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A REPORT ON FAUNA PRESERVATION
IN MALAYA.

By SIR THOMAS COMYN-PLATT.

I beg to submit the following report in connection with the preservation of fauna in Malaya, as the result of my recent mission.

Acknowledgments.—I should like to tender my thanks to the Colonial Office Authorities for the instructions sent to all officials abroad to assist me in my inquiries, and to add that everything possible was done to carry out their wishes. In both Ceylon and Malaya not only did the two Governors—Sir Edward Stubbs and Sir Shenton Thomas—grant me every facility to meet those who could supply me with information, but the various Residents were equally willing to help. Without their assistance my task would have been impossible.

Local Opinion as to Wild Life.—As it was essential to hear the views of officials and non-officials alike, I took particular care to consult both wherever my inquiries led me. It would be difficult to say with how many I discussed the question of fauna preservation. But it is interesting to note that during the whole course of my inquiries I failed to meet even one person who was not sympathetically inclined.

On all sides I found the wish to preserve the fauna of the country and to prevent the extinction of any species, always provided that the interests of the State and the inhabitants generally were not unduly jeopardized. Indeed, on several occasions I met planters and others who had sacrificed much in the interest of wild life. What was very apparent, however, was a shadowy conviction which I did my utmost to dispel that in the struggle between man and beast the Game Department is more favourably inclined towards the latter; that the preservation of wild life appears more important than the preservation of cultivated lands, and that if wild life—particularly elephant, tiger, deer, etc.—is the cause of any damage to life or property it is due to the presence as also to the methods employed by the cultivators and others. In other words, the belief is prevalent that the rights of animals are given more consideration than the rights of man.

And of this attitude of mind, I regret to say that not only is the Game Department accused but, in a measure, the Fauna Society and sportsmen as well. Though it was easy to explain that the Society had no such ideas, there is little doubt that the attitude of the Game Department has given rise to something more than suspicion.

I propose writing a separate report on the subject of elephant control and certain conclusions I have arrived at.

Ordinances or Enactments.—As regards the question of the general interest in wild life in Malaya, it is a truism to say that sound laws are the result of public opinion. The trouble is that there is nothing worthy of the name in the country at present. And so it happens that few know anything at all about Ordinances or Enactments, and they are not interested until they contravene some clause. This is much the case as regards the game laws. In the circumstances it is extraordinary that there are not more infractions, for it must be remembered that hunting is a widespread instinct and still the only means of meat supply for many a family. Nevertheless, poaching, trapping, unlicensed shooting, and the indiscriminate killing of game is becoming less frequent as the law is becoming more effectively administered. Strictly enforced I consider that the existing game ordinance would meet all requirements—certainly all that can be hoped for at present. General interest and goodwill, especially of the indigenous inhabitants, is what is lacking and time alone can ensure that. I think the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, puts his finger on the spot when he says that if there is any fault to be found with the existing game regulations it is the execution, not the laws, that need attention. And I agree with him.

I have not studied the various ordinances that have been enforced, amended, and added to from time to time, but the legislation which is now under consideration accords with approved legislation in other colonies.

But the question now arises, can the revised ordinance be enforced? There are nine game reserves and bird sanctuaries in Malaya with an area of, roughly speaking, 3,000 square

miles—not including the reserves in the State of Johore. At present the warding and watching of these extensive districts is carried on by three paid game wardens, some half-dozen honorary game wardens, and possibly twenty watchers. The exact figures are immaterial. The question is whether with double or treble the staff the regulations could be more effectively carried out. I very much doubt it. I do consider, however, that it might be suggested to the Sultans that they bring their subjects to realize the value to posterity of rational wild life perservation. The fact is the reserved areas are so vast, so difficult of penetration, and in some cases in such close contact with villages that the preservation of wild life by any law, no matter how far-reaching and drastic, becomes extremely difficult.

To take but one instance. The Krau Reserve in Pahang has an area of 131,000 acres. How is it possible to prevent those living on the outskirts from hunting, poaching, or trapping? An army of watchers would be needed, most of whom, following their natural bent, would throw in their lot with the offenders. Even when, as is sometime the case to-day, a law-breaker is caught red-handed, the chances of a deterrent sentence are slight.

The real need is propaganda with the object of convincing all elements of the population alike that wild life is a valuable asset, the protection of which is to the advantage of all. Such long-range views, I admit, can mature only with time, but nothing in the East was ever successfully carried through in a hurry.

