

THE PINKHEADED DUCK

(For reference see Page No. 71)

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The Importance of Sanctuaries (including National Parks) in the Conservation of Threatened Species of Large Mammals in South and South East Asia

BY

E. P. GEE

(Based on a paper read by the author at the Conference on Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in Tropical South East Asia at Bangkok, Thailand, November 29 to December 4, 1965.)

Summary

Due to pressure from human population and ever insistent demands for more lands, sanctuaries in South and Southeast Asia are of inestimable importance for preserving rare and endangered species—especially the larger mammals. With poverty, hunger and often illiteracy as prevalent as they are, the main emphasis should be on the economic or tourist value of wild life. The co-operation and assistance of the local inhabitants are vital if any progress is to be made in nature conservation, and some practical methods of ensuring this co-operation are discussed, including buffer zones, publicity and education, and provision of local amenities.

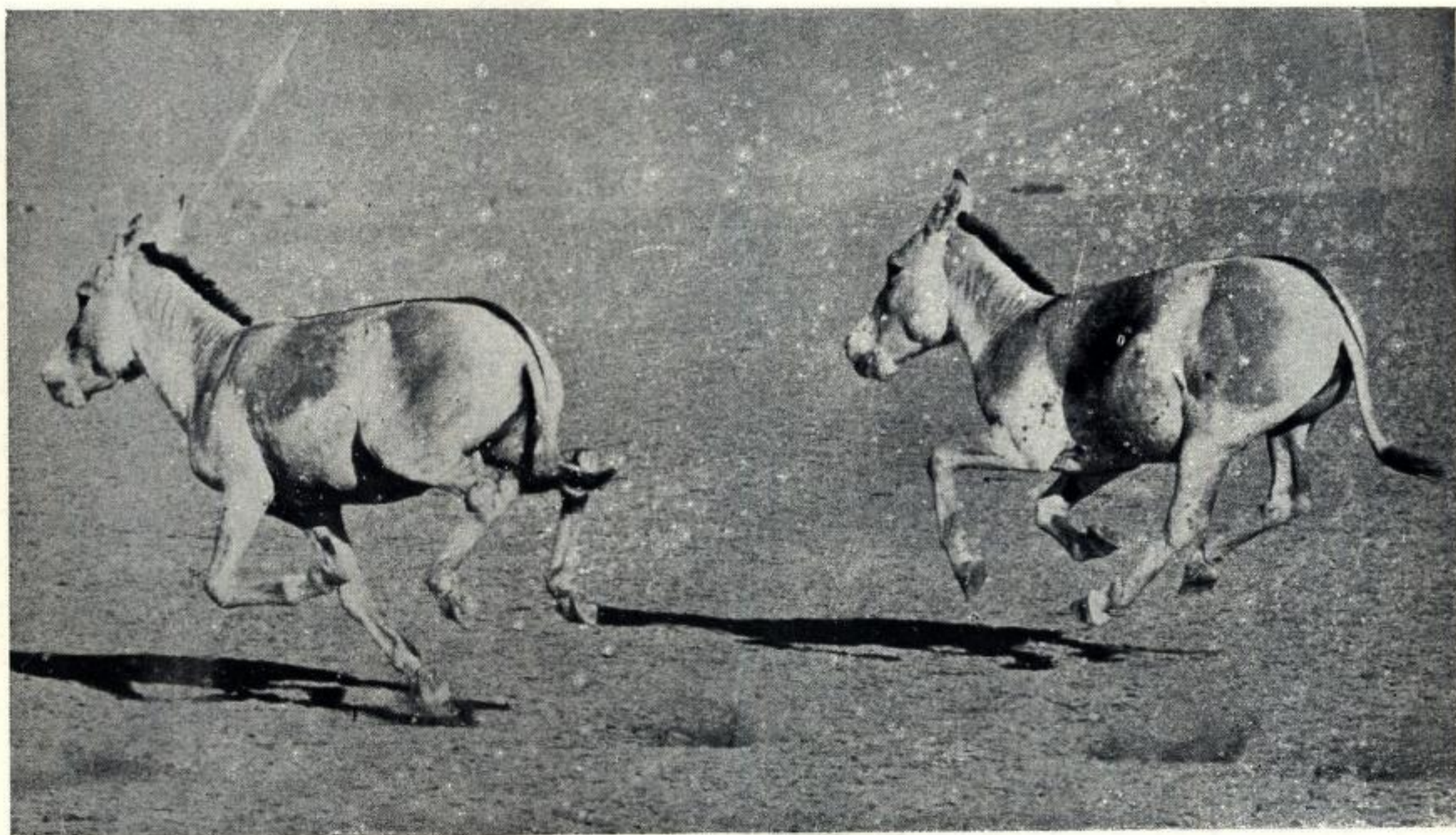
While legislation for giving total protection in all places to the larger endangered species is necessary, the difficulties of enforcing such legislation in emergent and developing countries makes it all the more imperative to preserve these rare species in sanctuaries. Sanctuaries, then, assume an even greater importance in developing countries—especially in those where there are pressing and ever increasing demands by a growing population for more land for opening up for grazing of domestic stock, for agriculture and for human settlement.

