

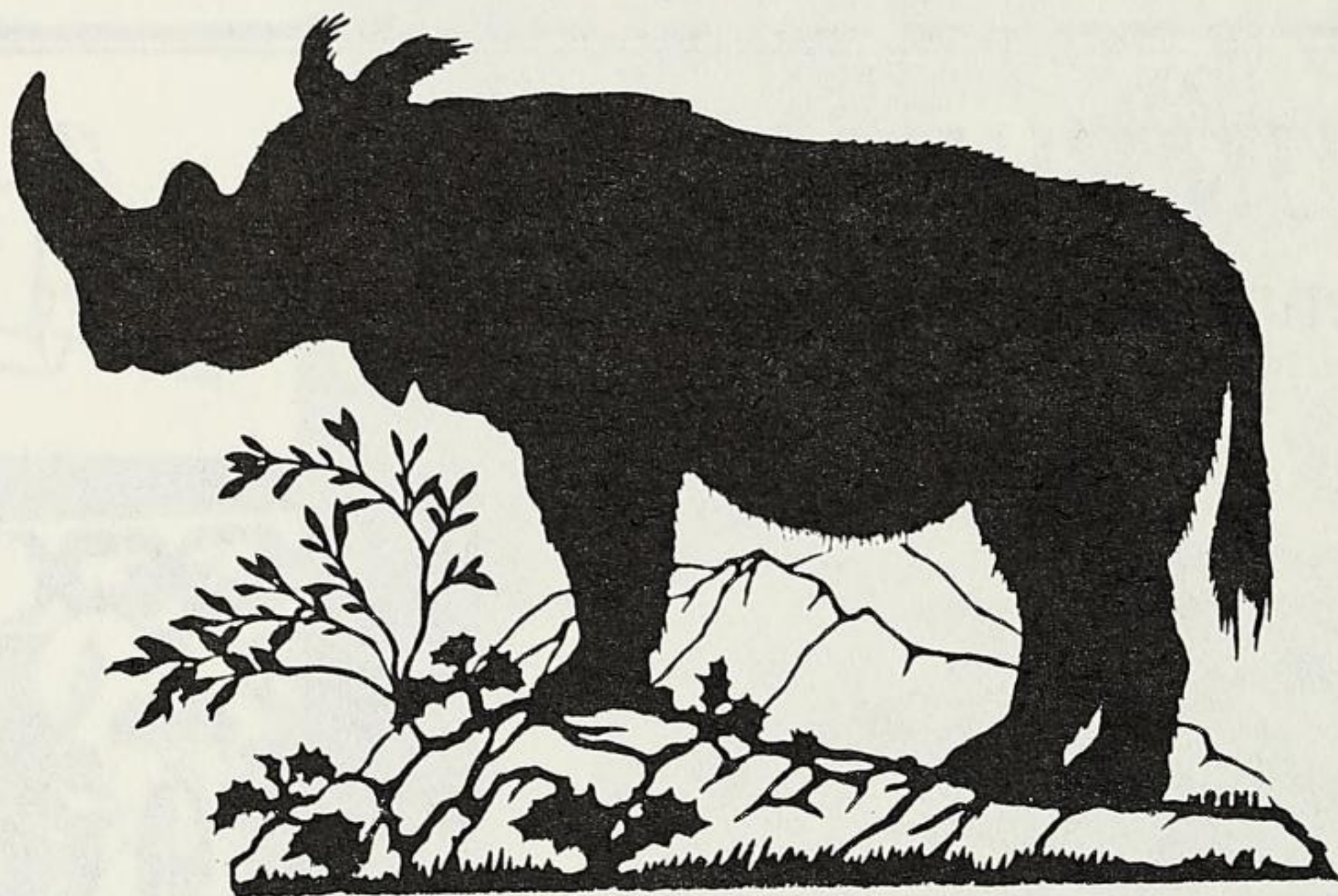
Sumatran Rhino Closer to Extinction

New information indicates that the Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) may now be the most endangered of all rhinoceros species.

Fewer than 500 Sumatran rhinos are now believed to exist in very small and fragmented populations, mostly in Indonesia and Malaysia, with perhaps a few in Thailand and Myanmar. Previous estimates from 1984 had estimated that there were as many as 1,000 Sumatran rhinos living in the wild. This decline has occurred despite significant efforts on the part of both Malaysia and Indonesia to protect this dwindling species. While habitat loss is more of a problem for the Sumatran rhino than it is for any other rhino species, most of the decline in their population can be attributed to poaching.

