

Save the Rhino International rolls to the rescue in Sumatra

KUALA LUMPUR

Save the Rhino International has moved "once more unto the breach" in Sumatra to help save the Sumatran rhino from extinction.

SINGAPORE

Due to massive poaching pressure, the number of Sumatran rhinos has decreased from "pest" levels in the early twentieth century to a mere 300. Save The Rhino, through its support for the Sumatran Rhino Survey in Kerinci Seblat National Park, was instrumental in revealing the severity of the situation. At the time, Kerinci Seblat was believed to contain the world's largest population (maybe 300 or more), but Philip Wells and Neil Franklin discovered that the species had been virtually annihilated. They even found notes engraved by poachers on tree trunks, marking which areas had been poached to extinction.

Drastic measures were required, but governmental conservation agencies in Indonesia and Malaysia did not have the resources to deal with the crisis. A new organisation, the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), joined with the IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist to establish special anti-poaching teams known as Rhino Protection Units (RPUs).

The RPUs conduct frequent patrols in the forest to destroy snares and traps, and to apprehend suspected poachers. They also engage in intelligence operations and community activities to facilitate the anti-poaching work. In areas where the RPUs operate, there has been a massive drop in poaching, with only one rhino lost. The RPUs actually discovered this rhino alive in a poacher snare but were unable to save its life, although they did prevent the poachers from collecting the spoils.

But over the last year, conservation conditions in Indonesia have significantly deteriorated, with more encroachment into the National Parks and more exploitation of wildlife. As a result, two Sumatran rhinos were killed in late 2001 and early 2002.

The economic recession of the last year has reduced the funds available for rhino conservation. Fortunately, SRI has resumed support for this critically endangered species, replacing an essential but badly dilapidated patrol vehicle. SRI is also seeking to fund a second vehicle and provide other support in the future, in partnership with the IRF.

Your help is desperately needed, greatly appreciated, and may make all the difference in saving the Sumatran rhino from total extinction. For further information see: www.rhinos-irf.org/rhinos/sumatran.html

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