

**CONSERVATION OF
SUMATRAN RHINOCEROS**
(*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis harrisoni*)
IN SABAH



Why Conserve The Sumatran Rhino?

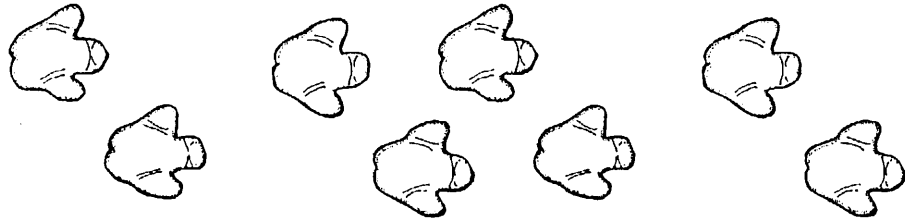
The Sumatran rhinoceros has been declared one of the world's 12 most endangered species by the International Union For Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. During the Asian Rhino Specialist Group meeting in 1987, the sub-species found only in Borneo *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis harrisoni* was declared endangered. There are only between 48-68 individuals are still surviving in the State. It exists in a few rapidly dwindling areas mainly in eastern Sabah and illegal hunting remains active. The rhino is part of Sabah's heritage, just as our cultures and languages are part of our heritage.

CHARACTERISTICS

The Sumatran rhinoceros is characterised by the presence of two horns above the nasal bones. There are two skin folds, the first encircling the trunk behind the fore legs and the second over the sides and belly. It is about 120-135 cm high at the shoulder and can weigh up to 700 kg. In captivity, they are observed to have longer hairs. The animal has poor eye sight but the sense of smell and hearing are good. It is usually quiet but sometimes makes soft low noises or squeeks. When alarmed it makes a "barking" sound caused by a strong expulsion of air from the lungs.

HABITAT

The Sumatran rhinoceros is found in the rainforest and low coastal swamps. Occasionally, individuals have been seen swimming out at sea. Sumatran rhinos are usually solitary, but sometimes seen in small groups of two or three, which probably comprise of an adult female and her offsprings of two different ages.



FOOTPRINTS

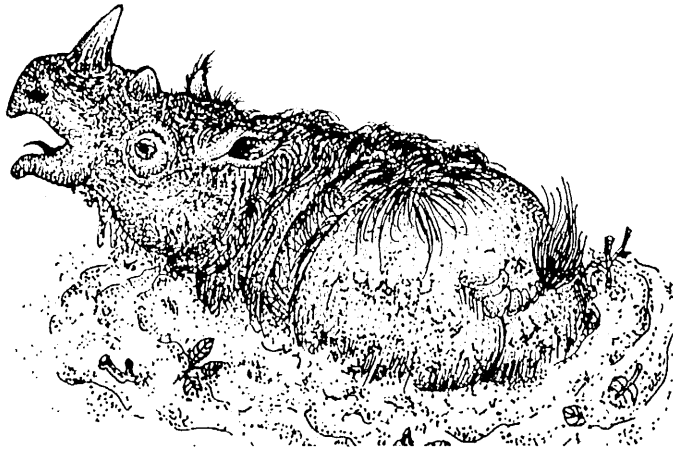
Like all rhinos, the Sumatran rhinoceros has three hoofs or nails on each foot, one central and two lateral.

FEEDING

Sumatran rhinoceros is a herbivore feeding on about 49 plant families and about 181 species. They feed on leaves and stem often pushing over small trees to reach them. Wild fruits are also consumed.

MUD WALLOW

The Sumatran rhinoceros enjoys wallowing in mud. This is the one way the animal regulates its body temperature and at the same time reduce attacks from irritating biting insects.



Why The Population Of Sumatran Rhinoceros Is Dwindling Rapidly?

O. HUNTING PRESSURE

The rhinoceros has been poached for centuries by hunters because of the widespread belief in the medicinal and magical properties of the animal's parts, especially the HORN. These beliefs persisted to this date and a profitable market of rhino horns and parts continues to exist. Poaching is very much reduced due to the strong presence of the Wildlife Department Sabah.

