

**DESCRIPTION OF THE HABITAT USED BY
THE SUMATRAN RHINOCEROS IN SABAH**

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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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The materials in this thesis are original except for quotations, excerpts, summaries, and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

DESCRIPTION OF THE HABITAT USED BY THE SUMATRAN RHINOCEROS IN SABAH

A field study on the Description of Habitat Used by the Sumatran rhinoceros in Sabah was done in four study areas as follows; Sg Sabran and Sg Purut – Sg Langgum were located in Danum Valley Conservation Area (DVCA) while Km 3 and Km 32 were situated in Tabin Wildlife Reserve (TWR), Lahad Datu Sabah. Five fieldworks were done from May 2007 until June 2008 to collect data for this study. The aim of this study was to collect data that are useful for the conservation management of the Sumatran rhinoceros in Sabah. Densities of woody saplings with the dbh measurement of 10 cm and below were taken to reflect the saplings availability. Frequency of salt licks and Sumatran rhinoceros signs including the numbers of wallows, footprints, dung and marking signs were also collected at the study areas. In each study area, 40 plots with the 10 x 10 m were the measuring constructed along 4 line transects (1 km each) to obtained the frequencies of the woody saplings inside the plots. Salt licks, wallows, footprints, dungs and marking signs were searched within the possible sites and also based on the Rhino Patrolling Unit (RPU) information. All of the signs locations were marked on the maps using GPS device. Saplings density at Sg Sabran (mean value $8.5 \pm$ standard deviation 4.5) shows significant difference tested between Km 3 (3.1 ± 1.4), Km 32 (4.5 ± 3.6) and Sg Purut – Sg Langgum (4.6 ± 1.7), [F 3, 156] = 22.706, $p < .05$]. As all of the study areas were observed to have Sumatran rhinoceros signs, this suggests that the Sumatran rhinoceros is well adapted to living in forests that have difference saplings availability. There were 19, 13, 6 and 5 Sumatran rhinoceros wallows at Sg Sabran, Km 3, Sg Purut – Sg Langgum and Km 32 respectively. Two old adult footprints, 3 old dung heaps and Sumatran rhinoceroses marking signs on the vegetations were found in study locations. Salt lick was presence at Km 3 but not found in other study areas.

Keywords: Sumatran rhinoceros, saplings availability, wallows and salt licks.

ABSTRAK

Kajian di lapangan mengenai Penerangan tentang Habitat yang digunakan oleh badak Sumatra di Sabah telah dijalankan di dalam empat kawasan kajian seperti yang berikut; Sg Sabran, Sg Purut – Sg Langgum terletak di Kawasan Pemuliharaan Lembah Danum (DVCA) dan Km 3, Km 32 pula terletak di Hutan Simpan Tabin (TWR). Sebanyak lima kerja lapangan telah dijalankan dari bulan Mei 2007 hingga bulan Jun 2008 bagi mengumpulkan data bagi kajian ini. Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk mengumpul data yang berguna bagi tujuan pengurusan pemuliharaan badak Sumatra di Sabah secara khususnya. Kepadatan anak pokok berbatang yang mempunyai ukur lilit 10 cm dan ke bawah telah diambil untuk menerangkan tentang perolehan anak pokok di kawasan kajian. Kekekapan jilatan garam dan kesan-kesan tinggalan badak Sumatra termasuklah bilangan kubang, kesan tapak kaki, tinja badak dan kesan penandaan juga dikumpulkan di kawasan kajian. Dalam setiap kawasan kajian, 40 buah plot berukuran 10 x 10 m telah didirikan di dalam 4 transek lurus (1 km setiap satu) bagi mendapatkan kekekapan anak-anak pokok berbatang di dalam plot berkenaan. Lokasi jilatan garam, kubang, kesan tapak kaki, tinja badak dan kesan penandaan telah dicari dalam kesemua tempat yang berkemungkinan dan juga berdasarkan kepada maklumat Unit Kawalan Badak (RPU) sebelum ini. Kesemua lokasi kesan-kesan berkenaan telah ditandakan di dalam peta menggunakan alat GPS. Kepadatan anak-anak pokok di Sg Sabran (nilai min $8.5 \pm$ sisihan piawai 4.5) menunjukkan perbezaan yang berkesan diantara Km 3 (3.1 ± 1.4), Km 32 (4.5 ± 3.6) dan Sg Purut – Sg Langgum (4.6 ± 1.7), $[F_{3, 156} = 22.706, p < .05]$. Disebabkan kesemua kawasan kajian mempunyai kesan-kesan tinggalan badak pada sebelum ini, hasil kajian ini mendapati badak Sumatra dapat menyesuaikan dirinya dengan baik di dalam habitat yang mempunyai kepadatan anak-anak pokok yang berbeza-beza. Terdapat 19, 13, 6 dan 5 kubang-kubang badak di Sg Sabran, Km 3, Sg Purut-Sg Langgum dan Km 3 mengikut turutan. Dua kesan tapak kaki badak dewasa yang lama, 3 longgok tinja lama badak dan kesan penandaan pada tumbuhan telah dijumpai di kawasan kajian. Jilatan garam pula hanya dijumpai di Km 3 tetapi tidak dijumpai di kawasan lain kajian.

