

THE FAUNA OF THE EAST INDIES

THE VERNAY-FAUNTHORPE COLLECTION.

IT is now ten years since Mr. Arthur Vernay and Colonel Faunthorpe conceived the idea of making a present to the American Museum of Natural History of a representative collection of the animals of the plains of India. Since then Mr. Vernay's original idea has been expanded so that it embraces the fauna of Burma and the Malay States and, in fact, the whole of the East Indies, so that the Vernay-Faunthorpe collection can now be termed a completely representative sub-Asiatic collection such as is to be found nowhere else in the world. Nearly every year since an expedition has gone out to the Indies, and the collection has been developed to embrace not only the commoner animals, but species of great rarity. The collection is already thoroughly representative of the mammals and includes also a good proportion of birds and a smaller number of reptiles.

The American Museum of Natural History, New York, to which Mr. Vernay has presented this wonderful collection, is probably the largest and best-equipped in the world, and the people of America as a whole take a great deal more interest in it than English people do in our own collections. We are born, as Mr. Vernay said in these pages some time ago, with our great museums established. We go through the Natural History Museum at South Kensington and are filled with wonder at the work that has been done, at the hundreds of beautiful exhibits and at the amount of effort that has been expended in order to accomplish the result. Here the wonder generally ceases. Do we ever think of how the work has to be carried on in order to keep the collection up to date? The New York Museum is an example to the world. Its endowment fund, aided by individual contributions, supports from year to year a large number of well equipped and

successful expeditions. Pamphlets and books dealing with all kinds of nature study are published, and lectures delivered all the year round. It is a great pity that equal interest is not taken in the work of our own museums and that they are not sufficiently well equipped with funds to copy the example of the American Museum of New York.

Colonel Faunthorpe, whose unfortunate death in December 1929 was a great blow to the organisation, was formerly our



1.—THE SUMATRAN RHINOCEROS.



2.—THE INDIAN RHINOCEROS.



3.—TIGERS IN THEIR NATIVE JUNGLE.



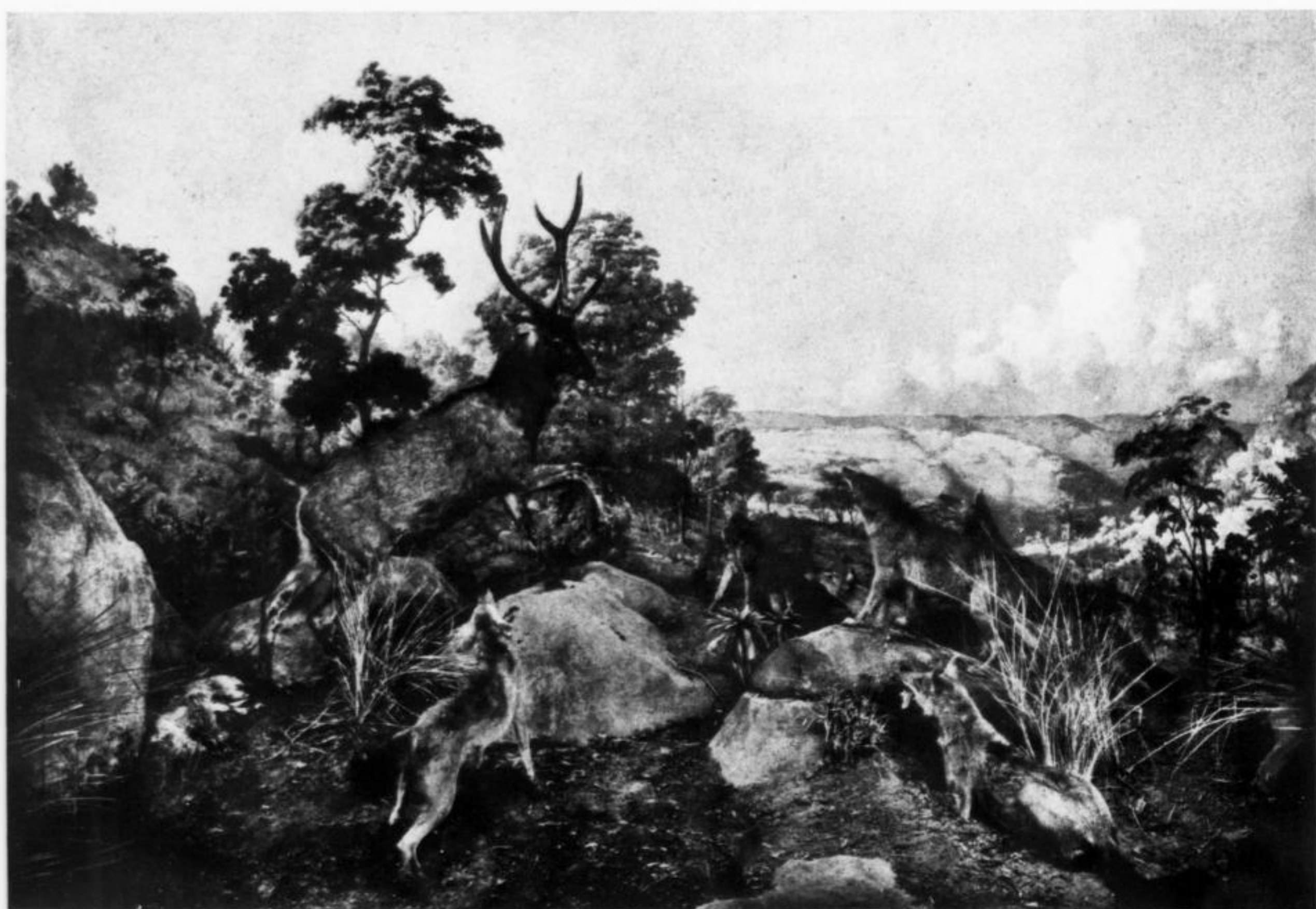
4.—THE LEOPARD AT HOME.



