

# Rhino poaching nearly outpaces births, group warns

November 22 2013, by Kerry Sheridan

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A handout photo provided on November 19, 2013 by the Lewa Conservancy shows Meluaya, a 17-year-old black rhino, who was killed and dehorned by poachers at the conservtion park

Deaths of rhinos by poaching are fast approaching a tipping point, with the number of endangered creatures killed annually nearly outnumbering births for the first time, international experts warned Friday.

South Africa is the epicenter of the crisis, with a record 827 black and [white rhinos](#) killed so far this year, already far surpassing last year's record of 668, said the International Rhino Foundation.

"These [poaching](#) levels threaten to wipe out decades of conservation progress, and it is imperative that we take action now," said IRF executive director Susie Ellis.

Despite the heavy toll of poaching, birth rates by black [rhinos](#)—of which there are 5,000 left in nine countries in Africa—continue to slowly increase, said the IRF.

Meanwhile, the white rhino population of about 20,400 is also slowly increasing.

"Overall, populations have remained relatively stable in the face of increasingly aggressive and sophisticated poaching, but the situation is almost certainly unsustainable in the long term," said the IRF in its annual State of the Rhino report released on Friday.

Representatives of the US-based foundation were meeting with conservation leaders from around the world in Tampa, Florida to discuss new strategies to end the crisis.

All five kinds of rhino species alive today face some kind of threat, whether from poaching, loss of habitat through deforestation or human settlements encroaching on their land.

Demand for rhino horn is driven by lucrative criminal trafficking and the belief in some Asian countries that it can cure cancer and other ailments, though experts say the horn has no special powers and is made of the same material as fingernails.

"Despite the crisis, there is hope for rhinos," Ellis said.

"We believe that the situation can be turned around. The sticking point is whether rhino countries like South Africa and consumer countries like Vietnam and China will enforce their laws and whether countries like Indonesia will take the bold actions needed to save Sumatran and Javan rhinos."

As few as 100 Sumatran rhinos are left, and there are around 44 Javan rhinos. Both are critically endangered and considered on the brink of extinction.

The State of the Rhino report also warned of "recent increases in poaching activity in northeastern India," home to the greater one-horned rhino of which about 3,300 remain in the world.

Detailing steps forward in the worldwide effort to save the ancient creatures, it touted some successes in Botswana, Zimbabwe, India and Indonesia, and urged officials to ramp up their efforts to protect rhinos and their habitat.

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