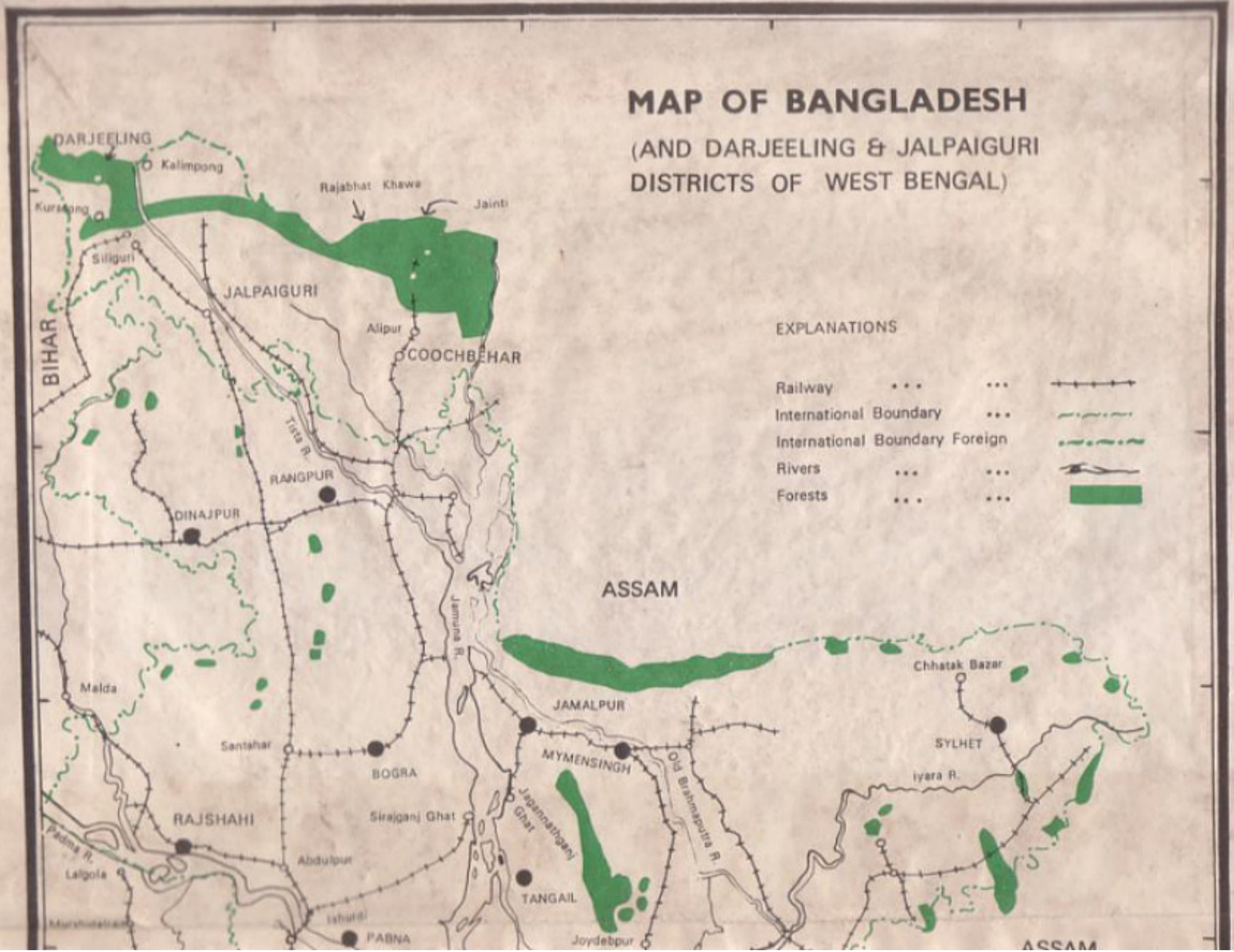
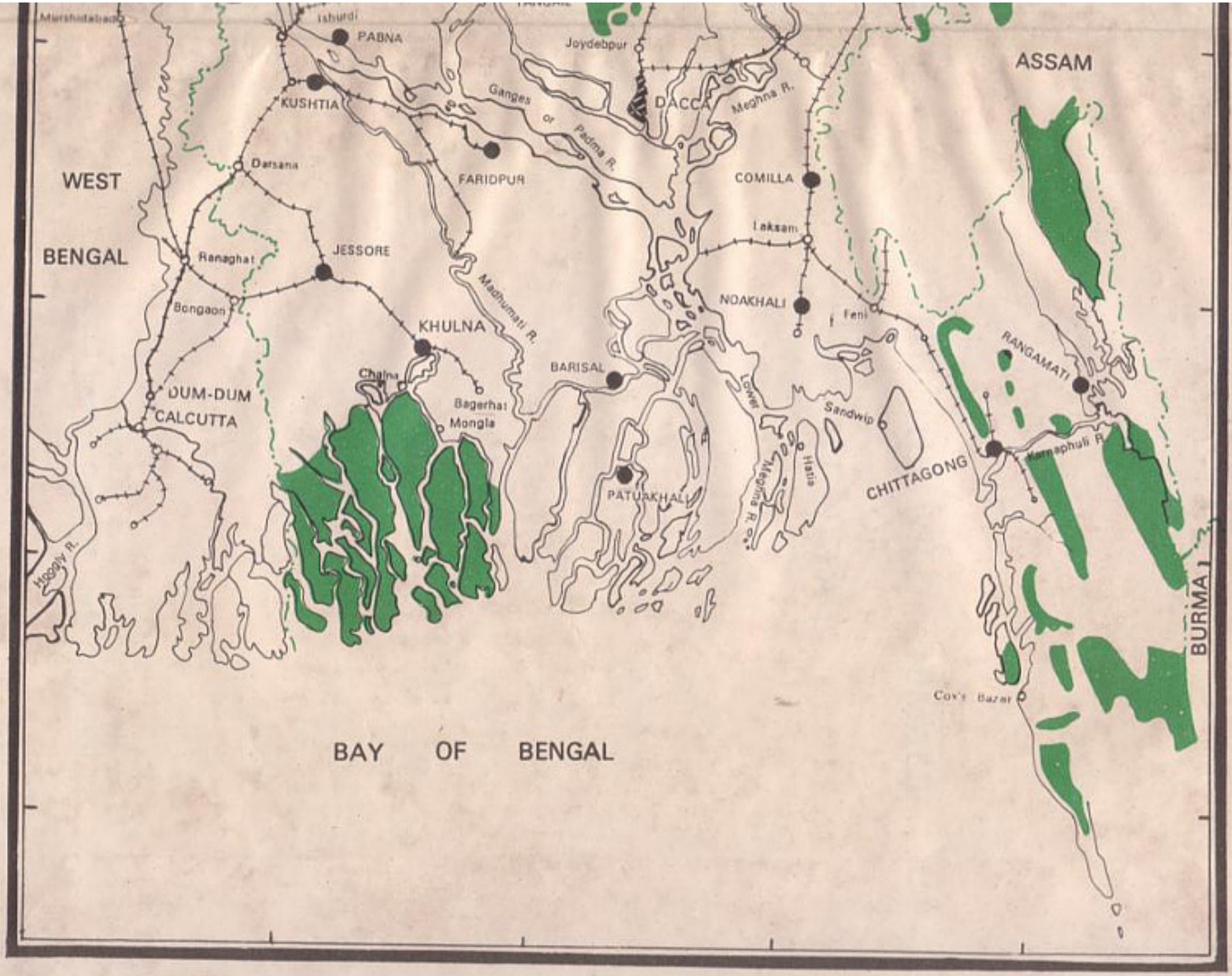
WITH THE WILD ANIMALS OF BENGAL

Yusuf S. Ahmad


MAP OF BANGLADESH
(AND DARJEELING & JALPAIGURI
DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL)
EXPLANATIONS
Railway
International Boundary
International Boundary Foreign
Rivers
Forests
DARJEELING
Kalimpong
Kurseong
Rajabhat Khawa
Jainti
Siliguri
JALPAIGURI
BIHAR
Alipur
COOCHBEHAR
Tista R.
RANGPUR
DINAJPUR
ASSAM
Jamuna R.
Malda
Santahar
BOGRA
JAMALPUR
MYMENSINGH
Old Brahmaputra R.
Chhatak Bazar
SYLHET
Iyara R.
RAJSHAHI
Siraiganj Ghat
Jagannathganj Ghat
Padma R.
Lalgola
Abdulpur
TANGAIL
Ishurdi
PABNA
Joydebpur
ASSAM


Murshidabad
Ishurdi
PABNA
Joydebpur
ASSAM
KUSHTIA
Ganges or Padma R.
DACCA
Meghna R.
WEST
BENGAL
Darsana
FARIDPUR
COMILLA
Laksam
Ranaghat
JESSORE
Bongaon
Madhumati R.
NOAKHALI
Feni
KHULNA
RANGAMATI
Chalna
BARISAL
Lower
DUM-DUM
CALCUTTA
Bagerhat
Mongla
Sandwip
Karnaphuli R.
Meghna R.
Hatia
PATUAKHALI
CHITTAGONG
Hoogly R.
BURMA
Cox's Bazar
BAY OF BENGAL

WITH THE WILD ANIMALS OF BENGAL

Yusuf S. Ahmad, I.F.S.
Retired Inspector General of Forests (PAKISTAN)

Published by :
Y. S. Ahmad
House No. 69/A, Road No. 6/A
Dhanmandi R/A, Dacca-9
Bangladesh.
Telephone : 311751

First Edition—July, 1981
2,000 copies

Printed by :
BRAC Printers
66, Mohakhali C/A
Dacca-12

FOREWORD

One day my little son came to know that my friend, Mr. Yusuf S. Ahmad, had been a Forest Officer. "Then he knows all about forests and wild animals ?" "Yes," I replied. "I wish he could tell some stories about wild animals to me."

This book surely fulfils his dream and the dreams of many children to hear stories about wild animals. These tales about Mr. Yusuf Ahmad's numerous encounters with the wild life of Bengal are varied and fascinating. Tiger, bison, bear, elephant, wild dog, game large and small, rare and common, are vividly portrayed here. Many of the stories are amusing but with a hidden menace lurking beneath. The reader is reminded again and again of what wild means—unpredictable, ferocious and cunning. Who would expect to find a tiger in a cow shed, or that one would chew through the walls of a hut to reach the humans within ? The tamed appearance an elephant presents in the zoo is belied by the actuality in these pages. Wild animals are exactly that, wild and dangerous, and many of Mr. Ahmad's tales end violently for both animal and man.

Mr. Ahmad's life uniquely qualifies him to write this book. He entered the Imperial Forest Service in December 1925 after completing his studies at Cambridge University. He served in the forests of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling. Sundarbans, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chittagong, Dacca, Mymensingh and Buxa Duar. After partition he was appointed the first Conservator of Forests in East Pakistan in 1947, and Inspector General of Forests for entire Pakistan in 1952. His contributions to forest management and conservation have been of great significance in both Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Through these pages his work in the forests and his love of forest life comes across strongly. An equally strong love, especially in his younger days, seems to have been shikar. Many of these stories are his shikar experiences and such is the clarity of his mind that his first encounter with a tiger rings fresh and lucid as if it happened last week instead of over 50 years ago.

These tales will delight all readers, young and old. Begun as stories told to his grandson he was persuaded to write them down and, finally, to publish them. The result is a fascinating book, a delight to read and a source of wonder and appreciation both of the animals of the forests and of the men who served in them.

Ellen Sattar
Dacca. 1981.

PREFACE

Having joined the Indian Forest Service, I was first posted to Jalpaiguri in Bengal, a province of British India. It was a haven for wild animals of many varieties and sizes, from elephants to quails. I worked in all the Forest Divisions of Bengal. During my long association with these forests of over thirty-three years from January 1926 to August 1959 I had many encounters with the wild life in this region. I had the good habit of maintaining a daily diary but the bad performance of never writing the interesting details of such encounters. I also had heard many thrilling stories of wild animals from others but never recorded them. In the beginning of my service, life was never dull in the forest as one could always expect to meet some animal or bird and get all the exciting experience that nature could provide if one would only enter into the forest at crack of dawn or late in the afternoon with a camera or a gun. Later the animals became so rare that their encounter became mere legends. To crown it all, I lost my diaries and photographs when my house was ransacked by the miscreants in January 1972 after the liberation war in Bangladesh.

My daughter, Rezia, was insistent on my putting down as many stories on paper as I still remembered. She was also the only person standing behind me when a charging wild tusker elephant was barely ten yards away from us before I shot it in February, 1948. We were then nearer to death together than ever. This book is therefore dedicated to her. Of my family members she has also been The One who has been beside me in a good few of the encounters and she amply deserves the privilege. Having lost my records from my diaries, I have been unable to mention in detail dates, names of persons and places concerned, except for those who were closely connected.

I am grateful and indebted to many contemporaries, friends and associates who have helped and suggested to me to put this manuscript into print, but, I feel I must particularly mention a few names—without their encouragement the book would never have been completed.

First, I am grateful to my friend, Principal Ebrahim Khan, a literator and a famous short stories writer of Bangladesh who very kindly went through the manuscript of my book and gave me several suggestions.

I would like to acknowledge the interest of the artist Kazi Abul Kasem, who advised that the book have as many illustrations as possible. I am indebted to Mr. A. Hamid, now the Inspector General of Forests of Bangladesh and to Mr. Salamat Ali, the Deputy Conservator of Forests for their assistance in collecting the coloured photographs.

Mr. Abdul Alim, the Conservator of Forests needs to be specially mentioned as he gave, ungrudgingly, many hours of his valuable time in reading and editing the manuscript.

And last, but not the least, I must acknowledge the invaluable help I received from my friends, Dr. A. Sattar and Dr. Ellen Sattar, without whose help this book could not have gone to the press for printing. Ellen Sattar has many publications to her credit and is a famous educationist. The form in which the book is printed is entirely at her suggestion.

Finally I would like to add that when I related some of the stories to my only grandson, Shahid Inam Chowdhury, his immediate reaction was, "NANA YOU MUST WRITE THEM UP." He regretted that he was born too late and could not join any of the thrilling incidents. With the fast rise in population in the country and the dwindling of the wild animals and birds in inverse ratio, it will be well nigh impossible for the youth to encounter the wild life as I did. For their benefit I sincerely hope that someday these stories may be translated into other languages.

Yusuf S. Ahmad.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Tract

The area referred to in the stories of the animals and birds related in this book comprises what is now Bangladesh and the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar in West Bengal, India. It is situated between 21° to 27° North latitude and 88° to 93° East longitude.

The Rainfall And Configuration

The rainfall is heavy on the north in the foothills of the Himalayas, above 90 inches per annum, very heavy in the north-east in Sylhet where it is about 200 inches in the year, reduces towards the east and south east to about 140 inches in Cox's Bazar and goes down to 90 to 100 inches in the south in Khulna. The climate can be generally described as tropical moist except in the Darjeeling hills above 7000 feet elevation where it snows in the winter. The topography is steep hills in the north rising to 14,000 feet above sea level and going down to the plains near Siliguri. Further east, the hills are low—barely 2000 feet, the out-crop of the Bhutan hills. In Sylhet there are a few hillocks, barely 200 feet high, a continuation of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills on the north and lower on the south towards Hill-Tippera. In Chittagong Hill Tracts in the south-east, there are hills rising to about 3000 feet (Chimbuk), but by and large they are sandy hills—a geological out crop of the Lushai Hills on the east and the Arakan Hills of Burma furthur south. In Khulna district, the tract is flat and marshy, inundated by salt water from the Bay of Bengal.

The Forests

The forests consist of a few conifers (Spruce, Silverfir and Taxus) above 10,000 feet on the north in Darjeeling with belts of rhododendrons of various gorgeous colours. The oaks (buch, phalat), Michelea (champ) and Magnolias occur lower down. Below 2000 feet the principal tree is Dipterocarp (Shorea, sal). In the tract below the foothills on the north, the forest consists principally of sal with patches of grass land and accacias on the sandy riverine areas. Cane breaks, elephant grass and reeds abound on moist areas which make attractive habitats for deer of various kinds and pigs and the tiger to feed on them. Some rhinoceros and bison are also found. Elephants come down from the Bhutan hills in the cold weather in herds but stray tuskers turned out from the herds, some time stay the whole year round doing considerable damage to the village crops in the summer.

The forests of Sylhet, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Chittagong also contain principally a Dipterocarp (garjan) with a thick undergrowth of bamboos, an ideal food for

elephants. Deer and some bison are also found. The Chittagong Hill Tracts region is more moist and very thinly populated. Wild animals are, therefore, more numerous there than in other areas of garjan forest. A few marshes form ideal homes for white winged wood duck.

In Khulna, the tidal forests of the Sundarbans are famous for the Cheetal deer which together with pigs provide good food for the tiger. The creeks and channels abound in crocodiles that get all the fish they want for their maintenance.

Birds, Migratory And Native

Throughout the tract big migratory flocks of ducks from geese to teals, cover the marshes with many varieties of snipes and snipets. They are also seen in large numbers on the sandy char-islands in the innumerable rivers, tributaries and distributaries of the mighty Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna that pass, after traversing over this area, ultimately to disgorge themselves into the Bay of Bengal.

Jungle murgis are native to this tract below 2000 feet elevation throughout the region. They are bigger in size in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where due to better cover they probably live longer. Pheasants (kalij) are also found above 2000 feet in Darjeeling and in every forest except those in Jalpaiguri and Khulna. Pigeons and doves of many varieties are also native to this area. The Sundarbans, in Khulna, is the home of many varieties of herons and other fish eating birds.

CHAPTER I

TIGERS

The Royal Bengal Tiger is the most magnificent animal of the forest. It came originally from Manchuria through Burma into Assam and then along the foot hills of the Himalayas into Bengal. The tigers of North Bengal grow bigger in length, lighter in colour—almost yellow with black stripes and white from the throat down the body and are very agile and clever by nature. Down in South Bengal, in the Sundarbans in Khulna district, this great cat is thick-set, dark almost brown-red in colour and in the forest, one can hardly distinguish the black stripes. Here it does not walk very far in search of food, as pigs and deer are plentiful. The movement through mud and slosh is heavy and slow. The animal is much smaller in size but stocky compared to the North Bengal tiger.

The common method of hunting tiger in North Bengal in the Duars of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts is from machans. A cow or a buffalo is tied by a forest road and when it is killed and dragged into the jungle, a machan is put up on a tree, about twenty feet off the ground near the kill, and when the tiger comes to the carcass, it is fired at.

The tiger has very sharp eyes and a keen sense of hearing, though not a strong sense of smell. In organising shoots for the Very Important Persons, I have often sat above live baits all night to study the nature of the Royal Bengal tiger. The bait animal has to be tied round the hind leg and never round the neck. Like most wild animals the tiger also comes out of the forest in the evening and walks along the roads and edges of the forest. As soon as the bait realises the approaching danger, it gets up and tries to move to the opposite direction. As it is strongly secured with ropes, it pulls and starts moving like a pendulum from side to side. This movement attracts the attention of the tiger and it at once begins to walk towards the bait. At first, it walks boldly along the road, covers a few yards, stops for a few minutes and then starts again. From a good distance, sometimes about a hundred yards, it skirts the forest trying to hide its approach from the bait. Then from a distance of about twenty yards it lies flat and slowly crawls towards the bait, a short distance at a time, up to a point from which it can jump on the bait in one hop. It gets up on the back of the bait and puts all its weight on the head with one paw and breaks the head from the neck. The front part of the tiger is much heavier and stronger than the hind part. The bait starts bleeding through its mouth and nose and the tiger watches it standing near the prostrate

body. If the tiger is small and the bait is big, it sometimes catches the animal by the throat until it is floored. The carcass is then pulled until the rope gives way. If the bait is big, the tiger drags the carcass, otherwise with one sweep it puts the body on its back with the fore and hind legs dangling on either side and walks away towards the water course.

In the Sundarbans, I have seen tigers lying near the deer track after the herd comes out of the tree forest on to grass fields to graze. They pounce on the deer or pigs when they go back into the forest. I have also seen tigers chasing the stags which cannot run very fast through the thick forest with innumerable 'shulas' on the ground. The movement of the tiger is also retarded over muddy ground and if the deer gets ahead or a little warning before it reaches one hopping distance from the tiger, it often escapes death. It is sometimes noticed that a herd of deer will stand in the open field and risk being fired at rather than take cover in the adjoining tree forest where a tiger may be crouching to jump on them.

The tiger lies near its kill after tearing open its stomach and eating the liver, heart and intestines. When the machan is being put up, the tiger moves away and returns when the men leave the area and quiet prevails. In North Bengal, the tiger invariably has a bath and drink before it comes to feed on the carcass.

With more than one gun in the shoot, and when a few staunch elephants are available that will stay still even when charged by a tiger, howdahs are put on their backs to take the place of machans. For a successful shoot off the howdahs one has to know the forest, where the bait is killed. The organiser of the shoot must be able to guess correctly the direction to which the tiger will bolt when driven out of the cover and put the howdah elephants about fifty feet apart beside a forest road or freshly pressed clearance about twenty feet wide. The tiger has to be shot at while crossing the clearance. Often the tiger walks up to the clearance and stops for a few seconds before jumping across it giving the shikari a chance only for a quick shot. This is a very aristocratic form of tiger shooting and needs elaborate arrangements.

The patch of forest, where the tiger is lying near about the kill, is surrounded by beaters and elephants from early morning and the shikaries come leisurely after a good night's rest and breakfast. The beat starts after the howdah elephants are placed in position. The tiger is a very wary animal and is the first to come out at the noise of beating. In ten to twenty minutes, the shoot is over. In Cooch Behar, the lines are cleared in advance of tying up the kills and stops are placed even behind the howdah elephants so that even if the tiger manages to escape across one clearance, the beating goes on to the next patch until the tiger is shot.

The tiger moves in a straight line when driven and can easily be distinguished from the movement of undergrowth or grass which is ideal for howdah shooting. In tree forest, the tiger is often at the clearance before the shikari realises what is happening and is missed. The beating has been so perfected by some trained shikaris that by controlling the line of the beaters, the tiger can be put up in front of any desired howdah.

The forests of Sylhet district are confined to the hillocks, locally called tilas, interspersed between paddy fields and tea plantations. It is not a tiger land. The tigers mostly live in the deeper forests in the Khasi Hills on the north and in Hill Tippera on the south and occasionally stray into the Sylhet forests. Once a tiger is located in a patch of forest, it is surrounded by a net put up with poles about nine feet high. The netted area is gradually made smaller and smaller and guarded night and day for several days. Restaurants and food stalls are opened in the vicinity for the benefit of the viewers who come by hundreds to see the netted tiger. When the tiger gets ferocious without food or drink and with net all round, it is killed with a gun and occasionally speared to death.

In the Sundarbans, no organised tiger shoot is possible. There are so many pigs and deer in the forest that the tiger is rarely interested in a cow even if one is tied. On the contrary it is suspicious of a cow when put up as a bait. Most of the tigers here are killed by trap guns and some are shot when met by chance on the river banks or in the forest. The tiger has a peculiar habit of moving to and fro on its own track. This can be easily noted from its pug marks on soft wet ground. It has even been observed that if a pole is lying across a stream, a tiger walks over the pole to one side and uses exactly the same route on its return. Fresh pug marks are looked for, and the distance between the fore and hind pug marks is accurately measured. Two thirds of this distance is taken as the height of the heart or the lung of the tiger. A loaded gun is placed a few feet away from the track on pegs with the hammer on ready to fire at the track. A thin wire tied to the trigger is taken across the track and secured to a camouflaged peg or bush on the side opposite to the loaded gun. When the tiger comes walking, it strikes the wire with its foreleg. The gun goes off hitting the tiger in the region of its heart or lung, depending on whether the left or the right side of its body was on the side of the gun. The shikari spends the night in his boat within hearing distance of the report of the gun. Sometimes he has to fire a second shot at the wounded tiger the next morning to kill it. In any case the trap gun is removed in the morning to prevent any wood cutter being hit by day. This is tried for two or three consecutive nights and if nothing happens the gun site is shifted to another place with fresh pug marks. In North Bengal, especially in Jalpaiguri, the tiger generally comes to the kill only in the evening, sometimes two or three hours after night fall. But in the Sundarbans, I have seen tiger feeding at all hours of the day.

The deer in the Sundarbans feed on the fruits, particularly keora fruits, immediately after the tide recedes leaving the fruits on the muddy banks of rivers and streams. The tiger also lurks in the neighbourhood to pounce on the deer while it is grazing or when it gets back into the forest after the feed. On grass land, the deer and the pigs graze early in the morning or when the sun is setting and those are also the hours for the tiger to hunt its prey.

1. My First Tiger.

It was on a hot day in April, 1927. I was posted on Working Plan duty in the Sundarbans after about fifteen months' service in Jalpaiguri forests. I acquired a 12 bore

Greener gun but could not afford a rifle. I took out an old ·425 bore magazine rifle from my home with only about ten cartridges left over from time worn stock. I could not even get any fresh cartridges in Calcutta on my way to Khulna.

I was in charge of the field work, enumeration of trees and stock mapping in the Sundarbans. Parties of eleven men were put in the forest every half a mile apart, with calipers and compasses to lay east west lines and measure all trees in eleven feet wide strips ; the trees measured were marked with a daub of red paint and recorded, species by species. I used to go with only two workmen to check up the measurements and prepare the stock map on the blank sheet of an out-line map of the area that I carried with me. Sometimes I walked from one line to the next, swimming across the streams on the way oblivious of any danger of tigers on land and crocodiles in the streams.

That afternoon, I had only one man with me and left the other in the dingy boat that brought me from the flat (a small house-boat with two cabins and a steel hull). I was in the forest west of the Bhadra river where all felling was closed at the time. I had gone about two hundred yards from the bank when I heard a heavy sound of some one's leg going into the mud and being pulled up again, on the bank of a small stream that lay ahead. I thought it was a thief who had come to cut fire wood from a closed forest. My companion left the rifle with me with only two cartridges in the magazine and got up a baen tree to look from a height. He soon shouted 'Bagh' 'Bagh'. I first looked up at him and then when I looked at the ground, I saw a big red animal trot past the baen tree. With the enthusiasm of a youth, unmindful of any danger, I fired the rifle and hit the tiger on the neck. He fell flat on the ground and was just rubbing its body. I should have quickly changed the cartridge from the magazine and fired the second shot but I was too flabergasted at the sight of that magnificient animal until it jumped back to the direction from where it had come. I fired my second cartridge but only to hit the hind legs ; the bullet passing from one to the other. As there were no more cartridges, I gave the rifle to my companion and climbed up on the baen tree.

After about five minutes, I could hear the panting sound of the tiger. I had a khukri on my belt, I cut a few branches and started throwing them in the direction of the wounded tiger. In a few minutes, out he came, pushing the undergrowth and the scrub with its forepaws. Coming under the baen tree it tried to jump at me but it could hardly clear three feet. My companion got as high up on the tree as he could with his bare feet, but I with my boots could not climb and felt quite safe at a height of about ten feet from the ground. Failing to reach us, the tiger lay on the ground and started roaring as loud as he could. I noticed that blood was spurting out of the wound on the neck like a fountain and I was sure it would bleed to death. The sun was going down. I was anxious to get back to my flat and return for the tiger the next morning. I started shaking the branches of the tree and as the twigs and leaves fell on the tiger, it was all the more enraged and roared the louder.

