

SUMATRAN RHINO CRISIS SUMMIT



Last chance to act!

***GLOBAL SUPPORT
NEEDED TO PREVENT
THE FIRST RHINO
SPECIES EXTINCTION
OF THE 21st
CENTURY.***

Date: Sunday 31 March –
Thursday 4 April, 2013

Location: Jurong Bird Park, Singapore

(a neutral venue for species
range states, and accessible
for international participants)

What is the issue?

Two-horned hairy rhinos have lived on Earth for 20 million years. The latest, smallest and last form of this rhino, known as the Sumatran rhinoceros, was once widespread throughout South-east Asia. Sumatran rhinos have been in terminal decline since the 1990s and their numbers have reduced to around 200 individuals. Numbers are now so low that we may see the rhino finally vanish in the coming decade, if we do not act fast and massively now.

What needs to be done?

Review the situation and our existing strategies. Identify key issues on which action has to be taken. Get inspiration from previous endangered species campaigns and implement lessons learned. Craft an ambitious yet achievable plan. Source financing to realize the plan. Seek strong governmental commitment and support for implementing the plan.

What is your role?

Participate in the summit. Help identify the key issues. Provide relevant experience. Help develop the plan. Help raise funds. Promote 100% government commitment and support.

The Sumatran rhino story

The Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) is on the brink of extinction on the equatorial islands of Borneo and Sumatra. Over five decades ago, pioneering conservationists were already concerned over its rarity. In 1984, the IUCN Species Survival Commission Captive Breeding Specialist Group, on behalf of the IUCN, convened a 3-day meeting in Singapore to “formulate an acceptable plan for a captive propagation project as part of the overall strategy for the conservation of the Sumatran rhino”. Twenty participants representing governments of the three main Sumatran rhino regions (Indonesia, Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah), zoos and others, agreed to a plan to, firstly, prioritise conservation of wild Sumatran rhino populations and, secondly, form a loosely-coordinated global captive population drawn from rhinos outside protected areas. What happened after that?

Eight natural forest habitats containing Sumatran rhinos were protected in the three main Sumatran rhino regions, and 40 rhinos were captured between 1985-94 from areas being converted to plantations, for the captive breeding programme. The wild populations in the 8 areas mostly have stagnated, declined or gone extinct.

Map 1: Historic and Current Distribution of Sumatran rhinoceros (courtesy IUCN-IRF – Nico van Strien)

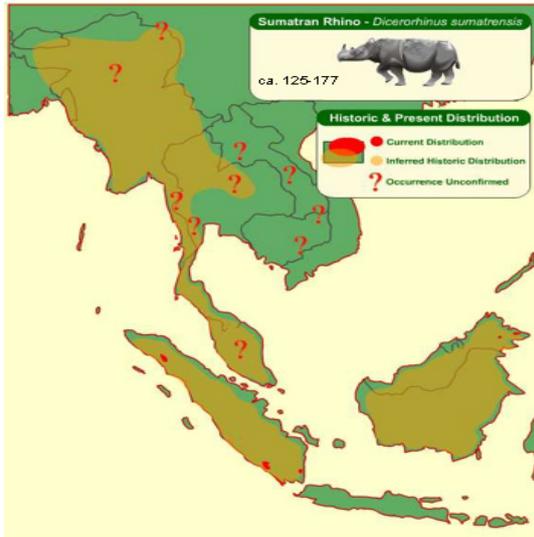


Fig. 1. Decline in estimated population numbers of Sumatran rhinos across their range

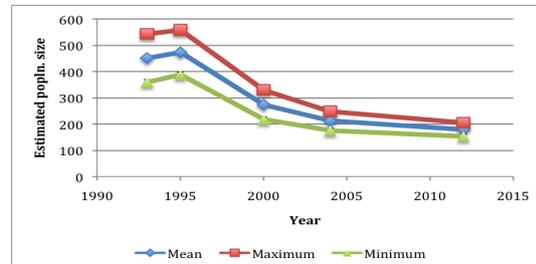


Table 1: Estimates of Sumatran rhinos left in the wild (IUCN 2012)

Name of PA	Size of PA (km ²)	No. of rhino 2010-11 estimates	End of 2012 estimates
Indonesia (Sumatra)			
Bukit Barisan Selatan	3,000	60 - 70	60-70
Gunung Leuser Ecosystem	8,000	40 - 80	40-80
Way Kambas	600	25-27	25-27
Sub-total		125-177	125-177
Sabah (Malaysia)			
Tabin	1,220	15	2
Danum Valley	500	13	<13
Isolated rhinos		?	?
Sub-total		28	15
Total		152-205	140-192

Note : except for Way Kambas, the estimates for 2010-11 are believed to be overly optimistic

Table 2: Sumatran rhinos in captivity

Location	No. of rhinos received into captivity 1985-2004	No. of 1985-2004 rhinos still alive	New rhinos received into captivity after 2004	Total no. of calves produced	Male : female ratio, 2012
Peninsular Malaysia	11	0	0	*1	-
Sabah (Malaysia)	10	1	2	0	1:2
Indonesia	9	1	2	**1	2:3
USA (from Indonesia)	7	1	0	3	2:1
UK (from Indonesia)	3	0	0	0	-
Totals	40	3	4	4	5:6

