



JAVAN RHINOS LOVE TAKING SELFIES!

That a population of no more than 50 Javan rhinos has managed to survive for more than a century – isolated on a tiny peninsula known as Ujung Kulon – is nothing short of amazing. The species is now considered one of rarest and most endangered of all the world's mammals, but could very well come through this demographic bottleneck if current conservation efforts focused on its behavioural ecology succeed.

Bill Konstant | Programme Officer, International Rhino Foundation

The Javan rhino is a mid-sized species, as rhinos go. It's a bit more than half the size of the African white rhino or the Greater one-horned rhino. Javan rhinos are significantly larger than Africa's black rhinos and dwarf the smallest of the living species, the Sumatran rhino.

Javan rhinos once lived in close association with Sumatran rhinos on the neighbouring island of Sumatra, in parts of mainland Southeast Asia and into foothill habitats of the Himalayas. Wherever they were

“The incredibly elusive Javan rhino will stroll directly in front of a well-placed camera-trap”



found, Javan rhinos have always inhabited

lowland forests, which inevitably put them in direct competition with humans for Asia's prime real estate.

Essentially, it's always come down to forests versus agriculture expansion and logging. Javan rhinos are known to eat more than 300 species of native plants, but none of them trumps commodity crops such as rice, oil palm, coffee or cacao, or factors into the equation when forests are clear-cut for timber. That the Javan rhino's diet is so eclectic, however, allows it to compete favourably with similar-sized threatened herbivores such as the Javan banteng or with domestic livestock such as water buffalo.

The Javan rhino's enormous bulk helps ensure its survival. Even when Javan tigers still roamed the forests of Ujung Kulon, there is no evidence that they preyed upon rhinos, and the much smaller Javan leopard probably would find it very difficult to take down even a young calf if mom was anywhere nearby. Humans are the only species that pose a serious threat to the world's remaining Javan rhinos, which may forever be a target for poachers in search of rhino horn. Fortunately, Javan rhinos have very small horns for their size, with adult females essentially sporting no horn at all.

Laying eyes on a Javan rhino is near impossible! Like all rhino species, their eyesight is believed to be incredibly poor, but superior senses of hearing and smell allow them to detect would-be pursuers. Many explorers and biologists have tried to observe wild Javan rhinos – to study or just to photograph them – but they've come up empty-handed almost every

time. Our Rhino Protection Units have reported just four direct sightings in the past year, and they average at least 15 days per month in the field.

What's so frustrating about not being able to encounter live Javan rhinos – despite the overwhelming evidence of their presence in terms of footprints, dung, urine, wallows and feeding signs – is that these incredibly elusive creatures will stroll directly in front of a well-placed camera-trap, apparently at any time of day or night, and allow themselves to be recorded electronically. That's how we know that at least

35 individual Javan rhinos still inhabit Ujung Kulon, including males that are actively courting



females, and calves still in the company of their moms.

'Every picture tells a story', as they say. So even though the world's last Javan rhinos seem very capable of hiding in plain sight, the fact that they're not camera-shy gives conservationists a rare peek at an even rarer creature, and may provide information about its behaviour that could prevent its extinction.



Despite plentiful footprints, wallows and dung, (left) Javan rhinos are rarely seen. Most evidence comes from camera trap photos (below).

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