

## WILD LIFE AND ITS PRESERVATION IN CEYLON

By C. E. NORRIS

Ceylon, for its size, has been richly endowed with a wealth of indigenous fauna ; many species that have been scientifically separated from their close relatives on the Indian continent are peculiar to the island.

The most noticeable absentee of the Indian fauna from Ceylon is the Tiger, whose penetration down the main Indian peninsula could not have occurred until after Ceylon had broken away from the mainland. The absence of vultures from Ceylon is, however, something of a mystery, as the narrow strip of sea dividing the mainland from the island would not appear to be a particularly formidable barrier to birds with such strong powers of flight. Climatic conditions together with elevations are responsible for the distribution of most of the fauna. The greater portion of the low-country in the north, east, and south-east of the island comes within the dry zone, only receiving rain with the north-east monsoon. The south-west portion, penetrating into the central hills, is considered as the wet zone, receiving rain with both the south-west and the north-east monsoon ; as much as 200 inches per year falls in some areas. The narrow area between these two zones is termed the intermediate zone, which receives rain in both monsoons, but on a lesser scale than that of the wet zone areas.

The majority of the larger mammals are found within the dry zone, as it is here that there are still large tracts of secondary jungles. These jungles were thickly populated some odd thousand years ago when the now-ruined cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnoruwa were prosperous. There are still primeval forests to be found in the wet zone ; they are the habitat of certain species of birds not found elsewhere in the island.

The Large Rock Squirrels are divided into sub-species, some restricted to the wet zone in the hills and others to the dry lowland forests ; there is a marked difference in the coloration of these sub-species.

The Elephant was found over most of the island, but with the opening up of large tracts of land for estates in the up-country hills, is now restricted mainly to the low-lying dry zone and the foothills of the central hill range. There was a small herd that could be found around the Horton Plains (6,000 feet) a few years ago, but it is now feared that they have died out

as no signs have been seen of them recently. The Elephant is a great wanderer and, when it was able to roam the island at will, undoubtedly penetrated into the central hills during the south-west monsoon, when water was difficult to obtain in the parched low-country forests. With the ever-increasing demand for extra land for food production, the Elephant is having its range more restricted and will shortly be confined only to Prescribed Reserves and Sanctuaries. Elephants are rightly accused of doing a great deal of damage to outlying crops and newly opened areas which, in its turn, means that the beasts are persecuted by villagers inadequately armed. During the last two years no less than ten orphaned baby elephants have been found wandering on their own, having probably become separated from their herds during a stampede out of a cultivated area. These youngsters are causing a great deal of anxiety as their feeding is no mean item. The Zoological Society of London very kindly came forward to save "Valli" from an uncertain fate by having her flown from Ceylon to Whipsnade. It is to be hoped that other Zoological Gardens will follow suit, and take any orphaned baby elephant that Ceylon has to offer.

The deer are represented by the Sambhur, Spotted Deer, Muntjac or Barking Deer, Mouse-Deer or Chevrotain, and the rare Hog Deer. The latter species owing to its restricted range within the swamps of the south-west of the island, is nearing extinction. Should this happen it will be a great calamity as this race of Hog Deer is peculiar to Ceylon. Sambhur will be found at all elevations over the greater part of the island where there is sufficient forest for them to find refuge. Spotted Deer are restricted to the dry zone jungles of the low-country, seldom ascending to more than 1,500 feet into the foothills. These deer are suffering very heavily from poachers, who find a ready market for the meat, both fresh and dried. Muntjac will be found at all elevations over most of the island, but are seldom seen owing to their skulking habits and love of thick undergrowth. The Mouse-Deer, the smallest of our deer, is nearly completely nocturnal and more numerous than is generally considered; it will be found, except at the higher elevations, over most of the island.

Buffalo are confined mainly to the south-east and east of the island, although scattered herds will be found in the northern forests. These animals are very prolific breeders and are a great nuisance in the Ruhuna National Park where, during the dry season they foul the waterholes to such an extent as to make them unfit for other animals. During bad droughts, such as we

experienced in 1948, the Buffaloes are very seriously affected and many succumb to thirst and hunger. In 1948, on a one mile stretch of the Menik Ganga, in the Ruhuna National Park, the Ranger informed me he had counted 750 carcasses of beasts that had died owing to the drought. On visiting this area at the end of 1949 it was difficult to believe such heavy toll had been taken, as I saw many large herds consisting mostly of young animals.

The Sloth-Bear is restricted to the dry zone jungles, being especially fond of large rocky outcrops that provide cool and secluded caves in which it can rest during the heat of the day. The bear is very seldom seen during the day, as it emerges from its places of refuge at dusk and returns to them again at dawn. The bear is the most feared of all our fauna by the Ceylon jungle-villager owing to its habit of attacking on sight. The ghastly wounds that it is able to inflict are evident on some of the luckless villagers who have escaped with their lives. It certainly is not an animal with which to take chances.

