

THE LARGE AND SMALL GAME OF BENGAL
AND THE NORTH-WESTERN
PROVINCES OF INDIA

BY

CAPTAIN J. H. BALDWIN, F.G.S.

LATE OF H. P. BENGAL STAFF CORPS

'Hæc olim meminisse juvabit'

4007.13

'To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell,
To slowly trace the forest's shady scene
Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,
And mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been;
To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,
With the wild flock that never needs a fold'

Childe Harold, canto ii. stanza 25

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THE GREAT INDIAN RHINOCEROS.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GREAT INDIAN RHINOCEROS (*Rhinoceros Indicus*).

Wilt thou trust him because his strength is great?—JOB.

DESCRIPTION.

Extreme Length.—From 12 to 13 feet.

Height.—From $5\frac{1}{4}$ to $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet.

Horns.—Both sexes have a single horn, situated near the end of the snout, slightly curved, and pointing backwards, from 15 to 20 inches in length.

Ears—Rather long and rounded. When erect they point forwards.

Eyes—Small and twinkling.

Neck—*Very short* and thick, and overlapped by two or three heavy folds of thick skin.

Body—Very broad, and much rounded. Back slightly hollow.

General Colour—Dirty black.

Limbs—Short and thick.

Feet—Divided into three toes.

Tail—Short.

THE Indian Rhinoceros is found in Assam, where it is still plentiful, and also in the Bhootan jungles. During the campaign of 1865, an advance guard, when marching very early one morning between Bala and Buxa, suddenly came upon a huge 'Gainda' standing in the middle of, and completely blocking, the narrow path. The animal, however, quickly wheeled round, and disappeared in the jungle. Later, a very fine rhinoceros was shot by my commandant, Colonel S——d, in the neighbourhood of Buxa. In former years it was to be met with in the forests bordering on the Sardah in Nepaul and the Philibeet district, and also in Gorruckpore; but it is now extinct there or very nearly so.

The Indian Rhinoceros, male and female, has a single horn, seldom growing to more than eighteen inches in length.

Rhinoceri are usually found in swamps where the reeds and grass are very dense, remaining hidden, often asleep, during the day: at night they come out to feed on the edge of the forest. They sometimes will travel long distances to reach rice and corn fields, and do immense mischief, so much so that there is a Government reward of twenty rupees to anyone shooting a rhinoceros. If left unmolested they are, usually speaking, harmless, but when wounded, dangerous, especially to a sportsman on foot. They will occasionally, in this condition, like the buffalo, charge an elephant with their eyes closed, and inflict severe wounds. I have never seen this happen, but I remember an instance of a howdah elephant being very dangerously hurt by the horn of a rhinoceros. A young tea-planter near Tezpore had charge of a fine elephant for the use of his garden, but occasionally took him out for shooting purposes. On returning one evening from the jungle, he came across two rhinoceri. He fired at and struck one, and followed it up into a swamp; suddenly he came upon the animal in the thicket, and it immediately charged: the elephant swung round and was about to make off, when the rhinoceros caught him a tremendous butt in the side, nearly knocking him over, and inflicting a severe wound

several inches in length, very deep, and, I need hardly add, extremely dangerous. For many months the poor beast was unfit for work, and became very thin and emaciated, and all thought he would die, but he eventually recovered.

The hide of the rhinoceros is so very thick, being covered with huge plates, that unless struck on the head (behind the ear is also a very deadly place) bullets from a common gun do him little harm, and even rifle balls with large charges of powder, unless well placed, are ineffectual.

We often hunted this huge animal in the neighbourhood of Tezpore, where it was by no means rare; an exceedingly fine specimen was shot by my brother officers, near the margin of the Lowqua Lake in the month of April 1865.

We usually came across them on the edge of some inland jheel or lake, where the water was surrounded by dense reeds, grass, and jungle. The animals like to roll and wallow in the soft mud, and generally speaking their hides are thickly coated with a layer of clay. On being disturbed by the approach of the elephants, they generally with pricked-up ears, more like huge pigs than anything else, stand staring and offer a fair mark to the nearest sportsman. Often, however, the jungle where 'Gaında,' as he is called by the natives, is to be found, is so high and thick that it is almost impossible to catch a glimpse of him as he makes off.

The foot of the rhinoceros is divided into three, that of the elephant into five toes, so that their footmarks are at once distinguishable the one from the other. Moreover, the prints differ in size, the elephant's being much larger. The horn of the rhinoceros can be removed with ease, whereas the tusks of the elephant are extracted with great difficulty. Rhinoceri are in the habit of depositing their ordure in one particular spot. I have several times come across these places: apparently, from the heap of soil and the rankness of the grass around, they had been used for very many years, and on examination I invariably found fresh traces of the brutes. Natives have told me that often savage encounters take place at these spots between the males, who, I suppose, have casually met. The Assamese build machāns in trees near, and on moonlight nights wait for the rhinoceri and sometimes shoot them.

Jerdon in his 'Mammals of India' describes a second species, 'The Lesser Indian Rhinoceros' (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*), which he tells us is found in the Bengal Sunderbuns. I regret that I am unable to supply any information regarding this animal.