

# WILD LIFE IN INDIA

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MENTION India to a stranger and he thinks at once of tigers and snakes and perhaps scorpions. Yet of Europeans in India very few ever see a wild tiger, and many never see either snake or scorpion.

The tiger is sought by the favored few at great expense of money and effort, although, of course, it may, in exceptional circumstances, be encountered accidentally in the jungle — to the mutual dismay of both parties; but Europeans who wander in wild jungle except for hunting are very few. Snakes and scorpions, although common everywhere; are seldom seen, partly because they are instinctively secretive and only come abroad, as a rule, at night; and partly because Europeans in India do no manual garden work in the hot weather and are careful not to wander from beaten paths after nightfall. If one wishes to see scorpions, however, one has only to lift up any old piece of matting in a verandah, where they will be revealed to the unwelcome light of day in numbers proportionate to the length of time since that matting was last moved; and, as for snakes, the mongoose — an elongated weasel-like creature with dense grizzled fur, almost a snake itself in outline, which makes its home in any old drain or inaccessible recess in the cactus hedge — knows where to find one every meal-time. The mongoose resembles the English weasel also in the audacity with which it will pop its head out of its retreat over and over again to have a

good look at you; but unlike the weasel it readily becomes a tame inmate of the bungalow, where it makes a charming pet, and is as fond of music as of milk.

The Indian animal most noticed by Europeans, perhaps, is the little gray squirrel with white lines down the back, made, according to pious natives, by God's fingers in stroking the little creature. It feeds in the roads as ubiquitously and impudently as the London sparrow, and gets out of the way of vehicles only at the very last moment; while English dogs are driven nearly frantic by its perfect judgment of the time necessary to reach the nearest tree, whisking round the trunk with a flourish of its tail while the furious dog is still three inches behind.

Musk-rats also force themselves occasionally upon one's attention in India by their habit of entering a bungalow and ambling slowly round the rooms, talking loudly to themselves all the time in a chattering voice. Although rat-like, the musk-rat is not really a rat, but a large shrew, protected to an extreme degree by offensive odor like sickeningly strong musk, which it emits at will. If not interfered with it will soliloquize round the room, picking up insects attracted by the light, and wander out again; but let anyone assault it, and the room will scarcely be habitable for a time. Dog or cat only attacks a musk-rat once in its life, and the mongoose moves politely out of its way. That is the meaning of the continuous noise which it makes as it goes

along — a sort of alarm-bell to let all concerned know that something is coming which is best left alone.

But of all wild beasts in India perhaps the most universally disliked is the jackal, like a gray wolf-shaped fox with half-length tail. When all is silent at night, a sudden crash of yells mixed with lunatic laughter just outside the bungalow wakes every sleeper in the place and sets all the dogs in the neighborhood barking; but before you can do anything the fiendish chorus ends as abruptly as it began, and the pack are silently racing away through the darkness. With these four exceptions, wild animals are scarcely more noticeable in India than in England, except to those who deliberately go in search of them: but the elephants and camels and dangerous-looking buffaloes, with their evil little eyes and immense curved horns, lend Oriental interest to a drive outside the town, while even in the narrow, crowded bazaars of the cities handsome humped bulls, which pious Hindus have set loose for the good of their own souls and the service of the country, loaf idly along, pilfering from the grain-stalls as they pass. Fat and superbly sleek seem these self-fed bulls by contrast with the starveling cows and still more starveling goats and goat-like sheep, diminutive donkeys, and undersized narrow-chested ponies, whose shaggy coats cannot conceal their staring ribs.

One cannot travel much in India, however, without making the acquaintance of two types of monkeys. Each part of India has its own *langur* — pronounced *lungoor* — a large slender-limbed monkey with very long straight tail, black face, and immense eyebrows, amazingly agile in getting across wooded country by leaping from tree to tree. It is no doubt to protect his eyes against twigs that his long stiff eyebrows have been acquired. Under the name of

Hanuman, the *langur* appears in sacred Hindu sculpture as an ally of the god Rama, though not a god himself. So, though not worshiped, he is highly revered; and when, as often in Bengal, he enters towns he is allowed to plunder the grain-stalls with impunity. More familiar monkeys than the *langurs* are the various Indian *bandars* — pronounced *bunders* — or macaques. These are our common short-tailed monkeys of the organ-grinding type; but in India, sharing some of the reverence paid to Hanuman the *langur*, they live an independent life in large companies, the old males of which like to exhibit a temper as short as their tails. As they have formidable canine teeth this contributes toward the respect with which the bare-shinned natives regard them.

