

THE LARGE MAMMALS OF BORNEO

By

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Apart from the only too common and often pestiferous Sambhur Deer (*Rusa unicolor*), we know remarkably little of large wild mammals in Borneo; there are—

- (1) The Asiatic Elephant (*Elephas indicus*).
- (2) Sumatran Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sumatranus*).
- (3) Wild Ox or Banteng (*Bos sondaicus lowi*).
- (4) Honey Bear (*Ursus malayanus*).
- (5) Clouded Leopard (*Felis nebulosa*).
- (6) Orang Utan (*Simia satyrus*).

In particular, little has been published on these in the past decade. The following information which I collected in travels during 1945-8, over all four territories of the island, will help to bring the picture up to date. Information to 1931 has been fully dealt with by Mr. E. Banks (*Journ. Malay. Br. Royal Asiatic Soc.* IX, 1931, pt. II), and only new or additional data is here included. Mr. Banks' paper is a valuable source of information for all interested in this subject.

1. The Asiatic Elephant.

It is usually said that the elephants now feral in North Borneo were originally a gift to the Sultan of Sulu from the East India Company about 1750; the Sultan parked these more-than-white (to him) elephants on the mainland. Elephants were certainly present earlier than that, however, for Pigafetti has left a fascinating account of his 1521 visit to the court of Brunei:

“When we reached the city, we had to wait two hours in a prau, until there had arrived two elephants, caparisoned in silk-cloth, and twelve men, each furnished with a porcelain vase, covered with silk, to receive and to cover our presents. We mounted the elephants, the twelve men going before.....”

In answer to enquiries, Mr. R. E. Parry, Director of Education, British North Borneo, has forwarded information mainly obtained from Mr. H. G. Keith, Conservator of Forests. There are probably over 1,000 elephants in North Borneo, ranging from the Paitan River to the north, west to the Sapulut, and south going well over the Dutch border. They are certainly still scarce in Dutch territory however, and do not come

south of the Sembakong River. The animal is protected, but illegal trapping is believed to take place on a considerable scale. Nevertheless, there appears to have been a considerable increase since 1931.

2. The Rhinoceros.

In 1931 Mr. Banks wrote:

"There can at the moment be no fear of Rhinoceros becoming scarce for as many as 36 trophies were brought into Belaga in two years not so long ago, and I have met men who have claimed to have shot over 30 in the course of their life time, but it must be evident that such a slow breeding animal cannot stand destruction for long at that rate so that the matter will one day have to be attended to."

Alas, that "one day" came some days too late,—and it was precisely such slaughter which, within a few years, virtually exterminated this fine beast in Sarawak. Since 1947 it has been fully protected, but the western side of the island can only hope to recoup its position if the small surviving stocks in North-west B.N.B. and in inner Dutch Borneo multiply, or migrate. There are now almost certainly no rhinoceros left in Sarawak. Once abundant in the Upper Baram and Limbang, noticeably around Mt. Batu Lawi, there are now definitely none in these great areas. In 1934 Banks saw fresh tracks of one at over 6,000 feet on Mulu (*Sarawak Museum Journ.* III, 1935, p. 329), but my extensive 1946 search of this area revealed no trace of rhino, though old wallows and hunters' trails are still identifiable over a good deal of the interior. Old people in some places say that at one time rhino were so unshy they would come down quite close to villages, and in late 1945 one was reported at the edge of a rice-clearing on the Raya River in northern Dutch border (near the North Borneo border).

There are still some in Dutch Borneo, and I saw the recent tracks of one near the top of the high pass between the Poedjoengan tributary of the Bahau and Nahkramo on the Batang Kayan in October, 1945. In North Borneo, where full protection has long been in force, a considerable number are now believed to survive, mainly in the north-east, according to information from Mr. H. G. Keith. A single animal was reported in the Upper Padas in early 1946, and was later said to have moved back east.

