

## Two former Zoological Gardens in Singapore

by *Kees Rookmaaker*

Previous to the formation of the current Zoological Gardens of Singapore in 1973, there were at least two animal collections which aspired to that name (Sharp 1994). The first of these operated as part of the Botanic Gardens 1875-1880, while the second was the private enterprise of a Indian estate owner and animal dealer, W.L.S. Basapa, 1922-1942.

### Botanic Gardens of Singapore

The Botanic Gardens of Singapore, founded in 1853, were handed over to the government and placed under the umbrella of the Raffles Museum and Library Committee in 1871. Four years later, the Committee decided to keep more than just a few birds in aviaries in the gardens and very quickly received valuable donations of live animals to be exhibited in the park. One of the first animals to arrive was a Sumatran rhinoceros, donated by the Datu Klana of Sunghei Ujong in Malaysia to governor Sir Andrew Clarke. A new house was built for the animal (costing \$310 at the time), said to be on a large scale with the hope that widen it later for an elephant and tapir, "animals we hope soon to have in our collection" (Krohn 1876).

The list of animals received during this first year was certainly impressive for such a small establishment, here reproduced from Krohn (1876), with donors in brackets: Sumatran rhinoceros (Andrew Clarke), sloth bear (Birch), 2 tiger cats (Newman), civet cat (Capt. Kirk), 2 sambur deer (Jamie and Brinkman), great kangaroo, 2 red kangaroo, bush-tailed wallaby, 4 black swans (Acclimatisation Society in Melbourne), 3 Australian rabbits (T.S.Thomson), 2 orang utan (Capt. Kirk), 2 white swans (Zoological Gardens in Hamburg); and – without donors listed - 2 Phillipine deer, 2 porcupines, 6 mouse deer, 2 common macaques, 3 pigtailed macaques, black macaque, Siamese teal, 2 moskovit ducks, 2 pelicans, 7 adjudants, 3 cyrus cranes, 2 white storks, 2 herons, cockatoos and parrots, Vieillot's pheasant fireback, rufous-tailed pheasant fireback, Siamese pheasant fireback, golden pheasant, silver pheasant, ring pheasant, peacock pheasant, argus pheasant, banksfowl, copper-coloured wildfowl, crown Pigeon, sundry pigeons and doves, 2 wedgetailed eagles, 2 hawks, 2 owls, 1 vulture (caught in the gardens).

In 1876, Henry James Murton, the Superintendent of the Gardens (1875-1880), was able to list the receipt of a fine young tiger donated by the Sultan of Tringanu, a leopard from the Minister of Siam and a leopard from W. Hargreaves. Building work included an enclosures for emus, casowaries and kangaroos, and the start of the monkey house. The deer enclosure, started in 1874, was however "quite rotten". Some animals (including a bear, emu, cassowary and kangaroo) were killed in February by an unknown hooligan.

Despite the ambitious and enthusiastic start, not all was well. Probably the lack of finance and possibly the inexperience of two army privates employed as keepers, led to a quick decline in interest to run the zoo. Hanitsch (1924) mentioned that by February 1877, the Gardens Committee had become tired of the rhinoceros (*sic!*, one would want to add), and it was agreed that the animal should be disposed off. The annals do not tell the whole story, but in August 1877 the skeleton of the animal was duly handed over to the museum. Two kangaroos and 2 leopards died in 1878.

A list dated 27 September 1877 (reproduced in Anon. 1918) still shows a reasonably impressive inventory: tiger, 2 leopards, 2 dingo dogs, jackal, binturong, sun bear, fish tiger, civet cat, 2 common cavys, rabbit, white rat, flying fox, kangaroo, 5 red deer, 4 sambur deer, 2 opossums, kawoo, orang outhan, 2 wou-wous, 2 black monkey, spider monkey, bear macaque, red face macaque, pigtail macaque, porcupine, cassowary, emu, 3 peacocks, manila duck, heron, 3 Manchurian cranes, 2 pelicans, 3 black swans, white swan, 2 water rails, 30-40 teal and mandarin ducks, 2 wood pigeons, 2 Nicobar pigeons, green pigeon, 3 ring doves, 3 common doves, 2 parakeets, blood-breasted pigeon, 2 horned owls, Sonnerat's jungle cock, large parakeet, 2 crested peacock pheasants, 2 fireback pheasants, pheasant, 2 rufous-tailed pheasants, golden pheasant, 4 ring-neck pheasants, 4 guinea fowls, 2 white eagles, falcon, 4 hawks, 3 sparrow hawks, 4 crowned goura pigeons, 2 Argus pheasants.

