

Animals



in India

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Simon & Schuster



REFERENCE
Not to be lent out,

Ylla went to India to photograph the animal life of that vast country as she had done previously in Africa. Material for Animals in India was gathered over a period of seven months in many parts of India. Ylla was winding up her trip photographing a country fair in Bharatpur when an accident took her life.

In addition to her photographs Ylla left three notebooks in which she had made almost daily entries from the time she landed in New Delhi until the day before her death. The notes were not kept for the purpose of publication. They were maintained as a private record of her impressions and described the circumstances under which her pictures were taken.

From this diary the following notes were selected and edited as a valuable and colourful testimony to her own experience.

On route to India, August 1954

It was Jean Renoir, director of the film *The River* who actually prompted me to go to India. This was last summer, when I was staying with my friends, the Pierre Sicards, in Bel Air, California, and we saw Renoir very often.

It had, in fact, been my childhood dream to be invited by a maharaja, and to see a white elephant, but I never dreamed it would be enough to send a book of mine to an eastern prince, and in return, receive an invitation. That is precisely what happened. I mailed my *Animals in Africa* to the Maharaja of Mysore, a great enthusiast of both wild life and photography, and shortly after, I had a telephone call from Frank MacGregor, Chairman of my American publishers, who told me that a registered letter had arrived for me from His Highness of Mysore. The letter contained an invitation.

Months of preparation followed: customs, letters of introduction, research, much reading, and contacting people who had been there. From them, as well as from Barbara Flaherty Van Ingen¹ with whom I had carried on a correspondence, I received generally discouraging reports about wild life in India.

New Delhi, August 1954

At the Crafts and Industry Show, I met Mr. Nehru's daughter, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. She told me of her three pandas, at present in the hills to escape the heat—pandas cannot bear a hot climate. I sent Mrs. Gandhi copies of my book on Africa, and *The Sleepy Little Lion*. The following day I received a charming note from her in which she thanked me for the books (it seems she has had a copy of *The Sleepy Little Lion*)

¹ Daughter of Robert Flaherty, Barbara has lived in Mysore for some years.

The tiger was skinned, the villagers took the meat they wanted, and the feast of the vultures started: grim, macabre, surrealistic—the movements of the vultures, of their wings and jaws; the tiger picked clean in no time; a stray dog fighting off the vultures for some prey.

February 11, the last day of the hunt

General beat through a forest that bore all the aspects of a forest in a fairy tale: light green ferns, a gentle play of light, a dreamlike reality . . . Not a single animal . . . Home by 3 p.m.

February 12

150 mile drive by jeep to Cooch Behar Palace, about sixty years old, Italian architecture; dinner terribly late.

February 15, Kaziranga wild life sanctuary, Assam

Upon my arrival at Jorhat, I was met by Mr. E. P. Gee, manager of Doyang Tea Estate at Oating. Mr. Gee, who is most hospitable, had done his best to see that I am comfortable here. Went to a large party, met a great number of tea planters. Visited tea gardens and plantations. Met Mr. P. D. Stacey, Chief Conservator, a friend of Dorothy Flaherty, a man of great charm and dynamism. We had had a long correspondence, and I was glad to meet him at last.

February 16, in the sanctuary

Thanks to Stacey the rhino capture was postponed until my arrival. The Philadelphia Zoo bought a young female rhino two years ago, and now they ordered a young male. For this reason everything was arranged, pits were dug, and elephants were kept ready

to drive rhinos toward the pits during the following night, the safest time for bringing in a captured rhino. However, this morning a report came that a rhino had fallen into one of the pits. The ranger, Mr. Das, went out to the pit, and I went with him to watch the capture—the rhino has to be roped and moved into a cage.

Roping a rhino is complicated, but getting him into the cage is a very complex and strenuous job. This difficulty was increased by the fact that the cage took a long time to arrive at the pit, it was very hot and the rhino suffered from the exposure to the sun. By the time the cage was brought it was noon, and the rhino, no doubt exhausted not only from the heat but his resistance to capture, collapsed while being pulled into the cage, and died. Mr. Das was terribly upset.

