

Javan Rhino foot print

Kerry Crosbie Travel Report February 2011 – Borneo and Indonesia

Between 7–21 February, I travelled to Borneo (Malaysia), Sumatra and Java (Indonesia) to attend the Sumatran Rhinoceros Global Management and Propagation Board Meeting (Sabah, Borneo), Way Kambas Project Visit (Sumatra), YABI Board Meeting and Ujung Kulon Project Visit (Java). ARP Vice Chairperson Clare Campbell attended the Indonesian side of the visit along with our partners Susie Ellis, Bibhab Talukdar and Terri Roth from the International Rhino Foundation and Cameron Kerr, CEO of the Taronga Zoos Society. As usual our Indonesian and Borneo partners were great hosts and I especially thank the government of Sabah, Borneo Rhino Alliance, Yayasan Badak Indonesia and the local National Park Authorities for their hard work and coordination in facilitating our journey.

Sumatran Rhinoceros Global Management Propagation Board Meeting

The Sumatran rhino captive breeding programs around the world are at crisis point! Only ten rhinos remain in four different locations (three rhino in two institutions in the USA, five rhino in Indonesia and the remaining two in Borneo). Of these 10 rhino, four animals are old (one not expected to live long at all) and two are considered post reproductive or not reproductively

viable. Sadly, the only breeding female in the program died last year due to liver disease (resulting from an iron overload disorder that is common to browsing rhino species in captivity). This leaves only father and daughter together at Cincinnati now and all rhino in the USA related. Some positive progress has been made, however. Indonesian, Malaysian, and US institutions agreed that they would allow exchange gametes (sperm and eggs), and that the two different subspecies (numbering ~ 20-30 animals for the wild Sabah population and ~150-170 for Sumatra) would be managed as one species in captivity.

Andalas (the first captive bred rhino from the USA returned to Indonesia in 2007) has produced two pregnancies with female Ratu at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Indonesia. Sadly, both pregnancies were miscarried, as is commonly seen in Sumatran captive programs (in the USA Emi miscarried many times before finally carrying three full term and healthy calves). Scientists around the world are also working on artificial insemination with rhino and seem to be making good headway. Facilities are working on collecting sperm which will be made available for all facilities to utilise easing the need to transfer animals

providing the program is successful. Gamete rescue protocols have also been formalised and put in place to rescue vital reproductive tissue in the case of death securing the genetics of these animals for future use. IVF programs are also being researched and have been attempted in the white rhinoceros already.

Regarding the iron overload issue in the captivity – Scientists are working hard to find out exactly why this is occurring and how to avoid it. Blood samples have been taken also from the Indonesian animals to assess their iron loads. It is hard to provide exact food diets these browsing rhinos ingest in the wild – especially in countries without direct access to the food plant of the rhino.

In the end it is recognised that the global Sumatran rhino captive breeding programs need more animals if they are to succeed. Captive breeding programs are designed to be ‘backup’ populations for their counterparts in the wild. With the current status of Sumatran rhino population in the wild, it is vital that this program succeeds if the species is to survive. All parties agreed that ‘isolated’ rhino are good candidates for these programs. They are rhino that are known to exist in a habitat that is not frequented by other rhino of the opposite sex and are therefore considered doomed. A major factor in this scenario is the well known fact that if a female rhino does not breed before a certain age – reproductive pathology develops and the rhino will no longer be able to contribute her genes to the population. No matter what their status, each rhino’s genes are valuable to captive populations. One female has been identified for capture and teams have been working hard to capture this animal in Sabah. No other animals have been identified or targeted; all captures require full governmental approval from the range country.

After the meeting, we travelled to Tabin Wildlife reserve and visited the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary and the two Sabah captive rhinos ‘Tam’ and ‘Gelogob’. Both rhino look in good condition. Sadly though, Gelogob is now blind due to long term corneal scarring and ulceration complications and is also considered post-reproductive.

