Martin Stummer

The Man In The Fairy Tale Isle

A true story narrated by Laura Montez

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This is the life story of a man who caused a zoological sensation in the late sixties, being the first and only one who located the extremely rare and endangered Mountain Tapir in the jungles of South America.

One of the last great collectors of wildlife and respected in the elite field of zoology, Martin Stummer had lived a dangerous and exciting life among unexplored jungle tribes, encountered bizarre sexual rituals and experienced the magical power of trees and their revelations.

At the peak of his career, he gave up wildlife collection and retired to a small tropical island somewhere in the Indo-Pacific Ocean to build his own “fairy tale kingdom.”

Europeans might have seen him in ARD, ZDF, RTL and many other television stations while being interviewed about his exotic island NAGARAO where strange stories abound.

Laura Montez

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PROLOGUE

The past never dies

It is an extremely hot summer this year and although they are used to scorching humidity, resident Ilonggos themselves couldn't hide their discomfort. It is worse for the few white expatriates who decided to settle in this southern part of the archipelago.

Being the second oldest city in the Philippines, Ilo-ilo has its own unique simple attractions. It may not be as cosmopolitan as Manila or Cebu, but every local or foreign tourist who gets to see the place shall have quaint memories to cherish.

This is the region where one irrepressible and wonderful German expatriate chose to dwell for more than 20 years – Martin Stummer. Loquacious and highly critical of things and systems that don't work consistently Martin has been well known in this part of Panay Island for his hard-hitting opinion columns in local newspapers.

Martin has, for a few days, left Nagarao Island, an eco-tourism resort in the southwestern part of Guimaras Island-province because the heat was unbearable. His air-conditioned office in Ilo-ilo City was the perfect place to do paperwork. This is the same office where he meets friends and visitors while staying in Ilo-ilo.

Martin first went through the emails so that he could get a good grasp of new developments. After reading the emails, Martin pored over parts of a manuscript which a good German lady friend of his had requested him to read. The hero of the novel is Martin himself and it all starts with

events in Ecuador more than 30 years ago. That was the time when Martin was still in the business of wild animals that made him well known in the zoological world. Nobody before or since him ever succeeded in collecting Mountain Tapirs (Tapirus pinchaque) in the wild and transporting them safely to several major zoos in the USA and Europe. The surviving offspring of this exported species would constitute a breeding core that might save the specie once their original habitat is gone.

Again, Martin's wife Helen interrupted his work and his reverie on those adventurous years. She called him to go down to "Bavaria," a typical German restaurant which is located in a part of his building complex which also houses his family apartment as well as the pension house, his booking office for Nagarao Island and his personal office.

Sir William, a renowned British environmentalist was downstairs together with his friends and two visitors from the Dallas Zoo. Martin greeted his old friend, and soon, the topic changed to the fate of Mountain Tapirs and what could be done to help them survive.

I, Laura Montez, the narrator of this story spend much of my leisure time in Martin's pub meeting his friends and listening to his tales.

I found this fellow intriguing and I wanted to know why it was that important personalities bothered him and talked to him about events that happened some thirty years ago in the jungles of South America. Incredulous as I was, I asked for evidence because as a writer, I am trained to verify facts before reporting them. I had a grand time reading old letters, brittle newspaper cutouts and documents as well as pictures of unique locations and beings that could have graced the National Geographic.

The first thing he showed me was the email he had just received. It was one of many emails sent to Martin.

Subject: Mountain Tapirs

Date: Sat xxxxxx 2001 11:09:16-0700 From: Tapir<xxxxx@xxxxxxxxx.com> To: nagarao@skyinet.net

Dear Martin,

This is Sxxxxl Xxxx (formerly Sxxxxl Xxxxxx of the Tapir Research Institute of Claremont, CA). Thank you very much for your reply to Emilio's letter (I expect he will be back in the office of Monday). I have been working with him. He's a great person, conservationist and naturalist. We have been trying to tell government officials that it's too dangerous to capture and remove mountain tapirs, but so far they don't seem to listen. I don't know if you remember, but back in the 1970s, Russ Mittermeier translated your article in DZG for us into English. I will be sending this translation to Emilio and others in Columbia and Ecuador who may have some influence on the situation. I remember that you described in detail how difficult it was to acclimate mountain tapirs to Quito and then send them to zoos outside of Ecuador. I think that they can only fail now, especially if they are not going to listen to the lessons from the past. They seem to think it will be easy, so I really appreciate your comments. No one else has your experience!

Thank you very much for all your help.

Sxxxxl Xxxx Deputy Chair
IUCN/SSC Tapir Specialist Group

Martin, in spite of his age, looks only at the future and obviously avoids talking about his past. But there was no running away from the past that has finally caught up with him. For an accomplished man like Martin, the past never dies.

As he has told me too often, “It is better to have this damn book done once and for all. If I let you work on my biography now, then I will never have to bother with questions again about my past life. If anyone, including my own children, ask about my past life, I will refer them to this book.”

