

Asian Rhino Project

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MAY 2005



A Warm Welcome to our New Members

Anonymous (3)
Ashe Rodger
Bob Lavis
Brooke Squires
Christine McComb
Darren Ciniglio
Dean Burford
Esther Widjaja

Greg Mollenkamp
Kate O'Connell
Kulari Harris
Lee David Oddy
Marc Bowden
Martin Storey
Melissa Reynolds
Michael Carnes

Nat Sullivan
Nicholas Bishop
Sarah Saunders
Shirley Sydenham
Stephen Widjaja
Tasha Czarny

With a special thanks to Marc Bowden for subscribing his friends!

Total number of members now stands at 102.

Project Updates

ARP, Peter Hall and the International Rhino Foundation – Sumatran Rhino Project, Sumatra

Well it is really hard to know where to start with this particular update! In March, the majority of the ARP crew had the privilege of visiting the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS) in Way Kambas, Sumatra where we were given a grand tour of the rhino facilities and the opportunity to meet the two resident Sumatran rhino Bina and Torgamba. Clare, Martina and Holly tied their travel to Indonesia with a visit to Java and the Silvery Gibbon Project's Javan gibbon rehabilitation centre. Kerry and Peter attended the inaugural Global Management Propagation Board (GMPB) meeting, also in Java. The team met up at the SRS after their Javan adventures. The girls arrived in Sumatra a day after Peter and Kerry who had been whisked out to the other side of the Island to Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park to meet with a very special rhino Rossa. Clare, Martina and Holly furthered their trip afterwards, visiting WildAid and Free the Bears conservation projects in Cambodia. We were all looked after extremely well throughout our adventures and all in all, the trip was very productive and extremely inspiring.

Rossa, Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park

By Kerry Crosbie

I have been very fortunate in life – I am working my dream job as an Exotic Mammal Keeper at Perth Zoo; I have been able to specialise in rhino husbandry and conservation; I have had the opportunity to travel the world visiting rhinoceros facilities and projects, AND been able to further my passion and desire to making a difference through working with a great crew of people forming the Asian Rhino Project assisting Asian rhinoceros conservation.

I had accepted the sad reality that one of my dreams was unlikely to ever happen though – to see a Sumatran rhino in its wild habitat. I was prepared to settle for a single hoof print which is the most you can really expect due to the thick, often impenetrable forest and severe lack of rhino numbers in the wild. However, last March, this dream came true!



Kerry examining a hoof print at rhino sanctuary. Photo by Terri Roth.

Kerry and Rossa in the coffee plantation. Photo by Terri Roth



I still can't believe it – I had the most unbelievable opportunity to meet a young female rhino named *Rossa*. *Rossa* has taken up residence in the outer regions of the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park (BBS) for the past year. She is estimated to be around three to four years old and unfortunately has decided to claim her stake on the edge of the park. It is believed that *Rossa* had probably been recently weaned from her mother at the time she was discovered and was pushed away to form her own territory (a natural separation process usually carried out when the cow is ready to calf again). Sadly *Rossa* regularly visits local coffee plantations outside the National Park and shows little fear of humans which threatens her existence. As

a result the BBS Rhino Protection Units (RPU) have had to keep a close eye on this inquisitive rhino to ensure her safety from poachers and/or frightened local villagers.

I was very impressed with the RPU team at BBS and in particular their leader Arief. Arief seemed to have a dedicated passion not only for *Rossa* and the other rhino at BBS, but also for his team. The rangers were all very professional and seemed to take pride in their work which is extremely tough, hard going and quite dangerous! Our driver for example is now an ex-ranger. He had to take a step back from his duties thanks to a run in with a poacher who had shot him in the leg rendering him physically unable to negotiate the rugged terrain and strength to tackle it. These men are true heroes! I truly admire their work and I felt honored to be in their presence.

There is hope that *Rossa* is pregnant as she disappeared into the jungle for a few days into a known males territory. We were able to get quite close to *Rossa* during our visit and Dr Robin Radcliffe, Dr Terri Roth and Dr Muhammad Agil had come prepared! They were able to carry out an abdominal ultrasound on *Rossa* while we were bribing her to stand with a scratch underneath the belly. Sadly pregnancy was unable to be confirmed or denied as *Rossa* would not stand long enough for a good image.