The enthusiasm was gone, however, and maybe public attendance was small. In 1879 it was decided to send the remaining large mammals, a tiger and orang utan, to Calcutta in exchange for Indian birds. Henceforth the Botanic Gardens would concentrate on small animals and birds, but no longer pretended to be a Zoological Garden as well.

## Punggol Zoo

Another Singapore zoological garden was started by William Lawrence Soma Basapa (1893-1943), who lived at 549 Upper Serangoon Road, next to the private Youngberg Memorial Hospital, with his second wife Alberta Maddox and his children, Aldewyn (1923-1966) and Dorothy (1926-1999). He kept large numbers of animals and birds in the one acre grounds of his home from 1922, and at some stage even started to charge a small entrance fee when the number of visitors were increasing. In 1928, he bought a 27-acre plot on the seaside at Punggol, overlooking the channel between Singapore and the Malaysian mainland.

While the Punggol Zoo was a great attraction and much visited, there are but few recollections which animals were kept there. Braddell (1940: 124) mentioned orang utans, crowned pigeons, and a tiger called "Apay", which came to the zoo as a baby and at the age of four could still be led around by a chain. Another source of information is contained in the annual reports of the Raffles Museum. In 1924, the director Cecil Boden Kloss wrote quite enthusiastically about the donations received from Mr. Basapa, and one can read between the lines that he had visited the new zoo and liked it: "Mr W.L. Basapa of Singapore has been a most generous donor.



All the animals that have died in his menagerie have been immediately sent to the Museum, and as in most cases their provenance was known, material of value has been received in this way" (Report for 1924).



W.L.S. Basapa and his favourite pet, Apay.

Through the years, these annual reports of the museum record the following donations from Mr. W.L.S. Basapa:

Annual Report 1924: Tapir, some panthers and gibbons, male tiger from Sumatra, female rusa deer from Johore, wild cats and birds in the flesh.

Annual Report 1925: a very fine male rusa (*Cervus unicolor equinus*), several gibbons including a specimen of *Hylobates lar albimanus* from Sumatra, and an adult tapir.

Annual Report 1926: Orang-utan, honey-bears, anoas, gibbons and other mammals; a python, all in the flesh.

Annual Report 1927: two young Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatranus*), orang-utan, monkeys, tapir.

Annual Report 1928: several large mammals in the flesh, a tiger, a young elephant, two black panthers and smaller but equally interesting wild-cats, porcupines, etc.

Annual Report 1929-1930: no entries.

Annual Report 1931: two orang utans (in the flesh)

Annual Report 1932: no entry.

Annual Report 1933: gibbons, two orang-utans, a young male elephant, a jungle cat (*Felis temmincki*) from Sumatra, and a female leopard.

Annual Report 1934: one gibbon, one Malayan peacock-pheasant.

