

Status : Once the Cheetah was quite common in India, but now we have lost it irretrievably through our imprudence. Possibly, the practice of taming adult cheetah and training it for hunting, and complete failure in its captive breeding, have greatly decreased its number from the last century. Moreover, shrinkage of its habitat, killing by man and high mortality rate among the cubs, contributed much towards its extermination from India. A few stray reports of its occurrence in southern India were available up to 1951 and 1952 but it has not been heard of since then.

Order Perissodactyla

GREAT ONEHORNED RHINOCEROS

47. *Rhinoceros unicornis* Linnaeus (V)

The Great Onehorned Rhinoceros is the largest land mammal next to the elephant, and measures 300-315 cm in the head and body length and about 180 cm in the shoulder-height. Unlike the African rhino, its hide is hairless. The skin of the body is divided into large shields by heavy folds before and behind the shoulders, in front of the thighs and on the buttocks. The folds behind the shoulders and in front of the thighs are continuous

great onehorned rhinoceros



across the back and those in front of the shoulders are not continued right across the back. The skin is studded with convex tubercles on the shoulders, thighs and the buttocks. The colour of its body is blackish grey throughout. A single well-developed horn is present in both the sexes which measures 38-41 cm. The horn grows throughout life, and if lost is reproduced.

Distribution : Long back it used to occur extensively in the Indo-Gangetic plains and along the base of the Himalaya from Nepal to Assam. There is a record that the Great Moghul Emperor Baber hunted it even near Peshawar in Pakistan in 1526. At present, it is known from scattered areas of Nepal, northern West Bengal and Assam.

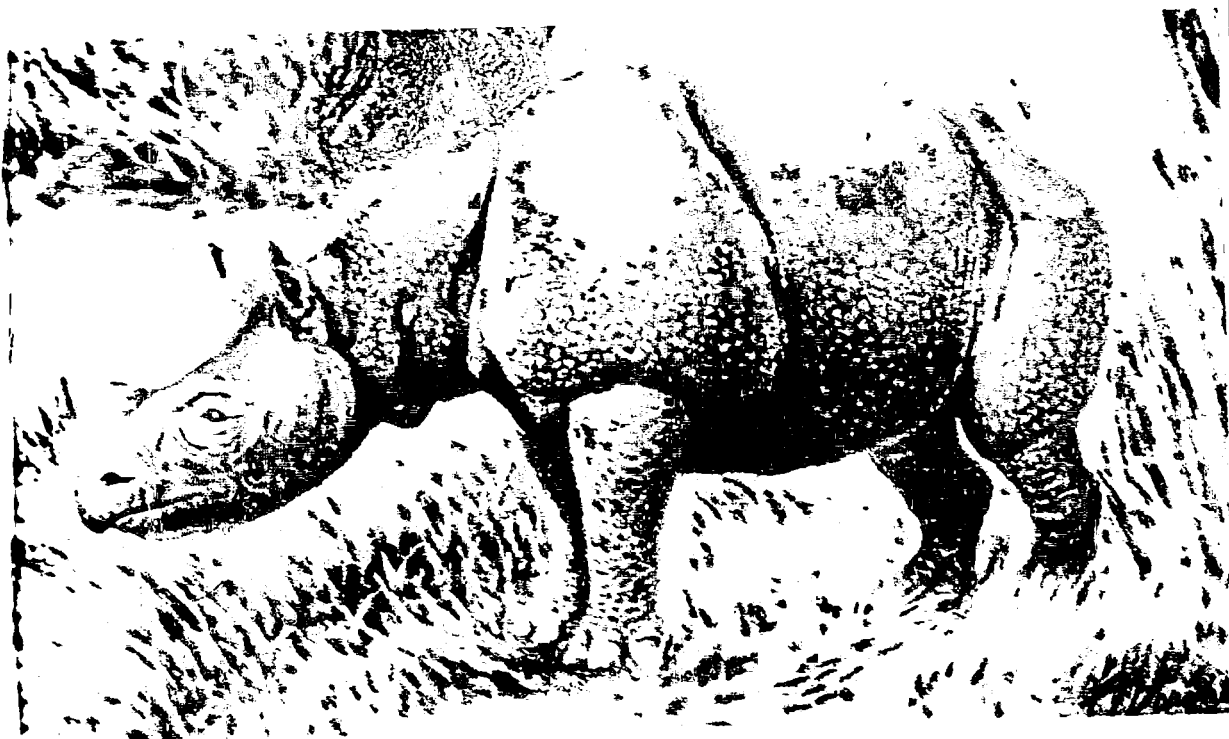
Habits and habitat : The Great Onehorned Rhinoceros is a denizen of the grass-jungles and prefers swampy ground. It is solitary in habit, though several individuals may sometimes occupy the same patch of jungle. It is a grazer and feeds mainly on grass. Its breeding rate is very slow; mating takes places between February and April, and the period of gestation varies from 12 to 19 months in different areas. The calf, usually a single is born around October.

Status : The population of the Great Onehorned Rhinoceros has greatly declined due to habitat-shrinkage and large-scale poaching for alleged aphrodisiac properties of its horn. Its slow rate of breeding and predation of young by carnivores are perhaps also responsible for the depletion in its number. However, due to all possible protective measures accorded to it, its population is increasing steadily in various forest-reserves and sanctuaries especially in Kaziranga and Manas (Assam) and Jaldapara (West Bengal). According to a recent estimate of 1978 its total number stands over 900 individuals in the Kaziranga National Park.

LESSER ONEHORNED RHINOCEROS

48. *Rhinoceros sondaicus* Desmarest (E)

The Lesser Onehorned Rhinoceros is a dusky grey animal. It is slightly smaller in length, though rarely shorter at the shoulder than the Great Onehorned Rhinoceros. The surface of its body is divided into shields by folds of skin as in the previous species, but the hide is divided by cracks into small, polygonal discs. The fold in front of the shoulders, however, extends right across the back. The single horn is never very long, measures rarely up to 27-28 cm. The horn generally is wanting in the female, but if present, it is only a low boss.



lesser onehorned rhinoceros

Distribution : This rhino was once known from Bengal and Assam, south of the Brahmaputra in India, and eastwards extended up to Sumatra, Java and Borneo. At present, it is said to occur in Java only.

Habits and habitat : It is more an inhabitant of tree-forest than of grass land, yet it is known to occur in a few swampy areas too. Its occurrence at higher elevations up to 2135 m is recorded. It is mostly a browser, unlike *Rhinoceros unicornis* which is a grazer.

Status : Extinct in India, Burma and eastern areas up to Malaysia. A few dozen individuals, however, still exist in western Java.

THREATENED ANIMALS OF INDIA

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*with a foreword by Dr. T. N. Khoshoo, Secretary,
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ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

1983