

Datta, Ann. 2004. Brian Hodgson and the mammals and other animals of Nepal. Pp. 154-171 in Waterhouse, David M. (ed). The Origins of Himalayan Studies: Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling 1820-1858. London and New York: Routledge

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Early mammal work in Nepal

Hodgson commenced his zoological work in Nepal in 1824 and his earliest published research described the gestation and birth of a rhinoceros (*rhinoceros unicornis*, Indian rhinoceros or greater one-horned rhinoceros) in the menagerie of the Rajah of Nepal. Hodgson had witnessed the pair copulating and eagerly awaited the birth which he carefully noted took place 17 to 18 month afterwards. It was at odds with the nine-month gestation that the great 18th century French zoologist George Buffon claimed and gave Hodgson his first insight into the perpetuation of zoological inaccuracies in classic zoological texts. For 19 month Hodgson studied and measured the infant rhinoceros. "The first dimensions taken of the animal were made at three days old, when it measured 2 feet in height, 3'4" and three quarters in length, and 4 feet and 7/4 of an inch in its greater circumference." Hodgson measured it again at one, 14 and 19 months old, when it was found to be "4'4" high, 7'4" and ½ long, and 9'5" in circumference." Hodgson measured it for the last time when it was eight years and one month old, and recorded its length was "9'3", his height at the shoulder 4'10", utmost girth of the body 10'5", length of the head to feet 4 inches, and of horn 5 inches."

The careful observations and meticulous notes were an indication of the exemplary methodical work that will flow from Hodgson's pen for 40 years. On rare occasions, from the 16th century, a live rhinoceros was taken to Europe where it was the subject of much interest because of its rarity, size and alleged ferocity, but Hodgson was probably the first person to record the birth and growth of a young animal. His findings coincided with the arrival of the first rhinoceros in London zoo in 1834.