

# Collecting With Rhinos

by Larry Noblick, Ph.D., Collections Manager

On the west coast of Java lies a peninsula that is attached to the mainland Java by a very narrow isthmus. It is part of one of Indonesia's finest parks, Ujung Kulon National Park, and refuge for the last fifty surviving Java Rhinos. My adventure in Ujung Kulon started in Tamanjaya, a village without telephones or electricity. Joko, an Indonesian palm expert, Enday, our driver, and I stayed the night in the residence of a local carpenter and woodcarver. The next day (October 1, 1998), with the help of our three porters and guide, Salem, we moved the baggage to the National Park's boat. As it was low tide, the baggage could only be moved to the larger boat by way of a small rubber life raft, which took two trips. Three hours later we arrived at Peucang Island. Deer on the island were so tame that they stared at us from close range. Seaside monkeys combed the shores for food, and schools of fish swam under our boat on their way to and from neighboring coral reefs. During a torrential down-pour, we made our first collection (*Cycas rumphii*) within the park from a small coastal population. Later, we returned to the peninsula by boat, going ashore at Cidaon. As we still had a seven-kilometer walk to the Cibunar security post on the south side of the peninsula, we decided not to collect this part of the trail then, but to mark interesting collecting opportunities for our return. Much of the trail from Cidaon to Cibunar was through lowland forest in ankle-deep water; our feet were soaked from the very start. The beginning of the trail was through part of a large *Nypa fruticans* swamp, and then passed by a large open area with wild Banteng (a native cow relative). We managed to collect a few floating fruits of a recently ripened infructescence of *Nypa fruticans* which we hid away for our return. We also collected scattered seeds along the trail of *Arenga obtusifolia*, called "langkap" in Indonesian, the most dominant palm of the area. We successfully arrived at the Cibunar security post just before sunset, but because of the swollen river, we had to back-track to cross over at a safer spot. Later I met a devout Moslem who, on a pilgrimage, nearly drowned last year as he tried to cross this very stream in the same spot. He had been swept out to sea and brutally beaten around in the surf before fighting his way back to shore.

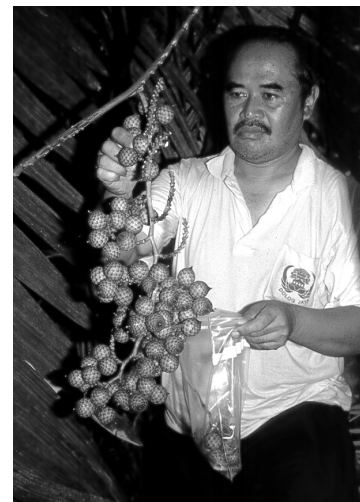
We arose early the next morning (October 2) to start up the slope of Mt. Payung. We collected *Oncosperma tigillarum* ("nibung"), taking advantage of a tree that someone had recently sacrificed, apparently for food. We also collected two large rattans, *Daemonorops rubra* with its spiny cirrus (modified leaf tips) and *Calamus ornatus* with its very impressive ten-meter-long spiny flagella that are born opposite the leaves. Rattans are well-armed with clusters of grappling hook-like spines which aid it in climbing its way into the canopy. Several men are needed to pull them down to collect the fruit and make a herbarium voucher. In the early afternoon, we returned to Cibunar and explored the alluvial flood plains of the Cibunar River, where we found *Areca catechu*.

On October 3, we had a very successful day collecting some of our previously marked palms along the trail back to Cidaon. The first pleasant treat of the day was our discovery of a *Corypa utan* with fruits, as they only fruit once in their lifetime of 60-80 years. Other palms collected that day were *Pinanga kuhlii*, *Licuala spinosa*, *Arenga obtusifolia*, a few fruits of *Caryota mitis*, and *Nypa fruticans*. Along the trail we saw tracks of Banteng, deer, and even a leopard. We arrived at the boat at 4:00 pm.

On the ride to Tamanjaya, the boat was tossed about by a raging thunderstorm. Luckily it was high tide when we reached Tamanjaya in the dark and the large boat was able to pull directly up to the dock. The thunderstorm had left the village in a state of flash flood and the walk back to the woodcarver's residence was through knee-deep water in places. I was especially troubled as we crossed one of the larger swollen streams by way of a crudely built log bridge. I knew that the depth of the water just centimeters

below the logs was between 3-4 meters, more than enough to sweep one out to sea; I couldn't stop thinking of the Moslem who almost drowned. Fortunately, we arrived safely at the woodcarver's home where we slept sound and dry.

The Ujung Kulon peninsula proved to be the most palm-rich area of Java and during those three days, we successfully collected 1,785 seeds or over half of the 3,170 total seeds collected during the trip. Half of this collection was shared with the Indonesian Botanical Garden in Bogor, which collaborated so well with us.



Enday collecting fruits from a branch of *Calamus ornatus*.

Stopping for a snack in the forest on Mt. Payung near Cibunar. Larry Noblick is shown on the right.

