

Borneo Rhino Sanctuary Programme In Tabin Wildlife Reserve - 2010 Report

Last chance to prevent the extinction of the rhino in Borneo

The Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) is one of the most endangered animal species anywhere in the world. The only known remaining very small breeding populations of the species occur in Sumatra (Indonesia) and Sabah (Malaysia). Since a report on the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary in Tabin Wildlife Reserve was published in the 2009 Annual Report of Sabah Forestry Department, some progress has been achieved on actions to prevent the extinction of the species in Sabah. But the prognosis for the species remains bleak. The limited information on wild rhinos in Sabah suggests that numbers are now very low indeed, and probably birth rate has for many years not been keeping up with death rate. There remains only one way to prevent extinction: boost birth rate, by whatever means possible. In support of this goal, the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary programme aims to develop rhino breeding facilities in Tabin Wildlife Reserve.

A decision was made in March 2010 to capture a specific wild female rhino as a mate for Tam, the male rhino captured and brought to Tabin in 2008. This particular female rhino had been monitored for over two years, and no evidence was found that any other rhino enters her "home range". But by end of 2010, success had eluded the continuous and sustained efforts of the monitoring and capture teams, and this rhino remained as a solitary, wild animal, unable to contribute to saving the species from extinction. After a long dry spell in February to early April 2010 (which resulted in mass flowering and fruiting events at Tabin), the remainder of the year was unusually rainy, a factor which contributed to the failure to capture the rhino.



The male rhino Tam just before his capture in a plantation, August 2008.



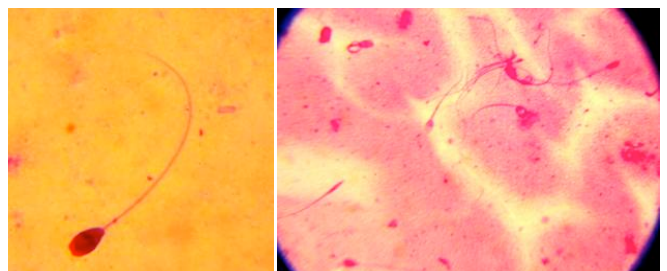
Tam, spraying urine as a territorial marker.



Tam, the male rhino in the interim facilities at Tabin, prefers leaves of fast-growing pioneer trees and lianas, and avoids feeding on leaves of closed-canopy rainforest tree species.



Tam in a mud wallow.



(L) A good example of Tam's sperm and (right) a clump of poor-quality sperm, from same collection.

Dr. Zainal Zahari Zainuddin, one of Malaysia's most experienced wildlife veterinarians and a specialist in Sumatran rhinoceros, joined the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary programme field team at Tabin in April 2010. A number of improvements were made to the infrastructure of the interim rhino facilities and to rhino husbandry. The emphasis was on minimizing risk of disease, and enhancing the health and condition of rhinos held in the interim facilities. Gelogob, the old, blind, reproductively senescent female rhino kept in recent years at Lok Kawi Wildlife Park was transferred by road to the interim facilities at Tabin in September.



Gelogob, the elderly female rhino held in Lok Kawi Wildlife Park in recent years, was moved into a special crate and transferred to Tabin overnight, 21-22 September 2010.



Female rhino Gelogob in night stall, undergoing routine health care.



Frequent rain at Tabin from April to December 2010 contributed to slow progress, including failure to capture a targeted wild female rhino as a mate for Tam.

The design for permanent rhino breeding facilities was completed. In addition, three new quarters for staff living and working at Tabin were completed during 2010, made possible through donations from Sime Darby Foundation, WWF-Germany and WWF-Malaysia.

Preventing the extinction of the rhino in Sabah will continue to require focused, collaborative work, involving government, NGOs and corporate support. Sabah Wildlife Department takes the lead role for rhinos, Sabah Forestry Department for the forests. Sime Darby Foundation and WWF-Germany were key donors during 2010. Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA), based at the Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation at Universiti Malaysia Sabah, and with twenty staff living at Tabin Wildlife Reserve, works to support Sabah Wildlife Department, while WWF-Malaysia continued rhino monitoring work at other rhino sites. The US Fish and Wildlife Service Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund supported rhino protection at Tabin in 2010. International connections and assistance are needed. Representatives from Sabah participated in a meeting of an ad hoc group of Sumatran rhino experts, the Sumatran Rhinoceros Global Management and Propagation Board, in Bogor, Indonesia, in January 2010. In November 2010, Sabah Wildlife Department entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (Berlin) and Leipzig Zoo (Germany), which will involve much-needed technical assistance in relation to Sumatran rhino reproductive biology.



Automatic water dispensers were fitted into the interim rhino paddocks at Tabin in September 2010, to provide constant clean drinking water for the rhinos.



Sumatran rhinos in captive conditions require at least 50 kg of fresh leaves daily.



Crush enables a rhino to be kept calm for routine procedures; and surveying the access road for the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary breeding facilities.



(L-R) Mud left on a sapling by a passing rhino - one of several types of signs of wild rhinos; mark of a Sumatran rhino horn on a tree trunk; Sumatran rhino horn marks on a tree trunk and Rhinos defaecate in streams, and also at specific sites to advertise their presence to other rhinos.

Newspaper



(L-R) Signing of memorandum of understanding between Sabah Wildlife Department and Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, November 2010; Signing of memorandum of understanding on Borneo Rhino Sanctuary between Sime Darby Foundation and Sabah Wildlife Department, June 2009; and Newspaper cutting referring to a community which is believed to be involved in illegal hunting in the Tabin area, May 2010.