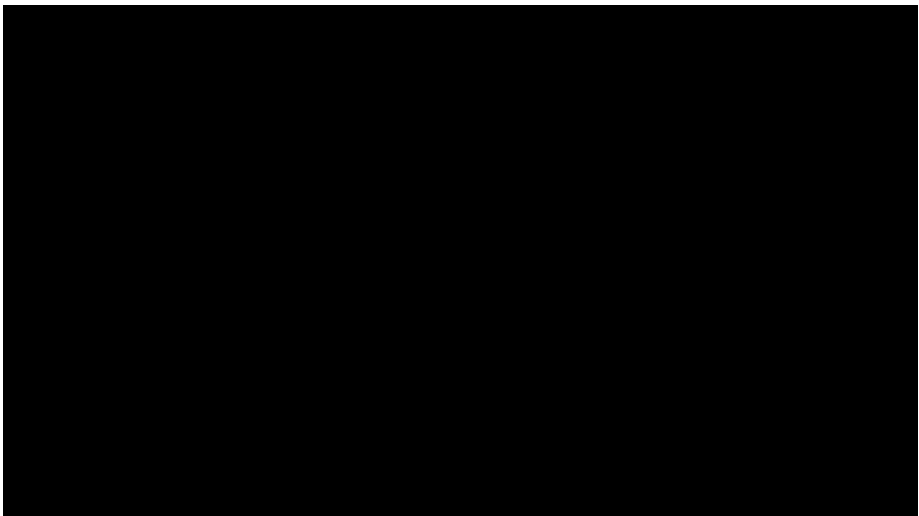




## SUMATRAN RHINO RETURNS TO THE CINCINNATI ZOO IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

JULY 21, 2013 / ANIMALS, CREW, FRONT NEWS, SUMATRAN RHINO / LEAVE A RESPONSE

CINCINNATI - (July 21, 2013) "Harapan," a six-year-old male Sumatran rhino born at the Cincinnati Zoo in 2007 and later moved to the White Oak Conservation Center in Florida and then on to the Los Angeles Zoo, returned home in July in an effort to help save his rapidly disappearing species from extinction. With no more than 100 Sumatran rhinos left on the planet and only two on this continent (Harapan and his sister, nine-year-old "Suci"), this move demonstrates just how desperate the effort to save this species has become.



Harapan is one of three Sumatran rhinos successfully born at the Cincinnati Zoo since 2001. Scientists at the Zoo's [Lindner Center for Conservation & Research of Endangered Wildlife \(CREW\)](#) are hoping they can work their magic once again with Harapan and Suci. Although the tenet at CREW is to maximize genetic diversity and avoid inbreeding, in this case scientists are forced to make an exception or watch the species disappear altogether.

"No one wants to breed siblings, it is something we strive to avoid, but when a species drops below 100 individuals, producing more offspring as quickly as possible trumps concerns about genetic diversity." said Dr. Terri Roth, Vice President of Conservation and Science and Director of

CREW at the Cincinnati Zoo. "We are down to the last male and female Sumatran rhino on the continent, and I am not willing to sit idle and watch the last of a species go extinct."

In April 2013, a Sumatran Rhino Crisis Summit was held in Singapore with over 100 participants from across the globe. At that conference, the most recent extremely low population estimate for this species was revealed and the news that there are approximately 100 individual animals remaining in the world was a devastating blow to an audience that has spent much of their professional career working to save the charismatic species. The wild Sumatran rhino population has decreased by >50% in the past decade and participants realized there were now more summit participants than there are Sumatran rhinos.

"What does it say about humanity and what will we save if we cannot find a way to share the earth with such an ancient, peaceful, non-threatening species like the Sumatran rhino," said Roth. "The Sumatran rhino is a forest dwelling species and therefore also plays an integral role in maintaining the forest ecosystem. As a browser, it eats small saplings and brush allowing other young trees more room to grow and maintain the forest canopy. It acts as a seed disperser that stimulates new growth in cleared areas and helps maintain the diversity of indigenous species throughout the forest. Together, these activities all help in maintaining a healthy forest which we know plays a significant role in absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and reducing the impact of climate change. So, if for no other reason, this is why the Midwestern American farmer who is tired of droughts and tornadoes and who is worried about how next year's crops will do and how the bills will get paid, should care about saving the Sumatran rhino."

