

jungle and babool trees in open fields and in such places it will be found skulking in the undergrowth or creeping about the branches of the babool trees". It is cheerful little bird continually on the move and constantly uttering its little song as it creeps about in scrub in its search for insects.

6450

## TWO VANISHING ANIMALS OF INDIA.

By

RODGER SHEPPARD

While living in Nepal during the last few years, I've had the wonderful opportunity of studying and seeing many varieties of Indian Wild Life. Of these I am going to tell about the Rhinoceros and the Wild Buffalo, both of which are nearing extinction in India to-day.

The great Indian Rhino (One horned), which is the largest of the species, is a big clumsy looking animal, weighing upward of three tons. It is distinguished not only by the single horn, but also by the great folds in the skin, especially around the shoulders and haunches, which give it the appearance of an armoured prehistoric animal. It's eye-sight is very poor, but it makes up in this defect by having a very good sense of smell and hearing. It is a bad-tempered and stupid animal on the whole and can be dangerous when provoked. This Rhino was once fairly common in India. However during the past years it has been almost exterminated. There are several reasons for this.

1. The Chinese regard the horn of a Rhino as having great medicinal power and will pay a large sum for it. Consequently this is the main reason why the Rhino has been killed in India.
2. As the population of India grows, more and more jungle area is cleared, with the result that the Rhino may be forced back until it can go no further. With the disappearance of the

jungle there is also the disappearance of the Rhino. 3. The breeding habits of Rhinos are so slow that may be only once in five years a cow Rhino will give birth to a young one. And if a cow Rhino does give birth, the young one is liable to be killed by a tiger. With this slow-rate of reproduction and the constant poaching the Rhino's chances of survival are limited.

There are two main ways poachers use to kill Rhinos, one is the pit trap, which is dug in a Rhino trail, and the other is shooting. However to avoid making too much noise the poachers use the former. If one of these pit traps is dug in a Rhino trail, a Rhino is bound to stumble into it sooner or later, where killing it is then an easy matter. I know of one case of a villager, who on finding a Rhino in one of his traps, struck at the head of the animal with a heavy axe. He missed the head and struck the base of the horn instead. The horn was completely knocked off. The villager having unexpectedly got the horn in such an easy way, released the dazed Rhino, which trotted off sporting a bloody stump. The Rhino recovered and was later recognized by the absence of its horn.

Now that the Indian Rhino is nearing extinction, restrictive laws have been issued concerning its protection. However the Rhino is still being poached, and if further steps are not taken to ensure its protection, it will soon be out of existence.

Another animal which is almost extinct in India to-day is the Wild Buffalo. The Wild Buffalo is a large heavy animal, weighing well over a ton when full grown. It is distinguished by the long massive horns which sweep back around its head, and also by its legs, which are white below the knees. It usually inhabits swampy areas thus being sometimes called the "Water Buffalo". This animal is easily angered and is considered very dangerous. The domestic water Buffalo, used all over India for farm work, is very closely related to the Wild Buffalo. Any hunter who has killed one of these majestic animals will say it is one of the finest trophies possible. However to-day these animals are so few in number that hunting them is usually prohibited. There are several reasons why this animal has become so rare. 1. As in the case of the Rhino, when the jungles are

cleared away to meet civilizations' great strides, the Buffalo may soon be left with very little natural surroundings, and may slowly disappear. The horns of a Wild Buffalo are terrible weapons and when two bulls decide to fight it out such terrible wounds may be inflicted both victor and defeated may die. This happens frequently and many bulls may die, thus cutting down the number of animals left, and reducing their chances of survival. 3. However, the biggest threat of all is rinderpest. Buffaloes sometimes leave the forest to feed in the fields and many come into contact with village cattle which are infected with rinderpest. The result is that the jungles are soon raging with an epidemic of rinderpest, not only Buffaloes, but Deer, and other animals will be found dead or dying. It is a very terrible but yet pitiful sight to see all these magnificent animals in such a state. Anyone, who has seen it will say that rinderpest is one of the most terrible tragedies that can befall the jungle and its animals. Rinderpest is the main reason why Buffaloes have been almost wiped out in India. Although much has been done to try to protect these animals it is doubtful whether they will survive and if they do become extinct India will have lost one of her finest animals.

Many people will ask us why we want to protect the Rhino and Buffalo.

Well one of the main reasons why we want to protect these animals is that we want people in years to come to be able to see them. If these animals make a come back may be in the year 2057 A.P., some person standing outside the cage of an Indian Rhino or Wild Buffalo will say "There is an animal that would have been extinct one hundred years ago in India but for the effort of the people in protecting it, we might never have seen it alive". Let us all hope that the Indian Rhino and Wild Buffalo make a speedy recovery.

[The best Essay received for the 'Wild Life Week' Essay Competition held during October 1957. It is written by a Sixth Standard Student of St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling.--EDITOR.]

---