Note : * mother pregnant when captured, ** father born in Cincinnati Zoo

From the 14 sites that recorded the presence of wild Sumatran rhinos in 1995, only five still have incontrovertible evidence of the species in 2012 and they are now restricted to the island of Sumatra, Indonesia (Bukit Barisan Selatan, Gunung Leuser & Way Kambas National Parks) and Malaysian Borneo (Danum Valley Conservation Area & possibly Tabin Wildlife Reserve). The 1984-2012 strategy of trying to protect them in the wild has not resulted in increasing their numbers except in Way Kambas.

The 2012 best guess of Sumatran rhino numbers is less than 150, down from an estimated 413 - 563 in 1995. The past population estimates are debatable, but specific numbers do not really matter. Any species numbering less than 200 and declining is in very serious trouble.

What went wrong? Protection and monitoring of the wild populations was inadequate and, in any case, by the 1990s, the rhino population densities were probably already too low for them to recover without intensive management intervention. The captive propagation plan largely failed through a fatal combination of diverse factors including dealing with a solitary species which is inherently difficult to breed, inadequate knowledge of rhino breeding biology and dietary requirements, cautious decision-making, poor hygiene in some facilities, weak collaboration, emphasis on capture of "doomed" rhinos rather than fertile rhinos, and a willingness to keep on doing the same thing and waiting in vain for a better result. Yet three calves were produced by one rhino pair in Cincinnati Zoo in 2001, 2004 and 2007.

An ad hoc grouping, the Sumatran rhino global propagation and management board (GMPB) consisting of representatives of rhino range states, rhino breeding facilities and donors, has been meeting since 2005. But since then, only four additional rhinos have been brought into captivity, and one additional program has succeeded with one captive birth (at Way Kambas, Sumatra), of a male whose father and grand-father are also in captivity. The only unrelated male is held separately in Sabah. The pace is too slow to save the species. Fresh ideas and perspectives are needed to help decide what to do next.

The essence of the problem now is that there are only a few breeding females. This applies to wild and captive Sumatran rhinos. Prevention of poaching is a necessary but now insufficient approach. Dedicated rhino protection units stave off poaching but are not fool-proof. The species may go extinct even if all poaching can be stopped. A conservation programme now needs to put in place measures that significantly boost rhino birth rate in captive conditions.

The Sumatran rhino receives much less attention than other endangered big mammals globally and locally, and it seems it would be convenient for everyone to let it slide to extinction. So, the basic question remaining is : do we give up and let the species go extinct, or have one last try to boost production of baby rhinos?

The answer should be obvious. There are small groups of dedicated people willing to try. They want to use the inspiration and lessons learned in bringing back species on the edge such Californian condor, black footed ferret, crested Ibis, red wolf, Indian rhino and white rhino, and to stop us from making the same mistakes that were made that led to the extinction of the Yangtze river dolphin, the Javan rhino in Vietnam, and the northern white rhino.

There are already a few hard core donors to Sumatran rhino conservation work. Knowledge of Sumatran rhino biology under captive conditions, along with techniques for captive husbandry and breeding, have improved greatly since 1984. Assisted reproductive technologies for large mammals continue to advance. Twenty-nine years later, let us garner global support to give the "last try" its best shot. And let us be able to say, thirty years on, that there is in place a functioning array of measures that have started to turn the tide, to boost birth rate of the remaining Sumatran rhinos, and to bring the species back from the brink.

Summit Objectives

1. To forge a global Sumatran rhino conservation plan (this will involve a review and synthesis of existing plans, enhanced by the experiences of people who have been involved in successes and failures with endangered species; captive breeding will be seen in the context of a long-term re-introduction into the wild).
2. To seek new impetus (via new potential financing sources, influence and partnerships) to support the goal of preventing the extinction of the Sumatran rhinoceros.
3. To lift the conversation from local, national and Sumatran rhino specialist levels to a broad, global platform.
4. To seek ways to help those working on the ground secure enhanced governmental, political and financial support.
5. To initiate a process to raise Euro 30 million for the prevention of the extinction of the Sumatran rhinoceros.

Proposed participation

- People involved in Sumatran rhino conservation and breeding
- People who will be involved in Sumatran rhino conservation and breeding after 2013
- People who have worked on other endangered species and sub-species that have been saved from extinction or that have gone extinct in recent decades
- Governmental and non-governmental representatives of the Sumatran rhino's current range states
- Institutions and persons who are involved in Sumatran rhino conservation financing
- Institutions and persons who may initiate new opportunities for sustainable financing

Financing the Sumatran Rhino Crisis Summit

Co-funding support is agreed between Sime Darby Foundation, Wildlife Reserves Singapore, WWF, Borneo Rhino Alliance, LEAP and Taman Safari Indonesia. U.S. State Department is being asked to contribute.



Puntung in her forest stockade a day after capture.