



NEWS FROM WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE

Javan rhino deaths

Fears that the world's rarest species of Asian rhino is under threat from poaching are prompting Indonesian conservationists to send an emergency survey team into the animal's last stronghold, Ujung Kulon National Park.

In November last year with WWF support, Indonesian officials were hoping to conduct an intensive survey of the almost impenetrable forests and swamps where the world's last population of Javan rhinos has made its last stand. According to unofficial reports, up to 10 Javan rhinos may have been killed by poachers out of a group numbering no more than 60 animals.

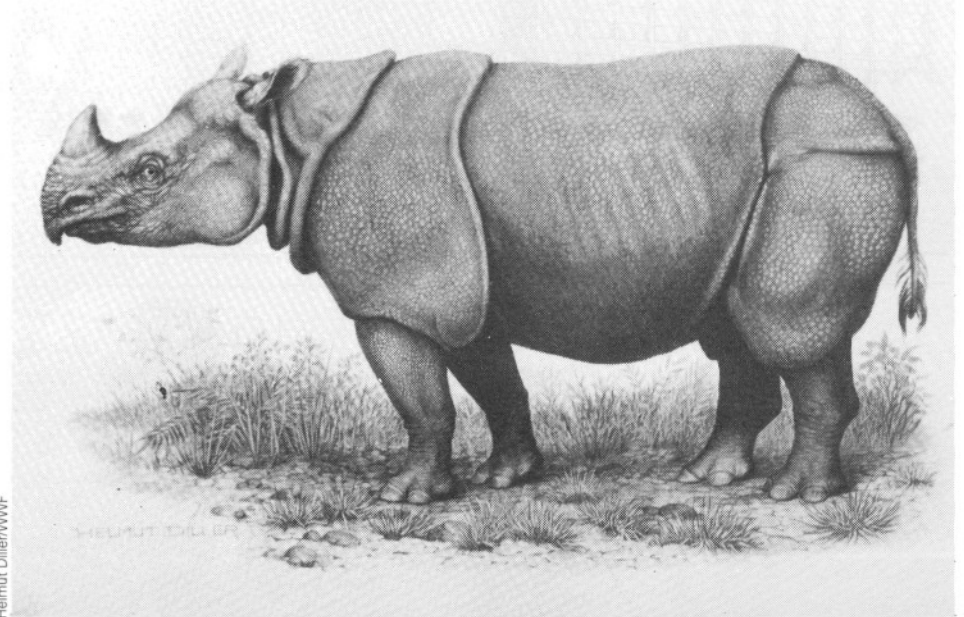
The 30-member team, organised by the Directorate of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation, were undertaking a month-long field survey to determine how many Javan rhinos are left in the park and investigating the possibility of establishing a second population in another locality in Sumatra where the species once lived.

Conservationists say the Javan rhinos have been able to survive because of the animal's inhospitable and nearly inaccessible habitat. Despite the difficult terrain and poor visibility, poachers seem to have succeeded in killing the animals. The dense mountainous rainforest and thorny scrub jungle have also made it virtually impossible for biologists to determine rhino numbers.

In a recent interview Dr Esmond Bradley-Martin, WWF Consultant and internationally renowned expert on the trade in rhino and elephant products, said that, 'The recent upsurge in the killing of Javan rhinos illustrates how important it is to close down internal as well as international trade in rhino products in all Asian countries, and to encourage the use of substitutes for them.'

Dr Martin, who has just completed a tour of several Asian nations for the purpose of studying the rhino trade, reports that 'New horn, hide, nails and other commodities from rhinos in Asia and Africa are continually being put on the markets. Hardly any known population of Sumatran rhinos is safe from poachers,' he added. In central Sumatra, at least a dozen rhinos are killed in snares every year, he explained. One population alone has been reduced from about 100 in 1974 to around 15 today.

Despite trade bans on imports of rhino products in Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao and China, rhino poaching is taking a heavy toll on the Sumatran rhino whose total population is estimated to be around 600. But new measures have been taken to shut down the trade. In July last year, Hong Kong's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries announced that the internal sales of rhino horn and hide would be stopped as of 1 August. To prepare for the new legislation, traders were advised in February and



Helmut Diller/WWF

Javan rhino.

again in May to dispose of their existing stocks. Hong Kong banned import of all five rhino species in 1979. Up until the passage of the new law, rhino horn stocks imported before that date could be traded in Hong Kong.

By the end of last year, Hong Kong was expected to prohibit the import, possession and local sale of all medicinal products containing rhino ingredients. This latest move was introduced in conformity with recommendations made by the international secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Other problem areas in Asia for illegal trade in rhino products, whose medicinal properties have been tested and proven to be ineffective, are China, Singapore and Thailand. According to Dr Martin, China is the main manufacturer of medicines containing rhino products and it exports them all over the world, particularly to south-east Asian nations. Many Chinese manufacturers are investigating the use of water buffalo horn as a substitute for rhino horn, but this is not as widespread as the government hopes it will become.

India probably has the best record for improving rhino conservation in Asia, with the number of rhinos killed having declined from 50 in 1986 to 41 in 1987. Moreover, India has built up its rhino population from a few dozen to over 1,300 today.

Elizabeth Kempf, WWF News

Global conservation centre launched

World Wide Fund For Nature, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, and the United Nations Environment Programme – who successfully launched the World

Conservation Strategy in 1980 – have joined forces once again to forge the creation of a World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

Recognising the growing demand for reliable international data on the state of the globe's environment, these three prominent environmental organisations have signed a memorandum of understanding pledging their support to the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC). The new organisation will build upon the former IUCN Conservation Monitoring Centre, and will be based in its present accommodation at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England, until its future headquarters can be found.

Each of the partners has pledged £200,000 (approximately US\$330,000) a year towards establishing the WCMC as a global database of international importance, a unique focal point for documentation and distribution of information on the state of the planet's threatened species, habitats and living resources.

The primary aim of the WCMC is to support conservation and sustainable development by collecting and providing reliable data on biological diversity and the distribution and status of habitat and species. In addition, it will make data available for scientists and decision-makers carrying out conservation and natural resources assessments at regional and national levels. WCMC will also develop a network of national databases as a means of supporting conservation action at the local level in developing countries and enable officials to make sound decisions based on reliable and up-to-date information.

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