XI. The Author in 1928. The Tiger shot in the Sundarbans.

After a time, my companion shouted to the man on the boat to go back to the flat and bring my shot gun and some more cartridges for the rifle. The youngman returned after about an hour with two of my sub-ordinates armed with guns. Before we realised their arrival, the tiger turned and went back to the same bush from where it had emerged. I thought it was giving me a chance to get down from the tree so that it could come back and attack. Soon we heard the sound of the approaching men and shouted to them that there was a wounded tiger under my tree. They should fire their guns as they neared my tree so that the tiger might be frightened away. In a few minutes, one Forest Guard with five rifle cartridges in his hand and a Deputy Ranger and a Forester well armed came up to the baen tree. The Forest Guard was asked to climb up to me first and when I loaded my rifle, the other two rescuers came up one by one. We started pelting at the tiger again but he made no move. I then asked the Forester to fire at the bush where I thought the tiger was lying. At that shot he moved and I fired my rifle immediately and got him behind the head. He lay down quietly. Thereafter, I felt quite exhausted. From the tree, I directed the men to look for the dead tiger. It took the cautious men about ten minutes, before the body was found. By that time other men came from the camp and we triumphantly went back with the tiger slung on a pole.

2. The Tiger That Ran Away With A Dhoti.

In the Sundarbans, the wood-cutters fell the trees, bark them in the forest and carry the dressed logs away in boat-loads to the markets. The Bawalies and the Forest Officers who mark the trees for felling to ensure that only marked trees are felled, live in temporary huts, built on stilts about eight feet high. These huts have only one or two rooms with walls and roofs made of golpata, with a verandah in front and a ladder to get up and down. The people work in the forest the whole day covered with mud and sweat, return to the huts in the evening, have their bath and meal and go for rest. One evening, in one such hut, a Forest Ranger and his assistant, after a bath hung their dhoties on the verandah and were resting in one room. Their cook was sleeping in the other room. They kept their shoes which were washed clear of the mud on the verandah. There were hurricane lanterns in both the rooms. The cook was a deaf man.

They were all fast asleep when a young tiger jumped on the verandah and started chewing the shoes. It then thrust a paw through the golpata wall and was pulling the bedding of the cook. He woke up and started shouting, 'Bagh, Bagh,' which roused the Forest Ranger and his assistant. As luck would have it, their rifle was in their room but the cartridges were in the drawers of the table in the cook's room. They could hardly believe the cook at first but hearing some movement on the verandah, opened a window to look out. It was a moon lit night. They saw the tiger and quickly shut the window. They screamed but could not frighten the tiger away. They also could not make the deaf cook understand that the rifle cartridges were in his room. They cut open the wall between the two rooms and brought the cook and the cartridges into

their room. Even the big noise they made in all their doings did not scare the tiger away. They loaded the rifle and through a hole made on the wall, fired at the tiger. The tiger jumped but carried one of the hanging dhoties away with him. They stayed quiet though panicky for the rest of the night.

The next morning when some enquiring Bowalies came to their hut they saw blood on the ground and were sure the tiger was hit. After they had their meal and the sun was well up, they collected more guns from the other huts and in a body started following the trail. The tiger was moving away from them, bits of the dhoti were seen in the bushes. No one could shoot at the tiger although several guns were fired in the process of the drive. The tide was coming in and some of the shikaries got into dingy boats to be ahead of the drive to be able to shoot at the fleeing tiger. One such shikari suddenly saw the tiger splash into the stream. He could only see the head in the water, a few yards away from the boat. He fired a bullet from a 12 bore gun. The tiger was hit on the head and it sank immediately. Fortunately the tide coming in pushed the body up stream. A dragging net was then brought and after a good few hours' search the body of the tiger that ran away with the dhoti was recovered from the bed of the stream.

3. The Most Notorious Man-Eater.

Soleiman was a famous trap-gun shikari of the Sundarbans. He belonged to Sarankhola village of Bagerhat within a few miles of the forest. He had several scores of tigers to his credit and he earned his glory in the first two decades of the twentieth century. One particular tiger killed about eighty people between the Baleswar river and the Supoti khal. Not only were the wood-cutters driven out of that forest but all the guile of Soleiman shikari to trap the man-eater proved unsuccessful. It was suspected that this tiger would climb up a keora tree and watch the shikari put the trap-gun and would never walk by its own track and get killed. There were other tigers killed in that part of the forest but the depredation of the notorious man-eater continued un-abated.

One afternoon Soleiman shikari, after placing a trap-gun in the forest, came back to Supoti Forest Office and was having his bath in the tank in the compound before his meal. There was no one else in the tank at the time but there were quite a number of people in the office. Suddenly the tiger came out of the forest and started chasing Soleiman. He dived and as long as he was under water the tiger could not see him. But as soon as he put his head up to breathe, the tiger swam towards him. He was shouting for help and the people in the office first came out to see what had happened and then went back to load the guns. Unluckily for Soleiman, he once put his head up not far from the tiger who immediately caught him by the neck and killed him. The tiger was swimming towards the bank nearest to the forest when the men from the office fired their guns. It scared the tiger and Soleiman was dropped before it retreated into the forest. Soleiman was the last man killed by this tiger at Supoti. Soon after his death, a tiger was killed by trap-gun in the adjacent forest and the depredation ceased. But the most famous shikari of the Sundarbans himself became a shikar of the Man-Eater.

4. The Tiger Hit In The Eye.

In the autumn of 1929, I took over charge of the Sundarbans Division and my D.F.O, took over the Working Plan Office. This was my first Division. After two thousand miles of linear survey and measurement of trees in the Sundarbans, I knew the forests inside out. I started work with great enthusiasm and was considered the Wild Man of the Forest Department.

One day I went out inspecting the fellings in a coupe in Selagang. The wood-cutters informed me that a tiger had killed a wild pig in their section. I took no notice and went about my work. After a few hours walk through mud and slosh, about mid-day, the men came again to say that they had to stop work as a tiger had killed a pig in their section. In those days, some of the coupe purchasers were supplied with shot guns but they had to pay for the ammunition. I carried no gun into the forest as I found it an impediment while walking over the innumerable shulas through the thick forest. On this day, the coupe purchaser had a loaded muzzle-loading gun and I thought I would go with it and inspect the killed pig so that I could come later and sit up on a tree for the tiger. I left accompanied by about half a dozen wood-cutters and a launch crew.

I came to a patch of hantal forest when I could smell the dead animal. I took the single barrelled muzzle loader and proceeded cautiously bending low to see the kill. Suddenly a tiger came out snarling at me viciously like a dog while eating its food and trying to drive away intruders. I had no time even to turn, so I fired the gun with the object of frightening the tiger away. Unfortunately, or fortunately, one pellet hit the eye of the tiger and it started going round and round. My men bolted in a flash. I put the gun on the ground and climbed up the nearest tree that I got. I could still see the tiger. As it did not go back to its kill, I was sure that it was badly hit. After about two hours, a Forest Ranger and my Tour Assistant came with other guns from the launch and found the tiger was as dead as a door nail. A pellet had hit its eye and got into its brain.

5. Three Tigers In A Row.

The Forest Department had two big steam launches which the superior Forest Officers used for travelling. Two small steam cutters used to carry the mail from the Divisional Forest Office at Khulna to the Officers on tour and provisions for those who had to live inside the forest. I sometimes used the small boats to go to the smaller streams where the big launch could not ply. Once, late in October 1929, I was going in one of the cutters near the Betmar gang. After inspecting the works in the forest, I was returning to my launch, the Harrier (now Bana Rani). The tide was full and was just turning. We were still in a small stream and anxious to get out quickly. It was pouring with rain. The crew and all of us were very excited, when we saw three black heads floating across the stream, barely twenty yards in front of the cutter. By the time I got down to the cabin and came up with my ·350 bore Mannlicher rifle, two of the

tigers crossed the stream and got into the forest but the third one went back to the side from which all the three came. I was sure the third tiger would also try to go across and join the other two.

We moved up and down for some time but could not spot the tiger. I went back to the launch, changed into dry clothes and came back in a dingy boat with a ·475 bore Westley Richard double barrelled rifle belonging to my eldest brother. Not being able to locate the tiger, I got down in the forest at the point where the tiger had retreated. From the fresh pug marks on the soil, I noticed that the tiger had gone back exactly the same way by which it came out of the forest. The two members of the crew who came with me in the dingy simply would not allow me to take the gun into the forest. They thought I was foolhardy enough to go after the tiger in the thick jungle and get killed. I hardly went ten yards bare handed watching how the tiger went back when I heared a growl; I stood stiff. A couple of minutes later, another growl but nothing came out. I discreetly retraced my steps to the dingy but my two companions did not allow me to get down again. I had such good relations with the crew that I agreed with them that discretion was the better part of valour. It was the only time when I saw three tigers in a row in the Sundarbans but could not have a shot.

6. The Arpangasia Tiger.

A colleague of mine was travelling with his family in S. L. Hawk (now Bana Kanya). I must say that most of the launch crew were keen shikaris. Even if they could not fire a gun, they were very vigilant. Rarely an animal could escape their notice on the land or in the water.

The launch weighed anchor in the early morning from Kobadak just as the tide was turning from high to low and was moving fast to the south, down the Arpangasia river. The whole family was assembled on the deck in front of the cabin and was enjoying the fresh air. My friend and his wife were sitting on stools and the children were leaning over the railing. Suddenly there was great commotion—a tiger in the river. A crew member ran down from the navigation bridge and pointed out to them a black object in the water floating from west to east. It looked more like an upturned earthen pot than the head of a tiger. Out came the rifle, which was always in readiness on the gun rack in the saloon, and the box of cartridges was taken out of the drawer. This friend had a double barrelled rifle, ·375 Magnum by Holland and Holland. Both the barrels were loaded to fire at the tiger which got a little panicky by then and was swimming as fast as it could. The Arpangasia river would be nearly half a mile wide at that point and the east bank was a hundred yards away.

The Serang put the launch carefully between the tiger and the bank and stopped the engine, allowing the boat to float down with the tide. My friend fired only from about twenty yards distance. He was possibly too excited and missed the first shot that splashed into the water. The panicky tiger raised its neck and head above the water with

a big growl and the second shot from the next barrel got him behind the head. The tiger died instantaneously, and the body started floating down stream. Out came the jolly boat with half a dozen crew, the dead tiger was pushed towards the bank and retrieved in about fifteen minutes. It is said that if the tiger is able to take in a breath before it dies, the body does not sink in water.

7. The Mistaken Red Pony.

This was in the village Dhansagar across the Bhola river that forms the eastern boundary of that part of the Sundarbans. In the cold weather of 1929—30, an application came from the local Police out-post, with the skin and skull of a tiger, for reward. I heard that the tiger was killed in the village and I wanted to get the full story by local enquiry before disbursing the hundred rupee reward.

I arrived at Dhansagar a couple of days after and came to learn that early one morning an old man went out of his house into the adjoining paddy field to answer the call of nature. While he was sitting on his haunches, he saw a red animal walking along the aisle between two fields towards the village houses. After he finished, he called out to his neighbour that his red pony was roamig about the paddy fields and it should be tethered before it damaged the crop.

By that time more people came out, men, women and children. They discovered that the red animal was not the pony but a tiger that had walked nearly half a mile from the river bank, over the fields into the village and got into a cane bush behind a kitchen. There was great consternation, word was sent to the Police out-post and also to the local shikaris. They assembled with several guns and the Assistant Sub Inspector of Police had a rifle. The tiger was driven out of the cover but instead of running towards the forest, it began to move from one court-yard to another much to the distress of the villagers. The children were all taken into the houses behind closed doors and some of the shikaris got up on hay stacks. One of them fired and hit the tiger. It dropped but soon got up and ran to the next house. Again it was fired on by a second shikari but the tiger was not killed and it took shelter in another bush.

The shikaris collected together for joint counsel. The deliberation lasted about an hour. By that time the tiger had bled profusely and was exhausted. The Police Officer with his rifle went up on a tree and wanted the villagers to drive the tiger towards him. But it would not budge. At the end, he got down from the tree, walked up to a mound of earth and killed the tiger with a shot from his rifle. That was the end of the pony incarnate of a tiger.

8. Did The Tiger Die Of Heart Failure ?

The forests of Buxa Division were ideal for the shoots of the Very Important Persons (VIPs) who could go for a tiger shoot after a good night's rest and sumptuous break-fast. The shoots off the howdah elephants would only take a few hours and the VIPs could enjoy themselves, visit friends or shoot small game in forests other than the

area where tiger shooting was organised. The two eastern ranges, Rydak and Sankos, were particularly suitable for shooting tigers. The names came from the two rivers that flowed beside them. Sankos was the eastern most. It adjoined Assam (Goalpara) on the east, across the Sankos river, and Cooch Behar on the south. The tigers frequently moved from one area to another and could always be put up for the shoot. Rydak was largely a tree forest but along the bank of the Rydak river on the east there were patches of grass land which could be beaten for tiger. There were cane breaks on the south interspersed by smaller rivers which were also good habitats for tiger. VIP shoots were mostly organised in Buxa Division.

On one occasion a shoot was arranged for a high Military Officer. This meant that he should get preference to others for the first shot at the tiger. In the shoots for the Governor of Bengal, about twenty to thirty elephants used to be collected, which included all the elephants of the forest and of the civil departments of Jalpaiguri. The rest came from the Cooch Behar State.

In this particular shoot, arranged at short notice, there were not many elephants for howdahs and the shikaris were put on low machans. The few elephants available were used in driving out the tiger. Several cows were tied in the likely forests as bait and there were two kills in one night. The tiger in the grass land was selected for the beat.

From the pug marks, seen on the ground where the cow was killed, it was evident that the tiger was quite a big one. The ground was such that the tiger could move to two different directions. Some of the elephants had to be used as stops so that their presence and the noise they made would divert the tiger to the desired direction, in front of the chief VIP. There were only four machans with shikaris on them.

When the drive started, the tiger moved to the wrong direction first and when turned by the stops, it went galloping to the desired direction and began to roar in panic. A patch of savahah strip, about twenty yards wide, was cleared by pressing the grass with the elephants in front of the machans which were camouflaged. When the tiger came to the edge of the clearance which did not exist previously, it became more suspicious and jumped out still roaring. The VIP fired and dropped the tiger in one shot. When the beating elephants reached the clearance, the shikaris were brought down from the machans and they all went to the dead tiger. Not a drop of blood was seen any where and there was no bullet mark on its body. Did the tiger die of heart failure? That was the great joke till the tiger was skinned and its body cut open. The soft-nose bullet had gone right through its mouth, into the body before it burst and smashed both the heart and the lung. The skin of the tiger was perfect and it was one of the biggest tigers shot in those forests. It measured about nine feet six inches between pegs.

9. The Tiger Chewed The Leg Of The Shikari, (Victor Pullan).

A tiger in North Rydak forest had killed a cow one afternoon. In the night following, some one had fired at a tiger from his car on the P.W.D. Road and had

driven away for his dear life without finding out the consequences. The next day nobody could walk along the road as the tiger was continually roaring. A local tea garden Manager was informed of the tiger and he sent for the two elephants of the Forest Department from the Rydak Forest Range Office, about ten miles away. By the time the elephants arrived the sun was declining. Both the elephants were saddled and he sent them in advance to wait for him on the P.W.D. road, on the edge of the forest. The Manager drove in his car, went alone with a double barrelled rifle and got up on the younger of the two elephants with a mahut who was also less experienced than the other. The other elephant was taken as a support to beat up the bushes. No one in the party had any idea where the tiger might be lurking.

After reconnoitering for about half an hour the carcass of the cow was found but there was no sign of the tiger. He then took his position across a forest track and instructed the other elephant to make a detour and beat up the undergrowth and drive the tiger towards him. Before the elephant could reach the point from where the beat was to start, there was a great hullabaloo—a big roar from the tiger and a heart rending shriek from the elephant as it bolted away and a big report of the rifle. When one elephant ran away the other also followed suit and the mahut could not stop it till she went well out of the forest to a small village. Eventually, the elephant was stopped and soothed. After some searching, the mahut found the first elephant also but without the mahut and the shikari. He brought the elephant out and requested the villagers to give it some fodder and himself went back into the forest. He began to coo, to locate the other mahut. It was more than an hour before he found the mahut perched on a tree. He took him on his elephant and heard the story of the incident before he could decide his next line of action.

When the two elephants were separated, the tiger suddenly jumped on the back of the elephant carrying the shikari. The elephant shrieked and swerved throwing the shikari off the pad. It then bolted. While falling from the elephant, the Manager lost his rifle which was jerked from his grip. The tiger pounced on him and chewed up his right leg. It then began to bite the stock of the loaded rifle which went off and made a loud noise. That frightened the tiger, it went into a bush and lay quiet. The Manager was too severely mauled to be able to move from the place and do anything except to wait for the tiger to come back and kill him. Oh, what a feeling! What an anticipation!

The mahut after collecting the news went back with his elephant to the place of occurrence with the second mahut and the driver of the car. The elephant refused to go right up to the prostrate shikari. He went as close as he could and asked the Manager to roll over. With great difficulty he managed to move dragging his chewed-up leg. The elephant was made to sit and with the help of the other two men, Victor Pullan was dragged up on the elephant and taken to the car. He was whisked off to Jalpaiguri hospital nearly a hundred miles away. His leg was amputated and later he fixed an artificial limb in the United Kingdom. He went back to the tea garden when he completely recovered and joined many tiger shoots. Some nerve indeed!

The mahut who rescued the manager got an M. B. E. award from the King of England. The wounded tiger was killed the following day and the rifle was recovered by other shikaris.

10. The Only Tiger I Shot Off A Howdah.

A shoot was arranged for the Forest Minister in Rydak Forest. A number of elephants were collected from the Jalpaiguri district. The Deputy Commissioner was also invited to join the shoot. The Minister had some guests from Assam. They were accommodated in the Forest Rest House at Rydak, the Deputy Commissioner and I had tents which were very comfortable in the cold weather. A number of cows were tied as bait in different parts of the forest and the Game Warden was the master of the ceremony. A cow was killed at night and five howdahs were tied on the backs of the elephants for the shikaris. Every arrangement was as right as could be desired. After a good night's rest and delicious break-fast we drove by car to the place of the shoot, about five miles from the Rest House, and got up on the respective howdahs allotted to us. The Minister was at one end of the cleared line where the tiger was expected to come out and then the Deputy Commissioner on his elephant. I was right at the other end, near a village, more to see the fun than to expect the tiger.

A tigress came out of the forest, soon after the beat started—as planned, between the Minister and the Deputy Commissioner and stood on a mound at the edge of the cleared line. They both fired, each trying to hit the animal first and to claim the trophy, but both of them missed. The tigress went back into the forest. After a good quarter of an hour when the beat nearly reached the cleared line, the tigress rushed out of the forest and lept across the line in front of my howdah. I took a quick shot—she was on the air and I got her at the heart. She landed dead on the ground and not even rigor mortis was noticed though I kept it covered with my second barrel. I got off the elephant when the beaters arrived, walked up to the tigress and found that the bullet had passed through its body. Though it was the Minister's shoot, I got the trophy.

11. The Sharp-Shooter Is Killed By The Tiger.

The Conservator of Forests Mr. E. O. Shebeare, who was a very well known jungle man with a few tigers to his credit, invited a Governor of Bengal to a tiger shoot in Buxa Division. The Governor was an elderly man and it was decided that the tiger must be driven into a stream in the forest so that the Governor could shoot just as the tiger came out of water. As Sankos forest had no river or stream passing through it, the forest selected for the shoot was Rydak. Elaborate arrangements as required on such occasions were duly made and the camp was set up at Rydak Forest Rest House compound.

Of the several cows tied as bait, one had been killed by a tiger which could possibly be driven into a stream. The forest near the water courses in this area was full of

cane-brakes and was very difficult for elephants and human beings alike to walk through. The cane bushes also afforded such complete cover for the tiger that it was well-nigh impossible to locate it or see it move through the forest. However, the decision was taken and every body had to try and do his best to make the shoot a success. The howdahs were placed across the stream and the drive started.

The Conservator himself led the beat on a pad elephant. The Governor's Sharp-shooter Security Guard sat behind the Conservator. The tiger was driven out but instead of coming out in front of the Governor, it crossed the stream in front of the howdah on which the Governor's pilot was the shikari. He fired, wounded the tiger but did not kill it. The tiger took cover into the cane forest behind the howdah elephants.

When the Conservator heard the story, he decided to drive the tiger back again into the stream. This was an almost impossible proposition against the nature of tigers. The howdahs were placed across the stream again and the beat started. No one knew how severely the tiger had been wounded. Sufficient time was not allowed for the tiger to bleed and become weak. The beating elephants were reluctant to go through the cane-brakes and began to push down small trees to frighten the tiger to move out of its cover. This went on for about half an hour. From the restlessness of the elephants one could realise that the wounded tiger was in that forest but no one knew where it was lurking. The Conservator then moved his elephant forward ahead of the others and the tiger suddenly jumped out of a cane bush and caught the trunk of the elephant. The elephant quickly bent its forelegs and tried to crush the tiger on the ground. The sudden jerk threw the Sharp-shooter off the pad. The tiger left the elephant and began to maul the man. He took out two revolvers in his two hands and emptied the magazines into the tiger which was on him. The elephants all bolted out of the forest. It was quite sometime before they could be controlled. When they came back to the spot, they found that the tiger was lying dead and the Sharp-shooter very severely mauled but still alive. They picked him up on an elephant but by the time he was moved out of the forest he also was dead.

12. Tiger In The Cowshed.

This occurred in the Sankos forest. It was a moon-lit night and a young tiger was prowling round the cowsheds in a forest village. An old man came out of one of the sheds to see what was outside. He was mauled badly and fell on the court-yard with a loud yell. Before the other persons from the same shed could come out, the tiger walked into the cowshed through the open door and killed a cow. The villagers realising what had happened closed the door of the cowshed and impounded the tiger. They started rendering first aid to the wounded man but before the day dawned he died.

The Forest Beat Office was nearly three miles away and men were sent there early in the morning to report the occurrence. By the time the Beat Officer and a Forest Guard arrived at the village, the sun was well up in the sky. The tiger was still locked

XII. The Author on the far right Howdah.

in the cow shed. After considerable deliberation it was decided to get up on the roof of the shed and make a hole to shoot at the tiger. The Beat Officer climbed up on the roof with a villager while the Forest Guard stood on the ground with another gun. When a hole was made, it was noticed that the tiger had killed two cows and two fowls in the shed, eaten a part of a cow and was lying down comfortably. He put the muzzle of his rifle down the hole and killed the tiger at point blank range. The tiger took five lives before its death.

13. An Unexpected Encounter.

Buxa was a big forest division, certainly the biggest one in North Bengal. It was intensively worked and during the second World War, it used to supply timber of all kinds. Copies of orders for jetty piles used to come direct from Alexandria for the African Theatre of War. There was a lot of activity all over the forest throughout the year. Climatically it was unhealthy, notoriously malarious. I used to keep my wife and daughter with me only in the cold weather and send them up to Shillong early in summer. This was the only forest division with a doctor and a dispensary exclusively for the Forest Department. There was a big labour force scattered in villages all over the seven Forest Ranges. The villagers were mostly Garos and Santals, excellent forest workers but not personally very clean people.

While I inspected the forests and the plantations, my wife used to go to the forest villages for social work. All the villagers were brought under one Co-operative Society. For vaccination for small-pox, inoculation for cholera, and for general treatment, the doctor was always on his round. The incidence of malaria was remarkably reduced. The Marwari money lenders were persuaded to move away from the forest. Tube-wells were dug for drinking water. The houses in the villages were reconstructed on the sides of wide roads passing through each village. A big house was constructed at one end of each village where all the young men used to sleep. Some Primary Schools were set up where, in addition to academic studies, the children were taught various works in forest plantation, agricultural fields and in the construction of thatched houses. Improved varieties of poultry were introduced and Linlithgow bulls were supplied for servicing the cows. This completely changed the calf population in three years.

One day in Damanpur Range, I went out to the plantation and Mafida, my wife, went to the forest village almost on the southern boundary of the forest. We were returning in my yellow peril, the V8 car, at about 12-30 p.m. We were on a stretch of a straight forest road which crossed a shallow stream about two hundred yards ahead of us. I was driving with Mafida beside me. The driver was sitting on the back seat. We had no guns and my Khukri was the only weapon in the car. As we were driving towards the stream, we saw a big tiger walking towards us along a ditch beside the forest road. Mafida was the first to notice the yellow back with black stripes and drew my attention. I drove on, but the tiger was most unconcerned. We came to within about ten yards, when the tiger got up from the ditch beside the road, looked at the approaching

car for a few moments and walked into the sal plantation across the road. If only I had a camera or my rifle, would it not have been fun ?

14. My Brother Gets A Tiger.

My eldest brother, Mr. J. Ahmad, was Additional Chief Presidency Magistrate in Calcutta. He was a very fastidious shikari, kept half a dozen shot guns—Churchill, Greener included—using different guns for shooting different kinds of birds. He also had two rifles—a double barrelled ·475 bore Westley Richards and a ·405 Winchester. Shikar was his only hobby. He shot panthers, sambhar deer and nilgai in the Bihar forests but never a tiger. So I invited him to Buxa Division for a tiger shoot.

We camped at Nilpara Forest Rest House, got him a shooting permit and placed him at the disposal of the Game Warden. A cow was tied as a bait in the sal forest about seven miles north east of Nilpara. It was killed by a tiger and a machan was duly put up. Mr. Ahmad and the Game Warden went there by car early afternoon and got up on the machan. Just at dusk, they heard the tiger having a bath in a nearby pool and waited till 9 p.m. but the tiger did not come to the kill. According to instructions, the local Forest Beat Officer went to the machan and brought them down. They returned rather disappointed to Nilpara after 10 p.m.

The next morning, we had news of another cow killed by a tiger near Chilapata Rest House about fifteen miles south of Nilpara. We arrived there by car at about 10 a.m. Three machans were hurriedly constructed, barely eight feet off the ground across a dry nala facing the forest where the cow was killed. There were two elephants and about twenty beaters. Mr. Ahmad sat with my orderly on one machan, Mafida and myself on the second and the Game Warden on the third on my right. The three machans were only about fifty yards apart but we could not see each other.

Within about ten minutes of the start of the drive, we heard a shot from my brother's machan but did not know what the result was. The big bang enlivened the beaters, they made louder noise and the elephants were pushing down small trees to drive the tiger out. I stood up on my machan to be able to get a wider view of the forest while my wife sat on a 'mora'. She could see the tiger crawling through the undergrowth and tried to draw my attention. I suddenly saw a tiger jump across the nala and shot him on the back. It fell in the nala, I could not see it then but the Game Warden could see it from his machan and thought that it was dead. After a few minutes, when the beaters came within our sight, the tiger jumped again and got up on the machan side of the nala. I fired my second barrel just behind its right shoulder and the tiger lay stone dead. We got off the machans and walked up to the tiger. My brother's shot was a bit low on the right shoulder, it had crippled the tiger but no vital part—lung or heart—was damaged. He did not expect the tiger to come out so soon and had to fire too quickly. My first shot hit its back and the second one smashed its lung. My brother drew the blood first and got his tiger.

15. Fearless Rezia, My Daughter, Rides Back On The Tigress.

It was my last cold weather in Buxa Division. With Mafida, and Rezia hardly six years old then, I went to Sankos in December, 1942. The Forest Rest House on the river bank was the quietest place in that vast forest area. I went there to write up my charge-note during the Christmas holidays. There were plenty of jungle fowl, green pigeons and peafowl in the forest and fish in the river.

