

Project 1972**Sumatran Rhinoceros, Malaysia**

No WWF-International Funding in 1982/83

(Total since 1981 — \$38.653)

Project Initiated 1981**Project Executant** Forest Department, Sabah.

Objectives To provide effective protection for the remaining Sumatran rhinoceros in the Silabukan area of Sabah and to study the rhino numbers, movements and ranges so as to evolve a long-term conservation plan.

This project is an extension to Sabah, on the island of Borneo, of an earlier project to protect the Sumatran rhinoceros in reserves in peninsular Malaysia.

The Silabukan area of eastern Sabah contains the only known remaining breeding population of the Borneo race of the Sumatran rhinoceros. When the importance of the Silabukan population became known in 1980, the difficulties involved in protecting the area and its rhinos appeared to be so great that a recommendation was made to catch the remaining rhinos so as to translocate them to an adequately protected reserve.

There are several problems involved in protecting the wild population in Silabukan. One difficulty is the retention of forest cover for the rhinos, since about 50 percent of the area is considered suitable for agriculture. Selective logging is another problem. Almost all the area containing rhinos has been logged or has been irrevocably allocated for selective logging, under which about 50 percent of the volume of plant material is removed or damaged. Finally, there is the problem of poaching. Large sums of money can be made by selling rhino horns and this is well-known to everyone in Sabah. The threat of poaching is always present, particularly when access to Silabukan is made easy by logging roads.

Despite these problems, a decision was made to try to protect the rhino population *in situ*, partly because no adequately protected alternative area exists. The problems of forest cover and logging are being covered by the Sabah Forest Department, with technical assistance from WWF/IUCN.

Protection of the rhinos against poaching can only be achieved by having a continuous, mobile presence of wildlife rangers in Silabukan, but in 1981 the Wildlife Section of the Forest Department had minimal manpower and no vehicle available for this job.

With the support of the Director General of peninsular Malaysia's Department of Wildlife and National Parks, money was made available from the WWF/IUCN Project to purchase a four-wheel drive vehicle for use by rangers posted in the Silabukan area. Subsequently, in 1982, a second vehicle was obtained under the same project and an additional ranger was posted at Silabukan. Both vehicles were donated to the Forest Department, which pays for fuel and maintenance costs. As a result, the four main logging road systems which penetrate Silabukan can be better patrolled than previously.

Editor's Note: In March 1984, the state government of Sabah declared Silabukan as a Wildlife Reserve and renamed it the Tabin Wildlife Reserve (120,521 ha). This event marks the successful conclusion of this project. Further assistance in developing the Tabin Wildlife Reserve is being provided under Project 3050 (see Chapter 5).

Seal, Fur

Project 1410

Juan Fernandez Fur Seal, Chile
 WWF Funding 1982/83 — \$12,348
 (Total since 1982 — \$12,348)

Project Initiated 1982

Project Executant Daniel Torres.

Objective To study the Juan Fernandez fur seal, so as to make recommendations for its conservation.

The Juan Fernandez group consists of two main isolated volcanic islands—one named Alexander Selkirk after the buccaneer who was marooned there, and the other Robinson Crusoe. after Defoe's book based on Selkirk's adventures.

When the British navigator William Dampier visited the islands in 1683, he found fur seals swarming thickly in every bay and on every rock. 'There are always thousands. I might say possibly millions of them' he wrote.

A century later, another British navigator. Philip Carteret, reported the seals were so numerous that 'I verily think that if many thousands were killed in a night, they would not be missed in the morning.'

But shortly afterwards seal-hunting there reached its height with one sealer recording that more than 3 million skins were shipped to Canton in the short space of seven years. With the continuing slaughter, the population of fur seals declined rapidly in the early 19th century, and after 1880 there was no scientific evidence of their continued existence.

In 1965, however, a Chilean scientific expedition observed 200 Juan Fernandez fur seals (*Arctocephalus philippii*) at a place called Loberia Vieja on Alexander Selkirk island. Four years later a first census was carried out in the Juan Fernandez group and recorded 459 fur seals. A more exhaustive census the following year, which included caves on the islands, gave a total of 750 animals. The discovery of some 200 animals in one cave probably indicates why the seals had not become extinct: they had taken refuge in deep caverns where the sealers could not reach them.

In 1978 markings and a census were carried out and this time the number totalled 1,416. To continue the research work, support was requested from WWF/IUCN. At the same, the Government of Chile issued a decree in 1978 imposing an indefinite ban on the hunting of any fur seal species in Chile.

During November and December 1982, a group of three researchers stayed on Alexander Selkirk Island to study the population of the Juan Fernandez fur seal during their breeding season.