

Project 3 - FIRST SUMATRAN TIGER RADIOCOLLARED – Report from the Jambi Tiger Project, July 2003

In early May 2003 the Jambi Tiger Project - a partnership between the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and oil palm company PT Asiatic Persada - became the first group ever to radiocollar a wild Sumatran tiger. The capture is part of an ongoing project aiming to discover how a small population of tigers is using the human-impacted landscapes in and around the oil palm plantation and the adjacent logging concession; it is the first project to study tigers living outside protected areas in Indonesia. Long-term project goals include establishing the requirements for maintenance of wildlife corridors through agricultural lands, as landscape connectivity is likely to be essential for the long-term future of viable populations of tigers. The detailed information on home range use available through radiocollaring will be invaluable in this process.

The radiocollared tiger, a magnificent male, is one of about seven individuals so far identified in the area from camera-trap records and is known to the team as "Slamet", which is Indonesian for "lucky".

Slamet was captured in the early hours of the morning using a humane leg-hold trap linked to a radio transmitter that alerted the team as soon as it was triggered. These leg-hold traps have been successfully used by WCS Russia in their Amur tiger radio-telemetry programme since 1991. Just before dawn, Slamet was anaesthetised with medetomidine and ketamine; by the time he was fully asleep, the sun was rising, ideal timing for the work as the temperature was as low as it gets in Sumatra yet there was enough light to work by. The tiger was fitted with an "activity" collar that distinguishes between rest and movement as well as signalling the location of the animal. He appeared in excellent condition, and every precaution was taken to ensure his welfare during the collaring process. The team took the opportunity to obtain a range of measurements and samples while the collar was being fitted; weight was the most difficult of these, as he turned out to be just over 148kg and it took the entire team to lift him off the ground in the weighing stretcher. Some of this weight was presumably due to the fact that he had clearly recently eaten, but even so he is very large for a Sumatran tiger. Capture, collaring, anaesthesia, reversal and release all went smoothly with no injury to the tiger, who was asleep for just over one hour. Further capture operations are planned later in 2003.

The capture has already raised interesting questions about Slamet's movements, as he was caught in an area where he has not yet been photographed by the project's cameratrap and where we normally see another large and healthy male, named Flash by the team. The cameratrap data so far have indicated that Slamet spends most of his time in Bungin, an area about 20 km from the capture site. After release he stayed fairly close to the capture location for a few days and then headed off back towards Bungin; he has since been located by telemetry and seen on cameratrap back in Bungin.

The project field team is headed by ZSL researchers Dr Tom Maddox and Satrio Wijamukti and was strengthened for the capture operations by the addition of wildlife biologist Bart Schleyer. Bart brought with him extensive experience of large carnivore captures in Russia, North America and Canada, including many of WCS Russia's Amur tiger captures for radiocollaring. Asiatic Persada staff Volta Bone and Wildan and visiting leopard cat researchers Dawn Scott and Elva Gemita also assisted at the capture. ZSL and Asiatic Persada would like to thank the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry (PHKA), particularly the BKSDA in Jambi province, for their support and cooperation throughout. The veterinary consultant to the project is Dr John Lewis of the International Zoo Veterinary Group and the research supervisors are Dr Sugardjito of LIPI and Dr Chris Carbone of ZSL. The radiotelemetry work is funded by 21st Century Tiger as part of the EAZA Tiger Campaign 2002/3 and the project is also supported by the Save The Tiger Fund, BSI Travel and the Tufton Charitable Trust.

A formal report on the capture is in preparation and will be made available to EAZA Tiger Campaign participants when it is ready.