Martin requested me to change a few names to protect the identities of certain people without changing the actual situations, dates and events. Like Scheherazade of the Arabian Nights, Martin has left so many other stories untold.

Part One

The “King of the Wilderness”

Chapter 1 Capturing the Great Beast

The tension rose. The well-trained hunting dogs had picked up the scent of the Mountain Tapir and began to chase it down from the steep side of the mountain covered by dense and impenetrable rain forest.

Martin and his crew knew where to intercept their prey. It would try to escape to the wild Palora River, a small tributary of the Amazon. This icy, mountain creek originated in the snow-peaked volcanoes of the Eastern Cordillera in Ecuador. It was so turbulent that no man would dare follow an escaping Mountain Tapir. This rare and noble animal of the wilds instinctively knew that the waters of the Palora would guarantee his continued freedom.

Suddenly, the Tapir appeared on the stony bank of the river. The Indian crew was well prepared. Martin had selected the strongest men from the high paramo or Andean highlands which stand above 4,000 meters altitude. All the men had lassos which they used skillfully.

Within seconds, several lassos were thrown. The enormous tension was relieved when one lasso was pulled tight around the neck of the Tapir but the fight was not over yet. Acting swiftly, the Indians added more ropes to control the wild panicky movements of this powerful animal, “the great beast.”

Contrary to the image of a dangerous beast, Tapirs in general are harmless, plant-eating animals the size of a bear. They live in jungles and grassy plains. They sleep by day, hidden among the foliage by the river’s edge basically eating at night. The Mountain Tapir, however, had adapted

to life in the highest altitudes of the Andes Mountains in Ecuador.

The Sierra or Paramo of the eastern Andes, with an altitude of 10,000 to 15,000 feet, is grassland dotted with small bushes and in lower regions covered by dense rain forests. The Mountain Tapir lived in this rugged terrain. Surrounding this picturesque area were snow and ice-peaked extinct or dormant volcanoes: Cayambe, Antisana, Cotopaxi, Tungurahua, and Altar. The very active Sangay Volcano, on the other hand, permanently emitted smoke and ash.

From these mountain ranges, the terrain steeply descends into the Amazon basin. Ravines, rivers, waterfalls, and the rainy days and nights of chilling cold made these rain forest mountains almost impenetrable and mysterious to man.

The great strong beast didn’t want to surrender its freedom and its home in the wilderness. Amidst all the dangers and troubles of capturing the wild animals, Martin somehow was sympathetic to the plight of the Tapirs. To be captured and have freedom taken away was his own worst fear. “But I have to become accustomed to this drastic method, otherwise the logical and higher purpose of this work will be defeated,” Martin rationalized to himself.

Oh, precious freedom! This is what Martin treasured more than anything else.

Behind all his adventures, it was freedom he eternally sought and found meaning in. In these wild jungles of the Amazon, Martin observed, there is true freedom, as seen in the ecological habitat of the animals. “I found what I’ve been searching for, this is like paradise here, a life free from all the restrictions of the fast-paced modern world.”

However, Martin was worried that the animals might die, unable to withstand the enormous stress of sudden captivity. So much was his concern for the animals of the wilderness that he did everything possible to keep them

from injury and deliver them safe to their destination the major zoological gardens overseas.

After the Tapir was subdued, it was kept for another period in a fenced grassy enclosure so it would calm down and get over the shock of capture. The Tapir's diet had to be gradually changed, too, as its usual fare cannot be found in its future home, an overseas zoological garden.

The next step was the complicated transport of the Tapirs to Quito, the capital of Ecuador. This also required stamina and involved a lot of risks. They had to be pulled by a lasso for almost a day just to reach the Land Rover. If the terrain permitted, big crates were built at the camp and with sheer muscle strength of the Indians, carried to the waiting vehicles that would take it to Quito.

In Quito, the captive Tapirs were placed at Martin's animal farm for some time, for them to adapt. Special air transport crates made of wood were built for these animals, with .....enough holes for air circulation and food to last them during the whole duration of their intercontinental trip.

The trade of animals could be traced back thousands of years. As men roamed around the continents choosing dwelling places they liked, they brought with them their favorite domestic animals. If the animals came in pairs, humans allowed them to breed and adapt to their new habitats.

At the height of the Roman Empire's civilization, trading of wild animals became highly commercial. The most spectacular but cruel scenario involving wild animals was in the famous coliseum of ancient Rome, where lions and elephants from Africa were brought in to duel with equally ferocious gladiators. The animals then were merely trotted out for savage entertainment and to satisfy the blood lust of emperors and the gore-hungry spectators.

Through the years, things have changed and the trade of wild animals became an important part of science and ecological programs. Zoological gardens bought pairs of wild

animals for research purposes and then later, for protection and breeding of endangered species.

It was in 1964 in this scenario of society's ecological awareness that Martin and his business partners took a hand. Martin was still in his early 20's but the pioneering spirit plus the excitement of the work made him take the risk.