Mafida and Rezia went out punting in a small boat in the river, the bamboo pole gave way and Mafida hurt her knee which already had a fractured patela. The Chowkidar of the Rest House came and complained that his cow was killed by a tiger the previous evening. I had two elephants with me and the mahuts reported that the carcass of the cow was lying about a hundred yards north of the Rest House on a slope leading to the grassy river bank. I told them to go and put up a machan. After tea I went to the machan on an elephant and sat up. Mafida could not go with me on account of her hurt knee and the local Range Officer, who was recently posted there and had never seen a tiger shot in the forest, accompanied me. We sat on moras. The kill was about twenty yards from the machan. As I was sure the tiger would have a bath and drink before it came to feed, I had another twenty yards of grass pressed down by the elephant between the kill and the river. The rifle was placed against the railing and I began to read a book.

Within fifteen minutes of the elephant leaving us I saw the tiger rise from a distance of another twenty yards to the north and slowly walk to the river. From the machan on the crest of the slope I could look over the tall grass right up to the river. The tiger first had a good drink of water, then eased itself. I noticed it was a tigress. It squatted in the running water of the Sankos river for a few minutes looking this way and that way. It was all very quiet. The tigress lay flat and splashed water on her body with her tail. She turned to the other side and did the same. She took nearly half an hour for the bath, quite lady like, then got up and shook the water off her body. She walked some distance on the sandy bank and coming in line with the kill and the machan entered into the grass, and walked straight towards me. She stopped some distance away from the patch of pressed grass and peered at the kill for a few minutes. She then walked away to the north. After a few minutes, she walked back again, still in the grass but nearer the clearance. This went on for quite fifteen minutes. Lastly when she came out of the grass and was still walking across the clearance and not towards the kill, I got her broad side. I put a bullet just behind her right shoulder into the lung. She dropped immediately but I kept her covered by the second barrel. After a couple of minutes, she raised her head a bit and lay quiet. I put the safety catch on the rifle and asked the Range Officer if he had watched how the tiger was coming. The poor fellow was looking to another side and did not notice anything.

Within a few minutes an elephant came with ropes, with Rezia sitting with the mahut. My bearer, two orderlies, another mahut, the two patawalas and the Rest House Chowkidar were walking behind the elephant. We got off the machan and

picked the tigress up on the back of the elephant. Rezia sat with the mahut all that time. I asked her to get down and walk with me but instead, she sat on the tigress and triumphantly went ahead of us to her mother at the Rest House. She still claims that was her trophy.

16. The Highest Reward Paid For A Tiger.

In the Sundarbans, the tigers were all considered as man-eaters and the normal reward paid for killing a tiger was rupees one hundred and fifty. There was one tiger at Chorabetmore that had killed about a dozen people in a sundri coupe. It used to come at the sound of cutting trees and no one knew in which part of the compartment it would appear. I advised the people to leave the dead body for some time in the forest and sit with a gun up on a tree near it. The tiger was sure to come and could be easily shot.

The advice was, however, never heeded. As soon as the excitement subsided after the first stampede, the bowalies would go in a body with guns, recover the partly eaten body of the man and take it home for burial. They would not appreciate that this could be done even after shooting the tiger. For some time all felling of trees on that area had stopped. I wrote to Government that if a man started killing other men in a village indiscriminately, surely a reward of a thousand rupees would not be considered too big a sum for his apprehension or destruction. I recommended a reward of rupees five hundred for destroying this man-killer in the forest and proposed disbursing this sum unless I heard from Government to the contrary. Accordingly, I announced this reward for the killing of this tiger.

Work was resumed on this area and one day, this tiger jumped through the fork of a sundri tree, pounced on a bowali, killed him and carried the body several hundred yards, crossing two small streams en-route. The man had an axe in hand, he could have hit the tiger but flinched at the last moment, tried to move away and was killed. His body was also removed to the village by his co-workers. This man-killer was seen by so many men on so many occasions over a period of three months that they knew it by sight. It was a young tigress.

One afternoon, a newly appointed Forest Guard was coming out of this forest by Chorabetmore khal in a dingy with two other men. They saw this tigress sitting on the bank of the khal. The young Guard got off the boat about fifty yards from the tigress with a double barrelled 12 bore gun loaded with bullets and started walking along the edge of the forest towards it. Generally the men used to run away from her but seeing this man walk towards her, the tigress was also surprised. She got up and faced the man. When he came to within twenty yards, he fired both the barrels and killed the tigress instantaneously. A large number of bowalies assembled to see the dead tigress and some said it was the man-killer and others opined that it was not. When the matter was reported to me, I came down from Khulna and inspected the forest myself. I waited for nearly two months and there was no more killing of woodcutters

in that forest. The reward of rupees five hundred was then paid to the young Forest Guard and Government sanction was obtained post-ipso-facto. That was the highest reward paid for destruction of a man-eater but it was worth it.

17. Chase Of A Tiger In Katka Khal.

It was in the month of March, Rezia had gone back to school at Shillong and my eldest brother, Mr. J. Ahmad, came down from Calcutta to spend a few days with me in the Sundarbans. We anchored the S. L. Harrier at the mouth of Katka khal. It was evening, the launch was facing east, the tide was just turning from ebb to flow. The crew had gone down to have their supper. My brother and I were sitting on the navigation bridge, enjoying the sea breeze and the view of the setting sun in that vast forest. My brother first noticed something black floating in the water about half a mile up stream from where we had anchored. When my attention was drawn, I went down to the cabin, got the binoculars out and handed it to him. He looked and announced it was a tiger. I rang the bell, the crew on duty and the serang both came up and the floating object was pointed out to them. They all agreed that it was a tiger. The jolly boat was called and we got in with our rifles and guns as quickly as possible. Four people started rowing as fast as they could. The tiger crossed the khal and got up on the bank on the east. It stood on the wet ground for a few minutes and kept on looking at the white jolly boat. It was still more than four hundred yards away and the light was also failing. The tiger then trotted for some distance and stopped. Within a few moments it started running again, its legs sometimes sinking into the soft mud. We chased it a little more but never came within shooting range before it entered into the forest. Any way it was an exciting chase before we turned the boat towards the launch. I have always noticed that the tiger in the Sundarbans swims across the bigger streams only when the tide just turns, either from ebb to flow or vice—versa.

18. Lowachera's Only Tiger.

Lowachera is a small forest in Sylhet, about seven miles east of Srimangal and about the same distance west of Shamshernagar. It is surrounded by tea gardens on all sides. The railway line passes through the area and a highway runs parallel, only about a hundred feet to the south of the railway line. The Forest Rest House is on a hillock just north of the railway line.

An army officer quite well known in the Second World War came to visit a tea garden manager near Shamshernagar. A tiger, the only one heard of in that area for a considerable period, killed a cow in the Lowachera forest and dragged it into the bed of a dry nala in the plantation between the railway line and the metalled road. The tea garden manager got the news of the kill and had a machan put up in the plantation within view of the Forest Rest House. His honoured guest was given the chance to try his luck and he lent him his rifle. He sat on the machan and the manager waited in the Forest Rest House. A passenger train passed by the area at about

6 p. m. Within ten minutes of the passing of the train, the tiger came to the kill along the nala and the General shot it. Altogether he did not spend even half an hour on the machan. Some people do have luck !

19. The Tigress Of Mainimukh.

During my long association with the Kassalong forests in Chittagong Hill Tracts from 1930 to 1958 only once did I see a tiger. It was in October, 1950. The Kassalong river still had enough water and was navigable by a motor launch. What is now Bangladesh was then East Pakistan. I was the head of the East Pakistan Provincial Forest Department, the Conservator of Forests. I went from Dacca on a short trip, by train to Chittagong and thence by jeep to Rangamati where I took a motor launch to Mainimukh. The Forest Rest House was situated on a hillock about two hundred yards west of the junction of Maini and Kassalong rivers where the local forest offices were situated.

The next morning I travelled to Shishak forest by the motor launch, accompanied by the Sub-Divisional Forest Officer. We returned about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and came to learn that a tigress had killed a cow on the play ground of the local school the previous evening and had dragged it into an abandoned jhum further up the Maini river. A machan was constructed on a tree nearby and as the tigress had caused considerable consternation in the locality, I was requested to try to kill her. I was most reluctant but even so I went and sat up on the machan. The rain came down in torrents at about 6 p. m. and saved the situation as my old Nepali bearer insisted on sending an elephant to bring me back and save me from an attack of fever. The next morning before I went out to the forest, news was brought that the kill partly eaten was carried further west, about a hundred yards, and was left near a dry nala. Two machans were constructed, one near the kill and another a little further away near a water hole on the same nala where there were lots of pug marks. I sat on the machan near the remains of the kill and the Sub-Divisional Forest Officer on the other machan. Around 6 p. m., the sun was setting, a full grown tigress walked out of the forest on the same hillock on which the Forest Rest House was situated and began to mew like a cat. Out came a cub from another patch of scrubby forest and trotted to the mother. The tigress then lay flat on its side exposing its teats. The cub had a jolly good feed for about fifteen minutes. The Sub-Divisional Forest Officer was signalling to me to shoot although it was far from me and much nearer to him. I was signalling to him not to shoot. My intention was not to kill the tigress but drive her away from the neighbourhood for the benefit of the villagers. The officer got exasperated and raised his own gun. Fearing that he would kill the tigress, I fired a shot from my rifle and the tigress and cub both jumped into the forest. The elephant arrived on hearing the report of the gun and I was glad to get back to the Rest House.

I had to return to Dacca the next morning and hoped that the tigress would move away from that area. It was reported later that the tigress walked right into the village

and killed another cow from a cow-shed. The owner, a Chakma villager, got drunk with locally made wine, walked into the lair of the tigress and killed it with one shot from a shot gun. That was the end of the tigress of Mainimukh.

20. The Governor's Luck.

It was in 1952, I was then in Karachi, Inspector General of Forests of Pakistan. I used to come to the Sundarbans once every cold weather and the following story was related to me by a launch crew.

The Governor, Sir Firoze Khan Noon and his wife went to the Sundarbans and they anchored their launch at the junction of the Kaga and the Jafa khals. It was late in the afternoon. The party had tea, got into a Forest Department's motor launch, Ranger type, and went up the Bara-siala khal. The tide was turning from flow to ebb. It was a likely time for the deer to come out and have their last drink before they retired for the night. The motor launch travelled about two hundred yards up the khal, when a black head was seen floating in the water. The launch chased it fast. "Tiger, tiger," was the shout all over the small launch. All guns were ready. The Governor came out with his rifle on the small foredeck, an A.D.C. sat with his rifle on the roof of the launch. The tiger after swimming the stream for a width of about two hundred yards, stopped for a while as soon as he touched the ground, as if to regain its breath. It turned its head and looked at the approaching launch. Bang went the Governor's rifle. The tiger lunged forward, trying to get out of the water on to the land in front, without showing any signs of being hit. Bang, bang, went the other guns, shots from all parts of the launch. Every gun, that there was in the launch, was fired. The tiger was hit. It reached up to the bank, rested its head on the high ground and expired. The Governor who fired the first shot got the trophy. There was no means nor question of verifying who drew the first blood. His first day in the Sundarbans and he got a tiger in the river, can there be a luckier shikari ?

21. Serang Abdus Sobhan Saves His Face, Though Mauled.

A General of the Pakistan Army went to the Sundarbans by the Forest launch, S.L. Hawk. It was evening, the sun was almost setting. The General stood on the navigation bridge with his rifle, hoping to shoot a deer. The launch was in the Passur river near the junction of the Charputia khal. This khal has strips of keora trees on both banks where deer frequently graze. Here a tiger lay waiting for an unwary deer.

The tiger was seen by the General. Bang went his rifle. It was hit but bounced into the forest. The following morning a Brigadier with some sepoys, Abdus Sobhan, the Serang of the launch, with a few crew and Pachabdi Shikari went into the forest and saw a trail of blood. They followed the trail deep into the forest, peering into every bush but unable to locate the wounded tiger. They wandered for nearly two hours and then gave up the chase to return to the launch. Abdus Sobhan was the only crew carrying a shot gun.

While returning to the launch, being disappointed at not finding the tiger, Sobhan poked his gun into a thicket of saplings under a baen tree. Like a flash, the tiger jumped at him from under the tree. He held his gun ; his two hands out-stretched ; warding off the tiger from his face. He was badly mauled. He fell down after a time. Pachabadi Shikari who was beside him, immediately fired and killed the tiger. The brave jawans of the army and the Brigadier fled in an instant.

The dead beast was later carried to the launch and the General having hit it first, claimed the trophy. He went further down the Passur river to shoot crocodiles. The wounded Serang was sent to Chalna in a speed boat. The Additional Divisional Forest Officer was informed of the incident by telephone to Khulna. He rushed down by launch to take the mauled man to the hospital the next morning. The long delay in rendering medical aid, not only caused the Serang indescribable suffering but also retarded his recovery. Several months were spent in the hospital before the wounds healed.

Abdus Sobhan rejoined his service as a Serang. I saw him during my last visit to the Sundarbans as the guest of the Chief Conservator of Forests.

The shot gun that he carried still bears the nail marks of the tiger on its steel barrel and can be seen as a souvenir in the Khulna Forest Office.

CHAPTER 2

PANTHERS AND BEARS

The Panther, often called leopard in this part of the world, is the other cat found in the forests of Bengal except the Sundarbans. It is a dry land animal and conditions in the Sundarbans are too wet for it. In North Bengal, in Jalpaiguri, panthers grow much bigger in size than in South Bengal—Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts or further east in Sylhet. In Jalpaiguri, it is mostly found on the edges of the forest, in the vicinity of villages where the panther can feed on village dogs and goats, and occasionally on the bigger cattle. Panthers used to be seen in the forests of Dacca and Mymensingh districts.

No where have panther and tiger been reported to be living together in the same forest. In Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts where the villages border the forest tracts throughout, the panther is the common cat and the tiger is rare. In Sylhet where villages and tea gardens are interspersed with patches of forest, the panther is the local feline animal and tigers occasionally stray in from the deeper forests of the Khasi Hills, Lushai Hills and Hill Tippera. When the local people speak of 'Bagh', they mean the panther. It is reported that panthers climb up trees but I have never seen one. I have seen a good few panthers but always on the ground. The usual method of killing them is from machans, put up near the kills. Sometimes it is driven out and shot from the ground. In Sylhet it is often netted like the tiger, for the benefit of the local villagers, and after a few days fun in a fair, it is shot.

Bears in Bengal were never reported as carnivorous, though they killed men. There are two kinds—one small in size that lives on trees in the Himalayas in Darjeeling district and the other, as big as a tiger, living in caves or in the deep plains' forests of Jalpaiguri. They are both generally vegetarian, feeding on fruits and roots of trees. The big bear is seen on ant hills and feeds on grubs. They both feed on maize in the villages when the maize is in season.

1. Panther Of Bhomariaghona.

I was posted in charge of Cox's Bazar Division from the Sundarbans in 1930 and it was a big change. Gone were the days of comfortable touring in luxurious launches fitted with frigidaires. Cox's Bazar had no motor cars. There were no metalled roads in those days. The kutcha roads were cut up by innumerable hilly streams with broken bridges. Even the cycle was often carried on the shoulder of the rider than vice-versa.

I acquired a new cycle in Chittagong on my way to Cox's Bazar. I had three elephants in the Division used for inspection of forests. I relieved a British Officer, R. I. MacAlpine, at Cox's Bazar who sold me his cycle also, along with the furniture at the headquarters bungalow.

There were no other Secretary of States' Officers in Cox's Bazar except myself. I soon made friends with the Deputy Magistrates, Munsifs, lawyers and a few landlords and settled down. In was good old bachelor days. I used to cycle alone from one Forest Rest House to another and at the beginning, was often taken by the villagers for a Forester which helped me gather a lot of information about the life of the lower subordinates and of work in the forests.

One Id-ul-Azha day, in April, I was invited by Muzaffar Ahmed Choudhuri, landlord of Chaufaldandi, to perform Id with him. His home was half-way, about eight miles north of Cox's Bazar, to Bhomariaghona. I sent my luggage to the Forest Rest House of Bhomariaghona, the headquarters of Garjania Range and the show place of Cox's Bazar Division, with my Madrassi bearer. They were carried in sampans via Mohesh Khali Channel and the Kalichera stream up to Kalichera and then by shoulder loads. I cycled to Chaufaldandi on the morning of the Id day, carrying a change of clothes for the Namaz, in a small bag tied on the carrier behind my cycle. After the prayer, Mr. Choudhuri entertained me to a sumptuous meal. I rested in the comfortable home of Choudhuri Saheb till 4 p. m. and then cycled to Bhomariaghona. I arrived there at 5 p. m. and was surprised to find that an elephant was saddled and waiting for me at the Rest House. The Range Officer was also there. He informed me that a Bagh had killed a village pony the previous evening and had dragged the carcass into the forest in a valley between two hillocks—about two miles south of Bhomariaghona. He had put up a machan on a tree. I quickly changed my clothes and climbed up on the elephant. By the time I arrived at the machan, it was about dusk.

In those days, I had a double barrelled 12 bore Greener gun and a small ·350 bore Mannlicher magazine rifle. I clamped a torch under the shot gun for shooting at night and sat alone on the machan with both the weapons. The Ranger went to the village, about half a mile away, with the elephant. He was to come for me when he heard the report of the gun or at 9 p. m. whichever was earlier. The sun soon went down and quietude reigned all round. After the rich meal at Chaufaldandi, not even high thoughts came into my mind although perched alone and surrounded by the tall and majestic garjan trees. The moon of the eleventh night was up and in about an hour after the sunset she sent her beams peeping through the heavy canopy of trees. The fire flies were my only companions.

After another half an hour or so I heard a sound on the hillock to my north as if some animal was treading on dry branches. I was alert but could see nothing on the ground. In a few minutes, I felt that some animal was prowling round the tree on which the machan was built but I could not make out what it was. Only once could I have a glimpse of the tail of an animal flashing over the dead pony.

That was my first night-shooting and I was expecting the animal to be as big as a tiger I saw in the Sundarbans, more so, when it killed a pony. After a few minutes, I could see two dazzling eyes behind the carcass when I flashed my torch. I was sure the Bagh had come to the kill. I picked up my shot gun, put it on my shoulder and again flashed the torch. I could see the spotted cat but when I lowered the gun to aim at the vital parts of the body, I could see nothing beyond the dead pony. I lowered my gun and raised it again two or three times and then fired hoping I would hit it between the shoulders. Immediately after the shot, the panther stretched itself on a side but on account of the carcass of the pony, I could not make out where its head or tail was. I was ready to fire a second shot if it moved but it did not. The elephant arrived in half an hour and I got down from the machan. We picked up the panther on the elephant and walked back to the Rest House. It measured seven feet two inches. That was my first panther.

2. Two Panthers In Bhawal Forest.

I was in charge of Dacca-Mymensingh Division from 1936 to 1938. All the private forests were under the charge of one officer in British days. I was not too pleased to be posted to my home district, specially when many of the forest proprietors were related to me. But Sir Nazimuddin, who was the Member in charge of the Forest Department, told me that it was his own choice and he would like me to work in this area for a term. The Conservator of Forests sent an elephant to Dacca to make my inspection of the forests more comfortable.

It was in the summer of 1937 when I was camping at Sripur. The local Marriage Registrar, who was well known to me and was a keen shikari, came and informed me one early afternoon that some panthers had killed two cows in a village about three miles east of Sripur and kept the kills in the forest about one hundred yards from the District Board Road and two machans were already put up.

As two machans were put up on sal trees, I agreed to go and take the chance of shooting one of the marauders. In all probability, it was one panther that had killed both the cows. I had a Fiat car which I sometimes used on the kutcha roads of Bhawal forests. Just at dusk, I drove to the place and entered into the gajari forest. I noticed that one kill was almost on the edge of the forest, on a dry paddy field. The other kill was inside the forest about fifty yards away from the first.

The forests were so interspersed with paddy fields, that there was hardly a patch wider than a hundred yards. The forests were confined to the high land, locally called chalas and the lower fields with paddy were called baids. There was not enough sunlight left, to investigate which side the killer or killers had gone to. We drew lots and it was my luck to sit on the edge of the field and the Marriage Registrar inside the forest. When all noise on the District Board Road subsided and the traffic of bullock carts and pedestrains stopped, I noticed that a pair of panthers walked across the paddy field. Quite a hundred yards away from my machan they went towards the other kill. I was disappointed.

I thought that they would come to the kill near me and would either eat it or drag it up to a chala. I only had a shot gun with me and I did not even attempt to fire at the panthers from that distance. I was hoping that they would come near me later. I was alone on the machan but the Marriage Registrar had a companion.

I sat for about five hours but heard no gun fire. It was getting on to mid-night, when the two men from the other machan came up to mine and reported that there were two panthers and the Marriage Registrar was too frightened to fire in failing light. When he was hesitating to shoot, the carcass was dragged away further into the forest and eaten up. It was only after all sounds of feasting on the dead animal had stopped that they got off the machan. That was the end of that panther shoot. We walked back to the road and drove back to Sripur.

3. The Panther Of Madhupur Forest.

The Madhupur Forests in Mymensingh were not under Government management. The Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson, once sent for me during a tour at Dacca and told me that he wanted these forests to come under Government management and wanted a Reconnaissance Report. So, in the cold weather of 1937-38, I spent a month wandering in those forests. I had with me an elephant and a small tent to live in. On one occasion I pitched the tent just beside the motor road between Tangail and Mymensingh. The road passes through the forest and I was about three miles away from habitation. The local Naib Babu was very worried that I would live inside the forest and he deputed a number of Guards for my protection. Some of them were to keep watch the whole night. My servants had canvas pals which they pitched about twenty feet away from my tent. It was the end of February and the night was warmish. I used to keep the door flaps of the tent wide open to let in as much air as was available.

Early one morning, I woke up and got out of the tent and found a handkerchief with some money tied in it lying on the ground in front of the tent. I noticed on the dust a distinct line of pug marks of a panther up to about ten feet from the door of my tent. From the kutchari of the Naib, I learnt later that the Guard on duty that night saw a panther walking towards my tent. He had a gun but did not fire through fear of waking me up. He used to sit on a stool in front of the servants' pal. He managed to drive away the panther without disturbing the camp. But in the morning he discovered that he had lost the money he had from me for marketing—this he kept tied in a handkerchief. He rushed to the kutchari to deposit his gun and report the story. Out of shear fright he resigned and went away. He refused to face another panther in the Madhupur forest. Although I worked in Madhupur forest for over a week thereafter, and expected the panther to turn up but he did not pay another visit.

4. Panther At Chilapata.

I took charge of Buxa Division in 1939 and my wife, Mafida, came down from Shillong with Rezia, and joined me in the cold weather of 1939-40. The second World War had started, large quantities of timber had to be supplied for military requirements and forest works had to be geared up all over the Division. I was camping at Chilpata Forest Rest House. My daily routine was to go out early into the forest and return about lunch time. It was a lovely division. In the cold weather every part of the forest could be negotiated by car although the forest roads were kutcha.

I remember, one day in March, 1940, I went out by car and Mafida was alone in the Rest House, Rezia having gone back to Shillong. Some villagers came and reported to her that a Bagh had taken away a cow from their shed. With the dead cow, it crossed a dry paddy field about one hundred yards wide and kept the kill in the forest about twenty yards from the boundary. Mafida sent for the mahut of Shampiari, the best elephant for tiger shooting, and had a machan put up. The mahut, on return from the forest, came and told her that the pug marks indicated that the Bagh was a panther.

I returned to the Rest House, and heard the whole story. After tea, Mafida and I got up on Shampiari and went to the machan. I only took my shot gun and some L. G. shots. By the time we sat up on the machan, it was past 5-30 p. m. Mafida and I sat side by side and the elephant went back to the village with instructions to come back for us at 9 p. m. unless the mahut heard the report of the gun earlier.

The bullock carts by then stopped moving on the road and the forest was quiet. Within about half an hour of our sitting, I heard an animal galloping out from the forest. Mafida wanted to know what it was. I told her—it was another cow that had strayed into the forest and it had either seen or smelt the panther or it was probably being chased and was running for its life. The cow soon came out on the field and my conjecture was confirmed.

In about ten minutes I could hear the fast approach of another animal over the dry leaves that covered the forest floor at that time. I was sitting on the right side facing towards the village and the panther came from behind. I picked up the gun and put the barrel over the railing of the machan. For about two minutes, there was no rustling of leaves. I still remember how silently Mafida sat on that machan about twelve feet high above the ground. The panther then stepped out of the undergrowth by Mafida's side and sat squat on its two hind legs, looking at the kill. I aimed at its lung but did not fire, giving as much time as I could to Mafida to have a good look. Then she began to whisper to me, "Can't you see, can't you see it ?" I could not wait any longer. I pulled the trigger. The panther lay dead without a stir. The elephant arrived in about fifteen minutes and we returned to the Rest House with the panther even before the sun set. It was a beautiful male panther and measured eight feet between pegs. That was my second and last panther.

5. The American Ambassador Shoots A Panther.

I was Inspector General of Forests with headquarters at Karachi and became quite friendly with the Ambassador of U.S.A. He helped me in securing scholarships for my young Forest Officers of Pakistan for advanced training and in obtaining a complete set of machinery for all sections of the Forest Research Institute at Chittagong with training facilities in U.S.A. The Ambassador came to my house several times and admired my trophies—some tiger skins with heads mounted and elephant tusks, which I took with me from Dacca on my transfer to Karachi.

The Ambassador was keen on shooting birds and had a single barrelled 12 bore gun with magazine for five cartridges. He could fire them all quite fast but I preferred my own double barrel. I always spent a month in the then East Pakistan forests and the Ambassador used to be with me off and on during that period, shooting jungle murgis and kalij pheasants in the forest or ducks in beels. He was also shown two khedas in two successive years when a large number of wild elephants were caught. When he retired, he took an elephant calf from East Pakistan to U.S.A. and it was used in the Presidential Election Campaign of General Eisenhower.

He expressed a desire to shoot a panther or a tiger if possible. To organise a tiger shoot in the manner and on the scale of North Bengal (Buxa in Jalpaiguri) was impracticable in East Pakistan. So I requested my friend, the Zamindar of Prithimpasha in Sylhet, to arrange a shoot for him. We reached Langla by train from Dacca one early morning and drove by car to Prithimpasha where we received a hearty welcome and were comfortably lodged in the Guest House.

Several cows were tied as baits in the forest about five to seven miles from the Zamindarbari and there was a kill on the very first night. On getting the information the next morning, I went to the forest myself and had a machan constructed with seats for two. Late in the afternoon, we drove up to the forest and got up on the machan. Soon after dusk, the panther walked out of the forest and started running about—an unusual phenomenon, on the paddy field out-side. Whether it was looking for fresh food or it was having an exercise, we could not make out. It was quite dark when finally it decided to come to the kill. I flashed my torch and the Ambassador killed the panther with one shot. Within fifteen minutes of the shot, the car arrived with some men. We got off the machan and carried the dead panther to the car, put it inside the boot and drove back to Prithimpasha. It measured six feet ten inches between pegs.

