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TIGER HUNTING IN NEPAL

How, on the Grass-covered Plains at the Foot of the Himalaya, Tigers Are Captured by Surrounding them with Numerous Hunters and Beaters on Elephants. A First-hand Account of a Hunt

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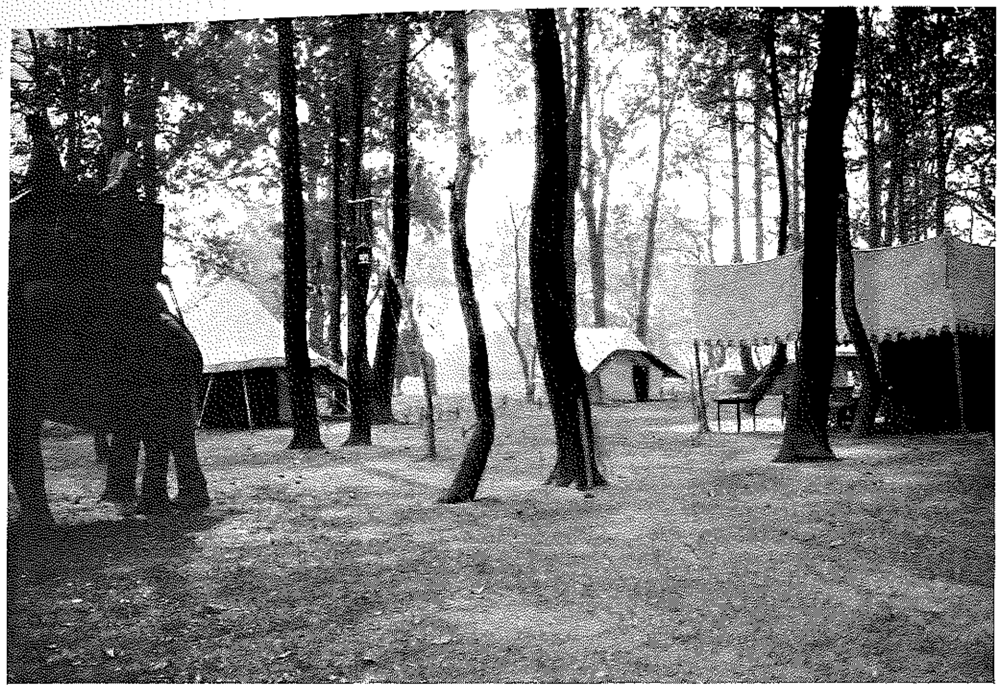
All tigers, wherever they may range, belong to the same family, though they are subject to considerable variation in size, coloring, and pelage. Those of the Amur River district, to which Mr. Morden is shortly to lead an expedition to collect these animals, are generally conceded to be the largest of the family—huge, long-haired beasts with a noticeable amount of white on underbodies, sides, and faces. They are considerably larger than the southern Asiatic tiger of today, and closely allied with them are the tigers of the Manchurian forests, while the Korean variety, also long-haired, is somewhat smaller. In southern Asia, due to the warm climate, the tiger is a short-haired animal, and in addition differs somewhat from his northern relatives in size and coloration. It is of these tigers that Mr. Morden speaks in the following article. There are, of course, no tigers to be found in Africa.—THE EDITORS.

TIGERS are usually associated with India, although as a matter of fact they are quite widely distributed throughout Asia. They are found in the Caucasus, northern Persia, portions of central Asia, China, Manchuria, Mongolia, southeastern Siberia, Korea, and the islands of Java and Sumatra, though in some of these localities they are not numerous. They are hunted also in Indo-China, in Siam, and in the Malay States, although not to the extent that they are in India. It is only with the Indian tiger, however, that this article will deal, for it is south of the Himalaya that I have hunted them.

They are, of course, large and powerful beasts, and there have been many records of Indian tigers measuring more than ten feet in length, but it seems probable that these measurements were taken along the curve of the back, rather than in a straight line from nose to tip of tail. It is now pretty generally accepted that a ten-foot Indian tiger, measured in a straight line from tip to tip, is a large specimen. Tigresses are somewhat smaller; a tigress of nine feet is unusual. The average weights of tigers and tigresses are about four hundred pounds and three hundred pounds, respectively, though tigers weighing more than five hundred



THE CAMP OF LT. COL. SIR FREDERICK O'CONNOR, BRITISH ENVOY TO NEPAL
Mr. and Mrs. Morden were the Envoy's guests for a week at this camp while the "tiger shoot" described in the accompanying article took place

pounds have been known. A full-grown tiger will stand about forty inches at the shoulder.

