



BRITAIN-NEPAL

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As our Society came into being during the State Visit to the United Kingdom of His Late Majesty King Mahendra and Her Majesty Queen Ratna, in October 1960, we can claim to have passed our twenty-first birthday. Membership continues to grow and it would be no exaggeration to say we are now a flourishing and very active Society with a good financial base. Our thanks are due to all those who have helped to build up the Society during the last twenty-one years.

As far as this, the fifth number of our Journal, is concerned we have to thank our contributors who by allowing us to publish the text of their talks to the Society, continue to make the Journal possible.

It has been a crowded twelve months since the last Journal was issued, starting with the Royal Visit of Their Majesties the King and Queen of Nepal in November last year (the Society was well represented at the Lord Mayor's Banquet for the Royal visitors at the Guildhall on 19 November 1980) and leading on to the Royal Wedding on 29 July 1981 which was attended by our Patron, H.R.H. Prince Gyanendra and Princess Komal, who the day after the Royal Wedding were entertained on behalf of the Society at the Royal Overseas League. All these matters are covered in an interesting report by our Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Celia Brown, in this issue.

EDITOR

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WILDLIFE OF NEPAL: THE ROYAL CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

Based on a talk given to members of the Society at The Alpine Club by Mr. S. R. L. Whalley on 22nd January 1981. Illustrated with colour slides. The same talk was given earlier to the Royal Society for Asian Affairs and the following text is reproduced with permission from the Journal of the Royal Society.

For most people, Nepal is a small mountain kingdom dominated by that great barrier of snow-capped peaks forming the roof of the world - the Himalayas. However, the country boasts other natural wonders amongst which, along the southern border with India, is a narrow strip of country known as the Terai, where the outermost foothills of the Himalayas divide to form broad valleys, called duns. These valleys contain many meandering streams, draining a flat landscape of marshes and dense, tall grassland. Of all the duns, the most magnificent is the Chitwan valley which is surrounded by hills on almost all sides and drained by the fast, clear waters of the Narayani and its various tributaries, the most significant of which, the Rapti, bisects the valley. Chitwan typifies the flora and fauna of the Terai, which is rich in species.

Until the 1950's, the human population in the valley was sparse, only isolated villages of a tribe known as Tharus. This tribe must have acquired some resistance to the particularly vicious strain of malaria that kept people out of the valley, which therefore contained over a thousand square miles of virgin forest and grassland; one of the finest wildlife sanctuaries in the whole of Asia. The only incursions into the valley were hunting parties of the ruling Rana family and their guests. Great hunts were organised but at infrequent intervals which, whilst they individually destroyed huge numbers of game animals, overall did not affect the wild population of the valley.

During the 1950's, the desperate plight of the hill people in Nepal forced many farmers to descend to the lowlands in search of new land to cultivate. At the same time a major campaign to eradicate malaria created the opportunity for thousands of people to settle in the Chitwan valley. Soon after the original eradication of malaria, all the northern part of the valley was cleared and more than two thirds of the forest and grassland was lost. Luckily the area south of the Rapti remained little touched and a Rhinoceros Sanctuary was established there in time to save the last two hundred rhinos and a reasonable number of tiger and other wildlife. However, poaching of the Great One-horned rhino continued and in 1971 His late Majesty King Mahendra set up the Royal Chitwan National Park, to protect this irreplaceable ecosystem which, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Project of FAO, the World Wildlife Fund and other bodies, has provided full environmental protection.

The vegetation of the Park consists of three types: the moist deciduous Sal forest with, on some of the highest ridges, stands of Chir Pine; the second zone is the riverine forest of which the dominant species is the silk cotton tree (*Bombax ceiba*). The third and most characteristic zone is the tall grassland comprising several species of *Saccharum* and other coarse grasses such as *Phragmites*.

The Sal forest is particularly beautiful, with tall trees of many different species, many of them excellent hardwoods, but here in Chitwan they are protected from logging, the only regular incursion into the Park is for annual grass-cutting, which is permitted by the Park authorities as the grass in any case has to be burnt to provide new, lush growth in the spring. Disturbance from the grasscutters is kept to a minimum by limiting the operation to a set period.

For tourists, there are lodges within or close to the Park. The most famous is Tiger Tops set in the western end of the Park, close to one of the tributaries of the Rapti and on the edge of the Sal forest. The lodge is surrounded by magnificent trees and is unfenced. From it stretch away the tall grasslands through which the rivers meander leaving many ox-bow lakes and providing a moist habitat, ideal for many species of wildlife. The easiest way of seeing animals in this country is from elephant back, which provides accessibility to areas where even four-wheeled drive vehicles cannot reach and sufficient height to be able to see over the grass. Travelling on foot through these grasslands where one can walk right into an unseen rhinoceros would be risky in the extreme.

The Great One-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is the most famous animal in the Park and this is one of only two areas where large numbers can still be found. It is the largest of the three Asiatic species of Rhinoceros and there are probably around a thousand left in the Indian sub-continent, of which approximately three hundred remain in Chitwan. This Rhino is a little larger than the Black Rhino in Africa and much more prehistoric in appearance, with its thick fold of skin giving the impression of armour-plating. As in all Rhinos, the horn is formed from a closely matted mass of horny fibres issuing from the skin. All parts of the Rhino, even the urine, are used for medicinal purposes in Asia; the most famous use being the mistaken belief that its horn has aphrodisiac properties.

