



INTERNATIONAL
RHINO
FOUNDATION

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STATE OF THE RHINO

PHOTO: BRIAN HUDSON

KEY TAKEAWAYS

According to the most recent IUCN estimations released in 2025, the total global population of rhinos is approximately 26,700.

- In the first quarter of the 21st century, greater one horned rhino populations increased substantially, black rhinos more than doubled, and white rhinos increased overall (although heavy poaching has led to decreases in recent years). Meanwhile, Sumatran rhinos experienced a severe decline. Javan rhino numbers fluctuated slightly year over year before decreasing sharply by 33% from 2019 to 2023, due to poaching.
- White rhinos decreased from the last count in 2023 of 17,464 to 15,752 in 2024, mostly due to losses in South Africa due to poaching. However, legal accountability for poaching crimes has been on the rise in South Africa and several other African countries.
- The number of black rhinos increased from 6,195 in 2022 to 6,788 at the end of 2024. Greater one-horned rhinos also increased, estimated at 4,075 (up from 4,014 in 2022).
- Most range states did not publicly release updated poaching counts in 2025; for those that did, poaching declined overall.
- Population Viability Analysis forecasts Javan rhinos could go extinct within the next five decades. Protection of the population is critical.
- Rhinos are being translocated to historical ranges across Africa and thus far, showing success with reintroduction. Range countries in Asia are following suit with this tactic, but habitat health has presented obstacles there.



RHINO WINS

- Namibia reports lowest rhino poaching number in over a decade. 41 rhinos were poached in 2025, a 53% decrease from 2024, and wildlife crime overall is on the decline, according to the Namibia Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement Annual Report.
- The Indian province of Assam recorded zero known poaching in 2025, only the second time this has been achieved since the 1970s. The country of Nepal attained zero poaching in 2025 as well, an accomplishment they have recorded ten times since 2011.
- The rhino population at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in India has increased to 53 rhinos according to the park’s latest census, up from 42 in 2022 as reported by the IUCN. The reserve’s rhinos, along with elephants and bears, are a source of pride for the region. Jaldapara National Park and Gorumara National Park, both in West Bengal, also conducted a census last year, reporting a 50% increase in their greater one-horned population over ten years.
- Ujung Kulon National Park confirmed the discovery of five new Javan rhino calves over the past several years. Security measures in place at the park, such as camera traps and monitoring methods like footprint tracking helped identify the new individuals.
- An analysis was performed in Leuser National Park to detect the home range of wild rhinos in the area. One rhino’s range covered over 12,000 acres. This discovery is valuable for understanding the spatial needs of Sumatran rhinos and confirming the need to protect the ecosystems they inhabit.

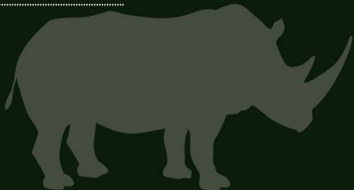
PHOTO: BRIAN HUDSON

2026 STATE OF THE RHINO



WHITE RHINO

Ceratotherium simum



IUCN Estimated Population

15,752

IUCN Status:

NEAR THREATENED



GREATER ONE-HORNED RHINO

Rhinoceros unicornis



IUCN Estimated Population

4,075

IUCN Status:

VULNERABLE



BLACK RHINO

Diceros bicornis

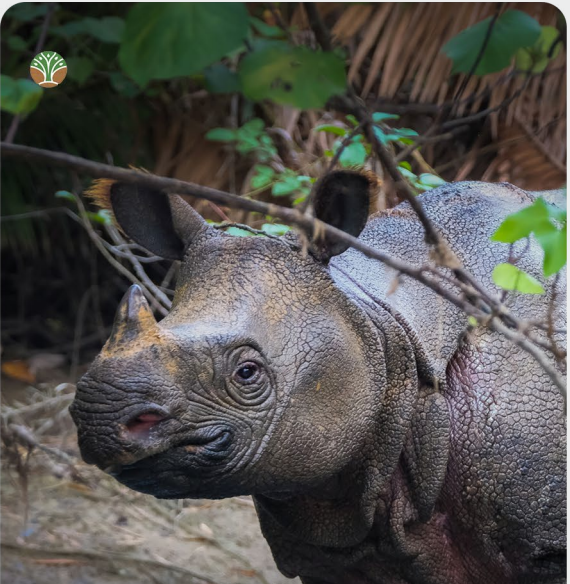


IUCN Estimated Population

6,788

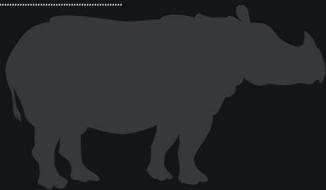
IUCN Status:

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED



JAVAN RHINO

Rhinoceros sondaicus

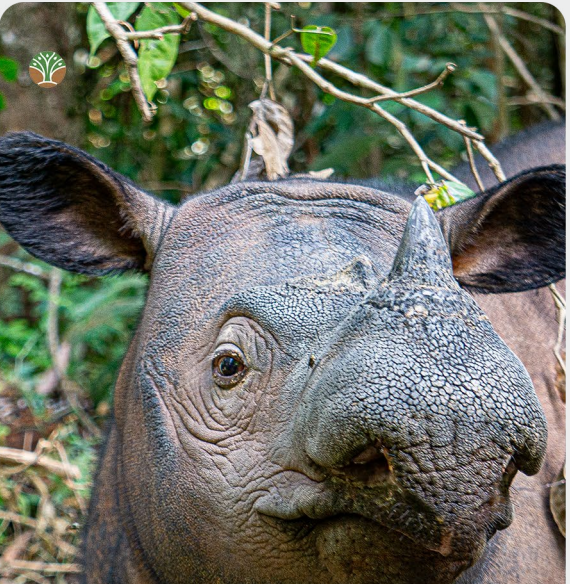


IUCN Estimated Population

50

IUCN Status:

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED



SUMATRAN RHINO

Dicerorhinus sumatrensis



IUCN Estimated Population

34-47

IUCN Status:

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

INTRODUCTION

The International Rhino Foundation (IRF) presents the latest edition of the State of the Rhino report, an annual synopsis of the status of the five rhino species. As one of the only organizations worldwide dedicated to protecting all rhino species, this report is used to document the most recent population estimates and feature both successes and challenges facing the conservation for rhinos in Africa and Asia.