Katakunci: Badak Sumatra, perolehan anak-anak pokok, kubang-kubang dan jilatan garam.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE	i
DECLARATION	ii
CERTIFICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABSTRAK	vi
LIST OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATION	xiii
LIST OF APPENDIX	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Background of Study	1
1.2 Problems Statement	3
1.3 Objectives of the Study	3
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Rhinoceros of the World	4
2.2 The Sumatran Rhinoceros	5
2.3 Poaching Threat	7
2.4 Habitat Loss	9
2.5 Ex-situ Challenges	10



2.6	Sumatran rhinoceros Habitat	12
2.6.1	Foods	12
2.6.2	Feeding Behavior	13
2.6.3	Wallowing Activity	14
2.6.4	Salt Licks	15

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1	Study Site	18
3.2	Tabin Wildlife Reserve	18
3.3	Danum Valley Conservation Area	21
3.4	Selection of the Study Areas	22
3.5	Fieldworks	25
3.6	Plant Availability Assessment	25
3.7	Salt Licks Assessment	27
3.8	The Sumatran Rhinoceros Assessment	27
3.9	Site Mapping	30
3.10	Data Analysis for Plant Availability	31

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1	Saplings Availability	33
4.2	The Existence of Salt Licks	35
4.3	Sumatran Rhinoceros Assessment	37
4.3.1	Wallows	37
4.3.2	Footprint	43
4.3.3	Dung	45
4.3.4	Mud Signs on Vegetation	47

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	
5.1 Saplings Availability at Sumatran rhinoceros Habitats	51
5.1.1 Lowest Saplings Density Area	53
5.2 Salt Licks and Minerals	54
5.3 Sumatran rhinoceros Assessment	56
5.3.1 Footprints	56
5.3.2 Rhino Dung	56
5.3.3 Mud Signs on the Vegetations	57
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	58
REFERENCES	59
APPENDIXES	71



LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 2.1	Physical differences between the five rhinos	5
Table 2.2	Sabah forest estates in 2006 and 2007	10
Table 2.3	Sumatran rhinoceros food plants in DVCA	13
Table 2.4	Influence of salt licks to Sumatran rhinoceros movements	16
Table 2.5	Salt licks at TWR and DVCA	17
Table 3.1	Sumatran rhinoceros at selected areas of TWR	23
Table 3.2	Sumatran rhinoceros at selected areas of DVCA	23
Table 3.3	Selected study areas in TWR and DVCA	24
Table 3.4	Fieldworks	25
Table 4.1	Salt licks	35
Table 4.2	Sumatran rhinoceros footprint at Km 3, TWR	44
Table 4.3	Sumatran rhinoceros footprint at Sg Sabran, DVCA	44
Table 4.4	Tree trunks survey sheet	48



LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 2.1	The Sumatran rhinoceros from Sabah 7
Figure 2.2	Traditional spear traps used by poachers at Gunung Leuser forest, Sumatra 9
Figure 2.3	Sumatran rhinoceros in its wallow 14
Figure 3.1	Tabin Wildlife Reserve 20
Figure 3.2	Danum Valley Conservation Area 21
Figure 3.3	Gbh measuring procedure 26
Figure 3.4	Plant availability assessment design 27
Figure 3.5	Sumatran rhinoceros assessment design 28
Figure 3.6	Standard measurements for Sumatran rhinoceros footprint 29
Figure 3.7	Garmin GPS, measuring tape and compass 30
Figure 4.1	Plant densities at study areas 34
Figure 4.2	Location of salt licks at Km 3, TWR 36
Figure 4.3	Numbers of wallows at study areas 37
Figure 4.4	Abandoned wallows 38
Figure 4.5	Recently used wallow by pigs contained soft mud 38
Figure 4.6	Locations of wallows, footprint, river and transects at Sg Sabran, DVCA 39
Figure 4.7	Locations of wallows, footprint, dung, salt licks, river and transects at Km 3, TWR 40
Figure 4.8	Locations of wallows, calf footprint, river and transects at Sg Purut-Sg Langgum, DVCA 41
Figure 4.9	Locations of wallows, river and transects at Km 32, TWR 42



