



Landscape from Kandy, Ceylon, showing the most beautiful tree of the Tropics (*Poinciana regina*)

FOREST LIFE AND ADVENTURES
IN THE
MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

By DR. ERIC MJÖBERG

Translated from the Swedish by
A. BARWELL

NEW YORK
WILLIAM MORROW & COMPANY

(AG)
QH
185
.M512
1936

FOREST LIFE AND ADVENTURES

warning breaks through the ranks of the bearers, causing general confusion and leaving in his track a wide path through the mighty forest. Or a choleric buffalo bull tries to vent his accumulated wrath in a sudden attack. Such moments call for speedy action; nor is any lack of decision permissible when a cobra rises to a height of six feet and a warning "hiss" bids the traveller beware of any nearer approach to the gates of death.

I have given my record in a number of chapters, each complete in itself and requiring no further index. First come those treating of the forest fauna from their highest representatives, the anthropoid apes, down to the pigmies of the insect world. Only the more distinctive creatures are depicted against their natural background of virgin forest. The following chapters are devoted to the forest itself and its more conspicuous features. In this section a few chapters have been included dealing with the chief objects of tropical cultivation, such as rubber, tobacco, coffee, tea, and others. The last chapter but one is given up to a description of that botanical marvel, the giant flower *Rafflesia*.

I harbour a hope that these short descriptions may help to increase the knowledge—which in our latitudes is still so scanty—of the largest of the Malay islands, namely, Borneo, and I hope, too, that they may spur on fresh young minds to begin where I have left off and to unveil many more of this country's hidden secrets. In this hope I have devoted the last chapter of all to helpful and useful counsel, under the title of "Advice and Hints to My Successors".

ERIC MJÖBERG

FOREST LIFE AND ADVENTURES IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

CHAPTER I

BORNEO'S BIG GAME

THE fauna of the largest island of the Malay Archipelago shows close kinship with that of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, these different portions of land having evidently been at no such very remote geological period more closely connected with each other than at the present day. At the bottom of the fairly shallow sea, along the surface of a large submarine bank on which these islands rest, it has been possible to trace deeper furrows, all of them running in the same direction. These are the submerged channels of the enormous rivers which poured down Sumatra's broader versant. Owing to such submersion of the land, the course and channels of the existing rivers have been very considerably shortened.

The three largest giants amongst the big game of the island are the elephant, rhinoceros, and buffalo, to which we will now proceed to give proper consideration, taking each in his due order.

The elephant is not a native of Borneo, at any rate not in its present form. It is asserted that the wild herds which now wander through North Borneo are the descendants of a certain number of elephants which the Sultans of Siak and Johore gave to the mighty ruler of Brunei when that State was at the height of its prosperity.

FOREST LIFE AND ADVENTURES

When this Sultan tired of his long-nosed, thick-skinned pets he let them loose in the primeval forests, where they grew and multiplied. By degrees they have become quite wild, and at times make incursions during moonlight nights upon the plantations, changing the whole landscape and causing much damage. They take special delight in rubbing themselves against fences, upright poles, telegraph posts, and such like, wherever they are to be found.

The planters therefore proceeded to encircle these with barbed wire, but the only result was that the elephants grew more and more enamoured of the new "sport"-poles, and came night after night to rub against the fresh wire, which had a pleasant rasp about it, entirely to their liking.

But that the elephant was once wild in Borneo is evident from the fact that a half-fossilized elephant tusk has been found in a cave at Bau, in Sarawak. So, taking everything into consideration, it is evident that the animal was once a native of Borneo, but owing to some unknown cause became extinct. That this did not happen in recent times is clear, since the Borneo people have no distinctive term in their language for the elephant. Thus his disappearance from the great island is one of the many riddles of this country (Pl. 1).

The Borneo rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sumatrensis*) is the smallest of all the species, and as its name implies, is also to be found in Sumatra.

