CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

MACACA MULATTA, M. RADIATA, THE Rhesus monkey
AND BONNET MACAQUE

28.1 The Living Animal

28.1.1 Zoology

Macaques are Old World monkeys (cercopithecids), closely related to the baboons of Africa though much smaller, with a head and body length of about 0.75 m. They have sturdy, squat bodies, strong limbs, and a somewhat elongated snout (fig. 372). The tail length of the rhesus monkey (fig. 372, above) is about one quarter of the head and body length, but much longer in the bonnet macaque. Other differences between the two species are the red hindquarters in the rhesus monkey, and the hairy bonnet on the head in the bonnet macaque. The bonnet consists of long dark hairs which radiate in all directions from the top of the head, except for the forehead (fig. 372, below, left).

Both macaque species are at home in trees as well as on the ground. They are good swimmers, and may drop from the trees straight into a stream and swim to the opposite bank.

Macaques are largely vegetarian, but they also eat insects, other small invertebrates and occasionally eggs and small vertebrates. As all primates, macaques carry food to the mouth with their hands. Like baboons, they have cheek pouches in which they store food that they cannot consume immediately. Macaques live in large troops, and they help each other to rescue the injured or threatened, and in defence of the young. Fur-picking is an important means of social communication.

The distribution of the two macaque species differs. The rhesus monkey lives in almost the complete northern half of the subcontinent from eastern Afghanistan and possibly formerly south-eastern Pakistan, through much of India and Nepal further eastward. The rhesus monkey is the most common monkey of North India. This macaque has adapted to a wide range of subtropical habitats and is found in high altitudes with snow up to near-deserts and dense deciduous forests and
mangrove forests. It is rare or absent in broad-leaved evergreen forests, and also in tropical zones. In some areas they mainly live in cities and towns, where they can find everything they need and are free from large predators.

The bonnet macaque lives in tropical deciduous, coniferous, riverine and mangrove forests of peninsular India south of the line Mumbai on the west and the Godavari river on the east. This is the common monkey of southern India, in villages and in jungles. On Sri Lanka, a very similar, but smaller, macaque is found, the toque macaque (*M. sinica*, see next section).

### 28.1.2 Related Species

Apart from the very common rhesus monkey and bonnet macaque, four more macaque species live in South Asia, all with a very restricted distribution and living in the forests. These four species are the stump-tailed macaque (*Macaca arctoides*) of the eastern Himalayas,¹ the Assam macaque (*M. assamensis*) of Nepal, Assam and Bangladesh,² the pigtail macaque (*M. nemestrina*) of Naga Land,³ the liontail macaque (*M. silenus*) of Tamil Nadu and Kerala (fig. 372, below, right),⁴ and the toque macaque (*M. sinica*) of Sri Lanka.⁵

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¹ The stump-tailed macaque lives in tropical and subtropical broad-leaved evergreen forests of the eastern hill ranges of the Himalayas, especially near the Brahmaputra River of north-eastern India. It lives more on the ground than in the trees. Its most characteristic feature is its tiny tail, reduced to a mere stump.

² The Assam macaque lives in the subtropical broad-leaved evergreen forests of the mountains of Nepal, Assam and Bangladesh. It looks pretty the same as the rhesus monkey, but is slightly larger.

³ The pigtail macaque lives in the tropical broad-leaved evergreen forested hills of Naga Land. Its most characteristic feature is its upright, curled tail.

⁴ The liontail or lion-tailed macaque lived in the tropical broad-leaved evergreen forests of south-western peninsular India, but is currently restricted to the Ashambu hills of the Western Ghats, the Anamalai-reserve (Tamil Nadu) and the Nellampathi hills (Kerala). Its most characteristic features are the luxurious whitish ruff of long hair on each side of the face vaguely resembling a lion’s mane and its rather thin tail that ends in a plume.

⁵ The toque macaque lives on Sri Lanka. It is the smallest living macaque species, while at the same time its tail is the longest of all macaques, longer than head and body together. It resembles a small bonnet macaque.