

# Oryx

The International Journal of Conservation

The original paper was published in the *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire* (1903-1925 and 1926-1950) or in *Oryx*, the journal of Fauna and Flora International (from 1951).

The website of the journal is (from 2008):

<http://www.oryxthejournal.org/>

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The Society was founded in 1903 as the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, and subsequently named the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society. Fauna & Flora International is conserving the planet's threatened species and ecosystems – with the people and communities who depend on them.

Oryx - The International Journal of Conservation, is now published quarterly by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Fauna & Flora International. It is a leading scientific journal of biodiversity conservation, conservation policy and sustainable use, with a particular interest in material that has the potential to improve conservation management and practice.

The website, <http://www.oryxthejournal.org/>, plays a vital role in the journal's capacity-building work. Amongst the site's many attributes is a compendium of sources of free software for researchers and details of how to access Oryx at reduced rates or for free in developing countries. The website also includes extracts from Oryx issues 10, 25 and 50 years ago, and a gallery of research photographs that provide a fascinating insight into the places, species and people described in the journal.

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frontier of Adamawa Province. It might happen, therefore, and has actually been reported, that Eland enter Nigeria. They should perhaps not, therefore, be omitted from Schedule I, as was suggested.

11. It is alleged that members of certain missionary societies are notable offenders against the game laws, possibly with good but misguided motives. Applications have, it is said, even been received for permission to shoot the female and young of antelope, the majority of the males having been shot out in the neighbourhood. In other cases it would appear that it is desired to add to popularity among native adherents by the provision of banquets of hippo meat.

Examples of this policy have been reported from other countries, but the heads of the particular organizations have usually been willing to check the blood lust of their staff.

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## ASSAM.

### FAUNA PRESERVATION.

By A. J. W. MILROY

(*Communicated by Assam Government.*)

While the Government of Assam recognize the value to Game Preservation of views of all sorts being aired, they feel they cannot pass unchallenged a number of statements made by Mr. Hanson in his article on the Fauna of Assam in the *Journal* of your Society, New Series, Part XX, which seem to imply, directly or indirectly, that Government have been supine, neglectful, and badly advised in their policy. It is accordingly requested that space for this letter may kindly be found in one of the Society's issues.

1. Mr. Hanson's initial assertion that Government have adopted a short-sighted policy in repealing the Arms Act is indicative of much that follows: the facts, as opposed to the allegations, are :—

The Arms Act (Act XI of 1878) is an Act of the Government of India, extending to the whole of British India, and has never been repealed. Breaches of the Act and the Rules made thereunder are punished in Assam with the same strictness and severity as elsewhere in India. Mr. Hanson, in his comments about arms and ammunition, appears to be gravely misinformed, and his recommendations suffer accordingly.

2. The statement that "nobody ever troubles" to observe the local Game Laws is clearly an instance of hyperbole doing injustice to the large body of sportsmen in the Province, who would as soon be guilty of vulpicide in a hunting country as of breaking the Game Laws. The "powers that be" provide police and forest officers, whose duties include the upholding of the Game Laws, and Magistrates for the trial of all cases brought before them, and if the disregard of the laws is as widespread on the part of the general public as stated, it is difficult to see what further can be done until the elected representatives of the public vote special funds and special staff for closer control.

3. Government was in no way concerned with the non-success of Mr. Hanson's attempt to form a Game Society about the time of his own retirement from Government service. Apart from it being launched at an unpropitious moment when retrenchment of both pay and personnel was hanging over Government services and private concerns alike, the attempt failed because it did not recognize the truth that the majority of Europeans, official and non-official, in Assam are recruited nowadays from classes in Great Britain who have no opportunity for indulging in sport, as opposed to games.

Most Europeans are employed in districts where shikar is not easily available, other than some snipe and possibly other bird shooting, but where they are expected to play tennis and polo, and consequently the preservation or destruction of game means little to them, and they see no reason why they should subscribe to provide good shooting

for the comparatively few who have the means, the time, and the opportunity, for big-game shikar. This refusal to contribute for the benefit of others was the root cause of the demise of the Darrang Game Association (which was started by an official), and it was found at a recent effort on the part of the Political Officer to resuscitate the Association that, though everyone was in favour of cheap shikar being furnished by Government, only the smallest minority were prepared to subscribe altruistically for the preservation of animals which they could never hope to see, much less to shoot.