A certain amount of caution is necessary in dealing with these animals, as I have learnt from many encounters. As a rule the great clumsy footprints

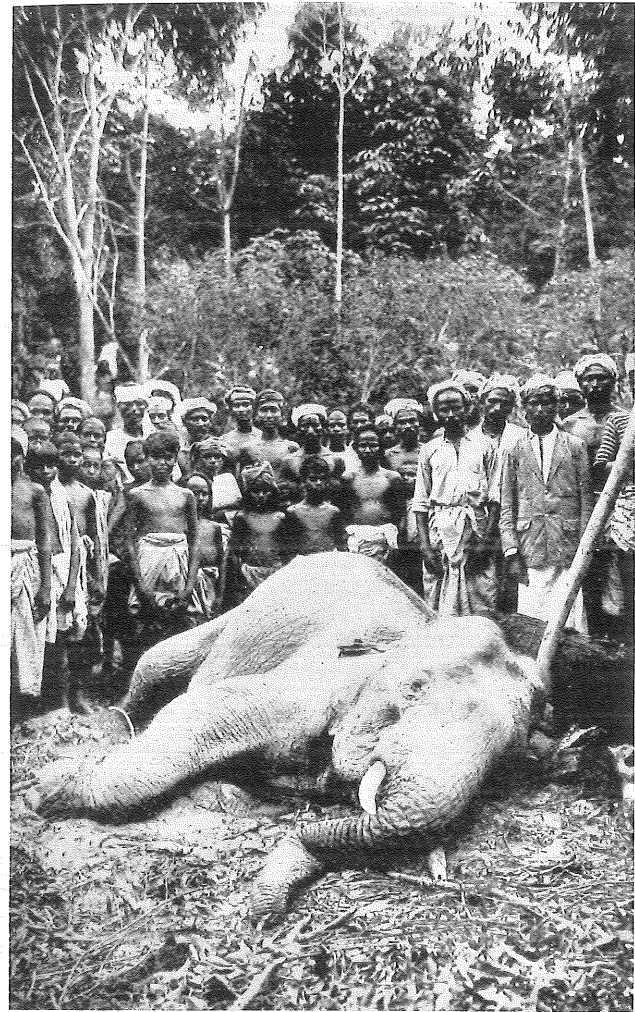


PLATE 1.—A Dead Elephant. N. Borneo

BORNEO'S BIG GAME

give warning that one is in the immediate neighbourhood. He lives in the most inaccessible tracts, which are free, as a rule, from all human visitors, and where he likes to wallow in mud-swamps or other stretches of water.

His chief article of diet consists of the leaves of the young trees, which he takes between his front legs and crushes down with his substantial body so that he can get at their topmost growth. On several occasions I have seen his course through the forest marked out by rows of small trees—about as thick as a man's arm or less—all bent down and half-eaten.

When in danger the rhinoceros generally takes refuge in flight, leaving a broad track behind him in the forest undergrowth; but sometimes he sets up a determined resistance, rushes at his hereditary enemy—man—in an access of blind fury, and either tries to trample him down and crush the life out of him with his weight, or takes his victim up in his mouth, to throw him high in the air and impale him on his horns, of which he owns two, a larger one in front and a smaller one farther back (Pl. 2).

On an expedition near the upper springs of the River Boh, in Central Borneo, we one day suddenly came across no less than four specimens of this animal. Three of them took to their heels at once, but the fourth attacked my procession of bearers and broke through it in the confusion that followed. A warning "*badak, badak*" re-echoed from one to another. All the men dashed down their burdens and hid themselves behind trees or climbed up the liana. In

