

TITLE: Conservation of the Sumatran Rhinoceros in the Silabukan area of Sabah

ORIGINATOR: P.M. Andau, Assistant Chief Game Warden, Forest Department, Sabah.

OPERATOR: Staff of the Wildlife Section of the Forest Department, Sabah.

PERIOD: January 1981 to December 1982. However, facilities provided therein will be utilised for the protection of the Rhinos in Sabah for several years.

ENDORSEMENT:

1. Forest Department Sabah.
2. Malaysian representative on the IUCN/SSC for the Asian Rhinoceros and chairman for Malaysia, Encik Mohd. Khan bin Momin Khan.
3. Department of Wildlife and National Parks, West Malaysia, the state member of the IUCN.

ABSTRACT: Current indications are that the Sumatran Rhinoceros (Dicerorhinus Sumatrensis) in the Silabukan area of Sabah, numbering at least 5 and possibly as many as 10, may be the third largest potentially viable population in the world next to the Gunung Leuser group in Northern Sumatra and the Endau-Rompin group in West Malaysia. The Rhino in the Silabukan area are located in the upper Tabin and Lumpongon river and a Rhino survey (refer to Project MAL 39/80 - operation Rhino Sabah - phase I) conducted by Rodney W. Flynn in December 1981 has confirmed this.

The Rhinos in Silabukan are constantly in great danger of being poached. The latest tragedy occurred when a young Rhino was trapped and killed by a group of loggers in the Silabukan Forest Reserve in March, 1981. The culprits have been caught and charged in court.

However, the publicity created has done much to convince the public that Rhinos still exist in Sabah and many are now sympathetic to the need for protecting the Rhinos. The acquisition of a vehicle from the project funds in April 1981 has not only enabled the game staff to reduce poaching in the Silabukan area but has also created an awareness among the relevant authorities of the importance in conserving the Rhinos. At a recent meeting on June 9, 1981, the Forest Department agreed to prepare the present recommendations to the Sabah Government for the conservation of the Rhino area in the Silabukan Forest Reserve. This recommendation is currently being compiled and will be submitted to the Government in due course.

The Branch Manager of Yayasan Sabah (the agency which has logging rights over most of the Silabukan Forest Reserve) in Lahad Datu has informed all their logging contractors within the Silabukan area to prevent any hunting or trapping in the area. The Manager reported that one of his rangers sighted a Rhino in the Southern side of the Silabukan area in April 1981.

However, the wildlife section of the Sabah Forest Department faces a chronic shortage of transport and manpower. Additional manpower and transport can only be obtained by 1983 at the earliest and this is by no means certain. This project is designed to overcome these problems immediately. Funds are requested for the necessary vehicle (one vehicle has been obtained in April 1981) and the setting up of a guard-post in the Silabukan area which will be

as a base camp for game rangers to conduct patrolling of the Rhino area, and for the hire of temporary staff to bring up the number now available. Funds are also requested to allow the Malaysian member of the IUCN/SSC Asian rhino group to make a detailed on the spot study of the situation.

Due to the uncertainties of the future needs a large reserve is being budgeted for against any unforeseen circumstances. Considering the general state of affairs in the area such concurrence is very possible.

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

##### 1. Conservation achievements:

The primary objective of this project is to bring immediate effective protection for the remnant Rhino in the Silabukan area and to prevent their decline or complete extinction. This is to be achieved in three ways:

- (i) The setting up of a base camp for a protection unit of rangers at some strategic location in the Silabukan area. *Has this been done?*
- (ii) The provision of transport in terms of four-wheel drive vehicles to carry out patrols along the perimeter of the area and on the more accessible roads as well as to provide logistic support for the base camp. The one vehicle currently in use is not sufficient to cover all the routes leading to the Rhino area and the poor road conditions does not allow great mobility for the one vehicle. *Is a second vehicle required?*

A secondary objective is to study the rhino population, in particular their numbers, movements and ranges, with a view to evolving a long term Conservation plan.

##### 2. Justification:

As the Sumatran rhinoceros is one of the most endangered of all the larger mammals in the world the justification to attempt to save or protect even one or two individuals of the species is obvious and needs no elaboration.

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The reasons for this request to the IUCN/SSC stems from the fact that under present conditions it would take about two years or more before the facilities listed can be obtained by the department through the normal channels. As we are talking about a critical five years period of extreme danger to the Silabukan rhinoceros, lack of protection for these two years may very well result in the populations extinction.

### 3. Background:

Between 5 and 10 rhinos, still survive in the Silabukan area. These animals are in danger of extinction. So serious is their situation that in 1980 Payne put a proposal to IUCN to translocate the animals, fearing local forest clearance of the habitat following the intensive logging now in progress.

