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# Animal Keepers' Forum



*Dedicated to Professional Animal Care*



# HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

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*"The rhinoceros has been on earth for sixty million years. But by 1990 the only rhinos left may very well be those in zoos and wildlife reserves."*

Bradley, 1982

This statement, made only six years ago, is becoming increasingly true more and more each year. Today there are only five surviving species of rhino, all but one species is threatened with extinction. How did the rhino get to this predicament? The answer to this question is surprisingly easy.

For centuries rhino products have been used for many things, from medicines and aphrodisiacs to ornately carved dagger handles. These have been in demand by cultures in the Far East where traditional medicines are often favored over modern ones, and a dagger handle or case carved from rhino horn denotes a symbol of masculinity. Even today the products from the rhino are still sought after for these very purposes.

The remaining species of rhino include: the Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*), and the White Rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) of Africa; the Javan Rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*), Indian Rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), and the Sumatran Rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) of Asia. Of these, the white rhino appears to have been brought back from the brink of extinction, while the other four are still struggling for survival. However, the smallest and oldest species, the Sumatran, is now receiving global support to insure its survival through the Sumatran Rhino Project. It is this species which will be the topic of this paper.

The Sumatran rhino is the only Asian rhino having two horns. The presence of two deep and permanent folds of skin crossing the spine in the region of the shoulders and hindquarters make it distinguishable from the Javan species. It also has the unique trait of having hair cover the majority of its body, although in the wild there is little evidence of any hair. This is primarily because the dense vegetation where it is found removes the hair as it moves through the bushes.

At one time the Sumatran rhino had a very extensive range which included parts of Bengal and Assam, Burma, the hill country of Thailand, Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam), Malaysia, Sumatra, and Borneo. Today this species of rhino is known to survive only in Sumatra, Borneo, Peninsular Malaysia and Burma. There have been reports of them still existing in Thailand and Indochina, but these reports have not been verified.

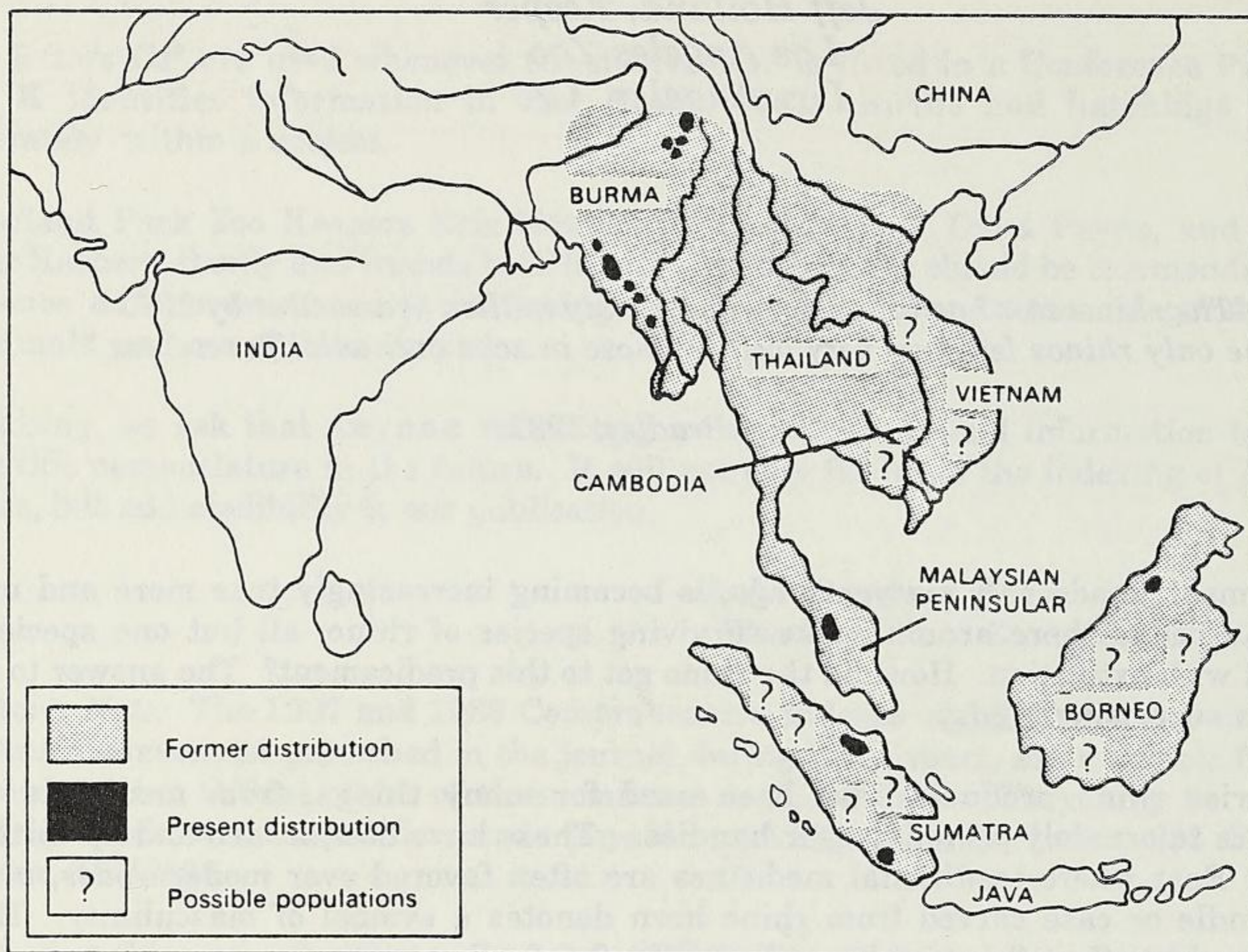
There are presently two recognized sub-species of the Sumatran rhino. The more widely known species is *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis sumatrensis* found on the Islands of Sumatra and Borneo and the Malay Peninsula. The lesser known sub-species is referred to as the Hairy-Eared Rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis lasiotis*) which is found in Indochina, Thailand, and Burma.