6. A Pair Of Panthers In Prithimpasha.

In the following year, the Ambassador himself wrote to the Zamindar of Prithimpasha inquiring if he could pay him another visit in the cold weather and also bring his niece who had arrived from the United States. He got a cordial invitation by return of post with a copy of the letter sent to me to Karachi. Shooting was also stopped

in that tea garden forest so that the game was not disturbed. I flew to Dacca on my annual tour and the Ambassador and his niece arrived in his personal plane, a few days later. We travelled to Langla by train on the appointed date and drove to Prithimpasha. Several cows were tied as bait that evening and there was a kill. The forest where the cow was killed was about a mile further from that part of Prithimpasha forest, where a panther was shot the previous year. A machan was constructed, but it had to be bigger than the last one so that the Ambassador, his niece and I, all three of us could sit. We drove to the forest and took our position on the machan in due time. It was two nights after the full moon.

The first part of the evening was dark and during that period nothing of interest happened. When the moon was well up we saw a pair of panthers roaming about on the paddy field. The male one was a beautiful beast. I was facing the fields while the Ambassador was facing the kill in the forest. When I drew his attention to the pair of panthers, one trotting behind the other, he and his niece turned round to watch the fun. His niece was thrilled every time the pair passed by the forest in which the machan was constructed. After an hour or so, the male panther suddenly appeared directly below the machan and balanced itself on a fallen tree. It was unexpected. I touched the shoulder of the Ambassador and flashed my torch but the Ambassador could not see the panther to shoot. It moved away immediately and after about fifteen minutes, the pair started running over the paddy fields again. The car arrived at mid-night as no gun was fired and we drove back to Prithimpasha.

The next day, the patch of forest with the kill was enclosed by a nine feet high net and driven by about a hundred men. The Ambassador and his niece were put on an elephant and I was walking along the net as the beat proceeded. Not a single animal came out. The beaters found a few pieces of bone of the cow but the carcass was completely eaten by the pair of panthers at night.

7. The Bear With A Cub.

This was in the very first year of my service in the forests of Jalpaiguri in 1926. After spending two very reckless months, I had my first bout of malaria in March. I was camping in the P. W. D. Rest House at Chalsa, just above the railway station. I was prostrate with fever for a few days. I took so many pills of Quinine Sulphate that I suffered longer from its after-effects than from the malaria itself. As soon as I felt fit to walk, I went out one morning to the Upper Tondu forest accompanied by the Range Officer. We walked about five miles away from the Rest House, a Forest Guard was following us with a double-barrelled shot gun and I had the cartridges in my pockets. We came to a cross road in the forest when we heard a big yell. As I turned back to see what had happened, I noticed a big she-bear standing on its two hind legs and coming towards us. A small cub, about the size of a dog was running in front of the mother. This pair of bears got between us and the Forest Guard.

Fearing that we would be attacked, he screamed. The noise frightened the cub which took cover in the forest, followed quickly by the bear. We also moved out of the forest as fast as we could.

8. Rajabhatkhawa Bear.

I was preparing to take over charge of Buxa Division from Freddie Hart, and camping at Rajbhatkhawa, which was the de facto headquarters of Buxa Division (Jalpaiguri district). Every evening, after tea, Freddie used to take me out for a drive through the forest, in his Austin car, to get me acquainted with the geography of the locality. My yellow peril, Ford V8, had not arrived from Calcutta and I was rather immobile. I quite looked forward to those short outings in Freddie's company. One evening, Mrs. Hart was sitting beside Freddie who was driving, and an orderly, Radha Gopal, and I were sitting behind. Freddie did not carry any weapons and my guns were not even unpacked. We went about three miles east along forest roads and came to a cross road. There, on the adjoining road, was a big black bear crouching on the road when it heard the approach of the car. Freddie stopped the car for quite five minutes, the bear was barely fifty feet from us and would not move. How I wished I had a camera ! In the end, the bear turned and ran down the road. We also proceeded on our journey. I never saw another bear in Buxa Division.

9. Bear At Chilapata.

The Game Warden of Buxa Division was at Chilapata. I told him that I had never fired at a bear. He advised that I sit up one night on a low machan that the villagers construct to drive away pigs from their paddy fields and bears from the maize. He gathered news from a number of villages if any bear was seen coming to their maize fields. It was the end of the rains but occasional showers were not uncommon. With the desire to collect a bear skin amongst my trophies, I agreed to sit up on a machan at Chilapata village. I went up after dinner, well covered with a rain coat and also took an umbrella. The owner of the maize field, a Garo, also sat with me. He was smelly but I made up my mind to put up with it. After a few hours, the rain started pouring down. It was most uncomfortable but I was determined to stick to the machan. The villagers kept on shouting every now and then from the machans constructed all over the fields and that kept me awake. I stayed till dawn but did not see even the ghost of a bear. I was told that a bear did come into a maize field about half a mile away. But that was the end of my bear shooting in Buxa Division.

10. A Night In A Village In Darjeeling Division.

From Buxa Division I was transferred to Darjeeling Division where big game was rare. The World War II was not over and forest activities did not abate. Japan also came into the war. In Darjeeling there was a large number of European refugees from Burma. Coal was in short supply and demand for fire wood had gone up tremendously.

I started felling four times the prescribed yield and innovated methods of planting up every acre of forest felled without enlarging the forest nurseries. I was fully engaged though I missed my occasional association with the wild animals. I was told that a bear of small size was sometimes seen on trees specially during fruiting season but I refused to go bear hunting on trees by torch light.

There was one remote part of forest about four thousand feet below Ghoom. The only way of getting there was by a bridle path. One had to get down-hill about eight miles, cross a stream and climb up another eight miles on the opposite side. I timed my travel very badly that day. I drove about three miles beyond Ghoom with luggage and servants, got half a dozen labourers to carry the luggage to the stream and then climb up hill across the bridge. By the time we reached the stream, it was dusk. The Range Officer met me with two ponies at the bridge-head, in addition to his own and I decided to push off, as the only place where I could spend a night was the local forest office eight miles away. The Range Officer and I had a pony each and we took a Forest Guard on the third pony.

We reached our destination at about 9 p. m. I had no food that night, I waited for two hours and as there was no sign of the luggage, the Range Officer offered me some boiled eggs and a chili-curry with some chapaties. I ate a little of whatever he produced though I never tasted a chili-curry again anywhere in my life. We talked about big game shooting in Buxa and the Sundarbans and he informed me that a bear had been visiting a maize field in that village for the last two nights and had damaged the crops. There were a number of small machans for the watchmen. As there was no prospect of a bed or bedding that night, I agreed to sit up on a machan with the Range Officer's gun. I spent the whole night, expecting the bear to turn up on the third night also. It did not oblige us. Never again, did I attempt to go for a bear.

CHAPTER 3

ELEPHANTS

Elephants are not indigenous to the forests of Bengal. Up in the north, they used to come down from the Bhutan hills in herds of about eleven to fifteen elephants in each. Down in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Chittagong, they came from the Lushai Hills in Assam and the Arakan Hills in Burma. These herds were bigger, the number going up to even twenty to twenty-five. On the north, the herds were noticed between December to February but in the south, they stayed longer from October to February. Elephants do not like heat and to keep fit must have plenty of water. They came down to the Bengal forests when there was paddy on the adjoining fields which they love as an addition to their diet of elephant grass and bamboos in the forest. When the climate got too hot for them, they moved back to their native land on the higher hills.

Stray elephants, generally some tusker or mukna, have been reported even in the rains. These elephants are generally turned out of a herd by a stronger one and they get so ill tempered that they do not go back with the herd to their native land. They stay behind in the plain forests and do a lot of damage to cultivation in the villages and often break down houses and sometimes kill people.

Although the elephant is a bulky animal, it can even run along a path only three feet wide. While in herds, they have a peculiar habit of walking just one after another and they make distinct tracks in the forest which is taken advantage of by human ingenuity to catch them. An elephant is a useful animal. Apart from circuses, ceremonial occasions, shikar and inspection of forests and Zamindari land, they are employed in numbers for extraction of logs. Before tractors were invented, they were the only means used for extraction of big logs. A trained elephant always fetched a high price. They also had a good hire value. The elephants of the Bhutan hills were stocky, with a thick body and short legs. The Assam and Burma elephants have longer legs and move faster. In very olden days, they were used in wars also—the last Elephant Corps that I know of was used in the Boer War in South Africa. They were used in a small theatre of the Second World War in Burma for which General Wingate became famous.

Elephants were generally caught in herds in a stockade in the Bengal forests. But in Sylhet, they were also caught individually—two or three tame elephants getting near a herd of elephants with fundies, with ropes and loops, on their necks. They single out young elephants from the herd. When two tame elephants get on the two sides of a wild one, a noose is thrown on the upper part of the trunk which

is very sensitive. The wild elephant raises its trunk to throw off the noose which is then pulled by the fundi from the tame elephant and it slips down to its neck. It tries to run but is held by the tame elephant which has to be a strong one. The other tame elephants come near it and help in throwing a second noose. When the wild elephant is secured from two sides, it cannot run away and is dragged to a selected stand and tied to a strong tree. This is called Melashikar. Sometimes pits are dug on the track and camouflaged. When the wild elephant unconsciously falls into the pit it is noosed.

Elephants are caught in herds by kheda operation. The term kheda means drive. When a whole herd of wild elephants is driven through the forest they run only along their own tracks. They remain scattered while grazing. The elephant catchers get into the forest and look for the areas where two or more elephant tracks cross each other. At the point of intersection or near about, a stockade is constructed. The stockade is a small area of about a quarter of an acre, generally circular in shape, and is made of fairly large poles cut from the forest. The poles are well driven or dug—about four to six feet into the ground. The poles almost touch each other tied together and propped from out-side, so that the elephants enclosed cannot easily push the poles down. A moat about six feet deep is constructed along the circle of poles inside the enclosure. A prominent elephant track must pass through the enclosure and a very strong drop gate or swing gate is constructed across the track leading to the stockade. Wings are also constructed with poles on the two sides of the track for a distance of about one hundred to one hundred and fifty yards, like a funnel, wide at the mouth but the poles are closer and closer near the gate. All the poles are camouflaged with branches and leaves. Some branches are also stuck inside the stockade so that when the elephants are driven, they run in as if they are running through the natural forest and do not realise that they are being driven into an enclosure.

After construction of the stockade, the herd of elephants is located and the drive starts at night—a dark night is better. If there is more than one track, it takes two or three nights to drive and bring the elephants to the track with the stockade. Very often, the herd runs into the stockade on the first night. Some stops are placed on the other tracks to divert the herd to the desired one. There must be absolute silence near the stockade so that the elephants are not disturbed at all. Men are kept on trees along the wings, on the gate at the entrance to the stockade and some around the stockade. The number of elephants is counted when the herd is driven and this number is passed on to the men at the gate. When the elephants begin to enter the stockade very quietly, (as complete silence prevails there), their number is counted. When they all get in, the gate is closed by cutting the ropes with which it is secured when open. Then the men around the stockade begin to fire crackers and hand bombs to frighten the elephants caught, who after a time keep quiet inside the stockade. At day break, some banana trees, elephant grass and other fodder are thrown into the stockade and the elephants, specially the younger ones, begin to feed. The wild elephants are kept for two nights in the stockade with very little food and water.

When the elephants are thus emaciated and pine for water, three or four tame elephants with mahuts armed with spears are put into the stockade through the gate. This is a very crucial period for the whole kheda operation. The wild elephants are generally so frightened that they huddle together at the furthest end. They cannot reach the fencing of the stockade on account of the moat. It is invariably noticed that an oldish cow is the first to approach the tame elephants for a fight while the others stay put and watch. There are always one or two big tuskers amongst the tame elephants which attack the wild cow and start punching from all sides. After a beating, she starts moving about, is chased and further punished until she goes back to the herd and takes cover. Having won the first bout, the tame elephants go for the other wild elephants, one at a time, and this goes on for an hour or two. Then the noosing starts.

In North Bengal, the noosing is done within the stockade by the fundis who enter as mahuts on the tame elephants. The noose is made of strong rope, one end tied round the body of the tame elephant and the loop at the other end is kept by the fundi which he throws on the head of the wild one. When it raises its trunk to throw off the loop, it slips down and a light pull from the tame elephant takes the loop to the neck of the wild elephant. It struggles to run away and the loop gets tighter. The poor beast gets more punches from the other tame elephants and very often a second loop is thrown from the other side from a second tame elephant. When the wild one is secured from two sides, the gate is opened again and the wild elephant is dragged out by two tame elephants straight to water in a nearby stream. After the wild one has a good drink, it quietens down and is then brought to a stand and tied to a tree. Here, its two hind legs are tied together by thick ropes and when well secured, the two tame elephants are taken away for catching more elephants. While the first noosed wild elephant is taken out of the stockade, some fresh group of tame elephants are put in the stockade who repeat the process and catch the wild elephants one by one. This takes at least two days, sometimes more depending on the number before all the wild elephants in a stockade are noosed and brought out.

In Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts districts, a second gate is constructed about ten feet in front of the gate of the first one, within the wing where the fencing is particularly strengthened with well dug poles. The width of the space between the two wings is so narrow that it can accommodate only three elephants standing side by side. This is locally called Chhota Kuthi. After the initial pounding and prodding with spears one of the youngish wild elephants from the catch is pushed into the Chhota Kuthi and two tame elephants get in there from the stockade and practically squeeze it in between them. The poor animal cannot even wriggle backwards. A poke or two from a spear from the side keeps it in position. The first gate is dropped when the operation in the Chhota Kuthi goes on. At other times only a strong tame elephant guards the gate to prevent the other elephants from the herd from getting into it at that time. Then, a fundi climbs down quietly on the ground with a looped rope in hand and quickly puts it round one hind leg of the wild elephant. It can kick the fundi down if it had the sense to do so but instead it tries to rub the rope off its

leg with the other leg. When the two legs come together, the fundi quickly puts the rope round the second hind leg also. Once secured, the rope is taken round both legs several times so that the elephant cannot even walk freely. Two nooses are then put on its neck and when fully secured, the first gate is closed and the second gate is opened, then the noosed elephant is dragged out to water and on to the stand as in North Bengal. The process takes more time but it is more secure as the noosed elephant is rendered immobile when its two hind legs are tied together.

Kheda operation is a very technical job and there are only a few persons who take it up as a profession. The kheda is leased out by the Forest Department either for a lump sum, or at a contracted value for a tusker or a mukna or a cow elephant or as an agreed share of the sale value of each elephant after a month of its catch. The Forest Department conducts the sale of the elephants and realises the Government's dues before the elephants are removed from the forest. Considerable damage to the forest is caused in cutting a very large number of strong poles for the construction of the stockade and the wings. All the fodder for the elephants, both tame ones and those caught in the kheda and the firewood consumed by the large number of workers who live in the forests for at least three months is supplied free. Elephants do much damage to the forest and to the agricultural crops in the vicinity so they have to be caught from time to time to keep their number down. The elephant is such a useful and valuable animal when trained that it is fully protected by law. It can only be destroyed when it is declared by Government as a rogue. There are not many who will attempt to shoot a rogue elephant as the following stories will show.

1. The Solitary Bull Elephant Of Teknaf.

I joined Cox's Bazar Division in April 1932 and spent about a week at the headquarters of each Range as early as I could. In May and June I visited every one of the plantation centres. There were not many permanent forest villages as in Jalpaiguri and Buxa Divisions. The out-side labour was expensive and not efficient especially as there was no argicultural crop to be weeded. The southern most Range, Teknaf, had a number of large forest villages but the timber from that forest had few purchasers as the market at Chittagong was too far and the means of transport were only the country boats, called sampans, which could ply along the Bay of Bengal only in the winter months. This limited the size of clear-felled coupes and consequently of annual plantations.

In October, I had reports that all over the Division wherever paddy was grown in the Taungya plantations, herds of elephants damaged the crop. In November, I went to Matamori Range in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in two dugouts, one for me and the other for the kitchen and the servants. The water in the Matamori river above Chakaria was so low that even punting the boats up by bamboo poles was time consuming and tedious. This kept me away from headquarters for a good few days.

When I returned, I received a frantic report that the kitchen of the Range Officer's quarters at Teknaf had been damaged by a tusker elephant. Even in Cox's Bazar Division,

I only had a 12 bore shot gun and a ·350 bore Mannlicher magazine rifle, good enough for small deer but useless for hunting elephant. Any way, to boost up the morale of the staff, I arrived at Teknaf in December. I could go by ship from Cox's Bazar but preferred to travel through the forest, halting at Rezu Range en-route. I took a sampan from Whykeong which was the northern most beat of Teknaf Range. There was no road to Teknaf even to cycle, though at present there is a metalled highway to drive a car. On arrival at Teknaf I assessed the damage done by the wild elephant and ordered the repairs.

On the following afternoon, I went out inspecting the plantations about a mile north of the Teknaf Forest Rest House. The Range Officer and a Forest Guard carrying my rifle accompanied me. We gradually walked our way up to the top of the hillock when the Forest Guard drew my attention to a huge big tusker at the bottom barring our way back to Teknaf. I was hoping that it would move away in a short while and we would be able to get back to the Rest House, but it did not behave upto our expectation. The skin of the elephant looked blue black to me and it had a magnificent pair of tusks. We watched it for more than half an hour as the sun began to set. Both the Range Officer and the Forest Guard were certain that it was the very elephant that came to the Range Compound and broke down the kitchen. It was not declared as a rogue and I had no proper gun to shoot it with. I decided to frighten it away and fired a shot in the air. The tusker took no notice of the sound made by the shot and instead started coming up towards us. The climb was steep and its speed was slow. My two companions got nervous and I also did not know how to get away. When it came to within about fifty yards, I took careful aim with the rifle and hit it on the head on the prominent head bone. Any way, at that shot the elephant dropped on its two forelegs, gave a loud scream and in a flash got up, ran some distance down hill and then into the forest on the west. We also beat a retreat as fast as we could. The tusker never reappeared at Teknaf after that and I did not get any report of its death or of any further damage done by it.

2. Raimatong Tragedy.

I took charge of Buxa Division early in the summer of 1939 and suffered a lot from malaria in the first two years. The second World War started in September, 1939 and we were very busy supplying timber of various kinds and sizes. I used to send Mafida and Rezia up to Shillong in the summer and would tour from place to place by elephants as the forest roads were impassable for motor cars during the rains.

In October 1940, after the maize (bhutta) had been harvested, news came that two boys were killed by an elephant in Raimatong forest village of Buxaduar Range. I was suffering from malaria but I still decided to go there from Rajabhatkhawa. I acquired my ·450 bore double barrelled rifle on way to Buxa Division from Calcutta and also shot a tiger with it the previous cold weather at Rydak. I was confident that I could stop any animal with that powerful weapon.

While Raimatong was only an hour's drive from Rajabhatkawa in fair weather, it took me the whole morning to reach there by elephant. After a short stay at the Rest House, I walked to the forest village and learnt that a tusker elephant had come to a villager's hut at night and had started to feed on the bunches of freshly harvested maize that had been tied on the verandah. Two of his boys, only twelve and ten years old, were sleeping in the cow-shed about twenty yards away. The villager, on hearing the elephant pulling away the bunches of maize, made a lot of noise and the elephant moved away. He then shouted to the two boys, warned them about the elephant and wanted them to light the hurricane lantern. The lantern was out and as the boys had no match box with them, they began to come to the hut with the lantern in hand. They did not know that the elephant was lurking just outside. Before they could even see it in the dark, the elephant charged and kicked the smaller boy whose dead body was found about twenty yards from the place where the elephant left its foot marks while kicking. The elder boy started screaming and running back towards the cow-shed. The elephant chased the boy, caught him, put him on the ground and trampled on him. The top part of the elder boy's body was buried in the mud, his two legs were flat on the ground and a part of his spine was sticking out. All the forest villagers made as much din and noise as they could and the elephant moved away into the forest.

The next morning, I sent two tame elephants with some forest villagers into the forest north of Raimatong to find out if the tusker could be traced. They came back and reported in the afternoon that its foot-marks were noticed near a salt-lick about three miles up the Raimatong stream. I had high fever that night.

Next morning, although I was feeling weak, I decided to go for the killer. I was on Shampiari elephant and sent a mahut and some villagers to the salt-lick with instructions to fire a gun if they saw the tusker. I expected it to come down-hill giving me a chance to shoot. I placed my elephant inside the forest just beside a barrier of stones tied with wire in the river bed. We waited for over two hours and nothing happened. Then suddenly I saw the tusker running down the river bed and put its two forelegs on the barrier. I was not facing the tusker but was on one side. I fired and got him just above its left eye. A wild elephant runs very fast. I could not stop it. It ran further down the river and then into the forest.

It started pouring with rain and I got back to the Rest House. The next morning, I took up the hunt again. About three miles down the river, we saw the tusker in a grass patch interspersed by the khair trees. It had its back towards us and it did not see us as we were about a hundred yards away. I was on Shampiari and there was another elephant also with a gun. We approached the elephant cautiously and coming within fifty yards, I signalled the other elephant to move to the tusker's side and draw its attention to our approach. Both our elephants were females and a tusker would not normally attack a cow elephant. I wish I had moved to its side instead because it turned and faced that elephant. I went forward a little more and from about forty yards, fired. I failed to get the vital point, between the two ear holes, at

the root of the trunk which is generally a little swollen. Perhaps the malaria made me too weak and my hands were not steady. The tusker stood up on its two hind legs and made half a circle and bolted. We went after it for some distance but it did not drop. We went back to Raimatong. I had fever again that night and realised that medical attention was necessary. I returned to Rajabhatkhawa after engaging men to search for the tusker in that forest with an offer of a handsome reward for its destruction and reported the matter to Government. After a fortnight or so, I learnt that the carcass of the elephant was found nearly five miles away from where it was last shot and its tusks had been removed. Any way, my forest village had no further trouble.

3. The Tusker Of Bhutanghat.

When Japan joined the Second World War and swooped down on Burma and the invasion of India was apprehended any time, all the elephants from the southern districts of Bengal were removed and placed under me in Buxa Division. I kept them in groups of ten to twelve scattered over the Division. In spite of a large number of tame elephants, several herds of wild elephants were reported in the forest doing considerable damage to the villagers' crops. I therefore decided to hold a kheda. The arrangements were late and in one catch thirteen elephants were noosed. The lessee was helped with the elephants I had under me but there were not many buyers of wild elephants and the lessee did not make much profit. He wanted to have a second stockade at Bhutanghat to catch a herd on its way back to the Bhutan hills. I gave permission and a stockade was constructed at Bhutanghat.

News came to me at Rajabhatkhawa that only a big tusker was caught and unless it was let out, the herd could not be driven into the stockade. I had several fine tuskers amongst the tame elephants but none was prepared to enter the stockade and tackle the wild one. Before letting it out, I wanted to see for myself why it could not be noosed. It had been in the stockade for four nights and should have been sufficiently weak by then. In Buxa Division, I always had a motorable track made to the stockade after the catch for the benefit of the visitors. The Governor's wife also informed me that she would like to see a kheda and so a motor track was made to Bhutanghat also.

I drove right up to the stockade, kept the car on one side, within ten yards and got up on the machan near the gate. I noticed that the wild tusker was a magnificent animal, stocky, with a beautiful pair of tusks but still full of fight. I had some banana plants thrown into the stockade, farthest from the gate, and the tusker at once started feeding on them. I had four tame tuskers, two of them splendid animals but they did not look as strong as the wild one. Every time they were brought near the gate, the wild tusker would leave the banana fodder and come charging towards the gate and the tame ones would step back. I tried for two hours but there was no change in the behaviour of the elephants, wild or tame. The fundies were also too nervous to take the tame tuskers into the stockade. I removed the tame elephants about a hundred yards away from the stockade and then had the

gate opened. The wild tusker would not go to the gate. Several crackers and hand bombs had to be burst behind it before it rushed to the open gate and bolted. It passed within a few feet of my car and wasn't I glad that I was not in it ?

4. Hamid's Baby Elephant.

During the partition of the sub-continent of India in 1947, the district of Sylhet, minus the Karimganj Sub-Division, was placed in Pakistan. The Officers of the Assam Government were given the option to elect to serve in India or Pakistan. A number of Assistant Conservators of Forest opted for Pakistan. Mr. A. Hamid now Inspector General of Forest, Bangladesh was one of them. As these officers had no range training in Assam, I, as Head of the Forest Department, in the then East Pakistan, posted them in charge of Ranges so that they could acquire the idea of forest administration from the grass root level. Mr. Hamid was put in charge of Garjania Range in Chittagong with headquarters at Bhomariaghona.

As luck would have it, one fine morning a small elephant calf walked out of the forest and started grazing in the paddy field adjoining the Bhomarighona forest. When it was quite late in the morning, the elephant calf was found in a herd of buffaloes. There were several Forest Department's elephants at that place and with their help the wild calf was noosed and brought to the Range Office. Mr. Hamid, as Range Officer started mothering the calf. It had to be fed with milk and cooked bran until it could live on its natural diet.

It was so attached to Hamid that it would not leave his company so long as he was in office. It had to be tethered whenever Hamid went to the forest or out of the range compound. It had a cut mark across its trunk, otherwise it was a good looking elephant complete with eighteen toes and a nice head. It became naughty and began walking up the steps into the office room and would run away with papers. When I first saw it in my cold weather tour of that area, I sanctioned Government funds for its upkeep. Being a lover of animals myself, I encouraged young officers to take interest in them.

Hamid was the only Assistant Conservator in those days who possessed a rifle. I advised him to take an interest in shikar as that would take him to parts of the forest away from working areas which he would not otherwise visit. That was the best way of acquiring full knowledge of the whole forest in his Range. The calf was maintained for some time and then the Government of East Pakistan presented it to an Ambassador of U.S.A. who took it away to his country. I am sure Hamid felt very sad to part company with his pet.

5. Our Boat Is Chased By An Elephant.

When I became a widower, Rezia was sent to Loreto Convent at Shillong. I did not like to change her school and interrupt her education even after partition of India.

She used to join me during the long winter vacation, live a nomadic life from camp to camp in the forests and go back to Shillong in March. In the cold weather of 1947-48, she was only ten and she brought two nephews with her from Shillong for company. At Mainimukh in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, we used to go about in dug-outs or elephants on daily trips, as they were in the cold weather, the only means of transport.

One evening, we were coming down the Kassalong river after inspection. I was sitting on the roof of the dug-out with my shot gun hoping on the off-chance to shoot a kalij pheasant or a jungle murgi. Rezia and her two nephews, Fazli and Farouk, sat on the front part of the dug-out with the Divisional Forest Officer. The sun had set and I was relating to them a story of my bachelor days in 1933, how I had once rowed into a whole herd of wild elephants bathing in the same river. We just came round a sharp bend and before the Manjhies could see the elephants bathing in the river, we rowed into them. The elephants screamed and got up on the bank helter skelter and the boat was carried past them by the strong current in the river. Soon after relating the story, we saw two elephants grazing on the bank and I pointed out to the children how far from Mainimiukh the Forest Department's elephants had come grazing at night. We did not realise that they were wild ones. When our boat came near the second elephant, it charged at the boat and came rushing to the edge of the water. It might have had a calf with it up in the grass field but we could not see it in the darkness at that time of the night. Our Manjhies got flabergasted but I shouted to them to row hard. I fired two shots from my gun to frighten the charging elephant and we bolted as fast as we could.

