

Elderly Malaysian rhino enlisted in breeding attempt

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This undated handout photograph released by the Indonesian Rhino Foundation (SRS-YABI) shows a highly endangered Sumatran rhino. Malaysian wildlife officials on Borneo island said Thursday they will try to artificially inseminate an elderly female Sumatran rhinoceros in a bid to revive one of the world's most endangered species.

Malaysian wildlife officials on Borneo island said Thursday they will try to artificially inseminate an elderly female rhinoceros in a bid to revive one of the world's most endangered species.

Gelegub, a Sumatran rhino who at 28-years-old is equivalent to a 70-something grandmother in human terms, will be impregnated with sperm from a virile young male rhino.

"Gelegub is too old to mate normally and the mating ritual of [rhinos](#) is quite violent so this would be one of the best ways to try and get her pregnant and give birth to a rhino in captivity," said Sen Nathan, coordinator of the Borneo Rhino Sanctuary where the procedure will be carried out.

Nathan said the only breeding facility in the world that has had any success in producing Sumatran rhino calves in captivity is the Cincinnati Zoo in the United States, which has produced three calves over the last decade.

"Our priority of course is to have natural mating in the first place but at the moment we only have one male rhino in captivity and Gelegub is the only other viable female that we have," he told AFP.

"It is critical that we try and get the rhinos to reproduce as there are only 50 such rhinos in the region and without reproduction, they face imminent extinction."

Nathan said Gelegub will be injected with hormones in November to stimulate the production of eggs, which will be removed and fertilised, hopefully producing viable embryos for implantation.

Spare embryos will be frozen for implantation in surrogates at a later date.

Between 30 to 50 of the Borneo sub-species of the Sumatran rhinos are known to remain in the wild in Borneo -- a vast island shared by Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

It is distinguished from other Sumatran rhinos by its relatively small size, small teeth and distinctively shaped head.

Only 150 to 300 Sumatran rhino are known to exist in the wild, making it one of the world's most endangered species, with only small groups left on Indonesia's Sumatra island, the north of Borneo and peninsular Malaysia.

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