

DIVYABHANUSINH, Asok Kumar DAS and Shibani BOSE. *The Story of India's Unicorns*. Marg Foundation, Mumbai: 2018. 151 pp.; illustrated. Price INR 2,000, US\$ 48.00 (hardback). ISBN 9789383243235.

In South Asia the rhinoceros is now restricted to protected areas in the Indian states of West Bengal and Assam, and in the southern part of Nepal. The animal had a much wider distribution some three centuries ago, and a good amount of traces from this period are left, where humans crossed its path. This book is a celebration of the interaction between man and rhinoceros in India, well written and beautifully illustrated. The title already indicates that the contents are restricted to accounts from India (with a few minor excursions to Nepal) and to the greater one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), which is now the only surviving species in the subcontinent. The book will appeal to a large audience, both in India and abroad, to scholars studying the impact of the rhinoceros on culture, as well as to the general public fascinated by this magnificent animal.

The historian Shibani Bose gathered information on faunal remains and a surprising array of Mesolithic rock paintings found in the mid-Indian region around the river Narmada. The same author extends her analysis through antiquity with a series of seals and figurines of the Harappa civilization, a variety of portrayals such as a medallion at the Buddhist stupa at Sanchi, a symbol of a Jain deity, a terracotta plaque unearthed near Kolkata, and gold coins issued by the fifth-century ruler Kumaragupta I. Although, to do justice to such a diversity of source materials, these chapters would have benefited from a more uniform analysis of the chronological periods and identification of the localities, the pertinent information is largely included.

The art historian Asok Kumar Das gives a clear overview of the miniatures in the Mughal tradition, showing that rhinos were hunted and captured, often in amazingly large numbers. Apparently, the rhinoceros was an important subject in Mughal art. Unfortunately, there is little information if these paintings represent actual events, when or where. Das also explores representations of the rhinoceros in art and culture from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are some interesting examples in the illustrations, including a painting by Thomas Daniell, which should have been identified as the specimen sketched in Kotdwara (close to Corbett National Park) in 1789.

The naturalist Divyabhanusinh continues the historical narrative through the British period to the present. The range of the rhinoceros in northern India dramatically reduced due to destruction of habitat, spread of indigo and tea plantations, and hunting. Much of what we know about the Indian rhinoceros in the nineteenth century is gleaned from books written by people who went out with their gun. The howdah used by the maharajas of Banaras with a rhinoceros in relief is a special find. The book ends with an illustrated narrative of a translocation of rhinos from Kaziranga to Manas in Assam in 2012, which is needed to stock parks where animals were depleted through poaching, as well as to reduce the pressure on the habitat in Kaziranga and Chitwan, where the animals have thrived under stringent protection.

The names of the rhino species in the Appendix need to be edited. A decent bibliography finishes the book. This story is the third in a series treating Indian wildlife, preceded by books on the lion and the elephant. Both the authors and the publisher have to be complemented on producing a volume fit for interested laymen as well as advanced naturalists.

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KEES ROOKMAAKER

Michael HAYWARD and Martin RICKARD. *Fern Albums and Related Material*. British Pteridological Society, London: 2019. 226 pp.; illustrated. Price £25.00 (paperback). ISBN 9780992612047.

This comprehensive study is written primarily for collectors of Victorian fern albums and for those with an interest in the history of botanical collecting. Botanical specimens are easily preserved by means of drying between sheets of absorbent paper to which some pressure is applied to ensure the specimen is flattened. Successful drying will preserve not only the shape but also the colour of a plant. An herbarium