

Death of Female Rhinos during Mating

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Introduction

The Kaziranga National Park situated in the Brahmaputra valley in the state of Assam, India, lies between latitude 26.30°N and 26.45°N, 90°50'E and 93°40'E, that covers an approximate area of about 430 sq. km (166 sq. miles) of flat marshy land with patches of evergreen pocket. This park was originally constituted in the year 1905 was named 'The Kaziranga Game Reserve'. In 1926, it was declared as Game Sanctuary and in 1953 the word 'Game' was correctly replaced by 'Wildlife'. This wildlife sanctuary has now been given the status of a National Park under notification of Assam Government No. FOR/WL/722/68, dated 1st February, 1974 (Das, 1974).

This park sustains the world famous one-horned rhinoceros, which in 1904 was reduced to only about a dozen but for protection and preservation from 1908, the number filled the void. As it contains the highest number, almost half the total number of rhinoceros in India, Kaziranga is aptly called the 'Rhinoland of India'.

The one-horned rhinoceros found in Assam is an endangered species. From the Kaziranga National Park, the one-horned rhinoceros is sent singly to different Zoological Parks of the world. From 1947 till date, Assam is earning revenues from this endangered species (Livestock Census, 2003). Rhinos being a threatened species, its life history was not fully known to the scientific world. It had to be studied carefully.

Due to the enforcement of the Rhino Preservation Act and much consciousness about the International importance of the animal, the rhino is seldom exposed to danger even outside the sanctuaries and forest reserves. This species has

been hunted almost to extinction for its horn, which is used in Chinese medicines.

During copulation, the male rhinoceros becomes very ferocious at times. We have come across instances where the female rhinoceros have died in fighting at the time of mating when she is an unwilling partner. Some of the instances are given below.

Case Report

Case One :

On one early morning in the month of November, 1995, I had gone along with my father Baguri Village in Kaziranga National Park (225 km from Guwahati) and happened to see a dead rhino with her four legs upturned on the right bank of the Mora Difalu river, just behind the Forest Inspection Bungalow. We immediately informed the Deputy Ranger who along with the Veterinary Field Assistant and with the help of some Karbi labourers examined the rhino. We found that it was a mature female rhino killed on the previous night, two ribs broken, lungs and the heart punctured obviously by the thrust of the horn of the male. The badly lacerated external sexual organ of the rhino was the greatest injury displayed.

Almost throughout the whole night on the previous day the neighbouring villagers heard the quarrel of the two rhinoceros in the form of growling, thumping, trumpeting and thudding.

That was obviously an unappeased act of mating. Probably the male wanted to rape the female which refused to yield leading to the great fight resulting in the death of the female. It is suspected that at the time of mating the male becomes greatly excited to the extent that if not fully appeased it

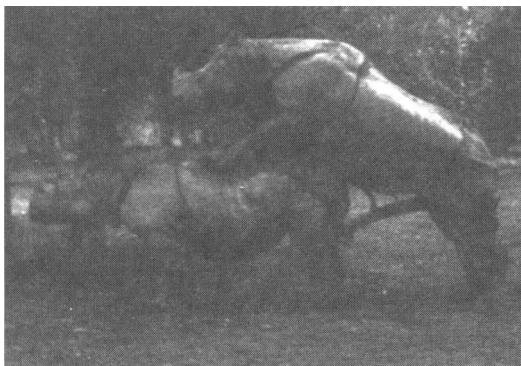
kills the female starting with damage of the vaginal part first.

Case Two

A similar instance took place in the month of January, 1996 at the Raja Mayong Reserve in the Nagaon district (110 km from Guwahati) where two fully grown mature rhinos fought for one whole day and whole night moving in the area of about 15 km up and down to the great fear of the villagers of Mayong. When it was all quiet in the morning in the grass land, the headman of the village with others went and found a female rhino lying dead with her four legs up turned and completely ripped open the belly up to the neck starting from her sexual organ.

Case Three

This is another case when a mature male rhino attempted to rape a young female rhino making her succumb to death in the Orang Wildlife Sanctuary of the Darrang Division (Fig. showing copulatory act of a male rhino with the female).



Rhino in act of copulation

At about 4 p.m. on 17th February, 1996, the Forest Ranger, Fire watcher, and the grass cutter saw one young female rhino being chased by a very big stout fully grown male rhino at Nicholamari Plantation Centre near the Orang Beat Office. They saw the young one being chased and attacked by the male with his horn to the extent that the female was bleeding profusely. They tried to drive him away, but he would not give in. At last after wounding her severely when she was extremely scared, he left her alone and went away. The

wounded female was lying down on the ground in a pool of blood growling in pain. Somehow she dragged herself to the nearest Rawmari stream and remained there in the waters till 19th February. At about 12 mid night on 19th February, she cried frantically due to pain on her body and died (Bayan, 1996).

On examination it was found that the measurement of the rhino was 1.70 m (in height), 2.95 m (in length excluding the tail), 0.60 m (tail) and 0.35 cm (ear) and circumference of the body was 2.80 m and the precious one horn was 12 cm.

The major wounds that were found were as follows:

- 1) 12cm ´ 8 cm – one wound about full horn length deep (0.30 cm) just near the base of the tail i.e. near the sexual organ.
- 2) One circular wound in the left hind leg in the thigh about 0.30 cm radius.
- 3) One deep wound on the left hip 15 cm length.
- 4) One deep wound on the right hip 15 cm length.
- 5) Two deep wounds on the right abdomen –
 - a. 20 cm ´ 6 cm
 - b. 15 cm ´ 3 cm

The wounds were made by the fully grown horn of the male about 30 cm in length and the horn was fully driven in. Besides minor injuries were found all over the body. Histological examination of sex organs of the dead female rhinos revealed great injury of the vagina and vulva.

Due to unsatiated sex starvation the male killed the young female rhino in this brutal way.

Acknowledgement

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