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“It will flourish, if naturalists, chemists, antiquaries, philologers, and men of science in different parts of *Asia*, will commit their observations to writing, and send them to the Asiatic Society at Calcutta. It will languish if such communications shall be long intermitted: and it will die away, if they shall entirely cease.”

SIR WM. JONES.

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1863.

A Further Note on Wild Asses, and alleged Wild Horses.

—By E. BLYTH.

1. *The Wild Ass of the African Zahára.*

At the time that my paper ‘On the Different Animals known as Wild Asses,’ (Vol. XXVIII. 229,) was submitted to the public, I had seen no detailed description of an undoubted African wild Ass, though (for reasons assigned) I claimed it as the veritable *ASINUS ONAGER*, as distinguished from sundry kindred specific races that had been a good deal confounded. This animal has, of late, been received both in the Paris *Jardin des Plantes*, and in the London Zoological Gardens; though, still, no particular notice of it would appear to have been yet published, shewing its distinctive characters, upon comparison, with the *HEMIPPUS*, *HEMIONUS*, &c.; nor have we been made acquainted with those that are alleged to justify the discrimination of the *Kyang* from the *Ghor-khur*. In a very interesting work* that I have lately seen, however, I find a description of the wild Ass of the African Zahára, which, I think, worthy of citing, and thus bringing more prominently to notice; and, especially, as it indicates the existence of at least a second African species, as the *Hamar* or *Ahmar* of Sudan; which latter is, doubtless, that which Dr. Barth considered to be identical in species with Mr. R. Schlagintweit’s Indian *Ghor-khur*. I may further notice, that, in Kraff’s Travels, &c., in E. Africa (p. 277), “wild Asses” are mentioned as being “plentiful in Kayo” (about 5° N. lat.)

Mr. Tristram writes, that, while his companion “set off with his sketch-book, I returned to see a very fine Ass which had been brought, for inspection, and was valued at thirty dollars. Having heard that wild Asses were to be occasionally found in the Soufa desert, on the route to Ghadames, I had made every enquiry after one; fully believing that I should see the Koomrah (*Equus hippagrus*, Jardine,)† mentioned by Dr. Shaw, and known to inhabit some of the sparsely wooded hills of the Fezzan country.

“My surprise, therefore, was great on seeing a veritable ‘Onager’ or wild Ass, of what exact species I cannot state. He certainly approached, very near, the *ASINUS ONAGER* of Asia [meaning the *Ghor-khur*, or *E. asinus onager* of Pallas and the younger Gmelin‡],

* *The Great Sahára: Wanderings South of the Atlas mountains.* By H. B. Tristram, M. A., F. Z. S., &c. (1860), p. 318.

† *Potius* C. Hamilton Smith, in Jardine’s *Nat. Libr.*—E. B.

‡ *Asinus indicus*, Sclater.

and possessed all the marks which distinguished this species from the *Hamar* or *Ahmar* of Sudan[!]. He stood about two hands higher than a common Ass [the race found in England is doubtless meant*] was very strong-limbed, of a rich slatish ash-colour, with the stripe running from the mane to the tail, and the cross-stripe on the shoulder; his coat very sleek and short [the summer vesture]. His nose and limbs were white; and the lower part of the neck, and between the shoulders, whitish; the mane and tail blackish; with ears broad; and I think, perhaps, longer than in the common Ass: square-built and powerful; with a keen, lively eye; and teeth ready to seize the first opportunity for a snap at any by-stander. He trotted with great speed, and cantered easily. He had been caught when very young, and was considered unusually tame for one of his species; but still he was capricious and unmanageable, and required a tremendous bit to hold him.

“These Asses form valuable beasts of burthen, from their power of sustaining a three-days’ march without water; but the adults are very difficult to entrap and impossible to train. The natives say that they are not gregarious [?], but consort regularly with the Ostrich, and have a keen sight and still keener scent. I have since regretted that I did not make some effort to bring this animal to England; because, I feel persuaded, that it differs, as a variety, if not as a species, from any hitherto seen in our Zoological Gardens.”

