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AXIS DEER HABITAT GROUP IN W. V. KELLEY HALL

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The latest addition to the series of habitat groups in William V. Kelley Hall of Asiatic Mammals (Hall 17) has for its subject the well-known axis deer. Other names for the species are spotted deer, as it is sometimes called in books, and chital or cheetal, which in Hindustani means spotted and is used by natives and shikaris in India. The name axis, although thought by some to be of East Indian origin, was first applied in this connection by the great Roman naturalist, Pliny the Elder. Later, it was formally given as the technical name of the species and from this it has come into general use, although its original significance is not quite clear.

This animal has been chosen by some as the most beautiful member of the deer family and, although many will not agree to this, it must at least be taken as an indication that it has some claims to the distinction. With certain exceptions, such as the moose, which scarcely contends, all members of the deer family are beautiful and the selection of any one for first place is not an easy matter. The axis deer is neither a large deer nor a very small one. It has neither the magnificence of the stately wapiti nor the slender grace of the roebuck. Its charm is mainly in its soft-colored, spotted coat and its demure refined demeanor.

The axis deer is common throughout most of peninsular India and Ceylon but does not extend into adjoining parts of Asia. Although less numerous than formerly, it maintains itself in considerable numbers since it has the ability to thrive in close proximity to man. Like our own white-tailed deer, it needs only a small tract of woodland or thicket for cover and retreat. It is a highly social species, however, and where conditions permit, it is given to forming large herds, sometimes numbering hundreds. It frequents hill districts and plains alike, but does not wander far from water. Like some other deer, it has a loud scream of alarm and a barking sort of call.

The spotted coloration of this deer is retained at all seasons and all ages. This is very unusual for, although many deer are spotted when young, in nearly all cases the spots disappear in the adult. It is thought that the spots serve to make the young less conspicuous by producing a broken or "interrupted" pattern corresponding to alternating light and shade in the forest. As a possible substantiation of this theory, it is pointed out that probably all deer were once spotted throughout life for protection from enemies, but as the need for this protection lessened there has been a tendency for the spots to disappear. Thus we now find that in deer of open plains or those that have attained large size and ability to defend themselves, there are no spots in either young or adults. In others, as in American deer, the spots are retained in the young but not in the adults, the assumption being that the advantage to the grown animal is no longer necessary. The axis deer is one of the very few species in which the spots are permanent.

Axis Deer or Chital

This species of deer, native to India and Ceylon, is notable for its beauty and its permanently spotted coat. The Museum specimens were collected by the James Simpson-Roosevelts Asiatic Expedition, and the late Colonel J. C. Faunthorpe. Staff Taxidermist C. J. Albrecht and Artist C. A. Corwin prepared the group.

The new group has unusually fine pictorial quality and pleasing color tones. The deer are represented in light tropical forest quietly resting at mid-day. A fine stag stands at one side in somewhat complacent attitude while a younger stag and two does with a pair of fawns are lying down on a leafy forest bed. The specimens were obtained from two sources, some from Colonel Theodore Roosevelt and Kermit Roosevelt during the James Simpson–Roosevelts Asiatic Expedition, and some from the late Colonel J. C. Faunthorpe, of Bombay, a noted sportsman.

The group is the work of Staff Taxidermist C. J. Albrecht, and Artist Charles A. Corwin.

THE FOSSIL RHINOCEROSES OF NORTH AMERICA

By Elmer S. Riggs
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Ordinarily rhinoceroses are thought of as belonging to Africa and India along with elephants and lions. The number of fossil skeletons of various species of rhinoceroses found in this country show, however, that these great pachyderms were once at home in North America. Not only were they at home here, but common and abundant over a great part of the continent.

In Eocene time (about 45,000,000 years ago) they were beginning to appear on the plains of Utah and Wyoming along with the four-toed horse. In Oligocene time (about 35,000,000 years ago) they are known to have been numerous in the great plains region about the Black Hills where they adapted themselves as ordinary plains and woodland animals, as swift-footed runners, and as heavy-bodied river animals. In Miocene and in Pliocene times, (the former about 20,000,000 and the latter about 8,000,000 years ago) they reveled about the rivers which flowed eastward across the plains of Kansas and Nebraska.

A mounted skeleton and several skulls and legs of rhinoceroses of different kinds are exhibited in Ernest R. Graham Hall (Hall 38). Some of them are from the "bad lands" of South Dakota, others are from the old river channels and from the drifted sands of Nebraska and Kansas. There these animals appear to have died out as the great plains region became colder and more arid with the approach of the ice age.

Extinct Birds Exhibited

There has been installed in Hall 21 a special exhibit showing eight of the extinct birds of North America. The specimens were prepared by Staff Taxidermist Ashley Hine. This is the first installation in a series of biological exhibits of birds. A full account of it will appear in the May issue of Field Museum News.

Remarkable examples of inlaid work in shell, fashioned by natives of the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, provide an interesting study of primitive art in Joseph N. Field Hall (Hall A).