

Asian Rhino Project

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A Warm Welcome to our New Members

Adam Chappell

Grant Harris

Melinda Devonshire

Alison Pyner

Greg Gibbard

Nicole Taylor

Andrew Giftakis

Hollie Cavanagh

Sarah Constable

Dick Norris

Joe Heffernan

Sarah McMullen

Dominique McCoy

Jon Hancock

Sharon Holden

Dwane Darbs

Joseph Constable

Trent Langthorn

Garnet Barndon

Kelly Hobbs

Gary Crosbie

Matt Hunt

Total number of members now stands at 75.

Asia's Tsunami and Animal Related Stories

It has been a hard month in Asia with the Tsunami Disaster and the devastation it has caused. The humanitarian aid is pouring in from around the world and it is at times like this we are reminded how valuable life is. It seems that the wildlife of Asia have been fairly safe from the wave's initial devastation. We have received a few amazing news stories of which we wanted to share with our members regarding elephant reactions and a good news story on Kaziranga NP:

Thai elephants' cries save foreign tourists

The Australian 3/1/05

KHAO LAK, Thailand: Agitated elephants felt last Sunday's tsunami coming, and their sensitivity saved about a dozen foreign tourists.

"I was surprised because the elephants had never cried before," elephant keeper Dang Salangham said yesterday on Khao Lak beach, at the eight-elephant business offering rides to tourists. The elephants started trumpeting in a way, Dang, 36, and his wife Kulada, 24, said could only be described as crying, at first light, about the time a 9.0-magnitude earthquake cracked open the sea bed off Indonesia's Sumatra island.

The elephants soon calmed down. But they started wailing again about an hour later and this time could not be comforted, despite their mahouts' attempts at reassurance. "The elephants didn't believe the mahouts. They just kept running for the hill," said Witt Aniwat, 24, who takes the money from tourists and helps them on to the elephants.

Those with tourists aboard headed for the hill behind the resort beach where at least 3800 people, more than half of them foreigners, would soon be killed. The elephants that were not working broke their chains.

"Then we saw the big wave coming and we started running," Witt said. Around a dozen tourists ran towards the hill from the Khao Lak Merlin Resort, one of a line of hotels strung along the 10km beach.

"The mahouts managed to turn the elephants to lift the tourists onto their backs," Kulada said. She used her hands to describe how they used their trunks to pluck the foreigners from the ground and deposit them on their backs.

The tsunami drove up to 1km inshore from the beach, but it stopped short of where the elephants stood.

Yesterday, the elephants were again giving rides to the tourists on whom the area depends.

Reuters

Where Are All The Dead Animals? Sri Lanka Asks

SRI LANKA: December 30, 2004

COLOMBO - Sri Lankan wildlife officials are stunned -- the worst tsunami in memory has killed around 22,000 people along the Indian Ocean island's coast, but they can't find any dead animals.

Giant waves washed floodwaters up to 3 km (2 miles) inland at Yala National Park in the ravaged southeast, Sri Lanka's biggest wildlife reserve and home to hundreds of wild elephants and several leopards.

"The strange thing is we haven't recorded any dead animals," H.D. Ratnayake, deputy director of the national Wildlife Department, told Reuters on Wednesday. "No elephants are dead, not even a dead hare or rabbit," he added. "I think animals can sense disaster. They have a sixth sense. They know when things are happening."

At least 40 tourists, including nine Japanese, were drowned.

The tsunami was triggered by an earthquake in the Indian Ocean on Sunday, which sent waves up to 5-metres (15-feet) high crashing onto Sri Lanka's southern, eastern and northern seaboard, flooding whole towns and villages, destroying hotels and causing widespread destruction.

Reuters News Service

Tsunami floods Kaziranga with tourists:

[India News]: Kaziranga (Assam), Jan 6: After the killer tsunami wreaked havoc in most South Asian tourist destinations, foreign and domestic visitors in their hundreds have been flocking to a wildlife sanctuary in India's north-eastern state of Assam, officials said.

Authorities at the internationally renowned Kaziranga National Park said they were unable to cope with the sudden surge in tourist flow to the sanctuary that is home to the endangered one-horned Indian rhinoceros.

"Such is the rush of tourists that we are now forced to regulate entry of visitors into the sanctuary," said park warden N.K. Vasu. "In less than a month we have exceeded the number of tourists we received at the park during the whole season last year," Vasu told IANS.

The 430 sq km park, 220 km east of Assam's main city of Guwahati, is home to more than 1,600 of the world's estimated 2,400 one-horned rhinos that now roam the thick savannah grasslands of Kaziranga.