Way Kambas National Park, Sumatra RPUs

Our first destination in the park was to visit a former encroachment area which has been seized and is currently being regenerated. This is a major achievement for the national Parks, RPUs (Rhino Protection Units) and all parties working in this area.



Top to bottom: River base camp Way Kambas NP; Kerry planting a tree at the Way Kambas regeneration area; Clare showing small token of appreciation with ARP magnets WKNP RPU; Group at the Way Kambas River Base Camp.



I was advised that around 500 people were relocated and 300 houses demolished. The area is being regenerated with a big focus on planting rhino and elephant food plant. A new guard station has also been constructed in the area. On the other side of the park, an illegal fishing village was relocated from the Way Kanan River mouth resulting in 100% of the park's encroachment now removed! The Way Kambas Sumatran rhino population is currently estimated to have grown to 33 animals and there has been sign of new rhino calves, which is great news.

RPU are working with the communities bordering the parks to show alternate farming practises. Upon entering Way Kambas, we saw large pineapple, cassava and watermelon plantations. A special grant is made available to RPU members from the Wildlife Conservation Network to use for alternate agriculture. This provides not only another source of income, but provides an example to the community of alternative and more sustainable plantations. Local RPU members have planted small crops of wood trees and rubber trees outside the park. These crops take longer to bring in money (7 yrs before the first harvest) but show that if the owner can find a way to sustain life for this time the yearly returns are far greater in the end e.g. US\$500/hectare for rubber plants. Cassava (currently more widely used) brings in far less though has more immediate returns.

On the second day, we travelled by RPU boat to a river base camp where we had lunch with RPU team and presentations of rhino distribution and tracking maps in the area. After lunch we walked along one of the trails with RPU I have never seen so many leeches in my life!!!!!! The ground was crawling with them! While we danced about like idiots trying to avoid the leeches and listen at tentatively to the information attempted to be passed on; the RPU team ducked and dived around us trying to remove any that attached to us. Man, these guys work in tough conditions!

The Bukit Barisan Selatan and Way Kambas RPUs and the Intelligence and Law Enforcement Unit gave formal slide presentations at the main RPU office upon our departure. This year saw more arrests and actual sentences due to professional evidence gathering and surveillance which could be properly used in a court of

Top to bottom: Group at the SRS - Kerry Crosbie, Clare Campbell, Sumadi Hasmaran, Bibhab Talukdar, Terri Roth, Susie Ellis, Cameron Kerr, Dedi Candra; WKNP RPU Team Leader Hartoto with adult and calf footprints from the park; Group Outside the WKNP Head Office with BBSNP, WKNP RPU and ILEU leaders; Group at Ujung Kulon NP Headquarters - Bibhab Talukdar, Widodo Ramono, Kerry Crosbie, Agus Priambudi, Clare Campbell, Waladi Isnani, Cameron Kerr.

law. Elephant and tiger products were seized and major players arrested. The RPU team's professionalism and dedication continues within the parks and together these teams are working closely with communities outside the parks to promote more sustainable and profitable farming practices providing incentives for people to assist the teams in their work also (providing intelligence, reducing encroachment etc).

Unfortunately, encroachment is increasing in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park) and it seems that the rhinos are being pushed further to the central and northern regions of the park. A new road constructed in the Southern part of the park, combined with an invasive weed, Matangan, appears to have caused this shift in location. Matangan is forming a blanket cover over existing vegetation which if left will eventually destroy rhino habitat. Rhino numbers in the park are still under discussion as different survey methods have resulted in different population estimates. All of this is of course major concern and will be a focus for this year.

Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary

We visited all the SRS rhinos and all look in good health (even Torgamba the old male who is not expected to live much longer due to renal disease and is currently receiving 24hour care). Introductions are continuing between Andalas and Ratu and we are hopeful that this year is going to produce a third and hopefully full term pregnancy between the pair. Semen collection is also a focus for this year at the SRS with collections planned from Andalas before June. These collections will be via electro ejaculation which requires anaesthetic. Thanks to Taronga Conservation Society Australia support, we will likely send over Dr. Benn Bryant to assist.

