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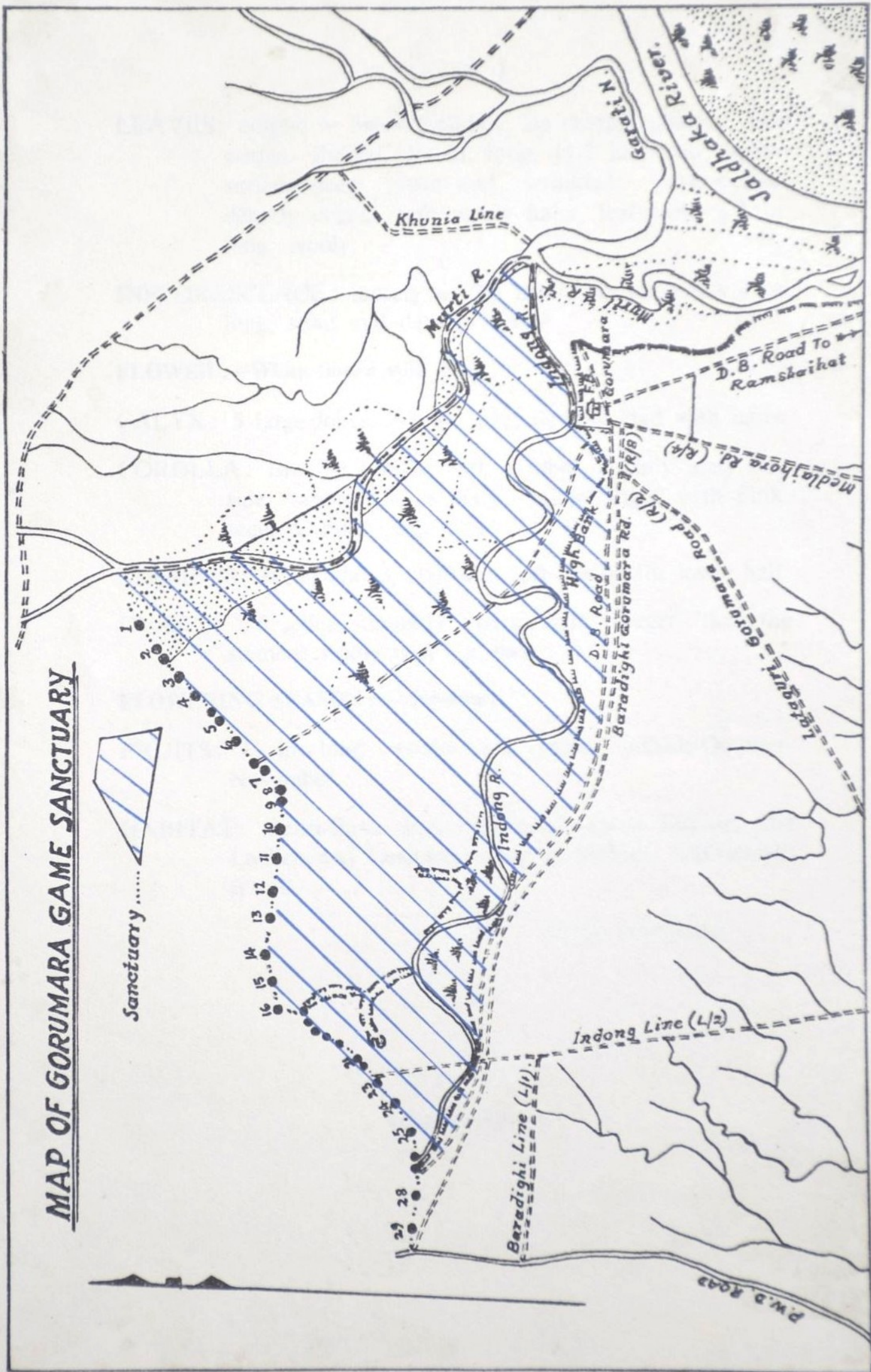
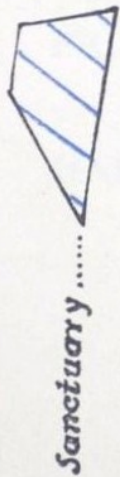
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MAP OF GORUMARA GAME SANCTUARY



