

Patrolling project comes to an unsatisfactory end in Cat Tien National Park

ARP through WWF, supported joint enforcement patrols of local community members and national park staff, to provide improved protection to Javan rhinoceros and other wildlife in Cat Loc, Cat Tien National Park. Over 12 months the teams removed over 450 snares from the park, about 10% of which were large snares targeted at catching animals such as Gaur, Sambar and perhaps even rhino.

Snaring was thought to be one of the main, immediate threats to the small Javan rhino population at the inception of the project in 2009. By increasing patrolling presence (which had declined since the closing of the WWF Cat Tien Conservation Project in 2005), with a strong focus on snare removal, we hoped to provide protection to this beleaguered population of Javan rhino.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the project by Cat Tien National Park left much to be desired. Patrolling was often not conducted every month and was implemented poorly, with little coverage of the core rhino habitat. The total number of snares removed by the project was only a fraction of the snares remaining in Cat Loc, and therefore a poor measure of the massive hunting pressure this part of the park is under.

Despite several discussions with Cat Tien National Park to try to improve patrolling frequency and coverage, WWF met with little success. Capacity and resources were not the issue; we had the funding and we provided training in patrolling methodology, GPS use, snare removal and data collection. Whilst under the supervision of WWF staff, the rangers performed very well. However, this performance was not maintained without direct supervision from WWF, and patrolling frequency continued to decline over time. In total, only a third of the amount of patrolling originally agreed was actually conducted.

In April 2010 a dead Javan rhino was found, with a bullet in the left forelimb and the horn removed. Although the rhino was not killed outright by the bullet, it probably eventually died as a result of the injury. We are waiting for the results of DNA analysis following a survey for Javan rhino faecals from October 09 to April 2010, but we suspect that this rhino may have been the last surviving individual of the annamiticus subspecies, therefore possibly



Photo courtesy of WWF Vietnam.

representing the extinction of the Javan rhino from mainland Southeast Asia.

What WWF are faced with now is to try to understand how Cat Tien National Park failed to protect its population of Javan rhinos, in the part of the park that was established for this very purpose. Millions of dollars of international (and national) investment has been spent in Cat Tien NP, with no demonstrable effect on the populations of species it is there to conserve. Hunting pressure appears to be increasing rather than declining and actions to remove these threats on the ground are grossly inadequate or inappropriate. This is not unique to Cat Tien but is a national problem throughout Vietnam's protected area system.

WWF are determined to learn lessons from our experiences in Cat Tien NP, to evaluate and adapt our approach to species conservation, to try to ensure that other globally threatened flagship species do not go the same way as the Vietnamese rhino, surviving perhaps only as the logo of Cat Tien National Park, and a symbol of Vietnam's inadequate management of protected areas.

Funds remaining unspent from the patrolling project will be put towards other activities or returned to ARP.