Such pressures from human population are generally much greater in Asian countries than in North America and Africa. Therefore sanctuaries in Asia are usually smaller in size and require more management and greater protection.

In South Asia, the preservation of the blackbuck and the great Indian bustard in the wide open cultivations and waste areas is a problem: can sanctuaries or national parks be created to save them? The Indian rhinoceros has so far been successfully preserved from extinction in Kaziranga, Jaldapara and other sanctuaries of Notheast India, but vigilance has to be maintained not only against poachers but also against intrusion by graziers, cul-



Intermediate or smaller egret at nest in Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary, Rajasthan.



Indian wild asses on the Rann, Gujarat.



A herd of wild buffalo in Kaziranga Sanctuary.
(A couple of rhino, probably a pair, pass by unheeded.)



Brow-antlered deer, stag, hind and fawn from Manipur in the Calcutta Zoo.

tivators and others. The Gir Forest, stronghold of the Indian lion, greatly needs the status of a sanctuary or national park for its survival. Dachigam in Kashmir also needs to be given better protection and legal status, otherwise the rare and vanishing Kashmir stag may be lost for ever. The Manipur subspecies of the brow-antlered deer owes its precarious existence to the near impenetrability of the floating humus on its corner of the Logtak Lake; while the Burma subspecies, living on drier and undulating land, is believed to be somehow surviving in fair numbers.

In Southeast Asia, the Thailand subspecies of the brow-antlered deer needs rescuing from extinction either in a sanctuary or in some appropriate place where it can survive and breed successfully. The Ujung Kulon Reserve in Java appears to be in urgent need of more effective protection, if the Javan rhinoceros is to be saved from extinction. Sanctuaries need to be created for the Sumatran rhinoceros, to include the largest possible number of them in any known locality, or at any rate a large and suitable area in some place, where full protection can be more easily given, needs to be set aside into which this species could be transplanted. The anoa and the tamarau in Celebes and Phillipines are similarly in need of preservation, and the orangutans of Sumatra and Borneo require close attention. In a lesser degree of urgency, but soon to require protection, are the seladang, kouprey, Malayan tapir and others.

Where poverty, hunger and often illiteracy are prevalent among the local people, it is mostly of no avail to stress the importance of wild life and wild places on aesthetic, cultural and scientific grounds. The main emphasis should always be on their economic value; in other words it should be emphasised that rare wild animals are of infinitely greater value to the local villagers if kept alive in their natural habitat than if killed and eaten. Wild animals, especially rare ones, in their natural surroundings will attract visitors from nearby cities and tourists from abroad, and thus provide the necessary revenue and foreign exchange for the sorely needed development and elimination of the very poverty, hunger and illiteracy which everyone wants to remove.

The problems of preserving rare species of wild life in existing or proposed sanctuaries in South and Southeast Asia are mainly political and administrative, and only in a lesser degree are they scientific or ecological. The staff of the department concerned with protecting a sanctuary, whether it be the Forest or some other department, and the local civil authorities including the police, will find it extremely difficult to enforce laws unless these laws are carefully drawn up and unless the full co-operation of the local villagers is first obtained.

