

#EQUESTRIAN SPORTS

Revitalizing Polo & Riding

Jaipur now has a revamped centre to learn the skill of horse riding and the strategic finesse of polo at the Sawai Man Singh Polo and Riding Academy. Located in the Rajasthan Polo Club, it fosters a love for equestrian sports in Jaipur.



Tusharika Singh
Freelance writer and city blogger

While Jaipur has long been recognized as the Mecca of polo, engaging local residents in the sport has presented its fair share of challenges. However, in recent years, the Rajasthan Polo Club and the dedicated efforts of Sawai Padmanabh Singh have been steadfast in their pursuit of involving more Jaipurites into polo. Their relentless endeavours have been instrumental in bridging the gap and creating opportunities for local participation in this esteemed equestrian discipline.

To further enrich the illustrious polo legacy of the Pink City, the Rajasthan Polo Club has opened its revamped horse riding school, Sawai Man Singh Polo and Riding Academy. Under the guidance of Sawai Padmanabh Singh, a renowned polo player and patron of the sport, the academy aims to promote riding, polo, and other equine sports in Jaipur.

To encourage Equine Sports

The Sawai Man Singh Polo and Riding Academy offers comprehensive riding lessons suitable for individuals aged 6 years and above. With its recent transformation, the academy is now equipped to meet the increasing demand for professional equestrian training. This initiative not only encourages local polo players from Jaipur to participate but will also eventually provide an opportunity for Jaipurites to engage in internationally acclaimed equine sports like dressage and horse jumping.

In his message, Sawai Padmanabh Singh expressed his enthusiasm for the academy, stating, "The Sawai Man Singh Polo and Riding Academy is an exciting and much-needed initiative that seeks to foster a passion for riding, polo, and equine sports in Jaipur. Our primary objective is to establish a robust platform for individuals to cultivate their skills, demonstrate their talents, and nurture the sport of polo. By doing so, we aspire to attract more local polo players from the Pink City while also expanding the horizons of equine sports beyond polo. Our ultimate vision is to encourage active participation from individuals hailing from diverse backgrounds and varied interests,



Tradition has it that Lord Curzon was responsible for saving the rhinoceros. However, the facts brought out by Ranjit Barthakur and Bittu Sahgal conclusively shows that these first steps were taken by a few determined, enlightened officers of the British Indian government. Barthakur and Sahgal record that the late S. Deb Roy, a remarkable Forest Officer of Assam and a conservationist, stated that Lady Mary Curzon, the Vicereine, had visited the Kaziranga region at the turn of the 20th century with the specific purpose of seeing this magnificent animal. However, she was not lucky, for all she saw was its spoor, and this led to her advocating for the protection of the rhino. There is yet another story doing the rounds: Lady Curzon went to Kaziranga in January 1905. She was accompanied by "Nigona Shikari", Bopiram Hazarika of Bosagaon, who convinced her that the animal she had seen in the distance was a rhino and not a buffalo. He showed her the distinctive tracks and urged her to stop the "Sahibs" from shooting them. There is, however, no written record of this visit and the story is probably apocryphal.



Divyabhanusinh
Ex India head for WWF. A renowned wildlife expert

....Saving The Gainda

#STORY OF THE INDIAN RHINOS

In addition to the hunting and capture of wild animals, human progress resulting in destruction of the habitat over the millennia took its toll. It is clear that the numbers of larger mammals decreased exponentially in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the rhino was no exception. By the beginning of the 20th century about 200 individuals survived. Numbers apart, chronicles of shikar of the British period were certainly alive to the desperate situation that the animal faced and had started to express concern about it.

By the beginning of the 19th century Williamson had already noted that the rhinoceros was not found west of the Ganga. "Maori" recording his exploits later in the century noted that while rhinoceroses were not protected in the Terai area of India, they were protected by the Rana rulers of Nepal in their part of the Terai where outsiders did not have permission to shoot them. In fact when "Maori" accidently shot one there, his host was much exercised. Captain J.H. Baldwin, a sportsman writing at about the same time, noted that the animal was found on the banks of the

Sharda in Nepal, Pilibhit and Gorakhpur districts "but it is now extinct there or very nearly so". Alexander A. Kinlock noted that about the 1860s many rhinoceroses had been shot around Jalpaiguri, "but there party owing to being constantly hunted, and partly owing to the clearance of large tracts for Tea cultivation, they are rapidly becoming scarcer....In eastern portion of Bhutan Doora and in Assam, wherever there are heavy reed jungles on the banks of rivers or on margin of swamps...occasionally some congregate in one covert."