Strangely enough, it was the hairy-eared rhino that was the first Sumatran rhino in the world to be brought into captivity. This animal, a female, was captured in 1868 near Chittagong, India. She resided there for four years before being shipped to London's Regent Park in 1872. She lived for 32 years until her death in August of 1900. It is this rhino which holds the longevity record for *D. s. lasiotis*.



## Hope for the Future - The Sumatran Rhino, Continued

The Sumatran Rhinoceros



The above is taken from *Rhinos Endangered Species 1988*.

However, in the Western Hemisphere, the first Sumatran rhino ever to be exhibited appears to be a female of the *D. s. sumatrensis* subspecies that arrived at the Hamburg Zoo in Germany in January of 1872. A female that lived for 17 years at Vienna's Schonbrunn Zoological Garden holds the longevity record for *D. s. sumatrensis*.

The majority of rhinos were exhibited at the turn of the century. All together there appears to have been a total of 55 Sumatran rhinos in captivity. By far the London Zoo has exhibited the most with a total of eight. Of the eight animals, six were of the sub-species *D. s. sumatrensis* and two were of the sub-species *D. s. lasiotis*.

The first Sumatran rhinos to be exhibited in the United States are believed to be two animals sent over from Europe in 1872. The first exhibition was in 1873 with John Robinson's Circus. The second animal from Europe was exhibited in 1874 with the Adam Forepaugh Circus. Although this appears to be the first exhibition of the rhino, there is still some speculation whether or not these two animals were indeed Sumatran.

With the exception of three years at the National Zoo and a brief nine-month period at the New York Zoological Park, all of the rhinos exhibited in the U.S. at that time were found in circuses.

Between the years of 1919 and 1959, no Sumatran rhinos were exhibited anywhere in the world. The last such rhino during this time period appears to be the female at Vienna's Schonbrunn Zoological Park that died from enteritis in 1919. In 1952 the Philadelphia Zoo had acquired a pair of rhinos for exhibition. Unfortunately both animals died aboard ship and their remains were tossed out at sea.

