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Wild Zoo Visitors

by Sally Walker

Camping in Sakkarbaug Zoo can be as exciting as camping in the wild.

It was still dark at 5:00 a.m. when I heard the excited voices of Zoo Director P.P. Raval and his watchman under the window of the zoo's guesthouse where I was sleeping. Just as I opened the window, Raval knocked at my door: "Come on," he said, "the lions are here!"

For a moment I was totally befuddled, as 5:00 a.m. is not my best time. "Of course the lions are here," I thought, "this is the Sakkarbaug Zoo, after all!" There are 31 Asiatic lions in this zoo. But Raval wasn't speaking of zoo lions. He meant wild lions which had left the group at Gir Forest and roam the Girnar Hill, just between the Gir Sanctuary and Junagadh.

The Gir Sanctuary and National Park has reached its carrying capacity, actually, and two male lions have sought new territory. It is not the first time wild lions have come to Gir, but it is still quite exciting and interesting, particularly if you are sleeping inside of the zoo.

When the lions jumped the wall into the zoo, the watchmen saw them nosing around the porcupine cage and phoned Raval, who rushed over. By the time he arrived on the scene, they had gone back to the garden, however. We could see their pugmarks in the soft sand of the botanical garden roads, but the lions were nowhere in view. We searched on the other side of the zoo, but had no luck and returned to the zoo.

While we were talking about the lions in the zoo compound, the watchmen shouted that they heard roaring again in the gardens. We rushed there, but the garden watchmen had driven them off, back to the Girnar Hill — and we were disappointed again.

In the morning, quite clear pugmarks were visible. The lions had jumped the wall, padded all around the porcupine cage and jumped back out. The story was clearly written in the sand.

(continued on page 3)



Photo courtesy of Sally Walker.

Raval and head keeper examine pug marks of the lions that jumped into the zoo to visit.

The Indian Rhino



Indian rhino mother and newborn calf in Kaziranga Sanctuary, India.

Photo courtesy of Bill Johnston.

by Bill Johnston

Of the five known species of rhinoceros, the Indian (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), is surely the most impressive. The thick folds of skin with their rounded excrescences giving it an armor-plated look, are reminiscent of a prehistoric beast from a bygone era.

An interesting story is related in India, of how the Indian rhino became armor-plated. The Lord Krishna decided to use the rhinos as battle animals. Several were caught and dressed in armor. But when they were presented to the Lord Krishna, they acted so stupid he sent them all back to the jungle — and so they have had armor ever since.

The Indian rhino existed 5000 years ago during the Mohenja-Dara era, along the plains of the Indus River. The Emperor Timor hunted rhinos in Kashmir in 1398. The same year, Tamarlane conquered Delhi, and discovered that King Mohammed Nassir kept a stable of

12 rhinos. They were used for ploughing the fields. In 1519, the Emperor Babur hunted Indian rhinos near Khyber Pass, and is reputed to have killed more than 1500 animals in his time. Babur's son, Humayan, shot rhinos from horseback.

Year after year, the slaughter continued. By 1850, there were none left in Bihar. The last was slain in Uttar Pradesh in 1878. From 1871 until 1907, the Maharajah of Cooch Behar shot 207 Indian rhinos, in Assam and West Bengal. During one winter season, the Rana family, prime ministers of Nepal, invited British VIPs for sport hunting in the Chittawan Valley in Nepal. They managed to kill 38 rhinos, as well as 120 tigers.

Then in 1973, 166 square miles were set aside in Nepal as the Royal Chittawan National Park. Today, it is a sanctuary for about 60 Indian rhinos.

In India, a game sanctuary was established at Jaladapara in Bengal,

where a number of Indian rhinos remain. Despite protection there, 38 rhinos have been killed at Jaladapara since it began.

The largest viable population of Indian rhinos today is in the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary. Approximately 400 Indian rhinos live there. In Assam too, several rhinos still exist in four smaller wildlife sanctuaries — at Orang, Manas, Laokhowa and Sonairupa.

The Assam Rhino Bill became law in 1954, prohibiting the killing, injury or capture of any Indian rhinoceros. Still some poaching exists. Why? The primary reason is the demand for their horn. The single horn of the Indian rhino is composed of keratin fibers in a hard compact mass, and is not connected to the skull, but rests in the flesh and can be knocked out easily. Within a year, a new horn begins to grow.

The Asian races have great belief in its use as an aphrodisiac, but chemical tests have proven it has no value.

However, it is not only the horn that is used. The urine is used as a cure for skin ailments. A bone sliver pressed into one's arm will give one the strength of the rhino. Dung is used for reducing swelling, and a sure cure for rheumatism and arthritis is to boil the umbilical stump into a soup.

The first Indian rhino to reach Europe was a male in 1515. King Muzaffar of Cambay presented this rhino to King Emmanuel of Portugal. The animal was shipped by Alburquerque, the Governor General of India, from Goa to Portugal. On his neck was a green velvet collar, studded with gold roses and carnations, attached to a gilt iron chain.

