



Borneo Rhino Sanctuary (BRS) programme (restricted distribution)

Quarterly report : covering the period October-November 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 (TWR)

### **Main participating agencies**

Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD), Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA), Sabah Forestry Department, WWF-Malaysia, Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW; Berlin), Zoo Leipzig

### **Main financing agencies during this quarter**

Sime Darby Foundation; Sabah Wildlife Department; WWF-Germany; WWF-Malaysia; BORA; US Fish & Wildlife Service Rhino & Tiger Conservation Fund

### **Programme description** (following May 2009 Sabah State Cabinet decision)

- protection and monitoring of wild rhinos in TWR (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 TWR.
- 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 and security of wild rhinos at TWR Routine patrols were done along the Tabin – oil palm plantation boundary in the north (13-15 October; Tabin Plantation) and south-east (24-29 October), and south-west (Kuala Lumpur Kepong estates) in November. A row of about 10 snare traps about 1 week old was found on 14 October together with a crudely made spear and a sack. The snares were clearly for animals smaller than a rhinoceros. Along the south-eastern border between Tabin and Long Libong estate, snare traps, a shotgun cartridge and other signs of poacher activity were found on 27 October. The snare traps destroyed. 15-19 November, along south-western border between Rimmer river and Tabin entrance gate, a newly cut trail presumably done by poachers was found on 16 November, and a single poacher with shotgun was glimpsed near Christiansen river, running from the forest into the plantation. Shotgun shots were heard every night but no snare traps were found.

Rhino rescue The pit trap at Malambabula was monitored twice daily throughout this reporting period, with a minimum of six persons stationed near the trap at all times. Puntung was sighted about 100 metres from the trap on 19 October, and her fresh footprints were found again near the same site on 8 November. Concern has been expressed that Puntung may have been “scared away” from the trap due to daily human presence. The fact that rhinos have keen senses of smell and hearing is indeed a concern, but it seems unlikely that Puntung did not walk into the trap for these reasons. In fact, she was seen not on her old trail but instead on the trail cut by the rhino capture team in order to avoid the team walking on Puntung’s own trail. The main reason Puntung did not walk along her old trail is most likely because a natural tree fall blocked that trail.

Visits were made in October and November to the northern ridge top area to select a site for a possible second trap. At end of November, the preferred option was to try to attract Puntung back towards the Malambabula trap area by “baiting” the area every four days with fresh faeces of Gelogob (which is expected to draw Puntung’s curiosity) but to pursue the option of building a second trap on the north side of her home range.

Interim rhino facilities Chlorination of water at the interim facilities was introduced in November.

BRS breeding facilities Contract to build the road access route to the permanent BRS breeding facilities site (about 1.2 km extra from an existing road) was issued by government and work commenced in October. The BRS breeding facilities design details were finalised in November, with SWD, BORA and the appointed consultant working together on all aspects. Zoo Leipzig experts provided last-minute recommendations for modifications. The basic design is a central building with 8 rhino night stalls, a store, a preparation room, a restraint chute, five forest paddocks of 2- 4 ha each, and two “breeding paddocks” of about 30 x 50 meters each, plus maintenance and guard staff quarters.

Staff accommodation Accommodation for staff working at TWR, both SWD and BORA, financed by Sime Darby Foundation and WWF, were officially opened at a ceremony held at TWR on 12 November (see newspaper cutting below).

Meetings held SWD programme coordinator and BORA executive director, 29 November; SWD-BORA-BRS consultant, 22 & 28 October, 16 & 29 November; SWD-BORA –IZW, 24 & 27 November; BORA-IZW, 21 November; BORA-Zoo Leipzig, 25 November; SWD-BORA-Zoo Leipzig, 26 November. A meeting was held 17 November between BORA and Camp Borneo, a company that places foreign volunteers in rural Sabah, with the possibility of involvement in forest improvement in the TWR border area.

