

# TRIPURA DISTRICT GAZETTEERS



TRIPURĀ

By

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*Rodentia*

This fairly large order includes the gnawing mammals like the squirrels, rats, mice and the porcupine. In general, most of them are destructive to garden crops. From amongst the larger varieties of squirrels are seen here two species: (1) the Large Indian Squirrel (*Sciurus indicus*)—with a pale band across the vertex in front of the ears; and (2) the large Malay Squirrel (*S. bicolor*)—B. *Kat Beral*, whose upper parts are black and the lower parts buff-coloured. The latter species seems to be more numerous here than the former. Both the species are arboreal and are found only in thick jungles. The medium-sized squirrels are represented by the hoary-bellied Himalayan Squirrel (*S. locroides*). From amongst the rats are seen certain stoutly built large Bamboo Rats (*Rhysomys sq.*). The Indian Porcupine *Hystrix indica*—B. *Sojaru*, its body covered with long and erectile spines, is also seen in Tripura, although in small number.

*Lagomorpha*

Rabbits and hares, though gnawing animals like the members of the preceeding order, have been recently separated into this group. The Hare (*Lepus ruficaudatus*)—B. *Khargosh*, is seen common in the jungles throughout Tripura.

*Ungulata*

To this great order of hoofed mammals belongs animals of great value to man like the elephant, deer, horses and the cattle. This order has been recently split up into three separate orders: (1) *Perissodactyla* or the odd-toed ungulates like the horses and the rhinoceros, (2) *Artiodactyla* or the even-toed ungulates like the deer and the cattle, and (3) *Proboscidea* which includes the elephants.

The Indian elephants (*Elephas maximus*)—B. *Hathi*, seen in rather large numbers in the forests of Tripura are, by far, the most valuable wild life of this territory. They are seen in herds in the forests of Kalajhari hill range, Abhaya, Anandapur hill range, Raima Sarma valley (especially Gondacharā), catchment area of Deo river (especially, Ananda Bazar, Nabinhampārā), Langtarāi (especially Jamircharā and Dhumacharā) and the catchment area of the Manu river (i.e. Lalcharā, Chhāmanu, Rajdharcharā, Māldharcharā). There are frequent reports of depredations by wild elephants in the tribal villages, particularly in the harvesting season. Taking proper precaution against the attack of these wild animals, particularly the 'rogue' elephants, tribals in the



elephant infested areas live in houses built on tree tops. Sometimes such houses are utilised only as a temporary refuge when attacked by the wild elephants. Even as late as in 1952, wild elephants used to maraud the M. B. B. College campus at Agartala creating havoc, killing people and damaging property. One of the biggest elephants so far known to have been killed in India has been from the forests of Bilonia in the year 1957 by Capt. Jaipal, the then Officer Commanding of the Tripura Signal Sec. NCC. The elephant catching operations which were being carried out directly by the Forest Department of the State during the Maharaja's regime, are now being done by private parties from the neighbouring State of Assam, as per terms and conditions laid down by the Forest Department from time to time.

Rhinoceroses are not seen in Tripura now, although there are reports that they were there in large numbers during the first decade of the present century.

Amongst the even-toed ungulates, the family *Bovidae* (hollow-horned ruminants) is represented by the Indian 'Bison' (*Bos frontalis*)—*Gabai*, *Mithun*. They are seen in the Kashari reserve forests, and between Abhaya and Garji in the southern part of Tripura. But there is no doubt that their number even here is highly limited. The local tribals are fond of their flesh. On examination of a skull of this specimen, it was found that unlike in the true Gayals, the tip of their horns are slightly incurved approaching a condition similar to that of the Gaur (*Bos gaurus*)—*B. Gaur*. It is possible that the latter species also exists in the area, but even then their number must be very few. The Wild Buffalo (*B. bubalis*)—*B. Bonmohish*—with a rather flattened and much elongated horns are reported to be present in the forests south of Dambur in areas adjoining the Chittagong hill tracts. But, it is almost certain that this too, if present, must be in a stage of near extinction in this territory. Unless very strict protective measures are enforced, these animals are likely to face total extinction in near future.

Some of the members of the Deer family are in no better plight than their relatives just mentioned. The Sambar Deer (*Cervus*=*Russa unicolor*)—*B. Kaleswar*—is one such example. They are large-sized animals with antlers having very short pedicles. Their colour is dark brown or grey. There are indications that they were once found in large numbers in this area. A species of deer which is very common throughout Tripura is the Barking Deer (*Muntiacus*=*Cervulus muntjac*)—*B. Khata Harin*. They are small-sized animals with a reddish brown colour. Their antlers are on rather long pedicles. They keep to the jungles but occasionally come out of the forests for grazing, particularly at the time when the forests are burnt for *jhooming*.