India's varied tracts of mountain, forest, and sunburnt plain are especially rich in large animals of sport and the chase. The most characteristic of these is perhaps the great sloth bear with shaggy black coat, gray muzzle, long white digging claws, and comically ungainly movements. *Bhalu*, as this bear is familiarly called in most parts of India, is dangerous if suddenly met, especially a female with cubs; and though it comes down hill like a runaway portmanteau, it covers the ground with unpleasant speed. Much handsomer and less dangerous, unless wounded, the Himalayan black bear and brown bear, the latter a slightly smaller race of the brown bear of Europe, attract many sportsmen annually to the hills, especially of Kashmir.

In the color and quality of the mane, in size and in strength, the Indian lion compares unfavorably with his relatives in Africa, and also lacks the dark line down the spine. The shortcomings of the lion are, however, more than compensated to India by possession of the tiger, most powerful of carnivora, from whose bizarre markings on face and

body we ought to have learned the secret of dazzle-painting and the value of stripes long before the war. In the leopard also — especially the larger, yellower race of leopards in the Indian hills, which used to be known as ‘panthers’ — Asia has the advantage over Africa, where the leopards are comparatively small and dark. Finer even in appearance than the leopard of the hills, owing to its dense pale fur, but not really quite so large, the snow leopard or ounce is much less often brought to bag; for it seldom ranges far below the Himalayan snow-line, where it preys upon the wild mountain sheep.

The Indian elephant, with its docility, intelligence, and strength, is much too valuable to be exterminated for sport; whereas both the Indian rhinoceroses, the greater and the less, are doubtless doomed to extinction except where rigorously preserved as interesting survivals of the past.

One of the most dangerous sports in the world is provided by the Indian wild boar. On more European lines is the deer-stalking of such grand stags as the *barasingha* of Kashmir, closely related to and somewhat larger than our own red deer, the still larger *sambur* of Central and Southern India, and in diminishing series the swamp, spotted, barking, hog, musk, and mouse deer — the last a tiny deer, standing scarcely a foot high. Beside the deer, India has five antelopes, including the *nilgai*, whose name, meaning ‘blue cow’ — though only the old males are slate color — aptly describes its size and sluggish character, and the common black buck, whose name is also applicable only to the old bucks, the does and young being, as with the *nilgai*, safely clad in khaki.

India has also one gazelle, the dainty *chikara*, and a number of fine wild goats, wild sheep, and cattle: the *serow*, handsomely colored but heavy in build,

the magnificent *markhor*, with horns sometimes four and a half feet long, the *gooral* or chamois, the typical wild goat (*tehr*) and the ibex of the Himalayas. The Nilgheri Hills have also an ibex of their own. Grand wild sheep with immense horns are found beyond the Himalayas, and on the southern or Indian slopes the *oorial* of the Punjab and the *burrel*, the blue wild sheep which is the snow leopard’s favorite food, are annually the objects of many a sportsman’s weary climb. Herds of gigantic wild cattle with almost the bulk of elephants, the *gaur* and the *gayal*, roam at large in the eastern forests and have often caused trouble by straying upon newly constructed railway lines. Nearly related to them is the *banteng* of Burma, while the wild buffalo, differing little from the domesticated race and often interbreeding with it, ponderously brings up the rear of India’s wonderful procession of big game.

