



In August 2019 Royle Safaris conducted a unique and secret expedition to try and find a Sumatran rhino. Possibly the second most elusive large mammal in the world (behind the saola) the Sumatran rhino may number as many as 100 animals over 5 populations in 3 places (Sumatra, Borneo and quite possibly Burma) or as few as 15 individuals (including the 9 in captivity); the real figure is probably somewhere in the middle. We wanted to see if we could see one of these incredible animals in the wild, before they are gone. This is a species with very little hope of surviving the next 10-20 years, never mind the next century. They are incredibly low in number, they are fragmented into tiny populations, it is unknown how many are still actively breeding (or even capable of breeding – should they meet a member of the opposite sex) and that is all without the increasing threats of poaching, habitat destruction and increasing human population pressures. We would hope against hope that things can and will change, but the reality is that this animal is probably already beyond help and every sighting of this animal could well be the last time any person sees on in the wild.

Over the last few years Royle Safaris has started to specialise in trips and expeditions to find some of the world's most exotic, elusive and endangered animals. Whether it has been pioneering group trips for red pandas, wolverines, snow leopards and striped hyena (which have now took off and are 'common' targets for wildlife holidays, or leading the way with Siberian tiger, Amur leopard, Javan rhino and giant panda trips – all of which we have an incredible success rate with; Royle Safaris is trying hard to create small sustainable eco-tourism centred around some of the world's most threatened animals. It was natural that the Sumatran rhino would be high on the list, this also goes hand in hand with the project of a good client and now friend Chris Scharf.

Chris has a special target of photographing the world's rarest and most incredible wildlife for his website (www.christofftravel.com) and he has certain 'sets' he wants to complete such as bears, rhinos and of course tapirs. With all but one of the bears seen and all the tapirs (including the disputed Kabomani tapir – thanks to another unique Royle Safaris expedition) it was down to the rhinos. Having got 4 of the world's 5 rhinos it was time for the Sumatran rhino to take centre stage.

There appeared to be many obstacles in the way when it came to trying to see a Sumatran rhino. Along with the common problems such as getting the right local guides, picking a location, getting the right access permits etc we didn't even know the basics such as are they diurnal or nocturnal, what habitat do they like? There is really nothing substantial known about this species and the little information we do have is either from captive animals or gleaned from one off encounters and are more likely to be anecdotal than reliable.

So after around a year of planning we managed to find a team who would take us deep into a very promising forest (the only information we are allowed to say is that it was the island of Sumatra; we cannot disclose any more location information or even names of guides etc), we were told to not bring any GPS equipment, including any cameras that geotag the location of pictures taken. We would be joining a team of rhino patrollers as they do their monitoring in the core habitat of one of the last remaining strong holds of this species. We had to wait several days when getting to the location so we could be 'assessed' (they wanted to make sure we were not poachers and that we were trustworthy people) and get the right permits etc all together. It was then 14 days hiking and camping in the remote and pristine forest. All we were told repeatedly was that it was secret and that we would be taken to the best place in the world to have a chance of seeing this animal, but that nothing was guaranteed.

When the day came to leave we were excited but probably no more enthusiastic, we approached this trip thinking we probably had a 0.5% chance of seeing one of these animals, with the extra special permits, assistance of the rhino patrol unit and getting the 'best' location our chances had probably doubled to 1%, but we would still need astronomical luck. On the plus side if we did get a sighting, Chris and Martin would likely become the only people in the world today (possibly ever??) to have seen all 5 species of rhinos extant today in the wild.

Because of the specialist nature of the trip and the stops we had to make whilst the team did their snare collection, reports and monitoring we didn't see as many species of birds as we could have, or possibly mammals. But as the team were more focused on mammals we did quite well with mammals in the end. The ease at which these trackers found evidence of animals and spotted animals was breath-taking.