Martin learned everything from scratch and along the way, made friends with respected men in the field of preserving wildlife. Men like Dr. Bernhard Grzimek, the well-known protector of wild animals in the early 1960s. Dr. Grzimek was the director of the famous Zoological Garden of Frankfurt, Germany. Martin supplied the professor's zoological garden with males and females of rare wild animals to establish a breeding stock.

Several years later, through hard work and the odd stroke of luck, Martin had created a niche for himself. He became known and respected in the field of wild animal trading. As to the impending perils of the specialized trade, the determined adventurer never harbored any reluctance or fears about encountering possible dangers.

In some remote jungle areas Martin put up collecting stations. The first one was set up in Coca, a tiny Indian settlement of about seven houses on the Napo River.

Quito was Martin's base, where the international airport was located. Government departments and ministries that granted the necessary export papers had to be sought out there too.

He set up his main headquarters in Quito, a city some 2,900 meters above sea level, with rough climatic conditions. This served as his office, living quarters and collecting station. From there he made systematic travels all over the country, but concentrating mostly in the Amazon region and among his local collecting stations.

The first part of the trip to Coca was by car along the "Avenue of the Volcanoes," as this breathtaking part of the

Pan Americana highway was called. Martin, alone or chauffeured, had to pass through colorful villages of Andes Highland Indians, small colonial towns under the imposing shadows of extinct or active volcanoes. The snow and ice of their peaks would shine brightly and could be seen from afar. The roadside sceneries of Pichincha, Antisana, Illiniza, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, Altar and Tungurahua formed a fantastic panorama.

In Ambato, the road swerved to Baños, nestled rustically under the slopes of Tungurahua, a charming little town with sulfuric springs for therapeutic baths. Then the narrow rough road would pass through a small tunnel carved through the rocky mountains and wind down to the vast open plains of the Amazon basin, locally called Oriente. The end of the highlands was marked by a mighty waterfall. The beginning of a descent to the lowlands was often endangered by mudslides and rock avalanches from steep mountains. Cars and buses were sometimes washed into the upper Pastaza River that carved its way through the mountains. Most difficult were those days and weeks when the road was totally closed by major mudflows. No car could pass and passengers had to trek by foot on narrow slippery trails.

Any trekker was relieved once he reached the lowlands. Safe again! No wonder the locals called the small tunnel where the dangers started “Puerta al Cielo,“ which means “door to heaven.”

As modern civilization crept in, Martin noticed that those travel travails disappeared. Modern technology had dynamited embankments to construct roads through the Andean mountains. New roads appeared and old roads were widened and paved for safer travel.

Once Martin reached the lowlands, he would pass by the small garrison town of Shell-Mera, named after the Shell Company that once searched for oil in this area. The airfield of Shell-Mera was in very good condition and the gateway to

the skies of the Ecuadorian Amazon jungle. From here, government military forces that maintained their principal garrison and airborne units near this airfield would protect the national territory from greedy neighbors like Peru.

Shell-Mera had no hotel or pension house, so Martin would continue to drive another few minutes to the then largest settlement in the Oriente: Puyo. There he would have a night's rest after a long day of traveling from Quito. Between Shell-Mera and Puyo, a girlie bar was located, Martin's favorite hangout where a bevy of girls from all over the country were found. And according to Martin, the very young and delectable-looking girls were such refreshing delights to weary travelers like him.

It was of course, not the local Pilsener beer or the well-tasting rum that would invigorate Martin, but rather the young ladies of the night. Martin was well adapted to the Latino lifestyle. A wife or live-in partner was just considered good for the household. Outside the home, the typical Latino macho would feel totally free and have no remorse whatsoever in taking as many women as his potency or purse would allow.

Women for this fleeting kind of affair were found anywhere. In Guyaquil, the largest city and principal seaport of Ecuador facing the Pacific coast, Martin would prefer a special type of "casas" or brothels. He was quite surprised to know that some young housewives would spend their mornings in those "casas." It turned out that whenever they got angry with their husbands who failed to leave them money for shopping or daily expenses, these disgruntled wives would get together in an apartment, actually a casa, located far away from the husbands' workplaces. Then they would sell their bodies to sex-starved men. Martin told he also grabbed the opportunity in these "casas". Otherwise, he said, he would suffer without his "sexercise for the day." Looking back, Martin said, "I was only 24 years old then and couldn't survive on fauna explorations alone."

Guayaquil, Martin recalled, had a lot to offer sex-obsessed male visitors. “La Diez y Ocho” or “The Eighteen’s” was the magic word. The Eighteen’s was a small street, numbered 18, a transversal of one that led to the city’s outskirt districts. A modest red light district was located there. A new male customer could easily sense the rural ambiance because most of the sex workers streaming past were poor girls from the countrysides. These girls would rent a cubicle-like cottage or a wooden mini quarter, just big enough for a bed, some small containers of water and a dresser. Scantily clad, they would display their fleshy wares in front of the doors to attract customers.

