

Video camera traps in Ujung Kulon

steal a glimpse at
the world's rarest
rhinos.

© WWF-Indonesia/Ujung Kulon National Park



Ujung Kulon National Park, Indonesia

In an attempt to get a closer look at the elusive Javan rhinos using non-intrusive methods, scientists have installed 34 video camera traps working round the clock in different strategic locations inside Ujung Kulon National Park, Indonesia. In just over a month after deployment, the cameras have yielded never seen before footage of 9 individual Javan rhinos that provide rare glimpses into their behavior.

The new cameras recorded both male and female Javan rhinos sharing the same mud wallow, proving that both sexes share the same territory. It has also revealed the rhinos' behavior at their wallows, for example a clip shows a Javan rhino taking over a warty pig's mud wallow, chasing the owner away. It is a first-of-its-kind video clip recording Javan rhino aggression towards another species. Of the two video traps installed in April 2008 one was able to capture a mother and calf (possibly male) in a mud wallow and in the initial stages of separation.

WWF-Indonesia and Ujung Kulon National Park officials first installed 4 video cameras in 2007. They added another 30 video camera traps in December 2008 in order to better understand the distribution and behavior of Javan rhinoceros that live in deep in the jungles of the national park. The new cameras were donated by the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), Asian Rhino Project (ARP) And WWF-AREAS

Programme.

"Video serves as a positive tool to provide evidence on the urgency of saving this species," said Agus Priambudi, head of Ujung Kulon National Park. "It is important to be able to show the real condition of Javan rhinos to local and central governments."

Video camera traps have proved to be an effective observation tool in monitoring behavior of rare animals in habitats like Ujung Kulon. Although naturally confined in the Ujung Kulon peninsula (120,551 ha, of which 76,214 ha are land and 44,337 ha are surrounding reefs and sea), Javan rhinos are difficult to observe or come across during field surveys. Their shy nature coupled with low numbers and general inaccessibility within the park, poses difficulty in gathering data. Previous attempts at gathering visual data included usage of tree platforms called "Ranggons" made of bamboos and wooden platforms installed in trees and supporting up to 4 observers. Although successful to an extent, the nuances of setting up the structures and the dangers involved rendered it an impractical option. The promising results obtained via modern digital technology has proved to be a great help to scientists gather crucial information on the behavioral aspects of Javan rhino study. Of the remaining two populations surviving, the Ujung Kulon population still has proof of breeding and hence

Further information: Adhi R. Hariyadi (ahariyadi@wwf.or.id)