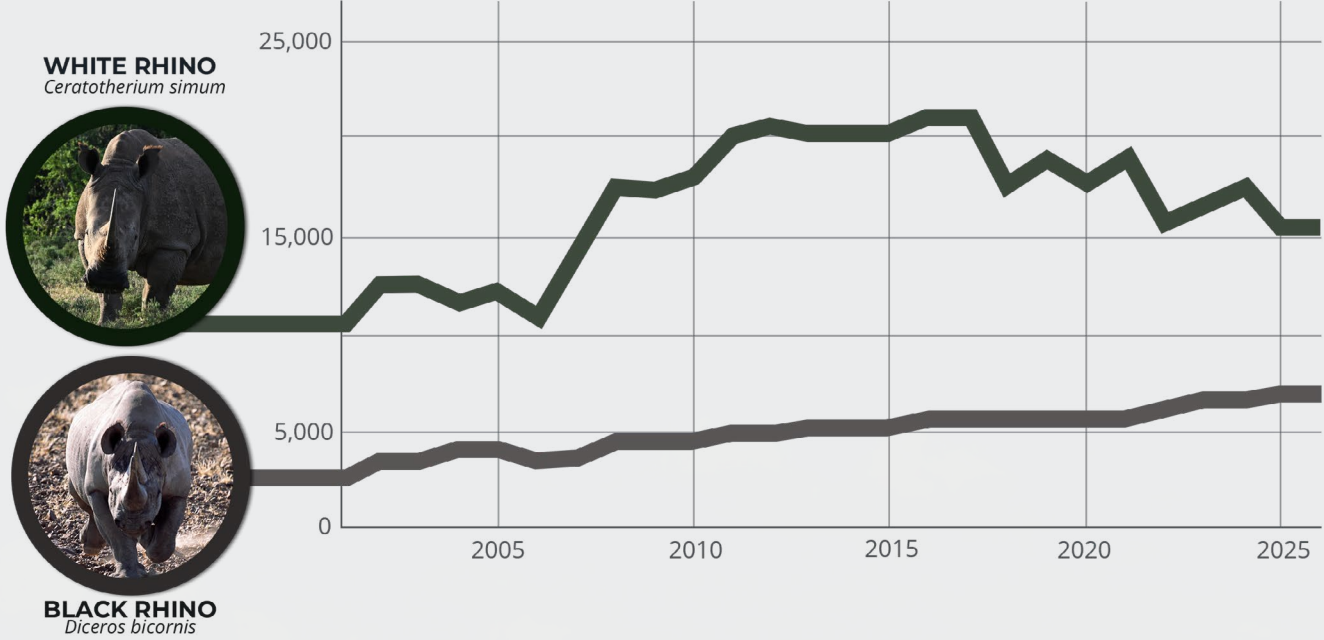
The International Union for Conservation (IUCN) Species Survival Commission's African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups and TRAFFIC released updated rhino population estimates in 2025. The IUCN report draws from information provided by the governments of rhino range countries regarding rhino population numbers and wildlife crime statistics affecting population size, like poaching. Obtaining accurate data in range states is a rigorous task that is often complicated by environmental and socio-political obstacles. Many rhino range states do not conduct updated counts every single year or do not publish the data publicly when they do carry out estimates. Furthermore, there is no one standard method for counting rhinos, so different countries use different techniques tailored to their unique landscape. Data in this year's State of the Rhino is gathered from the IUCN *African and Asian Rhinoceroses — Status, Conservation and Trade* report, released in 2025 with findings through the end of 2024, unless otherwise noted.

The total global population of rhinos stands at approximately 26,700. White rhinos declined overall between 2023 and 2024, mostly a consequence of losses experienced in South Africa due to poaching. However, the IUCN report surmises that the white rhino population may have been inflated in previous years. Black rhinos increased, and projections indicate a substantial likelihood of continued growth for the species if conservation efforts persist.

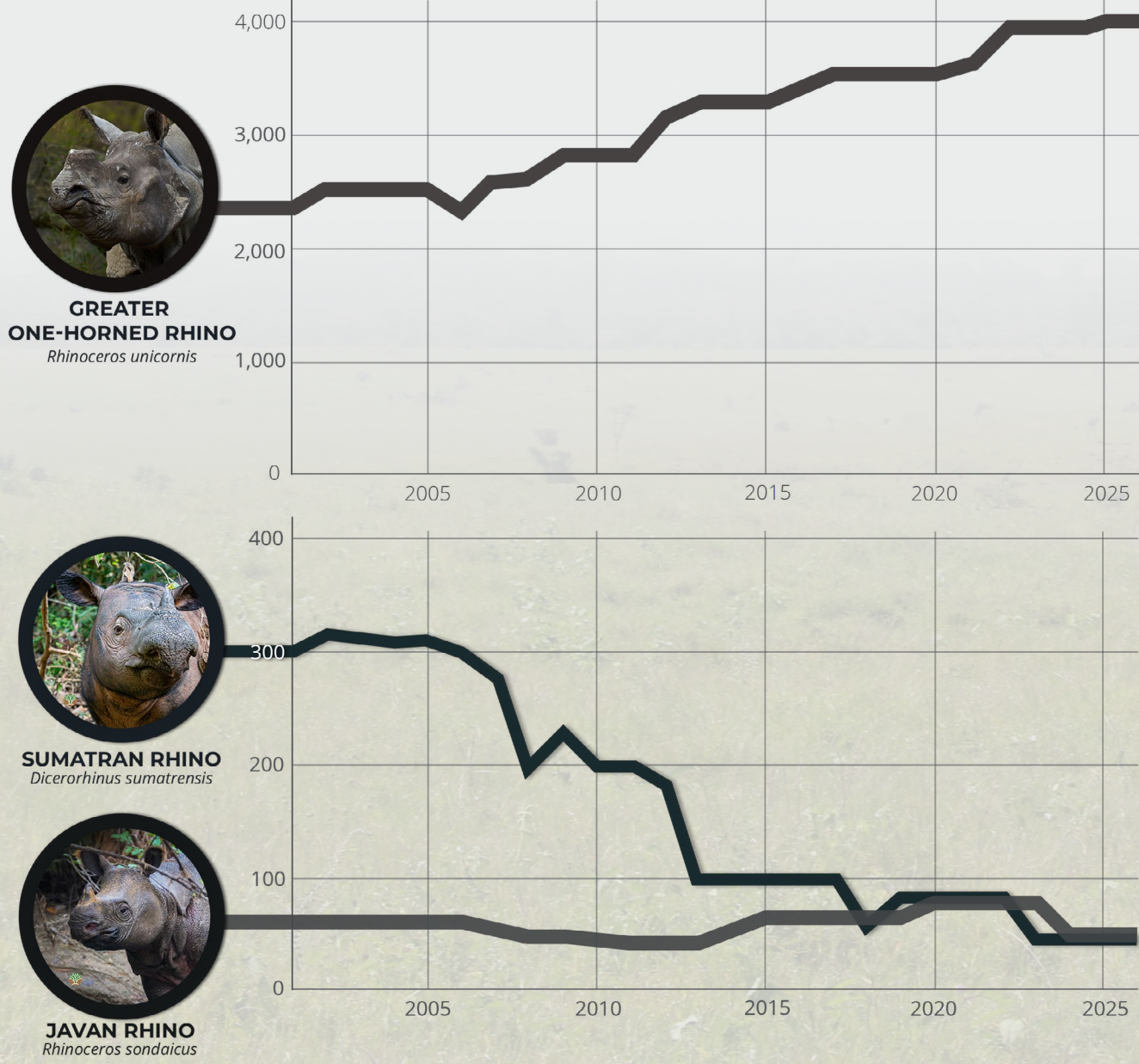
Heavy poaching losses plagued the Javan rhino prior to the last IUCN report, but fortunately, the species is reproducing in the wild, with multiple calves born over the last several years. The Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park continues its semi-wild breeding program, offering hope for the imperiled Sumatran rhino. The ten rhinos at the sanctuary are healthy and secure, spending their days engaging in natural behaviors like mud wallowing and browsing amongst acres of rainforest. The greater one-horned rhino population rose marginally, but habitat degradation and poaching remain threats to the species.



