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ANIMALS

WORTH THEIR WEIGHT

IN GOLD.

BY GAMBIER BOLTON, F.Z.S.

Illustrated from Photographs, by the Author.

To get at the true market value of most of the so-called "lower" orders of creation, one must consider the points of excellence or superiority of a given specimen over others of a similar race; the fact whether they have already or are about to become extinct; the difficulties and dangers connected with their breeding, capture, and transport, and lastly whether they are well-known or new to science.

Taking these points as a basis on which to work, we shall find that not only are some animals, living or dead, worth enormous sums to-day, but that it may be said with truth, of a few of them at least, that they would be worth their weight in gold to any person fortunate enough to possess them.

A living specimen of the Dodo, for instance, that weird, flightless bird, about the size of a swan, which at one time made the islands of Madagascar, Reunion and Rodriguez its home, and of which nothing but a few skulls, still bearing the strong hooked beak, and some bones, in our Museums now remain, would fetch any price in reason. So would the Great Auk, which only fifty years ago was so common in the North Atlantic that it is said they were killed on Funk Island, off the Newfoundland coast, in tens of thousands at a time, for the sake of their feathers, but whose eggs sell to-day for close on £300 apiece, and stuffed skins at £250 each, with a steady demand for more.

If an Auk and Dodo Syndicate were formed, with the certainty of becoming the

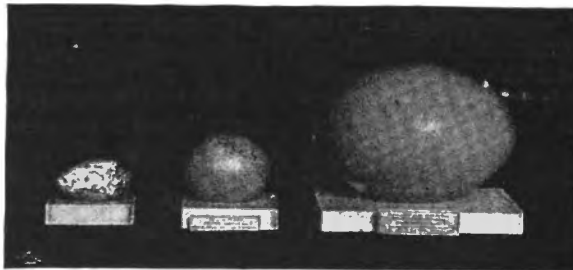
happy possessors of a few of these rare birds in the flesh, it would prove a far more profitable venture than many an African gold-mine that one could name. The Great Auk was about the size of a goose, measuring 30ins. to 32ins. over all, and is said to have dived when attempts were made to capture it in the sea, instead of flapping along the surface of the water, in this respect very closely resembling its living relative, the penguin.

Both the Dodo and the Great Auk have become extinct within comparatively recent years, like the Moas of New Zealand, enormous ostrich-like running birds, which are known to have existed up to the end of last century. Some of them exceeded 12ft in height, and over twenty different species are known to scientists. Rumours occasionally arrive from that far-off land, of living Moas; but year after year passes, and the priceless bird is not discovered in the

flesh, only its bones, feathers and egg-shells reaching us, all being quickly bought up for private or public collections.

The living Apteryx or Kiwi is very near the Moa in type, although but a pigmy beside the huge giant, for the largest does not exceed 3ft.

height, and it differs from the Moa in having an exceedingly long beak, with which it probes the soft earth at night-time in search of worms. Some of the Kiwis are valuable birds, too, for the rarest living specimens are said to be worth £150 apiece in this quarter of the globe, for they are extremely difficult



Eggs of

A Great Auk, an Ostrich, an *Æpyornis*.

A Great Auk's egg sold recently for £296, whilst one of an *Æpyornis* is worth £100.



Skeleton of a Moa, the extinct wingless bird of New Zealand.

originally from a sailor for half a crown. But after the discovery, through this very photograph, that it was the first specimen ever seen alive in Europe, it would have sold for a large sum, whilst even its skin after death realised nearly twenty pounds. We might mention also a pair of sober-tinted little Ducks, which the Curator of the Zoo at Rotterdam assured the writer he would not willingly exchange for our best thousand guinea Rhinoceros, as they were the last of their race. All these instances and others help to prove the saying, that some birds, living or dead, are almost priceless to-day.

Among the Beasts, what would not the huge Mammoth be worth, that strange elephant-like creature whose body was covered with long reddish hairs to protect it from the bitter cold of Siberia, where its remains are still often found, with the hair yet on the body, fast frozen into its icy grave; whose enormous tusks, far exceeding in size those of any Elephant, are still collected for the sake of their ivory, a ship-load having been actually sent to London for sale not very long ago. Its remains are frequently found in the brick-earth of the Thames Valley, and even under modern London itself, and are sometimes brought up in dredges from the sea off the Norfolk

to bring home alive from such a great distance as New Zealand.