With regard to wild life outside the gazetted reserves and sanctuaries, here again the difficulties of enforcing the regulations are many. There are, of course, cases of shooting without licences, disregard of the close season, poaching, trapping, and such like offences. But considering the state of the country as also the attitude of mind of the inhabitants, it is a little unreasonable to expect anything else. Fortunately the natural tendency is for the animals to take refuge within reserved areas, where pursuit is difficult. Whether or not this retreat will outrun the human advance remains to be seen. All

depends upon whether the hunter can be made to respect the law or to realize that the supply of game is not inexhaustible. He is far from seeing that at present.

Threatened Species—Mammals.—However difficult the preservation of fauna in Malaya, information at my disposal has not led me to believe that—with the exception of rhinoceros and serow—there is danger of any species becoming extinct at present.

Further, I am inclined to think that opinion generally is slowly but surely veering towards preservation, and that with a steady application of the game laws reason will prevail before irrevocable harm results. Many with whom I talked disagreed with me and were insistent that such animals as the lorises, binturong, clouded leopard, and serow are to-day practically non-existent. But I hold to my point, which is supported by several expert authorities.

It is true that the loris and binturong fetch a high price in the Chinese market, but they are numerous. As for the clouded leopard he can quite well hold his own. Not so the serow and seladang, which are, I admit, on the danger list despite protection. Undoubtedly the rhinoceros is having the most serious struggle, and I fail to see how his existence can be much further prolonged. After all trade will always defeat sentiment in the long run, and as the Chinese are convinced that rhinoceros horn is a most valuable aphrodisiac and will pay as much as three or four hundred dollars to get it, can one be surprised if this animal is being hunted to extinction? And this is happening in other countries besides Malaya.

Commercialization.—Whether or no commercialism is the reason for the practical disappearance of *Rhinoceros sondaicus* I am not prepared to say. But the fact remains that it is rarely, if ever, seen nowadays. It is believed that two or three are still to be found in the swampy lands of South Perak. There is no certainty, however, about this. An old native hunter with whom I discussed the matter informed me that he had lately heard of one, but was inclined to doubt the truth of the report. From inquiries I made elsewhere

I was led to the belief that any attempt at capture would be costly, long, and, in all probability, futile.

Tenure of Reserves.—One of the objects of my mission was to inquire as to the fixity of tenure of the various game reserves. This I did, but with not very encouraging results. There is no doubt that the present position is by no means all that could be desired. As matters now stand these areas—to put it crudely—are allotted to wild life just so long as they are not required for anything else! In other words, so long as the cultivator and prospector have no need of them so long will they remain intact.

The Seriting Reserve is a case in point. A commercial company some few years ago agreed to purchase several thousand acres for a rubber plantation. The offer being accepted, the State Council of Negri Sembilan revoked the Statute constituting this area a game reserve. I am not arguing the rights or wrongs of this decision; I merely mention the incident in order to show that a game reserve to-day may be something quite different to-morrow.

It is true the Governor has the last word. But if, for example, it was believed that there were mineral deposits within any reserved area—and it is not an improbable supposition—one could hardly be surprised if the Council of any State reconsidered its position. That is, of course, a disturbing possibility. But having discussed the matter with several Residents I see no likelihood of a more satisfactory arrangement than at present exists.

Birds.—In the course of my stay in Malaya I visited most of the bird sanctuaries and was much impressed by all I saw. According to those best qualified to judge, these areas are little disturbed and as a result the various species collect and thrive. And that is certainly the impression one gets after being a few hours in these secluded spots.

In the country outside, however, things are far less satisfactory, despite preservation ordinances. It is always a mistake to draw general conclusions from individual cases, but making every allowance for exaggeration and false reports I should say that interference with nesting, snaring, and

unlicensed shooting of birds is very prevalent, and just as difficult to prevent. The green pigeon appears to be most in danger of extermination, and as the quail, and also the rail have a market value for food every man's hand is against them. Their only chance is a more vigorous enforcement of the law or retreat within their sanctuaries which—as in the case of big game—is taking place.

Still I do not agree that bird life in Malaya is affected to any appreciable extent by native appetite. Commercialization is the root of the trouble, and if greater care could be exercised in the issue of gun and shooting licences—in other words shooting made more expensive—the results of preservation would be more marked.

