

by the same author

- PORTRAIT OF A WILDERNESS
- PORTRAIT OF A RIVER
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- THE HAWFINCH

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE
with Roger Peterson and P. A. D. Hollom

Guy Mountfort

THE VANISHING JUNGLE

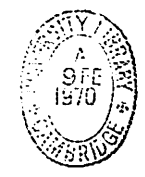
THE STORY OF THE WORLD WILDLIFE FUND
 EXPEDITIONS TO PAKISTAN

Illustrated by

ERIC HOSKING

Foreword by

H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF THE NETHERLANDS,
 G.C.B., G.C.V.O., G.B.E.



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the heady scent of the flowering frangipani trees in the residential areas. The ultra-modern hotel to which we were driven scarcely conformed to the Spartan standards we normally maintained on our expeditions; our hosts, however, seemed determined to pamper us and we all slept soundly.

One thing at least had not changed. When I awoke next morning, the first sound I heard was the long, peevish squealing of a Black Kite. My balcony gave a wide view over the city and on almost every roof-top sat the familiar scavenger of the East. Locally called the Pariah Kite, this bird acts as an efficient disposer of all street refuse and as such enjoys a considerable measure of public esteem. An immensely successful species, it has a range extending throughout most of Europe, Africa and Asia to Japan and the northern half of Australia. Though now able to find food only in the docks and refuse dumps of modern Karachi, the Black Kites continue to nest on the roof tops (plate 2*b*).

Our first study area was to be Cholistan, in the Bahawalpur Division. An aircraft had been put at our disposal and we were soon flying high over the featureless Sind Desert, on the first leg of our explorations. We were to land at Multan airfield, about sixty miles from the town of Bahawalpur, which lies on the left bank of the Sutlej River 450 miles from Karachi. Everyone was eager to begin serious work.

Looking down on the desert, I reflected that the huge basin of the Indus and its tributaries had once been fertile land cradling one of the earliest civilisations in the world. Here, it was once believed, had lived the 'godless, lawless and noseless barbarians of hostile speech, who inhabited fortified cities and possessed herds of cattle.' This description of the original inhabitants of

Pakistan had been emphatically disproved in the 1920s by the excavation of the ancient cities of Moenjodaro and Harappa. The ruins of Moenjodaro lay somewhere in the dusty haze to our left, on the bank of the Indus. Harappa was far to the north-east on a tributary, the Ravi River. Archæologists had now discovered that the civilisation of these two Bronze Age cities had been far from primitive: it had possessed a high standard of art and craftsmanship. Although its pictographic alphabet has not yet been deciphered, it is clear that by 2250 BC, long before the Indo-Aryans arrived in the Indus Valley, the Harappa Civilisation, as it is called, was already flourishing. Agriculture was its mainstay and trade with Iran and Mesopotamia was carried out by barter. The cities, which have been well preserved by the hot, dry climate, were constructed of burnt brick, with an elaborate system of brick-lined drains. The architecture was modest but practical, the houses being solidly constructed and well equipped with baths. The seals, painted pottery and figurines of the period, which depict local animals such as the Two-horned Rhinoceros, Indian Elephant and Tiger, provide clear evidence that the climate of the Indus Valley at that time must have been moist, with plentiful vegetation, or these animals could not have survived.

It is not known what brought this interesting civilisation to an end around 1800 BC. The total absence of warlike weapons in the excavations, which were otherwise rich in artefacts, suggests that neighbouring tribes may have been tempted to sack the defenceless cities; or perhaps the gradual change to an arid climate was the downfall of a peaceable people dependent on agriculture. Meanwhile, the glories of Moenjodaro and Harappa certainly deserve to be embraced in the National

created, chiefly to provide fuel for the railway locomotives. By 1871 9,000 acres were planted and soon afterwards the Chhanga Manga area was declared a Reserved Forest, which has since been enlarged. Its importance after Partition was greatly increased by the fact that Pakistan inherited only 3.6 per cent of land under forest. West Pakistan is in fact extremely short of trees for timber and firewood, let alone shelter for animals. All the extensive bamboo thickets and other protective vegetation which used to shelter Tigers, Asiatic Lions and Rhinoceroses in the valley of the Indus disappeared more than a hundred years ago. To-day desert prevails and 76 per cent of the land-mass of West Pakistan is subject to serious erosion.

One of the most valuable trees in the Chhanga Manga reserve is the Mulberry. It is the mainstay of the sports goods industry in Pakistan, besides supporting the basket-making industry and providing food for silk-worm farms. It colonised the plantations partly by seed carried on the canal waters, but chiefly by seed in the droppings of migrant Rose-coloured Starlings, or Rosy Pastors, as they are sometimes called. These birds are very numerous in the Punjab in the spring and are passionately fond of the fruit. The other chief tree species in the reserve are Shisham *Dalbergia sissoo*, Bakain *Melia azdarach*, Simbal *Salamlia malabarica* and Palma Christi *Ricinus communis*, all of which have important commercial uses, the last-mentioned being the source of castor oil.