Martin discovered the charges of the women’s services there were modest even for a tight-fisted male. The fixed rate for a “quickie” was seven Ecuadorian sucres (national currency), then the equivalent of a 0.7 liter bottle of beer which was around 25 US cents.

Once the prostitutes got older and still in the business, they would transfer to a small transversal of “La Diez y Ocho” called “Trece.” Trece means “Thirteen’s” and was the thirteen’s transversal of the Eighteen’s. Naturally the rate was lower there. It was fixed at Sucre 4 or around 14 US cents. The country’s currency was finally abolished in the year 2000 to give way to the mighty American Dollar.

Martin considered himself quite knowledgeable about the flesh trade in Latin American countries, telling his friends raw details about those “hijas de la noche” or “girls of the night.” He could describe in detail the “Zonas” of Colombia, which were the entertainment complexes of widely spread Western-style small shacks located outside some cities. He also mentioned some of those simple stores in Bogota that sold daily merchandise as a front for prostitution.

These stores caught Martin’s attention because only male buyers went in but never came out again. One day he followed one of the men inside and he too was escorted to the camouflaged back door that led to an open patio. There,

many young, voluptuous girls were waiting just like ordinary merchandise ready for selection by prospective customers.

The largest prostitution den that Martin found was in Callao, the port city of Lima. There were three two-story old buildings, each about half a kilometer long and a huge parking area connected to a bus shuttle service that catered mostly to local men availing the services of the prostitutes. Available for hire were about 2,000 seductive women of all sizes and individual skills. The men just paid a minimum entrance fee in exchange for a ticket. “You could select any woman you wanted and present her the ticket for her services. You could buy more tickets and have as many women as you wanted to consume,” according to Martin.

The liberal adventurous spirit and the wanton patronage of these sleazy places had basically affected Martin’s general attitude on sex.

To most people, his way of talking about the subject was shocking or vulgar. Martin had been forthright in saying that for him, “sex is an entirely carnal pleasure and the process of selection is similar to choosing items for a sumptuous dinner in the menu or wine card.” “I looked at women the way I appreciated nature in my heydays. At daytime, I enjoyed capturing with my camera the beautiful silhouette of a mountain range, and at nighttime, my hands would have much fun exploring the silhouette of my captured lady prey.” Martin jestingly told his friends.

Although respectful of the rights and of the role of modern women, Martin recalled with an irritating machismo and pride his past “conquests” of young women who fell “madly in love with him.” “But as far as I know, they were happy enough with me.” Martin said with a hearty laugh.

Turning serious, Martin concluded that “what really fascinated women were not the physical looks and sexual prowess but rather the total appeal of a man’s personality that includes intelligence and mental abilities.”

Any feminist would be quite appalled by the attitude of the eccentric German adventurer, but as the saying goes, “what you see is what you get.” For his candor and honesty about his preferences, Martin had been cherished and appreciated by his circle of friends. When asked if he felt any shame about what he did in the past, he said, “I am not ashamed. My character and my past formed my whole being. I just don’t want to be a hypocrite to myself.” But for all his sexual affairs in the past, Martin emphasized that he always observed some “ethics” – like not getting involved with women who were already committed to a boyfriend or husband.

The German adventurer happily reminisced about his past love life with a sweet young girl named Winonah. According to Martin, she was a pretty and dusky Melanesian lass studying in a school run by Catholic missionaries. She wrote about never-ending love and pure bliss, as shown in the excerpts:

“Before I go any further, I would like to express the night we spent in your room. I can’t express it, the moment you kissed me I felt very comfortable. … I must tell you what I felt the first time you touch me, I felt very sweet, and also your hands were very soft.”… I won’t forget you until I die, my never-ending love. I love you because you are the one who first have intercourse with me. I would rather like you to come again to our place and we’ll be companions about 3 or 4 nights… “

However, to go back to the story of the hunt of wild animals, Martin had to make a decision while in Puyo. Either continue his trip by car and boat or go by plane. From Shell-Mera he could hire a small bush plane with an experienced jungle pilot and fly to Coca. Coca had a grassy airstrip but void of any equipment or facility. Just a jungle clearing covered with grass whose runway could accommodate small planes under good weather conditions.

After heavy rainfall the runway would be soaked with water and no plane could land or take off. Finding small planes to lease was difficult because very few were available, if at all. The cost was unreasonably high despite the fact that some of their pilots were high-risk types. Those were the pilots who didn’t mind drinking heavily every night despite the dangers it posed to flying. Some would start their day still under the influence of alcohol. Because their income wasn’t enough for proper maintenance, other pilots didn’t mind flying with old unreliable Cessnas.

A German veteran pilot of Hitler’s Luftwaffe was the record holder in crashes. He had survived seven crashes and finally he gave up flying because no insurance would cover his planes anymore. But most Ecuadorian pilots eventually lost their lives in fatal crashes attributed to human error, mechanical failure or bad weather.

Unaccounted planes — from Cessna to middle-sized passenger aircraft that carried over 100 passengers, had been lost without any trace in those dense ravines and rain forests of the eastern slopes of the Andes.