International connections A memorandum of understanding was signed at SWD headquarters between SWD, Leibnitz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW; Berlin) and Zoo Leipzig on 22 November (see news cutting, below).

### **Other issues**

A presentation on “arresting species extinctions in Malaysia” was given at the Malaysian Nature Society seventieth anniversary conference in Kuala Lumpur, 9 October, with the Sumatran rhino as a key example.

A training course on capture and care of the Sumatran rhinoceros was given at TWR 25-26 October by SWD and the BORA veterinarian, to wildlife veterinarians working at the SWD Wildlife Rescue Unit, WWF-Malaysia and HUTAN. This was to prepare for the possibility that either or both the BORA and SWD veterinarians may be absent from Sabah whenever Puntung enters the Malambabula trap.

A satellite tracking device was fitted to Tam on a collar around his neck on 13 November; the idea was to observe if there might be any problems with such a device in terms of both effect on Tam’s behaviour (at time of writing there was none) and the level of detail to which movements might be detectable remotely; with this information, the device is available to attach to any rhino at any time in the future, if circumstances require it.

An interview was given, 25 November, by the BORA executive director for a CNBC programme on corporate environmental responsibility, where Wilmar, Sime Darby and Tradewinds were mentioned in relation to rhinos at TWR. Sabah rhinos and the BRS programme were mentioned in public domain during the reporting period, including local newspaper articles (see newspaper cutting below).

### **Plans for next quarter**

- (1) Capture Puntung. (2) Gelogob is to be treated with hormones in January 2011 (and again in June 2011, irrespective of previous failure or success) by German/Austrian/Australian specialists in collaboration with Sabah Wildlife Department and the BORA veterinarian. The idea is to induce Gelogob to produce eggs, which might then be fertilized, via artificial insemination, using sperm from Tam. (3) Construct access road to BRS breeding facilities.



(left) snare traps, set for smaller animals including deer, pheasants etc and (right) crudely made spear (14 October)



(Left) General view of the interim rhino facilities at TWR (November). (Right) Gelogob in her wallow at TWR; usually, rainfall is more than adequate to keep the wallow liquid, but water has to be pumped to the wallow if it becomes too dry (October).



(Left) Tam feeds in his night stall; note the satellite tracking collar. (Right) View from above of a restraint “chute” (removable iron pipes in the night stalls) which allows restraint of the rhinos for monitoring and health care.





(Left) BORA field manager / veterinarian views the proposed permanent BRS breeding facilities site. (Right) Initial construction work on the 1.2 km access road to the BRS breeding facilities (25 November 2010, note effects of rain).



(Left) Every alternate night, the BORA veterinarian prepares for the planned ovulation attempt by use of a rectal transducer supplied by IZW, to obtain an ultrasound image of Gelogob's reproductive tract. (Centre) One of Puntung's wallows on the ridge which forms the northern edge of her home range (November). (Right) placement of faeces from Gelogob near the rhino trap as an experimental means to attract Puntung to the trap area.



Adlin (second left) and Dr Laurentius (second right) opening the quarters, witnessed by Dr Junaidi (left) and Yatela (centre).

## Quarters to assist Rhino Sanctuary programme

Efa Rizan

LAHAD DATU: Personnel of the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary (BRS) programme can now work better knowing that they have comfortable quarters to return to - courtesy of the Sime Darby Foundation, WWF Malaysia and WWF Germany.

During the opening ceremony at Tabin Wildlife Reserve here on Friday, State Wildlife Director Dr Laurentius N Ambu said the quarters were very important to the ones involved in the programme.

"I am very grateful for the donation as it will greatly assist in this project. We will add facilities from time to time for the workers and the use of the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary programme," he said.

"On the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary programme, we will strive hard and seek co-operation from experts in order to prevent the rhinoceros from becoming extinct. The rhinos should be properly maintained as the numbers are dwindling significantly," he said.