Besides all the animals enumerated above, India has the beautiful cat-bear, brightest-hued of mammals, badger, hog badger, wolverine, marten, several weasels and allied small beasts of prey, nine cats graduating in size from the handsome clouded leopard, through the voracious *chaus* or jungle cat, to the smallest of the world’s cats, the rusty-spotted cat, scarcely a foot and a half in total length. Allied to these are the lynx-like *caracal*, with elegant lyrate ear tufts, and the *cheetah* or hunting leopard, the terror of the antelopes. The striped hyena, only less loathsome among mammals than the large spotted kind of South Africa, four civet cats, three tree-cats, and a black bear-cat: seven mongooses beloved as destroyers of snakes, and a wolf, detested as the murderer of children; the jackal, which attends upon the tiger for scraps, and the wild dog or *dhole*, which sometimes hunts the tiger to its death; four kinds of fox, two marmots, and about seven-

teen rats, including the bandicoot rat, often weighing three pounds and burrowing so strenuously as to disturb the foundations of houses; fifteen mice, including several with spiny fur, two voles, three porcupines, and four hares; numerous bats, including the large flying-fox or fruit-bat, whose leathery wings in flight can be heard afar, and more than one kind of vampire; moles, hedgehogs, and shrews, the best known among the last being the offensive 'musk-rat' mentioned above.

Last, but by no means least among land mammals of modern type, comes the wild ass or *onager* of Cutch; while the ancient class of toothless beasts is represented by two pangolins or scaly anteaters, queer creatures of reptilian aspect, walking slowly on their knuckles and rolling into a tight ball when scared. Although not complete, this list shows that, even for a country of such size and varied landscape, India is peculiarly rich in mammals.

And what can we say of the birds? That they attract more attention than the mammals is not surprising, seeing that there are about seventeen hundred kinds, the majority not rare and many of the commonest conspicuous for large size, beautiful coloring, striking habits, or strange voices. Most surprising to the newcomer, perhaps, are some of the carrion birds, such as the vultures, waiting in silent ghoulish rings upon the Towers of Silence in Bombay, the ubiquitous pariah kites forever wheeling and screaming in the air or slanting and twisting earthward to snatch some scrap of food. High above the kites on level wings float the sovereign eagles and, ennobled by distance, the wide-winged vultures, one at least of whom on descending to earth becomes absurd. This is the Egyptian vulture, who paces slowly about the compound with the feathers on his white head all ruffled up behind like a worried old man.

Not many minutes elapse, however, before the common Indian crow commands the newcomer's attention. Queerly named 'splendens,' for he is dull gray and black and undersized compared with other Indian crows and ravens, he always occupies the front place in the garden scene, more impudent and elusive even than the English sparrow — which, by the way, is even more aggravating in India than in England, owing to its habit of insisting upon making its nest indoors and sitting under the ceiling, chirping stridently at you while you try to work with the thermometer well over ninety degrees in the shade.

But it is not possible here to give even a summary of the birds of India, as may be realized from the fact that there are more than 30 tits, 40 laughing thrushes, 90 babblers, 50 *bulbuls*, 110 warblers, 50 fly catchers, and so on. In Europe we have one nuthatch, in India there are 12 kinds. Against one English swallow India can set 13. Still, besides the few mentioned above, there are some which stand out from the multitude, because they arrest attention from the first and always thereafter occupy the foreground of one's view or retrospect of Indian birds in general.

Foremost among these, perhaps, comes the familiar green parrot, or rose-ringed paroquet of bird-fanciers at home, whose arrowy flight and piercing cries, coupled with his mischief wrought in every cultivated garden, make it impossible for anyone to overlook or forget him. A larger red-shouldered paroquet of the hills can be taught to talk well, and the blossom-headed paroquets of plum-color and green are lovely little things, much too fond of tearing flowers to pieces. The place of our blackbirds and thrushes on the ground floor of the garden is chiefly occupied by the *mynas*, demurely decorated birds with the alert and quarrelsome habits

of our starling, from which, by the way, the common Indian starling differs only in the head being entirely glossed with purple. As with the green parrots, there is a larger, handsomer *myna*, or grackle, from the hills, which learns to talk with a perfect human intonation that no parrot can achieve.

