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A NATURALIST IN BORNEO

BY THE LATE
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1st ed. 1916 London, T. Fisher Unwin Ltd.

pp 7-xxviii, 1-331



[Photo]

R. W. C. SHELFORD.

[Maul & Fox.

Frontispiece.

Plate I.

SINGAPORE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
OXFORD NEW YORK
1985

of the river towns and Government stations. In many books it is stated that *R. sondaicus* also occurs in Borneo, but I do not know what authority there is for this statement.

Three species of Wild Boar are now distinguished from Borneo; the commonest is *Sus barbatus*, and so far as I know the habits of all the species are very similar. The gregarious instinct of the Wild Boar is well marked. At times great droves of them pass from one part of the country to another; hundreds may be seen for a day or two trotting through the jungle, and when they come to a river they plunge into it without hesitation and swim across to the other side.¹ The non-Islamic tribes of Borneo hail with joy these migrations, and slaughter the beasts wholesale. Driving them on to some point of land projecting into the river, the hunters spear or shoot the Boars as they emerge from the jungle and plunge into the water. The cause of these migrations is obscure; perhaps they are due to a failure of food-supply in certain tracts of the country, but it has also been suggested that an outbreak of swine-fever or some allied epidemic drives the animals to seek in haste some non-infected area. That wild swine are

¹ It has been asserted, though with how much truth I cannot say, that the domestic pig, when forced to take to the water, cuts its throat in the act of swimming, the hoofs of the fore-legs slashing the fat jowl until some large blood-vessel is severed. If this be true of the domestic pig, it is certainly not true of the wild species, for they swim admirably.—R. S.

The statement is certainly not true of the domestic pig, as I know from experience. The mistake was corrected by A. R. Wallace in *Geographical Distribution of Animals*, 1876, vol. I., p. 13.—H. N. R.

subject to periodic devastating epidemics is a fact that becomes patent to any one who has occasion to travel about much in the country; moreover, such epidemics are frequently communicated to the domestic pigs belonging to native tribes.

The following incident, illustrating the gregarious instinct of wild swine, is vouched for by one of the most trustworthy naturalists of my acquaintance, Mr. Ernest Hose, who was an actual eye-witness of the scene. Hearing one day in the jungle, close to his house at Santubong, a tremendous noise of wild pigs grunting, snorting, and squealing, he ran out to see what was the reason of it, and presently came on a large Python that had seized a young pig and was endeavouring to crush it. The snake was surrounded by a number of full-grown swine, which were goring it with their tusks and trampling on it; so resolute was their attack that the Python was compelled to relinquish its hold of the loudly protesting young pig, when the herd, catching sight of Mr. Hose, hastily made off, the young one, apparently little the worse for its adventure, trotting away with its companions. Mr. Hose examined the snake, and found it to be so slashed and mangled that it was unable to crawl away from the scene of battle.

In old jungle not uncommonly may be found areas in which the ground appears trampled and the undergrowth broken and tossed on one side; these are the resting-grounds of Wild Boars or places where a sow has given birth to her young. The unwary traveller who sits down in one of these spots has soon plentiful occasion to rue his lack of experience, for they literally swarm with ticks and other parasites

from 15 to 17 inches and the tail is about 8 inches long. At the extreme base the tail is furnished with spines, but throughout nearly "the whole of its length it is covered with rhombic scales of relatively large size, and arranged regularly in oblique series or rings. A short fine hair . . . starts from the base of each scale and lies closely adpressed to its median line, giving to the scale the appearance of being keeled (like the scale of a snake). Towards the end of the tail the hairs become longer, and the terminal quills are much elongated, 2-3 inches long, and compressed with a shallow groove, like blades of grass, only much narrower, and form a thin bundle. The majority are truncate at their extremity and hollow." These quills may be regarded as homologous with the peculiarly modified caudal quills of other Porcupines, but their structure shows that no rattling noise can be produced by them when the tail is shaken. Curiously enough, adult specimens are sometimes found without any tail at all, and for some time it was supposed that there were two species of *Trichys* in Borneo, a tailed species and a tailless one. Dr. Hose, however, procured a tailless female accompanied by her young one, which was furnished with a fully developed and normal tail. This proved beyond reasonable doubt that there was only one species of *Trichys* in Borneo, but what has never yet been satisfactorily explained is the reason of the disappearance of the tail in certain individuals.¹ Can this Porcupine shed its tail, when seized by that appendage, as do so many lizards? This question has yet to be

¹ Dr. Hose writes: "The tailless specimens of *Trichys* I have noticed in nearly every case are females, and I am inclined to think that the tails are often bitten off when chased by the males."—E. B. P.

settled. The loss of the tail may be related to the very remarkable thinness and delicacy of the skin of the body. In dead specimens the skin tears almost as easily as tissue paper, and it is not easy to prepare good museum specimens. The *Trichys* lives in burrows, and is largely a nocturnal animal.

The *Ungulata* are but poorly represented in Borneo and the noblest of them all, the Elephant, occurs in British North Borneo only, and there in very small numbers. These are probably the descendants of a small herd presented long ago to the Sultan of Brunei by a Sultan of some Malay State. Tradition has it that the Sultan of Brunei soon tired of his expensive present, and turned all the animals adrift into the jungle. That the Elephant was once truly indigenous in Borneo is, however, proved by the discovery in a limestone cave at Bau, in Upper Sarawak, of a semi-fossilized fragment of an Elephant's molar, but it must have been long since this species ceased to range the Bornean jungles, for not one of the native tribes have any word in their language for Elephant other than the Malay name Gajah, nor is there any tradition of such animals having existed in Sarawak.

The Rhinoceros, *R. sumatrensis*,¹ is still extant, but it seems to be confined to the mountainous regions in the far interior of the island, and I do not suppose that more than half a dozen specimens have been sent to European museums. The horn is much prized by the Chinese for medicinal purposes, but the other parts of the animal, having no commercial value, are not brought down by the inland natives to the bazaars

¹ Common in British North Borneo. I passed four in one trip.—H. N. R.