"We were planning a holiday in Thailand and Sri Lanka, but then we rescheduled our itinerary and came to Kaziranga following the monstrous tsunami," British tourist Robert Greene said.

About 17,000 tourists have visited Kaziranga since the park opened for visitors in early December with the rush reaching a peak during the past 10 days.

"After the tsunami struck the region, we received anything between 4,000 to 5,000 tourists, including hundreds of foreigners," another park ranger said. "Many of the tourists were destined for other locations, but the natural disaster brought them to Kaziranga."

On an average, some 10,000 to 11,000 tourists visit Kaziranga annually although the figure has surpassed all previous records during the current season.

"Private mahouts from nearby villages were being hired along with their domestic elephants for conducting wildlife safaris inside the park considering the mad rush," Vasu said. "We are doing our best to extend all hospitality to the tourists."

The rhinos apart, the tropical sanctuary is also home to a large number of Asiatic elephants, bison, deer, sloth bears as well as the occasional tiger and leopard, besides a large variety of birds.

Kaziranga is preparing for centenary celebrations in February with a weeklong wildlife carnival that includes soccer matches by elephants, elephant fights, special safaris, and lectures on conservation.

"I would say Kaziranga is a paradise on earth," said American tourist who identified himself as Andy. Andy along with a group of foreign tourists observed a minute's silence before venturing into the wilds on elephant backs.

"Life must move on although we cannot forget the tragedies caused by the devastating tsunami to millions of people in the region," said another British tourist Allan Hully.

Indo-Asian News Service

Project Updates

ARP, Peter Hall and the International Rhino Foundation – Sumatran Rhino Project, Sumatra Way Kambas Update

Peter Hall has kindly forwarded a further \$115,000US to the IRF for the Way Kambas Project and the Kerinci Seblat roundup. This brings his commitment to this project up to an astounding total of \$260,895US. It is the commitment of people like Peter that give these species hope for the future. A big thank you goes out to Peter Hall and his team at Hunter Hall Investment Management Limited.

Tom Foose from the IRF advises that Dr Robin Radcliffe has arrived in Indonesia to assist with the management, research and training at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS) in Way Kambas as well as assist with the transport of rhinos from Kerinci Seblat to the SRS. He has been, and will continue to be, consulting closely with Dr Terri Roth and other rhino experts to apply the best methodology and techniques to achieve success in reproduction at the SRS.

All the ground work has been completed to proceed with the rescue operations for the doomed rhino so they can be moved to Way Kambas to augment the captive propagation program there. Dr Nico van Strien is proceeding to Kerinci to inspect and facilitate progress on the rescue operations in the first week of January.

The dates have been confirmed for the first Global Propagation and Management Board meeting for late March this year in Jakarta. Kerry Crosbie and Peter Hall have been invited to take part in this meeting and will be attending. They will take advantage of their visit to Indonesia and plan to visit the SRS at Way Kambas in Sumatra after the meeting to observe the upgrades and progress of the rhino rescue.

Andrew Thompson (ARP Board of Management and Professor of Parasitology) has offered his services and will be co-ordinating a visit to the SRS while Peter and Kerry are there. Andrew will be providing assistance to the crew at the SRS for possible co-ordination of parasitological analysis with the rescued rhino and the resident rhino at the sanctuary.

The ARP committee will also plan to co-ordinate a visit to the sanctuary at this time. It turns out that Clare Campbell was scheduled to visit Java at the time of this meeting as a part of her role with the Silvery Gibbon Project. Holly Thompson and Martina ter Steeg have pitched in and also planned a trip to Asia co-ordinating their visit to Sumatra and Java to visit both the Silvery Gibbon Project and the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas. This fantastic opportunity will give the committee a first hand insight on what the ARP and Peter Hall are supporting.

Hunter Hall Charitable Fund Contribution

The Hunter Hall Charitable Fund donated a whopping \$16, 242 to the ARP last month. This funding came with great timing as we have recently committed to two of our proposed projects—to the assist funding an educational program for Alain Compost's Sumatran and Javan Rhino documentaries as well as provide some funding for an investigation into the illegal trade of rhino horn in India. Both projects are very important to the assistance of rhinoceros conservation in Asia and we are very excited to be a part of it. Generous support such as this is what enables us to the amazing things we do. Thank you!



