

TEN YEARS FOR THE SUMATRAN RHINO

Bad news has arrived for one of the world's most endangered species – the Sumatran rhino. Smaller than the African rhinos, it is nevertheless currently suffering the same fate in Indonesia, Borneo and the Malay peninsula. The population has tumbled to between 500 and 700 animals, and many of these are in isolated pockets.

Palm nut plantations, logging and an expanding human population are the main threats, together with poaching, which is almost out of control. As in Africa, the animal's small horn is its main downfall, but the skin and bones are also used in the traditional medicines of the Far East.

To create a viable captive breeding population in America, the Sumatran Rhino Trust was formed in 1984 between a number of American zoos who agreed a captive breeding programme with the



Indonesian Government. Destructive and premature criticism from other conservation bodies following the death of two of America's seven translocated rhinos has resulted in the American zoos withdrawing from the project.

Tony Parkinson, former Field Director of the Sumatran Rhino Trust, believes that this could be disastrous. "Without the American money the project is dead. It was essential to get a strong alternative population breeding in America, for future relocation to Asia when conditions for them have improved. Two rhinos died tragically, but during the same time far more died in the wild at the hands of the poachers.

"The criticism was unfair and short-sighted. This could be the final nail in the coffin of the Sumatran rhino. Poaching is on the increase and without a radical change I give the rhino no more than 10 years – it is a tragedy."

Robin Page