The slaughter of this interesting mammal has been largely the work of the indelatigable Sarawak Ibans (Sea Dayaks), especially those of the Rejang river, who have hunted far into Dutch territory and in violation of Dutch law. As the animal became scarcer, the value rose and rose, until the impedimenta of a carcase totalled some \$300 or more in value. Hard to approach, owing to its extremely sensitive hearing, the rhino

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(almost blind) was no easy kill. Most were shot at close range with muzzle loaders, but there are several good records of Punans blow-piping them, and a man from Belawit in Dutch Borneo speared and killed one many years ago — an act immortalised in a stirring song.

In view of the many hundred that must have been slain in Sarawak during this century, it is somewhat ironic that the Sarawak Museum (which is the only Museum in Borneo) has *no* specimen of the Rhinoceros.

3. The Wild Ox (*Banteng*).

Evidently this species was once much more common than now. Spenser St. John ("Life in the Forests of the Far East", 1863, vol. 2) met many all up the Limbang river in the middle of the last century, but today they are exceedingly scarce in that part of Sarawak. Further south in the upper Baram (Sarawak) they are also very much scarcer than previously. As with the rhinoceros, the widescale introduction of firearms has had its effect, and in this case also perhaps the spread and increase of Sea Dayaks (Ibans) in Northern Sarawak. Banks in 1931 wrote of them also in the Upper Trusan, but there has been no sign of any there for some years past now.

This decrease must be a matter for concern. To the best of my belief, the only place in the interior where it is now numerous is on the wide grass lands in the headwaters of the Bahau which eventually flows into the great Batang Kayan river and out to the sea opposite Tarakan. Here the sparse population and remote topography has acted as protection in some degree, and this area is literally teeming with game — I have watched many sambhur deer feeding at the salt licks openly across the valley, and groups of *Banteng* grazing, more remotely, the beautiful pale green hillsides, usually keeping near the forest edge. A particularly odd experience in September 1945 was to float down by parachute with a magnificent ox unknowingly below. Several seen in this area were unusually coloured and perhaps conceivably crossed with the vari-coloured domestic cattle which the Saban Kelabits of the Upper Bahau imported eastward from the Upper Baram. (These beasts originally came southward up from Brunei Bay via the Limbang and Trusan Rivers 50-60 years ago, and have now reached the Kenyah houses further down the Bahau, and a few of the riverine houses on the Baram).

Occasionally the Bahau (Dutch) animals wander long distances, and in early 1948 the tracks of one were seen thirty miles away in the Upper Libbun (the Baram's furthest tributary). A determined pursuit by the local people was unsuccessful, for the animal was moving alone and fast — back towards the Bahau in Dutch territory.

It would seem that full protection is desirable for this fine and harmless beast in all areas. Its flesh is not attractive, and it has no other

economic value. It plays, moreover, a proud part in Borneo history. It was in pursuit of the "temadau" (one Malay name) that Simau'un, brother of Wang Alak ber Tarta, later "first Sultan of Brunei," made his famous journey into the interior and brought it under Brunei control. The ox kept always ahead of him, and he followed its blood trail, stopping off long enough in each river system to have a son. The animal, eventually cornered in the Padas, proved to have golden horns (Rangau spoken legend; recorded September 1947).

A word should be said about the supposed Wild Buffalo, *Bubalus b. hosei*, since it is given full status as distinct, wild and indigenous in "North-western Borneo" in the recent and authoritative "Mammals of the Pacific World" by T. D. Carter, J. E. Hill and G. H. Tate (New York, 1945, p. 140). Feral buffaloes are quite common in coastal and upland Borneo, and some of the upland people have to spend days hunting their own (marked) beasts when the meat is required for a feast. But there has not been any reliable confirmation of the supposedly distinct local race described from a single Kuala Baram (Sarawak) specimen in the British Museum.

4. The Honey Bear.

This is the only wild animal of which Borneo native peoples are normally afraid, and many have been injured, some killed, by these animals when with young or hurt, or sometimes for no apparent reason. It can be extremely bold, and is very strong. In most areas it is quite plentiful. Recently one attacked and wounded some Dayaks by the coast road beyond Miri Sarawak. The R.A.A.F. had a tame one on Labuan in 1945 which attained a large size and remained on good terms with those it knew, but a menace to crockery, cookery and coolie morale.

