

Mongabay Series: Asian Rhinos

# Jaw-dropping footage: conservationists catch Ja- van rhino in mud wallow

---

by Jeremy Hance on 19 November 2018

---



- *With just 68 individuals surviving in a single site, the Javan rhino is one of the world's rarest and most endangered animals.*
- *The species is so elusive that conservationists have studied it for years without meeting one in the flesh. Even images are rare.*

- *Now, new photos from a recent expedition by Global Wildlife Conservation and WWF show a Javan rhino wallowing in a mud bath.*

Twelve minutes. That's all the time Robin Moore, photographer and communications director with Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC), and David Hermanjaya, a videographer with WWF, got to spend with one of the world's most endangered mammals — a species so rare that the men and women who daily protect it rarely see it in the flesh. But in those minutes they managed to get wonderful and intimate video and photos of the critically endangered Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*).

Only 68 of the animals are left on the planet, and biologists believe they spend a considerable amount of time in wallows and rivers to cool down and get rid of bugs and parasites. Camping above a wallow built specifically for this purpose, Moore and Hermanjaya had the encounter of a lifetime when one actually showed up.

"As the afternoon cooled and the curtain of darkness prepared to fall, an almighty crashing sound erupted to the right of the platform. It could be nothing other than a rhino," Moore said. "We sat motionless and waited. And then it emerged and walked from the forest into the mud wallow in front of us."

According to Moore, the rhino then behaved naturally as the two conservationists filmed video and shot photos.

"It's the first time in my life I have frozen with my finger hovering over the camera, afraid to move a muscle. It was a surreal moment —

without warning, and after months of planning, and days of searching, this majestic, mythical animal was in front of us," he said.

"By sharing these photos, we hope to give people an emotional connection to this rare species—an animal that even rhino biologists only dream of getting a glimpse of in the wild," Moore said.

The encounter was a part of a 10-day expedition that included bringing everything — supplies, food, a generator, and even a zodiac boat — in by hand. Every day, team members paddled down the river looking for rhinos, and at night took turns sleeping on the raised platform over the wallow.



*A team from Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC) and WWF managed to capture this rare image of a Critically Endangered Javan Rhino during a 10-day expedition in Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park. Image by Robin Moore/Global Wildlife Conservation.*

The entire Javan rhino population is concentrated in Ujung Kulon National Park on the western tip of Indonesia's Java Island. While a population of 68 individuals sounds



terribly small, it's a huge success, considering there were just 20 of the animals in Ujung Kulon in the 1960s.

Today, Ujung Kulon is the last stand for a species that was once widespread across Asia. The last Javan rhino on the Asian mainland was shot by poachers in 2010, in Vietnam, resulting in the total extinction of a distinct subspecies of Javan rhino.

The Indonesian government currently works in partnership with numerous conservation groups, including WWF, GWC, the International Rhino Foundation and the Indonesian Rhino Foundation (YABI), to safeguard this last Javan population.

Conservation activities include working to clear the park of an invasive tree species, arenga palm, that is depleting habitat for the rhinos; partnering with local communities; and, of course, protection by wildlife rangers.



*A rare image of a Critically Endangered Javan Rhino. According to the latest tally, just 68 Javan rhinos survive, all of them living in Ujung Kulon National Park. Image by Robin Moore/ Global Wildlife Conservation.*

Conservationists say they hope to find a suitable place to establish a second population of Javan rhinos.

"Having all rhinos in one site, which is vulnerable to poaching, disease, volcanic eruption and tsunami, is just too risky," said Barney Long, director of species conservation at GWC.

The search has focused on Java, but hasn't been able to identify a location large enough to maintain a viable population. With more than 140 million people on the island, there are few forests left big enough for rhinos. Java has already lost its endemic tiger and elephant subspecies. An alternative would be to find a new habitat in Sumatra, which has its own critically endangered rhino subspecies, the Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*).

"Assessments have been done in Sumatra, but it would be easier politically to move some [Javan rhinos] to Java — at least at first," Long said.



*A Javan Rhinoceros in a mud wallow. Biologists believe they spend a considerable amount of time in wallows and rivers to cool down and get rid of bugs and parasites. Image by Robin Moore/ Global Wildlife Conservation.*