

Critically Endangered Sumatran Rhino Rescued in Indonesia

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(via Ridho Hafizh Zainur Ridha/WWF-Indonesia)

The Government of Indonesia and Sumatran Rhino Rescue alliance are the heroes we need.

Together with local partners, they rescued a critically endangered female rhino from a mining concession in East Kalimantan.

This marks the first major move in a conservation breeding program aimed at saving the species—also known as the hairy rhinoceros or Asian two-horned rhino—from extinction.

The smallest of the rhinoceroses, it is still one of the largest—and most endangered—animals on the planet. Fewer than 80 Sumatran rhinos remain.

After decades of poaching and habitat loss, the species' greatest threat has become the distance separating their small populations, according to the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF). Unable to easily find mates, many breeding-age Sumatran rhinos risk infertility.



(via Ridho Hafizh Zainur Ridha/WWF-Indonesia)

Once scattered across Asia, these adorable creatures are now found only in Sumatra and Borneo, where, in 2015, researchers announced the Bornean rhinoceros had become extinct from the northern part of the island. A tiny population, however, was discovered in East Kalimantan in early 2016.

That's where the unnamed female was captured and transported to a temporary holding facility in Indonesia's Kelian Lestari Protected Forest.

"This first capture in Kalimantan is the beginning of a renewed international collaboration aimed at preventing the extinction of the Sumatran rhino," Susie Ellis, executive director of the International Rhino Foundation, said in a statement.

A team of animal experts will monitor the female as she adapts to her new surroundings, before working to determine her breeding viability.

"Saving this species requires capturing and consolidating the majority of remaining wild rhinos in intensively managed breeding facilities and, of course, continuing to protect animals in the wild," Ellis said.

"There have been multiple successful captures in the past," she added, "and international collaboration has led to refining the tricky science of breeding the Sumatran rhino in a managed setting."



(via Ridho Hafizh Zainur Ridha/WWF-Indonesia)

So far, three calves were born at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, and two more at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park in southern Sumatra.

“There’s still a long road ahead but today the future of the Sumatran rhino is looking brighter,” WWF-Indonesia CEO Rizal Malik said. “The Sumatran rhino is an integral part of our heritage; we simply can’t stand by and watch the species disappear.”

Praising the Government of Indonesia’s “bold conservation approach,” Malik also warned that these operations—even with years of preparation and expert assistance—“can prove risky.”

But considering the circumstances, preservationists are left with little choice.

“While risks remain for this rhino, with her safe arrival at the sanctuary, we’re cautiously optimistic, and our dedicated team will continue with round-the-clock care as she settles into her new home,” Malik said.