



Replanting areas that have previously been degraded is essential if we are to secure enough space for the Critically Endangered Sumatran rhino.

Beginning with small seedlings, and a whole community behind them, these plants will grow to full trees in three to four years.



# Growing harmony

Way Kambas National Park, on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, is home to one of the world's most endangered mammals, the Sumatran rhino. With fewer than 80 animals left, all living in small, fragmented populations, we must take immediate action to save the species from extinction.

**Christopher Whitlatch** | Communications Director, International Rhino Foundation

**W**ay Kambas National Park is the only protected area in Indonesia with no buffer zone – the Park is surrounded by villages on all sides. Human settlements have frequently encroached into the Park, destroying the habitat that rhinos and other wildlife need to survive. Sadly, around one-third of the rhinos' rainforest habitat has already been lost to human encroachment.

To boost the number of Sumatran rhinos, it's essential that we increase breeding efforts, but in the longer-term, we must also secure places for these rhinos to go. Together with a large coalition of partners, we're working simultaneously to achieve both of these goals; developing successful breeding programmes in rhino sanctuaries, while ensuring that there are safe and suitable habitats for every animal to live in the wild. Such wild habitats cannot simply be 'found', there are many factors to consider: how much space is required; how close is the new habitat to current locations; does it have the right food and water supply? Sometimes, the best approach is to restore a place that was previously suitable, but has since been degraded.

Reforestation can be difficult. Fires, tsunamis, and other natural disasters can each be a huge setback. And, of course, like any conservation project, the commitment of the local community, is crucial for the project to be sustainable. It's a delicate harmony between people and nature.

When a site is identified as potential good rhino habitat, they can't simply 'move in'. The site has to be cleared and replanted. Many such sites are located next to local villages, adding an additional challenge: villagers often collect fruits and other resources from the forest. A mutually beneficial solution has to be found for both people and wildlife.

To ensure the success of a reforestation project, we make sure that the local community are part of our efforts. Local farmers grow the new seedlings to replant the site, and people from a nearby village are hired to plant seedlings, maintain the area, and later harvest browse from mature trees to feed the rhinos at the nearby Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary. Once planted, trees should grow to maturity in just four or five years.

On the outside, bordering the village, local people will plant fruit trees that they can later harvest for themselves or to sell. At the core of the restoration area, rhinos' preferred foods will be planted. One plant, the jackfruit tree, is grown in both areas: it is liked by both humans and rhinos!

Such close working is critical to protect Sumatran rhinos. Not only will this boost our immediate conservation activities, but also improve harmony between people and wildlife for the future.

ALL IMAGES: NICK GARBUZZI