

unusual pet might involve, we bought it, after the usual Oriental bargaining, for seven-and-sixpence. The captain of our vessel was an enthusiastic supporter of our venture, and a chicken-coop was cleared of its occupants to form a "kennel" for the otter on the voyage. This was lowered into the water a couple of times a day, to give the animal a taste of his adopted element.

On our return to Mandalay we took him in a small box by car to Maymyo, three thousand feet up on the Shan plateau. Here his status quickly changed from that of "animal" to that of a very well-loved pet. With considerable lack of originality, but in appreciation of the original, he was christened Tarka.

The compound of the house was surrounded by a low wall, so that it was necessary only to nail a board across the bottom of the gate to make it otter proof. The bathroom opened into the compound, and when the bath was not being used for the purpose for which it was designed, it was kept three-quarters full of cold water. A box beside it served as a step, and after one showing Tarka learned the route and appropriated the bath as his own. He delighted to swim around in it or float on his back, playing with such toys as we gave him, or with a twig or any other object which attracted his attention. His great joy was when one of us towed him round and round the bath by his tail, or by his teeth, with which he would gently hold a finger.

When we were out, and at nights, he was confined in a wire netting enclosure, in which I had sunk a sixty-gallon galvanized-iron bath, which was fed with the garden hose. At all other times he had the run of the house and garden. Much though he loved water, he seemed equally to love basking in the hot sun. Often, too, when my wife and I were lounging in deck chairs, Tarka would yikker to be taken up to his favourite positions, my wife's lap, or my neck. In the latter case he would curl round the back of my neck, broad tail dangling down one side of my chest, and head and forepaws on the other. A quarter of a mile of rough grassland separated the compound from a stream which ran through a self-made cutting. The stream was about ten feet wide, made up of a series of riffles and deep pools. We knew that Tarka would follow us more closely than a dog, but it was with some trepidation that we decided upon the experiment of taking him to the stream. One evening we strolled towards it at a pace suited to his short legs and inquisitive habits. When twenty yards from the stream he evidently smelled water, and putting on a spurt, disappeared over the edge. We wondered if we should ever see him again. On reaching the top of the cutting we could see Tarka diving and rolling in his new-found freedom. He ran along the edges of the stream, stood in the rapids and breasted the waters, looked

up at us frequently and yikkered, or dived out of sight into the pools—but to our calls and blandishments he paid no heed. We stepped back a few feet. As soon as he could no longer see us he left the water and charged up the bank to rejoin us. Having found our fears groundless, a nightly walk to the stream became habitual.

Food was not a difficult problem. Fish was plentiful in the bazaar, and a daily expenditure of four annas kept him happy and healthy. Fish had to be really fresh, and on occasions he refused fish which we should ourselves have eaten without hesitation. We realized early that, however affectionate he might be, he was still a wild animal and not a domestic one. This showed particularly at feeding time, when there could be no safe toying with his fish. Sometimes, when satiated, he would take a small fish to the bath and play with it. We were then allowed to participate.

The quality of wildness appeared also when anything startled him. A sudden noise behind him would cause him to leap into the air, turning with miraculous speed as he did so, to come down facing the supposed danger. Sometimes, too, he would give one a painful bite if he awoke suddenly when on lap or neck.

He was an exacting, interesting, mischievous, but most lovable pet, and his eventual loss, when the Japanese advance into Burma made it necessary to chloroform him, was not the least of the losses we suffered during the war.



TARKA FROM BURMA
Photo: K. Mansfield

TASMANIA'S WOLF AND DEVIL

BY IAN HARMAN

THE island of Tasmania contains two animals of outstanding interest to naturalists—the Thylacine and the Tasmanian Devil.

The Thylacine is perhaps of greater scientific interest, and may almost be called a "living fossil." In general appearance it looks rather like a Wolf, but is a good deal thinner in the body and has rather poor fur of a yellowish brown colour. Across the back, from the middle of the body to the base of the tail, are a number of black transverse stripes from which it gets its popular name among Tasmanians of "Native Tiger."

It is also frequently called the Tasmanian Wolf by natural history writers, and though this name is more appropriate, it is still a misnomer, for the Thylacine is not even remotely related to the true Wolves. It is, in fact, a marsupial, having a large pouch in which the female carries her young. This opens backwards—in the reverse direction to that of the kangaroos.

The average length of a Thylacine is about forty-four inches, with an additional twenty-one inches for the tail. In the Tasmanian Museum, Hobart, there is a skin of one of these animals in the form of a floor-rug, which measures seven feet nine inches from tip to tip. This is, however, exceptionally large. It is, in fact, very difficult to obtain complete specimens for zoos or museums, those that are trapped usually being more or less damaged.

