

The royal hunt of tiger and rhinoceros in the Nepalese terai in 1911

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Abstract

King George V took part in a large organized hunt in the Chitwan area of Nepal from 18 to 28 December 1911. During these days, the king and his party killed 18 rhinos, 39 tigers and 4 sloth bears. A young live rhino was presented to them by the prime minister of Nepal and transported to the London Zoo. The events were captured in photographs found in three albums preserved in the library of the Royal Commonwealth Society (University of Cambridge) and the Australian National University.

Résumé

Le roi George V prit part à une grande chasse organisée dans la région népalaise de Chitwan du 18 au 28 décembre 1911. Pendant ces 11 jours, le roi et sa suite ont tué 18 rhinos, 39 tigres et 4 ours lippus. Le Premier ministre du Népal leur présenta aussi un jeune rhino vivant qui fut transporté au Zoo de Londres. Ces événements furent immortalisés par des photographies qui sont rassemblées dans trois albums qui sont conservés à la bibliothèque de la *Royal Commonwealth Society* (Université de Cambridge) et à l'Université Nationale Australienne.

Introduction

An earlier survey of historical sources about rhinos in Nepal by Rookmaaker (2004) recorded shoots organized for British royalty in 1906 and 1921, but rather glossed over a similar event in 1911. When details about a photo album with pictures of this *shikar* became available, a search was made for additional written sources. These were found to include narratives of the royal visit to India and Nepal in Fortescue (1912), anonymous (1914) and Day (1935, largely copied from Fortescue). This enabled us to provide a daily account of the 1911 shoot in Nepal, which focuses on information about rhinos and tigers found in the Nepalese terai. It must be said that

this summary presents rather depressing reading, being a record of who shot and killed what and when. Public opposition to such events was probably largely confined to royal hunting in England (Taylor 2004). We present the facts as found in contemporary sources, give the total of the animals killed, and introduce two sets of photographs portraying this royal excursion to southern Nepal.

The imperial visit to Nepal in 1911

George V (1865–1936), king of Great Britain and Ireland from 1910, went to India in 1911 to be crowned Emperor of India in a great *darbar* in Delhi on 12 December 1911. After the ceremony, a visit to Nepal

to participate in a hunt of tiger and rhinoceros was organized for his pleasure. Although the king of Nepal, Maharajadhiraja Prithivi Bir Bikram Shah Deva (1875–1911), suddenly died on 11 December 1911, it was decided to proceed with the preparations. Hence on 16 December 1911, King George and Queen Mary took different routes from Selimgarh station on the outskirts of Delhi. The king travelled by train and boat via Patna and Bankipore to Bikna Thori, where a temporary station was erected on the Bengal and North-Western Railway (see fig. 1 for localities mentioned in the text). Arriving on Monday, 18 December, at 10 a.m., the king was met by the prime minister and actual ruler of Nepal, HH Projwala-Nepala Taradisha Sri Tin Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana (1863–1929), together with his two sons and British Resident in Nepal Lieutenant-Colonel John Manners-Smith (1864–1920). Here the hunt started and we summarize the daily events from the three books mentioned in the introduction.

Monday, 18 December 1911

From the station of Bikna Thori, the king proceeded by car through the valley of the Rui River on a 13-mile road constructed for the occasion. Here he was

met by General Maharajkumar Sir Baber Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana (1888–1960), the second son of the prime minister. The king and his party went after elephants in the jungle for about 1 mile (1.6 km). At this time the king shot two tigers, which had been secured within a ring formed by the *howdah* elephants.

After motoring for another 19 miles and taking a short break for lunch, the royal party arrived at a second ring of elephants. Lord Durham shot a tiger, the king dispatched a pair of rhinos, and Lord Durham and Lord Annaly between them shot a third rhino.