E.G. Afalo's compendium of sport available to the British, written in 1904, noted that 40 years earlier rhinoceroses had been extremely numerous and several could be hunted down in a single day. Afalo went on to record that "Owing indiscriminate slaughter of both sexes and all sizes, their numbers have been terribly reduced but there are enough left to enable a well-equipped sportsman to be pretty

sure of obtaining one or two specimens.... He also stated that shooting them in Nepal could only be done with a special permit.

Writing in 1910, Sainthill Eardley-Wilmot noted that while rhinoceroses and bison (gaur) were found earlier in the Bengal Terai, they had now become very scarce and shooting them was prohibited. He wrote that the "Maharaja of Cooch Behar was a keen sportsman and the head of game had become insufficient to afford diversion both to himself and his guests....". However, he stopped short of saying that the maharaja himself was responsible for his degradation.

E.P. Stebbing recorded in 1920 that the building of railways and the increasing number of sportsmen were the cause of the rhinoceros decline. C.H. Stockley too noted the reduction in rhinoceros numbers in 1928 and went on the state that protection of the animal in Nepal had kept its numbers from being deleted in that kingdom.

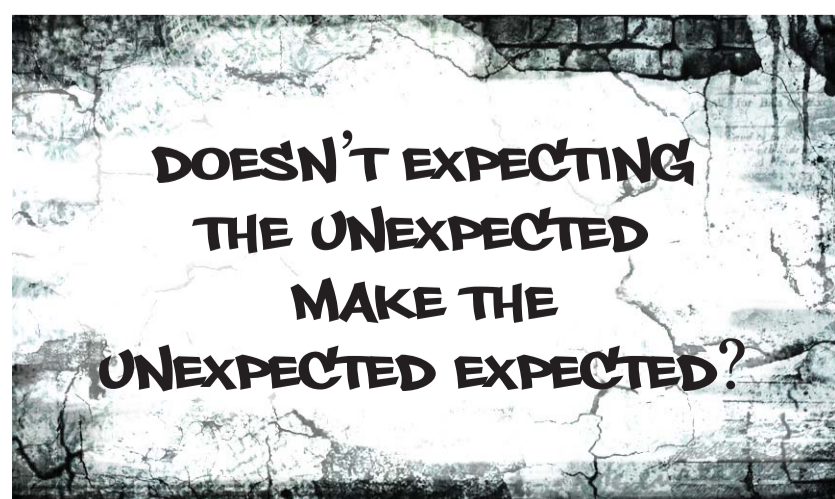
R.D.T. Alexander and A. Martin-Leake in Some Siniposts to Shikar noted in 1932 that it was very difficult to obtain a permit to shoot a rhinoceros in India and that was "as it should be for any rare or near extinct animal".

