
PROTECTING THE DRAGON: DUTCH ATTEMPTS AT LIMITING ACCESS TO KOMODO LIZARDS IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

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"[The Komodo dragon] has to be protected chiefly against the passion of collectors for *Musea*."¹

– K. W. Dammerman

In September 1926, an expedition under the leadership of W. Douglas Burden, and representing the American Museum of Natural History, returned from the Netherlands East Indies with two live, gigantic monitor lizards, soon dubbed Komodo dragons, which were housed in New York's Bronx Zoo. The presence of these two large lizards caused a sensation. Crowds—for example, the Bronx Zoo received 38,000 visitors on September 12—jostled to see the "descendants of the mammoth reptiles."² Although the two animals only survived in New York City for a couple of months (one died on October 19 and the other on November 14), they generated a tremendous amount of publicity and coverage in the local press. The crowds that were drawn to the zoo during those two months in 1926 were willing to pay to see these visitors from

¹ K. W. Dammerman, *Preservation of Wild Life and Nature Reserves in the Netherlands Indies* (Weltevreden: Emmink, 1929), p. 13.

² "Giant Lizards, which Airman Called Dragons, and Tapir with 40-inch Nose Come to Zoo," *New York Times*, September 11, 1926, p. 17; Louis Rich, "Dragons of Legend Come to Bronx Zoo," *New York Times*, September 19, 1926, p. 5.

Indonesia, as they were perceived as links to an antediluvian past, originating from a distant, little understood land—a perspective that seemed to originate in popular books of the period, such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*.

Much of the public fascination with Komodo dragons (*Varanus komodoensis*) was due to their rarity and size. The Komodo dragon is the largest lizard in the world. Prior to World War Two, many newspapers and even scientific journals reported that lizards from Komodo could grow to seven meters (almost twenty-three feet) in length. In reality, they can reach a maximum length of three meters (almost ten feet). Komodo dragons also have a very limited range. They can only be found in the western extremes of Flores Island and on a few small islands—particularly Komodo and Rinca—located between Flores and Sumbawa. Komodo dragons were unknown to the world before 1912, when an article in a relatively obscure Dutch science journal, published in Java, mentioned the discovery of a new species.³ While a few expeditions during the 1910s and early 1920s did make their way to the eastern Indonesian archipelago to observe the newly discovered lizards, no live specimen was taken outside of the Netherlands East Indies prior to the 1926 Burden Expedition. The son of an iron and steel baron, Burden had participated in several expeditions to Alaska, Central America, and Indochina prior to 1926. In line with adventurers of the day, Burden was not shy about publicizing his role in bringing this unique species to the West. He published several articles in the popular journals of the day—including *National Geographic*—and wrote a book detailing his exploits during his journey to Komodo from North America.⁴ *The Dragon Lizards of Komodo*, Burden's account of the expedition, became a phenomenon among those fascinated with the exotic East as well as an imagined prehistoric past. Through publicity and promotion, Burden created and developed the image of Komodo lizards throughout the world, transforming them from large reptiles into “dragons,” and it was this popularized image that fueled the work of scientists, collectors, and explorers for decades.⁵

The presence of Komodo dragons at the Bronx Zoo sparked interest among other zoological societies in Europe and the United States, which were not only interested in the large lizards for their scientific value, but also because they were a “celebrity species” that would draw crowds, which in turn could help an institution stay afloat

³ P. A. Ouwens, “On a Large Varanus Species from the Island of Komodo,” *Bulletin du Jardin Botanique de Buitenzorg* 2,6 (1912): 1–3. Komodo and its surrounding islands contained no natural resources, very few people, and little to make a stop worthwhile for Europeans. This is why the islands were relatively unexplored until 1912, when the presence of a large lizard was first mentioned. The earliest notice of Komodo Island among naturalists occurred in 1907, when J. T. Dingeman, the manager of a pearling company, sent an orchid from the island to the Buitenzorg Botanical Gardens. H. Zollinger, *Verslag van eene Reis naar Bima en Soembawa, en naar Eenige Plaatsen op Celebes, Saleijer en Floris, Gedurende de Maanden Mei tot December 1847* (Batavia: Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1850); A. Hoogerwerf, “Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta (Kleine Sunda Eilanden) Gemaakte Dienstreis van 21 Mei–6 Juli 1953),” unpublished manuscript, Museum Bogoriense, December/January 1953/54, pp. 10–11.

⁴ W. Douglas Burden, *Dragon Lizards of Komodo: An Expedition to the Lost World of the Dutch East Indies* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1927); “Stalking the Dragon Lizard on the Island of Komodo,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 52 (July–December 1927): 216–32.

⁵ Timothy P. Barnard, “Chasing the Dragon: An Early Expedition to Komodo Island,” in *Lost Times and Untold Tales from the Malay World*, ed. Jan van der Putten and Mary Kilcline Cody (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), pp. 41–53.

financially.⁶ The possibility that a Komodo dragon could be such a species was reinforced in October 1926 when another Komodo dragon that Burden had captured was put on display at the Amsterdam Zoo. It had been transported to the Netherlands with great care, having been “lodged in a specially built steam-heated cabin” aboard the SS *Karimata*. Unfortunately, the animal died on December 4 that year; it was stuffed and presented to the Zoölogisch Museum in Amsterdam. Five more Komodo lizards arrived in Europe the next year. Two were presented to the London Zoo, while the Amsterdam Zoo, Rotterdam Zoo, and the Berlin Aquarium each received one.⁷ Most of these animals survived the journey and subsequent captivity, and were the first Komodo lizards to become mainstays in Western zoological parks, and in each park they drew interested crowds.

The profits Komodo dragons generated in Western scientific institutions could not be ignored. Following the publicity and sensationalism of the Burden Expedition, Dutch officials would now have to deal with numerous requests for Komodo dragons. The applications for Komodo dragons were submitted to a colonial administrative system that aspired to rationalize Dutch rule over vast areas of the archipelago and to make the Netherlands East Indies a center of scientific research and conservation. Dutch officials now had to focus on how to protect a rare species, one of many animals that spurred a trade in wildlife from a distant and sparsely settled region of the vast Dutch colony. Dutch officials’ reactions to such requests, and their attempts to protect the Komodo dragon, resulted in the promulgation of a number of regulations and ordinances to deal with these developing circumstances. The resulting rules and procedures became part of larger global trends related to emerging environmental consciousness, while also reflecting understandings of how to create a system of control over distant lands and nature.

Robert Cribb has argued that much of the rise of environmental consciousness in the archipelago, beginning in the 1910s, was the result of colonial paternalism. Colonial authorities perceived the indigenous peoples as perpetuating environmental destruction through their traditional activities—such as hunting for food, gathering of exotic trade items from the forests or seas, or even collecting timber for fuel—while the colonial middle class and indigenous elite promoted the development of bourgeois activities, such as sport hunting, with permits and licenses, and protected endangered species. The development of laws and nature reserves in the colony was not only part of a nascent global movement of environmental consciousness, but also a reflection of how the rulers perceived a distant tropical land that was understood through exaggerated images of primitive cultures and wildlife that needed protection from the indigenous people’s ignorance. According to such a conception of the colony, the “natives” did not appreciate the wealth that surrounded them, and needed Western guidance to harness its potential.⁸

While many of the scientists and administrators involved in the development of these regulations meant well, they had little authority beyond the confines of

⁶ “Celebrity species” is a term Robert Cribb uses in his “Conservation in Colonial Indonesia,” *Interventions* 9,1 (2007): 49–61.

⁷ L. C. Rookmaaker, “The History of Some Komodo Dragons (*Varanus komodoensis*) Captured on Rintja in 1927,” *Zoologische Mededelingen* 49,6 (1975): 65; Burden, *Dragon Lizards of Komodo*, pp. 181–82.

⁸ Cribb, “Conservation in Colonial Indonesia,” pp. 49–61.

Buitenzorg and its Botanical Gardens. This article will argue that the activities of foreign institutions and expeditions that followed the 1926 Burden Expedition, as well as those of local officials and hunters, constantly tested the Western rulers' ability to protect a large lizard that lived at the margins of Dutch power. In the process, an amalgamation of forces—ranging from diplomacy and politics to ignorance and science—resulted in the development of a nature reserve, the borders of which today continue to demarcate a national park. While Komodo dragons were not the original inspiration for environmental protection in the Netherlands East Indies, which often focused on protecting megafauna such as orangutans and rhinoceros, these large lizards became a unique subset within the various regulations limiting access to wildlife in the Dutch colony, due to their isolation and unique status as a recently discovered species, whose habitat and biology was little understood. In the years leading up to World War Two, Komodo dragons played an important role in Dutch conservationists' conception of the colonial environment, and how to properly protect it, thus reflecting an understanding of the Dutch role in the vast archipelago.

Diplomacy and Dragons

The Burden Expedition was one of the great scientific journeys of its day, capturing the public imagination as well as contributing scientific research on a distant, exotic animal. As possession of a Komodo dragon specimen became a requisite for modern Western zoological parks and natural history museums, curators scrambled to obtain one. The five Komodo dragons that arrived in Europe in 1927 were the first to appear in the West following the publicity Burden generated beginning in late 1926, and fostered a growing interest among institutions to possess one for display. Prior to 1926, only one Dutch and one German expedition had made it to Komodo or Rinca, the two small islands where the lizard could be found. Wanting to accommodate the growing number of requests from scientific institutions, but fearing a troublesome flood of visitors to these islands, local Dutch officials developed a system for providing a sufficient number of Komodo dragons for the curious public and scientists, while also protecting a species that lived in a remote area in their colony and about which they knew little. The initial attempts to fill such requests resulted in the 1927 delivery of the first five specimens to Europe. They arrived through the efforts of H. R. Rookmaaker, the assistant resident of Flores, who quickly developed a system that became the standard procedure for obtaining a Komodo dragon prior to World War Two.