Figure 4.10	Sumatran rhino old footprint at Km 3, TWR	43
Figure 4.11	Sumatran rhino old footprint at Sg Sabran, DVCA	44
Figure 4.12	Sumatran rhino old dung	45
Figure 4.13	Sumatran rhino dung	46
Figure 4.14	Mud smeared tree trunk	47
Figure 4.15	Signs of rhinoceros passing from a wallow	49
Figure 4.16	Summaries of signs found at Km 3, TWR	50

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

a.s.l.	above sea level
B.C.	Before Christ
BORA	Borneo Rhino Alliance
Ca	Calcium
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
cm	centimeter
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DVCA	Danum Valley Conservation Area
gbh	girth breast height
GPS	Global Positioning System
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
Km	Kilometer
m	meter
mm	millimetre
NGO	Non Government Organization
P	Phosphorus
RM	Malaysian Ringgit
RPU	Rhino Patrolling Unit
Sg	Sungai
SOS Rhino	Save Our Sumatran Rhino
sp	Species
TWR	Tabin Wildlife Reserve
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
°	Degree
%	Percent



LIST OF APPENDIX

		Page
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 1 Km 3, TWR	75
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 2 Km 3, TWR	77
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 3 Km 3, TWR	79
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 4 Km 3, TWR	81
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 1 Km 32, TWR	83
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 2 Km 32, TWR	85
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 3 Km 32, TWR	87
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 4 Km 32, TWR	89
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 1 Sg. Purut-Sg. Langgum, DVCA	91
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 2 Sg. Purut-Sg. Langgum, DVCA	93
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 3 Sg. Purut-Sg. Langgum, DVCA	95
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 4, Sg. Purut-Sg. Langgum, DVCA	97
Appendix	A Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 1 Sg Sabran	99



Appendix	A	Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 2, Sg Sabran	101
Appendix	A	Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 3, Sg Sabran	103
Appendix	A	Stand structure analysis according to the gbh class distribution for transect 4, Sg Sabran	105
Appendix	B	Saplings density in different plots and altitude at Km 3, TWR	107
Appendix	B	Saplings density in different plots and altitude at Km 32, TWR	109
Appendix	B	Saplings density in different plots and altitude at Sg Purut-Sg Langgum, DVCA	110
Appendix	B	Saplings density in different plots and altitude at Sg Sabran, DVCA	111
Appendix	C	Wallow altitude at studied areas	112
Appendix	D	Saltlicks	113
Appendix	E	Descriptives comparison between the density of saplings at study areas	114



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) has been in the focus of the world conservation since 1970s, as their numbers have greatly reduced. There were 300 Sumatran rhinoceros located in three main areas on Sumatra (200), two or three areas in Peninsular Malaysia (75) and two areas in Sabah (25) (van Strien, 2005). Its conservation status has changed from endangered to critically endangered species according to the IUCN Red List (Foose and van Strien, 1995). It is the most endangered rhino species in this world as their numbers were less than 300, the rate of decline was at least 50% in 10 years, the situations was not stabilizing and the captive breeding was not reproducing very well (Foose and van Strien, 1995). The loss of habitat and poaching activities are the two most important factors that contributed to the decline of the population size of the Sumatran rhinoceros (van Strien, 2005). In addition, poaching activities which is associated with the use and trade activities of the rhino horn which may have contributed to the decline were recorded from China as early as 2600 B.C. (Rabinowitz, 1995).

In Sabah, the population density of the Bornean subspecies of the Sumatran rhinoceros was reported to be less than 20 since 1980's (Payne, 1986). In addition, its population is extremely in precarious situation, with low total number, a skewed sex ratio and many widely scattered small populations, resulting in the possible reproductive isolation from the main breeding areas (Malaysia Rhino Conservation Action Plan, 1993).

