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Sumatran Rhinoceros International Conservation
Programme- Intensive Programme.

Progress Report nr. 6

Eighth and ninth Mamas expedition.
With an appendix on the logistics of jungle expeditions.

January - April 1977.

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d/a Dinas PPA
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Introduction

After returning from leave on January 8th 1977, two more expeditions were made to the Upper Mamas Study Area, the first from January 29th until February 27th, the second from April 3rd until April 28th.

On the way to Indonesia a short visit was paid to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to meet Mr. Rodney W. Flynn, who conducts a rhinoceros survey in the south of this country. Both projects were discussed and mutual visits to both study areas were agreed upon. A joint trip to Mr. Flynn's area will be made in May and one to the Mamas area in June.

Eighth Mamas expedition

January 28th-February 27th, 1977

On January 28th the party was flown to the central landing-site by an IAT Alouette helicopter, lent from Mobil Oil Indonesia. Also some supplies were dropped on the natural landing-site close to the most northern camp (camp Uning).

We had to fly very early in the morning, because the helicopter had to be back in Medan before 9 a.m. Low-hanging clouds seriously limited visibility, but the pilot managed to get through and to land safely on both sites.

On February 2nd we moved to camp Aceh, on February 7th to camp Uning, on February 11th back to camp Aceh and on February 14th to the central camp. On February 17th we moved to the southern area, first to camp Pinus. On February 20st we went back to camp Pawang, on February 21st to camp Lukluk and finally again to camp Pawang on February 24th. On February 27th we walked back to Kutacane in about 11 hours.

Three camps (Aceh, Uning and Lukluk) were destroyed by elephants and some of the material stored there was lost. Camp Lukluk was trampled by a small herd, the first one found in the study area.

This expedition was joined by a biological student of the Universitas Nasional at Jakarta, Haerudin R.S. He took part in the programme from January 8th until March 14th, to get acquainted with this kind of fieldwork and to gather information on the rhino and its ecology, as background for an intended literature study on the Sumatran rhinoceros.

Due to favourable weather the results of this expedition were good. The first two weeks were rather rainy, but the next two weeks were dry without interruption. A large collection of plastercasts, foodplants and faeces could be made.

Fresh tracks of the mother-calf unit in the northern area were found again, for the third time in succession. In the southern area fresh tracks of another cow with calf, a very small one, were found. For the first time, apart from the observed cow-calf units, we found tracks of an individual, which were easily recognizable in the field. The front nails had a very characteristic shape, a rather pronounced point in the middle. Its tracks were found on 6 different places in an area of about 6 km wide.

Once we were very close to a rhino, hearing it fleeing from a wallow into impenetrable thick bush. A few times we followed fresh tracks, but could not make up with the animal.

Ninth Mamas expedition

April 3rd - April 28th, 1977

This time no helicopter was made available, because there was no pilot qualified for this difficult operation in high mountains. The risks of technical breakdown or crash were considered too high by the helicopter agency.

On April 3rd the usual party started to walk to the study area with only a minimum of the most necessary luggage. Another load of vital material was brought afterwards by the anti-poaching unit of Pawang Husin. On April 4th in the afternoon camp Pawang was reached after a very tiring journey.

On April 6th the party moved on to camp Central, on April 8th to camp Aceh, on April 10th to camp Uning, on April 13th back to camp Aceh and April 16th to the central camp. On April 19th camp was moved to the southern area, first to camp Lukluk, on April 21st to camp Pawang on April 22nd to camp Pinus and finally back to camp Pawag on April 25th. On April 28th we walked back to Kutacane. On the way we had time to make a new shortcut and, therefore, the traject can be covered now in $10\frac{1}{2}$ hours, when walking speedily.

On arrival it had obviously been dry for a long period in the study area. The soil was hard and crumbling and although there were numerous tracks, only very few plastercasts could be made. Later on it rained every few days and not many tracks were found. The results of this expedition were rather poor and the collections were small.

Notwithstanding unfavourable weather, fresh tracks of both mother-calf units were found, in the same areas as before. No direct observations of rhinos were made during this expedition.

The stock in the study area is largely depleted now and for the next expedition substantial replacements are necessary. The prospects of getting a helicopter in the next three months are not very good, and further expeditions probably have to be postponed until after July. There is a chance that in the near future a helicopter will be stationed in Kutacane for the road improvement project. This would make things much more easy.

Conclusions

The presence of two mother-calf units in the study area adds much to the importance of this study.

The fact that one unit has been found for the fourth time in succession proves the effectiveness of the method of patrolling. With the pattern and frequency now used, the animals present in the area cannot be missed easily, and the occurrence and distribution of the animals can be established rather precisely.

The changes in development of the footprints of the calves can be correlated with the growth of the animals and this will reveal many important data concerning the breeding, the growth and the relation between cow and calf. Until now almost nothing is known about these important aspects of the ecology of the Sumatran rhino.

At the end of the current programme (the end of 1977) one of the cow-calf units will have been studied for $1\frac{1}{2}$ year, the other for less than a year. This is a rather short period for observing an animal like the rhino, since it covers only a small part of the whole breeding cycle and does not even cover the period between birth and separation of the calf from the mother. The possibility to follow the progress in a whole breeding cycle of two individuals justifies a continuation of the rhinoceros survey in this area for the next two or three years.

The Mamas area must be patrolled anyway to prevent rhinopoaching, as is stressed in the second special report on this project. Continuation of the survey on a less intensive, part-time basis, can be combined very effectively with the necessary control of the anti-poaching units. The combination of anti-poaching patrols and scientific research will be very fruitful in this case. Costs can be split over both projects and both will benefit from each other.

Detailed proposals for the establishing of a special rhino protection force (anti-poaching units) for the Leuser area, and for a continuation of the rhino research in combination with rhino protection activities, are forthcoming.