At 5.30 p.m. they reached the camp at Sukhibar (Sakhi Bar) on the south bank of the River Rapti. The setting was wonderful: 'with a glorious climate, wonderful scenery, and always to the north the incredible panorama of the eternal snows towering into the sky' (Smythies 1961). In the camp a bungalow fitted with electric light had been built for the king, surrounded by the tents of his party. To give an idea of the operation: 'outside the fencing of the camp were various smaller encampments for the Residency Escort, the motor-cars, stables, taxidermists, hospital, laundry, the post and telegraph offices, and other subsidiary services. The camp of the maharaja, who had with him some members of his family as well as his staff and senior officers, was situated also on the river bank a little lower down and behind it, hidden in the jungle,

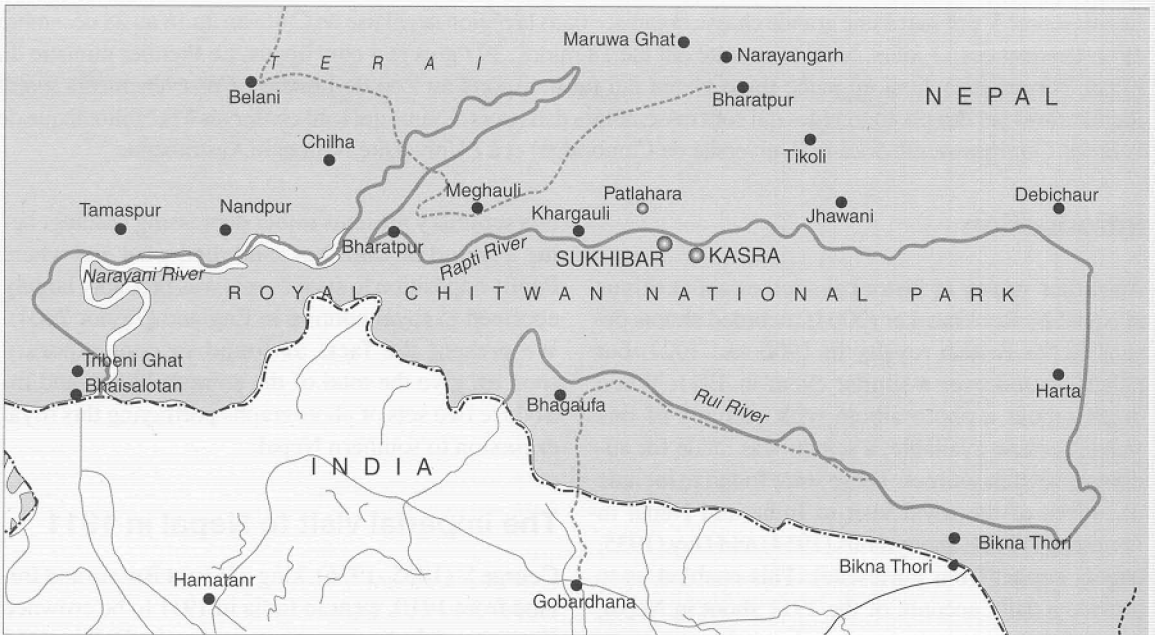


Figure 1. The terai region in Nepal, showing places mentioned in the text.

was the large encampment of His Excellency's followers, who numbered twelve thousand, besides six hundred elephants with two thousand attendants' (anonymous, 1914: 231).

Tuesday, 19 December 1911

Every night baits were put out for tigers over a large area of the country. News of a tiger on a kill reached the camp just after mid-day. A party went out and the king shot the animal. In the afternoon, Sir Charles Cust shot another tiger, while Sir Colin Keppel and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien each killed a rhino.

Wednesday, 20 December 1911

On this day three separate parties went out, two looking for tiger and one for rhinoceros. In the first ring, the king soon shot a tigress. In the second ring, the hunters disturbed a rhino cow and calf, which charged straight at the elephants and broke out of the ring without being hurt. After lunch it was found that the next ring contained no fewer than four tigers 'roaring and snarling in a blood-curdling chorus, the tigers charged madly from side to side while the surrounding elephants trampled and trumpeted and the mahouts screamed and shouted' (Day 1935: 99). The king killed all four tigers.

