

Poaching Setbacks and Renewed Protection Efforts **for Javan Rhinos**

In 2012, it was estimated that there were only 35 to 45 Javan rhinos left in the world. Slowly, the population grew, reaching an estimated 76 in 2021. Despite immense challenges and complexities, the species had one thing on its side: poaching was not a primary threat. In fact, there had been no official records of poaching incidents for more than a decade.

Now, that's changed.

In April 2024, our worst fears were realised as details emerged about a criminal gang that had been targeting the last Javan rhinos in Ujung Kulon National Park (UKNP). Tracking the elusive species through the dense forest, gang members found and illegally killed rhinos for their horns, selling to buyers that were lined up and ready to traffic horns out of the country.

Throughout 2024, during the court cases of the accused, gang members revealed a shocking blow for Javan rhino conservation: between 2019 and 2023, they had poached up to 26 rhinos in UKNP. With so few animals remaining, the news that around one third of the world's Javan rhino population had been illegally killed in just four years was — and continues to be — a very grave development.

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In response to the crimes and alongside supporting thorough investigations by police, Park authorities have significantly increased security efforts in UKNP, closing all public access. This has made a big impact, with reduced incursions and — thankfully — no reported poaching cases since 2023.

At the time of writing, two individuals have been successfully held accountable, having been prosecuted and sentenced for their roles in illegally killing rhinos and trafficking their horns. One individual, understood to be a gang leader, was convicted and sentenced to 12 years, the longest sentence ever given for a wildlife-related crime in Indonesia. The other, a trader and intermediary buying and trafficking horns,



was sentenced to 4½ years. These convictions are a crucial step in tackling wildlife crime networks operating not only in Indonesia but also internationally, as reports suggest the horns were destined for individuals in China.

Investigations are ongoing, and there are still many questions to answer alongside urgent action needed to support the future of Javan rhinos. However, this situation highlights the importance of looking at the full breadth of criminality involved in the illegal wildlife trade. From gangs working to find rhinos

in a Park, to international traffickers, disrupting illegal activity requires a multifaceted approach. At the same time, efforts to prevent such crimes in the future are required through work to support, empower and meaningfully engage communities living on the Park's periphery.

Amidst these challenges, there are hopeful signs. At least four new calves have been identified in the Park since August 2023, showing the species' resilience and ability to rebound when provided with a secure habitat. Nonetheless, the stakes remain high for one of the world's most endangered mammals.

We're doing everything we can to support their future. Through our partnership with the International Rhino Foundation, we are continuing to support the Government of Indonesia's efforts to conserve and protect Javan rhinos in Ujung Kulon.

Above: Javan rhinos are one of the world's most endangered mammals, living in the dense jungle of Ujung Kulon National Park.

Bwlow: Beyond the threat of poaching, the Javan rhinos' home lies in the shadow of Anak Krakatau. In 2018, the volcano caused devastation after triggering a tsunami. Thankfully, the tsunami didn't reach the shores of UKNP.

Images courtesy of the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry.