

## RHINOCEROSES LIVING WITHOUT WATER.

SIR,—In your issue of Jan. 29 I observe that Dr Drake Brockman criticises some remarks by Mr Lydekker in the *Field* of Dec. 18, which were based on a letter written by me to Mr Lydekker about a colony of the black rhinoceros which I came across in the Bur Dab range, a range of hills in which, I am credibly informed, Dr Drake Brockman has never been. He sweepingly declares that my deductions as to these rhino ever going for any great length of time without water are "not correct." He then goes on to say that "even in the dry season there are small pools of water only known to the nomadic Somalis throughout the Ain Valley."

This is a curious statement to make in view of the fact that during 1909 there was, for eleven months, a body of troops 1200 strong, stationed at various points along the entire length of the Ain Valley. I was with them myself for close on nine months, and during this time, although we were constantly searching for water, we never found a single pool during the dry season beyond the ordinary well-known watering places. We had about 700 Somali soldiers and followers in the force, and if any such pools had existed I am convinced they would have been discovered. The best evidence that no such pools are known to the Somalis, are the great distances from which they bring their stock to water at the usual wells in the Ain, at none of which do rhino drink.

The pool he calls Gal Wiyiled is, I am convinced, a myth. To begin with, "gal" does not by itself mean pool; "biyo gal," i.e. "water place," is the expression for pool. Gal Wiyiled merely means "the place of rhinoceroses." My authorities are Larajasse's Somali Dictionary and a Somali interpreter. I made four trips in the Bur Dab after rhino in a period of two months, and at the times when I myself was not out my shikari and another local man were hunting all over the range (which is only about fifty miles in length), and we never even heard of such a pool. Dr Drake Brockman himself admitted to me that his knowledge of it was confined to a report heard from a Somali two or three years ago.

I have, after many inquiries, been able to hear of only two places where these rhino ever go for water in the dry season. These are respectively about forty-five and thirty-three miles from their haunts. The first of these is a favourite place for shooting, but I have never heard of any sportsman coming across a rhinoceros there. The Somalis also informed me that the animals visited them very rarely during the dry season. There is, however, a good substitute for water on the Bur Dab in the shape of a species of aloe called "dar" by the Somalis, which grows particularly freely in the locality where I found the rhino. This aloe has thick juicy leaves, and is freely eaten by them. The stomach of the one I shot, and all the droppings, which were in heaps, were full of "dar" fibre bitten into pieces about one and a half inches long by half an inch wide.

It seems to me probable that the rhino only make these long journeys for water occasionally (judging by native reports, about once each in the course of the dry season), and subsist in the meanwhile on "dar" and such-like substitutes.

As a further piece of evidence, I may mention that for six weeks on end, whenever my shikari was out searching for rhino (and there were very few days when he was not) he reported seeing a cow rhino and her small calf in one of two adjacent nullahs. I saw them myself on two occasions, and should think the calf was about two months old. Now there certainly was no water in either of these nullahs, and, as far as I could ascertain, the nearest water approachable by rhino was about twenty-five miles away. It may be assumed, I think, that neither would the cow be likely to leave her calf at the mercy of any wandering beast of prey, nor would a calf of that size be able to do long and fast treks with its mother; it seems probable then, that for the whole of these six weeks they were subsisting on substitutes for water, or rather the mother was.

For a long time it puzzled me what substitute oryx find for water, as they do not appear, where I have found them, to eat "dar," or allied plants; but I lately shot two bull oryx in waterless districts, whose stomachs were full of the seeds of a small gourd called "unun" by the Somalis, which grows in each of the districts where these oryx were shot, and is full of juice.

The greater kudu also is distributed throughout the Bur Dab, and although usually a water-loving antelope has evidently adapted itself to the conditions of life there; I found that they also eat large quantities of "dar."

In conclusion, I fail to see why the rhinoceros should not have grown accustomed to go without water for a good long time, as nearly all the antelopes and gazelles of this country undoubtedly have, whatever their habits, and those of closely allied species in other countries.

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Burao, Somaliland, Feb. 25.