Of a rich *slatish ash-colour*, with the humeral as well as the dorsal stripe well developed! Surely the true aboriginal Donkey, as I contended before; and, from a brief description which I have received from the present talented Secretary of the Zoological Society, P. L. Selater, Esq., I should say identical in race with another African (Nubian?) specimen, received some time ago in that Society’s menagerie: only the latter has limb-stripes, also, which is not stated of Mr. Tristram’s animal; though this is of no importance whatever, except that the African Onager’s limb-stripes would seem to be those commonly seen in domestic Asses; whereas the limb-markings of the *Ghor-khur* (when it shews them), are altogether different, consisting of narrow and close wavy and sometimes reticulating cross-lines chiefly at the joints, and of a light fawn-colour; those of the true

* The late Don Carlos had an Ass in his stud-house at Aranjuez, in 1832, that exceeded fifteen hands in height. *Vide* the Hon’ble Richard Ford’s *Gatherings in Spain* (1846), p. 72.

Donkey being broader, much wider apart, and black. None of the kindred races is stated, ever, to be of a slaty hue; though it now appears that both *Ghor-ikhur* and *Kyang* are subject to variation of colour; and, in India, the puny domestic Asses of the country exhibit precisely the same range of colouring as the Camel. A *pieb* Ass is what I have never heard of. Here, the reported 'wild Ass' of the N. E. Shan States, noticed in p. 169 *antea*, may again be referred to.*

2. *The alleged Wild Horses of Mongolia.*

In the late Mr. T. Witlam Atkinson's 'Travels in the Regions of the Upper and Lower Amoor,' &c. (2nd edit., 1861), the Appendix consists of a series of highly interesting lists of the mammalia, birds, and ordinary plants, respectively of the valley of the Amoor (divided into Upper, Middle, and Lower), of the Kirghiz steppe, Kara-taw, Ala-taw, and Tarbagatai, and of the trans-Baikal and Siberia.† EQUUS HEMIONUS is mentioned, as an inhabitant only of the upper Amoor territory; and EQUUS CABALLUS *sylvestris*, only in the grand last-mentioned region: but the description (in p. 325) most assuredly denotes a *feral* as distinguished from an aboriginally wild race of Horse, or rather of *Pony*, analogous to that of true wild Ass in Africa. With the wild ASINI (of different specific races), some variation of shade of colour undoubtedly does occur, as before remarked; but is exceptional. No aboriginally wild mammal is known that varies ordinarily so much in hue, as would seem to be implied by Mr. Atkinson's description of the alleged wild Horses of Mongolia.

"This animal is not like the wild [or rather feral] Horse of South America, which undoubtedly sprung from those taken into the country by the Spaniards. He is of a distinct race from the Asiatic Horse [which, of among so very many Asiatic races? At all events, he, too, is Asiatic;] very small (not so large as an Ass), beautiful in form, having a small head and short ears, and varying in colour from black, bay, grey, and white, the latter being the most rare. He is called 'Muss' by the Kirghis. His sense of smell is very acute, which renders him most difficult to approach, and few Horses can run him down." The author incidentally mentions that these animals are found, in great herds (about May), near the foot of the mountains beyond the river

* I have recently observed several domestic Asses, of a very dark colour, but having no trace of the cross.

† From Dr. Leopold von Schrenk. *Vide Natural History Review*, Jan. 1861, p. 13.

Ili; and describes the mode of hunting them, which is to chase a herd into a narrow mountain-pass, secured on the other side, so that the poor animals run into a trap, and are there cruelly butchered with battle-axes; for "the Khirghiz consider their flesh the greatest delicacy the steppe affords."

I am disposed to consider that the herds, referred to, have about as much claim to be considered as aboriginally wild, as have the New Forest Ponies in England,—neither less nor more,—or, as the feral cattle of Chillingham Park, with their likewise very suspicious colouring; the latter, too, being artificially maintained by weeding out all calves that deviate in hue. I do not think that the *EQUUS CABALLUS* has, anywhere, so good a claim to be regarded as aboriginally wild, at the present day, as have the One-humped Camels noticed by Rüppell, as abounding in the long stretch of desert between the valley of the Nile and the Red Sea; but, it is to be regretted that M. Rüppell does not mention the colouring of these animals, whether, or not, subject to much variation. A large proportion of the domestic Camels of vast tracts of the African continent are white; and a prevalence of white individuals would be highly suspicious, in the herds which M. Rüppell considers as feral; but which may yet be truly as aboriginally wild as are the African wild Asses, which, also, by the way, were considered as feral by the late Prince of Canino. It must be a rare circumstance, indeed, for a Camel, left to perish by the Arabs and others, to recover; though, still, Camels may have strayed from domesticity. Should the wild herds not vary much in colour, I see no reason why they might not be regarded as probably aboriginal.*

* When I noticed what I termed the decimation of the wild herds of Elephants in Borneo (in p. 197 *antea*.) it should have been remarked, that, if the *tuskers* only were killed, it would no more affect the multiplication of the race, than does the withdrawal by emasculation of so many males of our common domestic animals. *Pro tanto*, therefore, the decimation argument goes for nothing.

