

ANIMALS & MEN

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ISSUE ONE



Is the legendary Mapinguari a surviving Mylodontid Ground Sloth? ... Frog Falls ... Mystery Martens ... Golden Frogs ... Relict populations of Asian Rhinos ... The Surgeons Photo is a hoax ... News.

A QUESTION OF RHINOCERI

Alberto Lopez Acha from Barcelona wrote to us asking for information about the relict population of The Javan Rhinoceros which was discovered in Vietnam in 1988. The Javan Rhinoceros is a well known, if exceedingly rare animal and we thought that this would be an easy question to answer. Not So. Our researches into the current status of the two species of Asian Forest Rhinoceros proved the aptness of Oscar Wilde's maxim that the truth is never pure and seldom simple'

In 1988 a female Javan Rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) was shot by a local tribesman in the jungles of Southern Vietnam about eighty miles northeast of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). (1). This was doubly suprising because not only is *R sondaicus* one of the world's 12 most endangered species of mammal it had generally been supposed to have been confined to the Indonesian island of Java since the 1940's. Or had it?

Hans Hvass (1956) wrote that the animal was confined to Malaya and Java (2) , The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Wildlife (3) said (1990) that the species was confined to Java with 'possibly a few hanging on in the remoter parts of Indo-China', Grzimek (1988) (4) wrote that the species was completely confined to one National Park in Java (and went on to say that 'reports of sightings in other locations are more than twenty years old and were considered unreliable even then') and the Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Animal Life (1952) merely stated that it had been 'exterminated over much of its previous range'.(5)

These conflicting status reports were too much for us so I did what any red blooded Cryptozoologist would have done under the circumstances. I telephoned Jan Williams who telephoned Karl Shuker who said, (much to my horror) that such discrepancies between major reference books were common and that the material in such books was often out of date and sometimes wildly inaccurate.

Karl went on to say that The Javan Rhinoceros had indeed been thought to have been confined to Java since the 1940's and that the discovery of an apparently healthy population in Vietnam was therefore incredibly good news for the survival of the species.

HELP!

The HELP Section of this magazine has two functions. Firstly we act as a fairly traditional magazine 'Questions and Answers' page but we also publish requests from you, the readers for help with your own researches.



If you can help with any of these queries, or if you have queries of your own, please write to :

HELP, Animals And Men
The Centre for
Fortean Zoology
15 Holne Court
Exwick, Exeter.

Something that everyone seems to have overlooked however is that the two populations of this, undoubtedly the rarest large land mammal in the world, may actually be different sub species. According to Khan (1989) (6) and Nowak (1991) (7) until about 150 years ago there were actually three different sub species widely distributed over South East Asia.

R s inermis: Eastern India, Bangladesh, Assam, Burma

R s annamiticus: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Eastern Thailand

R s sondaicus: Tennaserim, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Western Java

Still earlier, perhaps until the Sixteenth Century, other populations lived in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan and Hunan (Rookmaaker 1980) (8). These Chinese subspecies were certainly wiped out four hundred years ago and it seems almost certain that the sub species *inermis* is also extinct. It seems likely, however that the newly discovered population in Vietnam are of the subspecies *annamiticus* whereas the Javan specimens are *R.s sondaicus* and therefore in the interests of genetic purity the suggestions that have been made about interbreeding specimens from the two populations in order to enrich the gene pool may not be such a good idea after all.

Karl Shuker (1) also wrote about a small population of the hairy Sumatran Rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) that was discovered in a remote valley in Sarawak in 1986, and so whilst we are on the subject of the Asian Forest Rhinos I thought that it might be useful to include a short piece on the subject of the current status of this, possibly the most peculiar looking of the Rhinos.

There are three sub species: (7)

D.s lasiotus: Formerly found in India, Bangladesh and Burma, there may only be six or seven specimens left in Burma.

