

Jaldapara Sanctuary

By M. KRISHNAN

KAZIRANGA is the better known and much the larger sanctuary for the rhinoceros, but Jaldapara is no less valuable in its own way. A comparison between the two cannot be made by me, for I have no personal knowledge of Kaziranga, but from quite reliable reports of it I believe that the Jaldapara Sanctuary of West Bengal has thicker and less penetrable cover to offer the much-hunted rhino, and being smaller, is easier protected.

We have only the one species, the Great Indian Onehorned Rhinoceros, now left in our country, but this is the most magnificent of Asiatic rhinoceroses, and one of the largest anywhere. Superstitious belief in the miraculous rejuvenating and therapeutic powers of rhino horn (and even the flesh and blood) endows the dead rhinoceros with a fantastic ready-money value.

The old colloquial phrase, "the ready and the rhino" to signify spot-hunting, has contemporary meaning, and in spite of protective laws and official vigilance, poachers are still the greatest threat to the animal's survival.

Poacher's Way

True that the poacher's usual method is to wait at the dung-heaps to which the ponderous, punctilious beast returns each day to relieve itself, but thick, difficult cover does handicap him considerably, and a comparatively small sanctuary with dense tree and bush growth has definite advantages as a rhino preserve.

The 36-square-mile Jaldapara Sanctuary is in northern Bengal, in the Duars below the Bhutan hills—an area long known for its rhinos, as those who have read the shikar diaries of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar will know. It was at Jaldapara that the Swedish wildlife photographer, Bengt Berg, got his rhinoceros pictures with trip-cord and flashpowder, some 35 years ago.

The broad bed of the Torsa lies along the sanctuary, and even in the dry season holds thin streams—it is flooded during the rains. The forests along the banks consist of tall

grass and discontinuous belts of great trees—the trees I noticed were the red silk-cotton, siris (chiefly *Albizia procera*), *Dalbergia sissoo*, *Dillenia indica* and the giant-leaved *D. pentagyna*, *Sterculia villosa*, the palas, species of *Bauhinia*, and *Acacia catechu*—in places there was also the lofty sal, and there were some patches of bamboo and some cane brakes.

The tall grass is encouraged as cover and fodder, especially for the rhino, and the dominant kinds seem to be *Imperata cylindrica*, a species of *Saccharum*, and *Phragmites karka*. Of course there are many other kinds of fodder grasses, and there are patches of the "wild cardamom" (a species of *Alpinia*, I think), much relished by both the elephant and the rhinoceros.

I saw rhino, hog deer, and muntjac frequently. It is estimated that the rhino population of the sanctuary is around 75. This is about as much as the area can hold in comfort—it should be realised, of course, that the rhino (like many other large beasts) wanders over a wide tract and is not a strictly resident beast. Since rhinos are given to moving around, and since they are much given to raiding cultivation in and around the sanctuary, and furthermore, since the nature of the vegetation also counts, little is learnt from statistical ratios, but still it is interesting to note that Jaldapara offers its rhinos about half a square mile per head, as against the three-quarters of a square mile that Kaziranga does. Probably the more varied terrain and vegetation of Jaldapara is relevant in this comparison.

One would expect a riverain forest of this nature, with many deciduous trees, and a rich ground flora, to exhibit much seasonal variation, and a varied fauna, and in this no one will be disappointed. I was in Jaldapara in October, when the tall grass is at its rankest and the undershrub rampant: summer is the time for a visit to the sanctuary, and the bird life, especially, must be most attractive then; moreover, with the grass burnt, visibility would be remarkably improved, and one can see the animals clearly. But even in October, there was ample variety of birds (including some migratory water-birds) and beasts.

Among the larger birds I noticed were the adjutant and the black-necked storks, peafowl, red jungle-fowl, white-backed vultures, crested serpent-eagles, an osprey, fishing owls, and the Great Stone Plover (in parties at this time of the year); cormorants, lapwings, wagtails, sandpipers and other similar water-birds and waterside-birds were seen

along the streams and on the river-bed. The Bengal florican is said to be common here, but I did not see this unobtrusive fowl.

These are the main wild beasts of the sanctuary: the rhinoceros, hog deer, muntjac, sambar, gaur, wild elephants, pig, and the tiger. A few swamp deer (once known in the area) may also be there. The riverbed held the fresh tracks of the animals that had crossed it at night, and I noticed the tracks of at least three different tigers (one of these a tigress) and, in one spot, the footprints of many otters.