The Leopard, Ceylon's largest member of the carnivora, will be found over most of the island, excepting in the more populated and cultivated areas. It is a great pity that the Leopard has been proclaimed as vermin and is able to be shot at any season without a licence as it causes very little material damage to the economical well-being of the villagers. Leopard may take a few cattle, for this they can hardly be blamed as the Ceylon villager is not over careful in ensuring that his cattle are safely secured at night. It is usually the older animals that become addicted to cattle-killing and dog-snatching, having lost the speed required to catch their main diet of deer.

The smaller fauna are too numerous to mention in this article.

#### PRESERVATION

Ceylon has some 865,000 acres proclaimed for nature protection: Strict Natural Reserves 174,500 acres, National Parks 169,500 acres, Sanctuaries 200,000 acres, and Intermediate Zones 321,000 acres; in the latter organized shooting is permitted. The present legislation does not give these areas the full security that is desirable as it is possible for any of them to be alienated by mere proclamation in the Government Gazette. This, to my mind, is against all the concepts of true preservation and means that they are wide open to the whims and fancy of any politician. They should be made a national institution that is above party politics and something that cannot be alienated without the consent of a body of public trustees. It is to be hoped that the Ceylon Government will see

the folly of the present ordinance and have the necessary amendments passed without undue delay.

The Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance contains excellent laws, but it is regretted that they are not properly enforced. Wild life appears to be considered by the majority of the people—amongst them some that certainly should know better—as something to be killed on sight. The unwritten laws of sportsmanship are completely ignored, except by a few persons who can be termed real sportsmen. The absence of wild life on our jungle roads, which once was the great attraction of these highways, very forcibly brings this point home to the more observant. It is seldom that a car travelling on these roads, especially in the evenings, does not contain guns, for the most part totally inadequate to shoot at anything other than small game.

Another very dangerous loophole, that allows the game laws to be openly flouted, is the proclamation of village areas. This legislation allows for cultivators to shoot any game without a licence in these areas for their own consumption. The more unscrupulous traders have quickly found in this a means of securing unlimited quantities of fresh and dried meat to be sold openly in public markets without let or hindrance from the authorities. The trader supplies the villager with his daily needs, cartridges and a gun in return for venison; should the villager refuse, his daily requirements of necessary commodities are not forthcoming, putting him into an unenviable position. Recently legislation was passed to allow vehicles to be searched on roads leading away from or through proclaimed areas.

Offenders against the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance are never punished severely enough in the magistrates' courts, thereby in most cases making it financially worth the offender's while.

The Ceylon Government is to be congratulated upon the formation of a Department of Wild Life; this is certainly a step in the right direction, although a great deal of delay has occurred over the appointment of a warden.

This department carries the following staff: 1 warden, 1 assistant warden, 80 game rangers, 40 game guards, 90 game watchers, together with the necessary office personnel. The distribution of this staff, in advantageous positions throughout the island, has been very carefully considered; the housing of this staff in out-of-the-way jungle places is a problem that confronts the authorities; it is, of course, surmountable but may prove rather costly.

I am glad to say that the liaison between this newly formed department and the Ceylon Game and Fauna Protection Society is working well. They have a difficult and arduous task before them, especially in respect of stamping out illicit shooting in the close seasons. The export of Elephants has been prohibited, except by Government; the Zoological Gardens have recently exported a few Elephants in exchange for other animals.

Neither crocodile skins nor deer horns are allowed to be exported. A large trade was carried on in the latter under the guise of "shed horns", but after representations had been made by the Ceylon Game and Fauna Protection Society, pointing out the very great number of stags the exported weight of horns represented, Government banned this export.

If public opinion can be sufficiently aroused and the people educated to become more wild life minded, then the wild life of Ceylon will be saved for further generations.

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## MAN AND THE ZEBRA

By J. I. MENZIES

The African fauna has been subjected to pressure from two far distant sources. In the north the well armed Moors and Arabs have long ruled the land, and it is in this region that the faunal population has been most seriously depleted. The Atlantic Ass, depicted in Roman mosaics, disappeared long ago, the Rufous Gazelle and Bubal Hartebeeste have likewise vanished.

The zebras, however, have not been greatly affected from this region although it is interesting to note that the Romans exhibited zebras in their amphitheatres and must presumably have obtained them from north-east Africa. Dion Cassius, speaking of Plautonius, says: "he even took from one of the islands in the Red Sea the horses of the sun resembling tigers—" and also "—for the elephant indeed, and the rhinoceros and the tiger and the hippotigris slain in the theatre".

The second assault upon the African fauna commenced with Van Riebeck's settlement in the Cape in 1652. As the white population increased by immigration, so the fauna decreased. Such species as the Blaauwbuck soon became extinct and other species became reduced or exterminated, first in the Cape, later in the Orange Free State and other colonies. Less than fifty years after the Great Trek of 1835, which began the extensive