Most foreigners seeking a Komodo dragon would initially contact the Netherlands Indies government through consular officials in Batavia, which directed inquiries to the Department of Agriculture, located in Buitenzorg. Beautifully situated on a hill, Buitenzorg functioned as the capital and was also the home of the botanical gardens and zoological park for the Netherlands East Indies. In reply to a British letter written in January 1927 requesting help in obtaining a live Komodo dragon, for example, Dutch officials from the Buitenzorg Zoological Museum wrote that it may be possible to "secure live specimens from the natives if you are willing to pay for [the specimens]."⁹ The officials also wrote that, while travel to Komodo was rather

⁹ Letter to J. Crosby, British Consul-General, Batavia, from Zoologisch Museum, Buitenzorg, Java, February 3, 1927, DF200/200, Museum of Natural History Archives, London.

expensive, actually obtaining an animal would be relatively inexpensive. Thus, when the British offered 50 pounds for one specimen, Dutch officials said that amount was “much too high”; a more realistic price was set at “a hundred guilders for a fine specimen of about three meters length.” British officials were also reminded that since “these monitors are protected you need a license from the Director of Agriculture to procure them,” but there would not be any objection if they procured a maximum of three live specimens. Finally, it was recommended that consular officials contact Rookmaaker, who had shown a willingness to travel to Komodo and oversee the capture of suitable specimens. Working out of Ende, Flores, Rookmaaker began to fill requests from consulates located in Batavia.¹⁰

The arrival of the first Komodo dragon in Great Britain resulted from high level diplomatic contacts that characterized the cooperation of colonial powers in the inter-war period. The initial request came from Malcolm Smith, who had previously worked as a physician for the kings of Siam and was a leading herpetologist in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. It was Smith who, in December 1926, wrote the letters of inquiry on behalf of the British Museum of Natural History to British representatives in Batavia.¹¹ The British Consul-General in Batavia, Josiah Crosby, then contacted officials at the Buitenzorg Botanical Gardens, who arranged for the request to be fulfilled. Crosby reflected both the fascination that these large vertebrates were creating throughout the Western world, and his desire to represent British interests, when he wrote: “The interest attaching to these pre-historic creatures, and the fact that the British Museum is a national institution, impelled me to lend to Dr. Smith the assistance which he requested from me in the matter.”¹² The competition for zoological specimens in the West was also heating up. In his letter, Crosby mentioned that the Burden Expedition had spawned a great interest in Komodo dragons outside the Netherlands East Indies, and two Komodo dragons were in Surabaya, awaiting shipment to the Zoological Gardens in Berlin.

Crosby wrote to the director of the Zoological Museum and Laboratory at Buitenzorg, and, on his advice, in January 1927 he wrote to the *Gezaghebber* (district officer) of Middle and South Manggarai, who was based in Ruteng. Crosby quickly received permission to send three Komodo lizards to Great Britain from Buitenzorg.¹³ While Crosby waited for a reply regarding logistics from the more distant Dutch officials working far to the east of Batavia, the energetic Rookmaaker took the initiative. Although communication was usually quite slow to Flores, Rookmaaker did not simply reply to Crosby’s request for assistance. Rookmaaker cut to the chase and sent two of the rare animals to Batavia, which arrived on the steamship *De Klerk* on April 15. In a letter to Crosby that accompanied the lizards, Rookmaaker wrote that he first intended to send two of the large monitors to the British Museum the previous year, but was not able to do so. In early 1927, however, Rookmaaker had just

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Malcolm Smith, “The Komodo Dragon: The Truth about the Much-Publicised Reptile,” *The Aquarist and Pond-Keeper* 8,9 (November 1938): 289. Smith founded the British Herpetological Society, which was under the Linnaean Society.

¹² J. Crosby to Foreign Office, April 29, 1927, DF200/200, Museum of Natural History Archives, London.

¹³ J. Crosby to Malcolm Smith, February 14, 1927, DF200/200, Museum of Natural History Archives, London.

completed a trip to Komodo, and when he stopped at Ruteng he was shown Crosby's letter, and he decided to fulfill the request.¹⁴ The first Komodo dragons destined for Britain, therefore, were obtained through diplomatic channels. As Crosby described in a report, "The lizards were very kindly captured and dispatched to Batavia for me."¹⁵ The process was done in an orderly, friendly manner, as was expected of close allies and high imperial powers.

The British request for Komodo dragons, and Rookmaaker being in possession of some when he first saw the official request, were fortuitous. Those events, however, took place in the context of an existing, growing excitement over the possibility of displaying such a rare animal in zoos and natural history museums throughout the world. News of the Burden Expedition and the Komodo dragon displayed in Amsterdam in 1926 had opened up the world to the larger possibilities of travel to Komodo, and tapped into a larger excitement over the capture and display of a "pre-historic creature."¹⁶ Rookmaaker recognized that demand and did not hesitate to manage the supply. Among zoologists in the West in the late 1920s, Rookmaaker was to become known as a reliable supplier of the great lizards.

While the two best-described Komodo lizards reached Britain in May 1927, they were part of a contingent of twelve *Varanus komodoensis* from Rinca, collected two months earlier.¹⁷ The capture of these twelve lizards occurred between March 24–28, 1927, when Rookmaaker and a number of Indonesians visited Komodo and Rinca. The lizards were taken from Rinca to Ende, where two of the captives died. The remaining ten lizards were placed on the KPM (Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, Royal Shipping Company) steamship *De Klerk* on April 4, and they arrived in Surabaya on April 11. The two Komodo dragons destined for London continued on the ship, arriving in Batavia a few days later. For all the effort and labor it took to capture and transport the lizards, Rookmaaker charged a total of 189.60 guilders; by mid-June the Zoological Society of London had paid the invoice.¹⁸

The surviving ten Komodo lizards were distributed to five different zoological parks or aquariums in London, Surabaya, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Berlin. The Surabaya Zoo was the destination for one pair; nothing is known about their fate. As for the others, they had vastly differing fortunes, which reflected the problem of transporting via steamship such a large reptile, and displaying rare animals in the waning days of High Imperialism.

Two of the lizards were destined for the Amsterdam Zoo. They left Surabaya on the SS *Radja* in late April, and one died in route. Noting the loss, Coenraad Kerbert, the

¹⁴ H. R. Rookmaaker to Consul General of England at Batavia, April 1, 1927, DF200/200, Museum of Natural History Archives, London.

¹⁵ J. Crosby to Foreign Office, April 29, 1927; Rookmaaker, "The History of Some Komodo Dragons," p. 65.

¹⁶ Rookmaaker, "The History of Some Komodo Dragons," p. 65.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 66; Rookmaaker to Calman, May 10, 1927; H. R. Rookmaaker to Consul General of England at Batavia, May 14, 1927; Rookmaaker to Consul General of England at Batavia, date unknown; and Report from the Zoological Department, June 18, 1927, DF200/200, Museum of Natural History Archives, London. Rookmaaker charged 176.75 guilders for his costs, while the steamer freight charge to Batavia was 12.85 guilders. As one pound was worth approximately twelve Dutch guilders, the total charges were some seventeen pounds, far below the fifty pounds British officials offered.

director of the Amsterdam Zoo, reported that “the skin and skull are preserved and therefore are valuable for the zoological museum here.” The surviving Komodo dragon arrived in Amsterdam in poor health by June 27, 1927. It was a female, which measured 1.90 meters; she died on September 16 and her skin is preserved in the Zoological Museum in Amsterdam.¹⁹

The two Komodo lizards destined for the Rotterdam Zoo were shipped on the SS *Blitar*. One of the pair was extremely ill as the ship left harbor, and it died on the first day at sea. This animal’s remains were not preserved. The other lizard was two meters in length and reached Rotterdam in late 1927 in good health. No further record of that lizard exists. However, it is known that in November of the same year, the Royal Museum of Natural History in Leiden bought the remains of a Komodo lizard from the Rotterdam Zoo; it is preserved in alcohol and is in the Leiden museum today. We may assume it is the lizard that survived the journey aboard the *Blitar*, but how it died is unknown. A relatively quick death was a common fate for captured Komodo lizards at the time, as they often perished on the sea journey or in the cool weather of Europe and the United States.²⁰

On April 21, 1927, two Komodo lizards destined for Berlin left from Surabaya aboard the SS *Altona*. On June 11, the *Altona* docked at Amsterdam, where German officials awaited its arrival. They took responsibility for both Komodo dragons, one of which died on the way to Berlin; the other lizard survived the trip. In the pre-war period, this lizard became a well-known attraction in Berlin, and was famously tame—it was allowed to swim in the publicly accessible visitors’ area. Following air raids on Berlin in November 1943, the dragon was transferred to the Leipzig Zoo, where it died in January 1944. The remains were presented to the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfurt am Main, where they reside today.²¹

The two Komodo dragons that died in Ende in March 1927 were presented to the Royal Museum of Natural History (Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijk Historie) in Leiden, as were other specimens that died in zoological gardens shortly after their arrival. Founded in 1820, almost two decades before the Artis Zoo in Amsterdam, the Royal Museum of Natural History was the repository for the variety of wildlife collected from the colonies, particularly the East Indies. In addition, its members had developed working relationships with zoological gardens throughout the Netherlands during a period in which a dead specimen, which could be autopsied, was often perceived as more valuable than a living one.²² Although this perspective regarding an animal’s value was changing by the early twentieth century, mutually beneficial relations persisted between the Royal Museum and other zoological gardens, as well as with colonial scholar-officials scattered throughout Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. Among the remains the Royal Museum of Natural History received in 1927 were the skin and skeleton of an almost-entire Komodo dragon and the head of another, which

¹⁹ Rookmaaker, “The History of Some Komodo Dragons,” pp. 66–67.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²¹ *Ibid.*; Stanley Smyth Flowers, “Further Notes on the Duration of Life in Animals—III. Reptiles,” *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*. 1937. Vol. 107. Series A. General and Experiment (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1937), p. 30.

