

Building up protection for the Sumatran rhino

THE EAZA IUCN/SSC SOUTHEAST ASIA CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE HAS SELECTED SIX FIELD CONSERVATION PROJECTS AS EXAMPLES OF THE KIND OF WORK THAT WILL BE SUPPORTED BY THE EAZA IUCN/SSC SOUTHEAST ASIA CONSERVATION FUND. THE SIX PROJECTS ARE EVENLY DISTRIBUTED AMONG MOST ASEAN COUNTRIES AND COVER A WIDE AND DIVERSE RANGE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA SPECIES INCLUDING THE MEKONG CATFISH, RUFOUS-HEADED HORNBILL AND THE TOMISTOMA CROCODILE. THE FOURTH PROJECT TO BE INTRODUCED IN THIS SERIES IS THE SUMATRAN RHINOCEROS PROJECT OF THE INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH YAYASAN BADAK INDONESIA.

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The Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) is one of the most critically endangered Asian species, found currently in Malaysia (various localities in Sabah) and Indonesia (in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park, Way Kambas National Park and Gunung Leuser, all on Sumatra). The current global population of wild Sumatran rhino ranges from 150-220. Way Kambas National Park, about 1,300 sq km, has 25-30 Sumatran rhinoceroses with at least six mothers and calves recorded in the past year; it thus holds a significant future for the species. As the price of rhino horns in international markets is increasing rapidly, leading to countries like South Africa losing almost one rhino a day to poachers, threats to Sumatran rhino with regards to poaching are also immense and can only be kept in check with stringent vigil.

ANTI-POACHING

Rhino Protection Units (RPUs) are highly trained anti-poaching teams that are effectively protecting wildlife and habitat in Way Kambas National Park. Way Kambas is a high biodiversity area, containing significant (25-35) populations of Sumatran rhino, the Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*) and Malayan tapir (*Tapirus indicus*). This project is part of a long-term effort to ensure the survival of the Sumatran rhino, as well as other threatened Sumatran species through intensive protection and monitoring. The five RPUs operating in Way Kambas have been successful in preventing poaching of rhino or other wildlife. However, the current political and economic situation in Indonesia still poses a significant challenge for the conservation of rhino and other wildlife, and active protection is still needed. Pressure on the natural resources is continuing

and accelerating in all conservation areas in Indonesia, including Way Kambas, while the effectiveness of the Park staff to counter the pressure is being reduced by lack of support from other sectors of Government and a general lack of morale. The RPUs are the most stable and most effective force in the protection of the Park when confronted with illegal activities, working closely with police to prosecute illegal activities. It is essential that ongoing RPU activities continue in Way Kambas. Patrols by the RPU are the main methodology used by this project; prevention of rhino poaching is the main RPU objective. Patrols focus on key rhino areas such as saltlicks, wallows and other concentration areas, and also cover important access routes. Key areas are visited at varying but regular intervals. Each RPU is an anti-poaching team that intensively patrols rhino areas to destroy traps and snares as well as to interdict or apprehend poachers. Secondly, the RPUs collect data on rhino, tapir, tiger, elephant, and other wildlife species.

In 2009-10, encroachment in western parts of Way Kambas NP was halted by the Government of Indonesia, leading to more areas being occupied by Sumatran rhino. This needs further strengthening of protection with regular monitoring. In the northern part of the park, there is a need for a guard post – which could be in the form of a floating boat – to monitor the area through the Way Kanan river.

Funds from the EAZA IUCN/SSC Southeast Asia Campaign will be used towards supporting existing RPUs and also a floating boat camp to enhance the vigil in the northern side of the park to check poaching and illegal activities. Each RPU is deployed on patrol a minimum of 15 days per month. The leader of each RPU is a fully qualified ranger, who has the authority to carry firearms and arrest suspected poachers. The ranger is armed when appropriate and follows regulations set down by the Government of Indonesia regarding firearm use. The other members, including the field supervisors and





YABI

coordinators, have been recruited from local communities in the vicinity of the rhino areas in which the RPUs operate. Thus the RPUs not only protect the area's megafauna, but also contribute to the local economic wellbeing. All members attend, and must pass, a rigorous training course before being recruited. Training includes classroom instruction and field exercises, focusing on navigation, record-taking and law enforcement practices. Only candidates that pass the final test are recruited. At the last recruitment, more than 100 people applied for six open positions; eight underwent the training and six were selected as RPU members. A refresher/upgrading course is conducted periodically, and a special team of trainers has been formed to provide field training for guards, both from the programme and from protection programmes in other areas.

The RPUs are an integral part of the Conservation Strategies of the Government of Indonesia, with the model being promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry as an excellent means of providing protection for many other threatened species in other areas.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The International Rhino

Foundation (IRF) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to ensuring the survival of the five living species of rhinoceros through conservation and research. IRF was formed in 1989, initially to assist in the conservation of black rhinos in Zimbabwe through both *in situ* and *ex situ* efforts. It has since expanded its mission to encompass all five species of rhino. IRF programmes concentrate on the species most in need of, and most appropriate for, intensive protection and management. For its programmes in captivity, IRF facilitates management and sponsors research with the ultimate objective of helping captive populations become truly viable and hence an integral part of conservation strategies for rhinos. (www.rhinos-irf.org).

The **Yayasan Badak Indonesia** (YABI) was formally established in December 2006 with the support of the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry – Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHKA) which is responsible as the authority for the protection and conservation of species including rhino in Indonesia. A Memorandum of Understanding between YABI and PHKA has been signed. YABI's strategy and action plan are in line with both government policies on species conservation as well as other groups, such as IRF and the IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group, for both *in situ* and *ex situ* programmes. YABI focuses on rhino protection, breeding, research and education, fundraising and ecotourism, and communication and information, and its Board includes representation from Indonesia, the Netherlands, Malaysia and Australia. (www.badak.or.id)



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Find out more about the EAZA IUCN SSC Southeast Asia Campaign at www.southeastasiacampaign.org.