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# GREEN HEART

PP12747/02/2009 ISSUE 04 • 2008



# GREEN HEART

**COVER:** Tam, the rescued Sumatran rhino.  
Please see story on page 4.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Lee Shan Khee

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WWF-Malaysia, the national conservation trust, currently runs more than 75 projects covering a diverse range of environmental protection and nature conservation work. Since 1972, WWF-Malaysia has worked on important conservation projects, from saving endangered species such as tigers and turtles, to protecting our highland forests, rivers and seas.

### Community Establishes Wildlife Protection Unit

Villagers of Kampung Lubok Bongor, Jeli, have formed Malaysia's first community-based Wildlife Protection Unit (WPU) to reduce conflict incidences between local villagers and wildlife within their area. The expansion of human settlements and agricultural plantations into wildlife areas has caused a surge in human-wildlife conflict incidences over the last few years. With WWF-Malaysia's help, the WPU will organise regular night patrols along roads and rivers, and use spotlights, air-horns and loud-halers to create noise to ward off elephants. 21 villagers, ranging from farmers to businessmen, were trained in elephant conflict-mitigation methods by French NGO HUTAN experts.

After just one training session, the WPU managed to chase away two adult elephants that crossed a river to enter a nearby banana plantation. By preventing conflict incidences, the WPU is preventing potential injury to humans and damage to property as well as sometimes fatal reprisals against wildlife. Since the training, the WPUs in Jeli have been conducting regular night patrols and have reported a drastic decline in incidents of elephant encroachment and crop losses due their patrols; from five incidents in August to just one in September. Hamdan Musa, elected head of the WPU



Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Tiger Conservation Team

WPU team with Kuala Balah State Legislative Assemblyman Haji Abdul Aziz Derashid (middle row, fourth from left), who officially launched the unit by presenting certificates to WPU members; PERHILITAN, HUTAN and WWF-Malaysia representatives.

unit, said, "I believe that by helping my village ease their problems with crop-raiding elephants, I am indirectly helping myself too." He feels reducing human-wildlife conflict is a shared responsibility.

In Jeli district alone, conflict incidences with elephants are rising; 92 cases were reported in 2007 compared to 47 in 2006, according to the Jeli Department of Wildlife and National Parks (PERHILITAN). WWF-Malaysia's Species Conservation Programme and YTL Corporation Berhad are working together to develop Better Management Practices for local communities to mitigate human-wildlife conflict, including forming this community-based WPU to reduce crop raids and constructing barriers such as chilli-greased fences around plantations. ■

### Perlis State Park Gazetted

WWF-Malaysia congratulates the Perlis State Government for gazetting the Perlis State Park under Section 10 of the National Forestry Act 1984 (amended) on 3 July 2008. WWF-Malaysia has been working with the Perlis State Government since the 1980s on biodiversity conservation there and the establishment of the park was one of the long term efforts.

A significant collaboration between WWF-Malaysia and the Perlis State Government is the Conservation and Development of Perlis State Park Project implemented between 2000 and 2003, aimed at

equipping the Perlis State Forestry Department to effectively protect and manage the park. WWF-Malaysia provided technical assistance to the Perlis State Forestry Department during the project, utilising more than RM3 million contributed by the Danish International Development Assistance agency.

Among the project's key successes were the creation of a new legal instrument which allows the State Government to gazette state parks; implementation of various training courses for Perlis State Forestry Department staff; and the production of a management plan for the state park. Although the newly gazetted park is not large – covering just 4,379 hectares – it protects a rich biodiversity and unique features including the rare stump-tailed macaque (*Macaca arctoides*) whose range is restricted to Perlis and southern Thailand; the Nakawan Range, Malaysia's longest continuous limestone hills made up of rocks that about 450 million years old; Gua Kelam II, the longest cave system in Peninsular Malaysia (more than 3km long); and also many interesting plants growing on limestone such as the cliff-dwelling Perlis cycad (*Cycas clivicola*).

Now that the Perlis State Park is legally established, WWF-Malaysia hopes that the Perlis State Government will ensure that it is effectively managed, as well as promoted for nature conservation and recreation, for the benefit of all. ■

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Rohani Rahmani (Ronn)



The elusive and rare stump-tailed macaque found in Perlis State Park and also southern Thailand.