Species List

Sumatran Rhino Expedition

Aug 2019

Mammals (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Kloss's squirrel	<i>Callosciurus albescens</i>
2	Asiatic golden cat *	<i>Catopuma temminckii</i>
3	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
4	Black-striped squirrel	<i>Collosciurus nigrovittatus</i>
5	Hutan shrew	<i>Crocidura hutanis</i>
6	Sunda shrew	<i>Crocidura monticola</i>
7	Sumatran rhino *	<i>Dicerorhinus sumatrensis</i>
8	Sun bear *	<i>Helarctos malayanus</i>
9	White-handed gibbon	<i>Hylobates lar</i>
10	Big-eared pipistrelle	<i>Hypsugo macrotis</i>
11	Three-striped ground squirrel	<i>Lariscus insignis</i>
12	Niobe ground squirrel	<i>Lariscus niobe</i>
13	Long-tailed macaque	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>
14	Sunda pangolin *	<i>Manis javanica</i>
15	Small bent-winged bat	<i>Miniopterus pusillus</i>
16	Sumatran muntjac	<i>Muntiacus montanus</i>
17	Indochinese clouded leopard *	<i>Neofelis nebulosus</i>
18	Tiger *	<i>Panthera tigris</i>
19	Javan pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus javanicus</i>
20	Sumatran orangutan	<i>Pongo abelii</i>
21	Thomas langur	<i>Presbytis thomasi</i>
22	Woolly horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus luctus</i>
23	Big-eared horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus macrotis</i>
24	Trefoil horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus trifolius</i>
25	Eurasian wild pig *	<i>Sus scofra</i>
26	Siamang	<i>Symphalangus syndactylus</i>
27	Sumatran tree shrew	<i>Tupaia ferruginea</i>

Note: Some bats identified 100% at roosts or with good views. Others identified with spectrograms in combination with sightings (no spectrograms without visual confirmation are recorded as a sighting), behaviour and habitat – so not 100% but best educated guesses. For more information please email me.

Birds (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Black-nest swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus salangana</i>
2	Black hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros malayanus</i>
3	Plain sunbird	<i>Anthreptes simplex</i>
4	Eastern cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
5	Lesser coucal	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>
6	Greater yellownape	<i>Chrysophlegma flavinucha</i>
7	Olive-backed sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>
8	Orange-bellied flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>
9	Scarlet-headed flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trochileum</i>
10	Greater racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
11	Lesser racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus remifer</i>

12	White-crowned forktail	<i>Enicurus leschenaulti</i>
13	Chestnut-capped forktail	<i>Enicurus ruficapillus</i>
14	Common hill mynah	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
15	Grey-and-buff woodpecker	<i>Hemicircus sordidus</i>
16	Purple-naped sunbird	<i>Kurochkinogramma hypogrammicum</i>
17	Scaly-breasted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
18	White-rumped munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
19	Sunda robin	<i>Myiomela diana</i>
20	Blyth's hawk-eagle	<i>Nisaetus alboniger</i>
21	Oriental scops owl	<i>Otus sunia</i>
22	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer monantus</i>
23	Long-tailed broadbill	<i>Psarisomus dalhousiae</i>
24	Gold-whiskered barbet	<i>Psilopogon chrysopogon</i>
25	White-throated fantail	<i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>
26	Wreathed hornbill	<i>Rhyticeros undulatus</i>
27	Eye-brow thrush	<i>Turdus obscurus</i>
28	spiderhunter	<i>Yellow-eared spiderhunter</i>
29	Sunda thrush	<i>Zoothera andromedae</i>

Reptiles (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Common four-clawed gecko	<i>Gehyra mutilata</i>
2	Great angle-headed lizard	<i>Gonocephalus grandis</i>
3	Tropical house gecko	<i>Hemidactylus brookei</i>
4	Brook's house gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>
5	Flat-tailed house gecko	<i>Hemidactylus platyurus</i>

Amphibians (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Asiatic common toad	<i>Duttaphrynus melanostictus</i>