Aside from sources of food supply, the necessary requirements of the tiger in hot countries are a sufficiency of water and protection from the sun, and these requisites are found fairly generally throughout India, except in the deserts of the Northwest Frontier, the Sind, and parts of Rajputana and the Punjab. Although they have been killed off in some districts, tigers, generally speaking, are found all over the Indian Peninsula and even into the foothills of the Himalaya. Dense forests, bush and scrub growth, and areas of high grass form the favorite haunts of the tiger; he is almost never found in open country or far from good cover.

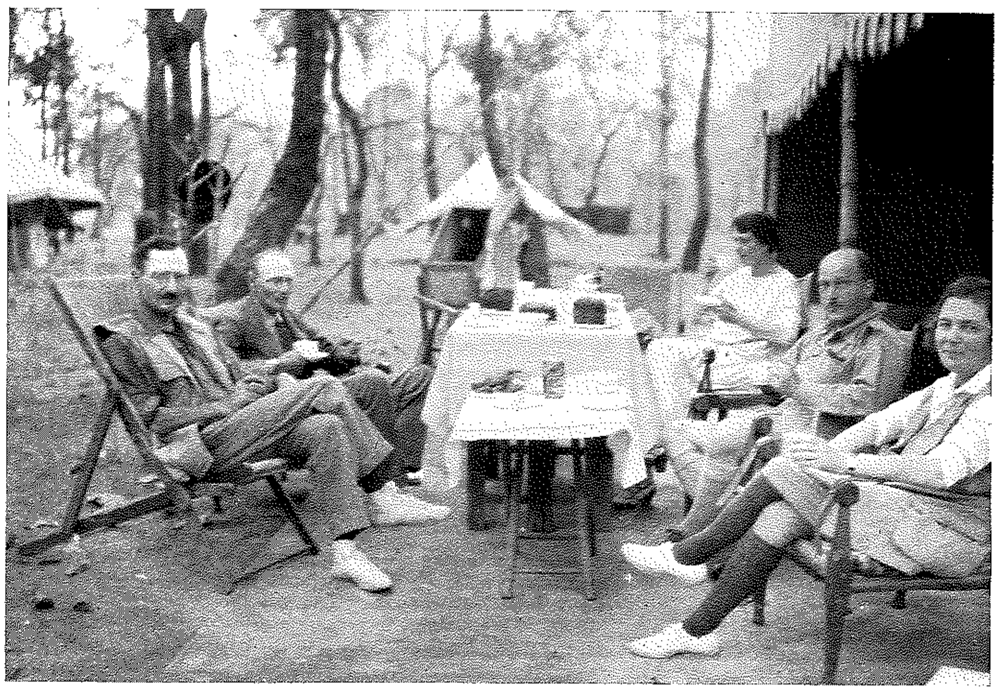
A tiger's senses of hearing and sight are both wonderfully acute, though it is on his ears that he mainly relies for detecting the presence of game. His sense of smell, on the other hand, is much less sharp, and in questing after game he does not scent along the trail as do members of the dog family, but locates his quarry almost entirely by hearing.

In Mr. A. A. Dunbar Brander's excellent book entitled *Wild Animals in Central India*, the author tells of experiments with a tame tiger which he kept for some time. When this animal's food was taken away from him and dragged through the grass, he never attempted to follow up the trail by scent, but hunted around in circles until he came upon it. As Mr. Dunbar Brander very aptly puts it, "Animals develop this sense (i.e., smell) either to hunt game, get their food, or for self protection. None of these causations apply to the tiger. They find their game by their ears and eyes, and having stalked it, they rush upon it. . . . They have been 'top dog' in the country they inhabit for so long, their strength and ferocity have been all the protection they required."