The BBS RPU rangers believe that there are approximately six rhino living in the area surrounding *Rossa's* territory including her mother, which they believe they have spotted on at least one occasion. It was suggested that the rhino numbers within the park also look to be increasing. If this is the case, this population could well be the most viable population of Sumatran rhino in the world along with the population in Taman Negara NIP (in Malaysia Peninsula) with the current population of rhino in BBS estimated to total approximately 80 head.

So, now that I have seen, touched and experienced not just hoof prints in the wild, but an actual rhino, lets see if we can reach the ultimate goal ... to save the species! With the professionalism and passion we observed from the RPU rangers working on the ground, the promising indications pointing towards a population increase within this area, and support from the rest of the world, there certainly is possibility for this dream to come true.

During our visit, it was identified that there was a need for satellite phones to carry out special operations within the park (eg to monitor *Rossa* and other areas of the park without others knowing their locations, increasing *Rossa's* safety). The proposal was taken to the ARP committee and Board of Management. We have since notified the National Parks and RPU in BBS that we would fund such equipment and are awaiting the receipts before forwarding the funds. This is in good time as recently there have been news reports of illegal logging within the park – if the rangers are not broadcasting their locations over two ways and discuss operations over the phones provided, illegal encroachers will be less likely to know where and when the rangers are going to pop up.

Kerinci Seblat Rhino Rescue

An excerpt from an update provided by Dr Nico Van Strien, IRF:

"I have just received a brief update from Mr. Waladi on the progress in Kerinci-Seblat. Things are moving as planned. The car and the other equipment are on site and the upgrading of the access road is almost completed. Two field camps have been constructed and the first trap is ready. The teams are working on three more traps

I plan to make a detailed progress report when I am back in Indonesia in June."

For more information on this segment please refer to past newsletters. You can find them on our website www.asianrhinos.org.au

Way Kambas Update

A part of Peters funding has funded the employment of Dr Robin Radcliffe who has spent the past four months at the SRS assisting the veterinary and captive management staff to implement captive breeding methods used for the successful breeding of the Sumatran rhinos at the Cincinnati Zoo, USA. Dr Radcliffe specialises in rhinoceros husbandry, health, nutrition and reproduction. He worked closely with senior veterinarian Dr Dedi Candra and his staff sharing information and knowledge while providing support and guidance in the implementation of successful methods used for the captive management of Sumatran rhino.



Kerry, Dr Robin Radcliff and Dr Dedi Candra ultrasounding *Bina* the female Sumatran Rhinoceros at Way Kambas SRS. Photo courtesy of Kerry Crosbie.

Andrew Thompson (ARP Board of Management and Professor of Parasitology at Murdoch University) had planned to visit the SRS with the rest of us but had to cancel at the last minute due to work commitments. He had aimed to collect samples during our visit to carry out a parasitological analysis on the resident rhino at the SRS. Kerry was able to collect samples however for Andrew to analyse - the rhino were given a clean bill of health and were completely parasite free!

Global Management Propagation Board (GMPB) Meeting, Jakarta

Kerry and Peter attended the inaugural GMPB meeting along with representatives of range states, National Parks officials, NGOs, institutions holding Sumatran rhino and Sumatran rhino specialists. All went well and the board was formed. It's tasks are to:

- 1 Recommend and decide on the management of the global captive Sumatran rhino population as a truly global population – maximising options for reproduction and to improve the vitality and viability of the program.
- 2 To prepare and facilitate exchange of animals between all locations in indicated for the purpose of the program.
- 3 To facilitate the exchange of experience and transfer of knowledge.

Kerry was voted and accepted onto the GMPB board as a representative of donors. The board will meet bi-annually to review membership and elect a chairman and discuss issues.



Dr Nan Schaffer and Dr Edwin Bosi at the river base camp, Tabin Wildlife Reserve, Borneo. Photo courtesy of Nadia Khashoukgi.