On the way back to camp, a big bull rhino came out of the bush and the king shot it with two shots. The other parties were also successful: Captain Godfrey Faussett and Sir Colin Keppel each shot one tiger, Captain Godfrey Faussett and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien each shot a bear, and the Duke of Teck shot a rhino. Elsewhere, a rhino pursued the elephant on which Major Wigram was riding, but abandoned the chase after half a mile (0.8 km) and ran away.

Thursday, 21 December 1911

In the morning, the king killed four tigers and a bear. Captain Faussett was pursued by a bull rhino, which he later killed.

Friday, 22 December 1911

On this day, the king shot three tigers. When a big bull rhino suddenly ran out of the grass, shots by Sir Charles Cust and the king missed it, but he was killed by Captain Faussett. On separate occasions Lord

Durham, Lord Charles Fitzmaurice, Sir Derek Keppel, Sir Colin Keppel and Sir Henry McMahon among them killed seven tigers and a Himalayan bear.

Saturday, 23 December 1911

This day was taken up by a move to a second shooting camp located at Kasra, 8 miles (12.8 km) further up the River Rapti. It is likely that the size of the first camp had disturbed the wildlife in the area so much that most animals had fled to other areas of the terai.

Sunday, 24 December 1911

In the morning, there was a divine service led by Rev. J. Godber, domestic chaplain to the bishop of Calcutta. In the afternoon, the king went with General Kaiser Shumsher to inspect a collection of animals from Nepal the maharaja had presented to him. There were over 70 kinds of animals, including a young elephant, a rhino calf, and a wild ass; these animals were sent to the zoo in London. Various items of Nepalese art were also presented, and they are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. In the evening, the king invested the Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumsher Jung with the insignia of a Knight Grand Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.

Monday, 25 December 1911

In the afternoon, after travelling 3 miles from camp (4.8 km) the king killed a tiger measuring 9 feet 6 inches (290 cm). He then went after rhinos and first shot a female, then a second animal after lunch. A party led by the Duke of Teck shot three tigers and a rhino.

Tuesday, 26 December 1911

The game in the area was already disturbed, obvious because only one of the 60 baits put out the previous evening had been touched by a tiger. Lord Durham shot one tiger and after a long beat the king finally managed to shoot a rhino.

Wednesday, 27 December 1911

The king shot one tigress, said to be his 20th since his arrival in Nepal.

Thursday, 28 December 1911

On this last day of the hunt, the king and the Duke of Teck simultaneously shot one tiger. After lunch, farewells were said and the party travelled 12 miles (19 km) by car to the train, which was waiting for them at Bikna Thori. On the way, the king shot his last (21st) tiger.

Animals obtained in 1911

According to Fortescue (1912) the total number of animals shot during this 10-day hunt in the Chitwan

valley of southern Nepal was 18 rhinos (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), 39 tigers (*Panthera tigris*) and 4 sloth bears (*Melursus ursinus*). Of these, King George V shot 8 rhinos, 21 tigers and 1 bear. In the narratives summarized above, only 13 rhinos and 31 tigers are accounted for, but we assume that this is an oversight and that the king killed none of the other animals. The persons credited with the various animals are listed in table 1, in alphabetical order after the king. The dates in December when the animals were shot are given followed by the number of that species on that day.

