

EASTERN BENGAL AND ASSAM  
DISTRICT GAZETTEERS.

---

JALPAIGURI.

BY  
JOHN F. GRUNING,  
INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE.



PRINTED AT THE PIONEER PRESS  
ALLAHABAD

—  
1911

## BOTANY.

In the permanently settled portion of the district and in the south of the Duārs, there is not much tree vegetation except in the Bāikanthpur forest. The numerous hamlets are surrounded by thickets of trees and shrubs, partly planted and partly of spontaneous growth, in which mango, jack, pipal and tamarind trees frequently occur; bamboos thrive luxuriantly and the numerous clumps of these form a conspicuous feature in the landscape and add greatly to its beauty. The red cotton tree or simul (*Bombax malabaricum*) is common and the graceful betel-nut palms are to be seen in almost every village. Along the north of the Duārs are large tracts of reserved forest of which a description is given further on; these decline southwards into plains of heavy grass jungle but in the last ten years much of this has disappeared, and the land is now under cultivation. Many varieties of orchids are to be found in the forests and a curious creeper, the Pāni lahrā (*Vitis repanda*), from the stem of which cold sweet water can be obtained, climbs in and out round the tree trunks.

## FAUNA.

The Jalpāiguri district has always been famous for its big game and, though the heavy grass and reed jungle which is the favourite resort of wild animals is steadily diminishing owing to the extension of cultivation, the sanctuary afforded by the numerous reserved forests will prevent game from being killed out and the district will always afford good sport.

Among the larger carnivora are the tiger (*Felis tigris*), the leopard (*Felis pardus*) and the clouded leopard (*Felis diardi*). The tiger is found all over the Western Duārs, in the neighbourhood of the forests; the most famous shooting-ground is on the east bank of the Jaldhākā river opposite Rāmshāi Hāt where Lord Curzon shot several tigers in 1904. Tigers are also occasionally seen west of the Tista and one was shot in 1907 in a small patch of scrub jungle about four miles from Jalpāiguri, not far from the southern extremity of the Bāikanthpur forest. Man-eaters are almost unknown; in the few cases in which human beings have been killed by tigers, the corpses were left untouched; game and cattle are so numerous in the district that tigers are not driven to eat human flesh. The largest tiger, which has been shot in the Western Duārs, measured 10' 2". Leopards are common all over the district, any small patch of scrub jungle gives them cover and they do much harm to the villagers by carrying off their cows, goats, pigs and dogs; they are far bolder than tigers and attack with less provocation. On one occasion the Assistant Manager of a tea-garden was riding a bicycle along a well frequented road, when, from a patch of jungle close to the tea, a leopard sprang on him, knocked him off his machine, and clawed him badly. On another, a Mech, cutting firewood in the jungle was attacked by a leopard, which he killed with his dāo after a hard struggle; he was brought into the

hospital at Alipur Duār very badly mauled about the head but recovered after some months. The clouded leopard is very rare and is found only in the Buxā hills. A black leopard was shot about five miles from Jalpāiguri in 1906 by the Superintendent of Police. The leopard cat (*Felis bengalensis*) and the jungle cat (*Felis chaus*) are common, as are also the larger civet cat (*Viverra zibetha*) and the smaller civet cat (*Viverra malaccensis*). The genus *Canis* is represented by the jackal (*Canis aureus*) and the genus *Cyon* by the wild dog (*Cyon rutilans*). Wild dogs are seldom met with and no report of damage done by them has been received in recent years. The only representative of the genus *Vulpis* is the Indian fox (*Vulpis bengalensis*).

The order Ungulata comprises the elephant (*Elephas indicus*), the wild pig (*Sus indicus*) and various Ruminantia including the rhinoceros, bison, wild buffalo, and many kinds of deer. Elephants are found in considerable numbers throughout the forests and appear to have increased in recent years; they come down from the hills in large numbers about the time when the rains break in June and again in November when the rice crops are ripening, on which occasions they do considerable damage. Solitary males, both tuskers and muknas, are a serious menace to life in the tracts through which they roam, and no less than five have been proclaimed in the last two years. One of these, a tusked, appeared at Madāri Hāt in March 1905; he pulled down several houses, charged the engine-shed, making a large hole in the masonry wall, damaged a first-class carriage standing in the railway station, and injured several people. He was next heard of at the Hantapārā Tea-garden where he killed a woman, after which he disappeared and was at last shot in December 1907 by the Assistant Manager of the Chuapārā Tea-garden, where he had chased the coolies from their work. On the road through the forest to Buxā, it was found impossible to use telegraph posts as the elephants pulled them down as fast as they were put up, and the wire is now attached to large trees. The Manager of the Bengal-Duārs Railway also complained of telegraph posts along the line through the forest between Latiguri and Rāmshāi Hāt stations having been pulled down by elephants. The wild pig is common throughout the district and its flesh is eaten by Rāj-bansis, Meches, Gāros and Nepālis. Rhinoceros, buffalo and bison were in danger of being shot out, and, to prevent their extinction, they are now protected in the reserved forests. The *Rhinoceros indicus*, *Rhinoceros sondaicus* and *Rhinoceros malayan* are all found in the district; the last named is very rare but has been shot in the Dalgāon forest. The *Rhinoceros indicus* appears to be increasing and I have myself seen over twenty fresh rhinoceros beds while shooting in a grass jungle north of Silitorsā. Buffalo are not numerous but bison (*Bos gaurus* and *Bos frontalis*) are found from time to time. Of the deer tribe, the

sambhar (*Rusa aristotelis*) is often seen in the forest, hog deer (*Axis porcinus*), swamp deer (*Rucernus devaucellii*) and barking deer (*Cervulus aureus*) are still common in the district though their numbers are decreasing as cultivation extends. A few spotted deer or chital (*Axis maculatus*) are still to be found in the forests to the north of the Alipur and Bhālka tahsils.