To save this species, the Government of Malaysia especially the State Government of Sabah has taken serious steps by gazetting the habitats for the conservation of the Sumatran rhinoceros. The Tabin Wildlife Reserve (TWR), a 120 521 ha of a mixed secondary-primary forest was gazetted primarily for large



mammals, in particular the Sumatran rhinoceros (Andau, 1987). The Danum Valley Conservation Area (DVCA), classified as Class I (Protection Forest) reserve, also harbors thirteen Sumatran rhinoceros (Alfred and Payne, 2005). Based on surveys conducted by a Non Government Organization (NGO) operating in Sabah, Save Our Sumatran Rhino (SOS Rhino), estimated population size of rhinos is about 50 to 70 individuals in TWR and DVCA (Thayaparan, 2006). As more surveys were done in recent years, this number has appeared to be on a much higher guess and estimation.

Even though previous efforts to conserve the Sumatran rhinoceros have not been so successful, saving this species requires more than just faith. It takes a lot of commitment and patience. *In situ* together with *ex situ* conservations must be strengthened. Supports from the world are needed during this critical time. As there are still protected forests, the chance for the survival of this species in Sabah is still strong and encouraging.

As the Sumatran rhinoceros is known to use certain parts of the known range more than the others, the habitat evaluation in its known ranges is presented in a way to understand the needs and preferences of the species for a better effort in *in situ* conservation. Further understanding on the ecological setting of this species may help the wildlife managers to set a better management protocols to save it from threat of extinction.

1.2 Problems Statement

1. Plant availability for the Sumatran rhinoceros in study areas at Tabin Wildlife Reserve and Danum Valley Conservation Area is unknown.
2. The number of salt licks at study areas is unknown.
3. As individual of rhinos are widely scattered in Tabin Wildlife Reserve and Danum Valley Conservation Area, signs of its existence are hard to find.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted in the selected areas in Tabin Wildlife Reserve and Danum Valley Conservation Area. The objectives of this research were;

1. To study the plant availability for the Sumatran rhinoceros in study areas.
2. To study the number of salt licks in study areas.
3. To study the Sumatran rhinoceros signs included the number of wallows at study areas, footprints, dungs and marking signs.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Rhinoceros of the World

Inhibiting the Earth for 50 million years, the rhinoceros family Rhinocerotidae had thrived and diversified to fit many ecosystems (Foose and Blumer, 2006). However, evolutionary had leaves us with only five rhinos species living in Africa and Asia today. In Africa there are two species of rhinoceros; the black *Dicerorhinus bicornis* and the white *Ceratotherium simum*. However, there are two separated species of white rhinoceros in Africa recognized as the northern and southern white rhinoceros. Studies on mitochondrial DNA confirm that the two subspecies of the white rhinoceros are genetically distinct (WWF Factsheet, 2004). The northern subspecies *Ceratotherium simum simum* is listed separately by IUCN as critically endangered, although the southern subspecies *Ceratotherium simum cottoni* has now reached sufficient numbers to qualify for near threatened (CITES, 2004). Three of the five remaining rhinoceros in this world existing in Asia; the greater one-horned *Rhinoceros unicornis* is also known as the Indian rhinoceros, the Javan rhinoceros is also known as the lesser one-horned rhinoceros and the smallest rhinoceros with two horns the Sumatran rhinoceros also known as the hairy rhinoceros. Table 2.1 shows the physical differences between the five rhinoceros of the world.



Table 2.1: Physical differences between the five rhinos

Species	Average height at shoulder (meter)	Average weight (kilogram)	Average length of front horn (meter)
White rhinoceros	1.52-1.83	2268-3583	0.91-1.89
Black rhinoceros	1.52-1.83	998-1814	0.46-1.22
Indian rhinoceros	1.10-1.98	1497-1996	0.20-0.61
Javan rhinoceros	1.37-1.68	1361	0.25
Sumatran rhinoceros	0.91-1.52	318-907	0.25-0.78

Source: Adapted from Hull, 1998

2.2 The Sumatran Rhinoceros

The Sumatran rhinoceros belongs to the order of the Perissodactyla and is one of the three species of rhinos native to Asia. It is the smallest from the five of the living species of rhinoceros in this world with a weight range of between 320-900 kg (Hull, 1998). The Sumatran rhinoceros have three subspecies that are the southern Sumatran rhino *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis sumatrensis*, borneon or eastern Sumatran rhino *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis harrissoni* and Northern Sumatran rhino *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis lasiotis*.

Sumatran rhinoceros is the only species of rhinoceros in Malaysia as Javan rhinoceros was hunted to extinct on the Peninsula Malaysia in 1932 (WWF, 2010). Lowland with plentiful of rivers and wet areas are favored (Foose and van Strien, 1997). As lowlands are the first areas used by human to settle down, the Javan rhinoceros were easily preyed and the lost of habitat is inevitable. However, the existence of Javan rhinoceros have never been recorded in Sabah (van Strien, 1974). The Javan rhinoceros was thought to have disappeared in Borneo due to natural causes about 12,000 years ago (Rabinowitz, 1995).

