



Borneo Rhino Sanctuary (BRS) programme (restricted distribution)

Quarterly report : covering the period October-November 2010

Programme objective

To prevent the extinction of the Sumatran rhinoceros in Sabah by protecting wild rhinos and by bringing rhinos together in managed breeding facilities at Tabin Wildlife Reserve (TWR)

Main participating agencies

Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD), Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA), Sabah Forestry Department, WWF-Malaysia, Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW; Berlin), Zoo Leipzig

Main financing agencies during this quarter

Sime Darby Foundation; Sabah Wildlife Department; WWF-Germany; WWF-Malaysia; BORA; US Fish & Wildlife Service Rhino & Tiger Conservation Fund

Programme description (following May 2009 Sabah State Cabinet decision)

- protection and monitoring of wild rhinos in TWR (BORA-SWD) and Danum Valley Conservation Area (WWF-Malaysia), the only two areas where potentially viable wild populations exist.
- establishing Borneo Rhinoceros Sanctuary (BRS) breeding facilities (a managed, fenced area) inside TWR.
- bringing isolated remnant rhinos from non-viable situations, into BRS.
- establishing a sustainable financing scheme to allow long-term operations of BRS.
- appointing a professional company to manage BRS and its rhinos

Activities and progress

Monitoring and security of wild rhinos at TWR Routine patrols were done along the Tabin – oil palm plantation boundary in the north (13-15 October; Tabin Plantation) and south-east (24-29 October), and south-west (Kuala Lumpur Kepong estates) in November. A row of about 10 snare traps about 1 week old was found on 14 October together with a crudely made spear and a sack. The snares were clearly for animals smaller than a rhinoceros. Along the south-eastern border between Tabin and Long Libong estate, snare traps, a shotgun cartridge and other signs of poacher activity were found on 27 October. The snare traps destroyed. 15-19 November, along south-western border between Rimmer river and Tabin entrance gate, a newly cut trail presumably done by poachers was found on 16 November, and a single poacher with shotgun was glimpsed near Christiansen river, running from the forest into the plantation. Shotgun shots were heard every night but no snare traps were found.

Rhino rescue The pit trap at Malambabula was monitored twice daily throughout this reporting period, with a minimum of six persons stationed near the trap at all times. Puntung was sighted about 100 metres from the trap on 19 October, and her fresh footprints were found again near the same site on 8 November. Concern has been expressed that Puntung may have been “scared away” from the trap due to daily human presence. The fact that rhinos have keen senses of smell and hearing is indeed a concern, but it seems unlikely that Puntung did not walk into the trap for these reasons. In fact, she was seen not on her old trail but instead on the trail cut by the rhino capture team in order to avoid the team walking on Puntung’s own trail. The main reason Puntung did not walk along her old trail is most likely because a natural tree fall blocked that trail.

Visits were made in October and November to the northern ridge top area to select a site for a possible second trap. At end of November, the preferred option was to try to attract Puntung back towards the Malambabula trap area by “baiting” the area every four days with fresh faeces of Gelogob (which is expected to draw Puntung’s curiosity) but to pursue the option of building a second trap on the north side of her home range.

Interim rhino facilities Chlorination of water at the interim facilities was introduced in November.

BRS breeding facilities Contract to build the road access route to the permanent BRS breeding facilities site (about 1.2 km extra from an existing road) was issued by government and work commenced in October. The BRS breeding facilities design details were finalised in November, with SWD, BORA and the appointed consultant working together on all aspects. Zoo Leipzig experts provided last-minute recommendations for modifications. The basic design is a central building with 8 rhino night stalls, a store, a preparation room, a restraint chute, five forest paddocks of 2- 4 ha each, and two “breeding paddocks” of about 30 x 50 meters each, plus maintenance and guard staff quarters.

Staff accommodation Accommodation for staff working at TWR, both SWD and BORA, financed by Sime Darby Foundation and WWF, were officially opened at a ceremony held at TWR on 12 November (see newspaper cutting below).

Meetings held SWD programme coordinator and BORA executive director, 29 November; SWD-BORA-BRS consultant, 22 & 28 October, 16 & 29 November; SWD-BORA –IZW, 24 & 27 November; BORA-IZW, 21 November; BORA-Zoo Leipzig, 25 November; SWD-BORA-Zoo Leipzig, 26 November. A meeting was held 17 November between BORA and Camp Borneo, a company that places foreign volunteers in rural Sabah, with the possibility of involvement in forest improvement in the TWR border area.

