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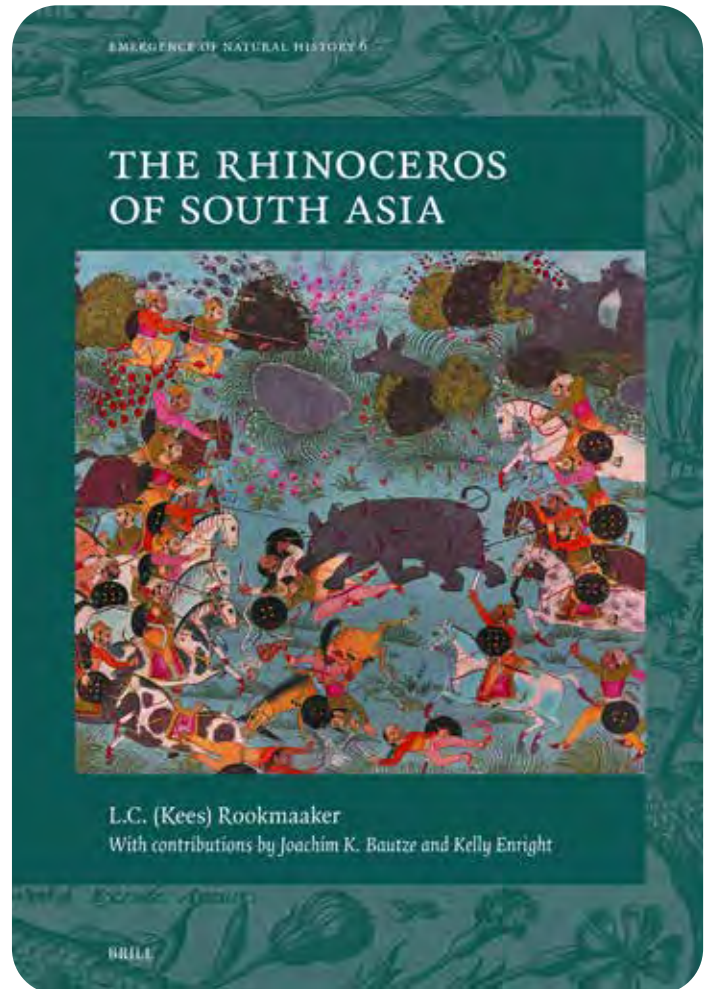
“THE RHINOCEROS OF SOUTH ASIA” BY KEES ROOKMAAKER

Three species of rhinoceros once inhabited South Asia, two of which disappeared over a century ago. This survey aims to reconstruct the historical distribution of these large mammals resulting in new maps showing the extent of their occurrences. Thousands of sources varied in time and nature are used to study the interactions between man and rhinoceros. The text is supported by over 700 illustrations and 38 maps showing the importance of the rhinoceros in the scientific and cultural fabric of Asia and beyond.

This book can be viewed and downloaded free of charge online (pdf 889 pages, 143.8 MB): <https://brill.com/display/title/64767>

Rookmaaker, Kees. 2024. *The Rhinoceros of South Asia*. Leiden, Boston: Brill (Emergence of Natural History, vol. 6), pp. i-liv, 1-835 (4to). With contributions by Joachim K. Bautze and Kelly Enright.

In the picture on the cover, full of flowers, colors and water, 13 archers and horsemen armed with shields assault a male rhinoceros with spears, arrows and braided manes from the front and back, with his left flank alone covered with some 15 wounds. The muskets aiming at a teen rhino hidden in the groves may soon turn on him, blocking his only remaining escape route. This anonymous painting, dating from 1690-1695, is the last surviving evidence of the presence of rhinos in the princely State of Raghogarh, now absorbed into the State of Madhya Pradesh.¹



RHINOCEROS RED CROSS SOUTH AFRICA

Rhino poaching is declining in Kruger Park, now Bunker Park, and spreading to other provinces, notably KwaZulu-Natal. But poaching is not the only pressure. The National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (NBES) project aims to “optimise biodiversity-based business potentials across the terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine, marine and coastal systems, and to contribute to economic growth with local beneficiation, job creation, poverty alleviation, and food security.” In the words of President Ramaphosa, biodiversity for local communities is currently as useful as “Rembrandts lying in the attic”. The NBES’s “extractivist” approach sees biodiversity as a mine and wants by year 2036 to multiply plant trade and bioprospecting, which involves the use of plants for pharmaceuticals and cosmetics, as well as to double and triple the consumption of antelope, zebra and crocodile meat. NBES also aims to increase financial resources from sport hunting and trophy exports. In 2022, the 6,000 hunters from the USA, Europe and other continents killed 36,500 wild animals, according to figures from the South African Guides and Hunters Union. To meet the financial targets for trophy hunting set by the NBES, 16,500 international hunters would be required by 2036, and thousands of elephants, lions, buffalo and white rhino legally killed. The economics of vision tourism are completely ignored.

On the subject of rhinos, NBES opens up a new avenue. The idea is to open the floodgates to “medical” tourism and encourage the world’s upper classes to come to South Africa for cures based on ground horn powder. This innovative approach, based on ancient prescriptions now disproved by traditional Chinese and conventional medicine, would make it possible to avoid listing rhinos in the CITES Appendices. Since horns are not legally exportable, the idea would be to bring to South Africa customers obsessed by the supposed preventive and curative virtues of horns, and keen to rejuvenate and boost their sexual activity.

NBES seeking to rally the voices of some rural communities and the rhino horn trade lobby, together with the voices of hunters and hunting guides, undoubtedly helped President Ramaphosa’s African National Congress party secure a relative majority in the May 29, 2024 general election.²