For beauty among Indian birds, the blue jay, as the Indian roller is always called, flies preëminent, looping through the air and displaying on body, wings, and tail alternate broad bars of Oxford and Cambridge blue. As it curves up to perch upon a low tree it is a dream of beauty. Another feathered jewel is the common, small bee-eater, perching on any wire or post which offers a good outlook upon passing insects, its bronzy green plumage gleaming in the sun. The grace of its shape with tapering tail is reflected in the fairy lightness of its short flights after evasive but doomed insects. There are six other Indian bee-eaters, all beautifully colored; but, although larger, none of them has quite the charm of this little emerald gem. Next to the bee-eaters come the kingfishers, of which India has many kinds, including our own English kingfisher, although the Indian type is rather smaller; but the commonest and most conspicuous of all are the black-and-white pied kingfishers, which may be seen hovering and diving over almost any piece of water in the country.

A bird well known to everybody in India by sound but to few by sight is the coppersmith, which, perched at the top of a tree, emits a musically ringing 'tonk,' 'tonk,' 'tonk,' exactly like some worker upon metal. It is the best known of some seventeen Indian barbets, almost all daintily variegated with green, red, yellow, blue, and black, and equipped, like woodpeckers and parrots, with climbing feet, two toes pointing forward and two backward. Of woodpeckers, colored as variously as the

barbets, but without the blue, India has about fifty-six, the best known being the golden-backed, with black wings and tail and scarlet crown, a lovely bird.

Tiny feathered jewels of the garden are the sunbirds, like humming-birds in habit, and scarcely larger or less beautiful. The best known is the purple sunbird, the rich metallic purple (of the male) being well set-off by large flame-colored tufts of fluff from the armpits, which he expands at will. With similarly expansible crest upon its head, the hoopoe in harlequin plumage of barred black-and-white and chestnut red is almost the most striking bird in the Indian garden, and his reiterated bell-like note 'oop-oop,' 'oop-oop,' lives in memory as the very expression of the sleepy afternoon.

Of 15 Indian hornbills the commonest is the gray kind, about the size of a magpie, with narrow pointed casque, and of 20 swifts — some of them by speed of flight deserving the name better than even our English swift — the best known is the common Indian swift, smaller and blacker than our swift, with a white patch on the back like our house martin. Most wonderful of nest builders are the weaver birds, which hang their nests in company upon a solitary tree until at a distance it seems to be bearing a crop of half-sized Rugby footballs on long stalks, and the little tailor birds, which sew large leaves together with long fibres to make a receptacle for their tiny nests.

Although black and white in the male and gray and white in the female, the Indian robin is a real robin in every other respect; while our English black-bird ranges to Kashmir and our missel thrush may be seen and heard in the Himalayas, where, too, our cuckoo is fairly common. Our golden eagle is quite overlooked among the numerous Indian eagles, and his name is bestowed upon the bearded vulture, which soars



so magnificently above the Himalayas. With so many indigenous birds of prey it is natural that falconry should have been for ages an Indian sport, and the *shahin*, *laggar*, *saker*, and *shanghar* falcons, as well as the *shikra* and *besra* hawks, and the little *turumti*, or red-headed merlin, are all used.

Of game birds India has an immense list, including, besides peafowl, the *monal*, almost the most resplendent bird that flies, and the jungle fowl, ancestor of our domesticated poultry; there are eight kinds of sandgrouse, 18 pheasants, about 16 quail, and 17 partridges, with a noble array of wild-fowl and waterfowl. Six kinds of bustards and as many snipe, about a score of plovers, and many kinds of pigeon worth shooting help to make up a list of feathered game from which bags of infinite variety may be made on any holiday.

