

Possible sighting of a twin Greater one-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) in Jaldapara National Park, India

Sumanta Kundu^{1*}, Vivek Menon²

¹Environment Specialist, NCRMP-II Project, Directorate of Disaster Management, Govt. of West Bengal, "Tran Bhawan", 87A, S. N. Banerjee Road, Kolkata 700014, India.

²Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Wildlife Trust of India, F-13, Sector-National Capital Region (NCR), Noida 201301, India

*Corresponding author: sumanta1979@gmail.com

Jaldapara National Park (JLNP, formerly Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary), West Bengal, India (216.51 km²) is home to the second largest population of Greater one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis* Linnaeus, 1758) in India after Kaziranga National Park, Assam (Syangden et al. 2007). The JLNP is situated in the Duars, the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas between 25°58' N and 27° 45' N latitudes and 89° 08' E and 89° 55' E longitudes. Administratively, it has been placed under the Forest Department: Coochbehar Wildlife Division of West Bengal (Ghosh et al. 2007). The present population of the rhinoceros as per the latest census conducted in 2012 in JLNP is 149 (Anonymous 2013). The species is listed as vulnerable under IUCN Red List but its numbers are slowly increasing (Talukdar et al. 2014).

A group of three rhinos was observed by the first author on 7 June 2007 at around 15:50 IST near the JP-3 watch tower inside the park. Two sub-adult animals of approximately the same size were photographed in the company of an adult mature female. One of them was very close to the female and the other was at a distance of about 5-6 meters. The first author investigated for the presence of any other adult female but none were found in the close vicinity. This nullified the chances of mixing up of offspring of two different mothers. The three rhinos were grazing on tall grass throughout the observation period. Both sub-adults were visually aged as between 3-4 years and moved in very close proximity to the female, which was assumed to be their mother. Initially the whole clan was hidden by tall grass as they were grazing, but for a short while the mother came out and stood in the middle of the forest road. Both sub-adults soon followed the mother and also came into the open standing just behind the mother, which gave ample time for photography. Later they vanished inside thick grass cover.

The Greater one-horned rhinoceros is mostly

solitary (Menon 2003) except occasionally, when young males join up together or when the female is with her calf for nearly four years (Menon 2014). Females give birth to one calf every 2-3 years (Sharma et al. 2015). Occurrence of twins in Indian Rhinoceros is probably rare and until now has only been recorded once from Kaziranga National Park (Gee 1955). The significance of the photographs of the group in JLNP taken by the first author was found during compilation of the book "*Indian Mammals—a Field guide*" authored by the second author, who suggested the possibility of a rare documentation of rhinoceros twins (Menon 2014). Twins are rarely recorded in any species of rhinoceros. Further careful field observations and recordings may bring to light further occurrence of twins among rhinoceros.

References

- Anonymous 2013. State Forest Report 2011-12. Government of West Bengal. Directorate of Forests, Office Of The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Head of Forest Force, Kolkata, India.
- Gee EP. 1955. Great Indian one-horned rhinoceros (*R. unicornis* Linn) cow with (presumptive) twin calves. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 53 (2) :256-257.
- Ghosh C. and Das AP. 2007. Rhino-fodders in Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary in Duars of West Bengal, India. *Our Nature* 5: 14-17.
- Menon V. 2003. *A field guide to Indian mammals*. Dorling Kindersley (India), Delhi.
- Menon V. 2014. *Indian mammals: a field guide*. Hachette Book Publishing India, Gurgaon.
- Syangden B, Sectionov, Ellis S, Williams AC, Strien NJ van, Talukdar BK. 2008. Report on the regional meeting for India and Nepal IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino



Species Group (AsRSG); March 5-7, 2007 Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India.

Sharma R. and Gupta M. 2015. Status and Monitoring of the Greater one-horned Rhinoceros in Dudhwa National Park. WWF-India, New Delhi.

Talukdar BK, Emslie R, Bist SS, Choudhury A, Ellis S, Bonal BS, Malakar MC, Talukdar BN, Barua M. 2014. *Rhinoceros unicornis*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2014.2. <www.iucnredlist.org>. Downloaded on 24 August 2014.



Greater one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) with calves, possibly twins, photographed in Jaldapara National Park, India.