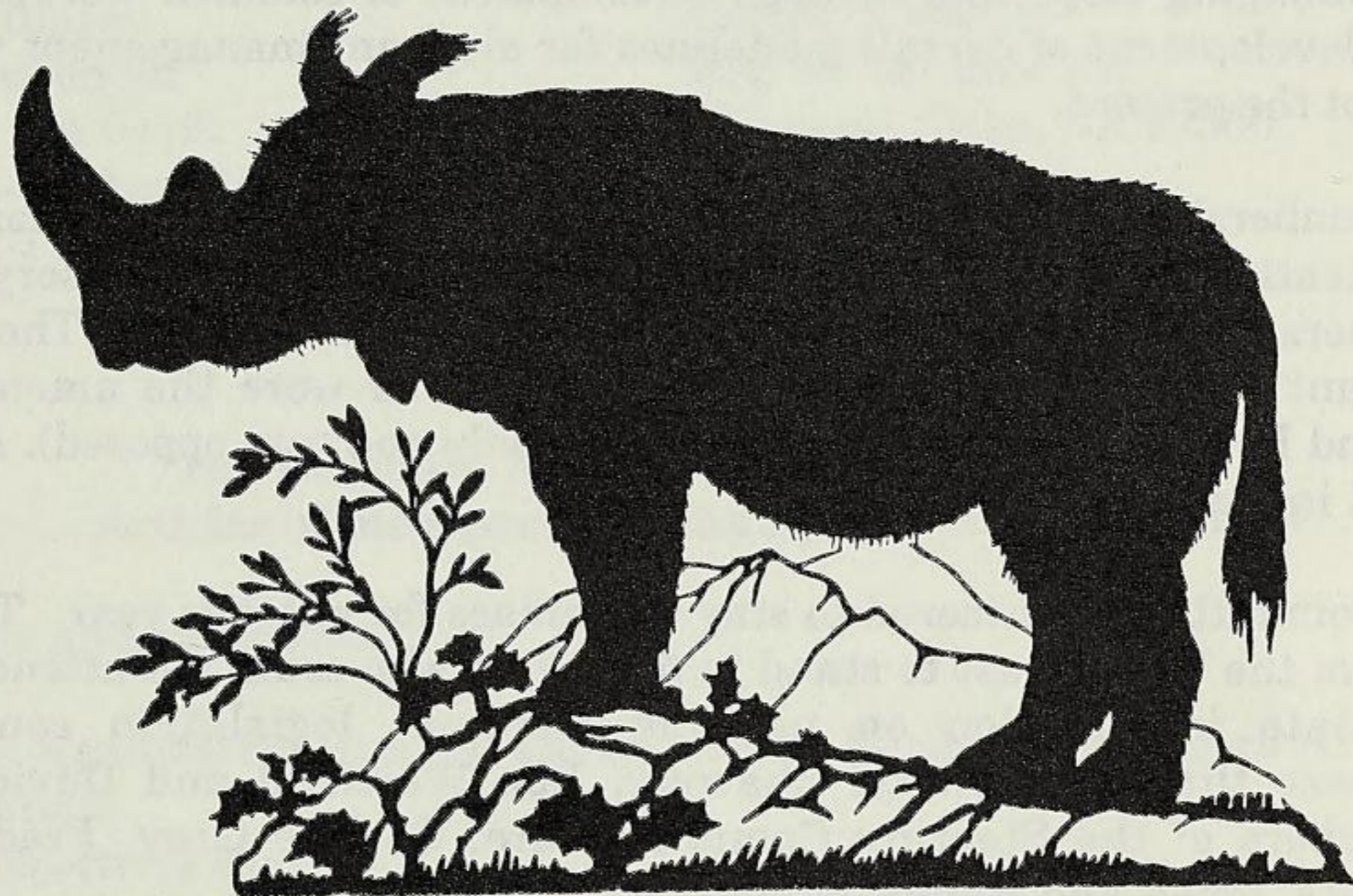
In 1959 the Copenhagen Zoo in Denmark put together an expedition to capture three pairs of Sumatran rhinos. The expedition was successful in capturing one male and four females. Unfortunately one of the females died in the trap and the male escaped. Of the remaining



## Hope for the Future - The Sumatran Rhino, Continued

animals, one went to the Copenhagen Zoo, one to the Central Institute of Nature Research in Bogor, Java, Indonesia, and the other to the Basel Zoo in Switzerland. However, there is some discrepancy as to whether or not the Basel female, known as "Betina", was captured by the Copenhagen expedition or by Peter Ryhiner, an animal collector who was operating in the same area. In 1961, the female in Bogor and the female at Basel died. In 1972 the last Sumatran rhino in captivity, the female at Copenhagen died of apparent vandalism. Thus the zoo world saw what appeared to be the last hope for breeding this rare animal fade away.

In 1982 at the AAZPA conference in Phoenix, the idea for a potential major project to bring Sumatran rhinos into captivity for breeding purposes was conceived. The first efforts of the project were carried out in Sabah. However, this soon fell apart due to political disagreements. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Government had formulated its own project to bring Sumatran rhinos into captivity. In 1984, the Malaysians captured a female rhino that became the first animal to be brought into captivity since 1972. Also in the 1984, individual efforts were made by Howlett's Zoo in England to acquire two pairs of rhinos out of Indonesia.



In 1985, a male rhino was captured in Indonesia and subsequently sent to England as part of the agreement made with Howlett's. In November of that same year, the AAZPA approached the Indonesian Government about the Sumatran Rhino Trust, in which five pairs would be sent to the United States for a captive breeding program. In the early part of 1986 the Sumatran Rhino Trust was approved and signed. Within that year a female rhino captured in Indonesia was sent to Howlett's. However, this animal died a few months after her arrival in England. In 1987 another female for Howlett's was caught and shipped to England. By this time there were eight rhinos in captivity - five in Malacca, Malaysia, one in Indonesia, and the pair at the Howlett's Zoo in England.

In 1988 the first three animals, all females, for the Sumatran Rhino Trust were captured in Sumatra, Indonesia. On 25 November, 1988 the first rhinos to be exhibited in the United States in about 80 years arrived in Los Angeles. One of the females went to the San Diego Zoo while the other went to the Los Angeles Zoo for the winter. In the spring of 1989 this animal will be sent to its permanent home at the Cincinnati Zoo. The third female that was captured seems to be pregnant and will remain in Indonesia as part of the agreement. The next two females that are caught will be destined for the New York Zoological Park and the Los Angeles Zoo. Any males captured will be sent to the Cincinnati Zoo, San Diego Zoo, New York Zoological Park, and the Los Angeles Zoo respectively.

Presently there are 17 Sumatran rhinos of the sub-species *D. s. sumatrensis* in captivity. There are 1.5 in Malacca, two others elsewhere in Malaysia, four in Indonesia, one in Sabah, 1.1 in England, and the two females in the United States.

It is quite clear that the survival of the Sumatran rhino has been one of struggle. Despite all the missed opportunities in the early years, much progress has since been made. It appears that we are finally on the right track for saving this rare and unique animal from extinction.

