

Report on the Javan and Sumatran Rhinos on the Thai - Burmese Border



Reliable reports of the killing of one or two rhinos on the western border of Thailand, especially in Karnehanaburi, have been received almost every year. On April 20, Dr. Boonsong Lekagul led a trip to the Nam Noi and Sai Yoke areas in Karnehanaburi to gather information about the rhinos. He found that because the western slopes of the Tenasserim Range catch most of the rain from the Indian Ocean in the Southwest monsoon, the vegetation on that slope is much denser and the weather is cooler in the dry season than it is on the Thai side. Streams and water holes for wildlife to drink and bathe in are plentiful on the western side. The Burmese (western) slope is covered with tropical rain forests while most of the Thai (eastern) slope's forestation is dry deciduous, and is too hot and dry for some kinds of wildlife in the dry season.

Because of this contrast, many big mammals make seasonal migrations across the border. Annual forest fires cause a lack of water and vegetation on the Thai slope during dry season, and most of the elephants and gaur and some other big mammals must migrate to the more lush Burmese side. (Banteng, which graze on the open plains, generally stay on the Thai side, as do Sambar deer and barking deer, which also eat wild fruit found on the Thai side.)

Elephants and gaur and possibly some rhinos move back to the Thai side when the heavy monsoonal rains come. They feed on young buds and shoots.

Most of the rhinos, both Javan and Sumatran are found in the wetter and denser Burmese forests.

On this trip, Dr. Boonsong had an opportunity to talk with a group of Karen hunters of uncertain citizenship. They live and hunt in both countries, crossing the border freely and shooting at any animal

they come upon. Every year in the dry season, they journey into the thick forests on the western side of the Tenasserim Range to hunt rhinos, and whenever they are successful they bring horns, dried blood, dried dung, and any other parts of the carcass they can carry back to Thailand to sell to the old style medicine shops.

He inquired as to the number of rhinos sighted and killed by the group and was given the following information:

- 1953 one male Sumatran rhino was killed
- 1958 one male Javan rhino was found but not killed;
- 1959 three Sumatran rhinos were found and one female was killed;
- 1960 a pregnant female Javan rhino was killed; the fetus was dried and sold for 500 Baht (about U.S. \$25);

- 1961 one Javan and four Sumatran rhinos were found but not killed;
- 1962 one Sumatran rhino was found, but ran away safely.

This is a report of one group of hunters only. More rhinos have no doubt been killed by other hunters in the area. The significance of these statistics, however, is that they show a distinct possibility that there are still remnants of both species of rhino living in this border area.

The Burmese government should be greatly admired for considering the establishment of either a national park or a game reserve in their territories where these rare animals are perhaps still found. It has been suggested that the Thai government set up a similar reserve on the Thai side and it is greatly hoped that the Thai government will respond favorably to this suggestion.

The Open billed Storks come, making more and more nests every year at the Wat Phai Lorn

Sanctuary. A rough estimate last year showed the population to be as high as 1,000 birds.