## Cover Story

# SMR Seeks SFR\*

By HS Harun, Heart of Borneo Programme Communications Officer

**WWF-Malaysia's Rhino Patrol and Monitoring Unit is taking on a match-making role after rescuing a wandering rhino in August. Will this lone male be the key to Sumatran rhino survival in Borneo?**

Ask the Rhino Team in the Heart of Borneo what is the latest and they will tell you that they are busy shooting cupid's arrow in the wild. The recently rescued Sumatran rhino believed to be long isolated from his kind needs to find a partner soon if he is to survive. The WWF-Malaysia Rhino Team vows to do just that.

Spotted in early August 2008, Tam is an adult male, roughly 20 years of age, which was seen taking up residence in an oil palm plantation about 3km away from the nearest forest. A plantation worker was the first to see him, a slightly aggressive but weak large mammal, suffering from an infected wrist caused by a snare trap.

WWF-Malaysia, which was contacted, immediately dispatched a rescue group together with the Sabah Wildlife Department and SOS Rhino Borneo. Now, Tam is safe and is given periodical health checks at the Tabin Wildlife Reserve (please see the text box for the chronology of the rescue).

"We are very pleased that the plantation company did the right thing by calling us, and not take matters into their own hands. Rhinos are aggressive animals and it is important not to provoke them especially when they are weak. We are glad to see that some community members are already aware that this is a critically endangered animal," said Raymond Alfred, WWF-Malaysia Borneo Species Programme Project Manager.

A 2005 Sumatran rhino survey conducted in the Heart of Borneo revealed that there are less than 25 rhinos left in Sabah. A very delicate population considering that there were more than 50 just half a decade ago. It is believed that poaching was the main cause of the massive decline of this species.

Wildlife poachers in Borneo are still at large, salivating over rhino horns for sale in the exotic market for medicinal and cultural reasons. A kilogram of rhino horn can fetch up to USD45,000 in the Far Eastern countries and China. Yemen was the world's largest market for poacher-supplied rhino horns in the 1970s where horns were considered to be status symbols. The Republic acted on the ban of the import in the 1980s.

### Matchmaking the Wild

WWF-Malaysia has been working on monitoring Sumatran rhinos in the Heart of Borneo since 2000 under the Asian Rhinoceros Elephant Action Strategy Programme. In 2006, Honda Malaysia Sdn Bhd and WWF-Malaysia initiated the five-year "Rhino Rescue" project to help protect Sumatran rhinos. The corporation pledged a contribution of RM5 million over the 5 years. Camera and video-traps were set up in various locations to track this elusive animal. WWF-Malaysia believes that the rescued Tam is the very same rhino that we have been tracking for the last 18 months.



Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Richard Sanggul

A lost Tam the rhino unnaturally displaced in a plantation.

"We have checked our records for the footprint size, compared the pictures and watched the footage over and over again. Based on the markings on his horn and ear, as well as the leg wound, we are 99% sure that this is the same rhino," said WWF-Malaysia Borneo Programme Senior Technical Advisor Dr Junaidi Payne, referring to the ground-breaking camera-trap footage of the rhino in the wild obtained by WWF-Malaysia in 2007.

Until his injury is healed, Tam remains under the observation of veterinary officers from Sabah Wildlife Department. Like humans, he needs to look and feel his best before he pursues a mate.

But how do isolated rhinos meet and mate in fragmented forests?

The answer is usually not by walking into a plantation. A consensus from the International Rhino Workshop held in Sabah in 2007 includes a complex process of translocating "doomed" rhinos to a potentially practical population. There are so few of these animals left that they are very difficult to find. But for Tam to walk into the plantation might just make the moving process a little easier. The good news is WWF-Malaysia has also been tracking two other rhinos in the Heart of Borneo: a mother and a calf. Provided that the environment, diet, health and relationship are suitable, this rhino might just get lucky. ■

\*Single Male Rhino Seeks Single Female Rhino



## Chronology of the Rescue

### 3rd August 2008

A plantation worker spots a wandering rhino in the plantation. It was believed that the rhino had been in the plantation for a while. The plantation company contacted the WWF-Malaysia Rhino Patrolling and Monitoring Unit (RPMU) which then informed Sabah Wildlife Department.

The rescue operation began immediately and the weak rhino was provided with water, salt and nangka leaves. Field boys stayed up round-the-clock guarding the rhino for fear that he might get hunted as news of his "discovery" spread. With newfound energy, the rhino escaped.

An interim rescue team comprising the RPMU and plantation workers was formed to search for the rhino.

### 4th August 2008

The rhino was found deeper in the plantation. More food and water were given to him.



Water stop for Tam en route to Tabin Wildlife Reserve.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Englebert Dausip

### 5th August 2008

The rhino was given a health assessment by Sabah Wildlife Department.

