

Zoogoer

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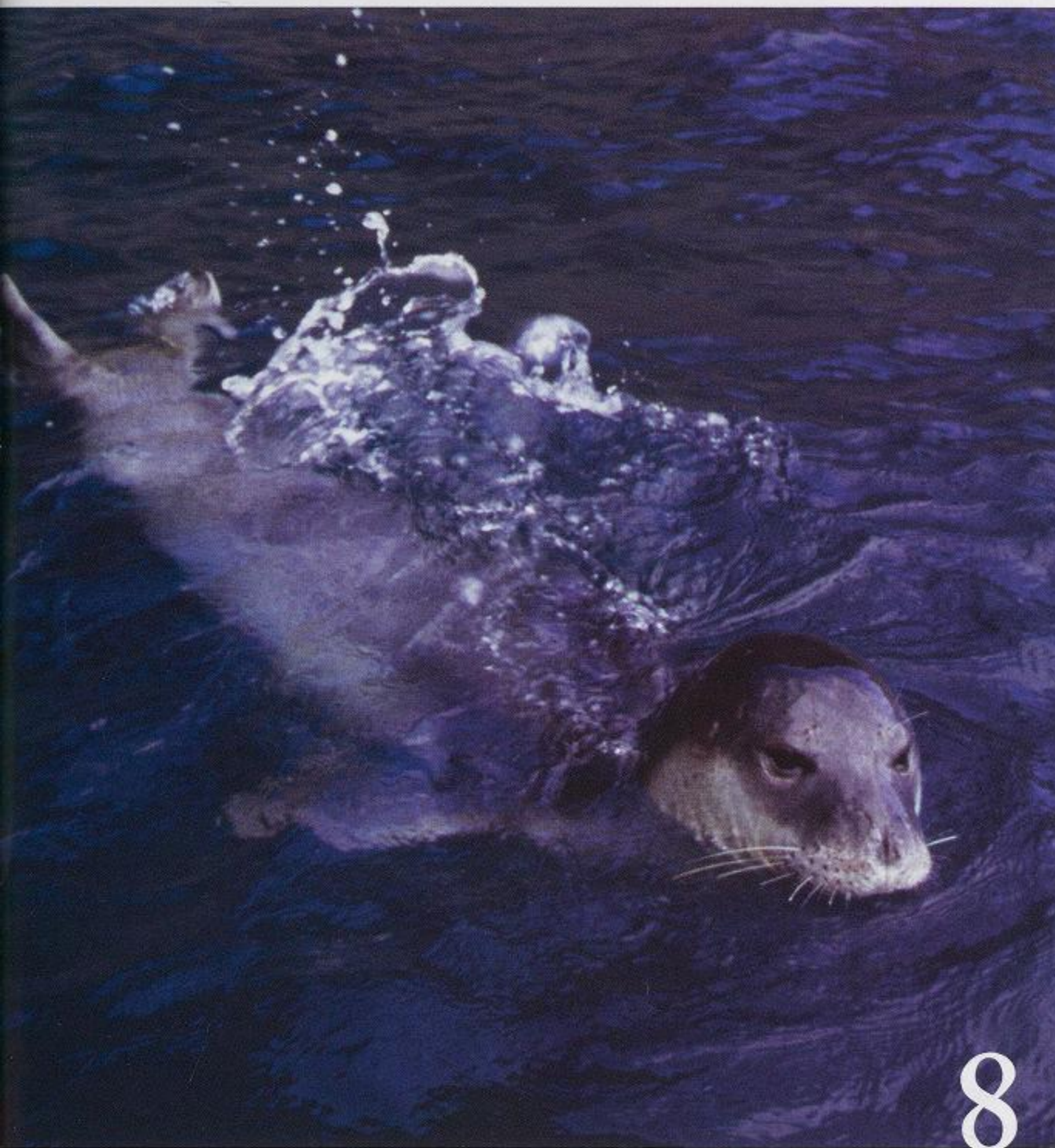
Small octopus. 🟢 Really small mammals. 🟢 Ferrets from frozen sperm. 🟢 Valuable foals. 🟢 ZooLights returns. 🟢 Bird Club perks. 🟢 Elephant Trails donations. 🟢 Unique holiday gifts. 🟢 Research winners.

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In *The Soul of the Rhino*, conservationist Hemanta Mishra writes of his personal experience in saving one-horned rhinos and Bengal tigers from extinction in Nepal.

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Wild Life and Times

In the past decade of civil strife in Nepal, poachers have taken a terrible toll on the Himalayan nation's vaunted one-horned rhinos and Bengal tigers. In one of the three reserves that are home to tigers, Suklaphanta National Park, a recent census revealed there were only about half the tigers that were present two years ago.

A similar trend is evident in the only two places in Nepal where the endangered rhino is found: Bardia National Park has lost about half its rhinos, and Chitwan National Park has lost about a third.

In an effort to focus on the good news, however, there may have been no rhino and tiger losses to mourn if people like Hemanta Mishra hadn't pioneered the effort to save them in the late 1960s. In fact, these national parks didn't even exist when Mishra began his work in Chitwan, then a royal hunting preserve with a burgeoning human population. What's more, there were no rhinos in Bardia at all before Mishra and colleagues from the World Wildlife Fund moved some there from Chitwan, which was established as a national park in 1973. In *The Soul of the Rhino*, Mishra writes of his personal and professional journey to conserve Nepal's rich wildlife and wild lands while also helping its impoverished rural people.

Mishra is among the first generation of Asian conservationists who are actually Asian rather than Westerners. Trained first in India then earning his Ph.D. at the University of Edinburgh, Mishra combines his strong scientific credentials with an intimate understanding of his native land and its Hindu Buddhist traditions, not to mention its arcane politics and bureaucracy.