The failure of Game Associations to thrive in Assam is simply due to lack of interest on the part of those who cannot expect to participate in the benefits, and this apparently is the very same trouble that the Society for the preservation of the Fauna of the Empire itself experiences in a larger sphere.

4. The suggestion that this is no time to think about hurting people's feelings fails to take into account that legislation to tighten up control and deal out enhanced punishment must be passed by a majority in the provincial Council, but no hint has been given in the article as to how the support of Members of Council can be gained in this matter.

5. The recommendation that in addition to a number of National Parks for rhino, 44-55 Parks should be established for other animals requires no comment as regards its value as a well-weighed contribution to the cause of animal preservation.

6. Mr. Hanson having specified Nongkhyllam Forest Reserve as likely to form a suitable National Park, it may be as well to give some account of this area. It contains 30,217·6 acres, entirely hill, mostly bamboo with some miscellaneous tree forest and several patches of *Shorea robusta* where the ground is less rocky. The Forest Department considered working out *Shorea* sleepers departmentally but abandoned the project owing to the difficulties of road construction, and a European firm, which secured the

monopoly, had to throw up the concession after losing money from the high costs of extraction. It will thus be seen that there can be no question here of interested spectators watching game from their cars as in Africa.

The Reserve contains some Bison, Sambhur, and Barking Deer, all more or less resident, and elephants pass through it. An active stalker should be able to track up these animals with some hope of success between April and October when the ground and debris are soft, provided he could stand the leeches, but it would require an exceptional shikari not to give warning of his approach during the cold weather months when the dry leaves and sticks crackle at the slightest touch. Unimpeded observation of the animals would usually be impossible even at point-blank range owing to the undergrowth, and it is difficult to think of conditions more unfavourable for the formation of a Park at the tax-payers' expense.

7. The destruction of a large number of Rhinoceroses in 1929 by armed poachers was reported by the Forest Department, and it is not understood why in alluding to this your contributor should have omitted to mention the prompt despatch by the Local Government of a force of Assam Rifles under a British Officer to deal with the situation.

Representations having been made that the poaching of rhino and elephants was facilitated by the fact that any one could legally be in possession of their horns and tusks unless these could be proved to have come from a forest, the Local Government introduced a Bill making these articles the property of Government as forest produce, unless the contrary could be proved. The Legislative Council, while throwing out the proposal as regards ivory, approved of rhino horns being listed as forest produce, and most beneficial results have since followed.

8. The above represent only a selection from among the misstatements and exaggerations to be found in the article under reference, which appears when examined critically to be merely a recital of what Mr. Hanson would like to do to

preserve game, if he had unlimited wealth and unlimited autocratic powers over the country's inhabitants. The Government of Assam is deeply concerned in the due preservation of the valuable local fauna, but recognizes that the measures taken towards this desirable end must be not only such as are enforceable now, but above all such as will prove acceptable when, in the future, popular control has been introduced.

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THE SECRETARY,  
SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE FAUNA OF THE EMPIRE.

SIR,—I have read the Assam Government's letter regarding my article in the Society's *Journal* and wish to reply to their criticisms of the statements made by me in that issue.

While recognizing that no Government ever likes their views, ideas, or principles questioned, I would like to point out that my observations were made during a sojourn of ten years or more in all parts of the Province and I simply stated facts as I found them during this period.

I do not consider myself an authority on big game hunting, but my views on Game Preservation have been fully endorsed by planters and others who have lived for many years in the country, and I have carefully studied methods of game protection in Kashmir and many other provinces.

Though these criticisms may be considered "destructive" at first sight, I hope that they will eventually lead to a "constructive" policy on the part of the Assam Government.

Regarding the statement that the Arms Act has been repealed, I may have been wrong in suggesting that this is so, but the fact that guns of all kinds have increased enormously in Assam during the past few years led me to believe that the Act had been repealed.

There are at present Game Laws in the country for the preservation of female bison, deer, etc., yet I have myself seen meat and skins for sale at various market places along the foot of the Garo Hills, in the Cachar Hills, the Mikir and Naga Hills, at Nongpoh, near Shillong, and innumerable other places in the Province; and at all times of the year.