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# Javan rhino 'now extinct in Vietnam'

By Mark Kinver Environment reporter, BBC News



Genetic analysis of rhino dung samples revealed that there was only one individual left in Vietnam

The WWF and the International Rhino Foundation said the country's last Javan rhino was probably killed by poachers, as its horn had been cut off.

Experts said the news was not a surprise, as only one sighting had been recorded in Vietnam since 2008.

Fewer than 50 individuals are now estimated to remain in the wild.

"It is painful that despite significant investment in Vietnamese rhino conservation, efforts failed to save this unique animal, " said WWF's Vietnam director Tran Thi Minh Hien.

"Vietnam has lost part of its natural heritage."

The authors of the report, Extinction of the Javan Rhino from Vietnam, said genetic analysis of dung samples collected between 2009-2010 in the Cat Tien National Park showed that they all belonged to just one individual.

Shortly after the survey was completed, conservationists found out that the rhino had been killed. They say it was likely to have been the work of poachers because it had been shot in a leg and its horn had been cut off.

Globally, there has been a sharp increase in the number of rhino poaching cases. Earlier this year, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) published a report that said rhino populations in Africa were facing their [worst poaching crisis for decades](#).

An assessment carried out by Traffic, the global wildlife trade monitoring network, said the surge in the illegal trade in rhino horns was being driven by demands from Asian medicinal

markets.

### Conservation blow

The Vietnam rhino, as well as being the last of the species on mainland Asia, was also the last known surviving member of the *Rhinoceros sondaicus annamiticus* subspecies - one of three recognised groups of Javan rhino populations.

## In detail: Javan rhinoceros

- Scientific name: *Rhinoceros sondaicus*
- The species is listed as Critically Endangered because fewer than 50 individuals remain
- Weight: 900kg - 2,300kg
- Height: 1.5m - 1.7m
- Length: 2.0m - 4.0m
- Male Javan rhinos possess a single horn about 25cm long
- It is estimated that they can live for 30-40 years
- Females reach sexual maturity between 5-7 years, and then give birth to a calf about once every three years

(Source: IUCN/IRF)

- [Rhino facts, stories and videos](#)

Another is already extinct. *R. sondaicus inermis* was formerly found in north-eastern India, Bangladesh and Burma.

The remaining subspecies, *R. sondaicus sondaicus*, is now found on Java, Indonesia. However, since the 1930s, the animals - now estimated to number no more than 50 - have been restricted to the westernmost parts of the island.

Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, chairman of the IUCN's Asian Rhino Specialist Group, said the demise of the Javan rhino in Vietnam was "definitely a blow".

"We all must learn from this and need to ensure that the fate of the Javan rhino in [Indonesia] won't be like that of Cat Tien in near future," he told BBC News.

"Threats to rhinos for their horn is definitely a major problem. But in Indonesia, due to active work done by rhino protection units and national park authorities, no Javan rhino poaching has been recorded in Indonesia for past decade."

Dr Talukdar observed: "What is key to the success of the species is appropriate habitat management as the Javan rhinos are browser and it needs secondary growing forests."

He warned that the habitat within the national park on Java serving as the final refuge for the species was being degraded by an invasive species of palm.

"As such, control of arenga palm and habitat management for Javan rhinos in Ujung Kulon National Park is now become important for future of the species."

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# South Africa record for rhino poaching deaths



Some game farms in South Africa have resorted to de-horning rhinos before poachers get to them

The demand for rhino horns has led to record poaching this year in South Africa, wildlife charity WWF has said.

Figures from South Africa National Parks show 341 rhinos have been killed so far in 2011, already outstripping last year's record total of 333.

WWF says the spike in poaching in Africa and South Asia is largely caused by increased demand for rhino horn in Vietnamese traditional medicine.

Poachers saw off a darted rhino's horn, leaving the animal to bleed to death.

In the five years up to 2005, an average of 36 rhinos were killed each year in South Africa.

The WWF said law enforcement efforts were increasing, but were not sufficient to stop the smuggling and sale of their horns by organised crime rings.

South Africa has been the focal point of poaching because it has the largest population of rhinos in the world, with 1,916 black rhinos and 18,780 white rhinos, the conservation group said.

The rhino horn trade is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) and at present South Africa only allows the export of horns as hunting trophies.

WWF said improvements were needed in the regulation of hunting permits and the management of rhino horn stock piles in the country.

"Since armed protection for rhinos in South African national parks is strong, poaching syndicates are likely to shift to countries with weaker enforcement power, including possibly Asian countries that may be caught off-guard," Carlos Drews, global species programme director at WWF, warned in a statement.

South Africa's government has commissioned a study into whether legalising trade in rhino horn could help to bring down poaching.

In Vietnam many believe that ground rhino horn can be used to cure cancer - although there is no scientific proof of this - and horns taken to the the Middle East are used to make handles for ornamental daggers.