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WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Sumatran rhino programme vital to prevent species from going extinct

KOTA KINABALU: An animal conservation programme dedicated to breeding Sumatran rhinos is crucial to prevent the critically-endangered species from going extinct, said World Wildlife Fund for Nature-Malaysia (WWF) executive director and chief executive officer Datuk Dr Dionysius Sharma.

He said while the species was extinct in the wild in Malaysia, there was still hope for the rhinos in Indonesia.

However, he said that organising a breeding programme would be difficult.

"Experts have estimated that the population in Indonesia is likely to be less than 100, scat-

tered in small, isolated groups in Sumatra and Kalimantan.

"The population is so thinly spread out that breeding is believed to be minimal, which means that this species could go extinct within the next 10 years, if not soon-er," he said.

He added that the case of Puntung, one of the last rhinos in Sabah, now awaiting euthanasia due to terminal skin cancer, was a wake-up call.

Dionysius called on the Malaysian and Indonesian gov-



Datuk Dr Dionysius Sharma

ernments, and all Sumatran rhinoceros conservation organisations, to work together through a dedicated team.

He added that the focus of Sumatran rhinoceros conservation should be on rescuing those in the wild for management in advanced facilities, increasing the number of births, and facilitating the movement of individuals and gametes among facilities as a population management tool.

The application of advanced reproductive technology, as advo-



Puntung is one of the last Sumatran rhinoceroses in Sabah, now awaiting euthanasia due to terminal skin cancer. FILE PIC

called by Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA), which is being attempted by international reproductive scientists, remains the best bet to ensure that the species will be saved.

The WWF Network executive team has mandated the creation of a Sumatran rhino working

group, comprising representatives from WWF-Indonesia and partner offices, to push Sumatran rhino conservation to the top of the agenda of governments, and to seek a common approach and agreements among NGOs working on Sumatran rhino conservation.