From this list of priceless birds we must not omit the other one for which Madagascar was so celebrated, the *Aepyornis*, a monster bigger even than the Moa, the eggs of which, still constantly discovered by the natives, are worth at least £100 apiece. They measure 3ft. in circumference, with a liquid-carrying capacity of no less than two gallons.

Some few of the rarer living birds of to-day are worth large sums, the King Penguin, of which we possess a solitary specimen in our collection in Regent's Park, being worth a hundred pounds or more. So, too, the White-headed Buzzard, of South America, from the Clifton collection, which, it is said, was purchased



A Kiwi, the wingless bird of New Zealand, still in existence, but becoming daily more rare.

coast. Mammoths must have been exceedingly numerous at one time, for from the quantity of tusks collected in Siberia alone, it is estimated that quite 20,000 carcasses were discovered there in twenty years.

In a newspaper cutting now lying before the writer, it is stated that there is still thought to be a chance of discovering the living Mammoth in those bitterly cold regions on either side of the Behring Sea, which separates Alaska from Siberia. Fortunate indeed will be the person who first finds it and brings a specimen into any civilised part of the world, for its value would be something enormous. In connection with this subject, we must remember that the tendency nowadays is to increase the number of



Hairy-eared Rhinoceros.

As much as £1250 was paid for this animal by the Zoological Society.



White-headed Buzzard.

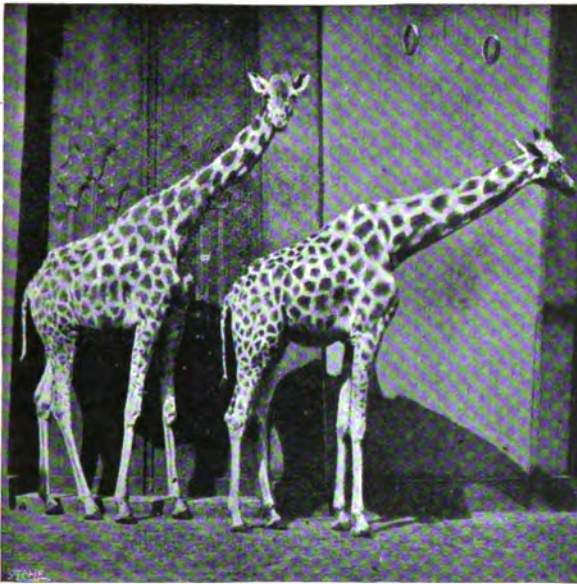
This bird was originally sold by a sailor for half-a-crown. When found to be the first specimen in Europe it became of great value. Its skin after its death sold for £20

Zoological collections of the world, rather than to let them fall off, for it is now at last realised that many of the animals are rapidly becoming exterminated, and that unless attempts are made to keep and breed them in captivity, future generations will only know what they were like from seeing paintings, photographs, and stuffed specimens.

This being the case, great competition invariably takes place among the many Zoological Societies to secure, at all costs, any rare beast or bird which may be captured, thus tending to keep up and even increase the prices which, but for this keen competition, might fall off.

Look at the little hairy-eared Rhinoceros from Chittagong in Upper Burmah, for which it is said that our own Society paid no less than £1250, the highest price ever paid by them for any animal, simply because in 1872 it was the first specimen ever discovered and brought alive to Europe. It is quite small, and ugly looking even for a Rhinoceros; but now that the species is becoming more common the price has fallen off, and it is doubtful if a hairy-eared rhinoceros would fetch a third of the money paid for the first specimen.

The Pigmy Hippopotamus of Liberia too, is known to exist there, but for some unexplained reason, not a single specimen has ever reached Europe alive, and, tiny as it is, being only about thirty inches high when full grown, it would be worth a very large sum, to any person landing a living specimen in Great



Two Giraffes.

Owing to their increasing rarity and the difficulties of transport and dangers of climate, Giraffes are worth £1000 each to-day.

