

A Walk through the
LOWLAND RAIN FOREST
of Sabah

Elaine J.F. Campbell

with photographs by

**C.L. Chan, A.Y.C. Chung, M. Heydon, A. Lamb, F. Lanting,
B.S. Parris, W.M. Poon, M. Strange, R. Stuebing, and K.M. Wong**

line illustrations by

Jamal Hassim

edited by

K.M. Wong



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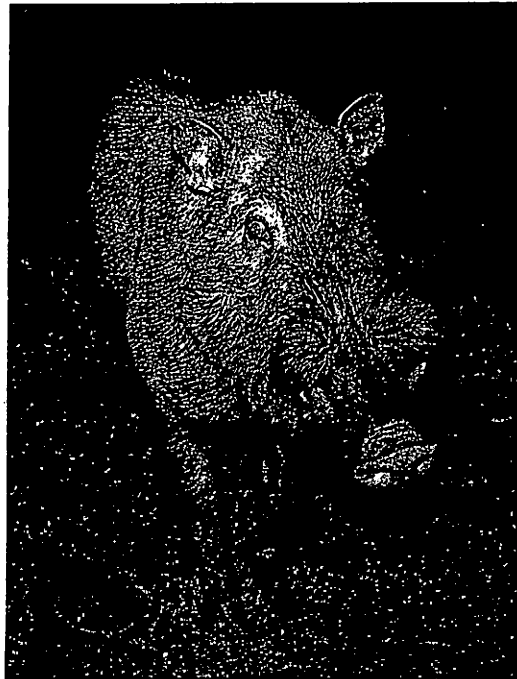
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Hooved forest animals

Other animals that may shatter the peace of the forest are two species of barking deer, the Common Barking Deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*) and the Bornean Yellow Muntjac (*Muntiacus atherodes*). The adults give short, loud barking calls when disturbed and can startle if they call close by. The barking signals to predators that they have been spotted, letting them know it may be a waste of time for them to stalk the deer. In dense forest, the barking is more effective than deploying a visual distress signal, such as a tail flash employed by some other deer, which may not be clearly seen.

Two other deer which may be seen during the day are the Greater Mouse-deer (*Tragulus napu*) and Lesser Mouse-deer (*Tragulus javanicus*). Mouse-deer, standing only 20 cm high and smallest of the forest deer, are very timid and shy. If disturbed, they will run into the undergrowth but do not usually move far. If you follow very quietly, you may be able to see this dainty little deer foraging on the forest floor. In Malay folk tales the mouse-deer, or *kancil*, always gets the better of the bigger and stronger animals by superior cunning.

Another ungulate species you may come across is the Bearded Pig (*Sus barbatus*), which will crash off into the undergrowth with a grunt or two. If female, she may have been accompanied by a litter of piglets. Young piglets have pale spots and stripes to help camouflage them in the vegetation. Bearded pigs are hosts to numerous ticks which can carry tick fever or scrub typhus and are difficult to remove from the body. Do not walk through or sit near any unnatural piles of leaves and twigs, which could be nests made by bearded pigs.



