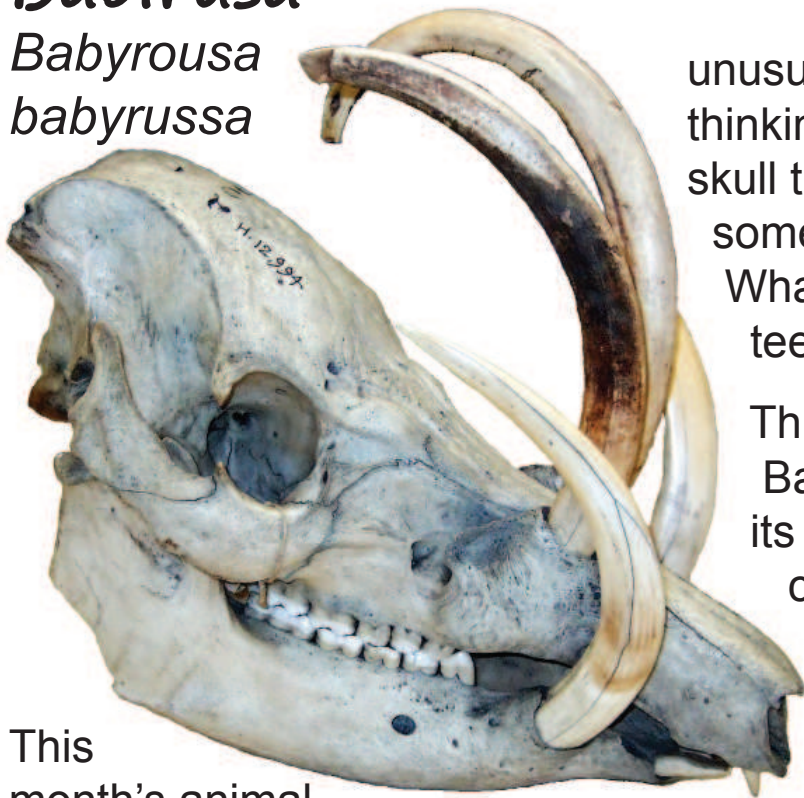


YZC Animal of the Month, February 2014

Babirusa

*Babyrousa
babyrussa*



This month's animal is a quite extraordinary pig. The Babirusa is a member of the pig family found on the islands of Sulawesi, Togian, Sula and Buru in Indonesia. Here they like to live near rivers and ponds in the rainforest. They can grow to a length of 1.1m, height at the shoulder of 80cm and weight of 100kg. Like other pigs they are omnivores, eating leaves, nuts, fruits and other animals. Unlike other pigs they tend not to root around in the earth for food – they are missing a pair of bones called the rostrals from their snout, so will only snuffle around in softer muds and sands. “Nothing so

unusual here,” you might be thinking. Take a look at the skull though, and it is like something from Halloween. What is going on with those teeth?

This is the skull of a male Babirusa. Those tusks are its canine teeth (your canines are the slightly pointy teeth between the biting incisors at the front and the grinding molars at the back).

The upper canines instead of growing downwards into the mouth grow upwards out of the snout, and curve upwards and backwards towards the forehead. The lower canines also grow upwards as pretty vicious weapons for use in fights with other males. The name “Babirusa” actually means “pig-deer”, and they use their tusks for display and combat as stags do.

The survival of the Babirusa is threatened by people cutting down its rainforest home, and by hunting. It is now a protected species.