

## ON a BLACK VARIETY of FELIS TEMMINCKI from SUMATRA.

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Last year the Museum at Buitenzorg came into possession of a black variety of *Felis temmincki* through the kind offices of the late Mr C. L. v. D. PLAS, Assistant-Resident of Pajakombo, Sumatra's West Coast. The animal was trapped by Mr F. RINNER, 17th January 1929, near Loeboek Koeok, at an elevation of 800 m.

A description of this almost entirely black specimen follows here.

*Colour*: Upperparts glossy black with brownish hue and a very few white hairs intermingled. Fur consisting of longer hairs, black with lighter bases, and dark greyish woolly hairs. Head black above; the long whiskers brownish; ear on the outside black; inside sparsely haired, blackish hairs around the margin, and a few white hairs with dark tips at the inner corner. Underparts brownish black, white hairs more numerous; breast and belly of a still lighter colour owing to the absence of the long black hairs. Of the typical markings of normal specimens nothing is to be seen excepted a narrow dark stripe on the cheeks between the mouth-angle and the ear, and very faintly indicated narrow black bands on the throat. The small spots on the breast can also be traced. Tail above same colour as the back; underneath dark greyish brown.

*Measurements* (those of a normal example between brackets): —

Total length: 1080 mm (1162); head and body, 660 mm (743); tail, 420 mm (419).

*Skull*: basilar length, 106.8 (118.2); zygomatic breadth, 85.7 (91); least postorbital breadth, 34.1 (32.7); median length of nasals, 22.8 (29.8); length upper molar series, 28.0 (29.8); length lower molar series, 27.8 (30.6).

The skull has the same shape as that of a red-coloured individual but is somewhat smaller; the true molar is already developed but not yet fully extruded; all canines, except the right upper one, are broken off.

A black or dark variety of *Felis temmincki* (*moormensis* HODGS.) from Nepal has twice been described and named: once by HORSFIELD in 1855 and once by GRAY in 1863.

HORSFIELD's description runs as follows:

"*Felis Murmensis*, HODGS. Proc. Zool. Soc. 1832, p. 10, varietas *nigra*. Mr. HODGSON has recently discovered a very beautiful variety, of a saturated brown or black colour, of which the collection contains several specimens. In size and external character it agrees exactly with the brown-red or bay species,

first described in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society'. The lateral marks on the cheeks, forehead and thighs are the same, and also a slight whitish discoloration on the tip of the tail. It is a very beautiful variety". (Extract from Ann. Mag. of Nat. Hist. Vol. XVI, 1855, p. 105) <sup>1)</sup>

The second name was made valid by GRAY in his 2nd edition of the "Catalogue of specimens and drawings presented by B. H. HODGSON to the "British Museum" (1863). The description (p. 4) is as follows:

"*Felis nigrescens* HODGSON n. sp. Hab. Darjiling Jan. 1849.

Very like *F. murmensis* and may possibly be a black variety of it". <sup>2)</sup>

From the descriptions it is not quite clear whether these two varieties are identical, the *nigra* of HORSFIELD having the characteristic marks of the typical *temmincki* still quite distinguishable, but both varieties were based on specimens collected by HODGSON. It seems probable that GRAY, when validating HODGSON's name, was unaware that HORSFIELD had already described the black variety.

The finding of this black variety of *temmincki* in Sumatra is of interest in connection with the controversy about the presence of the common panther (*Felis pardus*) in Sumatra. Several authors maintain the occurrence of the black panther in Sumatra, but there seems to be no material from Sumatra in any collection neither of normally coloured nor of black panthers. The only more or less positive record is by SCHNEIDER (Zool. Jahrb. Syst. Bd. 23, 1905, p. 102), who saw a black specimen in captivity at Tandjung Laut (Sumatra's East Coast); the beast escaped, however.

An interesting note on this question was written by JACOBSON (Journ. F.M.S. Mus. X 1921, p. 238) who concludes his article with the following words:

"My opinion, that the normally coloured *Felis pardus* does not live in Sumatra is still unshaken, and I am very much inclined to believe that the black animals shot or seen in this country are nothing else than melanistic examples of *Felis nebulosa*".

Now the above-mentioned record of an entirely black variety of *temmincki* may help to solve the problem. This melanistic specimen looks very much like a black panther and may easily be mistaken for it, at least when closer examination is excluded. Only the size is much smaller and therefore it may be that also black individuals of *Felis nebulosa* occur which are looked upon as black panthers.

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<sup>1)</sup> I owe this extract to the kindness of the Director of the Indian Museum, Calcutta; the said volume of the Annals being neither in our library nor in Singapore.

<sup>2)</sup> I have to thank Mr. C. BODEN KLOSS of Singapore for this note, as we have not got the above-mentioned publication.