Rosa continues to show distress with pairings for

mating – although all her behavioural signs are indicate receptivity in the yards, once introduced to a male she retreats and goes to all lengths to escape, which is dangerous and undesirable. The SRS team have reduced the amount of human contact she is getting in case this is due to imprinting and are considering getting professional behaviourist involved.

The older female 'Bina' is being paired with Andalas and seems to be cycling regularly again since December 2010. Although we are hopeful for a natural conception this year, Bina has been identified also as a good AI candidate.

Blood samples have been taken from SRS rhino to the US for testing of iron levels and the SRS team are working on getting required permits for sending faeces to Borneo for stimulation of the male 'Tam'. BORA (Borneo Rhino Alliance) are interested in seeing if introducing dung from other male rhino and reproductive female rhino excrement will stimulate testicular growth and sperm production. The SRS team are also planning to analyse faecal samples from the SRS rhinos for hormone analysis research.

Ujung Kulon National Park Visit

A major focus of Yayasan Badak Indonesia (YABI), Ujung Kulon National Park, Asian Rhino Project and the International Rhino Foundation this year has been on the Javan Rhino Study and Conservation Area (JaRhiSCA pronounced ja-rhis-ka). This is essentially expanding the useable rhino habitat in the with the idea that improving the habitat in the Gunung Honje area (the eastern part of the park) will draw more rhinos and thus enable the population to expand. (There are already several rhinos in the area.) Only 48 Javan rhino are estimated to survive today and all of them are in this park. It appears that the population



Left to right: Guard post at start of JaRhiSCA boundary fence line UKNP; Kerry and Clare at Javan rhino wallow site.

has reached carrying capacity – although the park was once thought to have a capacity of 100 rhinos, human disturbance, reduction in food availability has taken its toll. Natural forest growth has seen rhino food plants grow either too high to access and Arenga palm dominance is blanketing the forest floor making plant regeneration virtually non-existent. The rhino are susceptible to disease from wandering cattle and buffalo and, of course, poaching is also a serious threat if the rhino enter encroached areas.

Human settlements are being relocated from within the park to other areas by national park authorities. A total of 52 families have already voluntarily relocated. Electric fencing is being constructed to run from shore to shore (approx 28km of fence) along the boundary to protect the park. Already the rhino have been observed in areas they have not inhabited for some time and where human disturbance has been removed. Habitat improvement projects are being implemented including weed eradication programs, forest regeneration, and the creation of further water holes, wallows and salt licks. Guard posts are being erected and another RPU team has been employed. Local communities are also benefiting from this program with employment in the fence construction, weed eradication program and RPU team work forces. The fence construction is expected to be completed before the monsoon season this year.

Having the total population of Javan rhino in one area is dangerous - like having all your eggs in one basket! Natural disaster or a disease outbreak could wipe these animals of the face of the earth forever. Longer term, we hope to be able to study the rhino in this area and eventually identify individuals for a relocation program to other parks where the rhino once inhabited before.

We were honoured to meet with the Head of Ujung



Canoe Cigenteur River UKNP

Kulon NP – Pak Agus Priambudi and his teams working so hard on the relocation of the local people from within the park. We also met one of the village chiefs who was very supportive of the work being done to save their rhino and their park. It was quite a touching moment!

Most of our time was spent with the Ujung Kulon RPU team who have been working tirelessly on moving forward the JaRhiSCA project. The team also gave us a formal presentation on the work they are doing as well as escorted us around the park to see progress for ourselves. Our first destination was to the study area of Gunung Honje where we met with engineering team, National Park Community Liaison Officer and Chief of local village. The team showed us the starting point of the fence line and the first guard post construction. We were then escorted to an area where the Arenga palm had taken over a 100ha part of the park. The devastation caused by this weed was obvious – nothing grows under it and it was easy to see how the rhino carrying capacity of the park has been reduced.

Note: many of the staff involved in construction of this base camp building have contracted Malaria. Nine of a team often to be exact! This is an unfortunate risk working in this area and it affects our RPU teams as well. Issues like these will also impact on construction progress.