Unfortunately, the Thylacine is strictly carnivorous, and undoubtedly a menace to sheep-rearing. For this reason shepherds wage ceaseless war on it. A government reward of a pound a head helped to hasten its march towards extinction.

John Gould, the famous naturalist, who visited Tasmania about a hundred years ago, feared the eventual extermination of the Thylacine even in those days, when it was still abundant. He writes: "When the comparatively small island of Tasmania becomes more densely populated, and its primitive forests are intersected with roads from the Eastern districts to the Western coasts, the numbers of this singular animal will speedily diminish. Extermination will have its full sway, and it will then, like the wolf in England and Scotland, be recorded as an animal of the past."

It was recently feared that Gould's prophecy had come true, but expeditions into remote parts of Tasmania have revealed that there are still some Thylacines living there, and a few are believed to

have taken up residence in the protected region of the National Park—a marvellous area of mountainous country, still fairly remote and in a natural, unspoiled state.

Its headquarters have always been in the Lake District, a plateau in the centre of the island rising to 3,000 ft. above sea-level, and dotted with many fine lakes. This district is visited mostly by trout fishermen and campers, and the only dwellings are shepherds' huts. The plateau, being high and damp, makes ideal sheep-grazing country in summer and it is the custom of sheep-owners to transport their flocks here during the hot weather.

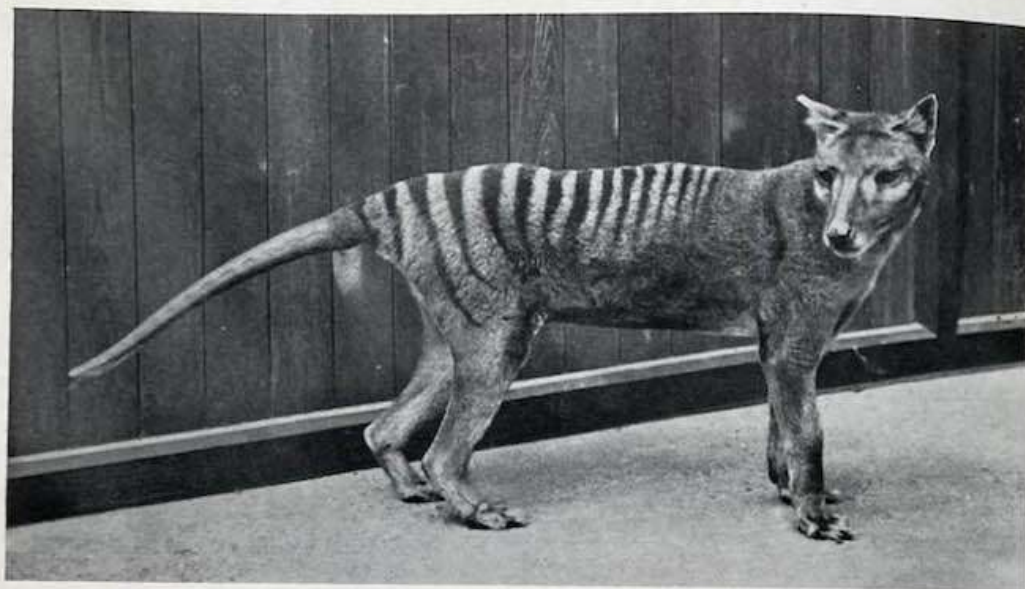
Until the first decade of this century, the Thylacine took considerable toll of sheep in the Lake District. The country here is of the type it likes best—open plains between fairly thick forests containing rocky hills where it makes its lair, this generally being in a cave or the hollow of a large fallen eucalyptus tree.

With the approach of dusk, the Thylacine sallies forth to the plains and valleys in search of prey. Its natural food consists of the small animals, Wallabies and the like, and its destructiveness of the larger marsupials and sheep is all the greater from its vampire-like, fastidious tastes. It will only make one meal of a Sheep or Kangaroo, merely sucking the blood from the jugular vein or perhaps devouring the fat around the kidneys, but once having left a carcass it does not touch it again.

Sometimes the Thylacine has been observed prowling around in the daylight, and specimens in captivity show themselves quite freely by day, so that it is not a purely nocturnal animal. In disposition it is rather shy, and will never attack a man, except when cornered or caught in a trap. Shepherds hunt it with large Kangaroo-dogs, and it will turn on these when they are close on its heels. Even several of these dogs will not approach a cornered Thylacine. The Thylacine is rather a silent animal, and the only sound made when hunting is described as resembling the whine of a puppy.

A very interesting fact about the Thylacine is that when hard pressed, or chasing a fast prey, it will often spring along on its hind legs, after the manner of a Kangaroo or Wallaby. This peculiarity was recorded as long ago as 1839, when the animal was quite common.