ARP and SOS Rhino Borneo – Sumatran Rhino Project, Borneo

The first of the requests for the funds raised from Karen's trek has come through from SOS Rhino Borneo. These funds will purchase a generator set for a base camp on the south-eastern part of Tabin next month (June 05). Six sets of emergency lights have also been requested for the camps so that they can utilise them after they stop the generator set which will aid in lowering fuel costs (can run without the generator).

ARP, Wildlife Trust of India – Illegal Trade in Rhino Horn Investigation

The ARP has committed \$5,000AU to the Wildlife Trust of India to support an investigation into the illegal trade in rhino horn. The following snippets are from the proposal provided by WTI:

"It has been reported by various authorities, that 17 and 10 rhino seizures have taken place in Nepal and India respectively during 1993 – 2001. There is a definite need to document details of these seizures, the sources of seized contraband (horn), details of the arrested, identities of traders and poachers, cases of repeat offences etc. Rhino poaching is regularly reported from Manas NP & Pobitora WLS."

"Menon (1996b) recorded six methods of rhino poaching in India. These are by shooting, trapping in a pit, electrocution, poisoning, spearing and catching with a noose."

"Domestic trade in Great Indian One Horned Rhinoceros horn is limited and restricted in Traditional Chinese Medicine and other minor uses. However, most of the rhino horn from India is thought to feed the demand in international trade."

"Against this grim background of rhino poaching, and the international trade in rhino horn and its derivatives in India and Nepal, we propose this study as an essential prerequisite to quantify the current volume of rhino horn trade in India and neighboring countries and also to ascertain control measures for this trade in India.

The project will take five months from the date of the grant and receipt of funds. The first 2 months will be used for data collection in India, followed by field work in Nepal during the next two months, one month for data analysis and report writing.

This proposal is a revised version of the initial proposal as adequate funding was not able to be sourced. This version will focus on NE India and Royal Chitwan and Royal Bardia National Parks in Nepal. Currently this proposal has been submitted solely to the Asian Rhino Project (ARP)".

This all comes in great time as the latest news stories coming out from India and Nepal suggest that poaching of tigers and rhinos has increased dramatically due to the unrest and civil war within the countries.



Indian Rhino's wallowing.
Photo courtesy of Brooke Squires.

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Feature Story

Javan Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*)

By Colin Groves

In 1883, the volcanic island of Krakatao, sitting in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra, exploded with a noise that could be heard halfway around the globe. The tsunami that resulted killed some 35,000 people – less devastating than the tsunami of December 26th, 2004, and over a smaller area, but it wiped out whole villages along the opposite coasts. It depopulated the small (30,000 ha) peninsula of Ujung Kulon, which juts out of the extreme southwestern corner of Java, and few people ventured back there for many years, leaving it to the rainforest and its wildlife. And that is why we still, today, have a small but apparently viable population of Javan rhinoceros.

The Javan rhino is not unlike the Indian rhino in appearance. Like the Indian rhino it has a single short horn, and the skin is thrown into characteristic folds as if it was wearing shorts and a sleeveless jacket. It is smaller than the Indian rhino and there are other detailed differences – especially noticeable are the small head and the long, prehensile upper lip. Females are essentially hornless. Very few females have more than a low knobble on the snout, if that, whereas the male has a fairly respectable horn, about 150-300 cm long.

The range of *Rhinoceros sondaicus* extended from Java in the south to the borders of Bhutan in the north, but – except in Java itself, where it was found all over the western (rain forested) half of the island - it was probably spottily distributed.

Local hunters were after them for their horns for the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) trade; they were also much sought after by bold white hunters, and one by one the populations disappeared. The last report from the Sundarbans was in 1908; the last one in the Malay peninsula was shot (to make sure of collecting the skeleton of the last of its kind) in 1932; and in 1925/6 a Dutchman called Hazewinkel shot seven in Lampung, defending himself by assuring everyone that it was still numerous there (needless to say, no more were recorded in Sumatra since his

forays). In 1817 Horsfield wrote that “it lives gregarious in many parts of Java”; by the end of the 19th century the combination of hunting and habitat destruction had reduced the range to tiny isolates, and in 1934 the last one outside Ujung Kulon was shot. That left, according to Andries Hoogerwerf, about 20-25 living, all in Ujung Kulon.

