

Pygmy Hog and Hispid Hare

Guy Mountfort

In *Oryx* September 1971, (pp 103–107), we described the re-discovery in Assam of two animals that had been feared extinct—the pygmy hog *Sus sylvanius* and the hispid hare *Caprolagus hispidus*. Guy Mountfort, who recently returned from a visit to India, Nepal and Sikkim on behalf of the World Wildlife Fund, reports encouraging news of these two Red Book species.

Thanks to the efforts of the Assam Valley Wildlife Society, under the chairmanship of Mr J.G. Oliver, there is now a good prospect that the main breeding area of these two recently rediscovered species will be protected. It is known that they occur in a dense tract of naul grass near a tea estate—the exact location is withheld for security reasons—where those in captivity were caught. The region is at present considerably disturbed by local graziers and by uncontrolled grass-burning, but the Society, in collaboration with the Forest Department, is to fence off one square mile of the best habitat, which will be guarded as a wildlife reserve. The fence will be strong enough to keep out cattle and trespassers. Unfortunately, however, wild elephant occasionally feed there, so repairs to the fence may become a costly item for the Society. An application is being made to the World Wildlife Fund for a grant of £2000.

Although there have inevitably been some casualties among the pygmy hogs (some of which were injured by local trappers), one of the captive-bred young is thriving. Unlike its parents, which remain extremely shy, it is delightfully tame. The adults make large and well hidden grass ‘nests’ in their enclosures, with separate entrance and exit holes beneath them. They are nervous animals and their movements are extraordinarily rapid, as is to be expected, for they lack any defensive weapon such as the wild boar’s powerful tusks.

At present two adult pairs and the surviving piglet are in large enclosures, with plenty of appropriate vegetation, on two adjacent tea estates; one of the sows is thought to be pregnant. Several more are held at the Gauhati Zoo in Assam. The intention is that the experience gained in feeding and rearing the pygmy hogs should be pooled and that, after the sow has farrowed, all the animals should be moved to the Gauhati Zoo, where it is hoped that under skilled management they will continue to multiply. Meanwhile no effort will be made to capture others. Great credit is reflected on the Assam Valley Wildlife Society for this successful enterprise.

Knowledge of the even rarer hispid hare in Assam is at present limited to the single specimen discovered last year by the Society. There is reason to believe, however, that there are others in the area now being put under protection. The Society would welcome the visit of a qualified wildlife specialist to conduct a thorough study of the reserve area and of the biology and ecological requirements of both these little known species.