The first Thylacine was captured—probably near Hobart—by Harris, and this type specimen has,



THYLACINE FROM TASMANIA
Photo: Zoological Society of London

unfortunately, been lost. All we know of it is, that the stomach contained the remains of the animal's last meal, which was, of all things, a Spiny Ant-eater (*Echidna*). Harris described the Thylacine in the *Transactions of the Linnean Society*, in 1808, naming it *Didelphus cynocephala*. The generic name was later changed to *Thylacinus*.

The female gives birth to four young ones at a time, and her pouch has four teats, so that it is unlikely that more than this number is ever produced, and certainly no more could be reared. Little is known of the Thylacine's family life, but the young seem to follow their parents on hunting expeditions for a certain period.

The Thylacine is interesting to students of the earth's history, since it provides evidence for the existence at one time of an Antarctic Continent, linking Tasmania with South America. At this time the Bass Straits which are now about two hundred miles wide, and separate Tasmania from Australia, were not formed. The fossil *Prothylacinus*, found in the Miocene beds of Santa Cruz, is practically identical with the living Thylacine. That the Thylacine reached Tasmania via the Southern Continent is almost certain, as its fossil remains have not been found farther north than Victoria on the Australian mainland.

In 1850 a pair of these interesting animals was presented to the Zoo by two keen Tasmanian

naturalists, Mr. Ronald Gunn and Dr. Grant. The report says: "The extreme rarity of this species and the difficulties of transport have prevented any previous attempt to obtain examples of this carnivorous marsupial."

The Zoo has had at least a dozen Thylacines—the last having been purchased from Mr. C. Bruce Chapman on 26th January, 1926. This specimen died on 9th August, 1931. About the same time several fine specimens were to be seen in the Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart. Owing to economic difficulties, this unique Zoo was disbanded some years ago.

The Tasmanian Devil is very different in appearance from the Thylacine, though its habits are similar and it is confined to the same island. It is, however, not nearly so rare, though it is only found in the wilder parts. Being smaller than the Thylacine—about forty inches in all—it does not cover such a large extent of country in its hunting range, and is content to dwell in the rocky, almost inaccessible thickets of the mountainous scrub.

The Devil is very ugly, squat, powerfully built, with coarse black fur and white markings, the face and snout being of an unhealthy pinkish-white hue. It can kill sheep, but being slow and clumsy in its movements, it lies in wait for the animal and then springs at its neck, fastening its hold with a Bulldog-like grip. In relation to its size, it has the most powerful jaws of any animal in the world.

The nature of the Tasmanian Devil is different to that of the Thylacine. It is very much fiercer, and extremely tenacious of life. Like the Thylacine, it shows traces of reptilian ancestry by the fact that the tail gradually merges into the body, and is not a free member, as it is with the dog, for instance. It is therefore possible, given sufficient courage and adroitness, to catch hold of the Devil by its tail and lift it up, when it cannot bend the body or tail sufficiently to bite its captor. When thus uncereemoniously treated, the Devil utters furious hissing noises, with widely opened jaws.

The Tasmanian Devil was discovered by Harris, and described by him in 1808. He found it common around Hobart, where it was destructive to poultry, etc., and says that it was used as food for the convicts. The flesh is reputed to taste like veal. Harris tried to tame some of these animals, without success. He tells us: "They appear to be untamably savage, biting severely, and uttering at the same time a low yelping growl. A male and a female, which I kept for a couple of months chained together in an empty cask, were continually fighting. Their quarrels began as soon as it was dark (as they slept all day), and continued throughout the night almost without intermission, accompanied by a kind of hollow barking."

Other observers confirm this view of extreme

intractability of the Devil. But it was not shared by Mrs. Mary Roberts, C.M.Z.S., who kept these animals for many years in her private zoo in Hobart. Mrs. Roberts succeeded in breeding them in captivity, and claimed that the Tasmanian Devil is not so black as he is painted. Her experience tends to show that young ones at any rate will respond to kindness and show affection for their keeper. Her detailed observations are recorded in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society for 1915.

The Zoo received its first Tasmanian Devil on 15th October, 1833, from Captain Riddle. It is not recorded how long it lived. Of another specimen in the Zoo, J. G. Wood records that "without the least cause it would fly at the bars of its cage, and endeavour by dint of teeth and claws to wreak its vengeance on me, while it gave vent to its passionate feelings in short, hoarse screams of rage. There was no reason for these outbursts of anger, for the animal behaved in precisely the same manner whenever any visitor happened to pause in front of its domicile."

Of recent specimens, one was purchased on 13th October, 1926, and four more on 8th October, 1931. The last of these died on 11th September, 1934. Finally, a pair was received during the present summer, and the male may be seen in the Raccoon dens.



TASMANIAN DEVIL (*Sarcophilus harrisi*) FROM TASMANIA
Photo: F. W. Bond