

Man fights lion with chainsaw

An American, Dustin Britton, used a chainsaw to fight off an attack by a mountain lion while he was camping with his family in Wyoming.

Mr Britton was on a camping trip with his wife and two toddlers in northwestern Wyoming.

The 32-year-old mechanic and ex-US marine from Windsor, Colorado, said he was alone cutting firewood about 100 feet from his campsite in the Shoshone National Forest when he saw a seven-stone lion staring at him from some bushes.

Mr Britton said he raised his chainsaw and met the lion head-on as it pounced - a collision he described as feeling like a grown man running directly into him.

"It batted me three or four times with its front paws and as quick as I hit it with that saw it just turned away," he told the Associated Press.

Wildlife officials said Sunday evening's attack was highly unusual because mountain lions are generally reclusive by nature. Only eight cases of mountain lions acting aggressively toward humans have been documented in Wyoming over the last decade.

"It's very, very rare," said Warren Mischke, a spokesman for the Wyoming Game and Fish authority. "We're still trying to investigate why this lion would behave this way."

The wounded animal retreated after Mr Britton inflicted a six to eight-inch gash on the lion's shoulder. Mr Britton was left with only a small puncture wound on his forearm.

"You would think if you hit an animal with a chainsaw it would dig right in," he said. "I might as well have hit it with a hockey stick."

The mountain lion was shot and killed on Monday after it attacked a dog brought in to track the animal, which was four to five years old. Authorities say it was in poor physical condition and appeared to be starving.

After Mr Britton's confrontation, he and his wife, Kirsta, decided to spend the night in their pop-up camper with their two children with the lion still on the loose.

Wildlife agents were called the next morning after Mr Britton told a passing forestry employee about the incident.

Tests for rabies and other diseases came up negative, but officials said they were continuing to analyse the animal for other potential diseases.

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The 'Malwana Special' is here to make your mouth water



by Aisha Edris
Pix by Kamal Bogoda

In Colombo, women dressed in their Cheethira attire and men in their sarongs eagerly call passersby to stop their vehicles to taste the plump white fruit in bright red or yellow protective cover. This we see not only in Colombo but elsewhere in the whole country during the Rambuttan season.

It takes just a second for the mouth-watering, fleshy Rambuttan from Malwana to sink into your teeth. For a few months of the year, we see the pavements of Colombo city littered with red and yellow Rambuttan shells. The Rambuttan season has just begun, making it a die-hard fans to rush to Malwana to buy the fresh, juicy fruit. Malwana's orchards are heavy laden with Rambuttans.

These days we see the streets of Colombo and super markets flooded with red-headed fruit. Rambuttan, the smelly and thorny headed Durian and the sweet purple fruit, Mangoosteen, one cannot avoid seeing in town during this time of the year. When it comes to the delicious Rambuttan, we that Sri Lankans just cannot get enough of it, in spite the rumors of falling ill, we still eat the fruit.

When we talk about Rambuttan, instantly it reminds one of Malwana, the land of Rambuttan. So in order to get first-hand experience of the Rambuttan industry, we vis-

ited Malwana at the peak of the Rambuttan season.

Even though Rambuttan cultivation has spread all over the country, we all believe that Malwana is the heart of the Rambuttan industry in Sri Lanka. This was confirmed when we saw Rambuttans shining like a million rubies stretching across a green cover on both sides of the roads of Malwana, while Archchies, along with their daughters, daughters-in-law and their children, stood on the sides of the roads impatiently waiting for buyers to stop their vehicles to buy the fleshy fruit.

Almost everyone in Malwana owns a Rambuttan tree, at least one tree, which has become a custom for the inhabitants. We spoke to several land owners and workers at Rambuttan estates closer to Mapiiti Gama Junction, about the industry and also about the myths surrounding it.

Different varieties

When we pass Havelock town, we see Rambuttan sellers standing at their makeshift huts selling different varieties of Rambuttan. The colours vary from different shades of red. A few others are red and yellow and there is also the yellow Rambuttan; one surely gets confused in selecting the best Rambuttan from the sellers. We spoke to Nimal Wijesinghe, a small Rambuttan land owner about different varieties of Rambuttan.

It was a pleasing sight for us, the hungry travellers from Colombo to see the fertilized land where the Kelani River flows into the sea. The beaming sun touching the heavily-laden Rambuttan trees of different colours, gives the weary travellers entering the Kingdom of Rambuttan, an invitation to learn the story of the fruit.

Wijesinghe explained to us that there are different types of Rambuttan in Malwana. The Malwana Special is the most distinctive one. The Malaysian Yellow is the other one.



The Malwana Special is a hybrid of a foreign variety and the indigenous Sri Lankan fruit is known as Val Rambuttan. The Malwana Special is pronounced the best variety and is sold at the highest price. The Malawana Special has the highest

demand in the local market and also in international markets.

Another variety of Rambuttan is the Malaysian Yellow which is also very sweet, sometimes tastier than the Malwana Special. However, the demand for this kind is very low since the Malwana Special has a distinct beauty that attracts the buyers.