O. HABITAT DISTURBANCE

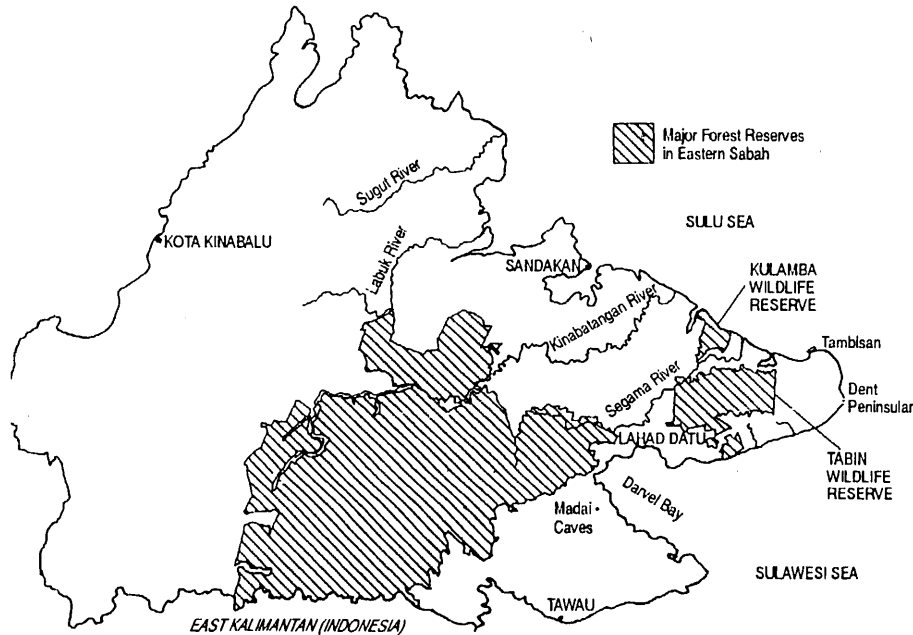
Excessive logging and land clearing for plantation have destroyed the rhinos habitat. This species has not been able to adapt to the latter. Logged over areas and secondary forest provide abundance of feed but that leave them exposed to poachers. The population of Sumatran rhinoceros is becoming scattered thus making natural breeding difficult.

PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

D. Law

In Sabah, the Sumatran rhinoceros is afforded the greatest possible protection under the Fauna Conservation Ordinance, 1963 (Part IV, Section 10). Anyone found killing the Sumatran rhinoceros shall be liable to imprisonment for not less than a month but not more than 5 years. The new draft legislation provides for even stiffer penalties for anyone caught harming a rhino.

LOCATION OF TABIN WILDLIFE RESERVE



O. Breeding Areas

Two areas have been identified so far as having viable concentrations of rhinos, namely Tabin Wildlife Reserve and Danum Valley Conservation Area. Tabin Wildlife Reserve was gazetted by the State Government in March, 1984. It covers about 120,000 ha. Surveys indicate approximately 15 rhinos are still present in this area. Danum Valley covers 42,755 ha and is designated by Sabah Foundation as a conservation area. At least a dozen animals were identified as still roaming in this area.

