

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ETHNOZOOLOGY OF THE KARENS IN THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

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The Karens, an ethnic group from the Irrawaddy (*Ayeyarwady* in local tongue) River delta, from the eastern hills, and also the western region of Burma (*Myanmar* in Burmese language), are thought to have originated in Mongolia or western China, before colonizing Burma (Rajah, 1990). Many Karen beliefs centre around animals and plants, one being that killing, or even injuring, a hornbill is a sin, equivalent to executing a holy man. Traditionally, Karens utilized animals only for their own survival (Thongmak & Hulse, 1993). Incidentally, there is now in Burma an active Karen separatist movement, with a predominant Christian leadership. For further details about the Karens, see Gilmore (1911) and Marshall (1922).

The 'British Raj' officials settled the Karens in North Andaman, in the 1920s, to assist their Forest Department. These Karen settlers' knowledge, of the utility of the wild plants and animals in the Andaman Islands is considerable, but no ethnozoological studies have been conducted so far. In this paper, I attempt to inventory this knowledge of 'Andamanese' Karen tribesmen regarding their use, or beliefs, of wild animals (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates) in these islands, and also list the local vernacular names (in native Karen tongue) of the species mentioned, in the table provided below.

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