WWF

FACTSHEET

HoB

2012

Sumatran Rhinoceros

(Dicerorhinus Sumatrensis Harrissoni)

FACTSHEET 20

There are three species of Asian rhino: Greater One-horned (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), Javan (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) and Sumatran (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*). The Sumatran rhino is the smallest, has two horns, and is comprised of two living subspecies: *D. sumatrensis sumatrensis* found in Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, and *D. sumatrensis harrissoni* found in Borneo. The Bornean subspecies is the smallest of all five rhino species found in the world.

The Sumatran rhino is listed as critically endangered with probably less than 150 left in the wilds of Sumatra and Borneo, and possibly mainland Asia. Weighing around 600-700kg, this rhino stands at 1-1.5m tall at the shoulder and measures 2-3m in length. It has relatively few skin wrinkles except around the neck. The skin is 16mm thick at its thickest part and is usually dark grey to brown in color. Like other rhinos, the Sumatran rhino has poor vision.

There is no recent confirmed record of Sumatran rhinos in their former ranges in Sarawak and Kalimantan. In Sabah, the distribution of *'badak'* (local name for rhino) continues to shrink. Current population numbers have declined to alarming levels with an estimated 25-50 rhinos remaining in the forests of Borneo.

Sumatran Rhinoceros *(Dicerorhinus sumatrensis harrissoni)*

The Sumatran rhino has been recorded in a wide variety of forest habitats from lowland rainforests and swamps to mountain moss forests. It has been reported to prefer hilly areas near water, particularly steep upper valleys with thick undergrowth. It also lives in secondary forests with food sources from smaller shrubs and vines. A healthy diet for the Sumatran rhino consists of a great diversity of tropical vegetation. In one day, it can eat 50kg of leaves of saplings and small trees. A rhino also feeds on fallen fruits and is reputed to favor figs and wild mangoes. Natural mineral concentrations (salt licks) are an essential habitat requirement of the Sumatran rhino to obtain salt and socialize with others.

Despite the long history of the rhino (Dicerorhinus) on earth for 25 million years, recent human-induced threats have pushed the species close to extinction. The ever-dropping numbers of Sumatran rhinos was in the past mainly due to illegal hunting. Poachers target rhinos for supposed medicinal properties in their horns and other body parts which carry a high price on the black market. Small populations can only support a small gene pool, leading to inbreeding and related complications. Rhinos are so rare that they are not isolated so much now due to lack of forest, but isolated from one another because they are solitary and live in home ranges that do not overlap. With so few rhinos remaining, the loss of each additional animal brings the species dangerously close to extinction.

Heightening breeding opportunities

WWF's goal on target species, including the Sumatran rhinoceros, is that 'by 2020, populations of the most ecologically, economically and culturally important species are restored and thriving in the wild'. One step forward is to concentrate on a few of the remaining wild breeding rhinos and place them in a situation where their chances of breeding are increased.

What is WWF doing to achieve this?

In 2005, WWF-Malaysia along with partners, Honda Malaysia, Sabah Wildlife Department and Sabah Foundation, initiated a five-year project called Rhino Rescue to strengthen Sumatran rhino conservation efforts in Sabah. The activities involve:

- Studying rhino distribution, ecology, breeding and habitat by using camera and video traps;
- Strengthening enforcement and patrolling in and around rhino areas, and
- Preparing a strategic Rhino Conservation Action Plan for Sabah.

A survey was conducted in May 2005 in and around Danum Valley Conservation Area to determine the number of rhinos. As part of this effort, a patrol and monitoring team was established to monitor the presence of rhinos. This multi-stakeholder effort involved Sabah Wildlife Department, Sabah Forestry Department, Sabah Foundation, Sabah Parks, Kinabatangan Orang-utan Conservation Project, SOS-Rhino (currently known as Borneo Rhinoceros Alliance – BORA), Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Raleigh International, and WWF-Malaysia.

WWF

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To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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Towards a Greener HoB

Understanding the behaviour of the Sumatran rhino in the Heart of Borneo is vital to the planning and management of protected areas and wildlife corridors. This promotes the sustainability of the forest in conjunction with sustainable economic activities, increasing the attractiveness of the Borneo rainforest with its rich bio-diversity.

WWF - Heart of Borneo Initiative

Ensuring the forests of the Heart of Borneo are worth more standing than cut down...

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