

Rhinoceros and Seladang - Malaya's Vanishing Species

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SUMMARY

The necessary rural expansion in Malaya during the past five years has created and is creating very serious problems in the field of wildlife conservation particularly for the Sumatran rhinoceros and the seladang. The distribution and location of individual rhinoceros are reviewed based on the author's personal knowledge gained from extensive experience over the past twenty years in Malaya. Seladang, although numerically greater than rhino, are just as vulnerable because their habitat is that land most suitable for cultivation.

Distribution maps of rhino and seladang are presented.

INTRODUCTION

During the past five years the face of Malaya has altered considerably in more ways than one, but the expansion of rural development, necessary as it may be to a growing nation, has created very serious problems in the field of wildlife conservation. The two most threatened species are the Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerrorhinus sumatrensis*) and the seladang (*Bos gaurus*). I am of the opinion that only one species of rhinoceros now exists within the limits of the Malay Peninsula, there being no evidence of the continued presence of the Javan one-horned (*R. sondaicus*).

THE RHINOCEROS

There is little enough positive information on the rhinoceros at all and that contained in this paper is all that the writer has been able to collect over the past twenty years or so. Details of known habitats are undoubtedly correct, but it has not been possible to ascertain the exact number of animals existing therein, and any estimate given is conservative.

Commencing our survey in the south of the peninsula, the last known rhino in the State of Johore was shot in 1947 although a few may still exist in the swamps.

Currently, the first rhinoceros to be found - about three in number - are located in north Selangor on the banks of the Bernam River where I found two adults and one young in 1949. A sanctuary of some 10,700 acres was created for their total protection by the Selangor State Government a few years ago; this is now surrounded by cultivation on three sides. It is unfortunate that no corresponding reserve has been made in Perak in the extensive swamp forest across the river which the rhino are known to cross.

Continuing northward, in 1949 the hind quarters of a solitary rhino were seen in the steep foothills of Gunong Bubu.

It is in the Bintang Hijau Forest Reserve in northern Perak and the contiguous Gunong Inas Forest Reserve in south Kedah, that we find the highest concentration of rhinoceros known in Malaya. The rocky inhospitable terrain, containing a series of precipitous 4000 to 6000 foot mountains, is well-watered and has frequent wallows and a number of

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fine salt licks, which when I inspected them in 1956 were regularly visited. The wide game trails were much used by both rhino and elephant. In fact the Assistant Game Warden of Perak photographed a rhino at a salt lick a year or so later.

No estimate of the rhino population there can be made without considerable research, but at the present time the whole area is relatively undisturbed apart from logging at some places and tin mining at Klian Intan.

In the upper reaches of the Perak River in the hilly country bordering Thailand there seem to be some rhino but it has not been possible to fix their number: the tracks of one mature animal were seen in 1964.

In the remote hilly bamboo forest of north Kedah bordering Thailand we heard an unknown number of rhinos and found a number of fresh wallows and dung heaps in April 1941.

We now turn our attention to the States of Kelantan, Trengganu, and Pahang. Trengganu, I am convinced holds a few animals in the relatively unexplored hinterland although it has not been possible to verify this. The former King George V National Park, now known as Taman Negara, contains large tracts of land in all three of the above-mentioned states, and there is irrefutable evidence of the presence of rhinoceros within that part of Pahang and also in a high remote region in South Kelantan. Last year a solitary adult was seen in Tembeling valley near Park Headquarters and was seen again some weeks ago. To the east and south east of the park (in the upper reaches of the Sungai Tekai and the foothills of Gunong Irong and Gunong Tapis) there is a great sweep of unexplored difficult country which could very easily contain rhinoceros.

The Krau Game Reserve in Central Pahang is also imperfectly known since no exploration has been done there since before 1941 at which time an adult rhino frequented certain salt licks in the southern quarter. Aborigines inhabiting these regions have told me of the presence of a few rhino on the western slopes of Gunong Benom and at a frequently used salt lick high up in the Ulu Klau Ketchil.

We are now left with southeast Pahang which for the greater part is a vast area of swampy jungle, mainly unexplored and unknown insofar as wildlife is concerned. From this area there periodically emerge migrations of the Bearded Pig (*S. barbatus*) which the aborigines slaughter as they swim the rivers. Apart from these migrations, this animal is practically unknown in Malaya, and it would certainly not be too far fetched to expect to find rhinoceros somewhere in that wild region, especially in the upper valley of the Sungai Endau.

From the available information, then, we can be sure that a few rhinoceros still exist in Malaya, but we cannot say how many, and we do not know where they all are. The summary in Annex 1 is an attempt to estimate the population from the knowledge at our disposal.

THE SELADANG

The seladang (*Bos gaurus*) while numerically in a much stronger position than the rhino, is, because of its habits, just as vulnerable, if not more so. It is a creature of the lowland river valleys seldom going even as high as 2000 feet. It grazes and browses on grass and low-growing vegetation on islets and river banks and in clearings made and abandoned. Since such country is the most easily developed, being accessible and with the best soil, the seladang is very easily left homeless. Once a herd is broken up and scattered they fall prey to carnivores and hunting, the breeding cycle may be interrupted and a steady decline in numbers sets in until the whole herd ceases to exist. In some areas of Pahang herds of 30 or more that existed in 1941 - 18 years ago - have disappeared. It is certain that seladang populations currently living in areas due for rural development are doomed unless some means of saving them can be found. At present these magnificent animals are still to be found throughout the country (except in Malacca, Perlis, and Selangor) occurring in greatest numbers in Pahang, parts of Upper Perak, and South Kelantan.

