



Rare images found of Northern Sumatran Rhinoceros Jackson From the colonial jungle into London Zoo

Hunted and captured from the Asian jungle in 1884 and encaged into the London Zoo up to 1910, to end up as a taxidermy specimen in Bristol Museum until the end of times. In a lot of lantern slides, photographed in London Zoo in the early 1900's, by an amateur photographer, this image of a Northern Sumatran Rhinoceros was found. It turns out to be the wellknown rhino Jackson, that lived in London Zoo between 1884 and 1910.

In the Bristol Museum in the United Kingdom, Jackson is still present as a lifesize taxidermy specimen. He is now standing in a display about 'uncomfortable truths'. The project seeks to uncover the darker stories behind museum objects. About how they were collected, what they represent and the difficult pasts hidden behind them. According to the museums website Jacksons body 'highlights the often traumatic relationship between humans and the natural world'.

From the wild into the zoo

Talking about 'early' zoo animals, their relationship with humans was often highly traumatic. Jackson - the name that this young rhinoceros was given - for example was captured as a 'baby' in the jungle in Myanmar (also called Burma), South East Asia on 27 March 1884. The rhinos were hunted by the locals and Jacksons parents will not have fared well eventually.

Jackson was captured by Scottish zoologist John Anderson who gathered animals for the Indian Museum in Calcutta, him being 'first curator' there from 1865 to 1887. Anderson catalogued the mammal and archaeological collections. Anderson made several 'collection expeditions' to China and Burma.



Jackson was still a small rhinoceros when he bumped into Anderson, then only 2 feet tall 'with pinkish skin covered with soft, pale grey hair'. Jackson was taken to and exhibited in the zoo in Calcutta, India for 2 years. In those times the Indian Army fought to 'pacify' the widespread rebellions against the imposition of British rule in Upper Burma. In 1886 Jackson was sent to London Zoo, arriving there on April 27. Jackson was the second Sumatran rhino to arrive in London Zoo, but the last surviving one of a total of 9, dying on November 22 in 1910.

After his death Jackson was offered to Bristol Museum as a taxidermy specimen. He was displayed there for decades. The Bristol Museum was bombed in World War II, but Jackson escaped with only singed ears and the partial loss of a horn.

Rare lantern slides

The magic lantern slides pictured here were made by an amateur photographer visiting the zoo. There were some other animals pictured also in the series, a chimpanzee, a lion, a warthog, a zebra and more. There were two lantern slides found picturing two different Northern Sumatran Rhino's. On the one image the second rhino can be seen in the neighbouring exhibit. The slides are marked 'Hairy Eared Rhinoceros'.

One image resembles the photo's of Jackson in the book 'London Zoo from old photographs', published in 2012. The rhinoceros on the other lantern slide is not Begum but one of the other 7 'imported' by London Zoo through the years. This dates the images between 1900 and 1910; which is right for the way the slides look. Magic Lantern slides were contact printed from the



original negative and most often are one of a kind. It is safe to say that these images are unique. Orientation of the images is correct; they are not mirrored, as the front was marked.

Breeding unsuccessful

London Zoo imported 9 Northern Sumatran Rhinos in total over the years; the female Begum being the first. The London Zoo acquired Begum in 1872, after her capture in Chittagong in 1868. The female rhino survived until 1900, setting the record of lifespan for a captive rhino. Jackson was the second in 1884, and also surviving the longest, until 1910.

In the late 1800's a lot of zoo's wanted a female and a male rhino, for breeding purposes. It is no coincidence Begum was female and Jackson - the second Northern Sumatran rhinoceros for London Zoo - was male. Breeding the animals provided advanced opportunities to secure the species for the zoo and to trade with zoos worldwide.

However for the Northern Sumatran rhinoceroses the ecosystem is highly important and they do not breed well in captivity. There was only one single known successful birth worldwide, in the Alipore Zoological Gardens of India in 1889.

Fire-eating rhino

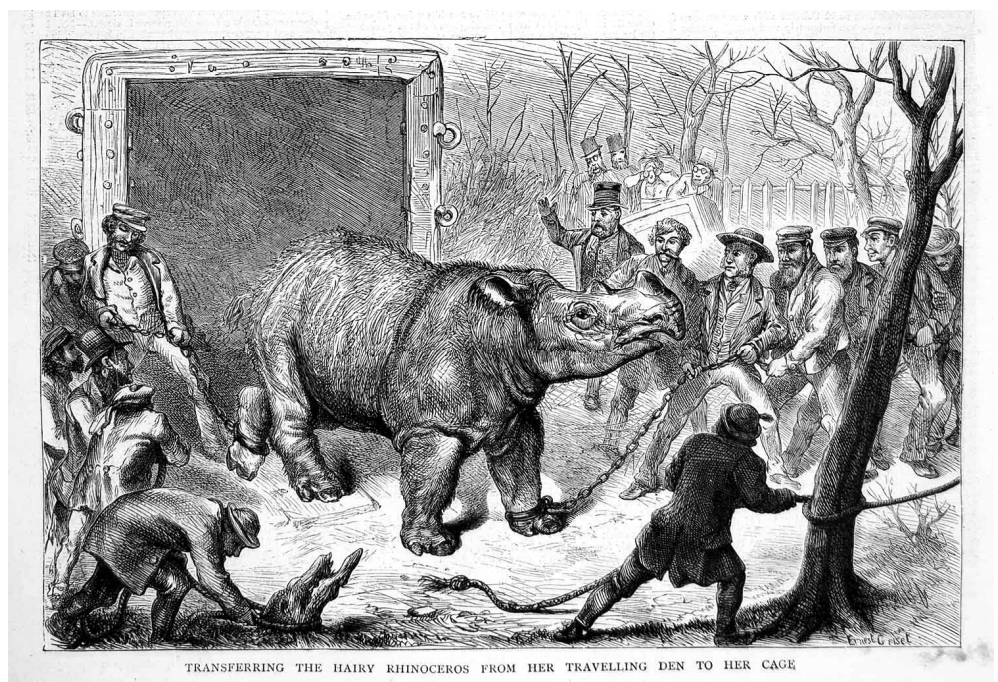
The Northern Sumatran Rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis lasiotis*), also known as Chittagong Rhinoceros or Northern Hairy (eared) Rhinoceros was the most widespread subspecies of Sumatran rhinoceros, as well as the only known subspecies native to mainland Asia. It has been officially declared as extinct on multiple occasions in the early 20th century. But small populations might still exist in the wild, such as in Burma and the Malaysian Peninsula. As of 2008 however, the species is considered as 'Critically Endangered'.

