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5. DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS OF THE GAUR *BOS GAURUS* IN NAGALAND

(With one text-figure)

The gaur *Bos gaurus* H. Smith is still widely and sparsely distributed in northeastern India, however, it is a rather poorly documented species. Except for a survey in north Bengal (Bhattacharyya *et al.* 1997) and some brief status reports (Choudhury 1992, 1993, 1995, 1999, 2001), no specific work solely for this species has been taken up in the region. Its distribution in Assam has been mapped recently (Choudhury 1997a). Here I report the past and present status of the species in the state of Nagaland (25° 10'-27° 01' N, 93° 17'-95° 15' E) (area: 16,579 sq. km) (Fig. 1) as ascertained during field visits in 1991, 1992, 1996 and 2001. The area was referred to in the past as the Naga Hills of Assam, as the entire area is hilly with small plains near Dimapur. The highest peak is Mt. Saramati (3,842 m above msl) on the India-Myanmar border. Mt. Japfu (3,043 m above msl) is the second and is on the Barail range. The lowest evaluation is in the riverbeds near Dimapur (less than 150 m above msl).

Some information on gaur in Nagaland is given in Choudhury (1997b). The current distribution of the species is mostly confined to Intanki Wildlife Sanctuary in Dimapur district. Some of the animals from this population also wander up to near Jalukie, Samjuram (both in Dimapur district), Peren and Tening (Henima) (both in Kohima district) (Fig. 1). Being located

near the Assam-Nagaland border, the animals move freely between Intanki and Assam's Dhansiri Reserve Forest (Choudhury 1998) and also to the unclassified forests of Assam's North Cachar Hills district and occasionally to Manipur's Tamenglong district. Small numbers of gaur are thinly distributed in the forests along the India-Myanmar border in Tuensang, Mon and Phek districts. An occasional animal is encountered, mostly wandering from Assam, in the Singphan Reserve Forest of Mon district, which also share borders with Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. There are no recent reports from other districts, although a few survived in Mokokchung, Wokha and Zunheboto even in the early 1980s.

During field visits, I examined and measured 11 preserved horns (seven in the Forest Museum, Kohima; three in Samjuram village and one at Zunheboto) of the animals shot in different parts of Nagaland. Three of these were large. The measurements of some are listed in Table 1. The animal from Zunheboto was killed by local hunters in the foothills area of Saramati, Tuensang district in 1967. In 1938-40, villagers near Ajikami village in Akuloto sub-division of Zunheboto district killed a bull after it had injured some villagers. It reportedly came to mate with a semi-wild cow mithun *Bos frontalis* (S. Hukiye, pers. comm.).