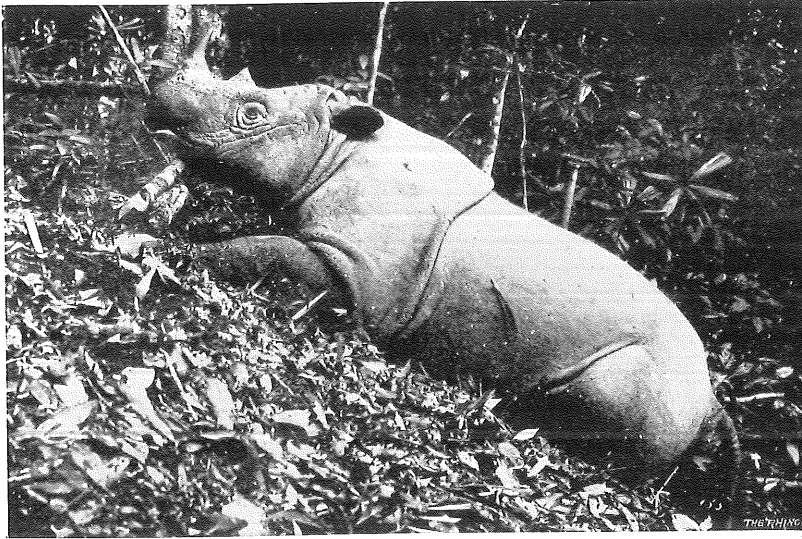


PLATE 2.—A Rhinoceros Just Shot (*Rhinoceros sumatrensis*)

FOREST LIFE AND ADVENTURES

a moment the spot seemed utterly deserted, but soon one terrified face after another appeared, peeping out from the midst of the tree-trunks, and the sudden adventure ended in a general laugh.

The nomad tribes that wander through the central districts of Borneo are very keen rhinoceros-hunters. The Punans follow his trail without a sound and blow poisoned darts at his more vulnerable points. They may follow one and the same animal for weeks without giving up the pursuit, until they have secured a suitable opportunity to use their blow-pipe.

In Sumatra, so it is said, the Battas creep up so close to the rhinoceros as to be able to cut the sinews of its back legs with a sharp knife. When the beast in its fury turns on them they hide behind one of the larger tree-trunks to await a suitable moment for a renewed attack.

It is chiefly the horns that are highly prized for trading purposes. They are sold for several hundred shillings apiece to the Chinese from the districts round the coast, who use them for the preparation of a medicine in great request by the almond-eyed sons of the Celestial Kingdom as a cure for ailments of every description.

Faith achieves such marvellous results in this world!

The fate of the rhinoceros family should soon be sealed in Borneo, for every year a very large number of them are killed simply for the sake of their horns. At the twelfth hour the Sarawak Government—acting on the author's initiative—has introduced certain

BORNEO'S BIG GAME

restrictions on rhinoceros-hunting, but they are not strictly enough enforced. Everything in this little obscure country bears the stamp of slackness and hopeless disorder, as I have had occasion to show in detail in a previous book. It is of course true that the rhinoceros is also to be found in Dutch Borneo, but apparently not in such numbers as in highly favoured Sarawak. As I have already mentioned, I once chanced upon a party of four of these animals, but that is a very exceptional occurrence. I was travelling that day through particularly rough impenetrable forests in a district made unsafe by two buffalo bulls as well. But it was fully three months more before I again met with any of these fine representatives of Borneo's big game.

The hunting of the rhinoceros ought to be entirely forbidden for humanitarian reasons. It is a perfectly harmless creature, that does not do any mischief. In common with all pachydermata still in existence, the rhinoceros stands badly in need of protection to enable it to survive in modern conditions.

Without a doubt the most dangerous of all the big game is the wild buffalo, or bantin (*Bos banteng*). The bull is a big animal, completely black and lustrous except for a white patch on the rump; the female is rufous, as dappled as any common cow, and considerably smaller than the male of the species. Both alike attack with lightning speed, and, one might almost say, on principle.

The bantins, or Bornean buffaloes, live in herds far in the dark depths of the primeval forests, but in spite of their size they climb with surprising agility

FOREST LIFE AND ADVENTURES

up the high mountains, where they like to hide in the close thickets of bamboo.

When I was staying on the lofty Mt. Tibang, in the heart of Borneo, I was out one day in the November of 1925 on a shooting expedition with my two Malay gun-bearers. We were after the wild "men of the woods" (orang-utans), whose fresh tracks we had seen day after day, and as we advanced with every sense keenly intent on our errand we heard a sudden noise in an adjoining clump of bamboos. Out rushed a great buffalo bull and came straight at us. In terror we all took to our heels. My companions, nimble as apes, took refuge with all speed behind some tree-trunks, whilst I ran for dear life and tried to get up a gigantic tree with exceptionally large root-branches which encircled the trunk with their great folds. The buffalo bull was so close behind me that I felt his panting breath on my back as I threw myself at the very last moment into the crevice between two such roots. The enormous beast, carried on by the impetus of his pace and the weight of his body, rushed past me, tripped over a piece of rock, fell on his knees and got his horns fixed in a liana tangle.