From these and other records of "naturalist's sportsmen" it becomes

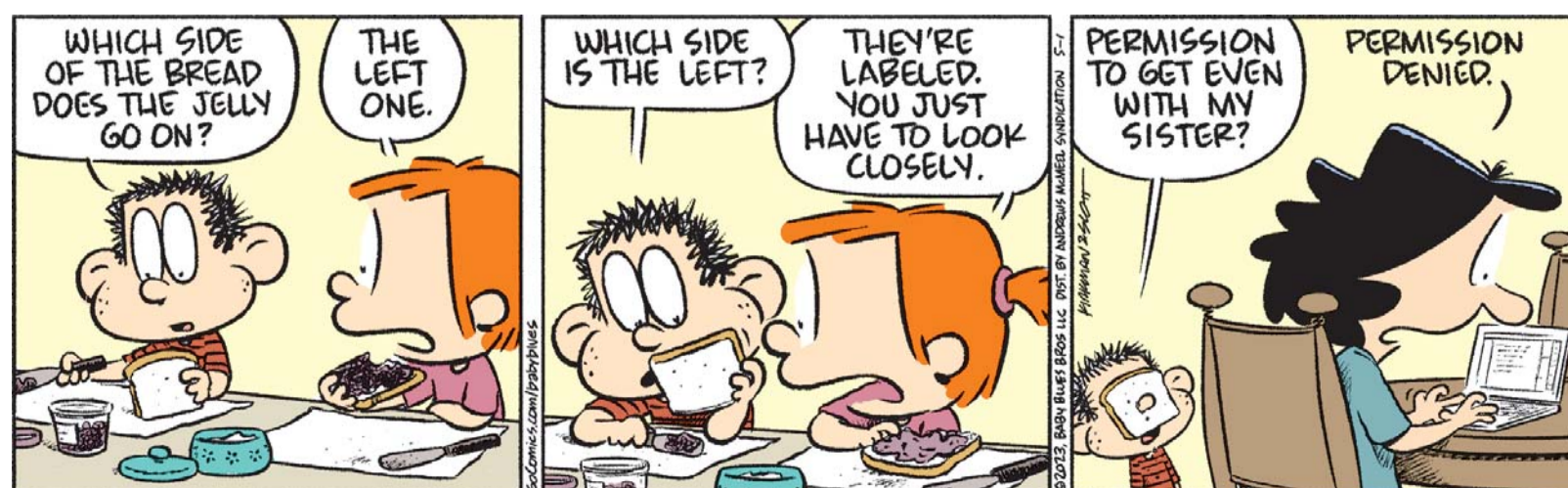


Prince of Wales (later king Edward VIII) with his rhinoceros trophy in the Nepal Terai, winter of 1921-22. From Ellison, 1925.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



Donald Duck Day

Donald Duck is one of the most iconic characters of the Disney franchise and has, for multiple generations, been one of the hallmarks of childhood and innocence. Donald Duck may spark a plethora of childhood memories too, the unique voice known as pseudobulbar dysarthria may resonate in your mind and take you back to the old age times! He certainly does deserve to be celebrated and there is at least seventy years of joy that this duck has brought to the world, what is your first memory of Donald Duck?



Territorial fights among male rhinos can cause grievous injuries. Often Bleeding animals have been spotted in Kaziranga.

Photograph: Kakubhal Kothari.

evident that early on during the British period the rhinoceros was in near irreversible retreat. In India the colonial government had awakened to the problem by the early 20th century, as will be noticed from records after 1905 that rhinoceros hunting required a permit from the ruling authority in British India and in most of the princely states in India, whereas the Rana rulers of Nepal already had afforded protection to preserve the object of their most prominent sport. The reasons for the protection of the animal may have been dubious; the result however, was welcome.

Protecting the Rhino

It is evident that the battle for the protection of the rhinoceros was to be fought in the easternmost regions of India, in the Assam region of the Bengal presidency. The issue of depleting numbers of the animal was recognized by the administration as early as 1902 when J.C. Arbutnot, Officiating Commissioner of the Assam Valle districts, wrote to B. Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam, on November 4 stating that the animal had been wiped out except in the Brahmaputra, Mikir Hills in Nowgong and Golaghat "where a few individuals still exist". Fuller replied on December 18 that while he regretted the plight of the animal it would be impossible to penalize unlicensed shooters without special legislation though he was open to create an asylum for them in the form of a reserved forest.

The possible areas for such a reserve were surveyed by an army officer, a Major P.R.T. Gurdon, and on September 20, 1904 C. Carr, the Conservator of Forests, recommended that Kaziranga be declared a Reserved Forest. This was promptly approved by Fuller and on June 1, 1905 a Gazette notification proposing to declare it as such was made. On January 3, 1908 Kaziranga was declared a Reserved Forest. This was promptly approved by Fuller and on June 1, 1905 a

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Gazette notification proposing to declare it as such was made. On January 3, 1908 Kaziranga was declared a Reserved Forest and then upgraded to a Game Sanctuary in 1916. It appears that the Kaziranga area had become a haven for hunters and poachers, and hunting once again became rampant in the 1930s. In 1938 A.J.W. Milroy, Chief Conservator of Forests, opened the area to the public. Until the dawn of India's independence, this position continued. "The rhinoceros thus received protection in Assam. Tradition has it that Lord Curzon was responsible for saving



A floral tribute: Rhino sculpture (topiary) at Hanging Gardens, Malabar Hill, Mumbai. Photograph: Nilek Dhalia.

the rhinoceros. However, the facts brought out by Ranjit Barthakur and Bittu Sahgal conclusively shows that these first steps were taken by a few determined, enlightened officers of the British Indian government. Barthakur and Sahgal record that the late S. Deb Roy, a remarkable Forest Officer of Assam and a conservationist, stated that Lady Mary Curzon, the Vicereine, had visited the Kaziranga region at the turn of the 20th century with the specific purpose of seeing this magnificent animal. However, she was not lucky, for all she saw was its spoor, and this led to her advocating for the protection of the rhino. There is yet another story doing the rounds: Lady Curzon went to Kaziranga in January 1905. She was accompanied by "Nigona Shikari", Bopiram Hazarika of Bosagaon, who convinced her that the animal she had seen in the distance was a rhino and not a buffalo. He showed her the distinctive tracks and urged her to stop the "Sahibs" from shooting them. There is, however, no written record of this visit and the story is probably apocryphal.

