

Mongabay Series: [Asian Rhinos](#)

## Indonesia reports a new Javan rhino calf, but population doubts persist

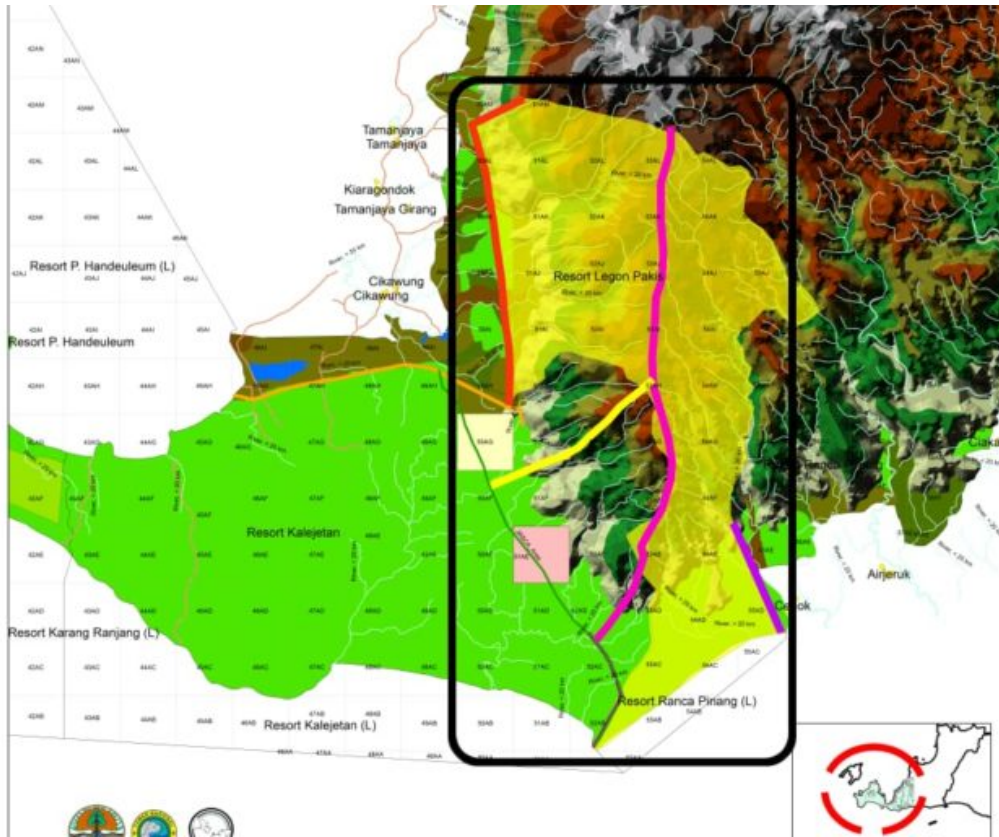
by **Basten Gokkon** on 6 October 2023

- *Indonesian officials have reported the sighting of a new Javan rhino calf in Ujung Kulon National Park, home to the last surviving population of the critically endangered species.*
- *While the discovery of the female calf is good news, it comes amid growing doubt about official claims that the species' population is increasing steadily.*
- *The Indonesian government puts the Javan rhino's current population at about 80 animals, with an average of three new calves added per year.*
- *Its past estimates, however, have counted rhinos that have disappeared (some of which were confirmed dead), throwing into question whether the species' population trend is really increasing or even declining.*

JAKARTA — A newborn Javan rhino calf has been spotted in Indonesia, but the good news is tempered by questions over the species' population trend and reports of an increase in attempted poaching incursions into the animal's last holdout.

Camera trap images taken between July and September in Ujung Kulon National Park show a female calf of the Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) roaming with its mother. Indonesian conservation authorities have since 2011 installed hundreds of camera traps throughout the park to monitor sightings of known, named adult rhinos as well as any new births, and also to keep watch for any poaching attempts.

"This birth shows the success of Indonesia in the conservation efforts of the Javan rhino," Satyawan Pudyatmoko, the Indonesian environment ministry's head of conservation, said in a statement [published](#) Oct. 5 in Jakarta.



**PENYUSUNAN PAGAR JRSCA  
TN LUUNG KULON - YABI  
2019**

SKALA 1 : 40.000  
1:1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Legenda :**

- Pagar Cibuk (5km)
- Pagar Ceng (2,1km)
- Konkor Cimahi (3,9 km)
- Konkor Aemheka - Cibuk (9,5km)
- jalan patroli
- jagar cimahi
- pagar aemheka
- Penyusunan WJ JRSCA
- DAM2
- DAM1
- roads (bakoutanar)
- Sungai
- Desa Area JRSCA
- Resort
- Grid 2x2

**countur**

**Elevation**

- 534.722 - 600
- 469.444 - 534.722
- 404.167 - 469.444
- 338.889 - 404.167
- 273.611 - 338.889
- 208.333 - 273.611
- 143.056 - 208.333
- 77.778 - 143.056

**ZONASI**

- HS
- Khusus
- perumahan
- rehabilitasi
- relig
- remba
- tradisional



The female Javan rhino calf with its mother. Image courtesy of the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

This is the first official announcement of a newborn of the critically endangered species after an investigative report published earlier this year [threw into doubt](#) the government's claims of a steadily growing population. In its report, the nonprofit environmental NGO Auriga Nusantara revealed that 18 rhinos had been missing for years, and at least three of them were confirmed to have died since 2019, yet continued to be listed in the official population count. None of these missing or dead Javan rhinos were publicly announced by either the agency that manages Ujung Kulon National Park or the Indonesian environment ministry.

The ministry's announcement of the newest calf doesn't give an updated population count — something the ministry [typically used to do](#) to [bolster its claims](#) of [stable population growth](#) for the [endemic species](#). In the last official mention of the Javan rhino population, the ministry said in a press release in September that there were ["about" 80 rhinos left](#), with an average of three births per year. Notably, it didn't give a death rate.

Auriga's report also highlighted worrying indications that attempted rhino poaching has resumed in Ujung Kulon since 2018, following three decades without reported incidents. It noted the discovery of a snare positioned specifically to catch a large mammal like a rhino or banteng (*Bos javanicus*), adding that sightings of people carrying firearms and other illegal activities have also been increasing all over the park. Accounts by communities and partner organizations in the Ujung Kulon area have reported [seeing poachers entering the coastal park from the sea](#).

Once ranging throughout Southeast Asia, these rhinos have been hunted to near-extinction, with a single population remaining. Since the 2011 death of the last Javan rhino in Vietnam, the critically endangered species now only exists in the Indonesian park at the western tip of Java Island.

Javan rhinos face several unique threats, such as an unbalanced sex ratio of about two males for every one female; a lack of genetic diversity within the existing population; the potential for disease transmission from cattle herded by nearby communities; and being confined to a single habitat that's now nearing its carrying capacity for rhinos and is located in an area [prone to natural disasters](#).



In its September press release, the environment ministry said it would beef up the security in Ujung Kulon to tackle poaching threats. It also said that if natural rates of birth fall off, it would consider using assisted reproductive technology, specifically IVF, with a Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) as a surrogate mother. The ministry added it would continue to increase its research activities inside the park, including expanding the potential habitable zone inside Ujung Kulon that the rhinos can occupy.

“Let’s together save the Javan rhinos that only exist in Ujung Kulon National Park,” Satyawan said. “Hopefully the Javan rhino calf stays healthy and lives long.”



***Basten Gokkon** is a senior staff writer for Indonesia at Mongabay.*