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# Rhinos in Thailand

*J. McNeely and A. Laurie*

In a paper published in *Oryx* in 1972 McNeely and Cronin concluded that small numbers of Javan and Sumatran rhinoceros *Rhinoceros sondaicus* and *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* still occurred in Thailand, in three main areas: the Malayan border, the Tenasserim range, and Chaiyaphum province.<sup>2</sup> Since then new information has come from several areas, and the present authors have re-surveyed Phu Khio Reserve in Chaiyaphum.

**1. Malayan Border.** There is no recent information from the Thai side – a reported baby rhino in captivity turned out to be a tapir *Tapirus indicus* – and the area is still controlled by several different groups of insurgents, making field investigations impossible.

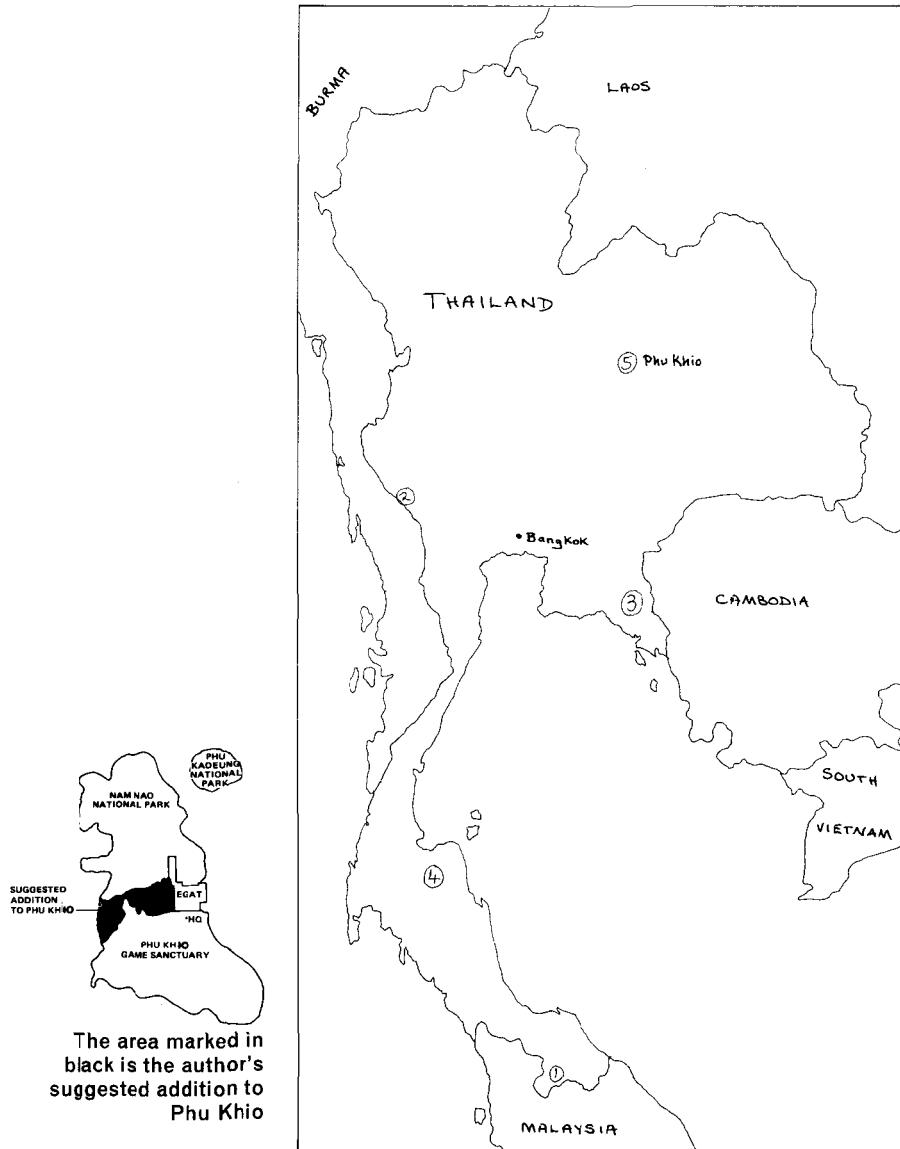
**2. Tenasserim Range.** A Karen hill tribesman reported in August 1976 that there are still Javan rhinos at Khao Sam Chan near the Uthai Thani – Kanchanaburi border.

