

A new historic record of the Sumatran rhinoceros from Nagaland in north-eastern India

Anwaruddin Choudhury

Deputy Commissioner, Baksa, c/o The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India
Bamunimaidam, Guwahati 781 021, India; email: badru1@sify.com

The Sumatran rhinoceros, *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, once ranged from north-eastern India to Indonesia (Corbet and Hill 1992; Choudhury 1997, 2003; Rookmaaker 2003). It had vanished from most of north-eastern India by the turn of the 20th century (Milroy

1934) and was believed to have become extinct in India (Khan 1989). However, Choudhury (1997) reported stray individuals in Manipur as late as the early 1990s. Historical records are available from most of the north-eastern states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and northern West Bengal, as well as from adjacent areas of Bangladesh (Rookmaaker 2003); however, specimen records with specific locations were few and far between. Hence, any historic record with evidence is extremely important.



Figure 1. Locality in Nagaland where skull was found.

I here report a recent record of a specimen from Nagaland in north-east India.

While on a visit to Noklak area (26°12' N, 95°00' E) in Tuensang District, Nagaland (fig. 1), on an awareness campaign as part of an Oriental Bird Club–WildWings Conservation Award in February 2004, I received reports of past sightings of a ‘two-horned hairy and small rhinoceros’. Noklak is near the northern part of the Saramati mountain range that separates India and Myanmar (Mr Chingla and others, pers. comm.). There had been past reports from the Saramati area, from both India and Myanmar (Tilson and Traylor-Holzer 1993; Rabinowitz et al. 1995; Choudhury 1997). After talking with a cross-section of elderly people, I re

ceived word of a skull. I visited the Noklak village above the town and located the skull in a villager's house. The rhino reportedly had been speared to death by two hunters, probably around the turn of the 20th century, from the mountain tops north-east of Noklak near the present India–Myanmar border. The skull could not be measured as it was fixed quite high, and being old, any attempt to bring it down would have damaged it. The skull lacked the nasal bone, which was apparently damaged when its reportedly tiny horns were removed. Three molar teeth on the right side were in good condition.

The villagers of Noklak area belong to the Keimnugan Naga tribe. They regard this skull with reverence and splash water on it when there has been no rain for many days and on similar occasions they observe. This specimen is probably the first from Nagaland as earlier records were all merely reports of sighting by hunters and villagers. Considering this skull's importance, the grandson of the hunter, in whose house it now is, and the villagers should be convinced to place it in a museum, perhaps at Kohima.

Acknowledgements

I thank the Oriental Bird Club for the OBC–WildWings Conservation Award that enabled me to visit Noklak; H. Shou, my guide in the area; Mr Chingla, the head *Dubashi* who first gave me the information; and Mr Shinj, age 80, the grandson of Musanj, one of the hunters (the other hunter was Musanj's brother, Shanji). Others who deserve mention are the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Noklak, the sister and brother-in law of H. Shou for providing food, Tsangchingla Imlong of Mokochung, Neisatuo Keditsu of Kohima, and Hakim.

References

Choudhury AU. 1997. The status of the Sumatran rhinoceros in north-eastern India. *Oryx* 31(2):151–152.



The Sumatran rhino skull (arrow) with skulls of domestic buffaloes at a house in Noklak, Nagaland.

- Choudhury AU. 2003. *The mammals of Arunachal Pradesh*. Regency Publications, New Delhi.
- Corbet GB, Hill JE. 1992. *The mammals of the Indomalayan region: a systematic review*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Khan M. 1989. *Asian rhinos: an action plan for their conservation*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.
- Milroy AJW. 1934. The preservation of wildlife in India. No.3, Assam. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 37 (suppl.):97–104.
- Rabinowitz A, Schaller G, Uga U. 1995. A survey to assess the status of Sumatran rhinoceros and other large mammal species in Tamanthi Wildlife Sanctuary, Myanmar. *Oryx* 29:123–128.
- Rookmaaker K. 2003. Historic records of the Sumatran rhinoceros in north-east India. *The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India Newsletter* No.5, p.11–12.
- Tilson R, Traylor-Holzer K. 1993. *Sumatran rhino PHVA briefing book*. IUCN/SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, Minnesota Zoo, Minnesota.