BIG GAME
OF
MALAYA

Their Types, Distribution and Habits

BY

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CHAPTER I

GENERAL INFORMATION

ALTHOUGH Malaya has a varied fauna it cannot be claimed that any of the big game is peculiar to the country, neither has it as full a complement of species as can be found for instance in Burma. Of the big game, the Banteng, Bibos banteng, and Eld’s deer do not occur, the absence of the former species being the less understandable. Of the carnivora, the tiger and leopard occur though of the latter a larger proportion of the melanistic black variety is to be found. Among all this fauna, however, only the larger big game comprising of the seladang or gaur, elephant, tapir and rhinoceros, are, from the point of view of the sportsman, worth-while quarries to pursue.

Tiger, leopard, sambur and barking deer afford but poor sporting chance in this country. In any case the chance of securing a head of any one of these, and much less a worthwhile head, is not in any way as good as in India and Burma. Though widely distributed these animals are certainly not numerous. It is chiefly the prevailing dense forest and the practically changeless weather conditions throughout the year which effectually prevent specimens from being secured by the usual hunting methods. The forests are of the evergreen rain type, having an obstructive undergrowth of varying density. Although there is a short ‘dry’ season from about June to the end of August, rain may be expected at any time.

Chance meetings with these lesser big game may occur but they are few and far between, and when they do happen the hunter is invariably surprised unarmed, or is on the trail of worthier game. In certain localities, known only to a few, away in deep virgin forest, sambur may be found in the open during daylight and may be stalked with success, but
the trophies are generally poor and would not satisfy every hunter. To hope for a view of a tiger or leopard, however, under such circumstances or even by accident in the forest is merely to indulge in the wildest of dreams. Several of the local nimrods circumvent these beasts by driving likely bits of jungle with the aid of trained dogs when anything from a mouse deer to a tiger may erupt from the bushes.

So it is that for those preferring the more arduous methods of securing good heads, none of these lesser big game animals afford sufficient sport or chance of success. To enjoy the best hunting one's efforts must be turned to the pursuit of the larger big game which may be hunted by the recognized methods of stalking or tracking. It is quite possible to obtain a fair trophy in a reasonable period and the hunter can be justifiably proud of any he has secured in this manner.

This book is concerned only with those Malay States which, prior to the post-war constitutional reorganization, were known as Federated and Unfederated. None of the larger big game are to be found in the Settlements of Malacca or Penang and Province Wellesley.

Of the States to the north, only Kelantan and Trengganu and to a lesser extent Kedah offer worthy fields to the big game hunter, for there the country is not so developed as the four central States, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang, and a larger proportion of the northern territories still remain under primeval forest. It is there that the wild elephant may be found in numbers, seladang in lesser amount, some tapir, and, more rarely, rhinoceros. Access to Kelantan and Trengganu, which before the Japanese occupation was available by the East Coast Railway, is now obtained either by a longer rail journey from the west coast via South Siam, the passenger entraining at Penang and dismounting at Kuala Krai in Kelantan, or during the open season, by road from Kuantan on the east coast of Pahang, or by coast steamer from Singapore. Roads in these two States are at best second-class and during the monsoon
(November to March) long stretches may become impassable. A limited number of elderly hired cars are available. Kedah may be reached by rail or road from Singapore or Penang.

It is in the four central States—Pahang in particular—that the best conditions exist for the adventurous sportsman. In these States proper Game Laws have been instituted and a Game Department started. The States of Selangor and Negri Sembilan, however, especially the former, have lost most of their larger big game owing to greater development and a denser population, whilst in the premier State of Perak only those portions to the east and north, adjacent to the main range, are areas worthy of investigation. In these particular areas vast forests occur and are connected with the jungle of north-western Pahang and western Kelantan. Seladang are to be found here but the territory is more favoured by elephants. A few rhinoceros occur on the main range, on the branch of it leading down to Gunong Bubu and in the upper Bernam river area where, however, those that remain are in jeopardy of being exterminated.