AFRICAN RHINOS:



ASIAN RHINOS:



As the first quarter of the 21st century comes to a close and we enter the next era, global rhino conservation stands at a pivotal point. Between 2001 and 2025, greater one-horned rhinos increased substantially, black rhinos more than doubled, and white rhinos increased overall (although this increase led to them being a primary target for poachers in recent years). Javan rhino numbers ebbed and flowed, all the while remaining in a precarious position with fewer than 100 individuals. The species eventually disappeared completely in Vietnam in 2010 and experienced a devastating decrease in Indonesia from 2019 to 2023 with between 18 and 26 rhinos poached, a 33% reduction in the total population. Sumatran rhinos experienced severe decline, estimated at nearly 300 animals at the turn of the new millennium and currently down to an estimated 34-47, all remaining in Indonesia. However, it should be noted that there is evidence that Sumatran rhino numbers could have been overestimated in the 1990s and early 2000s, so the decline may not be as steep as it appears.

Over the past 25 years, conservation strategies have increasingly embraced large-scale range expansion, moving rhinos out of strongholds to reestablish viable populations across their historical ranges. While in theory rhinos benefit ecologically from expanding into larger landscapes, real-world execution has revealed two points that must be addressed:

- First, habitat quality is not universal, and rhinos cannot expand if there is not enough healthy habitat for them to expand into. Expanding range area yields minimal conservation value if the landscape is degraded, overrun with invasive plants or suffering from water deficits—all issues certain regions of rhino range states face today.
- Second, crime prevention becomes much more difficult. Expansive areas greatly increase the difficulty of anti-poaching surveillance and ranger patrols. As rhino habitat is being restored, intense efforts must be made to ensure this is safe rhino habitat.

Biologically, small, isolated populations of rhinos are known to be less sustainable, but large populations across large areas can only be sustainable if the above factors are taken into account. To achieve long-term population viability and especially growth, range expansion must pair habitat preparation and management with proactive intelligence and legal accountability.

IRF believes both in addressing the obstacles present in conservation and celebrating the successes. By reporting on both, we hope to create a world where all five species of rhinos thrive in the wild, today and for generations to come.

This report is dedicated to the committed individuals in African and Asian rhino range countries working to secure the five species of rhinos in the wild. The International Rhino Foundation especially admires the tremendous sacrifices made by frontline rangers. We are proud to support these efforts.



AFRICAN RHINOS



WHITE RHINO

IUCN Estimated Population: 15,752
IUCN Status: *Near Threatened*

There are 15,752 white rhinos (*Ceratotherium simum*) across 13 countries in Africa, making this the most populous of the five rhino species. Around the start of the 20th century, there were fewer than 100 white rhinos in the world due to uncontrolled hunting. With dedicated efforts put toward protecting them, that number rocketed to more than 21,000 by 2012. However, their high population made them the main target for rhino poachers, and as a result, white rhino numbers declined by 24% between 2012 and 2021, falling to an estimated 15,942.

The white rhino population increased from 15,942 in 2021 to 16,801 in 2022, a 3.5% increase. In 2023, the population rose again to 17,464, reflecting a further 3.7% growth.

By the end of 2024, the number of white rhinos in Africa dropped to 15,752, marking a significant 11.2% decline. A number of circumstances led to this decrease, including increased poaching in South Africa and Namibia, lack of updated population assessments in some provinces and countries, and potentially an overestimation in previous years.

There are two white rhino subspecies, southern (*C.s. simum*) and northern (*C.s. cottoni*). The last male northern white rhino died in 2018, and now only his daughter and granddaughter remain—two females, making the subspecies functionally extinct. The pair resides at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya, guarded by rangers throughout the day. Through advanced reproductive technology, efforts have been made toward producing northern white rhino embryos with preserved genetic material and transplanting them into surrogate southern white rhinos. Thus far, these attempts have not been successful, but geneticists, biologists and conservationists around the world continue to hone resources that could deliver hope for the subspecies.



