

Vanishing Wildlife | *Love* may be the *Death*

of the

*Indian
Rhino*



The Indian rhinoceros, like all the world's rhinos, is so well protected from the ravages of nature and other animals that he has survived virtually unchanged for about 40 centuries. But he is vulnerable to a bullet. In recent years the Indian rhino has been reduced nearly to the point of extinction in pursuit, ironically, of love: its horn is prized by the Chinese as a powerful aphrodisiac. Poachers can get \$1,200 or more for a single horn. Though the animals shown here are protected on the 166-square-mile Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary in northeast India, poachers killed eight last year, and even murdered a forest officer. Officers now carry shotguns and have orders to shoot poachers. Compared to the other Asian species, however—the Javan and the Sumatran are down to a few dozen specimens—the outlook for Indian rhinos is not entirely bleak. From their alarming low of about 20 some years ago, they now number around 700.





Love and Death



"As a rule," wrote a turn-of-the-century adventurer, "rhinoceroses are inoffensive." Horrendous as they appear, rhinos are actually staid, myopic vegetarians. They are capable of a 30-mile-per-hour charge when provoked or intruded upon and will slash with their teeth. But Indian rhinos do not even fight with their horns (which are not horns at all but formations of agglutinated hair that can be knocked off with a firm blow and will grow back). For the most part, when they are not disturbed, Indian rhinos are content to spend their time as they are doing here—slogging through swamps to keep cool while munching water hyacinths.