²² Donna C. Mehos, *Science and Culture for Members Only: The Amsterdam Zoo Artis in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 79–86.

arrived in May, while in July a skin and “some loose parts of a skeleton” arrived. In August, the museum received another skeleton, and the next month an almost complete skeleton arrived. Some of these remains have been used for display in various exhibits, particularly in the nearby botanical gardens, although not all of the specimens can still be found today.²³

Rookmaaker made at least one other collecting trip. In June 1927, Robert Mertens, a German herpetologist who was visiting the Sunda Islands and had been unable to make the journey to Komodo or Rinca due to newly established limitations on access, asked whether Rookmaaker would procure some lizards for Mertens’s research and display. Rookmaaker said yes, returned to Rinca with a few local assistants, and captured two Komodo dragons. He delivered these to Mertens at Rana Mese, a lake situated near Ruteng, on Flores, on June 26. One of the two lizards had suffered a jaw injury, most likely incurred during capture, and was weak from the ordeal. Mertens believed that this animal would not survive for long, so he killed it. It was preserved and stuffed, and eventually went on display at the Senckenberg Museum at Frankfurt am Main. The second specimen, a female, survived the journey to Europe and was placed in the Frankfurt am Main zoological gardens, where it survived for more than fifteen years, until an Allied bombing run on March 18, 1944, destroyed the zoo.²⁴

In the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, most of the specimens that were put on display around the world were the result of official, sanctioned collecting expeditions, such as those led by Rookmaaker. Independent scientists and adventurers rarely reached the remote islands on the fringe of the Dutch colonial state due to regulations limiting access to Komodo and Rinca implemented in 1927. Despite those precautions and restrictions, the mortality rate for captured dragons was very high.

Protecting the Exotic

The polite and diplomatic exchange of the Komodo dragons Rookmaaker captured in 1927 reflects the delicate balance between diplomacy, oversight, and trade in exotic animals during the early decades of the twentieth century. Such cooperation occurred in the Netherlands East Indies against a backdrop of growing environmental consciousness. Most research, and interest, in the conservation of nature and endangered species in the Netherlands East Indies originated in the Buitenzorg Botanical Gardens, the leading center for science in the Indies, which also included a zoological park. In the 1910s, the director of the botanical gardens was J. C. (Jacob Christiaan) Koningsberger, an advocate of “pure science” and the former director of the zoological museum within the gardens. Koningsberger hoped that Buitenzorg, and the Indies, could become a tropical laboratory for research. While this was contrary to colonial policies at the time, which promoted practical agriculture and applied science, Andrew Goss has argued that Koningsberger, along with other key leaders, such as Melchior Treub, helped set the tone for a new era of Dutch colonialism during which officials believed science would make colonial rule appear polite and civilized, as well

²³ Rookmaaker, “The History of Some Komodo Dragons,” p. 69–70.

²⁴ Bernhard Rensch, *Eine biologische Reise nach den Kleinen Sunda-Inseln* (Berlin: Verlag van Gebrüder Borntraeger, 1930), pp. 197–98; Rookmaaker, “The History of Some Komodo Dragons,” p. 70; Flowers, “Further Notes on the Duration of Life in Animals,” p. 30.

as subtly reflect their own values, as their research would have implications beyond making the colonial state an efficient or profitable machine. “Pure science” would influence global understandings of the tropics.²⁵

Related to the vision of the East Indies as a vast tropical laboratory—for both scientific and social experiments, and functioning as part of the larger Ethical Policy in which “the welfare and development of the people of the archipelago according to Dutch standards were placed ahead of whatever their wishes might have been”—was the development of regulations with regard to wild animals.²⁶ Many of these regulations were promulgated due to the trade in popular items of the day, ranging from the feathers of birds of paradise—popular for the fashion industry in Europe and the United States—to various animal parts that were desired in Chinese cuisine and medicine. Koningsberger, who was director of the botanical gardens from 1911 to 1917, was one of the key figures in the development of environmental policy in the Netherlands East Indies during this period, and even played a role in the early development of environmental regulations at least a decade prior to his becoming director of the botanical gardens.

Beginning in 1898, the authorities directed Koningsberger to conduct research on Java’s birds with the goal of determining their economic value and which ones should be protected. His research influenced the structure of the first legal measure to protect wildlife in the Netherlands East Indies, the 1910 Ordinance to Protect Certain Mammals and Birds. The ordinance covered all wild animals, except those designated by the governor-general and those considered to be pests. The caveat related to pests greatly weakened the ordinance, as the animals that were regarded as being pests were numerous and included all monkeys—including the orangutan—as well as a number of game birds and animals that were traditionally hunted throughout the archipelago. Further undermining its ability to protect wildlife, the ordinance was only applicable in Java and a few other scattered parts of the Dutch colony. Throughout the rest of the archipelago, some 280 indigenous rulers, including the Sultan of Bima in eastern Sumbawa—who had traditional rights over Komodo and Rinca—would have the right to regulate hunting, and for the most part these rulers allowed the trade in a variety of animals, such as elephants and birds of paradise, to continue. As scientists in Buitenzorg first learned of the existence of the Komodo dragon in 1910, it only became protected by this ordinance when it was tweaked later. The Komodo dragon eventually became the only reptile ever listed as being protected in colonial Indonesia.²⁷

²⁵ Andrew Goss, *The Floracrats: State-Sponsored Science and the Failure of the Enlightenment in Indonesia*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), reviewed in this issue of *Indonesia*; Andrew Goss, “Decent Colonialism?: Pure Science and Colonial Ideology in the Netherlands East Indies, 1910–1929,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40,1 (2009): 187–214; Michael Adas, *Machines as a Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). Other works that have focused on the role of science in the Dutch East Indies, and its relationship to the colonial state, include Peter Boomgaard, “The Making and Unmaking of Tropical Science: Dutch Research on Indonesia, 1600–2000,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (BKI)* 162, 2–3 (2006): 191–217; Suzanne Moon, *Technology and Ethical Idealism: A History of Development in the Netherlands East Indies* (Leiden: CNWS, 2007); Lewis Pyenson, *Empire of Reason: Exact Sciences in Indonesia, 1840–1940* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989).

²⁶ Cribb, “Colonial Conservation in Indonesia,” p. 53.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–55; Dammerman, *Preservation of Wild Life and Nature Reserves*, pp. 2, 10–11; Robert Cribb, “Birds of Paradise and Environmental Politics in Colonial Indonesia, 1890–1931,” in *Paper Landscapes*:

The tensions that such regulations created between indigenous, traditional perspectives on the environment and those of the colonial Dutch authorities can be seen in the relationship between colonial officials and the Sultan of Bima, who was given the right to regulate the hunting and trade in wild animals under the 1910 ordinance. Dutch administrators in western Flores felt that the sultan's connections with traditional hunters on Komodo, as well as providing support to foreign expeditions, threatened to contravene the spirit of the original ordinance. While the Sultan of Bima issued regulations limiting hunting on Komodo in 1916, his lack of enforcement continued to draw colonial authorities' ire. Dutch officials in Batavia eventually legislated away the sultan's jurisdiction in 1919 by restructuring administrative boundaries such that Komodo and Rinca were placed under the control of Manggarai in western Flores. Despite such administrative maneuvers, the sultan continued to exercise quite a bit of control over access to Komodo, as most foreign expeditions to Komodo prior to World War Two—such as that led by Burden in 1926—stopped in Bima to obtain supplies and “coolies” for their collecting trips. Throughout the 1920s, the sultan's continuing influence in a territory that stretched into western Flores was the subject of numerous Dutch reports that finally resulted in fraud charges being brought against his primary advisor, the Raja Bitjara, in the early 1930s.²⁸

Due to the vast and varied landscape of Indonesia, both administratively as well as ecologically, Dutch authorities in the late nineteenth century realized that their efforts to manage the environment needed to stretch beyond the confines of the botanical gardens in Buitenzorg. This realization coincided with policies designed to place technocrats and scientists at the forefront of administrative policy.²⁹ The first nature reserve was created in 1889, when a mountainous area on Java known as Tjibodas was set aside to make it possible for scientists to conduct their work at a higher elevation. The development of both regulations and the expansion of nature reserves in the Netherlands Indies gained further momentum when forestry officials founded the Netherlands Indies Society for the Protection of Nature (Nederlands-Indische Vereniging voor Natuurbescherming) in mid-1912. The government recognized the organization the next year. In 1915, colonial officials who were members of the society urged the Sultan of Bima to issue a decree protecting the large lizard and banning possession or export of its body parts. By 1916, a government ordinance that allowed the governor-general to designate lands as nature reserves was enacted. This ordinance forbade the collection of plants and animals, hunting, animal husbandry, and any other activity that would alter the existing natural conditions of a reserve. Exemptions were allowed for scientific purposes if the director of agriculture was in agreement. The Forest Service was placed in charge of the nature reserves, with the Society for the Protection of Nature acting as an advisory board. Over the next decade, the government designated seventy-six nature reserves in the Dutch East Indies, of which

Explorations in the Environmental History of Indonesia, ed. Peter Boomgaard, Freek Colombijn, and David Henley (Leiden: KITLV, 1997), pp. 379–408; H. J. Heynen, “Maatregelen ter Bescherming van den Reuzenvaraan (*Varanus komodoensis* Ouwens),” *Mededeelingen van e Vereeniging van Gezaghebbers, B. B. in Ned. Indie* 53 (1939): 24–25.

²⁸ ARA, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten 1898–1940, Timor, 1936–1938, “Politiek Verslag van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1935,” pp. 7–8; “Politiek Verslag van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1937,” p. 11.