Unless one saw the distinctive rows of claw marks up the tree trunks, one would not believe some of the trees this heavy and seemingly clumsy beast can climb, usually in its passion for honey. Only the Manis or Scaly Ant-eater can compete with it as climber. But the Bruang will eat almost anything, and in some areas is a menace to sweet potato and manioc grounds, uprooting whole plots—partly, it would seem, in play. In 1945 one opened a parachuted container and totally destroyed wireless sets, a medical outfit, and much else.

In some districts the gall bladder is hung up on the long-house verandah, allowed to decompose, drip and dry. It is then said to be an efficacious cure for various diseases, including malaria. The skin is extensively used for the decorative seating pads men hang on their behinds to keep dry when sitting down out of doors or clean when sitting down in a long-house rice-beer party. The flesh is strong-scented and rather sweet, edible — and much eaten!

"As regards how many maias there used to be, the answer appears to be 'plenty.' The whole area was completely uninhabited, and it is the Chinese from 1870 onwards who started developing from the Rejang River towards the Second Division boundary and the Dayaks from the Second Division who came into the Julau River and from there into Binatang District who drove these animals into the only remaining areas of virgin jungle. The Dayaks only started moving to the Julau area after 1861."

At present in that area it appears to be confined to the headwaters of the smaller streams, Darau, Narasit and Ilang. This is probably fairly representative of the general Sarawak pattern of shrinking.

It is fully protected — in common with Rhinoceros and the remarkable Proboscis Monkey (confined to Borneo and now abundant in certain coastal areas) — by a new Sarawak Act in 1947. But owing to the unfortunate encouragement given to a collector early in that year, numbers of young have been brought in by Dayaks in recent months (and this generally means the mother has been killed first). Despite the closest attention, including penicillin, sulpha drugs and vitamin treatments, it is difficult to keep alive a Maias taken as a baby.

To the weird stories of alleged Orang Utan strength must now be added the account of an American film-man who met a monster specimen in the Batang Kayan area of Dutch Borneo; it killed his cameraman who was "broken, by one blow from collar bone to abdomen" ("Black Borneo," London, 1946, p. 180). On this same day the author, Mr. Miller, not only also photographed wild oxen, but the first Proboscis Monkey (p. 167) ever seen in the interior, an apparently previously undescribed species called the Skunk Monkey (whose smell caused "a Dayak (to) fall out of a tree as if stunned," p. 158), and "a flock of Argus Pheasants with two-foot tail feathers." Many observers have spent years without seeing a single Argus, one of the cleverest of birds at self-concealment.

The big Proboscis or Long-Nosed Monkey (*Nasalis larvatus*) has a widespread dialect name which is rather rude to our island neighbours—"Orang blanda." Apparently news of this nickname came as a shock to a distinguished Dutch visitor who came round the Sarawak Museum one day; he seemed quite put out!

The Gibbon (*Hylotates cinereus*) is not, of course, a monkey but an ape, as is the Mias. It is best known in Borneo by the native name "Wa-wa," a felicitous one, reflecting as it does those wild bubbling calls which ripple through the jungle at the first faint touch of dawn, thrilling animal music of the far-off hills. No sound better expresses the difference between the primitive path and the path urban in Borneo. In Kuching,

5. The Clouded Leopard.

Another fine animal that has probably been much reduced by pursuit — in this case for the value of skin as seating mats, teeth as ear-ornaments, and Chinese medical use. It is still, however, fairly numerous in the far interior of North and Dutch Borneo and Sarawak, though always extremely shy. Only a very few dogs will scent it, and it shows much skill in hiding in the wildest jungle (in the tree-tops). Nobody fears this huge cat, and there are derogatory stories about its prowess, and many leopard legends.

