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A solitary cock House-Sparrow had a bath on the morning of the 15th February ; it was the first one to do so. It kept flying from one side of the plinth to the other, for several minutes, before making up its mind to go in ; it was joined by another one.

14. The Indian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops orientalis* (Stuart Baker)).

While hunting for food they go pitter-patter at a run more than a walk and search the roads and lawn, methodically, sometimes probing the same hole.

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## THE GREAT ONE-HORNED RHINOCEROS IN KAZIRANGA SANCTUARY, ASSAM.

By E. P. GEE.

The very interesting and well illustrated note on the Jaldapara Game Sanctuary in the Duars, published in the issue of January 1948, prompts me to write something on the Kaziranga Sanctuary of Assam.

For many years an Honorary Forest Officer of Kaziranga Sanctuary, I have had ample opportunity of making the acquaintance of the rhino there. And the fact that the Assam Forest Department last year abolished the appointment of all Hon. F.O.s in the province has not diminished my interest, and I still go there whenever possible.

Kaziranga Sanctuary is, roughly, midway between Gauhati and Dibrugarh, and lies between the Assam Trunk Road on the south and the Brahmaputra river on the north. The village of Kaziranga is at milestone 137 on the Assam Trunk Road, and in it is situated a P.W.D. inspection bungalow and the Deputy Range Officer's office and staff quarters. The actual sanctuary is only about one mile distant at this point. Thus it is very accessible to visitors by motor or bus service.

In size Kaziranga is very much greater than Jaldapara. It varies in width up to 7 miles, and is about 27 miles in length,



comprising roughly 123 square miles altogether. It is mainly flat, but variable in character of terrain, consisting of tree jungle, elephant-grass (ekra) jungle, swamps, bheels and streams. Most of it is elephant-grass, and large patches of this are burned off each year in February and March to improve the grazing and facilitate the seeing of animals. The best time, therefore, to go into the sanctuary is the second half of March or first half of April, but anytime between December and April is good, in the rains large areas get flooded, but only the deer seem to suffer, as these often get caught and slaughtered by the local inhabitants.

The sanctuary was created about the year 1906 when rhino had become almost exterminated, only a dozen or so remaining then. Now there are supposed to be between 400 and 600 rhino, and 100 to 200 wild buffalo. There used to be some mithun there, but these have not been seen for some time.

Since 1938 the Forest Department has opened up Kaziranga to visitors on payment of a small fee, and two inspection elephants are available at a reasonable charge. Permission is obtained from the D. F. O., Jorhat, and on an average visit one would expect to see about 10 rhino, 12 buffalo, 30 deer and numerous other animals, as well as birds of all sorts.

Apart from Kaziranga, a few rhino exist in the Manas Game Sanctuary of Assam; and there are reputed to be about half a dozen in the Sona Rupa Sanctuary in the Balipara Frontier Tract. As these two latter sanctuaries are near the foothills of the Himalayas, there may still survive a few isolated Javan Rhino (*R. Sondaicus*) or Sumatran Two-horned Rhino (*R. Sumatrensis*), but this is doubtful. Only *R. Unicornis* exists in Kaziranga.

The inspection elephants at Kaziranga, fine and well trained animals though they be, are scared of the rhino should the latter face round and snort. And should a rhino charge, as they often do, the elephant is allowed to bolt for a short distance before being brought back to observe its pursuer again. As a general rule rhino allow visitors on elephant-back to approach to a distance of about forty yards without charging. The nearest I have been to a rhino is ten yards, as some of them are quite placid.





This large bull charged us. Our elephant fled, but was brought back to enable us to photograph our erstwhile pursuer.



This cow with a half grown calf seems to have decided not to charge. She is starting to move away.



Tiger seem to avoid rhino, and the deer and buffalo appreciate this fact and often graze in the company of rhino, apparently for protection.

If a rhino gets into a quicksand, he often cannot get out and has to have assistance. Similarly if he falls into a shallow pit he is helpless, and this is how poachers used to trap him in order to get his horn.

Nowadays, as rhino have multiplied to such an extent, the Forest Department have been catching a few for sale to zoological gardens. In 1938 they caught a five year old one for the Washington Zoo, which unfortunately never reached its destination chiefly owing to difficulties created by the war. In 1947 they wanted a pair for the London Zoo. The first animal caught was immediately dispatched to Calcutta by rail, but died from injuries on route. I had suggested keeping captured animals for several weeks in a small stockade to quieten them down and tame them before sending them away. Fortunately this suggestion was afterwards followed, and the next male caught was partly tamed in a stockade and then sent to London. The Superintendent of the London Zoo, Dr. Vevers, has recently written of this rhino: "Mohan is doing extremely well and has grown quite a lot".

Again early this year a male and a female were caught, stockaded and tamed for some time, and then dispatched to the Chicago Zoological Gardens, where they should have arrived by now.

Considering its attractions and accessibility, very few visitors ever trouble to go to Kaziranga. But the Assam Forest Department now at least seem fully alive to the possibilities of the sanctuary, and I understand that they intended in the near future to improve and popularise the place.

And as publicity means security for the rhino, their safety and welfare now seem assured for all time.