A Naturalist's View of Indonesia

by Rae V. Anderson Sierra Madre, California

Indonesia is a very large country population-wise, the fifth largest in the world. It is made up of more than 13,000 islands, the larger being Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), Irian Java (the western half of New Guinea), Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi (Celebes), Maluku (Moluccas), and the Lesser Sundas. This country stretches from east to west over 3,200 miles, separating the Pacific and Indian Oceans. This is greater than the distance between our Pacific and Atlantic coasts. It is an extremely complex country being made up of some three hundred ethnic groups with two hundred-fifty languages and multiple dialects of most of those. There are more than three hundred dialects in Irian Jaya alone.

The Indonesian population is approximately 175 million with about 60% of these jammed onto the island of Java which is only 51,000 square miles or about six percent of the country's total land mass. This is equivalent to putting the entire combined populations of California, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas into an area about the size of Louisiana. This is more than six times the entire population of Australia. There is pervasive reason for this.

Java is made up of a string of still active volcanos throughout its entire length. The activity is a result of this island lying just to the north of the deep Java Trench where the Indo-Australian plate pushes under the Eurasian plate resulting in much geothermal action. These volcanos are continually spewing ash with periodic violent eruptions. This ash and lava breaks down into exceptionally fertile soil. Consequently, the rice, fruit and vegetable farming of Java (and Bali which is effectively an

easterly extension of Java) is one of the world's most highly productive. The Balinese rice farmers are considered to be the world's best even with their primitive tools.

The soil over most of the remainder of Indonesia is very fragile and shallow and does not accept cultivation kindly. Its fertility level is low and short-lived. When cleared, it is marginally productive, soon becomes non-productive and erodes very quickly. So goes beautiful prime wild-life habitat!

Being an individual with a lifelong high level interest in all aspects of natural science, I enthusiastically took advantage of an opportunity to spend a couple of weeks in Indonesia.

Of course, anyone could visit Indonesia or most other countries as long as they have the health, the time and the money to spare. For me, the first two were no problem but the latter is, unfortunately, a perennial problem.

Indonesia has one of the world's lowest costs of living if you are willing to live in the native style including native food. It is probably one of the world's most expensive places if you choose to live in the western manner, even modestly, as you are accustomed to here.

One of my sons and his family were living in Jakarta (at the west end of the Island of Java). His company had provided them with very palacial accommodations, a western-style, completely furnished home of upward of 5,000 square feet, the rear yard of which was enclosed by a ten foot high concrete and masonry wall. Growing in the backyard was a red plumeria about twenty feet high with a twenty foot spread in addition to a mango. Also provided was a car and

driver, a house girl and a house boy. My daughter-in-law found these latter three very easy to get used to. The house girl, with her husband and children, lived in an apartment attached to the rear of the main house and garage and was available 24 hours a day as was the house boy, and driver. Between the house girl and boy they did all of the grocery shopping (which required about U.S. \$25 to \$30 per week), prepared all meals, did all house and yard work and the laundry was done daily. The lawns were mowed weekly with a pair of hand clippers. My son and daughterin-law, having two small children, found this arrangement very acceptable and easy to get used to, and rather traumatic to leave behind.

This all provided me with a very convenient and economical "base of operation."

Bicycles and mopeds are the most commonly used forms of private transportation with becaks (pedicabs) a frequently used public form. They quite jam the streets within the cities as well as being abundant even in the rural areas. It is common to see two adults on a moped and frequently two adults with a child and occasionally two adults with two children all on one little moped and no one wearing helmets.

In the center of Jakarta at a major intersection is the National Monument which is a marble pillar in excess of 400 feet high with a sculptured crowning flame reportedly covered with 77 pounds of pure gold.

Indonesia is the home of beautiful, intricately dyed and tediously woven ikat fabrics as well as the delicate and beautiful batik process. These fabrics are used for clothing, draperies, bed sheets and spreads, upholstery, tablecloths, wall hangings, etc. Each area of Indonesia has its own traditional styles and patterns for these fabrics.

As in Mexico and most third world countries, it is not safe for caucasians (or less specifically, Americans and Europeans) to drink the local water, even in hotels and good restaurants. You must likewise be careful not to use ice unless you know with certainty it is made from a reputable bottled water. Sealed container, brand name bottled water is available in most restaurants, grocery stores and many soft drink vendor stands. It costs a little but is well worth the investment. U.S. brands of soft drinks are readily available but are normally served at ambient air temperature

(warm) since ice is not available to the general populace and is too risky for Americans to use.

