

Book Review

Pictorial Guide to Oil Palm Cultivation and Mammalian Pests

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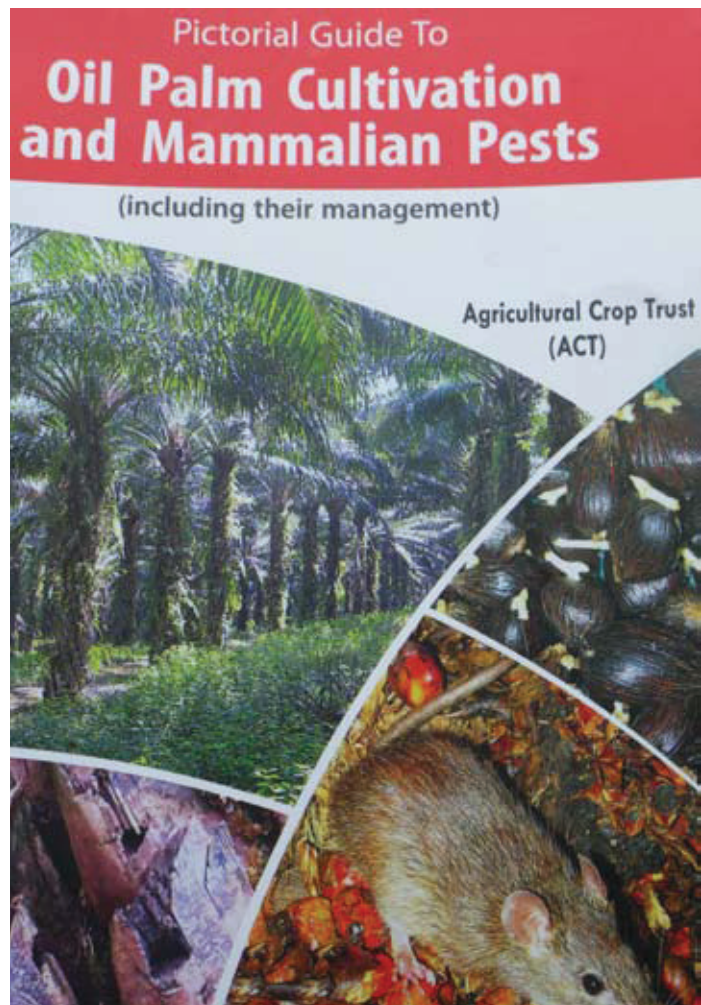
Price: RM100, available at the office of the Incorporated Society of Planters, Kuala Lumpur

