

International Rhino Foundation Javan Rhino Update – June 2011

Indonesia's remote Ujung Kulon National Park holds the only viable population of the Critically Endangered Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*). No more than an estimated 44 Javan rhinos remain on the planet, and surveys and other data suggest that only 4-5 females are still breeding. Evidence suggests that the species has recently been extirpated in Vietnam, where what may have been the last individual was poached in May 2010.

The breeding population of Javan rhinos occupies primarily the western half of Ujung Kulon National Park (UKNP), and thus is susceptible to catastrophic losses from disease or natural disasters. Although the population is believed to be stable, it likely has reached its carrying capacity in the current habitat and probably cannot grow any larger without intervention.

For the past 16 years, International Rhino Foundation Rhino Protection Units have kept the Ujung Kulon population safe from poaching. However, protection in itself isn't going to be enough to save the species from extinction. Over the long-term, the population needs to be spread out, with a second viable population established elsewhere in Indonesia. The first step towards accomplishing this goal is to create conditions that will allow the existing population to expand by increasing the habitat available in eastern UKNP (in the Gunung Honje area).

Over the past year, IRF, through its implementing partner Yayasan Badak Indonesia (Rhino Foundation of Indonesia) and supported by the Asian Rhino Project, Save the Rhino International, WWF, and other donors, has been working to expand the useable habitat for Javan rhinos in UKNP by creating the 4,000 hectare

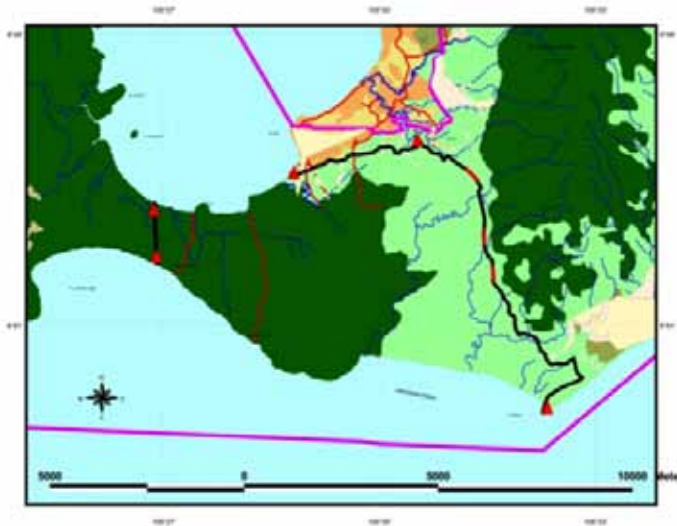
Javan Rhino Study and Conservation Area (JRSCA). The project intensifies active management in Gunung Honje, with the short-term objective of providing more habitat to allow the population to increase. We are doing this by constructing small bridges, an electric fence, and a patrol road; eradicating invasive species which have taken over a good portion of the habitat; planting rhino food plants; providing a water supply and saltlick; and constructing additional guard posts. The continued survival of the Javan rhino depends on their population increasing in numbers as rapidly as possible, and in spreading the population out so that 'all the eggs are not in one basket'. The JRSCA eventually will serve as a 'staging ground' from which translocations to a second site can occur.

As one of the first steps towards establishing the JRSCA, we began working on a plan to fairly relocate families living inside the Park boundaries so that we can make the area as safe as possible for the rhinos. UKNP authorities successfully negotiated with people living in the Gunung Honje area and to-date have helped moved 51 families living illegally in the park. These families agreed to relocate outside park boundaries, and will be eligible to participate in various job opportunities, possibly to include construction/development of the JRSCA.

Other early steps include building three new guard posts to provide for the security of the area. Construction of the guard posts is underway; one has been completed in the Cilintang area of the park (below) the rest will be completed by July.

At the same time, we are working on constructing a fence on the eastern part of the park to keep





domestic cattle, which carry disease to which rhinos are susceptible, from entering the park. The map here shows the eastern half of UKNP, with the Gunung Honje/Javan Rhino Study and Conservation Area shown between the two black/red lines. The fence will also make it easier for biologists and veterinarians to study the rhinos. Workers have already begun clearing a small, unpaved road along the fence placement.

Our next immediate focus will be on restoring good habitat for the rhino in the JRSCA area. Much of the park has been taken over by the invasive Arenga palm (*Arenga obtusifolia*) – (imagine a pasture overgrown with weeds, only this is a rain forest). The JRSCA area has to be re-zoned as a ‘research zone’ in order to accommodate our work to eradicate Arenga palm. A supporting environmental risk assessment has been carried out prior to beginning the work. We are beginning clearing of the palm, and as soon as that is completed, will begin re-planting rhino food plants to attract rhinos to the JRSCA area.

All Park Updates – IRF Indonesia Programs

August 2008

By Susie Ellis

I am just back from Indonesia where I had the chance to visit our teams in all three national parks where we work: Sumatra’s Way Kambas and Bukit Barisan Selatan National Parks, and Java’s Ujung Kulon National Park. Both Sumatran and Javan rhinos are among the most endangered species on Earth, and our teams in Indonesia are some of the most dedicated people with whom I have ever worked.

