

Malayan Safari

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WITH 8 PAGES OF PLATES



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The author. The only practicable way into the interior is by boat

expressed wonder that a male Chinese could turn into a female Malay ghost, he replied: 'Yes, Tuan, it is somewhat strange; however, it is quite true.' I should add that such a belief is not general, and I have never heard anyone other than Ibrahim subscribe to it.

The famous Malacca cane is also believed to be under the protection of a very powerful ghost. Known as *semambu* in Malay, Malacca cane grows in clumps in the jungle, and cane-cutters are very careful to obtain permission from its guardian before attempting to cut it. Coming across such a clump, they call out '*Boleh potong?*' ('Can we cut?') Whereupon a voice from down in the roots will say, '*Sudah!*' ('finished, done, over or past'). This means that permission is given for cutting; however, should another voice, coming from the end of the canes growing high in the air say '*Belum!*' ('Not yet!'), it means that permission is not given. Should the cutters ignore this voice and attempt to cut the cane the whole clump will disappear and reform elsewhere. I have spoken with many Malay cane-cutters who have told me of identical experiences in this respect.

Apropos of Malacca cane, I was showing two American clients around Malacca one day and took them to the shop of an old Malay friend of mine who makes Malacca canes and walking-sticks. This is a somewhat lengthy process, involving immersion in coconut oil, smoking, straightening, drying and so on. My friend, an old man named Haji Hussein, had a most amusing explanation as to why they are so expensive. 'There are four factors which govern the price,' he said. 'One, it is guarded by a most dangerous and powerful ghost; two, it grows in the jungle where many man-eating tigers roam; three, the cutters may be attacked by Communist bandits; and four, the most dangerous of all, British soldiers may shoot the cutters by mistake!' After this very complete and convincing argument my clients both bought canes, paying without further demur.

7

Rhinos and Vampires

THE rarest animal in the Malayan jungle is the one-horned or Java rhinoceros, which is possibly extinct. Another rhinoceros, the two-horned Sumatran species, does exist in the hilly, more inaccessible, parts of the jungle, although most uncommon. Both these animals are rapidly facing extinction throughout their range, due to the great value placed by the Chinese on the horn as an aphrodisiac. These animals, rightly so, are highly protected by game laws. However, they are still pursued relentlessly by Chinese hunters, one of whom was arrested recently in the Endau area of northern Johore for trapping and killing a two-horned species with the help of aborigines.

Some six or seven years ago a rhino put in an appearance on Limabelas Estate, near Slim River in Perak. It was seen by the assistant manager, a Frenchman named Bazin, who gave chase, together with his Alsatian dog, before it disappeared into the jungle. Monsieur Bazin obtained some very good photographs of the incident which were given prominence in the local press, as a result of which much speculation arose as the photographs appeared to suggest that it was a one-horned rhino, *R. sondaicus*. It is most probable, however, that there was another horn, perhaps very rudimentary or undeveloped, which did not show up in the photographs and that the animal was the more common, although still very rare, twin-horned species, *R. sumatrensis*.

The last known death of a rhinoceros in Malaya occurred on Ulu Tiram Estate in south Johore, the facts of which make interesting reading. It was in the year 1948, and two young European assistants, who had not been in the country long, were aroused one night and informed that a large animal had been caught in a pig trap near the jungle's edge. Armed with rifles, they went immediately to the scene where, in the dim light, they saw a large animal struggling furiously to get out of a deep pit. Just as they arrived it made a great lunge and succeeded in getting

half out. Not knowing what it was and being quite alarmed, they both fired at its head and killed it, in consequence of which they incurred the ire of H.H. the Sultan of Johore and were later tried in court and fined M\$100.00. His Highness, a great hunter and lover of wild life, was incensed at the killing of the country's most valuable animal, and quite rightly so, although there is something to say in mitigation for the planters in view of the circumstances.

I myself have only seen one of these beasts. It was on the Johore-Pahang border in the Ulu Endau area, where I was collecting butterflies with two young Australians who were keen amateur entomologists. It was about six o'clock one evening, and I was standing up to my knees in the swift, clear waters of a jungle stream with my two companions. I was washing and cleaning out two large flying foxes before cooking them for the evening meal, when I heard a loud crashing in the undergrowth. A moment later a huge rhinoceros dashed right across the stream in front of us, and disappeared in the jungle on the other side, a vast grey-black leviathan carrying all before it. I was so startled that I dropped the flying foxes, and they were carried away by the current. One of my clients, Bill Cannon, recovered them a few moments later.

Later that evening, lying on our camp beds gazing up at the star-filled heavens, my other client, Bert Wheeler, said to me: 'That meal tonight was really wonderful. It's hard to believe that such a horrible looking animal could taste so good.' I could well understand what he meant. Harmless, inoffensive creature that it is, it has all the horror of Dracula in its appearance. With its evil, wolf-like head, gleaming fangs and cold, malignant gaze, it looks like something from the dread pages of Bram Stoker, and appears to bear in earnest its chilling scientific name, *Pteropus vampyrus*. A large, fruit-eating bat with no blood-sucking tendencies whatsoever, its misnomer is due to its appearance. When the first specimens reached Europe they were associated with the vampires and werewolves of European legend, and thus falsely named.

Another large bat known as the false vampire (*Megadermatidae*), found in Malaya, is equally harmless. Vampire bats, in reality, are found only in Central and South America; revolting creatures which feed off the blood of vertebrate animals and

spread rabies by their blood-sucking activities; they are quite small.

From creatures of horror our thoughts turned to one of the main objects of our safari, the gorgeous female butterfly, Raja Brooke birdwing (*Troides brookiana*), a beautiful black, green and white creature which, unlike the male of the species, is rarely seen. We had spent days looking for it but without success. We had many rare and beautiful specimens but this one eluded us.

The Malayan jungle, with over nine hundred species of butterflies, has much to offer the lepidopterist and amateur collector. This figure can by no means be regarded as complete, and it is quite possible that collectors may discover new species. To the amateur collector all that is needed is a butterfly net, some envelopes and a flat tin. The butterflies, when caught in the net, can be dispatched by squeezing the thorax between thumb and forefinger, placed in an envelope and put away in the tin until the end of the safari. The perfectionist and dedicated collector, however, would need to take setting boards and 'killing' bottles containing ethyl acetate, tetrachlorethane or similar killing agent.

Sandbanks along rivers are particularly good spots to collect butterflies, and it is not uncommon to see clouds of them hovering over certain localities. They are usually attracted by animal droppings and urine deposits in the sand. Bait, in the form of rotten fruit or brightly coloured objects, can sometimes be used to attract butterflies—an inexpensive and fascinating hobby which can be indulged in by persons who are on safari for some other purpose.

On this trip my clients were fascinated by an amazing creature known as the stick insect (*Lonchodes*). This master of the art of camouflage is about a foot long and looks exactly like a piece of dead stick with twigs branching from it. The skin even peels from its body, resembling the bark of a tree. Even the closest inspection reveals it as a dead stick; movement only betrays it. Perhaps only the dead leaf mantis (*Deroplatys desiccata*) can offer it competition in the field of camouflage. This insect, with its distortion of wings and thorax, is to all appearances nothing but a withered leaf—an incredibly cogent example of the marvels of Nature's handiwork.