

[Animal News]

Sumatran Rhino sets a problem.

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*Also February*

Should you catch an animal that you know to be rare, and keep it in "safe custody" inside a zoo - or should you redouble efforts to make it secure in its natural habitat?

Here is a recent example from Malaya.

The Malayan Zoological Society decided to capture one of three Sumatran rhinos known to live in the Sungei Dusun area of North Selangor. These animals were felt to be threatened by poachers and by drainage schemes which have shrunk the amount of suitable habitat available to them.

International conservation bodies, notably the WWF and the IUCN protested strongly once the plans were made known. These organisations believed that the attempt to capture a rhino alive might prove as disastrous as a poacher's poison bait; in inexperienced hands tranquilising guns can be lethal, not sleep inducing. Nor were they convinced of the need to move the rhino to the safety of the zoo (the Zoo Negara).

As a result of these protests, the Society decided at its annual general meeting to reconsider its project - though apparently remaining unconvinced by its critics' arguments. If there is evidence that any of the three (and there may actually be more) animals have been captured by poachers "this could be considered a positive reason for capturing the remaining animals in order to save them."