In Way Kambas National Park there’s good news - Rhino Protection Units (RPU) found signs of a new baby rhino, with footprints and dung from mother

and baby in a wallow (essentially a big mud puddle in which rhinos like to cool off) in the central portion of the park. RPUs have had to step up their efforts in the northern portion of Way Kambas, where they destroyed eight large animal snares (mostly targeting tiger) last month. We are now working to raise about \$10,000 to refurbish a wooden boat that will serve as a floating RPU station to deal with these poaching incursions, most of which are coming from the north via the river. For now, the park’s core zone seems to be secure, but we cannot let down our vigilance for a minute!

I have often written about the importance of partners in conducting our work. In Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park (YABI), IRF’s implementing partner, operates seven RPUs and an intelligence unit. Fortunately, there has been no known rhino poaching for more than a decade. However, we are now worried that anti-poaching efforts alone may be insufficient to prevent the rhino’s decline in the park. As part of its Indonesia-wide mammal survey, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) led multi-season design patch occupancy surveys in BBS, WK and Gunung Leuser National Park (the only other major habitat for Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia) in 2008 and 2010. WCS surveys and RPU patrol records suggest that the Sumatran rhino’s range within BBS has decreased over the past several years. Further, no juvenile footprints have been recorded in the last several years. While I was in Indonesia, we convened several meetings among partners to develop a collaborative proposal for another comprehensive, rhino-focused survey. This time, we also will use faecal DNA analysis in addition to on-the-ground surveys to determine the core distribution and genetic make-up of the population. Our partner, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), has just led a pre-survey of BBS involving the RPUs, the park authority and WCS. The teams walked 26 km in the dense forest in just 6 days (4.33 km/day), discovering six new wallows which previously had been undetected. Stay tuned for updates on our work in BBS: we are very much hoping to be proved wrong in our recent concerns about its Sumatran rhino status and distribution.

Our work to conserve the Critically Endangered Javan rhino also is moving forward. Our internal review of the 4,000-ha Javan Rhino Study and Conservation Area (JRSCA) in Ujung Kulon National Park demonstrated good progress toward completion. The JRSCA will

serve as a study area so that we can glean basic knowledge of the Javan rhino's biology before the next big step which will be translocating a portion of the Ujung Kulon population to a suitable site in its historic range. So far, the fenced area is being cleared, with a base camp created and new guard posts under construction. An integral part of this project is creating 24 pilot sites where we are clearing the invasive Arenga palm, a species which is rampant in the park and which prevents the growth of rhino food plants. Half of the plots will be cut, with leaf debris removed so that the soil is clean, and the other half will be cut with the leaf debris remaining so that emerging plants have some protection from the hot tropical sun. The plots I saw had been clear for 3 weeks and already had a good outgrowth of rhino food plants where the palm had been cut.

As another example of the dedication of our staff, last month, members of our JRSCA team were working on opening up an Arenga palm control study area near the river in Ujung Kulon. However, a handful of local people had been illegally fishing in the river using poison. As the JRSCA team was surveying the area, the entire team became seriously ill after drinking from the river. RPU's and park authorities are still following up on the illegal fishers: although we ended up switching that particular site, the JRSCA team vows

that their work has never been more important, not only for the rhino but also for other wildlife living in the park.

Despite working in Indonesia for more than 10 years, I have never seen a Sumatran or Javan rhino in the wild: that's how rare these animals are. Our field teams, who spend an average of 15-20 days per month in the forest, have face-to-face encounters with rhinos perhaps two or three times a year. But, every time I look a rhino in the eye in an up-close-and-personal encounter at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS), which IRF operates in partnership with YABI in Way Kambas National Park, I am so inspired, feeling an even more urgent obligation to step up our work to prevent the extinction of these unique species. More and more, we are trying to develop outside-the-box strategies to make sure these species endure. IRF and our partners have discarded institutional barriers to come together for this common goal and are fully committed to doing everything we can to collaboratively ensure the species' future.

In addition to the commitment and hard work of our tremendously talented and dedicated staff and partners in range countries, all of us at the International Rhino Foundation and Asian Rhino Project are extremely grateful for your continued support.

Special Thanks to Peter Hall

Peter Hall has continues his support for Sumatran and Javan rhino conservation by donating another \$141,657 last month. I wonder where these rhino would be today without the kindness and generosity of this one individual in particular?

To date Peter has contributed \$1,931,657! Peter is committed to the conservation of the Sumatran and Javan rhino in Indonesia amongst many other causes. Even though conservation is challenging he continues to play a key role in the survival of these species not only through funding but also in person residing on boards and keeping in touch with key players through project visits and communications. The world truly is lucky to have him around!

Thanks so much Peter!

Continued Support from Auckland Zoo

ARP relies on the continued support from major donors such as Auckland Zoo's Conservation Fund. Auckland has recently donated a further \$25,000NZD (\$19014.30AUD) for Asian rhino conservation projects. The latest donation brings the total funds donated to the ARP from Auckland Zoo Conservation Fund to just over \$59,000AUD! Such dedication and support from Auckland has been vital to continue our important programs. Thank you so very much.

CONSERVATION
FUND AUCKLAND ZOO