

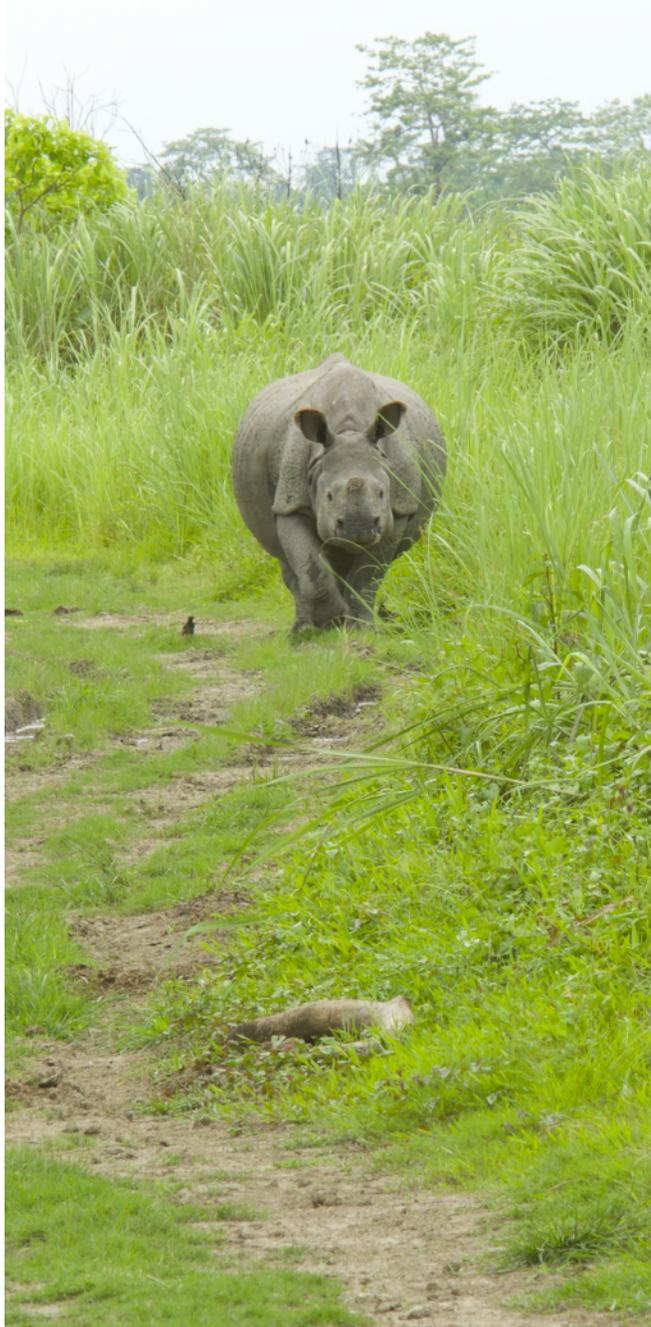


TALES FROM RHINO LAND

6x30' in 4K



Tales From Rhino Land



India's Kaziranga National Park is truly a nature's paradise. It's about the only place where one can hope to capture India's magnificent BIG FIVE wild animals in one frame --- the last surviving population of eastern swamp deer, Asiatic elephants, wild buffalos, tiger and rhinoceros.

Sloth bears, leopards, king cobras, pythons and nearly 800 species of birds add further colour and splendour to this breathtakingly beautiful landscape.

The park has the highest density of the majestic tigers anywhere in the world, yet surprisingly, they are not the headline here.

This is the kingdom of the Greater One-horned Rhinoceros (GOHR). Two other herbivorous mammoths, the elephants and buffalos, share these grasslands with the rhinos.

Set in the picturesque foothills of the eastern Himalayas, Karbi Anglong hills and the mighty river Brahmaputra, Kaziranga is land of plenty.

We spend three seasons in this incredible park to bring home some amazing tales. These are the tales of the big, bulky and often angry rhinos, who, if not busy eating, are relentlessly pursuing females. Tales of massive elephant herds and the elephant whisperer of rhino warriors and the monsoon babies.

The park is not about the big animals only. Songs of the Great Indian hornbills and the resounding calls of India's last and only ape, hoolock gibbons, echo the park to remind us that it's their playground too.

The tireless energy and fun and games of otters also find space in these tales.

The series unfolds these and many more remarkable tales that are bound to stay with the viewers for a long, long time.

The Background

By the time the British rulers stepped in to ban the rampant shikar (hunt), northeast India was left with barely ten GOHR. Two other species of the rhinos present in the area, Javan and Sumatran, were already lost by that time.

