

10 November 2011 Last updated at 02:17 GMT

# Western black rhino declared extinct

By Daniel Boettcher Environment Correspondent



Black rhino: For some species on the edge, captivity is the only hope

No wild black rhinos remain in West Africa, according to the latest global assessment of threatened species.

The Red List, drawn up by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), has declared the subspecies extinct.

A subspecies of white rhino in central Africa is also listed as possibly extinct, the organisation says.

The annual update of the Red List now records more threatened species than ever before.

The IUCN reports that despite conservation efforts, 25% of the world's mammals are at risk of extinction. As part of its latest work it has reassessed several rhinoceros groups.

## Poaching vulnerability

As well as declaring the western black rhino (*Diceros bicornis longipes*) extinct, it records the northern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*

*cottoni*), a subspecies in central Africa, as being on the brink of extinction.

The last Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) outside Java is also believed to have disappeared.

Overall numbers of black and white rhinos have been rising, but some subspecies have been particularly vulnerable to poaching by criminal gangs who want to trade the animals' valuable

horns.

Simon Stuart, chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, told BBC News: "They had the misfortune of occurring in places where we simply weren't able to get the necessary security in place.

"You've got to imagine an animal walking around with a gold horn; that's what you're looking at, that's the value and that's why you need incredibly high security."

Another focus for this year's list is Madagascar and its reptiles. The report found that 40% of terrestrial reptiles are threatened. But it also says that new areas have been designated for conservation.



Przewalski's horse has benefited from a breeding programme

That will help protect endangered species including Tarzan's chameleon (*Calumma tarzan*) and the limbless skink (*Paracontias fasika*).

Among the success stories identified in the latest annual update is the reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse (*Equus ferus*). Listed extinct in the wild in 1996, it was brought back after a captive breeding programme and the wild population is now thought to exceed 300.

Among the partner organisations involved in compiling the research for the list is the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).

ZSL's Dr Monika Boehm said: "This Red List update very much shows us a mixed picture of what's happening to the world's species. There's some good news and some bad news.

"Unfortunately, the overall trend is still a decline in biodiversity. We still haven't achieved our conservation potential."

15 November 2011 Last updated at 15:45 GMT

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## **Record rhino horn and ivory seizure in Hong Kong**



Hong Kong customs officials say the horns and ivory products arrived from South Africa

Customs officers in Hong Kong have seized 33 horns from highly endangered rhinoceri and hundreds of ivory products worth \$2m (£1.26m).

The haul weighed 86kg (190lb), making it the largest such seizure ever made in Hong Kong.

No-one has yet been arrested in connection with the find.

Rhinoceros horns are used in traditional medicine in parts of Asia and fashioned into ornaments in some Middle Eastern countries.

Along with the horns, 758 ivory chopsticks and 127 ivory bracelets were found, according to Lam Tak-fai of the Hong Kong customs and excise department.

Mr Lam told local media the horns had been hidden under layers of plastic and aluminium foil - either to avoid detection on X-ray scanners or to make it look like a shipment of recycled material.

The rhinos whose horns had been removed belonged to five species, all of which were "highly endangered", Alfred Wong, an endangered species protection official from Hong Kong's agriculture, fisheries and conservation department, told reporters.

"The total number of all of the five species of rhino in the whole world is less than 25,000," he added.

If caught and convicted under Hong Kong law, the smugglers would face a hefty fine and seven years in prison.

Mr Lam said the products had been concealed inside a 12m (40ft) container shipped to Hong Kong from Cape Town in South Africa.

Wildlife charity WWF released figures earlier this month showing that 341 rhinos have been killed in South Africa so far this year, already overtaking last year's total of 333.