Slum shacks overhang the banks of the rivers around certain areas of Jakarta. Here you will see people bathing and brushing their teeth in the river where clothes are being washed and at the same time people are defecating into the same water from bamboo scaffolds.

Something I had trouble getting used to was having to pay a fee to an attendant in order to park our vehicle on the street by the curb in the vicinity of shops or stores and even in the parking lots of food markets. This requirement may well only apply to caucasians.

Of particular interest to me were the birds, at liberty, in the bird parks, bird markets and even in the restaurants

All of Indonesia, with the exception of its highest mountains, is very tropical since the country straddles the equator.

As we drove into the mountains we passed through tea plantations at about the lower edge of the clouds. Tea, as most of you know, is a species of camellia. There were beautiful terrestrial pink orchids growing and blooming in the drainage ditches of the tea plantations. The weather is cool and comfortable at this elevation. As we progressed higher into the pine forest, mustached (Java) parakeets became one of the more commonly seen bird species.

The design of most Indonesian restaurants is a floor raised two or three steps above the ground, and a roof, either open on all sides or open on three sides with the kitchen behind a wall that is the fourth side. This design renders air conditioning useless (air conditioning being too expensive for use anyplace except in the large western-style hotels, offices and residences of the western expatriate employees). It also takes advantage of any air movements that might occur. It is really quite enjoyable to be eating dinner while the rain is falling within five or six feet of your table without walls or windows between.

Under the roof are the tables and chairs and frequently an open area of floor for the native plays and dances and the traditional gamelan (percussion) orchestra with their musical notes that are not a part of our musical scales. In most restaurants, you will also find a few birds in cages or just short-cutting through rather than

flying up and over or around. In small bamboo or metal cages hung from the rafters will be a beautiful emerald green leaf bird, or red and black minivet or a gold and black orioletype bird of some kind, always one to a cage. These three types of birds seemed to be, by far, the most popular in the restaurants and they were certainly eye catching.

Also eye catching are the little one to four-inch geckos or night lizards running around upside down on the ceiling catching insects. These geckos are active only after dark but are drawn to any area where the lights attract insects such as entry porches or open areas of entertainment. At least in these areas they are easiest for human eves to see. Be thankful for their existence. If it wasn't for friends like them, the bugs would be up to the back side of a tall ostrich.

Birds are readily available in the "bird" markets of Indonesia's larger cities as well as from street vendors. The number and species selection from street vendors is very small compared to what is found in the "bird" markets. Even so, they will have interesting birds including various native woodpeckers, the gorgeous small kingfishers, minevets, orioles, various mynahs, moustached and long-tailed parakeets, an occasional white cockatoo of various species, munias (nuns), zebra doves,

The bird markets are permanently located and organized(?). At least the many vendors have their individual areas though it is impossible to discern where one stops and the next begins.

Before proceeding, I want to clarify that these are called "bird" markets because they contain many more birds than anything else but I also found in them several young Siamangs (the Indonesian black gibbon). several species of civets, kittens of some species of wild Javanese cats, various species of mongoose, albino and "lutino" (?) squirrels, flying fox bats with thirty-inch wing spans (yes and very tame and friendly, anxious to eat fruit from my hand), slow lorises and the diminutive, timid and lovely Asiatic mouse deer being only eight to twelve inches high at the shoulder and weighing five to ten pounds when mature.

The bird markets which I visited were all of the same general plan: a floor, a roof, open on all four sides, surrounded by a low fence and small

peripheral buildings, the larger shelter area being perhaps thirty by fifty feet, containing many merchants, hundreds of cages and thousands of native birds and mammals stacked on top of each other and hung from the roof. I did not see any reptiles or fishes in the bird markets but did see an outdoor tropical fish market at another location in Jakarta. The smaller peripheral buildings were small, individual open display areas adjacent to what appeared to be living quarters. It was into these "living" quarters that we were taken when we asked about the availability of endangered or otherwise protected species such as the Bali mynah, Pesquet's parrot, palm cockatoo, etc. Never did we see these protected birds displayed openly.

