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<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/04/rare-malaysian-rhino-still-sick-but-showing-signs-of-improvement/>

Mongabay Series: [Asian Rhinos](#)

## Rare Malaysian rhino still sick, but showing signs of improvement

10 April 2017 / [Isabel Esterman](#)

*Officials are now cautiously optimistic about the health of Puntung, one of Malaysia's three surviving Sumatran rhinos.*



- *Puntung, one of three Critically Endangered Sumatran rhinos known to survive in Malaysia, is suffering from an abscess in her jaw.*
- *The rhino's caretakers feared she would not survive the infection despite receiving round-the-clock veterinary care.*
- *Since Saturday, Puntung has shown signs of improvement, although she is "not out of the woods yet."*

“After a week of grave concern, we have some positive news,” the Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA) [announced today](#). “Puntung looks like she’s getting better.”

Female Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) Puntung, is suffering from an abscess in her jaw, a condition that could lead to sepsis and eventually death. As recently as Friday, the rhino’s caretakers [feared she would not survive the weekend](#).



The life-threatening abscess in Puntung's jaw. Photo courtesy of the Sabah Wildlife Department.

Puntung, estimated to be around 25 years old, is one of three Sumatran rhinos known to survive in Malaysia. All three were born in the wild and are currently cared for at the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary in Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Malaysian Borneo's Sabah State.

Sumatran rhinos were [declared extinct in the wild in Malaysia](#) in 2015. Between 50 and 100 of the Critically Endangered species are believed to survive in Indonesia, including seven at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park in southern Sumatra.

Puntung's severe illness had raised alarm due to the low overall numbers of Sumatran Rhinos, and to the role BORA hoped she might play in efforts to breed more rhinos using experimental in vitro fertilization (IVF) techniques. Puntung has reproductive pathologies that leave her unable to carry a pregnancy, but is still producing eggs.

Deteriorating health, then signs of improvement

According to the Sabah Wildlife Department, Puntung showed alarming symptoms on Thursday and Friday, including loss of appetite and energy, and bleeding from her left nostril.

"She ate very little over those two days, and spent most of the daytime lethargic in her wallow," Sabah Wildlife Department director Augustine Tuuga said in a press statement.

On Saturday, the bleeding stopped and Puntung became more active — an improvement BORA attributes to constant attention, antibiotics, fruit and supplements.



The rhino's caretakers are cautiously optimistic about her condition. "While we are delighted that she is eating once again, she's not out of the woods yet," BORA said. "We still have much to do and need to proceed with caution and urgency."

Puntung will continue to receive care at the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary. The facility is also in contact with specialist rhino veterinary surgeons in South Africa, although Puntung has reportedly not cooperated with attempts to get a clear x-ray of her jaw.

"We have been trying to take an X-ray for the past four days but she is irritated not only by pain but by our attention, not least the injections," the sanctuary's manager and veterinarian Zainal Zainuddin explained in a press statement.

*Banner Image: Courtesy of the Sabah Wildlife Department.*

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<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/04/one-of-the-last-three-rhinos-in-malaysia-is-critically-ill/>

### **One of the last three rhinos in Malaysia is critically ill**

7 April 2017 / [Isabel Esterman](#)

***Female Sumatran rhino Puntung is suffering an abscess deep in her jaw and has not responded to treatment.***



- *Wildlife officials fear Puntung, one of the last three rhinos known to survive in Malaysia, is on the brink of death due to an abscess in her jaw.*
- *The abscess has not responded to veterinary treatment provided at the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary in the Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Sabah, where Puntung lives with the other two surviving rhinos in Malaysia.*
- *The Sumatran rhino was declared extinct in the wild in Malaysia in 2015. Fewer than 100 are believed to remain, mostly in Indonesia.*

UPDATE: [Rare Malaysian rhino still sick, but showing signs of improvement](#)

Puntung, one of the last three Sumatran rhinos (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) known to survive in Malaysia, is critically ill with an abscess deep inside her upper jaw.

Wildlife officials in Malaysian Borneo's Sabah State fear the rhino, one of the few remaining representatives of a critically endangered species, is on the brink of death.

The infection has not responded to drainage and antibiotic treatment, Sabah Wildlife Department Director Augustine Tuuga said in an April 5 press statement. "We are worried about sepsis, an infection that can spread quickly through the body and rapidly cause death," he said.



The life-threatening abscess in Puntung's jaw.

Photo courtesy of the Sabah Wildlife Department.

Puntung is receiving 24-hour veterinary care at the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary in Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Sabah, a fenced-in facility managed by the Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA) where she lives in captivity along with Malaysia's two other surviving rhinos.

"All of us here at BORA, are very much affected by this and are desperately doing everything we can to treat her. We want to hope for the best, but the situation does not look good," BORA said on [its Facebook page](#) today. "We are working round the clock to save one of the world's rarest and most lovable animals, and we will not give up."

The Sumatran rhino was [declared extinct in the wild in Malaysia](#) in 2015. Between 50 and 100 are believed to survive in Indonesia, including seven at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park in southern Sumatra.

Puntung, who is believed to be around 25 years old, was captured in 2011 and brought to the sanctuary. Prior to her capture — likely in infancy — Puntung lost her front left foot, probably to a poacher's snare. Hence the name "Puntung," which means "stub" in Malaysian.

According to BORA, Puntung is "perhaps the most endearing" of the rhinos at the sanctuary "due to her disability and her gentle nature."

Puntung's arrival at the sanctuary in late 2011 brought hope that she could provide a mate for Tam, the sanctuary's middle-aged male rhino. With a small, dwindling population separated into isolated pockets, many rhino experts believe a [captive breeding program](#) is the only hope for the species' survival.

However, Puntung was found to have a severe array of uterine cysts, making her unable to bear a pregnancy. A second female rhino, Iman, who was captured and brought to the Tabin facility in 2014, also has reproductive pathologies. Meanwhile Tam, although still producing some viable sperm, is past his reproductive prime.

Since 2014, BORA turned its focus to [assisted reproductive technology](#), specifically in vitro fertilization (IVF) in order to produce a viable embryo — an effort that has so far been unsuccessful.

"Loss of Puntung now would be a tragedy, because she potentially has quite a few years of egg production left," said BORA Executive Director John Payne in a press statement.