

A SEARCH FOR SCHOMBURGK'S DEER.

BY BRIGADIER GENERAL R. PIGOT.

I started my search for this deer with perhaps all the available recorded information as to its habitat,—viz. a report at the British Consulate-General, Bangkok, and a report in the Journal of the Natural History Society of Siam.* From this information it was apparent that the present habitat of the animal was about longitude 101 E. latitude 15 N.

Having with me photographs of the heads of Schomburgk's deer, sambhur, and thamin or Eld's deer, I left Bangkok at the end of October, 1928, and went to Korat, where I made exhaustive inquiries from Siamese officials, Chinese skin and horn merchants, Chinese medicine men, since stags' horns of all species are used extensively by the Chinese for making medicine, particularly when the horn is in velvet, and various other people of different sorts. No one had ever heard of Schomburgk's deer or could recognize its photograph, though the sambur and thamin were well known. One official, however, produced a photograph of an undoubted Schomburgk's deer, though with a small head. He did not know himself what the animal was, but said that the photograph had been taken at Sikiu some ten years ago.

At Nong Wat just north of Korat, on my way to Khonken, I found a Siamese hunter (mighty by repute) who said he had seen a deer like the one in the photograph some years ago at Chaiyapoom, that they lived in the mountains and were not found in the same country as thamin. I later decided that this information was of little account since I found that there was a marked tendency among the Siamese to confuse Schomburgk's deer with the barking deer, and Schomburgk's is probably a swamp deer or at any rate allied to the thamin or Eld's deer. North of Nong Wat, as far as Khonken, Udorn, and to the East of Udorn, half way to Thakek, I

*Some notes on *Cervus (Rucervus) schomburgkii*. By P. R. Kemp Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam, III, No. 1, p. 1.

could get no information at all, though I showed my photograph to very many different sorts of men.

I then returned to Korat and went to Pitsanuloke, making fruitless enquiries at Sikiu en route. At Pitsanuloke, the Siamese forest officer gave me the habitat of the Schomburgk's deer definitely as to the North of, and close to Vichien. Since I was still working on the assumption that I should find news of the deer in the vicinity of longitude 101 E. latitude 15 N, I had always intended getting on to the Menam Pasak (Nam Sak) and coming down it to Gengkoi. So I duly went across from Ban Moon Nak (south of Pitsanuloke) on the railway, to Petchaboon and came down the river to Vichien, Buachum, Chaibadan and Gengkoi. At Vichien, the Nai Amphur had up every available man in the village for my benefit and amongst them were several old men and reputed hunters. Not a man among them all, however, recognised the photo of Schomburgk's deer or had ever heard of such an animal.

I went down the Nam Sak (by road) to Buachum, where I met the Governor of Petchaboon returning to his Headquarters. He was much interested in my search and had up all the available men one evening, including one old man famed as a hunter. Again a complete blank. No one had ever heard of the deer, though many instantly recognised the photographs of the sambhur and thamin.

I then went on to Chaibadan where the Nai Amphur at once recognised the photograph and volunteered the name "saman." He said that I would find them at Nakon Nayok, south of Gengkoi. Another man here corroborated this information. The Nai Amphur took me to a house the owner of which had quite a number of heads of different sorts in the hopes that we might find a Schomburgk's deer, but in vain. The Nai Amphur also told me that one man lately in Chaibadan had a head of this deer, but that he had gone away and taken it with him. The man in question brought the head with him from Nakon Nayok. The Nai Amphur himself had been Nai Amphur of Nakon Nayok some years before and he was quite sure that I should find the deer there.

I went down to Gengkoi, where the information of the Nai Amphur of Chaibadan was again corroborated by one man. Nakon Nayok was the place. I went to Nakon Nayok to find paddy fields to the foot of the mountains, but the information that many years ago the Schomburgk's deer used to be found there, but was now to be found in the less populated parts to the east, towards Aranya Pradesa, on the French frontier. I went to the east as far as Krabin, where one man assured me that there were many of these deer at Aranya Pradesa and its vicinity, that they could be seen frequently at night by the light of a motor car's headlights; while another man, a French subject, told me that in French territory to the East of Aranya many houses had horns of this deer hanging up and used as hat-racks. The idea of the rare and probably extinct Schomburgk's deer having his horns used in numbers as hat racks was too good, and I very quickly decided that I was now on the track of the thamin instead of Schomburgk's, since thamin in whatever country they do exist are always plentiful and easy to shoot.

There is the greatest confusion about the names of the different animals; to take the four species of deer which concern the matter of the Schomburgk's deer, viz.—sambhur, thamin or Eld's deer, barking deer and the Schomburgk's deer itself:—

Sambhur. Universally known as kwang. One man told me that the kwang sometimes had more than its three normal points on each horn, and so became the Schomburgk's deer or "saman."

Thamin. Generally known as lamang. Often, however, the male is called la-ong and the female lamang, while the immature is known as a different species, sai.

Barking Deer. Known as ekeng and often confused with my photograph of Schomburgk's deer.

Schomburgk's deer. On the very few occasions when my photograph produced any response it was known as saman. On other occasions men would call it just ngua, which usually means cattle, but is said to also mean game.

In other parts of the country which I did not visit there is no doubt a different nomenclature for these animals.

The fact that horns of Schomburgk's deer can be bought from time to time in Bangkok and elsewhere means nothing. Such horns may be fifty years old.

The photograph of the live animal taken at Sikiu which the Governor at Korat showed me is the biggest puzzle of all. The photo itself did not appear to be very old and the animal was undoubtedly a Schomburgk's deer. Where did the animal come from? This is the only clue worth while following up perhaps, though personally I could make nothing of it.

While certainly not prepared to say that the animal no longer exists, I suspect that it is practically, if not quite extinct, and and I should be very greatly interested to hear of any one who has seen a live beast in the last twenty years.

[*Note* With regard to the photograph of the Schomburgk's deer shewn General Pigot by the Governor of Korat, it is possible that it was taken in Germany. A Schomburgk's deer was presented to Mr. Passmore at Sikiu twenty five years ago. Mr. Passmore, who was a railway engineer, gave it to a German in charge of the railway. This official sent the deer, which was a young one, to Germany where it was placed in the Berlin Zoo. Some years ago a photograph of it was sent out to Siam. Mr. P. Kemp has a copy and General Trotter was given one by him. *C. H. Forty.*]