

# REPORT ON THE SUMATRAN RHINO SURVEY, TABIN LIMESTONE EXPEDITION 2000

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Date	Particulars	GPS Reading
19 October	<p>I left Kota Kinabalu by air at 1150 hours arriving Lahad Datu at 1245 hr. Justine Wilfred from JHL sent us to the 1st base camp (Encik Kamsar bin Asa's property) and proceeded to the 2nd base camp along the Tabin river by boat. We arrived about 1930 hours.</p> <p>Wildlife observed were black hornbills, white egrets, purple heron, sandpiper, imperial pigeons, oriental darters, monitor lizard, long-tail macaque, gibbons (sound) and elephant (hoof prints).</p>	<p>Tributary of the Tabin river N05°21.371' E118°45.603'</p> <p>2nd Base Camp N05°18.887' E118°44.694'</p>
20 October	<p>Our survey team comprised of Wildlife Department staff (Karim, Leo, Muin, Anis) and Mette (Danish student). We proceeded upstream at 0830 hours and focused our survey on the right side of the river. About 150 feet from the bank of the river we saw a big mud wallow. The survey covered the ridge of up to 500 feet. We found fresh dung of tembadau on top of the ridge. We also discovered several logs had been felled and left idle on the ridge. While ascending the ridge, Muin saw two sambar deer. On descending, we found a waterfall. We found hoof prints of wild pigs, deer, elephant and tembadau. We returned to base camp at about 1630 hours.</p>	<p>Top of ridge N05°17.706' E118°43.294'</p>
21 October	<p>Our survey team went upstream at 0830 hours and covered the flat areas on the right side of the river. We found hoof prints of Sumatran rhinoceros measuring about 20–21 cm in diameter. A sand wallow that had been used by the rhino was found</p>	<p>River bank where rhino sand wallow was located N05°18.691'</p>

near the bank of the river. We followed an old logging road and found smaller hoof prints (17-cm diameter) of a rhino.

E118°44.280'

We found many hoof prints of wild pigs, deer and elephants. We heard sounds made by orangutans. There were hornbills and crows flying above. We returned to base camp at about 1600 hours.

Logging road where 17-cm diam. rhino hoof prints were found  
N05°18.960'  
E118°44.326'

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## DISCUSSION

When I discussed with the local people (those participating in the expedition) they said that no rhinos were found in the study areas. We saw a pair of sambar deer, lots of hoof prints from deer, wild pigs and elephants. Hoof prints of tembadau and fresh dung of this elusive animal were also discovered.

The most exciting finding was the hoof prints of Sumatran rhinos of measurement 20–21 cm diameter and 17-cm diameter. We saw the sand wallow (river bank) where more rhino hoof prints were observed. The other evidence of the presence of rhino is areas where the young saplings had been trampled. This allows the rhinos to reach the young shoots. A few months later, they return to eat the emerged new shoots.

The forests along Sungai Tabin were badly depleted. In fact, we came across several felled logs lying idle on the high ridge (150 m alt.). The presence of the logging road in this area explained the nature of the forest. The felling of timber has continued, especially along the river.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to halt the felling of timber along the river. The people here who depend on prawns (*udang galah*) and fish for their source of income must realize the effect of losing the forest cover along the river.

Sabah's Sumatran rhinoceros is endemic to Borneo in general and Sabah in particular. There are probably fewer than 30 wild rhinos left and Tabin has been identified as one of the last habitats. We need to protect this forest at all cost. It will be a crime and a historical shame for Sabahans if the *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis harissoni*, found nowhere else in the world but Sabah, becomes extinct.

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# TABIN LIMESTONE SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION 2000

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