

Rookmaaker, L.C., 2006.

The demise of the Lesser Indian Rhinoceros.

Pp. 27-28 in:

Das, J. & Barua, M. (editors): Souvenir of Kaziranga Elephant Festival 2006: English section. Airawat, vol. 4, pp. 1-34.



KAZIRANGA ELEPHANT FESTIVAL - 2006



# The Demise of the Lesser Indian Rhinoceros

Dr Kees Rookmaaker

L.C. (Kees) Rookmaaker studied zoology at universities in Amsterdam and Utrecht in Holland. His Ph.D. dissertation looked at the zoology of 18th century travellers at the Cape of Good Hope, The Zoological Exploration of Southern Africa 1650 - 1790 (Rotterdam, 1989). He has published over 150 books and papers on historical and zoological subjects, including a Bibliography of the Rhinoceros (Rotterdam, 1983), The Rhinoceros in Captivity (The Hague, 1998) and François Levaillant and the Birds of Africa (Johannesburg, 2004). He works as archivist and researcher at the University of Cambridge. He is Chief Editor the Rhino Resource Center, which aims to collect and disseminate all available information on the rhinoceros and has over 10,000 items in its collection on all five recent species.

In the nineteenth century it was common practice to discuss both the Great Indian Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) and the Lesser Indian Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*). The name has stuck for the first species, but the second one is now usually called Javan Rhinoceros from the island where it was first described. The two species are very similar in appearance, both being single-horned, but the first is larger than the second. They are well differentiated, but when only glimpsed for a minute in the field, mistakes are easily made. Hence it is always possible that written records for these species, unaccompanied by a skull or a photograph, are confused. Historians, quite rightly, tend to err on the safe side, but it means that there may be more reports of the Lesser Indian Rhinoceros than we can now deduce from the scanty historical record.

*Rhinoceros sondaicus* is the only rhinoceros ever seen in the Sundarbans of India and Bangladesh (Rookmaaker 1997). Its presence is only known from a few reports, which fortunately are clear enough to ensure that it was this species which once roamed these estuarine forests. Edward Baker must have been one of the luckiest persons, because when he was hunting, probably around 1850, he saw 'on the margin of a mud-hole twenty or thirty feet in diameter stood a huge rhinoceros in deep contemplation of two shapeless slate-coloured lumps just showing above the muddy water; in other words, two companions enjoying a mud-bath' (Baker 1887). He also saw a rhino on the banks of the Pealee (Piali) River, about six miles from Barrapoor (Baruipur), just south of the great city of Calcutta. It was a 'huge bull rhinoceros' and disappeared into the jungle before it could be obtained.

Because *Rhinoceros sondaicus* was known both in the Sundarbans and in Burma (Myanmar), one would expect to find it again in territories linking these populations (Rookmaaker 2002). It might have existed in Chittagong (Pollok 1879), but there are no definite records confirming this, as all rhinos known from this region have been two-horned animals – and thus supposedly Sumatran rhinos (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*). Rhinos were seen in the Cachar Hills of Assam, but none have been identified as *R. sondaicus*.

Further north, a Javan Rhinoceros was shot near Sylhet, now in North-Eastern Bangladesh, by a tea-planter called Gordon Fraser on an unknown date (Wood 1930). Reports of rhinos in Manipur refer to one-horned animals, probably *R. sondaicus*. Higgins (1935)

in 1913 saw a skull of one shot on the Khuga Liver and heard that a few had been killed in the lower valley of the Barak River, near Tipaimukh, but he was unable to verify the identification himself. In 1874, a young one-horned rhinoceros caught in 'Mooneypoor' (Manipur) was shipped from Calcutta to London, where it was bought by the Berlin Zoo. This animal was identified as *R. sondaicus* at first when staying in London, but later in life different people mentioned it as either *R. sondaicus* or *R. unicornis* and even as a new species called *R. jamrachii* (Rookmaaker 1983). This historical riddle may never be satisfactorily solved as the remains of the animal were not preserved when she died in 1884.