In 1946 I was presented with a fine skin obtained by Pangeran Tanid, Chief of the Milaus (Muruts) on the Middle Kerayan (Dutch Borneo), who had shot with a blow-pipe in a tree-top where it had been cornered while clearing the rice field. This method of obtaining animals is commonly used by the Kelabits and Muruts when clearing; if a scarce species is seen, the people promptly fell the trees all around to stop escape. A special elaboration of this technique is used on monkeys, when a favourite "roosting" tree is located, the surrounding jungle felled at night, and the monkeys picked off by gun and blow-pipe next morning.

Another specimen now in the Sarawak Museum collection was cornered by dogs in the Ulu Baram early in 1947 and speared, and a third skin (incomplete) obtained by barter from Punans. In about April 1946 the Magoh Punans obtained a very large pure *black leopard*, though unfortunately, as they consider it only of barter value, they chopped off tail and feet. Luckily they had kept the lower jaw. This skin caused intense astonishment throughout the interior, where no one had ever seen a black leopard before. Mr. Banks says that on Mt. Matang "there is once supposed to have been a black one," apparently the only other record to date, though the bigger Asian mainland species, *Panthera pardus*, has a well-known black variety.

6. The Orang Utan.

Usually known hereabouts as Mias (Maias), there seems little doubt that this great ape has grown much scarcer over the past century. It is probably most numerous in North Borneo and over into the Sembakong area of north-east Dutch Borneo, where several were seen in July 1945. There are none in northern-Sarawak or north-western Dutch Borneo, but numbers further south. Mr. Ian Urquhart reports from Binatang on the lower Rejang River, Sarawak, that the ape is said to have been present in the immediate vicinity until fairly recent times. Here again, the increase and expansion of the Sea Dayaks has driven them further back from the navigable rivers. But the Chinese were also a factor in this case, as Mr. Urquhart points out in a letter (September 1948):

Jesselton, Pontianak, one awakes to the crowing of Chinese roosters, the bickering of curs, and the new day's first clamorous jeep.

Happily the Wa-wa is numerous in most areas of virgin jungle, and really abundant inland in the interior, although considerably hunted for its flesh, and not infrequently kept as a pet. I have seen a nomadic Punan in the upper Tutoh (Baram tributary) suckle a baby son on one breast and a baby Wa-wa on the other. They make the nicest of pets, but are very susceptible to respiratory diseases, and on this account should not be allowed to mix in with crowds (e.g. taken on a ship).

Of the monkeys, there is another as well as the Proboscis which is worthy of mention, though not so large. This is the bright chestnut-coloured "Jelu merah" (Dayak) or "Kelasi" (this or some variant is the usual inland name). This shaggy, long-haired, ragamuffin animal is known to few white men, and has no common name for that reason — scientifically it is *Pygathrix rubicundus*. I have only seen it above 4,500 feet in the headwaters of the Padas (North Borneo), Trusan, Limbang and Baram (Sarawak), Bahau and Batang Kayan (Dutch). It often moves alone, and is then generally shy; but small parties may be encountered and then they are usually quite tame. Round Mount Batu Lawi in the head of the Limbang they are quite numerous. As Mr. Banks has pointed out, in general this monkey has a peculiarly irregular distribution and little is known of it.

Outside the strict scope of these notes on Borneo's big mammals is one which I include, nevertheless, because I am so often asked about it: "Where does the Tapir occur in Borneo?" The Tapir is, of course familiar enough in Malaya. The question is very naturally inspired by a North Borneo one cent stamp, which shows a Tapir; it was (Mr. Alan Dant informs me) first issued in 1909, and appeared in various guises up until 1949. Alas, Tapirs are unproven anywhere in Borneo! (Mr. E. E. F. Pretty, Resident Brunei, informs me that some years ago he twice saw Tapirs there; and it may be that they can one day be proved in Borneo.)

North Borneo is indeed an enterprising colony philatelically, for as well as a remarkably exaggerated Proboscis Monkey (4 cents) and an Argus Pheasant which appears to have been crossed with a Peacock (5 cents), the *current* stamp issue includes a 2 cent Cockatoo (though none are found anywhere in Borneo); and a "Dyak" (their spelling) 15 cent, though that term is not applied in North Borneo and the person shown is quite evidently a Sarawak type, with clothes etc., such as are not to be seen further north.