grand total:

50 JAVAN RHINO

BILL JOHNSTON

Rarest of the world's five species of rhinoceros is the Javan rhino *(Rhinoceros sondaica).* The last Javan rhino in Burma was collected for the British Museum in 1920. Malaysia lost its last specimen in 1932. In Sumatra the Javan Rhino vanished during the 1940s. The last Javan rhino in captivity was a male at the zoo in Adelaide, Australia; he died in 1907. Today, the only viable population is in the Ujung Kulon National Park in western Java, where it is estimated that 50 still survive: an ominously small number. And it hasn't always even been that high.

In 1964 Dr Lee Talbot (later of the World Wildlife Fund) conducted research at Ujung Kulon and recommended acquisition of motor launches for transporting supplies to the workers in the park. These were obtained by 1967, at which time the rhino numbered only 25. Between November 1966 and March 1967, Dr Jacques Verschuren of Belgium also made studies of the Javan rhino at Ujung Kulon. Although his work was hampered by monsoons, he found that poaching was on the decline and the rhino population was holding its own.

Next came Dr Rudolf and Lotte Schenkel, on behalf of the World Wildlife Fund. During their seven-month sojourn at Ujung Kulon, they were instrumental in helping arrange better living and working conditions for the workers in the park. The guard force was stepped up from 10 to 14. Poaching decreased and the rhino population had climbed to 50 by 1979.

From December 1978 to May 1979, Hartmann Amman of Basel University in Switzerland, studied the Javan rhino at Ujung Kulon. He suggested translocation, and that a survey be begun in Sumatra to find a suitable area for establishing a group of Javan rhinos. The Ujung Kulon park

covers only 30 000 hectares (300 – 400 square kilometres), which is a relatively small area for the present population.

The number of banteng in the park has increased, creating competition for the rhinos' preferred foodplants. Human intrusion has so far been kept in check, but there appear to have been problems arising from domestic stock. In 1982, five Javan rhinos died from a mysterious infectious disease similar to anthrax. Some domestic stock had invaded the park at the time, which could have precipitated this event.

Dr Schenkel's suggestions to help safeguard the Javan rhino include developing a detailed map of the park's flora, emphasising the rhinos' preferred foodplants; monitoring of rhino movements year round; controlled flora management to encourage growth of preferred foodplants; control of the banteng population; and Dr Schenkel also supports translocation of ten rhinos, preferably to Sumatra, to begin another viable population. Obviously the new location would have to be secure, assuring the rhinos of protection.

A proposal by Francesco Nardelli of the Port Lympne Zoological Park in England favours capturing some Javan rhinos for placement in a captive breeding situation. Considering the lengthy time involved in the translocation plan, captive breeding would be the best move for the immediate future. The recent success of a Sumatra rhino capture operation undertaken jointly by the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, England and the United States should offer much encouragement for this plan.

The Ujung Kulon area has probably reached its maximum carrying capacity for the Javan rhino. The animals' vulnerability in this concentrated area becomes more evident each day. Captive breeding arrangements should be initiated at once, and also the necessary steps taken for translocation of ten rhinos to Sumatra. The urgency of some kind of action cannot be emphasised too strongly.

References

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