

3. THE SHOU OR 'SIKKIM STAG'

In the *Journal* for December 1958 (55: 556) Mr. Gee appeals for information regarding the status of the 'Shou' (*Cervus affinis* Hodgs.) in Bhutan and Tibet. I have visited all the areas in which this animal is said to occur, and my experience of it may be of interest despite the fact that it is not up-to-date.

Western Tibet

I do not think the Shou has ever occurred in recent times in the vicinity of Mt. Kailas and the Manasarowar Lake. The fact that an antler was found in a monastery near the lake means nothing. All sorts of queer objects such as python skins, stuffed monkeys, crocodile heads, etc., are to be found in these monasteries—presents from pious pilgrims. Western Tibet is a barren, elevated country, totally devoid of forest, and suitable only to such animals as the yak, kiang, gazelle, and antelope which are specially adapted to the rigours of life on the great Plateau. The Shou could never exist under such conditions.

Chumbi Valley

When I was in Gyantse from 1923 to 1926 a few Shou inhabited the Chumbi Valley in the vicinity of a little plain called Lingmothang. In the winter of 1925 I saw three hinds in this area, but no stags. The Shou was also reported to occur at this time in the upper reaches of the Ha Valley in Bhutan, but even at this early date the animal was said to be on the verge of extinction, and in later years Raja Dorje, who owned the Ha Valley, told me he was convinced that all had been exterminated. In 1933 and 1949, in company with Major G. Sherriff I traversed Bhutan from west to east keeping for the most part to the temperate zone under the eaves of the Great Himalayan Range. Burhel were plentiful, also musk deer and barking deer, and in certain valleys takin, but I saw no Shou nor did I hear of any, though the country seemed eminently suited to their needs.

SE. Tibet

In 1936, 1938, and again in 1946-47, Major Sherriff and I made extensive journeys in SE. Tibet. We visited the provinces of Takpo, Kongbo, and Pome, and explored the great Tsangpo Gorge, and the valleys of the Po Yigrong and Po Tsangpo. In none of these areas did we see or hear of Shou, except in the district of Tsari. Tsari is holy ground wherein no life may be taken. Mt. Takpashiri, a place of pilgrimage, is as sacred in the eyes of the Tibetans as Mt. Kailas

in western Tibet. But Tsari unlike western Tibet is densely forested, and here the Shou at the time of our visits occurred in fair numbers. At the village of Chikchar the inhabitants informed us that it descended in winter to feed amongst their cattle. We were told, however, that even in this holy sanctuary the deer were often harried in late autumn by barbaric Dafla tribesmen who ascend the Subansiri to trade, and slay the animals with arrows tipped with deadly aconite. In proof of this we found Shou heads in the vicinity of Chikchar with horns still attached to the skull.

L h a s a

During the war, in 1942-43, I was stationed in Lhasa and in the summer of 1942 I sent my Kashmiri servant to a place called Reting, 60 miles north of the city, to collect plants. He was given a letter of introduction to the Reting Rimpoche, a lama of high rank who acted for a time as regent of Tibet after the death of the 13th Dalai Lama. My servant was well and hospitably received and allowed to wander wherever he wished. He returned to Lhasa in the autumn with a fine collection of plants, and confirmed the reports I had heard that the Reting district was a fertile and well-wooded area. He was most enthusiastic about the country, and said it closely resembled Kashmir and that it contained a large number of Shou which he called 'bara singh', which were strictly preserved by the Reting Rimpoche. In addition to the Shou, he said there were numbers of bear, leopard, and burhel. The fact that Shou occurred in the Reting area was also corroborated by Lhasa officials whom I consulted on the matter. It is certain, therefore, that the Shou enjoyed sanctuary in this Reting area until the end of the war. Unfortunately, after the war, the Reting Rimpoche got into serious trouble. He was arrested for a political crime, and imprisoned in a Potala dungeon where he is said to have died. Shortly after this China invaded Tibet. In view of the Chinese belief that the horns of deer in velvet possess aphrodisiac qualities, it is extremely doubtful if the Shou at Reting any longer enjoy the protection afforded them by the late Reting Rimpoche.

Information on this point could probably be obtained in Kalimpong.

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LONDON, S.W.,
March 3, 1959.

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Ludlow, E. 1959. "The Shou Or "sikkim Stag."." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 56, 626–627.

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