We were, of course, particularly anxious to know what wildlife was to be found in the reserve and gladly accepted an invitation to tour the plantations by means of the miniature railway which, at 7mph, enabled us to see most of the area. There was a good variety of birds, but unfortunately the little

steam locomotive was so infernally noisy that any larger animals in the vicinity disappeared long before we could see them. We were told, however, that there were a few Blackbuck, Nilgai and introduced Chital, or Axis Deer, in the forest. There were certainly some in the little zoo which had been created for the education of visitors. Nilgai were once so numerous here that great *battues* were organised to exterminate them. By 1938 it was estimated that the population had declined to about 1,000. During the Second World War, when the reserve was used as an army training area, most of these were killed, as indeed they were in the rest of Pakistan. No shooting is now permitted in the reserve, except for Jackal, Wild Boar and Porcupine, which are regarded as harmful pests. The Wild Boar in West Pakistan benefits greatly from the fact that it is a highly repugnant animal to Muslims and is therefore not hunted. In many agricultural areas its increasing numbers are a great problem and the army has had to be called in to organise large-scale shoots.

On reflection I felt that the reserve, which attracted large numbers of visitors from Lahore and elsewhere, served an admirable purpose for recreation and education. But the disturbance caused by the noisy little railway and the comings and goings of a labour force of more than 1,000 engaged in forestry and other tasks ruled it out as a satisfactory game reserve. Its economic value was obvious and it was a pity that in a region so desperately needing a fully protected area for all forms of wildlife, it could only partly fulfil this purpose.

We headed northwards for Lahore and as we approached the city the traffic increased in volume. A peculiarity of Pakistan is its freelance country bus service. Most of the vehicles seem of considerable age and are usually crammed to overflowing, often

That evening, in consultation with the very knowledgeable District Forest Officer, we drafted plans for a new Sunderbans reserve. The eastern area had certain physical advantages over the western and these outweighed the disadvantage of the higher incidence of river traffic; this could be fairly easily controlled or even eliminated, as all fishing and wood-cutting was subject to annual licence. The present small reserve was in itself suitable as a nucleus and by extending its boundaries westward to the Pusur River we could include a highly desirable wildlife habitat, amounting in all to some 300 square miles. An area of this size was necessary for animals such as the Tiger, which needed extensive hunting grounds. Although the Tiger is a strong swimmer, both the Pusur and the Baleswar rivers were wide enough to serve as fairly effective natural boundaries. The sea coast would be the southern boundary. The landward northern side, protected only by narrow creeks, would remain accessible for the natural flow of animals into the reserve. Experience in other countries had shown that animals soon learn where safety lies and that if properly managed they remain in the protected areas so long as food is adequate and the pressure of hunting outside the reserve continues as an invisible barrier.

If a suitably large reserve could be created and properly guarded, it would be possible not only to re-introduce the Gaur and Barasingha to provide more adequate food for the Tigers, but also to restore the Indian Rhinoceros, which had once been a typical occupant of the Sunderbans. There was now a surplus of rhinos in the well managed Kasiranga Reserve in Assam and it would not be difficult to transport some of them by boat down the Brahmaputra.

This, in essence, was the plan which I later submitted to Mr Nooruddin Ahmad, Chief Conservator of Forests for East Pakistan, who greatly encouraged me by his constructive interest. With his blessing and with certain modifications which he suggested, we included this as a firm proposal in our subsequent report to the Central Government (see map, page 203).

Edmund and I tried the Tiger *machan* the following night. It was in a particularly beautiful setting, a gnarled old Sundri tree of unusually large size, one of several standing in the centre of a long tract of tawny meadow, which had evidently once been part of the forest which had been clear-felled. Around the edges was dense jungle, through which we had had to pick our way slowly among the rank undergrowth and projecting pneumatophores. A well-worn path led past the tree to a distant water-hole, where tracks of Chital, Wild Boar and Tiger were numerous.

We were settled and ready by four o'clock and the light was still brilliant. A wait of thirteen hours or more lay ahead of us; but this time we were well prepared and had comfortable seats. Our *shikari* sat slightly below us on a branch, with his back to the main stem. There was barely room for us on the platform and we had to take care not to move our seats even half an inch, or the legs would slip between the four boards which supported us. Edmund's tripod and parabolic reflector occupied the space behind us and our rucksacks, Thermos flasks and the tape recorder filled every inch of the remaining space. Karim had insisted on my taking his heavy .375 Magnum, a rifle powerful enough to fell an Elephant, let alone a Tiger. I hung this on a branch within reach, though nothing but dire necessity would have induced me to use it. We had in fact equipped

Immediately after the return of the helicopter, George and Eric had to leave the expedition and begin their journey home, by way of Dacca. The rest of us were to go that night by river on the famous *Rocket* steamer; but as the time of our arrival in Dacca was uncertain, George and Eric took a plane to make sure of catching their connection to Karachi and London. These two stalwart companions had accompanied me on every expedition I had ever organised and I knew I should miss them badly during our forthcoming explorations in Sylhet. We loaded them into a Jeep and gave them a warm send-off.

