

Borneo Rhino Sanctuary

RM13.22 million
Jul 2009 - Jun 2017

Borneo Rhinoceros Sanctuary (BRS) is a joint initiative of the Borneo Rhinoceros Alliance (BORA) and the Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD). It serves as a sanctuary for the critically endangered Sumatran rhinoceros (rhino) within a fenced area at the Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Lahad Datu, Sabah. BRS also brings isolated rhinos from non-viable environments around Sabah into the Sanctuary to provide breeding opportunities for the rescued rhinos. Since 2009, BRS has acquired funding from SDF, including two funding extensions from 2009 to 2017.

SDF's funding covers the staffing costs of BORA employees and caretakers of the rhinos, subcontracted services enlisted to maintain BRS, travel costs incurred by BORA, and other indirect costs. The additional funding allowed for the advanced reproductive technology (ART) activities in partnership with experts from Leibniz Institute for Zoo & Wildlife Research, Berlin

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(IZW). IZW also provided training for BORA employees to enable them to acquire new skills and expand the pool of local specialists who are able to conduct the ART programme and In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) work.

To date, ART has not been used for any wildlife in Asia, making BRS the first facility to adopt ART, notably IVF and cell culture as a means to help prevent the extinction of a critically endangered species.

Nonetheless, there has not been any success in the production of the first IVF rhino embryo, as only eight oocytes (immature eggs) have been obtained. The necessary, optimum conditions and procedures for successful IVF have not been confirmed, prompting further research in this field.

The BRS programme has benefitted the people of Sabah through the creation of employment opportunities. BORA has 21 field staff (other than the veterinarian-field manager), all of whom are Sabahans. 13 are from four different native communities in the Tabin region. Over 25 people from predominantly rural communities have been employed under the project since 2009, some of whom now have employment with organisations such as WWF-Malaysia and the Sabah Wildlife Rescue Unit following their experiences with BRS.

Over the years, it has been apparent that the only way to save the Sumatran rhino is through IVF. BRS is working towards securing the Malaysian government's support to collaborate with Indonesia to save the species.



Tam remains in good condition, although is now estimated to be approaching advanced middle age.

SDF's support for the BRS project has shed light on the importance of the last remaining Sumatran rhinoceri in Malaysia and the Malaysian government has taken notice.

A five-year funding of RM11.9 million has been allocated under the 11th Malaysian Plan from the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry for the ART component of the Project.

SDF has now discontinued its funding of the BRS project to allow for other environment conservation projects which are in critical need of funding.

BRS has also successfully raised the profile of the Sumatran rhinos globally through the release of the National Geographic documentary "Operation Sumatran Rhino: Mission Critical" which follows BORA's Executive Director Datuk Dr. John Payne and Senior Veterinarian Dr. Zainal Zahari Zainuddin on their adventures and efforts to save the Sumatran rhinos in Malaysia.

The documentary was aired on National Geographic Wild and National Geographic Channel in conjunction with World Rhino Day in September 2016.



Sumatran rhino Tam under general anesthesia, undergoing the electro-ejaculation procedure on 24 August 2015.