New Project: Way Kambas National Park Endangered Megafauna Inventory and Ecological Study

The overarching vision of this project is in line with The Rhino Century Program and is to provide the vital needs required to support an increase in the population of Sumatran rhinoceros in Way Kambas National Park. The goals of the project are:

1. To expand habitat suitable for Sumatran rhinoceros.
2. To monitor the rhinoceros, build a population profile and identify vital needs.
3. To develop community conservation awareness.
4. To deliver a report on the security and viability of the Sumatran rhinoceros population and to make recommendations for providing for the vital needs essential for population expansion.

The population within the Park is dangerously low and given their solitary nature, dependence on specific fruit and leaves and need for a homing range, restoring habitat is the most pressing priority for wild Sumatran rhinoceros.

The project aims to expand the rhinoceros habitat in Babakan Bambang area, a severely degraded but previously significant rhinoceros area, by establishing a reforestation site and natural regeneration zone.

Monitoring and studying the rhinoceros will provide essential information on the status of the current population and their vital needs. The data will enable better informed management decisions about how best to conserve this critically endangered species.

Conservation Outcomes

Expansion and protection of rhinoceros habitat, will better provide for their needs and support population growth as well as benefiting all wildlife within the Park.

Knowledge about natural resources essential for their survival together with an understanding of the viability of the rhinoceros population will lead to improved decision making, improved protection, more informed responses to threats and further conservation actions.

Involvement of the community in the project and improved income will lead to partnership building as a result of "working together" and help to develop community conservation awareness and deter destructive illegal activities.

ARP has funded $5000 towards the purchase of cameras for the survey aspect of this project.

Update, June 2012 by Way Kambas National Park (WKNP), ALeRT - Aliansi Lestari Rimba Terpadu and SIES (Save Indonesian Endangered Species)

This project is currently in the Pre-study phase which started in December 2011 and will continue until August 2012. The Pre-study phase is the stage of initial camera/video trap set up to identify strategic camera locations and positions relative to the ground.

As different animals use different habitats the camera trapping is divided into 5 areas of focus, namely, the Sumatran rhino (Dicerorinus sumatrensis), Sumatran tiger (Panthera tigris sumatrae), Sumatran elephant (Elephas maximus sumatranus), Malayan tapir (Tapirus indicus), and Malayan sun- bear (Helarctos malayanus). Although information about all species can come from any camera location.

The project uses video camera traps to take mega fauna and other important wildlife pictures. Based on the experiences of similar projects in other National Parks, the use of video traps enables both the clear characteristics of the animal, and the patterns of behavior and activities to be captured.

The Camera Trap

The project started with 10 camera traps with video (no-sound) mode in December 2011 donated by the Aspinall Foundation to the Director General of the PHKA Ministry of Forestry. For the first three months, funds to cover the logistical support for the field team were donated by SIES (Save Indonesian Endangered Species)-Australia and Mr. Andri Rukminto from Jakarta.

In the period up until February 2012, some interesting footage of key species was captured. All of the target mega fauna were captured with the most frequent pictures being of sun bear, then in decreasing order of frequency elephant, tiger, tapir and lastly rhino. Except for the footage of

tiger, the Bushnell cameras were not able to take clear enough images of the characteristics of the other species to enable identification. After some discussion and consultation with projects in other National Parks, it was decided that the project required video traps with a higher resolution.

New Camera Donations

Between February and March 2012, the project received new donation commitments for the purchase of new cameras and to help cover operation costs. The new cameras are had better resolution and sound recording. Twelve cameras were purchased - two cameras were donated by Yayasan Silvagama, an NGO based in Bogor and the other four cameras and operational costs were donated by SIES-Australia.

In April 2012, a further donation commitment for the project came from the ARP (Asian Rhino Project) and WWF-Areas. High Definition camera traps were purchased using funds provided by the ARP. These cameras which have just recently been set up in the field. Similarly, the same High Definition camera traps are in the process of being purchased with funds from the WWF-Areas donation.

Preliminary Results

In the first 5 months of phase 1 some interesting footage was captured. This includes video of the five mega fauna, taken by cameras located along wildlife track lines during the first 3 months. Of special note was film of a rhino mother and calf, a tapir mother and calf and the presence of a large, new, young male tiger, who seems to be challenging for dominance in crucial tiger territory. In the last two months, it has been difficult to find specific locations where the megafauna activities can be readily captured. As the team continues to place and check camera locations along wildlife track lines, special locations such as rhino wallows and other locations from which to film behaviour are being surveyed. As it is easier to achieve results with camera trapping of tiger, elephant and sun-bear, the project is currently focused on: capturing footage of rhino and tapir; establishing the best camera locations and on commencing a rhino population census.

Left: Snapshot of the footage of Sumatran tiger captured in December 2011.
Above: Snapshots from footage of mother Sumatran Rhino with calf, captured on 8 January 2012.
Below: Snapshots from footage of mother Sumatran Rhino with calf, captured on 10 January 2012.