

## Oryx Tour to Qatar and India

*David Jenkins\**

The sixteen members of the ORYX tour to Qatar and northern India, in March, were given a splendid start by H E Sheikh Qassim Bin Hamam Al-Thani in Qatar. His generous hospitality was a highlight of our whole tour. He received the party at his country estate out in the desert, where we saw (and photographed) his fine herd of 35 Arabian oryx, all of which were in excellent condition and reproducing well. It is impressive to see so large a herd together, but the suggestion was made that the herd might be divided with only part on view to visitors in case disease was inadvertently introduced to these very rare animals. Sheikh Qassim extended a warm invitation to any future ORYX tours to visit him in Qatar, an invitation we hope to take up.

After a brief stop in Calcutta, where we were made welcome and entertained by Anne Wright and her husband, and introduced to conservationists there, the party went on to Assam to stay at Manas, on the Bhutan border in the Himalayan foothills, where the bird life was the best of the whole tour, especially on the Bhutan side, and where three members photographed what they took to be pygmy hogs, feared to be extinct. (The identification has still to be confirmed.) In the Kaziranga National Park, in treks on elephant back, we saw many rhinos which now total over 400 there, and may have reached optimum numbers for the area, as well as numerous wild buffalo, swamp and other deer, and one wild elephant. Sariska produced a tiger, and the fabulous Bharatpur sanctuary was visited not once but twice by most of the group because of its superb birdlife. Monthly ratings for this sanctuary give one for March compared with five for October, but by world standards one at Bharatpur equals five at most other places. The wealth of water-birds is possibly unique in India, but we saw many other birds including three species of eagles in one tree, with a marsh harrier on an adjoining bush. In the beautiful Corbett National Park the highlights were three tigers driven from tall grass by elephants, and two schools of otters, one of six and one of 12 animals, swimming, diving and fishing in the Ramnagunga river and playing on its banks – probably the best wild animal sight of the whole tour. Delhi golf course, surely one of the best bird spots in any capital city, produced its usual wealth of passerines; and the group were all thrilled by the marvellous sight of thousands of ducks resting in small pools in India's two principal zoos, mainly lesser whistling teal and garganey at Calcutta and mainly shoveler at Delhi. These zoos play an important role in the conservation of India's wildlife. In the whole three weeks over 250 species of birds were seen and 33 of mammals. Kaziranga was perhaps the most exciting place for mammals, and we hope on future tours to spend longer there.

Despite the havoc caused to our plane schedules by first a changed plane timing (in Qatar), then a 'go slow' and finally a lock out in the

\*Dr. David Jenkins was the leader of the party.

Indian air lines, which most unfortunately meant that the group could not get to Kashmir as planned, the tour did provide viewing of much of India's most exciting wildlife in some of her most beautiful sanctuaries. Certainly everyone enjoyed an excellent holiday.

## Kenya Tour

The next East African tour, planned for three weeks in January/February 1972, will break new ground for FPS in Kenya, taking in the Watamu Marine National Park and Lamu on the Indian Ocean, the Shimba Hills, Tsavo East, Lake Magadi and Lake Rudolph. We also have plans for a walking safari in northern Kenya. This article describing some of these places is based on a prospecting visit by the Hon Secretary and the Editor in January/February this year.

Forty sable antelopes, with gleaming chestnut coats, grazing over a hillside, were the star turn of the new Shimba Hills National Reserve, only twenty miles from Mombasa and the Indian Ocean. They were of all ages and sizes, from the small calf to one splendidly impressive black adult bull, and under a nearby tree we came upon three new-born ones, trying to pretend they were not there. This beautiful small reserve of wooded hills and steep valleys was created largely to safeguard the sable — there are about a hundred there — for this is one of only two populations left in Kenya.

Kenya National Parks have started on a policy of reintroducing some of the animals that have disappeared from these hills, and in a large enclosure we saw the first batch of roan that are being brought in, large antelopes easily recognised by their extraordinary 'spectacled' appearance. These 20 animals were due to be released in a week or two, and another batch brought in for acclimatisation. By next year it should be possible to watch them at large in this reserve. The roan, too, is a sadly reduced animal in Kenya, and these were captured by John Seago for the East African Wildlife Society (a project to which FPS contributed) in the Ithanga Hills, in the vast Tana Ranch in northern Kenya, where they are completely surrounded by cultivation (and poachers), and increasingly restricted as more and more farmer-settlers move in.

The third large and rare antelope which we expect the 1972 party will see is the forest-dwelling bongo, one of the most difficult to see. To everyone's astonishment the new Treetops-type lodge on the edge of the Aberdare Forest, the Ark, has succeeded in attracting these extremely shy animals to its salt-licks, and in considerable numbers. Here the party will spend a night — and all things are possible as well as bongo.

The Watamu and Malindi National Parks on the Indian Ocean have been created to safeguard the superb coral gardens and the beautiful and colourful fish. As a scene of natural beauty there is nothing to surpass it. Floating on the surface with goggles and schnorkel you can become a part of this superb scene, with fish of unbelievably brilliant colours, and varied shapes and sizes, completely unafraid and even swimming to look at you; even those who prefer to keep dry can watch the scene from glass-bottomed boats. And everywhere there are small