

## A new historic record of the Sumatran rhinoceros from Nagaland in north-eastern India

Anwaruddin Choudhury

Deputy Commissioner, Baksa, c/o The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India  
Bamunimaidam, Guwahati 781 021, India; email: badru1@sify.com

The Sumatran rhinoceros, *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, once ranged from north-eastern India to Indonesia (Corbet and Hill 1992; Choudhury 1997, 2003; Rookmaaker 2003). It had vanished from most of north-eastern India by the turn of the 20th century (Milroy

1934) and was believed to have become extinct in India (Khan 1989). However, Choudhury (1997) reported stray individuals in Manipur as late as the early 1990s. Historical records are available from most of the north-eastern states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and northern West Bengal, as well as from adjacent areas of Bangladesh (Rookmaaker 2003); however, specimen records with specific locations were few and far between. Hence, any historic record with evidence is extremely important.



Figure 1. Locality in Nagaland where skull was found.

I here report a recent record of a specimen from Nagaland in north-east India.

While on a visit to Noklak area (26°12' N, 95°00' E) in Tuensang District, Nagaland (fig. 1), on an awareness campaign as part of an Oriental Bird Club–WildWings Conservation Award in February 2004, I received reports of past sightings of a 'two-horned hairy and small rhinoceros'. Noklak is near the northern part of the Saramati mountain range that separates India and Myanmar (Mr Chingla and others, pers. comm.). There had been past reports from the Saramati area, from both India and Myanmar (Tilson and Traylor-Holzer 1993; Rabinowitz et al. 1995; Choudhury 1997). After talking with a cross-section of elderly people, I re

ceived word of a skull. I visited the Noklak village above the town and located the skull in a villager's house. The rhino reportedly had been speared to death by two hunters, probably around the turn of the 20th century, from the mountain tops north-east of Noklak near the present India–Myanmar border. The skull could not be measured as it was fixed quite high, and being old, any attempt to bring it down would have damaged it. The skull lacked the nasal bone, which was apparently damaged when its reportedly tiny horns were removed. Three molar teeth on the right side were in good condition.

The villagers of Noklak area belong to the Keimnugan Naga tribe. They regard this skull with reverence and splash water on it when there has been no rain for many days and on similar occasions they observe. This specimen is probably the first from Nagaland as earlier records were all merely reports of sighting by hunters and villagers. Considering this skull's importance, the grandson of the hunter, in whose house it now is, and the villagers should be convinced to place it in a museum, perhaps at Kohima.

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The Sumatran rhino skull (arrow) with skulls of domestic buffaloes at a house in Noklak, Nagaland.

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