

WILD MAMMALS IN MUGHAL SOURCES

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India is identified as one of the 16 mega-biodiversity zones of the world today. Its natural resources were always very rich as it is located in the tropical climatic zone and used to receive good amount of rainfall annually². Therefore, the diverse climate and landscape of India, makes it an ideal habitat for the wild animals also. The river systems and the dense forest of India were also conducive for their survival and further growth³.

Although scattered, but there are references about the natural resources in several medieval texts, which enable us to reconstruct the history of flora and fauna of the time. Generally wild animals are mentioned, in these texts particularly in case of hunting expeditions.

However there are two sources from where we get a large quantum of information on the topic under study; the *Baburnama* and the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*. Both Babur and Jahangir appear to be personally interested in the fauna and flora, and their memoirs are replete with information regarding them. Some of the information included in their respective memoirs are in the form of character studies. That appears to be the reason why one of the modern scholars, M.S. Randhawa was constrained to remark about Babur: “considering the age in which Babur lived, he can rightly claim to be the first natural history scientist of India. His genes for love of plants and animals were inherited by his grandson Jahangir, who was keen observer.”⁴

This paper is mainly concerns with wild animals, particularly mammals.⁵

THE WILD BUFFALO (*BOS BUBALUS*): It was found in Mughal times in *suba* of Awadh (Central and Northeast Uttar Pradesh), Tirhut (Bihar), and near Burdawan and in the Sundarbans.⁶

Babur in his memoir gives the description of the wild-buffalo. According to him “It is much larger than the (domestic) buffalo and its horns do not turn back in the same way. It is a mighty destructive and ferocious animal.”⁷ In other words wild-buffalo is by far the most savage and the boldest of Indian Bovidae as described by modern scholars as well.⁸ The court artist Sarwan’s, representation of a wild Indian buffalo in the *Baburnama* (C.1590-1600) may be taken as his best work preserved in British Museum.⁹ [See, Figure I].

In Akbar’s time, according to Abu’l Fazl, wild-buffaloes were numerous in Oudh. When the plains were inundated, he notice that,

“The animals take to high ground where people find sport in hunting – them. Some of the animals remain all day in the water and only at night approach the dry ground and breathe in freedom.”¹⁰

Jahangir writes that in the 11th regnal year, “I killed myself with my gun or otherwise, 64 wild-buffaloes.”¹¹

THE WILD ASS (*EQUUS ONAGER INDICUS*): The wild ass (*Gor-Khar*) lives in jungle-country; and this kind of landscape is found, between Dipalpur and Sarsati (modern Sirsa). That land is mostly waterless: for many *Kurohs* wilderness extends in every direction. If they dig into the ground to depth of 100 *gaz* (yards), they still may not find water It is the habit of the wild ass to live in a waterless tract.¹²

Babur in his memoir mentions that the wild asses were always plentiful and always fat. He records that “During the hunt I galloped after a wild ass; on getting near, shot an arrow, shot another but it did not bring it down; it was only running more slowly for the two wounds. Spurring forward and getting into the position quite close to it, I chopped at the nape of its neck behind the ears, and cut through the wind-pipe: it stopped, turned over and died. My sword cut well!”¹³. A portrait study of this animal, painted by Manohar, has been included in the manuscript of *Baburnama* preserved in British Museum.¹⁴ [See, Figure 2].

Abu'l Fazl informs us that the wild asses were hunted in the *Sarkar* of Tattah (Sind).¹⁵ They also appear on the lists of game shot by Jahangir in the course of *qamargah* hunt at *Girjhak* (in the neighbourhood of Kalpi) is “ten wild asses”¹⁶ and in the 11th regnal year “32 wild asses”.¹⁷ These were weighed by the emperor’s orders, the largest and strongest of the wild-asses weighed 9 mounds and 16 seers. (2 quintal 34 kg).¹⁸

Their habitat was in the desert of the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat¹⁹ and parts of the desert zone of the North West India and Baluchistan.