D.s,harrisoni: Borneo. Only about 30-50 left. These include the survivors in Sarawak discussed earlier, and various relict populations in Sabah, which were noted by British Army personnel in the mid sixties when they weren't meant to be there either. An acquaintance of mine who was involved in these clandestine military operations told me that although he had never seen one several members of his unit had found droppings and footprints which suggested that the species may, (at the time) have been more widespread than was otherwise supposed.

D.s.sumatrensis: This is the most widespread of the subspecies with about 100 specimens still living in peninsular Malaya and 400-700 on Sumatra itself.

The biology of both species is relatively little known both because of their rarity and because of their geographical inaccessibility. They co-existed over much of their former range because in areas where both species existed (4) the Javan Rhino lived on the wooded floodplains of large rivers whilst the Sumatran species lived in the more mountainous regions.

It is a good sign for the general progress of both species and of Cryptozoology as a science that such a large species can live undiscovered in an area not only just eighty miles from a major city but that was moreover scarified by defoliants such as Agent Orange in what was probably one of the most ecologically unsound wars in history.

One final snippet of interest that I discovered during my rhino researches. During the aforementioned military campaign in Borneo during the sixties one British Army Unit reported that their camp had been systematically destroyed by a herd of elephants. 'Nonsense' said the wise men at GHQ in Singapore. 'Elephants don't exist in Borneo'. Apparently, however one feral herd, the descendants of a number of AFRICAN elephants presented to one of the Sultans of Brunei still roams the jungles, the only wild African Elephants in Asia.

REFERENCES

1. Dr Karl Shuker: The Lost Ark (1993)
2. Hans Hwass: Mammals of the World (1956)
3. Woodward and O'Leary (Ed): The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Wildlife Vol 6
4. Grzimek: Mammals of the World Vol 4 (1988)
5. Drimmer (Ed): The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Animal Life Vol 6 (1952)
6. Mohd Khan Bin Momin Khan: Asian Rhinos: an action plan for their conservation. (IUCN)
7. Ronald Nowak (Ed): Walkers Mammals of the World Volume 2 (1991)
8. L.C. Rookmaaker: The distribution of the rhinoceros in eastern India, Bangladesh, China and the Indo Chinese region (Zool Anz Jena 205:253-268)

HELP! WANTED

Animals and Men subscriber, Richard Muirhead, of Salisbury wants information on the following subjects:

1. Large Bats in The Forest of Dean.
2. Albino Foxes
3. Something that looked like a Duck Billed Platypus which was killed sometime in the 1700s in the Earl of Tylney's park, near Wanstead in Essex.
4. A wolf killed by a car in West Suffolk during the 1970s, (mentioned in The New Statesman Fortean Column 21.2.94)

Alberto Lopez Acha from Barcelona wants information on the Vu Quang Ox. Apart from the references in Karl Shuker's 'The Lost Ark' (1993), I have very little information. Apparently there was an article in a recent issue of 'BDC Wildlife'. Photocopies anybody?

The Editor of this august journal is always interested in information about the following subjects:

1. The wildlife of Hong Kong, especially its Herptofauna.
2. Sligo's Salamander, and any other out of place Megalobatrachius species.
3. Any reports about Mustelids.

4. Living specimens of any species of Amphiuma, Mudpuppy, Siren or Caecelian. Please scrutinise any pet shops you visit and give me a ring if anything turns up. I have an extremely large and lonely Two Toed Amphiuma looking for a mate.

Paul Garner writes:

'There is a well known photograph of a decaying carcass which was hauled up by Japanese fishermen near Christchurch, New Zealand in April 1977, which some speculated might have been a modern plesiosaur. I have read somewhere that analysis of fibres from the carcass revealed the presence of Elastodin, a protein found only in sharks.

I would be interested to have any further information on this case. Can anyone shed any light on exactly when the initial discovery was made - some reports specify the 10th April, others say the 25th. Also, have the results of the fibre analysis ever been published, if so where. I hope somebody out there can enlighten me'

NEXT ISSUE: Green Lizards which aren't Green Lizards and Sand Lizards which may be. A Round up of queries and historical oddities.