Aside from the occasional man-eaters, which are usually old animals or ones that have been partly crippled by wounds or disease, the tiger varies his food according to the district in which he lives. Where game is plentiful, as it is in much of Central India, he preys on denizens of the forest such as the sambar, chital, nilgai, and pig. When game is scarce, however, tigers often take to killing cattle, and then they become great nuisances. A full-grown tiger will average about a hundred kills a year, so it may easily be seen that, in districts where tigers are numerous and are inclined to prey upon herds of domestic cattle and buffaloes, they prove a source of heavy loss to the inhabitants.

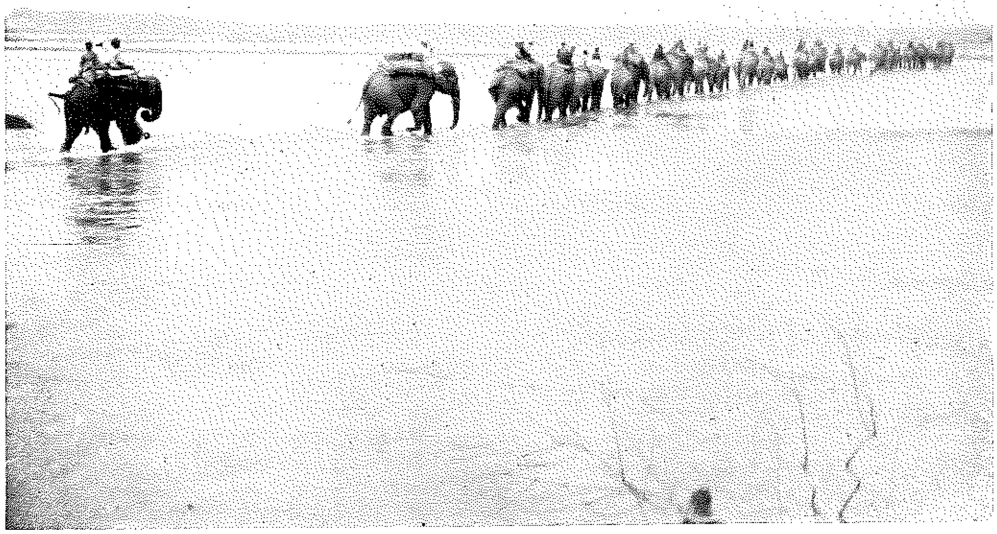
Such is the situation in parts of the Terai, the flat area of forests and high grass that extends along the southern foot of the Himalaya in Nepal and Bengal. It was there that I was so fortunate as to be a guest at a tiger-shoot given by the British Envoy to Nepal. This independent state, which lies between India and Thibet, is closed territory to foreigners, and very few have been able to shoot there. I believe, furthermore, that the method of tiger-shooting in Nepal is peculiar to that country. Briefly, it consists of surrounding the tiger with a ring of elephants, some of which carry the shooters in houdahs on their backs. The procedure is as follows:

Word comes that a tiger has made a kill, sometimes but a short distance away, but more often several miles from camp. Mounted on fast riding elephants, the camp's native shikaris, or hunters, ride out to inspect the kill, and if it seems probable that the tiger is not far away, word is



TEA AFTER THE DAY'S SHOOTING

The party included the Envoy and his aide, the Legation surgeon and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Morden, and a photographer. During the hunt about six hundred natives and more than fifty elephants were employed