In Burma, where the Northern subspecies once lived, the belief was that the Sumatran rhino ate fire. Tales described the fire-eating rhino following smoke to its source, especially campfires, and then attacking the camp. There was also a Burmese belief that the best time to hunt was every July, when the Sumatran rhinos would congregate beneath the full moon.

About the money

An old plate of Begum and her arrival in London Zoo shows how the zoo's first Northern Sumatran Rhino was transported and 'welcomed'.

In the Illustrated London News of 23-3-1872 there is a story about the capture of Begum and how she was taken to London. It shows how the animal trade with zoos worked and how it was about money and not putting the wellbeing of the animal first.



“Begum was captured in 1869, by some natives, about sixteen hours south of the station of Chittagong, in British Burmah, having become immersed in a quicksand from which it was unable to extricate itself. On the news arriving at Chittagong, some officers engaged on the service of supplying elephants for the Indian army proceeded to the spot, and brought the rhinoceros into the station tethered between elephants. Not however without much difficulty, as two large rivers had to be crossed on the march home. At Chittagong Begum remained three years in a stockaded inclosure, prepared for her residence, in which a shed was built to give her shelter and a basin excavated for her to bathe in. Negotiations were on several occasions undertaken between her owners and the Zoological Society of London for the transfer of the animal. At length, in November last, Mr. William Jamrach of London, a well-known dealer in living animals, being at Calcutta, proceeded to Chittagong, and succeeded in effecting the purchase of the animal. A huge box of the best teak was constructed for her habitation on board ship, and a large supply of fresh provisions laid in for her consumption, as well as for that of the other animals (including five elephants) imported by Mr. Jamrach in the same vessel. ... Begum is about 4 feet high and 8 feet in length, from the snout to the root of the tail. With the general form of the Indian rhinoceros she combines many curious peculiarities. She is covered all over with short bristles, about an inch in length, and has the margins of the ears fringed with long, drooping hairs. There are two short horns on the nose, the hindermost just above the eye, the other above the nostril. A strong well-marked fold crosses the back, and other folds are on the body ; but there is none of the massive armour-like sheathing that is seen in the Indian rhinoceros.”

“Out of five known living species of rhinoceros the Zoological Society has now succeeded in obtaining specimens of three - the Indian (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), the Sumatran (*R. sumatrensis*) and the African black rhinoceros (*R. bicornis*). The two not yet acquired are the Soudaic rhinoceros (*R. soudaicus*) of Sumatra and Java - a one-horned species resembling the Indian rhinoceros - and the African white rhinoceros (*R. simus*) with two long horns. Any of our foreign correspondents who might be able to assist the society in obtaining specimens of these last-mentioned animals would be not only rendering a service to science by so doing, but would also probably benefit himself, as the Zoological Society are extremely liberal in their dealings when such rare animals are offered to them, and have, we understand, paid upwards of 1.200 pounds for their last acquisition.”

Questionable

Zoo's would pay very high fees to add captured animals to their collection, thus driving the reason for the capture of the animals in the jungle. The animals were simply taken from the wild, regardless of endangering the species or the wellbeing of the animals. This was a questionable activity for zoos that claimed to want to preserve and protect the species, even if the animals were hunted by the local population. It would have been better to protect the animals in the wild, especially since Burma was under colonial British rule.

Jackson is present in the Bristol Museum still. Quietly standing its ground there; trying to teach visitors a lesson that mankind still hasn't learned fully to this day.

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Sources:

London Zoo

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Wikipedia

Illustrated London News, 23-3-1872

colonizinganimals.blog. Jackson the Rhinoceros, by Jonathan Saha, 2015

London Zoo from Old Photographs - 1852-1914, by John Edwards, 2012

The Royal Natural History, volume 2, Richard Lydekker, 1894

Image of Jackson in the bomb damaged museum; copyright Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives.

As alive as Jackson can be today. One of the Lantern Slide images professionally converted into 3D by stereoscopic specialist Ronald Schalekamp. Viewing through a parallel 3D viewer - for example a Loreo Pixi - brings the image ánd Jackson alive ... almost.

