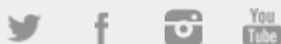


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The Red Rhino Blogs (Part VI): Black and White and Red All Over

By [Mike Bona](#)

 January 26, 2016

 Conservation



The hope is that Andatu, the male calf born to Andalas and his mate Ratu, will be the first of many Sumatran rhino calves born at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (Photo courtesy of Susie Ellis/International Rhino Foundation)

THE RED RHINO BLOGS

The announcement in August 2015 that [Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden](#) would send the last Sumatran rhinoceros, 8-year-old Harapan, in North America to the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Indonesia's Way Kambas National Park was bittersweet news. For those who have had the rare opportunity to work with these animals, it's a sad parting of ways, but it is also a reason for hope. Thanks to valuable knowledge gained in North American zoos about the science of Sumatran rhino husbandry and reproduction, Harapan will hopefully start a new legacy at his ancestral home. For the staff members at the L.A. Zoo who were fortunate enough to work with Harapan and other Sumatran rhinos, it's been an occasion to reflect on these magical creatures.

(UPDATE: Harapan's journey to Indonesia took place at the end of October and he arrived safely on November 2, 2015.)

Black and White and Red All Over

I started working at the Los Angeles Zoo as a part-time keeper in 2001. My first job at the Zoo was a two-day-a-week relief keeper caring for the Zoo's last black rhino, Buster. I couldn't



Cincinnati Zoo Animal Keeper Paul Reinhart with Andalus (Photo courtesy Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden)

believe my good fortune, being the “new guy” and getting an opportunity to work with such an amazing animal. I'd never worked with rhinos before so I started learning as much as I could about them, focusing on black rhinos, but also the other members of their family, the white, Indian, Javan, and Sumatran.

Shortly after I was hired, news quickly spread throughout the Zoo community of a very special birth at the Cincinnati Zoo of a Sumatran rhino, the first captive-born Sumatran rhino in 112 years. Although news of Andalus's birth was huge for everyone invested in the conservation efforts of this species, I think this story would have received much more attention in the media if not for the very recent tragedy of September 11th, which occurred days before his birth.



Animal Keeper Steve Romo

News of Andalus's birth came and went; I didn't think much about it as I settled into my new job as black rhino keeper. I'd never seen a Sumatran rhino in person and Cincinnati was a long way to travel for a guy with a part-time zoo keeper salary, so it was just one of those goals that ended up on my bucket list but I wasn't sure I'd ever achieve. After working with Buster the black rhino for about a year, it

returned to the L.A. Zoo with Andalus (Photo courtesy of Steve Romo)

came time for him to move on to be part of a breeding program at another zoo.

After he left, I worked with our South American primates and our tigers and bears. Then the news came that Andalus was going to come to the L.A. Zoo. Even more thrilling, I received the news that I was going to get to care for Andalus! Seeing a Sumatran rhino for the first time is truly an inspiring experience. It's like looking back in time at a prehistoric animal. They are very unique in appearance, looking more closely like their ancient relatives, the woolly rhinos with their long reddish hair, only much smaller, than any of their living counterparts.

Taking care of Andalus was a lot of work. Sumatrans have never been able to adapt well to the hay and grain diet that the black, white, and Indian rhinos live on in zoos, so instead we would feed him up to one hundred pounds of browse (tree branches) a day. To accomplish this task meant that his keepers would have to go out and cut his browse for him daily, a job that could take hours. The main type of browse that he ate was ficus. At the time, I had no idea how many different species of ficus there are, nor did I ever think I would know the difference between *Ficus nitida* and *Ficus macrophylla*. To this day I still take notice when I drive by a large *Ficus elastica* tree, which, by the way, was Andalus's favorite.

Andalus was very curious and very calm and easy to work with. When we were training him for blood draws he would never flinch or get upset when we poked him with needles; instead being very content with the carrot and apple treats he was receiving or just being rubbed down. He really enjoyed a



Andatu's name combines part of father Andalus and mother Ratu (pictured with the young calf) and means "Gift From God" in Bahasa (Photo courtesy of Susie Ellis/IRF)

good “rhino massage.” The lead keeper at the time was Steve Romo, a keeper who had years of experience working with Sumatran rhinos at the Cincinnati Zoo and also previously at the Los Angeles Zoo when we had Sumatrans in the past. He would even make regular trips to the Way Kambas Rhino Sanctuary in Sumatra, Indonesia, to work with the Sumatran rhinos there. Sadly, Steve Romo passed away a few years ago, but I will never forget all I learned from working with him and taking advantage of all the experiences that he shared with me.

I went from a part-timer to full-time keeper in 2005. This was a long-time goal for me, but also meant a change in location. I was moved to a new section of the Zoo to work with the giraffes and zebras, which meant I was no longer able to take care of Andalas. This was a very difficult move for me at the time, but it didn’t take long for giraffes to become my new passion. I’ve been head giraffe keeper for the past four years, but I will always look back fondly at my experience, taking care of Andalas, as the most memorable of my life.

It was bittersweet when Andalas moved to the Way Kambas Reserve in 2007. We were all sad to see him go, but couldn’t have been more excited for him and the future of his species when his mate, Ratu, gave birth to Andatu in 2012. I now have a new goal on my bucket list, and that’s to someday visit Andalas and his growing family at his new home.

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Sumatran
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L.A. Zoo:***

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When Andalas was mature enough to be on his own, he moved to Los Angeles to make room for sibling Suci (Photo courtesy Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden)

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To learn how you can help in saving these wonderful creatures from extinction, visit:

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