



The extinction of the Sumatran rhinoceros in Malaysia is now more real than ever.

Puntung

We found her in the thick, green foliage of the Danum Valley six years ago. We called her our “Christmas miracle” and she was, indeed, a miracle, as we had little hope of ever finding her kind in the Sabah wilderness.

Six years after her rescue, translocation and care, we had to say goodbye to Puntung on 4 June 2017 as she was euthanised to end her sufferings from cancer.

Puntung was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma in May 2017. The Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA) consulted specialists from several countries who gave the alliance a bleak prognosis: Puntung will die, with or without treatment.

“We have kept in close touch with experts in Europe, South Africa and Thailand, and there is no doubt in our minds that any form of conventional treatment would just prolong her agony,” BORA said in a Facebook post dated 28 May 2017.

With this in mind, the Sabah state government authorised euthanasia on Puntung.

BORA, in a Facebook post following her demise, said euthanasia was one of the hardest decisions the alliance had to make, but was the only defensible option.

Chemotherapy, radiation treatment and excision surgery were options to treat Puntung, but it would have caused her further pain and, at best, give her a few more months of life.

Sime Darby Foundation (SDF) Chairman Tun Musa Hitam said the dire straits of the Sumatran rhinoceros which is on the brink of extinction, especially with the devastating fate of Puntung, should be a lesson for all.

“Those related to the conservation efforts should reflect on the present situation,” he said.

“After spending so much time and funding to conserve the Sumatran rhinoceros since 2009, I regret that it has come to this and let this be a lesson to all those related to the efforts as well as the world at large.

“This is a very sad development. Future generations would certainly blame us for failing to save this species from extinction,” he added.

SDF had worked with BORA and the Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD) to save the Sumatran rhinoceros in Sabah over the past eight years up to February this year, including the rescue, translocation and care of Puntung, with an allocation of RM15.5 million.

There are currently only two Sumatran rhinoceroses left in Malaysia – Iman and Tam.

BORA Executive Director Datuk Dr John Payne thanked the SDF for its support since 2009.

BORA said it would continue its conservation efforts of the Sumatran rhinoceros, with Puntung's spirit of fighting for her life in mind.

"We'll always remember her as a fighter. She survived a poacher's attempt as a calf, when her foot was cut off. But, she refused to give up and went on to survive in the forests," Payne said.

BORA reminded us that the extinction of the Sumatran rhinoceros in Malaysia is now more real than ever and it will require all of us to save the species from being lost forever on Malaysian soil.

"This is the great tragedy that is at our doorstep. One that we must fight. But, we cannot do this alone."

"Humanity needs to come together, now more than ever. What we do today will define the very existence of an entire species. It will define who we are as people, a species who have the power to save the rest of life that we share this world with.

"And just like Puntung, we at BORA will not give up. Be at peace, Puntung."



Named the 'Christmas miracle', Puntung was found in the thick, green foliage of the Danum Valley six years ago.



Puntung was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma in May 2017 and was euthanised a month later to avoid her from suffering.