



Progress Report of Forest
Administration in the
Province of Assam
for the year
1935-36

SHILLONG

PRINTED AT THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT PRESS

1936

Price Rs.3-6 or 5s.

100. The Department received through the Forest Utilization Officer a large contract for sleepers, many of which are being supplied by small Assamese contractors who were in danger of being squeezed out of business.

101. The Deputy Director of Agriculture, Live-stock, Assam, continued to direct the breeding of cattle by the graziers who are living as Forest Villagers on the River Aie, and his efforts have been so successful in improving the cattle that the graziers are only too willing to adopt any suggestions that he may have to make.

He has now been asked to undertake the improvement of the Nepali buffaloes grazing in the Laokhowa and Kaziranga Forest Reserves, and the decadent Assamese buffalo in the Panidehing Forest Reserve, while he will be in charge of breeding operations in North Lakhimpur, if the proposals to set aside an area there for the maintenance of a stock of the real Assamese buffalo can be given effect to.

CHAPTER IX

THE PRESERVATION OF WILD LIFE AND ELEPHANT CONTROL

1.—THE PRESERVATION OF WILD LIFE.

102. The writer was unable to find time to tour in any of the three Sanctuaries in the Province except for a couple of days in the Sonai-Rupa Sanctuary.

103. *The Monas Sanctuary* of 159 square miles on the Bhutan boundary was in the general charge of Mr. J. Swer, Extra Assistant Conservator of Forests, under whom was the Cachari Game-keeper with the rank of Forest Ranger.

The whole of this forest lies in the "Bhabar" Tract where most of the rivers become dry during the cold weather soon after emerging from the Himalayan foot-hills, and do not contain water again for several miles, and Mr. Swer is of opinion that the migration of rhino mentioned in last year's Report is probably only made in search of the water that is always to be found just inside Bhutan, which luckily is not inhabited just there.

Poaching has not been serious and is confined to killing deer and occasional fishing.

It is difficult to form any estimate of the rhino closer than the number given in last year's Report, namely 15 to 25 mature pairs.

Elephants are numerous, buffalo plentiful on the Jia and Mora Monas, Bison plentiful along the Bhutan boundary, and Swamp deer are found in enormous herds in the grassy country. Sambhur, Hog deer, Barking deer, Pig, Pigmy Hog, Tiger, Leopard, Himalayan and Sloth Bear, Pea-fowl and Florican are all fairly numerous where the country is to their liking. Wild dogs are found close to the foot-hills.

His Excellency the Governor visited this Sanctuary again during the course of the year.

104. *The Kaziranga Sanctuary* of 165 square miles on the south bank of the Brahmaputra remains under the charge of Mr. M. C. Miri, Extra Assistant Conservator of Forests, who with his staff has been indefatigable in safe-guarding the area under his protection.

Three rhinos were found dead during the course of the year, one possibly poached, one probably killed as the result of fighting, and one probably dead from old age.

The vigilance with which this Sanctuary is now guarded, and the ruthless persistence with which clues regarding former poaching cases have been followed up, in one particularly important case by Deputy Ranger Syed Abdul Ali, combined with the ready assistance of the Subdivisional Officer and Deputy Commissioner, have killed rhino-poaching for the time being, for which the staff deserve every credit.

Mr. Miri believes that there cannot be less than 50 pairs of adult animals, and as the most favourable area for them is restricted, measures will now have to be considered for pitting live specimens for sale to zoological gardens: this will bring profit to the Department and relieve the congestion and over-crowding that will otherwise occur.

This low-lying Sanctuary contains a few elephants and very large herds of buffalo, a few Bison and Sambhur, Hog-deer Swamp-deer, and Barking-deer. Tiger, bear and pig are rare and wild dog not found.

Arrangements were made for taking colour films of the animals in Kaziranga but had to be postponed as the party could not commence operations before the new grass had grown too high.

The only non-official Expedition made into the Sanctuary during the year was shown 15 rhino in one day, all more or less in the same place.

Visitors can be provided with Government elephants at a fixed rate of hire, and on these with due caution can approach to within point-blank range of the rhino in the open.

Many enquiries have been received, and it is expected that visitors will become numerous. When funds permit, it will be possible to do more for the accommodation and comfort of these.

105. *The Sonai-Rupa Sanctuary* of 67 square miles on the Aka Hills boundary in Darrang is under the charge of a Deputy Ranger, who receives much assistance from Messrs. Erskine Scott and Milburne, Honorary Forest Officers, the former of whom lives inside the Sanctuary during most of the cold weather.

The Deputy Ranger believes there to be 12 or 13 rhino, and reports that after the close of the year (March 31st) he has found foot-prints in localities which they do not usually visit, and he ascribes this to increasing confidence following freedom from molestation.

