

Constructive liaisons

The International Rhino Foundation (IRF) concentrates its Asian programmes on the conservation of the Sumatran and Javan rhino in Indonesia.

IRF's programmes emphasise the protection of wild populations and the propagation of species in captivity or semi-captivity. Pervading throughout these programmes is the need for co-operation.

Inov Sectionov | Indonesia Liaison, International Rhino Foundation

Indonesia harbours two of the world's five rhino species: the Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus sondaicus*) and the Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*). Both species are classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN and are of major conservation concern.

There are, at most, 60 Javan rhinos and 185 Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia and, based on recent population estimates, this represents more than 90% and 65% of the respective world populations. Indonesia, consequently, has an enormous responsibility to conserve these animals (IRCS 2007).

As you can read more about on page 28, Indonesia's population of Javan rhinos, the only viable population left

in the world, is confined to Ujung Kulon National Park and has been stagnating in size, if not slightly declining, for the last 25 years. If the current slight decline continues, the population will have been halved before the end of this century. Sumatran rhinos are a little more spread out, but predominately confined to Bukit Barisan Selatan, Way Kambas and Leuser National Parks and during the 1980s and 1990s their numbers fell considerably.

In an effort to address these worrying trends, IRF has helped the Indonesian government develop a strategy to ensure the continued survival, and ultimately population increase, of Javan rhinos and Sumatran rhino in Indonesia.

One of IRF's key tools in Indonesia is the Rhino Protection Units (RPU). The RPUs are a unique, highly professional collaboration, which bring government officers and local community members together to work for a common goal. The RPUs provide security and good management of the National Parks in which they work by implementing regular patrolling. RPUs spend at least 15 days per month on patrol in the forest, and during this time they monitor rhinos and other wildlife, remove snares, and work to catch illegal hunters, loggers and encroachers.

Patrolling and monitoring are undoubtedly the main focus of the RPUs, but developing and maintaining relationships with the Parks' management and the local communities that live in close proximity to the Parks are also integral parts of the RPUs' jobs and critical to the success of the programme. In addition to needing their support for the programme to thrive, local community members are particularly important for providing the RPUs with useful information about illegal activity, including poaching, in the National Parks. This kind of informer network is only possible when good relationships have been established and maintained.

RPUs also play a major role in carrying out community outreach activities. Again, this activity is not the main focus of the RPUs, but increasingly it has become an important component of the programme as a means to help engagement with local villages and communities, especially farmers. Many local people now trust that the RPUs can give useful training on how to develop their livelihoods (such as training in cacao farming) and, because this trust has been built up, local communities are far more likely to support the RPUs' activities and provide them with information. For example, recently in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park a tiger was poached. Based on information that was provided by a local informant who had received training from the RPUs, it was possible to identify and locate the suspects. Collaborating with the Park authority and the police, a plan to arrest the suspects was developed. Trust and co-operation was key to the success of this operation, just as it is key to the long-term survival of the rhino.



Confiscated snares and weapons



The Rhino Protection Units have a tough job patrolling in hot and humid conditions



Grants

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