



Sambar : The State Animal of Orissa

Dr. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty

Wildlife : A Precious Bio-diversity

The life which is not tamed or cultivated or domesticated or inhabited is a wildlife. Precisely the life in natural surrounding of forest is wildlife. The nature is majestic because of the presence of varieties of natural faunal assemblage. The increasing human population, urbanization, industrialization, deforestation and various other anthropogenic developmental activities have led to fast depletion of the habitat of wildlife. This compounded with the problems of poaching of wildlife for various needs, have brought several species at the verge of extinction. Conservation of wildlife has always been a matter of serious concern of the Government. The first National Parks Act came into force in 1955. No several protected areas like Biosphere Reserves, National Parks, Sanctuaries, Zoos, Zoological Gardens and Biological Parks with Science Centres are set up to accelerate the process of conservation and stimulate the process of breeding programmes. Inspite of all these efforts, the danger to wildlife continues. For better protection, the Government of India declares National Bird (Peacock), National Animal (Tiger), National Flower (Lotus) and National Tree (Banyan). Orissa also has declared State Bird (Blue Jay) and State Animal (Sambar) to generate awareness among people and children.

Sambar and Past History

Sambar is a type of deer. It is well-known since the reign of kings in our country. The kings were enjoying their period by going to the forest and hunting several species of deer. Hunting of deer was an enjoyable part of the royal life. The deer is known and familiar to human beings owing to hunter and prey relationship. This spirit still continues in the mind of present day people. This is the prime reason for the decline of deer population of our country so also in our state. If we look at the paintings of kings, we will certainly visualise the picture of king, queen and forest having deer. In past people were of the belief that using the skin of deer during reading of mythology is auspicious. Many people even were attracted in decorating their rooms with the antlers (horns) of the deer and skin of deer. So poaching of deer in past was for enjoying meat, seating material for reading or prayer and decoration. But now-a-days illegal hunting of deer is exclusively for the flesh of the animal. Can this animal survive by this inhuman hunting ?

Sambar as a Creature of the Forest

Deer are perhaps the most ancient of all the typical ruminants making their appearance in the lower miocene period. Man's influence on deer has been mainly that of an exterminator from the forest. A deer's means of escape are alertness, a



premonition of danger, quickened by a keen sense of scent, hearing and sight. Protection is also derived from their gregarious habits. These animals when in a large group are more immune from attacks of prey.

Sambar (Sambhar) is a kind of deer like Kashmir stag or Hangul (*Cervus elaphus hanglu*), Thamin or Brow-antlered deer (*Cervus eldi*), Swamp deer or Barasingha (*Cervus duvauceli*), Hog-deer (*Axis porcinus*), Muntjac or Barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjac*), Musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*) and Mouse-deer or Indian chevrotain (*Tragulus meminna*) (**Table 1**). Very often we call some other animals as deer in a wrong way. The animals which are wrongly considered as deer are Chiru or Tibetan Antelope, Chinkara or Indian Gazelle, Blackbuck or Indian Antelope, Chowsingha or Fourhorned Antelope and Nilgai or Blue Bull. These animals are grouped as antelope instead of deer. Antelopes are characterised by the presence of antlers

(horns) both in males and females whereas in deer, the antlers are present only in male except Rein deer and Caribou.

Structure and Behaviour

Sambar in Hindi is called as Sambar or Samar; in Marathi Sambar; in Tamil Kudoo marn; in Malayalam Kullay marn; in Kannada Kudawe or Kuddama; in Burma Sut and in Oriya Sambar. The scientific name is *Cervus*. It is the largest Indian deer and bears the grandest horns. Its height at the shoulder is nearly five feet. A full-grown stag scales nearly 300 kg. The average length of the horn is three feet.

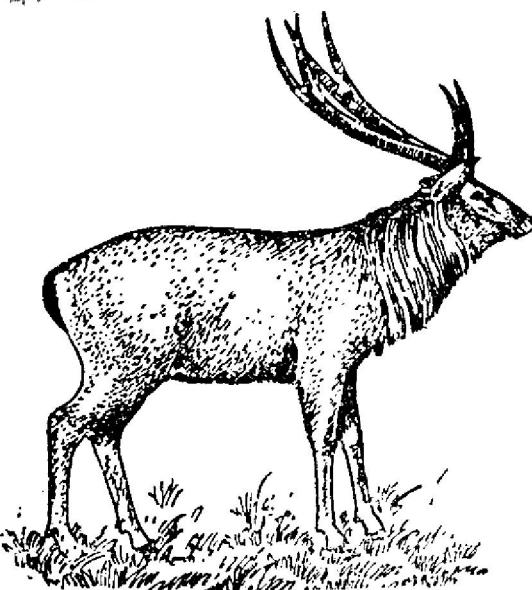
Sambar are distributed in the wooded districts of India, Burma and Ceylon, extending through the Malay countries and eastward to the Philippines and beyond. The race *c. u. unicolor* is from Ceylon; the Malay race *c. u. equinus* extends from Assam eastwards and the Indian race is *cervus unicolor niger* is exclusively confined to India.