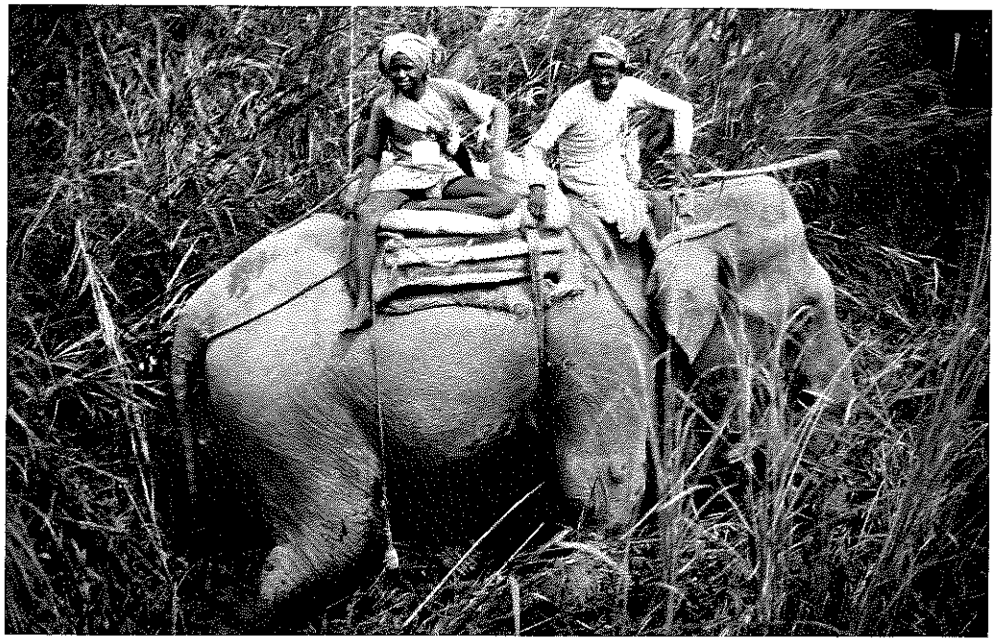


THE WORKING ELEPHANTS LEAVING CAMP
When the shikaris learn of a kill by a tiger, the working elephants are sent out to form the ring around the kill

sent back to camp. Then the so-called working elephants go out, each in charge of his mahout, or driver, with usually another man sitting on the pad, or mattress, tied over his back. With the working elephants go also the houdah, or shooting, elephants, which carry the box-like houdahs on their backs. These are the mounts of the shooting party, and they are always huge, steady, well-trained fellows, from the top of which one can get a good view over the tall grass or through the thick undergrowth. Altogether, about fifty or sixty elephants go out in the working party, and they make a striking picture as they file away from camp and trail off into the forest.

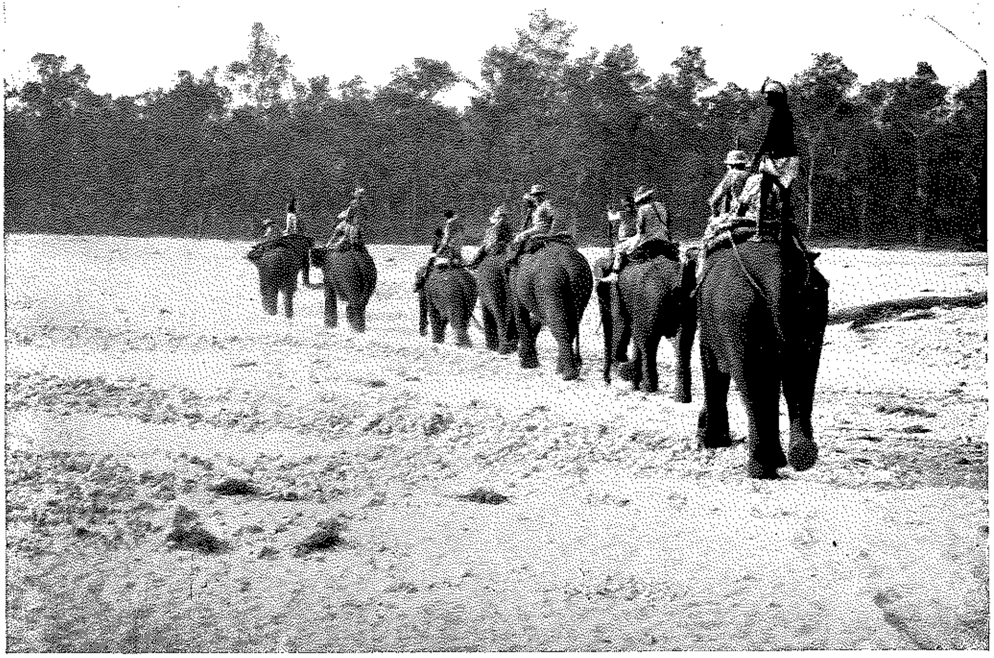
The members of the shooting party allow the others a head start, depending on the distance from camp that the kill has been reported, and then follow on "pad" elephants which are smaller, faster, and more easy riding than the big houdah carriers. Usually, the ring has been partly formed when the second party overtakes the first, and then a transfer is made to the houdahs. If there is a great difference in size between one's two elephants, the mahout of the larger makes him kneel, so that one may simply step from the back of the pad elephant into the houdah. After the transfer, all the elephants take their places in the ring, with the houdah-carriers located at advantageous points. The size of the ring depends upon the terrain; in the flat areas of high grass where our tigers were found, the ring was usually about three hundred yards in diameter at first. This distance is gradually reduced as the work of dislodging the tiger progresses. Somewhere inside the ring lies the kill and, one hopes, the tiger.