Table 1. The Great Hunt: 18–28 December 1911, Chitwan area, Nepal

The hunters and their titles	Rhinos shot and dates	Tigers shot and dates	Bears shot and dates
King George V (1865–1936)	6: 2 on 18th; 1 on 20th; 2 on 25th; 1 on 26th	16: 1 on 19th; 5 on 20th; 4 on 21st; 3 on 22nd; 1 on 25th; 1 on 27th; 1 on 28th	1 on 21st
Lord Annaly: Sir Luke White, 3rd Baron Annaly of Annaly and Rathcline (1857–1922), permanent Lord-in-Waiting to George V from 1910 to 1921	1 on 18th; shot with Lord Durham	—	—
Sir Charles Leopold Cust (1864–1939)	—	1 on 19th	—
Lord Durham: John George Lambton, 3rd Earl of Durham (1855–1928)	—	4: 3 on 22nd; 1 on 26th	1 on 22nd
Captain Faussett: Captain Sir Bryan Godfrey-Faussett (1863–1945), captain in the Royal Navy, Equerry to George V	2: 1 on 21st; 1 on 22nd	1 on 20th	1 on 20th
Lord Charles Fitzmaurice: Sir Henry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice (1845–1927), 5th Marquess of Lansdowne	—	1 on 22nd	—
Admiral Sir Colin Keppel (1862–1947): admiral in the British navy (retired 1932). Commander of the HMS Medina on the voyage to India with HM King George V for the King Emperor's durbar in 1911	1 on 19th	2: on 20th; 1 on 22nd	—
Sir Derek William George Keppel (1863–1944): Deputy Master of the Household to HM King George V between 1910 and 1912	—	1 on 22nd	—
Sir Henry McMahon (1862–1949): British High Commissioner in Cairo	—	1 on 22nd	—
General Sir Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien (1858–1930)	1 on 19th	—	1 on 20th
Duke of Teck (1868–1927): Adolphus Charles Alexander Albert Edward George Philip Louis Ladislaus, 2nd Duke and Prince of Teck (from 1900). In 1917 adopted the surname Cambridge. Personal Aide-de-Camp to the Sovereign, 1910–1914	2: 1 on 20th; 1 on 26th	4: 3 on 25th; 1 on 28th	—

How the various trophies were distributed is unknown. The rhino presented to the king on 24 December 1911 was, with the rest of the collection, for some time kept in the Alipore Zoological Gardens in Calcutta (Basu 1912). It left Calcutta on 1 April 1912 on board the *SS Afghanistan* and lived in the Zoological Gardens in London from 21 May 1912 to 2 November 1921 (Edwards 1996: 130; Rookmaaker 1998).

Illustrations of the hunt

When Rookmaaker (2004) submitted his paper, he found it almost impossible to find any historical illustrations of the rhinoceros in Nepal. He then saw a number of relevant photographs on the website of the