Endless myths abounded about those lost planes, because in most cases neither the wreckage nor any survivor was ever found. Some stories would recount that extraterrestrials had kidnapped the plane and all the passengers and crew. Others speculated that still unknown fierce jungle tribes had taken the survivors to their villages and forced the men to marry local girls. According to Martin, these stories were not credible at all. Nobody knew the wilderness of the Andes and upper Amazon better than Martin — based on the way he described it, his memory is still strong on this matter.

“It was no man’s land, pure nature in its most poignant virginity. No people lived there, not even Indians. No roads, trails, or even footpaths. The jungle was so dense that I felt immersed in an ocean of plants that shrunk my horizon to only a few feet. Under those trees I thought I would never

see the sun, even after I explored for weeks through the wilderness. The slopes were so steep and the small creeks cascaded in innumerable waterfalls to the lowlands.”

He once accepted the booking of a German millionaire, a well-known personality from Munich’s fashion world. At that time, he was already in the adventure tour business. This eccentric businessman was younger than Martin. He wanted to be brought to a mountain range that was never explored before or inhabited by men.

That was a real challenge for Martin, and so he catered to his client’s request. He chose the Sumaco Mountain range and there, both of them had an unforgettable experience. They and their twenty porters entered a jungle so dense and expansive that they trekked through it for several days without ever seeing the rays of the sun. It was like being in a wildlife garden seen only in a dream.

After several days of camping within the perpetual darkness of the jungle, with only their tents to shelter them from humidity and rain, they started to miss the sun and the blue sky. The days of darkness that engulfed them created such an overwhelming longing for the sun and sky that Martin ordered his men to clear out just a few trees to catch a glimpse of the view aloft. It was then when he realized that there were simple joys of nature which the average person takes for granted every single day of his life: the blue sky above him, the endless horizon, the floating clouds, the warm sun, the sunrise and sunset, the cooling rain, refreshing mist, the waxing moon and the twinkling stars.

Martin usually preferred to continue from Shell-Mera by plane in spite of all the risks. During a prolonged bad weather period however, nobody would fly for several days. In this case he would continue to drive another 80 kilometers to the Napo River near Puerto Napo and from there he would hire a dugout canoe with outboard motor and travel for the whole day down the river. At the outset, some wild rapids had to be negotiated. The next scenario

was a stark contrast – a serene and quiet river. Thick jungles left and right. If the rains were scarce, the water level would go down. Thus, canoes had to be pushed through sloshing mud, muck, and rocky parts so that the trip would not drag. When rain was very heavy, angry torrents of water would come cascading from the mountains, uprooting giant trees in their path that, in turn, drifted into the murky waters. Such situations were dangerous for people riding in canoes, which capsized frequently. One had to be a good swimmer to survive. The right riverbank was a “strictly prohibited” side because beyond its green almost impenetrable jungle the fierce Auca tribesmen lurked there, just waiting for the right time to strike.

Finally, after traveling for several days, Martin reached his collecting station in Coca to pick up the wild animals for transport back to Quito. The process needed to be quick and efficient to ensure that that the animals were alive and well when released in the principal collecting station in Quito. In exchange, he brought merchandise and money to Coca for his local partner Jose, the mestizo helpers and the Indians.

Coca was not the only collecting station of Martin. He established collecting stations all over the country in order to get a steady supply of wild life. About a hundred miles south of Coca was one of these contacts in a place called Curaray, another one was in Shell-Mera. Near the town of Baños he had several groups of bird collectors working for him, and in the western slope of the Andes he also had people working for him near the villages of Toachi and Mindo. Further west on the Pacific plain he had suppliers in the town of Sto. Domingo, the city of Guayaquil and in the province of Manabi.

As soon as the animals were acclimatized and fit for travel, the proper transport crates were built and the shipment could leave Quito on board a big plane for their overseas destination.

Reflecting on the fate of these animals, Martin thought they were better alive in captivity somewhere than ending up in the stomach of his Indian friends. The Indians hunted wild animals basically for food, unlike modern time hunters who often do it for fun or to show off their trophies.

Sometimes, the Indians would keep them in cages they themselves made and reserved them for feasts or for simple gatherings. Those that Martin selected for export were exchanged for clothes, cooking pots, machetes, shotguns and frequently, for cash. There were times when Martin would find the captive animals very peaceful and docile in a simple Indian-made enclosure.

Transfer to overseas was always by plane and restricted to those months of the year when the climate in the Northern Hemisphere was warm. In wintertime, the animals could not survive a stopover in any European airport because of the intense cold.

By telex, Martin coordinated all the details and discussed all stopovers for the animals' trip. If the crate carrying the animals did not arrive at its final destination on time, Martin would request the airline officials for a search via telex. The crate would usually be somewhere in a hangar of the airport.