PHOTO: MALILANGWE CONSERVATION TRUST

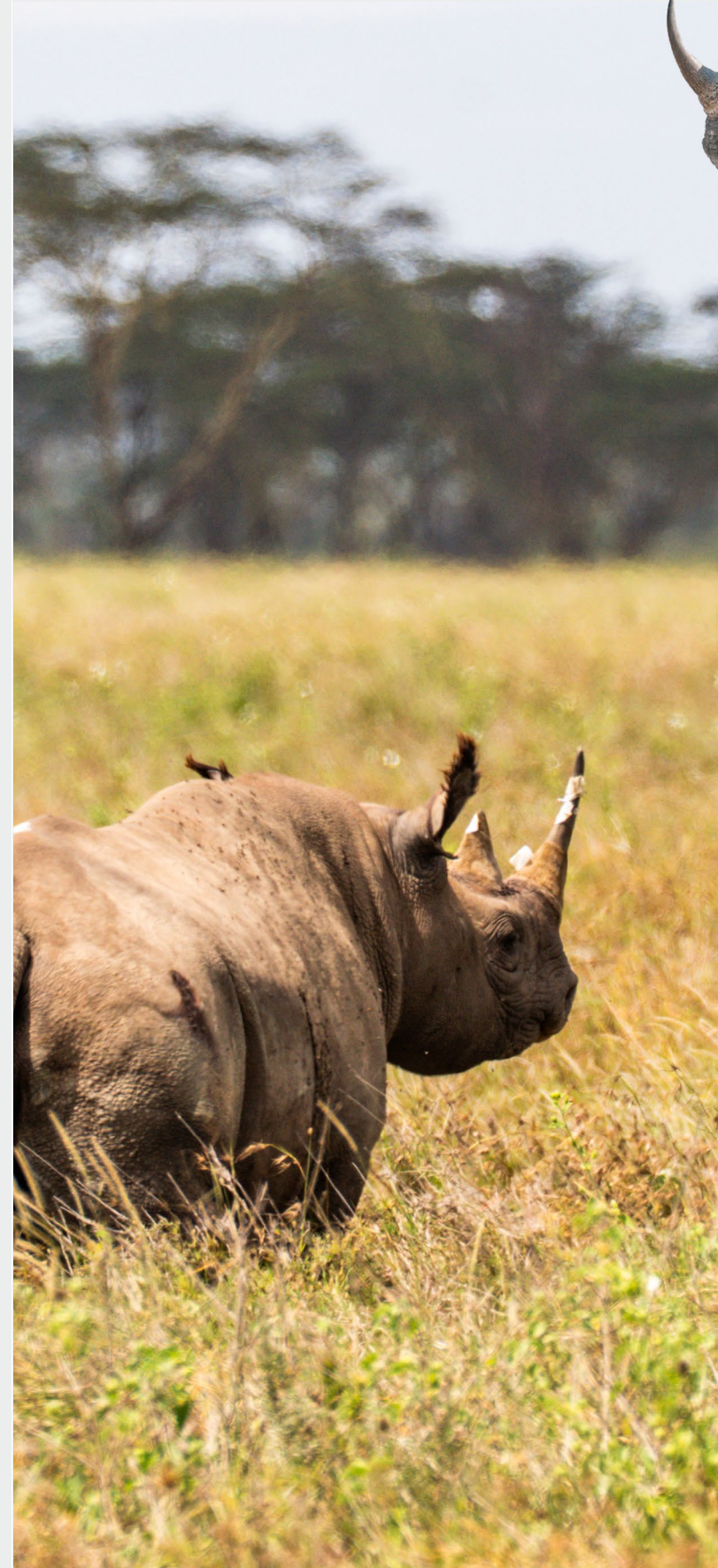


PHOTO: BRIAN SIAMBI



BLACK RHINO

IUCN Estimated Population: 6,788
IUCN Status: *Critically Endangered*

Black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*) reside in 12 African countries, totalling an estimated 6,788 individuals. The black rhino population comprises three subspecies, including approximately 2,597 south-western (*D.b. bicornis*); 2,720 south-central (*D.b. minor*) and 1,471 eastern (*D.b. michaeli*). A fourth subspecies, the western black rhino (*D.b. longipes*), was declared extinct in 2011; its last evidence of existence was in Cameroon in 2006. With as many as 100,000 black rhinos throughout Africa in 1960, they were once the world's most populous rhino species. By 1970, poaching had driven the black rhino population down to around 65,000. Their numbers plummeted throughout the remainder of the 20th century, reaching a low of roughly 2,300 individuals by the mid-1990s.

Despite continued poaching pressure, black rhino populations are holding steady due to strong protection and management strategies. In 2023, Africa's black rhino population dropped to 6,421 individuals, a decline from the previous year, but by the end of 2024, the number of black rhinos in Africa increased to 6,788.

If current conservation efforts continue, the IUCN predicts the population could grow to 8,943 by 2032, and by 2122, there could be 20,952 black rhinos in Africa, indicating a substantial potential for recovery.

AFRICAN RHINO POPULATIONS AND REPORTED POACHING

Data is gathered from the CITES *African and Asian Rhinoceroses — Status, Conservation and Trade* report, released in 2025 with findings through the end of 2024, unless otherwise noted.

African Rhino Range Countries	Estimated Rhino Population, by species (As of the end of 2024, unless otherwise noted)	Last-Reported Rhino Poaching Count (All poaching figures cited are from 2024 unless otherwise noted)
Botswana	345 rhino (25 black, 320 white)	1
Chad	2 black rhino**	0 in 2024 2 in 2025
Côte d'Ivoire	1 white rhino*	0
Democratic Republic of Congo	31 white rhino*	1
Eswatini	124 rhino (62 black, 62 white)	0
Kenya	2,102 rhino (1,059 black, 1,043 white)	2
Malawi	66 black rhino	2
Mozambique	58 rhino* (18 black, 40 white)	0
Namibia	3,598 rhino (2,098 black, 1,500 white)	83 in 2024 41 in 2025 8 through April 2026
Rwanda	71 rhino (34 black, 37 white)	0
Senegal	3 white rhino*	0
South Africa	14,389 rhino (2,307 black, 12,082 white)	420 in 2024 352 in 2025
Tanzania	268 black rhino	0
Uganda	43 white rhino*	0
Zambia	114 rhino (60 black, 54 white)	2
Zimbabwe	1,406 (836 black, 570 white)**	4 in 2024 5 in 2025 0 through August 2026

*Latest estimates were in 2023
**Latest estimate from 2025

LEGAL WINS AND OBSTACLES:
THE COMPLEX FIGHT AGAINST WILDLIFE
CRIME SYNDICATES



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK VIA ENVATO ELEMENTS

Maintaining progress against wildlife crime and trafficking syndicates requires on-the-ground security investments to be matched by sound and stringent judicial proceedings. South Africa remains a hotspot for poaching rhinos, with 352 rhinos killed throughout 2025. As an example of the pace, pressure and unpredictability of these crimes, ten carcasses were found in a single week within one specific area of Kruger National Park in mid 2026.