The rhino arrived in Lisbon on May 20, 1515. The king arranged for a fight to be held between the rhino and an elephant. However, the elephant fled from the arena when it saw the rhino.

Then, in December 1515, the king shipped the rhino to Rome as a gift to Pope Leo X. The ship carrying the rhino reached Marseille, France, on January 5, 1516, where Francis I, the King of France, inspected the animal. In the Gulf of Genoa, the ship ran into a violent storm and sank — rhino and all. The poor beast eventually drifted ashore, and was picked up. It was stuffed and mounted and then sent on to Rome for the Pope to wonder at.

A male Indian rhino was caught in India in 1829, and acquired by a rajah in Calcutta. In January 1830, this animal was shipped to America. It arrived in Boston, Massachusetts on May 9, 1830 — the first on American soil. It was shown at the Washington Gardens in Boston during June and July, then at 350 Broadway in New York City. It appeared in September and October in Philadelphia, and in Washington, D.C. in December. He then became the property of June, Titus and Angevine, menagerie owners from New Salem, New York. He toured with their American National Caravan in 1831, their Grand National Menagerie in 1832-33, and was shown at a permanent exhibition in New York City the winter of 1834-35. In January 1835, an association

of menagerie owners was formed called the Zoological Institute. In the spring of 1835, this rhino was sent out with a unit of the institute, The Association's Celebrated and Extensive Menagerie and Aviary. This male died early on the tour.

Probably the most amazing Indian rhino to appear in America was a male called Old Put. After traveling with several menageries and injuring some of his keepers — and killing one, he was retired to a farm in Putnam County, New York, where he acquired his name, Old Put.

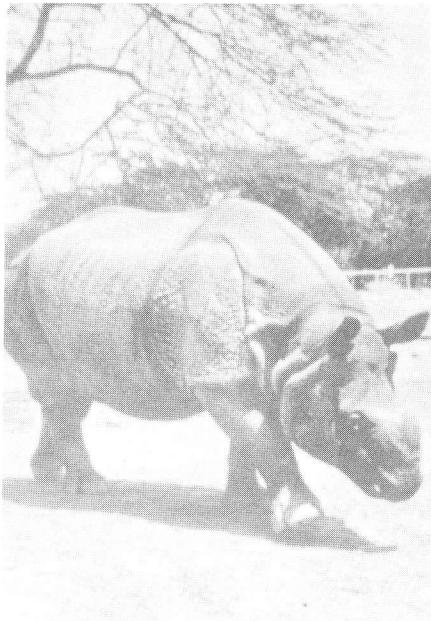


Photo courtesy of Bill Johnston.

Indian rhino at Delhi Zoo, India.

In 1855 he was sold to Dan Rice, a noted clown and circus proprietor, for \$700.00. Rice took him to his farm in Girard, Pennsylvania. Here he was trained by Frank Rosston, and Rice presented him in his circus. In the act, he would ascend a three step platform, and upon reaching the top, let out a bellow. In the meantime, Rice would light a paper house and yell "fire!". Old Put would descend the steps, go to a stand holding a bell, and nudge it with his horn. This alarm brought in the clown fire department in a pig-drawn cart. With a lot of blundering, they would put out the fire.

Old Put would not always be cooperative, and sometimes threw a tantrum in the ring. He would immediately be taken outside, and held until he calmed down — then brought back in to perform. On August 18, 1861, while traveling on the Mississippi River between Prairie du Chien and LaCrosse, Wisconsin, the barge Old Put was on was struck by a steamboat. Old Put's cage was knocked into the river, and unable to escape, Old Put was drowned.

At the present time, there are about 70 Indian rhinos in captivity. There are nine zoos in the United States holding Indian rhinos, and five have produced calves. The San Diego Wild Animal Park is the leading breeding institution.

Approximately 700 exist in the wild state, of which half are in the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary in India.

Without protection, the Indian rhino would have long ago disappeared. They are short-sighted and hard of hearing, — and what is worse, they are slow-witted and foolhardy, standing their ground at times when flight would be wiser.

They are, on the whole, very harmless animals. In the Kaziranga Sanctuary, an old male Indian rhino called Borra Goonda, spent the last 15 years of his life on the south fringe of the sanctuary. He was battle-scarred, but he was a placid beast, allowing visitors to come near him and to take photos. He died in 1953, only to have his place taken over by another old male named Kankatta, or "Torn Ear."

As with most endangered species, the most dangerous threat to their future is man. Certainly it is an enigma why anyone would want to destroy these harmless animals. The Indian rhinos do no damage where they live, as they are not crop raiders. They will charge only in defense or if surprised suddenly.

May conservation forces at our command succeed in protecting for all time this magnificent descendant from the distant past. ☩

Bill Johnston has had more than 40 years experience keeping and training wild animals of all kinds with circuses, zoos and safari parks.