

Rhinoceroses exhibited in the People's Park of Madras

In Bangalore, the Lal Bagh Park received a pair of Greater One-horned Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* in 1868. The female lived there until 8 March 1893, but she proved incompatible with the male which was “deported to another state” (Rookmaaker 2024). It is likely that the male was moved in 1870 to the ‘Government Gardens’ in the People’s Park of Chennai (Madras), where a large rhino was seen in March 1871 and again on 13 December 1875 (Rookmaaker 2024). The inventories of animals in Chennai as found in the administration report of the Madras Municipality (1877–1899) included one rhinoceros on 31 March 1878, 1 January 1879, 1 January 1881, and 31 March 1886. This male *R. unicornis* was unknown to Rookmaaker (1998).

The reports of the municipality also provide details of repairs of the rhinoceros enclosure:

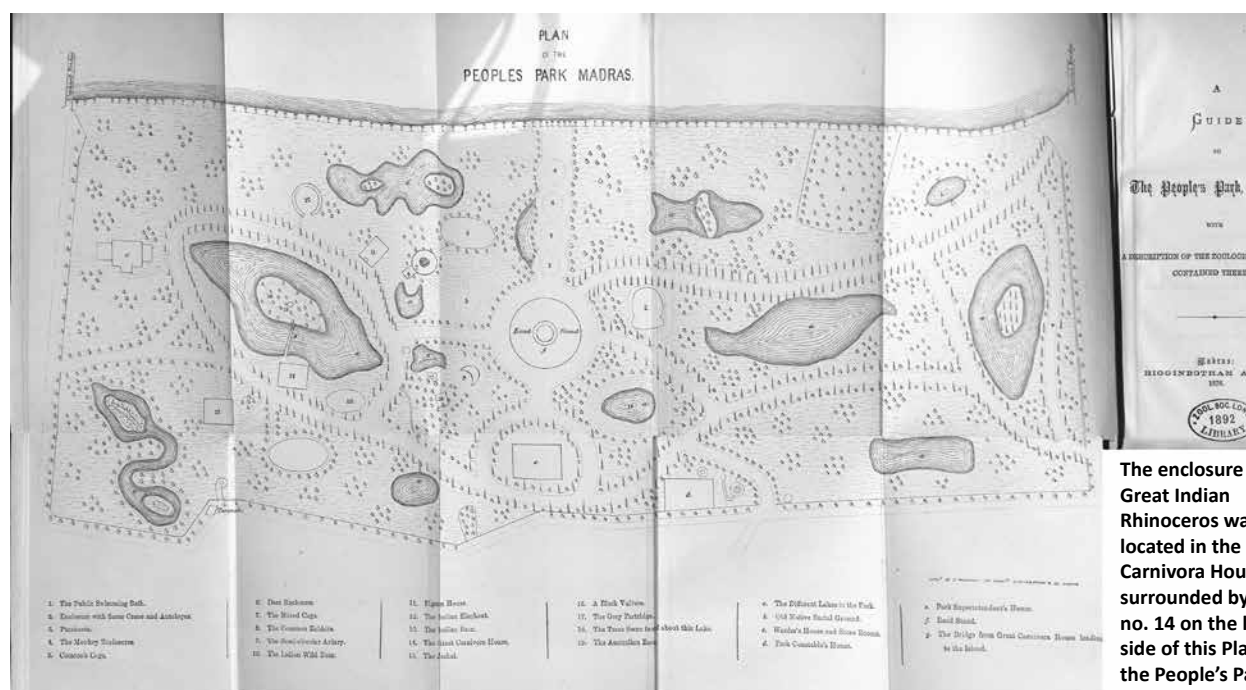
1877–78: Expenses include repair of rhinoceros enclosure and Picottah Rs 41.

1880: Expenses include planking and repairing the rhinoceros enclosure Rs 138.

1887–88: Expenses include repair of rhinoceros cage Rs 253.

On 27 July 1890, Dougherty (1892) visited the People’s Park, where “the miserable Zoo has only three specimens worth looking at – an ancient battered rhinoceros without a horn, and two fine otters [and] a couple of funny-looking badgers must not be overlooked.”

The animal probably died in the 1890s before the accession of another rhinoceros in 1898.



The enclosure of the Great Indian Rhinoceros was located in the Great Carnivora House, surrounded by water, no. 14 on the left side of this Plan of the People's Park, Madras (from Madras Zoo 1876). Courtesy Zoological Society of London.

Unfortunately, the administration reports of the 1890s do not include a comprehensive list of all animals, nor is there a record about the death of a rhinoceros, but the years 1890–1893 are missing from the available literature. The One-horned Rhinoceros lived for a remarkable number of years in the Zoo, from 1870 to at least 1890.

According to the administration report of 1898–99, a ‘Rhinoceros’ was received in People’s Park on 7 June 1898: “not paid yet.” From other sources it is known that this animal was caught when just a year old by John Hagenbeck (1866–1940) in Padang, Sumatra (Rookmaaker et al. 2002). This female Sumatran Rhinoceros *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* was still alive on 1 May 1913 (Flower 1914). It may have died shortly afterwards because in the financial year 1916/17 “the rhinoceros enclosure in the menagerie at the People’s Park was converted into a lion enclosure by adding two masonry rooms and erecting a high iron bar fence” (Madras Presidency 1917). Maybe further research might find an exact date, or even a photograph.

These records of a Greater One-horned Rhinoceros, followed by a Sumatran Rhino, in the zoo in Chennai might have to be supplemented by a third species, the Javan Rhinoceros *R. sondaicus*.

There was a rumour that an animal captured in the Dindings, Malaysia by a forest ranger, Granville Maurice O’Hara (d.1939) in September 1905 was traded later in the year to Chennai for Rs. 1500 (Rookmaaker 2024). No confirmation of arrival in India has ever been found. It is probably unlikely that the zoo would invest in a

rhinoceros while their only enclosure was still occupied by another species.

The zoo in Chennai is one of the few institutions where two, possibly even three, different species of rhinoceros have been exhibited in the 19th Century.

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