

New calf, same threats: Javan rhinos continue to reproduce despite perils

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- *Recent camera-trap images of a Javan rhino calf, estimated to be 3-5 months old in March, demonstrate that the species continues to reproduce despite being beset by challenges.*
- *The species is confined to a single habitat, and while its population is officially estimated at more than 70 individuals, a report last year cast doubt on those figures, alleging that 18 of those rhinos had not been spotted on camera for years.*
- *The peninsula of Ujung Kulon National Park, where all Javan rhinos live, has been closed to all visitors since September 2023 after poaching activity was detected.*

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There's good news and bad news for the Javan rhino, one of the most threatened large mammals on Earth. The recent sighting of a mother-and-calf pair in Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park, the only place in the world where the species is still found, means the Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) continues to reproduce. However, the overall dire situation for this critically endangered species remains unchanged: The total population remains well under 100 animals, and is unlikely to grow given habitat constraints and ongoing foot-dragging by Indonesian authorities to set up a second rhino population.

The mother and the calf were captured on camera-trap video on March 4. At the time, the calf was estimated to be 3 to 5 months old. Unfortunately, the mother was so close to the camera that park officials were unable to determine her identity, nor are they certain if the calf is male or female.

"It's encouraging to see these rhinos continue to breed successfully. The world certainly needs more Javan rhino calves to combat the challenges they face," said Nina Fascione, executive director of the International Rhino Foundation (IRF). "The

rhinos are doing their part; we need to do our part to ensure the population remains safe and can continue to grow.”

The Javan rhino, once found as far as mainland Southeast Asia, is today confined to Ujung Kulon National Park at the western tip of the island of Java. The total population has officially been estimated at 70-plus rhinos, and for a while appeared to be growing. But that estimate came under doubt last year, when a scathing [report](#) by Indonesian NGO Auriga Nusantara alleged that 18 rhinos consistently counted by the government hadn’t been seen since 2019 — and three of those had been confirmed dead.

The new calf recorded on camera in Ujung Kulon National Park.

The report also noted that locals had reported poachers entering the park. This has been obliquely verified by park officials, who in September 2023 indefinitely closed off Ujung Kulon to tourists (but not the small island of Peucang that’s part of the national park) after detecting poaching activity. According to the IRF, the park has also increased security measures. There’s been no information on whether the poachers managed to kill any of the rhinos.

Despite this, officials have counted four rhino calves over the past two years, meaning that even though the population is incredibly small, and beset by challenges and perils, the rhinos are still reproducing.

Scientists and conservationists have for decades called on Indonesia to find a site outside Ujung Kulon to relocate some of the rhinos, to better secure the species against disaster and allow the small population more potential to grow. In recent years, there have even been calls to move some of the rhinos into captive-breeding facilities, similar to the one currently used for Sumatran rhinos (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*).

“We should not be lulled by the joy of finding this birth,” Satyawan Pudyatmoko, the head of conservation at Indonesia’s Ministry of Environment and Forestry, said in a statement. “Even though Javan Rhinos can reproduce, this does not mean that the habitat and individual Javan Rhinos are safe from various disturbances.”