The Mogul Emperor Báber mentions, incidentally, the occurrence of the Rhinoceros, the wild Buffalo, and the Lion, in the neighbourhood of Benáres; and wild Elephants in the vicinity of Chunâr! When nearly approaching Benáres, he states—"At the station, a man said that in an island close on the edge of the camp, he had seen a Lion and a Rhinoceros. Next morning we drew a ring round the ground; we also brought Elephants to be in readiness, but no Lion nor Rhinoceros was roused. On the edge of the circle one wild Buffalo was started ***. In the jungle around Chunâr, there are many Elephants." (p. 407). Elsewhere, he asserts that the Elephant "inhabits the district of Kalpi; and the higher you advance from thence towards the East, the more do the wild Elephants increase in number. That is the tract where the Elephant is chiefly taken. There may be thirty or forty villages in Karrah and Manikpûr that are occupied solely in this employment of taking Elephants." Upon which, the translator justly remarks, in a note penned about half a century ago, that—"The improvement of Hindustân,

Order Chelonia.—By S. R. TICKELL, ESQ.

Maulmein, March 8th, 1862.

To the Secretary of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

DEAR SIR,—I have the pleasure to send to the museum of the Society a specimen, as well prepared as circumstances permitted, of a rare and little described species of Turtle, of which I beg to annex the following description, which may perhaps be considered worthy of publication in the Journal of the Society.

Your's obediently,

S. R. TICKELL.

Family. Thalassidæ.

Genus. Sphargis (Merrem).

Synonyms. Corinda (Fleming).

Dermatochelys (Blainville).

Species. Coriacea? (Auctorum).

“The Trunk Turtle” (apud Bell).

The specimen herewith forwarded to the Society is a female. She was captured, February 1st, 1862, near the mouth of the Yé river (in the Tenasserim Provinces), on the sandy beach of which she had since Báber's time, must be prodigious. The wild Elephant is now confined to the forests under Hemâla, and to the Ghâts of Malabar. A wild Elephant near Karrah (Currah), Manikpûr, or Kalpi, is a thing, at the present day, totally unknown. May not their familiar existence, in these countries, down to Báber's days, be considered as rather hostile to the accounts given of the superabundant population of Hindustân in remote times?—I have now reliable information of the unexpected fact of a two-horned Rhinoceros having been killed in Asâm! where it is undoubtedly exceedingly rare. I was told this by a friend, whose informant (when in the province) had seen the two horns attached to the skin; but I cannot at present obtain further details.—As regards the reported existence of a one-horned Rhinoceros in Africa (*vide* p. 153 *antea*), Dr. Livingstone incidentally remarks—and I cite the whole passage because of its interest—that “Sportsmen have still some work before them in the way of discovering the fauna of Africa. This country abounds in game; and beyond Berotse, the herds of large animals surpass anything I ever saw [elsewhere], Eilands and Buffalos, their tameness was shocking to me: 81 Buffalos defiled slowly before our fire one evening, and Lions were impudent enough to roar at us. On the south of the Choba, where Bushmen abound, they are very seldom heard; these brave fellows teach them better manners. My boatmen informed me that he had seen an animal, with long wide-spreading horns like an Ox, called *Liombikalela*; also another animal, which does not live in the water, but snorts like a Hippopotamus, and is like that animal in size—it has a horn, and may be a one-horned Rhinoceros. And we passed some holes of a third animal, which burrows from the river inland, has short horns, and feeds only by night. I did not notice the burrows at the time of passing, but I give you the report as I got it. Sable Antelopes abound, and so does the Nakong; and there is a pretty little Antelope on the Sesheki, called *Teeanyane*, which seemed new to me. These animals did not lie in my line, so you must be content with this brief notice.” (*Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. XXIV, 700) A horned burrowing animal is not very likely to exist.