

E

xecutive
Summary

Asian rhinoceros, pre-historic yet majestic looking creatures that have wallowed in swamps and wandered in forests for tens of millions of years, are among the world's most endangered species. They are on the brink of extinction in Vietnam and clinging precariously to survival in Indonesia and Malaysia. Fewer than 2,900 rhinos survive in the wild in all of Asia. Africa is home to around 2,700 black and 10,400 white rhinos in the wild.

Hundreds of species of rhinos once roamed the earth, but only three exist in Asia today. The most critically endangered rhino, the Sumatran, has declined from an estimated 600 animals in 1994 to around only 300 today. In less than a decade more than half the population of this species has been lost. By the mid-1900s, Sumatran rhinos were scattered, with small numbers located mainly in Sumatra, Indonesia, where they were estimated to number between 425 and 800 in the early 1980s, with lesser numbers in Peninsular Malaysia and in Borneo (Sabah, Sarawak and Kalimantan).

The Javan rhino, which inhabits the western tip of the Java Peninsula and the remotest part of Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam, is the rarest of the Asian rhino species. It numbers no more than 50 to 60 animals in Indonesia (*Rhinoceros sondaicus sondaicus*), and probably less than eight in Vietnam (*Rhinoceros sondaicus annamiticus*).

The Javan and Sumatran rhinos are classified as Critically Endangered in the IUCN (World Conservation Union) Red List of Threatened Species, while the greater Asian one-horned or Indian rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is listed as Endangered.

Although the greater Asian one-horned rhino is now the most numerous of the three Asian species, its future is still far from secure. All is not gloom, however, and there have been conservation success stories. Early in the last century only a dozen greater Asian one-horned rhinos survived in Kaziranga National Park in north-eastern India. Kaziranga was protected from 1908 and, despite considerable fluctuations in the early years, the population has grown to over 1,500 today. In Nepal, greater Asian one-horned rhinos were numerous in the swampy regions of the Terai (Sanskrit for "lowlands") near the Indian border, playing an important role in Nepalese culture and royal rites, as well as being a hunting trophy for the rulers and their guests. After World War II many rhinos were killed, leaving only around 100 rhinos in the Chitwan Valley in 1968, where a national park was established in 1973. Poaching was brought under control, and due to intensive conservation efforts and law enforcement, the rhinos have increased to over 600 now in the Chitwan Valley.

But there is no room for complacency as poachers continue to pursue the rhino in Asia,

Greater Asian one-horned rhino.



often penetrating into remote, dense forest or inhospitable wetland habitat, to meet the demand elsewhere in Asia. Between July 1998 and August 2001, at least 34 rhinos were poached in the Chitwan Valley in Nepal. The rhinos were shot with firearms, speared, captured in concealed pits, poisoned or electrocuted by power lines deliberately lowered onto the regular paths of the rhinos and other wildlife. In India reports reveal an unusually high spate of poaching, resulting in the deaths of 35 rhinos between January 1998 and February 1999.

Although 40 Rhino Protection Units operate to safeguard the Sumatran rhino in Indonesia and Malaysia, twice that number is needed. There have been few reported deaths since 1995, but in April 2001 the carcass of a female rhino, believed to be more than 10 years old, was discovered in a forest reserve in Sabah, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo. That same month, grim news also emerged from Sumatra in Indonesia. A male rhino was found caught in a snare in Bukit Barisan Salatan National Park and died from a combination of dehydration and over-exertion as it tried to escape.

The poachers, paid by unscrupulous middlemen and traders, are mainly in pursuit of rhino horn and other body parts, used in traditional Asian medicine systems to treat a wide range of illnesses from reducing fevers and calming convulsions to stopping nosebleeds and preventing strokes. Traditional Asian medicine made from rhino horn is processed into tablets, herbal treatments and tonics and sold worldwide with the main users in China, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and wherever ethnic Chinese communities live, including North America, Australia and Europe. Patented medicines that claim to contain rhino horn are also manufactured and traded internationally, further stimulating trade in authentic rhino horn and the poaching of rhinos to meet market demand.

WWF and TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring programme of WWF and IUCN, have been working to combat the illegal trade in rhino horn and other parts with its partners since the 1970s. All international trade in rhino horn and products is in violation of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). Across the globe WWF and TRAFFIC have launched joint public awareness campaigns and opened dialogue with the users and practitioners of traditional Asian medicine sys-

tems. WWF and TRAFFIC are also continuing to monitor the enforcement and effectiveness of the trade bans and are disseminating information regarding viable substitutes that do not threaten species of animals or plants.

In 1998, WWF strengthened its support for anti-poaching, monitoring and habitat protection when it launched its Asian Rhino and Elephant Action Strategy (AREAS) Programme to ensure that broad landscapes where Asian rhinos and elephants live, are given much-needed security.

WWF's AREAS Programme combines cutting-edge conservation biology with trade monitoring, socio-economic analysis, and policy advocacy. WWF envisions rebuilding and conserving rhino populations in Asia and ensuring the

peaceful coexistence of people and wildlife. WWF's AREAS Programme reaches beyond national parks and reserves into surrounding areas and addresses land-use practices. The cornerstone of AREAS is landscape conservation, whose aim is to connect and safeguard networks of protected areas. Through sound land-use planning conserving vast areas, endangered species can migrate freely through forested corridors between reserves, some of which are too isolated or too small to maintain them.



Sinceny faience table top, c. 1748-50 (private collection, London)

The Asian rhino can only be saved from extinction if effective measures are taken to combat both the persistent demands of traditional Asian medicine and habitat loss. In the short term, rhino habitat needs to be safeguarded immediately against any further fragmentation and degradation. Expansion of oil palm, wood pulp, and coffee plantations into rhino habitat must be sharply curtailed and natural forest cover maintained. Anti-poaching efforts must be strengthened wherever rhinos survive. Government management authorities must allocate more resources for rhino conservation, clamp down on corruption, and improve management.

Development and conservation programmes must reconcile the interests of both people and rhinos. Effective substitutes, a number of which have been identified by the Asian medicinal community, must be promoted by practitioners of traditional Asian medicine systems. The link between illegal trade in rhino horn medicine and the disastrous effect it is having on the world's endangered rhinos must be emphasized through proactive publicity campaigns in consuming countries – with the ultimate aim of stopping trade in rhino horn.