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Animals of
**Southern
Asia**

illustrated by Don Forrest



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FOREWORD

Southern Asia is bounded to the south by the Indian Ocean for most of its extent and by the Persian Gulf and the South China Sea at its western and eastern extremities. Northward, the boundary is determined by the southern foothills of the great Himalayan range for the central half of its extent. West and east of this, the southern frontiers of the U.S.S.R. and of China have been chosen as arbitrary limits. Iraq in the west and the Philippine Islands and Celebes to the east determine its limits of longitude. The whole area lies in the subtropics and tropics and at its eastern extremity it extends briefly south of the equator.

In any context of natural history territories have to be considered from the geographical point of view. In this book the term 'India' without qualification means the whole Indian subcontinent south of the Himalayas. 'Indo-China' is the area comprising the states of Laos, Cambodia, North and South Vietnam and a part of Thailand. Malaysia and Indonesia are not often referred to because their frontiers are not determined by physical geography. The Malay Peninsula is called 'Malaya' and the partly Malaysian and partly Indonesian islands standing on the Sunda Shelf are referred to as the 'Sunda Islands'.

The animal life of southern Asia is an enormous subject. An adequate reference library of information relating to it would require a fair sized room for its accommodation. All we can do in a book of this size is to describe and illustrate some of the mammals, birds and other creatures that a resident or traveller in the region is likely to see, and to give as far as possible a balanced account of its fauna for comparison with that of other great geographical regions of the world. All civilized people must feel concern for animals that are in danger of extermination, and emphasis has been placed on these for this reason.

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Binturong

India and ranges eastward as the last species does. The largest of the climbing civets is the Binturong or Bear Cat (*Arctictis binturong*), which is found over the same range as the Masked Palm Civet. It is black with rather shaggy hair, thoroughly arboreal, and its tail is prehensile.

The Large Indian Civet (*Viverra zibetha*) and the Small Indian Civet (*Viverricula indica*) are ground-dwelling animals, distinguished by the black-and-white barred throat and banded tail; both occur in continental southern Asia from India eastward.

The linsangs, of which there are two species, are very different from the other civets. They are elongate and short-legged with long, thickly-haired tails and beautifully patterned fur, and they lack the defensive scent glands. The Banded Linsang (*Prionodon linsang*) is a rare animal found in Malaya and the Sunda Islands; it is buff with four or five broad, black stripes across the body and the tail also banded.