In the 1960s, direct flights and computerized communications were uncommon. Thus, the crates had to be unloaded all over again and transferred to another plane belonging to a different airline company such as bound for animal destinations in the USA, Europe or Asia. The animals' well-being depended upon the efficiency of the airline staff.

For Martin, a dead animal meant wasted time and money, ruined reputation, and sleepless nights of troubled conscience. Instead of having contributed to the propagation of endangered species, the extensive losses due to careless handling could actually push the animals to the brink of extinction.

In 1971, Martin wrote an article regarding his experience with Mountain Tapirs for the prestigious German scientific magazine: “Der Zoologische Garten.” A year later this article was translated for the Tapir Research Institute of Claremont California. Some excerpts are presented here:

It is noteworthy that the Mountain Tapir, which is excellently adapted to its habitat, the high Andes, is not found in all high altitude areas but only in the eastern part of the eastern Andes range. We have tried in vain to find Mountain Tapirs in the western Andes. Either the animals never lived there or they have been extirpated for a long time – which is not very likely, since there are extensive jungles in the western Andes as well. The western part of the eastern Andean chain has been settled for generations and it is therefore apparent that the Mountain Tapirs have retreated eastwards into the untouched mountain forests. Today, we find the Mountain Tapir in the following provinces: Carchi, Imbabura, Pichincha, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, Cañar, Azuay, Zamora-Chinchipe, Morona-Santiago, Pastaza and Napo.

Mountain Tapirs are well known to the inhabitants of these areas and to the people who know the fauna there. All the hunters are familiar with it and the Indians hunt it for meat. In the realm of the Volcano Cotopaxi, chunks of Mountain Tapir meat are sold for about US$3.20. Salves made from the animals’ toes and ears are found in the Indian markets where they are sold as aphrodisiacs and healing solutions, etc. They are called by the name “La uña de la gran bestia” or the “Nail of the great beast.” In other areas, the Indians do not hunt the Mountain Tapirs at all. The flesh is not considered to be very good. Here, only Mazama (Deer) species are hunted. This is especially true of the Antisana area (5705 m). On the other hand, the hunters of the larger towns consider the meat a delicacy. I have eaten it and it seems to be very tasty.

North of the Cayambe mountain range, to the east of the village of Pimampiro, the Indians often keep young Mountain Tapirs that have fallen into the hands of hunters after the mother has been shot. They are kept with the domestic animals, especially pigs. I have also made this observation in other areas. My animal-collectors reported to me once that there were Mountain Tapirs on the farm of some mountain Indians. As we arrived there a little later, the animals were dead. The Indians explained the killing thus: The tame young animals ate the children's meal and the parents became so annoyed that they killed and ate the Mountain Tapirs. It is to be expected that Mountain Tapirs kept in this way by Indians never lived long because of the unsuitable food and the lack of any veterinary services.

But there are exceptions. In 1965, the first Mountain Tapir was brought to me. Hunters had caught the animals as youngster and then taken it to their farm in the Amazon lowland. This farm was in the vicinity of the tiny Indian settlement of Cosanga. The owner transported him through the Amazon jungle across the rapidly flowing Napo River and then by delivery truck to Quito. He was completely tame and his pelt was scanty. The first day, he all but refused food. Then we thought of cooking some lightly salted soup and this he relished, being completely accustomed to the fare of pigs.

One night, he disappeared and we found to our amazement that he had gotten into our neighbor's house and had made himself comfortable in their daughter's bed! Only with great effort could we entice "Pancho," as we named the Mountain Tapir, back home. Otherwise, Pancho gave us much pleasure with his lovable ways. He was sent to England on January 22, 1965 where he arrived in good condition.

With his experience in capturing Tapirs, Martin was able to provide Tapirs for zoos in Los Angeles, and other zoos in the United States, to German zoos in Frankfurt, Leipzig,

Wilhelma in Stuttgart and to Menagerie des Jardin des Plantes in Paris, France.

Again, Martin narrated his experiences in his article:

The snowline is about 5,000 meters, but in bad weather, it falls to 4,500 meters. We have even experienced snowstorms at 4,000 meters and hail that whitens the landscape at 3,000 m. The last mentioned is rare and the sun melts everything away quickly. In bad weather, the Mountain Tapir wanders in lower areas. It can be found at about 2,000 m. but we cannot accurately determine the lower boundary of its range since there are thick, uninhabited forests found everywhere and it becomes too difficult to follow the Mountain Tapirs. The animals do like to wander many kilometers, presumably to find better feeding grounds. In so doing, they enter quite low elevations and they avoid the high passes. Only wherein the heat becomes too pressing and large numbers of gadflies injure the Mountain Tapirs that they go high into the mountains.

The cloud forest reaches to 3,800 meters, and then they adhere to the “chaparos” or “crippled forests.” Here, one may find Spectacled Bears who look for food in the forests. At about 4,000 meters, the “paja” or straw begins to appear tough grasses that reach almost to the snowline. The Tapirs may come into these areas on hot days, but their food is found only in the cloud forests, also called rain forests. These contain little-known flora.