The reason why a kill may be surrounded with the reasonable certainty that the tiger is not far away, is the beast's habit of gorging, then drinking and sleep-



A WORKING ELEPHANT
This photograph was taken in the dense grass of the Nepal terai. It is such cover as this that would make it impossible to locate a tiger if the hunter were on foot

MRS. MORDEN ON HER RIDING ELEPHANT
When the working elephants go out, the houdah elephants, which are slow and hard riding, go with them. The party follows on smaller, faster elephants



THE PARTY GOING OUT
An hour's start has been given to the working and houdah elephants. When the party catches up, a transfer will be made to the houdahs

ing. Where kills are found far from water, there is little likelihood that the tiger will be lying-up near by, for after his drink he will seldom move far before sleeping. So expert do the native shikaris become in judging the chances of there being a tiger near the kill, that in a total of nine rings formed during our week in Nepal, tigers were found in the seven of them—and on two occasions there were three in the ring at once.

After the circle of elephants is completed, two or three near each houdah carrier are brought forward and worked back and forth in front of the line, to trample down the high grass so that it may be possible to see the tiger, should one come that way. I had never realized how impossible it would be to find a tiger on foot in such country, until I viewed those great stretches of grass from the vantage of a houdah. From the ground I could see only two or three feet in any direction; even when I was mounted on my elephant's back, the grass-tops, in many places, rose above my head.

The trampling out of a "field of fire" is the last operation in the forming of the ring. Shouts from all sides announce that all is in readiness, and a general tenseness becomes noticeable among the mahouts. The shooters take their weapons—usually double-barreled shotguns loaded with ball, to lessen the possibility of dangerous ricochets in case of misses—and stand to. Orderlies in the rear compartments of the houdahs hold the second guns in readiness, in case the tiger comes close and more than two shots are needed. Then, into the high grass in the center of the ring go two or three elephants, guided by their mahouts. These animals are always old timers, ones who know tigers and are not to be bluffed by them. Ordinarily, a tiger will not attack an elephant, though when hard pressed or wounded he may spring at one. The elephants seem to enjoy the fun of rounding-up tigers, and although they often show excitement when the tiger comes close, I have never seen one exhibit fear. Once, however, a hare broke through the line and the elephants on both sides nearly stampeded.

The elephants moving about inside the ring go "whooshing" here and there, tearing up great trunkfuls of grass and generally making as much noise as possible. The mahouts know that the densest cover will most likely hold the tiger, and they guide their mounts toward the thickest places. The tension around the ring becomes greater, and all ears are strained for the first sound which may indicate the quarry's location and his probable line of retreat. Sometimes the tiger is dislodged almost at once; more often it seems that every foot has been covered and that nothing larger than a mouse can have escaped being trampled.

Suddenly, from behind one's back comes the excited voice of the orderly, "Bagh hai, sahib, bagh hai." ("Tiger, sir, tiger!") The man's trained eye has caught a movement in the grass, to which he points with trembling finger. A moment only, then a snarling roar and a movement of the grass as the tiger, aroused from sleep and thoroughly angry, dashes for a place of greater concealment. You follow his movements by the line of moving grass-tops and stand ready, leaning over the front of the houdah in case he breaks cover near by. If he does come your way, a snap-shot from the swaying houdah at a plunging yellow streak in the grass far below, is all that you will get, unless, as sometimes happens, the first shot turns him and he dashes along the trampled area inside the ring.