Sime Darby Foundation Board member Tan Sri Dr Wan Mohd Zahid Mohd Noordin, in his speech delivered by Sime Darby Foundation Chief Executive Officer Yatela Zainal Abidin, said it had been more than a year since they started their relationship with the

BRS programme and Tabin Wildlife Reserve.

"We have committed RM5 million over three years to the BRS programme for consultant and staff costs and accommodation, to improve the facilities and for translocation equipment."

"For the Tabin Wildlife Reserve, the Sime Darby Foundation committed to contribute RM2.3 million over two years to support activities at the reserve, such as management to staffing, transportation, road works and maintenance," she said.

She also said the quarters would be very useful indeed in ensuring that the people who have dedicated themselves to this cause have proper facilities to carry out their duties.

"I wish to congratulate all those who have committed themselves to making our efforts possible and for their utmost dedications and passion to ensure the survival of the endangered animal species," she added.

Also present were WWF Malaysia President, Dato' Seri Tengku Zainal Adlin, Executive Director of Borneo Rhino Alliance, Dr HJ Junaidi Payne, and Chief Technical Officer for the Borneo Programme WWF Malaysia, Dr Rahimatsah Amat.

Daily Express

## Local



Dr Laurentius (centre) presenting mementoes to Dr Herbert (right) and Leipzig Zoo representative.

## World's attention on bid to breed rhino

Larry Raion

KOTA KINABALU: The world's attention will be on the Tabin Wildlife Sanctuary in Lahad Datu for the next 12 months as it witnesses an attempt to breed the Sumatran rhinoceros - the world's most endangered rhino species.

This will be done under a collaboration between the State Government and Germany. If successful, it will be an important milestone not only for the State's conservation efforts but also the world.

The Sumatran rhino has been known all the while to be very sensitive with countless attempts made previously to breed it failing.

The breeding attempt is one of the collaboration projects under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW), the Leipzig Zoo (LZ) and State Government, represented by the Sabah Wildlife Department.

It was signed Wildlife Director Dr Laurentius N. Ambu, IZW Director Prof. Dr Herbert Hofer DPhil and LZ Director Dr Jorg Janschold in a ceremony held at the department headquarters in Wisma Maia, here, Monday.



The female rhino in Tabin with Leipzig Zoo keeper.

quarters in Wisma Maia, here, Monday.

The LZ is aimed at conducting international expertise and resources in order to prevent further losses of biodiversity.

Sabah is internationally renowned as one of the world's most important biotopes of biodiversity, including the world's oldest rainforests with its associated flora and fauna.

According to the IUCN, Sabah's large animals - such as the Sumatran rhinoceros, Borneo pygmy elephants, Borneo cloud leopard and orang utan, which are seriously threatened, face no extinction crisis.

Personal issues about the WWF, Department and IZW have cooperated in conducting research on the conservation needs of threatened Bornean mammals.

This initiative has raised international attention through the re-discovery of the half-grown rhino in Sabah alive over 100 years, and the first rhino ever taken of the Sumatran cloud leopard or the malagasy giant civet.

With the LZ signed, this partnership will expand its reach to other Bornean flagship species such as the Sumatran rhino.

Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has agreed to finance the attempt to breed the Sumatran rhino, the first project in the collaboration.

The Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* Javanicus) is a subspecies of the Sumatran rhino and primarily lives in the lowland rainforests of the State.

It is the smallest rhino and with less than 30 individuals it is the most endangered rhino species on the planet after the Northern white rhino in Africa.

The Wildlife Department, with the cooperation of the Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA) and WWF Malaysia, started a comprehensive conservation programme to protect and breed these impressive rhinos.

The Borneo Rhino Alliance Programme is jointly funded by the Malaysian Government through the Sabah Development Corporation as well as Yayasan Rime Darby.

"Japanese Rhinoceros has been very instrumental in initiating the Rhino Rescue Programme here in Sabah. The IZW will contribute to this programme with its scientific expertise in assisted reproduction techniques, and the LZ will contribute their skills in animal husbandry and will train our local staff in handling the animals," said Dr Laurentius.