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Wild elephants are not features of the sanctuary, as they are at Periyar, or even Mudumalai at times, but herds sometimes come in and stay for awhile, and a lone bull or two is usually around. The riding elephants at the sanctuary were, as I noticed with pleasure, in excellent condition, and very well looked after.

I saw neither sambar nor gaur, but that was because I did not look for them where they were. The gaur naturally avoided the rank tall grass in which I spent most of my time, and sambar tracks were common on the river-bed.

Hog deer and muntjac were there in plenty—the former seemed almost as much at home in the tall

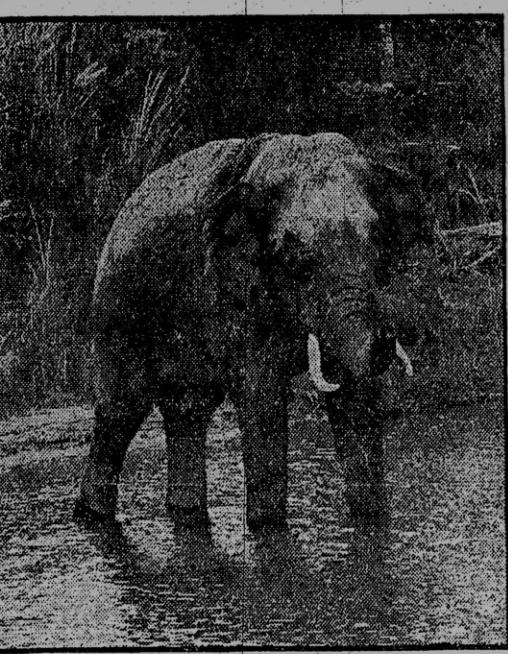
grass as the rhino. Almost every day I saw pig, but singly or in small parties, not in a regular sounder. The only monkey I saw was a small group of fury, diminutive rhesus.

Certain difficulties in the running of the sanctuary were pointed out to me. The forest being in small, discontinuous belts, is frequently interrupted by human settlements: there are many more settlements here than in forest areas elsewhere. This necessarily makes protection difficult, for the protection of remote, inaccessible habitat is not available to the wildlife. Moreover, it is hardly possible to prevent cattle from entering the forest areas.

Again, the many plantations (mainly tea) around the sanctuary make for a certain amount of poaching—labour cannot have too many stringent restrictions imposed on it these days, and the labourers indulge in a measure of small-game hunting and snaring which the plantation authorities cannot control entirely.

And the needs of the essential services also tend at times to circumscribe, if not to intrude upon, the sanctuary's needs. Finally, the Torsa, which has been known to change its course, can pose major problems.

I appreciate all these difficulties fully, and realise that many of them are such that no departmental remedy can be prescribed to eliminate them. But then, these are difficulties common to most sanctuaries in unspoilt.



A lone bull in musth

It's an ill wind that blows no good, and I think that some of these handicaps have a beneficial potential, too. The fact that there are a number of settled inhabitants in and around the sanctuary makes it extremely difficult for poachers to operate in the area in a large way.

Rhinoceros

The most valuable animal of the sanctuary, the rhinoceros, is gladly suffered by the people here—they do not harm it even when it raids their crops—and I cannot help the impression that the rhino is probably safer here than anywhere else.

I was greatly impressed by the fact that no minor forest produce collection is allowed within the sanctuary, nor even plantations. In most of our sanctuaries, the need for providing the wild animals with an entirely natural setting, and for ensuring freedom from human depredations and interference, is not appreciated, but here it is.

The visitor to the Jaldapara Sanctuary can have the genuine pleasure and deep satisfaction of seeing a typically Indian forest area, where the natural charm of a riverain forest has been preserved unspoilt.



Bull rhino in the Torsa

Kipling And India

By A. S. ABRAHAM

THE life and writings of Rudyard Kipling, who was born in Bombay 100 years ago, have two predominant traits. He was English in the most loyal traditions of Victorian imperialism, this is the first; the second is the deep and fruitful influence India had on him.

The two are, of course, interconnected. If Kipling was profoundly affected by India and came, in his own way, to love it, it was principally because India was to him, as it was to Queen Victoria, the most precious jewel in the imperial crown. Conversely, the more India and all that it represented became a part of his being, the more his loyalty to the British Empire was strengthened.

In his own time, Kipling was hailed as pre-eminently the poet of empire, a Cecil Rhodes of English letters, extolling the virtues of Anglo-Saxon civilisation, asserting

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