WWF-Malaysia, Sabah Wildlife Department and SOS Rhino Borneo held talks to decide what to do with the rhino, and how. Translocating the rhino to a better location was the best solution. However, the stockade at the Tabin Wildlife Reserve needed a few days for major repairs.

### 7th August 2008

First attempt to coax the rhino into the translocation crate was unsuccessful. Sedatives were on standby but were not needed as the rhino was fairly tame.

### 13th August 2008

The rhino was finally moved to Tabin Wildlife Reserve using a 10-tonne lorry. Travelling for 5 hours, adequate water had to be provided to cool and calm him as well as to prevent stress and aggravation.

### 14th August 2008

Decision to translocate the rhino to a viable population was made.

### 16th August 2008

Sabah Wildlife Department decided to name the rhino "Tam", after the location of where he was found. (WWF-Malaysia will not release the detailed locations of endangered animals to protect them from poachers.)

Donations from WWF-Malaysia supporters helped to buy the camera and video traps, rhino food supplement and water tank as well as fix the paddock and staff cabin. THANK YOU!



## Rhino facts

**The critically endangered Sumatran rhino is the smallest rhino species and the only Asian rhino with two horns.**

- Also called the lesser two-horned rhino or hairy rhino, it once ranged from north-eastern India through Indochina, Malaysia, and the islands of Sumatra (Indonesia) and Borneo (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Malaysia).
- Their numbers are thought to have at least halved between 1985 and 1995. Today, the population is estimated at less than 300 individuals in small pockets of Sumatra, peninsular Malaysia and Borneo, making it the most threatened rhino in the

world. The Borneo population is considered a distinct subspecies, numbering between 25 and 50 animals.

- In some cultures, the rhino horn is believed to cure fevers, headaches, and detect poison in a drink. Horns are made out of agglutinated hair, the same fibre as fingernails, and have no nutritional or medicinal values. This proves that the horn has no use except by its owner.

**Help by stopping the buying and telling your friends to buy readily available and affordable medicine in their local pharmacy instead!**

## Features

# A “Gaur-geous” Creature

By Sara Sukor, Peninsular Malaysia Species Conservation Programme Communicator

He oozes confidence while parading his muscular body and perfectly groomed hair with unhurried grace. Alas he is reserved and aloof, although, when not provoked, his gentle nature reveals an intense vulnerability. He has very few adversaries, being the largest and most powerful of his kind. He wanders far and wide in search of his perfect mate. And, he is a vegetarian.

Would you like one of these rare hunks for yourself? Well, a lot of people do too. That is why this mighty creature is endangered. He is the Malayan gaur (*Bos frontalis*), more well known as seladang. The second largest terrestrial animal after the elephant, seladang are the largest of all wild cattle, even bigger than the Wild Asiatic Water Buffalo as well as the American and European Bison.

With highly muscular bodies and distinctive dorsal ridges, seladang exude power. They appear well-groomed due to an oily exudation that carries with it brown pigments, making their skin shiny. WWF-Malaysia’s first encounter with the “handsome” seladang occurred in Perak’s Royal Belum State Park: through a camera-trap lens. A camera-trap is a film or digital camera housed in a camouflaged waterproof case, with built-in infra-red sensors that detect body heat and motion, triggering it to take photos when animals pass by. These photos are important for documenting and identifying wildlife at conservation project sites while mapping out their movement, territorial grounds and activity patterns. Such data will help conservationists enhance wildlife protection efforts.

WWF-Malaysia’s team has been surveying Belum for about two years in search of the elusive Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) as the area was identified as one of the last strongholds for viable rhino populations. Although the team has not found recent rhino signs, they still hope to find fresh rhino tracks or rhino droppings. Meanwhile, they have learned more about other wildlife in Belum, including the “gaur-geous” seladang.

Lowland forests are the seladang’s preferred habitat, though there is not much left in Peninsular Malaysia. Thus, seladang and other large mammals have retreated to the country’s remaining hilly primary forests. Grasses, shoots and fruits are the seladang’s main diet and research shows that this appears to be the most important determinant for its preferred habitat.

A herd of wild seladang comprising 2 to 40 individuals is usually led by a female matriarch. Although few, there are solitary adult males that will search out receptive females during breeding season. Their resonant mating calls can be heard more than one kilometre away, and like their cousin the cow, they also “moo”, but in a lower tone.

Male seladang can weigh up to 1000 kilograms (kg) and females up to 700 kg. They can reach up to six feet in height, from foot to shoulder. Besides being massively muscular, both males and females have horns that can exceed 30 inches!



Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia

A camera-trap photo of a seladang in Belum.

Due to their size, few animals have been known to take down unguarded calves, let alone adults. It is reported that only tigers have succeeded in killing a full-grown seladang. Unfortunately, it is also this formidable size that appeals to poachers, who hunt seladang mainly for meat while other parts such as horns, teeth and skin are traded as trophies.

Apart from poaching, expansion of human settlements and opening of agricultural lands have caused seladang numbers to dwindle due to habitat loss. Moreover, forests fragmented by roads, railways and logging activities mean that seladang in Peninsular Malaysia are now confined to protected areas in Kedah, Perak, Pahang and Terengganu.

The global population of seladang is estimated to be 13,000 to 30,000 individuals, with India holding the highest number. Out of that, around 273 to 333 currently reside in Peninsular Malaysia compared to 549 to 577 individuals recorded in 1991 according to the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN) reports – this is a drop of roughly half in only 17 years!

The seladang is a totally protected animal under Malaysia’s Protection of Wild Life Act 1972 and listed in Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which bans all commercial trade of this species. Unless the Act is amended with harsher penalties to deter poachers, laws firmly enforced and good land-use planning properly established, the seladang will continue to lose its battle for survival. Establishing wildlife corridors, having more protected areas with natural saltlicks, fresh water and food supplies in addition to protecting the populations from illegal hunting will definitely improve seladang numbers, as well as other wildlife that share the same habitat. **Your contribution is important for WWF-Malaysia to continue such efforts, thank you.**

WWF-Malaysia’s field team perseveres with the rhino search. But this is one moment of glory for the “Arnold Schwarzenegger” of the forest: the seladang of Royal Belum. ■

# RPU's to the Rescue

By Peninsular Malaysia Species Conservation Programme Manager Reuben Clements and Peninsular Malaysia Rhino Conservation Programme Senior Programme Officer Ahmad Zafir Abdul Wahab

Conservationists come in many forms; from teachers bringing schoolchildren for beach cleanups to elite rangers patrolling forests in search of poachers. In April 2008, WWF-Malaysia's rhino teams were fortunate enough to meet the latter in Indonesia. The Rhino Protection Units (RPUs) in Sumatra and Java have received praise from conservationists worldwide for their remarkable contributions to protecting the highly endangered Sumatran (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) and Javan rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*). Established in 1995, RPU patrols have led to the apprehension of numerous poachers and confiscation of illegal weapons. One reason for their success is support from the Forestry Department in terms of both manpower and enforcement authority.

Armed with guns and the mandate to arrest poachers, RPUs scour the jungles of Sumatra and Java in search of poachers and illegal loggers. Outside the forest, they conduct raids on suspected poachers based on tip-offs from their extensive intelligence networks. They also monitor the status of tiger and rhino populations and conduct outreach programmes in villages to raise conservation awareness. If not for them, Indonesia's rhinos would probably have long succumbed to poaching.

WWF-Malaysia enlisted the help of RPUs in Sumatra to train our field staff and project partners from PERHILITAN, Perak State Parks Corporation, Sabah Forestry Department and Sabah Wildlife Department. Training started with presentations on anti-poaching and intelligence gathering techniques, followed by a three-day

patrol in different sectors of Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park where more than 50 rhinos still live. The patrol in each sector was led by 3 RPUs and a Senior Forestry Ranger, who is always armed with a sub-machine gun to deal with trigger-happy poachers. Although we did not encounter any of the park's elusive rhinos, we were just as thankful there were no gunfights!

The second phase of training took us to Way Kambas Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary. Breeding has not occurred thus far, but this sanctuary appears to be the best solution to bring isolated rhinos together to mate. Everyone was anticipating a face-to-face encounter with these gentle giants, especially those who have spent years in the forest tracking this rare species. When we entered the enclosure of one rhino, silence descended on the awestruck crowd. It was a moving experience for many of us, born of respect and compassion for a species that has withstood relentless hunting pressure since the turn of the last century. The RPUs then brought us along rhino trails to familiarise us with rhino feeding signs and tracks.

After returning home, it was decided that WWF-Malaysia will form Wildlife Protection Units (WPU's) to conduct regular patrols to deter poaching of not just rhinos but other endangered species as well. Currently, WWF-Malaysia is working with relevant authorities to conduct patrols in Perak's Royal Belum State Park and Sabah's Danum Valley. We hope that our efforts will one day amount to the success of the inspiring Indonesian RPUs! ■

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia



WWF-Malaysia staff with the RPUs at the latter's field house on the fringe of Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park.