

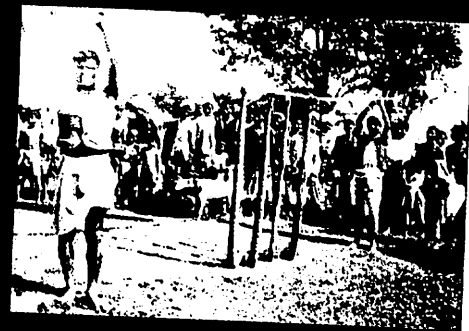
Shikar in India



The Diminishing game of Assam

The lover of animals and of game animals in particular is sorely disappointed in the protection afforded to the poor creatures that sportspeople call game in Assam at the present moment. Everywhere one goes, one hears the eternal 'bang', 'bang' of poacher's guns in reserved forests and out of them. It makes one wonder at such a terrible state of things existing in British India, where game is always supposed to be protected, and where there are so many true sportsmen ever ready to do their bit to stop poaching. Certainly there is the Forest Department in Assam trying its best to cope with the evil that is fast spreading everywhere – even in game sanctuaries and special localities, but the Forest Department cannot by itself deal with the matter, and unless all true sportspeople in the province combine to put an end to this slaughter, the fate of these poor animals is sealed, and a few years will see the last of the game in Assam.

Assam once boasted some of the finest animals to be obtained in the east, and still has a fair supply left, but something must be done quickly to remedy the evil and save the balance before it is too late. Even the birds and fish are being destroyed on every bit of land and stream, and no steps are being taken to protect them. Nowhere in the rest of India is one permitted to shoot or fish without the necessary licenses, yet here under our noses we have this great leniency shown to everyone. The native shikari, ever ready to emulate the European in other respects, sees that there are no strict rules regarding licenses, and imagines he is at liberty to shoot anywhere and at all times without any payment of fees, and is undoubtedly taking advantage of the leniency shown to him in the province. Some sportsmen see the serious damage that is being done to the game, and are quite unable to act in the matter. Others are willing to let things slide during their sojourn in the country, and have not the inclination to act or stop the poaching that is taking place, and imagine it would be a hopeless undertaking if attempted; but we must realize that nowhere in the empire is one allowed to destroy game *ad libitum*, and that everywhere licenses are required for shooting or fishing.



For the protection of game, game licenses are absolutely necessary, and it is up to all European sportsmen to insist on licenses being given out on number of shikaries who would want to shoot at all. The next step would be to confiscate guns, besides imposing fine, if poachers were caught, and also to stop the issue of guns for the protection of crops. This last excuse put forward by all and sundry is an absurdity, and only encourages the native shikari to shoot—not to protect his crops as is universally believed—but to tramp out for many scores of miles into reserved forests and outside them, and to kill the animals, young or old, male or female, over salt licks and pools. There is generally more game outside the reserved forests than inside them, and this is where we want them to be protected, and here the Forest Department cannot help at all. They are concerned with their forests only, but not a soul worries him about what is outside. This seems a great pity, and the only solution to the difficulty confronting everyone who shoots or fishes, is to start a game department or society with real sportsmen at the head of it. Special guards or game-keepers must be employed to stop all poaching throughout the province, and they must from time to time be rewarded for reporting any infringement of the game laws. Unfortunately it would be too expensive to employ Europeans as game-keepers in each district, and we would have to rely on the native, but there are natives and natives, and reliable men, who have served their time, may perhaps be obtained from the Gurkha regiments stationed at Shillong and elsewhere.

Hitherto European sportsmen have had free shooting and fishing in Assam, and a game department or society may come as a great blow to some, but true sportsmen who have the welfare of the game at heart will gladly welcome a change and not look to their own interests only. Moreover young sportsmen, who may come to the country later on, will thank them and be ever grateful for their foresight, and their sporting action in protecting game and fish of the country.

At the present moment even rhinos and elephants are being killed in remote places, and the Forest department cannot by itself deal with the situation. New and severe laws must be introduced to stop this illegal practice, as well as the reprehensible practice of shooting out of season and destroying the females and young of all animals. Mithun, buffalo, sambar and barking deer are all being ruthlessly killed and their meat being sold in the bazaars for a few annas per seer. This the police can stop now, but game-keepers or watchers employed by a game society and paid well to report such offences might help greatly to improve the present conditions. On no licenses for shooting being produced, offenders should be heavily fined and their guns confiscated at once. A tax

on gunpowder, caps and 12 bore cartridges might also be introduced till the conditions are improved somewhat.

The native states in India have introduced very severe game laws, and it is up to Britishers in British India to do the same. All persons found guilty should be punished at once, as is the custom in Indian states, and our judges and magistrates can easily help in the proposed society and prevent poaching in their areas.

There are other smaller animals as well and these would have to be included in the list of game animals. The districts that require special attention at the present moment are Goalpara, Garo Hills, Kamrup, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Cachar, Lakhimpur, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and the Lushai Hills; and only the well-known game localities would require watching. Special places like the Manas Sanctuary should have permanent watchers or guards who would have to listen for the report of guns in the jungles around. The mithun, buffalo and deer in the Garo Hills, Lakhimpur, Cachar, Nowgong and other districts would also have to be carefully looked after by men on the spot.

Turning to lesser game, birds whether on *bils* or in the hills of Assam require watching, and well-known *bils* like Tihu should have reliable men placed there; formerly myriads of birds existed on these lakes or *bils*, but now there are some hundreds only, and in a few years we shall have a few dozens left, unless something is done very soon. In the hills, Pheasants, jungle fowl and other birds are destroyed year in and year out without any regard to closed seasons, but no attention is paid to this as long as they have meat for the pot throughout the year.

Fishing is carried on in nearly every stream in Assam and nets are invariably used for catching fish. Cannot this practice be stopped at once and special fishing licenses introduced in Assam? By introducing licenses, poachers can be caught and summarily dealt with. In the U.P, Punjab, Kashmir and other provinces, the fishing rules are very severe, and everyone has to take out a license. Why cannot the same thing be done here where there is so much fine mahseer fishing?

Assam on the whole is far behind other provinces in the matter of game protection. The United Provinces, Central Provinces, Mysore and the Punjab are well in advance in this respect; and though there is a certain amount of poaching found everywhere, shikaries are not so brazen, and game is not indiscriminately slaughtered as in Assam; so it is up to all sportsmen, and sportsmen only, to put an end once for all to this deplorable state of affairs in the Province.

The article published in January 1931, under the initials R.C.H. was contributed by B.K. Bhuyan from the personal library of Late Suryya Kumar Bhuyan.

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