

A Note on the Mammals of Christmas Island

By C. A. GIBSON-HILL

To a large extent the information obtained about the mammals is negative in nature. In 1887 the officers of the *Flying Fish* and J. J. Lister collected specimens of two rats, a large fruit-bat and a shrew (all indigenous to the island), and saw a small, insectivorous bat. C. W. Andrews took examples of all five species in 1896-97, but was unable to make any further additions to the list. The fauna as established in the *Monograph of Christmas Island* is thus,

- Crocidura trichura* Dobs.
- Pteropus melanotus natalis* Thos.
- Pipistrellus murrayi* Andrs.
- Rattus macleari* (Thos.).
- Rattus nativitatis* (Thos.).

according to the nomenclature of Chasen's Handlist of Malaysian Mammals, (Bull. Raff. Mus., 1940).

On his second visit to the island, in 1908, Andrews found considerable numbers of introduced ship rats, particularly in the neighbourhood of the settlement and landing piers, but no signs of the two indigenous rats or the shrew. He formed the opinion that the latter were extinct, and, as the introduced rats had barely penetrated to the further corners of the island, that the indigenous species had been killed by trypanosomes or other pathogenetic organisms brought in by the newcomers.

In 1933 the island was visited by Prof. J. W. Harms of Tubingen University. On his return he claimed to have taken examples of the indigenous rats, but his specimens have never been submitted to the Raffles Museum or the British Museum for confirmation. If he was successful, Prof. Harms is the only field worker who has handled these species since 1897.

Both bats, of which Mr. Tweedie took examples in 1932, were flourishing during the period of my stay on the island. The fruitbat was even a nuisance as it fed freely on the papayas. I set traps for rats in all parts, and during the last three months of 1940 was assisted by a Dayak collector from the Raffles Museum. All that we ever caught was a large number of introduced rats, of which two hundred were measured and sample series sent to Mr. Chasen. In a brief examination he identified them provisionally as *Rattus rattus* subsp. (probably *frugivorus* (Raf.)), *Rattus concolor* subsp. and *Rattus norvegicus norvegicus* (Ersl.). In general they were more plentiful at the north-east corner, but it was possible to collect specimens of at least the

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first two from any part of the island. We also took a number of specimens of *Mus musculus ?rama* Cantor in the settlement at Flying Fish Cove. Nowhere did we find any evidence of *Rattus macleari* or *R. nativitatis*. From this work one would list the extant mammals as

- Pteropus melanotus natalis* Thos.¹ ✓ 2 RC
- Pipistrellus murrayi* Andrs.¹ ✓ 2 RC
- Rattus rattus ?frugivorus* (Raf.)²
- Rattus concolor* subsp.²
- Rattus norvegicus norvegicus* (Erxl.)²
- Mus musculus ?rama* Cantor.² ✓ 2 RC

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- 1. = indigenous.
 - 2. = introduced since 1897.