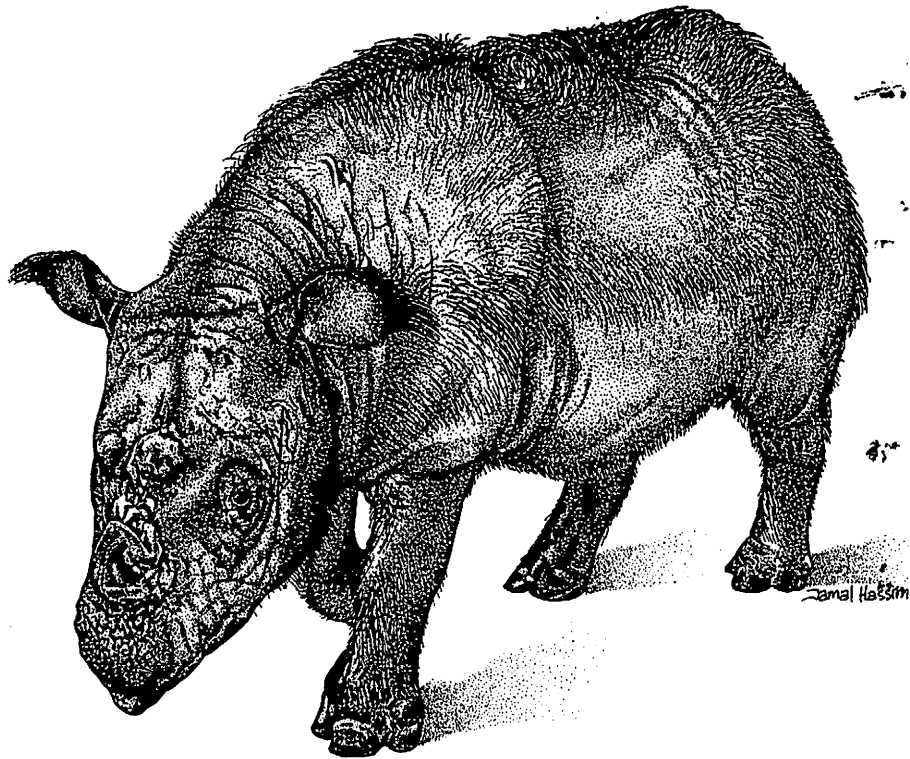
Sow of the Bearded Pig (*Sus barbatus*), so named for the bushy tufts of bristles on either side of the snout. (Photo: M. Heydon)

The Asian Two-Horned or Sumatran Rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*), once more widespread, is now only found in eastern Sabah, the Ulu Baram area, in Sarawak, and possibly adjacent parts of Kalimantan. Over thousands of years, hunting by humans for their meat and horn, which is believed by some to possess medicinal properties, has reduced their numbers considerably. Although a protected species, rhinos still fall prey to illegal poaching. Only about fifty are thought to remain in Sabah, where most inhabit an area of the Dent Peninsula and scattered populations occur between the Segama and Kinabatangan Rivers. Rhinos are shy, elusive, solitary animals, active from late afternoon to early



Sambar Deer (*Cervus unicolor*), the largest forest deer, is found in open areas of forest such as river banks and forest edges. These deer are more active at night, although one can occasionally be seen during the day. (Photo: A. Lamb)

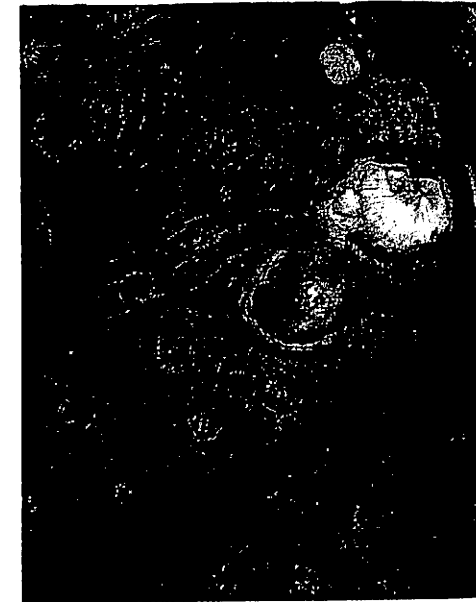
morning but have been occasionally seen during the day. They apparently prefer to eat mature leaves and twigs from a wide variety of plants, rather than more succulent plant shoots. Rhino presence is often only indicated by their distinctive footprints with three clear toe marks or the deep score marks in the sides of wallows made by their horns. Their wallows are sometimes encountered in lowland forest though it is not really known why rhinos use wallows. They may be good places to keep cool during the hottest part of the day or the mud in the wallow may keep off skin parasites such as flies and ticks.



Sumatran Rhinoceros. (Drawing by Jamal Hassim)

Flowering and fruiting trees

With such a profusion of plant life in the forest, you might expect, at any time of the year, to find many trees flowering or fruiting but this is often not the case. Although the forest microclimate is stable, many tree species reproduce only at certain times of the year with all the adult trees of each species reproducing simultaneously; this event is a "mini" mast fruiting. In the lowland forest of Sabah, mast fruiting occurs from around April to September, depending on the forest area, and can be quite patchy in occurrence.



Some rattans, such as this *Calamus ornatus*, have edible fruits.
(Photo: A. Lamb)

The wild relatives of the nutmeg genus *Myristica*, including many species in lowland forest, similarly produce seeds clothed in a finely dissected, brightly coloured mace.
(Photo: E.J.F. Campbell)