

Rhino conservation success in Assam

Right: Relocating a Greater one-horned rhino.

Far right: Rhinos enjoying their habitats in India and the relocation team that has enabled IRV2020 to be successful.

Assam, a state in the Northeastern part of India, is regarded as a conservation success in terms of recovery of the Greater one-horned rhinoceros. In 1905, when the Government initiated efforts to protect the species, Kaziranga National Park and Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, two areas home to the last remaining animals, were declared as Reserved Forest, helping to secure the rhinos and their habitats.

Bibhab Kumar Talukdar | Senior Advisor, Asian Rhinos, International Rhino Foundation

At that time, it was thought that Kaziranga had as few as a dozen rhinos left. Thankfully, since then, the number of rhinos in Assam has significantly increased: by the early 2000s almost 2,000 Greater one-horned rhinos were living in the State. While this achievement was huge, there was a major issue: 80% of the population lived in one place, Kaziranga National Park, and the Park was running out of space for rhinos. We had to find a way to continue to increase the rhino population and expand rhinos into new sites.

Our first wild-to-wild translocation was completed in 2008 with two adult males

In 2005, we celebrated the centenary anniversary of Kaziranga's protection and launched the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020). The programme's aims were simple: to boost Assam's rhino population to 3,000 by 2020 by establishing populations in new parks and reserves across the State.

As a member of the Rhino Task Force constituted by the Government of Assam, my work was to ensure that the objectives set for the project were delivered. To reach our goal, rhino translocations from more densely populated areas (including Kaziranga) into reserves without any rhinos were key. To execute these translocations, a smaller group known as the Translocation Core Committee was also constituted by the Government of Assam to make quick decisions on planning rhino captures and transporting animals to release sites. I am fortunate to be a member of the Translocation Core Committee, too.



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Our first wild-to-wild translocation was completed in 2008 when two adult males were successfully moved from Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary to Manas National Park.

Manas is a 950 km² UNESCO World Heritage site north of the Brahmaputra River. Until the early 2000s, it was home to around 80 Greater one-horned rhinos; after years of social-political unrest, the entire population was poached. Between 2008 and 2021, we moved 22 wild rhinos from Kaziranga and Pobitora and released them into Manas.

Thanks to these actions and many others within IRV2020, there are now thought to be more than 3,000 Greater one-horned rhinos in four of Assam's protected areas: Pobitora Wildlife Reserve, Rajiv Gandhi Orang National Park, Kaziranga National Park and Manas National Park.

Of course, there have been numerous challenges along the way. Many translocations were delayed to ensure safety for people and rhinos during periods of political unrest, and poaching incidents threatened the growth of new rhino populations. Yet, one of the most important goals, increasing the rhino population, has been reached.

We are now developing our next set of long-term plans for India's rhinos, to ensure that we build on all of the progress that's been made since 2005.



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