²⁹ Goss, *The Floracrats*, pp. 59–96.

twenty-one were located outside of Java, reflecting a growing confidence in Dutch control over the *Buitenlanden* (outer areas).³⁰ Designating and expanding nature reserves became a vital tool for environmental protection and scientific research, and followed growing conservation trends throughout the Western world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Despite the enactment of regulations protecting wild animals, and the development of nature reserves, the trade in living fauna from the Netherlands East Indies was nevertheless quite lucrative in the first few decades of the twentieth century. For example, over 69,000 nondomesticated live animals were exported from the Netherlands East Indies in 1918, and the number rose to over 350,000 by 1925. Most of this trade was in wild animals from Java, particularly birds.³¹ This business, while quite large, was not of particular concern to Dutch authorities, although they hoped to monitor it. Their key concern was the trade in large, fetishized animals, such as the orangutan, which were the focus of many expeditions, as well as hunting regulations.³²

Wild game collectors, in an effort to fill demand, maintained offices in Batavia as well as Singapore, which were the main locations for export. The most famous of these collectors in the 1910s and 1920s was Frank Buck, as he was also one of the best at publicizing his exploits. Buck maintained a compound in the Katong region of Singapore, and during his intermittent stays in the British colonial port he claimed to have exported thirty-nine elephants, sixty tigers, and fifty-two orangutans, as well as 10,000 other mammals and 100,000 birds.³³ Most of these animals were from the Netherlands East Indies and destined for the American market, where Buck was filling orders for circuses and zoos.

Due to lax enforcement—and the impracticability of even expecting enforcement over such a vast area as the East Indies—combined with the growing demand for particularly rare animals from the region, a new hunting ordinance was proposed in 1924 that took a position opposite that of the 1910 regulation, which had protected all animals unless otherwise mentioned. The new ordinance allowed for the protection of only sixty-one specifically designated animals. The list contained endangered species, including the “Giant monitor” of Komodo, as well as animals that were considered “useful, such as many insect-eating mammals and birds.” The 1924 ordinance also had additional regulations related to hunting, such as requiring a permit for anyone using a firearm to hunt animals. That requirement solidified a trend that had begun earlier in the century, in which hunting had become an imperial initiative that reflected Dutch moderation and controlled access to the riches of the archipelago. Problems remained,

³⁰ Hoogerwerf, “Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta,” p. 12; Dammerman, *Preservation of Wild Life and Nature Reserves*, pp. 22–24.

³¹ Dammerman, *Preservation of Wild Life and Nature Reserves*, pp. 16–17, 88–89. Those numbers do not include farm animals, such as poultry, cattle, and swine.

³² Cribb, “Colonial Conservation in Indonesia”; Peter Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malay World, 1600–1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Peter Boomgaard, “Hunting and Trapping in the Indonesian Archipelago, 1500–1950,” in *Paper Landscapes: Explorations in the Environmental History of Indonesia*, ed. Peter Boomgaard, Freek Colombijn, and David Henley (Leiden: KITLV, 1997), pp. 185–214.

³³ Frank Buck, *Bring 'em Back Alive: The Best of Frank Buck* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2000); Vicki Croke, *The Modern Ark: The Story of Zoos: Past, Present, and Future* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), p. 156.

however, as, once again, the new ordinance's enforcement was effectively limited to Java and Madura, where hunting licenses would be required and hunting seasons limited to a few months a year.³⁴

The 1924 ordinance also did not ban the export of protected species, although it did require an export license be issued should anyone wish to take a protected-species specimen out of the Netherlands East Indies. The heads of regional administration were to issue these licenses, and also inform officials at the Department of Agriculture, so they could be sure that this system was not being abused.³⁵ While many of these regulations were enacted to limit the trade in birds-of-paradise, which had boomed as a result of demand from European fashion designers, they also had implications for the Komodo dragon. The members of the Burden Expedition, upon arriving in Batavia, were told that "the island had been made a preserve and that hunting, therefore, was prohibited."³⁶ Burden showed how easy it was to bypass these new regulations when he drove to Tjibodas and met with the newly appointed governor-general, Andries Cornelis Dirk de Graeff, who was on his honeymoon. "Within five minutes," de Graeff offered Burden the use of "the SS *Dog*, a four-hundred-ton government boat, for a period of two months, and letters of introduction to all the residents of the Sunda Islands, Banda, and Celebes." Burden received these favors because "the Dutch are genuinely desirous of helping scientific expeditions, and because we had been formally introduced through diplomatic channels."³⁷

Public reaction to the diplomatic favors extended to Burden focused a spotlight on colonial policies that were developed to limit hunting, except as a bourgeois pastime, while also fulfilling their role as a leading proponent of scientific research in the tropics. The ambivalence this created in Dutch society—of protecting the unique life forms in the Indonesian archipelago while also being respected members of the international community—resonated in the Netherlands, as Dutch politicians began making enquiries to their colonial counterparts. This was particularly true if the blurry line between hunting and scientific research was crossed. For example, in 1928, Eugene Dubois, the famous paleoanthropologist and discoverer of "Java Man," who had read about Burden's expedition in the journal *Natural History*, addressed the Dutch Parliament, criticizing the access Burden, an American, had been given to Komodo. Dubois focused on the right Burden was given by the governor-general to kill or capture fifteen lizards, and Burden's report that his team had released many others that had been caught. Dubois felt that these hunting and capture rights were excessive for such a rare species, even if they were carried out under the auspices of a scientific institution. While some restrictions had been enacted in 1927, he called for a closer

³⁴ Boomgaard, "Hunting and Trapping in the Indonesian Archipelago," p. 196; Dammerman, *Preservation of Wild Life and Nature Reserves*, p. 3 and Appendix II: Proposed Regulations for the Protection of Wild Animals; Cribb, "Colonial Conservation in Indonesia," pp. 55–56.

³⁵ "Mededeeling No. 3, 12 May 1926," *Nederlandsche Commissie voor Internationale Natuurbescherming*, *Mededeelingen* No. 1–6 (May 1926), p. 24; anonymous, "Korte Mededeelingen: Nederlandsch-Indische Vereeniging tot Natuurbescherming," *De Tropische Natuur* 16,7 (1927): 127.

³⁶ Burden, *Dragon Lizards of Komodo*, pp. 51–52.

³⁷ In addition, De Graeff was under orders from the Dutch Minister of Colonies to cooperate with Burden. ARA, Min. van Buitenland. Zak. B dossiers, 2.05.38, #2896: Expeditie van W. Douglas Burden naar Comodo, 1926; Burden, *Dragon Lizards of Komodo*, pp. 57–88; letter from Douglas Burden to Ira, May 29, 1926, William Douglas Burden Collection (B87), American Museum of Natural History Archives; H. C. D. [H. C. Delsman], "Nogs iets over de reuzenvaranen van Komodo," *De Tropische Natuur* 16 (1927): 26–27.

consideration of the effect such expeditions would have on the population of lizards, as well as the details on how they were captured. Such enquiries from the Netherlands were constantly being addressed to colonial officials who were trying to balance science and administration in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁸

In addition to politicians, organizations in the Netherlands also played an increasingly important role in demanding the enforcement of environmental regulations and trying to establish a balance between exploitation and science in the Netherlands East Indies. These organizations usually promoted policies that were more restrictive than the ones that Dubois and officials in the Dutch colony would have required. Among the most influential of these groups was the Netherlands Commission for International Natural Reserves (*Nederlandsche Commissie voor Internationale Natuurberscherming*), which mainly dealt with various worldwide developments related to nature conservation. Scattered throughout the pages of its reports are frequent discussions concerning the access that scientific institutions had to Komodo during the 1920s and 1930s. For example, the commission noted with alarm in a 1926 report that the governor-general of the Netherlands-Indies, as well as the minister of colonies, provided equipment, such as access to the *S. S. Dog*, for expeditions to travel to Komodo to capture the “Great Lizard.” The commission was horrified that such government resources had been used to take a rare animal from its habitat, and urged that an immediate ban on capturing rare animals be put in place. That recommendation moved beyond Dubois’ objections to hunting and into the realm of banning any access at all.

The commission further proposed that a general export ban on certain species be enacted, and that a special license—which would mention the maximum “capture” number of each species—be issued for specific, rare animals that were needed for scientific purposes.³⁹ At this same time, in late 1926 and early 1927 (and reflecting a reaction to the Burden Expedition), Dutch authorities in Flores issued their own set of restrictions, since those that the Sultan of Bima promulgated expired after ten years. These new restrictions forbade the capture or killing of a Komodo lizard, the possession of the Komodo’s skin or body parts, and the removal of lizard eggs or the disturbance of a nest.⁴⁰ These various regulations were similar in that they reflected attempts at both the local and national level to address issues related to the trade in rare animals. As a result of these regulations, the 1927 German expedition, under the leadership of leading biologists Bernhard Rensch and Mertens, was prohibited from approaching Komodo; instead, Mertens had to contact Rookmaaker for the lizards that were exported to Germany in 1928.

The political machinations and conservation efforts eventually resulted in the passing, in 1928, of further ordinances that provided better protection for the wildlife on Komodo, and mainly brought together the patchwork of approaches. According to

³⁸ “Mededeeling No. 4, Correspondentie met Nederlandsch Oost-Indie,” *Nederlandsche Commissie voor Internationale Natuurberscherming, Mededeelingen* No. 1–6 (May 1928), p. 43.

³⁹ “Kort Verslag der Vergadering op 12 Mei 1926,” *Nederlandsche Commissie voor Internationale Natuurberscherming, Mededeelingen*, No. 3 (May 1926), pp. 23–24; “Mededeeling No. 4, Correspondentie met Nederlandsch Oost-Indie,” *Nederlandsche Commissie voor Internationale Natuurberscherming, Mededeelingen* No. 1–6 (May 1928), pp. 27–28.