I only know of certain bamboo plants and majestic tree ferns that reach 10 meters in height and remind one of past ages of the earth. Orchids in profusion are also to be found here. The ground is moist and slimy. During the day, temperatures are generally warm but it gets very cool at night. This is the favored habitat of the Tapir – the highlands from 2,500 to 3,800 meters elevation. The temperature here is pleasant, water is plentiful and the vegetation gives the Tapir more than sufficient protection from man who appears to be his only enemy. Here, the Tapir finds a wealth of plants

and leaves, which he finds most pleasing to eat. I name for example, Colca (Micronia crocea). At least once a week the animals visit certain salt and mineral licks in the jungle. They lick the salt or even eat small pieces of the stone. An unusual number of footprints characterize such places.

In the area of the still-active volcano Sangay (5,323 meters), we noticed that the animals have black teeth. It is presumed that they lick the black, mineral-bearing volcanic ash. We were able to follow their tracks up to the snowline where we succeeded in catching a 275-kg. animal. However, we released it since we couldn't transport it. The high plateau north of this volcano is so cut deep by gorges that it is almost impossible to penetrate. The mighty emissions of the volcano at nighttime make the area as bright as day.

Despite the hardships of working in the clouded forests of the Andes, Martin grew to admire the place. The area of the Andes where they worked in was sometimes exposed to snow fall. There were glacier-capped volcanoes, rocky mountains, precipices, gorges and partially uninhabited areas never trodden by man. The untouched beauty of these places hosted a wealth of plant and animal life.

Fish abounded in rivers and mountain lakes. High moors and waterfalls were found from the snowline down to the steep mountain valleys where the tropical jungle began. Martin would look over the unending expanse of the Amazon Basin and could sense the Atlantic at the other end of the continent.

In his Andes adventures, Martin found himself in the home of the Mountain Tapir, the Mountain Puma, the Spectacled Bear, the Mazama Deer, the rare Pudu mephistophiles, the Mountain Paca, the Andean Fox, small hummingbirds like the Chimborazo star or the huge Condor, the largest flying bird on earth with a wingspan of up to 10 feet (3 meters). There were various amphibians and a variety of insects, some of them waiting for a name.

The zoologist or botanist could achieve some immortality if he wants to.

Martin normally talked little about his experience as a wild life collector. Only if friends would really insist on hearing more about this adventurer and Martin felt like telling the stories of his younger years, would he answer questions.

Marita and Bernd, a young couple who always traveled with Martin for over 20 years were exceptions to the rule. Martin would answer endless questions from Marita and Bernd and would just demand one thing in return.

“Bernd, your jokes are great. I will tell you my stories, but every time I am through it would be your turn you have to tell me jokes for an hour, not the same ones. I always want new ones.”

“You are demanding, but I have no choice, because Marita won’t go to bed until all your stories are told,” Bernd would reply.

Marita would then proceed with questions, “Martin, isn’t it dangerous to catch those wild animals? The possibility of being attacked, you know.”

“Not at all if you know how. This might surprise you but most wild animals, as a rule, avoid human beings. Snakes for instance, or even a jaguar, will just move away or ignore humans passing by unless man attacks them, scares them, hunts them, gets too close to their offspring, or steps on them. However, there are a few exceptions. Big alligators or crocodiles can’t be trusted. And tigers or lions that are used to killing humans can be extremely dangerous when very hungry. Wild animals already used to having humans feed them can still be unpredictable. These include the baboons or macaque monkeys. They can scratch or bite without provocation.”

“What animals scare Indians of the Amazon most?” Marita asked like an inquisitive little girl.

“Those animals which they believe represent manifestations of ancestral or enemy spirits. These are the

giant anacondas and jaguars.

But in the world of ordinary real animals, just the presence of a huge flock of white-lipped Peccaries (Tayassu albirostris) could send the Indians into panic during a jungle excursion. These Peccaries or Amazonian wild pigs are, according to the Indians, the most aggressive creatures of the forest. If a lone hunter was surrounded by them, he would have to climb a tree. But if the tree is not big enough the wild pigs would dig out the roots until the tree is brought down, then devour its victim. I, however, have never witnessed such an attack."

Peccaries eat anything. Martin once saved, at the last moment, a small Tamarind monkey trapped in the mouth of a young Peccary that was allowed to roam around freely in his premises. Luckily, the monkey was unharmed because Martin quickly but carefully snatched it out of the piglet's mouth. Martin was unaware of the danger they posed to other animals

"Next to a flock of wild pigs, poisonous snakes are feared. While hunting for a monkey for example, the Indio hunter with a blowgun or shotgun should not only be quick to follow the movements of his choice target swinging from tree to tree, he should also be alert to any slithering or coiling snake on the leafy grounds or hanging branches. But during the tense minutes of aiming for the target, the hunter must neglect to observe the usual precaution of looking at the ground for snakes and this is the time when he is at risk from the snake. Nobody in the jungle during my time as collector of animals carried an anti-venom. So the bite often turns out to be deadly. But being bitten and poisoned by snakes is a basic risk in hunting."

