

INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION



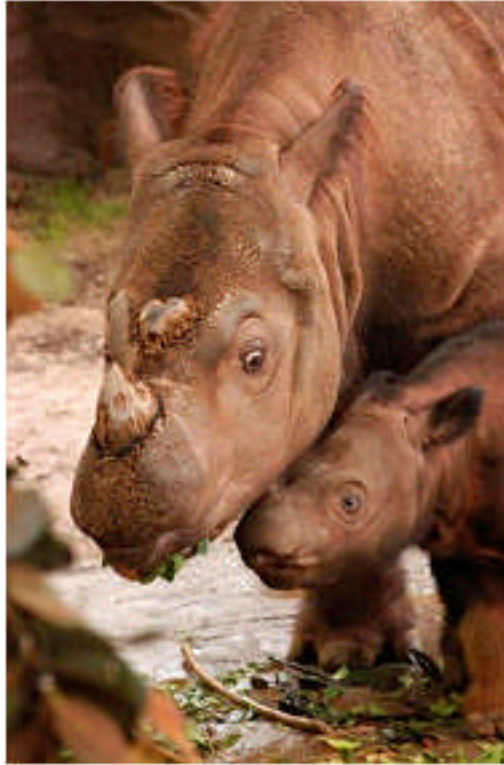
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Rhinos have walked the Earth for more than 50 million years. Today, all but one species could face extinction within our lifetime.

The greatest threat to rhinos is poaching for their horn, which is made of keratin, the same material as hair and fingernails. Most rhino horn is sold in the black market for traditional Asian medicine and is used to reduce fever, and not as an aphrodisiac, contrary to popular belief. In the Middle East, especially in Yemen, rhino horn is also used to make ornamental daggers, which are considered a cultural status symbol. Although rhinos are legally protected worldwide, high black market prices for rhino products continue to entice people to engage in poaching.

A small but dynamic organization, the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) has its roots in the belief that rhinos should endure for future generations, and that protecting these magnificent animals ensures the survival of many other species that share their habitat, including people. IRF was founded in 1989 in response to a grave concern that Zimbabwe's black rhino population was decreasing at an alarming rate from intense, organized poaching. In part because of the organization's support, poaching was virtually eliminated and now the species' numbers are increasing. For the last 15 years, IRF has funded and operated rhino conservation programs in Africa and Asia, focusing expertise and resources in areas where rhinos are most in need of protection, and where conservation efforts will have the most significant impact.

Although it works with the well-known African rhinoceros species, much of IRF's program emphasis is in Asia, and particularly, in Indonesia, where two little-known, secretive, forest-dwelling rhino species are found. Indonesia is an island archipelago that supports some of the richest diversity of life on Earth. With its wide range of habitats, wealth of plants and animals, and high numbers of island endemics, Indonesia is the second most biodiverse country on Earth, just behind Brazil.



Sumatran Rhino & calf
Photo courtesy of the Cincinnati Zoo

The Sumatran rhinoceros may be the most threatened of all land mammals on Earth. The species has been listed as "Critically Endangered" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, which means that it is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild – possibly within our lifetime. About 200 Sumatran rhinos remain, primarily on Indonesia's Sumatra Island, where the population declined by about 50% in the mid-late 1990s, largely from deforestation and habitat fragmentation.

The Critically Endangered Javan rhinoceros also is one of the rarest species of mammals and one of the most endangered rhinoceros species. Only two populations remain – the largest in Ujung Kulon National Park in West Java, Indonesia (stabilized at about 40-50 animals), and a very small, and likely non-viable population of about 5 animals in Nam Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam.

Over the past five years, however, rhino losses have been nearly eliminated in Indonesia through intensive anti-poaching and intelligence activities led by IRF-funded Rhino Protection Units. This program also provides significant benefits for numerous other threatened species (including Sumatran tigers, Asian elephants, and Malayan tapirs) and for the entire ecosystem.