**3. Chantaburi Province.** In January 1974, rhino footprints were found at Khao Soi Dao reserve in south-east Thailand; Forest Department personnel made a plaster cast of the footprint which was 21 to 23 cm wide, within the size range of Sumatran rhino. No more tracks have been reported, but old wallows have been found. An American Peace Corps volunteer is now stationed at the reserve to conduct surveys, and, it is hoped, collect more information. Until recently Khao Soi Dao was part of a continuous area of rain forest extending eastward to the Cardamom and Elephant Mountains of southern Cambodia. Now, as a result of forest clearance and fruit growing, it is a large 'island' of forest in a sea of cultivation. Satellite imagery shows that the Cardamom rain forest is still continuous.

**4. Surat Thani Province.** Hunters recently reported at least three rhinos in the mountains of Surat Thani Province, in southern Thailand, but the information is insufficient to determine which species. After the misidentification on the Malayan border, the chance of their being tapirs cannot be dismissed.

**5. Chaiyaphum Province.** McNeely and Cronin,<sup>2</sup> who found only a single track of a Sumatran rhino about three weeks old, reported that poaching was a serious threat to their survival here. To control it, a reserve was established in 1973 under the Wildlife Conservation Division of the Royal Forest Department, and staffed with five forestry graduates and up to 20 local rangers. By 1975 the farmers of Thung Kamang village, established illegally in 1965, had been resettled outside the reserve, but in the last year nine families have moved back. We took a one-week trip to Chaiyaphum to assess the situation, and spent four days in Phu Khio reserve. We surveyed some of the most suitable habitat on foot, and talked with Mr Manop Chomphuchan, Chief of the reserve, about the problem of the Thung Kamang villagers.

In the reserve, tracks of elephants *Elephas maximus*, gaur *Bos gaurus*,



sambar *Cervus unicolor*, wild pig *Sus scrofa*, and barking deer *Muntiacus muntjak* were frequent. The elephant trails are wide and well used, intersecting with numerous smaller game trails. We saw signs of tiger *Panthera tigris*, wild dog *Canis lupus* and Himalayan bear *Selenarctos thibetanus*; leopard *Panthera pardus* and sun bear *Helarctos malayanus* are also reported, but not banteng *Bos javanicus*, which are found about 50 km to the north. Gibbons *Hylobates lar* and langurs *Presbytis phayrei* and *P. cristata* were often seen, and macaques *Macaca nemestrina* and yellow-throated marten *Martes flavigula*

*flavigula* on one occasion each. Bird life was numerous and diverse. However, all wildlife was shy and fled on detecting our presence, an indication of heavy hunting pressure.

In two days of intensive searching in the most suitable rhino habitat we found Sumatran rhino tracks in the four places marked on the map. In two stream beds, both in narrow, steep-sided valleys, we saw four (two in each) which may have been made by at least two different animals, since the track widths were 18.5, 20.0 and 21.0 cm (one could not be measured accurately). Their age varied between 1-2 days and 2-3 weeks. One rhino dropping, found in a large pig wallow along a stream bed, differed from the numerous elephant droppings in being more finely divided and less fibrous.