⁴⁰ Hoogerwerf, “Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta,” pp. 21–22.

a letter from the minister of colonies, written to the Dutch Commission for International Natural Reserves, "the Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies has decided to permit no more scientific expeditions that will result in the capture or killing of specimens of the Komodo lizard."⁴¹ Fundamentally, the Komodo lizard would still be classified as a wild species, and the capture, killing, or possession of one still fell under the 1910 ordinance. While the director of agriculture, industry, and commerce continued to have the right to exempt certain people from that prohibition for scientific purposes, the commission was assured that any dispensation granted would be tightly controlled, and all measures were taken to ensure strict compliance with accepted rules and standards.⁴²

While the Dutch government and scientists in the East Indies had developed a system of regulations limiting access to rare species, as well as an uneasy cooperation with foreign institutions and governments to supply a few specimens of the Komodo lizard for their zoological gardens and natural history museums, there was still an overwhelming desire among representatives of a number of institutions to travel to the distant, exotic island that Burden had described. When faced with these requests, the Dutch government was reluctant to grant permission, as the island, although within the boundaries of their colony, was on the edge of their sphere of influence. To accommodate such requests, Dutch officials still required that a government official or, even better, a scientist from Buitenzorg, accompany the foreigners. Thus, by the mid-1930s, a foreign expedition that arrived in Batavia would make its way to Buitenzorg for meetings and discussions with members of the department of agriculture, from whom permits could be obtained. The foreigners would then visit the Buitenzorg Gardens, where they would see some of the Komodo lizards, living in captivity, and receive a briefing on what to expect. From Buitenzorg, they would travel towards Komodo, with stops usually taking place in Surabaya, Bali, and Bima. While Burden's expedition had followed this approach, very few other foreign requests actually got that far. Most simply lingered as written wishes for access to the large lizard on a distant island, and such requests were systematically passed over to Dutch diplomatic offices in Western capitals. Regulations to protect rare species, for the most part, effectively discouraged Western adventurers from gaining access to Komodo and Rinca. A few, however, did make it to the islands that lay between Sumbawa and Flores.

A Spirit of Cooperation

One of the first expeditions to attempt to navigate the new regulations limiting access to Komodo and Rinca was from another US institution, the Field Museum of Natural History, in Chicago, Illinois. These researchers' attempts to obtain a dragon reflect the various restrictions and issues related to access, as well as how the Dutch authorities approached these issues.

The Field Museum was conceived and constructed for the Columbian Exposition World's Fair in 1893, which was held in Chicago, and by the 1920s the Field Museum

⁴¹ "Mededeeling No. 6, Correspondentie met Nederlandsch Oost-Indie," *Nederlandsche Commissie voor Internationale Natuurbescherming, Mededeelingen No. 1-6* (May 1929): 59-60.

⁴² Ibid.

had developed into one of the leading natural history museums in the United States. In 1928, Cornelius Vanderbilt Crane decided to take his new yacht *Illyria* on a journey through the Netherlands East Indies on behalf of the Field Museum. (Crane's family had been long-time supporters of the Field Museum, and Cornelius's father, Richard T. Crane, was a board member.) Crane was to be the leader of the expedition, as well as its financier. This journey was part of a longer, round-the-world journey for Crane. The plan was for scientists and experts to fly in and use the yacht as a base for collecting specimens, and for documenting distant cultures and taking still photographs and silent movies. To arrange for the journey, Richard M. Tobin, a Vanderbilt cousin, first wrote to the Dutch minister of foreign affairs in July 1928, explaining that the Chicago Field Museum planned to send an expedition to the Netherlands East Indies "for the purpose of collecting specimens of marine and land fauna" and museum officials would appreciate it if the *Illyria* and its crew be accorded "the courtesies and facilities usual in such cases."⁴³ Among the scientists on board was Karl P. Schmidt, one of the leading herpetologists of the twentieth century. For these scientists, "the principal object of the expedition [was] the collection of zoological specimens, mainly vertebrates," and on the journey they collected over 3,000 specimens, with particular focus on the South Pacific and New Guinea. Despite passing through the Netherlands East Indies, scientists aboard the *Illyria* did not collect a Komodo dragon, mainly due to the recently enacted legislation.⁴⁴

The limits placed on access to the rare Komodo dragon perplexed officials from the Field Museum. While a number of cables had been sent between US and Dutch authorities requesting access to Komodo for the Crane Expedition, no real progress was achieved, even after the *Illyria* sailed into the waters of the Netherlands East Indies. The members of the Crane Expedition, believing that they were just making perfunctory requests—requests normally granted to a scientific institution—experienced a number of disappointments and frustrations with the Dutch bureaucracy and its responses when trying to gain access to the Komodo lizards. As Karl Schmidt wrote to Field Museum officials:

The Foreign Office points out, however, that it is strictly prohibited to trap or kill the animal known as the "waraan," which is found on the Island of Komodo, and that permission to export animals and birds, whether alive or dead, can be accorded only upon condition that duplicates of each variety are presented to the museum of the Netherlands Indies.

The members of the proposed expedition are requested to transmit as soon as possible to the Director of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce at Buitenzorg,

⁴³ ARA, Min. van Buitenland. Zak. B dossiers, 2.05.38, 2901: Amerikaanse Wetenschappelijke Expeditie naar Nederlands-Indie, 1928.

⁴⁴ Sidney N. Shurcliff, *Jungle Islands: The Illyria in the South Seas* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930); Oliver C. Farrington, "A Brief History of Field Museums from 1893 to 1930," *Field Museum News* 1,1 (January 1930): 1, 3; anonymous, "Other Expeditions," *Field Museum News* 1,1 (January 1930): 1, 3; Virginia Lee-Webb, "Authorship and Image: Hand-Coloured Glass Lantern-Slides from the Crane Pacific Expedition," in *Pacific Art: Persistence, Change, and Meaning*, ed. Anita Herle, Nick Stanley, Karen Stevenson, and Robert L. Welsch (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 83–84.

Java, a complete list of the animals which it is desired to trap or to kill, in order that the necessary permits may be issued.⁴⁵

Ultimately, Schmidt and the other members of the Crane Expedition never went through the proper channels, and they were denied any rights to land at Komodo.

Field Museum executives, in a scramble to obtain a Komodo dragon, then turned to an expedition in which they previously had shown limited interest, the Chancellor-Stuart Expedition, whose main goal was the collection of reptile specimens in Australia and New Zealand. While the main focus of this expedition was not the Indonesian archipelago, these two travelers had planned a brief stop in Southeast Asia with the goal of collecting species that the museum desired—such as a reticulated python from Borneo and a “Komodo lizard (if the Crane Expedition should not secure enough material)” —in exchange for having the Field Museum’s name attached to their endeavors.⁴⁶ This overlooked expedition would now play an important role in collecting one of the most desired animals in the world in the 1920s by negotiating through the various regulations the Dutch had erected to limit access.

Philip M. Chancellor and Norton Stuart had begun writing to the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History in late 1928, as they searched for a sponsor to legitimize their trip to the Pacific. Chancellor, a twenty-two-year-old curator of reptiles at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and an avid photographer, had recently come into a fortune. He was looking for adventure and an exciting way to spend his money. Stuart—born in 1880—had been with the museum in Santa Barbara for four years, during which time he gained a reputation for being “an expert in constructing museum groups with the natural settings of the species exhibited.”⁴⁷ Previously, he had worked for the US Forest Service and also dabbled in mining and engineering. As Chancellor was financing the entire expedition, he only sought the Field Museum’s seal of approval to provide the imprimatur of respect for the entire enterprise. As it would cost the Field Museum nothing—and Chancellor even agreed to do some of the preliminary preparation of the specimens for display—the Field Museum’s board of directors quickly agreed. The only obligation for the Field Museum was to arrange for publicity and to distribute photographs and other materials that might be obtained on the expedition, which they routinely funneled to the *New York Times*’s World Photo Service, and from which the Field Museum would profit. From the perspective of the Field Museum, Chancellor and Stuart prepared for their journey with the purpose of “securing photographic (motion and still) records of reptiles and other animals and plants found” and collecting them for “scientific and educational purposes.” Chancellor and Stuart—in a bit of self-promotion that Douglas Burden would admire—also designed expedition stationery featuring their names in large print, which were placed over the much smaller “Field Museum” and “Oceania and Malaysia” titles in the imprinted header. On the eve of the expedition, Stuart resigned from the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. The two men left San Francisco in

⁴⁵ “Letter to Philip M. Chancellor from Stephen C. Simms,” March 23, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

⁴⁶ “Letter from Norton Stuart to Stephen C. Simms,” January 21, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

⁴⁷ “Letter to Dr. Bernard from Coert du Bois,” June 18, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

February 1929 for New Zealand and Australia, where they spent five months collecting specimens.⁴⁸

In March 1929, Stephen Simms—the director of the Field Museum—informed Chancellor that Karl Schmidt and the Crane Expedition had been denied access to Komodo. Simms sent instructions to Chancellor to meet with Dutch officials in Buitenzorg when they arrived in hope of obtaining permission, while also explaining that the Field Museum would continue with its own efforts to contact the government of the Netherlands through the US Department of State.⁴⁹ By mid-1929, Chancellor and Stuart had made their way to the Netherlands East Indies, and this is when diplomatic confusion set in. The Field Museum had sent several cables since mid-1928 requesting that the Crane Expedition be given access to Komodo dragons, but all of those requests had been rejected due to the newly expanded regulations. Stuart explained to Simms that he and Chancellor only learned of the Dutch government's prohibition on travel to Komodo upon their arrival in Batavia, and that approval was difficult to come by since "previous American expeditions to the Netherlands Indies have made it exceedingly difficult for anyone to collect the Komodo lizard."⁵⁰

For their part, the Dutch authorities were confused by the appearance of another group of natural history explorers claiming to represent the Field Museum, particularly since the officials had already told members of the previous expedition about the new steps required to reach the protected island and its rare lizards—mainly, the need to obtain approval from officials in Buitenzorg. This confusion led to a series of cables being sent between Batavia and Washington, and Washington and Chicago, to verify the claims of Chancellor and Stuart, particularly with regard to their relationship with the Field Museum. In a letter to the US secretary of state, the American Consul General in Batavia, Coert du Bois, asked for clarification, as he had received a letter from Field Museum Director Simms explaining that "Stuart would like very much to be put in contact with some Dutch Scientists, and representatives of the Dutch Government" to help him arrange for the chartering of a boat and to accompany him on a journey of six to eight weeks. Chancellor would pay for all of the expenses. Du Bois then wrote to Dutch officials, explaining the status of the Field Museum ("one of the leading institutions in the United States") and that the officials from the museum were "anxious to have a waraan group—consisting at the most of three or four specimens—and [the museum] is not concerned, I take it, as to which of the expeditions it has sponsored brings the necessary material."⁵¹

⁴⁸ See, from the Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives, "Letter from Norton Stuart to Stephen C. Simms," January 21, 1929; "Letter from C. M. Graves to S. C. Simms," March 19, 1929; "Letter from Norton Stuart to S. C. Simms," February 11, 1929; "Letter from Caroline Hazard," December 14, 1928; and "Itinerary." For an example of the stationery, see "Letter to Stuart C. Simms from Philip M. Chancellor," February 13, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

⁴⁹ "Letter to Philip M. Chancellor from Stephen C. Simms," March 23 and March 29, 1929.