Britain. Of the huge White Rhinoceros too, with its double horns, the front one often exceeding four feet in height, not a single living specimen has ever been known out of Africa. Rumour, however, says that a thousand pounds each was paid to the lucky sportsman who brought three skins and skeletons of the white rhinoceros to Europe. If one should suddenly appear, not only Zoological Societies in all parts of the world, but dealers and show-men as well, would tumble over each other in their hurry to possess it at any price.

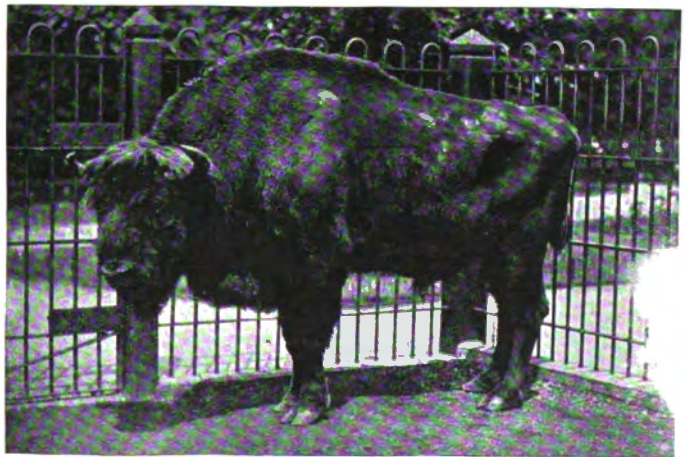
The third of the African rarities is of course, the Quagga, an animal resembling the Zebra, but of a much heavier build, and with its stripes showing only on the head, neck and withers, the remainder of the body being a light reddish tint, unstriped, excepting for a dark line down the spine, and with the under-parts of the body and legs, a creamy white. As recently as 1839 these animals existed in vast herds even so far South as Cape Colony, but owing to their rather

heavy build and somewhat slow pace, they fell a prey first to the lions, then to the natives and finally to the white men, who coveted their flesh and hides. Not a single specimen has been seen for nearly twenty years, although there still remains the slight chance of coming across a few survivors in the German and Portuguese territory of South West Africa.

Their skins and skeletons alone would be worth a very large sum, and a living specimen would create almost as much competition as that set up by the appearance of a White Rhinoceros. The Quaggas that one so often hears and reads about at the present time, are in reality the Burchells Zebras, which are still fairly common, as they breed well in captivity, and North of the Zambesi are found in large herds.

Two more of the African Mammalia are becoming extremely rare, the Elephant and the Hippopotamus, at least so far as known specimens

in European countries are concerned. Probably the only African Elephant in Europe is now in our collection at Regent's Park, and would sell at auction for more than a thousand pounds, whilst to prove the scarcity of the Hippos, our Society, it is said, paid no less than £500 for an infant male born in the Zoological Gardens at Antwerp about three years ago. It was only the size of a large pig, so that the Society is pretty safe to value



A European Bison.

They are now nearly extinct, only being found in Lithuania, in Poland, and in the Southern portions of Russia. Once they roamed over Britain,

a full grown one on a par with the African Elephant. Even twenty years ago we received £2000 for our monster "Jumbo," who was killed in 1886 by an express train in Canada, as he attempted to rescue a dwarf elephant who had strayed on to the line, and was in danger of being annihilated.

We must not leave the African continent without a reference to that rare animal the Giraffe, for although it is possible that, with the opening up of the country round Khar-toum, it may become more common out of

Africa, there is always the risk of transport to be considered. We have only to remember the death of the large male which was sent as a present from South Africa to the Queen two years ago, which, after a very long and trying journey from the interior, died as he was being released from his travelling box in the Zoo, whilst the young male which arrived last year from West Africa, lived only a

few weeks, finally dying from indigestion. The true market value of the former was at least £1500, whilst it is said that £900 was paid by the Society for the latter, so that when we price Giraffes at £1000 each all round, we are not very wide of the mark. There is a demand for quite a dozen at this price, amongst the dealers, show-men, and zoological societies of the world. With the American and European slaughter parties pouring in from every side of Africa, it can only be a question of years before all the

larger game there will have become exterminated, and nothing can prove this better than the way in which the market value of the animals of the Dark Continent is advancing by leaps and bounds, so that, ere long, the smaller societies will be quite unable to afford to purchase any more specimens for their collections.

