

---

# THE SUMATRAN RHINO IN WAY KAMBAS NATIONAL PARK, SUMATRA, INDONESIA

Dwiatmo Siswomartono<sup>1</sup>, Suherti Reddy<sup>2</sup>, Widodo Ramono<sup>1</sup>,  
Jansen Manansang<sup>3</sup>, Ron Tilson<sup>4</sup>, Neil Franklin<sup>5</sup> and Tom Foose<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Directorate General of Forest Conservation and Nature Conservation (PHPA), Ministry of Forestry, Manggala Wanbakti, Jalan Gatot Subroto, Jakarta 10270, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Sub BKSDA Way Kambas, Jalan Raya Labuan Ratu Lama, Wayjepara, Lampung Tengah, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Indonesia Centre for Reproduction of Endangered Wildlife, Taman Safari Indonesia, Cisarua, Bogor, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Department of Conservation, Minnesota Zoological Garden, Apple Valley, MN 55124, USA

<sup>5</sup>WayKambas Sumatran Tiger Project, Secretariat for Sumatran Tiger Project, Taman Safari Indonesia, Cisarua, Bogor, Indonesia

<sup>6</sup>IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group & International Rhino Foundation, 14000 International Road, Cumberland, OH 43732, USA

Photo credit: Ron Tilson and Neil Franklin



*A Sumatran rhino in the wild, photographed with an infrared camera trap in Way Kambas National Park, Sumatra, Indonesia.*

---

The Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) is probably the most critically endangered species of rhino. Perhaps as few as 400 survive. Approximately 200-250 of them occur on Sumatra in perhaps 10 localities, of which three are considered to harbour the major rhino concentrations: Gunung Leuser National Park, Kerinci Seblat National Park and Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park. Remnant populations are suspected to occur in other areas. A population and habitat viability assessment (PHVA) workshop in 1993 revealed that the rhino population in Sumatra was only 50% of previous estimates.

The Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHPA) in Indonesia is conducting an intensive programme for in situ protection through development and deployment of anti-poaching teams. The initial, catalytic funds for this programme are being provided by a grant from the Global Environment Fund (GEF) though the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This GEF project arose out of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Conference on Financing Rhinoceros Conservation in 1992 and again in 1993. The Asian Rhino Specialist Group has facilitated the GEF Project.

Until five years ago, the Sumatran rhino was believed to be extinct in Way Kambas National Park. However, reports suggested that rhinos might still occur in the area. In the earliest reports, it was unclear if the species was Sumatran or Javan. However, the size of some of the tracks indicated that it was the Sumatran species. The possibility of the Sumatran rhino still occurring in Way Kambas was discussed at the 1993 PHVA workshop. Its occurrence has now been unequivocally confirmed.

Colour photographs of the Sumatran rhino in the wild are even rarer than the species itself. The photograph accompanying this article was collected by an infrared camera trap, which is used in the Sumatran Tiger Project in Way Kambas National Park. The Tiger Project is a collaborative project with PHPA and Taman Safari Indonesia.

Way Kambas is also the site of a proposed Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS), which is currently defined in the Asian rhino conservation community as a managed breeding centre in native habitat\*. Despite great expectations and efforts, the captive breeding programme for Sumatran rhinos, which commenced in 1984, has not been successful. A total of 40 rhinos have been captured in three areas where independent projects have been conducted: Indonesia (in cooperation with zoological organisations from the United Kingdom and United States), Peninsula Malaysia and Sabah. A major problem is believed to be the unnatural conditions which are provided by the captive programmes i.e. in terms of diet, climate (especially exposure to excessive sunlight and its ultraviolet component), size and complexity of enclosures, and social configuration of the rhino. As a consequence, the concept of re-orientating the captive programmes into managed breeding centres in a native habitat was developed through a series of meetings in Indonesia with PHPA. These "sanctuaries" will provide much larger enclosures and more natural conditions for the rhinos. The centres will be populated by rhinos which have been repatriated to native habitat from captivity. The SRS Programme is a collaborative effort of PHPA, Taman Safari Indonesia, Yayasan MISTRA Rhino and the International Rhino Foundation.

The Way Kambas Tiger Project is financially supported by Esso-UK and the Save the Tiger Fund (a joint venture between Exxon and the US National Fish and Wildlife Foundation). Financial support for the Indonesian Sumatran Rhino in situ protection programme is being provided by the GEF through UNDP with advice from UNEP. Funds for the Sumatran rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas are being provided by the International Rhino Foundation.

\*The usage of the term "sanctuary" is slightly different in the South East Asian context than in the context of African conservation. However, it is the objective for the managed breeding centres in Asia to evolve towards the African models.