

My First Experience Arresting a Rhino Poacher

Below is a story provided by Arief Rubianto, Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park RPU Leader on the arrest of an animal poacher.

According to information from our informant there had been rhino poaching activity in Bengkunt, West Lampung. Based on this information, it was decided that we should approach this issue in collaboration with the BBS NP forest guard and the local police. We requested one police officer to monitor the house of the suspected poacher and prepared one unit to be on standby in the village. Using two-way radio communication we were able to ensure that the suspected poacher was unable to leave the village before the operation was in action.

We were required to use a public vehicle to travel to the location, as the familiarity of our vehicle could have jeopardized the operation. If we were approached by villagers as to our reasons for being there, we stated that we were merchant traders collecting coffee and cacao. It was important for us to remain undercover at this time.

According to informants our target was still in the forest at this stage so we needed to wait for him in the village. We ended up waiting for him for about 3 days! In order to survive, we bought clothes and meals from the villagers. We stayed in an unused and very small store and could only leave after midnight to ensure that we did not blow our cover!

After 3 days of waiting in the store, we received information that the suspected poacher had returned to the village and was planning to travel to the city by motorcycle the following day. We needed to make careful plans before he left the village.

At 10 am the next morning we saw the target walking in front of the place where we were staying. We made contact with our team members to prepare and advised that we must make an arrest today!!

After coordinating the team we were able to make a successful arrest. Unfortunately he had no evidence with him and only had a knife. We were then able to take him to his house and after searching his property we managed to find some rhino teeth! This was all the evidence we needed to return him to our camp and send him to jail. It was our belief that the rhino horn had already been sold on so we hoped to interrogate him at the police office.

During interrogation, the poacher stated that he had not killed a rhino or any other mammal and that the teeth had come from a friend. He was not aware that we were RPU and that we had plenty of information relating to his involvement in rhinos killed in the area since 1990.

After following the required legal processes, this poacher was only given 4 months jail due to the fact that the teeth were the only evidence that we had. We were very disappointed but have to accept this legal decision. It was actually my first experience to arrest a rhino poacher!

I have now made a promise to myself to improve our methods in the future so that we can arrest more rhino poachers and ensure that they receive maximum punishment and longer jail terms.



ARP is very proud to support the important work that Arief and his team do in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park. We have visited the teams there and seen firsthand the tough and dangerous work that these men do and how proud and professional they are. These guys are on the front line of rhino conservation putting their lives at risk not only from mosquito born disease and animal attack but also attack from poachers and illegal encroachers they are working hard to stop. We take our hats off to them. Absolute heroes!

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