



Borneo Rhino Sanctuary (BRS) programme (restricted distribution)

Quarterly report : 1 April 30 June 2010

Programme objective

To prevent the extinction of the Sumatran rhinoceros in Sabah by protecting wild rhinos and by bringing rhinos together in managed breeding facilities at Tabin Wildlife Reserve

Main participating agencies

Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD), Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA), Sabah Forestry Department, WWF-Malaysia.

Main financing agencies during this quarter

Yayasan Sime Darby; Sabah Wildlife Department; BORA (funds raised from multiple donors in March 2009); WWF-Malaysia; WWF-Germany.

Programme description

- protection and monitoring of wild rhinos in Tabin Wildlife Reserve (BORA-SWD) and Danum Valley Conservation Area (WWF-Malaysia), the only two areas where potentially viable wild populations exist.
- establishing Borneo Rhinoceros Sanctuary (BRS) breeding facilities (a managed, fenced area) inside Tabin Wildlife Reserve.
- bringing isolated remnant rhinos from non-viable situations, into BRS.
- establishing a sustainable financing scheme to allow long-term operations of BRS.
- appointing a professional company to manage BRS and its rhinos

Activities and progress

Monitoring wild rhinos at Tabin Due to a continuing focus during this quarter on rhino rescue work, only short ad hoc monitoring /patrol trips were done. The 10 WWF camera traps set in February within the home range of Puntung were removed in early April, in

order minimize disturbance to this rhino. A series of photos was obtained (see below) of a rhino assumed to be Puntung.

Interim rhino facilities and Tam Following arrival of Dr Zainal Zahari Zainuddin as BORA field manager at Tabin (see below), additional improvements were made to the interim rhino facilities, in order to allow for a second rhino, and to protocols for care of Tam (e.g. iron-free salt blocks, dipping of food in mineral-rich water prior to feeding, single daily harvesting of food plants).

Design of BRS breeding facilities The revised concept for the physical structure of BRS, following the Indonesian Way Kambas model, was approved by government of Sabah, and the specific site recommended by BORA and Sabah Wildlife Department was agreed. A topographical survey of the 20 hectare site – which will include road access, five individual fenced paddocks, ten night stalls, two small breeding paddocks, simple staff quarters and other infrastructure - was done in April, under the Sabah Development Corridor allocation for BRS. The appointed consultant designed a 1.5 km access road to the breeding facilities, following a 1970s logging road alignment starting at km 2 on the core area road. Preliminary alignments for the perimeter fence of the breeding facilities were identified.

Rhino rescue Over two tonnes of materials (crate, temporary fencing, pump, field staff foods etc) were successfully brought to the chosen capture site for Puntung in Tabin, by Bell Jet Ranger helicopter on 9 April. A base camp to house a minimum of 12 persons was constructed about 1 km from the trap site, so that the trap may be monitored twice daily (early morning and late afternoon), and action taken if a rhino (or any other large mammal) enters the trap. The trap (a seven-foot-deep pit, into which is inserted a wooden crate, with leaves and twigs as bedding, and with doors resting on a trigger) was built by sixteen men 11-12 April. However, the site was judged unsuitable during construction, because the “soil” at the site consists of boulders and sand, which are unstable and wedge the crate into the ground. An alternative site about 200 meters away, was selected 12-13 April, and a new pit trap successfully built 14-15 April. Unfortunately, this site has rock as its bottom, and rainwater cannot escape during heavy rain storms. A minimum of six persons were maintained at all times during this quarter to monitor the trap twice daily. Tabin experienced frequent and often heavy rain during this quarter, so frequent pumping of water out of the trap was necessary. It is unlikely that Puntung will return to the site until a long drier period is underway.

Staff accommodation Work on construction of the Tabin Wildlife Officer house and terrace house for staff associated with BRS (both houses funded by Yayasan Sime Darby) continued during this quarter. Work on major renovation of old kitchens and stores behind the wooden longhouse at Tabin, in order to provide additional rooms for BORA field staff, continued during this quarter.