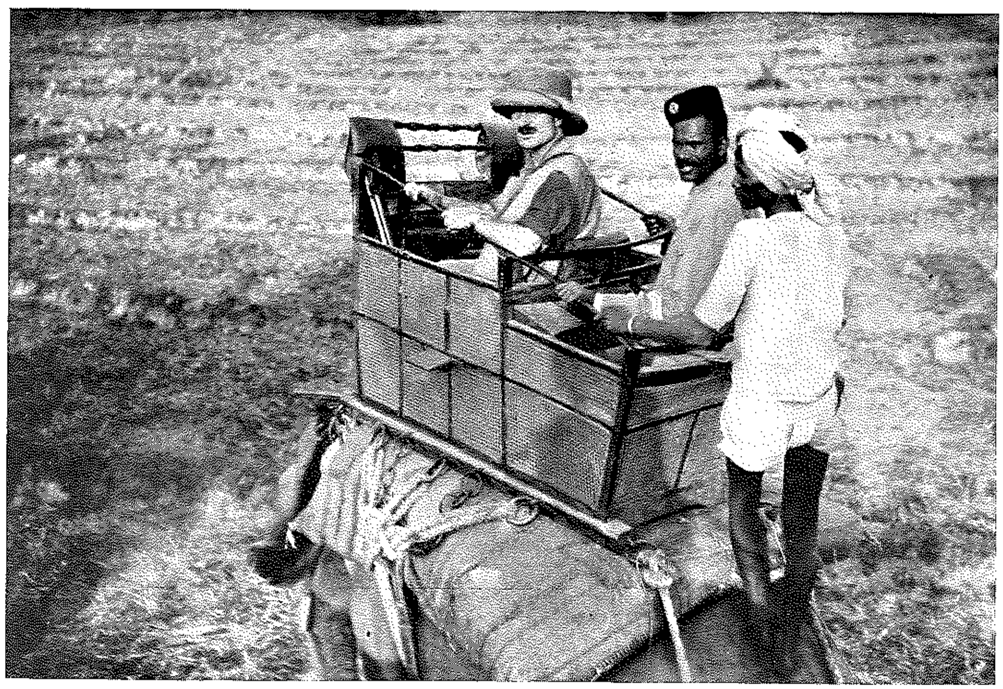
Should he strike the ring at a point where there are no guns, the elephants, trumpeting and squealing, let him pass between them. After he has passed, the mahouts on each side of the break turn their steeds and parallel his line of retreat, keeping track of his movements by the telltale shaking of the grass-tops.

TWO OF THE PARTY IN A HOUDAH
A mahout, astride the neck of his elephant, and an orderly in the rear compartment of the houdah make up the elephant "crew"

RINGING THE TIGER
As many as forty or fifty elephants may start out in two groups, one walking to the left, the other to the right until the two leaders meet, thus completing the ring

A BENGAL TIGER IN CAPTIVITY
Tigers in the wild state are likely to be stronger and heavier than specimens to be seen in zoos, due to their more active lives

THE DEFENSE GUARD
In case the tiger breaks through the ring, his line of retreat is paralleled by the elephants on each side of the break, and when he stops, another ring is formed



MR. MORDEN IN HIS HOUDAH
In this photograph the mahout is hidden by the houdah. Sometimes, as in this case, an extra man rides behind the houdah to speed the elephants if he lags

THE RING CLOSES IN

After a tiger is shot, the ring closes in. A wounded tiger sometimes takes cover in particularly heavy growth, and then it may become dangerous to the elephants and difficult to dislodge

A SHOT AT SHORT RANGE

A wounded tiger has broken cover and Mrs. Morden in the foreground has just fired at him. Mr. Morden is taking aim

TRYING TO DISLODGE A TIGER
It is typical of tigers to take cover rather than to run any great distance. Thus the method of ringing them is usually successful

When he stops, which he does at the densest bit of growth, they surround the place and a new ring is formed. Were the tiger to keep going, he would probably get away, but his instinct for concealment is his undoing.

Sometimes, as happened to our party on two successive days, more than one tiger may be found in the ring. Then ensue a few seconds of the greatest excitement, for they almost always break in different directions. Guns pop, elephants squeal, and mahouts shout on all sides, two or three tigers dash through the ring and are followed by lines of racing elephants. It is an experience never to be forgotten.