**Photo courtesy of David Jenike –
Sumatran Rhino, Cincinnati Zoo USA**

ARP and SOS Rhino Borneo – Sumatran Rhino Project, Borneo

Karen's Trek

Karen completed her trek on Sunday 28th November. Kerry went down to pick her up at the finishing point in Albany that weekend. She was in fine spirits when Kerry arrived and seemed delighted that the track was completed as she creaked around town to the nearest bottle shop to crack a bottle of wine at the finish line. Excited about being back in the lap of luxury and all that civilization has to offer such as fresh coffee, at the same time she almost seemed lost in contemplation of what to do now and what will the next new challenge be. She certainly took advantage of the wonders of first class service and treated herself to a comfy B&B at Vancouver House ... tea bought to you in bed and Port left out for you upon return from dinner. No doubt she deserved it after her long journey that is for sure! Almost all pledges of sponsorship for this trek have been collected now and if the final ones come in, Karen will have raised a total of \$2,427.50. Below is a word from Karen upon her return:

First off, thanks to all those who sponsored me and helped raise money for the Asian Rhino Project. I think the final figure raised was about \$2,300.

This long distance walk track ran from Kalamunda to Albany, 960 km in all. There are campsites about a days walk apart with tent sites, a shelter, water tank and a drop, or composting, loo. I had done two shorter sections earlier in the year, which I did not repeat, so I walked about 860 km in Oct/Nov. The highlights of the trip were the amazing wild flowers, the Karri forests, the stars at night, interesting people on the track, the beautiful beaches and wildlife. The other highlights were getting into a town and having a hot shower and a comfy bed to sleep in! You can read about the trip in more detail by looking at the Asian Rhino web site, www.asianrhinos.org.au look under the 'what's new' or 'events' links. If any one is interested to walk some, or all, of the track feel free to catch up with me, or you can check out the Bibbulmun Track website.

Thanks again,
Karen Rotherham

Congratulations Karen—we are very proud of your accomplishment! SOS Rhino have been notified and they are compiling a list now for equipment needed. They have already identified that there is urgent need for another diesel generator set in the new river base campsite. We will let you know what items were supplied in our next newsletter.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Perth Zoo Docents for getting behind Karen and providing a large chunk of the sponsorship monies. In particular, a special thanks goes out to Yvonne Garnsey. Without her assistance in managing the sponsorship side of Karen's trek, our job would have been a lot harder. Thank you!

ARP and SOS Rhino – Indian Rhino Project, Dudhwa

Watch out! There's a rhino on the run! This was the heading of a news report from the TIMES NEWS NETWORK [Thursday, December 23, 2004 12:35:08 AM]

An Indian rhino strayed from the forests of Dudhwa National Park and created a scare among local villagers. It has killed a woman and extensively damaged crops. This rhino is suspected to be the same rhino that has killed one person and injured another in the area on a separate occasion.

According to the story a team from the Dudhwa National Park and forest department officials with help from experts from Assam and West Bengal set out to capture and return the rhino to its natural habitat, but sadly the capture went wrong. The rhino was tranquillised and shifted in a wooden crate but was sinking too deep under anaesthetic. Reversal drugs were administered and unfortunately the rhino regained consciousness enough to break the crate and escape.



Karen Rotherham at the Southern Terminus, Albany

Unfortunately it was considered too dangerous to tranquilise the rhino again for another 90 days from the original attempt, so the rhino had been hiding out in sugarcane fields in the area with officials keeping an eye on it. It was reported in the Indian news on January 12th that the rhino has now been successfully captured in fields of Thakurdwara and has been taken to the Lucknow Zoo.

Nan Schaffer from SOS Rhino is working in with the officials at Dudhwa NP and advises that this was one of the males from the park. She says getting him back and inside a fence was vital and that four times the original amount of funding is now required to secure other rhinos from straying out of the National Park. She says that they are going to try to put the fence up by June. Late last year the ARP had dedicated \$2,000 to this important project assisting them in preventing other human/rhino conflict causing damage to community attitudes towards the conservation of the Indian Rhino. Let's hope that the team in Dudhwa are able to secure the fence before more damage is done.

Sadly, Nan also advised that there have been reports that Bardia, across the border, has been hit hard by poachers.

ARP and Wannamedia Lestari Foundation Documentaries – Javan and Sumatran Rhino Project, Indonesia

Photo courtesy of Alain Compost – Javan Rhino, Ujon Kulon NP Indonesia

The ARP Board of Management has approved \$5,000 to the educational side of this project. We have advised that we are happy to acquire the equipment required to enable the distribution and presentation of these films to people living in or near threatened habitats. These residents are generally marginalized populations with low educational levels and are often ignorant of the long-term impact of their daily activities on wildlife and the environment. Wannamedia will work with local NGO's and the local Government to distribute CD's and organize projections followed by discussions in some of the most remote villages around the protected areas using portable video projection units. The ARP has offered to provide this project with the following required items:

- Honda 500W generator and stabilizer
- DVD Player
- Video Projector



Feature Story

This is a new segment of the ARP newsletters. We hope to bring you feature stories on a variety of different flora and fauna within the Asian Rhinos habitats. We will begin with a focus on three rhinos themselves starting this issue with the Sumatran Rhino.