GORUMARA GAME SANCTUARY

BY

A. C. GUPTA

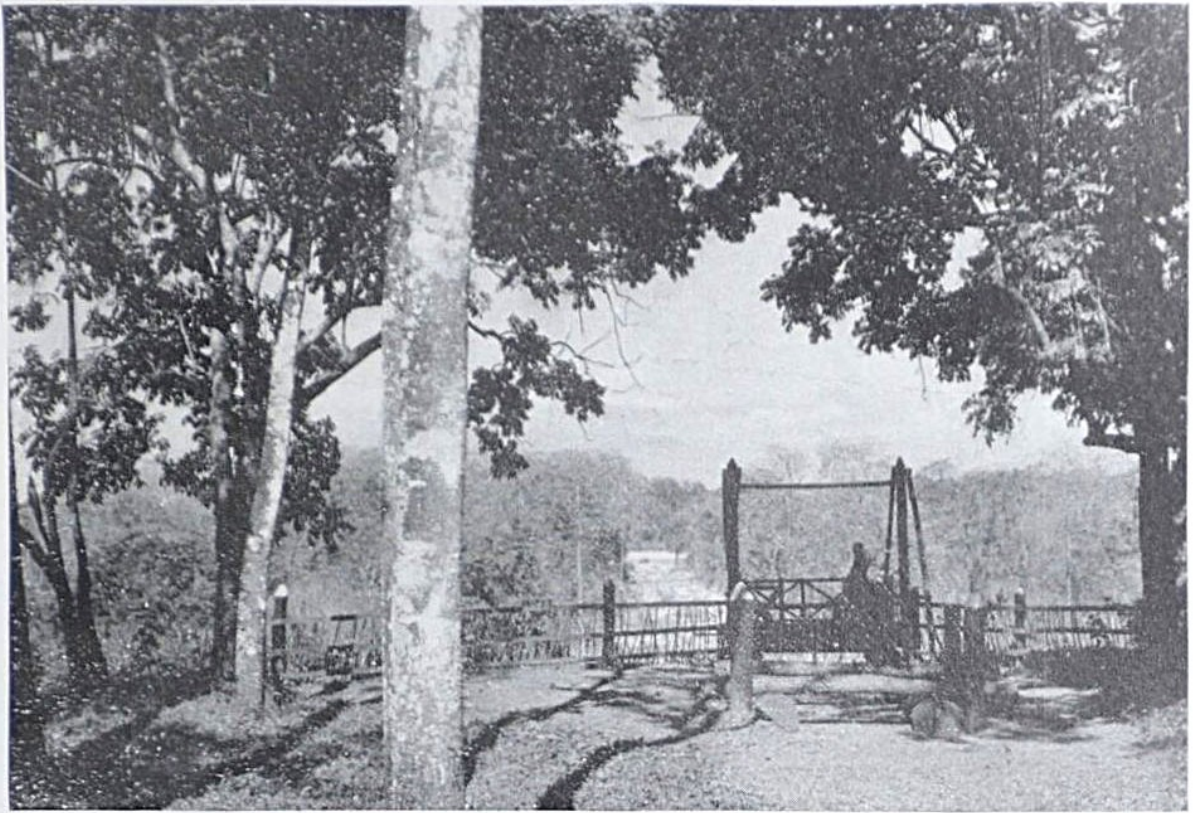
Formerly of the Indian Forest Service.

The Gorumara Game Sanctuary stretching across 3 rivers in the Lower Tondou Forest of Jalpaiguri district, occupies an area of 3,326 sq. miles. It falls within the administrative jurisdiction of the Jalpaiguri Forest Division, and the sphere of influence of the Tista-Toorsa Game Association. The sanctuary takes its name from Gorumara a small clearing within the forest reserve on the right bank of the Indong, the smallest of the 3 rivers draining the submontane area. The clearing, which is on the western edge of the sanctuary, holds two rest-houses together with their outhouses, and is protected on 3 sides against elephants with a 4 feet deep trench. The buildings are all wooden with c. i. sheet roof. The larger 2 storeyed rest-house provides accommodation to forest officers of gazetted rank, while the smaller rest-house on stilts is meant for the non-gazetted staff. The nearest station on the Assam rail link is Chalsa with which Gorumara is connected by a first class motor road of which 6 miles are tar-macadam, and 2 miles shingled.

