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## **2019 State of the Rhino Report: 10-Year Improvement in World Rhino Populations Offers Cautious Hope**

*Poaching pressure continues to increase,  
impacting African rhino species*

*Efforts in India and Nepal lead to increases  
in the numbers of the greater one-horned rhino*

Strasburg, VA – The International Rhino Foundation (IRF) released today the 2019 State of the Rhino report which details the impacts on the conservation of the world's five species of rhinoceros.

Remarkable recoveries have been seen over the past ten years for several species, including the black rhino in Africa and the greater one-horned rhino in India and Nepal. Poaching remains the largest threat and has led to decreases for white rhinos and Sumatran rhinos over 2 years.

10 years ago, fewer than 21,000 rhinos roamed the Earth. Today, rhino numbers hover around 27,300 – a 30 percent increase over the past decade. But, shorter term, over the past 2 years, the global rhino population has seen a steady decline, dropping from a high of 29,000 in 2017 to 27,300 today.

Despite the overall 10-year increase, rhino populations have reached a tipping point as births no longer are keeping up with poaching losses. “Two of the world's five rhino species could be lost in our lifetime,” says Susie Ellis, executive director of the IRF. “Rhinos across the globe are threatened by rampant poaching to feed illegal markets, by habitat loss, and by other factors ranging from inbreeding to invasive species. “

[Africa](#)

In Africa, criminals killed nearly 900 rhinos last year. While this is a decrease from 3.7 rhinos lost per day in 2015, 2018 still saw 2.4 rhinos killed per day – or one rhino every 10 hours.

White rhinos, which number 18,000 today, have been most heavily impacted by poaching over the past 2 years. The species is more susceptible to poaching largely because they generally live in more open habitats where they are easier to target.

Africa's other rhino species, the black rhino, is slowly coming back from horrendous losses. By 1993, fewer than 2,300 rhinos remained from populations numbering more than 65,000 in the 1970s. Today, black rhino numbers hover around 5,500 animals. Poaching remains a threat for this species as well.

“The declines would have been far larger if not for the enormous protection efforts by governments and conservationists in Africa,” says Ellis.

## Asia

Strict protection by government authorities in India and Nepal, has resulted in remarkable conservation successes for the greater one-horned, or Indian, rhino which has rebounded from fewer than 100 individuals to more than 3,600 today.

Beginning in 2009, IRF and its Indian Rhino Vision 2020 partners worked together to establish a new Indian rhino population in Assam's Manas National Park. Eighteen animals have been born in the park, and there have been two births so far in 2019, which brings the population to 36 animals.

“These efforts demonstrate that rhinos can recover on their own if they are given adequate space and are free from the outside pressures of poaching and habitat loss,” says Ellis.

In Indonesia, fewer than 80 Sumatran rhinos remain. The species is likely now the most endangered large mammal on Earth, with declines of more than 70 percent in the past 20 years.

Three small, isolated populations exist on Indonesia's Sumatra Island, plus a tiny handful of animals in Indonesian Borneo. Remaining populations are heavily guarded by anti-poaching units, but despite protection, numbers continue to decline.

In 2017, the Government of Indonesia developed a Sumatran Rhino Emergency Action Plan, and in 2018, IRF and partners formed the Sumatran Rhino Rescue project, with plans to rescue rhinos and bring those with reproductive potential into large, semi-natural breeding and research facilities like the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary to increase population numbers.

Javan rhinos, numbering no more than 68 animals, are found only in Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park, where they are heavily protected. There has been no poaching in Ujung Kulon in more than 25 years.

### Eighteenth Conference of the Parties, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

In August, representatives from nearly every country in the world met in Geneva, Switzerland to discuss trade issues pertaining not only to charismatic species like rhinos and elephants, but also species ranging from otters to sturgeons to coral to a variety of plants.

Three rhino proposals were brought forth to the parties:

1. By Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) to allow the country unrestricted international commercial trade in its specimens of white rhino, their horn and products. The Parties rejected the proposal 202-25, with seven abstentions;
2. By Namibia to allow the country to conduct live trade in southern white rhinos to appropriate destinations. The proposal was rejected 82-29;
3. And by South Africa to allow it to change its trophy hunting system for black rhinos, requesting the hunting quota be increased from five adult males to a total number of adult males not exceeding 0.5% of its total black rhino population. The Parties approved the proposal, with amendments.

### Assisted Reproductive Technology

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) as part of the conservation activities for rhinos has been a trending topic in 2019. In September of this year, European scientists recovered eggs from the last female (non-reproductive) northern white rhino females, and successfully fertilized them with frozen-thawed sperm from two deceased northern white rhino bulls. Two of the eggs grew to early stage embryos and have been frozen to be later implanted into a southern white rhino surrogate. This was followed by the recovery of one egg from the last Sumatran rhino in Sabah, Malaysia, which hopefully can be matured and frozen.

In July, scientists in the US, produced a southern white rhino calf using frozen semen and artificial insemination (AI). In May, another group of US scientists hormonally induced ovulation in a greater one-horned rhino and used AI to produce a calf.

"We follow and applaud these developments with great interest, while also noting the importance of keeping these accomplishments in perspective, particularly for a subspecies that is functionally extinct, such as the northern white rhino," says Ellis. "No species has ever been saved using ART along and attempting to use ART to try to 'bring back' any subspecies or species is a complex, highly difficult endeavor. These are but the first steps on a long, long journey. "

The report outlines the following four priorities for all five species of rhinos:

1. Bolstering anti-poaching activities or “boots on the ground”.
2. Maintaining intensive monitoring and active management of wild populations, complemented by captive breeding as needed.
3. Working with local communities to ensure they receive economic incentives for participating in successful conservation programs.
4. Governments must commit to enforcing their wildlife crime laws and commitments to international treaties to foster more effective international collaboration on investigations to address the entire criminal supply chain, particularly in Asia.

“IRF takes the approach of maximizing options and minimizing regrets, tackling the challenges facing rhinos using multi-faceted strategies,” says Ellis. “There is more work than we can ever accomplish in our lifetime. We applaud everyone’s commitment to ensuring that all five rhino species survive for future generations.”

For more information on IRF, please visit [rhinos.org](http://rhinos.org).

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