specimens which were found to be practically identical with the southern form. It was, however, accorded subspecific distinction and named after that explorer. It appears to occupy a very limited area, extending along the left bank of the Nile from about Wadelai to the northern boundary of the Enclave. The tract it inhabits is, however, very narrow, as it is never found more than perhaps twenty miles from the Nile, although it is common within the area detailed. The white rhinoceros is a grass feeder, its square, broad lip being well adapted for grazing, whereas the black rhinoceros has a pointed and slightly prehensile lip, which especially formed for pulling the leaves off thorn bushes. Although perhaps slower and duller witted than the black species, and every bit as short sighted, the white rhinoceros will not be so easily exterminated in the Lado Enclave as it was in South Africa; for on the open plains of the latter region it was a marked object for miles, being always visible above the short grass. The longer and denser grass of the Enclave affords it better covert, and it is only by chance or by tracking up its spoor that this animal may be met with, and in the tall grass it can seldom be seen at any distance.

The accompanying photograph of the white rhinoceros is interesting, as there can be few, if any, photos extant of this animal in life. The ground in which the animal is seen is peculiarly favourable to the photographer, as the grass is, for the Congo, very sparse. The snapshot was taken from the top of an ant hill, and so the tall grass close by does not blot out the view of the camera. The animal looks particularly white. This is not due to the skin being of a lighter shade than that of the black rhinoceros, but is the result partly of the kind of mud in which the animal last wallowed. It must also be due in a great measure to the effect of a bright sun on the hide as seen by the eye of the camera, for I did not notice that the animal was so white when I took the photo. The white rhinoceros is rather bigger and more ponderous than the black species. The base of the horns is also square instead of being rounded, as on the other species. It is a curious fact that Sir Samuel Baker during the time that he was hunting in these parts never came across the white rhinoceros. This is all the more remarkable as he mentions having been shown a pair of horns in Egypt which he considered resembled those of the white and not the black rhinoceros, so that he should have been on the lookout for this species. Another curious fact is that, although all other kinds of game on the two banks of the Nile are exactly similar, one never meets with a white rhinoceros on the Uganda or right bank of the Nile, or with a black rhinoceros in the area above described as the habitat of Burchell's rhinoceros.

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An Aged Cage Bird.—There has this week died in the possession of Lady Seale, of Wonaston Court, Monmouth, who is