

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

As a result of long, tedious and dedicated efforts on the part of a number of Association members, two female Sumatran rhinoceros arrived in the United States from Indonesia on 22 November. One of the females was transported to the San Diego Zoo and the other to the Los Angeles Zoo. The animal at Los Angeles will remain there during the winter months and then will be transported to the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden.

This is the first time in nearly 100 years that the critically endangered Sumatran rhino will be held in North American zoos. The two females constitute the first shipment of a group of ten animals (five males and five females) that will ultimately make up a North American captive-breeding population to serve as a guard against the species' extinction in the wild.

The Association's interest in the species began long ago; but through the efforts of Warren Thomas, Tom Foose, Ed Maruska and others, who urged the Association to become actively involved in a rescue attempt, a Sumatran Rhino Trust was formed and several institutions signed on, thus dedicating both substantial financial resources and technical expertise. Later, the species was formally incorporated into the Association's Species Survival Plan. Warren Thomas and Tom Foose made frequent trips to Indonesia to work out the myriad of details with governmental agencies, Indonesian zoo officials and other Indonesian conservationists. Thomas serves as both the Chairman of the Sumatran Rhino Trust and the Species Coordinator.

The long-range plan includes that breeding pairs will ultimately be held at the Cincinnati Zoo, Los Angeles Zoo, New York's Bronx Zoo and the San Diego Zoo/Wild Animal Park. The exact figure on the rapidly disappearing wild population is difficult to determine. However, estimates range between 500 and 700 specimens. Many of them are in small, isolated groups of far too few animals to constitute major breeding wild populations. All of the animals shipped to the United States will remain the property of the Government of Indonesia, and participating zoos will provide financial support to the on-going conservation efforts in Indonesia. Several zoos, other than the four designated to initially receive Sumatran rhinos, have been helpful in this rescue effort; and those institutions will ultimately receive captive-born Sumatran rhinos if the program is as successful as hoped.

The Sumatran Rhino Trust retained the services of Tony Parkinson, a professional animal trapper, to assist in the capture project. Parkinson was able to capture the rhinos in two months. Francesco Nardelli, a well-known naturalist, was retained to handle local logistical arrangements, including transportation, providing supplies for the field operation and keeping the Indonesian officials apprised of the project. Because of the terrain in which the rhinos were captured, the task of getting the animals from the capture site to the holding areas was extremely arduous; but the rhinos made the journey with no adverse effect.

The Sumatran rhino is one of the most unique of the five species of rhino, all of which are endangered. It is quite small, ranging from only 2,000 to 4,000 pounds, and its body is normally covered with orange-blond hair. Sumatran rhinos are solitary animals except during a relatively short breeding season.

(R. Wagner)