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The First Birth in Captivity of an Indian Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*): Kathmandu, May 1824

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With 1 Figure

It has always been thought that the Sumatran rhinoceros, *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, born at Calcutta zoo on 30. 1. 1889 was the first rhinoceros birth ever in a zoological garden. Similarly, concerning the Indian rhinoceros, the stillbirth in Calcutta on 9. 10. 1925 and the successful rearing of the calf born on 14. 9. 1956 at Basel Zoo were supposed to be "firsts" (Lang et al. 1977). All these births, however, are preceded by the baby rhinoceros born in a Kathmandu (Nepal) Menagerie in 1824. Brian Hodgson informed us about it in at least 2 short papers, which also appeared in German and French (see the references at the end of this paper). Unfortunately, these reports were all published in obscure journals and consequently they were quickly forgotten. Hodgson's paper of 1834 is much better known but, while he gives the measurements of the Kathmandu calf, all other information is omitted and it is only vaguely suggested that a zoo bred animal is involved. To put this right, some of the data given by Hodgson will be repeated here and the history of this baby rhinoceros will be discussed.

A pair of Indian rhinoceroses was kept in the menagerie of the Rajah of Nepal at Kathmandu (nothing is known about these specimens). In March 1825, Hodgson wrote that "about 18 months prior to May last a male and female Rhinoceros voluntarily associated, and that the result after an interval from 17 to 18 months, was a fine male cub" (Hodgson 1825: 155). Clearly, this means that conception took place in captivity and that the baby was delivered in May 1824 ("May last"), even though the 2 translations (Hodgson 1826b, d) incorrectly make it occur in 1825. The gestation period of 17 to 18 months is a reasonable estimate but, of course, it is too long, the average gestation for this species being 478 days or about 16 months (Lang et al. 1977). Hodgson further provides us with the animal's measurements at the age of 3 days, 1 month, 14 months, 19 months and 8 years (Table 1). When 3 days old, the baby differed from its mother "by a bright pink suffusion, which pervaded its hide, and by the absence of the nasal horn". A month later the colour had become uniformly dark and the horn had started growing (Hodgson 1825). Later, at the age of 19 months, the skin folds were more apparent and the horn was some 2 inches long. The animal also was quite tame (Hodgson 1826a, c).

This ♂ rhinoceros calf continued to thrive in the Rajah's menagerie. When 8 years old, its measurements were again recorded (Hodgson 1834). Gee (1953: 344) mentioned some further information about it, which can be found among the Hodgson manuscripts in the library of the Zoological Society of London. These papers contain a drawing of the animal made on 1. 3. 1833, which is now published for the first time (Fig.1). In an accompanying note, Hodgson states that the rhinoceros was transported to Calcutta at the age of 10 years, i.e. in 1834. There are no records about a possible arrival in Europe. Only 2 specimens are known to have come to England in the 1830's (London,

Table 1. Measurements of the ♂ Indian rhinoceros born May 1824 in Kathmandu

Age (date)	Body length	Shoulder-height	Circumference of body	Length of head	Source
3rd day (May 1824)	3' 4½'' (103 cm)	2' (61 cm)	4' ¼'' (122,6 cm)	1' ½'' (31,7 cm)	Hodgson 1826 a, b, c, d.
1 month (June 1824)	3' 10'' (117 cm)	2' 5'' (74 cm)	4' 5'' (134,6 cm)	1' 2'' (35,6 cm)	Hodgson 1826 a, b, c, d.
14 months (July 1825)	5' 10'' (178 cm)	4' (122 cm)	7' (213,4 cm)	—	Hodgson 1826 a, c, d.
19 months (December 1825)	7' 3'' (221 cm)	4' 4'' (132 cm)	9' 5'' (287 cm)	—	Hodgson 1826 a, c, d.
8 years (1832)	9' 3'' (282 cm)	4' 10'' (147 cm)	10' 5'' (317,5 cm)	2' 4'' (71 cm)	Hodgson 1834.
9 years (1833)	—	5' 2'' (157,5 cm)	—	2' 5'' (74 cm)	Hodgson ms., cf. Gee 1953: 345.



Fig. 1. Drawing of the Indian rhinoceros which was born in a Kathmandu menagerie in May 1824. It was made on 1. 3. 1833, when the animal was 9 years old. (Hodgson manuscripts, library of the Zoological Society of London; published with their kind permission.)

1834 and Liverpool, ca. 1836) but both were said to be much younger. The animal therefore probably remained in Calcutta, but again, I have not seen any corroborating evidence.

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