⁵⁰ "Letter to Stephen Simms from Norton Stuart," July 6, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

⁵¹ Coert du Bois, "Letter to Dr. Bernard," June 18, 1929; Coert du Bois, "American Scientific Expeditions to Netherlands India"; "Letter to Philip M. Chancellor from Stephen C. Simms," June 11, 1929; "Letter to Stephen C. Simms from Philip M. Chancellor," July 23, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives. The American Consul in Batavia was Thomas C. Herringer.

Du Bois arranged for Stuart to meet with a number of Dutch officials in Buitenzorg, among them K. W. Dammerman, the director of the Botanical Gardens and a founder of the Netherlands Indies Society for the Protection of Nature. This meeting was crucial in easing some of the reluctance that Dutch authorities felt following the fallout from the Burden Expedition.⁵² After meeting Dammerman, Du Bois and Stuart drew up a proposal that was forwarded to Ch. J. Bernard, the newly appointed director of the Department of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade (Landbouw, Nijverheid, en Handel). The proposal described how Chancellor and Stuart would be given positions on a Dutch expedition to Komodo that was scheduled to conduct a census of the large lizards later in 1929, and that the Americans agreed to cover their own costs. Moreover, while awaiting permission to join the Komodo census project, Chancellor and Stuart invited Dutch scientists and officials to join a short expedition to Sumatra and Borneo. Dammerman supported such cooperative efforts, but Bernard continued to deny the American duo access to Komodo on the grounds that:

... the number of the *Varanus* as a result of the hunting of them by previous expeditions has decreased so considerably that there is a justified fear that they will entirely die out, which has led the Government to decide that this remarkable animal species, to allow them to recover themselves, should for the time being be left alone.⁵³

Bernard, however, did offer some hope that if Dammerman ascertained that there were enough Komodo lizards still alive he would arrange for "one or two specimens [to] be caught on behalf of the Field Museum and be shipped directly to Chicago."⁵⁴ In any event, by mid-1929, Dammerman convinced Bernard to lift the prohibition on travel and allow Chancellor and Stuart to accompany the already planned expedition to Komodo, which would be under the leadership of J. K. de Jong and was scheduled to leave in October. By mid-July 1929, Chancellor and Stuart had received a positive response from Dutch authorities. They now only needed to wait a few months before obtaining a specimen of a celebrity species for the Field Museum. In the meantime, Chancellor advised that the Field Museum avoid any publicity about the expedition, as full approval had yet to be received, and such self-promotion would anger Dutch authorities in the Indies "due to sentiment here regarding any American expedition."⁵⁵

Another problem that the Chancellor-Stuart Expedition faced was the continued presence of the *Illyria* and the Crane Expedition in eastern Indonesia in mid-1929. As Dutch officials were particularly sensitive about any publicity with regard to Komodo, and especially its valuable lizards, there was a fear among Field Museum officials that if members of the Crane Expedition went to Komodo without permission, it would throw a spanner in the works. A series of cables was sent between Chancellor and the

⁵² In the 1920s and 1930s, Dammerman's approval was usually the most important factor for any expedition seeking permission to export a rare animal from the Netherlands East Indies. For example, Frank Buck attributed his friendship with Dammerman for his ability to export orangutans from Sumatra. See Buck, *Bring 'em Back Alive*, p. 24.

⁵³ Coert du Bois, "American Scientific Expeditions to Netherlands India," Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ "Letter to Stephen C. Simms from Philip M. Chancellor," June 24 and July 23, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

Field Museum in an effort to contact Schmidt aboard the *Illyria*. He was instructed to not make any attempt at approaching Komodo. To emphasize this point, the cablegram ended "This is important." The members of the Crane Expedition arrived in Chicago in September 1929, having called off their visit to Komodo after they received the message. To make sure that relations remained cordial, Stanley Field—the Grand Poobah of the Museum—wrote letters of appreciation to DuBois and others involved in the delicate negotiations. As Field accounted, "I think that the whole matter is in as good shape as could possibly be expected."⁵⁶ All of these letters and meetings bore fruit when Chancellor and Stuart left for Komodo on October 8, 1929.

The main goal of the 1929 De Jong Expedition was not to collect specimens for foreign scientific institutions, but to conduct a survey of Komodo and Rinca. This was necessary due to a lack of knowledge about the habitat of the Komodo dragon. Such information was needed to advise properly the government regarding a request from the Netherlands Commission for International Natural Reserves. The commission, while pleased with the regulations that had been enacted between 1926 and 1928 to restrict access to Komodo for scientific institutions, continued to campaign for the development of a reserve on the distant island. The members of the commission wrote to Governor-General de Graeff on December 3, 1928, advocating such an approach. In their estimation, the enactment of a number of regulations over the past few years to protect specific species was a positive step, but the best approach was not to protect just a specific animal, but rather to protect that animal's entire environment. Such reserves would protect all of the animals that the specific one needs to survive. The ecosystem was now identified as the key, and for animals such as the Komodo dragon this development shifted the focus away from the reptile to what it needed to survive. The advocates of such an approach cited the successful enactment of such policies in the United States, with Yellowstone Park being the primary example. The commission called for such reserves to be developed within the Netherlands East Indies for orangutans, elephants, and tapirs in Sumatra—in Gajo, Indrapura, and Niru—as well as for the lizards of Komodo. Commission members requested that the entire island of Komodo, "which at this point is not inhabited and cultivated," be set aside for "the most remarkable species, the Komodo lizard, as it is a link between the distant past and present."⁵⁷ Data to be collected by the De Jong Expedition was the first step in this process.

The leader of the expedition was J. K. de Jong, a herpetologist, who represented the Netherlands Indies government as well as the Zoological Museum in Buitenzorg. His duty was to conduct a survey of the Komodo lizard's numbers and range as part of the effort to better understand how to set up restrictions and regulations that would protect the unique species and its ecosystem. In addition to the scientific survey of the lizard, the expedition was to take ten specimens from the island to fulfill requests from museums and governments. Of these ten Komodo lizards, five would be alive and five

⁵⁶ A copy of the cablegram, and discussions of the efforts to stop the *Illyria* from going to Komodo, appear in: "Letter to Philip M. Chancellor from Stanley Field," August 9, 1929; also see "Letter to Secretary of State Stimson from Stanley Field," September 6, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

⁵⁷ There was actually a village on Komodo, which reflects the level of grandstanding—and ignorance—that occurred in their correspondence. "Mededeeling No. 6, Correspondentie met Nederlandsch Oost-Indie," pp. 66–67.

would be dead. The Prince Regent of Belgium and the Artis Zoological Gardens in Amsterdam would each get two live lizards, and one would go to the Zoological Gardens in Surabaya.⁵⁸ As for the five dead specimens, the Zoological Museum in Buitenzorg would get three, while the final two would be for the Field Museum. Chancellor had also been told that the first two dead specimens would be for the Field Museum, which was basically a guarantee that the intrepid duo of Chancellor and Stuart would return triumphant.⁵⁹ They were thus joining an expedition that fulfilled both the desires of foreign museums and zoological parks, as well as Dutch scientists, diplomats, and environmentalists who wanted to maintain limited access to Komodo and safeguard the reputation of their colonial presence. On November 6, Stanley Field received a cablegram from Chancellor and Stuart, sent from Makassar, "advising that they have secured two fine specimens of Komodo lizards."⁶⁰



Fig. 2. Zwaar gewond exemplaar, 2.78 m lang.

A member of De Jong's expedition to Komodo in 1929 demonstrates the size of a Komodo dragon and, perhaps, his own bravery⁶¹

⁵⁸ Flowers, "Further Notes on the Duration of Life in Animals," p. 30.

⁵⁹ "Letter to Stephen C. Simms from Philip M. Chancellor," October 7, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

⁶⁰ "Letter to Secretary of State from Stanley Field," November 6, 1929, Chancellor-Stuart-Field Museum Expedition to the South Pacific, Field Museum Archives.

⁶¹ For source, see G. F. M. Avé Lallemant, "De reuzenleguaan (*Varanus komodoensis*) op eilanden Komodo en Rindja," *De Tropische Natuur* 8,8 (1929): 127

In January 1930, it was announced in the American press that the Chancellor-Stuart Expedition to the South Pacific had acquired—along with the reticulated pythons of Borneo—“two of the giant lizards of Komodo” and that “officials of the Dutch East Indies colonial government cooperated.”⁶² Each of the Komodo dragons was nine feet long, and it was announced that they would be “exhibited in a habitat group which will show the reptiles with a reproduction of their natural environment.”⁶³ By early 1931, Karl Schmidt, the assistant curator of reptiles for the Field Museum, announced that the specimens—known through “half legendary tales of gigantic lizards current among the Malays in the East Indies” until the Burden Expedition—were on display, and this would allow for new understandings of the animal, as Leon L. Walters of the museum’s taxidermy staff had used the “remarkable cellulose-acetate process” to preserve the lizards, thus allowing visitors to see the “varied coloring of the living animal.”⁶⁴

The cooperation and diplomacy the Field Museum, Dutch officials, and even De Jong displayed through this trip reflected the development of policies related to allowing scientific institutions limited access to the Komodo lizard, as well as protecting its habitat. The policies were based on the earlier diplomacy that Rookmaaker had used, but with the added bonus of having a Dutch scientist—who wrote a report for other officials, shared his knowledge, and made important recommendations for the development of a reserve in the area—on board.

