

Rhino Rescue

By Brenna Maloney

Time is running out to save this species from extinction.

Wildlife

LIFE SCIENCE

As you read, think about how human actions can change the natural world.

It took a great deal of planning and then eight long months of waiting. The trap had been carefully set, but there was no rushing their target. She did not know she was being followed, nor would she have cared. A Sumatran rhino works on its own time.

The **conservationists** were waiting, waiting, waiting, and when it finally happened, it happened unexpectedly. The 770-kilogram (1,700-pound) Sumatran rhino stepped onto a leafy spot on the forest floor and fell into a shallow pit. The conservationists had dug that pit and covered it with branches and leaves. Believe it or not, this kind of trap is the safest and most effective method for catching a rhino. But why did a team of conservationists want to trap a rhino?

It's all part of a plan—a multinational plan to save the Sumatran rhino from extinction. It's called the Sumatran Rhino Rescue.

NATIONAL
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Rhinos in Trouble

All five **species** of Earth's rhinoceroses are threatened with **extinction**. Yet, the Sumatran rhino is the most **endangered** of all rhino species. Largely due to poaching, the number of Sumatran rhinos has decreased more than 70 percent over the past 20 years.

Rhinos are killed for their valuable horns, which have been used for centuries in traditional Asian medicine. Powdered rhino horn is prescribed by Asian doctors as a cure for everything from asthma to chicken pox to nosebleeds to snakebites. Although there's no proof that rhino horns have any medicinal effect, that doesn't stop people from wanting them. Rhino horns can sell for prices that rival gold.

Experts now think there are only 80 Sumatran rhinos left in the wild. These remaining rhinos are split into 10 small populations between the islands of Sumatra and Indonesian Borneo. They have become so few in number that they are almost never seen. Their isolation currently poses the greatest threat to their existence.

A Rescue Plan

The Sumatran Rhino Rescue plan is to safely capture as many wild rhinos as possible and then transfer them to nearby sanctuaries where scientists can assist in their reproduction.

Right now, there's only one place where that can happen. It's called the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary. It was built by the International Rhino Foundation in a place called Way Kambas National Park in South Sumatra.

This isn't the first time that conservationists have tried this. As far back as the 1980s, rhinos were being rounded up for the purpose of **captive breeding**. The program struggled, though. Not enough was known about these rhinos to help them reproduce.

Sumatran rhinos are solitary animals. They cannot be housed together. A rhino's pregnancy lasts about 15 months. The only land animals with longer pregnancies are elephants, which carry their babies for about 22 months. However, if female rhinos go too long without breeding, they develop problems that can prevent successful pregnancies.



Emi nibbles on leaves with her baby at the Cincinnati Zoo, U.S.A.

Rhino Research

The work of one scientist named Terri Roth showed promise. Roth is the vice president of conservation and science at the Cincinnati Zoo. She and her team developed special techniques and ways of handling the rhinos that made their efforts more successful. In 2001, a captive rhino named Emi gave birth to a calf. They named him Andalas—an old Indonesian word meaning "Sumatra." Andalas became the first Sumatran rhino born in captivity in 112 years.

Today, the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary is home to seven rhinos—three males and four females. The new rhino, named Pahu, is currently at a facility in Borneo. She may one day join the others.

Pahu's Rescue

Veterinarians from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Australia were on hand to guide Pahu into a crate that was then loaded onto a truck. Heavy rains had choked the roads with debris, so the path forward was not clear. A local mining company sent a bulldozer. Pahu was finally given a police escort to a sanctuary.

Pahu will be given time to settle in to her new home. In the meantime, plans continue to find other rhinos in the wild and give them new homes, too. The Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary is nearly full. So, a new facility is being built.

For now, Pahu's rescue marks another major step in rescuing the Sumatran rhino. The work is slow, but promising.



This rhino is now living in the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary and is safe from poachers.



PROTECT THE NATURAL WORLD

Protecting the planet is vital! The National Geographic Society has set a goal to help improve the status of 100 species or populations by 2030.

Rhino horns are made of keratin, the same material found in your hair and fingernails.



The Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary is home to seven rhinos that are part of an intensively-managed research and breeding program aimed at increasing Sumatra's wild rhino population.

In Captivity



In 2001, **Andalas** was the first Sumatran rhino born in captivity in more than 112 years. He is the first in a long line of Sumatran rhinos that conservationists hope will be bred in captivity. Eventually, they also hope to introduce him back into the wild.



Bina is estimated to have been born around 1985. She is the oldest female at the sanctuary and is the oldest living captive Sumatran rhinoceros.

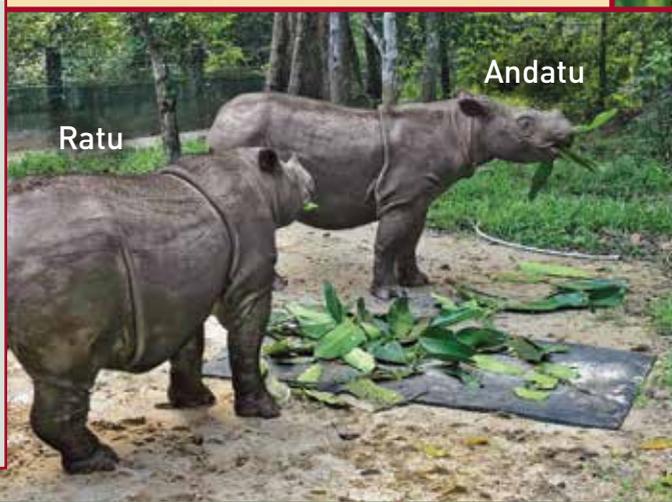
In 2003, **Rosa** was spotted wandering through villages, looking for food near one of the national parks. In 2005, she was moved to the sanctuary where she could be protected from poachers.