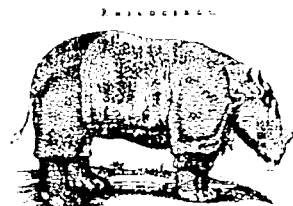
There are three known records of the Javan Rhinoceros in the northern part of West Bengal and adjoining districts, which may be surprising as the area is now only inhabited by the Great Indian rhinoceros. The first is found in the authoritative Fauna of British India, where Blanford (1888) mentioned that a certain specimen of *R. sondaicus* was shot in the Sikkim terai by Kinloch. Maybe rumours had been distorted, because Kinloch (1892) himself wrote about shooting *R. unicornis* in Bengal in 1878 and 1886, and would certainly have referred to *R. sondaicus* if he had seen it there. However, later in life, Kinloch (1904: 65) mentioned that the Javan rhinoceros existed in the Bhutan Duars 'where I once saw one shot by a friend.' Another specimen was shot by J.A. Møller from Denmark at Moraghat, in the Jalpaiguri district of northern West Bengal on 24 February 1881. The skull of this young female is still preserved in the Zoological Museum of Copenhagen. Finally, Shebbeare (1953) related that J.W.A. Grieve killed one early in the 20th century in the Buxa Forest Division, thinking that it was a small *R. unicornis*, but recognized it as a Javan rhinoceros when it was mounted by the firm of Rowland Ward in London. One thing makes me wonder. The Maharajah of Cooch Behar (1908) gives details how he killed 135 and injured 34 rhinos in his district between 1871 and 1904 - and none of them were identified as *R. sondaicus*.

Despite the paucity of records, there is no doubt that both the Great and the Lesser Indian Rhinoceroses were once part of the fauna of the Indian subcontinent. It is a pity that the smaller species

has not survived in its former haunts. Protection came too late for these animals to survive into the 21st century. Hopefully, the Great Indian Rhinoceros will continue to prosper in the great reserves of North-East India and elsewhere.

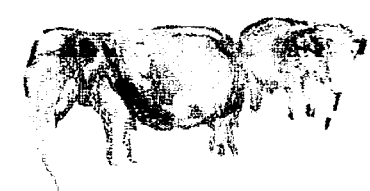
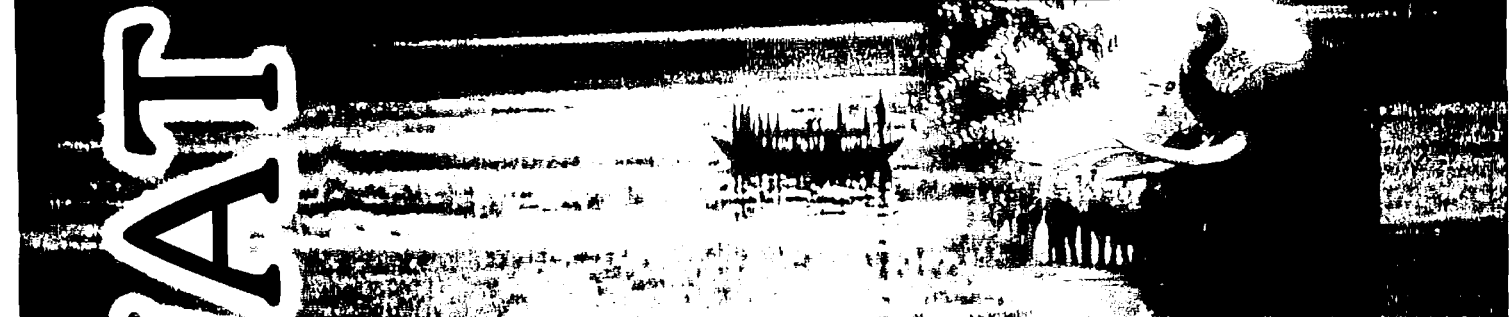
#### References

- Baker, E. B. 1887. *Sport in Bengal: and how, when, and where to seek it*. London.
- Blanford, W.T. 1888. *The fauna of British India, including Ceylon and Burma: Mammalia*. London.
- Cooch Behar, Maharajah of 1908. *Thirty-seven years of big game shooting in Cooch Behar, the Duars and Assam*. Bombay.
- Higgins, J.C. 1935. The game birds and animals of the Manipur state with notes of their numbers, migration and habits. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, 37: 298-309.
- Kinloch, A.A.A. 1892. *Large game shooting in Thibet, the Himalayas, Northern and Central India*. London.
- Kinloch, A.A.A. 1904. Indian rhinoceros shooting. In: Aflalo, F.G, 1904. *The sportsman's book for India*. London.
- Pollok, F.W.T. 1879. *Sports in British Burmah, Assam, and the Cossyah and Jyntiah Hills*. London.
- Rookmaaker, L.C. 1983. Jamrachs Rhinoceros. *Bongo*, Berlin, 7: 43-50.
- Rookmaaker, L.C. 1998. Records of the Sunderbans Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus inermis*) in India and Bangladesh. *Pachyderm*, 24: 37-45.
- Rookmaaker, L.C. 2002. Historical records of the Javan Rhinoceros in North-East India. *Newsletter of the Rhino Foundation of N.E. India*, no.4: 11-12.
- Shebbeare, E.O. 1953. Status of the three Asiatic rhinoceros. *Oryx*, 2: 141-149.
- Wood, H.S. 1930. Observations on Indian rhino and their shikar on foot. *Journal of the Darjeeling Natural History Society*, 4: 59-69. □