By virtue of its position on the high bank bordering a fairly extensive riverain type of forest in the combined flood-plains of the rivers, Indong, Murti, Jaldhaka and Daina, Gorumara commands from its elevated position, a pleasant view of the riverain forests stretching away to the north-east, and of the Bhutan hills beyond. The feeling of being shut within a small clearing in a fairly dense Sal Forest never oppresses a visitor to Gorumara. The high bank would be about 30 feet above the small Indong river immediately below. Gorumara is ideally situated for making observations of what goes on in the forest below, and by way of taking full advantage of this circumstance an overhanging observation platform supported by Sal log cantilever has been provided at a vantage point on the edge of the high bank. To aid observation 2 strips radiating from the Indong river immediately below are cleared of scrub

and tall grass at the end of the rains each year, and these extend upto the next river, which is the Murti. One can spend hours on this platform without feeling bored, and as many years record in the visitors' book would testify, many a visitor to Gorumara has seen, from the security of this platform, quite a number of wild animals in daylight. The one person who has seen the most is, of course, the chaukidar of the rest-house, who is always there. I remember several occasions when I had an exciting time in this sanctuary. About November, 1951, a cow-rhino with a very small calf was frequently seen. A tiger was after this calf, and one afternoon in early December when I happened to be at Gorumara with some friends, the tiger went for the calf. The cow at once charged the tiger, and a fearful battle ensued about 300 yards from the platform. There was a lot of movement, and the tall grass often obscured the view, but the little that could be seen kept the small crowd at Gorumara spellbound for 30 minutes or so. All was quite thereafter, but the battle was inconclusive. About 3 weeks later I saw the Cow-rhino and her small calf again. The calf looked normal, but the cow was emaciated, bore deep claw marks, on both flanks, and seemed to walk slowly with some difficulty. In the third week of January, 1952, the second and the concluding round of battle was fought during the night, and the poor, much weakened rhinoceros was killed together with her calf. I was not at Gorumara at the time, and the news reached me the following evening. I reached Gorumara on the 3rd day, and I found the remains of the two animals on the right bank of the Indong, a little upstream of Gorumara. This time there were two tigers, and the calf had been completely eaten together with about a third of the cow. There were no vultures, and from the signs imprinted on the soft earth no carrion eaters such as bears, wild pigs, and civet cat had visited the kill. That proved that the killers were constantly there until my arrival.

Two lone bull elephants, who were never seen together, were a feature of this sanctuary some years ago. One was a *Mukna* (a tuskless bull) while the other was a tusker with the long right tusk intact, but carrying the stump of a broken tusk



Observation Platform at Gorumara
overlooking riverain Forest.



Rhino tunnel through tall Grass
Photos—Author.



A lone *Muckna* elephant in the sanctuary



Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) in wallow
Photos—Author.

on the left. While going about alone in the jungle I inadvertently came very close to both the animals on numerous occasions, but they were quite harmless, and never did anything more than making a little noise. In October, 1951, a lone tusker unknown in the country-side, appeared in the Kumani forest in the Kalimpong foothills, not very far from Gorumara, and started doing a great deal of damage to both human life and property. In November the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling proclaimed the animal for destruction. The animal however, continued at large, and at the close of the year he shifted his haunt to the Gorumara forest, which was in the adjoining district of Jalpaiguri. He was a stranger to the locality, and when he first arrived nobody suspected him to be the rogue from Kumani. For a week or 10 days he went about taking stock of his new surroundings, and then suddenly one day he engaged the one-tusked bull to a fight. At the end of the fight, which lasted only about two hours, the one-tusked bull was killed outright, but even then the killer was not connected with the Kumani rogue. A few days later he seized a man on the forest road, and almost reduced him to pulp. It was then that we started regarding him seriously, and we got evidence that he was the rogue of Kumani fame. Poaching in the Gorumara sanctuary became rife from November, 1951, and all efforts made by the small protective staff proved unavailing. The killing of a man had however, a very salutary effect, and as soon as the identity of the rogue was established all poachers' guns became silent. Soon after this the elephant was once again proclaimed as a rogue, but this time by the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri. One afternoon when I was at Gorumara, someone brought the news that the rogue had just been seen close by. I quickly decided that I should take him on my movie before he was destroyed. Followed by an orderly carrying a rifle I went about looking for the animal, and after a while we found him in the thick *Sal* jungle. He stood still and stared at us for a minute or two as if in amazement at someone, who did not run away from him. Then he started manoeuvring for a position from where to launch, a charge at two defiant men. I had to keep moving with him for considerations of both defence and favourable light. When I had exposed a few feet of my film the

