

Editorial

MALAYSIA MUST ACT TO SAVE THE SUMATRAN RHINO "Rhinoceros chases kampong folk, shot dead."

PASIR MAS, Wed. — A female rhinoceros was shot dead at Kampong Tasik China, 20 miles from here, yesterday morning after it had terrorised the village.

A villager, Inche Ismail bin Abdullah, shot the rhinoceros after the kampong people had chased it round the area for about an hour.

The rhinoceros, weighing about 300 lb. appeared at about 7 a.m. and sent about 20 school children and kampong folk for shelter.

It also chased several rubber tappers.

The Kelantan Game Warden, Inche Musa bin Noordin, said that the rhinoceros probably came from the Gua Badak forest reserve, about five miles from Rantau Panjang. — *Bernama, Malay Mail September 23, 1970.*"

There are five species of rhinoceros in the world — two African and three Asian.

Two species were once widespread in South-East Asia. The few surviving Javan or Lesser One-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) are all in Ujung Kulon Nature Reserve, Java where they are protected. The last known specimen in Malaya was shot in 1932.

The Sumatran or Asiatic Two-horned Rhinoceros (*Didermoceros sumatrensis*) is on the verge of extinction. The majority of the survivors are believed to be scattered throughout West Malaysia.

The Colombo Plan adviser on Wildlife and Conservation Dr. Stevens estimated a total of 20 in 1968, of which 3 were in Taman Negara (comprising parts of Kelantan, Pahang and Trengganu) and only one other was known in the whole of Kelantan.

The shot animal weighed 300 lb. This, and the locality in the north of Kelantan away from extensive tracts of virgin jungle, make it more likely that the animal was a young tapir. Both species are commonly called *badak* in Malay. The tapir, symbol of this Society, is an even more inoffensive herbivore than the rhino and is usually quite docile unless maimed or wounded. It also is totally protected by law throughout Malaysia. It is little consolation that the tapir is less rare than the rhino.

It would seem from the newspaper report that although the appearance of this unfortunate animal at first scared the villagers they had no difficulty in chasing her around for her last hour. The loophole in the law that protected animals may be killed in defence of human life is all too often abused in this country where many people possess

firearms and are eager for some hunting sport. Moreover orang asli are exempted from legislation in so far as it prohibits their customary habits.

Dr. Stevens wrote in his report to government that "the officially sanctioned control of nuisance animals in agricultural areas has virtually eliminated several important game species and has left the populace of Malaya a tradition of indiscriminate slaughter of wildlife".

There is clearly a need to re-educate the people so that future sightings of rare wildlife will have a happier outcome than the Pasir Mas incident.

It must be realised that Malaysia holds in trust for the whole world some of the rarest, noblest and most interesting species of wildlife. Legally all are totally protected. Normally they should be left unmolested. If an animal appears to be a nuisance the Game Department should be called in to decide its fate. Only imminent danger to human life justifies killing. Far better, the animal should be driven back into its jungle habitat, or if that is being decimated by lumbering or agricultural development, the animal should be coralled for eventual transfer to an inviolate sanctuary. At present Taman Negara is such a legally protected sanctuary and long may it remain inviolate against excisions or changes.

Our Indonesian neighbours have set a fine example by protecting the Javan rhinoceros and the Banteng. Malaysia alone can ensure the survival of the Sumatran rhinoceros. The present trend towards extermination must be reversed, or within a decade or so this noble animal will be extinct. The nation's trust for all mankind broken.

Distribution and Population of Siamang and Gibbons in the State of Perak

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INTRODUCTION

Among the monkey tribe occurring in the States of Malaya, gibbons have the smallest population. A family consists on the average of four to five animals. It is doubtful if ever the species had been plentiful in history. Game Department case files show few cases of shooting, killing or trapping which point out to one conclusion—there has been little or no change in the past and present populations.

Young gibbons have very high commercial value because of the demand for them as pets from among the general public. A young still clinging to its mother is usually caught by killing its mother. It is obvious therefore that for every young gibbon that is kept in captivity another animal, which is its mother, had died. As a source of food our aborigines are the only people who consume the meat of these animals and sad to say the meat is claimed by them as excellent.

Gibbons are relatively slow climbers when compared with leaf-monkeys or macaques. As evidenced from many observations a whole family uses the same branches and trees and follow the same route when taking off. Even an inexperienced hunter will succeed in bagging a whole family.

LEGISLATION

The shooting, killing or taking of all gibbons (*Hylobates*) was absolutely prohibited since 1923 by Gazette Notification No. 2495 of 1932 under Section 10 of Cap 193. On conviction the accused was liable to a maximum fine of \$500.00 for each animal so shot, killed, or taken. Under the present legislation, the Wild Animals and Birds Protection Ordinance No. 2 of 1955, the maximum fine is \$1000.00 for an unlimited number.

The total protection given to the gibbons and strict law enforcement carried out by staff of the Game Department had obviously saved the species from being seriously depleted. Unlike the elephant where herds numbering thirty or more animals have been completely exterminated because of crop depredation the gibbons may have remained more or less the same as far as it could be remembered. Number of young in captivity and arrest cases showed very few animals were caught annually. The opening of forests may have strong effects on the population of gibbons as their