5.—THE GAUR.



6.—THE BANTING.



7.—A SAMBAR ATTACKED BY WILD DOGS.

Commissioner in Lucknow and A.D.C. to the King. He was in America with the British Mission during the War, and Mr. Vernay himself has had long associations there. These two Englishmen, in recognition of the splendid hospitality which Americans have always shown to their countrymen, undertook this series of expeditions very largely in order to promote Anglo-American friendship. "I am very anxious," said Mr. Vernay at the time of the first expedition, "to show the American people the actual conditions in India and the beneficent effect of British rule, which is not quite perfectly understood in America. The films, which will be presented to the museum, will be shown to probably a million and a half people a year, and the result must be that, apart from the better knowledge of the conditions in India which will be gained in this way, they will see that this country appreciates the almost incredible things which America did during the War for every Englishman whose duty took him to that country."

The staff on the first trip included Mr. Vernay, Colonel Faunthorpe, Commander Dyott (who led the party which cleared up the fate of the late Colonel Fawcett's ill-fated expedition in South America), a trained cinematograph operator, an expert taxidermist, an artist and an accessory expert. In addition to these there were, of course, an enormous number of native servants, camp staff and porters and packers. The function of the accessory expert is to record exactly the natural surroundings appropriate to any given creature, and it is to his efforts, apart from the superb taxidermy to be found throughout the collection, that its amazing realism is due. Let us assume that a particular species of deer frequents a definite type of grass jungle, the accessory expert gathers specimens of this particular herbage, collects typical rocks and even notes the kind of fallen leaves on the ground. From these specimens moulds or copies are made, as one makes artificial flowers, and the animals or groups of animals when set up are shown in a perfectly true, natural setting. The artist, helped by the camera, records features for colouring and for the appropriate scenic setting or panoramic backcloth which is set behind the groups. In 1927 and 1928 these fine settings were greatly improved when Mr. Vernay took with him to India certain members of the Museum staff in order to secure further data for backgrounds and to make close study of the actual localities for the "habitat groups."

One of the first and most important groups to be secured was that of the Indian elephant. Then followed in rapid succession the one-horned rhino, the gaur, chital, sambar and swamp deer. Later expeditions brought back fine examples of the barking deer, hog deer, musk deer, and also such important carnivores as the tiger, lion, leopard, hyena, sloth bear, wild dog and others reproduced in this series of illustrations.