animal grew impatient, and without further ado made a savage charge at us from a distance of about 50 yards. At first we ran for a position of vantage behind a close group of *Sal* trees, and once there, I exchanged my movie camera for the rifle, and gave the animal a shot on the head when he had come dangerously close. It was a soft nose bullet, and it found its mark rather high on the head. The massive animal was dazed all the same. Without turning he immediately put himself on the reverse gear as it were, and swayed his huge head from side to side as blood oozed out of the bullet hole. The rogue was never seen again alive or dead in any part of the North Bengal forests, and presumably he went up the Jaldhaka valley and disappeared into Bhutan.

A long tongue of forest running south from the Bhutan border on the west of the Jaldakha river is known as the Tondu Reserve and it is in the southern half of Tondu (Lower Tondu) that Gorumara is situated. At its north-western extremity it touches the Kumani forest in the Kalimpong foothills. The Kumani forest, which holds a salt-lick in Rongo compartment No. 1 on the left bank of the Nuxal Khola, has been generations past, a rendezvous for scores of herbivorous animals from the adjoining Bhutan, the foot hills forests of Kalimpong and the farthest end of the Tondu forest. There is no other salt lick to serve the animals of those forests. Upto the outbreak of World War II the sanctity of the salt lick was respected, and many well-trodden game paths converged to the salt-lick from several directions through dense forest. There was a large concourse of wild animals, elephants, gaur, sambhur, cheetal, muntjac and others, to be seen in the precincts of the salt lick and as an Assistant Conservator serving in those parts some 30 years ago, I remember I used to be afraid even to approach the salt-lick. The war proved to be the undoing of many things, and the preservation of wild life was one among these. Throwing the basic principle of management of forests and of wild life to the winds, most accessible parts of forests were heavily exploited, and large clearings were made all over for labour force establishments. This fever of unbalanced action lasted for several years after the termination of the war in 1945, and a very great deal of damage was done. In the context of our

present subject, the importance of the salt-licks at Nuxal Khola to the wild life many miles around was completely overlooked, extensive clear-fellings were made in Kumani Block along the game paths, a large clearing was made fairly close to the salt lick and a forest village established therein, and finally the Rongo Block in which the salt-lick occurs was transferred to the Directorate of Commerce and Industries for the cultivation of medicinal plants. It seems strange that in the Working Plan for the management of Kalimpong forests, which was drawn up during the years, 1946 and 1947, and which prescribed the clear-fellings in Kumani Block, no provision was even made for the exclusion of forested strips along the permanent game paths leading to the salt-lick to serve as corridors. While dealing with nature human actions are often of far-reaching consequence, and the damage once done may prove difficult to repair. The facts enumerated above should prove that the actions taken over a period of years were based neither on a sound local knowledge nor on knowledge of the laws of nature.

