

# Scientists Capture Rare Photos of the World's Most Endangered Rhino

BY [SIMONE M. SCULLY](#) 11.19.2018 :: 4:24PM EST



**A Javan rhino — a species seen in the wild only a handful of times — wallows in mud in Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park. (Photo Credit: Robin Moore/Global Wildlife Conservation)**

It was a late afternoon in Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park when Dr. Robin Moore, a conservation biologist and photographer with Global Wildlife Conservation, and his colleague heard a loud crash to their right.

There was no doubt in their mind what they had just heard.

It was the elusive, rare Javan Rhino — a species so endangered that there are only 68 individuals remaining in the world, and all of them live in the jungle of this one National Park. In fact, this rhino is the most endangered of the five species of rhino found anywhere in the world.



Javan Rhinos are one of the rarest animals on the planet. (Photo Credit: Robin Moore/Global Wildlife Conservation)

Dr. Moore and his colleague, a videographer with WWF-Indonesia, had been perched up on a platform near a mud wallow for hours in the forest, ever since their team had heard a rhino nearby the night before. And the pair had stayed there, just waiting and hoping that they might get to hear — and spot — the wild animal before the sun went down and it would be too dark to take any photographs.

But seeing a rhino wasn't guaranteed. In fact, his team had been in the park for a few days and they'd struck out every time they'd gone looking for one. Dr. Barney Long, one of the conservationist on the team, had studied this animal for over a decade — and had even documented its extinction in Vietnam — and yet had never seen a living one in the wild before.

“There are people who have worked for decades on the Javan Rhino without ever seeing one in the wild,” says Dr. Moore. “They're solitary animals that live in thick forests. We don't know enough about them to say ‘if you come here, you'll definitely see a Rhino’ and they're weary of people because their survival depends on it.”

“So when that moment [of hearing it] just comes out of the blue,” he continues, “you're not really prepared for it. But you just freeze and wait... hoping it will emerge. Hoping it's not seeing us or smelling us...” And then it does emerge.

“It came down to the wallow and it was just kind of a surreal moment, seeing this mythical animal,” he adds. “I had to really compose myself to click the shutter [on my camera] because I didn't want to move a muscle.”





A team from Global Wildlife Conservation and WWF-Indonesia, with permission from the national park, captured the rare photos, which are among the first to show the species wallowing. (Photo Credit: Robin Moore/Global Wildlife Conservation)

The rhino spent about 10-11 minutes taking a mud bath in the wallow in front of them — allowing the pair to document this behavior for the very first time.

“Then it clambered up and walked towards us, looked up and made eye-contact,” Dr. Moore continues. “That was just a heart-stopping moment — to connect with this incredible animal” before it took off into the forest.

Not only was this experience life-changing for the pair, but hopefully it will also help with future conservation efforts.

“There’s only 68 Javan Rhinos, but there are even fewer published photos,” Dr. Moore says. And many of these images are 30-40 years old and grainy.

“So few people know about this species, and I think a big part of it is just that there is no imagery,” says Dr. Long. “[Imagery] is what really gets people excited about wildlife.” And conservation efforts need that awareness and enthusiasm to be successful.

“There’s so much interest in African rhinos, but so little in Asian rhinos,” he continues. “I don’t know if people even really know that there are Asian rhinos. Plus the Asian rhinos are found in really low numbers, they’re hard to see, they live in dense rainforests [and] there aren’t TV shows about them. There aren’t the stunning photos of them. People just don’t know about them, so they don’t feel an affinity for them.”





This Javan rhino is one of only 68 Javan rhinos still left on the planet. All of the rhinos live in Ujung Kulon National Park on Java Island. (Photo Credit: Robin Moore/Global Wildlife Conservation)

He continues, “[but] the more people that know and understand the situation, the more pressure there is for organizations and governments to act and the more funding comes in.”

The good news is: conservation efforts to protect the Javan Rhino are going well so far. “There hasn’t been a poaching event in Ujung Kulon since the 90s because there’s been a pretty effective Rhino poaching unit there,” says Dr. Moore. Research on disease and improvements in monitoring have also helped the rhinos grow their numbers, as have efforts to remove an invasive palm that has been shading out one of the rhino’s food sources.

According to Dr. Long, they believe that in the 1960s, only about 25 rhinos called this park home. Now it’s up to 68. “It actually been quite an amazing success story,” he says.

Conservationists hope to soon get that number up to 80 or 100 in the park, though to really save the species, they’re going to need to also re-establish a second population somewhere else so that, as Dr. Moore says, “we don’t have all our rhinos in one basket, so to speak.”

