

# Parks & Recreation

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## GREAT INDIAN RHINOCEROSES

By RALPH GRAHAM, *Assistant Director, Chicago Zoological Park, Brookfield, Illinois*

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Mr. Graham went to Assam for the animals that he describes in this article. He was on the ground throughout the period when the rhinos were captured, became accustomed to human beings, and were shipped to Chicago via Calcutta.*

The Chicago Zoological Park at Brookfield, Illinois, is now exhibiting a pair of Great Indian rhinoceroses, the only pair in captivity other than the pair in the Calcutta Zoological Gardens. These rhinos were the gift of George B. Dryden, of Chicago, who has hunted and filmed Black rhinoceroses in Africa.

Permission to capture the two animals was granted to the Society by His Excellency, Sir Akbar Hydari, Governor of Assam, India, through the intercession of Arthur Vernay, of New York, and the actual job of capturing the beasts was carried out in co-operation with the Forest Department of Assam under the senior conservator, P. D. Stracey.

The Forest Department estimates that there are between 400 and 600 Great Indian rhinos remaining in India at present, and they are to be found in three general ranges — the foothills of Nepal, a small reserve in Bengal which probably shelters no more than a dozen animals, and the Kaziranga Game Sanctuary of Assam, where the greatest concentration occurs and where Brookfield's pair was captured.

The Kaziranga Game Sanctuary is situated about 500 miles northeast of Calcutta; its northern border being formed by the Brahmaputra River and its southern border by the Assam Trunk Road which the American Army virtually built and over which it hauled supplies into Ledo and the Burma Road. It is approximately thirty miles from east to west, and it is from eight to twelve miles between the Brahmaputra and the Trunk Road.

The sanctuary was established in 1906 by the Government of Assam, primarily for the preservation of the rhinoceros. The animal at that time was nearing extinction from being ruthlessly hunted by "sportsmen" and from being killed by natives for the sake of the horn which they sold to the Chinese. The Chinese ground it as the major ingredient of a mixture that they sold as an alleged powerful aphrodisiac. At that time there were said to be as few as twenty individual animals in this area. Besides rhinos, there are water-buffaloes, elephants, deer, boars, tigers, leopards, bears, and many species of birds living in the area.

The entire sanctuary is overspread with a tall, almost bamboo-like grass called ekra, elephant grass, or jungle grass as the natives refer to it. There are a few open parklands interspersed through the region and in these a short, lush grass grows. It is to these areas that the rhinos go to graze in the morning and evening. The ekra attains a height of



WILD RHINO IN BURNED AREA OF SANCTUARY

ten to fifteen feet, and averages about eleven. It grows so densely that it is impossible for a man on foot to get through without chopping his way, but the rhinos have worn a labyrinth of trails throughout. These are kept open by the continued passage of the animals.

A manifestation peculiar to rhinoceroses is evident in the open parklands. Each individual has its own one or more particular spots where it goes to defecate. It kicks its feces into a neat pile, some of the piles reaching a height of four feet. These are the first things to greet the eye upon entering an open area. From a distance they look much like a number of mounds of black earth.

Each year during the dry season, the Forest Department burns sections of the ekra. This gives the men a chance to check on the rhinos, for it is impossible to see one in the green ekra whereas they can be detected readily in a burned area.

Well-traveled trails in the ekra were first chosen. Then pitfalls twelve feet long, four to five feet wide, and about six feet deep were dug and covered each day with fresh grass. The subsoil of most of the area was swampy (at a depth of four or five feet), hence it served as an excellent shock absorber

for the rhinos when they crashed through the thin grass covering into the pit below.

To remove the rhinos from the pit, a wide ramp was dug with the deep end separated from the front end of the pit by only 18 inches of earth. An iron cage was pushed down the ramp, with the end gates opened so that they touched the barrier of earth. The cage was mounted on sections of a tree trunk, and these acted as wheels. When the cage was in position, the barrier was chopped away and the rhino was goaded until it finally surged into the cage. Then the bolts were shoved into their sleeves to secure the end gates and the caged rhino was hauled to a previously prepared stockade built of light logs. There it was liberated in the enclosure.