Hunters and Protectors

By the 1930s, access to Komodo was an important issue for Western scientists and administrators, as the giant monitor lizards became increasingly popular attractions in zoological gardens seeking revenue during the world financial depression. The Dutch government received numerous requests for the large lizard that combined both commercial and scientific motivations. Dutch officials sought to strike a balance between preserving the natural habitat and fulfilling international obligations of friendship and research, and they would have to continue negotiating this tightrope until the Japanese invasion in 1942. To properly protect the dragon, however, these officials would have to change some of the contradictory elements of the various laws and ordinances that had been passed over the previous few decades. With the return of the De Jong Expedition, more information about Komodo dragons and their habitat became available, which allowed for further policy changes to be enacted.

The problems related to the various, often contradictory, parts in the 1924 ordinance were addressed with two new laws enacted in 1929, which separated matters related to hunting and animal protection throughout the archipelago. The new

⁶² Anonymous, “Other Expeditions,” p. 3.

⁶³ “Two Giant Komodo Lizards to be Shown in Chicago Museum,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1930, p. 118.

⁶⁴ Karl P. Schmidt, “Exhibit of the Dragon Lizard of Komodo—Chancellor-Stuart Expedition,” *Field Museum News* 2,2 (February 1931): k; Leon L. Walters, *New Uses of Celluloid and Similar Material in Taxidermy* (Chicago, IL: Field Museum of Natural History, 1925). In 1934, the Field Museum also received a Komodo dragon skeleton—“which will greatly facilitate our study of this interesting species”—as a gift from P. M. Miles from St. Louis, Illinois. How he obtained it is not clear. *Annual Report of the Director to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1933* (Chicago, IL: Field Museum, 1934), p. 69.

laws' chief aim was the "preservation of those species of animals that are exposed to persecution unnecessarily or for commercial purposes."⁶⁵ The 1929 ordinance protected far fewer animals than had earlier ordinances, singling out those that faced extermination or "whose preservation is desired for the sake of science or for other reasons of general importance."⁶⁶ These regulations were relevant for the protection of a range of animals that were popular in zoos and circuses, particularly orangutans and rhinoceroses, as well as the Komodo dragon. Any real initiative to create reserves, however, was delayed until the late 1930s. For the rarest species, the focus was still on limiting their export and exploitation. As K. W. Dammerman wrote about the Komodo dragon in a booklet outlining these new regulations for the Fourth Pacific Science Congress, "this animal has to be protected chiefly against the passion of collectors for *Musea*."⁶⁷

The difficulties of attempting to balance the requests of scientific institutions against the safeguards necessary for the preservation of a rare species received renewed focus in response to an American expedition to Komodo in 1934, led by Lawrence Griswold and William Harkness. Griswold and Harkness were Harvard University graduates who had come to Southeast Asia on a whim, having traveled all the way to Komodo on commercial liners. Their primary motivation for the trip was adventure and a promise from New York's Bronx Zoo that they would be paid for the delivery of a living Komodo dragon, despite being told that it would be difficult to "obtain official permission to capture the beasts." Despite their pleas to the Governor-General upon their arrival in Java, the leader of the colony told them "he had no power to grant [their] request."⁶⁸ Dammerman, however, agreed to issue the permit if they followed three rules: they take only four Komodo dragons, and provide another four for the Dutch; they only kill a Komodo dragon in self-defense; and they agree to the presence of an observer approved by the government. Griswold and Harkness readily complied, and further manipulated events by arranging for their observer to be from the Surabaya Zoo, which desperately wanted its own Komodo dragons. This arrangement effectively eliminated the presence of any official who had an interest in upholding or developing regulations.⁶⁹ Controversy over the access Griswold and Harkness were given was compounded when, later, it was reported in the press that the officials from the Surabaya Zoo had profited by charging the two Americans 10,000 guilders per lizard they captured. In their criticism of this expedition, the Dutch press proclaimed that authorities tasked with protecting wildlife would "sell our natural resources, and also enrich themselves at the expense of Western prestige in an Eastern land."⁷⁰ The uproar over access grew even louder when Lord Moyne, a former British minister and member of the House of Lords, sailed to Komodo with full government approval in 1935.

Due to widespread criticism of those two expeditions, Dutch officials had to reiterate that such excursions were forbidden. The fallout also resulted in the

⁶⁵ Dammerman, *Preservation of Wild Life and Nature Reserves*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Lawrence Griswold, *Tombs, Travel, and Trouble* (Alexander, NC: Alexander Books, 2001), p. 183.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 182–84.

⁷⁰ Hoogerwerf, "Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta," pp. 27–31. The quote is from p. 28.

enactment in 1935 of new protective measures for the Komodo lizard, many of which were added due to the bad publicity surrounding foreign expeditions. Moreover, pressure from the Netherlands Commission for International Natural Reserves ramped up, particularly following increased speculation that the Komodo dragons were becoming rare in their own habitat, mainly due to the voracious appetite of Western scientific institutions. Thus, while officials at the Buitenzorg Botanical Gardens told Burden in 1926 that he could take as many Komodo dragons as he liked, as “the animals are plentiful,” by 1935 F. C. van Heuren estimated that only a few hundred existed.⁷¹

Given the number of varying regulations, as well as questions from Europe-based politicians and commissions who had little understanding of this distant island, Dammerman—as the director of the Botanical Gardens, the person ultimately in charge of nature and nature protection in the Netherlands East Indies at the time—faced a dilemma. Without verified numbers, questions about whether the animal was actually endangered were moot, as were politicians’ and environmentalists’ further cries for expanded regulations to protect the dragon. Dammerman had to determine whether the capture of Komodo dragons could be sustained and, if so, how to control and regulate it; what type of access (if any) should be allowed to Komodo; and how to balance the benefits for all concerned.

Dammerman decided to send De Jong back to Komodo in 1937 on another expedition, which would, once again, function as both a fact-finding and collecting mission. De Jong was given the task of, first, capturing a total of nineteen Komodo dragons, for the Jakarta Zoo as well as six foreign zoos and two foreign museums (even though the Nature Protection Commission had been told that the government would no longer issue trapping licenses for Komodo lizards); and, second, writing a report on island conditions, as well as recommendations for its preservation. De Jong left for eastern Indonesia on June 1, 1937, for what would ultimately be a six-week journey. He sailed on the KPM *Reiniersz* from Makassar to Labuanbajo, accompanied by a board member of the Botanical Gardens, a filmmaker, and a photo editor for the periodical *Java Bode*. De Jong collected the Komodo dragons for the various scientific institutions, and then wrote a series of reports that became the basis for all future plans for preserving and protecting the animal in its natural environment.⁷²

De Jong’s reports addressed many of the questions that politicians and conservationists had about the Komodo dragon. To temper the popular expectations and misconceptions with regard to the giant lizard, he began the main report—which is contained in a thirty-six-page article in *Natuurkundig Tijdschrift voor Nederlands Indie*—with complaints about the “myths” surrounding the Komodo lizard that had

⁷¹ Such speculation led to quite a bit of confusion. Van Heuren used his estimate to advocate for the establishment of a nature reserve, while others, such as C. de Voogd, had difficulty estimating the Komodo dragon population or claimed that there were thousands. Letter from Douglas Burden [undated, but written in mid-May 1926], William Douglas Burden Collection (B87), American Museum of Natural History Archives; C. N. A. de Voogd, “Naar de Varenen van Komodo,” *3 Jaren Indisch Natuurleven, Elfde Jaarsverlag* (1936–1938) (Batavia: Ned. Ind. Vereeniging tot Natuurbescherming, 1939), p. 306; Delsman, “Nogs iets over de Reuzenvaranen van Komodo,” p. 27; Hoogerwerf, “Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta,” pp. 31–33; G. F. M. Avé Lallemand, “De Reuzenleguaan (*Varanus komodoensis*) op de Eilanden Komodo dan Rindja,” *De Tropische Natuur* 18,8 (August 1929): 128.

⁷² Hoogerwerf, “Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta,” pp. 33–34.

been repeated so often that they had become “truths.” He reasoned that many of these myths originated out of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the Komodo lizards, as it only became known to the world in 1912, had a limited range, and was thought to be the largest living lizard species. The myths De Jong refuted included its exaggerated length, bloodthirstiness, deafness, and status as a remnant of a prehistoric past. In the process of debunking these misconceptions, he also directed his contempt towards “animal lovers” (*dierenbeschermers*) who knew little of the island or animal and yet propagated the myth that “they are dying out, on the verge of extinction,” and thus “feel obligated to fight a fierce campaign to save these lizards.”⁷³

Having refuted the most frequent misconceptions, as well as “facts” about the giant lizard’s scarcity, De Jong turned his attention to protecting the Komodo dragon. He argued that it is a unique species, and falls under Dutch protection, and should remain so. In addition, he noted that there had not been any observable population decline between his visits in 1929 and 1937, and, thus, the panoply of regulations that were in place must be working.⁷⁴ He contended that the Komodo lizard was only a rare species because of its limited range. Within that area, the lizards were quite numerous, and if their habitat was maintained, there was little threat of extinction. To protect the habitat, De Jong recommended that a wildlife reserve be established.