When a tiger is killed, the ring is gradually closed in until it is but a few yards in diameter. Then, after making sure that the animal is dead, the mounts of the shikaris and those of the sahibs are made to kneel, and the prize is examined. Before the beast is moved, however, the head shikari makes puja—literally, "worship"—a ceremony which is performed after each kill. The shikari takes five blades of grass, dips them in the tiger's blood, and casts one to each point of the compass; the fifth he buries in the ground, all the while uttering a sort of incantation. Thus the gods of the jungle are appeased and good hunting is assured for the future.

One of the most interesting features of the Nepal tiger shoot on which I went was the elephants, which were loaned by the Maharajah of Nepal and the rajahs of neighboring states. To say that one becomes fond of one's hathi, is to put it mildly. They are such amazing brutes, clumsy in appearance, and yet remarkably quick and intelligent. In moving along a forest trail, a low-hanging branch or creeper may look as though it would brush the mahout and his passenger off the elephant's back. You prepare to

BEGINNING OF MAKING *PUJA*

A ceremony of propitiation is performed by the shikaris after a tiger is killed. Five blades of grass are dipped in the tiger's blood, one is thrown to each of the points of the compass, the fifth is buried in the ground.

THE RETURN OF THE SHOOTING PARTY

For return to camp a transfer is made from the houdah elephants to the riding elephants on which long distances may be covered without discomfort as their motion is easy on the rider. Their average traveling gait is about five miles an hour.

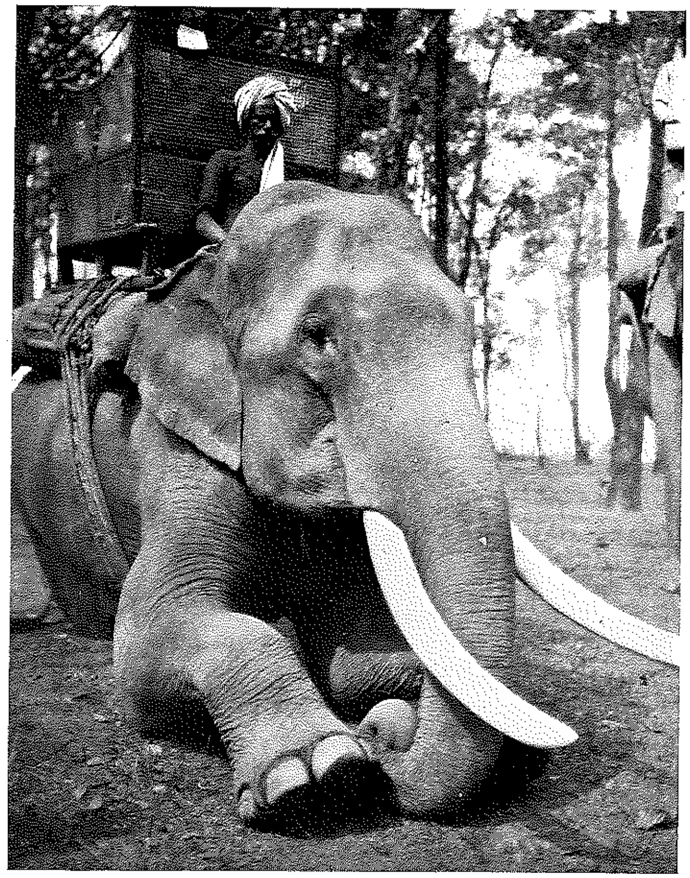
bend as low as possible, but just before reaching the obstruction, the elephant stops, and you see his trunk reach up, curl around the limb, tear it down and throw it aside. Again, a tree of considerable size may bar your path. Your mount just leans his head against it, his trunk curled; an easy push and over goes the tree.

On arrival at camp after the day's work, it is customary for the rider to give his mount a piece of sugar cane, and one of the camp attendants is always on hand with a bundle of short lengths for the purpose. Hathi knows about how long it should take you to dismount and get his present, and he waits quietly until he thinks the time is up. Then he becomes impatient and "whooshes" about with his trunk until the titbit is forthcoming.