But in thinking of Indian birds one's mind goes always rather to the familiar birds of the garden, such as — in addition to the few mentioned above — the king crow or drongo-shrike, like an undersized blackbird with a forked tail, who by his superb powers of flight and indomitable courage terrorizes all hawks, eagles, ravens, or other large birds which come near the place; the tree-pie with long thin tail barred in three colors like a croquet-stick and uttering many quaint sounds of which one exactly reproduces the call that has given the American bobolink its name; the seven sisters, always in a family party of about that number, chattering under the bushes, and justifying in size, color, groundling habits, and trailing tails their other name of 'rat birds'; and at least three kinds of cuckoos — the crowlike *koel* whose long-drawn repetition of its name is, like our cuckoo's two old notes at home, India's promise of summer; the hawklike brainfever-bird, a fiend in feathers who perches in some tree at

night and shouts 'brain fever! brain fever!! brain fever!!!' and so on in rising notes until his voice breaks, and he begins at the bottom of the scale again; and the curious crow pheasant, a ground cuckoo who looks like a crow with a pheasant's long tail behind, uttering a long deep hoot which sounds strangely distant and ventriloquial until one catches sight of the bird slipping between the bushes near at hand.

In reptiles, India is rather unpleasantly rich, although to Europeans its perils from snakes may not be all that Western fancy paints. There are at least three kinds of venomous snakes which are justly dreaded — the slender *krait*, dull purple, dully ringed with white; the hooded cobra, sometimes grayish black and sometimes whitish gray, but equally deadly in either hue; and the desert saw viper (*Echis carinata*), so-called because the scales on its sides have saw-toothed keels. It were not wise, however, to feel them while the reptile lives, for, as with *krait* and cobra, its bite means almost certain death. Others are equally deadly, but seldom encountered, such as the aggressive king cobra or hamadryad, sometimes measuring more than four yards of venomous spitefulness, and a sea snake which advertises its character by wasplike bands of black and yellow. Compared with these the Indian python or rock-snake, even when it attains a length of thirty feet, is harmless, though sufficiently alarming when disturbed by accident in the jungle.

Among other familiar Indian snakes are the large and active but harmless all-brown rat snake, and the vivid green tree snake like a long whip-lash twining itself in and out of the branches, an unpleasant surprise sometimes for gatherers of fruit or flowers.

More detested even than the venomous snakes are the huge estuarine crocodiles of Eastern India. These mon-

sters, sometimes thirty feet in length, never hesitate to attack a human being, while the common short-nosed crocodile, or *muggur*, of the Indian rivers, though often dangerous, usually feeds upon smaller animals and seldom reaches half that length; and the *gharial*, or long-nosed crocodile, which attains to twenty feet, feeds only upon fish.

Lizards take a prominent place in the wild life of India. Inside the houses fat little dust-colored geckos climb with their lobed feet like flies upon the walls and even run across the ceilings in pursuit of flies, not infrequently falling to the ground with a 'flop' which sometimes jerks off their tails. In the garden

almost every tree trunk has its long-tailed tree lizard, commonly called 'blood sucker,' because when it is excited its head and neck become vivid red; and in the country a common object is a large monitor — which people in India insist, without reason, upon calling an 'iguana.' Sometimes one of these monitors will put up a good fight against an English terrier, and, of course, the natives believe that the harmless creature is very venomous. The frogs, whose multitudinous clamor ushers in the rains, and the tortoises whose protruding heads often fringe the edges of river or tank are other lasting memories of reptilian wild life in India.

## RUSSIA IN REVERSION

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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RUSSIA presents first and foremost an economic problem. Its political tasks, immense and complex as they are, obviously stand second to its economic recovery. The Communist theories which still prevail, without being put completely into effect, are a great obstacle to the country's reconstruction. But it is vain to regard Russia with the eye of a speculator who has loaded up with old imperial rubles in the hope that the Bolsheviki may be turned out. Russia must be accepted as it is, and its uncertain political future must be discounted. The Soviet government is a fact. It is practically certain that its overthrow would be followed by utter anarchy. In that

case reconstruction would be even more difficult than it is to-day under an ostensible dictatorship of the proletariat.

Another important factor in the situation is that the present rulers, having failed to obtain their theoretical objects by a direct route, seem willing to yield at last to practical necessity. So the first questions before us are, what are they actually doing to-day, and what are they able to do in the way of repairing the ruin in their country?

We must constantly bear in mind that no other form of government could start out to solve the nation's present economic puzzles in any other way than have the present rulers. The situation is one that dictates its own