The principal circumstance that led to the Gorumara forest being notified as a sanctuary in November, 1940, was its content of about a dozen heads of the Great One Horned Indian Rhinoceros. An area of 1129 acres was notified in that year. Later on in August, 1949, another area of 1000 acres on the east was added on. For many years the number of these massive pachyderms has remained more or less constant, the reason being that the increase resulting from normal multiplication is offset by casualties amongst cows and calves inflicted by tigers, and amongst both cows and bulls inflicted by cultivators' shots in the neighbouring paddy fields. Other than the Balapara forest on the right bank of Sankos, and the forests bordering the Torsa, the Tondou happens to be the only forest in North Bengal that still has a few rhinos. The sanctuary as it is constituted with about half of its area under thick tree forest, and the other half in the riverain area with tall grass, provides an ideal habitat to the rhinoceros. The sanctuary is small being only a little over 3 square miles in extent, and it cannot be expected to hold large animals on a permanent basis. The rhinos roam throughout the Tondou forest far beyond the boundaries of the sanctuary,

and elephants travel even farther. A few Gaur (*Bos gaurus*) come from the north each year, and spend the winter in this sanctuary. They are often seen from the observation platform at Gorumara. The Himalayan Black Bear is also a winter visitor. The tree forest is too thick to hold Cheetal deer, but there is a fair number of Sambhur and Muntjac. I have never seen a Hog-deer in this area, and perhaps there is none. Pigs constitute the staple food of the tiger. The sanctuary holds a small number of leopards, which usually live near the forest villages. There are several species of wild cats and civet cats. One interesting thing about the sanctuary is the occasional occurrence of feral buffaloes. I once saw a fairly young animal, very well built and streamlined, that had been knocked down by a heavy lorry during the night. It still bore unmistakable mark of yoke on its neck. Game birds include Pea-fowl, Kalij Pheasant, and the Red Jungle Fowl. Pythons are common in the damp areas bordering the rivers. Of vermins there are a few, the prominent being the wild dog, the otter, and the cormorant. Porcupines have burrows along the high bank on the western flank of the Indong.

Although this area was constituted a sanctuary nearly 20 years ago, nothing was ever done either here or in the other sanctuary (Chapramari) in the Tondu forest lying to its north, towards carrying out what is currently understood as Wild Life management. All that has been done is to exclude the area from shooting rights, and the provision of a small protective staff of men in lower ranks having no specialized knowledge nor training. The shooting right of the poacher however, remains unimpaired, and a game sanctuary offers him much greater attraction than a forest outside it. The portion of the sanctuary in close proximity of Gorumara, which often has visitors in the rest-houses, is disturbed a great deal by human noise, but strange as it would seem, it is here that animals are mostly seen. They have learnt from years of experience that the human beings occurring at Gorumara are friendly, and very unlike the inhuman human beings they have known in other parts of the forest. It is remarkable how quickly the wild denizens of the jungle can feel a kindly atmosphere, and how eager they are to grasp a friendly hand. This has been amply exemplified by the results achieved in the National Parks of the U.S.A. and Canada.

When the Murti river is not in flood, its bed is used as a regular pedestrian highway by people inhabiting the Ramshai and Bamandanga areas. This is highly undesirable in a game sanctuary, and unless the practice is rigorously put down now the position may become difficult later. Domesticated cattle trespassing into forest reserves carry a great many disease against which wild animals have no immunity, and it is particularly for this reason that cattle trespass into game sanctuaries has to be prevented by all possible means. In May 1931, in the Jaldapara Reserve, which has since been constituted a sanctuary, I remember having witnessed whole herds of bisons afflicted with rinderpest and dozens of fine animals either dead or in death throes. We have deaths even among wild elephants from similar causes, yet cattle trespass goes on, and thanks to the unenlightened public opinion, and the unfriendly attitude of many of the local leaders, conscientious forest officers trying to do their duty often burn their fingers. So far as the Gorumara Sanctuary is concerned, cattle trespass is common on all sides except on the west, and the number of cattle involved is often quite considerable. It would be an act of wisdom if our administrators made a determined effort to stop this before instituting any measures for wild life management on modern lines.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE INDIAN ELEPHANT.

The Indian Elephant is the largest of all the big game animals of India. It is one of the two survivors of a race of animals which were more widely distributed and had numerous species in ancient days.

In Assam, where I have done most of my observation and hunting, at one time there were thousands of elephants. They were especially numerous in the great Namba Forest, in the Langting Forest and in the Garo Hills. In the Naga Hills, there was a forest encircled all round by steep mountains. This place was strictly preserved by the Forest Department and was full of elephants.