The Ursidæ are represented by the Himālayan black bear (*Ursus tibetanus*) and the common Indian sloth-bear (*Ursus labiatus*). The Himalayan black bear is fierce and readily attacks without provocation anyone who gets in its way; it is not uncommon to hear of villagers being killed by this bear and in Mech villages men may often be seen who have been mauled badly. Mr. Ainslie, the Subdivisional Officer of Alipur Duār, who has shot several, told me that he has never seen a tiger fight so hard as one of these did; it charged the beating elephants, seized one of them by the hind leg, and went on charging and fighting till it was killed. Other mammalia found in the district are the common Indian hare (*Lepus ruficaudatus*), the hispid hare (*Lepus hispidus*) which is very rare, monkeys, squirrels, otters, porcupines and several of the smaller rodents.

The following is a list of the larger wild animals found in Jalpāiguri district:—

The tiger (*Felix tigris*).

The leopard (*Felix pardus*).

The clouded leopard (*Felix diardi*).

The leopard cat (*Felix bengalensis*).

The jungle cat (*Felix chaus*).

The larger civet cat (*Viverra zibetha*).

The smaller civet cat (*Viverra malaccensis*).

The jackal (*Canis aureus*).

The wild dog (*Cyon rutilans*).

The Indian fox (*Vulpis bengalensis*).

The elephant (*Elephas indicus*).

The wild pig (*Sus indicus*).

The Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros indicus*).

(*Rhinoceros sardaicus*).

(*Rhinoceros malayan*).

The wild buffalo.

The bison (*Bos gaurus*).

(*Bos frontalis*).

The sambhar (*Rusa aristotelis*).

The swamp deer (*Rucernus Devaucellii*).

The hog deer (*Axis porcinus*).

The barking deer (*Cervulus aureus*).

The spotted deer or chital (*Axis maculatus*).

The Himalayan black bear (*Ursus tibetanus*).

The common Indian sloth bear (*Ursus labiatus*).

The hispid hare (*Lepu shispidus*).

- The Bengal monkey (*Macacus rhesus*).
- The black squirrel (*Sciurus giganteus*).
- The grey squirrel (*Sciurus Lokriah*).
- The common Indian squirrel (*Sciurus palmarum*).
- The Indian Porcupine (*Hysterix leucura*).
- The otter (*Lutia nair*).

Game birds.

Game birds used to abound in the Western Duārs but many species are getting scarce as the grass lands are being brought under cultivation. The Indian pea-fowl (*Pavo cristatus*) is still common particularly in the jungles east of the Jaldhākā and Torsā rivers; the Indian bustard (*Euphoditis edwardsi*) and the floriken (*Sypheotis bengalensis*) are becoming scarcer, but are still fairly numerous in the cold weather in grass jungle on high land; the lesser floriken or likh (*Sypheotis aurita*) is also met with. The Kalij pheasant (*Gennæus leucomelanus*) is common in the forest north of the Meenglas tea-garden and the Moonal pheasant (*Lophophorus impeyanus*) may be found occasionally in the Sinchula hills near Buxā. Partridge were common everywhere, but many of the best shooting grounds have been brought under cultivation in recent years and there are nothing like so many as there used to be. The black partridge (*Francolinus vulgaris*), the swamp partridge (*Ortygornis gularis*) and the grey partridge (*Ortygornis ponticeriana*) are still fairly common and the hill partridge (*Arboricola torqueola*) is found in the hills near Buxā. The red jungle fowl (*Gallus ferrugineus*) may be seen feeding in the early morning and at sunset on the edges of the forests. The green pigeon (*Crocopus phænicopterus*) is common all over the district and the Imperial pigeon (*Circophaqa sylvatica*) is found in the forests. Snipe, duck and quail are also fairly numerous.

Snakes.

Many varieties of snakes are found in the district. The hamadryad or king cobra (*Ophiophagus elaps*) and the python (*Python molurus*) are numerous in the forests of the Western Duārs, where large specimens are occasionally shot. The common cobra (*Naja tripudians*) the karait (*Bungarus cerulia*), the banded karait (*Bungarus fasciatus*), Russell's viper (*Daboia russellii*), the phursa (*Echis carinata*) and one of the pit vipers (*Trimeresurus carinatus*) are met with throughout the district. The common grass snake and several species of water snakes are also very common.

Fish

The numerous rivers and streams in the district contain many varieties of fish of which the mahseer, rohu and katli are the biggest. Other large species are the chital, boal, kalbaus, karusa, and raicheng. There are very few families who live solely by fishing, but Rājibansis, Muhammadans, Meches, and Nepālis, all catch fish in addition to their other occupations. Illustrations of the principal appliances used for catching fish are given on the next page; the drawings were kindly furnished by Babu Balaram Das Gupta, *tuhsildār* of Māinagurī. Meches poison fish