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Last male rhino in Malaysia dies

by **Mongabay.com** on 27 May 2019

- *A Sumatran rhino affectionately known as Tam died May 27 following months of poor health.*
- *Tam was the last male Sumatran rhino known to survive in Malaysia. One female of the species is now living in Malaysia.*
- *When he was captured in 2008, researchers hoped he would contribute to efforts to breed the critically endangered species in captivity. Tam died without reproducing.*

Tam, the last known male Sumatran rhino in Malaysia, died May 27 after months of [declining health](#).

“It is with heavy hearts that we share the tragic news that Tam, Malaysia’s last male Sumatran rhino, has passed away,” the Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA), one of the organizations caring for Tam, announced [via social media](#). “We will share more details in due time, but right now we need some time [to] mourn his passing.”

Only a single female rhinoceros, Iman, now survives in the Southeast Asian country.

Apart from Iman, the entire global population of the critically endangered Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) now survives in Indonesia; the wild population in the island of Sumatra and in the Indonesian part of Borneo is estimated to number between 30 and 80 individuals. Another seven live in captivity at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Indonesia’s Way Kambas National Park, and a female was recently [captured in Indonesian Borneo](#) as part of an effort to greatly expand captive-breeding efforts in that country.



Kretam, or Tam for short, was captured in a palm oil plantation in Sabah, Malaysia, by a team of wildlife experts in 2008. Image courtesy of the Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA).

Tam was believed to be about 30 years old at the time of his death, well into old age for his species, according to wildlife officials from the Malaysian Bornean state of Sabah. Since April, he exhibited an abrupt decline in appetite and alertness, and displayed indications of multiple organ failure.

The rhino had been receiving round-the-clock veterinary care at the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary in Sabah's Tabin Wildlife Reserve, where he had lived since his capture in August 2008.

Tam's relocation from a palm oil plantation to the sanctuary brought hopes that he could contribute to efforts to breed his species in captivity. He died without having reproduced; Tam's sperm proved to be of poor quality, and the females held at the Tabin facility also suffered reproductive pathologies.

"I remember so well when Tam was captured and the high hopes everyone had that he could be the founding member of a successful captive breeding program in Sabah, and join the then-international efforts involving the US and Indonesia," said Susie Ellis, executive director of the International Rhino Foundation, in a statement. "Sadly, those hopes were repeatedly dashed over the next decade by a series of incidents, some sociopolitical, some biological, and some simply bad luck."



Tam, pictured here in 2010 at the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary. Image by Jeremy Hance for Mongabay.

Malaysia's sole remaining hope for producing new rhinos now lies with a much-delayed effort to artificially inseminate one of Iman's eggs using sperm from a proven breeder at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary.

However, Iman has also showed signs of poor health, suffering a [ruptured tumor](#) in her uterus in December 2017. And Indonesia has refused to allow sperm to be transferred out of the country, requiring that Iman's eggs be sent instead.

"What Indonesia wants is that everything happens here, nothing comes out of Indonesia," said Indra Eksploitasia, director of biodiversity conservation at Indonesia's environment ministry on the sidelines of a May 27 press conference in Jakarta.

John Payne, head of the Borneo Rhino Alliance, [told Mongabay](#) last week that he was angry at the lack of interest from parties that had agreed to pursue collaborative efforts in ensuring the survival of the rhino population in Malaysia.

"The numerous missed opportunities to conduct actions to save the world's most endangered terrestrial mammal genus from extinction is nothing short of irresponsible," Payne said.

According to Indra, Indonesia has submitted a proposal regarding the egg transfer, and is awaiting a reply from Malaysia. “The ball is now in Malaysia’s court,” she said.

“We’re sorry to hear the news,” Indra said of Tam’s death. “We’re working so that the same fate doesn’t happen with the rhinos in Indonesia.”

Correction: This story was updated May 28 to correct the spelling of Indra Eksploitasia’s name.