

# Malaysiana



BN 0126-5318 • KDN 0095/84

Vol 9 No 2 • MS8150

↓  
Vol 9 no 2 1984.

# The Sumatran Rhinoceros in Ulu Selama

by Mokhtar Mohammad & K. Fletcher

The Sumatran rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sumatrensis*) is the most critically endangered rhinoceros species in the world. It is a large, heavily armored mammal, once common in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. In the 1980s, it was estimated that there were only 20-25 animals left in the world, with the last sighting in the 1990s. The Sumatran rhinoceros is a very seldom seen and rarely photographed animal.



We were therefore extraordinarily lucky to obtain numerous photographs of a mature female (Figure 1) in the Bintang Hijau Forest Reserve, Ulu Selama, Perak on December 26, 1983. The animal was drinking from a small hot spring (Figure 2), and by approaching from behind a large boulder, we were able to observe it from a distance of 5 m (15 feet) for nearly five minutes. Track records—ranging from 280 m to 850 m above sea level—by one of us (MM) and occasional sightings by rotan collectors suggest that perhaps six individuals occupy the reserve, which forms a core of undisturbed forest surrounded by logging activities. The area has yet to be gazetted as a wildlife reserve.

**D**istinguishing characteristics of the Sumatran rhinoceros are its two horns (both other Asiatic species have one) and the permanent folds of

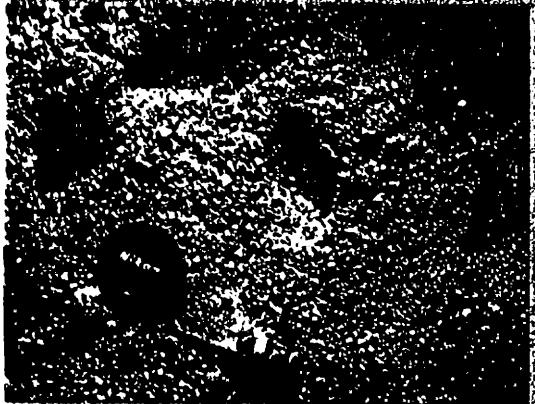


Figure 1. Three rhinos in the Bintang Hijau Forest Reserve, Ulu Selama, Perak (K. Fletcher).



Figure 2. Bushes damaged by browsing rhinoceros, Sira Kamban, Selama (K. Fletcher).



skin at the shoulders and in quarters but not at the neck. It is hairier than the other species, this being most noticeable on the ears. Typical three-toed footprints, with a diameter of 21 cm (8.3 inches), are shown in Figure 3. Medway (*The Wild Mammals of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore, 1978*) gives the following measurements for adults: head and body 2.5-2.8 m (8-9 feet), shoulder height 1.0-1.3 m (3.3-4.3 feet) and weight around 900 kg (2,000 lbs). We estimate the shoulder height of this individual as 1.0 m (3.3 feet). The diet of the Sumatran rhinoceros consists of shrubs and bushes that are torn and broken before eating (Figure 4); and, like

other species of rhinoceros, it likes to wallow (Figure 5). Dung nodules are shown in Figure 6. Despite numerous tracks in the region, there is no evidence of the Selama rhinoceroses returning regularly to the same spot to deposit their dung in the manner described by Groves (*Malayan Naturalist 36:11-12, 1982*). The rhinoceros is totally protected by law.

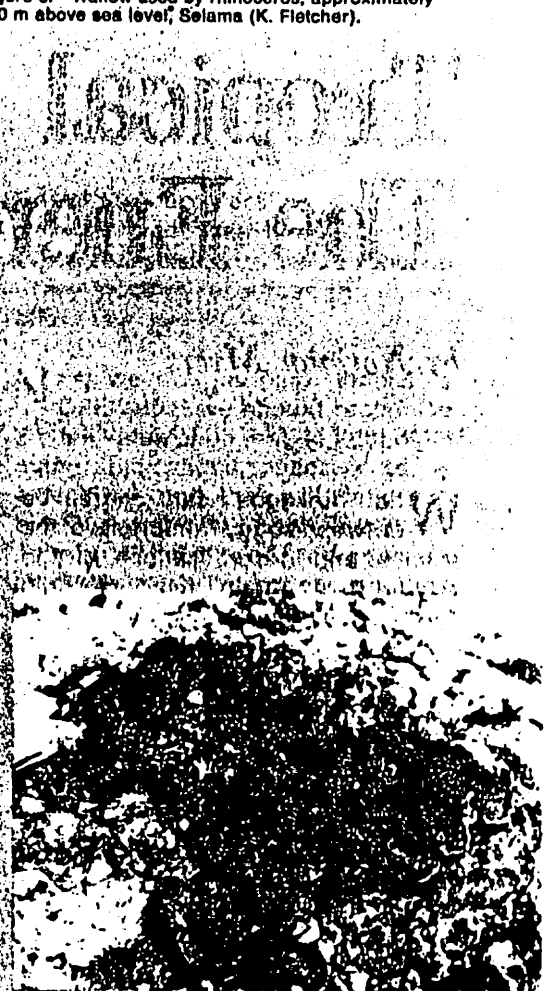


Figure 6. Rhinoceros dung nodules approximately 5 cm in diameter, Sira Harimau, Selama (K. Fletcher).