There are three subspecies of the Sumatran rhinoceros in the world that are differentiated by their skull measurements (van Strien, 1974). The *D. s. sumatrensis* is known as the western Sumatran rhinoceros lived mostly on western Sumatera and some may still live on a very few parts on Peninsular Malaysia. In

addition, there is a slight genetic difference between the western and eastern Sumatran rhinos (Asian Rhino Specialist Group, 1996). The Sumatran rhinoceros on the Peninsula Malaysia were once known as *D. s. niger*, but were later recognized to be similar to the rhinos on western Sumatera (Rookmaaker, 1984).

The second subspecies, the *D. s. lasiotis* is known as the northern Sumatran rhinoceros was once roamed in India and Bangladesh but has been declared extinct in these countries. However on the present day unconfirmed reports suggest that there may be a small population still surviving in Burma, but the political situation in the country has prevented verification (Asian Rhino Specialist Group, 1996).

The last subspecies, *D. s. harrissoni* is the subspecies of Sumatran rhinoceros that being studied by the researcher (see Figure 2.1). This species is distributed in Borneo and recognized as the smallest compared to the other subspecies. It was once spread in Asia and existed in the areas of lowland and mountain across Southeast Asia, from the hills of eastern Assam in India through Burma, Thailand, Indochina, the Malay Peninsula, and Sunda Islands of Sumatra and Borneo (van Strien, 1974; Groves, 1967). This subspecies is named after Tom Harrison, who worked extensively with Bornean zoology and anthropology in the 1960s (Groves, 1965).



Figure 2.1: The Sumatran rhinoceros from Sabah, Malaysia

Source : From SOS Rhino, 2007

2.3 Poaching Threat

The Sumatran rhinoceros has disappeared from most parts of Borneo as a result of hunting for its valuable body parts especially the horn over thousands of years and particularly over the past one hundred years (Payne *et al.*, 2005). By the Tang Dynasty (600-900 A.D.), large quantities of horn including the Sumatran rhinoceros horn were imported to China (Rabinowitz, 1995). Schafer (1981) concluded that the near extinction of the Javan and Sumatran rhinos in modern times has been largely attributed to the trade during the Tang Dynasty.

The more rapid decline on the Borneo can attributed to the greater hunting skills of the Bornean Island people because most of the tribe lives in and from the jungle (van Strien, 1985). In a survey conducted in upper Kayan and upper Mentarang (in the northwest corner of East Kalimantan, bordering Sabah and Sarawak) in 1981 showed that no more rhinos remained in the area and the disappearance was due to heavy hunting by their fathers' generation (Blower *et al.*, 1981). Fortunately, the absence of real hunting tribes in southeast Sabah has resulted the survival of rhinos but until the year of 1980s the hunters had move

back into the areas and create a serious threat to the Bornean rhinos again (Payne, 1986).

The high value of their body parts, especially the horn, continues to encourage illegal killing (Martin, 1979). In 1999, hunter's price sale for 100 g of the horn was reached 5 million rupiah which was equal to Malaysian Ringgit (RM) 1750 (currency exchange 2009) for the trade that happened in Southern part of Sumatra, Indonesia (Foose *et al.*, 2000). Some people believe that the Sumatran rhinoceros horn and body parts are the best remedy for all kind of sickness. However, in this modern era where the preparation of medicine is based on the scientific study and sophisticated technologies, the used of Sumatran rhinoceros as medical ingredient is found to be baseless. Rhino horns are compressed keratin fibres likes our hair and nails. The central core is reinforced with calcium and melanin (Martin and Vigne, 2007).

The Sumatran rhinoceros was hunted by poachers in many ways. In the earlier days, poachers set their traps and waited for the rhinos to come but in this millennium, fire guns are used to kill the rhinos and could cause immediate death. The poachers set their traps, spear falls, pitfalls or steel wire snares to catch the Sumatran rhinoceros in an area and after several years, no more rhinos could be found in that area anymore (van Strien, 1985). Figure 2.2 shows the spear trap that was used by the hunters at Gunung Leuser in 1970s. The spear is almost one meter long and made from the hard type woods. When the animal disturbs the trigger thread, the ring pulled from the peg on the hanging cord. The whole construction drops down and driving the spear into the rhino's back (van Strien, 1974). No rhinos would escape from the trap without getting injured.

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