THE RHINOCEROS (*DICEROS SIMUS*):²⁰ The rhinoceros was encountered by Ibn Battuta in the 1330 on crossing the Indus near Multan and near Bahrach in east Uttar Pradesh. Two hundred years later Babur described the animal as abundant in the territory of Peshawar, Hasht-ghar (north of Kabul River) and the Salt Range, and on the banks of the Saru (the old course of the Sarju running past Bahrach).²¹

In 1519, Babur noticed rhinoceros in Kabul and mention that “After starting off the camp for the river, I went to hunt rhinoceros on the Sawati side which place people call also *karg-khana* (rhino-home).²²

In the manuscript of *Baburnama*, there is a painting by Sabu Das, in which Babur is shown hunting rhinoceros near Baigram (Peshawar) dated 10, December 1526.²³ (See, Figure 3). When Babur writes about the fauna of Hindustan, he again gives us information regarding rhinoceros. He wrote "This [rhinoceros] also is a large animal, equal in bulk to perhaps three buffaloes."²⁴

Babur in his memoir also mentions the physical features of the rhinoceros. According to him "It has a single horn on its nose, more than nine inches (*qarish*) long; one of two *qarish* is not seen. Out of one large horn were made a drinking- vessel and a dice-box, leaving over 3 or 4 hands. The rhinoceros hide is very thick; an arrow shot from a stiff bow, drawn with full strength right up to the arm-pit, if it pierce at all, might penetrate 4 inches (*ailik*, hands). From the side (*qash*) of its fore and hind legs, hang which from a distance look like housings thrown over it. It resembles the horse more than it does any other animal."²⁵

Regarding the nature of rhinoceros Babur mention that it is more ferocious than the elephant and cannot be made obedient and submissive.²⁶ He further mentions that the Peshawar, Hashnagar jungles and the jungle of Bhira have been the habitat of rhinoceros.²⁷

Abul Fazl in the *Ain-i-Akbari* notes its presence in *Sarkar Sambhal* (northern Rohilkhand). By the early decades of the seventeenth century the rhinoceros had disappeared from northwest Panjab, since Jahangir, despite his extensive hunts there, fails to mention it; and today it is extinct in all the areas within Uttar Pradesh, where it was present till late in the sixteenth century.²⁸

THE NILGAI (*BOSELAPHUS TRAGOCAMELUS*): The Nilgai is a common wild animal which is notice by Babur who explained that "The nilgai may stand as high as a horse but is somewhat lighter in build. The male is bluish-gray, hence, seemingly, people call it nilgai. It has two rather small horns. On its throat is a tuft of hair, probably nine inches long; (in this) it resembles the yak. Its hoof is cleft (*airi*) like the hoof of cattle. The doe is of the colour of the *bughu-maral*; she, for her part, has no horns and is plumper than male."²⁹ A painting of the nilgai by Mansur dated c.1620, preserved in Metropolitan Museum Art, New York.³⁰ [See, Figure 4].

The Mughal emperors appear to have been extremely fond of hunting the nilgai. We find repeated references in the memoir of Jahangir. In March, 1609 when Jahangir was in Agra, He gave an order to the clerks of the hunting department to write out (a list of) all the

animals that had been killed from the time of my leaving until I re-entered the city. At this time 70 male and female nilgai had been killed.³¹

THE YAK (POEPHAGUS GRUNNIENS):³² Jahangir in his memoir also record that “On Friday, the 15th of the Divine month of Farwardin, two *Kutas* oxen (Yak), out of the offerings of the *zamindar* of Tibet, were brought before me. In appearance they closely resemble the buffalo. All the limbs are covered with wool which properly belongs to animals in a cold country.”³³

It is found within Indian limits of northern Ladakh, especially in Cheng Chenmo.³⁴

THE MARKHOR (CAPRA FALCONERI):³⁵ No doubt that the animal referred to as “Mountain Goat” in Jahangir’s memoir is no other than this. The emperor mentions that as compared with the Rang (ibex) whose horns are bent backward, the horns of this animal were straight and convoluted. The clue alone would be sufficient to its identity.³⁶

While commenting on this animal Jahangir mentions “I found the flesh of the mountain goat more delicious than that of all wild animals, although its skin is exceedingly ill-odoured, so much so that even when tanned the scent is not destroyed.”³⁷ At another occasion he says, “In Ahmadabad, I had two male *markhur* goats. As I had no female in my establishment to pair with them, it occurred to me that I could pair them with Barbary goats, which they bring from Arabia.”³⁸

It is found in Bokhara, Afghanistan, the western Himalayas and the Hindu-Kush.