8.—WATER BUFFALO.

Mr. Vernay and Colonel Faunthorpe were able to make such an unrivalled series of collections because of Colonel Faunthorpe's long and intimate knowledge of game conditions in India and, too, because of the hearty support of the Government officials and native princes, who spared nothing to assist the collectors in gathering a truly representative series of the larger mammals of southern Asia, so that, in the years to follow, the world might still view, as in their native habitats, a species which will have passed from the earth.

The illustrations which we publish with this article show not only what triumph modern taxidermy can claim, but the amazing effect of realism which can be produced by an infinite devotion to detail and capacity for taking pains. The skilled taxidermist of to-day must be a real artist, for he has to re-build the skin upon the actual skeleton, and give it not the appearance of a stuffed animal, but a semblance of life. Not only is it no easy matter to skin a big animal in such a way that it can afterwards be properly set up, but the dissecting out and preparation of the bones of the skeletons is a highly skilled and difficult task.

The present illustrations are photographs of some of the larger animal groups, and anybody wishing to see the final triumph of the taxidermist's skill has only to look at either of the groups of great cats or the even more amazing groups of pachyderms. Both tigers and leopards are shown in absolutely natural surroundings, and even in these museum specimens the difference in frame and mental outlook can be seen between the great and comparatively clumsy tiger and the lithe and active leopard, which is obviously far bolder and more courageous than its larger striped cousin. The specimens shown in the group of the Indian rhinoceros (Fig. 2) were collected near the border of Nepal. This great, one-horned rhinoceros has the same appearance of wearing armour plate as that which was shown in the famous wood

engraving by Albrecht Dürer. Though it was once widely spread throughout the Indian peninsula, this two-ton grass-eater is now practically confined to the jungles of muddy lowlands of the alluvial plains of Assam. The Sumatran rhinoceros (Fig. 1), which is two-horned, is the smallest of all living species. Though it is sometimes called the hairy rhinoceros, the hair on the adult is thin and scattered, the ears and tail being the only truly hairy parts. The young of the species, however, is possessed of a really luxurious coat. The water buffalo (Fig. 8) is the animal of grassy plains where water is abundant and where they make the mud wallows to which they are partial. The buffalo usually live in large herds, which split into smaller ones during the breeding season. It is this form of buffalo that is widely domesticated in India and used as draught and milch cattle. Within the range of the wild form, which includes the Indian peninsula and Burma, the tame herds interbreed with wild individuals. The gaur (Fig. 5) frequents the hilly country and occurs up to six thousand feet, but is not found in the lowlands inhabited by the water buffalo. Though it is the tallest ox in the world, the gaur is shy and inoffensive and not in the least ferocious. It may, however, having poor sight and hearing, charge suddenly, and solitary bulls are likely to be dangerous if unexpectedly disturbed. The range of the gaur extends over the hilly districts of the Indian peninsula, Burma and the Malay peninsula. The banting, however (Fig. 6), is the characteristic wild ox of the Malay region. It has little trace of the shoulder hump seen in other Asiatic oxen, and carries no dewlap. It is said to be mute except for a snort of warning. The banting is probably one of the progenitors of domestic cattle, though no modern breed can be pointed to as its direct descendant. Fig. 7 shows a group consisting of a sambar, a large deer with three-pronged antlers, attacked by a pack of wild dog.

R. J.

ANY DOG

No one goes softly if by chance he's ill,
Few hesitate to push him from a chair,
Or hate to eat because he's standing there
All shining eyes and hope and wagging tail!
And rarely in the storm or evening chill
Do we relent and take him out to play,
Because he's waited for his treat all day
With perfect trust that we will never fail.

And hour by hour he'll wait our coming still,
His welcome's just the same—without alloy,
As though his very heart would break with joy,
As though without us, sun and moon would pale.
And sometimes quite apart from what we will,
But occupied perhaps with this or that,
We quite forget to give him word or pat,
So that his rapture seems without avail!

* * *

And when at last there comes the dreaded break,
Someone who never owned a dog or cat
Will smile and say, "Rather a fuss to make—
And not a very handsome dog at that!"

KATHLEEN M. BARROW.