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Video shows endangered rhino in the wild

Extinction feared in 10 years for Sumatran rhino, the smallest of 5 species

AP Associated Press

Updated: 1:23 p.m. PT April 24, 2007

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia - A Sumatran rhino has been filmed eating, walking and sniffing at a camera in the jungles of Borneo, giving a privileged glimpse into the endangered animal's behavior, conservationists said Tuesday.

The World Wildlife Fund said in a statement that the two-minute clip — taken with a special video camera set up in the rain forest of Malaysia's Sabah state — was "the first-ever footage of observing the behavior in the wild of one of the world's rarest rhinos."

However, SOS Rhino, a Chicago-based wildlife foundation, said in September last year that wildlife rangers on one of its expeditions had taken a video clip and photos of a single male Sumatran rhino, also in Sabah, after a decade-long search.

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WWF officials in Malaysia could not immediately be reached for comment.

The Sumatran rhino is the smallest and most endangered among five species of rhinos left in the world, and the only rhino species found in Malaysia.

"The photos and video footage will be used to determine the condition of the rhinos in the wild," Raymond Alfred, project manager for the WWF's Asian Rhino and Elephant Action Strategy, said in the statement.

"But we have to realize that these rhinos could face extinction in the next 10 years if their habitat continues to be disturbed and enforcement is not in place," Alfred added.

The rhinos have rapidly vanished in recent decades as their rain forest habitat has been lost to logging, plantations and other development and poachers hunted them for horns used in aphrodisiacs and traditional medicines.

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Sabah is the last preserve of the Borneo Sumatran rhino, a subspecies of the Sumatran rhino, a bristly, snub-nosed, smaller version of the African variety. Scientists estimate there are only between 25 and 50 rhinos left in Borneo, the WWF said.

"These are very shy animals that are almost never seen by people," said Mahedi Andau, director of the Sabah Wildlife Department, said in the statement. "This video gives us an amazing opportunity to spy on the rhino's behavior."

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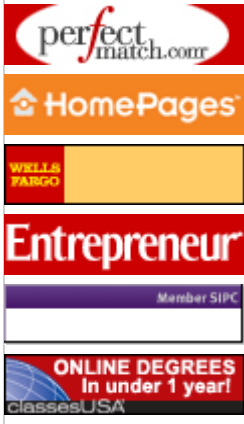
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Hopes for the Borneo subspecies were boosted after Malaysian government wildlife officials and WWF experts found evidence of at least 13 of them in May 2005. Rhino protection units have since launched patrols to deter poaching.

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