



A Sumatran Rhino Story

by Nat Sullivan, Asian Rhino Project Supporter and Keeper at Auckland Zoo

Asian Rhinoceros.... Until just a few short years ago I didn't even know there was a species of rhino in Asia, let alone three!

Whilst attending an Australasian Zoo Keeper's conference Kerry Crosbie from Perth Zoo/Asian Rhino Project gave an inspirational talk about the plight of the Asian Rhino and from the moment I saw photos of these extraordinary secretive critters I too was hooked on helping with their survival.

All three species of Asian Rhino are endangered, two critically and without help may be extinct in the next decade.

Greater One Horned Rhino inhabit parts of Northern India and Southern Nepal are considered along with Africa's White rhino a conservation success. With numbers dropping as low as 200 in the early 20th Century Greater One Horned rhino numbers are now thought to be as high as 2600 although poaching is again rearing its ugly head in many areas.

Sumatran Rhino are critically endangered and inhabit small fragmented areas in Indonesia and Malaysia. The Sumatran rhino is one of, if not the most endangered mammal on earth with more than 50% of the species having been

wiped out in the last 10 years. Numbers may be as low as 250 individuals and due to poaching, Sumatran rhino can only be found in heavily protected areas of jungle.

Javan Rhino are the rarest of all rhino species with only between 40-60 individuals left on Earth. Highly secretive animals they can be found only Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park and a small group of 1-5 animals in Vietnam. Without intervention soon, the world may soon lose these beautiful solitary beasts.

Auckland Zoo's Conservation Fund (AZCF) have committed to the fight to save both the Javan and Sumatran rhino from extinction. As part of that commitment, I was fortunate enough to have been invited by Asian Rhino Project director Kerry Crosbie to join her in Indonesia and experience first-hand the issues surrounding the rhino and the best way in which AZCF can help.

Arriving in Indonesia I joined staff from International Rhino Foundation, Save the Rhino International, Asian Rhino Specialist Group as well as two zoo keepers from America.

The next two weeks were very possibly the best two weeks of my life. Not only was I networking with rhino colleagues from around the world, I met a very special group of people who I can honestly say I consider to be true heroes. Rhino

Protection Units or RPU's as they are affectionately known put their lives on the line every day to protect both the rhino themselves but also the habitat they live in. These mostly quiet unassuming men work in groups of four and trek off into the dense Indonesian jungle for 20 days at a time.

A typical day in the jungle includes monitoring for any sign of rhino, looking for illegal poachers, loggers and removing snares set for wildlife including tiger, sun bear and deer. Out of the jungle the RPU's work with local villages to educate and build partnerships to empower the villagers to earn money and support their families without the need for encroachment on the jungle or conflict with the local wildlife. The RPU's in parts of Sumatra are so respected that local villagers have voluntarily given up their traditional poaching guns to the RPU's!

The RPU's took us on a number of jungle walks which in 40o heat and humidity beyond belief made me admire the RPU's even more. Zoo keeping keeps me relatively fit and at times I was really struggling with the jungle environment. The jungles varied from sometimes dense jungle other times swamps and at times open woodland jungle showing us the diverse range of habitats the rhino lived in. Unlike their African cousins Javan rhino are at ease in the water and often cross deep rivers in their travels.

A very special part of my trip was meeting my first Sumatran Rhino. In the middle of Way Kambas National Park is the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS), a 100 hectare area of

native forest, set up to house a small captive population of Sumatran Rhino as part of a breeding program with state of the art veterinary and nutritional expertise. SRS is currently home to five Sumatran rhino and I was able to meet all rhino individually. Being used to Auckland Zoo's White Rhino weighing in at around 2000kgs I was amazed at the sight of these pygmy pint sized rhino weighing in at only 600-950kgs. Covered in hair these vocal prehistoric animals sounded more like whales or dolphins than any other rhino I've ever met.

Some of the other wildlife I encountered while in the jungle were monitor lizards, deer, hornbills, siamangs, macaques, various reptiles and signs of tiger, sun bear and panther. The most abundant of animals was one I wouldn't mind not encountering again. The leech. For some unknown reason the leeches found me the tastiest person in our group and on average I was targeted five times more often by these blood suckers than anyone else!

Of course for me the signs of wild rhino activity was a highlight. Although we didn't catch a glimpse of any wild rhino our RPU guides told us that at times we had only missed the rhino by one day. We came across fresh mud wallows, eating spots, defecation sites, male courting markings and of course numerous rhino hoof prints preserved perfectly in the swampy substrate.

The race is now on to find a way to fully protect and maintain viable populations of the endangered Asian Rhino.

Rhino Rembrandts

ARP is proud to present the fantastic and rare "Asian Rhino Rembrandts". The artists are Indian and Sumatran rhino from Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, USA.

Painting is a special activity that has become one of many ways to enrich their day. For the keepers working with them, this exercise strengthens their bond and broadens their spectrum of operant conditioning.

As an enrichment activity, painting adds to the animal's choices of engaging activities with their keepers. Not only are they receiving a stimulating activity but this type of enrichment seems to benefit everyone with proceeds from the paintings going to conservation projects to help the rhino in the wild.



You can own one of these rare and exciting forms of art! ARP has these paintings available for a special price of \$475 each. Each painting comes framed with a photo of the artist and a certificate. First in best dressed, so act now!

Contact kerry.crosbie@asianrhinos.org.au or call 0419015286 to place your order.