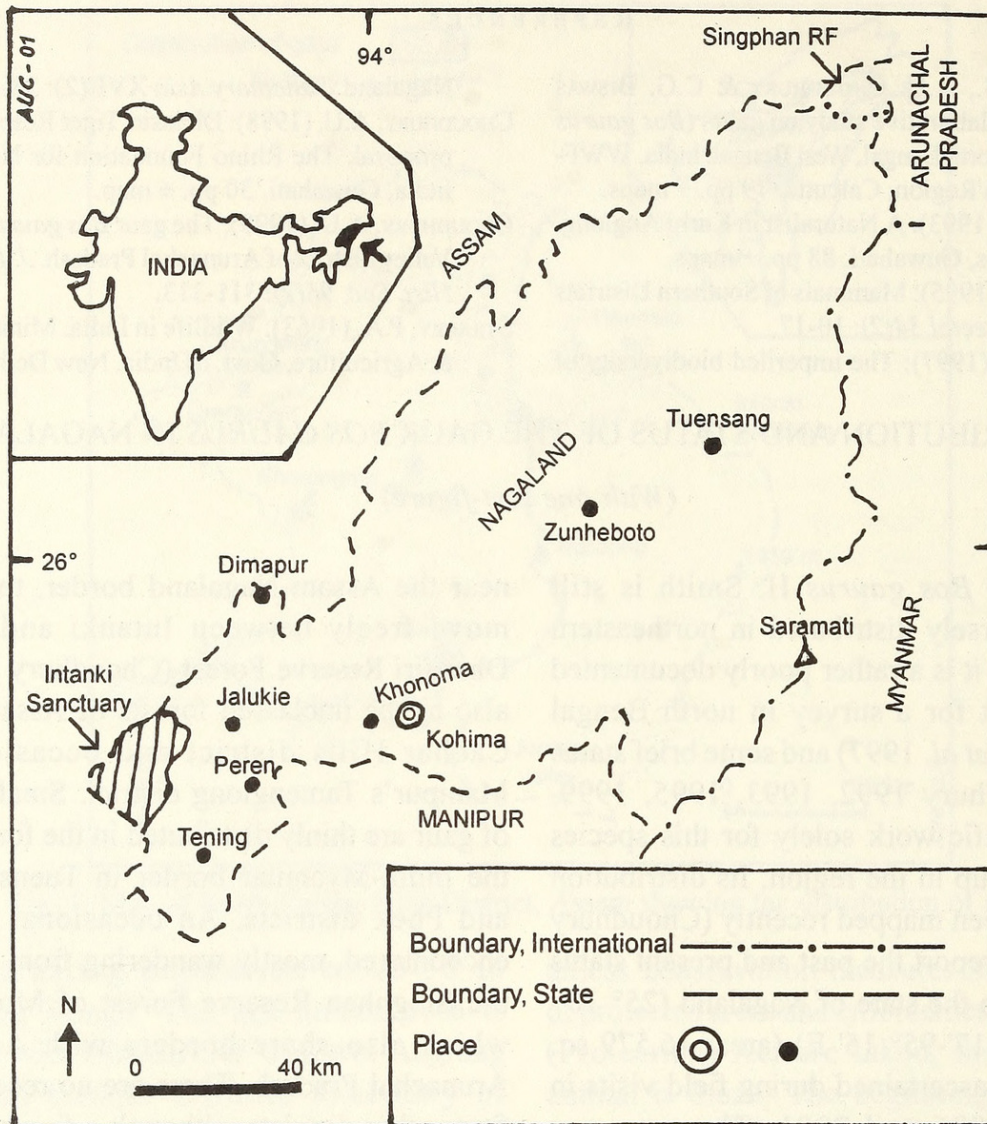


Fig. 1: Map of Nagaland showing the places mentioned in the text

In the Barail range stretch between Peren and Kohima, the gaur is not found now, save for stray animals. In the late 1980s, the hunters from Khonoma village had shot two in Dzukou area (T. Sakhire, pers. comm.). Around Peren, the gaur was not uncommon till the 1980s; now it is very rare. In 1999-2000, 4-5 came from the northwest (Intanki and adjacent areas). In February 2000, one was shot near Tening town. It reportedly came from the North Cachar Hills district of Assam (Huki, pers. comm.). In 1974-75, two were reportedly snared with a rope near Nkio village, near Tening. Both the horns are now with the Range Officer of Jalukie (I

examined them). In 1981, a bull and a cow were shot near Samjuram village.

Poaching for meat was the main reason for the decline of the gaur from larger parts of Nagaland as its meat is relished. Destruction of habitat by felling for wet paddy cultivation (in Jalukie-Rangapahar areas) and *jhum* elsewhere was also a major factor. Although no specific record of large-scale occurrence of rinderpest could be found, perhaps there was casualty in 1966 in southwestern Nagaland when this dreaded disease took a heavy toll in the North Cachar Hills district of Assam (Choudhury 1995).



Table 1: Measurements of some gaur horns (in cm)

	Spread	Span (tip-to-tip)	Sweep across forehead	Girth (right horn)	Girth (left horn)	Length (right horn)	Length (left horn)	Skull Length
Specimen A: Forest Museum	100.0	68.5	186.5	51.0	52.0	75.0	73.5	59.0
Specimen B: Forest Museum	90.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Specimen C: Zunheboto	92.0	47.0	-	-	41.0	-	-	-

It is generally estimated that less than 100 gaur are present in the Intanki Wildlife Sanctuary and adjacent areas. During a census in 1978, the Forest Department staff sighted 67 gaurs. With improvement in protection measures, the number will rise both due to local growth as well as movement from the Dhansiri Reserve Forest of Assam. In the latter area, a healthy population of a few hundred survives (Choudhury 1993). In the forests along the India-Myanmar border, some 20 to 30 may still occur. Elsewhere, less than 10 may be estimated as stragglers. The total habitat available for the species in Intanki and adjacent areas is about 250 sq. km.

