

NEPAL

BY

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*"The country is wild and mountainous,
and is little frequented by strangers,
whose visits the King discourages."*

MARCO POLO, iii, 8.

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also been taken in Nepal at an elevation of 12,000 feet. It can be readily recognized by the black rings of hair round the eye. Hodgson's Tree Mouse (*Vandelluria dumeticola*), a bright chestnut mouse, with a white belly, occurs in the northern and central regions. Two species of House Mice are recorded—the Nepal House Mouse (*Mus homourus*) and the Indian House Mouse (*Mus urbanus*); the former occurs in the central and northern zones, the latter is commoner in the lower region. Two species of Field Mice have been obtained—the Nepal Field Mice (*Leggada cervicolor*), recorded from the central region, and the Indian Field Mice (*Leggada booduga*) from the plains—to these must be added the Indian Bush Rat (*Golunda ellioti*), recorded by Hodgson as inhabiting "wooded country."

The Nepal Vole (*Apodemus (Neomys) gurkha*), a vole with smoky bluish-grey fur and white feet, inhabits the higher elevations. A single specimen of the Flower Mouse (*Neodon sikkimensis*) was taken at an elevation of 12,000 feet. The Flower Mouse is one of a small group of Asiatic Voles to which the name *Neodon*, applied originally by Hodgson to the Flower Mouse of Sikkim, has been given. According to Hodgson the Sikkim Flower Mouse inhabits forests and breeds in the hollows of decayed trees, making a nest of grass.

SPALACIDAE (Bamboo Rats)

A single species of Bamboo Rat is recorded from the lower and central region of Nepal—this is the Bay Bamboo Rat (*Canomys badius*), which is not uncommon on the edge of cultivation. Bamboo Rats are heavily built, the eyes are small, and their soft dense fur completely hides their small ears. The large orange-coloured incisor teeth are a striking feature.

HYSTRICIDAE (Porcupines)

The Indian Porcupine (*Acanthion leucurus*) and the Crestless Himalayan Porcupine (*Acanthion hodgsoni*) both occur in Nepal. In the latter the dorsal crest of long bristle-like hairs is wanting.

LEPORIDAE AND OCHOTONIDAE (Hares and Mouse Hares)

Two species of hares are found in Nepal—the common Indian Hare (*Lepus ruficaudatus*), which is generally distributed, and the Woolly Hare (*Lepus oiostolus*), confined to the northern region. The Himalayan Mouse Hare (*Ochotona roylei nipalensis*) inhabits the higher parts of the northern and central regions. The Mouse Hares resemble guinea-pigs in form and habit—three varieties occur in the Himalayas, of which the Nepalese race is distinguished by its dark colouring.

UNGULATES

Elephants and Rhinoceros—(*Elephantidae and Rhinocerotidae*). The Elephant (*E. maximus*) is still plentiful in the dense jungles of the Tarai,

where they roam in herds of from eighty to ninety. During the rains they visit the cultivated areas, being thus a source of considerable damage to the crops. Numbers of Wild Elephants are captured annually in Nepal. The Great One-horned Rhinoceros (*R. unicornis*) is still plentiful in the Nepal Tarai, especially so in the Chitawan district and along the Rapti river. Though many are shot every year no appreciable diminution in their numbers has yet been made. Though the Rhinoceros prefers swamps and high grass, it is also found in wooded jungles and up the ravines and low hills in the Tarai. Many legends and beliefs are attached to the rhino in Nepal. H.H. General Kaiser Sham Sher Jang Bahadur has contributed a very interesting note on these animals to the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. He writes: "The flesh and the blood of the rhino is considered pure and highly acceptable to the *Manes*, to whom high-caste Hindus and most Gurkhas offer libation of its blood after entering its disembowelled body. On ordinary *Sradh* days the libation of water and milk is poured from a cup carved from its horn. The urine is considered antiseptic, it is hung in a vessel at the principal door as a charm against ghosts, evil spirits, and disease." Like the elephant, the rhinoceros wanders into the cultivated part of the Tarai during the rainy season to feed upon the rice crops.

BOVIDAE (Gaur, Sheep, Goats, etc.)

The Gaur or Indian Bison (*Bos gaurus*) is restricted to the Tarai, where it adheres to the most solitary parts of the sal forest, close to and between the salient spurs of the hills, never encroaching into open country.

The Yak (*Poephagus gruniens*), according to Hodgson, inhabits the northern region as well as Tibet, but only in the immediate vicinity of the snows. The tribes of the Kachar are said to rear large herds and cross-breed them with domestic cattle.

The Wild Buffalo (*Bubalis bubalis macroceros*) is confined to the Tarai, where its haunts are the margins, rather than the interior, of the principal forests—they never ascend the mountains and prefer the most swampy parts of the district they frequent. The Wild Buffaloes frequently inter-breed with domesticated animals, herds of which are driven into areas inhabited by wild buffaloes, remaining there in a semi-wild state for three or four months at a time.

WILD SHEEP AND GOATS

The Argali (*Ovis ammon hodgsoni*), the Bharal or blue sheep—the *Nahoor* of the Nepalese—the Himalayan Ibex (*Capra sibirica*) are all found on the snow-capped mountains of the northern region—a habitat they share with the Tahr (*Hemitragus jemlaicus*), known in Nepal as the "Jharal." According to Hodgson the Jharal inhabits the inaccessible bare crags close to the snows above tree level, feeding below such crags at early morning