Despite these grim statistics, a number of momentous arrests and sentences have occurred this year, which strengthens governmental and law enforcement’s authority and supports the stance that poaching is a serious crime that should have serious consequences. In May, Goodwill Sibongiseni Mathebula was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by the Skukuza Regional Court—a specialized wildlife crime court in South Africa—for trespassing in Kruger National Park, killing a rhino and unlawful possession of a firearm and ammunition. A trio of former Kruger employees convicted of rhino poaching and conspiracy also face a minimum of 10 years in prison, while 44-year-old Sifiso Mbuyane was convicted of trespassing, killing two rhinos and possessing illegal horns, resulting in a lengthy and monumental 28-year imprisonment.

South Africa is not the only country taking action; in Zambia, six high-level traffickers were arrested in March, disrupting a network that included four known rhino horn dealers operating across Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia. In a landmark decision, the court denied bail for five out of six of the suspects, setting an important precedent in Zambia where wildlife crimes are typically bailable offences. And in Namibia, 45% of all poacher arrests over the past seven years have been made before a planned attack on a rhino, meaning the attack was ultimately thwarted. Paradoxically, while Namibia exhibits an impressive number of preemptive poaching gang interceptions, this coincides with a lower number of prosecutions than neighboring countries. The more effective preventive measures are, the less verifiable criminals there are to prosecute.



PHOTO: SOUTH AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE



These breakthroughs depend heavily on dedicated field operations and the hard work of the organizations IRF collaborates with. PROACTIVE Wildlife Protection's partnership with the Zimbabwe Republic Police addresses gaps in intelligence detection, providing training and mentorship for anti-poaching operations in the Lowveld region that have led to over 100 wildlife crime arrests. Intelligence units with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife in Zambia are supported by Wildlife Crime Prevention; together, they are working to identify emerging threats and hot spots for poaching. Units meet routinely to share findings and debrief on cases, and significant seizures of goods linked to wildlife crime, like bushmeat, ivory and firearms, are mounting, enhancing overall security in Zambia's rhino regions. In South Africa, Stop Rhino Poaching collaborates with lawyer Coert Jordaan,

"the Ranger's Lawyer," who equips rangers and managers with a foundation of legal knowledge relevant to their anti-poaching activities. Ranger confidence in high pressure situations and the ability to make lawful decisions in fast-paced scenarios has proven to be life saving. All of these projects are made possible in part by generous donations to IRF.

While all the progress is promising, challenges within wildlife crime prosecution still remain. This past summer, high-profile mastermind Dawie Groenwald was sentenced in the Polokwane High Court, receiving a fine of two million rand (\$122,860) or four years imprisonment for the primary charge. This was the culmination of a 15-year legal battle involving over 1,700 charges against him and his horn trafficking syndicate, disguised as a professional hunting outfitter. While media

outlets revered this as "the world's largest rhino trafficking case," conservation champions have expressed deep concern over the lenient and "soft" ruling, feeling that justice was not served after myriad legal delays and disruptions spanning over a decade. Allowing major crime organizers to avoid direct prison time by paying fines undermines the rigorous efforts being done on the frontlines to fight poaching.

Systemic court backlogs compound the issue, causing trials to routinely stretch over years, allowing suspects to be provisionally freed on bail and often re-offending while out. Poaching kingpin Joseph "Big Joe" Nyalungu was one such example, notoriously freed on bail after several arrests and police raids on his property. In a surprising turn, Big Joe was assassinated on May 16th, likely as a result of foul play linked to his criminal network. IRF believes that Big Joe should have been brought to trial years ago, and more effort is needed to disrupt and dismantle these entrenched and enabled criminal networks that encompass not just poaching but drugs, weapons, kidnapping, murder and other dangerous activities. Long-term deterrence will only be made possible with strict sentences for serious crimes and mandatory minimum prison terms, not mere fines, for elite wildlife trafficking moguls and their accomplices.



PHOTO: PROACTIVE WILDLIFE PROTECTION



COERT JORDAAN, "THE RANGER'S LAWYER," CONDUCTING A LEGAL TRAINING
PHOTO: STOP RHINO POACHING



PHOTO: STOP RHINO POACHING

THE CONSERVATION VALUE OF TRANSLOCATIONS AND REWILDING

Across the African continent, translocating rhinos has long been a conservation tactic, but it has evolved from desperate emergency intervention into a broader tool for biodiversity protection. Translocating rhinos helps re-establish wild populations in former habitats, improves population genetic diversity throughout Africa and mitigates overcrowding amongst thriving populations. More significantly, moving rhinos to an area often brings increased security measures, which in turn helps protect all biodiversity located there—one of the many reasons rhinos are considered an umbrella species. When executed correctly, with consideration of subspecies differentiation and historical range, along with years of habitat preparation, veterinary and behavioral oversight, security measures and deep community involvement, translocations can successfully rebuild ecosystems destroyed by historical poaching and conflict. A number of recent translocations have demonstrated this potential:

- **Seventeen black rhinos were reintroduced to Matusadona National Park in Zimbabwe**, after being extirpated there through poaching. Improved security and monitoring with drones and infrared technology will contribute to securing this landscape. This operation was undertaken by African Parks in collaboration with Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and local stakeholders.
- Ol Pejeta, a 90,000-acre conservancy in Kenya, holds the largest black rhino population in East and Central Africa. Ol Pejeta and a significant number of other rhino habitats in Kenya have reached carrying capacity, which can lead to territorial behaviors and other stressors for the rhinos. Thus, Ol Pejeta regularly translocates rhinos to establish founding populations in new areas across Kenya—six rhinos were moved in 2024, and nine were moved to Segera Conservancy in 2025. **With support from the IRF Rhino Range Expansion Fund, Ol Pejeta is working to increase its capacity to carry out rhino translocations**, including repairing crates and upgrading veterinary equipment, while also ensuring that as populations continue to grow, the land that sustains them remains resilient and productive too.

