

Category: Letters to the Editor

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JAVAN RHINOCEROS

A DISAPPEARING SPECIES

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—I read with much interest in your issue of May 10 Mr. Edward Thompson's article entitled "Rare Beasts" and as in the second paragraph, in referring to the rhinoceroses of India, he writes, "I should like to know more definitely from men who have seen these animals——" I venture, having recently collected a specimen of the *Rhinoceros Sondaicus* in Malaya, to give what information I can in regard to this interesting animal, which is rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth.

The three species mentioned by Mr. Thompson are (1) the great Indian rhinoceros (*R. Unicornis*); (2) the Javan rhinoceros (*R. Sondaicus*); and (3) the Sumatran rhinoceros (*R. Sumatrensis*). The great Indian rhinoceros is the largest of the three; this species and the *Sondaicus* have only one horn, the Sumatran two horns.

Of the three Asiatic species the *Sondaicus* will be the first to disappear, and it is more than probable that the great Indian one-horned rhinoceros will be the next, although at the present moment there are more of this species than either of the others, but its habitat being, so far as any number are concerned, the Nepal Terai, the increased agricultural activities of the inhabitants meaning rapid cultivation, its gradual extinction is to be expected. The *Sumatrensis*, living in the hills in country which is practically useless for cultivation, and in many instances extremely remote, will probably be the last of the Asiatic rhinoceroses to survive.

The great Indian one-horned rhinoceros is comparatively common in the Nepal Terai, also there are a few in Assam, also Bhutan. Until recently it was common in the Sanderbans. The *Sondaicus*, or Javan rhinoceros, is

bans. The *Sondaicus*, or Javan rhinoceros, is on the verge of extinction. Mr. Thompson mentions that the *Sondaicus Indicus* will survive a while longer in the Nepal Terai and in Kuch Behar. I presume the *Unicornis* is meant, as the *Sondaicus* is not found in the Terai or Kuch Behar. It has been found in Southern Tenasserim, and there may be a few specimens there at the present time, but in 1928 Mr. H. C. Smith, then Game Warden of Burma, and I made a very thorough survey of the southern part of Tenasserim for the *Sondaicus*, as Sir Harcourt Butler, then Governor of Burma, had given us permission to shoot two. No tracks were found of this species, although tracks were found of *Sumatrensis*. There are possibly a few *Sondaicus* in Java, but, apart from this, the animal has almost disappeared. It is now known that there are a few in the States of Selangor and Perak, in Malaya. It was in Perak that a specimen was obtained for the British Museum in January of this year, and this will be referred to later. In the Shwe-U-Daung Game Sanctuary, in Upper Burma, it is hoped that a few may exist, but it is unlikely; however, the *Sumatrensis* are there and elsewhere in Burma.

As to the *Sumatrensis*, owing to the extremely dense jungle in which it lives, this species should exist longer than either of the others. A considerable number are to be found in parts of Malaya, Perak, Selangor, Pehang, Johore, and in Siam. It lives in dense jungle from a few hundred feet up to an altitude of 8,000ft. Also it is found in the Arakan and Pegu Yomas, Burma, Borneo, and Sumatra, always in difficult and somewhat inaccessible country.

Having collected adult specimens of the three types of Asiatic rhinoceros, it was found that by far the most interesting and curious of the species was the *Sondaicus*. The epidermis of *Sondaicus* is quite different from either of the others, being tessellated, or as one naturalist has described it, "in Mosaic pattern," it has very heavy folds over the neck, back, and legs. The height of the shoulder of the specimen shot for the British Museum is 5ft. 2½in., and the length over all from the root of the tail to the tip of the nose is 10ft. 8in.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

A. S. VERNAT.

51, Berkeley-square, W.1, June 4.