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Rare Sumatran rhino caught on tape

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A Sumatran rhinoceros is captured on a remote video camera set up in March 2007 in the jungles of eastern Sabah state, in Malaysian Borneo.

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (Reuters) -- One of the world's rarest rhinos has been caught on film for the first time on Borneo island, wildlife officials said on Tuesday. They showed footage of the animal eating, walking about and sniffing the car.

Malaysian officials of global conservation organization WWF said the two-minute video, recorded early this year by a camera hidden in the jungle, was the first to capture the behavior of the elusive two-horned Borneo rhino in the wild.

There are only between 25 and 50 of the rhinos left alive in the dense jungle in the heart of the Malaysian state of Sabah on Borneo, and the animals are so rare that the first still picture of one was only taken last year, the WWF said.

"At the moment they're so rare, it's difficult even to get the video," said Mike Leary, team leader of the WWF's rhino conservation project in peninsular Malaysia. "If we have more videos, we can study them in greater detail."

The video clip shows the huge animal foraging in undergrowth, breathing heavily as he approaches the camera close enough for viewers to glimpse its eyes and long horn, along with the individual hairs on its chin and the wrinkles on its neck.

Except for the sighting in Sabah, there have been no confirmed reports of rhinos in Borneo for almost 20 years, leading experts to fear the species may now be extinct on the rest of the island, the WWF said.

Major threats the animals face include poaching, illegal encroachment into their habitats, and the fact that they are so cut off from each other that they may rarely breed.

Rhino horns, made of hair-like keratin fibers, have long been reputed aphrodisiacs and are a prized ingredient of traditional Asian medicines.

Many females also have difficulty reproducing, and with many aging animals

population, the numbers of those dying could be exceeding new births, the v

The photos and video footage will be used to determine the condition of the wild, Raymond Alfred, project manager for WWF's Asian rhino and elephant said.

"But we have to realize that these rhinos could face extinction in the next ter their habitat continues to be disturbed and enforcement is not in place," he a

Scientists consider the Borneo rhinos, known to biologists by the name Dice sumatrensis harrissoni, to be a subspecies of the Sumatran rhino because tl genetically different from those found in Indonesia and the Malaysian penins said.

The Sumatran rhino is one of the world's most critically endangered species numbers found only in Indonesia, Sabah at the northern end of Borneo, and peninsular Malaysia.

It is the smallest and hairiest of the rhino species and can weigh from 600 to kilograms (1,300 to 1,800 pounds).

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