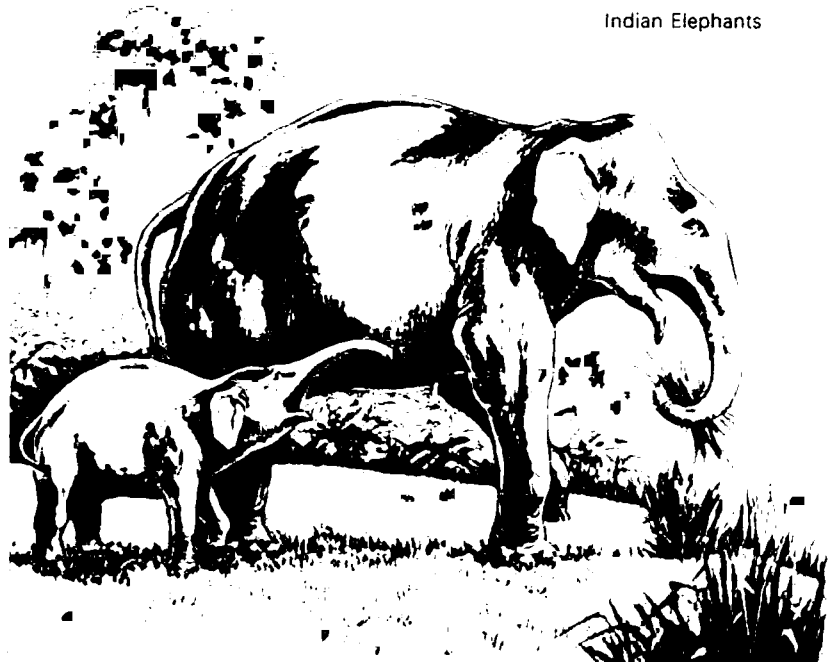
The Indian Elephant

The Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is one of the two species that are surviving on the earth today. It differs from the African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) in a number of important features, among which are the ears (much larger in the African) and the trunk, which ends in two fleshy processes or 'fingers' in the African and one in the Indian. The African is the larger of the two species and, with a maximum weight of about six tons, the largest living land animal. With a weight of up to four tons the Indian Elephant is rivalled by the Hippopotamus and the African White Rhinoceros.

Asian Elephant would be a better name for our species, as it inhabits not only the forested areas of India, but Ceylon and a large region east of India as well. This includes Burma, Thailand, Indo-China, the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. There are wild elephants in Borneo, but there is good reason to suppose that they are not native animals but descendants of escaped, domestic elephants.

Elephants have been domesticated from very early times, in India probably from the second millenium BC. They

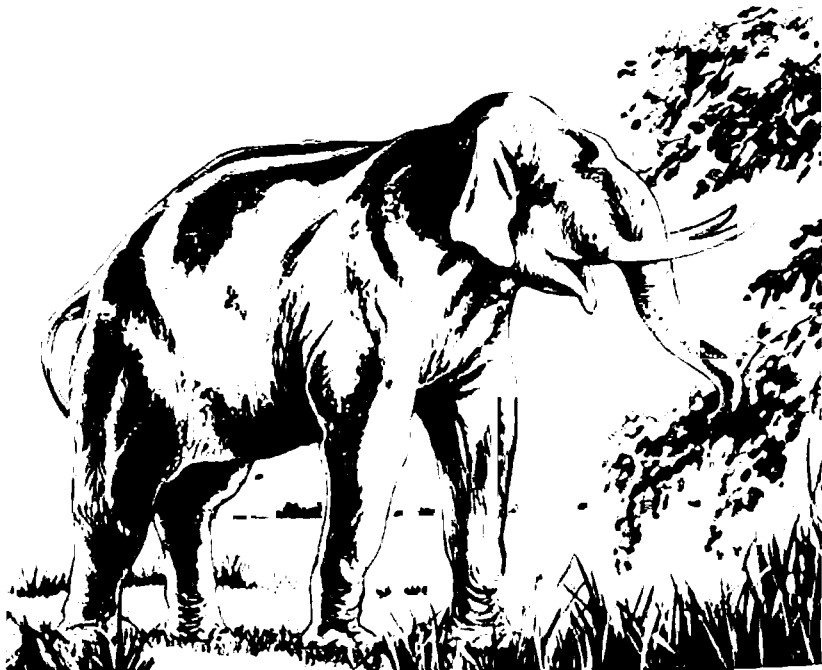
Indian Elephants



cannot carry a very heavy load (between five and six hundredweight only), but can drag an enormous weight and can be trained to perform quite complicated tasks, such as moving and stacking timber, at words of command. Formerly they were used, with varying success, in warfare. The ivory of the tusks is very valuable and has led to extensive hunting of elephants in Africa and to some extent in Asia.

Elephants' teeth are very curious. The tusks represent a single pair of incisors, and six enormous molars develop in each half-jaw, twenty-four molars in all, but only one is in use at a time because they are grown in succession throughout the animal's life, the early ones becoming worn down and being replaced by new teeth growing behind them. The last molars grow when the elephant is about sixty, and when they are worn out it must die, at any rate in the wild state. The period of gestation is long, twenty-one months.

Their appetites are enormous; a captive elephant will eat 100 pounds of hay in a day, and in the wild they devastate their surroundings, whether cultivated or natural forest. They drink by sucking up a trunk-full of water, amounting to a gallon-and-a-half, and squirting it into their mouths.