In addition to their direct effort to produce more Sumatran rhino calves in captivity, the Cincinnati and Los Angeles Zoos are partnering with many international conservation organizations including the International Rhino Foundation, the Indonesian Rhino Foundation, SOS Rhino and World Wildlife Fund to help protect remaining wild populations. The Sumatran rhino is recognized as one of, if not the most endangered large mammal on the planet, and due to the recent surge in illegal poaching, encroachment which is causing population fragmentation, roads being built through habitats, and deforestation due to the palm oil industry, humans are decimating them (and many other species, including tigers and orangutans) faster than scientists and conservationists can make incremental progress towards saving them.

Currently, there is resistance at the government level in Indonesia to both capturing additional rhinos that are so desperately needed to enhance the gene pool and exchanging rhinos for breeding so that inbreeding can be avoided. Furthermore, the permit process put in place to protect endangered species can be slow and cumbersome, often stalling out efforts among global partners to exchange gametes for assisted reproduction attempts. Finally, even though most conservationists now agree that captive breeding must be a part of the Sumatran rhino recovery effort, financial support for the program is exceedingly difficult to obtain. Most US federal dollars for conservation are restricted and will not even be considered for captive breeding efforts. That being said, the cost of maintaining Sumatran rhinos is significant because their diet is complex, much like that of the giant panda's, but donors flock to the popular giant panda and remain relatively unaware of this unique rhino's critical situation.

"The captive breeding program in the US has been the most significant contributor to the survival of the Sumatran rhino in recent years and in particular the progress that the Cincinnati Zoo has made in determining the reproductive strategy of this species," says Jeff Holland, Mammal Curator, at the Los Angeles Zoo. "Without the work of the Cincinnati Zoo we would not have had the success that we have seen. This is one reason why it is vitally important to maintain a captive population of Sumatran rhinos in the US and secondly to avoid having all the rhinos in one place where they are at risk of disease, poaching and/or natural disaster that could potentially wipe out the entire captive population in a single stroke. The idea of two captive populations lessens the risk of something like this happening."

Recently, the NGO SOS Rhino reached out to U.S. politicians in Washington D.C. In response, Senator Sherrod Brown, Senator Rob Portman and Congressman Steve Chabot contacted key officials in Indonesia and the United States, including the Indonesian Ambassador to the United States and Secretary of State John Kerry. Congressman Chabot, as Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, also sent a letter to the Indonesian President that was signed by most of the other Subcommittee members. All of the global partners are now

requesting that national government officials step up.

“There needs to be serious and immediate action that addresses excessive deforestation and poaching that is wiping out so many species in Southeast Asia, especially rhinos and tigers,” said Dr. Roth. “First and foremost, we have to secure the few surviving wild populations. However, the captive breeding program could also benefit if governments acknowledge the crisis and act accordingly.”

After years of research, CREW scientists at the Cincinnati Zoo unraveled the mysteries of Sumatran rhino reproduction and produced the first captive bred calf in 112 years on September 13, 2001. After that historic birth of the male calf “Andalas”, CREW scientists quickly repeated their success twice more, producing the female calf “Suci” and the male calf “Harapan” before the breeding pair passed away. For 11 years, the Cincinnati Zoo held the distinction as the only place successfully breeding this endangered species until the summer of 2012 when the Cincinnati and Los Angeles Zoo’s Indonesian partner, the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park, Indonesia, produced its first calf. The calf was sired by Andalas, who had been sent by the Los Angeles Zoo and International Rhino Foundation (IRF) to Sumatra in 2007. Cincinnati Zoo staff members have been working with the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary staff for over a decade exchanging information and transferring the technology developed at the zoo that proved key to the successful breeding effort. The birth of Andalas’ first calf was a monumental global achievement resulting from collaboration among the Cincinnati Zoo, Los Angeles Zoo, IRF and the Indonesian Rhino Foundation, wherein all parties acted in the best interest of the species.

“There is no way the Cincinnati and Los Angeles Zoos can save this species alone, but we can (and already have) contribute significantly and tangibly to the global effort,” says Dr. Roth. “It is critical that in-country programs succeed, which is why we support them financially, donate our services and send them rhinos produced at our zoos when it is essential to their success. But in return, the U.S. captive breeding program needs new genetic diversity to ensure it continues to flourish, before it’s too late.”

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