The purpose of transferring the animals to the stockade instead of immediately putting them into their shipping crates was to give them an opportunity to recover from the shock of capture, and, equally as important, to let them accustom themselves to mankind. They fought the stockade fence for the first four or five days, and then suddenly seemed to reconcile themselves to their



MALE RHINO IN PIT

situation. Within a week they would come to the fence when called and hold their mouths open so that a handful of grass could be shoved in.

Wooden shipping cages were built in Calcutta and forwarded to Kaziranga, but their construction was so poor that it was necessary to take them apart and completely rebuild them.

The animals were hauled one at a time by an antiquated truck and home-made trailer from Kaziranga to Dhansirimukh, on the Brahmaputra, a distance of 15 miles. It took over a week to complete this part of the operation as the road was not of the best and the monsoon was beginning. There they were loaded on a river boat, and after a 15 day trip down the Brahmaputra, the



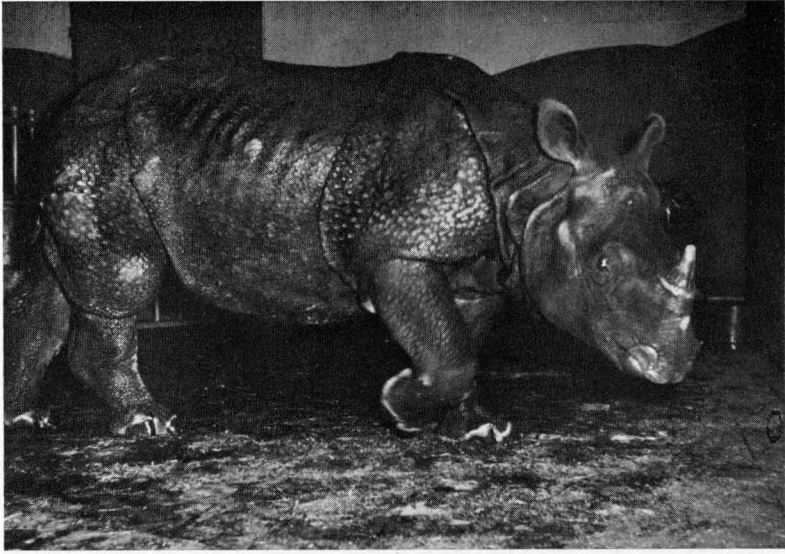
HAULING CAGE INTO PIT

Ganges, through the Sundarbans, across the upper end of the Bay of Bengal, and up the Hooghly River, they reached Calcutta. There they were reloaded on a cargo ship which took them to Savannah, Georgia, after a 29-day voyage. From there to Chicago their trip was completed in an express car.

They withstood the whole trip remarkably well, considering the fact that the Indian hay was of very poor quality, and that they suffered from seasickness for the first four days out of Calcutta. These factors caused them to lose some weight on the voyage.



FEMALE RHINO IN STOCKADE



MALE, KASHI RAM, AT BROOKFIELD

The male, Kashi Ram, weighed 3450 pounds upon his arrival at Brookfield, and Kamala Rani, the female, tipped the scales at 3340 pounds. They have each regained 200 to 300 pounds and appear to be thriving in their new habitat.

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## GROUNDHOG NOT APPROVED BY WEATHER MAN

For reasons which, obviously, are not all clear to groundhogs, the weather is more important on February 2nd than on any other day. This year was no exception.

Bright and early on Groundhog Day, a mysterious box was carried out through the service entrance of the Philadelphia Zoo. It was put into an automobile and taken down to the weather bureau at the Philadelphia Customs House. Up the elevator it went, ten flights in all, and was brought into an office where newspaper photographers and newsreel camera-men were waiting. The box was placed on a table, the lid flew open, and out stepped — who else? Gertie, the Philadelphia Zoo's "progressive" groundhog!

Gertie had accepted the challenge of Henry P. Adams, the local weather man, to look over scientific techniques of weather forecasting. Skeptical but curious, she had responded favorably to Adam's suggestion that she take a sniff or two at some of his modern instruments.

For a moment Gertie and the weather man eyed each other across anemometers, thermometers, and whirling psychrometers. Gertie wasn't impressed. She had seen her shadow and predicted six more weeks of snow and ice.

Like her famous predecessor, Suzie, who died in 1947, Gertie has never resorted to the use of instruments. While she lacks the ten years of experience which lent so much