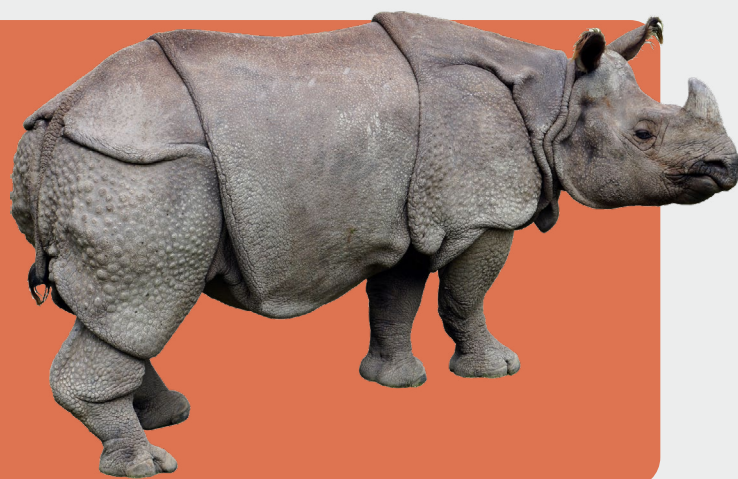
- Nine female white rhinos were moved to Zinave National Park in Mozambique in June 2026, bringing the total in the park to 39 white rhinos and 22 black rhinos. Decimated by decades of civil war, Zinave was once known as “the silent park.” Now, over 2,500 animals, including elephants, giraffe, impala, hyenas and leopards, have been moved there from neighboring countries in efforts to reshape the landscape into a vibrant refuge of biodiversity. **As the rhinos establish themselves (inside a protected, high-security area), they are beginning to reproduce, a sign of success after a translocation;** five healthy black rhino calves have been born, and hopefully the white rhinos will soon follow suit.
- African Parks successfully integrated 70 white rhinos to Akagera National Park in Rwanda in summer 2025, a significant move for the organization’s Rhino Rewild initiative (a recipient of IRF’s Rhino Range Expansion Fund), with a goal to rewild 2,000 rhinos into protected areas. **A year later, the rhinos appear to be adapting well, grazing and exploring across the savanna.** Despite issues with local disease that park managers are working to address, these newly introduced animals have begun reproducing. Rhinos and other species disappeared from Akagera in the 1990s; today, increased ranger patrols, stronger law enforcement and especially community engagement have facilitated the park’s recovery, with locals developing ownership and pride in the ecosystem. Akagera has recorded zero poached rhinos, elephants or lions over the past 15 years.
- Six rhinos orphaned by poachers in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa were rehabilitated and released to the wild. **Every single female has subsequently produced a healthy calf as of summer 2026**, confirming that proper rewilding protocols and advancements in rehabilitation are essential for young animals to fully adapt to life in the wild.

For translocations to deliver genuine conservation value rather than just headlines or tourism boosts, long-term security plans must be in place, along with supportive local communities, rhino health monitoring and ongoing habitat management. When these factors align, translocations and rewilding can be a safeguard for preserving both overall biodiversity and genetically diverse rhino populations.



PHOTO: GREATER KRUGER ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FOUNDATION (GKEPF)

ASIAN RHINOS



GREATER ONE-HORNED RHINO IUCN Estimated Population: 4,075 IUCN Status: *Vulnerable*

Greater one-horned rhinos (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) reside in India and Nepal. Since the early 1900s, the greater one-horned rhino population has grown from less than 100 individuals to more than 4,000 today, a significant recovery over the past 100 years.

In early 2025, officials at Jaldapara and Gorumara National Parks in West Bengal, India, carried out population surveys. Jaldapara reported an increase of 44 rhinos since the last survey, while Gorumara saw a rise of nine rhinos. However, many areas within India, such as Kaziranga National Park and Orang National Park, have not conducted recent population counts. Similarly, the country of Nepal has not carried out a country-wide census since 2021 and instead relies on localized counts.

While greater one-horned rhino numbers are increasing, the species is currently classified as Vulnerable. Poaching is a regular threat, as is habitat degradation. The abundance of invasive species in rhino rangelands outcompete native plants rhinos depend on to survive and restrict the amount of available habitat. Greater one-horned rhinos no longer live in much of their historic range, though they are returning to some areas through habitat restoration and protected corridors.



