

## Threatened Species of Large Mammals in Tropical South East Asia and the Importance of Sanctuaries (Including National Parks and Reserves) in their Conservation

by

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### SUMMARY

Due to pressure from human populations and ever insistent demands for more land, sanctuaries in South East Asia are of inestimable importance for preserving rare and endangered species. With poverty, hunger and often illiteracy as prevalent as they are, the main emphasis should be on the economic or tourist value of wild life. The co-operation and assistance of the local inhabitants are vital if any progress is to be made in nature conservation. Some practical methods of ensuring this co-operation are discussed, including buffer zones, publicity and education, and provision of local amenities.

While legislation protecting endangered species is necessary the difficulties in enforcing such legislation in emergent and developing countries makes it imperative to preserve these rare species in sanctuaries. Pressures from human populations in the countries of Asia are much greater generally than in North America and Africa. Consequently sanctuaries in Asia are usually smaller in size and require more management and greater protection. The Javan and Sumatran rhinos, the brow-antlered deer, the anoa, the tamarau, the orang-utans, and to a lesser degree the seladang, kouprey, and Malayan tapir are animals of South East Asia that urgently require protection if they are to be preserved from extinction.

Where poverty, hunger, and often illiteracy are prevalent among the local people, it is of little avail to stress the importance of wild life on aesthetic, cultural and scientific grounds. The main emphasis should always be on their economic value; in other words, rare animals are of infinitely greater value to the local villagers if kept alive in their natural habitat than if killed and eaten. Rare wild animals will attract visitors from nearby cities and tourists from abroad and thus provide the sorely needed revenue for development.

The problem of preserving rare species of wild life in existing or proposed sanctuaries in South and South East Asia is largely political and administrative. It depends ultimately on the careful drawing up of laws and the full co-operation of the local villagers.

Drawing on experience gained at Kaziranga Sanctuary in North East India, where the Great Indian Rhinoceros is preserved, it has been found that the creation of a buffer zone of varying width around the sanctuary in which no firearms or other weapons may be carried except by bona fide inhabitants of the zone for the actual protection of their own crops from vermin, has done a great deal to keep away poachers.

Anyone from outside caught inside the buffer zone with a firearm can be immediately arrested, while those living within the zone can then be more carefully watched and

To ensure the co-operation and assistance of the inhabitants living and working in the vicinity of a sanctuary, the importance of publicity and education cannot be over-estimated. The inhabitants must be convinced of the monetary value of wild life; the local members of the legislature who live near the sanctuary must be convinced of the long-term economic advantages of the wildlife resource and must themselves spread the gospel of nature conservation among their constituents. Basically the animals belong to the local people and they could well be regarded by them as living money earners, particularly if there is some concrete proof of the profit from tourism to the country as a whole in the form of a special school or water supply. Some special project (in addition to the normal work of development) publicly proclaimed as being the result of funds derived from the rare species or sanctuary concerned, should create a very favorable impression on the local people.

Local human populations adjacent to a rare species of wild life should be induced to take a pride in their accidental trusteeship - protectors of this valuable natural resource rather than destroyers of it. It is significant that poachers of the rhinoceros in Kaziranga are forced to do their illegal killing secretly and in the remote interior away from and unknown to the local inhabitants who would resist such interference from outsiders.

In the event of a rare species having to be transported to a new area more suitable for its supervision and protection, as might happen in the case of the Sumatran rhinoceros, it is even more important to have previously enlisted the support of the local population. To create new conditions of wild life as potential crop-raiders might arouse resentment in a new area unless the inhabitants of the neighborhood could be previously persuaded to accept the new situation with its land requirements and risks, in their own and in the national interest.

It is on the co-operation of the local villagers that many of the endangered species and their sanctuaries depend, and it is mainly by such simple and practical methods that under-developed peoples can be persuaded to become conservation-minded.