With the remainder of the day to spare, Edmund and I drove out of Khulna to see the countryside, which was intensively farmed. Among new bird species were Singing Bush Larks, a Bluethroat, a very fine Pied Harrier and, very surprisingly in an area of open paddyfields, a Wryneck. Grey and Small Indian Mongooses were very numerous, foraging busily along the ditches with complete disregard for passers-by.

It was in Khulna that we first heard the rumour that a Sumatran, or Two-horned Rhinoceros had been shot in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The total world population of this species probably does not exceed one hundred, in scattered localities in Burma, Malaya, Sumatra and North Borneo. I was later able to obtain further information about this scandalous affair through Jerry Wood-Anderson. For some time it had been known that a few of these extremely rare animals existed in the jungle on the Burmese side of the frontier not far from Cox's Bazaar. One of them had apparently entered the territory of East Pakistan and had at once been shot. Its carcass had been taken in triumph to Chittagong, where it was sold in small pieces as an aphrodisiac for a total of Rs 15,000 (about £1,150).

We are still seeking confirmation, but if the story is true it is a sad blow to the international efforts which are being made to save this unique species and a further indication of the need to introduce effective conservation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

I had to give another Press conference before we sailed that evening. The editor of the local newspaper had already published a very well written account of our work elsewhere in Pakistan and I was glad to give him the opportunity to scoop the Dacca papers with a report on our findings in the Sunderbans.

The *Rocket* was a grand old paddle boat, which had plied between Khulna and Dacca for many years. The lounge and impeccably neat cabins were almost Victorian in their lavish use of mahogany and lace curtains. The food was excellent. We had most of the first-class accommodation to ourselves, but the lower deck was crammed to overflowing with a picturesque crowd of merchants and others, each carrying enormous bundles.

Sharp at eight o'clock, amid much shouting and ringing of bells, the great paddles began thrashing the water and we cast off, promptly colliding broadside with a sickening crash into a steamer which had crept up in the darkness on the port side. However, only the housing of the paddle was damaged and after the captains had exchanged insults through loud-hailers we edged our way out into the moving shipping. Our searchlight was kept swinging from side to side as a warning to the host of suicidally minded canoeists who were zigzagging in the darkness among the larger vessels.

All through the night and the following day we continued our journey up the wide river through verdant country, stopping occasionally at picturesque little ports to unload merchandise, or pick up passengers. At Chandpur, which was crowded with

- Golden Cat *Felis temminckii*. Now extremely rare. Seen in Sylhet. A few still occur in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Nepal, Sikkim and Assam.
- Fishing Cat *Felis viverrina*. Becoming rare. Occurs in Indus Valley south of Larkana and in Indus Delta and Sunderbans.
- Clouded Leopard *Neofelis nebulosa macrosceloides*. Declining rapidly. Occurs in Pakistan only in Chittagong Hill Tracts and near Assam-Tripura borders: plate 59a.
- Tiger *Panthera tigris*. Rapidly declining. A few still remain in Chittagong Hill Tracts; vagrants occur in Sylhet Division; between 50-100 remain in Sunderbans: plates 46b, 51a.
- Leopard *Panthera pardus*. Evidence of presence in Gilgit, Masan and Salt Range (*P. p. saxicola*); in Sylhet and Chittagong Hill Tracts (*P. p. fusca*); and Kirthar Range (*P. p. sindica*): plate 51b.
- Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia*. Severely exploited by skin traders and hunters; declining rapidly. Occurs in small numbers in Gilgit, Hunza, Chitral, Baltistan and Kashmir.
- [Asiatic Cheetah *Acionyx jubatus venaticus*. Two reported shot in Mekran area in 1967. Though generally regarded as extinct, this species may still be surviving, though unlikely to recover.]

Proboscidea

- Indian Elephant *Elephas maximus*. Becoming scarce. A few remain in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and along the Assam-Tripura borders.

Perissodactyla

- [Indian Wild Ass *Equus hemionus khur*. Between 20-30 reported to occur regularly in Great Rann of Kutch, where several have been shot recently. Main population is in Indian Little Rann.]
- [Two-horned Rhinoceros *Didermocerus sumatrensis*. One shot in Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1967, a vagrant from Burma.]

Artiodactyla

- Wild Boar *Sus scrofa cristatus*. Abundant and increasing everywhere.
- Musk Deer *Moschus moschiferus moschiferus*. Severely persecuted for its musk pods. Occurs in small numbers in Gilgit, northern Hazara, Baltistan and Kashmir.
- Barking Deer (Muntjac) *Muntiacus muntjak*. Fairly plentiful in Sylhet Division, Mymensingh and Chittagong Hill Tracts. Also occurs in parts of Swat, Hazara, Dhir and Kashmir: plate 57a.