

Expedition to Borneo

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In 2001, an offer from the Mainz University gave me the opportunity to take part in a scientific expedition to Borneo (Kalimantan). This endeavour aimed at the exploration of the biodiversity of the Kayan Mentarang National park (Kalimantan), especially concerning its amphibian and reptilian faunae. My task was the analyse of the reptiles - in cooperation with Dr. Peter Sound, Gerhard Hallmann and Christian Langner. Prof. Dr. Michael Veith., the leader of the expedition, and Joachim Kosuch devoted their activity to the amphibians I was the sole participant to join all the three excursions.

Before we could even start our travel to Borneo, lots of written formulae and applications for research permissions etc. had to be accepted by the competent authorities a Djakarta. These procedures required more than a weak, as higher authorities will only take notice of the respective documents if the have been certified by the subordinate officials - a lengthy procedure which requires a considerable degree of patience. Of course, we had applied for a research permit already in Germany.

So we finally took a plane to Tarakan, an offshore island near Northeast Borneo. As our expedition was organized in close cooperation with the WWF Indonesia, the necessary details were discussed at

the local station. We also used the time to observe the long-nosed monkeys inhabiting the nearby mangrove reserve. During this period, we managed to shoot some excellent photos of these fascinating creatures. After a further three days, we finally travelled by boat from Tarakan to Borneo. There we spent the night, and the following morning, our journey continued upstream the River Kayan in a tender boat. After a tour of approx. 10 hours, the next overnight stay followed. In the morning, we head to break up very early. As the river proved to be more and more torrent, we often had to leave the boats and walk along the banks in order to pass the rapids. Numerous timbers cut down in the rainforests were highly dangerous obstacles, as they are thrown into the stream to use it as a cost-free means of transport. During our first tour, the water level dropped overnight so that we had considerable problems in crossing the next rapid. As a consequence, the night had to be spent among the rocks on the banks of the river. Because all our equipment had been unloaded at the opposite bank, we did not even have tents. Tremendous rainfall during the night solved the problem of passing the rapid, but we were soaked to the skin - The following morning, our expedition reached the next station where we spent the night in a tiny village; here we had to change to smaller boats as the journey became too risky for the large ones, but even with these vessels, we often had to disembark and walk along the banks. After a five days journey, we finally reached the WWF station in midst the rainforest. It proved to be equipped

excellently for our special purposes, offering even a solar installation which provided the current required in the evening hours, and the technical gadgets greatly supported our research work. Otherwise, the furniture was rather austere. The most annoying problem, however, were the mosquitoes and cockroaches which populated all the rooms in considerable numbers. We lived on rice and on anything which the forest provided. Occasionally, the village people gave us fish they had caught themselves.

Before we could start working, we had to pay a visit to the mayor of Long Alango, a village approx. 1 hour apart (by boat). After the official salutation, a feast was held in the evening. On this occasion, the villagers also presented traditional dances of the Dayak, the aboriginal inhabitants of Borneo. We were integrated into these ceremonies and had to take part in the dances as well. As the feast lasted till late in the night, the night was spent at the said village.

Afterwards, we finally could take up our research work. First of all, we examined the area immediately adjacent to the station. To this purpose, we controlled a certain transect at a given time every night in order to get an overview of the animals occurring here. On these occasions, we found a great number of frog species but only a few reptiles. As far as anurans were concerned, the genus *Ansonia* proved to be extremely interesting. *Bufo juxtasper*, a species we observed again and again

at night - excelled by its impressive size. However, we also observed various noteworthy species of tree frogs, e.g. *Polypedates otlophus*, *Rhacophorus reinwardtii*, *Rhacophorus pardalis* or *Rhacophorus appendiculatus*. Besides, specimens of *Cyrtodactylus consobrinus* appeared in the same trees every night, with only one gecko inhabiting a given trunk. Whereas frogs and toads proved to be very common, snakes were represented by single specimens only. However, the number of species occurring here was quite considerable: in the immediate surroundings of the station, we found *Python reticulatus*, *Gonyosoma oxycephalum*, *Dendrelaphis caudolineatus*, *Ahaetulla prasina*, *Amphiesma flavifrons*, *Boiga dendrophila*, *Boiga cynodon*, *Oligodon everetti*, *Oligodon purpurascens*, *Rhabdophis chrysargos*, *Trimeresurus popeiorum*, *Trimeresurus sumatranus*, *Tropidolaemus wagleri* and various other species. Some days alter, we started a tour to another region, but some porters were required to transport our equipment. The sole provision taken along was rice - all the rest had to be collected in the forest. So we regularly fished in the rivers we passed, and with a bit of luck, we also hunted a "bearded pig". Our porters proved to be extremely skilled when the tents had to be pitched. We disposed of special peaces of cloth which could be converted to comfortable camp beds by inserting rods or branches through certain loops. In this way, we spent several days in different regions. At daytime, we used to look for reptiles and other animals. Mammals proved to be very difficult to find, as these animals were usually very shy. In

an mountain brook, we found various tadpoles and even a soft-shelled terrapin of the species *Dogania subplana*. At night, the rainforest was scanned for nocturnal species, and we were not surprised when our helpers brought us specimens of the most various species of frogs and toads. *Megophrys nasuta* was one of the most noteworthy finds. Reptiles, however, were collected only very occasionally. High in the trees, we found some specimens of the genus *Cyrtodactylus* representing the species *C. yoshii* and *C. baluensis*, respectively, but we also collected some dragons (*Gonocephalus grandis*, *Gonocephalus bornensis* and *Aphanotis ornate*), diverse skinks and lots of insects.

The days passed by only too fast, and as we had to travel back by boat as well, a week was calculated for this. Unfortunately, my friend Joachim Kosuch fell so ill during the second tour that he had to be transported to Trakan in a small bush plane we chartered for this purpose. As luck would have it, Long Alango has a small runway on which the pilot could land. My friend obviously suffered from some kind of typhus so that he had to spend a few days in a hospital on Tarakan. Unfortunately, the reptiles collected did not represent any unknown species, but the frogs and toads offered a different situation. All the specimens we found during our excursions are presently stored in the collections of an Indonesian university, and we still await the export permit in order to prepare the respective descriptions. If our financial situation allows this, we would like to make further excursions on Borneo

during the next year.