The palm cockatoos were the most expensive birds which we priced. Their asking price was equivalent to about U.S. \$250. That meant that with some serious bargaining they could be had for U.S. \$200 or less. I would have dearly loved to have sent some of the palm cockatoos home but inquiries at the office of the Director General of Forest Conservation and Nature Preservation in Bogor, quickly established that no CITES permits would be issued for these birds (even with "payoff" offers) and the birds would be confiscated if found. The fact that we inquired of the possibility of a permit for palm cockatoos at the time we were applying for a permit to send home a citron crested cockatoo resulted in a surprise visit to the house by an inspector to "check" the birds (we believe to determine whether or not we had palm cockatoos although this was never stated).

Among the most abundant species in the bird markets were moustached and long-tailed parakeets at 13,000 rupias (about U.S. \$8) each, common mynahs, various munias (nuns) generally about 1,000 rupias or U.S. \$.60 each and small zebra doves. In addition to these were various species of barbets; mynahs; pied starlings; Javanese hanging parrots (vernal); orioles; green, Sonnerat's or hybrid jungle fowl; dorangos; pin-tailed nonpariel parrot finches; many species of lories including purple-crowned, cardinal, blue streaked, black, chattering, Stella's and Papua; cockatoos including Moluccan, umbrella, various sulphur-crested, citron-crested and Goffin's; four species of eclectus parrots; various woodpeckers; king-



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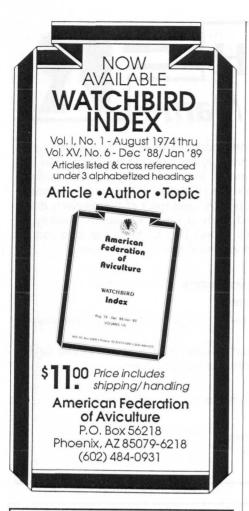
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fishers; silver-eared mesias; leafbirds; minivets: fairy bluebirds: Malaysian wood owls and various large hawks and eagles. A bird I had never seen before and which was a great treat was a pink trogon (perhaps the scarlet-rumped).

The birds most commonly kept and seemingly most popular with the Javanese are the little zebra doves and common domestic pigeons. The pigeons are frequently dyed pink, blue, green or yellow. These seemed to be special birds and were being shown much tender care and affection.

In addition, hybrid chickens, crosses between junglefowl and the long-necked, long-legged, skinny domestic fowl which were built like fighting cocks (the only kind of chicken I saw in Indonesia either in yards, the streets or on my dinner plate), compete each Sunday in crowing contests at the bird markets. The winner is hoisted to the top of a tall pole above the Bird Market roof the place of honor.

Many of the larger cities in southern Asia have very nice bird parks, Singapore's being particularly large and fine and including what, I understand, is the world's largest walkthrough aviary.

At this point I will digress for a moment and talk about Singapore. Prior to World War II, Singapore was one of the "sin capitals" of the world. In more recent years the change has been so dramatic, but for knowing better, you would believe you were in a totally different country.

English is the principal language. Irrespective of what else is spoken, English is spoken by everyone. It is probably the cleanest city I have ever visited — absolutely no graffiti or litter. Their water can be safely consumed in any hotel, restaurant or even public drinking fountains. Everything is signed and identified better than in the United States so it is very easy to find your way around. The people are friendly, courteous, and helpful, their police being the most courteous and helpful I have ever seen any place. But be warned! You had better not drop a chewing gum wrapper (a \$500 firstoffense fine), or jay-walk (a \$50 fine). The fines are huge and they don't care if you are a visitor. Those are the rules! They are proud of the cleanliness of their city and they intend to keep it that way.

Another item of interest is that, in

years past, Singapore had great drug problems. No longer! About thirty minutes before your plane lands, when you are given your immigration and customs cards, you will see on them printed in bold, red letters (and it is also announced in three or four languages over the aircraft's public address system) MANDATORY DEATH FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING BY SINGAPORE LAW. Again, they don't care what country you are a citizen of and you are making a grave mistake (literally and figuratively speaking) if you expect protection from your own government.

Should you be found to have a quantity of illegal substance which is too small to reasonably be construed as trafficking, then they have something else. They are one of the few remaining countries with caning laws. That is, you may escape with your life but after fifteen lashes of a rattan cane. The offenders seem to remember that very well also. Personally, I applaud Singapore for these efforts. It is a most pleasant place to visit. A woman can walk alone any place, day or night, and feel completely safe. Contrast that with the U.S!