Great Indian Rhinoceros

Rhinoceros and the Malayan Tapir

Three of the five living species of rhinoceros now survive precariously in southern Asia. The largest of them is the Great Indian Rhinoceros* (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), which stands over six feet at the shoulder and may weigh over two tons. Its most striking feature is its thick hide, which has loose folds on the neck and the fore and hind parts of the body. Convex tubercles on the skin, looking like rivets, heighten the illusion that the animal is clothed in armour plating. There is a pair of sharp tusks in the lower jaw which the rhino uses, in preference to its single horn, in attack.

The Javan Rhinoceros* (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) differs from the Great Indian Rhino in its smaller size, an additional skin fold in front of the shoulder and the fact that the female almost always lacks a horn. It was once widespread in South East Asia but is now reduced to a remnant of about forty individuals in the Udjong Kulong Nature Reserve in extreme western Java.

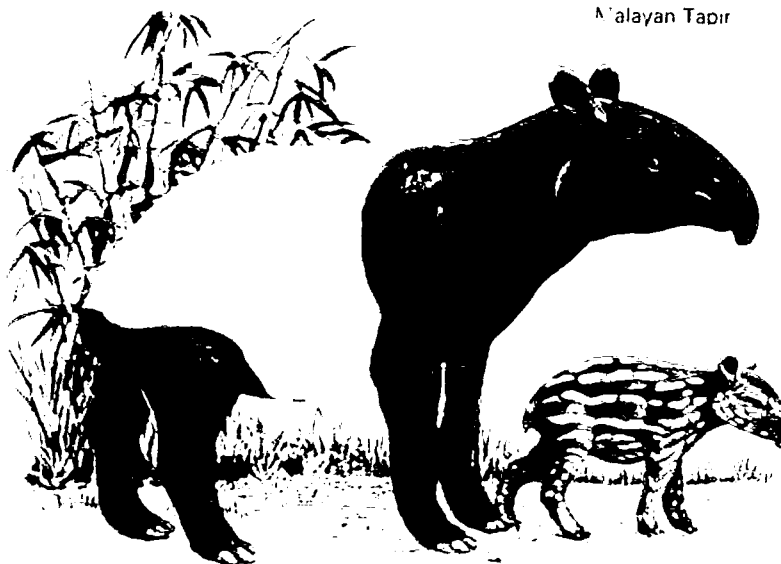
The Sumatran Rhinoceros* (*Didermoceros sumatrensis*) is the smallest of the rhinos, standing four feet six inches at the shoulder or less. It has two horns, the hinder one very small,

Sumatran Rhinoceros



and a relatively smooth skin, which is covered with hair in young animals. It exists in very small numbers in Malaya, Sumatra and Borneo and possibly in Thailand and Burma.

Rhinoceroses face extermination because of the unshakable belief of the Chinese that the horn, or indeed any part of the body, is an effective aphrodisiac. Prices paid are so high that the rewards of poaching always outweigh any reasonable penalty.



Malayan Tapir

The Malayan Tapir (*Tapirus indicus*) is a most curious animal, particularly remarkable for the dramatic change in coloration as it grows to maturity. It is not uncommon in the forests of southern Thailand, Malaya and Sumatra, but is seldom seen, as it is nocturnal, only occasionally remaining in the open for a short time after sunrise. It favours the vicinity of water and feeds on soft, lush vegetation. Tapirs are otherwise found only in tropical America; they are primitive survivals from the remote past of the type of animal from which rhinoceroses and horses are descended.

Babirusa



Bornean Pig



Wild Boar



The even-toed ungulates

The even-toed ungulates are the hoofed animals with 'cloven hooves', and they are all classified as an order of mammals, the Artiodactyla. Nearly all man's important domesticated species come from this order of mammals. They are quite distinct in their evolutionary origin from the odd-toed ungulates, the tapirs, rhinoceroses, horses and asses, which comprise the order Perissodactyla.

All the Asian even-toed ungulates except the pigs and