There are only five species left of this beleaguered animal on planet Earth --- two in Africa and three in Asia. With very little numbers, Javan and Sumatran are still tottering on the brink. The Indian rhino, GOHR, however, has made a dramatic comeback.

It is one of the most spectacular conservation success stories of modern times. Today more than 2500 GOHR's have their home in the Kaziranga National Park.

Its future, however, is far from secure. The species that has weathered the geographical and climatic upheavals for over 40 million years, is locked in a grim battle for its survival.

GOHR is THE most persecuted and coveted animal on the planet. Black-marketeers attach far more value to its horn than that of any other rhino species. In fact, every part of its body is valued astronomically for its superstitiously and erroneously believed curative powers.

It is therefore, poachers' top most target. Their menace has further been bolstered by the support and patronage they now receive from certain militant outfits in neighbouring countries. Armed with sophisticated weaponry, they breach the park boundaries from Brahmaputra river or the Karbi Anglong hills and disappear into hundreds of caves after making good with their brutal loot.

Tales from Rhino Land, however, is not about poaching and rhino only.

Our tales include elephants to hoolock gibbons as well as the endearing monsoon babies.



Episode 1: *Shikari Dandi*

It's a tense atmosphere that greets us when we arrive for the final schedule of our filming. The Burrapahar Range office of the park has received a tip off that poachers are about to enter the park. Because of its surroundings --- hills, national highway and river --- this range has a pretty much open boundary. Over 40 per cent of all the poaching incidents in the park, happen in this range.

An ambush is laid at three locations selected on the basis of past experience. A tense wait follows. Suddenly the calm of this serene park is shattered by the gun shots....

Episode 2: *Into Poachers' Den*

The Kukarkata hills of Burrapahar are dotted with hundreds of caves. One of them is home to thousands of bats. Poachers head for these caves after the strike. Once there, they can't be caught. Our team persuades the rangers to take us along on one of their search operations to the dreaded bat cave. We had little idea what it would entail. It's a 4-kilometer climb through thick vegetation, slippery tracks and treacherous rocks. Not to mention the leeches that swarm these rocks and vegetation. We reach the bat caves, but have to pay a price ... the crew's blood to the leeches.

Episode 3: *Elephant Whisperer*

While making wildlife films, one often comes across grassroots characters who captivate your imagination with the brilliance of their knowledge, passion and a special bond with wild animals.

Debeshwar Pegu is one such character, and there aren't many like him in the world!

Baby-faced with an average build, but when he stands up and commands, even mammoth wild tuskers pause in their tracks. A tourist guard in the forest department he carries an old relic of a gun, but he has not raised it against elephants ever. He doesn't have to. Elephants seem to listen to him and obey him. When he says 'go mother, go', even a furiously charging female will stop and turn back. On three occasions, we were surrounded by large herds and were given the charge. Our saviour, Pegu ...with just his raised hand!!

