



IN SOUTHERN INDIA. A wild elephant charging in the Mysore jungles. Sport is carefully regulated in Mysore, with bags and shooting licences strictly controlled.



A TIGER as the hunter may see it. Unrestricted shooting has driven game from many areas where it was once plentiful, especially those near large towns.

SHIKAR IN MODERN INDIA

By L. F. RUSHBROOK WILLIAMS

The changes of the past ten years: Problems of indiscriminate slaughter: Good sport and how to find it

BOMBAY, February 24th

ON returning to India in present times after a long interval one realises how great a change has come over the whole picture of sport and, indeed, of wild life in that country since it became independent 10 years ago. There is excellent shooting to be had, both of big and of small game, if one has Indian friends, or if one has the right introductions to the right people, or if one is a V.I.P. going out as the guest of the Government. Failing any of these qualifications, the traveller who intends to visit India for sport is advised to consult one of the recognised travel agencies in London before he starts. Most of these agencies have special sections, staffed by men who know Indian conditions well, to deal with a visitor's sporting requirements.

But, in addition, it is as well to enlist the interest of one of the several reputable shikar agencies in Bombay, Delhi or elsewhere. They know the local conditions, the best forest blocks that can be hired, the immediate prospects for shooting particular species in any given season—and the seasons vary very much. Moreover, there are extensive development projects going on in many parts of India; and a locality which was excellent for, say, spotted deer or panther in one year may be so changed that it is quite hopeless in the following season. For all these reasons, up-to-date knowledge of the kind available only on the spot is essential to avoid disappointment.

Broadly speaking, unless he has the luck to be the guest of a sporting Indian host, or has an introduction to one of the Indian princes (who, by and large, still command infinitely the best shooting, particularly of big game), the sportsman who goes to India gets exactly what hunting he can afford to pay for. Far more tourists come to India than ever before; many of them are anxious to take away with them trophies of the chase; the whole business is now to some extent organised on a commercial footing. This state of affairs sometimes leads to an unfortunate tug-of-war between the visitor—especially if he happens to be a poor shot or otherwise unskilful, but anxious to bag his trophy—and the recognised code of sportsmanship.

As a result, some agencies, in their zeal to satisfy their patrons, adopt practices of which no sportsman can approve, and which are often forbidden, at least on paper; such as mowing down (sometimes with shotguns!) animals dazzled at night by car spotlights. The trouble is that the enforcement of shooting regulations is very difficult in a country where forests are so extensive and where the value of the national heritage of wild life is still imperfectly appreciated, and at present there is no well-recognised, properly enforced, all-India regulation of shooting—such as a proper close season, or even a limitation of bags. By and large, the control of the conditions upon which a visitor's sport depends is in the hands of what were in British days called the Provincial Governments, and are

now the Governments of the States which together make up the Indian Federal Republic.

Some of these local Governments are very enlightened indeed about wild life. In Mysore, as well as in what used to be called Travancore and Saurashtra, good work is being done in the preservation of rare species, the limitation of bags, the strict control of gun and shooting licences, and the like. In these and certain other places, sport is carefully regulated, carefully supervised, and, in consequence, excellent—but expensive. Wild life in India owes much to some of these enlightened local authorities; for example, the survival of the rare Indian lion in the Gir Forest in western India is mainly due to purely local action. Kashmir, owing to the political situation, is in rather a different category; but in both the Indian and Pakistan sides, the arrangements for sportsmen are admirable and the preservation of game excellent. But other local Governments are sometimes a good deal more casual, enforcing no close season, issuing gun and shooting licences entirely indiscriminately, and, in general, doing nothing at all, except, perhaps, passing regulations on paper which are never enforced to protect the wild life which exists in their particular areas.

The result is that in many parts of India, where wild life was once plentiful and where shooting was good, there is now almost nothing to be had in the way of sport. The effects upon game of the general apathy concerning wild life have been rendered more serious by the multiplication of roads, the advent of the jeep, and the unrestricted issue of gun licences not only to the farmer but also to the townsman. There has now grown up a wholly new class of "urban" hunter, who goes out in his car or jeep to shoot for the pot or for the market irrespective of the (nominal) close season. Such people will blaze away at sitting birds, pursue deer and gazelle remorselessly across country in jeeps and shoot indiscriminately at herds with a shotgun, maiming or wounding many animals for every one which is dropped. Game birds and other small game have now almost disappeared from the vicinity of most of the larger centres of population; in these neighbourhoods it is no longer possible to stroll out in the cool of the evening with a 12-bore and bring back partridge, hare and other delicacies at the cost of a little exertion.

The outlook of some State Governments towards game of all kinds is now a curious mixture of opposites. On the one hand, there is often a feeling against shooting for sport at all. This is partly the expression of the old Hindu dislike of taking life, which has acquired new force from the political influence now exercised by some of those who share this dislike, and partly a middle-class, largely urban, reaction against hunting, which is regarded as a typically aristocratic pursuit which should have no place in an enlightened age. On the other hand, there is a reluctance, for political reasons, to displease the new class of people who shoot for the market and for the pot. Thus the feeling of the sanctity of animal life is

often overridden, and in these democratic days, when votes count for so much, a certain timidity of approach marks any efforts which are being made to restrain the depredations—for that is what they amount to—of the kind of "urban" hunter already mentioned, especially if he can represent himself as shooting for the market, and thus as supplementing the public food supply from wild life which is "public property."