Turning once more to our own continent, we find that rare animal, the European Bison heading the list of valuable creatures nearly extinct, for it exists only in Lithuania in

Poland, where it enjoys the protection of the Russian Government, and in the Caucasus, in parts of Moldavia and in Wallachia. At one time it must have roamed in vast numbers, through the wooded parts of all Europe, including of course Great Britain, but each year now sees the numbers falling off, and soon, like its fast disappearing relative across the



The King of the Animal World.

In mere money a fine Lion is worth to-day something like £600.

Atlantic (the American Bison), it will be classed among the "have beens," for both species are doomed.

To many persons it may appear absurd to talk of the extermination of the larger "Cats," yet this is an undoubted fact, and it is not too much to say, that there are infants living to-day who will live to see the last of several of these handsome species, as it is impossible for most of them to exist where civilisation encroaches upon their hunting grounds.

Take the so-called Asiatic Lion for instance,

the ridiculously named "Maneless Lion," of the less up-to-date Natural Histories. It is a positive fact that the Lions in Asia are now so nearly exterminated that the Rajahs in India, at least, are preserving them as carefully as pheasants and other game are preserved by



Ounce, or Snow Leopard

A creature of which as yet but little is known. Our Zoological Society paid £300 for the first specimen which reached Europe. It comes from the mountains of Central Asia.

us. The Shah of Persia also, it is said, is keeping a large number of them in enclosures as curiosities, although twenty years ago they were quite common in Persia, India and other parts of Asia. It is strange that, unlike the Tiger, they have never been known in the Malayan region or east of the Bay of Bengal.

Lions from all parts of Africa are fast disappearing too, as their market value shows, for "Toby," from Somaliland the last one to provoke any keen competition on account of his many grand points, was sold for the collection at Antwerp, when in quite a raw and half-grown state, and even then £300 was paid for him. Doubtless if sold to-day, he would fetch nearly double this sum, as he is quite the "record" lion of the century.

The Ounce, too, that mysterious grey-coloured leopard, about which little or nothing is known at present, and for which, it is said, our Society paid £300, is a creature the value of which depends not so much on its approaching extermination, as on the difficulty of its transport from a bitterly cold region of from six to twenty thousand feet above the sea level, in the mountains of Central Asia, through the hot tropics, to the changing climate of Europe. It is not surprising that, however much care may be taken, none

of them survive the change for very long, and are apt to die before the importer can get rid of them, thus saddling him with the heavy cost of their transport. The Ounce in the Zoo was the first which ever reached Europe alive. It arrived some four years ago.

Turning to the domesticated animals, it is chiefly amongst the horses, cattle and dogs that we find specimens of enormous value, although big prices are often paid for poultry, cats, rabbits or guinea-pigs, £80, it is said, having been paid for a pair of the latter that had won a great many prizes at the large shows. Even cats will find buyers at sums as large or larger than this, for £100 has before now been offered for long-haired specimens, whilst it is rumoured that £50 was refused for the English short-haired tabby, Champion Xenophon, who has won prize after prize for his fortunate owner, Mr. Sam Woodiwiss.

Dogs and cattle too, often change hands at enormous prices. With the latter it is sometimes the size that affects the sale, provided that other points are equally good. One has but to call to mind those giant St. Bernards "Plinlimmon," "Rector," and "Sir Bedivere," each of them measuring nearly a yard in height at the shoulder, and selling at from £1000 to £1250 each, whilst collies have fetched an even higher figure.

The Japanese spaniels or sleeve dogs are, at present, the most fashionable amongst the



A Japanese Spaniel.

£300 is said to have been offered and refused for this little dog. It is supposed to be the smallest and best out of Japan.

"toy" breeds to-day, and £300 has been, it is said, offered and refused for the specimen whose portrait we give, as she is one of the smallest and best out of Japan, where they are bred chiefly by the aristocracy, and are consequently difficult to obtain.