6. Touch And Go At Kaptai.

It was in February 1948, Rezia, her two nephews and I travelled in a motor launch from Mainimukh to Kaptai in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, arriving there at about 4:30 in the afternoon. We left the Divisional Forests Officer at Rangamati, his headquarters. He was to join us a few days later. The Range Officer came upto the launch and reported that a wild tusker had come into the compound of the Rest House the previous night and would not move out even after he had fired his gun to frighten it away. It had damaged the servants' quarters. On getting off the launch I went straight to see the damage done and how the elephant had walked out of the compound to the forest nursery ; how it had come out of the forest on the north and how it had eventually gone back.

Just then the public launch arrived from Chittagong, in which my dakwala arrived with bags full of mail from head office. I was out of touch with my headquarters while touring in the Kassalong forest and I started talking to the dakwala for news of Dacca. My luggage was being off-loaded from the launch and brought to the Forest Rest House. Within fifteen minutes of the departure of the public launch, we could hear an elephant breaking bamboos in the forest across the Karnafuli river on the bank opposite to the Rest House. The labourers carrying our luggage shouted from the river warning us that it could be the previous night's wild tusker. Instead of getting up the steps of the Rest

House, the children and I went back to the river front. Within a few minutes, we saw a big tusker slip down the hill on the opposite bank with its two forelegs put straight forward and its hind legs bent from the joint acting as a brake. It fell into the water and had a jolly good bath for about twenty minutes, turning on one side for some time and then on the other and splashing water on its body with the trunk.

I was at the edge of the water, the children, the staff and the labourers were on top of the bank about fifteen feet higher up. The luggage had all gone into the Rest House when my old Nepali Bearer, Singbir, brought me the double barrelled rifle and two cartridges and told me to take the gun as he was also not sure what the tusker might do.

After the bath the elephant swam across the Karnaphuli river, about two hundred yards, to our bank and stood in the water as soon as it touched ground, about eighty yards away from me and about twenty feet from the dry bank. It was regaining breath after the swim. There were at least thirty people watching it from the top of the bank. A few of them were advising me to fire a shot and frighten the tusker away. I had no intention of killing it as it was not a declared rogue elephant. Still I did not want him to come again to the Rest House compound and do further damage. I fired my right barrel to frighten the elephant away but the cartridge was an old one and the shot did not go off. I rebuked the bearer for bringing dud cartridges and not giving me two fresh cartridges straight from the box.

The elephant got up on the bank and started walking away from me while I started to walk up the bank to join the children. Suddenly the tusker turned and charged along the water's edge like a black ball, its trunk, legs and tail could hardly be distinguished. There was a yell from the top of the bank that the elephant had turned. Instead of looking up the bank and running for the Rest House as every body else had done, I turned to the water to see what was happening. The elephant reached the point where I was standing by the water and turned to climb up the bank. I aimed with my rifle at the elephant, barely ten feet away and fired the left barrel. Luckily for me and unfortunately for the elephant, this one was not a misfire. The bullet was put neatly at the root of the trunk between the two eyes. The elephant tumbled on its two forelegs, slipped into the water and sank in the pool. When I looked up, I saw Rezia was the only one still standing on top of the bank. The rest had all disappeared. Her two nephews were crying from the verandah of the Rest House fearing that was the end of their grand uncle.

I walked up the bank and joined Rezia. My dakwala came in a dingy in about five minutes and with a bamboo pole found that the dead elephant was submerged only a few feet under water. The other on-lookers then picked up courage and trooped back to the river side. The Serang of the motor launch gave an anchor with a chain. The dakwala with the help of the launch crew put the chain round the neck of the tusker and put the anchor on the bank to ensure that the current in the Karnafuli did not drag the elephant down the river.

XIII. The Author, His Daughter Rezia And His Grandson Shahid.

The launch was sent to the nearest village at Rangkheongmukh, to inform the villagers about the killing of the tusker so that they could come early next morning to pull the carcass up. I went back to the Rest House, changed and bathed and after dinner worked till late at night, ploughing through the mail. I also sent a report to Government about the killing of the tusker even before it was formally declared a rogue. There was peace in the camp and everybody slept soundly that night.

Early next morning, I went back to the river and saw a big black mass floating in the whirl pool, tied to the anchor. Several boat loads of Chakmas had arrived soon after the sun was up, some with ropes, some with thick canes, but all with the traditional Chakma dao. It took us nearly two hours to pull the carcass to the bank but within half an hour of that, every bit of the flesh was cut to pieces and taken away. The trunk was fancied the most. I could only keep the head and saw off the two tusks. The Chakmas told me that they would dry the meat in the sun and eat it throughout the year. Even the heart, liver and lung were taken away. I could not save the legs which I had wanted for making stools after tanning the hide. In Pakistan there was no tannery which could cure the elephant hide and I was sorry. The two tusks were boiled in water in tins to get rid of all fat and flesh. I noticed that the head of the elephant was riddled with shots which the villagers had fired when the tusker had damaged their jhum. That must have turned it to be a rogue and it wanted to attack human beings whenever it saw them. The head wounds were only skin deep and were festering and must have caused a lot of irritation. I had the head buried under ground so that when it was taken out after a few months, people could see that at the root of the trunk, the bone is like a sieve and a shot hitting there, could easily penetrate into the brain of the elephant and kill it. It is a difficult target but very effective.

It was indeed a matter of touch and go for me and for Rezia, although I did not realise it then. When I asked her why she also did not run away like the others, the quick reply was, "I knew Daddy would do something and it never occurred to me that I had to run for safety." I told her what a brave girl she was. Government granted me the two tusks as a present for destroying such a rogue tusker. Rezia still preserves them and my grand-son, Shahid, exhibits them to his friends and relates to them how brave his mother was and what indomitable confidence she had in her father as a shikari.

7. Nocturnal Visitors.

Two nights after the tusker had been killed, we were still camping at Kaptai. The evening was dark but the moon was up on a clear sky in the later part of the night. The temperature was low and the beds with blankets and quilts were very comfortable. Kaptai Rest House had two bed rooms on two sides of a biggish dining-sitting room, a wide verandah in front—all facing the Karnafuli river. The attached bath rooms were at the back. The kitchen with a side room for fuel was about thirty feet away at the back of the Rest House and the servants' quarters another twenty feet behind the kitchen. The

compound had a wire fencing four feet high and the forest was further away about a hundred yards north of the compound. The intervening space, cleared of all trees, was used as a forest nursery. I occupied the bed room on the west and the children, Rezia and her two nephews, were in the other, one on each bed.

That night my bearer came into my bed room through the bath room, woke me up and told me that there was a number of wild elephants in the compound, breaking the fuel shed where the two tusks of the rogue elephant previously killed were boiled in tins. My double-barrelled rifle was kept fitted resting against the wall, the box of cartridges was in a drawer of the dressing table. I quickly got out of the bed, put on a sweater on top of my sleeping suit, loaded the rifle and climbed down the steps of the bath room—still in my slippers. Singbir, my bearer, was close behind with a torch and some more rifle cartridges. The Rest House was constructed on stilts about six feet off the ground, having wooden posts, wooden floor, double bamboo tarja wall—well ventilated with glass windows and corrugated iron sheet roof. On getting down on the ground, I saw a whole herd of elephants file out through a gate about twenty yards east of the children's bed room. I walked up to the gate but as not even one elephant turned back, I did not fire to frighten the herd away because the report of the shot would awaken the whole camp and cause unnecessary panic. We went back to our rooms but I did not sleep for the rest of the night.

Early in the morning I got down from the Rest House and first went to the fuel shed adjoining the kitchen which had a three feet high cemented plinth and a bamboo tarja wall. I saw one side of the wall had been broken by the wild elephants. I was wondering if the elephants could smell the two tusks which were still in tins of water in that shed. On further examination, I noticed that the herd stood for quite some time on the children's side of the compound and there were foot marks of elephants under their two windows and marks of trunks on the wet glass panes which they might have tapped. When they got up, I asked the children why they did not wake when their windows were tapped by the mighty night visitors. They would not believe me until they came down and saw for themselves a number of foot marks of elephants on the clear ground under the windows.

We were not disturbed by the elephants any more on that exciting tour but I decided to hold a kheda in the Kaptai forests in the following year.

8. The Kheda At Kaptai But The Best Of The Catch Jumps Clear Out Of The Stockade.

A kheda to catch the elephants at Kaptai was organised in the cold weather of 1948-49. It was a small area of forest and not more than one catch was possible in a season. With a lot of coaxing we found one lessee for it. The news about my killing the tusker and the intrusion of a herd of elephants in the Rest House compound at Kaptai reached Karachi, the capital of Pakistan. The Central Minister of Agriculture

wrote to me expressing his desire to see the kheda and he had to be invited and also given an approximate date when the catch was expected. I arrived at Kaptai two days before. Two tents had been pitched on the compound, one for me and one for the Deputy Commissioner, Chittagong Hill Tracts who came with a posse of armed police for guarding the Minister. Food had to be arranged for the whole party. The Minister was in the habit of taking a glass of milk every night before retiring and all details had to be attended to. The Deputy Commissioner also set up a walky talky wireless set in the compound so that as soon as the herd of wild elephants was driven into the stockade, the news could be broadcast for the benefit of the honoured guest. A motor launch was kept ready at Chittagong by the Deputy Commissioner there to bring him to Kaptai. Rezia was with me and although she was not in her teens, she was a good hostess and a great help.

The stockade was constructed in the forest across the Karnafuli river about half a mile south of the Rest House. The herd of elephants was located and kept surrounded by the lessee's men. There were large patches of elephant grass on the banks of the Kaptai khal that passed through that forest and the elephants had plenty of fodder and water and they were happy. After the construction of the stockade had been completed, the drive started and in the extraordinarily short period of an hour, news reached the Rest House that a herd of eleven elephants was caught in the stockade. The good news was broad-cast over the walky talky and the Deputy Commissioner went across the river with a number of armed policemen and the local forest officers. I wanted a good rest at night for I knew the heavy work that was ahead and stayed back in the Rest House.

There was a very big Ganesh in that forest. It did tremendous amount of damage to the jhum cultivation in the vicinity of Kaptai forest. The Deputy Commissioner and his men had fired at this giant at least a dozen times and thought that it had died, but it reappeared again like a ghost and even started chasing the Chakmas and breaking down their houses. It was a real menance in that locality. As luck would have it, the Ganesh was also with the herd and walked into the stockade. Once inside a well secured wall of poles, it became furious and started lacerating the other animals in the herd. A young tusker, a superb animal with a fine pair of uniform tusks and all other good signs, was the particular object of the Ganesh's fury. He was badly bashed. The lesssee was anxious to save the elephants from being gored and wounded and earnestly requested the Deputy Commissioner to destroy the Ganesh. He and his men fired at least thirty shots from their ·303 rifles but could not bring the Ganesh down. The lessee also emptied his magazine of 12 bore cartridges but without any effect.

I was sent for from the Rest House. I had already turned into bed and had to change into jungle clothes most reluctantly and go to the stockade with my ·400 / ·450 double barrelled rifle. Rezia was not to be left behind. She insisted on accompanying her Daddy. I did not want the stockade to be broken by the Ganesh as the kheda at

Kaptai would then be a complete flop. I got up on the machan near the gate, the light was very bad, the few torches we had were not powerful enough to spot the vital part of the Ganesh's head and give me a clear shot. After waiting for a quarter of an hour, I put in two successive shots on the head. The Giant fell with its head down but in two minutes, pushed the ground with its trunk and started going round and round in the stockade. I waited for another half an hour. The Ganesh was dazed and was not hitting the other elephants anymore with its strong thick tusk. Then I had a strong hazak lamp with a man behind me and turned all the other men out from my machan. The Ganesh started coming straight towards me and I put a shot at the root of its trunk from a distance of barely ten feet. It just sat down with its two fore legs outstretched and died instantaneously. We waited for another half an hour and returned to the Rest House at about mid-night.

Next morning, news came that the young tusker climbed on the carcass of the Ganesh and jumped clean over the fence of the stockade. The best elephant of the catch was thus lost. We first had to collect some tame elephants to noose the wild elephants in the stockade. Luckily, there were only nine elephants to noose of whom three were male calves. The Deputy Commissioner had a big tusker, Lalbahadur, very good for kheda work. He also had two other cow elephants and the Forest Department had five cow elephants, all well experienced in kheda work. The lessee had fundies but his elephants hired from Sylhet were on the way and there was no knowing when they would come. All Government elephants were collected during the day and ropes and nooses were made ready. About eight inches of the tusks of Lalbahadur were sawn off so that he did not lacerate the wild elephants when taken into the stockade.

The Minister had reached Chittagong by plane the previous day and had heard about the catch of eleven elephants over the radio in the evening. He reached Kaptai at 11 a. m. and brought the news that the Governor's wife was also coming from Dacca by the Widgeon plane and the Karnafuli river had to be kept clear of boats for four hundred yards for the Widgeon to get down. Dingy boats had to be kept ready to bring the lady ashore from the plane. She arrived well before lunch time with the Governor's Military Secretary, a Major of the British Army. After lunch at Kaptai Rest House, I took the whole party to the stockade through the forest to see the catch of elephants. We spent an hour taking photographs of the dead Ganesh still sitting majestically inside the stockade. We returned to the Rest House for tea.

The Governor's wife came only with a hand bag with no idea of stopping over night but she made the most earnest entreaties to be allowed to stay that night at Kaptai and see the noosing of the elephants the following day. The Military Secretary was equally insistent that she should go back and if necessary come back the following day. At the end they referred the dispute to me for arbitration. I gave the decision in her favour and she stayed at Kaptai. Rezia had to chaperon her and spent the night with her in one bed room and the Minister occupied the other bed room of the Rest House. The Deputy Commissioner and I had our tents. We went back again in the evening to

the stockade to ensure that the elephants caught got enough fodder and water and no more of them escaped at night.

After dinner we watched a tribal dance with their music for a couple of hours. It was an enjoyable evening and a peaceful night with no chance of disturbance by wild elephants.

The following morning, we went back to the stockade after break-fast. The (Wideon) Widgeon came back around 10 a.m. with the Military Secretary who was glad to see that all was well. We saw the noosing of three wild elephants, had cold lunch at the stockade and then saw the guests off in the Widgeon.

When all the wild elephants were noosed and taken out of the stockade, the big tusk of the Ganesh was sawn off and the carcass was buried in the stockade in a big hole that took two days to dig. The tusk can still be seen in the Forest School Museum at Sylhet.

9. The Kheda At Mainimukh.

The Governor's wife having seen the kheda at Kaptai considered herself an expert in such operations. She wanted her husband to see a kheda. I do not blame her. It is an extraordinary event and full of thrills. Elephants are not found in every forest, there are not many people who can catch elephants and a kheda is not an annual event. A kheda is not generally held in the same forest for two consecutive years. The forest is disturbed with lots of irregular fellings of trees and the elephant fodder is reduced due to heavy demand for such produce for feeding the large number of tame elephants employed in the kheda as also for the wild elephants caught. Time has to be allowed for the forest to recover and for the sale of elephants caught so that the market is not glutted with them and the kheda operation becomes uneconomic.

When the next kheda was leased in the Kassalong Reserve, it was decided that the Governor and his wife would see the operation. The Forest Rest House at Mainimukh could accommodate them but a large number of bamboo huts were constructed for the entourage. The Rest House was on a knoll with no flat ground near about where tents could be pitched. The Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tracts undertook to construct a jeepable road by the side of the hills from Rangamati to Mainimukh. From the Rest House to the stockade the visitors could go on elephants.

I arrived at Mainimukh two days before the expected date of the drive. All arrangements were ready, the herd of elephants was located. Efforts to drive them on two consecutive nights were made but they would not move to the track leading to the stockade. I got a bit worried and would have liked the Governor's party to postpone their arrival till the herd was in the stockade but the Deputy Commissioner sitting at Rangamati could not be contacted and he brought the party in a caravan of jeeps

on the fixed date. They were lucky. Sometime after everybody had retired to bed in the camp on that night, there was a number of reports of gun fire and I could realise that the herd of elephants was in the stockade. The guns, the hand bombs and the crackers were fired to frighten the elephants caught and to keep them quiet. Some of the guests in the barrack-like bamboo huts, specially the English physician of the Governor, wanted to go to the stockade at night to enjoy the excitement but I would not allow it. On these occasions, there must be one Master of Ceremonies, capable of making and giving decisions which all others must obey.

The next morning, the doctor managed to slip out of the camp, took a Forest Guard from the Range Office and arrived at the stockade. The party had breakfast leisurely after the previous days long and bumpy jeep journey and we all started on the saddled elephants. There was a number of them and no dearth of space at the rate of two on each elephant. The Military Secretary, a Major in the British Army on deputation, elected to ride cross legged on a small elephant that was caught only a couple of years ago. We had to cross the Kassalong river twice and even at the first crossing in front of the Maini Range Office, his legs got wet as the water was too deep for the small elephant that had to swim across the river. I requested him to change his elephant but he thought it was great fun and continued on the elephant he had selected.

At the next crossing the bank was rather steep. We were all climbing up very cautiously, with the elephants bending their forelegs at every step to make a hole for proper grip. Suddenly the young elephant ridden by the Major, who had not learnt these niceties over-stepped and the poor Military Secretary slipped clean off the elephant into the Kassalong river. He was then completely wet and caused an all round laughter. We were too far from the camp and unless we sent him back we could render no help. However he managed to get up and we proceeded to the stockade.

A few machans were constructed round the fencing of the stockade by the time we arrived there and the "Chhota kothi" was under construction. I got up the ladder of one and helped the Governor's wife up to come and see the elephants. There were fifteen elephants caught—a good number. The Governor got up on another machan with the Deputy Commissioner. It was only the first day after the elephants were driven into the stockade and they were in a mood for frivolities. As a rule, they should not have been disturbed and every one watching them should have kept absolutely quiet. This rule cannot be enforced when the party is big.

A big cow elephant, probably the leader of the herd, picked up a lump of wet earth with its trunk and before any of us could even guess what she was going to do, she swished it off at the Governor and hit him on the chest. Fortunately the earth was wet and soft. We decided to get back to the camp for lunch and rest.

On the following day we had a wholesome breakfast and set out for the stockade in good spirits. We arrived there, saw how the tame elephants were first taken into the stockade, how the wild elephants were punched and pummelled till they were demora-

lised and how one by one they were driven into the "Chhota kothi" and noosed. We saw the noosing of four elephants and then went to the stand where the noosed elephants were watered and tied to strong trees. It was amusing to see how the elephants after a good drink of water lie on their sides and fall asleep even though their two hind legs are tied to the trees.

We returned to Mainimukh in the evening for dinner. The camp broke up the next morning. The Deputy Commissioner escorted the party back to Rangamati. I stayed on for a few days till all the fifteen elephants were caught and then departed.

10. The Kheda At Shishak.

I was then the Inspector General of Forests with headquarters at Karachi. In 1955 I was summoned to the Governor General's house to an exclusive lunch and was told that the Governor General, Iskander Mirza, and his wife would both like to see the kheda that the Government of East Pakistan had organised for the following cold weather. I was not happy about ladies as V.I.Ps in camps. Their entertainment was a problem that was not in my line. As a matter of protocol, the Governor General had to be invited by the Provincial Government to grace the occasion. I took a trip to Dacca to get in direct touch with the provincial authorities and work out details. I was told that all camp expenses were to be charged to the Governor General's account. Formal invitations were sent and the preliminaries were duly executed.

The Deputy Commissioner, Chittagong Hill Tracts, took charge of catering and a caterer was arranged from Chittagong. The Conservator of Forests took charge of all affairs in the forest. The place selected for the kheda was at Shishak and the camp was set up at Mainimukh. The Forest Rest House had two bed rooms, one of which would do for the Governor General and his wife and the other for the American Ambassador and his wife. Two small tents were pitched in the courtyard, one was for the A.D.Cs. and the other for another guest of the Governor General. The rest of us stayed in bamboo huts, built in Chakma style with a bath room attached to each bed room. A big basha was constructed for meals. Breakfast was to be served to the V.I.Ps. at the Rest House but all the other meals were to be eaten in the common Dining-hut. Plans of the houses and a lay-out plan of the camp had to be taken to the Governor General for his approval.

The East Pakistan Forest Department did an excellent job. Fundies and tame elephants were collected at Mainimukh well in time and the drive was arranged for a definite date when the first part of the night was dark and the moon was up after mid-night. I offered to host the dinner for the whole party on the first night and the caterer was to operate from the morning following the V.I.Ps'. arrival. I arranged for "Kabuli" (Polao cooked with green peas and plenty of chicken) prepared by a well known cook from the Dacca Nawab's palace, as the principal dish and it was highly appreciated.

The guests retired early that night as they were all tired after the long drive from Chittagong. I was a bit worried as the jeeps did not reach Mainimukh till dusk and the road by which I drove up in the morning along the hill side was rather narrow at places. However, every thing went off satisfactorily.

The drive started that night but the herd of elephants did not oblige by walking into the stockade on the very first night. The herd was located and surrounded. The stockade at Shishak was about twelve miles north of Mainimukh. A good jeepable road was constructed with two temporary bamboo bridges over which the jeeps could pass. Some of the party wanted to visit the stockade the following morning but I ruled against it as I did not want the elephants to be disturbed in the forest even by the sound of the jeeps. A small-game shoot was arranged in the Mahalya forest, within a few miles of Mainimukh, to keep the V.I.Ps. engaged.

We were all sitting on a series of eight feet high machans. I sat with the Governor General and his wife. The drive started from the Kassalong river southwards. As ill luck would have it, a whole herd of eleven wild elephants came out in that drive and ran past the machans. Fortunately there was no tusker and no gun was fired. We saw no other animals, not even jungle murgis. However, after the drive, we had a picnic lunch in dug-outs. This was very enjoyable. The Governor General's wife felt extra hungry—the good effect of jungle life after Karachi, and she had a big helping of lobster cutlets with mayonnaise sauce. When the Governor General went to the boat and told her that the cutlets she relished were of lobsters, the fat was in the fire ; she was alergic to lobsters and immediately started scratching her body and artecarial erruptions appeared. The poor Deputy Commissioner felt very guilty but how was he to anticipate this. The afternoon was glum. I arranged to tie up one or two cows in the neighbouring forest for panthers.

A herd of fifteen wild elephants was caught in the stockade and I got the news—the first thing in the morning. I was also told that a cow had been killed by a panther in a forest about five miles away. I walked up to the Rest House at break-fast time and gave the V.I.Ps. the good news. The Governor General's wife was cheered and got over the ill effects of lobster cutlets after the night's rest. I advised against visiting the stockade as the "Chhota kothi" had to be constructed and the tame elephants marched to Shishak that day. I went to Shishak myself but left the rest of the party with the Deputy Commissioner.

The next morning, we set out after early break-fast. The Governor General sat beside his A.D.C. who was driving and I sat at the back with his wife. About five miles north from Mainimukh, he shot a jungle murgi which was feeding on the forest road and he was very pleased. We had a line of six jeeps and we all reached the stockade without any incident. A number of machans had been constructed along the fencing of the stockade. The jeeps were left in Shishak forest village and some of the guests got up on saddled elephants and others walked to the stockade which was about two hundred yards inside the forest. The American Ambassador had a cine camera and was in high spirits.

The first part of the fore-noon passed off satisfactorily and everybody was thrilled to see how the tame elephants were taken into the stockade and how they were pumelling the wild ones. When the wild elephants looked subdued, I wanted at least one of them to be noosed before lunch. I asked the Governor General if he fancied any particular elephant to be noosed first. I told him that it was principally to show the process of noosing and suggested that an easy one would be a young female elephant. He however suggested a young tusker. When the first gate was lifted and the six tame elephants inside the stockade moved away from the gate to allow the selected tusker to walk through the gate to the chota-kothi, the whole herd rushed towards the gate and the tame elephants could not stop them. Our mahuts got panicky, left their charges and climbed over the fencing for safety. There was pandemonium ! Photographers of the Publicity Department jumped off their machans and broke the cameras, the Governor General ran down the ladder for his dear life, his wife was carried down with great difficulty but the American Ambassador started laughing till he wept. The lessee of the kheda thought that the stockade would be broken and all the elephants would escape. A number of hand bombs was fired outside the chota-kothi to frighten the wild elephants. After about half an hour, order was restored.

It was amazing to see how that large number of elephants tried to squeeze into that small space of the chota-kothi. I had some cut banana plants thrown into the stockade on the opposite side. The elephants were so hungry and thirsty that they started going back into the stockade one by one and began to share them with the tame elephants. After another half an hour, we called the tame elephants near the fencing and the mahuts mounted them again. More banana plants were thrown in and the wild elephants were kept engaged. Eventually, a cow elephant was driven into the chota-kothi, quickly squeezed in by two elephants and the first gate was dropped but still guarded by a tame tusker. A fundi got down on the ground with a loop in his hand. There was pin drop silence and the two hind legs of the elephant were quickly tied. Two nooses were put on the neck of the wild elephant from the two tame ones and she was dragged out to the watering place about a hundred yards away.

We then had lunch ourselves and I narrated to them a few thrilling stories of kheda in North Bengal for entertaining the party. But I also told them that in my thirty years experience of kheda, I had never seem an incident like that before. I was neither frightened nor excited and the few steps I took helped in restoring the position and the morale of the people. After lunch we saw the noosing of two more elephants one of which was the young tusker that the Governor General had desired to be tackled. We paid a short visit to the stand where the noosed elephants were tied after watering. We returned to Mainimukh before dusk. After dinner that night, the Governor General held a small Darbar and presented the Deputy Commissioner and me with a Silver Cigarette box each. We also made short speeches thanking the V.I.Ps. and hoping that they had enjoyed the visit in spite of the inconveniences.

The camp broke up next morning after break-fast and we returned to Chittagong by the way we had come. The remaining operations in the Shishak kheda were successfully completed by the Provincial Forest Department.

11. The Deputy Commissioner Was Killed.

Another summon, from the President's House at Karachi for a quiet lunch made me suspicious that there was some thing on. The President, his wife, myself and an A.D.C. were the only souls at the table. It was then announced that a Prince from a friendly neighbouring country had written for permission to shoot an elephant. Elephant was a protected animal and could only be shot after it was declared a rogue. I told the President the provisions of law and advised him to write to the Governor of East Pakistan personally, as Chittagong Hill Tracts was the only area where elephant shooting was possible. He agreed and asked me to write to the Deputy Commissioner. I also wrote a personal letter to Mr. Niblett, the Deputy Commissioner drawing his attention to provisions of law and received a prompt reply that stray tuskers were always a danger to human lives and property and if necessary he would declare the tusker a rogue for its audacity to face a Prince, an Honoured Royal Guest of the Government, and allow him to be shot. The President received a reply in due course that the shoot could be arranged in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Thereafter, I received a letter every week giving descriptions of stray elephants damaging the jhum cultivation in different parts of the district. Two elephants were reported from Bandarban area, south of the Karnafuli river, of which one was a tusker. They were consistantly seen in one area of Unclassed State forest. I thought they were the best to try, for, the rains were not over and in autumn when the jhum paddy would ripen, the elephants, if not disturbed, could be easily located. Declaration that they were rogues, damaging village crops and houses, was issued and an invitation was sent out to the Prince to come in October. The Deputy Commissioner offered to compensate the villagers in cash if they did not attempt to drive the two elephants away from that locality.

The President ultimately decided that it was not necessary for me to go as the guest was not a Head of a State. He desired that the local authority should organise the shoot and take credit for it. For the guidance of the organisers, I was directed to give detailed instructions as to how to conduct the shoot.

I wrote to the Deputy Commissioner accordingly, advising him that the shoot should be attempted either in the morning or late in the afternoon when the wild elephant was most likely to come out of the deep forest. I particularly emphasised that the hunter should go on a female elephant which would normally be allowed by the wild tusker to approach him. And I further instructed that two elephants both female, should go with two shikaries—the second one to support the first. Sometimes the wild elephant is not found in the right position for an effective shot and with two elephants, it can be manoeuvered to move, allowing the hunter to aim at the most vulnerable part of the head.

The Military Secretary from Dacca was to accompany the Prince and food was to be arranged from Dacca. When the Prince reached Karachi, I was invited to meet him.

I told him not to shoot in a hurry as it would be possible to approach a wild tusker within easy shooting distance if the hunter was on a female elephant. The brain of the elephant is in a small pocket in the middle of a line joining the two ear holes. It is protected from the front by sieved bones at the root of the trunk about the middle of the line joining the two eyes. I wished him the best of luck. I also wrote to the Deputy Commissioner, my last to him, wishing him success and congratulating him in anticipation.

The Deputy Commissioner arrived at the camp the day before the shoot and himself went out on his tusker elephant, Lalbahadur, accompanied by some villagers to locate the wild tusker. He spent quite a few hours before he found out where the tusker was. He was quite exhausted when he returned to the camp. The next morning he took the Prince with him on Lalbahadur and not on a female elephant as I had particularly emphasised. The Mahut of Lalbahadur reported sick and he took a young Mahut who was not used to driving Lalbahadur. News reached Karachi that the Prince could not shoot the wild tusker and the Deputy Commissioner was killed.

When the Prince returned to Karachi, I did not meet him. However, I was asked to proceed to the Chittagong Hill Tracts for a confidential inquiry. I found that the Prince and the Deputy Commissioner went on Lalbahadur, contrary to my direction. They located the wild tusker grazing in a jhum. They were accompanied by two villagers who went on foot. The Military Secretary and the Deputy Commissioner's daughter came on a female elephant later with cold lunch and drinks and waited at the edge of the forest for the hunters to return after the shoot. The wild tusker was grazing in a clear jhum across a small stream. The Mahut was young, inexperienced and nervous, and did not like to face the wild tusker. The two villagers also watched the incident from a safe distance. Although the wild tusker was seen, Lalbahadur was not taken across the stream and the Prince could not possibly have a shot at the vital point. According to the advice of the Deputy Commissioner who sat behind the Prince on Lalbahadur, he fired at the wild tusker but could not bring him down. It bolted and Lalbahadur raced after it.

The stream was a handicap and the young Mahut jumped off the elephant when its speed was slowed in crossing the stream. Lalbahadur continued to chase the wild tusker without a Mahut and the Deputy Commissioner was trying to stop it but without any effect. When they came up to a hillock, the Prince also jumped off Lalbahadur. The villagers ran back to the edge of the forest and reported the incident to the Military Secretary who was waiting there on a female elephant. On hearing the story they hurried to the place of occurrence, collected the Prince who was wandering on the ground and reached the hillock which Lalbahadur crossed. Just on the other side, they found the Deputy Commissioner lying almost unconscious in a pool of blood, his right shoulder nearly separated from the body. He was still alive and asked how His Royal Highness the Prince was. They put him on the cow-elephant and proceeded towards the camp but he died on the way. Lalbahadur also followed the female elephant but without its Mahut. The Deputy Commissioner was a very dutiful officer. His last thought, before he died, was the safety of the Prince, the honoured guest of the Government.

CHAPTER 4

OTHER ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

Rhinoceros

The Asian Rhinoceros, which has only one horn on the nose, is the largest animal in the forests next to the elephant. It is a native to some parts of the riverain forests of North Bengal where there are patches of reed grass, the favourite fodder and habitat for this animal. It is found in the Nepal forests at the foot hills of the Himalayas but in North Bengal it is confined to a forest on an island in the Hasimara river. Apart from the special fodder, the rhinoceros needs plenty of water where it can wallow. It was said that once upon a time it was found in the Sundarbans where a stream is still called Gandamara khal, indicating that Gandar was once seen on its banks. The reed grass area has all been excluded from the Sundarbans Reserved Forests and brought under cultivation. At present there is no trace of this animal in any forest in Bangladesh.

The rhinoceros has a peculiar habit of coming to the same place to ease itself. Where fresh dung is noticed, one can sit on a tree, look out for it and even shoot at it as it generally comes back to the same spot for easing till the dung heap is so high that it is unable to stand on it. It then moves to another part. If disturbed, it moves from one part of the forest to another for quite some time until it has forgotten that it had been disturbed. It is rather a heavy foolish animal, which does not run very fast nor very far. Its single horn is very valuable for its aphrodisiac value and at one time there were lot of illicit killings for its horn. The carcasses were always found near the dung heap. For its protection a special Rhinoceros Act was passed and even possession of a rhino horn without a permit was an offence under the act. I still remember how the Member who piloted the bill was daubed as "Rhinoceros skinned" by the Congress opposition members in the legislative council in British Bengal.

A sanctuary was created in Hasimara forest of about twenty-one square miles where no shooting was allowed so that rhinoceros could live there undisturbed and breed freely.

Hasimara Rhinoceros.

The Hasimara Game Sanctuary was included in Buxa Division and I used to visit it once every two months while I was in charge of that Division. As all animals were protected, a special squad of Forest Guards was sanctioned for intensive patrol. It was also the charge of the Game Warden who was sanctioned a special pay for the work. I saw the largest tiger of Buxa Division in this forest which once just walked past my elephant and got into the Hasimara river for a dip. Sambhar deer used to walk with

the tame elephants and were never frightened as they knew that they would not be fired at. The hog deer used to roam about like herds of goats. Even jungle murgis, if found in the adjoining Chilapata forest would fly back to the sanctuary, when disturbed, as they knew that they could not be killed there.

To attract Tourist Traffic, I tried to train the forest department's elephants to face the rhinoceros so that the rhinoceros of the sanctuary could get used to the tame elephants. Every time I went to the sanctuary, I would take at least three elephants. The dung heaps, if fresh, would indicate the presence of rhinoceros in the neighbourhood. The Game Guards also knew about their number and location pretty well. At the beginning, I used to go after a single bull rhinoceros, the mother with a calf would be more dangerous. The rhinoceros would see the elephants from a distance and the elephants would also hesitate to get too close. Then the rhinoceros would bolt and stop again after running about two hundred yards. I used to surround it with the elephants, making a detour and blocking its escape. It would snort and run back to the original place. In course of time it realised that the elephants were harmless and the elephants also found it good fun to go near the rhinoceros.

Before I left Buxa Division, I found them in groups of four or five who would allow themselves to be photographed from the forest department's elephants. There were about twenty-five rhinoceros in Hasimara sanctuary in 1942.

Bisons

Bison or Gaur was the biggest bovine animal of the Bengal forests. It occurred in the foot hills of Nepal and very rarely strayed into the plain forests of Kurseong Division. It was also found in Goalpara forests of Assam across the Sankos river but was never seen in Jalpaiguri district. It was noticed in Cox's Bazar Division and in the southern forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts. It was a protected animal on account of its rarity. I knew of a shikari who only for the credit of shooting a bison amongst his bag, killed a stray bison in Kurseong and paid a fine of five hundred rupees.

The Bison Of Bengdhepa.

Bengdhepa is a forest village in Garjania Range, deep inside the Cox's Bazar forest about five miles south of Bhomariaghona. The best means of getting there in the early nineteen-thirties was by elephant. One fine morning in late November, accompanied by the Range Officer I set out for Bengdhepa. I carried my ·350 bore magazine rifle with the odd chance of shooting a barking deer or at best a smaller deer. We arrived there fairly early and spent the morning inspecting the plantations on foot. We left the elephant at Bengdhepa forest village. My rifle was carried by a Forest Guard.

While in the plantation, we were told by the villagers that a Mithun was damaging their jhum every night. We agreed to visit the area after seeing the plantation. It was some distance away from the plantation. I walked up to the place with the Range Offiicer, the Forest Guard and a villager. While looking at the big hoof marks all over the jhum that was badly browsed, I suddenly heard a snorting

sound from a patch of assamlota. The villager shouted. I looked in his direction and there, barely ten yards away, I saw a big bison bull, of the colour of a buffalo, only showing its head above the assamlota. It came forward a step or two while we all stood stiff on lower ground. It had good horns and the head looked enormous. It seemed to me that its beard almost touched the ground. I could only see its head and no other part of the body. It reminded me of an incident when a Forester was charged by a bison. He rolled on the ground to save himself. This bison looked more ferocious than a tiger. I did not have even a gun to frighten it with. Suddenly it thought better, turned and sauntered away. That was the only bison I ever saw in the forest and I never fancied meeting another.

Deer

Deer of all kinds were found in the Bengal forests. The red barking deer was the most common in every forest. It was seen in the hill forests of the north, in the plains sal forests of Jalpaiguri district, in the Sundarbans, in Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts and in the Sylhet forests. The biggest deer were the sambhar, abundant in Jalpaiguri district, some in Chittagong Hill Tracts, and in Chittagong but rarely in Sylhet. It was never reported from the Sundarbans where the conditions were totally unsuitable for its survival. Hog deer, which is much smaller than the sambhar but bigger than the barking deer was seen mostly in the riverain forests of Jalpaiguri district and sometimes strayed into the sal plantation. The cheetal or spotted deer is still abundant in the Sundarbans. They are seen in small groups under the keora trees through out that forest. In large numbers they are found on the grass patches along the bigger rivers and in big herds on the grass fields on the sea coast at the estuary of the Baleswar river specially at Katka between the estuary of Supoti khal and Betmorgang. Herds can be seen also at the mouth of Selagang, on Dublachar at the estuary of the Passar river and at Nilkamal at the estuary of the Sipsah river. The most common hoof mark on the soft forest floor of the Sundarbans is that of cheetal. They are more numerous in the eastern Sundarbans where the water is less brackish than in the forest west of the Sipsah river. The male cheetal shed their antlers in the summer and the new antlers come in velvet through out the rains when they are not allowed to be shot. Only the stags of all varieties can be shot in the open season while the does are all protected.

1. My First Sambhar.

It was in the very first cold weather of my service in the Forest Department. A colleague of mine and I were doing thinning in young plantations. We noticed lots of damage by deer to the young gamar trees. In some areas every tree was stripped of its bark. My friend decided to have a beat on a Sunday. The labourers who worked with us were quite willing to beat the plantation for a few hours with the hope of getting some venison if a deer was shot. I only had a 12 bore gun and a few L. G. cartridges were the largest size of shots I had. I was a novice; my friend selected a place for me to stand and advised me to put a number 4 cartridge in my right barrel for

murgies and L. G. in the left barrel for deer or pigs. Within a few minutes of the start of the beat, I saw a dark brown animal, the colour and size of a small buffalo, run within ten yards of me. I was standing on a small path and when it ran up to the clear point I saw a beautiful pair of antlers on its head. I fired my L. G. shot just behind its right shoulder and dropped it. I ran up to it myself and saw it was still struggling and fired the number 4 shot on its head from point blank range and it lay quiet. Hearing two shots, my colleague came up to me and was very pleased at my performance. That was the best head of a Sambhar I ever shot.

2. A Sambhar At Raimatong.

Throughout the second World War when Japan joined the war and the Burma front was very hot, my mother-in-law Mrs. A. Majid, stayed on in Shillong. War was raging all along the eastern boundary of Assam. It was after considerable cajoling that I could bring her down from the hill station to spend the cold weather with us in Buxa Division. I was camping at Raimatong. I noticed considerable damage done to young sal plantation by pigs.

My mother-in-law used to tell us stories of sambhar shot in different parts of Assam in her younger days and of bison in the Bijni Raj Estate in Dhubri district. All I could entertain her with were a few jungle murgis. At last I decided to have a beat in the plantation at Raimatong. As luck would have it, a big stag sambhar came out and just as it was running past me, from one plantation to another I put a shot from my ·450 double barrelled rifle into its heart and it just lay quiet. An elephant was sent for from Raimatong Forest Rest House to carry the deer. My mother-in-law was very pleased and thought her son-in-law was a great shikari. She even dried bits of venison in the sun and took them with her to Shillong.

3. A Hog Deer At Chilapata.

After the Sundarbans, I was never keen on shooting deer. The best shooting area was in Buxa Division. The shooting Club only allowed two stags per permit per annum and the Forest Officers also abided by that rule. The war supplies made the work very heavy. In every range two years' area was clear-felled and planted up the same year. I never went for deer shooting even for sport. I would shoot jungle murgis with my shot gun and save the rifle cartridges for tiger and even that I shot only one each year.

The protection given to all animals in Hasimara Game Sanctuary increased the number of deer of all varieties and they began to intrude into the adjoining Chilapata forest and damage the young plantations. To keep the local staff and the forest villagers satisfied, occasional beats were held in the plantations and the stags beaten out had to be killed in the interest of protection of the plantations.

Once in February, a beat was held in the Chilapata sal plantations. I stood with my shot gun on a forest road and sincerely wished that nothing bigger than a jungle

murgi would come my way. The Game Warden Mr. A.N. Roy, himself was master of the ceremony and he put me near a dry stream that came out of the plantation. He advised me to load at least one of the barrels of my double barrelled gun with a bullet but I loaded a No. 6 cartridge in one barrel and one L.G. cartridge in the other. A few minutes after the beat started, the beaters shouted out that a deer was being chased out by them. As luck would have it, a pair of hog deer, a stag and a doe came racing along the dry bed of the stream towards me. The doe was leading, she stopped for a minute when she saw me and then leapt forward. I let her pass. The stag got up on the bank of the stream and I killed him with the L.G. shot I had in my gun. That was the only hog deer I ever shot.

4. Cheetal Deer.

In the nineteen twenties the Sundarbans was full of cheetal. Even the coupe purchasers were allowed to shoot them within the coupe without paying for a shooting permit. The idea was to drive the cheetal out of the coupe as they browsed the young seedlings and did considerable damage to natural regeneration of the forest. My first years in the Sundarbans were on working plan duty. At times, I had about two hundred men in a flotila of boats, most of whom had to work in mud and water from morning till evening. We hardly had more than two meals a day—breakfast and dinner. The subordinate officers were also permitted to shoot deer and enjoy the vension with their men, as an additional incentive for the hard and long hours of work that everybody had to put in. Cold weather was the best time for enumeration work. Friday was a holiday when we used to have boat races and no one got into the forest. The cheetal was generally shot off keora trees when they came to graze on fallen leaves and fruits but hardly anybody could spare the time to sit up on a tree as they were all anxious to get back to their boats as soon as the day's work was finished. Most of the cheetal in the camp were shot from dingy boats. I had a ·350 magazine rifle with me which was very effective for the cheetal.

Later in 1929 and 1930 while I was in charge of the Division, I used to spend an occasional afternoon walking along the grass fields near the sea face. Herds of cheetal could be seen and I picked up a few good heads from Katka, Dubla and Nilkamal.

5. Cheetal At Baleswar.

One afternoon, a colleague of mine and I got off the launch on the long grass strip along the western bank of the Baleswar river, about five miles below Supoti. We saw a big herd of cheetal. As I had shot many cheetal stags before, I wanted my friend to have the pick of the herd. I posted him near the forest and I, myself, went to the river side to chase the herd towards him. He had a ·375 bore magnum rifle and was a good shot. After about half an hour's chase, I heard a shot, he dropped a good stag but it managed to roll into the adjoining forest. Even after the first shot, the herd

did not run away but stood together and began to thump their legs on the ground. He fired again and bowled over a second stag. The whole herd then ran back towards me and away to the sea side—miles to the south. I then heard a third shot and I proceeded towards him.

To my amazement, I found that he had shot a tigress with his third shot within twenty yards of the place from where he got his first deer. When that deer dragged itself into the forest, a pair of tigers caught hold of it and killed it. The herd of cheetal realised that there were tigers in the forest but we were unware. After killing the second stag, when my friend went to look for the first deer, he saw the stag lying on the ground but two tigers on its two sides flat on the ground with their forelegs outstretched. The herd of deer, after the third shot, knew that both the gun and the tigers were on the forest side and so they ran back towards me. My friend shot the deer but the tigress also laid her claim on it. He fired at her from a range of barely ten yards. The tiger knew better and immediately disappeared into the forest.

6. Barking Deer At Bhomariaghona.

Barking deer is considered a vermin in the forest ; of all deer they cause the greatest amount of damage to the young trees by browsing. I shot many barking deer in the forests of Jalpaiguri, Sundarbans and Cox's Bazar. My impression is that the barking deer of the Sundarbans is more red in colour with a beautiful coat in the cold weather. The colour grows dull in the summer.

In Cox's Bazar Division, although I had my ·350 bore rifle, I never used it. I only used my shot gun. The most interesting sport was shooting snipe in the paddy fields for an hour a day in the evening after the paddy was harvested. This was a sport to which I was initiated by my Conservator, Mr. Jeston Homphrey, who was my first Divisional Forest Officer when I joined the Forest Service in Jalpaiguri. It was good exercise and good fun as the snipe is a very wily bird and can only be shot on its wings. Cartridges were cheap in those days and one snipe in four shots was considered good.

One afternoon at Bhomariaghona, in the company of my Conservator, we shot about a dozen snipe and most of them fell to my gun. The villagers who were watching the fun came and reported that they had seen a flock of jungle murgis enter a bushy forest in an isolated hillock. We decided to beat that out before retiring for the day. Driven murgis have a peculiar habit of crossing from one cover to another all by one route. My Conservator, who was about thirty yards to my left got two jungle murgis with two shots. Then to my right, I saw a barking deer jumping across the paddy field where we were standing. I had only No. 4 cartridges in my barrels. There was no time to change. I fired and got him nicely on the neck and it tumbled down. I was immensely pleased with my performance that day. Of all the barking deer I shot, the Bhomariaghona one is still most vivid in my memory.

Wild Goats

Only two kinds of wild goats were available in the forests of Bengal, the serow and the gooral. The serow is a small animal about the size of a domestic goat, about three feet high. It is light brown in colour, having a white patch under the chin running down the body up to the tail. It is found in the Tista Valley in Darjeeling below two thousand feet elevation. It was also reported from Chittagong Hill Tracts in Sitapahar range near Kaptai where it was notified as a protected animal. I once saw a herd in the Tista Valley, high up on a rocky gorge. It was impossible to get within shooting range. Rifle cartridges were so scarce during the Second World War that I did not like to take a chance shot with my rifle. Actually I did not even have the rifle with me in camp. There must have been quite a number of serow in that herd as we counted about a dozen jumping clean across a canyon while we watched from five hundred feet below.

The gooral is a much bigger animal, found in the cold weather in the Tista forests between two thousand and three thousand feet elevation. It comes down from the upper reaches of the Himalayas in the snow season. The colour is deep blue-black, it is about four feet six inches high, with long hair like a goat. It is very smelly and looks like a small cow from a distance.

The Gooral Of Tista.

One cold weather, I was camping at Tista Bridge. The Range Officer of Tista Range was a young Nepali Deputy Ranger. He came and reported that the Forest Guards had noticed the fresh droppings of a gooral and inquired if I would like to try to shoot it. Not having seen a gooral in the forest before, I readily agreed. We had started very early in the morning before the wood-cutters entered the forest and disturbed the animals. We had to ride up-hill about five miles and left the ponies just as the sun was rising. We walked another mile or so over precipitous ground and came to a narrow ridge on the hill where the fresh dung of the gooral was noticed. We tossed a coin and decided which face of the slope I was to watch for the gooral and the other side was for the Range Officer. Two Forest Guards with six villagers went about half a mile away and started to lightly beat the forest.

It was a long wait but I saw a black animal way down on the rock on my side of the ridge. My first impression was that it was a hill cow. It was coming on and then I thought it was a black bear. I only had two L. G. cartridges in my gun and was not at all happy at the prospect of facing a bear with only my shot gun. When it came nearer, I could hear the beat of its hoofs on the rocks and saw it cross the ridge to the side of the Range Officer, about two hundred yards away from me. Within a few minutes, I heard a bang. I waited till the beaters reached us. I then went to the Range Officer's side and saw the gooral lying on the ground. He fired a bullet from his shot gun, hit him behind the shoulder and as it dropped only about ten feet from him, he ran up to it and chopped its neck off with his khukri. The men were pleased, they cut open its stomach and threw away the intestines. Then they tied the four legs, hung the carcass on a pole and four men carried it down on their shoulders to Tista Bridge.

Wild Dog

The wild dog, or Dingo, is found in the Darjeeling hills as well as in Buxa Division in the foot hills of Bhutan. It is reddish-brown in colour, about the size of a pye dog. Except for its behaviour in the forest, one is liable to mistake it for a village dog or even for a barking deer when seen from a distance. It is hardly seen singly, but generally found in packs of three or more. Coming down from Phalut on the border of Nepal, I once met three of them on the road to Palmajua. We had three ponies walking behind us. I was leading and there were six people on the road. At one bend, we suddenly came across three dogs in a pack. I first mistook them for village dogs. The elevation of the place was over eight thousand feet and they were about twenty yards ahead of us. All the three dogs looked so similar that I stopped and remarked on it. Within a few minutes, they left the road and rushed into the mixed forest of oaks and spruce.

The Red Dog At Bhutanghat.

It was in the month of November, the forest roads had just been cleared for motor traffic. My wife had not come down from Shillong and I tried to get round the out-lying parts of Buxa Division before she joined me. I had quite a lot of malaria during the rains that had just past so I had two elephants with me to go round the forests and plantations at Bhutanghat.

One morning, I went out on Shampiari elephant to a distance of about eight miles from Bhutanghat Rest House. I had the shot gun loaded with No. 4 cartridges, just in case I saw a jungle murgi or a flock of imperial pigeons. The mahut was carrying the gun and I was sitting behind him. Going through a sal forest, over undergrowth—mostly of grass, the elephant was stopping again and again. The mahut got suspicious and went further inside the forest when we came upon a pack of red dogs which looked to me like barking deer. Their method of running was very different from the hop of deer and they were in a pack unlike barking deer. The mahut pointed out to me that they were red dogs and handed me the gun. They ran away in front of the elephant and I thought that they had disappeared in the forest. About a hundred yards from that place, we came upon a fallen tree and a single red dog was standing on it and looking back at the approaching elephant. I was barely thirty feet away and fired a No. 4 cartridge killing it instantaneously.

Shampiari, which was the best howdah elephant of the Forest Department, resented sitting down near the dead dog. The mahut climbed down from the elephant and I also shouted to Shampiari to raise her right foreleg for me to stand on it and got off the elephant. I then held Shampiari by her ear while the mahut picked up the dead dog and put it on the saddle. I got up on the elephant by her trunk and the mahut did the same. We saw the rest of the pack run away through the undergrowth. We returned to Bhutanghat with our trophy where the dog was skinned and the skin was sent to Van Ingen and Van Ingen, Mysore, for curing. That was the only Wild Dog I ever shot.

CHAPTER 5

REPTILES AND BIRDS

Crocodiles

Crocodiles are mostly found in the estuarine rivers of the Sundarbans. In the early part of the twentieth century, alligators were seen on the sandy islands of the Padma river and even higher up in the Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers and their tributaries. But with the increase in river traffic by steamers and launches and large scale fishing with big nets in almost all the rivers of Bengal, alligators were driven out of the rivers and they are now mostly confined to the estuaries.

In the early nineteen-twenties, crocodiles were seen on the mud banks of almost all the estuarine rivers in the Sundarbans in the cold weather. In the summer they kept to the water and could only be seen floating about. Crocodiles live mostly on fish which are plentiful in the tidal rivers. They would eat up the carcass of any animal floating on the rivers. Occasionally they were reported to have taken away unwary villagers, men and women, having a dip in the tidal rivers adjoining the forests. They were also reported to have carried away wood-cutters from the Sundarbans while fishing along the banks of streams with throwing-nets. Cases were also reported when crocodiles carried away wood-cutters from the wooden ladders at the ghats of their huts in the forest.

Crocodiles lay their eggs in the summer in thorny bushes on the bank of small streams in the forest. The bushes are pressed down and made into a big nest. Thirty to forty eggs in one nest is quite common. The largest number ever reported to me was eighty. After laying the eggs, the crocodiles, probably the mothers, are always found near about, looking at the eggs and splashing salt water on the eggs with their tails during high tide. On such occasions, the crocodile would never leave the nest even if approached by men. I could never find out if the father and the mother took up the watch by turn and if the crocodile ever left the nest of eggs and went away in search of food. After the eggs have been hatched, only the shells are left in the nest and the crocodiles also go away into the water with their brood. The crocodile is dreaded in the rivers of the Sundarbans as much as the tiger on land. If a crocodile is shot in the water or it drops into deep water from the bank after being shot, it sinks and its body cannot be recovered until it rots and then floats. The best place to hit at a crocodile to kill it is between the eyes. Even a 12 bore gun bullet would kill it. Once, I saw a crocodile stunned by a bullet that hit the bulge on its head just behind the eye.

1. A Family Of Crocodiles.

It was late in March, I was travelling by S. L. Hawk from Burigoalni to Koikhali. The tide had just turned from high to ebb and the launch was moving fast. We turned

south from the northern boundary of the forest down the Kalagachia khal. I had a busy morning and was relaxing in the saloon when the telegraph of the launch went cling clang. I ran up to the navigation bridge to find out what all the excitement was about. I shall never forget the sight. Barely twenty yards in front of the launch, the carcass of a big dead cow was floating down the river and a family of five crocodiles was swimming behind it. Each would hold a part of the cow's body in its mouth and separate it from the body by a strong jerk. It would then swim some distance away, throw that part into the air, raise its head and fore part of the body up to the two forelegs above water, open its mouth and swallow it. It would then come back to the carcass again for another part. The bigger crocodiles got the bigger parts of the carcass like the legs and the smaller ones had to be satisfied with the smaller bits. They probably could not swallow the larger parts of the cow. We watched the performance for about half an hour until the whole carcass was swallowed up by the family of crocodiles.

2. My Biggest Crocodile.

In Khulna, the superior officers lived like one family in the late nineteen-twenties. The terrorist movement was then very strong in Bengal. Khulna was a small station and there was great espirit-de-corps amongst the superior officers. We shared all our joys and worries. Even the wives and children of the officers accepted one another as members of their own families.

In the Christmas of 1929, it was decided that we would all go down to the seaside at Katka and spend the holidays there. The District Magistrate was a senior British I.C.S. Officer. He had his wife but no children. The District Judge was a British Officer with three little kiddies. The Superintendent of Police was a Britisher but unmarried. I was Indian (then) and a bachelor. I took the S.L. Harrier and the other district officers took S.L. Helen and S.L. Pheligree. There were two European guests from Calcutta—businessmen, who joined the party. We tied the three launches together and left Khulna in high spirits. We all took our rifles and guns with the idea of shooting if any game came our way. We reached Katka the same evening and had a really hilarious time. We spent most of the day on the sandy beach. One day we walked along the grass fields from Katka to Supotikhal (Tiger point) and back. Every day, the men, except the judge, used to jump off the roof of the launches into the Katka khal and swim to the dingies that the launch crew kept ready for us. Was it madness or bravado? I saw crocodiles in that part on many occasions but never thought of any danger during that holiday. The District Magistrate used to jump with his glasses on—he was rather short sighted. On the last day the glasses slipped off his nose and he lost them for good. Luckily he carried a spare pair.