Episode 4: **Rhino Warriors**

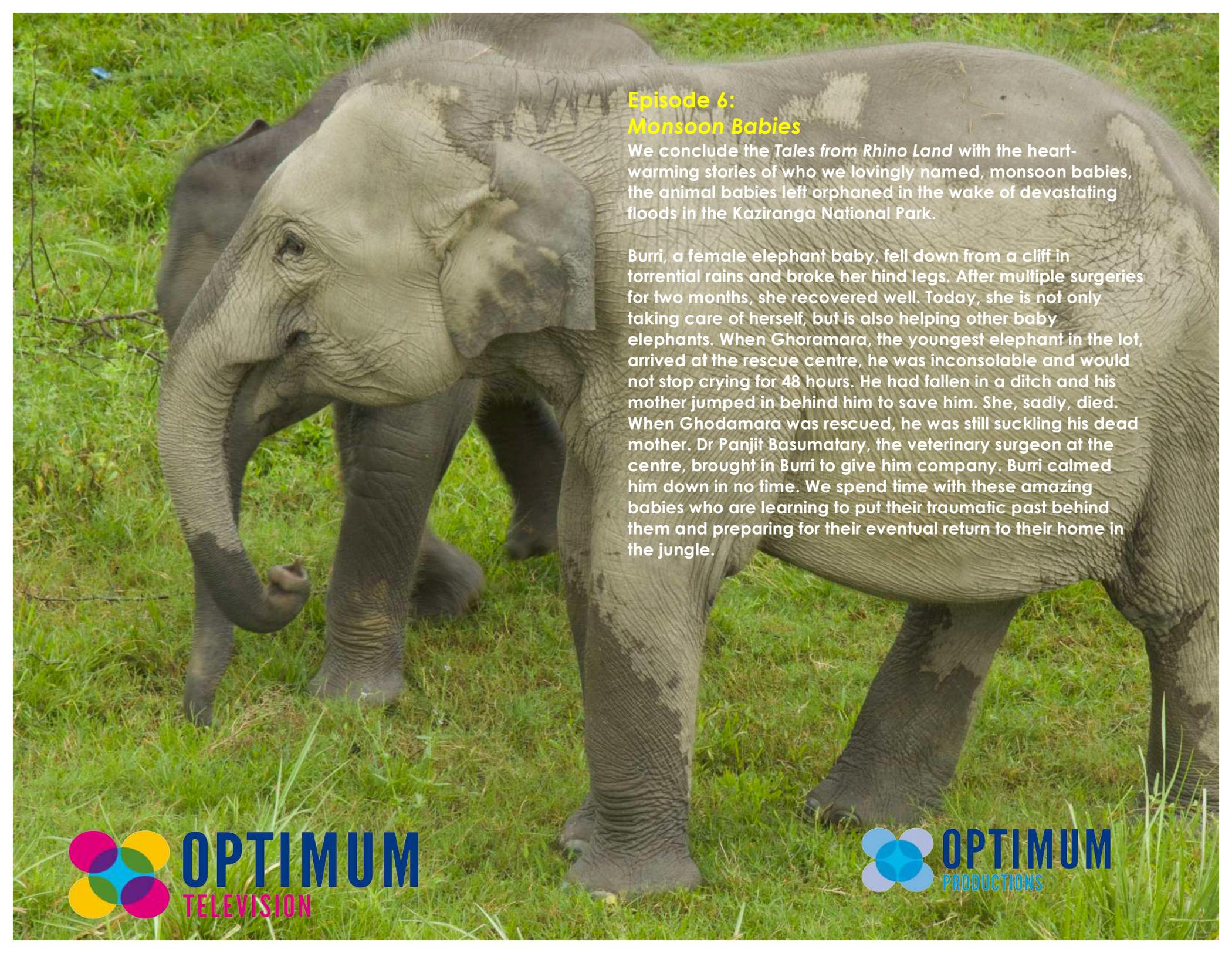
On a rainy morning, we came across a pair of guards walking from the range office to their base camp deep inside the forest. Only one had a bicycle. The other one requested a hike. We dropped him five kilometres on to a place he had pointed out in the middle of the jungle. We carried on further ahead. On our way back after three hours of filming, we came across the same duo still walking towards their base camp. They had done eight kilometres and two more to go! With an old gun in hand, they were walking through 8-foot high elephant grass on both sides of the path in a forest that has almost 7000 dangerous animals! Once at the base camp, they spend weeks altogether away from family and friends, connected to the outside world only by a walkie-talkie or a mobile phone. It's understandable that they are routinely targeted by the poachers but you feel really sad when you hear the news of death by the very animals they are trying to protect! They earn a salary of Rupees 7000, or USD 100 or GBP 85 a month. Are they in it for money? Bah!! Welcome to the world of the rhino warriors. Rain, summer or winter, day or night, they guard the rhino with a zeal and passion that is rare to witness.

An episode built around the heroics of young female officer, Abharna, and many like her.

Episode 5: **Seasons in the Sun ... and Rains**

We look at Kaziranga National Park's relationship with the elements. It's a park that has been created by the mighty river Brahmaputra and the annual floods that it unleashes locally. It brings in fresh water, minerals and fish and creates fresh islands on the one hand, but on the other, leaves behind a trail of widespread devastation, including death of hundreds of wild animals year after year.



A young elephant with grey, wrinkled skin stands in a lush green field. The elephant is facing left, with its trunk slightly curled. The background is filled with tall grass and some small plants.

Episode 6: Monsoon Babies

We conclude the *Tales from Rhino Land* with the heart-warming stories of who we lovingly named, monsoon babies, the animal babies left orphaned in the wake of devastating floods in the Kaziranga National Park.

Burri, a female elephant baby, fell down from a cliff in torrential rains and broke her hind legs. After multiple surgeries for two months, she recovered well. Today, she is not only taking care of herself, but is also helping other baby elephants. When Ghoramara, the youngest elephant in the lot, arrived at the rescue centre, he was inconsolable and would not stop crying for 48 hours. He had fallen in a ditch and his mother jumped in behind him to save him. She, sadly, died. When Ghodamara was rescued, he was still suckling his dead mother. Dr Panjit Basumatary, the veterinary surgeon at the centre, brought in Burri to give him company. Burri calmed him down in no time. We spend time with these amazing babies who are learning to put their traumatic past behind them and preparing for their eventual return to their home in the jungle.