The same sort of attitude is sometimes to be seen in local opposition to sanctuaries, national parks, nature reserves and hunting jungles. There is often some local interest which claims that these areas ought to be thrown open to indiscriminate shooting, to cultivation, or to any other form of "public use." Too little regard is often paid to the consideration that such areas, quite apart from their value in preserving the national heritage of wild life, are usually entirely unsuitable for any purpose except that to which they are being put. An Indian prince told me a story which throws an interesting sidelight upon present conditions. The prince, who was a keen sportsman, reserved for his own use certain tiger jungles when he made over his State to the Government. Before long, some of the local population began to sit fasting inside those jungles, claiming that the land was needed for cultivation. Out of pure public spirit the prince handed over the forests to the local authority. But the area was not cultivated at all. The local officials earmarked it for the "urban" hunters, who go out with nets slung on their jeeps and bring back deer for the market. The tigers have left because there is no more prey for them, and not one acre has come under the plough.

The Government of India, as might be expected, takes a broader view, and fully realises that India's wealth in wild life is part of her heritage—besides being an important attraction for the growing tourist industry. But even at New Delhi the official attitude towards shooting for sport sometimes strikes the European visitor as a little ambiguous. Shooting, particularly for big game, is often an essential part of the entertainment of V.I.P.s. who are Government guests. Quite often the Government will ignore its own system for arranging this and appeal to some Indian prince who is known to possess good big-game jungles to see that such a V.I.P. is not disappointed. The reason probably is that in the territory which was once part of an Indian State, the bond of attachment between the prince and the ordinary villager is still so strong that the whole population is eager to see that good sport is forthcoming. Although the princes no longer rule their former territories, and indeed do not now, for economic reasons, maintain the former extensive establishments of full-time professional hunters, entire villages gladly turn out when the prince appears, almost always without any payment at all, voluntarily ceasing all agricultural operations in the neighbourhood of a kill, and taking pride in bringing up-to-the-minute information about the location of animals and co-operating enthusiastically in the beat, anxious only that the prince and his guests shall enjoy good sport. There is small reason for surprise that invitations from an Indian prince to shoot with him are highly prized—and not only by V.I.P.s.!

In general, it is fair to say that the Government of India is little interested in encouraging shooting for sport, except in so far as limited facilities for it have to



AT CLOSE QUARTERS with an Indian tiger. The Board of Wildlife is attempting to interest the public in conservation and a number of sanctuaries and national parks have been established.

be provided as part of official hospitality, and there is not much disposition to put pressure upon local authorities to tighten up the game regulations, to enforce a close season, or to forbid the destruction of rare species. All these things, as we have seen, are done in some parts of India; but the impulse from which they result is local rather than central.

But there is an awakening consciousness in Delhi of the value of wild life in India as part of the national heritage. An Indian Board of Wild Life, under official auspices, is working hard to interest the public in the conservation of wild life. Moreover, there is considerable encouragement from the centre for establishment and preservation of sanctuaries and national parks, such as those at Kaziranga in Assam, Bandipur in Mysore, and Periyar near Trivandrum. These sanctuaries have excellent arrangements for visitors and a really wonderful variety of game, big and small, to be seen; but shooting can be done only with a camera, not with a rifle. From time to time a forest warden must kill a rogue elephant, or destroy a pack of wild dogs which menace all forest life; otherwise shooting is forbidden. But there are forest blocks which can be rented by sportsmen in regions not too far away from these sanctuaries. Here arrangements are excellent, poaching is kept down, and shooting is strictly regulated, but sport is excellent, although rather expensive.

All in all, it is fair to say that India is still one of the most interesting countries in the world for the sportsman, whether he specialises in big- or small-game animals or in game-birds. But one must be prepared to take sufficient trouble if one is not to be disappointed. Good local advice is essential; game is no longer on one's doorstep; it has to be looked for in the right places. And, above all, good sport is no longer available, as it used to be in the old days, for the mere price of one's cartridges.

What I have written applies more particularly to the sportsman who is going to India primarily for shooting with the intention of bringing back trophies for his hall or gun-room. The less ambitious cold-weather visitor who tours the country either in business or for pleasure can find an occasional day's shooting at partridge or duck with little expense or even with none at all. If he has an introduction to one of the hospitable Indian squires he may be lucky enough, along with his host, to shoot 30 or 40 partridge, 50 grouse, or a hundred duck in a single morning. And such introductions can often come from the visitor's own Indian social or business contacts.



BEATERS WAITING for the order to move off during a tiger hunt in Udaipur. Special arrangements are made to provide sport for tourists and official visitors.