# AIRAWAT

TV 2006



# 4<sup>th</sup> KAZIRANGA ELEPHANT FESTIVAL - 2006

30th, 31st January & 1st February - 2006



Our mission is to

---

**Organised By :** District Administration, Golaghat  
Forest & Tourism Department, Govt. of Assam

**Supported By :** Local populace .

Our website: [www.kaziranga100.net](http://www.kaziranga100.net)

# airawat

Souvenir of Kaziranga  
Elephant Festival - 2006

## Editorial Board

### ADVISOR

Annada Saikia

Anjali Tirki

### EDITOR IN CHIEF

P.K. Talukdar, ACS,

### EDITOR ASSAMESE

Nizora Borthakur

### EDITOR ENGLISH

Jayanta Das.

Maan Barua

### MEMBER

Tarun Biswas

Uttam Saikia

Subarna Saikia Bordoloi

Kalpana Chetia

Gitanjali Kolita

Kailash Patwari

Chandra Prakash Nath.

### COVER/PAGE DESIGN

Tarun Biswas

Niranjan Neog

### SKETCH

Bijoy Tanti

Avijit Sinha

### PHOTOGRAPH

Nilu Acharjya

### PRINTING :

Bokakhat Offset Printing

Press.

### PUBLISHER

KEF Committee - 2006

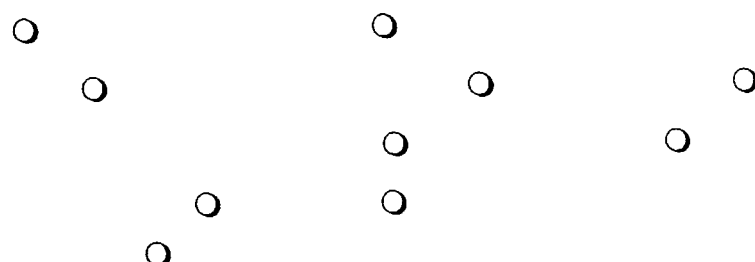
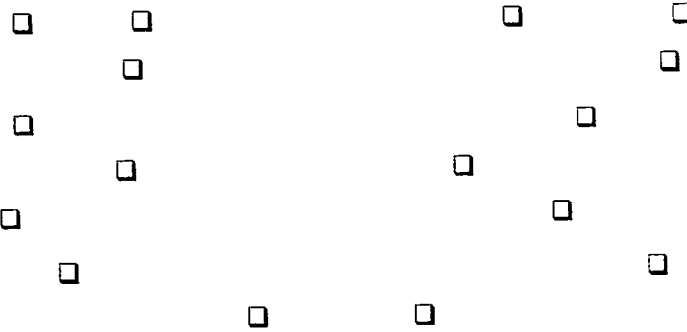
### SPONSORED BY

ONGC Nazira

### PRICE

Rs. 50 (Fifty)