Table 1 : Types of Deer, Their Common Name and Scientific Name

Sl.No.	Common Name of Deer	Scientific Name of Deer
1.	Barasingha or Swamp deer	<i>Cervus duvauceli</i> Cuvier
2.	Hangul or Kashmir stag	<i>Cervus elaphus hanglu</i> Wagner
3.	Sangai or Thamin or Brow-antlered deer	<i>Cervus eldi</i> Mc Clelland
4.	Sambar or Sambhar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i> Kerr
5.	Hog-deer	<i>Axis porcinus</i> (Zimmermann)
6.	Chittal or Spotted deer	<i>Axis axis</i> (Erxleben)
7.	Muntjac or Barking deer	<i>Muntiacus muntjac</i> (Zimmermann)
8.	Musk deer	<i>Moschus moschiferus</i> Linnaeus
9.	Mouse-deer or Indian Chevrotain	<i>Tragulus meminna</i> (Erxleben)

* The animals which are not deer but we believe to be deer are as follows :

1. Chiru or Tibetan Antelope (2) Chowsingha or Fourhorned Antelope (3) Chinkara or Indian Gazelle (4) Blackbuck or Indian Antelope (5) Nilgai or Blue bull. These are all Antelopes.



Male Sambar

The favourite place of sambar is forested hill-sides preferably near cultivation. They prefer to take grass, leaves and various kinds of wild fruits as their food. They are nocturnal animals. So they feed mainly at night and retire into dense forest at daybreak and do not usually come out till dusk. It is, therefore, very difficult to locate these animals during day time in dense forest. Their power of sight are moderate but smell and hearing power is strong. The capacity of so heavy an animal to move quite silently through dense forest is amazing. They take a good amount of water available nearby and can swim if necessary. They swim with the body submerged, only the face and antlers remain exposed to the water surface. The horns commence to grow in May and are in velvet (a coating on the horns) during the rains and clear of velvet by November. The stags clean and remove their horns by rubbing them against trees.

The body coat is coarse and shaggy. In stags it forms a mane about the neck and throat. The colour of the body is brown with a yellowish or greyish tinge. The underparts are paler. The

females are lighter in tone in comparison to males. Old stags tend to become very dark in course of time. During hot weather, much of the hair is shed. The antlers are stout and rugged. The antlers gradually get branched like the branches of trees. The branching of antlers get developed in full number in the fourth year. The antlers are rough to see and feel. Another structural character associated with the surrounding is seen in the size of ears. Both sambar and swamp deer have large ears which spread. The larger ears of sambar are designed to pick up as much sound as is possible from the surrounding.

Of all deer, sambar have the largest and best developed facial glands. The reason is the forest habitat surrounding in which it is well-nigh impossible for a stag to collect a following of hinds during mating period. A sambar stag attracts hinds by his call and by the powerful odour of his scent glands which attain their maximum development during the rut. Sambar are territorial animals. The males fight for territory. Each stag fights to obtain sole rights over some favoured valley. The victor becomes the master of the hinds which enter it. Pairing (mating) takes place in November and December. The stag's harem is limited to a few



Female Sambar



hinds. After the rut, he deserts them and leads a solitary life till the return of the mating season.

The young are born at the commencement of the monsoon in late May or early June. Young stags remain with the hinds. Sambar are rarely found in large numbers. Four or five to a dozen are usually noticed. Both stag and hinds are observed singly or a party of hinds and fawns without a stag. Sambar hinds may associate with swamp deer but not the stags. Variation in size in relation to different geographical areas in which they live is seen in some deer. Sambar, of course, is the largest deer with finest horns come from Central India.

Sambar : The Pride and Symbol of Orissa

Sambar, as a deer, is very unique in Orissa. The spectacular characteristics of Sambar are as follows.

- (i) Sambar is the largest deer.
- (ii) Sambar possesses the grandest horns.
- (iii) Sambar bears large spreading ears.
- (iv) Sambar have the largest and best developed facial glands.
- (v) Sambar are found in most parts of Orissa.

Because of these unique features, sambar has been considered to be the state animal of Orissa. But the danger to this precious wildlife seriously continues. So conservation strategy must be taken up. An awareness of the destruction and damage caused to the Earth's bio-diversity by human activity and the need for a balance between the two is the basis for conservation. For conservation to be successful this knowledge needs to be available to all strata of society. Therefore, for conservation to work, there is need for extensive and effective conservation and environmental education. We need to do much

more to protect wildlife; we need to create awareness among the masses that once a species is eliminated, it cannot be regenerated.

It may also be suggested that the state may keep certain number of sambar at Regional Science Centres located at Bhubaneswar and Dhenkanal where environment may be created for successful breeding as well as for creating awareness as our "State Animal". Secondly a few deer parks may also be developed at certain pockets of Orissa to conserve the species and breed the same for achieving a good population of sambar in Orissa. Hope, these attempts alongwith certain innovative steps would increase the demography of sambar and improve the awareness of our people as to the symbolic state animal of Orissa.

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Dr. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty is the Reader, P.G. Department of Zoology, Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar-751 004.