THE WILD GOAT (CAPRA HIRCUS):³⁹ Regarding wild goat Jahangir has mentioned in his memoir that “The same Afghans brought a hunted goat the like of which I had never heard of or imagined. I ordered the painters to draw a likeness of this animal. It weighed four Hindustani mounds (1.44 quintal). The horns measured one and a half yards by the yard-stick.”⁴⁰

WILD BOAR (SUS CRISTATUS):⁴¹ Abu’l Fazl in his *Ain* mentions that the wild Boar was hunted in the *Sarkar* of Tattah (Sind).⁴²

In the account of 1615 Jahangir mention that “when I was coming back from Pushkar and returning to Ajmer, on the way forty two wild pigs were taken.”⁴³ He also mentions that two pigs were killed in a

qamargah hunt which took place at Rawalpindi.⁴⁴ A portrait study of boar, painted by Fazl, has been included in the manuscript of *Anwar-i Suhaili* preserved at the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, and the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.⁴⁵

RED DEER (CERVUS ELAPHUS):⁴⁶ Jahangir records that while “passing on from Rohtas, the hills of which contains these antelope, red deer of this description is not found anywhere in the whole of Hindustan, except *Girjhak* and *Nandanah*.⁴⁷”

Jahangir also mentions that about thirty four red deer were killed at Rawalpindi.⁴⁸

HOG DEER (HYELAPHUS PORCINUS): Babur in his memoir mentions about hog deer (*Kotah-paicha*) that “It may be the size of the white deer (*aq-kiyik*). It has short legs, hence its name, little legged. Its horns are like a *bughu*’s but smaller; like the *bughu* (red deer) it cast them every year. Being rather a poor runner, it does not leave jungle”⁴⁹

Abul Fazl also writes that the sport of hunting hog-deer was much pursued in the *sarkar* of *tattah* (Sind). This animal is still plentiful in the Tamarisk forest in the Indus and canal areas of that province and the *zamindar* display considerable fervor and ingenuity in hunting it.⁵⁰

Jahangir noted in his memoir that “The village of *Qasim-Khera* was halting place. On the road a white animal was killed, which resembled the *Kutah paya* (hog deer), it had four horns, two of which were opposite the extremities of its eyes, and two finger breaths in height and the two other horns finger breaths towards the nape of the neck.”⁵¹

TIGER (FELIS TIGRIS):⁵² The Mughal paintings sometimes depict a lion and even a lioness, but tigers appear more frequently. We may assume that in the Gangetic basin it was the tiger.⁵³

In 1616, when Jahangir was in Mandu, he mentions that “The huntsmen brought news that they had marked down a tiger within 3 kos. Although it was Sunday, and on these two days, viz. Sunday and Thursday, I do not shoot; it occurred to me that as it is a noxious animal it ought to be done away with. I proceeded towards him, and when I arrived at the place it was sitting under the shade of a tree. Seeing its mouth, which was half open, from the back of the elephant, I fired my gun. By chance it entered its mouth and found a place in its throat and brain, and its affair was finished with that one shot.”⁵⁴

In 1617, Jahangir was in Kuch (Bihar) his scouts reported that there was a tiger in the neighborhood which vexed wayfarers, and in the forest where it was they had seen a skull and some bones lying. After midday Jahangir went out to shoot it, and killed it with one discharge. Though, it was a larger tiger.⁵⁵

Abul Fazl informs us that a large number of men took part in elephant and tiger hunts.⁵⁶ He also mentions that tiger was seen in the *sarkar* of Tirhut.⁵⁷

Jahangir in his memoir mentions that “Not only the leopards do not pair together; tigers too have never been likewise heard to pair after being taken captive. Since in my time wild animals are rid of their feeling of estrangement the tigers are tamed to the extent that free of chains and shackles, they roam around among people in groups, hurt no one nor feel wild or frightened – it was just a freak that a tigress became pregnant and after three cubs. Else, it has never happened that a wild tigers paired with its male in captivity.”⁵⁸