Chiefly owing to its vast undeveloped areas, the presence of several Sakai tribes, and its general suitability, Pahang is the State which offers the best chances for sport. The country is mostly forest-clad and well drained. Seladang and elephant abound, the latter being ubiquitous. Seladang, on the other hand, are more selective in the matter of environment, are more local in their habits, and are not given to roaming over large areas. Thus it is that all along the Pahang river and its many tributaries from about the mouth of the Lepar river upstream these splendid animals range. There, through the methods of shifting cultivation of the Sakai (Malaya's aboriginals) conditions suitable for them exist. As far as I am aware, only one such area is poor in respect to seladang, that being the Bera Valley but even so some may yet be found up the Serting, its main branch. Elephants, though individual herds keep to particular but large areas which are adjacent to each other, are prone to roam the length and
breadth of their domains in their efforts to search for food. In consequence it could be said that for Pahang every district is suitable for the hunting of this grand beast. Of course, there are districts where finds are surer and these are usually the ones which are more hilly and undeveloped such as Kuala Lipis and Raub, with Bentong and Kuantan to a lesser degree, though Temerloh and Pekan districts need not be despised. Exceptionally good seladang country is to be found in Kuala Lipis and Temerloh districts followed by Raub, whilst the other districts hold a certain number in some restricted localities.

Communications are fair. Here again the Japanese removed long stretches of the railway line and until this is relaid the main route for access is the road which runs from Kuala Lumpur to Raub and across to the east coast at Kuantan. To get to the real hinterland from these main lines of communication a certain amount of foot-slogging will be necessary in some areas but navigable rivers flow through the best big game country, and it is possible to travel by Malay perahus speeded by an outboard motor if desired. Whilst on such journeys some pleasant fishing can be enjoyed with the sebarau and further up the rivers its cousin the kelah. The chances of small game shooting, especially green pigeon and jungle fowl, are fair. Wild pig abound and are to be had at any time should something more juicy be desired. However, you will eat this only if the cook of the party does not profess the Mohammedan faith.

Similar conditions obtain in Northern Perak. A river trip has to be experienced only once to ensure that the desire to repeat such an unforgettable and joyful memory will ever be present. Camping out in a shady nook with a sand spit nearby in the quiet of the forest with fishing and hunting facilities at hand, cannot fail to captivate all those who love the great outdoors.

Johore, the most southerly Malay State, lying as it does so close to Singapore, is by far the most accessible and here
THE STATE OF PAHANG

3. Proposed Serting Game Reserve.
too elephant, some seladang and tapir may be found. Under
the conditions pertaining before the Japanese occupation,
special permission had to be sought from H.H. the Sultan
before big game hunting could start.

The Malays one meets in these places are a cheery lot,
and only those who are unhealthy through the ravages of
malaria will be found to be indolent. Otherwise willing
helpers can be easily recruited and will be found to be a
joyous and hard-working band having a natural enthusiasm
for hunting. They will be found to be proficient and quick
in making temporary huts from materials in the surrounding
jungle, but it is advisable to take a tent-fly measuring in feet,
say 10 x 12 x 15, which will be very useful and convenient
should a sudden rainstorm occur whilst on the march.
These men’s wages should be in conformity with those pre­
vailing in the country at the time and for general satisfaction
this rate could be justly increased by a few cents per diem
since it should be remembered that the men are employed
on a temporary basis. Over and above this it would be
advisable to distribute a few dollars to the men in the form
of a parting gift at the end of the trip, be it successful or
not.

They are not good skinners, but from among those em­
ployed for the trip some will be found who can pick up this
work in a fairly short time. I have dealt with the subject of
trackers in this book but what is also essential for speedy
work is the employment of one or two guides who reside
in the locality chosen for the hunt. These men know the
country well enough to lead a hunting party back to camp
in quick time. Without a knowledge of the country it will
be found to be extremely difficult to do so by oneself even
with the good topographical maps that exist.

Small advances of pay will be applied for and those
should be given as they are required to buy smokes and
other luxuries for the duration of the trip. The chief need
is to leave some funds in their homes. At the end of the
trip the remaining wages should be paid by the sportsman
himself and receipts obtained for them. By treating his men fairly and good-humouredly, the sportsman will be liked and respected, and in subsequent trips, either in the same locality or elsewhere in the district, no difficulty should be experienced in obtaining useful hands.