

Sumatran Rhino Conservation Program Update

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The Critically Endangered Sumatran Rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) is the closest living relative of the woolly rhinoceros of the Ice Age. It is considered the most "primitive" rhino species, with hairy, reddish-brown skin revealing its ancient past. The Sumatran Rhino is also generally considered the most endangered rhino species (CITES Appendix I). Sumatran rhino numbers have declined more than 70% over the last two decades due to poaching for its horn as well as increasing destruction of its habitat. Fewer than 200 Sumatran rhino survive in very small and highly fragmented populations in Southeast Asia, with Indonesia and Malaysia the only significant range countries. The largest populations of wild rhinos are found in Bukit Barisan Selatan (BBS), Gunung Leuser, and Way Kambas National Parks in Sumatra, Indonesia; there is also a small population in the Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Sabah, Malaysia.

ARP funding assists our major local partners, the Indonesian Rhino Foundation (YABI) and the International Rhino Foundation to operate a comprehensive program aimed at protecting and increasing the populations of Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia. The multi-faceted approach includes protection of Sumatran rhinos and their habitat (through their Rhino Protection Units), research on and captive breeding of the species at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, and outreach to local communities (including both education programs and alternative income development).

Wildlife Protection and Community Outreach

Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park (BBS) and Way Kambas National Park (WK) in Sumatra, Indonesia, are two of the three major habitats for Sumatran rhino, and are also two of the highest priority areas for other threatened megafauna, including the Sumatran tiger and Sumatran elephant. Approximately 50 rhino, 40-50 tigers, and about 500 elephants inhabit BBS. Way Kambas is home to 25-35 Sumatran rhino. The main cause of the initial decline of Sumatran rhinos was poaching for horn, which is used in traditional Chinese medicine. Now, the populations are also limited by available habitat, which is continuously being encroached by human populations. IRF and YABI, operate 7 Rhino Protection Units in BBS and 5 Rhino Protection Units in Way Kambas.

Rhino Protection Units (RPU) are highly-trained, four-person anti-poaching teams that intensively patrol key areas within Indonesia's national parks. They monitor threatened wildlife, deactivate traps and snares, identify and apprehend illegal intruders, including poachers, and investigate crime scenes, thus preventing or reducing the loss of wildlife. The goal of the RPU program is to prevent the extinction of Sumatran rhinos and other threatened species and to protect critical habitats Sumatra through proactive prevention of poaching and habitat destruction.

Thanks to the Rhino Protection Units, there have been no incidences of poaching of Sumatran rhinos in Bukit Barisan and Way Kambas National Parks in Sumatra for the past 6 years. The RPUs also protect numerous other threatened species, including tigers, elephants, tapirs, monkeys, leopards and fishing cats.

During the first quarter of 2011, the RPUs operating in Bukit Barisan Selatan and Way Kambas destroyed 91 traps (primarily intended for birds, deer and wild pigs) and made a total of 15 arrests. Six suspects were arrested for illegal logging and two were arrested for bird poaching. In partnership with park rangers and local police in BBS, the Rhino Protection Units there undertook joint intelligence operations resulting in the arrests of 7 suspects for trade in illegal wildlife parts. Two of these suspects were arrested in possession of small pieces of ivory and tiger and leopard skins; five were arrested in possession of spears, deer antlers, and two large pieces of ivory (which they had advertised for sale at US \$5,000 each).

The Sumatran rhino RPUs averaged 17 days per month on patrol during the first three months of the year, walking a total of 759 kilometers (472 miles). They conducted 6 investigations on illegal logging and 26 investigations on illegal encroachment, and destroyed 8 illegal camps or cabins within the parks. The Way Kambas RPUs also destroyed 2 bridges built to provide illegal access into the park, and halted three illegal fishing operations.

Last month, thirty of our RPU members attended a week-long training in MIST (Management Information System), led by staff from the Wildlife Conservation Society. MIST is a simple, user-friendly database for ranger-based law enforcement monitoring. This

methodology has great potential for the RPU work, particularly in putting the rhino data in a central database for the parks, which will be accessible to the park authorities. MIST provides a standardized format for recording movements of patrol teams and recording observations of illegal activity and carcasses, and so will be useful for identifying gaps in patrol coverage, emerging threats and problems, and for surveillance of known crime hotspots. MIST also provides a way of producing important status and distribution information on rhinos, elephants, tigers and other key species, which can also feed into national monitoring programs set up for these species. We believe implementing this system will further improve our intelligence and law enforcement activities, resulting in even more arrests and successful prosecutions of poachers and others committing illegal activities.

Research and Captive Breeding

The SRS is a 250-acre complex located within Way Kambas National Park in Sumatra, Indonesia funded primarily through the International Rhino Foundation and the Asian Rhino Project. Its four rhinos – ‘Andalas’, ‘Rosa’, ‘Ratu’, and ‘Bina’ – are part of an intensively managed research and breeding program aimed at increasing our knowledge about the Sumatran rhino with the ultimate aim of increasing the population in the wild. At the SRS, the rhinos reside in large, open areas where they can experience a natural rainforest habitat while still receiving state-of-the-art veterinary care and nutrition.

Sumatran rhinos are difficult to breed in captivity, and we have not yet had a successful pregnancy at the SRS. Female Ratu became pregnant by young male Andalas twice in 2010, but unfortunately miscarried both pregnancies, which is not uncommon. SRS staff are using all the tools at their disposal (including a

hormone supplementation protocol developed at the Cincinnati Zoo, the only facility to successfully breed Sumatran rhinos within the past century) to help ensure that Ratu will be able to bring her next pregnancy to term. Ratu and Andalas have continued to breed over the past several months, and we are hoping for another pregnancy soon. Rosa, the other young female rhino at the SRS, is also being regularly introduced to Andalas. Although they have not yet successfully bred, Rosa is becoming more acclimated to Andalas.

Unfortunately, in April 2011, Torgamba, the elderly male Sumatran rhino (estimated to be 32 years old), died at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, following a long illness which appeared to be associated with chronic renal disease.

Despite several years of treatment for his chronic illness, and the best efforts of the Sanctuary’s keepers and veterinary staff in consultation with international rhino experts, Torgamba passed away. SRS vets and staff worked around the clock for several months to make Torgamba’s last months comfortable. A necropsy (an animal autopsy) was conducted, involving Indonesian pathology experts.

The SRS is still home to one captive born male (Andalas) and three female rhinos, and these animals are in good health, although one of the females (Bina) is nearly post-reproductive. All animals are monitored on a daily basis by the Sanctuary’s two veterinarians and are immediately treated for any health problems that may arise.

During the coming months, in partnership with the Cincinnati Zoo, the SRS will also begin working on an artificial insemination program, to help increase the likelihood of pregnancies, and to help bank sperm for global conservation and breeding efforts.

Adopt-a-Rhino Fundraiser

Help us save the Sumatran rhino by adopting one today – and it’s tax deductible!

All funds raised through the ARP’s adopt-a-rhino program will be used to support the SRS in Way

Kambas National Park, Sumatra.

With each adoption you will receive an attractive adoption certificate including information on your rhino and the program.

You can also choose to receive

quarterly updates on your rhino as well as an A4 sized photograph (extra costs apply for photos and updates).

More information on the rhinos and the program is on our website www.asianrhinos.org.au.