

Sumatran Rhino Rescue

In the dark, dense forests of Sumatra and Borneo, a handful of creatures eke out an existence

browsing on forest foliage, wallowing in mud and using their hairy ears to listen out for the 'singing' of potential mates.

But, there's a problem. There are so few of these bizarre and wonderful animals left that they are struggling to find one another to breed and produce the next generation.

Jack Bedford | Fundraising Officer



Sumatran Rhino Rescue Alliance Partners

IUCN Species Survival Commission, Global Wildlife Conservation, International Rhino Foundation, the National Geographic Society and WWF

I'm talking about the Critically Endangered Sumatran rhino. Experts suggest that fewer than 80 individuals remain in the wild, scattered across the islands of Sumatra and Borneo. Some live in the relative protection of national parks, whilst others cling on in unprotected fragments of their former habitat, threatened by human development and poaching. The species is on a knife edge: without action, the Sumatran rhino faces extinction.

In 2018, a group of international conservation organisations formed an alliance and hatched a plan to save the Sumatran rhino. Sumatran Rhino Rescue is a ground-breaking, collaborative approach to conservation that aims to save the Sumatran rhino by supporting search and rescue efforts to relocate rhinos from the wild and build conservation breeding facilities designed specifically for their care.

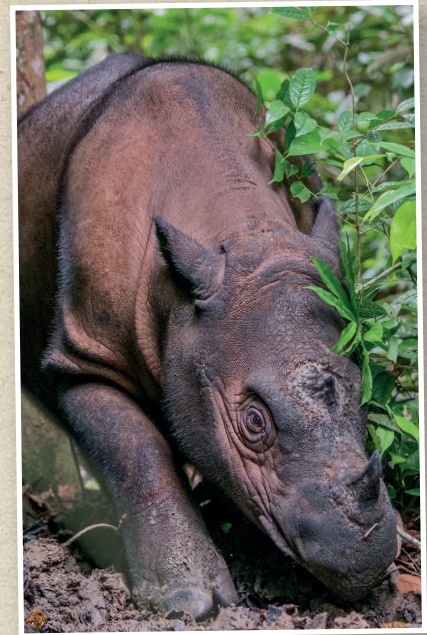
Step 1 Capacity building

The first step of the Sumatran Rhino Rescue effort is to ensure that all staff are well-trained to search, capture, relocate and look after the Sumatran rhinos. Alongside the existing Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park, two new sanctuaries will be built: one in Indonesian Borneo; the other in Gunung Leuser National Park in Aceh Province, northern Sumatra.

Step 2 Search and rescue

Next, the mission will focus on finding as many wild rhinos as possible living in small, isolated populations and relocating them to the managed conservation breeding facilities. Camera traps will be deployed to locate the few rhinos remaining in the wild. Once they have been found, efforts will turn to rescue the rhinos and bring them safely into the sanctuaries under the care of expert teams.

The project has already had its first success. In Indonesian Borneo, after extensive surveying, the Sumatran Rhino Rescue team discovered a female rhino roaming in an area threatened by mining developments. The rhino, named Pahu, was safely captured in a pit trap within her rapidly disappearing habitat and, under the expert eyes of conservationists and veterinarians, was relocated to a rehabilitation centre. Here she is receiving round-the-clock care, and it is hoped that she will contribute to the next generation of this unique species.



Step 3 Care and protection

The final step is to protect and breed the rhinos once they are in the sanctuaries. The Sumatran Rhino Rescue team aims to manage the rhinos in a single conservation breeding programme, using state-of-the-art veterinary and husbandry techniques to grow the population as efficiently as possible. At the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, the breeding programme has already paid off: two rhino calves, Andatu and Delilah, have been born at the centre since 2012! They are the beacons of hope for the project, demonstrating that with hard work, determination and the highest standards of care, Sumatran rhinos can successfully breed and have a future.

It will be a long and arduous road, but it is hoped that this project will eventually increase the population of Sumatran rhinos to the point where they can be returned to protected habitat. If we act now there is a chance, one day, of the Sumatran rhino thriving in the wild again.

We are excited to share that we joined Sumatran Rhino Rescue as a Strategic Partner, providing \$100,000 for the initiative under the leadership of the core alliance partners. Zoological and Botanical Garden Stuttgart, Wilhelma, has also joined as a Strategic Partner, continuing its commitment to seeing the Sumatran rhino flourish in the future.



How do you rescue and relocate a Sumatran rhino?

With the dense jungle canopy, it is impossible to spot the rhinos from the air and tranquilise them. Instead, to capture a Sumatran rhino, 'pit traps'—a hand-dug pit with a muddy base to cushion a rhino's fall—are built and covered with foliage as camouflage.

Once a rhino enters the pit, the rescue team must spring into action to quickly and safely get the rhino out of the pit and into a sanctuary.

IMAGES: CALBY BISHOP, BARNEY LONG, JOEL SARFOTE, WWW.MICKGABBUTT.COM

Isolation and infertility

Sumatran rhinos are struggling to find each other and breed. Exacerbating the problem, females can develop reproductive problems and infertility if they don't mate for long periods of time.

Sumatran rhinos are wonderful, caring, inquisitive animals.

The first ever Sumatran rhino born at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, Andalas (pictured bottom right) was born in 2012, followed by Delilah (pictured top right) in 2016.

