

Indonesian Rhinoceros Close to Extinction

By:
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The rhinoceros!! This animal is widely popular amid the people. There is even a proverb about a “rhinoceros’ face” which has been used widely to name a shameless person, though actually the rhinoceros is a shy and solitaire animal in their native habitat.

In general, people know the rhinoceros as an animal having one or two horns on the nose. Morphologically their overweight size is enormous. Yet, based on direct observation and experience, the Indonesian people more often recognize the African Rhinoceros. Is the African rhinos are big, tall and have horns that soar high like those in the Safari park, zoo, and television.

In fact, in the world today there are only 5 kinds of Rhinoceros: 2 Rhinoceros from Africa, 1 from India and 2 from Indonesia. Details of their differences can be noted on the following pictures.

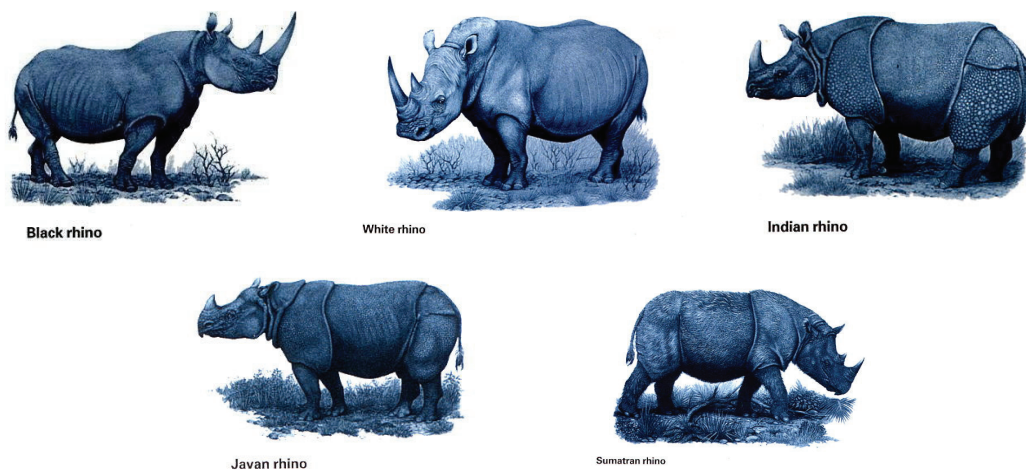


Figure.1 Five Kinds of World’s Rhinoceros (Pictured by WWF)

Indonesia has 2 kinds of Rhinoceros; the Javanese Rhinoceros and the Sumatran Rhinoceros. However, they are very few in number with photographs and film stating the Indonesian Rhinoceroses are very rare, unlike the African Rhinoceros that exist in larger numbers and there are more widely known through film and photographs. For comparison, the white Rhinoceros population at this time numbers approximately 14,000 individuals while black Rhinoceros number approximately 3,000 individuals; meanwhile the number of Javanese Rhinoceros at this time are not more than 40 individuals while the Sumatran Rhinoceros are not more than 200 individuals. Moreover, they have different life histories, the African Rhinoceros lives in an open space and grazes while the Indonesian Rhinoceros lives in secondary forest and eats foliage. The Rhinoceros is already quite rare in the forest, and is even rarer to capture their film or photographs. In general, the community in Indonesia cannot be blamed if they only know the Rhinoceros comes from Africa, as it is in reality, and if partly people know that there are Rhinoceros in Indonesia, it is only in Ujung Kulon. The Rhinoceros as a protected animal in Ujung Kulon has become a mascot for the people of Indonesia. In fact, if we do not act now the Indonesian Rhinoceros will become extinct in our lifetime. Such an extinction would give the Indonesian Rhinoceros the same story ending as for the Javanese Tiger and Balinese Tiger.

The drastic decline of habitat has decreased the population of Indonesian Rhinoceros and it is already at the crisis stage for the continuation of the species. Likewise, the population of Sumatran Rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) has declined more than 50% of the available population in the past 10 years. The development of the Javanese Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) has not been increasing and instead remains stagnant.

Beside the serious decline in habitat, the high level of poaching has also increased the decline of the Rhinoceros population in Indonesia especially the Sumatran Rhinoceros. For example, the Kerinci Sebelat National Park once held perhaps the largest numbers of Sumatran rhino known, but at the present time is thought to be locally extinct. The crisis condition of Rhinoceros population also remained in several other Indonesian National Parks.

As comparison, 17 locations were noted in Sumatera Island according to the recent Indonesian Rhinoceros Conservation Strategy in the year 1994. Today, however, only 4 locations remain that have good numbers of animals. Those 4 locations are, namely: Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park, Way Kambas National Park, Kerinci Sebelat National Park and Gn. Leuser National Park. Although, there are some indications of Rhinoceros population in some other places not yet confirmed.

The Javanese Rhinoceros and the Sumatran Rhinoceros populations remain in a threatened situation and are nearing extinction because of the declining populations with passing of time. Today, the Javanese Rhinoceros only survive in Ujung kulon National Park (TNUK) in Indonesia and in Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam. According to recent results of routine census, the Javanese rhinoceros population is not thriving. For the last ten years the population has remained steady with between 50-60 individuals, or in other words, the condition of this population was stagnant. However, the level of the security is good because no more reported cases of poaching of rhinoceros have been recorded since the existence of the security patrol by Rhino Monitoring and Protection Unit (RMPU). However, this alone cannot guarantee that the condition for the Javanese rhinoceros will remain alive and long lasting.

The declining quality of the habitat, the existence of growing competition for space and food resources as well as internal factors within the Javanese rhinoceros should receive more attention from conservationists. Many articles suggest the preference of the Javanese rhinoceros habitat is a plain area, whereas occasionally the rhinos visit a mountain to get mineral, sulfur, salt, and other. As for habituation, these kinds of food very much depend on the existence of sprouts of plants that often are presence in ecoton.

Although the Sumatran rhinoceros have a larger distribution compared with the Javanese rhinoceros, its population numbers are still very poor. Although well over 100 individual Sumatran rhinos survive and exceeds the Javanese rhinoceros population, the level of the extinction rate of the Sumatran rhinoceros is far higher than for the Javanese rhinoceros.

The poaching of the Rhinoceros is still quite high and reduction of Rhinoceros's habitat because of the change of forest area into other purpose by people.

The conservation action plans for the Javanese and Sumatran rhinoceros are being implemented. The research activities regarding life habitat, population and conservation of Javanese and Sumatran rhinoceros as well as the increase of awareness of the community around the rhinoceros habitat have been carried out by researchers from abroad and domestic, by the university and the national park itself. There has been community participation and a high level of awareness for the Javanese rhinoceros, but more needs to be done.

Programs for searching for a secure second habitat for Javanese rhinoceros outside Ujung Kulon still have yet to be realized, in part, because a difference of opinion still exists among stakeholders about the best and most appropriate location especially from the security point of view.

In the future, our concern and love for nature including the rhinoceros are so welcome and essential for the Indonesian conservation of our biological diversity. Aren't the living animals more valuable than only inanimate objects and their stories from the past??????????

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