

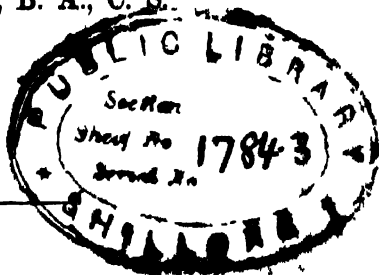
ASSAM DISTRICT GAZETTEERS.

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Kamrup.

BY

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Fauna.

Wild animals include elephants, rhinoceros, bison (*bos gaurus*), buffalo, tigers, leopards, bears, wild pig, and different kinds of deer, of which the principal varieties are the *barasingha* or swamp deer (*cervus duvauceli*), the sambar (*cervus unicolor*), the hog deer (*cervus porcinus*), the spotted deer (*cervus axis*) and the barking deer (*cervulus muntjac*). Elephants are fairly common, especially near the hills, and when the crops are ripening do much damage unless the numbers of the herds are regularly kept down. For this purpose the district is divided into three mahals or tracts. The right to hunt in each mahal is sold by auction, and the lessee is required to pay a royalty of Rs 100 on every animal captured. The method usually employed is that known as *mela shikar*. Mahouts mounted on staunch and well trained elephants pursue the herd, which generally takes to flight. The chase is of a most arduous and exciting character. The great animals go crushing through the thickest jungle and over rough and treacherous ground at a surprising pace, and the hunter is liable to be torn by the beautiful but thorny cane brake, or, were he not very agile, to be swept from his seat by the boughs of an overhanging tree. After a time the younger animals begin to flag and lag behind, and it is then that the opportunity of the pursuer comes. Two hunters single out a likely beast, drive their elephants on either side, and deftly throw a noose over its neck. The two ends of the noose are firmly fastened to the *kunkis*, as the hunting elephants are called, and, as they close in on either side, the captured animal is unable to escape, or to do much injury to his captors, who are generally

considerably larger than their victim. The wild elephant is then brought back to camp, where it is tied up for a time and gradually tamed. Fourteen animals were caught in 1899-1900, the last year in which the mahals were sold by the Deputy Commissioner.

Rhinoceros live in the swamps that fringe the Brahma-^{Other}putra and the Manas, and in the sparsely populated tracts ^{animals.} in the north-west corner of the district, but they are now becoming very scarce. They breed slowly, and, as the horn is worth more than its weight in silver, and the flesh is prized as food, they present a tempting mark to the native hunter. Steps have recently been taken to preserve the game in a tract of jungle land, about 90 square miles in area, in the northern part of the Bijni mauza. Herds of wild buffalo are found in the same locality, and wild bulls often serve the tame cows that are kept by the Nepalese on the Brahmaputra *churs*. Bison are generally found near the hills and in the neighbourhood of tree forest; tigers, leopards, and bears are met with in almost every part of the district. Wild animals cause little loss of human life, but in 1903 are said to have accounted for nearly four thousand head of cattle. The number of human beings killed in that year by different animals was as follows:—Elephants 4, tigers 8, bears 2, wild buffaloes 3, wild pigs 2, snakes 29, total 48. Rewards were at the same time paid for the destruction of 86 tigers, 146 leopards, and 23 bears. Small game include wild geese and duck, snipe, florican (*syphæotis bengalensis*), black and marsh partridge, pheasants and hares. Peacocks are also occasionally seen in the north of the district.