

Rhinoceros borili Blyth, 1870, a forgotten name for the black rhinoceros

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Borili, or Boreli, was the Ndebele (Matabili) name for a type of black rhinoceros in South Africa, recorded by the explorer-zoologist Andrew Smith (1797–1872) and the engineer-hunter William Cornwallis Harris (1807–1848) in their books published in 1838 (Rookmaaker 2008: 33, 52). As the name was associated with the usual black rhinoceros found in South Africa showing a posterior horn much smaller than the anterior one, it was only used as a common name for *Rhinoceros bicornis*, now *Diceros bicornis*. During much of the 19th century it was separated from the black rhinoceros with horns of equal lengths known as *Rhinoceros keitloa*, which should now be used as the name for the south-eastern sub-species as *Diceros bicornis keitloa* (Rookmaaker 2016).

Although Borili and Keitloa appear in 19th century literature, there was never a need to provide a scientific name for the Borili. However, such a name was indeed provided once, in a popular book of natural history, and subsequently overlooked even by authors (like myself) who have perused this well-known publication. It is necessary to discuss the author and date, and interesting to look at the history of the accompanying engraved image of the black rhinoceros.

The French naturalist Louis Figuier (1819–1894) wrote many books popularizing science, among which one on mammals aimed at younger people in 1869. His approach was definitely conventional and greatly outdated, recognizing just two species shown in two figures, the one-horned Indian and the two-horned African rhinos (Figuier 1869: 119). The second edition of 1873 was unchanged.

Figuier's book was rather quickly published in English in 1870, translated by the popular

author Parker Gillmore (1835–1900). As stated in the translator's "Note" dated 12 March 1870, "the early portion was edited by E. Blythe [sic], Esq., F.Z.S. This acknowledgement is necessary, as that part was remodelled and considerably augmented" (Figuier 1870: v). Edward Blyth (1810–1873) was the former Curator of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, India, who had returned home due to sickness in 1862. He had certainly greatly changed the section on the Rhinocerotidae with text originally four pages in extent augmented to 27 pages but still with only two illustrations (Figuier 1870: 139–160). Repeating his discussion on the rhinoceros written in India (Blyth 1862a, 1862b), Blyth now recognized three Asian species and three African species, almost like our modern classification except for accepting two types of black rhinoceros (*R. bicornis* and *R. keitloa*). It may be noted that Blyth used the generic names advocated by John Edward Gray (1868): *Ceratotherium* for the white rhino and *Rhinaster* for the two black rhino species, the latter spelled *Rhinoster* (p.155), which may be regarded as an incorrect subsequent spelling in terms of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN).

The two illustrations of rhinos in the original French edition of 1869 were also replaced in the English edition of 1870, with new captions for "Fig. 35. – Indian one-horned Rhinoceros (*R. indicus*)" (p.139) and "Fig. 36. – Two-horned African Rhinoceros (*R. Borili*)" (p.142) (Fig. 1). The latter species, clearly the black rhinoceros, was called Borèlè in vernacular and *Rhinoster bicornis* taxonomically in the general discussion (Blyth 1870: 155). The name *R. Borili* in the caption has never been formally noticed anywhere in any other work about rhinos. It is a valid name, because there is an illustration and because the book was doubtlessly a normal publication. The name cannot be attributed to Louis Figuier, leaving Parker Gillmore or Edward Blyth as contenders. I believe that

