



WILDLIFE VETS INTERNATIONAL

Sumatran Tiger Disease Surveillance Meeting, TSI, Bogor, Indonesia, March 22-24, 2014

Introduction

The strong suspicion that Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) may be causing disease in wild Sumatran tigers led to an initiative by WVI in September 2013 to establish an Indonesian organisation that would identify significant endemic and emerging diseases in wild Sumatran tigers across the island. This organisation is known as the "Sumatran Tiger Health Forum" or STHF. (see previous report - "**Sumatran Tiger Disease Surveillance - Meeting, TSI, Bogor, Indonesia, September 3-5, 2013**")

In its formative years, the STHF will be supported by WVI with technical advice and assistance from the UK, and through 6 monthly review meetings at Taman Safari Indonesia with the STHF committee. The first such meeting was held in late March 2014.

The aims of the meeting in March 2014 were to:

- Review progress of STHF and facilitate solutions to any problems
- Plan for the annual meeting and training programme of the STHF to be held in September 2014
- Investigate possibilities for starting CDV research on Sumatra



Progress of the STHF

Progress by the STHF towards achieving goals set out in the organisation's working framework document was found to be extremely limited due to the prolonged and severe illness of the forum's chair Dr Retno Sudarwati. Tragically, Dr Retno died early in April 2014. Tiger conservation has lost a dedicated and enthusiastic professional and we have lost a good friend. Our condolences go out to her family, friends and colleagues.



Dr Retno, 2013

In response to this unfortunate situation, Dr John Lewis has agreed to guide the forum by setting discreet, achievable tasks for individuals within the STHF committee and monitor progress closely via email. In this way, although progress will be much slower than under the guidance of Dr Retno, progress should nevertheless be made. This is clearly only an interim situation until a new chair can be elected at the forum's next annual meeting in September 2014.

Plans for the annual meeting of STHF in September 2014

Since the creation of the STHF it has always been the intention to hold an annual meeting of all relevant Indonesian personnel involved with tiger conservation, and the first such meeting is planned for September 2014. This will facilitate review of progress and maintain the engagement of all conservation professionals working in Sumatra on tiger health issues. Following discussions with staff at Taman Safari Indonesia and Dr Erni Suyanti, a draft structure for the meeting was constructed. Furthermore it was agreed that following the meeting a training programme will be offered to wildlife vets that have expressed the need for practical instruction in the collection, storage and transport of biosamples taken from wild tigers. Details will be refined over the coming months.

Canine Distemper Virus research on Sumatra

Further meetings were held with the STHF committee, Toni Sumanpau and Dr Ir. Bambang Novi - the Director of Biodiversity Conservation, Department of Forestry – to explore the possibility of a UK post-graduate student starting research into CDV in or around a core tiger habitat site. All present were supportive of the proposal and details of how such a project could be organised were outlined to WVI. Any such research by a UK national will be conducted in cooperation with an Indonesian counterpart to ensure that there is a lasting benefit to the country's capacity to conduct wildlife disease investigations into the future.

Summary & concluding comments:

The loss of Dr Retno to the STHF and tiger conservation in general is a sad and significant one, but ambitious projects like the development of disease surveillance programmes for wild tiger populations inevitably experience setbacks. It is the response to such situations that is important. WVI takes a long term view and will assist in overcoming such difficulties as and when they arise. The need for the STHF is not diminished, and neither is our commitment to the project. Furthermore, Taman Safari Indonesia remains solidly supportive of the STHF and there is no reason why the forum shouldn't evolve into a valuable organisation serving the needs of tiger conservation in years to come.

On a more positive note, the meetings in March 2014 have set the framework for the next phase in the ongoing training programme for Indonesian wildlife vets and the agreement in principle that CDV research could start on Sumatra is a major step forward.

Our sponsors

None of the activities detailed above would have been possible without the generous support of our supporters. We are enormously grateful to the following organisations:

21st Century Tiger
Colchester Zoo's Action for the Wild programme
Friends of Paradise Wildlife Park
Shepreth Wildlife Conservation Charity
Wildlife Heritage Foundation