However, constant protection by well-trained armed guards in Chitwan, has led to the present increase in numbers. The Great One-horned Rhino can be extremely aggressive and although occasional records of Rhinos attacking elephants are heard of, normally well-trained elephants turn to face the Rhino and the charge is terminated a few feet short from being pushed home. Rhinos will however attack people on foot when surprised and despite the prominent single horn, it is the lower incisors which are used both in fights with other Rhinos and in attacks when it considers itself threatened. The Great One-horned Rhino is a magnificent animal but its situation, despite the increase in numbers, is still very precarious and a project is now being finalized to translocate animals from areas such as Chitwan, and Kaziranga in India, where numbers have increased to the maximum capacity the areas will support, to other areas where, originally, Rhinos were found in abundance and where suitable habitat and protection can be provided. ITNC is planning to take an active role in supporting the project.

The Park has a wide range of other Ungulates, of which the most spectacular is the Gaur (*Bos gaurus*), the largest of all the world's wild cattle. The bulls are very black, whilst the cows are more of a dark chestnut brown. A wary animal, it is well capable of protecting itself, though even large bulls may occasionally be taken by Tigers. The Bull stands well over six foot at the shoulder, with massive horns and surprisingly slender legs, which with its white "stockings" appear scarcely capable of supporting the vast bulk. The Gaur is an animal of the densely forested hills where it lives in small herds which are extremely shy and very rarely seen. During the pre-monsoon months, after the grass burning, which takes place each year, the Gaur may visit the lowlands to feed on the sweet, new grasses. There are four types of deer in Chitwan, of which the largest is the Sambar (*Cervus unicolor*). It is a large deer, similar in appearance to the European Red Deer, but having antlers with only three tines, which are much heavier in the beam than any found on deer in this country. The Sambar may weigh up to six or seven hundred pounds and live mainly in the forested hills, though they frequently visit the riverine forest to feed when the new grasses are coming through. They have acute senses of scent and hearing, though their sight is less good and they are thought to be the optimum size prey for the Tiger. The Chital (*Axix axis*), the dainty Spotted Deer, perhaps the most beautiful of all deer, is much the same size as our Fallow Deer, though it is more lightly built and the rusty brown coat is even more heavily marked with white spots. The stags, for their size, have possibly the longest antlers of any deer, again with only three tines. They are found mainly in the riverine forest and grasslands. In Chitwan they are extremely prolific and are the most numerous prey species in the Park. Closely related to the Spotted Deer is the Hog Deer (*Axis porcinus*), though it is smaller and confined to the grasslands. There are no markings on the coat and its short rounded head and peculiar gait, running with its head held very low, gives the excuse for its name. Although usually encountered singly or in groups of two or three, sometimes, on the open river banks, large groups of twenty or thirty can be seen feeding on the plants growing between the pebbles.

The fourth type of deer is the Muntjac or Barking Deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*).

This is a bright red deer always seen singly or in pairs, mostly in the densely forested hills. It is very secretive but its alarm call is frequently heard and is a sharp bark, completely unlike the whistling alarm call of the Chital. Muntjac bucks have small antlers consisting of a short brow tine and an unbranched beam, while the does have tufts of bristly hair instead of horns. Muntjac bucks are also peculiar in having large canine teeth, which are used defensively.

Of the other Ungulates, the Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*) is present in large numbers and forms a major prey species of both Tiger and Leopard. The boars can be over three feet at the shoulder and weigh several hundred pounds and with their sharp tusks and aggressive nature, they are a formidable opponent for the big cats. Wild Boar are frequently seen from elephant-back, running through the grass in small herds called 'sounders'.

The Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is found in the wild in the Park but only in one small area which is almost inaccessible. However, recently a baby elephant was born to one of the Tiger Tops females and, as far as is known, this baby which was fathered by a captive male, is the first born to captive parents in Nepal. Normally, the elephant drivers and mahouts have great reluctance to let the captive elephants mate, although they are, during the monsoon, allowed to wander fairly freely throughout the area of the Park close to their base.

Monkeys are common in the Park and two species occur, the Grey Langur (*Presbytes entellus*) - these are the Bandalog from Rudyard Kipling's 'Mowgli' stories - and the Rhesus Macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) which has been the species most commonly used in laboratory work. Here, however, it is still numerous, though its habit, when frightened, of taking to the ground and running before climbing another tree, seems strange in a species one would think much safer remaining in the trees.

The Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*) is the dominant predator and, although mostly nocturnal, is occasionally glimpsed during the day, when disturbed from lying-up. During the summer, they can sometimes be seen lying in the rivers to cool off in the heat of the day. The Tiger, perhaps because of its postulated Northern origin, is always found close to the water but the ecology of Chitwan suits them admirably and there are currently twenty-five to thirty Tigers in the Park. The Tiger has a much more complex social organization than used to be thought and there is much to learn about its habits. Dr. Charles McDougal has written an excellent book* which is the result of many years study in Chitwan and his work in the area is continuing in association with the Tiger Ecology Project started by the Smithsonian Institution. Pug marks from the Tiger can be found in soft ground all over the Park and are used by Chuck McDougal, as each is diagnostic of a particular animal, to study movements. To a first time observer the size of these prints is really most impressive. Other Tiger signs frequently encountered are scratch marks on trees and scent marks which, even to the human nose, are quite obvious.

* THE FACE OF THE TIGER. Rivington Books/Andre Deutsch, 1979

The Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) has been able to hold its own, despite the presence of the larger predator, because of its greater adaptability. This adaptability has also enabled it to survive in many areas of the world where population increase has destroyed much of the natural wildlife. It is, however, hunted for its spotted coat everywhere it occurs, even where protected, and like all big cats is threatened by Man's fear and greed. It will kill and eat anything it can overpower - cattle, deer, monkeys, small beasts of prey, large rodents, birds and reptiles. In Sri Lanka, where the Tiger is absent, the Leopard hunts more frequently in daylight, though in Chitwan it is mostly seen at night at baiting sites. It is found in Chitwan throughout the Park, from the highest hills, which approach two thousand feet, to the grasslands of the riverine valley.

The Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*) is a shaggy, black bear with a long muzzle and short hind legs which give it a shambling, ungainly gait, but this is very deceptive as the bear can be aggressive and very quick to charge. Although not large by bear standards, they can weigh up to three or four hundred pounds and with their enormous claws are only approached warily as one blow from a forepaw can remove half a man's face.

Other mammals found in the Park include Jackals, Indian Civet, Jungle Cat, Leopard Cat, Fishing Cat, Yellow-throated Martin, Mongoose, Common Otter, Large Flying Squirrel and Indian Porcupine. Occasional packs of Wild Dog (or Dhole) are sometimes seen or heard.

Of the birds, the common Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) is probably the most spectacular but there are over three hundred resident or migratory species which occur and they are probably the most conspicuous and one of the most attractive features of the Park. For someone visiting the Indian sub-continent for the first time, the large numbers of parakeets flying in noisy parties high over the trees or clustering in the branches to feed on fruits and seeds is one of the most spectacular sights. The parties of Rose-breasted Parakeet (*Psittacula alexandri*) and other common species - including the Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) and Blossom-headed or Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) - flying in to roost are sights evocative of the area. Large Raptors are very common, with many species of Eagles and Hawks, sometimes perched in trees or glimpsed sailing high over the hills. One of the most beautiful is the Pied Harrier (*Circus melanoleucus*) looking almost like a giant butterfly in slow flight over the grasslands. Scavenging birds such as Kites and Vultures are also numerous and both White-backed Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*) and Indian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*) can be found wherever there has been a kill, which they seem able to find even in the forest. Many of the small birds are also spectacularly beautiful, with male Paradise Flycatchers (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) floating through the trees like animated white streamers and small sun-birds such as the Scarlet-breasted (*Aethopyga siparaja*) like living jewels on the flowers of the forest edge.

There are two species of Crocodile, the largest, the Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*), a purely fish-eating species, as indicated by the long thin snout, grows up to twenty feet. Originally widely distributed throughout India, Burma, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan its numbers are down to only about two hundred in the wild of which about fifty remain in Nepal, most of them in Chitwan. It is quite different in appearance from the Marsh Mugger (*Crocodylus palustris*) which is a typical crocodilian feeding on mammals, birds and any other food it can capture. The Mugger is mainly found in slow-flowing or still water and is reasonably common in the ox-bow lakes of the marshy lowlands. The Gharial is now so rare that a special project has been established to try and save it. It is a strange primitive species of crocodile with no close relatives and much of its life cycle still remains to be studied. Some of the adult males have a peculiar swelling called a Ghar on the end of the snout but since this is not present in otherwise apparently adult males, its function is still open to doubt. The special project begun, with support from the Frankfurt Zoological Society, by the Wildlife Department of His Majesty's Government of Nepal has brought in eggs from the wild, where constant interference and poaching seems to have reduced the chances of young Gharial reaching maturity to almost zero. They are hatched artificially in incubators at a centre in the Park and reared to a length of between one and two metres. Now the project urgently needs funds to enable monitored releases of the young crocodiles back into the wild combined with study of the wild population. This is another project that the International Trust for Nature Conservation is anxious to support as it is clearly both practical and urgently needed.

For many people, Chitwan is the best run of all National Parks in Asia - here rare species thrive and with its recent extension, the Park will continue to provide at least a glimpse of what the wildlife in the Indian sub-continent once was and, save for a few isolated pockets, can never be again. That we have it at all is a miracle for which we must be grateful; for, were we to lose the Tiger or the Rhino, we could not replace them and we would diminish ourselves. If we were to lose the forests completely - then our own future would be in jeopardy for, as Chief Seathl - a Red Indian Chief - said in a letter to the President of the United States in 1855: "All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth..." It is up to all of us to recognize this and to do what we can to help safeguard the world we share with so many other creatures.
