

# SUMATRAN RHINOS NEED A BIGGER HOME

With the total population numbering fewer than 100 individuals, the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary runs an intensive breeding and research programme in Indonesia's Way Kambas National Park.

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**B**ut with just seven resident rhinos, the team needs to bring rhinos living in fragmented populations into the Sanctuary if the species is to be saved. Time for a home extension! Save the Rhino and its donors, particularly Chester Zoo, Paignton Zoo, Keith Richardson and Ales Weiner, have stepped in to help.

The first major recorded decline in Sumatran rhino numbers occurred in the 20th century due to poaching for their horn and widespread habitat loss throughout their historic home range. The threat of poaching still looms, but eventual extinction may now be caused by isolation due to shrinking, fragmented populations, with surviving animals struggling to meet and breed in the wild.

Against this sad backdrop, the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS) is positive news. The Sanctuary is currently home to seven Sumatran rhinos all enjoying a semi-wild existence in 247 acres of heavily protected forest, whilst being scientifically monitored as part of an intensive breeding programme. Two new calves have been born in four years, and now plans are afoot to move more wild Sumatran rhinos into the Sanctuary to encourage further breeding. Thanks to its success, the SRS now needs to double in size! So how do you build a bigger home for Sumatran rhinos?

Sumatran rhinos are generally solitary, but it's important for males and females to be exposed to each other regularly so that females don't develop fertility problems. Each animal has its own pen, called a boma, at the Sanctuary, with a communal pen for managed breeding.

The bigger and better Sanctuary will have to house adults, teenagers and our newest addition, Delilah, who turned one this year. She was our second bundle of joy, joining big brother Andatu two years after he became the first Sumatran rhino ever to have been born in captivity in Indonesia. In the hope of having more new-borns, a nursery is a must-have.

A special maternity pen will give space and security to expectant mums, with a CCTV system providing monitoring without disturbance.



Access to the laboratory next door allows our scientists to monitor fertility and take blood samples to ensure the rhinos are in top condition. We also preserve genetic material as insurance; if science develops successful artificial breeding techniques, we want to be sure we're ready to make even more rhino babies.

We're also building a quarantine area where we can safely hold newly acquired rhinos while we conduct all the necessary checks for disease. Once given the all-clear, new animals will be transferred to their own boma. Each boma is approximately 30 acres, providing access to native plant species and mud wallows.

Rhinos love al fresco dining, and their food is sustainably harvested by local community members. Sumatran rhinos eat around 50–60 kg per day, almost 10% of their body weight. Baby Delilah's favourite treats are fresh bananas, carrots, melons, and squash. She is quite loud when she wants a treat – she sounds like a puppy begging for a bone!

Rhinos also love to bathe, and access to plenty of wallows in which to cool off is a high priority. As well as mud baths, each boma will have a water system so the rhinos can have a daily hose-down by their keeper.

Most importantly of all, the new Sanctuary has to stay super-safe, and we need the best equipment possible for both the rangers and the scientists at every step of the way. A new ranger post is being built nearby to ensure the bomas have full protection.

This may seem like quite a lot of effort for just a few animals. However, captive species recovery success stories, such as that of the California condor and the scimitar-horned oryx, give us hope that we can pull this species back from the brink of extinction and ensure a future where Sumatran rhinos are safe, secure, and thriving.

Below: Delilah (left) and Ratu (right) shared a 'cake' for Delilah's first birthday in May 2017

