

Pygmy Hog and Hispid Hare

The re-discovery of the pygmy hog *Sus salvanius* in some numbers in the Himalayan foothills of Assam this year was an exciting event in which the members of the FPS Indian tour participated: they obtained what may be the first photographs ever taken of this diminutive rare animal. When in April fourteen were captured as well as one hispid hare (probably much more endangered), and held on tea estates in Assam the FPS sent an investigator, Mr Jeremy Mallinson, to report. The following account is largely based on his report.

In March this year members of the FPS tour in India saw and photographed a tiny wild pig they thought must be a pygmy hog. This was in the Manas Sanctuary, in the Himalayan foothills on the Bhutan border. Their leader, Dr David Jenkins, however, being a good scientist said firmly, 'feared extinct – identification to be confirmed'. But unknown to the FPS party pygmy hogs were being seen – and caught and eaten – in some numbers some 70 or 80 miles to the east, thanks to an extensive fire which swept through fifty square miles of the tall grass areas known as thatchlands, between the Rajagarh forest reserve and the Attareekhat tea estates in Mangaldai, owned by Williamson Magor & Co. The fire drove the pygmy hogs out of their natural cover.

For some time there had been rumours of pygmy hogs, and in January this year Mr Richard Magor, Director of the Attareekhat Tea Co. and a founder of the Assam Valley Wildlife Scheme, had asked his staff to try to secure some. So when Mr Richard Graves, manager of one of the estates, heard what was happening, he offered to buy (at a higher price than the market rate) any pygmy hogs that were brought to him alive, and on March 31st received the first two; twelve more came along at intervals during April. As a precaution against disease they were divided into two groups and four sent to Mr Robin Wrangham at the Paneery estate. Three more animals were held on another tea estate. Three animals died and three or four young were born soon after capture.

All the animals are now held under the Trusteeship of the Assam Valley Wildlife Scheme, founded early this year by the proprietors of the tea estates in the neighbourhood with the object of conserving the wildlife; Mrs Gandhi has now consented to be Patron of the scheme.

Jersey Trust Initiative

Some months before these events Gerald Durrell, Hon. Director of the Jersey Wildlife Trust, who had received reports of pygmy hogs in this area from Mr J. Tessier-Yandell, suggested to the FPS that he would like to mount an expedition with the approval of the Indian authorities, FPS and IUCN, to look for and if possible capture a group of pygmy hogs to start captive breeding at the Trust's zoo in Jersey, which concentrates on breeding endangered species, especially the smaller and rather obscure ones. This was approved by the FPS Council, but with the news that at least 14 animals were already in captivity the Society decided that the situation should be investigated, and asked Jeremy Mallinson, deputy director to the Jersey Wildlife Preservation

Trust, to go out to Assam to advise on the conditions in which the animals were being kept and make recommendations for the future. This he was able to do in a visit lasting from May 22 to June 5. The FPS sponsored his journey to Calcutta, and Mr Richard Magor, Director of Williamson Magor & Co, sponsored the onward journey from Calcutta to Assam and entertained him while there. Mr Mallinson made detailed descriptions of eleven of the animals – measurements, weight, etc, their condition and behaviour – and advised on their diet. He also visited their habitat in the thatchlands by jeep and flew over it by plane. His full report will be published later.

Pygmy hogs are a blackish brown colour suffused with rusty red, and the largest adult Mr Mallinson measured was only nine inches high at the shoulder. Both tail and ears are short and hairless, and the females have only three pairs of teats compared with the six of other pigs. They go about in small herds of up to 15 or 20 animals, the males fearlessly attacking, charging and cutting at the legs of human intruders at lightning speed. When disturbed they move at the same lightning speed, keeping close together and then piling in on top of one another in a new refuge in the thatch.

Lord Frederic Hamilton, in his autobiography *Here, There and Everywhere*, describing a shooting expedition with the Maharajah of Cooch Bihar in 1891, says that they 'go about in droves of about fifty, and move through the grass with such incredible rapidity that the eye is unable to follow them. The elephants, oddly enough, are scared to death by the pygmy hogs, for the little creatures have tushes as sharp as razors, and gash the elephants' feet with them as they run past'.

The pygmy hog was first recorded in 1847 and described by B. H. Hodgson in his paper *On a new form of Hog kind or Suidae* in the May issue of the *Journal* of the Asiatic Field Society, Bengal. Hodgson stated that it must seem almost incredible that so tiny an animal should effectually resist men; he thought it had escaped all notice due to being exclusively confined to the deep recesses of primeval forest. The scarcity of records since, and the fact that the animal is still virtually unstudied in the wild state, have led some authors to suggest that it was extinct, but the *Red Data Book* suggested that it probably survived in parts of Assam and Nepal.