Drawing on experience gained at Kaziranga Sanctuary in Northeast India, where the great Indian rhinoceros is preserved, it has been found that the creation of a buffer zone around the sanctuary of varying width, in which no firearms or other weapons may be used or carried except by bonafide inhabitants of the zone for the actual protection of their own crops from vermin, has done a great deal to keep away poachers coming from outside. For anyone from outside caught inside the buffer zone with a firearm can be immediately arrested, while those living inside the buffer zone can be more carefully watched and controlled. Such a buffer zone can, if necessary, contain villages, cultivations, grazing grounds and so on as in the case of Kaziranga, though the ideal buffer zone would naturally be one devoid of such human activities.

To ensure the co-operation and assistance of the inhabitants living and working in the vicinity of a sanctuary, so that it will be easier for the authorities concerned to administer and protect the place and the wild life therein, the importance of publicity and education cannot be over-estimated. The monetary value of the wild life and of the wild place as a definite tourist attraction must be emphasised, for no hungry or impoverished person can consider an edible animal as something beautiful or scientifically interesting.

Under a democratic set-up, the local members of the legislature who live near a wild life sanctuary or national park must be convinced of the long-term economic advantages to the people of wild life resources, so that they may resist local demands for immediate short-term exploitation of these local resources. In other words, it is essential that the right kind of publicity be done in such a way that the local members of the legislature may themselves spread the gospel of nature conservation among their constituents.

Basically, and by the democratic way of thinking, animals belong to the people of the area in which they exist—to the local people, and could well be regarded by them as living money earners. As such the local inhabitants living on the fringe of a sanctuary should be the protectors of this valuable natural resource rather than the destroyers of it. It is significant that poachers of the rhinoceros in Kaziranga cannot operate on the edges of Kaziranga: they are forced to do their illegal killing secretly and in the remote interior, away from and unknown to the local inhabitants who would resist such interference from outsiders.

Local human populations adjacent to a rare species of wild life should be induced to take a pride in their accidental trusteeship, so that they could then proudly boast of being the sole custodians of the only survivors of that species in the world as has already happened in at least one place known to the writer.

In the event of a rare species having to be captured and transplanted to a new area more suitable for its supervision and protection, as might happen in the case of the Sumatran rhinoceros, it is even more important to enlist previously the support of the local population. In such a case the local villagers, being unaccustomed to the presence of a strange species which could be considered as usurping their land and which might cause damage to their crops, might resent such action being taken by the authorities—unless they have been previously carefully prepared for it. For instance the villagers round Kaziranga have been long accustomed to animals emerging from the sanctuary and eating their crops, and have come to realize that crop growing in the vicinity of a sanctuary is an occupational hazard which must be accepted with good grace. But to create new conditions of wild life as potential crop-raiders might arouse resentment in a new area—unless the inhabitants of the neighbourhood could be previously persuaded to accept the new situation with its land requirements and risks, in their own and in the national interests.

In order more easily to convince the people living in the vicinity of an old or a new sanctuary that wild life and wild places are revenue earners for the people of the country as a whole including themselves, it is suggested that there be some concrete, practical and useful proof of the fact that revenue is, in fact, coming in from the wild animals. There must be some proof that although a sanctuary is locally run at a financial loss, yet there is a profit from tourism in the country as a whole. Such proof can be given as follows: instead of all the revenue derived from tourism and wild life being lost in general country wide expenditure, at least some part of it should be allotted for special and extra development in the vicinity of the sanctuary from where some of it came. In other words a special school, a special clubhouse, a special drinking water supply or suchlike construction in the neighbourhood of a sanctuary, in addition to the normal development work which is going on in the district, publicly proclaimed as being the result of funds derived from the rare species or sanctuary concerned, should create a very favourable impression on the local people.

It is on the co-operation of the local villagers that many of the endangered species and their sanctuaries depend, and it is mainly by such simple and practical methods that underdeveloped peoples can be persuaded to become conservation-minded.