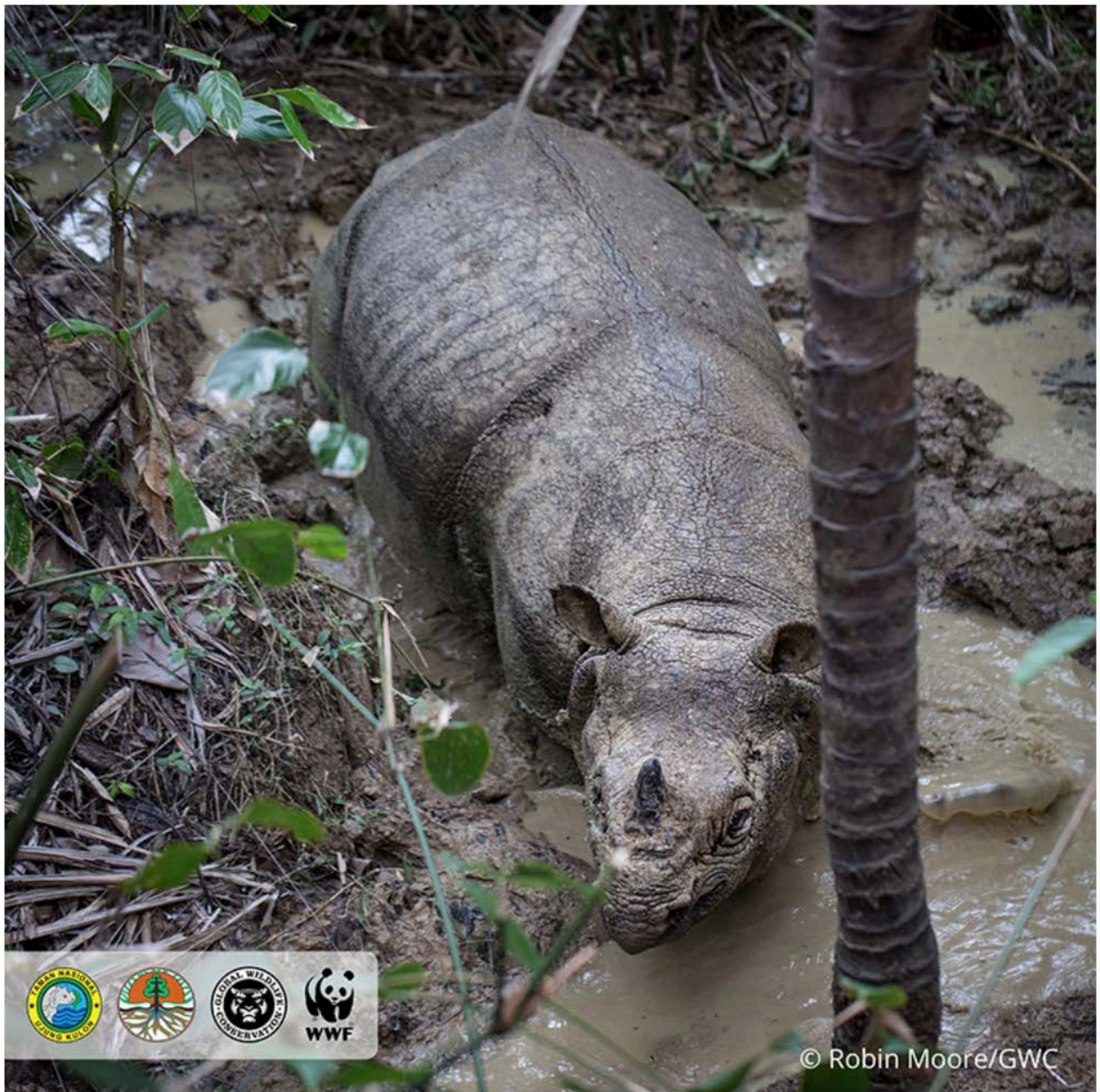
“[When] they’re all in this one spot, they’re vulnerable,” he explains. “They could be wiped out by disease, they could be wiped out by a volcano, they could be wiped out by a tsunami.”

That’s why they hope that the photos will give their efforts a much needed boost to keep up efforts to save the Javan rhino.

“The thought of such a large animal being wiped out completely would be just tragic,” says Dr. Moore. “Even just being in a forest with the presence of an animal like this one brings something magical and wild to that place.”

“If the rhino were to go away, there’d be something missing forever from that place, making it just a little less wild, a little less magical.”





Conservationists are preventing poaching and helping the population grow. And they plan to eventually move some rhinos to a second location, with the hope that the species has a long future of mud baths ahead.  
(Photo Credit: Robin Moore/Global Wildlife Conservation)