Hoogerwerf urged the protection of Ujung Kulon, and it happened – from that day to this it has remained Indonesia’s best-kept reserve (now National Park), a paradise for wildlife. A few poaching incidents from time to time, and one episode of unexplained excess mortality in 1981/2 when 5 died (perhaps of anthrax), have not prevented the rhino population doubling or tripling since then. Up to the 1990s there was a census every year or two, based on measurements of footprints. In recent years camera-traps have been installed, and a large number of individual rhinos are photographed regularly. At least four calves have been born since 2002, and the population is put at between 50 and 75.



Javan Rhinoceros. Photo courtesy of Tom Foose

Persistent reports of “scaly rhinos” emerged from Vietnam through the 1970s and 1980s, and the presence of a few in region about 120k northeast of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) was finally confirmed in the late ‘80s. In 1992, the Vietnam government demarcated an area of some 20,000 ha as the Cat Loc Rhino Sanctuary, which is administratively part of Cat Tien National Park. A team from Ujung Kulon visited Cat Loc in 1993 and made a census based on footprints; they concluded that there were 7-9 individuals present (although only two different rhinos have so far been confirmed by camera traps).



Javan Rhino browsing Ujung Kulon NP.
Photo courtesy of Alain Compost.

Though Ujung Kulon is well protected, the population needs to expand in numbers if it is to survive. From time to time proposals have been made to translocate some to other parts of Indonesia, such as Way Kambas in Lampung (the region from which they were extirpated by Hazewinkel). But nothing has been done – and nothing will be done until the Indonesian government is able to reassert control over the wayward elements among its citizenry, and prevent poaching and illegal logging.

Meanwhile, to see one you will have to go to Ujung Kulon, where actually your chances of doing so are not too bad. Did I see a rhino? Did I ever! “Ada badak di pantai!” shrieked the deputy conservator late one afternoon: “There’s a rhino on the beach!” Visitors, cooks and stewards tumbled over each other to get down to the water’s edge first; and there he was, a male with horn, 500 metres away, ambling along the beach on the mainland opposite the island. As we watched, Harti Amman stepped out the bushes, following him cautiously. For twenty minutes the rhino walked, browsed, twitched his ears, snorted, while Harti alternately took photos and made notes. Then the rhino pushed his way back into the forest behind the beach, and was gone.

The following morning five of us went over to the mainland to see if we could track him: Harti, Usup the tracker, my wife and myself, and a colleague from ANU (a visiting archaeologist). We found him after about half an hour, but he was feeding the other side of a screen of bushes, so we got only occasional glimpses. Then, silently, he was gone, and after a brief discussion, as the rain gently began to fall, we again followed his trail down a tunnel through the

thorny undergrowth. But this time it was different; he was waiting for us. Usup and Harti, leading the way, stepped out of the tunnel, and the rhino charged. Usup stepped behind a tree, and Harti stepped back – and slipped on the muddy ground. As the rhino passed over him, Harti was momentarily convinced he had been stepped on (“I remember thinking how light he was”). The other three of us had all read our Boys’ Own safari manuals - when charged by a rhino, just step aside and it will run straight past you. Strange how adrenalin induces amnesia. We ran.

As we picked the thorns out of each other and wiped off the blood, we had to chuckle. We had joined a tiny elite group of human beings who had been charged by the world’s rarest animal.

ARP Events

10 Pin Bowling for Rhinos

The 10 Pin Bowling fundraiser held on 8 April 05 was a fun night had by all. We had 45 people attend of which 41 bowled. The Fairlanes City complex put on a good show and kindly promoted us the whole way through the night encouraging other bowlers within the complex to purchase our merchandise and become members of the Asian Rhino Project for which we were very grateful! Special thanks goes out to all who supported us with their attendance and also to the ARP committee who made it all happen.

Have you ever had that feeling that you want to help save a species or a precious piece of land?

Well you can!

Drop us an e-mail on info@asianrhinos.org.au or phone Kerry on 041 901 5286 - we are awaiting your call! Any help no matter how small is extremely worthwhile, even attending our events or talking to your friends about the rhinos is directly helping the Asia Rhino Projects quest to save the three beautiful Asian rhino species, the Sumatran, Javan and Indian rhinos.