Staffing Dr Zainal Zahari Zainuddin, recruited by BORA as the programme veterinarian and site manager for Tabin, at last joined BORA on a full-time basis commencing 5 April. A new operations officer, Ms Audra Webber, joined BORA starting May 2010.

Rhino Action Plan A draft Rhino Action Plan (draft text by BORA in collaboration with SWD and WWF-Malaysia) was prepared during this quarter, with a multi-stakeholder workshop held 10 and 11 June to discuss this and similar species action plans for orang-utan and elephant in Sabah.

Meetings held SWD programme coordinator and BORA executive director, 8 & 14 April, 29 May; SWD-BORA-BRS consultant, 27 May, 24, 25 & 28 June; BORA board meetings, 8 June; BORA-WWF, 6 April, 17 May.

International connections BORA executive director, together with staff of WWF-Malaysia and WWF-Vietnam, visited Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam, 30 March-3 April, to observe trained tracker dogs (labradors from USA) seeking rhino faeces as a possible means to locate rhinos and to collect faeces for extraction of rhino DNA, with the intent to distinguish different rhinos living in remote areas. It was concluded that trained dogs would not be useful for the Sabah rhino rescue programme in terms of seeking rhinos or locating best trap sites, although such dogs might be useful in the future as part of an additional programme to estimate wild rhino numbers in Tabin Wildlife Reserve. In early May 2010, there came news that the skeleton of a poached rhino had been found in Cat Tien, and it is feared that that individual may have been the last of the species in Vietnam.

Sustainable financing

In April, both WWF-Germany and the US Fish & Wildlife Service approved grants to BORA for maintaining rhino protection units and building infrastructure other than that funded by Yayasan Sime Darby. A stakeholder workshop at Sabah Forestry Department on “no net loss” of natural habitat (17 and 18 June) provided support for taking this concept (obligatory replacement of habitat or biodiversity values lost by destruction of existing wild habitat) forward in Sabah, and a small prospect that this concept might possibly be applied to Tabin Wildlife Reserve (and rhinos) in the future.

Other issues

A satellite tracking collar was received from Sweden during this quarter to fit to Tam.

A security consultant (Datuk Clement Jaikul) was contracted by BORA for the period April-June 2010, to advise on possible ways to improve security for rhinos in the Tabin region, with special reference to the role of the Royal Malaysian Police Department. Contact was made with the Lahad Datu District Police Chief, Supt. Shamsudin Mat.

Discussions on rhino conservation issues were held with relevant persons (including TRAFFIC regional director, Dr William Schaedla) at the annual WWF global conference held in Kota Kinabalu, 10-13 May.

The Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Sabah affirmed his support for rhino conservation during a courtesy call by BORA on 7 June.

Plans for next quarter

(1) Capture Puntung. (2) Initiate plans to rescue a second rhino, from the Lower Kinabatangan Segama Wetlands. (3) Initiate construction of access road to BRS breeding facilities. (4) Finalise design of the BRS breeding facilities.



Images of a rhino within the home range of Puntung, obtained using WWF camera traps (1 April 2010); the front left foot is unclear in all this series of images, but this rhino is assumed to be Puntung.



(Left) Sections of rhino trap crate and “boma” fencing arrayed ready for the helicopter lift to the trap site in Tabin Wildlife Reserve, 9 April. (Right) weighing each piece, to ensure the helicopter is not overloaded



(Left) The Bell Jet Ranger needed over 20 trips to bring all the materials to the trap site. (Right) the site to which all the trap materials were brought



(Left) Base camp for the rhino trap site in Tabin. (Right) Bathing after a day digging a rhino trap.



(Left) Dismay when on 13 April, it is decided that the soil conditions at the first chosen rhino trap site are too unstable to maintain the site. (Right) Satisfaction later the same day, when an alternative trap site is located and agreed upon.



(Left) Soil and rocks dug from the trap pit, which has to be removed and disposed of manually away from the trap site. (Right) Fallen flowers of dipterocarp trees in the Malambabula river, Tabin, mid April 2010.