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HOME OF INDIA'S RHINO

By E. P. GEE

(Reprinted by permission from the *Calcutta Statesman*, 30th May, 1948)

Thousands pass it by every year as they motor along the Grand Trunk Road of Assam. Only few of the local residents trouble to visit it. Yet here at Kaziranga, midway between Gauhati and Dibrugarh, within a mile of the main road, is one of the most famous game sanctuaries in the world.

Therein live in perfect security hundreds of Rhino, Wild Buffalo, Pig, and various kinds of Deer. A few Bison (Gaur), Tiger, Elephant, and other animals are also found there. And thousands of birds find safety there. Geese, Duck, Herons, Storks, Partridges, and numerous others.

In this large tract of unspoilt Nature, with its streams, beehives, and patches of tree jungle, the country can be seen exactly as it was thousands of years ago. Giant Elephant grass, 15-20 feet high in places, gives full protection to the wild creatures which thrive there. Tracks go in every direction over the low but slightly undulating ground.

The sanctuary came into being about 1906. It was then (only just in time) realized that the Great Indian Rhino was nearly extinct, and that Bison and Buffalo were becoming scarce. So the sanctuary was formed, and Rhino have now increased to about five hundred or even more. It is difficult to count the animals in a hundred and sixty odd square miles of thick grass jungle.

Kaziranga was opened to visitors in 1937. Before that only officials and their friends went there as a rule. But now you and I can go there at any time provided we get permission from the Divisional Forest Officer beforehand. You can stay in the inspection bungalow there if it is not occupied; and two fine inspection Elephants—Akbar and Sher Khan—are available for visiting the sanctuary.

Rhino, being somewhat stupid and proverbially short-tempered, sometimes give a snort and charge. But usually they are placid creatures, and move away when approached nearer than about 50 yards. Elephants, instinctively scared of Rhino, will generally bolt if charged.

The two forest Elephants at Kaziranga, however, are staunch and their mahouts experienced and skilful. At the same time, a gash from a Rhino is worth avoiding, so the mahouts use the utmost caution in approaching these horned animals. And



Photo by E. P. Gee.

A FULL-GROWN BULL RHINO IN KAZIRANGA SANCTUARY.

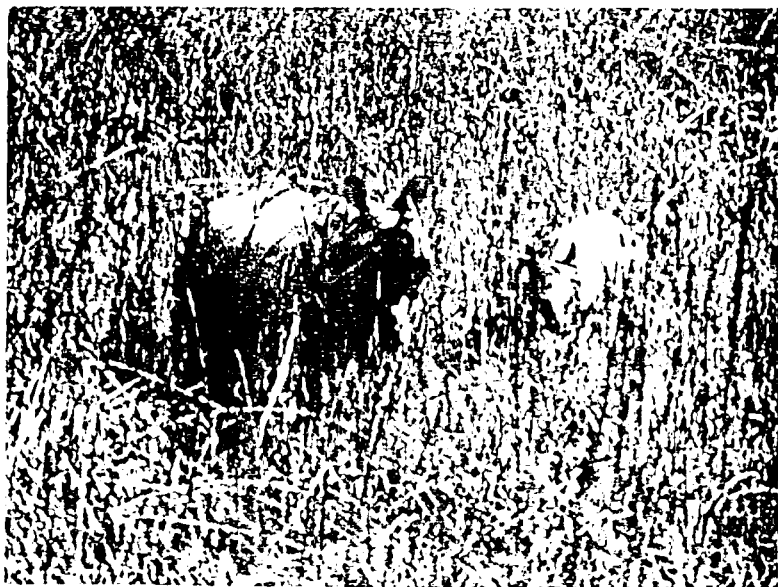


Photo by E. P. Gee.

THIS COW RHINO, WITH HER CALF, AT FIRST LOOKED LIKE CHARGING US, BUT SHE DID NOT.

should a Rhino charge, as a cow with a calf often will do, the Elephant is allowed to run for a short distance before being brought back again to observe its weird pursuer.

A gallop on Elephant back from a Rhino is a thrill worth experiencing. In fact one is often disappointed nowadays if one is not charged; and there is an entry in the visitors' book written by a disappointed couple which reads: "Only charged by the Forest Department."

Indian Buffaloes are more wary than Rhino and keep at a distance of about 80 yards. They go in herds and are a great sight as they stand facing you, often with a fine bull among them. They have become friendly with their armour-plated fellows, and two were once seen lying in a hheel within one foot of a Rhino.

A few Bison (Gaur) are supposed to live in the furthestmost part of the sanctuary, but have not been seen for some time. They may have migrated to the Mikir Hills near by, where Bison have always existed.

Sambhar, Swamp Deer, and Barking Deer abound in great numbers in the sanctuary. And it is interesting to note that a common enemy, as in the case of man, often unites animals otherwise diverse in character. The Tiger is the sworn enemy of Deer, Buffalo, and Pig. These three, therefore, have instinctively formed friendships with Rhino, of whom the Tiger is afraid. A sort of lease-lend arrangement ensues. Deer, in particular, graze freely with Rhino; and alertly give warning of impending danger from Tiger or man to their more short-sighted guardians.

It is hoped that the Forest Department will be able to carry out some improvements at Kaziranga. The sanctuary could be made even more accessible to visitors by the making of a forest road right up to it. And a tourist's hut at the end of this road would provide convenient accommodation to those going out in the very early morning.

A large clearance in front of the proposed hut would enable visitors on arrival to see animals in the evening as they come out to graze.

A ready supply of information about the sanctuary and its inmates would lead to the creation not only of increased public interest, but also of the preservation-mindedness so much needed nowadays.

Recently some friends of mine, whose bungalow overlooks part of the sanctuary, were watching a herd of Wild Buffalo graze. The herd moved on, but a cow had left a very young calf

crying there all by itself. A peculiar incident. Possibly a Tiger or two had frightened the herd away.

My friends rescued the calf and put it on the bottle. It thrived. Several days later the herd returned, and there was the mother searching for her baby, which was promptly returned to her.

If we, the trustees for future generations, were all as preservation-minded as this there would be no fear for the survival of our valuable fauna.

THE PLIGHT OF OUR WHOOPERS

By MYRTLE J. BROLEY

(Reprinted by permission from *The Carling Conservation Digest*)

One of the biggest bird hunts for many years was conducted last summer—big because of the size of the bird and the vast area searched. Canada and the United States have joined forces to seek out Whooping Cranes, the largest birds in North America, not to shoot them but to provide protection for any nests or young as well as for the parents.

It is estimated that there are only about thirty-one of these high white birds left unless a few more may be dwelling in out-of-the-way places.

About two years ago it was decided to make an effort to save the remnant of the mighty flocks which once made the whole night musical as they passed overhead on their migrations, according to Audubon. A Canadian, Mr. C. L. Broley, was asked by Dr. Cottam, of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, to conduct the search. Through his wide connections with press and radio he was able to get publicity for the search throughout Canada and did locate, through correspondence, several pairs of birds and even a possible nest. Unfortunately he was unable to go on with the work and Dr. Fred Bard, of Saskatoon, took over.

In 1946 during the spring and summer Dr. Pettingill, of the United States, flew thousands of miles over the Canadian Northwest but caught no sight of the big birds. There were some though, for last year when they returned to their wintering ground in Texas, three young Cranes, easily identified by their rusty brown heads, were with the adults. Cranes usually lay two eggs and if three are deposited the third is infertile, so at least two pairs and possibly three nested in the north, in spite of the late cold spring.