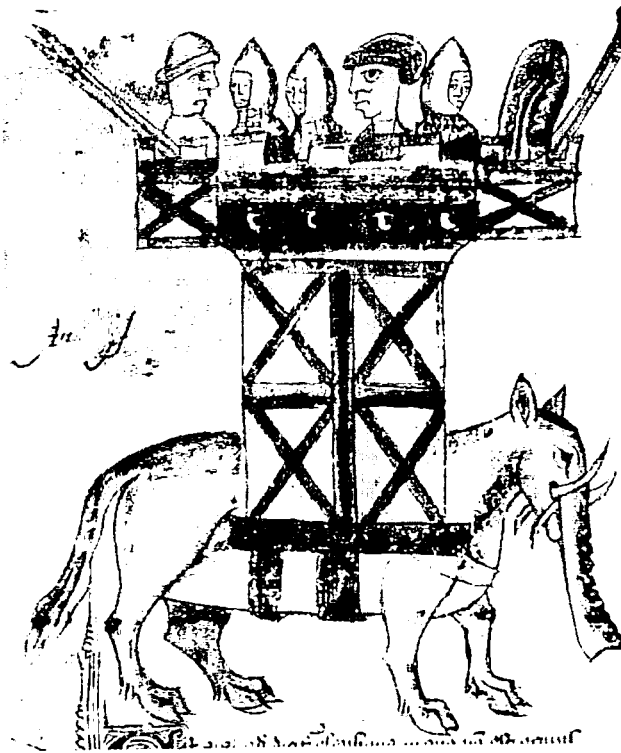
# CONTENTS



Editorial Board airawat



# ENGLISH SECTION



Editors  
Jayanta Das & Maan Barua

# Contents

airawat  
Vol. IV 2006

1	Harekrishna Deka	<i>Human Elephant Conflict</i>
3	Rajib Handique	<i>Towards a Wilderness-Centered Approach to Conservation</i>
5	Bimal Deka	<i>Will Man choose Coexistence...?</i>
7	Abhijit Sinha	<i>Between two Worlds</i>
8	Bodheswar Gogoi	<i>Some Basic Human Considerations and Biodiversity</i>
11	N.K. Vasu	<i>Highway 37 Revisited</i>
14	A.K. Barua	<i>Eco Tourism in Assam: A Note</i>
19	A.J.W. Milroy	<i>'The Pilkhana' from A Short Treatise on the Management of Elephants</i>
21	B.N. Talukdar	<i>Some thoughts on Musth in the Asian Elephant</i>
27	Kees Rookmaaker	<i>The Demise of the Lesser Indian Rhinoceros</i>
29	Samiran Boruah	<i>The Representation of Nature in the Assamese Painted Manuscript</i>
32	Maan Barua	<i>Some thoughts on the Hastividhyarnava of Sukumar Barkaith</i>



## Editors

Jayanta Das & Maan Barua

## Design & Layout

Niranjan Neog

## CONTRIBUTORS

**A. K. BARUA** claims to be an antiquarian with amateur interest in history. He was member of the Standing Committee of IBWL, the country's apex advisory body on wildlife matters and is now a member of the Steering Committee, Project Tiger. He is the author of a monograph on the Status of Tigers in Assam.

**MAAN BARUA** has been working on the birds of Assam for the last 13 years. He has published papers on birds in various journals, and is currently working on a book. He was the winner of the Sanctuary - ABN Amro Young Naturalist of the Year 2004 and awarded the Carl Zeiss Role of Honour for excellence in his discipline. At present he is working on threatened grassland Passerines and Lepidopteran ecology.

**SAMIRAN BORUAH** a painter & writer works in the State Museum, Assam. He had received a grant from the India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore, to document and study the Assamese manuscript paintings.

**BIMAL DEKA** is currently serving in Assam Civil Service and interested in poetry and drama

**HAREKRISHNA DEKA** was a former Director General of Police and introduced innovative police community relations programmes in Assam Police during his tenure. Following his retirement in the beginning of 2005, he joined as the editor of *The Sentinel*, English daily published from Guwahati. He has left this job and has devoted his time to creative writing. He is a renowned short story writer and a poet with 16 books to his credit. He is also a recipient of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award and Katha Award.

**DR. BODHESWAR GOGOI** is Senior Medical and Health Officer, Bokakhat. His interests lie in the field of human biology and philosophy. He has written extensively on this subject

**DR. RAJIB HANDIQUE** is a professional historian specializing in the Environmental History of Assam. A Gold-medalist from Guwahati University, Dr. Handique is a life member of the Indian

History Congress and is actively associated with various academic bodies and organizations of the country. He has authored a book on the British Forest Policy in Assam, one of the first books on the region's environmental history. He is currently the Deputy Registrar (Academic) of Dibrugarh University.

**DR KEES ROOKMAAKER** studied zoology at universities in Amsterdam and Utrecht in Holland. His Ph.D. dissertation looked at the zoology of 18th century travellers at the Cape of Good Hope. *The Zoological Exploration of Southern Africa 1650 - 1790* (Rotterdam, 1989). He has published over 150 books and papers on historical and zoological subjects, including a *Bibliography of the Rhinoceros* (Rotterdam, 1983). He works as archivist and researcher at the University of Cambridge.

**ABHIJIT SINHA** The writer is presently serving in the Assam Civil Service and likes to experience wildlife first-hand and on television.

**B.N. TALUKDAR** ACF has been PA manager of all the important rhino-bearing areas of Assam. He is currently Member Secretary, Elephant Task Force and Member Secretary, State Forest Management Plan Committee. His fields of expertise include, amongst other things grassland ecology and management, wildlife law and the Asian Elephant. He is the recipient of several awards including the Sanctuary Asia - ABN Amro Wildlife Conservation Award for his dedication to the wildlife of India, and is the author of several papers and two books, including one on the Asian Elephant. **N.K. VASU**, IFS is Park Director, Kaziranga National Park. He has been instrumental in building partnerships with international and national NGOs and other stakeholders for PA management and conservation. His fields of interest, besides others, include landscape planning in fragmented habitats, studies of fluvial dynamics, resource prioritization and in management and rehabilitation of rescued animals. He authored the Management Plan for Kaziranga National Park.