International connections A memorandum of understanding was signed at SWD headquarters between SWD, Leibnitz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW; Berlin) and Zoo Leipzig on 22 November (see news cutting, below).

Other issues

A presentation on “arresting species extinctions in Malaysia” was given at the Malaysian Nature Society seventieth anniversary conference in Kuala Lumpur, 9 October, with the Sumatran rhino as a key example.

A training course on capture and care of the Sumatran rhinoceros was given at TWR 25-26 October by SWD and the BORA veterinarian, to wildlife veterinarians working at the SWD Wildlife Rescue Unit, WWF-Malaysia and HUTAN. This was to prepare for the possibility that either or both the BORA and SWD veterinarians may be absent from Sabah whenever Puntung enters the Malambabula trap.

A satellite tracking device was fitted to Tam on a collar around his neck on 13 November; the idea was to observe if there might be any problems with such a device in terms of both effect on Tam’s behaviour (at time of writing there was none) and the level of detail to which movements might be detectable remotely; with this information, the device is available to attach to any rhino at any time in the future, if circumstances require it.

An interview was given, 25 November, by the BORA executive director for a CNBC programme on corporate environmental responsibility, where Wilmar, Sime Darby and Tradewinds were mentioned in relation to rhinos at TWR. Sabah rhinos and the BRS programme were mentioned in public domain during the reporting period, including local newspaper articles (see newspaper cutting below).

Plans for next quarter

- (1) Capture Puntung. (2) Gelogob is to be treated with hormones in January 2011 (and again in June 2011, irrespective of previous failure or success) by German/Austrian/Australian specialists in collaboration with Sabah Wildlife Department and the BORA veterinarian. The idea is to induce Gelogob to produce eggs, which might then be fertilized, via artificial insemination, using sperm from Tam. (3) Construct access road to BRS breeding facilities.



(left) snare traps, set for smaller animals including deer, pheasants etc and (right) crudely made spear (14 October)



(Left) General view of the interim rhino facilities at TWR (November). (Right) Gelogob in her wallow at TWR; usually, rainfall is more than adequate to keep the wallow liquid, but water has to be pumped to the wallow if it becomes too dry (October).



(Left) Tam feeds in his night stall; note the satellite tracking collar. (Right) View from above of a restraint “chute” (removable iron pipes in the night stalls) which allows restraint of the rhinos for monitoring and health care.



(Left) BORA field manager / veterinarian views the proposed permanent BRS breeding facilities site. (Right) Initial construction work on the 1.2 km access road to the BRS breeding facilities (25 November 2010, note effects of rain).



(Left) Every alternate night, the BORA veterinarian prepares for the planned ovulation attempt by use of a rectal transducer supplied by IZW, to obtain an ultrasound image of Gelogob's reproductive tract. (Centre) One of Puntung's wallows on the ridge which forms the northern edge of her home range (November). (Right) placement of faeces from Gelogob near the rhino trap as an experimental means to attract Puntung to the trap area.

Efforts can and should be made to save rhino

A GOVERNMENTAL programme, the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary programme, led by Sabah Wildlife Department, exists to make last ditch efforts to prevent the extinction of the rhino in Sabah. Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA) is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the same aim, largely through assisting the State government in that programme.

On behalf of Bora, I was pleased to see the report in *Daily Express* (Monday, 8th November 2010) enti-

tled "Interbreed Sumatran And Bornean Rhinos" and, grateful that the issue of the critically endangered status of the rhino in Malaysia (and Indonesia) does periodically receive attention through the *Daily Express*.

I am sometimes asked to explain the purpose of trying to save endangered species, and what good such efforts do when there are so many human problems that NGOs can help to address.

The report quotes me extensively, and so I do wish to comment on a sig-

nificant statement which does not reflect what was intended.

The report says "Moreover, he said it is a waste of time and money to try and save them." In fact, what I had said was "What should be done? One option is to decide that the species is doomed anyway, and that it is a waste of time and money to try to save the rhino."

My point was that, before spending a lot of effort to save an endangered species, effort which may have to be sustained over many years, it is

wise to reflect carefully, and weigh the pros and cons in a rational manner.

I did then go on to argue, however, that efforts can and should, indeed, be made to prevent the extinction of the rhino, but tried to show that the rationale is ultimately an ethical one. And by implication, we should be reluctant to try to provide only economic arguments for nature conservation.

Junaidi Payne

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