The IZW is known for its scientifically based approach to conservation research.

"With the financial support from the German Federal Ministry of Research and Education, which has recently been granted for the Sabah rhino project, we are able to implement research and to support the local breeding programme with high-tech equipment and a team of experts from Germany and Australia," said Dr Herbert.

LZ will send skilled keepers to Sabah in order to exchange their experiences in captive management, enrichment techniques and in enclosure design with the local keepers in Lahad Datu and Tabin.

"On top of this we will inform more than two million visitors annually about Sabah's outstanding rhino conservation project in our tropical hall 'Commodoreland', which will open in 2012," said Dr Jorg.

The IZW and LZ are closely collaborating with the Sabah Government and other partners in the region, which will help promote the Sabah rhino project in Germany.

The cooperation between the Wildlife Department, IZW and LZ was initiated in November 2008 during a visit by the



Tabu, the young male rhino in Tabin.

directors of the two German institutions in Sabah.

The parties agreed to cooperate, improve, develop and implement strategies in the field of wildlife conservation research, wildlife veterinary medicine and zoo management activities.

Shortly after their visit, the experts from both organisations performed a reproductive assessment of a captive male and female rhino, conducted by a specialist team of wildlife veterinarians selected by Dr Thomas Heidebrecht from IZW and Prof. Chris Walzer from the Veterinary University of Vienna.

In January next year, the next step of the programme of reproductive research will take place.

"A female rhino, recently transferred to Tabin, will be stimulated with hormones and artificially inseminated," said Dr Peter Riemchen from IZW.

Explaining further, she said the resulting embryos will be collected and frozen in liquid nitrogen. Her genes are very valuable for the survival of the species but she is unfortunately too old to breed naturally.

Being fertile is necessary for the success of the Sabah rhino conservation programme and to maintain research.

Large areas of Sabah's rainforest have disappeared for oil palm and rubber plantations, making the rhino's habitat increasingly fragmented and isolated.

The Rhino and Forest Fund, a German-based non-governmental organisation, will implement the conservation research programme of IZW and LZ, restoring and reconnecting degraded and fragmented forest land through reforestation.

The aim is to increase habitat and movement patterns of rhinos, building the connectivity of individuals and the restoration of breeding of isolated populations.

The project is conducted in cooperation with the Sabah Forestry Department. It is believed that this approach, including cutting edge scientific know-how from IZW, training and preparation from a prominent zoo, a conservation programme and a public awareness campaign is unique and necessary for the rescue of one of the most endangered species on earth.



## Efforts can and should be made to save rhino

A GOVERNMENTAL programme, the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary programme, led by Sabah Wildlife Department, exists to make last ditch efforts to prevent the extinction of the rhino in Sabah. Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA) is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the same aim, largely through assisting the State government in that programme.

On behalf of Bora, I was pleased to see the report in *Daily Express* (Monday, 8th November 2010) entitled

"Interbreed Sumatran And Bornean Rhinos" and, grateful that the issue of the critically endangered status of the rhino in Malaysia (and Indonesia) does periodically receive attention through the *Daily Express*.

I am sometimes asked to explain the purpose of trying to save endangered species, and what good such efforts do when there are so many human problems that NGOs can help to address.

The report quotes me extensively, and so I do wish to comment on a significant statement which does not reflect what was intended.

The report says "Moreover, he said it is a waste of time and money to try and save them." In fact, what I had said was "What should be done? One option is to decide that the species is doomed anyway, and that it is a waste of time and money to try to save the rhino."

My point was that, before spending a lot of effort to save an endangered species, effort which may have to be sustained over many years, it is wise to reflect carefully, and weigh the pros and cons in a rational manner.

I did then go on to argue, however, that efforts can and should, indeed, be made to prevent the extinction of the rhino, but tried to show that the rationale is ultimately an ethical one. And by implication, we should be reluctant to try to provide only economic arguments for nature conservation.

Junaidi Payne

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