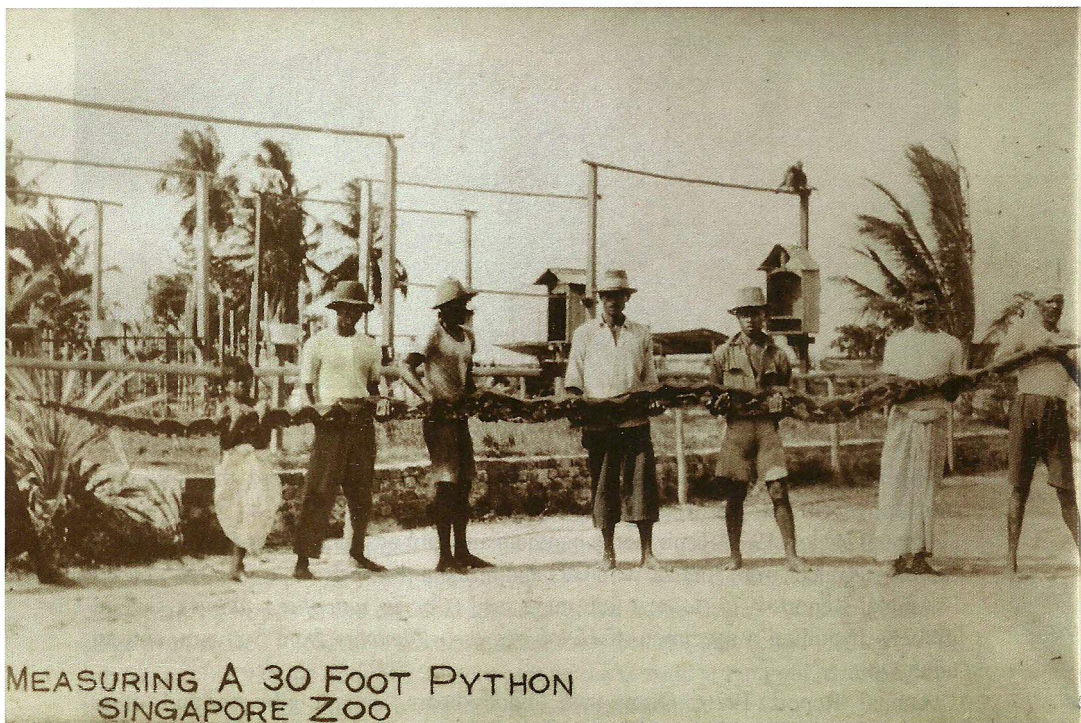
Annual Report 1935: "interesting" animals which died during the year in the Ponggol Zoo.

Annual Report 1936: "interesting" Malaysian mammals and birds that died in the Ponggol Zoo.

Annual Report 1937: Malaysian birds and mammals which died in the Ponggol Zoo.

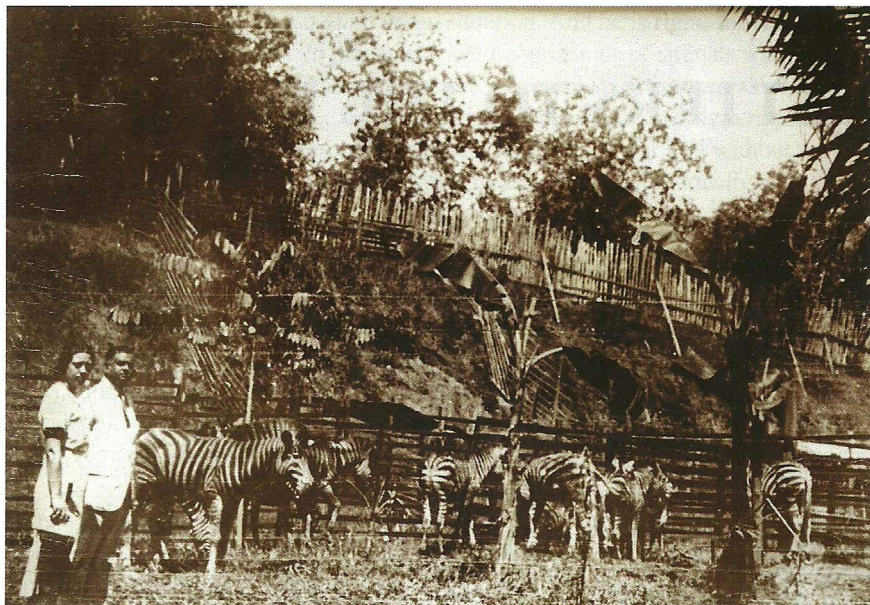
Annual Report 1938: a gibbon.

Annual Report 1939-1945: no entries.



In 1942, on the eve of the Japanese invasion of Singapore, British armed forces occupied the land and asked Basapa to move his animals and birds. As this could not be achieved in the small time frame available, all animals and reptiles were shot, while the birds were released. The zoo was never restored. William Basapa died in 1943 and the land was sold off by the family in 1948.





W.L.S. Basapa and his wife Alberta among zebras.

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Dr Kees Rookmaaker. Chief Editor of the Rhino Resource Center  
<http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com>) Email: [rhinorrc@gmail.com](mailto:rhinorrc@gmail.com)