

Report from Malaysia

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KUALA LUMPUR, the capital of Malaysia, is a modern city of half a million people, but to the north and east there is excellent tropical rain forest within fifteen miles of the center of town. It is no trick at all to have lunch of rice and roast mouse deer with the aborigines in a forest camp, and be back in town in time for dinner at home. All that is needed is a jeep for transport, and a hot bath to

they could be trapped alive and transported back to a laboratory.

As it turned out, the Zoology Department of the University of Malaya was an excellent base of operations for such a program. It has fine laboratories and field equipment, and the staff really know the country around Kuala Lumpur, which saved a good deal of the time that usually has to be spent on explora-

cental mammals, but they are of scientific interest because the very first placental mammals must have looked and acted very much like these.

Trying to trap gymnures alive was frustrating at first. We set up a camp in the mountains twenty-five miles behind Kuala Lumpur and put out every trap we had. Gymnures are said to find durian irresistible so we hunted out a durian tree in the jungle and baited traps with the fruit. We offered immense rewards to the aborigines for every gymnure they brought in alive. At the end of six days we had caught one lesser gymnure, and it was dead in the trap. Our luck was even worse at other localities. I began to fear that the work on gymnure behavior would have to be washed out. Then just before Christmas we went back to the original camp and got three gymnures the first day and in a week I had all the material I needed. Their locomotion and feeding behavior are now preserved on motion picture film, and we have embalmed specimens for anatomical studies that will tie in with the data on behavior.

Making forays into the jungle between faculty meetings worked out so well, thanks largely to the geography of the hinterland behind Kuala Lumpur, that the Museum now has a collection of about three hundred Malayan mammals and several hundred amphibians and reptiles. Some are species not previously represented in the Museum's research collections, and others provide good series of forms that were inadequately represented. Several mammals were embalmed at the University of Malaya for later anatomical study at Chicago, and the skeletons of others were preserved. The fact that modern university facilities and rich tropical rain forest are almost side by side at Kuala Lumpur makes the University of Malaya probably the best place in the world for many kinds of tropical research.



This greater gymnure was trapped alive for behavioral studies.

wash the jungle off before dressing for dinner.

When I accepted an invitation to fill a temporary post in the Zoology Department at the University of Malaya last year, I wondered how much time teaching and administrative duties would leave for my own research program. The Museum needed a reference collection of Malayan mammals and other vertebrates, but making such collections is normally a full time job and it can scarcely be done on a university campus. Besides, ever since I had first encountered them on an earlier trip to Borneo, I had wanted to investigate the behavior of some very primitive mammals that live in Borneo and Malaya—provided

tion. The tropical forest is so close to the campus that it was always possible to get out for a few days or hours.

The mammals I wanted for behavioral studies are not exhibited in zoos and few people have ever seen them alive or even know that such creatures exist. They are rather drab-looking insectivores—the greater gymnure (*Echinorex*), nearly as big as an opossum, and the lesser gymnure (*Hylomys*), not much larger than a good-sized mouse—that somehow survived in the great tropical forests of southeastern Asia long after their relatives became extinct in other parts of the earth. They can scarcely be expected to be handsome, since they are among the most primitive of living pla-



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