

Big-Game Hunting in India.

HUNTING big game is one of the most exciting and interesting of sports. Assam is but little known outside of India, and yet in its dense jungles roam the elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, tiger, bear, etc.

Even in the present day there are huge tracts of virgin forest teeming with game of all descriptions. Perhaps for the true lover of sport the most interesting is the catching of wild elephants. These roam the hills of Assam in large numbers; frequently as many as a hundred have been captured in a single drive.

Of course there are several ways of catching elephants. In Assam it is generally done by driving them into a stockade, or else by what is called "mela shikar." In the case of the latter only one elephant can be caught at a time and not over about six feet six inches in height. The method is as follows: Two fast female tame elephants are usually chosen. On the back of each elephant is a driver and one other to help with the ropes. The elephants are taken into the forest where wild elephants are known to be. Search is then made for fresh tracks of a herd. When these are found the herd is followed up till the tame elephants get in among the wild ones. The one to be hunted is then selected, and the tame ones gradually edge up close to it, stopping when it does, and feeding alongside it. A young female is generally chosen. As soon as each tame elephant has closed in on each side of the wild one a rope with a noose is thrown over the neck of the latter by the driver of each tame elephant. As soon as he feels the rope the wild one bolts, and the tame elephants have to chase till he is finally run down, which is generally done in about one hour.

The elephant drivers have to be very careful, as they are liable to be knocked off by branches of trees or overhanging creepers. This kind of hunting calls for great endurance, and is only done by natives.

The best way to hunt elephants is by driving. Usually about the end of October the elephants come down from the hills to the salt licks. These are dotted about at the foot of the hills. Every year in Assam the right to catch elephants is put up to auction by the government officials and knocked down to the highest bidder. Whoever has purchased what is called the "mehal" has the sole right to catch elephants and proceed to the hunting districts, and near one of the salt licks, much frequented by elephants, proceeds to erect a stockade.

A large number of coolies are employed. These cut down the trees in the forest into posts and drive them firmly into the ground. They are bound together and long posts are braced against them for support. Inside the stockade a big ditch, generally about four feet deep and five feet wide, is made right around the stockade. This is done to prevent the elephants from using their great strength against the stockade. Along both sides, leading to the inclosure, trees are felled and a guiding fence made leading right to the salt lick and left open at the side the elephants usually enter the salt lick. A huge gate is made and this is closed by a rope. Big pieces of timber are used for barricading it from the outside. The inside of the stockade is left as near like nature as pos-

sible, and around the inclosure men are placed on platforms among the trees, watching night and day, as there is no telling when the elephants will visit the salt licks. Along the tops of the trees leading to the salt licks clackers are fixed to a string which runs along past the salt licks, so that when the string is pulled they make a great noise. At the end of the fence men are hidden with guns. As soon as the elephants enter the salt licks—men have been watching every move from the top of trees—and it is thought that all the herd are through the salt licks, the men at the end fire off their guns and the clackers are pulled, making a tremendous noise. The elephants at once stampede and naturally make for where there is no noise, for near the stockade everything is quiet.

Men follow behind the elephants till they are driven right into the stockade. The gate is then closed and barred. It is a most exciting time when the elephants first enter the stockade, for as soon as they discover they are closed in they make frantic efforts to get out, charging at every side of the stockade. The men gathered around wave lighted torches in the elephants' faces, and when they get too close prod them with spears. They also put the ends of split bamboos into the fire, which makes them explode with a report like a gun. Young elephants not accompanied by their mothers frequently get killed, as the elephants rush about in the stockade.

If the elephants do not break out of the stockade the first night, they rarely break out at all. As a rule they are allowed to remain in the stockade for two or three days in order to weaken them. When it has been arranged what wild ones are to be taken out, the "keonkies" (tame elephants trained to do the work) are then lined up outside the stockade, and each, with its driver dressed in some dark colored costume and thick ropes which they form into nooses, are then prepared to enter the stockade.

Before entering the stockade the natives chant to their gods three times. As the last chant is finished the gate, which had been gradually unfastened, is thrown wide open and the keonkies enter to do battle with the wild ones. As soon as they enter the stockade they are formed up in front and on each side of the gate to prevent the wild ones from making a rush and getting out.

It is a most interesting and picturesque sight seeing the keonkies first enter the stockade. They now advance toward the wild elephants and endeavor to separate the one to be caught from the rest. As soon as this is done two keonkies range up, one on each side. The wild one bolts around the stockade pursued by the keonkies until, at last, one of the drivers is able to slip a noose over the head of the wild elephant. The driver on the other elephant watches his opportunity and throws over another. The ropes are drawn fairly tight, care being taken to tie the slip-knot with a small rope to prevent its slipping and strangling the elephant. The big ropes are then tied to the keonkies, one on each side of the wild elephant, who continues to make frantic but useless efforts to escape. All the time he is being gradually pushed and hauled until he is gotten to a tree in the stockade and securely tied. The bark of the tree has been previously stripped off, so as to allow free play to the rope and to prevent the elephant using great pressure against it.

In the majority of cases the wild ones are taken straight out of the stockade as soon as roped to the keonkies, but in the case of big tuskers they are usually tied up to trees in the stockade and left for two or three days without food to weaken them. The wild elephants, after being taken out of the stockade, are, as soon as possible removed to the training ground where would-be purchasers can inspect them. Sometimes we have a good deal of excitement in the stockade when a newly roped wild elephant drags the tame ones clear off their feet, and accidents frequently occur.

The last time I helped in elephant catching, a big female was being taken out of the stockade, when she bolted and knocked down one of the tame elephants, dragging her about fifty yards through the forest. A newly caught elephant about seven feet six inches in height will generally cost about \$400. Of course the price goes up considerably after the animal has been trained.

It was in connection with elephant hunting two years ago that I was fortunate enough to shoot the third largest elephant ever killed in India. It measured ten feet four inches in height from the shoulder, and the circumference of foot was sixty-two inches; it was a "goonda"—a solitary male. It had been giving considerable trouble fighting our keonkies, and I applied to the Government for permission to shoot the brute. One night the elephant amused itself by breaking down the servants' tent and nearly killed two men.

I had a small camp, and several friends were staying with me to see the wild elephants taken out of the stockade. We were all admiring them, when one of my elephant hunters rushed up and said that the goonda was going for the keonkies. This was most serious, as some of the wild elephants were at that very moment roped to tame ones and being tied up to trees. If the goonda got among them some elephants would probably be killed and certainly some of the drivers. There was only one thing to do. The goonda must be stopped at all costs. Seizing my rifle, a .450 bore high velocity, I ran into the forest to cut him off. I had not gone more than twenty yards in the forest before I saw the huge brute, but what was more to the point, he also saw me. There was just one moment of hesitation, when he seemed undecided whether to go for the keonkies or to come for me. He decided on the latter course, and with a shrill trumpet charged straight down on me, the very incarnation of rage. It was a glorious sight, one of those moments which make life worth living. I let him get within ten yards, then shot him clear through the brain. He dropped stone dead to the one shot, shaking the earth as he fell, and one more trophy was added to my collection.

EDWIN PINCHES.

Turkeys for California.

W. E. Van Slyke, special commissioner of the State Game Commission, arrived at San Bernardino on June 12 with thirty-five wild turkeys caught in Mexico which will be liberated in southern California. A much larger number of birds was expected, but the climatic conditions in Mexico made it impossible to take more of them.