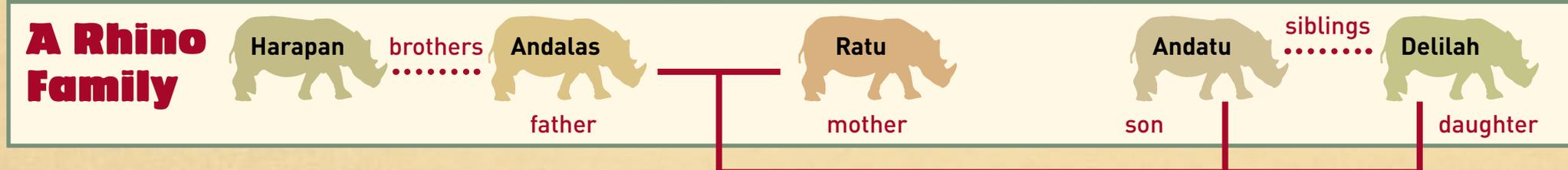
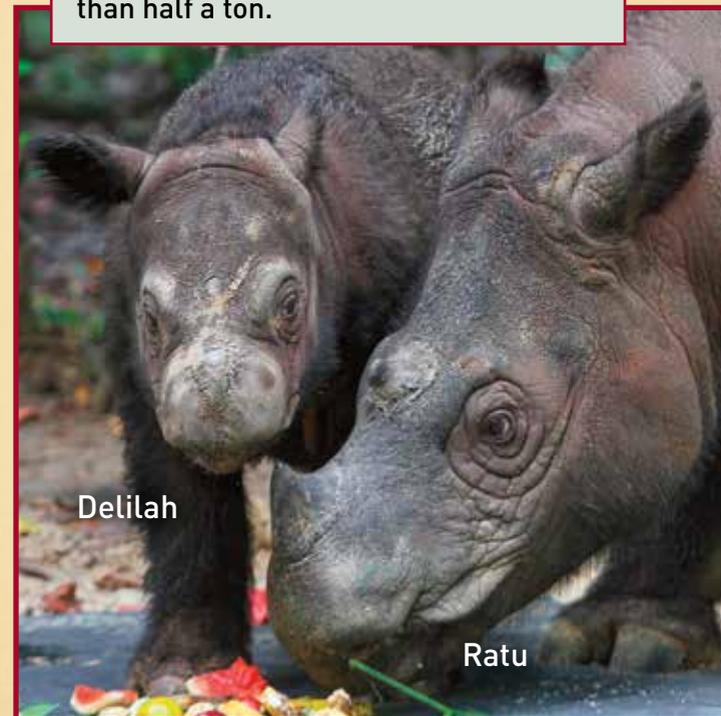
Delilah was born in 2016 at the sanctuary. She is Ratu's second calf and the second rhino ever born in captivity in Indonesia. She weighed 20 kilograms (45 pounds) at birth. Now almost fully grown, Delilah will soon weigh more than half a ton.

Ratu was born around 2000 in Way Kambas National Park, the protected area where the sanctuary is located. In 2005, there were reports of her wandering around a nearby village. For her safety, she was captured. Ratu was chosen as the primary breeding female with the sanctuary's young male, Andalas.

Andatu was born in 2012 at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary. Andatu is the first rhino ever born in captivity in Indonesia. He weighed approximately 27 kilograms (60 pounds) at birth, but now tops 450 kilograms (1,000 pounds).



Harapan (Harry) was born at the Cincinnati Zoo in 2007. His parents were part of an international breeding program. Harry was moved to the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in 2015. His big brother is Andalas.



Rhino Recovery

The critically endangered Sumatran rhino lives in four isolated regions of steep, dense forest. Sightings are so rare, population estimates are largely based on camera trap images. Isolation is now the biggest threat to Sumatran rhinos.

WORDWISE

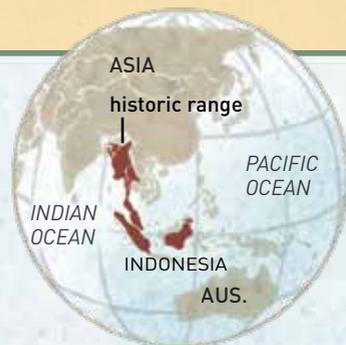
captive breeding: the reproduction of rare species controlled by humans in a closed environment, such as a zoo or animal sanctuary

conservationist: a person who advocates or acts for the protection and preservation of the environment and wildlife

endangered: at risk of becoming extinct, or dying out

extinction: the condition of no longer existing in living form

species: a group of similar organisms that are able to reproduce



Height: Up to 1.5 meters (5 feet)

Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*)



Weight: Up to 900 kilograms (2,000 pounds)

Tabin Wildlife Reserve
1 rhino in captivity (1 female)
unable to reproduce

In 2015, rhinos were declared extinct in the wild in Malaysia.

Leuser Ecosystem
Fewer than 50 rhinos in 6 subpopulations

Sumatra
Fewer than 75 rhinos in 10 subpopulations

Indonesian Borneo
Fewer than 10 rhinos

Pahu lives here now.

Way Kambas National Park
Fewer than 20 rhinos in 2 subpopulations

Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary
7 rhinos in captivity (3 males, 4 females)

Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park
Fewer than 5 rhinos in 2 subpopulations



Wild rhino population
 Last observed wild rhino location
 Park or reserve

0 mi 100
0 km 100