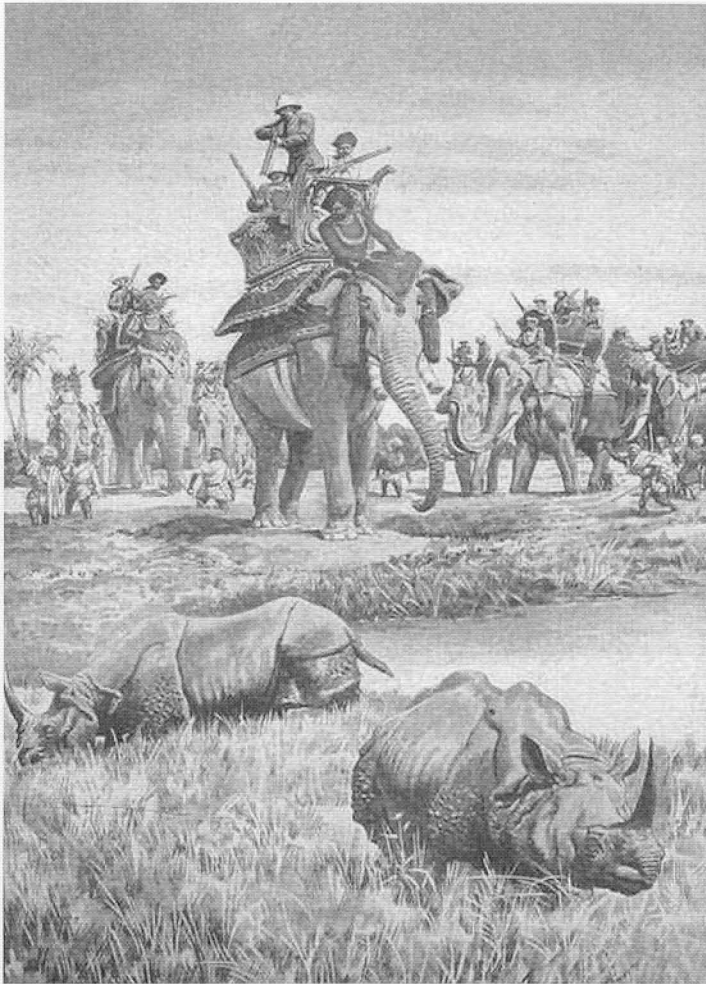


Figure 2. Engraving (in colour) of the king's hunt in Nepal, from *Le Petit Journal*, 31 December 1911.

Australian National University, Canberra, Australia (<http://images.anu.edu.au/tigers>), associated with King George's hunt in Nepal in 1911. This led to the discovery of two more albums of photographs in the library of the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS). Details of these three albums are presented here. Finally, there is a coloured engraving showing George V seated on an elephant hunting a rhino, published in the 31 December 1911 issue of *Le Petit Journal* (no. 1102) issued in Paris, France (fig. 2).

In 1950, Queen Mary presented a large and valuable collection of books, scrapbooks and 29 photographic albums relating to British India and the royal family to the RCS in London, which the library of the University of Cambridge obtained in 1992. Handlists of the contents of the collection are available in the library. One of the photograph albums (QM 21) is a large, oblong volume (52 x 37 cm), beautifully leather bound, entitled 'H.I.M. The King—Emperor of India's Shooting in the Nepalese Terai, December, 1911'. It has 41 leaves with 278 black-and-white photographs, which are numbered but not otherwise annotated. This appears to be a chronological record of all events from the arrival of King George V in Nepal until his departure 10 days later. It appears that every tiger and rhino seen or shot in this period is figured, as well as the collection of live animals given to the king. There are 10 photos of dead rhinos (nos. 45, 92, 125–128, 206, 235, 242, 243), one of a rhino hidden in the grass (no. 219), one of the captured young rhino given to the king (no. 165), and one of a collection of trophies including a mounted baby rhino (no. 177). This album QM 21 represents the most comprehensive record of the king's shoot in Nepal in 1911 that has come to light.

The second photographic album in the RCS (QM 20) is a large, oblong volume (42 x 31 cm) entitled 'Indian Tour 1911–1912'. It has photographs taken during the whole tour, with those taken during the hunt in Nepal numbered 196 to 333; none are annotated. There are eight photographs of dead

rhinos (nos. 244, 261, 294, 296, 299, 301, 304, 330) and one of the captured young rhino (no. 165), mostly different from those in QM21. For a number of reasons, these photographs cannot be reproduced at present.

The photographic album in the Australian National University consists of 16 pages and 50 photographs (signature: MENZIES v.lge rare bk + 2108458; anonymous 1912). It appears incomplete with the back cover missing. The front cover bears the company name Herzog & Higgins, Mhow (Central India) and the title 'His Imperial Majesty's shoot in Nepalese Terai, December 1911'. Inside the front cover it is stated 'Bound at the Caxton Works, Bombay'. Herzog & Higgins operated a photographic studio from the 1890s to the 1920s at Mhow, a British military cantonment town 22 km from Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India. The album was donated by

Dr U.N. Bhati. He had discovered it in Madhya Pradesh, in the rural home of distant relatives, Mr and Mrs Parbinder Singh, who had worked for the former maharaja and maharani of Ratlamand, and who gave him the album. Although it is unlikely that this album is unique, no identical copies have been found in the course of this research. There are five photographs with a rhino, all of which are also found in the RCS album QM 21. One shows the animal running in the grass; three were taken after the rhino was shot (figs. 3–5), while the last one shows the young animal that was presented to the king and that was later shipped to London (fig. 6). There are several photos with tigers (fig. 7) and other scenes of the people involved. All photographs in the album are available on the Internet on the website of the Australian National University (<http://images.anu.edu.au/tigers>).