A pivotal event in his life, as detailed in the book, is telling. In 1979 Mishra was charged with organizing a royal rhino hunt. It is a Nepalese tradition that, once in his life, a king must kill a male rhino and offer its blood to his ancestors, thus ensuring peace and prosperity in the kingdom. Though a staunch conservationist, King Birendra was duty-bound to perform this ritual. Mishra, despite his misgivings, was duty-bound to obey the king's wishes. Relying on his wildlife expertise, however, he

wisely selected for sacrifice an old male rhino, past his breeding prime. This rhino was also a crop-raider, so eliminating him would be a boon to local farmers. The ceremony was a success for the king, for Mishra, and for conservation. Soon after, King Birendra doubled the size of Chitwan National Park. And by the 1980s, some 350 rhinos, up from fewer than 100 in the 1960s, were thriving there—enough to embark on moving some to Bardia so all of Nepal's rhinos were not in one “basket.”

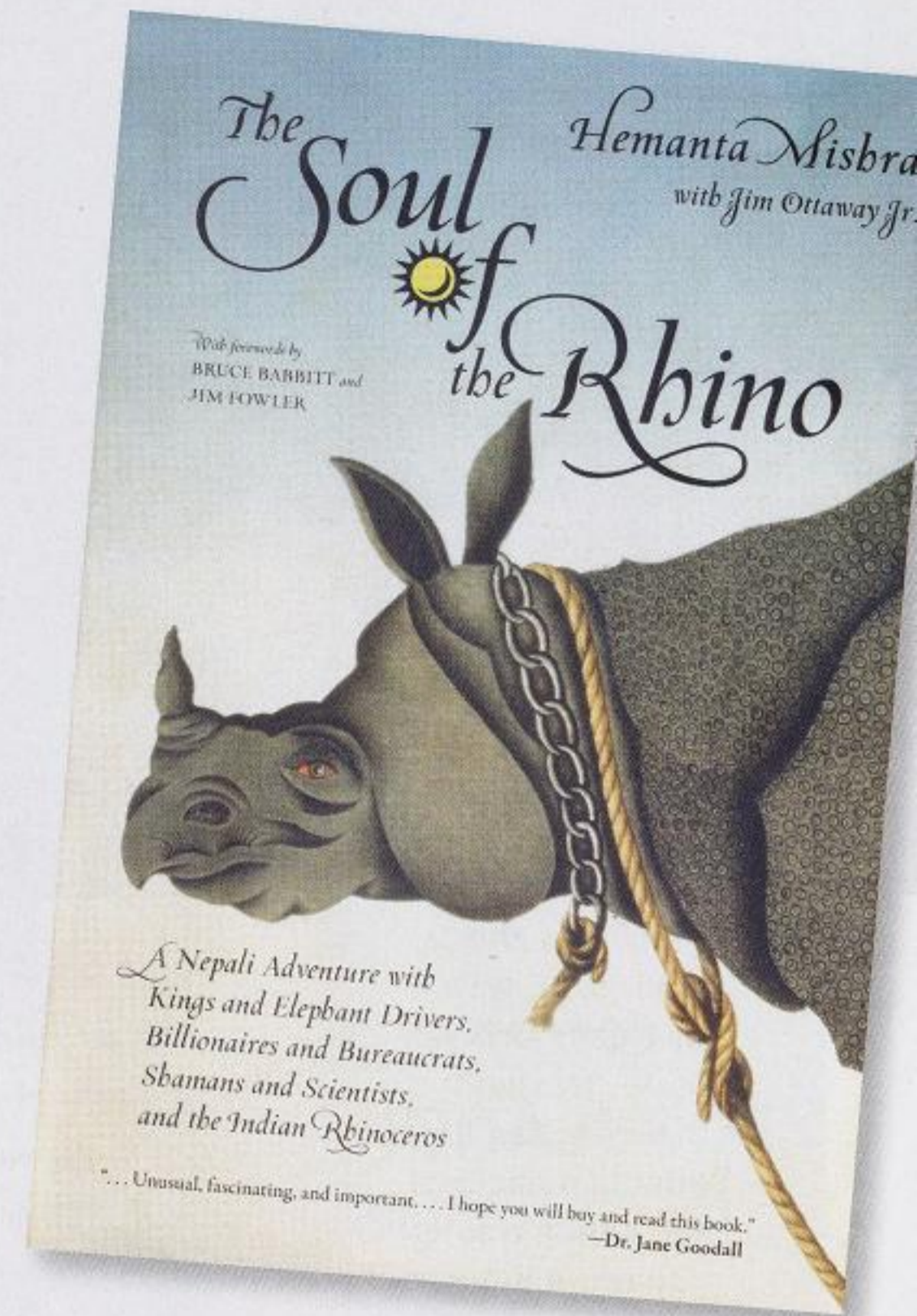
Throughout his outstanding career—among other honors he was awarded the J. Paul Getty Conservation Prize—Mishra has also been a friend of zoos and the Smithsonian's National Zoo in particular. He was in Chitwan at the onset of the Smithsonian-Nepal Tiger Ecology Project, which he co-founded with the National Zoo's John Seidensticker in 1973. He spent a year at the Zoo's Conservation and Research Center in the 1980s.

The Soul of the Rhino is a fascinating look at the heart of a conservationist—and what it takes to save an iconic species.

—Susan Lumpkin



Jessie Cohen/NZP



The Soul of the Rhino: A Nepali Adventure with Kings and Elephant Drivers, Billionaires and Bureaucrats, Shamans and Scientists, and the Indian Rhino. Hemanta Mishra with Jim Ottaway Jr. 2008. The Lyons Press, Guilford, Connecticut. 232 pp., hardbound, \$24.95.