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ANIMALS, RESEARCH, RHINOS

Seeing, Shooting, Saving, Seeing...

Posted by [JONATHAN SAHA](#) on [JULY 25, 2017](#)

The preambles to colonial legislation designed to protect wildlife managed to be at once condemnatory and fatalistic. The blame was placed on the Burmese people for failing to recognize the value of wild animals. At the same time, the retreat of wildlife was presented as an inevitable consequence of modernity. So, as well as being pragmatic legislation aimed at mitigating the effects of human activity on the wildlife, the laws were intended to have an educational effect. They were to inculcate an understanding of the “commercial, scientific, aesthetic and sporting reasons” for preserving fauna.

These reasons were, in practice, often indistinguishable. In 1931 a colonial hunter called E.H. Peacock visited the Shwe-U-Daung sanctuary that had been established in the north of Burma and wrote about his fortnight’s trip in the [*Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*](#).



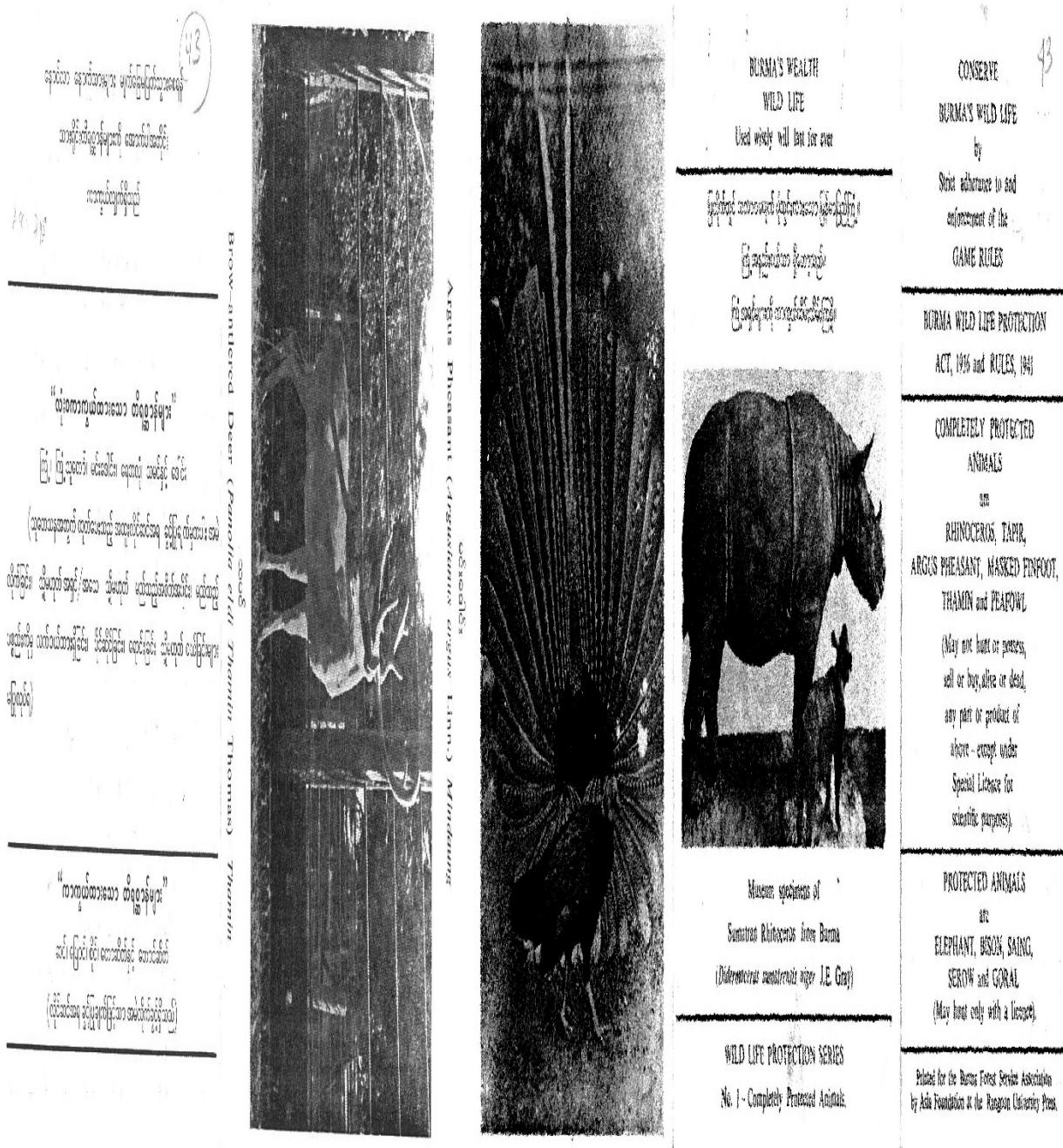
THE SHWE-U-DAUNG GAME SANCTUARY.

Giving a brief account of the extent and population of the sanctuary, Peacock goes on to emphasize the importance of making the animals visible. He suggested getting the animals accustomed to humans so that they do not hide from visitors and constructing a path around the sanctuary. While he was there he also shot a rhinoceros, a photograph of which he included in his short article. It was a two-horned rhino, *Rhinoceros sumatrensis*, and its skin and skeleton were preserved and sent to the British Museum to be mounted.



THE ASIATIC TWO-HORNED RHINOCEROS (*R. summatrensis*), SHOT IN THE SANCTUARY.

Around ten years later, the Government of Burma produced a leaflet in English and Burmese that informed readers of the colony's game laws. It drew attention to certain animals that were protected, including *thamin* (a brown-antlered deer), *argus* pheasant, and rhinoceros.



Photographs were shown on these leaflets, perhaps to help people spot endangered creatures or perhaps to make the leaflets more interesting. Prominently placed is a photograph of a rhinoceros, or rather, the remains of a rhinoceros.

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Museum specimens of
Sumatran Rhinoceros from Burma
(*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis niger* J.E. Gray)

National Archives of Myanmar, 1/15 (B), 715, 1929 File No. 5M-5: "Wild Animals".

This "museum specimen" was the same species as the rhino killed by Peacock a decade earlier. It's possible that it was even the same creature—although I have seen no documentation yet that confirms this.

Whether the same rhino or another, there is a lethal logic at work. Conservation laws established sanctuaries to protect animals, like rhinos. They made it so that rhinos could be seen and (with the correct license) shot, in order to finance the sanctuaries. A rhino was then shot in a sanctuary and its remains shipped overseas. An image of a rhino once shot in the colony was then sent back to the colony, where it was used to support conservation laws, which were based on sanctuaries where rhinos could be seen and shot. While this is a particular case, it does highlight the circular way in which killing was embedded in colonial conservationism.