



NEWS

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Rare rhino pregnancy gives hope to species

Andalas-Ratu love story proves conservation efforts can work

Cincinnati/Los Angeles/Indonesia -- Conservationists across the world are celebrating a pregnancy in one of the world's most endangered species, the [Sumatran rhino](#). The pregnancy of female Ratu, born in Indonesia, and male [Andalas](#), the [first](#) of only three Sumatran rhinos born in captivity in more than 112 years, is giving hope to international rhino biologists. The breeding occurred at Indonesia's [Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary](#) in Way Kambas National Park after international efforts led to the pair's introduction. The calf is expected to be born in May 2011.

This is no ordinary pregnancy. Andalas and [Ratu](#) were brought together through international goodwill and cooperation in an effort to save this critically endangered species. Ratu wandered into a village just outside Sumatra's Way Kambas National Park in 2006; Andalas was born at the [Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden](#) in 2001, grew up at the [Los Angeles Zoo](#) and was transferred from the L.A. Zoo to the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in 2007. With help from Dr. Robin Radcliffe of the [International Rhino Foundation's](#) (IRF) [Rhino Conservation Medicine Program](#), the then-5 ½-year-old Andalas journeyed more than 10,000 miles on a 63-hour trip by plane, truck and ferry. Prior to his departure, he was vaccinated to protect him from diseases he would soon face in the rainforests of his native habitat.

Three years after [Andalas'](#) successful transition, he and [Ratu](#) mated. The breeding followed months of gradual introduction by scent, sound, sight, and finally, physical proximity, ultimately resulting in the pregnancy.

"A combination of sound science, international collaboration among government, non-profits, and zoos, as well as timing and personal chemistry, has led to this groundbreaking event," said Dr. Susie Ellis, executive director of the International Rhino Foundation. "Sumatran rhino numbers have decreased by more than 50 percent over the last 15 years in the wild. Every individual counts, and the captive population represents not only an 'insurance policy' for the wild population, but also a means to study the basic biology of the species, which we must understand in order to save them."

The Sumatran rhino population is estimated at approximately 200 individuals in the wild and 10 currently in captivity worldwide. Ratu's pregnancy represents the hope for a future generation.

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"We have been waiting a long time to share news of a rhino pregnancy," said Dr. Dedi Candra, the sanctuary's animal collection coordinator. "With help from our partners, we have worked tirelessly to keep these animals healthy and breeding. Our dedicated keepers deserve a great deal of the credit."

"The Los Angeles Zoo is anxiously awaiting the birth of Ratu's calf in Indonesia," said John Lewis, Los Angeles zoo director. "We are longtime supporters of this program. Although we miss Andalas at the zoo, we are so proud to have helped contribute towards the conservation of rhinos by sending him back to Indonesia."

In 1984, a group of reproductive biologists, zoologists and conservationists joined together to form the *Sumatran Rhino Trust*, an agreement bridging several countries and symbolizing hope for the conservation of an entire species. The Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary is a 250-acre complex built and funded by IRF. It is currently operated in partnership with the Indonesian Rhino Foundation under an agreement with the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry. The sanctuary houses five rhinos that are part of an intensively managed research and breeding program aimed at contributing to the conservation of the species in the wild. The rhinos reside in large, open areas where they can experience a natural rain forest habitat while receiving state-of-the-art veterinary care and nutrition.

Dr. Terri Roth, director of Cincinnati Zoo's Center for Conservation and Research of Endangered Wildlife (CREW) and vice president for IRF's [Asia programs](#), has used her extensive training in reproductive biology to produce three Sumatran rhinos beginning with Andalas in 2001, utilizing hormonal assays and ultrasound techniques to determine the optimal time for introducing males and females.

"Sumatran rhinos are very solitary by nature and very aggressive towards one another except when a female is in estrus," said Dr. Roth. "Through science we can determine when the female is ready to ovulate so that she is paired with a male at the right time and fighting is minimized while the likelihood of conception is optimized. It is wonderful to see the science developed at CREW help our Indonesian colleagues achieve success in the forest of Sumatra."

According to Dr. Roth, captive Sumatran rhinos fill many roles. They represent a valuable resource for learning about the species' basic biology which can facilitate efforts to monitor and protect them in the wild. They serve as ambassadors for their species helping to educate both children and adults about rhinos and the rainforest, and they are becoming increasingly important as a back up to the wild population as the latter continues to decline.

"The Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary has been encouraged by Cincinnati Zoo's success," said Dr. Widodo Ramono, executive director of the Rhino Foundation of Indonesia. "Our staff has adapted the Cincinnati Zoo's methodology to the local environment at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, particularly ultrasonographic techniques, to achieve this result."

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“While captive breeding is not a substitute for protecting the species in the wild, it is a critical part of an integrated strategy for the Sumatran rhino’s recovery,” said Dr. Ellis. “The International Rhino Foundation, through its local partner, the Indonesian Rhino Foundation, also operates anti-poaching units in three Indonesian national parks. Thanks to those programs, there has been no rhino poaching in the last five years, and poaching of other large vertebrates which share rhino habitat has decreased significantly.”

Development of a viable and holistic program that involves captive breeding will provide insurance against the difficulties and uncertainties of protecting the Sumatran rhino in the wild. Solid success with this species may provide a model for development of a similar program for the critically endangered Javan rhino, whose population is more stable but numbers no more than 50 individuals in the wild, with no insurance population in captivity. Indonesia harbors two critically endangered rhino species, but with far less attention than African rhinos, under pressure from a 15-year high in poaching for horn, which is used in traditional Asian medicine as an analgesic.

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About the International Rhino Foundation

The International Rhino Foundation is a global not-for-profit organization dedicated to the survival of the world’s rhino species through conservation and research, and increasing awareness about the plight of the rhino. To learn more about the IRF or make a direct contribution to support the proud parents-to-be, visit www.rhinos-irf.org.