

# GREEN MALAYSIA

RAINFOREST ENCOUNTERS



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*Photographs on pp. 1-8*

*p. 1: Massive dipterocarp buttresses; p. 4: Virgin jungle at Sungai Belawan, c. 1907; p. 6: Stream in Malaysian rainforest; pp. 8-9: Aerial view of the Malaysian tropical rainforest.*



The sambar deer (*Cervus unicolor*) is fond of nibbling the bark of rubber trees.

Another victim of poaching is the Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*), the most endangered animal in Malaysia. It is also the smallest and most primitive of the five surviving rhinoceros species (two in Africa and three in Asia). Found mainly in lowland dipterocarp forests, this hoofed animal can be easily detected because of its appearance and well-defined walking trail. It has two horns, slit eyes, folds around the trunk and brown-grey hide. An adult weighs up to 500–750 kilograms.

The penalty for illegal ownership or harming this totally protected animal is a possible five-year jail sentence in addition to a fine. But the high commercial value for rhinoceros products, believed by Asians as having medicinal properties, continues to be a draw card. Rhinoceros horn is a highly desired aphrodisiac and is also believed to reduce fever; the hide is said to cure skin diseases and the entrails relieve constipation. It is estimated that there are altogether between 800–1,000 Sumatran rhinoceroses left in Myanmar, Thailand, Sumatra and Malaysia. Of this, 150–220 are found in Malaysia.

The Malaysian rainforest is home to several species of deer, the largest being the rusa or sambar deer (*Cervus unicolor*). Sambar range in colouring from pale to dark brown and their fawns have faint spots at birth. Adult males have antlers. Their diet consists mainly of grasses, plant shoots, leaves of shrubs and fruit that has fallen to the forest floor. Sambar deer are occasionally a nuisance to farmers and commercial agriculture as they invade plantations to nibble on young plants.

The Indian muntjak (*Muntiacus muntjak*), which reaches up to 55 centimetres at the shoulder, is not as large as the sambar which can be as tall as 1.5 metres; but it has similar antlers, and its young is spotted as well. As they grow older, the deer lose the spots. The muntjak is often referred to as the 'barking deer' because

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## THE SUMATRAN RHINOCEROS

The Department of Wildlife and National Parks Malaysia began a rhinoceros breeding programme in 1984. Six years later Sungai Dusun Wildlife Conservation Centre, Ulu Bernam, Selangor, became the main centre for captive breeding of the endangered Sumatran rhinoceros. Currently the centre has six rhinoceros in captivity, four females and two males. Another three rhinos—one male and two female have been bred in the Melaka Zoo; unfortunately, several attempts to mate them have failed. The Global Environment Facility, jointly operated by United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank, has allocated RM3.8 million (USD1 million) for Malaysia's programme to conserve the Sumatran rhinoceros.

The Sumatran rhinoceros escapes the heat of the day by wallowing in mud holes.