

# INDIA

## PICTORIAL AND DESCRIPTIVE

*By the Author of*

*"THE MEDITERRANEAN ILLUSTRATED"*

*&c. &c.*

*William Henry Davenport Adams*

*1822-1891*



SHAH JEHAN'S PALACE IN THE ISLAND OF JUGMUNDER, OODEYPUR.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ANIMAL LIFE IN INDIA.

#### ITS FAUNA—BIRDS—REPTILES.

**A**S we are not writing a zoological treatise, our review of the Animal Life of India will be little more than an enumeration of some of its principal forms. Here, as in the Flora, any attempt to generalize is baffled by the wide extent of the area with which we are concerned, and the radical differences induced by climatic variations and physical influences. ( Certain animals there are, however, which the popular mind at once identifies with India—such as the tiger, the elephant, the hunting leopard, the gavial. But of the Indian Fauna it may be said, as of the Indian Flora, that though generally and principally Tropical in character, it also includes numerous forms belonging to the Temperate regions—such, for instance, as the horse, the ass, the ox, the sheep.

If we were called upon to represent India by any particular animal, we should unquestionably select the elephant. It is the elephant that figures in state processions, that stalks conspicuous in the "ranks of war," that serves both as a beast of burden and a beast of draught. Though no longer employed to charge the battalions of the foe, it carries into the battle-field the necessary stores of ammunition, and light pieces of field-artillery are frequently mounted on its back. In the tiger-hunt it provides the sportsman with a secure and commanding position. Nor has the increase in the number of conveyances, nor the extension of railway-communication, done much to lessen its popularity or usefulness. Mrs. Murray Mitchell, describing a grand ceremony of which she was an eye-witness, observes, that elephants in their gay trappings were at least as common as horses. She herself went on one of these huge creatures two or three times "to see the sights." "I felt myself," she says, "a Ranee at least, as we sat in dignity on the back of our elephant, resplendent with gilt howdah, and saddle-cloth of scarlet velvet embroidered with gold."

The Indian elephants differ among themselves in size, and colour, and the length of their tusks; but though the differences are sufficient to constitute varieties, they are not important enough to constitute species. The general hue is a blackish brown; the sacred white elephant being the product only of Indo-China, and, in the opinion of many naturalists, owing its distinctive colour to disease. In the thick woods of the Ghats elephants are still found in herds of two to three hundred. The average height of the male is eight to ten feet; of the female, seven to eight; but the individuals in the north of India are much smaller. It is said that the largest elephant ever seen in India measured ten and a half feet at the shoulder; it was caught in 1796, and belonged to the Nawab of Oudh. The largest tusks of the Bengal animal rarely exceed seventy or eighty pounds in weight.



In Bengal the one-horned rhinoceros is scarcer than it used to be, thanks to the extending influence of British civilization and love of sport; but it still frequents the islands of the Gangetic delta, and is frequently seen in company with the tiger. The two are not naturally fond of each other's company, but they are here brought together by causes which overrule any



THE INDIAN ELEPHANT.

instinctive mistrust. The tiger finds food and shelter among the dense jungle-growth of the Sundarbans; and the rhinoceros resorts thither for protection against the burning heat.

If the elephant be a fitting type of India itself, the tiger has been taken as an emblem of its people. It has, at all events, the sleekness and suppleness of the Hindu, though the Hindu can hardly be said to possess its ferocity! Of all living animals, surely it is the handsomest; with its bright glowing eye, its brilliant skin, its compact, powerful, and lissom frame. The force and swiftness of its bound is something terrible; the rapidity of its course justifies



the ancient application of the name Tigris to an arrowy river. It will clear fifty feet at a leap; it will outrun the fastest horse; it is so strong that it will seize in its jaws and carry off a bullock. Hunting such an animal is, therefore, no tame or paltry pastime, but needs, in most cases, the possession of great courage and singular presence of mind, with the addition of a keen eye and a thorough command of one's nerves. But it is seldom that the native challenges the tiger "face to face." He leaves the hazard and glory of



THE INDIAN RHINOCEROS.

such an encounter to the English *sahib*; and, for himself, is content with the adoption of cunning devices, or with a shot from some absolutely secure position. The trap, or "string-bow," is a favourite invention. He makes an immense bow, some eight or nine feet in length, and strings it with good strong gut line. Usually the path by which the tiger leaves his den is very narrow; on each side of it a post is firmly driven into the ground, and to these posts are attached the two ends of the bow. Further: a blunt stick is inserted between the bow and the