There is no record of Lord Curzon visiting Kaziranga either, but he was very much alive to the problem of conservation of wild animals. In 1901, the Burma Game Preservation Association sent a memorial to the Viceroy seeking the imperial government's approval to shoot that in, the bro-antlered deer of Burma. In his celebrated reply of 1902, the Viceroy presents a tour de force of an argument for conservation that was rare in the empire at the time. His own words ring true even today: "There are some persons who doubt or dispute the progressive diminution of wildlife in

more after the letter was written and he could have intervened during that time. Be that as it may, 2005 saw the century celebrated of Kaziranga National Park and Sir Nicholas Moseley, the scion of Curzon's illustrious family, was invited to receive the Sentinel of Kaziranga tribute.

What is absolutely clear though, from various reports of "naturalist sportsmen", is that permission to hunt rhinoceroses was difficult to come by in the 20th century, as noted earlier. The province of Bengal went ahead with formalized protection by passing "The Bengal Rhinoceroses Protection Act" in 1932 when the shooting of an animal without permission or sale of its body parts invited imprisonment for one month and/or a fine of Rs 1,000. This was followed by the Assam Rhinoceros Preservation Act of 1954 after independence which was on the lines of the earlier Bengal Act of 1932. Thus the animal came to be legally protected throughout its remaining range.

The situation for the rhinoceros remained unchanged for the last two decades of British rule in India when the government was preoccupied with India's Freedom struggle and then the Second World War. The rhinoceros was already in precipitous decline when the British arrived in India, a situation that was exacerbated as a result of the depredations by the British and Indians alike. When the British left, the animal was making its last stand, thanks to the steps taken by certain British administrators.

After independence

The question, therefore, arises: what was the rhinoceros inheritance that the Republic of India received? The Javan and Sumatran rhinoceroses had long gone from the Indian subcontinent. What we know about the numbers of the greater one-horned rhinoceros is essentially a result of intelligent estimations by wild lifers, naturalists and forest officials, as no systematic population evaluation was done. That the situation was critical is obvious from the fact that, as early as 1954 M.R. Medhi, Chief Minister of Assam, wrote to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that the rhinoceros was on the verge of extinction in his state.

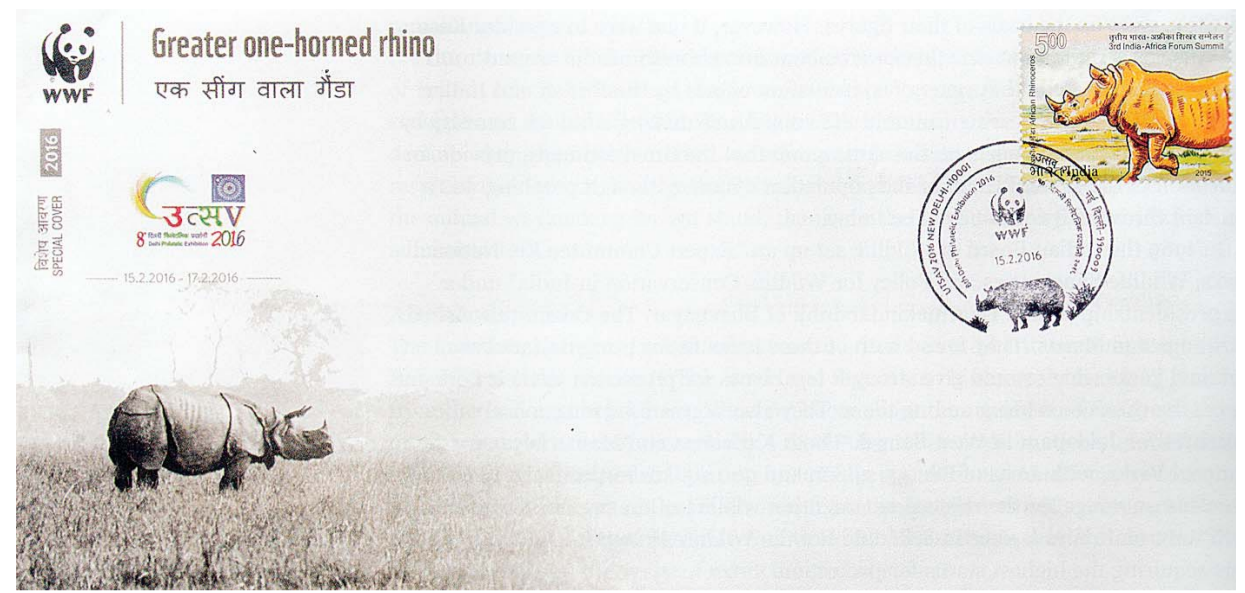
P.D. Stracey, a well-known Forest Officer and Director of the Forest Research Institute and Colleges, Dehradun, give us an early estimate of rhinoceros numbers. According to him in 1960 there were about 150 of them in Kaziranga Sanctuary, an area of 430 sq. Km, out of a total of about 300 in Assam, with another 50 in Bengal and about 300 in Nepal. According to him the total population was likely to be over 600. But, he adds: "No accurate census of this



Rhino medallion: Nepal's iconic magafauna features on this issue to celebrate the first decade of king Mahindra Trust for nature conservation in 1994. Courtesy Divyabhanusinh



On India's currency. The rhino appears on a 25-paise coin, now rarely seen, and with other mega fauna on the 10 rupee note (opposite).