Phu Khio Reserve has a wide variety of habitat types, including *Shorea obtusa*-grassland savanna, dry dipterocarp, *Pinus merkusii*-grassland (a fire climax), bamboo, and dry evergreen forest. The 1413 sq km of mountainous dry evergreen forest with many narrow steep-sided valleys is good Sumatran rhino habitat, with a great diversity of low browsing plants along the streams and in forest clearings made by fallen trees. We surveyed only a relatively small area in the north-east part of the reserve but similar habitat is generally distributed in the steeper upland areas, continuing north to Nam Nao National Park and beyond to Phu Kadeung National Park and Phu Luang Reserve. Part of this habitat type is wedged between Phu Khio and Nam Nao but is designated neither reserve nor national park. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) controls part of the area, including the Nam Phrom valley and the Chulaphorn Dam area. It seems likely that rhinos use at least the western part of this area, moving between Nam Nao and Phu Khio, and it is essential that it be included as part of the Phu Khio Reserve – it is too far from the Nam Nao park headquarters to be effectively patrolled from that side.

Poaching remains a serious problem. Poachers come mainly in search of gaur, sambar and barking deer – barking deer meat is worth US\$4 per kilo – but would certainly shoot at a rhino if they came across one since they could easily sell at least the horn for a good price. A hunter in 1970 sold a 600-gram horn at US50 cents per gram – a quarter the price at which we found it for sale in Bangkok. We found many old poachers' camps in the forest, one within two hours' walk of the reserve headquarters and another within 200 metres of a rhino track. There is little attempt at concealment, as patrolling in the reserve is minimal; even if arrested, poachers are difficult to convict, fines are minimal, and jailing, though provided for in the game law, unheard of. Poachers claiming that they are just poor villagers hunting for food to eat, without which they would be forced to become Communist insurgents, get considerable sympathy from the government, while the rangers become scapegoats oppressing the poor farmers.

Poachers come from most of the villages surrounding the reserve, but the village of Thung Kamang, with nine families whose main source of meat comes from hunting, is in the middle of the reserve. They were successfully removed by Forest Department personnel in 1974 but, stimulated by a sympathetic Member of Parliament from their district, moved back in 1975, and are holding out for US\$2500 compensation to move out; this the Forest Department, which has offered \$500, cannot pay. To make the situation worse, the villagers are supporting their demands with weapons from the insurgents.

## 6. Indochina

*R. sondaicus* has been reported from all the Indochinese countries, and it is possible that small populations still exist. The most likely areas are the Cardamom Mountains in Cambodia, NW Laos, the Bolovens Plateau region in southern Laos, and parts of S Vietnam near Da Lat. Neese (1975) found evidence of *R. sondaicus* from villagers' reports in the Bolovens region during a kouprey survey in 1975 – see *Oryx*, July 1976, page 371.

The Sumatran rhino is reported from Cam Ranh in South Vietnam,<sup>1</sup> but there are no recent records for Indochinese countries where the war has certainly destroyed enormous numbers of wildlife.

Most of Burma is not under government control, and it is unlikely that any large rhino populations remain.

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### References

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## New National Parks in East Malaysia

The Sarawak Government has announced its intention of establishing seven new national parks, and the Sabah Government is planning eight, three of them marine parks incorporating coral reefs and an important mangrove area, the Klias Peninsula. In peninsular Malaysia, however, the proposed Tembeling Dam would flood over 50 square miles of the Taman Negara National Park (the one true national park), including the principal grazing areas of the severely endangered seladang *Bos gaurus*. The Malayan Nature Society is opposing the dam, especially as it would probably have a short life due to the heavy silt in the river.

### Wild Animal Products

TRAFFIC, the IUCN trade specialist group (Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce), of which John Burton, FPS Assistant Secretary, is Chairman, is making a research collection of objects made from wild animal products – e.g. snake-skin, rare bird feathers, tortoiseshell. Any contributions – either as gifts or loans – would be welcomed. Please send to the FPS office.

### Correction

The author of 'Chimpanzees in Uganda' (*Oryx* July 1976), Dr H. Albrecht, wishes to correct two figures on page 359. Compartment W30 covers 1.1 sq. miles (5.8 sq. km.) and N15 covers 1.96 sq. miles (10.36 sq. km.). The figures given were in acres.