GANGETIC DOLPHIN (*DELPHINUS DELPHIS*):⁵⁹ The animal referred to by Babur as *Khuk-e-abi* is doubtless of this species.⁶⁰

Babur referred that “this also is an all Hindustan rivers. It comes up suddenly out of the water, its head appear and disappear, it dives again and stays below, showing its tail. Its snout is as long as the *Siyah-Sar*’s and it has the same rows of small teeth. Its head and the rest of its body are fish like. When at play in the water, it looks like a water carrier’s bag (*mashak*). Water-hog (*Khuk-e-abi*), playing in *Saru*, leap right out of the water, like fish, they never leave it⁶¹”

THE MONKEY: Babur in his memoir provide us interesting information regarding monkeys, “Hindustani calls it *bander*. Of this too there are many kinds, one being what people take to those countries. The jugglers (*Luli*) teach them tricks. This kind is in the mountains of Nur-dara, in the skirt-hills of Safid-koh neighboring on Khaiber, and from there downwards all through Hindustan”.⁶² He further informs us about their physical feature, monkey’s hair is yellow, its face white and its tail not very long.⁶³

In 1612, Jahangir in the account of the seventh year, also provide us information about an unusual monkeys, an unusual Muqarrab Khan brought a monkey (from Goa) of a strange and wonderful form. Its hands, feet, ears and head are like those of a monkey, and its face like that of a fox. The colour of its eyes is like that of a hawk’s eye, but the eyes are larger than those of a hawk. From its head to the end of its tail it is an ordinary cubit in length. It is lower than a monkey and taller

than a fox. Its hair is like the wool of a sheep and its colour like that of ashes. From the robe of its ear to its chin it is red and of the colour of wine. Its tail is two or three finger breadths longer than half of a cubit, quite different from that of other monkeys. The tail of this animal hangs down like the tail of a cat. Sometimes it makes a sound like a young antelope. On the whole it is very strange animal".⁶⁴

In 1620, Jahangir saw monkey in the village of Bakkar.⁶⁵

One may thus finds that the account of Mughal period are a valuable source for writing the history of fauna in the 16th-17th centuries.

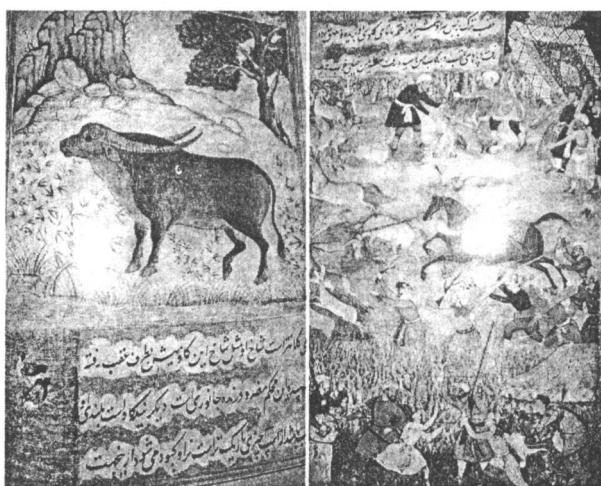


Fig.1. Buffalo by Sarwan

Fig.2. Wild Ass by Manohar



Fig.3. Rhinoceros by Sabu Das

Fig.4. Nilgai by Mansur

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. Irfan Habib, in his pioneering work, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, has explored the extent of forest in Mughal India as well as wild animals.
4. M.S. Randhawa, *Paintings of the Baburnama*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 16.
5. A warm blooded animal that has hair or fur, produces milk, and bears live young, OED sv.
6. Irfan Habib, *Man and Environment: The Ecological History of India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2010, p. 97, See *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, New Delhi, 1982, Sheet 8B, 11B and 12B.
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9. Hamid Suleiman, Miniature of Baburnama, plate, 57, Taskent, 1970
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43. Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, Vol. i, p. 304.
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48. *Ibid.*, I, p. 229. (translation)
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62. *Ibid*,p.492
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64. *Tuzuk-i- Jahangiri*, Vol. i, p.216
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