

Steller recognized the similarity of the sea-cow of the North Pacific to certain other animals already known ; but, being possessed of imperfect information, he assumed that all these belonged to a single species. We now know that this was an erroneous conclusion, that this sea-cow was specifically and generically distinct from others of the group, and it is consequently very often known as Steller's sea-cow.

The sea-cows in fact form a peculiar group of the mammalia, which is now classed as a separate order and which shows little affinity to any other mammals, for though in its aquatic habits and in some other respects it resembles the whales and porpoises it is very different from these in anatomical structure. This is probably a very ancient group, for fossil remains referable to it are found in several geological formations in Europe, Africa and America ; but in human times it appears to have dwindled, and to be verging on extinction from natural causes altogether apart from any specific attacks by man.

Within the historic period, this whole order of mammals has had but three living genera. The Manatee proper, which inhabits the shores and estuaries of the Atlantic within the tropics. The Halicore or Dugong, found in the Red Sea, on the East Coast of Africa and in the Indian Seas as far east as Australia ; and the Rhytina, of which but one species (*R. Stelleri*) appears to have existed. The last-mentioned is the sea-cow here specially referred to, that of the North Pacific.

It is very often the case, that ancient types of animals which have already played their part in the history of the world, are found in the last stages surviving in a few forms widely separated geographically. It is so in the present instance. The Halicore is separated by the length of the African continent from the Manatee of the Atlantic, while Steller's sea-cow was discovered, as we have seen, on a remote island of the North Pacific.

Early navigators had observed the Halicore and Manatee as animals of a strange and problematical character, and it is supposed that the habit of these animals in carrying the young under the fore limb may have given origin to the fabled mermaid. Thus when systematic names began to be applied by naturalists, those animals belonging to this order were designated *Sirenia*.