I made use of the momentary pause to slink out between the trunk and the buffalo's back legs and take shelter behind another tree, where one of my gun-bearers had found refuge. At the same moment my other Malay shrieked out of his hiding-place: "*Djalan di atas akar, toewan, dia datang kembali*" ("Climb up into the liana, master, he will soon come back"). Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before the buffalo was on his feet once more and

BORNEO'S BIG GAME

rushing in the direction where he had heard voices, and very likely also caught a glimpse of the Malay clinging anxiously to the tree.

This gave me a short breathing-space. I fired a shot, the buffalo fell forward, but with great effort got up again, only, however, to receive another shot that put an end to his life. The enormous creature fell only a couple of yards from my terrified Malay, who, in his fear, was taking refuge behind a tree-trunk.

Thus the adventure ended more happily than we had dared to hope, and we were all pleased to know that we had got out of it with whole skins. For when a buffalo once gets hold of a man, the victim has practically not a chance of escape. The beast pierces him with his horns, and tramples him to death with his front feet if there is still any spark of life left in him. Natives have certainly been known to save their lives, when suddenly attacked, by throwing themselves flat on the ground so that the buffalo has galloped over them. For, owing to his short neck, the creature, when going at full speed, cannot reach down low enough to pierce a man lying on the ground. If then one of his companions attracts the buffalo's attention, the native first attacked has a chance to save himself.

The Borneo jungles, which are so peaceful in other respects, are free, too, from royal tigers, a fact that fills anyone who has to make a long stay in primeval forests with a sense of relief. In Sumatra the wild tigers run about amongst the houses practically every night and make the district particularly unsafe. It is exceedingly unpleasant to know that such a dangerous

FOREST LIFE AND ADVENTURES

beast of prey as the tiger is slinking round all the house-corners.

It is not easy to understand why the tiger is not forthcoming nowadays in Borneo, for there is not the slightest doubt that he used to be there once upon a time. Since all the other larger land animals are common to Borneo, the Malay Peninsula, and Sumatra, there is no reason to think that the nimble tiger, with his love of deep forests, would not also have found his way to the great Bornean land, where there is such abundance of wild life of every kind. His disappearance from Borneo is one more of the many unsolved problems to be found in this country.

The largest of his tribe in Borneo is the clouded leopard-cat, or tree-tiger (*Felis nebulosa*). This species is scarcely as large as a panther, and not, as a rule, dangerous to man. It often lies in wait on overhanging tree-stems, and thus attacks its prey. It is the possessor of a beautifully marked skin, of which the natives make use in their battle equipment.

The Borneo native has great reverence for the tree-tiger's soul, and has to go through a special purification rite if he, with the help of his dogs, has caused the death of one of these clouded leopards.

It is not yet certain that the tapir has been met with in Borneo, although there are persistent reports that an animal of its size and appearance exists in the interior of the country. It would be wise to suspend our judgment for the present and content ourselves with the fact that so far it has only made its appearance on the North Bornean postage stamps!

The great forests in Borneo offer exceptional

BORNEO'S BIG GAME

opportunities for hunting, literally filled as they are with deer and wild boars. The former are of many different kinds, from the *Rusa equina* deer to the dainty little pigmies (*Tragulus spp.*) no bigger than a hare.

The wild boars (*Sus barbatus*) creep on one another's heels everywhere. They are black, as a rule, but when young are beautifully striped, and as good to look at as they are delicious to eat.

The Malay bear (*Ursus malayanus*), with his shiny black skin and V-shaped collar of white round his neck, is no rarity in Borneo. As a rule, he trots off and makes for safety when a human creature comes in sight, but he is a gentleman with an uncertain, touchy temper, who sometimes proves aggressive, and is then a very ugly enemy. With his sharp claws, more than an inch long, he can inflict fearful wounds, and has even been known to tear men to death.

It is always wise to have a loaded revolver in one's pocket when taking a walk in Borneo; it never fails to be useful in uncomfortable or unexpected encounters as well as in dangerous hand-to-hand contests.