The threat to this species comes primarily from the increased accessibility (to hunters) of rhino areas. This increased accessibility is a result of logging activities.

In November 1980 two officers of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks visited Sabah with express purpose of studying the rhino situation there. This visit of Louis Ratnam, Head of Research and Tajuddin Abdullah was carried out on the instructions of the Director General of Wildlife and National Parks Malaysia, Encik Mohd. Khan bin Momin Khan, who is also the regional representative on the species survival commission and a member of the Rhino Specialist group.

Ratnam and Tajuddin made a brief visit to Silabukan. Later together with Patrick Andau and Yap Poh Pen they researched the current and future status of the area. They concluded that as things stand there is no justification to attempt a translocation of the animals (as proposed by John Payne 1980) for the following reasons:

- (i) The area is unlikely to be clear felled as it is generally too steep for agriculture.

- (ii) The remaining primary forest in the area will be logged over a five year period. This will allow sufficient time for the rhino population and the long term situation to be thoroughly researched. This will lead to a more realistic and practical long term management and conservation plan for the species in the area and Sabah as a whole.

However the present situation although generally under control remains critical. The rhinos face a continuous threat from poachers. The network of logging tracks that penetrate the area are used by poachers who are looking for deer and wild boar but who would have no hesitation in shooting at a rhino. Records show that over the past four years rhinos have been poached in Sabah. Two of these were in Silabukan. The actual number killed is not know.

This project aims at providing additional equipment, transportation and manpower to enable the Sabah Wildlife Department to implement a Conservation programme for the Sumatran rhinoceros, including immediate anti-poaching measures.

The Sabah Wildlife Department faces several problems in attempting to protect the Silabukan area.

- (i) Poachers are often the loggers themselves or persons associated with the loggers. N.B. Most reported rhinos sightings in Silabukan have been made by loggers.
- (ii) The Sabah Game Department, with just two vehicles for the whole state is unable to make available sufficient transport to protect adequately the Silabukan area.
- (iii) There are only 23 wildlife rangers in the state and the maximum that can be spared for Silabukan is two. A minimum of between four to six rangers are needed for this task.

While nothing can be done about (i) this project seeks to solve points (ii) and (iii) above.

## REFERENCES

- (i) Prof. Dr. Ruedi Schenkel of the IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group.
- (ii) Mr. Louis Ratnam and Mr. Tajuddin Abdullah of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Kuala Lumpur, Peninsula Malaysia.

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

### (i) Personnel

Mr. P.M. Andau, the project coordinator will be responsible for directing the project as a whole. He will be assisted by the Junior Game Warden and rangers of the department. A task force of two teams using the two vehicles and comprising at least two rangers each will be assigned to the task of protecting, patrolling and manning the guard post.

### (ii) Methods

One vehicle has already been obtained and one team of two rangers are patrolling the area constantly. As soon as additional funds are obtained, a second vehicle will be purchased to be used by another team of at least two rangers and a guard post will be put up on the major access route into the area.

This should have the effect of seriously deterring any would be poachers from entering the area or for loggers working the area to smuggle fire-arms into the area.

(iii) <u>Budget</u>	<u>US\$</u>
1. 2 four wheel drive vehicles	33,000
2. Guard post including materials	20,000
3. Two trips (Sabah - K. Lumpur - Sabah) for project coordinator to discuss project with SSC/Asian Rhino Group member* (based upon M\$ 800/= return airfare per 5 day trip, at M\$ 165/= per diem)	1,413
4. Two 10 day visits (K. Lumpur - Sandakan/Lahat Datu - K. Lumpur) of SSC/Asian Rhino group member to study and advise on the situation.* (based upon M\$ 800/= return airfare per 10 day trip, at M\$ 114/= per diem and M\$ 200/= for travel within Sabah)	1,860
5. Personnel equipment	2,000
6. Additional personnel costs for 5 rangers/labourers for 12 months (based upon a monthly salary and allowances of M\$ 600/= per person)	15,652
7. Contingency	6,075
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TOTAL US\$	80,000
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Of this total US\$ 20,000 will come from funds already provided under WWF/IUCN Project 1972 which are no longer required due to the availability of local funding.

\* Funds have already been partially utilised on the following:

- (i) 1 vehicle
- (ii) 1 trip each by project coordinator and Asian Rhino SSC Group member

General note

Funds not fully utilised will be put into the contingency. Any other expenditures requiring utilisation of the contingency will be cleared with WWF/IUCN first.