"What about the animals that are intended for collection? How are they retrieved and brought out of the jungle alive? Marita queried.

Martin answered, "We put a minimum dose of poisonous curare in the dart to make the prey tipsy and semi-

conscious. That was my way of taking the animals without really harming them."

"Did those Indios, especially the Shuar or former headhunters, use curare to kill enemies?" Marita further asked.

"No," said Martin, "because man, like the monkey, could quickly pull out the poisonous dart from his body. What the Indians, like the Aucas, preferred to use for their enemies were the 10-foot spears.

Blowguns were widely used by many Indian tribes of the Amazon. They were approximately 10-feet long hollowed wood. Small darts are blown over long distances. The tip of the dart is soaked with curare, a deadly mixture made from several poisonous plants and roots. The Indians did not use it on humans because the victim could pull out the poisonous darts even before the toxin could spread throughout his body.

For monkeys, the darts were especially prepared. Near the tip, a cut is made using Piraña teeth. When the monkey tries to pull out the small dart, the tip breaks off and remain embedded in the monkey's flesh and the curare would slowly take effect. The animal would attempt to escape but after a few minutes his movements would slow down and he could be trapped."

"What about Jaguars, Ocelots, Spectacled bears, and mountain lions or pumas as you call them?" Bernd asked.

"I never wanted to collect those animals, but the Indios and especially the mestizo farmers wanted to eliminate them. They hunted these wildlife either for their skin, or to prevent them from preying on their chickens, the young cattle and other domestic or farm animals. When a mother animal is killed, babies were left behind unprotected and offered to anybody who would buy them. If nobody bought them, they would be kept under cruel circumstances, like being chained around the neck which would soon cause bloody cuts. Animals were kept in small, dark, dirty and

constricted crates. Even if I had a lot of money to buy them just for the purpose of releasing them to the wild, it would not have worked out, because those babies were in no condition to survive alone," Martin said with lament.

Marita was interested to know how a condor or big bird of prey, like a harpy eagle, could be collected.

Martin explained that for the Condor they had to dig a deep hole in the ground, get into the hole, cover it with a wooden grill, put leaves on it, and use meat of animals on top of it to attract those huge birds. Once the birds feasted on the bait, the men hiding in the hole would grasp the birds by their feet, avoiding the sharp claws and then overwhelm them and place them in a transport crate.

"Did you export reptiles and amphibians? Tell me about those giant Anacondas and the Boa constrictor?" Bernd asked with a sudden fascination.

"Well, they are not poisonous, they just kill with the sheer strength of their coiling body. But if you really want such a giant snake, you'd better wait until it has caught and swallowed a deer, wild pig, capybara or any big prey, which it cannot digest right away. Its stomach will then expand and form a super bulge, making its movements extremely slow, rendering it defenseless for weeks. With the help of a dozen men, it is not hard to push the feared giant snake into a transport crate."

"Is it true that they can grow to 30 meters and swallow a person whole?" Bernd continued.

"No, that's the usual exaggeration. They reach at most, 30 feet (close to 10 meters) and a whole person was never found in the stomach of a giant snake. However, I believe that smaller children are vulnerable to attacks, especially when they carelessly swim and play in a jungle creek, known to be home to a giant Anaconda. They could end up in the stomach of these giant snakes. But so far I never encountered ocular evidences," Martin answered.

Marita then interrupted, “Enough of those stories, I might have terrible nightmares. Tell me about those beautiful birds. How did you collect them?”

“Ecuador has more than 1,500 bird species. Zoological gardens had certain preferences for tiny Hummingbirds, colorful Tanagers, rare Ornate Umbrella birds, Cocks of the Rock, Trogons, Laminated Toucans, Macaws, and anything spectacular, unique and adaptable to a long life in captivity.”

“To breed them and raise their offspring successfully was the ultimate challenge. But this wasn’t easy at all. Take those hummingbirds. You find some 130 species in Ecuador, all of them have an extraordinary rapid wingbeat up to 80 times per second thus producing the hum for which they are named. To replenish the energy that keeps them flying, they have to feed frequently.”

“Hummingbirds feed on nectar of flowers and heavily supplement their honey diet with the protein from insects they pick up around those flowers. I first had to develop a food formula and design special small plastic bottles in which their food would be placed. This formula was the basis of success or failure. Observing the habit of Hummingbirds in the wild, I concluded that honey nectar alone was not enough. I bought baby milk, heavily enriched with proteins. Only certain high quality products would turn out to be right. I also developed very sophisticated transport crates with feeding bottles that could be used even if the airline personal tilted or inverted the crates during transport. I believe that I became a pioneer in this field.

Tanagers and other birds posed lesser problems, because they would survive on mixed fruits,” Martin explained with fascination.

To collect those birds, imported fine meshed nylon nets from Japan were used. These were placed on open space between trees or bamboo poles. The flying birds could not see those obstacles on time and were trapped. Skilled