

Creating space for Sumatran rhinos

The Sumatran rhino is arguably the most endangered large mammal on Earth, with fewer than 100 individuals surviving in four fragmented populations on Indonesia's island of Sumatra and in central Kalimantan, Borneo.

Susie Ellis, PhD | Executive Director, International Rhino Foundation

The decline of the species was initially caused by poaching for its horn for use in traditional Asian medicine. Poaching remains a threat today, with the risk of extinction exacerbated by habitat fragmentation, human encroachment, small population effects, and potential natural or human-caused disasters.

Throughout its 25-year history, the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) has supported and managed rhino conservation projects in Africa and Asia. In Indonesia, with our implementing partner, Yayasan Badak Indonesia (YABI or the Rhino Foundation of Indonesia), we operate a multi-faceted Sumatran Rhino Conservation Programme that includes anti-poaching patrols that protect Sumatran rhinos and their habitat, research on and propagation of the species at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS), and outreach and livelihoods work with local communities.

There are only 10 Sumatran rhinos in captivity in the world: three non-reproductive animals in Sabah, Malaysia and seven at the 250-acre Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS) in Indonesia. Decisions concerning management of the Indonesian population are an integral part of discussions among the Sumatran Rhino Consortium, a multi-national stakeholder group that is heavily involved in the species' recovery strategy in Indonesia.

The International Rhino Foundation (IRF) built and has funded the SRS through our local partner, Yayasan Badak Indonesia (YABI or the Rhino Foundation of Indonesia) since 1996. The SRS is a 250-acre complex located within Way Kambas National Park, where Sumatran rhinos reside in large, natural rainforest habitats and receive state-of-the-art veterinary care and nutrition. The SRS rhinos are part of an intensively managed research and breeding programme that aims to increase the population of captive rhinos as a contribution to the metapopulation management strategy being developed for the species. The SRS currently is at capacity and cannot hold any more animals.

Recent meetings of the Sumatran Rhino Consortium have focused on developing a multi-faceted recovery strategy designed to increase the population of Sumatran rhinos. An important part of the recovery strategy is to consolidate animals into two to three populations, and to add more animals to the SRS to augment and maximise current captive breeding efforts. Key to the success of this initiative is the expansion of the current SRS facility so that it can hold more animals.

In February 2016, the IRF and YABI developed an SRS Expansion Plan. This includes doubling the Sanctuary's holding space; building permanent quarantine, maternity and ambassador animal enclosures; improving infrastructure with solar power, energy efficient generators, additional wells, staff and guest quarters, laboratory space, equipment, and other improvements. Partial funding has recently been secured to begin the expansion, and work will begin in early October. If all goes as planned, the facility will have room for at least five more animals by the end of 2017.

Achieving our shorter-term goal of expanding the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary will catalyse its longer-term development into a true Centre of Excellence for Sumatran rhino propagation and research, allowing us to more fully understand this enigmatic and magnificent species while further contributing to its long-term survival.

Grants

Since November 2015, we have sent €5,000 from Wilhelma Zoo Stuttgart, £1,200 from Horst and Jutta Lubnow, £1,000 from Keith Richardson, £500 from Vijay Rajan, £5,000 in core funds and just over £3,000 from our "It's a baby" appeal, marking the birth of Delila earlier this year.

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Thank you to creative agency **Twogether** for generously providing pro-bono expertise to develop a number of campaigns, including the Rhino Dog Squad, 'It's a Rhino!' for the new arrival Delila the rare Sumatran rhino and Save the Rhino Viet Nam

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