Each elephant has its own personal servants, four of them. The mahout, who rides on his neck and guides him by prodding him with bare feet behind his ears, is usually a man who has grown up in the elephant service and thoroughly knows his mount. Mahouts seldom speak loudly to their charges, but seem to do most of their guiding by low-voiced orders and by their toes. Now and then a mahout will bring the blunt edge of his kukhri (the curved Gurkha knife which they all carry) down on an elephant's head with a crack that one would think would fell the animal. The blow does not seem to hurt the elephant, however, who just shakes his head a bit—and usually does what is required of him without further ado.

One of the three other men assigned to each elephant might be termed his groom, for this man sees that his animal is properly bedded down at night—they are always kept chained in camp—that he is watered, fed, and generally looked after. The other two men cut grass during the day and pile it up in bundles, which are brought to camp by the elephants themselves when they return from their day's work.

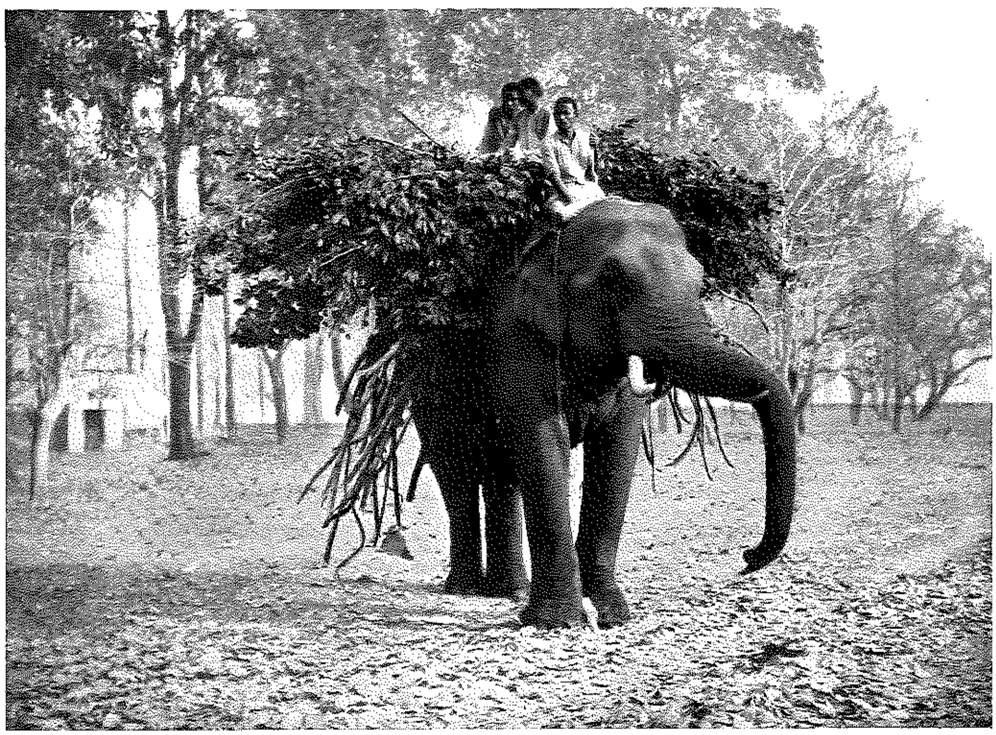
Although in some districts, where game is plentiful, tigers serve to maintain a



A TYPICAL TUSKER

The houdah elephants are large and specially trained for their work Due to this training they are not likely to become excited at critical moments balance of nature and prevent undue multiplication, in others they are malicious marauders. In the Nepal Terai, natives came to us and begged us to hunt near their villages, where, they said, tigers killed enough of their herds to cause real hardship. Nor are these natives usually able to protect themselves.

Tigers undoubtedly play an important part in the economic life of India, for they serve to keep down the numbers of other animals that tend to destroy the native crops. It is not likely, therefore, that the government will permit them to be exterminated. Where, however, they prey too extensively on domestic herds, it is highly desirable that their numbers be reduced, for thus, and thus only, can the proper balance between wild life and agriculture be maintained.



BRINGING IN A SUPPLY OF FODDER

Each elephant daily consumes several hundred pounds of leaves and smaller branches. This fodder is cut by two of the four men assigned to each mount and is collected and brought to camp by the animals after the day's work is over