Finding a second home

Even though we Sri Lankans are crazy about Rambuttan and Durian, these fruits are not indigenous to our country.

It is believed that the Portuguese brought the first Rambuttan seeds to Sri Lanka from Malaysia. Even though Rambuttan is a foreign fruit to Sri Lanka, since the day the seeds were planted in Sri Lanka, it has become part and parcel of the Sri Lankan culture.

According to legend, the Portuguese had a fortress in Malwana. They had found the Malwana soil along the Kelani River ideal for the plant to thrive.

During the Rambuttan season, the villagers or outsiders offer land owners a price to lease Rambuttan trees. Piyadasa Mahinda, an employee at a Rambuttan estate explained to us about the leasing system.

This system is practised by owners of Rambuttan lands who have acres of Rambuttan that needs to be plucked. If they receive a high price for their land, they lease out the land during the season.

Mealy Bug

This year, the Rambuttan industry faced a great problem due to the Mealy Bug, also known as Piti nekuna invading the trees.

According to Wijesinghe, the crops were affected in large numbers due to the bug. In some cases, almost all the crops were destroyed and the losses amount to thousands of rupees, he explained.

The Mealy Bug is a fungal disease which affects the trees. The food habits of Mealy Bug are those of sucking juice from the plant, which causes malnutrition, leading to the death of the plant. When it goes from plant to plant it spreads viral diseases.

The Rambuttan rituals

In the good old days, some unique traditions were practised in the Malwana area when the harvesting times were over.

Religious ceremonies were organised to praise the god of Katharagama for giving a fine crop. Some people made vows to the god as they had promised last year, while others promised to make vows if they obtained a good harvest in the coming year.

According to the elderly community in Malwana, the fruits must be picked before sunset, if not the picker is thrown down by guardian deities of the tree. However, most of these traditions are not practised today.

The villagers explained to us that the biggest enemy of Rambuttan is the bat which is known as Eka Vavula in Sinhala. When the sun sinks, hundreds of bats appear and cause great damage, if they are not chased.

The villagers added that in the day time animals like squirrels and various kinds of birds feed on Rambuttan.

During night time, watchers switch on all the lights placed on the top branch of trees to keep the bats away from the fruits and fire crackers are also used to chase away the flying intruders. The traditional tikkes made out of iron, are hung on the branches of Rambuttan trees. The owners and watchmen stay awake the whole night to protect their harvest from bats, animals and also humans.

Mango tree bears fruit after 20 years

For 20 years it has failed to produce a single mango, despite the tender care of some of the best botanists in the world. But now the mango tree at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew has finally borne fruit.

The mango tree, which is one of the main features in the Palm House glasshouse at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London, has amazed staff after they spotted the tennis ball-sized fruit hanging high in its branches.

It comes as another mango tree, growing in the Indian Garden at the British Museum, has blossomed in what is believed to be the first time a mango tree has bloomed in central London.

The tropical tree, which originates from the Indian subcontinent, is notoriously difficult to grow in the UK as it requires high temperatures and sunlight.

And despite being housed in the carefully controlled tropical conditions inside the Palm House at Kew, staff have never been able to get it to produce any fruit before.

Last winter, however, the bed where the tree is planted was accidentally allowed to dry out more than normal and this seems to have sparked the plant into action.

There were originally two fruit on the tree, but one of them dropped off, said

Wesley Shaw, manager of the Palm House. The remaining fruit seems to be still growing.

It has taken 20 years for it to happen. The other fruit trees we have in Palm House such as the banana, papaya and star fruit regularly produce fruit so it was a bit of a mystery as to what was wrong with the mango tree.

It looks like what may have happened was that over the winter the tree dried out a bit more than usual and it seems to have mimicked the dry season they get in the tropics. We have subsequently found out that they need a dry season to promote fruiting.

Mango trees, which are relations of the cashew nut tree, can grow up to 100ft tall in the wild and have been cultivated for their juicy yellow-fleshed fruit for more than 1,000 years.

There are thought to be 400 different varieties of mango with fruits that can weigh up to 2.5lbs. They typically flower in the dry winter months before developing fruit in the wetter summer months.

The one growing at Kew was planted in the 1980s by botanist David Cook from a seed extracted from a mango bought in a shop.

Scott Taylor, a display horticulturalist at

Kew who first spotted the fruit on the mango tree, added: "Somehow the water content in the soil had dropped this year and it seems to have prompted the tree to fruit."

Next year we might let it dry out a bit deliberately this time to see if we can get it to produce more fruit.

In the meantime we are looking forward to the fruit that is there just now ripening so we can share it out among the staff and have a taste.

Guy Barter, a horticulturalist at the Royal Horticultural Society, said it was unusual for a mango tree in the UK to produce fruit.

He said: "You need a very special greenhouse to generate the heat required for this fruit to grow. Your average person at home would never be able to get them to flower or grow fruit."

The Eden Project in Cornwall has mango trees that have been producing fruit for the past few years.

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