It was not all trekking – we canoed up the Cigenteur River to a known rhino wallow where we observed old rhino scrapings, footprints and vegetation that had been fed upon by rhino. We also visited the banteng feeding ground, however, no banteng were seen. We travelled by sea to Peucang Island where we were shown habitat which has been unchanged since Krakatau erupted over 100yrs ago – an example of why rhino don't do so well in primary forest (no saplings to feed on and trees too high to reach). From there we went to the mainland opposite and walked into cascade area of UKNP which is the park's primary spring and water source. Three rhino had used the track we followed in the past month in both directions. One of the rhino tracks were only 2 days old. Interestingly, rhino had not stopped to feed on the track – seemed to be on a mission to get from point A to B.

While in Ujung Kulon we stayed at two separate accommodation facilities. One was Handeleum Island where we have stayed before and the other was a local home stay set up by a local family with assistance from WWF – another example of how the park benefits local people.

YABI Board of Trustees Annual Meeting

Sixteen RPU teams and one Intelligence and Law Enforcement (ILEU) team operate through YABI in Sumatra and Java as well as the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS). These teams are vital to the rhino conservation programs and they are on the front line working to remove snares, encroachment, illegal activities, monitor the animals and the habitats as well as work with communities to educate and motivate them to protect their valuable parks and animals.

The board and visitors were given an overview of RPU, SRS, ILEU and YABI office achievements, outcomes, and plans for 2011. Most outlined in the report above. Budgets, fundraising initiatives and organisation planning were also covered. Most of the YABI budget is covered from international donors with ARP and IRF funding at least 97%. A focus also this year will be to seek local funding sources and opportunities to provide further support and continued security within projects.

A small group was invited to meet with the Ministry of Forestry Director General 'Pak Darori' afterward to update him personally on the progress of YABI operations and concerns. He seemed impressed with our progress and promised government funding to rhino programs for 2012. We felt most honoured as it turns out that Mr. Darori left his wedding anniversary celebrations to meet with us!

Silvery Gibbon Project

Clare and I travelled to Gunung Gede for the last two days to visit the Javan Gibbon Centre. Aside from Clare's dedication to the ARP and her work at Perth Zoo, she is also the president of the Silvery Gibbon Project – an Australian NGO who raises funds for gibbon conservation programs in Indonesia. As a partner in fundraising and awareness programs in Australia, it was good to visit their project and brainstorm on ways we might be able to collaborate projects in Indonesia and Australia further.

Thank You, Hunter Hall Investment Management

ARP would like to thank Hunter Hall for another generous donation with their 2010 contribution being a whopping \$13,690.00! The Hunter Hall Charity Scheme allows each Hunter Hall shareholder to nominate recipients of charitable contributions on a basis proportional to the number of shares they own. I was thrilled to accept this generous donation which sees Hunter Hall donations reach over \$73,000 to the Asian Rhino Project. Hunter Hall continues to be one of our major corporate donors.

These important funds will contribute to funding Rhino Protection Unit operations in Sumatra and Java. The Rhino Protection Unit (RPU) program in Indonesia

is the front line of defence in securing Sumatran rhinos in Bukit Barisan and Way Kambas National Parks in Sumatra, and Javan rhinos in Ujung Kulon National Park. This program has essentially helped to put a halt to rhino poaching in these three parks. As human populations increase and the threats from illegal activities such as encroachment and illegal logging grow, the protection provided by the RPUs will remain crucial for the survival of Indonesian mega fauna. Once again thank you for your generous contribution.



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Help us save the Sumatran rhino by adopting one today – and it's tax deductible!

All funds raised through the ARP's adopt-a-rhino program will be used to support the SRS in Way

Kambas National Park, Sumatra.

With each adoption you will receive an attractive adoption certificate including information on your rhino and the program.

You can also choose to receive

quarterly updates on your rhino as well as an A4 sized photograph (extra costs apply for photos and updates).

More information on the rhinos and the program is on our website www.asianrhinos.org.au.