O. Breeding In Captivity

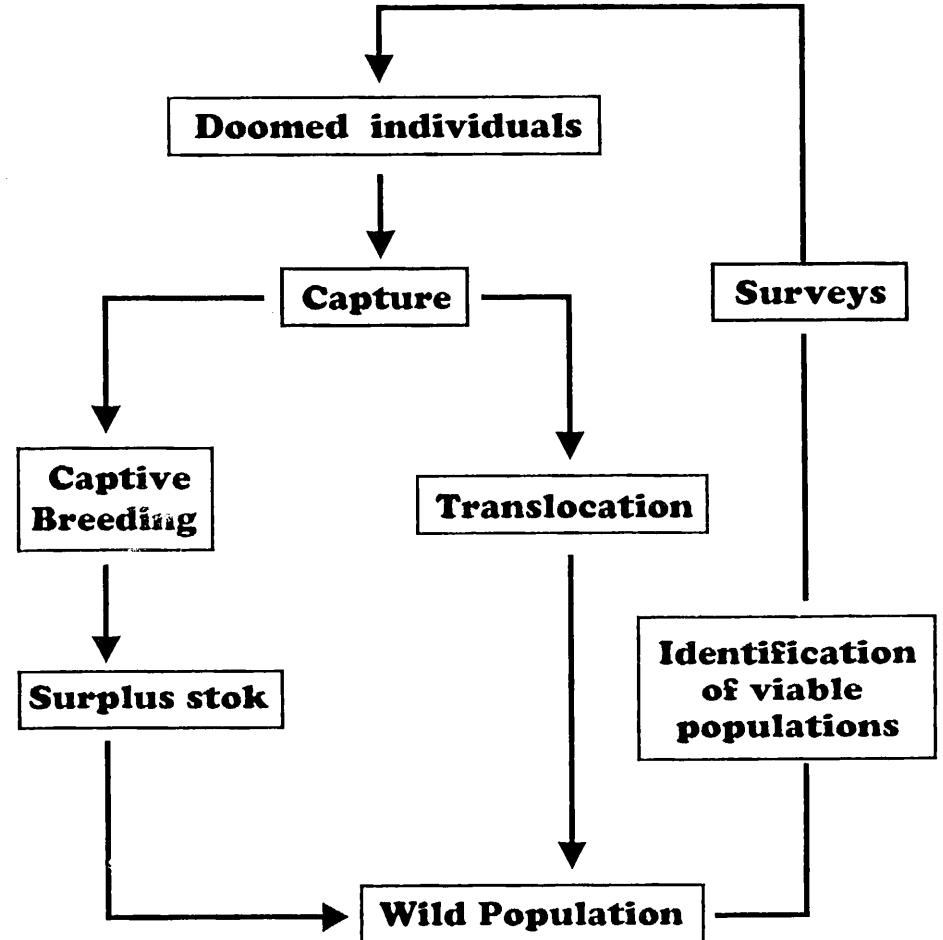
Captive propagation of Sumatran rhinoceros may be the only way to save the species from extinction and to increase its population. It is hoped that in the near future rhinos bred in captivity can be released into the wild, where their habitat is properly protected. At Sepilok, efforts are being made to try and breed this rare and endangered species. At present, the centre has 5 rhinos.

SABAH'S RHINO CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The prime overall objective in the conservation of this highly endangered species is to ensure longterm survival in the wild in Sabah. This is being achieved by:

1. Intensive protection of the animal in the wild from such dangers as poaching, accidental injury from snares set for other species and disease.
2. Preservation of selected portions of the rhino's habitat against destruction or degradation as a result of agricultural development, by the creation of protected areas such as wildlife sanctuaries or reserves. Tabin and Kulamba are examples of Wildlife Reserves containing suitable habitat and small population of rhino. Danum Valley Conservation Area is another example.
3. Capture and removal of endangered individuals or small groups which have become isolated in locations where their longterm survival cannot be guaranteed, such as areas earmarked for forest clearance for plantation development. These 'doomed' animals are caught in traditional pit traps set in rhino trails in the forest. Many months of work are often involved in the location and capture of one rhino and great care has to be taken to minimize injury and stress during the trapping operation.
4. Rehabilitation of these rescued individuals by:
 - a) immediate TRANSLOCATION to a well protected and managed wild area containing adequate habitat and possibly and existing but depleted rhino population. Tabin Wildlife Reserve near Lahad Datu is currently being used as a reception area for rhinos translocated from nearby areas under development for agriculture. Tabin already has small breeding population but there is ample unused habitat for newcomers.
 - b) retaining for some time in a confined CAPTIVE BREEDING facility while their numbers increase (by reproduction) and the protection of wild habitat for their ultimate release is implemented. Sepilok has a rhino captive breeding facility of this kind and it is planned that this will ultimately produce surplus animals for the restocking of depleted.

The above rhino conservation strategy is summarised in the diagram below:



A decorative border consisting of a repeating pattern of small, stylized floral motifs. The border runs along the top, right, and bottom edges of the page, forming an L-shape on the right side.

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