

REVIEW

The World As It Once Was Wildlife Has Never Been More Gloriously Shown Before

George Dian Balan

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White rhinoceros from *The World As It Once Was*; p.97. © George Dian Balan.

This is a large book about large animals. Perhaps an eclectic mix with lions, bison, mega-beetles all vying for space with elephants and rhinos. Dian Balan is a fine art wildlife photographer as well as a passionate conservationist. *The World As It Once Was* is a book full of photographs each occupying a full page, with explanatory text on the spread opposite. Definitely stunning examples of the animal world as some lucky travellers and

artists could still see wildlife in my lifetime. These photographs were taken by an impressive series of dedicated men and women who must have spent many hours in remote corners of the earth to capture on camera a rare set of images of a world that once was. It is not necessarily a world that is entirely in the past. There remains hope that iconic individuals shown here might be born again later in this century. When it comes to the elephants (both Asian and African) and

the rhinos (all African), the text and pictures are definitely about size. Animals with ‘plough the earth’ long tusks and horns ‘pointing to the skies’ are put into special focus.

I was intrigued by the photograph of a black rhino with a 15-cm third horn on the forehead (p. 80). Balan has done his homework well and the text has some fascinating insights. Sometimes we like to know more, for instance when he says (p. 90) that he knows 20 horns over 90 cm from photographic evidence not yet recorded. Maybe some of this type of information will be shared elsewhere. There are pictures of the famous long-horned black rhinos of Amboseli in the 1970s, here called No.1 and No. 2 instead of *Gertie* and *Gladys*. They remind us of their special attraction to tourists and zoologists alike. In those days, these were the animals that we all wanted to see, and lucky were the privileged ones who made the journey and could obtain their simple snap. The record horn for a black rhino in the *Records of Big Game* of 136 cm, was one attributed to KV Paynter. I once tried to locate the specimen, somewhere in the USA, without success. Like the 159 cm long horn of Roualeyn Gordon Cumming, it has disappeared, possibly poached or pilvered in their immortal state. The front cover of volume

62 is also from *The World as it Once Was*, reproduced by kind favour of George Dian Balan.

There are many examples throughout this book of individual animals which were the pride of their species. Not only pachyderms, also some amazing individuals of black maned lions, wild pigs, deer, antelopes, and from all continents. This is a great visual treat to peruse and to marvel. The author is a conservationist and he explains his vision for sustained protection. He expands on the reasons why he feels that all trophy hunting, probably all hunting, should be banned forever. His is not a scientific treatise, but certainly a plea that is worth listening to. The text in this book might remain undervalued as there are so many beautiful, great, well-chosen photographs which will grab our attention first. This is a coffee-table book with a message, and one which we should discuss and take forward.

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The book can be obtained directly from the author (dian.balan@gmail.com), who ships worldwide, or can be ordered on Amazon for readers based in the UK.

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