

RHINO ATTACKS ON MAN IN UDJUNG KULON

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Reports of attacks by Javanese rhino (Rhinoceros sondaicus) are quite rare. HOOGERWERF (1938) and SODY (1959) mentioned some cases, and SCHENKEL & SCHENKEL-HULLIGER (1969) also provided a general discussion of the aggressive behaviour of rhinos.

During my one year field study of monkeys in Ujung Kulon I encountered the very shy rhino five times. On one occasion we were also seriously attacked and my brother, who was with us at that time, was injured. This being the first direct report on such an instance, the editors of this journal asked me to write about it.

First I want to give some account of a few personal encounters with the rhino in its last refuge, the Ujung Kulon Nature Reserve. On 18 December 1970 during a heavy rain I walked with Saridan and Sardamin (guards) through a swampy salak thicket. After a turn we suddenly saw a rhino about five meters in front of us. It was an adult, probably a male specimen, it faced us motionlessly. We moved back behind the nearest big tree which happened to be only three meters away. I started to mount my camera, but I was not yet ready when the rhino fairly silently trotted away.

" Last October I was walking with Saridan, Sardamin and Misdi through a bamboo stand. We saw an, adult rhino at a distance, of about ten meters. Still before it was aware of our presence, we stepped back, to an open spot. Suddenly we heard a Snort and the rhino was moving a few steps noisily away from us. After a period of silence we advanced again and could see now part of the adult rhino and a new-born baby nearby. Soon the mother rhino turned in our direction and we immediately ran away. The rhino followed in a somewhat different direction and then kept still. After a short rest beside a tree we advanced again and then could observe the little rhino, both lying and walking a few steps. I made a few photographs and then we stole away like thieves.

A part consisting, of Albert Will (a horticulturist from Florida), my brother Henry Angst, Suwardi, Akmar and I were following the fresh tracks of two rhinos up a hill . on 7 January 1971 Near the top of the hill, in a stand of bangban, (Donax.sp.) and scattered trees, Suwardi and I-who were walking about fifteen meters in front of the others - heard breaking branches about twenty meters in front of us.. We Stopped to look, and immediately a rhino appeared and ran directly towards us. It was not quite fullgrown and I estimated its age being about one and a half years. jt was uttering loud, rhythmical sounds, rather like a steam locomotive.

suwardi and I ran together to the next tree, which was in front of us and somewhat uphill. The rhino proved very agile and almost succeeded in cutting us off. While I was jumping over a big root behind that helpful tree, the rhino gave my back leg a little push with its horn. suwardi continued his flight in the direction from which the rhino had just come. I hopped over the roots as the rhino twice chased me halfway around the tree. Then it turned off and I hastily climbed the tree. The rhino now charged the second part of the group. Akmar and Albert Will each had enough time to escape behind a tree. But my brother wanted to film it, but he did not then realize the danger until he saw the rhino heading straight for him. He jumped aside and the rhino passed by, but it stopped, turned quickly and attacked again. Henry ran downhill, the rhino right on his heels. He was caught and knocked down to the ground. He rolled around and was bitten three times. The bites were cut by the incisors of the lower jaw (rhinos have no incisors on the upper jaw). He bumped his head against a stone and then lay motionless, in a crouched position. The rhino, as Albert Will could see, nearly stepped over Henry's body, but instead of doing so, it turned away and disappeared. Then a second, adult rhino (perhaps the mother of the former one) passed nearby without attacking. My brother had three deep cuts on his right hip, lower leg and foot, and a lot of smaller wounds, but nothing was broken.

After five days without proper medical attention in Udjung Kulon, now he is home in Switzerland, and he hopes to leave the hospital soon.

Why did the rhino in the last encounter ,attack, whereas the ones on the other two instances did not ? It seems that not only external stimuli but also internal factors, either resulting from the individual life history, or just being momentary dispositions, play a role in determining the reaction of a rhino towards man. Because the man who meets a wild rhino normally has no idea about its internal state, its reaction towards him then is to a large extent unpredictable.

In 1966 and 1968 there were two men injured by rhinos in Udjung Kulon in quite the same manner as the one described above. Both victims recovered.

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