The wildlife reserve De Jong proposed not only protected a unique resource, but also—as important—its food supply. He argued that the reserve should fulfill the following conditions: it should be large enough to sustain the number of animals and other wildlife as currently existed; and, key to this proposal, the dragons’ food source—pigs and deer—needed a large enough area to be self-supporting. He maintained that the two most logical places to establish a reserve would be the northern half of Komodo or the southern half of Rinca. Komodo Island, he argued, would be an excellent location for a reserve, but there was a village on it. In conclusion, he proposed that the reserve should be established on the southern peninsula of Rinca, as no one lived there, it was inaccessible, and it had no economic importance. Even hunters did not go there. De Jong also advised that a license to catch fifteen to twenty lizards should be issued only once every five years. Furthermore, the license would limit the capture to Komodo, Rinca, or Flores on a rotating basis, and thus each of the regions would have up to fifteen years to recover the loss of the animals.⁷⁵

De Jong’s report led to discussions among the directors of economic affairs, home affairs, and the Botanic Gardens. They came up with three possibilities for protecting the Komodo dragon. The first recommendation involved making Komodo Island a wildlife preserve and removing (and compensating) the villagers living there; the second proposal called for the 143 (as of 1930) residents of *kampung* Komodo to stay and help in monitoring and controlling any non-islanders who came to the island; the third proposal suggested that reserves be established on only certain portions of Komodo and Rinca. The Dutch authorities chose the easiest option to implement (the third one). On May 10, 1938, the lieutenant-governor of Mangarrai, operating on the

⁷³ J. K. de Jong, “Een en Ander over *Varanus Komodoensis* Ouwens,” *Natuurkundig Tijdschrift voor Nederlands Indië* 97 (1937): 173–74, 179.

⁷⁴ De Jong, “Een en Ander over *Varanus Komodoensis* Ouwens,” pp. 205–6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207; Hoogerwerf, “Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinja,” p. 40; De Voogd, “Naar de Varenen van Komodo,” p. 309.

official Dutch recommendation, made certain areas of Komodo and Rinca wildlife preserves. While the existing regulations restricting the hunting and export of certain animals, unless authorized by the competent authorities (*bevoedged instanties*), remained in force, those rules would now be supported by the development of a reserve. The quilt work of laws and regulations would limit hunting—a concern on Java and Madura—and preserve an area for a rare, unique animal, which would reinforce the status of the Netherlands East Indies as a center for scientific research. On Komodo, only the islanders would be allowed to hunt the swine and deer present. In addition, a motorboat was to be stationed at Reo on Flores to provide proper surveillance and to discourage poachers.⁷⁶

While the development of a reserve greatly enhanced the status of Komodo in the scientific and environmental communities, hunters who frequented Komodo and Rinca did not perceive the new regulations favorably, and this created one of the biggest problems that Dutch authorities faced in protecting the dragon in the late 1930s. Among the greatest concerns voiced in Batavia were worries regarding the activities of poachers who desired animals for their valuable parts, such as rhinoceros horns, as well as the behavior of hunters acting outside the standards of a colonial elite who saw hunting as a sport. To limit poaching, the 1924 Hunting Ordinance had banned the use of nets, snares, and pits to catch game—all common strategies for those trying to capture an animal alive, and commonly used on Komodo and Rinca—as well as the burning of grass to drive game into a kill zone. Hunting the lizards, however, was not a popular activity in the region, as the lizard's parts were of little value. While they had attracted the interest of Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies, as the tail was thought to be a good remedy against burns, Komodo dragon body parts were not thought to be more valuable than those of other lizards. This led De Jong to conclude that the lizard was in a good position and not under any direct threat from hunters. It was the dragon's food supply that was under threat.⁷⁷

The concern over hunters destroying the Komodo dragon's food supply was legitimate. De Jong reported that when he went to Rinca's Loho Boeaja in 1929, a known place to capture lizards, he was unable to get any specimens at that time, or to even detect the presence of any. This was no doubt the result of a massive deer hunt that had taken place in the area a month and a half prior to his arrival. The hunting was conducted on horseback, and done with dogs and fire to drive the deer into a kill zone. Because of this, no deer were found when he visited. This meant that there was no wildlife—except for monkeys—in the area. He also witnessed such a phenomenon, on a smaller scale, when he visited Flores in 1937. Such hunting practices, while not specifically targeting the Komodo lizard, damaged their environment and threatened their food supply, and, ultimately, their existence.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ No more Komodo dragons were officially exported to the West to satisfy requests from scientific institutions for another twenty years, but this was mainly due to the disruption of World War Two. Hoogerwerf, "Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta," pp. 41, 50–51.

⁷⁷ Cribb, "Conservation in Colonial Indonesia," p. 57; De Jong, "Een en Ander over Varanus Komodoensis Ouwens"; G. E. P. Collins, *Komodo, Dragon Island* (Beersel: Clepsyde, 2003), p. 160; Delsman, "Nogs iets over de Reuzenvaranen van Komodo," p. 27.

⁷⁸ De Jong, "Een en Ander over Varanus Komodoensis Ouwens," p. 207.

De Jong was not the only person to comment on the threat that hunters posed to the Komodo dragon. An article in *De Locomotief*, most likely written by W. Koenders, who accompanied De Jong on his 1937 trip, related the following story. On July 3, 1937, in the harbor at Labuanbajo, there had been a yacht, the *Sho Fong*, owned by an American named Baker and operated by a ten-man crew; the sailors were there to find lizards. In addition, when the De Jong Expedition was on Komodo—July 2–7, 1937—anthropologist and filmmaker Paul Fejos was landing on the other side of the island. Fejos had planned to film the dragons, but his trip was a disaster. His drinking water was lost during the journey to Komodo from Bima, and his film equipment was lost or damaged. He was saved from this terrible situation by the passing KPM ship *De Klerk*, which responded to his distress signals, and took him back to Sumbawa. Fejos reported that local hunters had set fire to the *alang-alang* grass to force deer into ravines, where they were easily captured. As he wrote—in English—“The vandal method of burning up hectares of vegetation to chase two or three deers to the seashore, is undoubtedly causing the death of many of the varanes, who perish in the fire on the mountainsides.”⁷⁹

After Fejos’s disastrous visit to Komodo became known in the press, G. E. P. Collins, a British adventurer known for having built a traditional Bugis sailing ship and journeying throughout the archipelago in the 1930s, approached Fejos and agreed to accompany the Hungarian anthropologist back to Komodo. Collins and Fejos spent several months on Komodo and Rinca, and most of this time was in the company of illegal hunting parties, the most prominent being under the guidance of a charismatic man from Flores whom Collins called “Hadji Soepoe.” The “tough-looking men” under Hadji Soepoe’s command would hunt by marking off “a wide v-shaped area with tape made of young white palm leaf,” which they placed at the eye-level of the deer, and would use this to funnel the animals into an enclosure where they could be killed. Another party of hunters from Sumbawa hunted with dogs, without a care for government regulations that prohibited that practice, and usually killed two deer per day. Hadji Soepoe claimed that he had been given exclusive hunting rights on Komodo and Rinca, and he saw the hunters from Sumbawa as interlopers. Collins also reported that a Japanese trader would pay the locals to go hunting.⁸⁰ These reports reflect a continuation of the influence of the Sultan of Bima, who hosted a number of foreign guests and continued to exert influence over Komodo and Rinca, despite the earlier reconfiguration of boundaries in the region that were more in line with Dutch administration of the region.

In an attempt to limit hunters, some of whom were operating with the Sultan of Bima’s approval, the local government of Manggarai began to enforce a 250-guilder tax for the capture or killing of a Komodo lizard, which would be charged to all those who sought specimens, except for Netherlands or Netherlands Indies scientific institutions, as well as a ten-guilder fine for hunting deer or swine on Komodo or Rinca.⁸¹ While recovering from a leg infection, Collins bumped into Hadji Soepoe, who had been

⁷⁹ Hoogerwerf, “Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta,” pp. 42–44; Collins, *Komodo, Dragon Island*, pp. 126–27.

⁸⁰ Collins, *Komodo, Dragon Island*, pp. 95, 98–100, 209; Hoogerwerf, “Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta,” pp. 50–51.

⁸¹ Collins, *Komodo, Dragon Island*, p. 123.

summoned to Ruteng and ordered to pay the ten-guilder fine. Hadji Soepoe summarized many of the hunters' feelings about such regulations when he laughed off the fine; he explained to Collins:

Hunting is forbidden in Komodo, except for people who live there. Parties of hunters from Flores and Sumbawa have gone to Komodo to catch deer for as long as I can remember, and, of course, for many years before that. But now it is forbidden, and only the people of Komodo may hunt there.

Why? ... Just because of those evil and rotten land crocodiles! The government wants to keep the deer for the dragons. They say that if we go to Komodo and catch deer, the dragons won't have enough to eat. Land crocodile ... useless beasts! I'd rather have one fat deer than all the dragons in Komodo.⁸²

In the distant, sparsely populated islands of Komodo and Rinca, the traditional pastime of hunting deer and swine would no longer be allowed, as it contradicted international desires to protect a rare species that was popular in zoos and museums.

Poachers in search of dragons or their food supply, of course, continued hunting illegally into the late 1930s. In October 1938, F. H. Endert, inspector of forestry for the Great East (that is, eastern Indonesia), visited Komodo along with the governor of Timor and its dependencies and the resident of Timor and Manggarai. There they encountered a Chinese hunting party targeting lizards, reportedly to use them for medicinal purposes. Endert also reported that outsiders would pay 10,000 guilders for a dragon specimen. The numerous reports of hunters seeking both game and dragons led to bans on any type of ship stopping at Komodo and on the export of dragons and dragon parts in 1938.⁸³

The presence of poachers and overly enthusiastic representatives of scientific institutions, as well as a growing climate of concern over controlling the East Indies and its natural wonders, led to the development of rules and regulations limiting access to the Komodo region and its lizards. Such regulations, however, made the various "celebrity species" in the region even more valuable. While numerous live animals were exported from the Netherlands East Indies prior to World War Two, it was a few iconic animals—tapirs, rhinoceroses, orangutans, birds-of-paradise, and Komodo dragons—that led to the development of nature reserves and the rules and regulations required to protect them. These restrictions were often counter to local practices—such as hunting for deer and boar on Komodo and Rinca—but eventually they set new standards for how to handle sensitive, protected areas. As knowledge about the dragon's habitat grew, a better understanding of how to handle environmental problems and threats to the dragon's survival correspondingly increased. Dutch authorities limited access to these animals—they protected the Komodo dragon—and the new, dynamic regulations continued to set the tone for nature protection in independent Indonesia.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Hoogerwerf, "Rapport over een naar Komodo, Padar en Rinjta," pp. 42, 51.