

WATCH: The world's rarest rhino caught on camera in Indonesia

BY EARTH TOUCH NEWS NOVEMBER 19 2018

There are few people who have seen a Javan rhino. Tucked away in the almost-impenetrable forest thickets of Ujung Kulon National Park on Indonesia's Java island, a fragmented population of these creatures cling to a precarious existence. Today, conservationists with WWF-Indonesia and Global Wildlife Conservation released rare photos and footage of one of these armoured animals enjoying a mud bath.

“We heard a crashing sound, and suddenly this rhino just appeared to the right of us,” said Robin Moore, the team member from Global Wildlife Conservation who snapped the photos last October. “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.”



Although Javan rhinos once roamed in parts of India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and southern China, today there are fewer than 70 of the secretive animals living in a large swathe of dense Indonesian forest making it particularly difficult to spot them in the wild. So difficult in fact, that many biologists who have dedicated their careers to studying the animals have never even seen one in the flesh. According to a WWF spokesperson, the newly released images are only the third manually captured set ever published.



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Deforestation and poaching are the main culprits responsible for the decline in rhino numbers, restricting the creatures to a tiny range on the Javan peninsula. To make matters worse, the rhinos' remaining habitat is located just 30 miles from the notorious, and currently active volcano, Krakatoa – one eruption could easily wipe the entire species off the planet. The isolated population is also susceptible to an outbreak of disease.

Thanks to the efforts of groups like WWF-Indonesia, YABI (the Indonesian Rhino Foundation), Global Wildlife Conservation and park officials at Ujung Kulon National Park, Javan rhino populations have been relatively stable over the last five years. Rhino Protection Units patrol the park to prevent poaching and 120 remote camera traps help keep tabs on the population. But until Javan rhinos can be established in a new location – a plan that is still in the works – their future remains uncertain.

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

"By sharing these photos, we hope to give people an emotional connection to this rare species," says Moore.

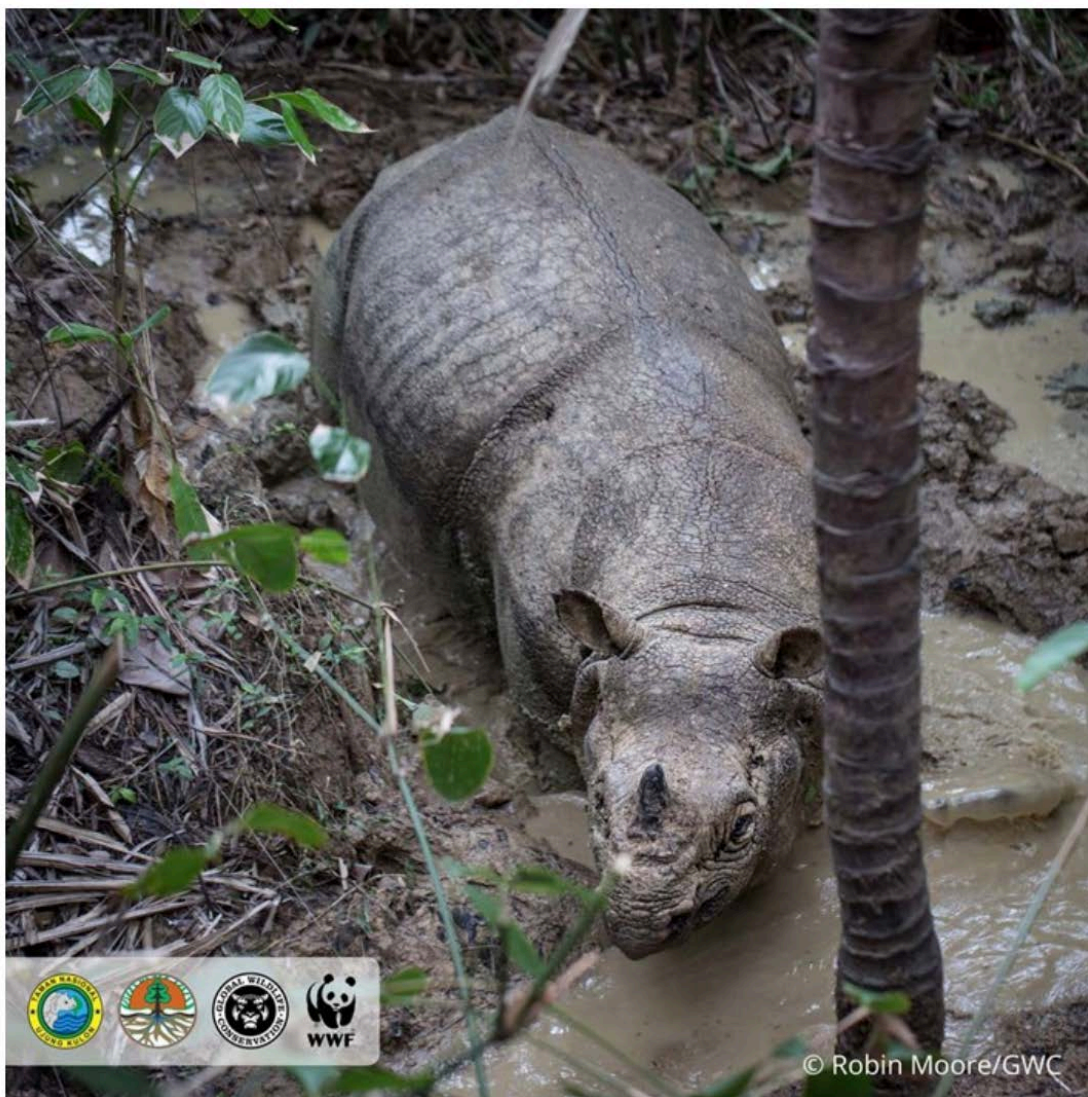


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