

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mentawi Group, to the west of Sumatra, consists of the islands of Siberut, Sipora, and North and South Pagi. The first and northernmost, roughly quadrilateral, about sixty geographical miles long and twenty-five wide, is larger than the other three (which are fairly equal in size) put together: there are also a number of small islands near their shores. The group lies parallel to the coast of Sumatra and about fifty to eighty miles distant: its northern extremity is Lat. 1° South.

Sipora Island had been visited by Dr. E. Modigliani in 1892 and Herr Alfred Maass in 1897 and the Pagi Islands by Dr. W. L. Abbott and myself in 1902, but Siberut Island had never been worked by naturalists until I landed there in September 1924 accompanied by Mr. N. Smedley, Assistant Curator of the Raffles Museum, Singapore; Dr. H. H. Karny, Entomologist of the Zoological Museum, Buitenzorg, Java; and a party of native assistants. I had several times since the visit to the Pagi Islands applied to the Government of Netherlands India for permission to visit Siberut, but sanction had been withheld on account of the attitude of the Indonesian inhabitants, the last in the group to come under administration. At length in 1923, however, the Government was able to agree to a visit, and when the time came a year later to make it, gave assistance, as usual, in a most generous manner. A month was spent on Siberut (Sept.—Oct.) and another on Sipora (Oct.—Nov.), and besides obtaining much zoological material, both vertebrate and invertebrate, collections of plants and ethnographical objects were made as well. Reports on all these, as prepared, are being published under the general title "Spolia Mentawiensia". The following have already appeared:—

- i. The Flora of the Mentawi Islands. H. N. Ridley, Kew Bulletin, 1926, pp. 56—94.
- ii. Birds. F. N. Chasen and C. Boden Kloss, Ibis, 1926, pp. 269—306, pl. iii and map.
- iii. Three new birds from the Mentawi Islands. J. H. Riley, Proc. Biol. Soc. Washington, XL, 1927, pp. 95—96.
- iv. Reptiles and Amphibians. Malcolm A. Smith, Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist. (9) 1926, xviii, pp. 76—81.
- v. Zoraptera. H. H. Karny, Treubia, ix, 1926, pp. 1—5, pl. i, text-figs. 1—3.
- vi. Dragonflies. F. F. Laidlaw, Journ. Malayan Branch Roy. Asiat. Soc. iv, 1926, pp. 214—233, figs. 1—5.
- vii. Dermaptera. A. Borelli, *t.c.s.* pp. 384—391, figs. 1, 2.
- viii. Fulgoroidea, Homoptera. F. Muir, *t.c.s.* pp. 392—412, figs. 1—34.

- ix. Homoptera—Fulgoroidea. C. F. Baker, Philippine Journ. Sci. xxxii, 1927, pp. 391—410, pl. i, text-figs. 1—13.
- x. Mantidæ. F. Werner, Treubia, ix, 1927, pp. 413—419.
- xi. Mammals. F. N. Chasen and C. Boden Kloss, Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London, 1927, pp. 797—840, pls. i—v and Map.
- xii. Acridiidae (Orthoptera) C. Willemse, Journ. Malayan Br., Roy. Asiat. Soc., vi, 1928, pp. 1—12, pls. i—iii and text-figure.
- xiii. Membracidae, Homoptera. W. D. Funkhouser, *t.c.s.*, pp. 13, 14.
- xiv. Pterydophyta. R. E. Holtum, *t.c.s.*, pp. 14—23, pl. iv.
- xv. Musci. H. N. Dixon, *t.c.s.*, pp. 23, 24.

Dr. H. H. Karny has also published an illustrated popular account of the visit:—*Auf den Glückseln (mit 60 Abbildungen)*: Natur, xvii, 1926, pp. 9—16, 28—39, 60—67, 80—89, 102—110. (Leipzig).

The group is forested all over, and the collections were made at various localities near the Government stations of Siberut, in the island of that name, and Sioban in Sipora: they came from the sea-shore, low-lying ground, the swamps, cultivated areas, and from such hills as were accessible.

The islands are not very pleasant collecting-grounds: they are mostly swamp, out of which rise hills nowhere more than 1,500 feet high and generally difficult to get at, being surrounded by soft ground. The sago-palm is common. The native villages are situated on the banks of rivers some distance upstream, and there are scarcely any paths except those made by the Dutch military posts: these are generally through flat land and are often untraversable owing to floods. There is much rain throughout the year. The islands are unhealthy: in spite of systematic employment of quinine and other precautions, all the members of a party of fifteen, except myself, suffered from malaria either on the islands or soon after leaving them.

As much on the latter account as because my period of absence from headquarters was limited, the Pagi Islands were not visited again.

The Mentawi Islands are apparently connected with each other by a sea-bottom of less than 100 fathoms, and most bathygraphical charts show a connection with Sumatra, *via* the Batu Islands to the north-east, by a narrow ridge of similar soundings; but I am inclined to doubt whether this ridge is as unbroken as indicated, for the faunas of the groups differ greatly; though the Mentawi Islands possess a much richer mammalian fauna than the undoubtedly deep-water islands of Simalur and Engano at the

extremities of the West Sumatran chain of islands, the fauna is much more peculiar and differentiated than that of Nias Island, also represented as being within the one-hundred-fathom line.

Apart from the connecting ridge, the group is surrounded by depths of 100—500 fathoms of water; further, everywhere directly between it and Sumatra lies the long Mentawi Basin with depths of 500—1,000 fathoms. Such conditions render several of the West Sumatran Islands, in spite of small size and lack of height, quite as distinct from each other and from the rest of Malaysia as the larger areas of that sub-region are from each other.

Various hypotheses have been offered as to the former conditions of the West Sumatran Islands, but most of them were made by students of the reptilian faunas.

In "Proceedings of the Zoological Society" (1927, pp. 797—807 and map) I discussed the past and present conditions of the Andaman-Christmas Island chain from the indications afforded by their mammals (q.v.), which, with the birds, are the best known of their animal classes and which are more instructive than the latter.

We have nothing to say about the habits of the Mentawi Blattidæ. They were mostly secured by our native assistants; and when a collector is endeavouring to obtain as much as he can of everything in a limited period he has no time for field studies. Dr. Hanitsch has aptly summed up this case:—"With most of us collectors the life history of an insect begins in the net and ends in the bottle!" C. Boden Kloss.