February 23. Kaziranga sanctuary

I must admit, I feel apprehensive on my elephant's back when a rhino threatens to charge. I do not press forward then. I am not sure I could keep on the elephant's back when he bolts. Sometimes a rhino—stirred out of his mud-hole by the noise of the approaching elephants—watches us come closer with a most menacing expression. Undecided whether they should charge or not, rhinos often turn around and bolt.

The early morning drives are very lovely. We are usually out in time to see the sun rise, a huge red ball that dispels the mist, low over the plains. It is cool when the day begins, but the rising sun feels gentle and warm. There are many birds—mostly of the stork and crane family—looking fragile and mysterious in the rising mist.

February 25, photographing rhinos from a "hide-out"

Since rhinos are so easily frightened off, I decided to try my luck today by making use of Ellis Dungan's hide-out, which is a kind of machan made of hides, a most makeshift contraption, absolutely no protection against a bad tempered rhino. But I got into the hide-out, crouched there hoping to be able to photograph some rhinos; Das and his three elephants were supposed to round them up and drive them past me. And they did.

One rhino was particularly obliging, stopped directly in front of my hide-out, quietly looked around, then wandered off. I signalled to have the whole process repeated, and the rhino did reappear three or four times. At one point, he was no more than two feet away from me, which was a most thrilling experience.

Deeper in the sanctuary, looking for mothers and babies, we came upon a cow with a two-year old calf, who both stared at us and, surprisingly enough, did not move away. But bad luck: at that moment my 150 mm. lens gave out; I also noticed to my dismay that I had run out of black and white film, so I had to work in colour with my 300 mm. lens; Akbar, my temperamental elephant, kept flapping his huge ears; all of which was most distracting. The baby rhino went into the bush, came out again and stood near its mother, but with the 300 mm. lens I could only get one rhino into the view-finder. Going on a bit, we came again upon "mother and child"—the mother relaxing in a mud-hole and the baby standing nearby. But again the long lens was a handicap; it was maddening. For once I am lucky enough to sight two rhinos who practically pose for me, and my equipment gives out!

I also developed quite a backache from having crouched so long in E.D.'s contraption.

The forest is indeed a jungle: dense, forbidding, hostile, covered with undergrowth, damp, swampy, full of leeches, creepers on every tree.

March 7, Benares, in monkey temple

Monkeys everywhere. Completely unpredictable. One approaches me quietly for peanuts, which I give him, but suddenly, for no good reason, he starts yelling and all the monkeys scatter. A little beggar boy comes in to tell me one of the monkeys has snatched away one of my shoes which I left at the door. Lots of children gather and, led by the beggar boy, a chase begins. The monkey is chased everywhere, on the roof, up and down, in and out of rooms and yards. Finally they catch him and bring me the shoe triumphantly. I had already resigned myself to driving back to the hotel for another pair of shoes. A few minutes later, a monkey steals the shawl from a woman just as she enters the temple. The monkey runs with the stolen shawl, and the rest of the monkeys apparently thinking that all this is hilariously funny, become very excited. The woman seems quite accustomed to their tricks and makes no attempt to recover the shawl. A man



The Kaziranga Sanctuary in Assam shelters most of India's rhinos. For years hunted by natives for their 24-inch horns and other parts of the body which were believed to have aphrodisiac and medicinal qualities they had become virtually extinct a few decades ago. Due to government protection their number is on the increase again. Today there are about 250 of the huge rhinos in the Sanctuary, which can be penetrated by visitors on elephantback. Rhinos are not usually aggressive, but occasionally a protective mother or a young male will come lumbering out of the tall grass with his short tail held straight up as he charges right for the intruding visitor.



The first of these is the fact that the
 world is not a flat plane, but a
 curved surface. This means that
 the distance between two points
 on the surface is not the same as
 the distance between two points
 in a straight line. This is why
 the shortest path between two
 points on a sphere is a curve,
 not a straight line. This is why
 the shortest path between two
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