

### Rarest of the Rare

The Javan rhino is the most endangered of the five species. These one-horned rhinos once browsed in rainforests along coastal plains and river valleys from eastern India to Indonesia, and as recently as 150 years ago were common enough to be considered agricultural pests. But their decline since then has been rapid, as poachers took their toll and people logged and cleared forests for farmland, leaving little habitat for the rhinos.

Today, Javan rhino populations totaling 12 to 15 animals remain in and around Vietnam, but the bulk of the rhinos—

about 50—are confined to the Udjong Kulon Reserve in western Java. The park population has been legally protected since 1931, but poachers continue to kill rhinos there and the size of the population hasn't grown much. Moreover, like all animals living in small groups, they are vulnerable to being wiped out by disease, natural catastrophe, or loss of genetic diversity due to inbreeding, although work on greater one-horned rhinos suggests the last may be the least of the threats.

The greater one-horned rhino population in Nepal's Royal Chitwan National Park fell from at least 1,000 animals in

1950 to a low of about 70 in 1962. Since then, it has grown to nearly 400 animals and its genetic variation approaches the highest recorded for wild mammals, according to Eric Dinerstein of the World Wildlife Fund and Gary McCracken of the University of Tennessee. The researchers attribute this high variability in part to the fact that greater one-horned rhinos were relatively widespread and abundant as recently as 40 years ago. Likewise, the Javan rhino was far more common and widespread before the long years of conflict in southeast Asia that began with the French-Indochina War in 1946.

## Rhinos at the National Zoo

Twenty-six rhinos have lumbered their way around the National Zoo from 1893, when the first and only Sumatran rhino to live at the Zoo arrived, to the present. The Zoo has hosted Sumatran, black, white, and greater one-horned rhinos in the past, and has been the site of four rhino births.

Half of the Zoo's rhinos have been black rhinos, and three of the four rhino births at the Zoo resulted from one prolific pair of them. Tony and Thelma arrived in 1961, and these two black rhinos produced the first baby rhino at the Zoo, named Dillon, in 1967. Tony and Thelma went on to have two more offspring in 1970 and 1978.

The first white rhinos arrived at the Zoo in 1956, and were named Bill and Lucy after then-director of the Zoo Bill Mann and his wife. They were also the first white rhinos to come to the United States. Bill and Lucy spent 16 years at the Zoo, and then they were loaned to the San Diego Wild Animal Park for breeding.

The first greater one-horned rhinos at the Zoo lived long lives. Gunda arrived in 1939 and enchanted crowds at the Zoo for 20 years. In 1960, shortly after Gunda passed away, the Government of India donated a three-year-old greater one-horned rhino named Tarun to the Zoo.

In 1963, the Zoo received a female

greater one-horned rhino named Deepali, a potential mate for the male Tarun, and her calf Rajkumari. They were flown from India to the States by the U.S. Air Force because commercial airlines couldn't carry 4,000-pound animals. Deepali never mated with Tarun, but her daughter Rajkumari lived at the Zoo for 17 years, mated with Tarun, and gave birth in 1974 to Patrick, who can currently be seen at the Metro Toronto Zoo.

Three greater one-horned rhinos live at the Zoo right now. A 10-year-old male rhino named Pandu, who has been nicknamed "Sport" by his keep-

ers, came to the Zoo from the San Diego Wild Animal Park in 1985. The two females, five-year-old Mechi and four-year-old Kali, were given to the Zoo by His Majesty's Government of Nepal in 1987.

Sport mated with Mechi on April 1, and with Kali on April 13 of this year, but no rhino pregnancies have been confirmed yet. Greater one-horned rhino pregnancies last more than a year, so if Mechi or Kali became pregnant from their encounters with Sport, the newcomers would arrive in late summer or early fall of 1992.

—Melissa Blouin



"Sport," Mechi, and Kali in the Zoo's rhino yard. (Jessie Cohen/NZP Graphics)