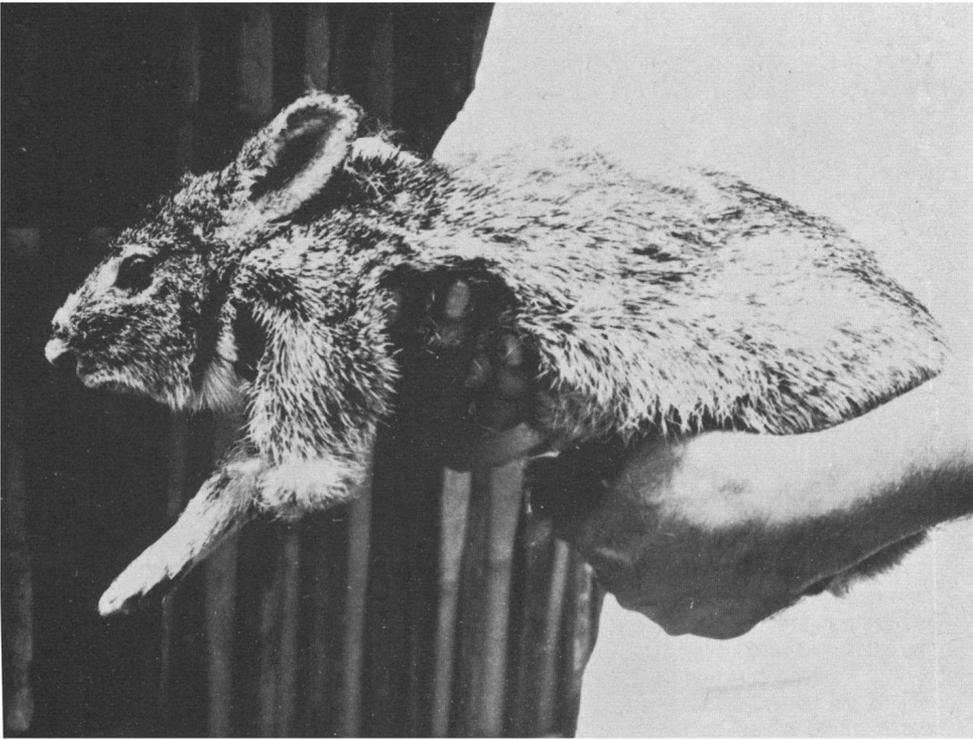
Their habitat, is the jungle and thatchlands of the Himalayan foothills. This terrain starts in the Naini Tal district, 150 miles north-east of Delhi, and extends 600 miles almost to the West Bengal border, starting again in the Manas valley, where the FPS party saw them, and extending east up to Lakhimpur, in north-east Assam, another 300 miles. The width of this foothill belt is between 5 and 15 miles. Mr Mallinson believes that in the Bhutan - north-west Assam part of the range the pygmy hog is still fairly numerous, and that if the habitat could be left intact would probably survive unaided. But settlers from Nepal, who are coming in increasing numbers, have made clearings in the forest and the thatch with consequent disturbance for the pygmy hogs, and it is feared that, if the present rate of settlement continues, most of the pygmy hog's habitat will have disappeared in ten years or less. He recommends the immediate establishment of at least two captive breeding units in enclosed areas within their present habitat,



PYGMY HOG

Above two pygmy hogs photographed in the Manas Sanctuary in Assam, in March, by a member of the FPS Indian tour, L.J. Turtle. This may be the first photograph ever taken of the pygmy hog.

Right one of the captured animals on the Atareekhat tea estate photographed by J.J.C. Mallinson



A HISPID HARE *Caprolagus hispidus* captured last April in Assam. The small ears and short stiff brush-like hair are typical of this very rare animal, also known as the harsh-furred hare.
J.J.C. Mallinson

that a comprehensive evaluation of the habitat should be made, and a professional capture operation undertaken, under the aegis of the Survival Service Commission of IUCN, to ensure a good dispersed stock for captive breeding.

Hispid Hare

In the same area and the same month (April) as the pygmy hogs were captured, a hispid hare was also caught. This species rates a red sheet (extreme danger) in the *Red Data Book*, and no estimate could be given of its present numbers. Unfortunately only one hare has been captured, which Mr Mallinson was able to examine and photograph. He recommends that this species should be included with the pygmy hog in any capture operation and breeding programme.

Protection in Assam

The Assam Valley Wildlife Scheme, which is acting as trustee for the rare pygmy hogs – see report above – was founded early this year by the proprietors of the tea estates in Bishnauth and Mangaldai, and is open to all other tea districts in Assam. Mrs Gandhi has consented to be Patron. The proprietors of the estates joining the scheme have agreed to prohibit the shooting, trapping and capture of game animals on their land, including tiger, leopard, sambhur, and hog deer, to encourage wildlife conservation in the neighbourhood, and to work for the establishment of sanctuaries and prevention of poaching.

New Sanctuary near Delhi

The Sultanpur jheels near Delhi, a wonderful area for birds especially waders, consisting of 246 acres of marsh and shallow pools, has been bought and declared a Wild Bird Sanctuary by the Haryana State Government. Many delegates to the IUCN Assembly in New Delhi in 1969, including the FPS representatives, urged that this should be done as the area was threatened with development, and when it was brought to her notice Mrs Gandhi personally recommended that it should be made a reserve.

Crash Programme for India

An indefinite ban on the shooting of endangered species, a three-year ban on shooting of all wild animals and prohibition or at least severe restriction on folidol and all similar poisons are demanded by a committee of Indian wildlife experts, chaired by Dr Karan Singh, Minister for Tourism, as part of a crash programme to save India's wildlife from 'approaching extinction'. The only 'silver lining' the committee see in the situation is the fact that Mrs Gandhi 'is fully seized of the problem of wildlife conservation, is a lover of wildlife and is determined to save it'.

Endangered Buffalo

The wild buffalo is in much greater danger of extinction in India than the tiger, according to *Cheetal*, journal of the Wild Life Preservation Society of India. This is largely because of the destruction of its habitat. Not having the popular appeal of the tiger it gets much less attention.