Fish.—As to fish, this being the staple food of the majority of Malayans, it is no wonder that many rivers are being slowly cleared out. Here, again, if the native only fished to supply his home wants little harm would be done. But he has an inexhaustible market within a few miles of his door and spares no pains or efforts to supply it. Netting, spearing, the use of explosives are the methods employed without any consideration as to season, spawning ground, or size. If things continue much longer as they are it is merely a matter of time and there will be no fish at all. It is a difficult problem to tackle, but Government is doing all that is advisable at present to remedy the evil.

National Park.—I presume, however, the Committee will be more especially interested in my inquiries as to the National Park. Thanks to the hospitality of the Chief Game Warden I was able to visit it. I was much impressed by all I saw and formed the opinion, as to which there is no doubt, that as a game sanctuary it will prove invaluable.

In view of the fact that the area allotted is close upon 2,000 square miles, most of which is dense jungle, I can only speak of the portion that has so far been opened up, which borders the Tembling River. Here, separated by a few miles, are the huts of several watchers who have made a number of clearings and cut many miles of paths through the thick undergrowth. Following one of these for half an hour, one

reaches an opening, a hundred yards square, where there is a salt-lick or sulphur spring, very attractive to animals. One has only to wait at such a spot, and there are many, to see all the wild life of the jungle. Within a few hours I saw several kinds of deer, and by the tracks nearby many other animals, including seladang, must be in the habit of coming to the spot. It is safe, therefore, to say that wild life in the National Park is plentiful, though how varied the species is as yet unknown. To discover this will need much time.

I also noticed a large variety of birds, several mouse-deer, wild dog, and pig, and actually came face to face with a seladang.

As to fish there are a great number in the Tembling River, including carp, but the others are quite unknown to our home waters.

With regard to scenery the Tembling River is certainly most beautiful, and if only more accessible would attract a host of sightseers. But here is the difficulty—the National Park at present is quite unapproachable for the ordinary traveller. From Singapore a ten-hours' journey by rail is necessary, and double that time from Penang. And to this must be added fourteen hours by river. As a game reserve it is ideal, but to make it a popular resort will need time and a large expenditure of money.

So far the boundaries are undefined, except, I am told, trigonometrically. To do anything more—to clear a boundary line, for example—will be an expensive business, to say nothing of the upkeep. Neither do I think anything more than a rough demarcation is necessary, for however well marked the limits it would be quite impossible to ward many miles effectively. If the reserve formed the centre of a cultivated or populous area I should have other views. As things are, I see no chance whatsoever of this happening for many a long year. Indeed, the density of the surrounding jungle is its greatest protection.

Poaching in the Park.—As to poaching, I should say it was negligible, and that only to supply the wants of those living in the few villages on the outskirts. I feel sure from all

I heard that trading in skins, etc., with the inhabitants of the neighbouring states may be altogether ignored. I am of opinion, however, that a permanent European game warden is needed, with an adequate staff of watchers, whose duty it would be to study the fauna and get some idea as to the stock of wild life. This will no doubt entail a certain expense, part of which I think the three Sultans would be willing to meet. The balance I feel sure Government, if properly approached and the Game Department is not too extravagant in its demands, will find means of supplying.

New Reserve.—In connection with the questions of reserves the Committee will, I am sure, be gratified to learn that as the result of an interview I had with the Regent of Kedah, His Highness undertook to set aside a large area on the north-east boundary of his state as a refuge for wild life. Further, he undertook to watch and ward this area to the best of his ability, and promised that the matter should be put in hand with the least possible delay. For this very satisfactory decision the thanks of the Committee are due to the Acting Resident, Mr. Jones, who not only supported whole-heartedly my appeal, but urged the Regent to grant it.

Dealing with my mission as a whole I am, at a later date, submitting certain recommendations which if adopted would make game preservation in Malaya still more effective.

A REPORT ON FAUNA PRESERVATION IN BRITISH NORTH BORNEO.

By SIR THOMAS COMYN-PLATT.

I much regret not having visited Borneo, in view of your instructions, though I made every effort to do so. Nevertheless, I collected the necessary information as to fauna preservation—which can be thoroughly relied upon—from a late District Officer who had spent several years in the country, as also from a Resident, now in the service of the Malayan Government, and others, all of whom are keenly interested in wild life.