Review by P.S. Tong

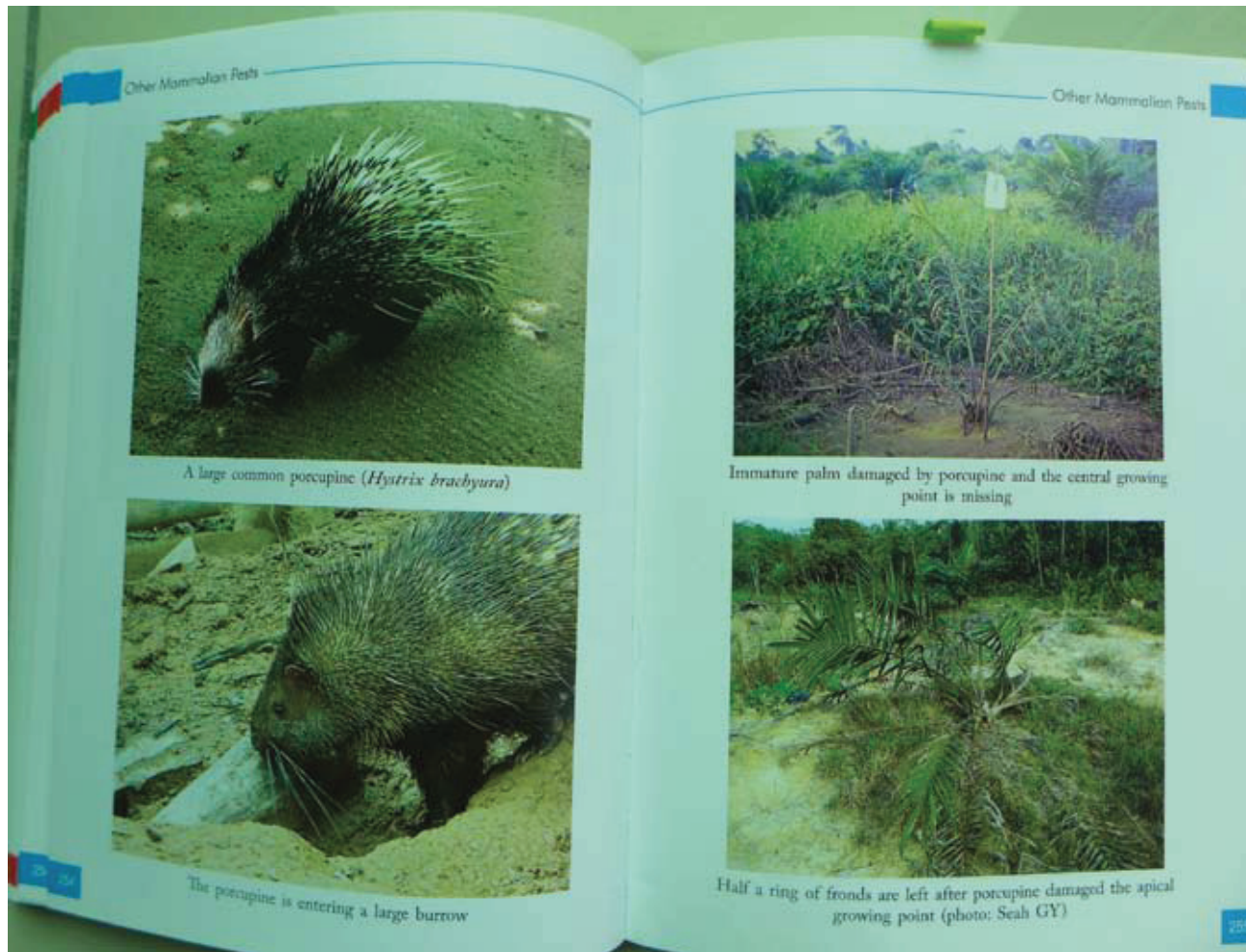
Oil palm is the main industrial tree crop in Malaysia. This is the first book to provide detailed pictorial information on oil palm cultivation and on the control of the mammalian pests of oil palms. The book is in four sections.

The first section covers oil palm cultivation, which includes oil palm ecology, habit and cultivation practices. It is illustrated profusely with photos showing oil palm cultivation stage by stage. These photos will be interesting and useful for those interested in oil palm plantations.

Insect pests such as the leaf-eating caterpillars or bagworms are well known in the plantations but mammalian pests, though less well-known, can be just as serious. Hence this book fills a gap by focusing on mammalian pests. The most serious mammalian pests are the rats, which cause great losses to plantations in Malaysia and Indonesia. The second section of the book is devoted to rats. The authors cover a comprehensive list of topics including rat incidence in oil palm plantations, the identification of six common rat species, rat damage on yield, rat population measurement, and rat control measures.



Other mammalian pests are covered in the third section. They include squirrels, porcupines, wild pigs, monkeys, elephants, cattle, goats and sheep. Some photos showing the damage caused by these pests are probably revealed for the first time in a publication. All pests are identified



by their scientific and common names. The common names include names in English, Malay and Chinese. This is pertinent in the context of Malaysia's multilingual and multiethnic composition and is consistent with the authors' use of pictures to overcome language barriers.

The inclusion of domestic sheep, goats and cattle may come as a surprise. These animals were initially introduced as biological controls for weeds in oil palm plantations. As it turns out, they are not only feeding on weeds, but also grazing on the crop.

The fourth section covers miscellaneous items such as glossary, abbreviations, references, books for further reading, indexes for scientific, common, Malay and Chinese names, types of rodenticides and acknowledgements.

The authors have put together photos and knowledge from years of working experience into this pictorial guide book, thereby providing a great service to the agricultural community. The book design could have been a bit better if in Section 1, the pictures had been closely integrated with the text instead of being lumped all together at the end of the section, but this is a minor quibble.