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Watch: The incredible moment RHINO has a mud bath

AN ASTONISHED conservationist has described the remarkable moment one of the planet's rarest creatures came down for a jungle mud bath before his eyes.

By **STUART WINTER**

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Moment critically endangered Javan rhino has a mud bath (Image: Robin Moore/GWC)

With only 68 Javan rhinos left on the planet, catching a grainy shot on a static camera trap set in the forest is always hailed as major success. These remarkable scenes of the rhino wallowing in glorious mud deep in Java's impenetrable Ujung Kulon National Park are being hailed not only for their historic value but also a way of highlighting the plight of the iconic creature. Robin Moore, the team member from Global Wildlife Conservation who took the remarkable images, explained today: "We heard a crashing sound, and suddenly this rhino just appeared to the right of us."

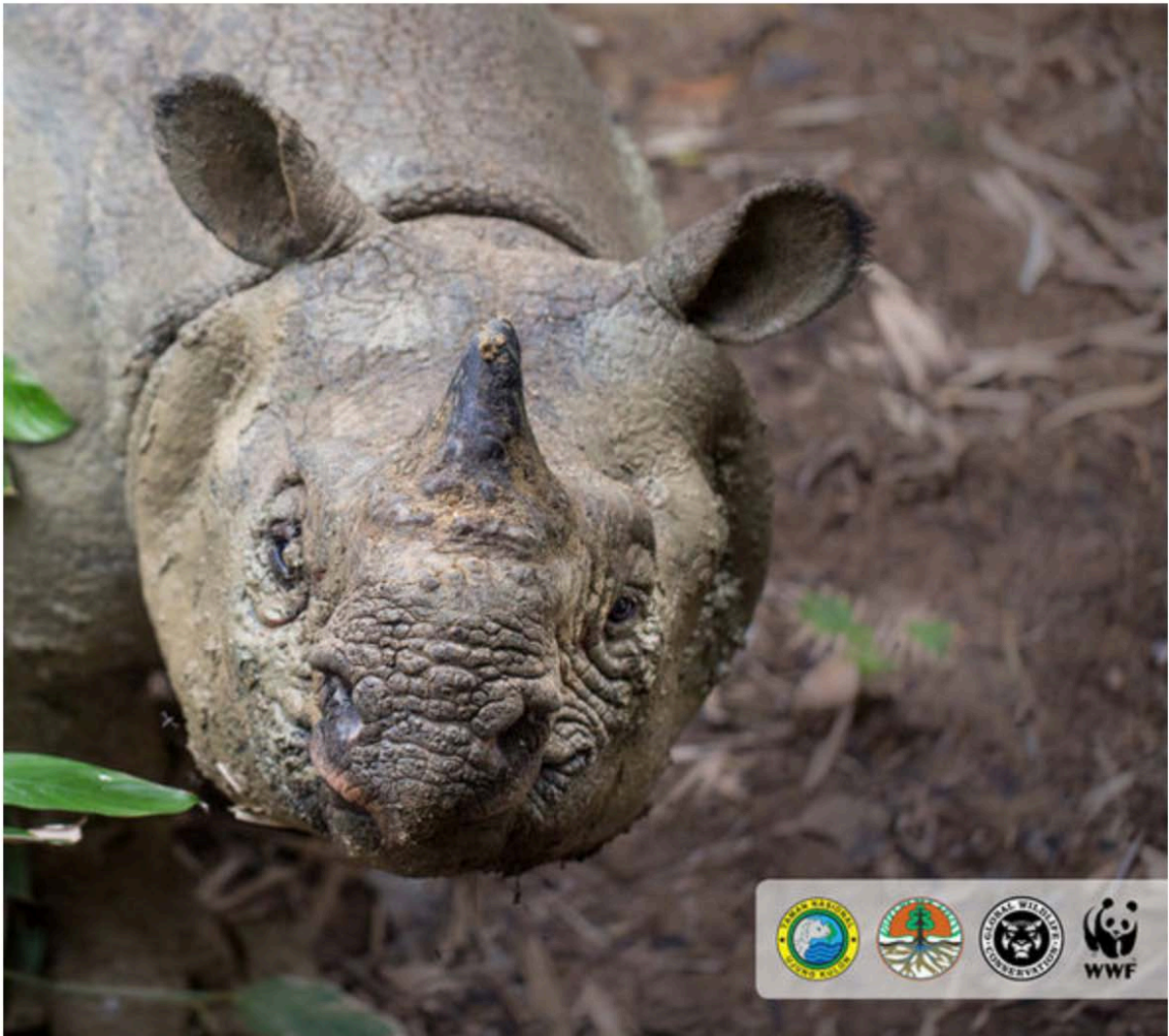
“It was a surreal, once-in-a-lifetime moment, like time had stopped, and it was all we could do not to scare the animal away in our excitement.

“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.”

Global Wildlife Conservation is working with WWF-Indonesia to prevent the critically endangered Javan, or lesser one-horned rhino, from plunging to extinction. Poaching and the impacts of the Vietnam War wiped the south east Asian population off much of the map in the 1970s, and there remains a heavy demand for its horn for Oriental medicine.

Yet the Indonesian authorities regard the creature as the “pride of the nation” and communities surrounding its last retreat have played a vital role in its survival.

This allows numbers on the westernmost tip of Java to remain stable, but an outbreak of disease or a natural disaster, such a volcanic eruption or tsunami, could wipe them out in an instant, making the necessity of establishing a separate population a conservation imperative.



Glorious mud bath for critically endangered Javan rhino (Image: Robin Moore/GWC)

There are hopes that individual rhinos will be translocated to another part of Indonesia to establish a second population. Clearing the forest of invasive palm trees that shade out the rhinos' favourite food plants is another area of important conservation work. Protecting them from poachers also requires constant vigilance.

“This amazing footage of one of the world’s rarest animals is a reminder of how hard we must work to bend the curve on the decline of rare and iconic species like the Javan rhino,” said Margaret Kinnaird, leader of WWF’s Wildlife Practice.

“Last month, we released the Living Planet report showing a 60 percent decline in wildlife populations over the last generation, with poaching and habitat destruction among the greatest threats.

“However, collaborative conservation efforts have resulted in rising Javan rhino numbers, underscoring the need to work together for common conservation goals.

“Javan rhinos are still far from secure and require continued efforts by the Indonesian government and its partners.”



Conservation efforts have bolstered the Javan rhino to 68 individuals (Image: Robin Moore/GWC)

Once, Javan rhinos ranged across a vast swathe of South East Asia from India, through Burma, Thailand and Vietnam into Indonesia. Efforts in Java have been vital to save the species from oblivion.

Lukas Adhyakso, conservation director of WWF-Indonesia, explained: “WWF has worked for Javan Rhino conservation since 1962 when the population of rhinos was only 20 individuals left. The population increased to 68 individuals in 2018. This is clearly a good sign for population recovery.

“Currently, the Javan rhino population is a single population and only occurs in Ujung Kulon National Park. We need to establish a second population to prevent them from the risk of major catastrophic events and disease outbreak.”