

## XI. THE MALAYSIAN HERITAGE AND SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION: ENDAU-ROMPIN, 1985-1986

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The Malayan Nature Society (MNS), a non-governmental organisation with about 3,000 members, has since its formation in 1940 always had a strong emphasis on conservation. The Society's objective in mounting this expedition, a mammoth undertaking for any Society as it included raising funds to a tune of almost M \$ 400,000 (about £ 80,000), were several:

1. To gain permanent legal protection for the only area in Malaysia where there still is a viable population (estimated at between 20 and 25 animals) of the rare Sumatran rhinoceros.
2. To gain legal protection for one of the few remaining extensive areas of lowland forest left in the Southern part of Peninsular Malaysia.
3. To explore the area and to document the flora and fauna of this Southern forest type, which until then was relatively poorly known scientifically.
4. To increase the awareness among school children and the general public of the beauty and value of Malaysia's natural heritage.

### BOTANICAL FINDINGS

Scientists from all Malaysian research institutes and universities were invited to participate. As a result this area, which covers the forests drained by the River Endau (Johore) and River Rompin (Pahang), and which had been proposed as a national park in the Third Malaysia Plan as long ago as 1975, is scientifically now one of the better known areas in Malaysia. More than 100 scientists and their technical assistants took part in the expedition. Reports on the exploration of the area were published in the Malaysian Naturalist 39, 3/4 (1986) 1-58 (MN 39), (M\$ 2.00), vol. 40, 2 (1986) 1-44 (M\$ 2.00), and the scientific findings in the Malayan Nature Journal 41, 2/3 (1987) 83-446 (MNJ 41) (M\$ 30.00).

Exploration not only relocated most of the local endemics (*Calamus endauensis*, *Phyllagathis cordata*, *Phyllanthus watsonii*, *Salacca minuta*, *Schoutenia furfuracea*), but also investigated several interesting plant communities such as the rheophytic flora, the *Livistona* forest and the hill swamp forest, where several 'montane' species were found at previously unrecorded low altitudes (c. 700 m).

Not surprisingly from an area that is little known scientifically, many novelties were discovered. These included:

#### a) New records for Peninsular Malaysia.

1. 37 new diatoms (T.T. Wah *et al.*, MNJ 41: 159).
2. 1 entomogenous fungus, *Cordyceps dipterigena* (R. Kiew & B. Spooner, MNJ 41: 179).
3. 2 mosses, *Chaetomitrium beccarii*, *Sematophyllum microcladioides* (M. A.H. Mohamed & A.D.H. Mohamad, MNJ 41: 183).
4. 1 fern, *Schizaea fistulosa* (R. Kiew *et al.*, MNJ 41: 191).
5. 2 dicots, *Chionanthus lucens* and *Rothmannia kuchingensis* (K.M. Wong *et al.*, MNJ 41: 267).

## b) New species.

1. 2 palms, *Livistona endauensis* (J. Dransfield & K.M. Wong, MNJ 41: 119) and *Licuala dransfieldii* (R. Kiew, MNJ 42, in press).
2. 4 trees and 1 climber, *Anisophyllaea reticulata*, *Schoutenia leprosula*, *Morinda hispida* (K.M. Wong *et al.*, MNJ 41: 267), and *Barringtonia corneri* (Kiew & Wong, MNJ 41: 457).
3. 5 herbs, *Codonoboea nivea*, *Didissandra kiewii*, *Didymocarpus craspedodromus*, *D. falcatus*, *Loxocarpus tunkui*, *Phyllagathis stolonifera* (R. Kiew, MNJ 41: 201), and *Hoya endauensis* (R. Kiew, MNJ 42, in press).

## c) New biological phenomena described.

1. First record of a crab living in a *Nepenthes* pitcher (P.K.L. Ng & R.P. Lim, MNJ 41: 393).
2. The importance of leaf litter and fungal spores in the diet of forest grasshoppers (K.A. Monk, MNJ 41: 383).
3. Ant gardens in Malaysia (R. Kiew & S. Anthonysamy, MNJ 41: 303).
4. Tree roots ascending *Livistona* trunks (L.G. Saw *et al.*, MN 39: 18).

