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There's hope for the Sumatran rhino

Scientists plan to match Iman's harvested egg cell with Tam's sperm for IVF attempt

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KOTA KINABALU: There is a glimmer of hope for the critically endangered Sumatran rhino in the country after scientists managed to harvest an egg cell (oocyte) from Iman, Iman is Malaysia's last surviving female Sumatran rhino.

The egg cell will be matched with thawed frozen sperm from Tam, the male rhino that died in May this year of renal failure, for an in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) attempt.

The egg cell which was harvested at the Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Lahad Datu on Monday has been sent to the Reproductive Innovation

Center for Wildlife and Livestock at the Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in Sandakan.

Sabah Wildlife Department director Augustine Tuuga said this was great news and it would have been even better with more oocytes.

"But this does allow us to continue with the IVF programme of this critically endangered species.

"We are ready to collaborate with Indonesia for further attempts," he said.

The extraction was performed by Prof Thomas Hildebrandt and his team from Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in Berlin, Germany, in collaboration with the

local Borneo Rhino Alliance team.

Preparation and maturation of the oocyte is being handled by Prof Arief Boediono of the Bogor Agriculture University, Indonesia.

Prof Abdul Hamid Ahmad, dean of the Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture, said the Reproductive Innovation Center was now open for use and he looked forward to the IVF attempt that would be made there.

"There are not enough wild Sumatran rhinos left alive to save the species," he said.

Advanced reproductive technology can ensure that the living genomes of rhinos are kept alive long after their death.



A possible future: The team from Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research harvesting the egg cell from Iman.