(As a matter of interest while on the subject, it has been reported to me that a small herd of Banteng (*Bos sondaicus*) still exists in a certain very remote part of Kedah although there has been no positive record of the presence of this animal for many years).

Salt licks so important to wildlife have been destroyed by cultivation and now a series of dams for hydro-electric power to be constructed on the Perak River and the Sungei Muda in Kedah will submerge the greatest known concentration of salt licks in Malaya. The development of a vast area of 150,000 acres in Pahang known as the Jengka Triangle now inhabited by both seladang and elephant, and the building of roads into hitherto inaccessible country, populated only by aborigines and wildlife. show that the problems of conservation are becoming progressively more acute.

ANNEX 1

ESTIMATED POPULATION OF RHINOCEROS IN MALAYA

Locality	Number Definitely Known	Probable
Johore	Nil	2
Selangor/Perak (Ulu Bernam)	3	4
Selangor (U. Kenaboi)	Nil	1
Gunong Bubu	Nil	1
Perak/Kedah	2	4
Ulu Kedah (Thai border)	2	4
Perak/Kelantan border	Nil	2
National Park	2	4
Ulu Trengganu	Nil	2
Krau Reserve	Nil	2
Southeast Pahang	Nil	2
Ulu Perak/Thai Border	1	2
	<hr/> 10	<hr/> 30

FIG. 6

Areas in Malaya where Rhinoceros have been Reported

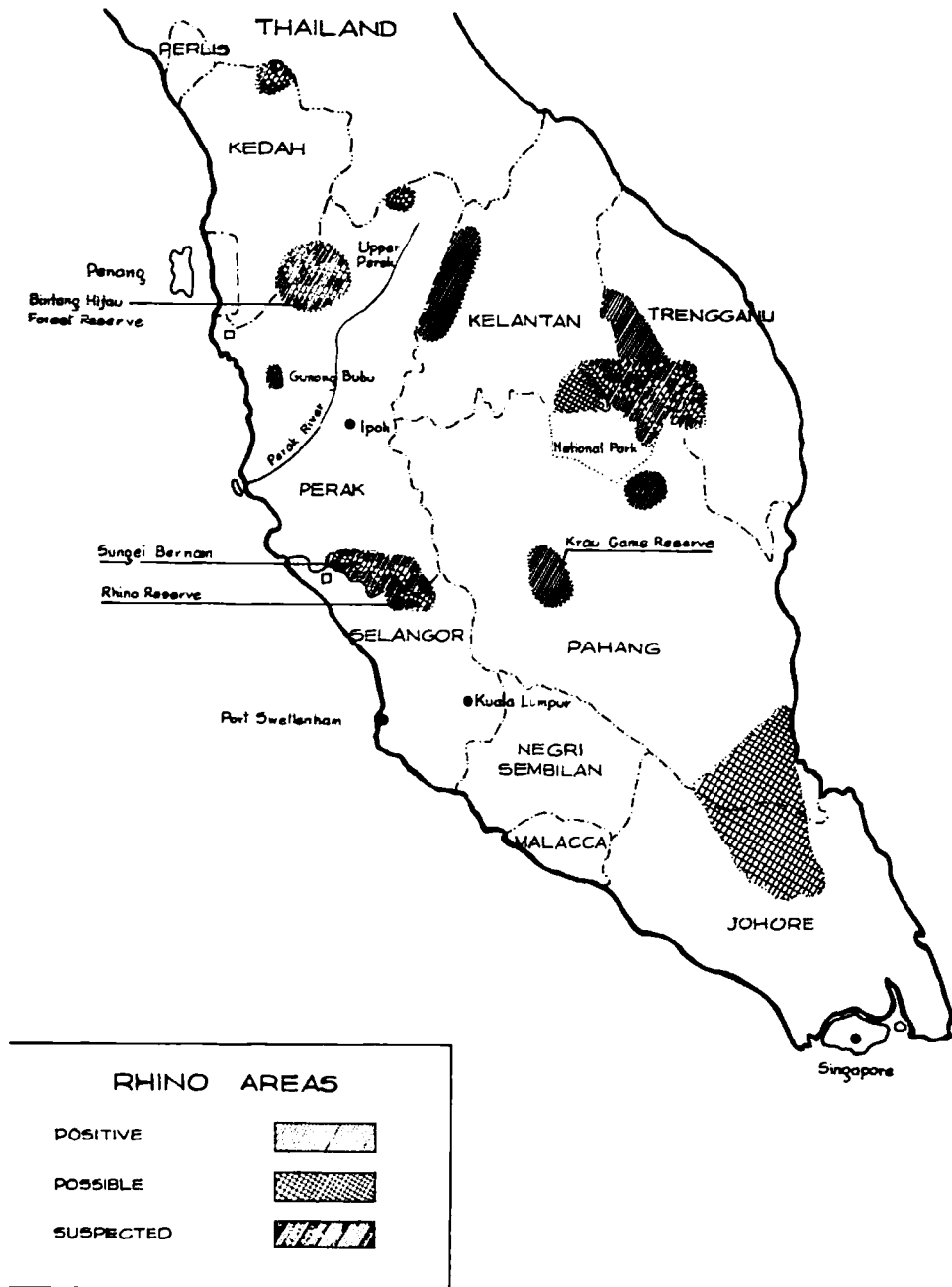


FIG. 7

Areas in Malaya where Seladang are Found