Then came the Ist of January, 1930, and time for us to return to Khulna. We had the tide in our favour from about 8 o'clock in the morning and the Serangs were told to steam up accordingly. It was a cold day with a strong northern wind. After

break-fast, we had the front door of the cabins shut and we were playing cards. In about an hour's time, we got out of the Betmar gang and turned right into the Sela gang. A crew member came running from the navigation bridge to tell me that my crocodile was lying, like a dingy boat upturned, on the sand bank.

This was the particular crocodile, I had noticed many times in the Sela gang for the past three years but could never take a shot. Crocodiles were very shy of country boats but I could always get to them within shooting range by launch. This big crocodile of Sela gang was however peculiar. It would slip into the water even at the approach of a launch. The launch crew of the Forest Department all knew how keen I was to have a crack at him. That was why they called it my crocodile. On this occasion, the crocodile was fast asleep with its mouth wide open. We first saw it from a distance of about half a mile. In those days, I used to keep a double barrelled ·475 bore rifle by Westeley Richards, belonging to my eldest brother who was Additional Chief Presidency Magistrate in Calcutta. I also had my ·350 bore magazine rifle. We all hurried up with our armoury. All rifles were fully loaded as we stood on the navigation bridges of the three launches. We were moving full steam with the tide pushing us up from behind.

When we were about two hundred yards from the crocodile, all the engines were stopped and we were pushed up by the tide only. As I had the most powerful rifle, I was given the honour of the first shot. The children and ladies were looking on, most excited. All the men had rifles in their hands. The District Judge who did not own a rifle had my magazine rifle in his hand and was standing beside me. I knelt down, kept my rifle on the front railing of the bridge and banged two successive shots from a distance of about one hundred yards. The open mouth was such a big target that I could not miss it. The northern wind against us made the approach of the launches soundless and the crocodile slept on.

Immediately after the first shots, the crocodile closed its mouth and blood started flowing through its nose. All the other rifles started banging at it and the crocodile did not stir at all. I changed the cartridges of my ·475 rifle and put in two more shots on its head, in between the two eyes from a much closer range. My rifle after four shots got so hot that I could not even open the breech without taking the barrel down. In all about fifty-two shots were fired at this crocodile.

The tide was still rising and the launches got right up to the bank where my crocodile was lying completely dead by then. The crew from all the three launches jumped a-shore with their thick ropes. There was great excitement. But the rope could not be put across the belly as the crocodile was so heavy that the men could not move its body. Shovels and spades were carried from the launches to dig the ground and take the rope across its body. It was secured with ropes behind its forelegs and in front of its hind legs. We were about sixty strong men in the three launches, everybody lent a hand but we could not drag the crocodile to the boats. Ultimately, the rope had to be put round the capstan of the launches, both fore and aft, and with the help of

steam to augment our pulling strength, we managed to bring the crocodile on board. It took us nearly four hours, before we steamed north again for Khulna.

We were late in reaching Khulna and our two guests from Calcutta could just manage to catch the mail train. We went back to our respective bunglows after dinner. The crocodile was off loaded on the bank beside the forest jetty at Khulna. The news of the monster crocodile spread like wild fire throughout the town. Streams of people came on foot, on horse-drawn carriages and in boats to have a look at it. About mid-day, a telegram came from the Calcutta Museum intimating that their taxidermist was coming to Khulna to skin the crocodile. I thought it was a bit cheeky of the Museum. I went across to the District Magistrate's bunglow with the telegram at lunch time. He advised that I should allow the expert taxidermist to supervise the skinning. The Museum must have got the news from our two friends who had gone back to Calcutta the previous night.

The taxidermist arrived by the mail train in the early hours of the morning and saw me after break-fast. He was of the opinion that it was a record size crocodile. Its length was eighteen feet seven inches, the girth behind the forelegs was eight feet ten inches and the mouth when opened was four feet six inches. It was on the third day that we managed to skin the crocodile. It was duly salted under the direction of the taxidermist and the hide was sent to Van Ingen and Van Ingen. I, however, refused to make over the hide to the Calcutta Museum. It took over two years to cure the hide which was stuffed into the life size of the crocodile. I was informed that I would need to reserve a whole wagon to carry it from Mysore to wherever I wanted it. By that time I was transferred to Cox's Bazar which was not connected by rail. Even the curing of the hide had very nearly cost me all the savings I had in the few years of service I had then put in. My Conservator wrote to me that I should present it to the Natural History Museum at Darjeeling which was principally patronised by the Forest Officers of Bengal. I realised that it was impossible to lug it about every time I was transferred and agreed to the Conservator's suggestion.

It is still preserved in Darjeeling Museum with a brass plate on which it is inscribed that "The crocodile was shot by Mr. Y. S. Ahmad at Sela gang in the Sundarbans on 1st January, 1930."

3. The Crocodile Swallows The Cook.

This happened after I left the Sundarbans on transfer to Cox's Bazar. The Officer who took charge from me was the senior most Divisional Forest Officer in Bengal at that time. I have every reason to believe that the story as related to me by him was true.

In the rains of 1930, the Divisional Forest Officer was touring in S. L. Harrier and anchored in a big stream near a Sundri Coupe. The next morning, some wood-cutters came to the launch and complained that their cook was taken away by a crocodile the previous evening and it had to be destroyed to prevent further casualties.

In the Sundarbans, even the wood-cutters construct temporary huts made with golpata roofs and walls, and the floor is of young saplings tied together. The whole structure is put on sundri posts about six to eight feet above the ground so that even the highest tide is well below the floor. Every hut has a ladder made of poles leading up from the water's edge to the hut direct from their boats and dingies. The wood-cutters have their night meals early to save kerosene oil for lamps and to avoid the insects which are very bothersome in the rains. That evening, the men had their food and the cook went down the ladder with his pots and pans and a hurricane lantern to wash them while the others were lying down or sitting about and smoking. Suddenly they saw the lantern drop into the stream and there was a splash in the water. They shouted for the cook but he had disappeared. The tide was then rising. The wood-cutters of the Sundarban Coupes, mostly men from Barisal district, were very enterprising. They realised that it might have been a crocodile that had swiped the cook from their ghat and it might have swum upstream as was the nature of crocodiles. Fortunately, the stream was a small khal whose source had dried in the forest. They collected their co-workers from other huts and started dropping into the water the sundri logs which do not float but sink to block the stream. They and their neighbours had enough sundri logs in their depots and the stream was completely blocked that night. They also kept watch to ensure that the crocodile did not get out into the big river beyond the mouth of the stream. The next morning, they went to S.L. Harrier for guns and shikaris to hunt the crocodile.

The Divisional Forest Officer's launch always carried some Government rifles and plenty of ammunition for emergencies. They were readily given out. A number of dingies were dragged above the pile of sundri logs and the hunt began. Right at the top of that stream, about two miles from their hut, one party in a small dingy noticed that the undergrowth was pressed down and it looked as if a small boat had been dragged up. The shikaris on that dingy climbed up on trees along the drag to find out what that was due to. They thus went another one hundred feet or so when they found that a fat crocodile was lying on the ground. One shikari got up on the nearest tree and fired at the crocodile between the two eyes and killed it.

The men were collected and they came in numbers with ropes. The dead crocodile was dragged to the stream and with two dingies rowed back to the ghat from where the cook was missing the previous night.

The Divisional Forest Officer himself saw the dead crocodile pulled up to the depot from where the sundri logs were removed and put in the stream to block it. It was almost evening when the stomach of the crocodile was cut open. They found the cook in the stomach of the crocodile, in a huddled position but complete, only a bit of his nose had disintegrated. The crocodile must have thrown the man into the water with a swish of its tail, caught him between its teeth and gone upstream. When the man died of suffocation, the crocodile must have swallowed the cook. Strange things do happen in the Sundarbans. The dead body of the cook was sent to his village for a ceremonial burial.

4. Rezia's Crocodile.

I have met and heard of many children of Forest Officers but none so lucky as Rezia as far as shikar animals are concerned. On the very first day of her life in the Sundarbans, in S. L. Harrier she saw a tiger on the bank of the Passar river, just above Cheilabogi khal (which she named her Tiger Point) and saw her father shoot and kill it. The dead tiger was collected from the forest the next morning and the launch moved on to the coupes towards the sea. I inspected two coupes that day, sent the Range Officer back to his headquarters at Chandpai in his motor launch and proceeded to Katka to spend the night there in peace. It was again tea time when we turned off the Betmar gang into the Katka khal and the Engine-driver of the launch was getting ready to bank fire the boiler and rest for the night. We sat down for tea when a crew member came into the saloon. I wondered if it was another tiger but he announced that it was a crocodile lying on the mud bank well away from the water and the tide was just turning from ebb to flow.

All of us rushed up on the bridge. I took my rifle and ammunition and saw the crocodile lying like an upturned dingy. It was Rezia's second day in the Sundarbans and she was thrilled to see the crocodile. It must have got up with the high tide and basked in the sun the whole day undisturbed. The water was low and the launch could not get very close to the bank. The sun in January sets quickly and as the light was failing, I fired at the crocodile from well beyond a hundred yards and missed. I saw the bullet pass over its head and hit the ground. It, however, roused the crocodile from its slumber and it started sliding down towards the water which was a good distance over mud. My second barrel was also loaded and the crocodile was comihg nearer to me than at the time of the first shot, a few seconds before. I put the second shot between its eyes, right on the head and it lay stone dead. The crew rushed in the jolly boat with ropes, tied the crocodile and brought it to the launch. That was Rezia's crocodile, a lucky girl !

Snakes

The Bengal climate suits snakes and they are found in every forest. The most dangerous one is, of course, the cobra. Fortunately they are not very numerous and cases of snake bite are rare. It was only from the Sundarbans that we heard of woodcutters being bitten by cobras, but men killed by tigers were far more numerous. They live mostly in holes on trees and sometimes in grass land on the sea coast. There are large numbers of iguanas also in the Sundarbans that feed on snakes' eggs and keep their number down.

The most interesting snake is the Python. It has the most gorgeous markings on its body. It is more common in the sal forests of Jalpaiguri than in the sundri forests of the Sundarbans. Its skin was so fancied that even if any python was killed we did not hear of it, because the skin was taken away by the killer.

1. Jalpaiguri Python.

It was in the very first year of my service in Jalpaiguri forest that I got my first python. I was doing selection marking in the sal forest. I used to carry a shot gun—more to keep up the moral of the labourers than to do any serious shooting. The gun was carried by one of the men while the cartridges used to be in my pockets. There was great excitement one day when we came to a small stream passing through the forest. When I went to the men to find out what all the shouting was about, I saw a python swimming in the water. The movement was not very fast. We watched it for sometime and then I fired a No. 4 shot on its head. It curled itself into a coil but was dead. It was eleven feet long. The skin was sent to Van Ingen and Van Ingen of Mysore, and tanned. A small attache'-case, ladies' handbags and some purses were made which cost me all my savings but were coveted presents for the brides of my friends who got married one after another about that time.

2. A Python In The Sundarbans.

Strangely enough, although in carrying out the field work for the Working Plan of the Sundarbans, we measured trees on two thousand miles of enumeration lines at regular intervals all over the forest, we never came across a python. We met tigers, killed many crocodiles, but nobody reported a python. It was after I took over charge of the Division that I saw a python in that forest. I was inspecting a coupe where fellings were going on. An old baen tree was felled freshly. The wood-cutters were reluctant to cut the tree as it was hollow. The Working Plan prescribed that for the improvement of the forest the hollow trees had to be felled from the bottom. As soon as the tree lay on the ground, a python started crawling out from the top of the hole. When the base of the tree was being cut, the snake might have moved up the tree. This was also shot with a 12 bore gun and measured thirteen feet.

3. A Family Of Pythons.

While in charge of Buxa Division I was deputed one cold weather to Cooch Behar State to prepare a Working Scheme for the Maharaja's forest. The Cooch Behar forests were largely grass land, ideal for tiger shooting in the cold weather, with scattered patches of tree forest. I was provided with elephants to move about the forests and also had the trees enumerated and the whole forest stock-mapped.

One day, I was going on an elephant with the State Forest Officer sitting behind me. We were on a forest road passing through a patch of trees. We saw a dead barking deer lying on the road surrounded by what looked like a few thick branches of trees. We were quite far from the dead deer. On coming closer, I had the surprise of my life when we saw five pythons all appearing ready to swallow the deer. They were not even frightened of the elephant. However, when we came right upon them, they slowly moved away into the forest. All shooting was prohibited in the State Forests and we did not even carry any guns. I wish I had a camera though !

4. The Python At Rajabhatkhawa.

In Buxa Division, during the Second World War, it was my usual practice to go into the forest in the morning. The dakwala used to arrive from Baksaduar by the late afternoon train. All dak was disposed of in the evening and some letters were posted from Rajabhatkhawa in ready made envelopes and the dakwala used to go back to Baksaduar by the mail train in the morning. There was a camp clerk who often used to do the typing work till late at night. I was always an early riser, the fair copies of letters were signed and despatched before break-fast.

I still remember, one particular morning when the Range Officer and I went to a clear-felling coupe about two miles north of Rajabhatkhawa location. The workmen were just going to their place of work, the cartmen were moving leisurely along the forest roads. In one corner of the coupe a number of sal trees were lying about which had to be logged and dressed. It was late in the month of March, the coupe had to be cleared and burnt so that the area could be planted up. The coupe had to be cleared from one side to facilitate the subsequent plantation. On approaching the area, we saw a huge big python slowly swallowing a whole barking deer. Only part of the deer was inside the python and the other part, including the head and forelegs, was still outside. The Range Officer cycled back to Rajabhatkhawa to get my gun while we kept watch on the snake. When the gun arrived, I killed the python with a shot on its head. The snake was carried to Rajabhatkhawa Forest Bunglow in a cart. It measured fifteen feet in length. My wife had a writing case, some shoes, a hand bag and a number of purses made from the skin.

5. Ali Mia And The Cobra.

Although I have faced tigers and elephants on foot, I must confess, I never liked the snakes. They gave me the creeps. There are people who could beat a cobra to death with a stick. I was not one of those lucky ones. I remember how my father one night followed a cobra with a lantern in hand in the compound and shouted to us to come out with sticks, which some of my elder brothers did, and then killed the snake. I never killed a snake with a stick, though I did not mind firing at it with a gun.

In the Working Plan Camp in the Sundarbans, there was a launch crew named Ali Mia, who always accompanied me into the forest. He was a hard swimmer. I used to swim across small streams with boots on my feet and a hat on my head. My Sola hat had a net inside where I used to put a dry handkerchief, a pocket compass and a pocket watch and swim across the khals instead of waiting for the dingy. The enumeration parties also followed my example and that was why the work progressed very fast and enumeration and stock mapping were completed a year ahead of the originally estimated time. Ali Mia used to swim with one hand, which I could not do. With the other hand he used to carry my ·350 bore rifle and some ammunition above the water.

One day, at Slane Khali, we came out of an enumeration line on to a grass patch at the estuary of the Barapanga river. I was walking through the grass with a blank

map on tracing cloth to jot down the extent of the grass land. I heard a hissing when Ali Mia signalled me to stop. He passed a few yards in front of me, picked up a little sand, recited some thing which he never divulged to me and threw it at the cobra. When I followed him I saw a big cobra, coiled but head raised as if ready to strike. He then went into the forest to cut a stick leisurely to beat the cobra to death. Of course he took the rifle also with him. He came back with the stick but would not beat the snake. I was badly cornered and was too shy to admit that I did not also like to beat the snake. The situation was saved as the enumeration party came out of the forest by that time and one of the work-men beat the cobra to death with the stick. The cobra never moved from the place after Ali Mia threw the little bit of sand at it. It was about ten feet long. I saw him stop crawling snakes on other occasions also in the same way. I never met another man who could do it nor did Ali Mia ever teach me what he recited before he threw earth at the snakes. When I was posted to the Sundarbans the second time in 1947, I found Ali Mia had left service and gone home to be a cultivator.

Birds

There are innumerable birds native to the forests of Bengal and some are migratory also. Of them, the common game bird is the jungle murgi. It looks very much like the domestic fowl but a little smaller in size. The cock is red and the hen yellowish brown. The biggest game bird is the pea-fowl. They can be seen, where they roost, only early in the morning and just before dusk. The cock is a magnificent bird and a coveted trophy for its rich plumage.

The most common game bird is the pigeon. There are a number of varieties. Some of them are migratory.

A black pheasant is native to the Darjeeling hills. A different variety is found in Sylhet and the Chittagong Hill Tract forests and some in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar forests but not in Jalpaiguri district or in the Sundarbans. Some varieties of partridges are also found in the same forests as the pheasants.

The beels of Bengal abound in ducks and snipes of many kinds in the cold weather. Some geese also come in the winter and fly back north across the Himalayas with the advent of summer. A whole book can be written on the migratory birds but I shall confine myself to the birds in the forests only.

Pea-fowl

The pea-fowl is seen only in Jalpaiguri district. They are found in the riverine forests. They also abound in the Hasimara Game Sanctuary and in the adjacent khoir-sissu forests of Chilapata Range. One Conservator always used to write to the Game Warden for a pea-fowl to be kept ready for his table when he toured Chilapata Range. I shot pea-fowl at Sankos, in the eastern most part of Buxa Division. They fly fast and roost on the tallest trees. They do not see well in failing light and I used to go out on an elephant in the evening when they fly fairly low within a shot gun range.

One pair of pea-fowl used to roost on a tree near the Bhutanghat Forest Rest House. I never disturbed them. I also had standing instructions that no game could be shot within view of the Forest Rest Houses in Buxa Division. This order paid handsome dividends and made the Rest Houses more interesting as some of the game birds also found them as safe zones.

Black-pheasant

The black-pheasants of Sylhet, Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts are attractive game birds of the forest. They are locally called Mathura. The cock is deep blue in colour and looks black from a distance. The hen is speckled yellow. Both carry a crown on the head which makes them look beautiful. They are rather foolish birds, fast on their legs and hardly ever fly and that even not high when they do. Early in the morning, they are seen on forest roads and offer easy shots. In the evenings, they can be found on the banks of streams or water courses where they come for a drink. In Chittagong Hill Tracts going by boats along rivers, through the forest just before sun set, I have often seen them, flying low across the river and shot them. Their size is as big as a large domestic fowl. The meat is white and good to eat. Like all pheasants, their legs have fibrous bones.

Grey-pheasant

There is a grey-pheasant in the forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts locally called kath-mayur. It is seen deep in the bamboo forest and is a rare bird. Its plumage is speckled grey with some green spots on the wings like a peacock and hence the name kath-mayur. When frightened it always gives a peculiar call which gives away its position. It is also a fast runner and I have never seen it on its wings. I shot only a couple of these birds in the early nineteen-thirties. Very often by the time the shot gun was collected from the carrier, the kath-mayur had disappeared into the forest.

Partridges

There are at least two varieties of partridges which I saw in the forests of Cox's Bazar Division. They are locally called quail. In size they are like a big chicken. Like mathura, the cock is deep blue in colour and the hen is yellowish brown. While driving small hillocks for jungle murgi, I saw them fly across the paddy fields from one jungle to another and shot them. They are nice table birds with tender meat. They also fly low and one should fire at them only from behind. If this rule is not observed, accidents are likely to happen. I remember a shoot with a Conservator of Forests who came from Bihar Province. One pellet from one of his shots hit a beater just below the eye and he was hospitalised.

Jungle Murgis

Jungle murgis are available in the sal forests of Jalpaiguri, in the Sundarbans, in Sylhet and also in the forests of Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tract districts. The cock, a beautiful red bird, smaller in size than the domestic fowl, is the first to crow in the

forest when the day dawns. Except in the Sundarbans, they are commonly found grazing on the paddy fields or on forest roads. They get back into the bushes after the feed but not too far from the grazing ground. If they are seen in the morning, they can be beaten out when the sun is well up and shot on the wing. They are hard fliers and fly fairly high and can be safely shot. At night they roost on trees and can rarely be seen. When in flocks, they very often fly one after the other from the same place across the paddy fields from one patch of forest to another and only one gun can get all the shots in one beat. The meat is a little tough, otherwise nice to eat. Their shooting season is from September to March, but the birds are in their prime condition in January-February when they are fat after feeding on the harvested paddy fields.

In Buxa Division, when I prohibited shooting within view of the Forest Rest Houses, I found jungle murgis mixing freely with the domestic fowl and jungle cocks mating with domestic hens. Even at Rajabhatkhawa, which was a crowded location, this was a common sight.

Pigeons

Like the jungle murgis, pigeons are found in all the forests of Bengal. The biggest is the Imperial pigeon, found in all the forests except the Sundarbans. It is a grey bird with a whitish breast and in size like a domestic fowl of common variety. This bird sits only on the tallest trees and also flies very high. It is a migratory bird and goes to the higher hills in the summer. It feeds on wild fruits. It makes a moaning call which is very distinctive and gives away its location. On one occasion in Rankheong Range I found a whole flock feeding on plum bushes. They are difficult to shoot but a challenge for any shikari.

The next in importance are the green pigeons. The plumage is green and hence the name. There are more than two varieties, the biggest would be the size of a large domestic pigeon. They all feed on fruits and can be seen particularly on ficus trees when in fruit. They have a peculiar habit of making a whistling noise which helps the shikari in locating them. They fly in flocks and offer good targets for a right and left shot while on the wings.

There is another very dark green pigeon, the size of a dove, found in ones and twos in all the forests of Bengal. When they sit on the ground or on trees, they can hardly be distinguished as the colour of their greenish blue plumage gets merged with the green grass or leaves of trees. They fly fast but do not fly very far. The colour of the breast is rocky brown and hence they are called rock pigeon. To shoot them on the wing is good sport.

Doves are very common in the forests of Bengal. Their peculiar call can be heard in every forest. There are a number of varieties but they all have the common name, Ghu-ghu, from the sound that their calls make. There is one variety, small in size, reddish brown in colour, and is found in flocks. They are good fliers and when disturbed can be easily shot.

The White Winged Wood-duck

The white winged wood-duck is a migratory bird found in the marshes of Kasalong forest in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. They are generally seen in pairs, never more than six in a flock. They would arrive by the end of November and fly back north to the Himalayas (probably to China) with the advent of the hot weather in March. In size, they are as big as a Brahmini duck (Sheldrake). I shot only one of these ducks in my first posting to Chittagong Hill Tracts in February 1933. It was later declared a protected bird and its shooting was prohibited.

Since the construction of the dam across the Karnaphuli river, the marshes in Kasalong reserve were absorbed in the Kaptai lake which then became a haven for many varieties of migratory ducks in the cold weather. It would be interesting to find out if the white winged wood-duck still pays a winter visit to those forests.

Bird Sanctuary In The Sundarbans.

In Satkhira Range, in the Sundarbans, in the Chunkuri khal there was a patch of forest, about three square miles in extent, which used to be the breeding area for cormorants. It was between Kadamtola and Koikhali within five miles of the northern border of the forest. Further north there were vast areas of paddy fields full of fish of all kinds in the rains.

Herons of many kinds used to build nests on dwarf trees and lay eggs in April-May. In July-August, when the eggs hatched, it used to be a sight to see. Nothing but the heads of herons could be seen in July-August from a dingy during high tide. The young birds could not fly and the parent birds used to feed them and would not leave the nests even when approached by human beings. One could catch them by hand and no shooting was necessary.

During my first posting to the Sundarbans, I paid several visits to that area in the season to enjoy the sight. On many occasions I saw crocodiles lying under the trees, in shallow water and catching every bird that dropped from the nest. The birds flew away to other parts of the forest and to the villages when the young ones learnt the use of their wings. During severe cyclones in the nineteen-sixties, that area of forest suffered badly and the number of birds was considerably reduced. It was declared as a bird sanctuary and their shooting or snaring was prohibited. I wonder if the steps taken by the Forest Department had any impact on the birds and whether their numbers have increased to the old proportions.

CHAPTER 6

MORE TIGERS

1. The Cattle Lifter Of Rydak.

Rydak, one of the eastern Ranges in Buxa Division in Jalpaiguri district, was a good tiger area. I was posted to that Division in the late spring of 1939. I changed my ·350 Mannlicher magazine rifle for a ·400/·450 double-barrelled rifle by Jeffrey. In November, 1939 I was camping at Rydak. One morning some villagers walked about six miles to Rydak Forest Rest House and reported that the notorious cattle lifter of Rydak had taken away a cow from their shed, the night before.

This tiger was causing regular depredation in the locality. On many previous occasions, some Tea Garden Managers had sat whole nights on machans over the kills but the tiger would not even come near the kill. Only once, it was fired at and missed. This tiger would eat the liver and intestines of the cow the very first night, and if not disturbed, would eat the kill in three or four nights. If the villagers went near the carcass, it would leave the area and go in for fresh cattle from their sheds. It was the month of Ramzan, I was fasting and was not at all keen on sitting up on a machan for the night. At the same time I had full sympathy for the villagers and wanted to relieve them of their worries, if I could.

One of the best shikar elephants of the Forest Department was Shampiari. She was a "Kumirabandh" elephant, about eight feet high, steady for tiger shooting and an excellent howdah elephant.

Before going out for my work, I told the Mahut of Shampiari to collect all materials for the machan from the forest near the Rest House and go with the villagers to find out the kill. He was only to put up a machan on the nearest tree. No one was to tread the ground near the kill. After the machan was constructed, he was to wait for me at the village where I hoped to arrive by car late in the afternoon. I returned from my work around 1 p.m. After a little rest, I left by car with some dry food and a flask of tea for breaking my fast. My Nepali orderly, Dalbahadur accompanied me with a mora. I reached the village at about 4 p.m. and saw the shed from which the cow was taken away. I got up on Shampiari with Dalbahadur and travelled about half a mile into a grass area beyond a patch of forest leading up to a shallow rivulet. I saw the machan tied on a babul tree barely nine feet from the ground. The tree had very little foliage to cover me. The machan had only one faggot, tied between two branches of the tree, facing the kill. The faggot could be used as a railing. The other three sides of the machan were absolutely open. There was no ladder, nor was one necessary.

We stepped up on the machan straight from the back of the elephant. I sat on the stool and kept my rifle resting on the side opposite to the kill. After we took up our position, I asked the Mahut to press the grass down between the machan and the kill, a distance of about twenty yards. The Mahut, who had seen many tiger shoots in the forests of Buxa Division, told me that the tiger would approach the kill from the tree forest. He left us there and I instructed him to come back to the machan if he heard the report of the gun or at about 9 p. m. to take us back to the village.

Within about ten minutes of his departure, I noticed a movement of grass, absolutely in a straight line, from the side to which the elephant had gone. I was so exposed on the machan that I did not move and give away my position to the tiger till it came up to the kill. It came to the edge of the pressed grass, put its head out, looked at the kill which was untouched and then pulled back into the grass. I could see it walk to the river and then have a good bath, lying on one side for some time and then on the other. Thereafter it walked away from the machan.

