Q· *What do people outside Assam most misunderstand about Manas?*

People often assume that Manas is still deeply affected by insurgency — unsafe, lawless, its animals routinely hunted. That image is outdated. Manas today is a recovering, actively managed landscape with committed frontline staff, engaged communities, and growing wildlife populations. The challenge now is not lawlessness; it is sustaining recovery in a complex landscape.

Q· *A moment you are proudest of?*

The journey from 2007, when the UNESCO monitoring mission reviewed Manas as a site in danger and I was a bright-eyed DFO supporting the review mission, to 2011, when the site came off the Danger List — and now to receiving recognition from UNESCO for Manas's revival. Being part of that journey has been deeply humbling.

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06 · PARK & PEOPLE · NO. 2 IN THE SERIES

Ujung Kulon, *the last of the last*

PAK ARDI ANDONO · HEAD, UJUNG KULON NATIONAL PARK · CO-CHAIR, JAVAN RHINO CONSERVATION PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBER, ASRSG



Pak Ardi Andono — © Ujung Kulon National Park (UKNP)



Marine patrol, Ujung Kulon

© UJUNG KULON NATIONAL PARK (UKNP)



Patrol on the ground

© UJUNG KULON NATIONAL PARK (UKNP)

Q· *Ujung Kulon is the only place on Earth where the Javan rhino survives in the wild. What does that responsibility feel like, day to day?*

It is both a great honour and a serious challenge. I am fully aware that the survival of one of the world's rarest mammals depends on the protection we provide in this park. This is not only Indonesia's responsibility, but a global conservation responsibility. For me, protecting the Javan rhino is more than an administrative duty — it is a moral responsibility to ensure that future generations can still see this magnificent animal living in the wild, rather than only reading about it in history books. We should never be satisfied simply because the Javan rhino is still alive today.

Q· *Where does the population stand, and how do you monitor it?*

Since 2024 we have been developing a population monitoring approach called spatial count. Our survey design is organised into 35 clusters, with four camera traps in each — 140 cameras providing systematic coverage across the park. We identify individuals from physical features, and combine identification, camera locations and detection times into a spatial database. Importantly, we do not simply count the rhinos photographed: in a dense tropical forest some animals may never pass a camera, so we use statistical approaches that account for imperfect detection. Monitoring is not just about knowing how many Javan rhinos remain

— it is about understanding where they live, how they use their habitat, and how changes in the environment may affect them. Alongside the cameras we run regular patrols and are developing thermal drones.



From the spatial-count grid: 140 cameras across the park

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Camera-trap still, Ujung Kulon

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Q· *The difficult findings of recent years shook confidence in the park's numbers. What has changed?*

Population monitoring must go hand in hand with stronger protection. Over the past few years we have rebuilt the protection system: patrols reorganised under a single command with revised procedures; a Fully Protected Area approach across the peninsula, with patrol teams moving continuously, supported by marine patrols, to close access routes; a firearms reduction effort with the police — 375 firearms collected and destroyed; law enforcement strengthened — seven rhino poachers arrested and prosecuted, with sentences of 11–12 years and fines up to IDR 100 million; real-time surveillance cameras and a K9 unit of four detection dogs; river access routes used by poachers blocked; and a communications network and operations room so rapid-response teams act on threats quickly. Javan rhino conservation requires two things working together: stronger scientific monitoring and stronger protection on the ground.

Q· *What role do the communities around the park play?*

Park protection cannot be achieved by park officers alone. We have developed an approach called the Five Protective Pillars — Lima Pagar Perlindungan: Social, Cultural, Life, Economic and Education Protection. We want to change the way people think about local communities: they should not be seen as people who need to be monitored, but as strategic partners. Our philosophy is simple — protecting Ujung Kulon means building strong relationships with its people, creating a living social shield for the Javan rhinoceros and its habitat.

Q· *The park lives with Krakatau and tsunami risk. How do you see the second-habitat question?*

When the entire population of a species is concentrated in one location, its future is exposed to the same risks; a major disaster could have devastating consequences. That is why developing a second habitat is a strategic necessity, not simply an additional option. Indonesia has developed the Javan Rhino Study and Conservation Area (JRSCA) to build the knowledge, technical experience and management capacity needed. The future of Javan rhino conservation must be built on two approaches working side by side: strengthening protection in Ujung Kulon and developing a safe and suitable second habitat.

Q· *You are now Co-Chair of the AsRSG's Javan Rhino sub-committee. What should it achieve by 2029?*

Together with Mr Wanda, I see four priorities: strengthen the scientific information on the population — estimates, distribution, dynamics, individual identification; strengthen protection of the population and habitat; support the development of a second habitat and prepare a translocation strategy based on scientific, veterinary, welfare and risk-management considerations; and strengthen collaboration between the Indonesian government, scientists, veterinarians, conservation organisations and international experts. The success of the sub-committee should not be measured by the number of meetings held or documents produced, but by its real contribution to better protection and a more secure future for the Javan rhino.

Q· *What can AsRSG members do, practically, for Ujung Kulon?*

Scientific expertise in population estimation, genetics and technology-based monitoring; veterinary expertise in rhino health, anaesthesia, transport and welfare during rescue and translocation; support for second-habitat development — suitability, carrying capacity, ecological readiness; and the experience of India and Nepal in rhino management and translocation, which could provide valuable lessons. The most valuable support is support that can be translated into real action.

Q· *A moment you are proudest of?*

Operation Merah Putih — the rescue and translocation of a Javan rhino named Musofa, with support from partners including the Indonesian Navy Marine Corps and its KAPA K-61 unit. Javan rhino translocation is an extremely challenging operation; every stage had to be handled carefully, from capture to the animal's adaptation at the destination. But the greatest achievement is knowing that we have helped keep Javan rhinos alive and safe in their natural habitat — and I deeply appreciate our field officers, who work every day under difficult conditions.



The Head of Park with joint patrol personnel, Ujung Kulon

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07 · MEET THE MEMBERS · THE FIRST BATCH

Three of us, *properly introduced*

A new standing series: members introduced in their own words, with questions written around each person's actual work.



Anwar Purwoto — *the coordinator*

CO-CHAIR, SUMATRAN RHINO SUB-COMMITTEE

Q· *Your first rhino memory?*

My memory goes back to the 1990s, when I was working for the Ministry of Forestry with protected areas that were habitats for the Sumatran rhino — Way Kambas, Bukit Barisan, Kerinci Seblat and Leuser. My involvement got deeper at WWF Indonesia, where rhino was one of four flagship species and we worked directly with the Javan rhino in Ujung Kulon and the Sumatran rhino in Bukit Barisan Selatan.