Javan Rhinoceros
Photo by Alain Compost

Protecting both Sumatran and Javan rhinos in the parks in which they live, Rhino Protection Units (RPUs) rigorously patrol forests to destroy snares and traps (the main mode of poaching for these species) and apprehend poachers. Each RPU is deployed on patrol a minimum of 15 days per month. The leader of each RPU is a fully qualified Ministry of Forestry ranger, who has the authority to carry firearms and arrest suspected poachers. The other members of the RPUs, including the field supervisors and coordinators, have been recruited from local communities in the vicinity of the rhino areas in which the RPU operates. Thus, the RPUs not only protect the area's wildlife, but also contribute to the local economic well-being.

By gathering intelligence from local communities, RPUs proactively prevent poaching attempts before they take place. Only five Sumatran rhinos have been lost to poachers since the inception of the program in the late 1990s, and no Javan rhinos have been killed. By virtue of the RPUs' consistent presence and patrolling, other species, such as Sumatran tigers, Malayan tapirs, and elephants also benefit, as does the ecosystem as a whole.

Despite these successes, significant challenges still exist for the conservation of rhinos and other wildlife species. Pressure on natural resources is increasing throughout conservation areas in Indonesia, while the financial and organizational support from the central government for Parks and their staff is being reduced.

Further, management of natural resources has been decentralized to the district government level, which puts pressure on local governments to generate revenue. This often is done with a short-term view in favor of natural resource management practices which provide an immediate return, but are unsustainable over the long-term.

IRF operates eight patrol units in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park in Sumatra, one of the highest priority areas for Sumatran megafauna. Approximately 60-85 Sumatran rhino (the second largest population in the world) inhabit the Park, along with 40-50 Sumatran tigers and around 500 Asian elephants. Five patrol units operate in Way Kambas National Park, which has a resident population of 40+ Sumatran rhino (the third largest population of Sumatran rhinos). Four patrol units operate in Ujung Kulon National Park, home to the only remaining viable population of Javan rhinos in the world.

This protection provides the best possible hope for the species' long-term survival. However, in recognition of the necessity for holistic conservation strategies, the IRF's Sumatran Rhino Conservation Program uses a three-pronged approach, incorporating (i) protection of surviving populations in the wild, (ii) captive or managed propagation of rhinos, especially in sanctuaries located in native habitat, and (iii) education and outreach programs to local communities.



Sumatran Rhinoceros
Photo courtesy of the Cincinnati Zoo



Pair of Javan Rhinoceros
Photo by Yayasan Badak Indonesia

Given the species' critically endangered status, IRF established the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS), a 250-acre complex located within Way Kambas National Park in Sumatra, Indonesia. The SRS is currently home to five Sumatran rhinos that are part of an intensively managed research and breeding program aimed at increasing the Sumatran rhino population in the wild. At the sanctuary, the rhinos reside in large, open areas where they can experience a natural rain forest habitat while still receiving state-of-the-art veterinary care and nutrition.

The Cincinnati Zoo has already achieved spectacular success by reproducing this species three times in the past five years – the first births in a zoo in more than 112 years. Lessons concerning reproductive biology have facilitated successful propagation techniques, which now are being applied at the SRS. Combined with the acquisition of two healthy young females recently rescued from unviable situations in the wild, as well as the arrival of a new male, “Andalas”, from the USA in February 2007 (the first Cincinnati-bred Sumatran rhino), the animals at the SRS are poised for successful reproduction at the SRS and the stage for a new era of Sumatran rhino conservation breeding and science in Indonesia is being set.



Sumatran Rhinoceros and calf
Photo courtesy of the Cincinnati Zoo

From its inception 15 years ago, IRF has focused its programs on areas where rhinos are in the most need of attention and where conservation will have the most significant impact. As IRF and partners work to save the Indonesian rhinoceros species – which require large intact native forest habitat for survival – it will simultaneously ensure the persistence of a diverse range of other wild species. As importantly, conserving the rhino also benefits local people who rely on the rainforests for life-sustaining ecosystem services (i.e. clean water, clean air and other benefits). *For more information about IRF and its programs, please visit www.rhinos-irf.org.*