

Oryx

The International Journal of Conservation

The original paper was published in the *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire* (1903-1925 and 1926-1950) or in *Oryx*, the journal of Fauna and Flora International (from 1951).

The website of the journal is (from 2008):

<http://www.oryxthejournal.org/>

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The Society was founded in 1903 as the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, and subsequently named the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society. Fauna & Flora International is conserving the planet's threatened species and ecosystems – with the people and communities who depend on them.

Oryx - The International Journal of Conservation, is now published quarterly by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Fauna & Flora International. It is a leading scientific journal of biodiversity conservation, conservation policy and sustainable use, with a particular interest in material that has the potential to improve conservation management and practice.

The website, <http://www.oryxthejournal.org/>, plays a vital role in the journal's capacity-building work. Amongst the site's many attributes is a compendium of sources of free software for researchers and details of how to access Oryx at reduced rates or for free in developing countries. The website also includes extracts from Oryx issues 10, 25 and 50 years ago, and a gallery of research photographs that provide a fascinating insight into the places, species and people described in the journal.

The [Rhino Resource Center](#) posted this PDF in June 2009. We are grateful for the permission.

The Mexican grizzly bear may not be extinct after all. In the September 1969 ORYX we reported Dr Carl Koford's 'reluctant conclusion' following an expedition that failed to find or hear of any, that the small remnant population found by A. Starker Leopold in the late 1950's had all been shot or poisoned. But in *Natural History* for January this year Dr Starker Leopold writes that last year a cattle rancher in the Sierra Madre, 100 miles west of the known site, had been protecting grizzlies round his ranch and reported 'several dozen' animals there. This is now to be investigated. If it proves true it is to be hoped that this time it will be possible to take whatever effective action is needed. When Dr Starker Leopold found the Sierra del Nido bears in the late 1950s, the Mexicans immediately gave them full protection, an intensive field study was started and it was hoped that the whole mountain range might be dedicated as a National Wild Life Refuge. But the grizzlies gradually disappeared. One old male made the mistake of killing an Angus bull, and the business-man ranch-owner declared all-out war on bears, distributing poison baits all over the range; by 1968 not a grizzly was to be seen. If the new report proves correct it may prove an easier area to protect; there is unlikely to be a third chance.

**The Mexican
Grizzly
May Survive**

The Indian rhino in Nepal—one of the two major concentrations of the species (the other is in Kaziranga in Assam)—is in a serious state of decline, according to Graeme Caughley in a report to FAO. He puts numbers at between 81 and 108, compared with 300 in 1959 (Gee) and 800 in 1950 (Willan). Most serious is his conviction that this is due not to overhunting and poaching, but to a natural decline of the species as a result of the destruction of its habitat. Until 1950 the rhinos in the Rapti Valley were strictly protected by the ruling Ranas, and even their considerable hunting did not affect the numbers. But when their rule collapsed poaching became serious, and the simultaneous eradication of malaria, which had kept the population down, resulted in a population increase from about 36,000 to 100,000 by 1960. In 1962 King Mahendra took stern measures, and in 1964 he removed 22,000 villagers from the sanctuary; since then poaching has ceased to be a serious problem. But the habitat destruction has had a much more insidious effect. Between 1953 and 1968 Caughley estimates that rhino habitat has decreased by 77 per cent and much of the rest has suffered in quality; in the same period rhinos have decreased by 88 per cent. One 36-square-mile area of elephant grass—essential to the rhinos for shelter and shade—has completely disappeared since 1953. Even the area south of the Rapti river, which is rigidly protected against agricultural encroachment, has deteriorated. The 15-foot-high elephant grass is reduced to a 'one-foot-high turf' by annual fires and the intense grazing of cattle and buffalo which are driven across the river each day. In the critical months before the monsoon 2000–3000 head a day are grazing in the rhino sanctuary; the elephant grass is thinned out

**Nepal's
Rhinos are
Disappearing**

to scattered clumps so that the swamp level is lowered, and the swamp (essential to rhinos for wallows) dries out. It is clearly urgent that if the rhino decline is to be stopped the grazing of domestic animals in the sanctuary must also be stopped; there is no other way of ensuring that the rhinos get their three basic requirements: food, shelter (elephant grass) and wallows. There is also the danger of the cattle transmitting disease. If something is not done quickly, says Caughley, the rhino will be extinct in Nepal by 1980.

The saltwater crocodile in Western Australia has been given all-the-year-round protection for a period of ten years. At the end of that time, if numbers have recovered sufficiently permits may be issued to allow some specimens to be taken to establish crocodile farms. *Crocodylus porosus* is a Red Book species, listed as rare, and because of its size at first breeding (8-9 feet) it is particularly vulnerable to poachers after the skin. The freshwater crocodile

**Crocodiles
in
Australia**

C. johnsoni has had total protection in Western Australia since 1962, but recently poaching has become serious and strong efforts are promised to enforce protection, with much larger fines for skin poachers. The government is investigating other measures including the possibility of a reserve. All these measures stem from a report to the government on the crocodiles by Dr Robert Bustard as a result of a survey in September-October last year; most of his recommendations have been approved. It is now hoped that Queensland and the Northern Territory will follow Western Australia's lead, but according to Mr D. L. Humphries, Queensland sees no need to protect either crocodile; in the Northern Territory the freshwater crocodile is protected and the saltwater one partly so. An article by Dr Bustard on these two crocodiles in Papua-New Guinea is on page 249.

In 1962 E. P. Gee made a survey of the only population of the Indian wild ass in the Little Rann of Kutch in north-west India, and estimated numbers at around 870 (ORYX, April 1963). This was a considerable drop from the thousands to be found after the last war, but an aerial count in December 1969 produced a figure of only 368. Although this is probably an underestimate, there seems little doubt that the decline continues. And no manage-

**Indian
Wild Ass
Decline**

ment whatever is being done to stop it; there is not even a sanctuary. In January this year Dr David Jenkins and Paul Joslin (who is presently working on the Indian lion in the Gir sanctuary) visited the Little Rann and concluded that the situation calls for serious investigation. The reasons for the asses' decline are not clear, but among the factors to be taken into account, they suggest, are: 1968 and 1969 were famine years; a new road and railway now bisect the Little Rann, probably reducing the asses' range and possibly dividing them into two groups; much of the previously unused land on the edges of the Rann has recently been