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Kahilu Wild Life Sanctuary

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THE constitution of this sanctuary in 1928 was the final effort on the part of the Forest Department to save the Javan rhinoceros (*r. sondaicus*) from extinction. Authentic evidence on the habits and distribution of this species of rhinoceros in Burma is very slight indeed and there is no available evidence to show that the Javan rhinoceros ever existed outside the Tenasserim and Salween forests (situated in the extreme south of Burma). Up to 20 years ago however, the Mergui forests were considered to hold a number of Javan rhinoceros but when Mr. T. R. Hubback of Malaya came over in 1920 to shoot a Javan rhinoceros for the British Museum, he reported that the southern forests of Mergui no longer contained this rhinoceros and that heavy poaching was taking place in the north of these forests.

Subsequently a forest patrol was organised to deal with poaching of rhinoceros—much of which was reputed to be done by Siamese, but the patrol failed to stem the slaughter of the Javan rhinoceros, so that writing in 1928, Mr. H. C. Smith the first Burma Game Warden, stated that to all intents and purposes, the Javan rhinoceros was now non-existent in the Mergui forests.

In 1927, however reports were received that a few Javan rhinoceros were living in and around the small Kahilu reserve forest, situated on the right bank of the Yunzalin river about 40 miles south of Papun and in 1927 Mr. Smith put up proposals for constituting the Kahilu reserve and the surrounding unclassed

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Photo :

F. J. Mustill

The Sumatran Rhinoceros.

forests to be a sanctuary. The sanctuary was formally notified in July 1928 and covered 62 square miles of which 50 square miles were unclassed forests containing a number of Karen villages which exist by cutting *taungyas* or hill cultivation. Two keepers were appointed to patrol the sanctuary.

Previous to this very little definite information was available regarding the species of rhinoceros in the area. Some 5 or 6 specimens were known to exist but the evidence of local villagers regarding the species was not very conclusive whilst the dense and almost impenetrable nature of the forest prevented any observation being made by reliable witnesses. However, some definite evidence was obtained shortly before the sanctuary was notified, as the remains of a female rhinoceros were found inside the area in February 1928. The skull of this animal was subsequently identified by the Bombay Natural History Society as that of a Javan rhinoceros. Later in 1930 another skull was found in the sanctuary and this again was identified by the Bombay Natural History Society as belonging to a Javan rhinoceros. There was thus good reason to conclude that the rhinoceros in the Kahilu Sanctuary were actually Javan rhinoceros and for the last ten years we have been congratulating ourselves that Burma possessed the few remaining specimens of this animal. During this period the number of rhinoceros in the sanctuary remained practically stationary.

One calf was born in 1928 and there is another small track in the sanctuary at present but apart from the two casualties mentioned above, no other deaths have been reported. Glimpses of rhinoceros have been obtained from time to time but in no instance has a sufficiently clear view been obtained to permit of definite identification of the species.

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In 1938, however, a visitor who has had some experience of rhinoceros abroad, visited the sanctuary and expressed the view that the footprints seen by him in Kahilu suggested that the rhinoceros in the sanctuary was more probably the smaller two horned or Sumatran rhinoceros (*r. sumatrensis*) specimens of which occur in the Shwe-u-daung Wild Life Sanctuary, situated in the Mogok Hill Tracts of Katha District. (Described in *The Burma Police Journal*, Vol. II, No. 1, April 1939.—*Ed.*).

It may be of interest here to point out the most easily visible differences between the Javan and Sumatran rhinoceros: The Javan rhinoceros is a large animal standing up to 5 feet 6 inches at the shoulder whilst the Sumatran rhinoceros stands no more than 4 feet 2 inches at the shoulder. The skin of the Javan rhinoceros is scaly and heavily folded round the neck with a deep double fold underneath whilst there is a characteristic fold down the back of the shoulder and across the top of the fore-legs almost as if a cape were worn. There is also a fold in the skin down the junction between the hip and body. The skin of the Sumatran rhinoceros on the other hand resembles that of a buffalo and the folding of the skin round the neck and shoulders is much less pronounced. The diameter of the footprint of an adult Javan rhinoceros may reach 11 inches but the Sumatran rhinoceros footprint hardly ever exceeds 8 inches and finally there is the question of horns. In the Javan rhinoceros only one horn is carried in the male and the female carries no horn or in some cases a slight nasal protuberance, whilst the Sumatran rhinoceros carries two horns in both sexes. The longer horn is situated at the end of the nasal ridge whilst the smaller horn is carried between the eyes. This latter is frequently a mere bulge and for this reason a Sumatran rhinoceros may

at first sight be easily mistaken for a one horned rhinoceros.

When I visited the sanctuary in March 1939, one of my chief concerns was to obtain more definite evidence of the species of rhinoceros living in the area especially in view of the report by the visitor mentioned above. It should be pointed out however that since its formation in 1928 this sanctuary has not been developed in any way, mainly with the idea of leaving the rhinoceros undisturbed. Consequently no facilities existed for observing the rhinoceros and owing to the dense nature of the forest it was impossible to visit much of the area.