Singapore also has many interesting eating places. I personally enjoyed the "hawkers' centers." There you can select a table under an umbrella. choose the items you wish to eat from any number of the merchants, and return to your table. In the "hawkers" centers" the food items are very fresh, many of them live fresh. You can, if you wish, select a live turtle, fish, lobster, eel, octopus, etc., from a tank and it will be prepared for your meal. When the food items have been cooked or otherwise prepared, they are delivered to your table. I especially liked the giant tiger prawns which were the size of small to medium lobsters. The deep fried baby squid with sweet and sour sauce was also excellent. If you order pineapple, papaya, guava or mango juice, they simply run the peeled and seeded, chilled fresh fruit through a blender and serve. It is a true delight in the hot, humid weather.

We were surprised by the level of honesty we found in Singapore. One evening after dinner my daughter-inlaw noticed her heavy gold bracelet, an anniversary gift from my son, was missing from her wrist. In struggling with an infant she had not realized when she had lost it but suspected it may have occurred at the restaurant.



View of the bird market in Jakarta.



Silver-eared Messias on display for sale at the Jakarta bird market.



These Duvenboid's Lories were photographed in the Singapore Bird Park.

They went back to the restaurant and, sure enough, it had been found and turned in to the management. The bracelet was returned and the kids were informed that had they not returned for it, it would have been sent to them. The ownership identity could only have been made from the restaurant's Visa or American Express receipt.

Now back to Indonesia. In the Tamin Mini Bird Park in Jakarta we walked through a large, planted flight cage with perhaps thirty or more crowned pigeons of three species, argus pheasants, moustached and

long-tailed parakeets, several species of lories and cockatoos, a strange beige mutation of the Indian blue peafowl, barbets and many other beautiful softbills. There are also many smaller aviaries with palm cockatoos, sea eagles, cassowaries, etc. It is a truly memorable experi-

The bird market in Yogyakarta (central Java) was very similar to that in Jakarta.

Yogyakarta is also an historic cultural center. Here you will find the huge, spectacular 8th century Buddhist temple of Borobudur with its seven levels and three and threequarter miles of relief sculptures of scenes depicting Buddhist scriptures.

Just outside Yogyakarta at Prambanan is the ruins of the 10th century Hindu temple Loro Jonggrang. Reconstruction of this complex was begun when Indonesia was under Dutch rule and has continued ever since. It is well along. To me it is almost incomprehensible that these structures, some in excess of a hundred feet high, were constructed a thousand years ago from hand-hewn and relief sculptured basaltic rock and without use of cement or mortar.

In this area you can also visit the Sultan's palace and go through the ruins of the extremely unique "water palace." This was a palace with large, secret chambers and passage ways built for security and concealment, beneath ponds and moats. In addition, this area is an art and craft center.

With the exception of the mutant Indian blue mentioned earlier, the only peafowl I saw were Java greens including a couple at liberty (wild?). The liberty birds had perhaps been artificially hatched and released hence not so shy.

On to Bali (just off the east tip of Java). Bali is a particularly beautiful island heavily cultivated but beautiful once you get out of Denpasar.

No trip to Bali is complete without a visit to the sacred monkey forest at Sangeh. Here a colony of a hundred or more wild but tame Rhesus macaques beg handouts from the visitors, the local stall owners getting rich selling peanuts, bananas, film, T-shirts, and innumerable other souvenirs.

At one location where we left cameras in the car but were away from it, I noticed the driver (Bali is predominantly Hindu) also left the proximity of the car but did not lock it. I asked Photos by Rae V. Anderson

A cage full of nuns (munia) at the Jakarta bird market. Note the interesting string tie arrangement that creates the perches.



A Black-capped Lory and Umbrella Cockatoos await good homes at the Jakarta bird market.



This mutant Indian Blue Peahen was seen at the Tamin-Mini Bird Park, Jakarta.

him if the cameras would be safe and he assured me they would. He said, "Only the tourists steal things. We believe that if we do something bad we will return in our next life as something worse than we are now." We could use quite a bit of such philosophy in the United States. Nothing was stolen.

Next I spent a few days in the Pulau Seribu (Thousand Islands) in the Java Sea between Jakarta and Singapore. They are about forty-five miles north of Jakarta. In spite of their name, there are fewer than 700 islands in the group, the largest of which are about one kilometer in greatest dimension. Only seven of these islands are inhabited. One is reserved for President Suharto, another contains a complete village and three have dive camps, of which two have very modern accommodations and the other the basic accommodations of a serious dive camp. The latter, Pulau Papa Theo, is the one I chose.