In addition, geological and zoological studies were carried out. There was also a strong emphasis on ecological studies with work being carried out on the riverine system (M. T. Lim, MNJ 41: 291; S.M. Phang & P. Leong, MNJ 41: 145), on plant biomass (E. Soepadmo, MNJ 41: 275), litter-fall (M. T. Lim, MNJ 41: 291), population studies of *Livistona endauensis* (J. Weiner & R. T. Corlett, MNJ 41: 297), as well as on epiphytes and ant plants (R. Kiew & S. Anthonysamy, MNJ 41: 303). A phytochemical survey covered 118 plants in this area (R. Kiew *et al.*, MNJ 41: 329), and 52 species used in aboriginal herbal medicine were also reported (C.E. Taylor & K.M. Wong, MNJ 41: 317).

Conservation importance of this area was not only emphasized by the number of endemic species found within the Endau-Rompin area, but also by the fact that there is no other area which protects this Southern forest type. It was also discovered to be the centre of distribution of the rare and endangered bamboo, *Racemobambos setifera* (K.M. Wong, MNJ 41: 249), and that the 'rare' banana, *Musa gracilis*, has in fact become more common as it has spread along old logging tracks (R. Kiew, MNJ 41: 239).

From the above findings, it is obvious that scientifically the expedition was a success, but had MNS managed to fulfill its other objectives?

## EDUCATION

In parallel with the scientific work ran a 4-day programme for school children. In the school holidays 400 children, mostly from urban areas, visited Base Camp. They instantly appreciated the pristine beauty of the area, became involved in nature study and enjoyed living in the outdoors. Many groups then went back and held an exhibition in their school to tell their classmates what they had done.

'I used to think economics was the most important consideration in development. Now I believe we have to make sure the natural environment is also protected.' (Thian Hock, student, Camp Log Book.)

500 volunteers and visitors from all walks of life visited the Base Camp where MNS organized guided walks around the area, which were often taken by scientists. The public's enthusiasm and enjoyment emphasized the potential of nature areas for tourism aimed at the nature lover. The volunteer programme met with mixed success. On the one hand they enjoyed the activities for visitors, on the other hand they were less enthusiastic about washing up for groups of 30 or more, or helping with taking scientific samples. ('But that's boring!', was the common reaction. Apparently the glamour of scientific discovery does not include repetitive work.)

#### PUBLICITY

MNS organized the expedition jointly with the STAR newspaper, and STAR took care of the publicity with MNS training and guiding their cub reporters around the expedition area. Almost daily reports came from Base Camp of the expedition activities and scientific findings. Perhaps what surprised us most was the genuine interest the general public showed in local natural history. One local TV-station made a 1-hour documentary of the area, which was shown in both Bahasa Malaysia and English.

Publicity is crucial in any conservation campaign. The constant enthusiastic reports, the new discoveries by Malaysian scientists, the obvious enjoyment of the general public and school children are more convincing to the local politician than well-meaning advice from overseas experts!

The expedition also coincided with the growing importance of tourism as a money-earner in Malaysia and has helped convince politicians that forests can generate income other than by logging them.

#### CONSERVATION

The expedition, by being a Malaysian expedition run by Malaysians for Malaysians, generated a lot of goodwill. Subsequent to the expedition a short 'workshop' was held for local government officers in the Base Camp to show them the area, to emphasize its conservation value and its potential for tourism.

The area falls in two states, Johore and Pahang. Both states have announced their commitment to the formation of a joint state park. (A state park and not a national park?, you might ask, but that is another story.) The need for the preparation of new state legislation for state parks has delayed the gazetting of the Endau-Rompin State Parks from the target date of July 1988, but it is presently underway.

The Malaysian Heritage and Scientific Expedition also convincingly showed that a large-scale expedition of high scientific standard can successfully be carried out by Malaysians. After all, if local people do not appreciate their own natural heritage, whatever the concern overseas, there is going to be little political will to conserve the tropical rain forest.

If you are interested in knowing more about the Malayan Nature Society, or would like to join or buy its publications, please write to: The Development Officer, POB 10750, 50724 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**Note:** *ENDAU-ROMPIN: a Malaysian Heritage* is the 'coffee table' book of the Expedition (see Chapter VI).