

trapped leg. At my remonstrance at this display of callousness, I was told that the animal was capable of inflicting a nasty bite if handled in any other way. Monitor lizard meat is relished in some places in the Andamans.

The hunters also used throw-nets to catch freshwater prawns in the clear mountain streams that ran by their encampment into the sea. The prawns were baited with balls of dough. Eggs of seaturtles were assiduously dug up after they had been located by the use of probe-stick. Turtle-egg omelettes were prepared out of the yolk alone, the albumen being wastefully discarded. But most of the eggs and the meat and hide of the animals they trapped -- as also the large cowries (Cypraea mauretania) that they collected from the reef at low tide -- were sold at Nimbutala and Betapur.

Turtles

It is curious that during almost 200 years of occupation by Europeans and Indians the existence of turtles -- other than seaturtles -- in the Andamans and Nicobars should have gone unrecorded. By a coincidence, two species were found in a single year, 1979, by the Wildlife Wing of the Forest Department. Both have been hitherto unreported from Indian soil. One, which awaits identification -- it is a softshell turtle, in all likelihood an exotic subspecies of the otherwise common Lissemys punctata -- was reported to have been found in the sea in shallow water near a mangrove swamp at Port Blair. The other, probably Cuora amboinensis the Amboyne turtle, is a box turtle that was found at Campbell Bay, Great Nicobar island. A living specimen of this species was also shown to me at Trinkat island as also two eggs that it had laid in January. They were white and elliptical. One measured 25 mm X 50 mm. The species is also said to occur on Camorta island and on Car Nicobar.

Nicobarese

I found the diet of the Central Nicobarese to be worthy of comment. It was not unusual for a Nicobarese to offer, as a friendly token, a piece of dried fish to a visitor. That it was totally uncooked only appeared to heighten the esteem in which the flavour was held! On one occasion, I saw Nicobarese children and adults clustered about a honey-comb they had found in a forest on Nancowry island. The grubs it contained were being delicately extracted singly and eaten with relish. The meat of seaturtles -- including that of the Hawksbill -- is sometimes finely minced and eaten raw with coconut. I believe this practice, however, to be not entirely safe as Hawksbills have been known to sometimes accumulate lethal poisons in their system through the consumption of marine organisms containing these poisons. Tridacna clams (giant clams) are sometimes carefully nurtured or farmed in shallow water near Nancowry until they grow to a large size, when the meat is eaten.

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