The thirty dollar a day rate included a pondok (native style palm thatch hut) complete with native style bathroom facilities and three meals. The high areas of these islands are probably no more than five or six feet above the high tide line. They are quite densely overgrown with coconut palms, Pandanus and a tree form of what is locally called hybiscus but having large, abutilon-type flowers.

These islands are mushroomshaped with only the top above water. Their sides abound with beautiful reef fishes, and some two hundred species of coral and large mollusks such as the helmet conch. It was here that I saw, face to face, my first lion fish and stone fish, two highly venemous species, in their natural environment.

On these islands I also saw the small and beautiful kingfishers, dorongos, large (size of an Indian Hill mynah) gold and black oriole-type birds and umbrella cockatoos. These cockatoos were extremely shy and wary. We would hear them, then try to sneak up to where we could see them but invariably they would see us the instant we saw them and they would take off. If we pressed them too much they would simply fly the few hundred yards to the next island and be done with us. Consequently, I was never able to get pictures of them. This location, by the way, is some 1,200 miles west of the range where Foreshaw places them in

A likely place to find a scavenging sevenfoot Malayan water monitor lizard is behind a cook shack. This one was photographed raiding a dumping area behind a cook shack on Pulan Papa Theo Island.

Parrots of the World.

Of equal interest to me were the huge Malayan water monitor lizards that inhabit all of these little islands. The largest I saw were about seven feet but I was told by the locals that they reach nine feet. These are very adaptable creatures, seemingly very much at ease on land, in the water, in burrows or in the trees.

The easiest place to find and photograph these modern dragons was while they were scavenging the garbage pile beind the cook shack. They would swallow chicken bones and carcasses, fish skeletons, papaya skins, etc. These lizards are smaller than the komodo "dragons," the world's largest lizards located a couple of hundred miles further east. Regardless of being in second place, these were very respectable and impressive. They were quite shy so we had to move slowly and quietly, remaining hidden as much as possible

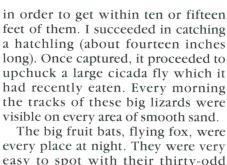


This extremely rare Xanthochromic (lutino or albinistic) crocodile resides in the Jakarta Zoo. It was captured from the wild on West Irian Jaya.



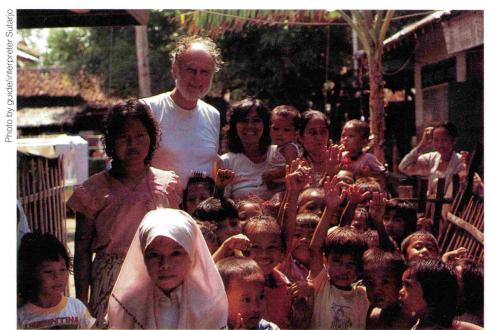
An argus pheasant takes a stroll down the walk at the Tamin-Mini Bird Park, Jakarta.

and luscious tropical fruits. Many of these fruits are immedimelon with the edible portion in



easy to spot with their thirty-odd inch wing spans. Their day roosts are in large, high, dead (or, at least, leafless) trees. Hundreds of them congregate in the same tree. You can hear them a block away bickering, biting at and squabbling with their nearest neighbors. Not too unlike many humans. I cannot understand why they do not separate themselves more, as I have done, if they so totally object to near company. This would, of course, mean they would not all fit in the same tree. Perhaps that is the problem. Beneath their roost tree the ammonia stench from their urine rain was quite stifling. I was not, however, compelled to stay under these trees. Under the roost trees you can occasionally find a baby that has fallen from its mother and is otherwise unhurt. The locals sometimes take these for hand rearing. When the baby is old enough to hold reliably to a twig, it is placed in a small tree or shrub outside the door and hand fed. They become extremely tame and affectionate, and are an interesting if not unusual greeter. When able to fly and forage for itself, it will continue, at least for some time, to return to the roost where it was reared.

In addition to all this, as if anything more was needed, were all of the beautiful butterflies, exotic flowers



Differences attract curiosity and admiration. Author Rae Anderson finds himself surrounded by a flock of women and children on an outing to a Pulan Kalapa Island village.

pecan size segments, saluk (snake-fruit) which is about the size of a plum but with an outer cover that looks like brown snake skin, rambutan — a bright red, spiny looking fruit with a skin that slips off like that of a Concord grape, mangosteen, guavas the size of baseballs, soursop and sawo, a small tan, egg-shaped, honey flavored fruit.