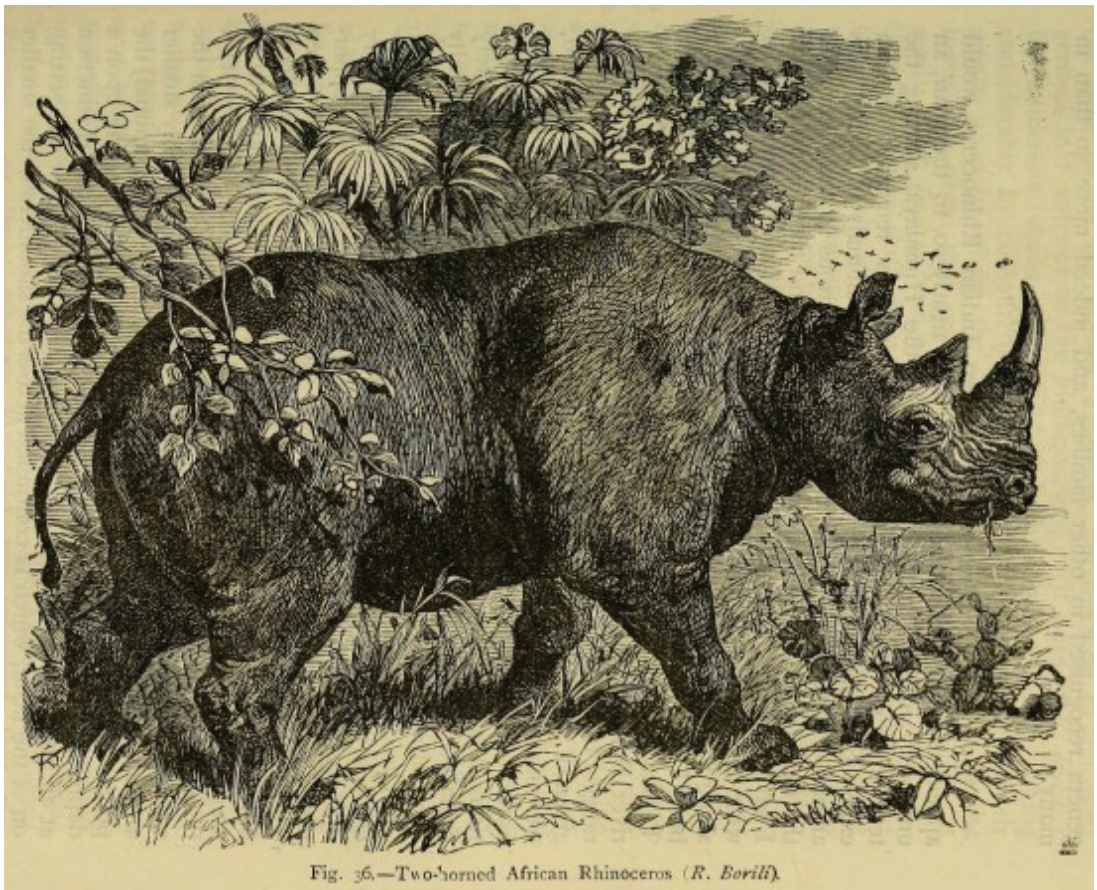


Fig. 36.—Two-horned African Rhinoceros (*R. Borili*).

Figure 1. The black rhinoceros drawn by W.S. Coleman as found in the English editions of the *Mammalia* by Louis Figuier of 1870, 1875 and 1883 with the caption “Two-horned African Rhinoceros (*R. Borili*).”

it is best to credit Blyth with this name. It needs no explanation that *R. borili* should be regarded as a *nomen oblitum*, a forgotten name, because it has not been used again, except in reprints of the same work (as below). A *nomen oblitum* remains valid and available, but being unused after 1899, does not take precedence over a younger synonym or homonym.

The illustration used here for the African rhinoceros was not original. It was earlier published in another popular book on the animal kingdom authored by Rev. John George Wood (1827–1875), an immensely prolific author on science and nature topics whose works were regularly reprinted both in the UK and in the USA. The figure of the “Rhinaster or Borele—*Rhinoceros bicornis*” first appeared (as far as I can verify) in the multi-volume edition of Wood’s *Illustrated Natural History* of 1859

(Wood 1859, vol.1: 757). In some editions of this work, this engraving is signed in the lower left corner “W.S. Coleman” identifying William Stephen Coleman (1829–1904) as the draughtsman, and in the lower right corner by the engraver which might read (but it is almost illegible) “Mesnel sc.” for Albin Mesnel (1830–1875). Considering that the first black rhinoceros was exhibited in a zoological garden as late as 1868 (Rookmaaker 1998: 164), the animal that inspired Coleman’s drawing can no longer be identified. The animal in this figure is clearly the type-specimen of *R. borili* and the locality where the animal was seen is the type-locality. Although South Africa is the most likely location, this cannot be verified.

There were three further editions in English of Figuier’s *Mammalia*, dated 1875, 1883 and 1892, for which the translation and revision was credited to the Irish zoologist Edward Perceval Wright (1834–1910). The illustration of 1870 with *R. borili* in the caption

was repeated in 1875 and 1883, but reversed back to *R. bicornis* in 1892. Coleman's drawing first seen in J.G. Wood's work in 1859 was repeated in various works and editions by this author until 1885, always as *R. bicornis*.

This investigation has found two new names relating to recent rhinoceros:

Rhinoster Blyth, 1870 (in Figuiet's *Mammalia*, p.155), incorrect subsequent spelling of *Rhinaster* Gray, 1842.

Rhinoceros [or *Rhinoster*] *borili* Blyth, 1870 (in Figuiet's *Mammalia*, caption to Fig. 36 on p.142). Type-specimen: the animal depicted by William Stephen Coleman as found in Wood (1859, vol.1: 757) and later works until 1885, and in Figuiet (1870: 142, 1875: 141, 1883: 141). Type-locality: unknown, probably South Africa.

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