We two sat very quietly till dusk. When the time for breaking my fast came, I told Dalbahadur to open the tiffin box. Just then the tiger was also coming directly towards the machan from behind me. Dalbahadur, who had no cover, gave me the warning of the approaching tiger. He was breathing so hard that I could hear his heart beating. I took no notice and made no move. I finished one small cake and put the other into my mouth when I could hear the tiger snorting at the foot marks of the elephant, under the tree. The tiger then lay flat on the ground on its tummy and started crawling under the grass towards the kill. It moved fast directly under my tree like a snake. I could have hit it with a stone but even then I did not pick up my rifle. It went about ten yards, stood up, turned its head and had a last look backwards before walking up to the kill. I picked up the rifle, pushed forward the safety catch and got ready to shoot. I was directly behind the tiger and was waiting to get its side before pulling the trigger. On reaching the kill, it did not wait even a second, bent its two forelegs and lifted up the carcass and dropped it a few feet away. I could only see its balls between the two hind legs. Just as it put its mouth again into the kill, I fired at the shoulder down the spine. It fell on its back and bounced into the tall grass like a golf ball and bounced a second time.

I stood up on the machan, very alert for a second shot if I noticed any movement in the grass. After about three minutes, I heard a murmur, its last breath. Dalbahadur said it was finished but I was not so sure that I had hit it at a vital part. It was also my first shot with my new rifle and I did not know how the bullet would behave. Anyway, I put the safety catch on and comfortably finished my repast. The moon was up and the weather was pleasant. Neither Dalbahadur nor I was attacked by the tiger though it could reach the machan even if it only stood on its hind legs. The Mahut arrived with Shampiari and a villager in about half an hour, heard the story and wanted to look for the tiger. I decided against it and went back to the Rest House.

Next morning, when the sun was well up, I went back to the machan with all the seven elephants available at Rydak to drive the tiger if necessary. There was not

a drop of the tiger's blood near the carcass of the cow and some of the mahuts were in doubt if the tiger was hit. I knew to which side it had bounced and ordered the grass to be pressed. It did not take us three minutes before we came to the stiff dead body of the tiger. We picked it up on the back of an elephant and returned to Rydak. That was the end of the Cattle lifter of Rydak. It measured nine feet six inches between pegs. It would have measured longer if I could recover the body the previous evening. It had an unusually short tail but a magnificent head, the best I ever shot.

2. Mafida And Rafika Serenade The Tiger.

The shooting in the Buxa Forest Division in Jalpaiguri district was leased to a Shooting Club for a fixed Annual rental. The Club used to get all the revenue realised from Shooting Permits issued by the Forest Department. For game preservation, the Club engaged a number of special guards who were controlled by a Game Warden of the Forest Department. Shikaris from outside the district of Jalpaiguri were allowed to shoot only one tiger a year. The local shikaris were allowed two tigers annually but hardly any body shot more than one.

In the cold weather of 1939-40, I had already shot my tiger and was not keen on shooting a second one. My wife, Mafida, joined me in January, 1940, and her niece, Rafika, also came down with her from Shillong to spend the cold weather in the Dooars. We were camping at Chilapata, the forest adjoining the only Game Sanctuary of Bengal at Hasimara. Chilapata was also the headquarters of the Game Warden who was then the Range Officer of that Range.

One morning in February, I went out with the Range Officer to inspect some forest work when news came from Chilapata forest village, about seven miles north of the Forest Rest House we were living in, that a tiger had killed a cow the previous evening and had carried it into a sal plantation. Mafida on her own instructed the villagers to put up a machan near the kill with the assurance that I would go in the afternoon for the shoot. An elephant was sent there to help. I heard the news of the tiger and the arrangements made when I returned to the Rest House.

After lunch, the excited girls allowed me barely an hour's rest while the rifle was sunned and cleared of grease. We started after tea by car. The Game Warden was with me. Of course Mafida and Rafika were also in the party. When I told the Game Warden that I had already shot a tiger that cold weather and was not keen on shooting another, he replied that this tiger was not for me but for the benefit of Mem Saheb and to destroy an animal that was a menace to the forest villagers.

We first went to Chilapata Forest Beat Office, left the car with the driver and got up on the elephant. The kill was about a mile away. The sal plantation was young and three poles had to be tied together for the machan which was about twenty feet high from the ground. Mafida, Rafika and I sat on moras, and the Game Warden went back to the village. The cow was well secured with a strong rope which was

anchored in the ground by tying the rope with sal billets well dug and buried under two feet of earth. My seat was right at the back with the rifle resting against the railing in front. I was advised by the Game Warden to let the tiger start feeding on the carcass before I shot, so that the ladies could have a good look at the tiger eating its kill. All of us had books which we began to glance at in order to prevent any whispering on the machan or excitement about the tiger shoot. The kill was lying just beside a patch of thatch grass which I would have liked pressed by the elephant but the Game Warden told me that the tiger would approach the kill from the opposite direction as a stream was flowing on that side, a few hundred yards away.

Just before sun set, I heard the sparrows and other birds fluttering near the grass patch and I noticed a slight movement. I put my hand on Mafida's shoulder and the three of us looked at the kill. First came the left paw and then the beautiful head of a tiger who caught the hind part of the kill and with one pull picked it up and took it into the grass. We did not even see the body of the tiger. The rope, with which the kill was tied, snapped like a thread. I stood up but could not even locate the kill where it was moved. I clapped my hands and then could hear the tiger moving away from the grass patch. The car was to come for us at 9 p.m. There was no point in waiting there for three hours. I decided to get down and go back to the Beat Office to bring the car or the elephant. Mafida was most reluctant to let me go when we all knew the tiger was in the neighbourhood. But relying on my ability to use the rifle, if needs be, I left.

I walked to Chilapata village through the forest and returned with the car and the Game Warden after about an hour by which time it was quite dark in the plantation. When we reached the machan, about twenty yards from the motor road, we could hear the two ladies serenading the tiger as melodiously and loudly as they could. They did not even have a torch with them and singing was the best they could do in the circumstances.

We drove back to the Forest Rest House and returned to Chilapata the next morning. Two low machans about ten feet from the ground were put up near the stream and a drive was organised. Some monkeys came out but there was no trace of the tiger. On reconnoitering later, it was noticed that the kill was carried to a cane bush across the stream and completely eaten. A few pieces of bones only were left here and there.

3. The Governor Draws A Blank.

A tiger shoot was arranged for the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Herbert, in the month of March 1941, when the leaves started to fall off the deciduous trees and the forest was quite open. It was soon after a kheda operation in which a number of wild elephants were caught.

I collected about forty elephants, a good few were tuskers and looked very staunch. My Conservator of Forests, the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police, all came from Jalpaiguri. A temporary Post and Telegraph Office had to be set up for urgent messages specially as it was war time.

The area was, of course, Sankos where there was only a small two roomed bunglow on the bank of the Sankos river, a very picturesque site. Assam was on the east across the river. The bunglow was fitted up for the Governor and his wife. Thatched huts with bamboo mat walls and attached bath rooms were constructed for all officers including two A.D.Cs. to the Governor. A contingent of Eastern Frontier Rifles was drafted. Luckily they did not accompany the Governor into the forest to disturb the shoot. A big long hut was constructed for sitting and dining.

The Game Warden was in charge of the shoot but I was in overall charge and moved to the camp two days before the date of arrival of the Governor. The other officers reached in the morning of the appointed day. The Governor, piloted by the Superintendent of Police, drove by car from Jalpaiguri, about one hundred and twenty miles to the west and was expected late in the afternoon. My responsibility started with his arrival at the camp and continued till his departure.

After an early tea, I advised all the assembled officers to get ready to receive the august guest but they were not expecting him before an hour and a half. Unexpectedly a car arrived driven by Sir John himself with his wife sitting beside and the Superintendent of Police at the back. Although I had never met him before, I guessed he was the Governor and opened the door of the car when it stopped near the lounge shed. He came out and introduced himself as Jack and introduced his wife as Mary and asked who I was. I said I was Ahmad. Not satisfied, he wanted to know what my parents called me. When I replied, "Yusuf", he told me that in camp we would all be known and called by our first names and not Sir, or Madam. I conducted them to the lounge shed which was fitted up with some settees. The Governor's wife immediately went to her room. She came back washed and groomed and we were all relaxed and at ease. The Commissioner and his wife came out of their hut and the camp life started.

About twenty cows were tied as bait in different parts of Sankos forest that night and at crack of dawn, the Game Warden and I went out in a car to find out how many were killed. The local Forest Beat Officers were also instructed to gather the information in their respective jurisdiction. The place where the cows were tied were all marked on a map and it was quite easy for us to get to them. To our great joy, we found that two cows were killed at two different points about eight miles apart. We were sure that at least there were two tigers. It was decided to beat out the tiger in the grass land, which would be easier.

On returning to camp around 8 a.m. after covering about forty miles on the forest roads we found that the camp was just rising. I shaved and bathed and went for break-fast quite refreshed. Break-fast was a casual meal—no definite hour and no gong rang. One could have it any time he liked. The Governor and his wife did not come down to the dining shed till after 10 a. m. His first complaint was that he could not sleep well at night. I asked him if he had dreamt of a tiger. He wished he had as that would be exciting. But he complained that the armed guard on the ground in front of the bunglow made too much noise with his munition boots and the Governor

knew every time he clicked his heels and turned about. The Superintendent of Police was told and he immediately sent a station wagon for rubber soled canvas shoes for the Guards from Alipurduar about forty miles away. I was glad it was not my worry.

Outside the Rest House compound, the Game Warden sent out all the elephants and beaters to the area where the shoot was to take place and surrounded the forest with them. All men had their meals early and reached the place by 9.30 a. m. A line for placing the howdah elephants was selected and all grass and bushes were pressed down by the elephants so that no animal could cross it unseen. We arrived there by car at about mid-day and got up on the respective howdahs. The Governor's wife honoured me by selecting me as her partner on the howdah. The Governor took the Commissioner. The Conservator of Forests was on the third howdah with an A. D. C. There were altogether five howdahs at the shoot. The guns were placed at predetermined points by the Game Warden who carefully noted the likely routes the tiger could probably take when driven. This was done when the line was cleared. After that the Game Warden went on an elephant to the beaters.

The tiger is the most wary animal in the forest and when driven is the first to come out. In fact, I noticed, on many occasions, that the tiger comes out of the forest even before the birds start flying out. It was proposed, in this instance, that the forest was to be beaten from two sides. The drive was started in one direction and after a time, at a signal from the Game Warden, the beaters and elephants were to drive from another side. The noise from two sides would force the tiger to come out at the particular spot where the Governor's howdah was placed camouflaged by some grass covering the head of the elephant.

As soon as the drive started, I could mark the tiger from the movement of the tall grass and pointed it out to Lady Mary. It was her first experience of a tiger shoot. In spite of my assurance and her knowledge that I had shot a number of tigers before, she got too excited and signalled to the Governor who did not seem to realise what was happening. When the beat started from the second side, the tiger galloped through the grass, never came out on the cleared line and escaped. No one even saw the tiger that day.

The baits were tied again that evening, The next morning I went out early with the Game Warden and found that one tigress (with good length and small paw marks) had killed a cow and dragged it to a narrow strip of forest beside a stream which formed the southern boundary of the Sankos forest. Beyond the stream was cultivated land and a village. We thought that was the easiest animal to beat out. Immediately we returned to camp about ten miles away. Every body got excited at the news.

The Governor and his wife also had a more restful night as the security guards had rubber soled shoes and made no noise. The President of the Shooting Club was invited to join the party that morning and I requested him to accompany the Governor on the howdah. I spoke to Lady Mary and she agreed to let my boss, the Conservator of Forests, sit behind her on her howdah. I decided to go on the beat myself on

a saddled elephant. No line had to be cleared as between the strip of forest along the stream and the main forest there was a forest road which the tigress had to cross to escape. The Governor's howdah was put on one side, next was his wife's and then three more howdahs near the side from which the beat was to start. My elephant was down the bank a little beyond the Governor's elephant.

After placing us all in position, the Game Warden went back to the beat on an elephant and started the drive. It did not take even five minutes when I saw a tigress walking towards me through the strip of forest. I told my Mahut to go forward a bit and immediately the tigress scrambled up the bank. It was so near that I could hit it with a stone. As soon as it was on the road, bang, bang went two shots. I told my Mahut to wait instead of going up at once as I did not know whether the tigress was killed or only wounded. When the beaters arrived we all went up to the road and learnt that the Governor did not fire at all. On getting up on the road in front of the Governor, the tigress was flabergasted for a moment, stood still and then bolted between his elephant and Lady Mary's elephant. The Conservator of Forests fired twice but missed it clean. Any way the tigress was seen. Lady Mary came on my elephant and we started moving towards the car park about a mile away. I then heard some one calling me, "Yusuf, Yusuf." We stopped and found the Governor coming towards us on his howdah. On coming near us he said, "Yusuf, please take me also with you." I felt pity for him and picked him up also to sit beside me. He was immediately taunted by his wife, who said, "Jack, I knew you were slow but I never knew you were so slow." I wanted to know what had happened. The Governor related that the tigress came up beautifully and even stood for about a minute hesitating which way to run. He aimed at her and was waiting for her to get away from a hanging creeper but then she bolted so fast that he could not pull the trigger of his rifle. As there was only one more day for the camp before he had to get back to Calcutta, he wanted to know if he would be given another chance. I told him that I would surely try my best.

That afternoon, I drove the Governor and his wife about fifteen miles to a place where a number of wild elephants, caught in January, were being trained. I showed them a cow elephant that I had selected for the Forest Department. As she was noosed on the 23rd January, Lady Mary's birth-day, she wanted to know if the elephant could also be named after her. My Conservator who was also with us decided to call her 'Lady Mary'.

The baits were tied again that evening and the Game Warden and I went out on our round early the next morning. One cow was killed on the north-eastern part of Sankos forest very near the Assam border, with the Sankos river flowing by one side. We decided to beat that. I was on a howdah with an A.D.C. who was sitting in front of me. The next was the Governor's howdah again with the President of the Shooting Club as his companion. Lady Mary was on the third howdah with the Commissioner and the other two howdahs were further beyond.

It was a long beat and as nothing came out on the cleared line in front of the howdahs for nearly twenty minutes, the shikaris were getting restive. Then we heard the report of a gun from the river. The Game Warden, who was on an elephant walking along the river, saw the tiger trying to break through and fired his gun to divert the animal towards the howdahs. Sure enough, a beautiful tiger came along a nala and stood at the edge of the clearance with its left foreleg up and turned its head looking at the Governor's elephant. It stood in that position for a good minute. Bang went the Governor's rifle. Instead of aiming at its body behind the shoulder, he must have aimed at the head and he missed. As the bullet passed, the tiger pulled its head back and ran for his dear life. My shikari, the A.D.C. fired two shots before the tiger crossed the line and escaped into the forest beyond. That was the end of the Governor's shoot, two tigers were put up but none was hit. The Governor drew a blank.

4. Rezia's First Day In The Sundarbans.

From 1943 to 1946 I was at Darjeeling. Mafida kept a very open house at Willowdale and entertained right from the Governor of Bengal down to the common man. We had a very wide circle of friends and after my wife's death, on the 21st June 1946 I found the associations too painful to settle down to. Rezia, was sent back to Shillong to her aunt, Mrs. Z. A. Rahman, who was then the President of the Assam Legislative Council, to continue her studies in the Loreto Convent there. I was ready for a transfer. I was expecting a post in the Development Circle. But during the second World War, there was hardly any organised work in the Sundarbans, conditions there had gone out of hand and Government decided to post me in charge of the Sundarbans Division once again to bring order out of chaos.

So, on the 1st January, 1947, I arrived at Khulna. Rezia had winter holidays and came down from Shillong to travel with me. My old friend, S. J. Curtis, was then acting as the Chief Conservator of Forests and was present there to give us a hearty welcome. He himself briefed me about the miserable conditions of the Division and assured me all out support in whatever action I deemed necessary to take to pull things up.

After a few days at headquarters, I decided to go down to the Sundarbans and steam was ordered in S. L. Harrier. This was Rezia's first visit to the Sundarbans. She had not seen me use my rifle since I left Buxa Division and was full of excitement. I inspected the offices at Dhangmari and Chandpai, talked to the Bowalis and collected general information. I spent quite some time at the latter place where there was a young Englishman, Wheelan, undergoing training as a Range Officer. It was tea time when we turned south down the Passur river beyond Mangla.

The high tide had just turned and the Harrier was moving fast. We passed the Bhadra gang and proceded to the confluence of Cheilabogi khal with the Passur when the launch was turned round and a crew ran down from the navigation bridge to inform us that there was a tiger on the bank. Rezia and I were having tea in the saloon.

We went up immediately with the rifle and a box of fresh cartridges. I saw the tiger standing beside a grass patch near the junction of a small khal with the Passur. Rezia could not distinguish the tiger from that distance as its colour merged with the colour of the dry tall grass.

When we came to within one hundred yards, the tiger turned and faced the launch. Rezia could then see it quite distinctly and was very excited. I put the rifle on the railing and took an aim. The tiger started moving back into the forest but I fired from a good eighty yards. It looked as if the tiger jumped back into the forest. When the launch neared the bank, four members of crew quickly went to the spot in the jolly boat and shouted that the tiger was hit. When I inquired why they thought so, they replied that the tiger was bowled over by the shot and left the mark of its whole body on the wet mud before it had bounced. I was not sure where I hit the tiger as it was a very quick shot. Old Kala Mia, Serang, took four more crew with his gun and my shot gun in a dingy and went up the small khal. I told him that he was to fire at the tiger again even if he found it dead.

After about fifteen minutes he came back to tell me that the tiger was lying dead on the bank of the khal and that he did not consider it necessary to put another shot into it. I was not convinced and I myself went out in the jolly boat with the dingy in front of me, leaving Rezia in the launch with my Nepali Bearer, Singbir, and the cook. The tide had gone down considerably by that time and the Serang could not easily spot the point where the tiger was seen. As we were moving slowly up and down the khal, we suddenly saw some animal move out of a Kewa Kanta bush. On approaching the point, we noticed a pool of blood—that was where the wounded tiger was lying. Kala Mia felt very sad that he did not fire at the tiger as I had wanted him to do. I sent him back to the launch and with only two men went further up the stream in the dingy. As the tide was running out and the bank of the khal was considerably high, we could not see anything in the thick bushes in the falling light. We returned after about half an hour. It was dusk. I found Rezia lying on the bed on her tummy and weeping. When I asked the reason, as fondly as I could, she replied she had already lost her Mummy and she feared that her Daddy would also be killed by a tiger on the first day of her visit to the Sundarbans. Poor darling !

We were soon joined by Wheelan, the Range Officer, who came in his motor launch. We stayed there that night, had dinner and rested. The following morning, after break-fast when the sun was well up, we went in a body back to the forest. We soon found the trail of the tiger that bled profusely as it moved up along the bank of the khal. After going some distance, I could smell the tiger. I signalled to the men to fall back and cautiously walked forward with the rifle ready to fire. I could see the profile of the tiger lying on its side in a bush but could not make out where its head or tail was. From a distance of about twenty yards, I took an accurate aim at its spine and fired. The shot only shook the carcass, as the tiger was already stone dead. We came back with the tiger to the launch. That was the trophy Rezia got on her first day in the Sundarbans.

5. I Proposed To Sit In A Cage As A Bait.

This was also in the Sundarbans. An old tiger in Betmorgang had killed a number of men. Some were wood-cutters but mostly they were fishermen. If was a very good area for fishing. near the Bay of Bengal and yet sheltered. When the wood-cutters were killed in the forest, their bodies were recovered, but the fishermen were carried away from their boats at night and very often the cases were not even reported. This went on for several years and no forest work was allowed in that area.

When I heard the various stories, I decided to construct a strong cage with sundri poles and sit in it on an open boat in a stream in that area. If the tiger got up on the boat, all I need have done was to push the barrel of the rifle out through the poles of the cage and pull the trigger. I had to wait till Rezia left for Shillong before ordering the construction of the cage. The news soon got about and a number of Bowalies came to me for permission to cut golpata from that forest. They were taking the village shikaries and ojhas who would keep the tiger away from them. As there was no trace of this old tiger for more than two months, it was suggested that it might have even died a natural death. I agreed to open a golpata coupe. Instructions were however issued that no one was to leave any golpata in a dingy boat at night beside their big boat. From the stories I heard, I learnt that it was generally at night that this tiger used to swim to the fishermen's boats and carry them away.

People were cautious at the beginning but became lax as the days passed. In one party of golpata cutters, there were three persons, one was young and newly wed, while the other two were older. A lot of golpata was cut one day and as it was already late when they returned to their big boat, the golpata was left in the dingy and they started preparing their meal instead of transferring the leaves on to the big boat. They were all tired after the long day's work, had their meal and retired. The oldest man slept along the small opening in the roof of the boat, through which the water in the boat is baled out. The other two slept across the boat with their feet towards the slit. They had a hurricane lantern hanging from the roof inside the boat and they all fell asleep. Towards the later part of the night, the moon was up, the tiger swam to the dingy, got up on the heaped up golpata and entered into the boat. He walked across the old man without touching him and caught the young man by the throat. He gave a groan and spread out his legs and arms which woke up the other two men. When they opened their eyes, they saw the hairy visitor in the boat but even before they could shout, the tiger jumped into the water over the dingy with the dead young man still in its mouth. The two men saw their companion carried away by the tiger which entered into the forest on reaching the bank. They started shouting and tins were beaten and gongs were sounded from all the neighbouring boats.

The Coupe Office where the cage was being constructed by carpenters was a few miles off this place. The Coupe Officer was informed of this incident next morning, and the golpata cutters all became panicky again. There was a local shikari who was supervising the construction of the cage. He came down with the Coupe Officer, armed

with a gun, to the place of occurrence. They entered the forest in a body, followed the pug marks of the tiger and found that the body of the man killed was carried about fifty yards along the bank of the khal. A good part, consisting of the stomach, intestines and breast, was eaten. The head, the back and the legs still remained.

The shikari then laid two trap guns, one on the side to which the tiger retreated at the approach of the men and the other on the side from which the tiger carried the dead man. It was quite late in the afternoon before they completed the laying of the guns. They then went back to their respective dingies. They did not go more than two hundred yards from the junction of the small khal and the Betmorgang. Within half an hour of leaving the dead body of the man with two guns on either side, they heard a big report of gun fire. They did not go back to the kill that evening but proceeded to the Coupe Office. Next morning, they returned to the site with more guns in their hands and found that the tiger was lying dead on the side to which it had retreated. It had two bullet holes on its head almost joined to each other.

On getting the news, I went to the golpata coupe after a few days and got the head and the skin of the tiger. The animal was so old that even the fur had dropped off its body in many patches. From the head it appeared that one top canine tooth was missing and only half of the other was still sticking in the upper jaw. It could not probably kill any animal except human beings. It could not chew any hard bone. The body must also have shrunk so that when it had returned to the kill and struck the wire tied to the trigger of the trap gun, the bullet, instead of hitting its heart or lung, hit the head which must have been turned towards the gun at the time. Any way that was the end of the old tiger of Betmorgang and I never got the chance to sit in the cage.

GLOSSARY

A. D. C. : Aide-de-camp.
assemlota : Eupatorium, a weed plant in the forest.
babul tree : Accacia arabica, found in the dry riverine forests of North Bengal
baen tree : Avecenia, tree found in the Sunderbans.
bagh : tiger.
baid : low cultivated ground between two knolls.
basha : a hut.
bawali or bowali : a local name for wood-cutters in the Sunderbans.
beels : marshes.
cane break : patches of thorny cane in the forest.
Chakma : a tribe of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
chala : a knoll, a local name used in Dacca and Mymensingh Districts.
chapaties : (pl). a thin cake of unleavened bread.
char-islands : sandy islands in the rivers.
chhota kuthi : a small stockade for catching wild elephants.
coupe : an area marked in the forest for felling trees.
dak : mail.
dakwala : mail carrier
dao : a curved knife used for cutting wood.
darbar : an audience chamber, a reception or levee.
D. F. O. : Divisional Forest Officer.
dhoti : a cotton fabric, loin cloth used by the Hindus.
dingy : a small rowing boat used in the rivers, with no roof.
dipterocarp : a tall timber tree, local names are sal, garjan, telsur.
fundi : elephant catchers
gajari forest : a coppiced dipterocarp forest in Dacca and Mymensingh Districts.
gamar tree : Gmelina arborea, a valuable tree in the forests of Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet Districts.
gandar : rhinoceros.
ganesh : a male elephant with one tusk ; a Hindu god.
gang : a river
garjan : a Dipterocarp, found in Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts.
garo : a hill tribe, originally from the Garo Hills of eastern India.
golpata : Nipa frutican, a palm found along the banks of rivers and channels in the Sunderbans.
ghat : a landing on a river bank.
hantal : Phoenix, a thorny palm found in the Sunderbans.
hazak : a big hand lamp in which the oil is pumped before the mantle is lighted.
howdah : two rows of seats enclosed on four sides fixed on an elephant's back.
huricane : an oil lamp encased so as to defy strong wind, which can be carried by hand.
I. C. S. : Indian Civil Service.
jhum : shifting cultivation practised in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
jungle murgis : wild fowl
kalij : pheasant found in Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet.
keora tree : Sonerata apetala the biggest tree found in the tidal forests of the Sunderbans.
khoir trees : Accacia catechu, found in the dry riverine forests of North Bengal.
khal : a narrow stream.
kheda : an enclosure for catching wild elephants ; the operation of catching wild elephants.

khukri : a sharp curved Nepali knife, carried in a sheath.
kumirabandh : a term used for elephant with short legs, strong and thick body and big broad head.
kutcha : unmetalled.
kutchari : a Magistrate's court in the town.
machan : a platform made of faggots and planks on a tree.
Madrassi : people of Madras State in India.
mahut : the driver of an elephant.
M. B. E. : Member of the British Empire, a title awarded by the British Government.
Marwari : professional businessmen from Marwar in Western India ; commonly money lenders.
mela shikar : catching wild elephants one by one in Sylhet District.
manjhies : (pl.) boat-men.
mithun : bison.
mora : bamboo stool.
mukna : a tuskless male elephant.
murgis : fowl.
Naib : a revenue officer in the villages.
nala : a ravine ; a water course.
oaks : Quercus ; local names in Darjeeling district are **buch, phalat.**
ojha : a village apothecary.
paddy : rice in the husk.
pal : a single fly canvas tent
patawala : assistant to the elephant driver who collects fodder.
polao : rice cooked with spices in butter.
P. W. D. : Public Works Department.
sal tree : a Dipterocarp, common in the forests of Jalpaiguri, Dacca and Mymensingh districts.
salt-lick : a place where salt mixed with mud is found in the forest, licked by the wild animals.
Santals : tribal people from Santalpargana in Bihar, India.
sampan : a boat constructed with planks, used in the coastal districts of Bangladesh.
serang : the captain of a launch or steamer of the rivers.
shikar : hunt (v). game (n).
shikari : hunter.
shulas : aerial roots of trees in the Sunderbans on the ground.
sundari : Heritiera minor, a common tree of the Sunderbans.
tarja wall : a split bamboo wall.
taungya : shifting cultivation of agricultural crop ; forest plantations continue to grow thereafter.
tila : a knoll, local name in Dacca and Sylhet forests.
tusker : a male elephant with tusks.
zamindar : a land owner.
zamindarbari : house of the land owner.

Notes

1. Crocodile : Period of gestation—One month approximately, after the eggs are laid.
2. Rifle bore : Maximum diameter in cms. ·400/·450—Maximum diameter of bore ·400 cms but the cartridge takes a charge of ·450 bore rifle.
3. 12 bore gun cartridge ; For a $2^1/_2$ inch long cartridge, L. G. has 7 pellets ; S. G. 15 ; B.B. 70, No ; 1 100 ; No ; 2 130 ; No ; 3 150 No. 4 200 ; No ; 6 250 ; No ; 8 300.