The latest figures were officially disclosed at a meeting of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG) of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of IUCN. This information has emerged through more intensive surveys that have been in progress in Malaysia and Indonesia. The largest change in numbers has been in Indonesia as revealed during a Population and Habitat Viability Analysis Workshop conducted jointly by the Indonesian Department of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHPA) and the Captive Breeding Specialist Group which specializes in small populations for the IUCN-SSC.

The plight of the Sumatran rhino is reflective of the dire status of the three species of Asian rhinos. Much of the focus about the extinction crisis for rhinos has been on Africa's black rhino, which has declined 97% in the last 20 years and perhaps 85% in the last 10. However, there are still as many black rhinos in Africa as there are rhinos of all three Asian species combined: Sumatran rhino (500), Javan rhino, *Rhinoceros sondaicus* (<100) and Indian/Nepalese rhino, *Rhinoceros unicornis* (1,900).



Although the numbers of the Javan rhino are lower, its population has not continued to decline at the rate of the Sumatran rhino. Although the African black rhino has declined more rapidly over the last 10 years, there are still 5 times as many black rhino as there are Sumatran rhino. Consequently, the Sumatran rhino probably has the dubious distinction of being the most critically endangered of the rhino species, and perhaps of all larger mammals.

The demand for rhino horn as a medicinal ingredient in Asia is the root cause of the three Asian rhinos' plight. Traditional Chinese medicine uses rhino horn to treat fevers and other ailments such as epilepsy, malaria, poisoning and abscesses. In China itself, the last rhino was killed more than 1,000 years ago. Trade in rhino horn continues despite the fact that rhinos are listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which makes all commercial trade in rhinos and their byproducts illegal.

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The Sumatran rhino is also known as the Asian Two-horned or Hairy Rhinoceros. Indeed, the species can develop a rather heavy coat of hair, especially when in captivity. The Hairy Rhinoceros is also related to the Woolly Rhinoceros which lived during the Ice Ages in Europe and Asia until about 10,000 years ago, when it became extinct, probably due to human pressures.

Sumatran rhinos are wanderers, migrating freely up and down mountain chains and seldom staying very long in one area. They seem to favour the steepest, wettest, and most inconvenient country and are, therefore, extremely difficult to find and study. Even a clear hoofprint of a Sumatran rhino can be hard to locate because they have a habit of placing their rear foot in the same place as their forefoot.

Despite the Sumatran rhino's inaccessibility, poachers still manage to catch these animals. The traps they place tend to consist of a runway of bamboo on a known rhino path. This runway has a trip wire near the ground that, when broken, releases a heavy spear embedded in a log, which drops through the shoulder blades of the rhino. The animal then bleeds to death.

With such a fragmented and small population, conserving the Sumatran rhino is going to require even greater efforts and resources. The IUCN/SSC, WWF and the IRF have been working closely with the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia on intensified programmes for the Sumatran rhino.

If you desire further information on the Sumatran rhino, or other rhino species and the efforts to conserve them, please contact:

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Korea's Whale Catch Beefs Up the Argument for an Antarctic Whale Sanctuary

Chagalch'i in Pusan, South Korea's second largest city, is the country's oldest and best known seafood market. Merchants openly sell whale meat there. It's the same story at the city's Shin Sewha department store.

When TRAFFIC (Trade Records Analysis in Flora and Fauna in Commerce) reported these findings last November, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) asked the Republic of Korea to check the species and origin of the meat.

According to TRAFFIC, the meat appears to be from baleen species, which are all protected from hunting under the IWC, and banned from trade under the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

"Both British and American diplomats told me they regularly saw whale meat in the markets," says TRAFFIC investigator Judy Mills, who was actually conducting a survey on rhino horn when she discovered the whale meat.

Vendors talked to her openly until she questioned them about the cost and species of whale meat on display. "They became defensive and shooed me away," says Mills. "They know they are doing something wrong."

Last October, Norwegian authorities confiscated a 3-ton shipment of minke whale meat, headed for South Korea, after an airline courier noticed that boxes labelled "shrimp", were oozing blood. An investigation is pending.

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