

# Provincial Gazetteer of Assam

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The most noteworthy wild animals are elephants, rhinoceros, <sup>wild</sup> tigers, leopards, bears, wild dogs, deer, buffaloes, and <sup>nilgai</sup> mithan (*Bos gaurus*). The smaller mithan (*Bos frontalis*) has been domesticated by the wild tribes, and it is doubtful whether it is now found in Assam in a wild state. Rhinoceros are of three kinds, the large variety (*unicornis*), which lives in the swamps that fringe the Brahmaputra, the smaller variety (*sondaicus*), which is occasionally met with in the same locality, and the small two-horned rhinoceros (*Sumatrensis*), which is now and again seen in the hills south of the Surmā Valley, though its ordinary habitat is Sumatra, Borneo and the Malay Peninsula. The ordinary varieties of deer found in the Province are the *sambhar* (*Cervus unicolor*), the *bara singhu* or swamp deer (*Cervus duvaucelli*), the hog deer (*Cervus porcinus*), and the barking deer (*ceratalus munflac*). Goat-antelopes (*Nimorhaedus Sumatrensis*) are occasionally met with on the higher hills, but are scarce and shy. Elephants are found in considerable numbers in the Assam Valley and in the lower slopes of the Assam Range. They are also occasionally hunted with success in south Cachar and in south-eastern Sylhet. Extensive operations have been undertaken by the Government Khedah department, and *mahāts*, or the right of hunting within certain areas not reserved for that department, are leased by auction sale to the highest bidder, who pays a royalty of Rs. 100 on each animal captured. During the period when the Government kheddas were working in the Gāro Hills about 400 elephants were annually captured in the Province. Small game include florican, partridges, pheasants, peo and jungle fowl, wild geese and duck, snipe, and hares. Excellent mahseer fishing is also obtained in some of the rivers.

The climate of Assam is characterised by coolness and extreme humidity, the natural result of the great water surface and extensive forests over which evaporation and condensation go on, and the close proximity of the hill ranges, on which an excessive precipitation takes place. Its most distinguishing feature is the copious rainfall between March and May, at a time when precipitation over northern India is at its minimum. The year is thus roughly divided into two seasons, the cold weather and the rains, the hot weather of the rest of India being completely absent. From the beginning of November till the end of February the climate is cool and extremely pleasant, and at no period of the year is the heat excessive. Table I. appended to this article, shows the mean temperature and diurnal range in January, May, July, and November at Silechar, Sibsagar, and Dhubri, the only stations in the Province at which observations have been systematically recorded for any considerable period. Except in the height of the rains, the mean temperature is appreciably lower at Sibsagar than at Dhubri. This is partly due to the heavy fogs, which in the cold weather frequently hang over the upper part of the Brahmaputra Valley till a late hour of the day and prevent the country from being

Climate and  
temperature

warmed by the rays of the sun. In the Surmā Valley the thermometer in the winter is from five to six degrees higher than in upper Assam, but during the remainder of the year the climate of Sylhet is fairly cool. Cāchār has a higher mean temperature for the year than any other District in the Province. On the Shillong plateau the thermometer seldom rises above 80° in the shade at the hottest season of the year, and ice forms on shallow pools in the winter nights. Fogs occur in the Surmā Valley, but are not as common as in central and upper Assam, where at certain seasons of the year they are a serious impediment to steamer traffic. In the Surmā Valley the prevailing wind is from the south-west, except in the months of April and May, when it has a north-north-east direction. In the Brahmaputra Valley the wind is usually from the north-east. In July and August the wind blows from the south-west in Assam proper and from the south-east in the Goalpara District.

**Rainfall.**

The total amount of rain that falls in Assam during the year is always abundant, but is sometimes unfavourably distributed. In the Surmā Valley, the average rainfall at Sylhet is 157 inches, and at Silchar 124. To the south of the valley precipitation is less pronounced, but deluges of rain fall on the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills and pour down into the valley. The average annual rainfall at CHERRAPUNJI is 458 inches, and in 1861, 905 inches are said to have fallen, of which 503 inches were recorded in the months of June and July. Goalpara and Lakhimpur, at the two ends of the Assam Valley, receive about 115 inches of rain during the year. Kāmrup, Nowgong, and Darrang are to some extent protected by the high plateaux of the Khasi Hills, and the rainfall of these Districts ranges from 71 to 77 inches. At Lankā, in the Kapili valley in Nowgong, the average annual fall is less than 43 inches, but a little to the east the level of the hills that separate the Brahmaputra and Surmā Valleys falls, and the rainfall in Sib-sāgar rises to 85 inches. The percentage of the absolute range on the average annual fall is 70 in the Surmā and 68 in the Assam Valley. The rainfall in the hill Districts is ample, but at the few stations at which observations have been recorded its character is largely determined by local conditions, and the average rainfall of this region is probably larger than the figures would suggest. Statistics of monthly rainfall are shown in table II.

**Storms and floods.**

Storms often occur in the spring months, generally accompanied by high winds and heavy local rainfall, but seldom take the form of destructive cyclones. Two such, however, visited the country at the foot of the Gāro Hills in 1900, destroying everything in their path, and killing 44 people. The Province has always suffered more from floods than from a failure of the water-supply. The rainfall, which is everywhere heavy, is in places enormous, and the rivers are frequently unable to carry off the torrents of water suddenly precipi-