Sumatran rhinoceros

Dicerorhinus sumatrensis

By Colin Groves

This is the smallest and most primitive of the five living species of rhinoceros. It is also the most critically endangered: although the total world population probably numbers more than the Javan rhino, it is less well protected in the wild. A project in the 1990s to capture some and breed them in captivity proved a disaster—three-quarters of those captured have now died, and only two have been bred, both in Cincinnati Zoo (in 2001 and 2004).

100 years ago, the species was widespread, from Sumatra and Borneo in the south to northern Burma and northeastern India. Today, remnant populations survive in Sabah and in parts of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. There is evidence that a few survive in Manipur. One of the reasons for its decline is habitat loss—extensive forest areas have been cut down or burned, often

for agriculture or oil palm plantations. But a far more important reason is hunting for Traditional Chinese Medicine. In TCM, rhino skin, hair, toenails, teeth and, above all, horns are all said to have powerful properties. The horns of rhinos are reputed to make a powerful fever-reducing drug, and it probably does have some effect, but a very slight one. The horn of a Sumatran rhino, as it lives in wet rainforest, is supposed to be good for dry fevers; that of an Indian rhino, which lives in dry monsoonal areas, is said to be good to treat wet fevers. Rhino horn is worth its weight in gold - literally.

The Sumatran rhino is about 110 to 135cm high, and weighs 500 to 800 kg—compare this to the Southern White Rhino, whose males may be up to 170cm high and weigh 2500kg! It is the only species with conspicuous body hair; other Asian rhinos have short, sparse, unnoticeable hair, and African rhinos are hairless except for the eyelashes, ear fringes and tail tuft. The skin is thinner than other rhinos, but like other species it is consistently folded, with especially a fold running over the back and down behind each foreleg. The build is compact; the legs are thick, and the feet are wide, with the three toes long and splayed out like claws (other Asian rhinos have short toes which barely project at the front of the soup-plate-like feet). The nose is not flexible like other rhinos, but hard and cornified, presumably a good battering ram as it scampers fast through dense tangled vegetation.



Photo courtesy of David Jenike – Sumatran Rhino, Cincinnati Zoo USA

Small it may be, but the gestation is long as it is in other rhinos. The two that were born in Cincinnati Zoo had gestations of 475 and 477 days. (The newborn weighed 33 and 34kg). What was discovered in Cincinnati was that, unlike all other rhinos, the Sumatran rhino is an induced ovulator—the female does not ovulate until she is mated. This may be an adaptation to living a solitary existence at a low population density—individuals might simply not meet each other at the right time. Yet, to some extent, it is a creature of habit; each individual occupies a wide home range and travels along habitual paths in it. When the capture program was operating, in the 1990s, a pit trap would be dug along a well-used rhino path, and covered up, and it did not take too long before a rhino would fall into it—but almost all were females (the males seem to have wider ranges and less regular routes). There is a story that, during the Second World War, a field hospital in Malaya was constructed over a rhino path, and on one occasion the rhino walked into it and along the passage between the rows of beds, to the consternation of the patients.

About 15-20 million years ago, the ancestors of modern rhinos began to diverge into three groups. One was the African rhinos (white and black); the second, the Asian one-horned rhinos (Indian and Javan); the third was just the Sumatran rhino. Since that time, the Sumatran rhino has changed much less than the other groups: it is very much a living fossil.

Three subspecies are recognised: the typical subspecies (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis sumatrensis*), which lives in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula; the smaller Bornean subspecies (*D.s.harrissoni*), and the larger northern one (*D.s.lasiotis*), which has a slightly differently shaped skull. Intermediates between the typical and northern subspecies lived—perhaps a few still survive—in central Thailand and the Pegu district of Burma.

**Have you ever had that feeling that you want to help save a species or a precious piece of land?
Well you can!**

**Drop us an e-mail on info@asianrhinos.org.au or phone Kerry on 041 901 5286
—we are awaiting your call!**

Any help no matter how small is extremely worthwhile, even attending our events or talking to your friends about the rhinos is directly helping the Asia Rhino Projects quest to save the three beautiful Asian rhino species, the Sumatran, Javan and Indian rhinos.