In India Postage: The rhino adorned an early postage stamp and in 2016 the postal department issued a first day cover at the behest of world wide fund for Nature-india. The postage stamp on the first day cover depicts a black rhino from Africa. Courtesy Divyabhanusinh

animal (a) possible however and all climates of its numbers are to be treated with caution. E.P. Gee, the well-known tea planter and wildlife conservationist, estimated rhinoceros numbers as follows: Nepal 185, Bengal 65, and Assam 375, a total of 625 in 1964. Five years later, Balakrishna Seshadri, an engineer-turned-wildlife enthusiast, gives a figure of 745.

It is evident from these records that only rough estimates were made, as none of the three give the basis of their figures. However, if one were to consider Kees Rookmaaker's estimation that there were about 200 rhinos in India around 1900 then one can conclude that years of conservation efforts by the British and Indian administrations were bearing fruit and the animal was making a bid for recovery by the end of the 1960s. This is on the assumption that the three estimates provide an indication of the general trend of the population dynamic, though poaching was a constant threat as it continues to be today.

In 1969 the Indian Board of Wildlife set up an "Expert Committee Re: National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Policy for Wildlife Conservation in India" under the presidency of K.S. Dharmakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar. The Committee visited Kaziranga and Manas. They found both of these areas fit for being declared as National Parks which would give stronger legal basis for protection to their flora and fauna, the rhinoceros being among them. They also suggested strong conservation measures for Jalidapara in West Bengal. Both Kaziranga and Manas of 884.43 sq. Km respectively, providing more secure refuge for the rhinoceros and other wildlife of the region. The animal itself went on to



find a place in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, this acquiring the highest status for protection.

In addition to the government's efforts, there is another reason for the gradual success of the protection of the rhinoceros over the last several decades. The Assamese people take a special pride in their "gainda". It has a unique place in local tradition. According to one legend the Princess of Sonitpur, daughter of king Ban, had a dream of a handsome prince with whom she fell in love. Her friend Princess Chitralakha drew likenesses of all the eligible princes of India until finally she drew a picture of Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Krishna, whom the princess recognized as her dream prince. Aniruddha came to Sonitpur to fetch the princess and apparently he was confined there by the King. Then lord Krishna arrived, riding on a rhinoceros all the way from Dwaraka, to rescue Aniruddha. He left his mount in Kaziranga to graze and crossed the Brahmaputra to wage war. Upon the successful completion of his mission he played his flute to call the rhinoceros who could not hear it because of the sound of the flowing waters of the river. Lord Krishna was annoyed.

He disowned his mount and proceeded to Dwaraka without it. The mount loved the environment of the green grass and stayed back. Hence the animal's presence in Kaziranga. It is also believed that the animal has no hair on its body as it was saddled for battle, according to a variant of the legend, and thus has hair only on its ears and tail! According to yet another legend, Lord Krishna's mount was readied for battle with armour.

Later, it was considered unsuitable for war and abandoned; however the armour remained, thus explaining the folds of its armour like skin which is bequeathed to its descendants.

Over the past decades Assam and Bengal have seen several insurgent movements. This has impacted the protection of the rhinoceros, to the extent that they were wiped out from Manas and had to be reintroduced from other protected areas. Its horn has made it a coveted target of poachers, which has always been a serious threat and accounts for the continuous decimation of rhino numbers.

The importance of the rhinoceros in the fauna of the Indian subcontinent has been recognized through its depiction on coins, stamps and commemorative issues. Despite the impediments and threats, the conservation efforts of the administration coupled with the local Assamese pride in their iconic symbol-a sentiment sadly lacking in Bengal-have played a prominent role in the rhino's successful survival and prosperity till date. At the same time such pride can also have led to some impediments in their reintroduction elsewhere, which is necessary for their long term survival.

Acknowledgement

1. The Book: "The story of India's Unicorns"
2. Authors: Divyabhanusinh, Asok Kumar Das & Shibani Bose.
3. Publisher: The Marg Foundation.
4. For Purchase: The book is available for purchase on www.marg-art.org



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman