

# Alarming decline of rhinos, tigers found

June 1 2006

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The World Wildlife Fund says it has discovered an alarming decline in Nepal's rhino and tiger populations in a former Maoist stronghold.

The WWF's first assessment in two years suggests widespread poaching in one of Nepal's premier national parks. The area only became accessible to the public a month ago following a cease-fire between Maoist insurgents and government troops.

Since 1986, 70 rhinos were relocated to Bardia National Park, but only three were found last week in the Babai Valley, WWF officials said. Thirteen tigers were reported in the area from 1998-2001, but the WWF team found evidence of just three.

Researchers believe the decline is due to poachers who took advantage

of the absence of anti-poaching patrols in the rhino and tiger habitat, which was under the control of Maoist insurgents.

The May 2006 assessment, conducted by a 40-member team, also resulted in the apprehension of two alleged poachers armed with locally made muzzle guns.

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