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# Rhinos still in Danum Valley?

**KOTA KINABALU:** Researchers have recently found what may be the footprint of a Sumatran rhinoceros in the Danum Valley Conservation Area.

Sharon Kok, who is in charge of the patrolling and enforcement of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia, disclosed that the discovery was made during her team's participation in the Danum Valley Conservation Area Wildlife and Resources Survey 2016.

The team spotted a number of footprints, but one was distinctly clear from the rest, which they presumed to belong to a rhinoceros.

Measuring 23 centimetres in width, the team guessed the footprint could be that of an adult rhino.

"We thought of the possibility of it being an elephant's footprint. But if it is, looking at its size, it must be a baby elephant.

"And if it is a baby elephant, there must be an accompanying mother somewhere, and with a

baby and mother elephant in the same compound, it must have been chaos and traces of damages could have been seen.

"There was also no elephant dung anywhere. Taking all of these into consideration, it strengthens our hope that yes, this could be the footprint of a rhino.

"However, we did not see the animal itself, hence we cannot confirm anything yet," said Koh, when met during a seminar on the survey here yesterday.

Koh said they will be going back to conduct a recheck on the area, together with the Borneo Rhino Alliance (BORA), the Forestry Department and the Yayasan Sabah Wildlife Department.

The plan for the revisit trip was initially set to be in November, but had to be rescheduled due to the pilot's health.

They were also advised not to go to the area considering the current rainy season which enhanced possibility of trees

falling.

According to Kok, the footprint was found within the conservation area's borders, and unfortunately, not within the safe zone.

"We could see that there were signs of encroachment in the area and it worries us on what should we do next. But the Forestry (Department) has been doing a good job, putting in extra enforcement and patrolling regularly. In the meantime, we can only hope that the rhino has moved up to higher ridges.

"In our presentation today, I will pose the question to the audience to think about the possibility that there might still be a Sumatran rhino roaming in our wild, by calculating the distance of where Iman (one of the last two known surviving female Sumatran rhino now placed in the Borneo Rhinoceros Sanctuary in Sabah), was found in 2013, and then this one, and identify if it could be the path/route that the rhinos would have been at," she said.

## New species of bird discovered in Danum Valley

The seminar was a conclusion of the survey organized by the Yayasan Sabah Group and Sabah Wildlife Department from August 15 to 29.

Some 133 participants from various government departments, non-governmental organisations, and academic institutions – divided into 11 teams – took part in the survey.

The institutions involved were the Sabah Forestry Department, Sabah Parks, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Institute for Development Studies (Sabah), Forest Research Institute Malaysia, SEARRP, Sabah Biodiversity Centre, HUTAN-KOCP, WWF Malaysia, Sabah Environmental Trust, Perbadanan Taman Negara Johor, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,

Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin and University College Sabah Foundation.

Director of Yayasan Sabah, Datuk Sapawi Ahmad, said that the survey was aimed at acquiring the latest information on wildlife diversity and richness in the Danum Valley Conservation Area, determining the presence of rare, threatened, and endangered species, assessing potential threats such as poaching, fire, encroachment, etc and prospects for ecotourism development.

"Information obtained from the survey will provide input for the mid-term review of the Danum Valley Strategic Management Plan (2010 – 2020), which shall among other things evaluate the success of implementation of planned activities, address gaps (if any) and to consider the future direction of the management of the DVCA where relevant," he said in his launching speech

read out by his representative, deputy director, Datuk Rosmawati Lasuki.

Yesterday's seminar also saw the launching of the Danum Valley Monograph: The Rain Forest, a book on Danum Valley's mysterious rainforest, co-authored by Hans Hazebroek, Tengku Datuk Dr Zainal Adlin and Dr Waidi Sinun.

According to Hazebroek and Tengku Adlin, it took more than four years to compile the monograph, which was the result of findings by experts in the last 25 years.

Among the most recent finding, said Hazebroek, is the discovery of a new species of bird, the 'spectacled flowerpecker', spotted in 2009 at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge canopy walkway.

"We found a number of other new species of flora and fauna and it is all mentioned in the monograph," said Hazebroek

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on the book, which explains in laymen term the scientific findings on the geology, soils and plants and animals of Danum Valley.

“Discoveries are continuously being made from time to time, that is how rich the Danum Valley soil is,” he commented.



Sharon



Hazebroek (right) explaining some of the contents as he presents the Danum Valley Monograph: The Rain Forest to Rosmawati at the launching ceremony yesterday.