Last and foremost is the durian (Durian zibethinus). No one is neutral about this spiny, football size fruit. You either love it or despise it. Many gourmets consider durian to be one of the most delicious fruits in the world. Its flavor is heavenly, like many things but like nothing you have ever had before. It also happens to be the world's worst smelling fruit. No hotel will permit you to enter the building with a durian other than into the basement via a rear service entrance. The odor permeates and clings to everything that has come into its proximity. The odor of durian has been variously described as that of garbage, rotten eggs, and an overcrowded, unkempt dog yard. To me, the best description of durian would be that of eating ice cream or a gourmet custard in an unkempt public restroom or beside an open sewer. You should, however, judge it for yourself. Slightly underripe durian is a favorite food of the orangutan.

There were plants everywhere that would make the horticulturist and serious plant enthusiast drool. The tables in most restaurants were decor-

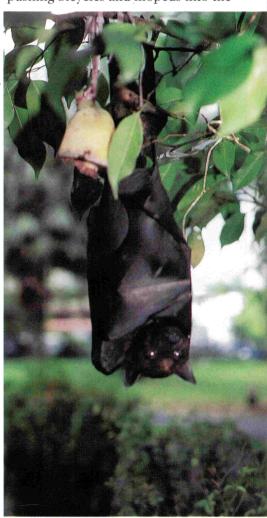
ated with small bouquets of dendrobium and oncidium orchids. Commonly seen as landscape items in yards and around buildings and available for practically nothing from street vendors and small street side 2 nurseries were the magnificent palms 5 Licuala grandis with their symmetri- \(\) cal, palmate, complete, pleated leaves & and Cyrtostachys renda (sealing wax palm) with its brilliant, glossy scarlet leaf bases and petioles and its beautiful and neat clumping habit. In the United States these palms are very expensive and difficult to grow even in a greenhouse.

One thing I continually looked for were some of the beautiful *Platy-ceriums* (staghorn ferns) that are native to Indonesia. I saw none in the wild and not even any in the trees in the Bogor Botanical Gardens. When I asked about this I was startled when told they are all kept in their greenhouses. This, it was explained, became necessary because they were being stolen from the trees.

We found the Indonesian people to be very poor and very friendly. They have a particular fondness for small children and make a great deal over caucasian children.

One thing I could have well done without was the continual game of "chicken" when you are on the roads. Except for a few main thoroughfares in the major cities, most of the roads are two lane — one lane each direction. There are always lots of bicycles and mopeds driving at the

edges of the roads. The automobile drivers want to drive at 55 or 60 mph and everyone seems to think he has an obligation to get ahead or stay ahead of all the others. Consequently, the regular scene is to see vehicles two, three and sometimes four abreast, each trying to get ahead of the other or stay ahead, coming toward you on a two lane road with no one in either direction slowing at all. When this procedure is not occurring the antithesis is. You see the driver of the vehicle in which you are riding in white-knuckled prayer, pushing bicycles and mopeds off the left side while he is trying to stay ahead, or else yours is the third or fourth vehicle to the right, looking down the throat of oncoming trucks, which themselves are taking up both sides of the road. You are uneasy from the beginning because there, as in England, they drive on the wrong side of the road. When the vehicles do make their last-second shifts, pushing bicycles and mopeds into the



This young pet fruit bat was well supplied with hand-outs of fruit from guests such as the author, and its temporary "owner"

mud in order to avoid the head-on collision which continually appears imminent, the vehicles miss each other by mere fractions of an inch. At the end of each day of riding, I thanked my God, the Hindu gods, Buddah and Allah for their joint efforts because it seemed beyond the capability of just one of them to get us back alive.

This "chicken game" must have some kind of rules because as improbable as it seemed we were

never involved in an accident nor did we ever see evidence of one having occurred (perhaps they quickly clean up the mess?).

There is very much more to Indonesia than the small sample which I experienced and have related here. I very much hope to be able to return and get a great deal more first hand exposure to the multitude of unfamiliar locales, people, their culture, arts and crafts, animal life, plants, etc.

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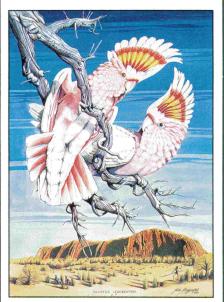
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