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# L.A. Zoo Blog

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## The Red Rhino Blogs: Part I



September 22, 2015



Sandy Masuo



Conservation



Sumatran Rhinos Andatu and Ratu (Photo Courtesy of IRF; SusieEllis)

## Magical Creatures

Until I met a Sumatran rhinoceros, I never thought I could be so smitten with a hoofed

creature. Growing up, I was a Nature and National Geographic junkie and zoo nerd, so I knew what okapi, gerenuk, and anoa looked like, but it was only after I started working at the L.A. Zoo that I came to appreciate how different each ungulate species is in character. When you spend time with them, you discover that they each have their charms, but the Sumatran rhino is really special. There's a meme going around the Internet that features a photo of a baby rhino and the caption "Rhino on the outside; Unicorn on the inside." But in person, they are unicorn through and through.

The first time I saw the L.A. Zoo's resident Sumatran rhino Andalas was shortly after I started working in the Publications Division in 2003, and my first story for ZOOSCAPE was about the arrival of Andalas from Cincinnati Zoo. His mother Embam had been one of the original Sumatran rhinos brought into the U.S. during the 1980s in an effort to start a captive breeding program



Sumatran Rhino Embam

PHOTO BY: Tad Motoyama

for the highly endangered species. After stealing the hearts of staff and visitors alike, she was transferred to Cincinnati which was home to the only eligible male Sumatran rhino, Ipuh. The pairing worked, and Andalas was the first Sumatran rhino born in captivity in more than a century. In the hope that Emi and Ipuh would produce some siblings for him, Andalas transferred to L.A. as soon as he was weaned.

I met Andalas on a June-gloomy morning before the Zoo opened to the public, and then-General Curator Michael Dee was also out visiting the youngster. (Mr. Dee's history with the species is long and full of wonderful memories, which he'll share in subsequent Red Rhino blogs.) Sumatran rhinos are unlike any of the other four species. They are much more hirsute and seem unfazed by humans—on more than one occasion, inquisitive wild females have wandered into villages. They are most closely related to the woolly rhino that disappeared after the last ice age, and looking into the eyes of Andalas (and later his brother Harapan) was like looking into the eyes of Dolly the California condor—an instance of time travel that opens a bridge to a lost world.

Andalas left in 2007—he transferred to his ancestral home in Indonesia. At the Sumatran Rhinoceros Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park, he was introduced to Ratu, who gave birth to their first calf, Andatu, on June 23, 2012. It was cause for celebration. But the fact that there are so few Sumatran rhinos in the world that conservationists know them all by name means that there is still a lot of work to do.

Embam passed away in 2010, leaving only three Sumatran rhinos in North America—Harapan, his sister Suci, and father Ipuh, who died in 2013. Harapan came to Los Angeles on November 17, 2011 and lived in off-exhibit accommodations until 2013, when he returned to Cincinnati. During those two years, he proved to be as charming as Andalas, and a high point of the 2012 Volunteer Appreciation Week activities was a chance for Zoo volunteers to go behind the scenes and meet Harapan. I had visited Andalas many times when he lived in the exhibit that is now home to the Sichuan takin, but I had never been close enough to touch him. Harapan's keeper, Ayessa

Rourke, gave us vegetables to feed him, and the time flew past. As did his time at the Zoo.



Harapan and GLAZA Associate Editor Sandy Masuo

The Sumatran rhino breeding program at that point was in limbo. Discussions dragged on with the Indonesian government, and the poaching crisis continued to escalate. In a desperate last attempt to keep the breeding program going, it was decided to send “Harry” back to Cincinnati, and on July 2, 2013, Sumatran rhino Harapan departed the Zoo with a Los Angeles Police Department escort to make moving through 405 traffic to LAX easier. He arrived safe and sound at Cincinnati Zoo, where it was hoped he would breed with female Suci. This pairing was obviously not an ideal one, but with so few animals left, any calf would be better than losing the species. But in 2014, Suci succumbed to the same disorder that afflicted her mother (hemochromatosis, or iron storage disease). So now Harry was alone. With no prospective females available from any other zoos, and the Indonesian government’s decision to keep all the Sumatran rhinos in the country, there was only one choice.

Cincinnati Zoo’s announcement last month that Harapan will go to Indonesia in October is bittersweet news. Everyone who has ever had a chance to concern themselves with Sumatran rhinos feels at least a twinge of sadness at not being able to see them in North America, but Harapan’s departure means a new chapter in the survival of this species. He takes with him our hopes and dreams that there will be shaggy red unicorns for future generations.

Sumatran rhino

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