It seems that the Intanki Wildlife Sanctuary is the only area where a viable gaur population could survive for long. Unfortunately, enforcement is virtually non-existent, while poaching, felling and encroachment threaten this protected area. Since it is the only potential area in the entire state of Nagaland where not only gaur but sizeable populations of elephant *Elephas maximus*, sambar *Cervus unicolor*, tiger *Panthera tigris* could survive, adequate protection must be given to the Sanctuary. Some adjacent forests should be added to increase its

area from 202 sq. km to at least 300 sq. km and the Sanctuary should be declared a National Park — the first in the entire state. New guard posts with well-armed personnel and radio-network should be established. Intanki Wildlife Sanctuary has records of some other globally threatened species such as the marbled cat *Felis marmorata*, clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* and the white-winged duck *Cairina scutulata* as well as the largest population of hoolock gibbons *Hylobates hoolock* in Nagaland. Presence of the Dhansiri Reserve Forest (770 sq. km) across the border in Assam is an added advantage for the gaur and other species of Intanki. Reported cases of poaching of the gaur and other animals should be dealt with firmly.

For their help during the field study, I thank M.I. Bora, Akato Sema, Khekhiho Sohe, Thomas Kent, S. Hukiye, Hakim, Kierang, Rasam and Hiareurangbe.

Dec. 12, 2001 ANWARUDDIN CHOUDHURY  
*The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India,*  
*C/o The Assam Co. Ltd., Bamunimaidam,*  
*Guwahati 781 021,*  
*Assam, India.*

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## 6. ALBINO GAUR AT THE NAGARHOLE NATIONAL PARK, KARNATAKA

(With one plate)

On April 11, 2001, at about 0630 hrs, while going around Nagarhole National Park, in Kodagu district, Karnataka State, I spotted a herd of gaur *Bos gaurus* at a salt lick on the Chikkapala road. To my great surprise and wonder, an albino calf was moving in the herd. The sun had not risen, the day was cloudy and the light very poor. But fortunately, my camera had a 400 ASA film and 80-200 lens with f 2.8 aperture (Plate 1, Fig. 1), which helped me take several good pictures of the calf, even though the light was poor. The calf was entirely snow-white, and it was about six months old. I have

been going to all the sanctuaries of Karnataka for the last three decades, but it was for the first time that I saw an albino gaur. My friends T.N.A. Perumal and Dr. S.R. Jayaprakash, both from Bangalore, and Arunthavaselvan T.R.A of Coimbatore were with me. It was a rare sighting worth recording.

May 30, 2001

S.G. NEGINHAL  
# 643, 9th Main, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cross,  
III Stage, III Block,  
Basaveshwaranagar 560 079,  
Karnataka, India.

## 7. OCCURRENCE OF THE WILD WATER BUFFALO *BUBALUS ARNEE* IN MIZORAM AND MANIPUR

(With one text-figure)

The Asiatic wild water buffalo *Bubalus arnee* Kerr (*bubalis* Linn.) has become very rare all over its former range. It is common only in a few protected areas of Assam, e.g. Kaziranga, Manas and Dibru-Saikhwa. Information on the current status and distribution is given by Choudhury (1994). The species usually occurs in tall grasslands in the plains. However, its presence in the Balpakram National Park of Garo Hills, Meghalaya and adjacent areas (Choudhury 1994) has been a matter of curiosity as well as question. But it seems that the small grassy patches along the rivers and streams, in the depressions and on tableland in hilly areas, also harbour buffalo populations, apparently in lower density than the plains. After the Balpakram

experience, I had reason to believe that the wild buffalo also occurred in other hilly regions of northeastern India in the recent past, although no documentation had been done. However, because of hunting pressure from various tribal groups, it has vanished from most such areas.

During a recent visit to Mizoram in February 2001, I came across a massive horn of a bull wild buffalo at a house in Aizawl city, the state capital. On enquiry, I came to know that it was collected from Vaitin, a village in Aizawl district, in far northern Mizoram (24° 12' N, 92° 58' E) (Fig. 1). The interstate border with Manipur is not far from the village, about 5 km only. The buffalo was reportedly shot around 1976 inside Manipur. The locality of shooting





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