The keepers and local villagers had from time to time caught glimpses of the rhinoceros as they forced their way through the dense undergrowth and from all such reports I gathered that the rhinoceros carried only one horn. This of course seemed to confirm that the species was the Javan rhinoceros but as mentioned above, identification depending on the horns especially in the dense jungle is not reliable. It was obvious that the only means of obtaining clear views of the rhinoceros was to locate their wallows and erect hides nearby. This work was begun during my visit in 1939 when some five wallows were located. Measurements of footprints indicated that the rhinoceros could quite easily be the Sumatran species but I was unable to obtain views of the animals.

When I revisited the sanctuary in February 1940, however, I was more fortunate as on the third day of my tour I obtained a clear view of a rhinoceros in its wallow at a range of 8 yards and there was no doubt that the animal belonged to the Sumatran species. The illustration shows the animal in its wallow but unfortunately the lighting conditions were so bad

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that good photography was out of the question. Actually the picture was taken on a very fast film at a speed of $1/15$ and an aperture of 2.8, but as this is the first picture to be obtained of a rhinoceros in Burma in the wild state the result may be considered satisfactory.

Nevertheless it must be admitted that the discovery was disappointing more especially as the particular animal seen has the biggest track in the sanctuary *i.e.* 8 inches and there now seems to be strong reason to conclude that all the rhinoceros in Kahilu are the Sumatran species and not the Javan species. This would then appear to indicate that the Javan rhinoceros is extinct but since my visit to Kahilu a report has been received that a rhinoceros with calf has been seen on the Kyaiktiyo Hill in the Thaton Forest Division. The description of this rhinoceros as given to me by the local villagers gives every reason to believe that the animal belongs to the Javan species. The matter is being investigated at the moment. There is no doubt that at the time of its constitution the Kahilu sanctuary contained the Javan rhinoceros and judging from my recent investigations, the Sumatran species as well and it is quite possible that the few Javan animals which originally resided inside the sanctuary have moved elsewhere, in fact it is quite possible that the rhinoceros now on the Kyaiktiyo Hill occasionally visit the Kahilu Sanctuary.

When considering the case of the Javan rhinoceros which if it still lives, is the rarest large mammal in the world, one is rather inclined to overlook the fact that the Sumatran species is also a very rare animal indeed. The fact therefore that the Kahilu Sanctuary may no longer contain the Javan species does not in any way detract from the value of this sanctuary as a protective area for the Sumatran species.

At the moment the keepers in the sanctuary are making careful measurements of all fresh tracks and from these it is hoped to compile a fairly accurate estimate of the numbers of rhinoceros living in the sanctuary. My own observations indicate that there are not more than seven specimens, which however should provide sufficient stock of breeding animals provided that the sanctuary is left undisturbed. At present it must be admitted that the presence of several villages in the sanctuary is undesirable and leads to disturbance inside the sanctuary. Before proposals are formulated for improving the conditions in the sanctuary, however, the result of the census-taking operations are awaited. The case of the Kahilu Sanctuary provides an example in its acutest form of the problem which constantly confronts those responsible for wild life protection. Boiled down to a few words it amounts to "should villagers be subjected to disturbance and inconvenience for the sake of wild animals, however rare they may be." In Kahilu however there are indications that several villages are quite agreeable to move elsewhere or agree to some restriction of the area over which they cut their *taungyas*. If the stock of rhinoceros is large enough to justify proposals for improved protective measures therefor, proposals to reduce the area of the sanctuary will be made so as to exclude all villages and at the same time providing an area which will be free of disturbance in which the rhinoceros can live in peace.

In conclusion I should like to mention the extraordinary behaviour of two Sumatran rhinoceros with which I have been in contact during the past two years. In the first case, a Sumatran rhinoceros walked into the middle of my camp in the Shwe-u-daung Sanctuary at 2 p.m. and stopped to look at a camp follower

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chopping firewood at a range of 10 feet. The rhinoceros showed no alarm at the sight or scent of human beings.

In the second case, which concerns the rhinoceros I recently photographed in Kahilu, it was only after much shouting on my part at a range of less than 10 yards that I was able to induce the rhinoceros to leave his wallow and within 5 minutes of driving him from the wallow, he returned again and resumed his bath.

At one stage of my attempts to obtain pictures I approached so close to the animal that I could have hit him with a long stick and it is certain that a poacher could easily have killed the animal with a spear. These experiences incline one to believe that the rhinoceros shooting exploits of nineteenth century sportsmen in this country were in reality stark butchery and almost devoid of any skill in tracking or approaching their quarries. At the same time it is fairly obvious that determined poachers today would have little difficulty in killing rhinoceros and when it is borne in mind that even the smaller species is worth probably a thousand rupees to a poacher then special measures are required to save the Sumatran species from the unhappy fate of its larger cousin, the Javan species.

389 carnivora were reported killed in Burma during the past year—92 tigers, 50 leopards, 174 bears and 73 wild dogs.

Wild life sanctuaries for the preservation of *thamin* (*Rucervus thamin*) are to be constituted in the Minbu and Shwebo districts. The sanctuaries will cover an area of 300 square miles.