

Not one but two tigers

By Alfred Leclair

A villager informed me that a tiger had taken away one of his cows. He and his friends had searched the whole of the grazing land with negative result. The next morning I walked along the jungle bordering the grazing field and eventually heard the noise I was expecting: the humming of myriad of flies indicating a dead animal in the vicinity. Guided by the hum I found the cow only twenty yards inside the jungle and well hidden under a bush. A tiger may eat his kill directly after having removed it into high grass or bush but again, probably when not very hungry, he will hide his prey for a day or two. Unlike as in the "wild beast park" in Africa where the lion has no worries for the food of tomorrow, the tiger in the Malay Archipelago may sometime go a whole week without finding a single morsel to alleviate his hunger and that is the time when pushed by hunger he will dare come out in the vicinity of habitations and will carry away cows, dogs or goats or if unsuccessful, he will go for a man and having found it an easy prey and tasty he will repeat this carnage every two or three days until he is poisoned, trapped or shot.

Ten yards away from the dead cow there was a tree with a low crown, good enough for fixing a piece of a board for a seat. A small part of the bush was slashed so that the cow could be seen from the tree. At dusk, i.e. at 6:30 pm., we were in the tree and I was exercising the man to switch on the flash-light on the cow at a signal from me. I could not understand why the man was so stupid, he could not direct the beam on the cow at the first go, he kind of search the place before discovering the cow. This was not good enough. There was a small branch just overhead; I pulled off my belt and fastened the flash-light on the branch and in the proper direction, after a couple more trial I was satisfied the man understood to push the switch on.

Half an hour later I heard the tearing of skin and meat and crushing of bones. The man said or rather whispered "he is there, he is there". I put my hand on his mouth to stop him speaking and felt he was shivering of fright. I would have waited a little longer for a tiger to begin is very alert and watchful and time has to be allowed for him to gain confidence, however seen the condition of the man I gave the sign, (I forgot to mention I had chosen this man because his job was making charcoal in the jungle and always worked alone thereby believing him to be fearless). In his precipitation to do away with this impenetrable darkness he pushed the switch with such force that the flash-light was displaced however apart. From the center beam there are the side rays and these rays were enough to reflect the tiger's eyes, there were not two but four eyes, my man said with shattering teeth " there are two, look, look, there are two" just like he was informing me of something I was unaware. I aimed between one pair of eyes and pulled the trigger. The other tiger replied with a tremendous roar and I saw two eyes soaring in the air in our direction; then I lost the eyes: he must have drop back to earth quite near our tree. But judge of my consternation when I discovered that my man was no more beside me; he had dropped off the tree. Was he being mauled by the tiger? I could see nothing I tried to tear down the flash-light but nothing doing I had to undo the belt and at last I could shine the beam below; the man was sprawled at the foot of the tree unconscious and the tiger was not to be seen.

I came down and slapped the man until he came back to his senses. I said what do you think you were trying to do feed the tiger? He said "where are they"? I said "one is away thanks to your nice help with the flash-light; the other is dead". He said "pardon me sir but the roar and the jump of that tiger made me a little giddy but I am alright now". I said the one I shot is no doubt dead but there is a possibility that he is just wounded; therefore I have to go and see. "Can I trust you to hold the light over my shoulder from the back"? He said "no, no sir it is too dangerous" and began shivering again so that I had to give up the attempt. The next morning I found the beast just where he had been with a round hole in his brains. This is of course the story of only one tiger of the score or so which I shot in the Far-East.

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