Figure 3. Shikari flays a dead rhinoceros (*His Imperial Majesty's Shoot in Nepalese Terai*, page 14, photograph 4; also RCS QM 21, no. 243).



Figure 4. Hunting party inspects the head of a slain rhinoceros (*His Imperial Majesty's Shoot in Nepalese Terai*, page 14, photograph 3; also RCS QM 21, no. 128).



Figure 5. Hunters with slain rhino (*His Imperial Majesty's Shoot in Nepalese Terai*, page 5, photograph 4; also RCS QM 21, no. 235).

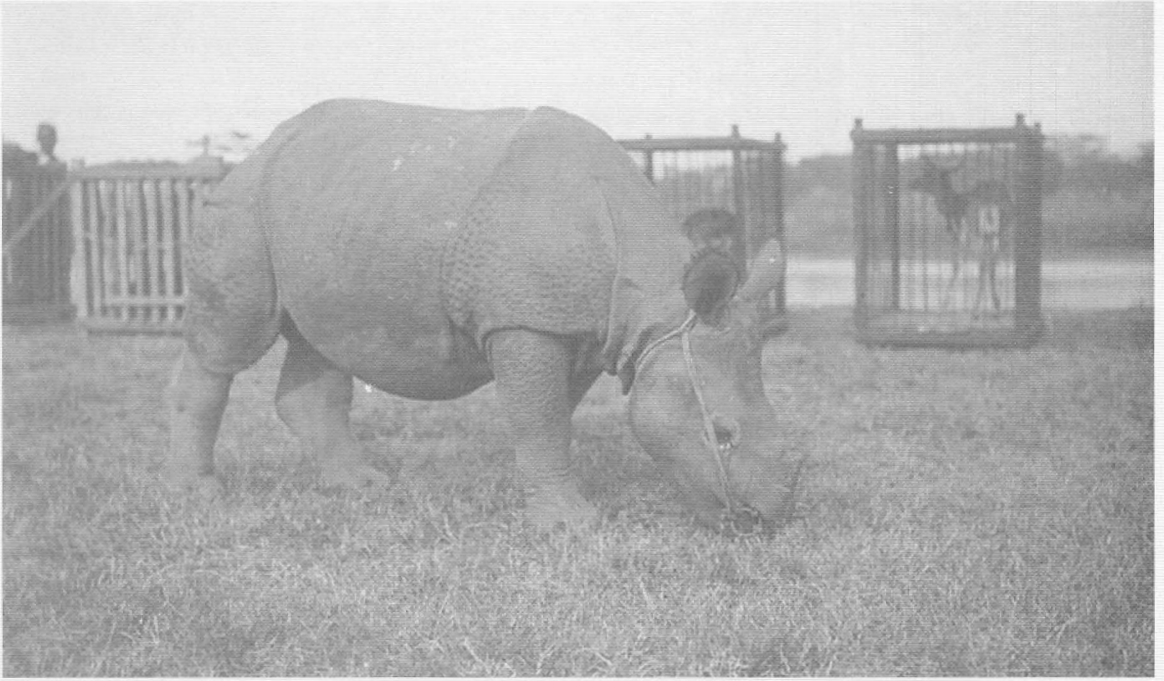


Figure 6. Rhino presented to King George V by Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana in December 1911, later transported to the London Zoo (*His Imperial Majesty's Shoot in Nepalese Terai*, page 7, photograph 2; also RCS QM 21, no. 165).



Figure 7. Four tigers and a deer shot during the hunt (*His Imperial Majesty's Shoot in Nepalese Terai*, page 14, photograph 2).

Acknowledgements

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