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BEARDED PIGS (*SUS BARBATUS*): TOOTH-WEAR AND AGING WILD POPULATIONS IN SARAWAK

Earl of Cranbrook and David Labang

INTRODUCTION

The only wild pig of Borneo is the bearded pig, *Sus Barbatus* (Corbet & Hill, 1992). This is a long-snouted pig, stripe-coated when JL young, dark grey as an immature, but appearing white when fat and full grown. Bearded pigs occur in all natural and semi-natural habitats on the island from the beach to mountain tops (Medway, 1977) and, in the interior, are the most abundant and most heavily hunted large mammal. While local breeding populations can (or could, in the past) be found at any given place at all times of the year, the bearded pig is famous for its periodic mass movements (Caldecott & Caldecott, 1985; Pfeffer & Caldecott, 1986). As shown by remains recovered in the excavations at Niah Cave, Sarawak, bearded pigs have been hunted by the inhabitants of Borneo for at least the past —40,000 years (Medway, 1978).

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It is commonplace for rural people of the Malayan and Southwest Pacific region to keep the jawbones of their quarry (and, occasionally, skulls) as trophies of the hunt, or as mementos of a feast (Medway, 1973). During 1977-78, as participants in the Sarawak Forest Department/Royal Geographical Society expedition to Gunung Mulu (Hanbury-Tenison, 1980), we confirmed that this custom is normal among the roving Penan people of the interior northeast of the State. Jaws of large and medium-sized mammals were hung neatly in the abandoned temporary huts of their encampments, providing a useful guide to their hunting achievements and diet (Labang & Medway, 1979). In August 1977, we took advantage of this habit to gather up (with the residents' permission) all the skulls and jaws hanging from trees or scattered on the ground at Long Iman, a small, government sponsored village on the Tutoh river occupied by a community of Penan families who, at that time, had been semi-settled for less than ten years.

We found the following remains at Long Iman:

- One cranium (skull) of a male sambar deer, *Cervus unicolor*, with full permanent dentition. The antler pedicels had been gnawed by dogs.
- Three crania of pig-tailed macaque, *Macaca nemestrina*. All male, aged, with full permanent dentition, moderately to well worn. These skulls had been opened by a tangential cut (by a right-handed man) removing the dorso-parietal region, presumably to extract the brains.
- Representing bearded pigs, we found six more or less complete crania, from all but one of which the brains had been extracted; six half skulls, longitudinally divided; three nasal portions of skulls, and one palate. More significantly, we found 70 more or less complete mandibles. These 70 lower jaws form the basic collection described below, now deposited in the Natural History Museum, London.

At the time we took this collection, we also asked the hunters of Long Iman village to continue to keep lower jaws as trophies. Almost a year later, in 1978, we sexed, measured and recorded the wear score on the 41 jaws that they had saved. We also took comparable data of 19 pigs killed during the same period in the Sungai Melinau – Sungai Birau area by a skilled local Penan hunter, Nyapun, who assisted the expedition team in a variety of ways. These specimens were not kept.

Our objective, at the time, was two-fold: first, to derive a set of dental measurements and tooth-wear characteristics for comparative use in relation to bearded pig remains recovered at archaeological sites in Sarawak and, second, to see what inferences could be made, based on this material, about the hunting practices of the Penan people and the population of bearded pigs on which they depended so heavily for their dietary protein.

For 25 years these observations have remained on file. Our specimens deposited in the Natural History Museum have proved useful in other research fields, including pig taxonomy (R. Sabin, *pers. comm.*). We feel it is timely to publish the background information, and our conclusions.