PHOTO: KELLY RUSSO | INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION

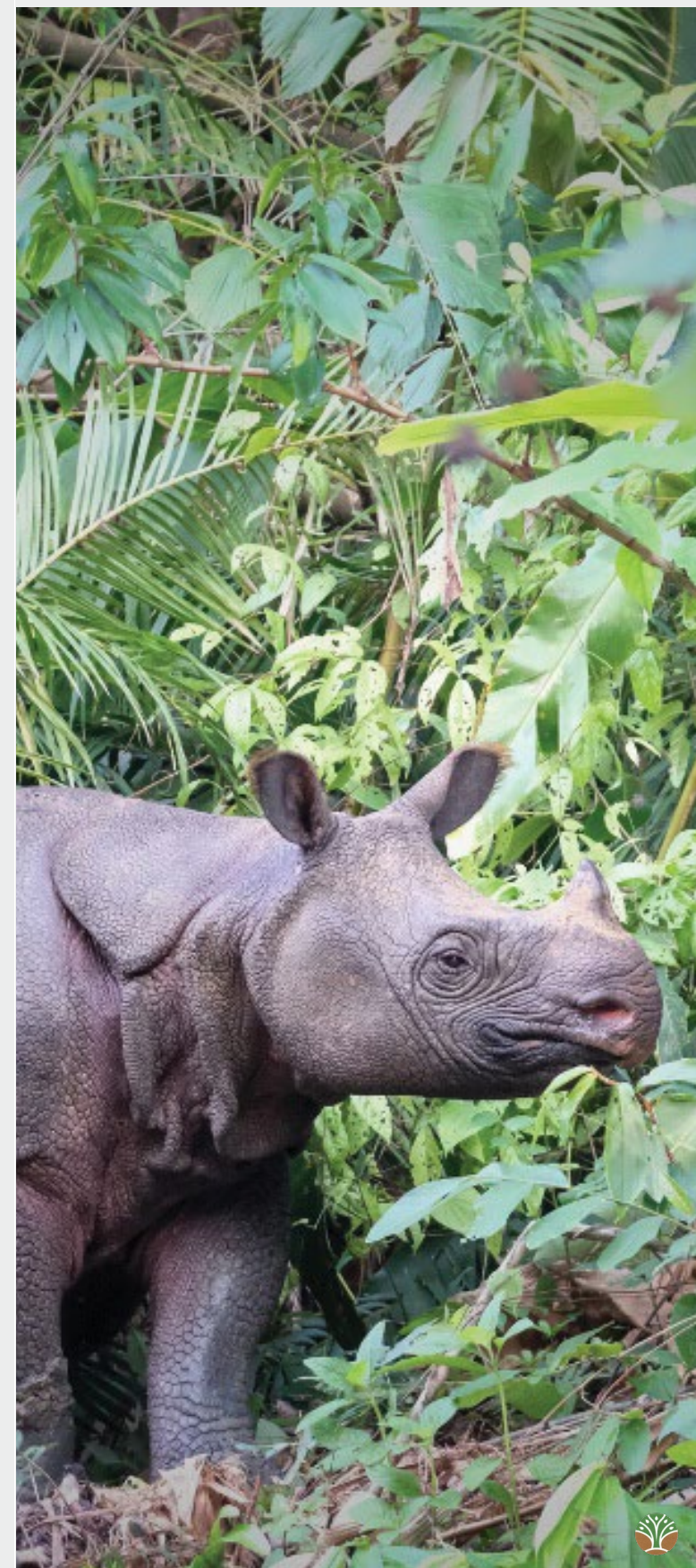


PHOTO: TOBIAS NOWLAN

ALL JAVAN RHINO IMAGES COURTESY OF THE INDONESIAN MINISTRY OF FORESTRY



JAVAN RHINO IUCN Estimated Population: 50 IUCN Status: *Critically Endangered*

The IUCN estimates that approximately 50 Javan rhinos (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) survive in the wilds of the Indonesian island of Java. Javan rhinos live in only one national park, Ujung Kulon National Park, where they face several unique threats, in addition to poaching risk. These threats include an unbalanced ratio of males and females, a lack of genetic diversity in the existing population and their existence in an area prone to natural disasters.

Poaching groups confessed to killing between 18 and 26 Javan rhinos from 2019 to 2023, a loss that resulted in a 33 percent reduction of the total population. After an investigation in 2024, Indonesian police arrested and secured convictions against the leader and six members of the poaching gang. The courts imposed fines and handed down sentences of up to 12 years for the perpetrators.





SUMATRAN RHINO
IUCN Estimated Population: 34 to 47
IUCN Status: Critically Endangered

Sumatran rhinos (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) are now only found on the Indonesian islands of Sumatra and Kalimantan. There are up to four isolated populations and as many as 10 subpopulations of Sumatran rhinos left in Indonesia. Only one of these wild populations, in Gunung Lesuer, is believed to have enough individuals to be viable. The IUCN estimates the total population in Indonesia at 34 to 47 individuals.

Despite protection, the species has decreased by more than 70% over the past three decades. Living in fragmented rainforest habitats across Sumatra makes it difficult for breeding-age animals to encounter one another. The breeding program at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, a protected, semi-wild facility in Sumatra, continues its efforts to create a viable population of Sumatran rhinos and now houses 10 animals.



PHOTO: ERIC PIESNER | COURTESY OF THE INDONESIAN MINISTRY OF FORESTRY



ALL SUMATRAN RHINO IMAGES COURTESY OF THE INDONESIAN MINISTRY OF FORESTRY

Asian Rhino Populations and Poaching

Data is gathered from the CITES *African and Asian Rhinoceroses — Status, Conservation and Trade* report, released in 2025 with findings through the end of 2024, unless otherwise noted.

Asian Rhino Range Countries	Estimated Rhino Population, by species (As of early 2025, unless otherwise noted)	Last-Reported Rhino Poaching Count
India	3,323 greater one-horned rhino	2021 to 2024: 9 2025: 0 in Assam
Nepal	752 greater one-horned rhino	2021 to 2024: 4 2025: 0
Indonesia	84 to 97 rhino (50 Javan, 34-47 Sumatran)	2019 to 2023: Between 18 and 26 Javan 2025: 0



PHOTO: INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION | COURTESY OF INDONESIA'S MINISTRY OF FORESTRY

ZERO KNOWN POACHING REPORTED IN ASSAM AND NEPAL

The Indian state of Assam and the country of Nepal both reported zero known poaching of greater one-horned rhinos in 2025, a milestone that demonstrates the powerful effects of integrated law enforcement, frontline vigilance and community-centered conservation.

Assam is home to 80% of the world's greater one-horned rhinos, with Kaziranga National Park holding the largest population at over 2,600 rhinos and Manas National Park holding between 40 and 50 individuals. In the mid 2010s, Assam reported nearly 30 poached rhinos in a single year, as large poaching syndicates and rugged terrain made protecting them difficult. By refining collaboration between law enforcement agencies and upgrading surveillance technology, the statistics have improved. In 2022, Assam recorded zero known rhino poaching for the first time since the 1970s, and last year, this milestone was achieved yet again. Within Manas National Park, zero rhino or tiger poaching has been observed for a noteworthy three consecutive years.

Much of this success derives from working to stop poaching before it happens rather than merely reacting. IRF supports targeted education for forest staff and rangers, teaching rhino monitoring and essential field skills. When poaching attempts are made, responding officers

know exactly what to do using IRF-funded training and intelligence to thwart the hunt, while advanced coaching on crime scene investigation allows for successful evidence collection to locate suspects and prevent future attacks. IRF's intelligence program manages a strategic informant network, and information-sharing between various law enforcement agencies serves as another deterrent for poachers.

Nepal, the first country worldwide to report zero poaching of rhinos, tigers and elephants simultaneously, has achieved zero reported rhino poaching ten times since 2011. The government often delegates forest protection to local communities, providing economic opportunity for residents and encouraging interest in conservation. K9 units operate as part of wildlife crime investigation in Chitwan National Park, where nearly 700 greater one-horned rhinos live.

While poaching attempts have not been eradicated in these strongholds for greater one-horned populations, and security efforts should not be loosened, the recent zero-poaching records in both Assam and Nepal are a promising accomplishment for rhino conservation work in Asia.



