

# MISCELLANY

International Zoo News, 20(2)

March/April 1991

## Sumatran rhinos turn up in Sabah

5403

Wildlife experts have found fresh tracks belonging to the rare Sumatran rhinoceros, once thought to have vanished from Borneo. It was reported from Sandakan at the beginning of March.

There may be as many as 10 rhinoceroses in the lowland forests of Silabukan on the coast of the east Malaysian state of Sabah, Mr Patrick Andau, the assistant chief game warden, said. He claimed, that it would be the third largest group anywhere in the world. Indonesia has about 60 Sumatran rhinoceroses and the World Wildlife Fund last September estimated that about 40 still roamed the forests of peninsular Malaysia.

The animal's forest home, however, also provides Sabah with its best timber, and intensive logging activities are a real threat to its future survival. "We have no way of stopping the logging. Nor do we have the manpower to keep poachers at bay", Mr Andau said. "We can only hope the rhinos escape to safe areas."

Loggers who encountered the animals may also be tempted to kill them for their horns which are highly valued among the Chinese as an aphrodisiac and can fetch high prices. Since 1975 at least two rhinoceroses have been illegally killed in the Silabukan area.

The state's Game Department has posted two rangers to patrol the areas where the animals are found and has banned firearms in the forest reserves.

*The Times, London*

36

## Capuchin monkeys help the paralysed

A research group at Tufts-New England Medical Centre, directed by Dr Mary Joan Willard, is working with six capuchins in a remarkable experimental programme. So far, they have been able to open a refrigerator and take out specified items; open, close and lock doors; remove a record from its cover and put it on a record player; and brush their owner's hair. To someone immobilised in a wheelchair, they could be even more valuable than a guide dog is to a blind person.

One female capuchin aged three is in the home of a man paralysed from the shoulders down. She gets a plastic bowl of food from the refrigerator, slots it into his feeding tray and removes the lid. Then she picks up a spoon and feeds him. Another job is to clean his apartment with a miniature vacuum cleaner. But she is also capable of old-fashioned dusting with a cloth.

The main problem so far has been to teach the 18-inch monkeys to amuse themselves quietly (and undestructively) when their owners do not need them. It is expected that a capuchin would cost as much to train as a guide dog (about \$8,000) — but they live three times as long.

## Wildlife strikes back at Malaysian town

The Malaysian government cleared half a million acres of jungle in the Pahang

peninsula in order to create a new township. The local wildlife, which includes tigers and elephants, was to be penned inside two large game reserves, surrounded by electric fences and firework devices. But the elephants trampled down the valuable oil palms, though this was solved by using trained elephants to lead the intruders away. The tigers were not so easily thwarted from preying on the domestic cattle, which they continue to attack.

## Exciting fish find on South African beach

A remarkable new fish has been discovered washed ashore on a beach at Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The find was described by Dr P.C. Heemstra and Dr M.M. Smith in the *Ichthyological Bulletin* of the J.L.B. Smith Institute of Zoology, and subsequently in *Nature* and the *London Times*. Naming it *Hexatrygon bickelli*, they placed it among the batoid fishes (sawfishes, rays, skates, stingrays, and electric rays). Though the 103 cm fish strongly resembles a stingray, it has an extra pair of gill openings and a flap covering its two spiracles, which suggests the ability to shut down the spiracles externally. It has a number of different internal features, and an unusual long flaccid snout, well equipped on the underside with sense organs. Dr Heemstra and Dr Smith believe it lives in moderately deep water rather than the shallow waters inhabited by other batoids. They have assigned it to a newly established subgroup, the *Hexatrygonoidae*.

## Japanese hunters to breed game animals

The Dainippon Hunting Association, one of the biggest clubs of its kind in Japan with 400,000 members, plans to breed wild mammals and birds at special farms because the country's game population has been seriously depleted in recent years. The club will open its first experimental breeding farm on five hectares of land near Tokyo.

It is planned to start by breeding 10,000 pheasants, 100 weasels and other small animals. A hundred Hungarian partridges will be imported from the United States. The animals will eventually be released into reserved hunting grounds in Yamanashi prefecture. Animal welfare organisations are not happy about the plan. Indeed, animal protection has become a big issue in Japan lately. So sensitive is it that the entire cabinet turned down an invitation to participate in the Imperial Household's traditional duck hunt this year.

*The Times, London.*

## Coming Events

It has now been confirmed that the 1981 annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums will be held in Quebec City from 10 — 12 September. Speakers are requested to contact Claude Minguy, 8191 Avenue du Zoo, Charlesbourg, Quebec, G1G 4G4, Canada.

The World Pheasant Association annual convention will be held in Lunteren, Netherlands, from 22 — 24 October 1981.

A conference entitled "Cetacean Reproduction: Estimating Parameters for Stock Assessment and Management" will be held from 28 November to 7 December 1981 in La Jolla, California. It is sponsored by the International Whaling Commission and the US Marine Mammals Commission.

The International Theriological Congress III (Helsinki) meeting is in preparation for 16 — 20 August 1982, and calls have gone out for contributions on insectivores and for an "Age Determinations" workshop.

The Zoological Society of Philadelphia and the Institute for Cancer Research are sponsoring a symposium from 16 — 20 May 1982 on "Animal Counterparts of Human Disease, With Particular Reference to Hepatitis B-like Viruses". Further details from Theresa Mullarkey, Philadelphia Zoological Garden, 34th St. and Girard Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA.