

Rhinoceros and Seladang — Malaya's Vanishing Species

By J. A. Hislop

The two animals most seriously threatened by development in the Malay peninsula are the Sumatran rhinoceros and the seladang. The author, who has extensive knowledge of the peninsula, puts the rhinos at ten known individuals, with a probable total population of thirty, but many areas are still unexplored and information is far from complete. The seladang or Malayan gaur, the huge wild ox standing as high as six feet at the shoulder, is even more vulnerable than the rhino. Seladang unfortunately prefer habitats that are suitable for cultivation, and since the war some herds of thirty or more animals have completely disappeared. Two projected dams, which will destroy the greatest concentration of salt licks in Malaya, are a new and serious threat to the seladang.

IN the last five years the face of Malaya has altered considerably, creating serious problems in the field of wildlife conservation. The two species most gravely threatened by the expansion of rural development are the Sumatran rhinoceros *Didermoceros sumatrensis* and the seladang *Bos gaurus*. It can be safely assumed that only one species of rhinoceros now exists in Malaya, there being no evidence of the Javan one-horned *Rhinoceros sondaicus*. There is little enough positive information on rhinos at all, and this paper contains all that I have been able to collect over the past twenty-five years. It cannot be fully guaranteed, but it is probably the most accurate available. Details of known habitats are undoubtedly correct, but it has not been possible to ascertain the exact number of animals existing therein, and any estimate given is conservative.

Starting in the south of the Peninsula there is no recent news from the state of Johore, where about 1947 a misguided rubber planter shot dead a mature rhino which had fallen into a pit. Parts of Johore, however, are very swampy and difficult of access, and the continued existence of rhinoceros cannot be definitely ruled out. In Malacca and Negri Sembilan there are none. The first rhinoceros going north are in North Selangor and Perak, on both banks of the Bernam river, the boundary between the two states, which the animals cross. A few years ago the Selangor State Government created a sanctuary of some 10,700 acres, the Sungei Dusun reserve*, for their total protection, but unfortunately no corresponding reserve has been made in Perak. It is generally believed that there are only three rhinos in this area; when first discovered by me in 1949, there were two adults and a young one, probably half grown and large enough to fend for itself.

* A note on recent developments in this reserve is on page 332. Editor.

The Selangor reserve is now bounded on three sides by cultivation, but in Perak, the area of swamp forest is extensive and little known.

Between the Bernam forest and the district of Larut and Matang in Perak there are no rhino. In 1949, one member of the party I was with sighted the hindquarters of a solitary rhino in the steep foothills of Gunong Bubu, but investigation was impossible owing to the current emergency, and since then there has been no further information. The terrain around Gunong Bubu is rough and few people go there.

Unsearched Areas in Perak

The highest concentration of rhinoceros known in Malaya is in northern Perak, in the Bintang Hijau Forest Reserve, which is contiguous with the Gunong Inas Forest Reserve in south Kedah, but the number of animals is unknown. The terrain is steep, rocky, inhospitable and extensive, with precipitous mountains from 4000 to 6000 ft. high; it is also well watered, and there are a number of fine salt licks frequented by elephants. In the limited area that I inspected in 1956 there was at least one pair of rhino, but tracks were so numerous and confused that there could well have been more. Wallows were frequent, and the local salt licks were regularly visited. Game trails were wide, and much used by both rhino and elephant, and a year or so later, the Assistant Game Warden, Perak, photographed a solitary rhino in a salt lick. To the east and north-east, the unbroken mountainous forest extends some twenty-five miles to Grik and Klian Intan, with wallows and salt licks as yet unrecorded. The whole area is relatively undisturbed apart from some logging, and tin mining at Klian Intan. No estimate of the rhino population could be made without an intensive search.

In the upper reaches of the Perak river towards the hilly country bordering Thailand, there seem to be a few rhino, but the only definite evidence is of one mature animal from tracks seen some time in 1964.

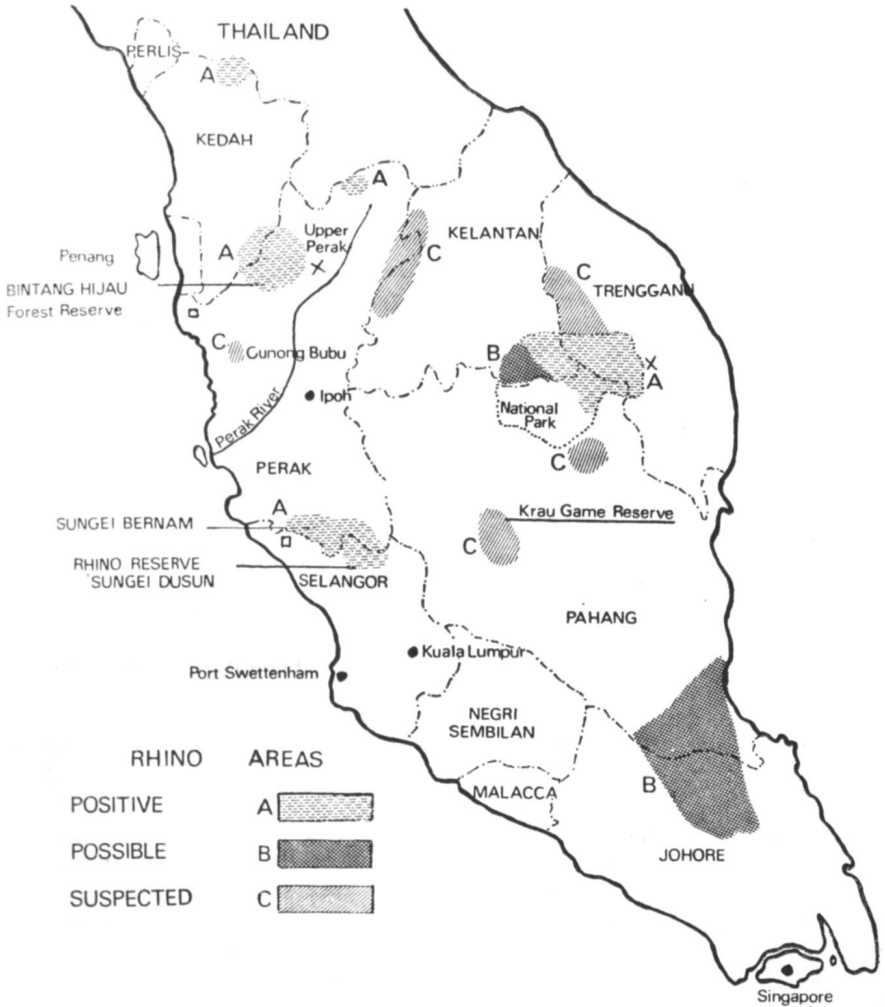
On the Thailand Border

In April, 1941, I went on an expedition to a very remote area of north Kedah, on the borders of Thailand, and found an unknown number of rhinoceros inhabiting an area of hilly bamboo forest. When we arrived at one hilltop, we heard animals moving off, but could not see them owing to the difficulty of following them through fallen bamboo. There were a number of fresh wallows and many dung heaps in the vicinity. Unfortunately the expedition had reached its furthest point, and we could not explore further.

From time to time I receive reports from the borders of Perak and Kelantan, a high, rugged and inhospitable country rising in places to over 7000 ft. and very difficult of access. Military patrols, geologists and others tell of odd encounters with solitary rhinos, but none has ever been confirmed.

Trengganu on the east side of the peninsula, I am convinced, holds

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a few animals in the relatively unexplored hinterland. In 1952 while on a prolonged expedition, I saw signs which could have been made by rhino, but the weather was so dry and the ground so hard that positive identification of footprints was impossible. From another area further to the north, a European District Officer reported that he had seen the hindquarters of three animals disappearing from a wallow, but once again, there has been no verification.

The former King George V National Park, now known as Taman Negara, contains large tracts of land in all three of the eastern States, Kelantan, Trengganu and Pahang, and there is irrefutable evidence of rhinoceros in the Pahang part, and also in a high, remote region in South Kelantan. A solitary mature specimen was seen in the Tembeling valley only a short distance above the park headquarters in 1964, and again in 1965, also well within the park boundary. Where it came from no one seems to know, but to the east and south-east of the park there is a great sweep of unexplored country in the upper reaches of the Sungei Tekai and around the foothills of Gunong Irong and Gunong Tapis which could easily contain rhinos. I made one trip there some years ago, but the going was so difficult that the programme was never completed. No signs of rhino were found, perhaps because we hardly ever got away from the river.

Likely Areas in Pahang

The Krau Game Reserve in Central Pahang is also little known; it has not been explored since before 1941. At that time one mature animal was frequenting certain salt licks in the southern quarter. Aborigines from the hinterland have repeatedly told me that there are a few rhinos inhabiting the western slopes of Gunong Benom, and a tribe living towards the north-western end of the reserve informed me that a salt lick high up in the Ulu Klau Ketchil was regularly used by rhinoceros. These reports have never been verified, but I see no reason to doubt these aborigines who had nothing to gain by telling falsehoods.

We are now left with south-east Pahang, which for the greater part is a vast area of swampy jungle, mainly unexplored and unknown so far as wildlife is concerned. From this area, for example, there periodically emerge migrating herds of the bearded pig *Sus barbatus*, many of which are slaughtered by aborigines as they swim the rivers. This pig is practically unknown in Malaya apart from these migrations, and it would certainly not be far-fetched to expect to find rhinoceros somewhere in that wild region, especially in the upper valley of the Sungei Endau, which is the boundary between Pahang and Johore.

From the available information then, we can be sure that a few rhinoceros still exist in Malaya; but we cannot say how many, and we do not know where they all are.

**ESTIMATED POPULATION OF SUMATRAN RHINOCEROS
IN MALAYA**

| Locality | Number | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|----------|
| | Definitely Known | Probable |
| Johore | Nil | 2 |
| Selangor/Perak (Ulu Bernam) | 3 | 4 |
| Selangor (U. Kenaboi) ... | Nil | 1 |
| Gunong Bubu | Nil | 1 |
| Perak/Kedah | 2 | 4 |
| Ulu Kedah (Thai border) ... | 2 | 4 |
| Perak/Kelantan border ... | Nil | 2 |
| National Park | 2 | 4 |
| Ulu Trengganu | Nil | 2 |
| Krau Reserve | Nil | 2 |
| South-east Pahang | Nil | 2 |
| Ulu Perak/Thai Border ... | 1 | 2 |
| | — | — |
| | 10 | 30 |
| | — | — |