PHOTO: INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION



PHOTO: BILL KONSTANT



PHOTO: ERIC HESNER | COURTESY OF THE INDONESIAN MINISTRY OF FORESTRY

POPULATION VIABILITY FOR RHINOS IN INDONESIA

For Earth’s most critically endangered rhinos, survival against extinction is not only a battle against illegal poaching; it also depends on achieving the biological conditions necessary for long-term survival. To evaluate whether a species can persist long term, biologists rely on population viability analysis governed by the “Three R’s”—resiliency, or the capacity of a population to withstand environmental disturbances; redundancy, the existence of multiple geographically-separated populations; and representation, preserving genetic diversity across evolutionary processes.

The last remaining Javan rhinos exist only in Indonesia’s Ujung Kulon National Park, lacking resiliency, redundancy and representation. One unfortunate catastrophe in this isolated area could wipe out the entire population, and Indonesian Ministry of Forestry studies show a potentially unhealthy inbreeding rate of 58.5%. Population Viability Analysis forecasts the species could go extinct within the next five decades.

Despite biological bottlenecks for both rhino species in Indonesia, recovery is still possible. The Sumatran rhino, whose remaining wild individuals are scattered across isolated forests, has seen progress through managed reproduction at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, which has produced



five healthy calves since its inception in 1996 by IRF and local NGO Yayasan Badak Indonesia (YABI). IRF partners have also successfully restored almost 300 acres of prospective rhino habitat outside Way Kambas National Park in the past six years, planting over 30,000 seedlings in just the past year. This creates essential food sources for the Sumatran rhino as well as habitat that could be used for reintroducing rhinos to the wild in the future as the population at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary grows.

Last year, the Indonesian government announced plans to create a biobank for Javan rhinos and launch a captive breeding program. In November, the first attempt to capture a Javan rhino was unsuccessful. Plans are underway for the next phase of the program. Any captured rhinos will be moved to a newly constructed sanctuary within Ujung Kulon National Park.

Fortunately, Javan rhinos are reproducing successfully in the wild, with five new Javan rhino calves discovered over the past several years. IRF continues to direct funding toward protection and monitoring of the wild population, implemented by trusted partner ALERT. With strong field protection, heavily-backed intelligence networks and increased resources, there is hope for this population to survive and grow.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE INDONESIAN MINISTRY OF FORESTRY



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE INDONESIAN MINISTRY OF FORESTRY

HABITAT FIRST: ONE KEY TO ASIAN RHINO EXPANSION

Range expansion for rhinos in Asia hinges on a critical variable: habitat health. The receiving landscape must possess appropriate foraging opportunities, water sources and ecological resilience in order to support rhinos and prevent them from wandering into human-dominated areas.

Between 2006 and 2021, 22 greater one-horned rhinos were translocated from other areas in Assam, India to Manas National Park, and 20 orphaned or injured rhinos were rewilded in Manas. Today, they are actively breeding, with first generation females born in Manas birthing calves as well. Natural reproduction is one of the best indicators of success after a transfer; however, the founding population is not large, so the limited gene pool presents a risk factor. The habitat requires consistent maintenance of water sources and removal of invasive plants, which IRF assists through Aaranyak: 5,600 man-hours have been spent uprooting woody species and clearing invasive weeds across 123 acres of degraded grassland. Of the 100 worst invasive species on earth, 11 exist in India.

At the end of March 2026, four greater one-horned rhinos were moved from a protected, fenced rehabilitation boma inside Dudhwa National Park to a fully wild grassland in the park, which brings Dudhwa’s free-ranging rhino population to eight. This was part of a decades-long conservation plan to build a stable and demographically healthy population in the area; since rhinos are a keystone species, their presence in the park will help prevent tall grasses from dwarfing other plant species. Here, adaptation risks are lower, as the rhinos were already acclimated to the local ecosystem within the fenced area.



PHOTO: TRAVELLERSNEP VIA ENVATO ELEMENTS



PHOTO: WOODLAND PARK ZOO

In Nepal, rhinos have been reintroduced to Bardiya and Shuklaphanta parks, but ecological constraints abound. In the Babai Valley of Bardiya National Park, flooding has eliminated necessary grasslands and wallows. Less-than-optimal foraging and water shortages have forced translocated rhinos to stray far outside their designated release zones into agricultural lands, increasing the likelihood of human-wildlife conflict. Like Manas, extensive habitat restoration will be vital to supporting the population, and researchers are looking into other alternatives such as the nearby Karnali floodplain.

Beyond expanding within Assam and Nepal, conservationists are looking across international borders too, including assessing habitats in Bhutan and Pakistan, all the while drawing on the successes of translocations across borders for the southern white rhino in Africa. For these ambitious plans to materialize, range states must commit to securing habitat not only from a safety, conflict and anti-poaching standpoint, but by ensuring the landscape is capable of supporting generations to come.



PHOTO: AARANYAK



PHOTO: ALBERTO CARRERA VIA ENVATO ELEMENTS

CONCLUSION

From Africa to Asia and across national parks, conservancies and reserves, every rhino population has a unique set of hindrances to its survivability. IRF and our partners are working to ensure that conservation strategies used for each species reflect the reality of the environmental and cultural factors they exist in.

Range countries must commit to maintaining grasslands and clearing invasive plants, both for current population areas and future ones. If habitats are not well-managed, rhinos will eventually stray into human-populated areas and bring about human-wildlife conflict. And worse, rhinos simply cannot survive long-term without access to proper grazing and water sources.

Anti-poaching efforts must continue shifting from reactive measures to a combination of intelligence-led law enforcement and efficient on-the-ground patrols. Of course, judicial proceedings need to back up these efforts by allowing for more swift trials, targeting all facets of poaching including the syndicates in charge and upholding true consequences.

For critically endangered species and subspecies with extremely small numbers, intense field protection and monitoring is key, and can be paired with semi-wild reproduction programs or genetic preservation to heighten the chance for survival and ultimately recovery.

No single tool is the cure-all or quick fix, but with a combination of conservation strategies and the collaboration of humans who are committed to the cause—us here at IRF, our partners working in the field and of course, supporters like you—we can create a world where rhinos are able to thrive as they truly deserve.



This report was prepared by the International Rhino Foundation from sources including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) *African and Asian Rhinoceroses – Status, Conservation and Trade* report, released in August 2025 by the IUCN SSC's African Rhino and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups and TRAFFIC. Thank you to IRF's rhino range country advisors and partners for input on this report as well.

PHOTO: BRIAN HUDSON