

Sumatra:



ALL IMAGES: ROBIN RADCLIFFE

For four months from January to May of 2005, Dr Robin Radcliffe traveled on an IRF mission to the rhino sanctuary in Way Kambas with support in part by Peter Hall and the Asian Rhino Project. The mission's several objectives included work to induce the pair of Sumatran rhinos in the SRS to reproduce. Dr Radcliffe also assisted with the evaluation of the wild Sumatran rhino, named Rossa, a unique tame animal highlighted in the spring 2005 issue of *The Horn*.

While progress was made on the biological front, the mission also provided Dr Radcliffe the opportunity to cultivate another of his passions - an educational programme for children that incorporates a children's book about rhino conservation in the local language together with a traditional dance celebration. The book, entitled "Badak Tidak Bercula" ("The Hornless Rhinoceros"), is still in production and is part of a larger application to the Rolex Awards for Enterprise. The story features one hairy rhino in his quest to regain his lost horn while finding instead a genuine worth among the forest community. The illustrated tale is filled with adventure, humour and a message: the rhino AND people are good for the forest.

The primary objective of the project, Children for the Hairy Rhino, is to raise awareness about the urgent need to coexist with the rhinoceros and its rainforest home, rather than compete with or eliminate such amazing biodiversity - a variety of life of which the hairy rhino is but one small part.

The single most critical challenge facing grassroots conservation for this species in Southeast Asia is the paucity of knowledge and understanding by local people about the "hairy" rhino and its rainforest home.

Rhino dance in Way Kambas National Park

Perhaps nowhere was this more apparent than during one such visit Robin and SRS Staff Marcellus Adi (SRS Site Manager) and Dedi Candra (SRS Curator) made to a school outside Way Kambas National Park. Not a single student from Grades 4, 5 and 6 (representing more than one hundred children) knew that a forest rhino, the Badak, lived nearby in the jungles of Way Kambas. Of course, the hairy rhino lives a rather secretive life and is rarely encountered, even by the RPU staff who are charged with their protection. Yet children knew about Gajah (the elephant) and Harimau (the tiger) from encounters with crop-raiding elephants and elaborate dance celebrations featuring striped denizens of the forest. So why not a rhino dance?

The stage was set. A local artist crafted several rhino dance costumes and the first "Rhino Dance" celebrations began in earnest in Plang Ijau, a local village adjacent to Way Kambas National Park. Amazingly children flocked to learn more about this "mythical" creature from their own forests. "Please come back and teach us more!" rang forth in song as we left that school where the children knew so little of their own hairy rhino. There must be a lesson here!

Robin W Radcliffe, Marcellus Adi,
Dedi Candra, Nico van Strien
and Tom Foose

