



LORD of the JUNGLE

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LORD of the

JUNGLE

*The wild elephant of
the Malay Peninsula*

by

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F.Z.S.

NOT very many decades ago wild elephants were widely distributed throughout the Malay Peninsula and are still to be found, although in rapidly decreasing numbers, in the more remote and less developed parts of the country.

The number of elephants found in a herd seldom exceed a dozen head, small herds of five or six animals being more general. They are never, nowadays, to be found in large herds of twenty or more, the disturbance to them by the exploitation of their true habitat tending to make them split up into a few head in each group.

The Malayan elephant has been described as a sub-species of *Elephas maximus*, the Indian Elephant, and given the designation of *Elephas maximus hirsutus*. The young of the Malayan sub-species has more hair on its body than the type species and the shape of the ear shows a distinct departure from the standard.

The Malayan elephant is little less in height and bulk than its Indian cousin. The tallest elephant that I know of,

recorded by a reliable observer, was shot by Mr. Frederiksen in Kelantan. It measured 9 feet 8 inches at the shoulder. I have shot one measuring 9 feet 6 inches at the shoulder. I think such measurements are about the maximum. So far as I know a ten-foot elephant has never been recorded from


Malaya.

Elephants have been much harried and many immature beasts killed. Only a small percentage of males reach a ripe old age, and consequently large tuskers are the exception. It is therefore no easy

matter to judge as to what is a fair weight for a large pair of tusks, because we have few records to consult.

I think the heaviest pair of tusks recorded in Malaya was






from an elephant shot by the late Mr. William Hay in Pahang. They weighed 90¾ pounds as recorded in Messrs. Rowland Ward's "Records of Big Game."

Probably the extreme weight of mature tusks might be taken at 100 pounds the pair, but the average would be about 50 pounds the pair.

Elephants are little used in Malaya for transport purposes, probably due to the fact that the training and caring of domestic elephants is not a congenial occupation for Malays. Neither are Malays experts at catching wild elephants.

The elephant in Malaya has been generally looked upon as a nuisance because of its enjoyment at times of native cultivation and its very unfortunate acquired taste for the cultivated rubber tree.

Ultimately the wild elephant in Malaya will be found only in well-guarded sanctuaries and in remote mountain ranges. The Malayan elephant is a great wanderer, even reaching the




tops of the highest mountains. This trait in his character saves him, to some extent, from the persecution which is undoubtedly his lot, and will probably allow him to outlast other species of large wild life now in the Peninsula.

* * * * *

THE illustrations of wild elephants in this number of the Straits Times Annual are reproductions of photographs taken in a salt-lick in Ulu Pahang. Wild elephants are almost impossible to photograph in a Malayan jungle. They seldom enter a salt-lick during such time as the light is good enough for photography; and when going about their ordinary jungle perambulations, or idling away their time during the heat of the day, the environment favoured by them is an impossible one for the photographer.


After many years of striving for an opportunity to photograph elephants under favourable opportunities of light and position, I had the supreme gratification, a few months ago, of being in a hide in a salt-lick at 4.45 p.m. when seven elephants came into the lick.



The light was good, with the late afternoon sun over my right shoulder; the elephants were entirely unsuspecting; and as the photographs show, two of them came down to the lick—35 yards from my camera—while one played tricks on a log. I made numbers of exposures including fifty feet of cine film.

An elephant, still near the edge of the jungle, presently got a taint in the wind, and swinging round shuffled off; the others immediately turned and also disappeared into the forest which surrounds the lick. Some instantaneous wave of understanding had warned the herd. It was the end of a perfect day! I had been in the hide since 8 a.m.

The most striking photographs are those of the elephant on the log. This elephant deliberately climbed up on to a log which was only about 15 inches wide, but, to make it a still more unstable perch, was split with a fissure of five or six inches in width running down the centre.



In turning round the elephant nearly fell off and threw out his trunk to steady or balance himself. It will be noticed that when this happened he had one fore foot on the top of the other one. He very nearly came a cropper. But having at last got a good footing on the log he smiled to himself, as one of the photographs clearly shows, and then contemplated (possibly with some envy) the elephants in the lick.

The elephants seen in the lick are an old cow and a young tusker, probably her calf. Until the old cow, obviously the leader of the herd, had satisfied herself at the lick, the other elephants would keep their distance. Elephants have Victorian ideas of respect for their elders! I have noticed this with scladang (bison) too.

THE really astonishing piece of information that I learnt from this incident is the fact that this acrobatic feat on the log was no initial effort, because after the elephants had gone I examined the log and found that the numerous excrescences on it were well polished, no doubt by a succession of elephants having played the same trick.

The two elephants in the lick are stirring up the mud with their trunks and feet, enabling them to get at the sulphur-impregnated sand at the bottom. They suck this up with their trunks and squirt the mixture into their mouths. They do not like it, but, I presume, take it as a medicine, some instinct teaching them the benefit thereof. Possibly experience also helps; they may appreciate that "salt-lick feeling"!

I have seen elephants do this before, shoulder to shoulder as in this case, shuddering as the nauseous liquid goes down. Those of us who are old enough to remember brimstone and treacle as a nursery medicine will appreciate those shudders!

The elephants remained in the vicinity of the lick all night and about one o'clock in the morning they came round my camp—it was about half a mile from the lick—but flashes from an electric torch soon drove them away.

At seven o'clock in the morning loud and prolonged trumpeting from the direction of the lick announced their departure and the ringing down of the curtain on a very interesting experience.



Theodore Hubback.



Above: the height of pachydermatous bliss.



Above: the height of pachydermatous bliss.



Below: a delightfully maternal expression!



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