

16cm

The size of a Javan rhino calf's footprint discovered in Ujung Kulon National Park in Indonesia. The calf is one of four born recently – the first known births of this endangered species for three years.

This has been the worst year yet for the Mexican wolf reintroduction project in Arizona and New Mexico. Four wolves were shot because of livestock predation, the most since the project began in 1998.



NEWS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL

1-MINUTE GUIDE



Is the Iberian lynx going extinct?

Why the concern?

The Iberian lynx once roamed the Iberian Peninsula and southern France. From about 3,000 individuals in 1960, numbers plummeted to 1,200 in 1988 and 150 by 2002. Now an estimated 100 lynx are confined to a few pockets of south-west Spain and Portugal.

What's the cause?

Hunting (though poaching is now illegal) and loss of habitat (intensive agriculture and logging plantations) precipitated the crash.

What's the current status?

Matters may actually be getting worse. Experts fear that dams, new roads and disease mean the game could soon be up. Since 2000, 16 lynx have been killed on roads in Spain's Doñana National Park. In July, two lynx were killed, including the park's last breeding female. Meanwhile, Portugal's Alqueva Dam will create the biggest reservoir in lynx territory.

How can the lynx be saved?

Repopulating rabbits (the cat's favourite food) and sustainable farming will help. WWF wants road building halted in lynx territory, but if roads must be built, then tunnels and flyovers would reduce lynx casualties. Captive breeding and sperm collection (to tackle inbreeding) are urgently needed. More at www.sos.lynx.org

Mark Rowe



Financial backing for anti-poaching patrols and local communities has helped India's rhinos to flourish.

The right way to save a rhino

Two countries, two approaches: Nepal's rhino population is in decline, but in India the news is more encouraging.

An estimated 115 one-horned rhinos or more – about 5 per cent of their global population – were poached in Nepal between 2001 and 2005, making it one of the world's deadliest hunting grounds for this rare animal.

Yet better news can be found only a few hundred kilometres away in West Bengal in India, where the rhino population has grown and been poacher-free since 1996. How can these two extremes be explained?

Official rhino numbers have risen in West Bengal from 50 in 1994 to 133 in 2005, mostly thanks to an extremely high government budget – \$3,000 per km² – allocated to Gorumara National Park and Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary. This generous funding stems from the West Bengalis' belief that rhinos are

their natural heritage of which they are intensely proud.

It means the state can pay for more than one person per km² to protect its parks and can fund development projects and compensate for crop damage, injuries and deaths caused by elephants and rhinos – which in turn encourages local people to support conservation and keep out poachers.

In addition, the West Bengal Government does not try to maximise tourist revenue, in

contrast to some African rhino range states, where officials believe rhinos must pay their way.

Nepal's rhinos, in contrast, numbered 612 in 2000 but have since declined sharply. This is mainly because Maoist rebels forced the army to reduce its patrolling range. Rebels also occupy the south-east part of Bardia National Park, making patrols impossible.

And while Bardia and Chitwan National Parks do give half their earnings to people in buffer zones, funds do not always reach the poorest, encouraging some to assist poachers. *Esmond Martin*

BACKGROUND

- » The greater one-horned rhino lives in northern India and southern Nepal and today numbers 2,600.
- » In India, Assam is home to 2,000 rhinos, but the fastest growing population has been in West Bengal. This is despite a continuing demand for their horn, which is sold illegally in eastern Asia for about \$12,000 a kilo.
- » In Nepal, there were 100 rhinos in 1968, but numbers rose as anti-

poaching strategies improved.

- » A Chitwan census in 2000 recorded 544 rhinos, but by 2005 there were 372, reduced mostly by poaching and translocations.
- » Bardia's 2000 census recorded 67 rhinos, but in May 2006, a team of 40 people entered the south-east of the park and could only find three individuals. Instead, they saw poachers, guns and large amounts of smoked game meat.