There were solitary bulls but no buffalo-herds living in this Sanctuary during the year though the writer found fresh tracks of one two years ago. The east boundary of the Sanctuary was fixed as the Diputa River, but last cold weather the old Aka Path was cleared, and if this is constituted the east boundary (it is all inside Reserved Forest), several more *bils* visited by buffalo will be included as well as the interesting Daini and Jora salt-licks.

Elephant and Bison are common, the latter now coming boldly down south after the rains have started, and often remaining close to the quarters of our staff. Sambhur, Barking Deer and pig are numerous and there are a few Hog Deer but no Swamp Deer. Tigers are common, bears and leopards are fairly common. Wild dogs are seen fairly often.

The forests here have been declared a Silvicultural Preservation Plot closed to exploitation for all time, so that this area will be valuable to those who wish to study the Flora as well as to naturalists.

Thanks to the assiduity of the Deputy Ranger and his staff there has been very little disturbance of the game, and the Political Officer has dealt promptly with any small cases of fishing that have been reported to him.

106. New draft Rules regulating sport in Reserved Forests have been published in the Gazette inviting criticisms and suggestion from the public, and it is expected that the next shooting season will start with shikar properly organized and controlled for the first time.

Henceforth it should be possible to publish accurate statistics of all animals shot in Reserved Forests.

107. The Local Government have issued orders that Police and Forest Officers should be permitted to raise objections when known poachers present their gun-licenses for renewal: this order should have a most salutary effect.

Two rhino were shot during the year in the Laokhowa Reserve in Nowgong, leading to the dismissal of a Forest Guard, who was grossly negligent, if not an actual accessory, and to the non-renewal of gun licenses.

108. Difficulty has been found in keeping out deer-poachers from the Reserved Forests in the Kochugaon and Haltugaon divisions (formerly known as Goalpara) and this matter will receive special attention next season. No carcasses of rhino have been found there, and there are still a number of these animals scattered about.

109. A 3-year lease for catching snakes and monitor-lizards for their skins in these 2 divisions ended on March 31st: not only has the lease been instrumental in allowing poachers to mark down the habitats of game, but it has been found to upset the balance of nature, resulting in serious damage by rats in our plantations, and no such mahals will be constituted again.

110. Though he was unable to inspect the Sanctuaries the writer found time to make two expeditions in connection with a Resolution passed by the Legislative Council asking that greater protection might be afforded the wild buffalo, and greater encouragement given to the breeding of the half-wild stock for which Assam has always been famous, and which needs crossing with the wild bulls from time to time to preserve its size and milking qualities. An area in the uninhabited North-East corner of Kamrup was found to contain wild buffalo (and also a valuable stand of trees) and has been put up for reservation. Another area in North Lakhimpur, containing wild buffalo and suitable for breeding Assamese buffalo, has been gazetted for Forest Settlement proceedings next cold weather; it is understood that considerable opposition will be raised during the course of these.

The Government of Assam is doing all that is possible for the wild buffalo and, though the herds still existing outside reserved forests are certain to be killed out in the course of time, the species anyhow will be preserved from extinction inside the Reserves.

The domesticated pure-bred Assamese buffalo is, however, bound to die out very soon unless some immediate action is taken to ensure survival.

The proposed Reserve as laid out interferes very little with anyone's amenities except that it would prevent the local expansion of Bengali immigrants. Previous endeavours to keep this valuable breed of buffalo from disappearing have been defeated by the apathy of the Assamese themselves, and the writer is convinced that this represents the very last chance of doing so. Now that the Assamese themselves have at least realized the danger of losing an unique possession of which they should indeed be proud, and have passed a Resolution in Council on the subject, it is to be hoped that the reservation proposals will not be considered from an entirely parochial point of view. There are thousands and thousands of acres elsewhere in Assam suitable for immigrants but not containing both wild buffalo and the room for running tame herds in their vicinity. And it should be understood that this is far from being a matter of sentiment only, but is one of importance at a time when there is such a drive on to improve India's cattle stock, for if the Forest Department can be permitted to provide facilities for the maintenance of a few pedigree herds, as it were, from which breeding bulls could be supplied to herds of the more docile but decadent animals throughout the settled parts of the country, Assam could produce buffaloes of more outstanding draught powers and of higher milking capacity than the average now found.

II.—ELEPHANT CONTROL

(a) *Kheddahs and Mela Shikar*

111. Mr. P. D. Stracey, Deputy Conservator of Forests, was in charge of the semi-departmental *Kheddahs* in Sibsagar district, in which 283 elephants were caught in stockades and 10 by *Mela Shikar*.

Ninety-four elephants were released, mostly being adult females that are not profitably saleable these days.

Nine elephants only were killed or died in removal from the stockades or at the depôt during training: this is satisfactory and is a tribute to the care exercised by Mr. Stracey and the skill of the Forest Veterinary Assistant Surgeon in what is by far the most difficult part of the elephant-catching business.