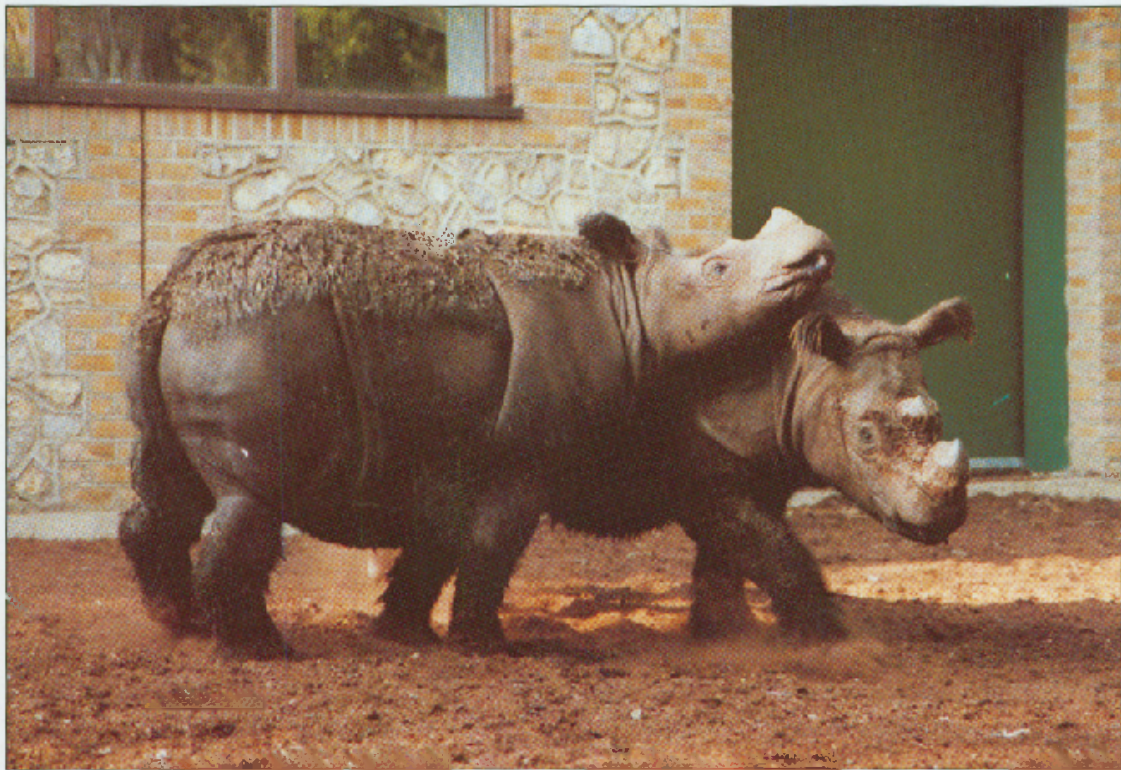


# THE SUMATRAN RHINO PROJECT

by Tom Begg



At the end of May we concluded the project started three years previously. Our initial aim under the terms of our agreement with the Indonesian Wildlife Department was to catch four pairs of rhinos. Two pairs would remain in their country of origin and the others be exported to Port Lympne. The situation regarding numbers of animals as reported in HELP Newsletter 9 still pertains, although the male Rokan and the female Meranti have since been moved. In short, from July 1987 until May 1988 no further animals were caught and the tracks of very few had been seen. This statement is not made in a critical way, but the fact of the matter is that the destruction of the forest continues relentlessly and the attendant disturbance

is playing havoc with the rhinos' normal patterns of behaviour. The major game trails that they used on a regular basis are growing over through disuse, and the few animals left give the impression of wandering aimlessly to suffer death at the hands of poachers. Our catching teams were moving further and further from the original base camp in all directions, and in spite of their best efforts the traps which they dug were not productive. Thus in May, when our catching licence came up for renewal and our expenditure was considered, we decided to discontinue the project, at least for the time being. All the equipment (vehicles, base camps, holding yards, medicines, dart gun etc) was donated to the Wildlife Department for their general use.



At the end of April Francesco Nardelli and I made arrangements to transport Meranti to Port Lympne and Rokan to Surabaya Zoo in Java. These animals had for different reasons remained in the base camp for around nine months. Rokan prior to his capture had fallen victim to a poachers' snare on his right foreleg, and the ensuing complications took this long to resolve. He departed on his week-long trip by lorry and ferry, in good health, with his leg completely healed and normal in appearance save for the permanent scarring caused by the snare. Meranti's departure from Indonesia was timed to coincide with the appearance of leaves on the deciduous trees at Port Lympne. While she had for some time been fed lucerne hay in preparation for the inevitable, though not too drastic, change in diet she would experience, it was hoped she would take to some if not all of the browse she would be offered, with our homegrown lucerne hay as a standby. The same means of transport and the same routes were used as previously with Subur, and on 30th April Meranti arrived at Port Lympne.

During my departure to collect her, Torgamba

had been moved from his temporary quarters at Combe Farm to the new complex created for the Sumatran rhinos in the wood below the mansion. It met with his immediate approval! Meranti's arrival, unloading, and subsequent meeting and mixing with her mate are described by her keepers Jimmy Shave and Gordon Scott elsewhere in the Newsletter. Suffice it to say that all went according to plan, as did their first sortie into their woodland paddock at the end of August.

Francesco Nardelli, who has served us well and to whom we owe our sincere thanks for all his efforts as the project manager, remains in the Far East in the same role for the similar project being run by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria (AAZPA). Their exercise began in October 1987 in a different area of Sumatra, using Tony Parkinson as catcher, and the current information is that they have caught three female rhinos. Congratulations and continuing success to them! The more rhinos out of reach of the poachers' snares and the woodman's axe, the better chance of delaying their extinction.



*Torgamba & Meranti enjoying their new 'forest' home*

*(Photo by R. Williams)*