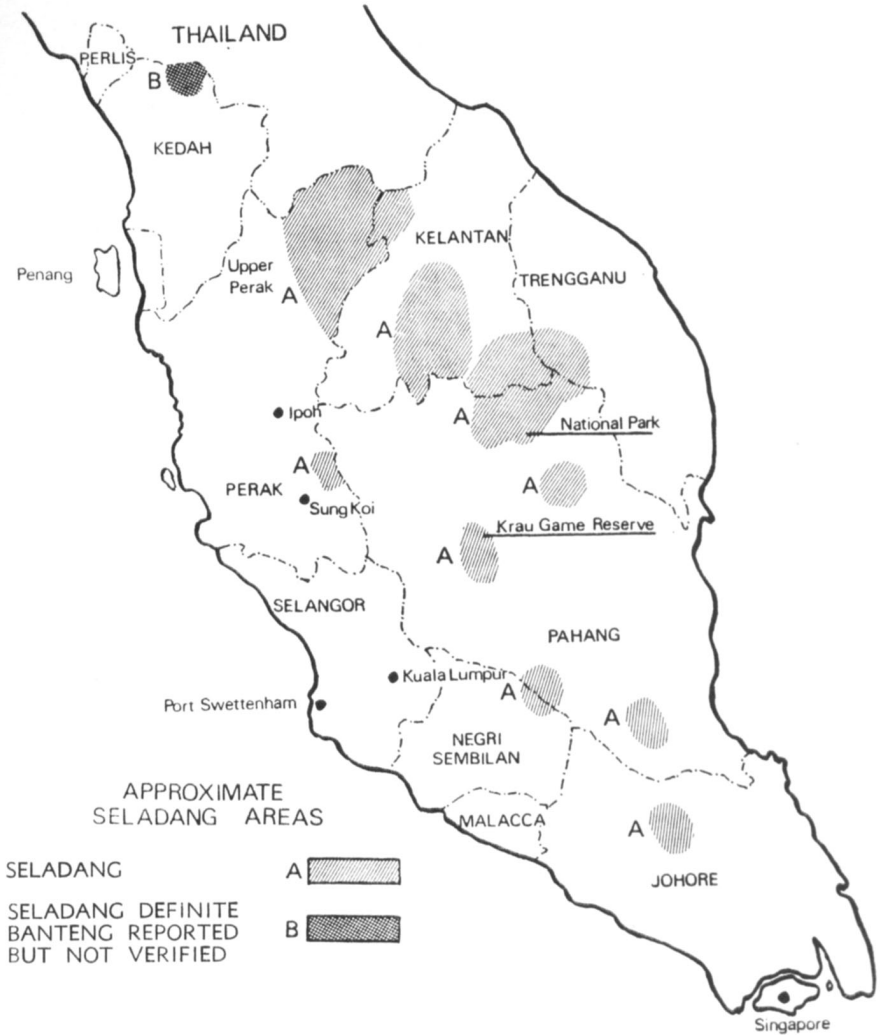
Seladang versus Man

Seladang *Bos gaurus*, by virtue of their habits, are just as vulnerable as rhinos, if not more so. There are of course many more of them, but whole herds have completely disappeared within recent years, and, unlike the rhino, they do not surreptitiously move off into inaccessible country, because their way of life precludes it.

The seladang in Malaya is a creature of the lowland river valleys, seldom going even as high as 2000 ft. It grazes and browses on grass and low-growing vegetation on islets and river banks, and in clearings made and abandoned by aborigines or riverine Malays. Such country, being accessible and having the best soil, is most easily developed, thus depriving the seladang of its habitat. Once a herd is broken up and scattered, their natural protection is greatly reduced. Immature animals soon fall prey to carnivores, and others may be gradually hunted down and killed. In addition, a worried and insecure herd is liable to change its habits; the breeding cycle may be interrupted, and a steady decline in the numbers sets in until the whole herd dies out. I know of places in Pahang where, before 1941, seladang could be seen in herds of up to 30 and more, and after the war were still plentiful. Today a number of those herds have completely disappeared, and it is certain that any herds in areas due for rural development are doomed unless some means of saving them can be found.

Nevertheless these magnificent animals are still to be found throughout the country except in Malacca, Selangor and Perlis, although in Selangor it is just possible that a few survive in certain remote valleys. The greatest numbers are in Pahang, parts of Upper Perak, and south

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Kelantan, and there are several herds within the National Park. As a matter of interest it has been reported to me that there is still a small herd of banteng *Bos sondaicus* in a very remote part of Kedah, but I should like to have first-hand information of this before accepting it, since there have been no positive records of the presence of this animal for many years.

Seladang, it appears, require salt licks to keep them in good health, and where there is a concentration of one, there is usually a concentration of the other. Many salt licks have been destroyed by cultivation in recent years, and now a new destructive power is about to eliminate a large number of the most important licks in the country. A series of dams for hydro-electric power are to be constructed in the Perak River, and the lowest one in particular will completely submerge the greatest known concentration of salt licks in Malaya. A similar scheme on the Sungei Muda in Kedah will flood the most extensive lick known to me, and two others with it, leaving none at all, as far as I am aware, in that part of the country.

In Pahang, a continuous block of some 150,000 acres is to be opened up to development within the next few years, and the preliminary operations are now in hand. This vast area, known as the Jengka Triangle, holds both seladang and elephant, and there would seem to be little doubt as to their ultimate fate. Another project to build a road from Lasah, in the Sungei Siput district of Perak, to Gua Musang, in Kelantan, will open up a great deal of hitherto inaccessible country, populated only by aborigines and wild life. At the moment this scheme has been dropped because money has been diverted to more pressing matters; but the writing is on the wall, and the respite may be brief.

[This paper was presented at the Bangkok Conference on Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in Tropical South-East Asia, in November, 1965, organised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and is reprinted by kind permission.]

RARE BIRDS

THREE classic reports of bird conservation, originally prepared for the National Audubon Society, and long unobtainable, have recently been reprinted unchanged by Dover Publications of New York, and are available from Constable at 16s each. They are James T. Tanner on *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, Robert Porter Allen on *The Roseate Spoonbill* (these two both first published in 1942) and Carl B. Koford on *The California Condor*, which appeared ten years later. It is still uncertain whether the ivory-billed woodpecker still exists, either in the United States or in Cuba, and the California condor, with about 50 individuals surviving, is one of the rarest birds in the world, and the subject of a current research programme of the US Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. The roseate spoonbill, however, is not now considered rare enough to feature in the Red Data Book of IUCN. It is of the greatest value to have these three basic documents of conservation once more available at so reasonable a price.