ARK & TENT

Uniting people & animals...through travel

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*Every month we'll bring you compelling stories of animals in the wild that are in danger of being lost to us - animals that are quite literally on the brink of extinction. Whether due to man's careless disregard for their habitat and its destruction, or because of overfishing or hunting, or due to chemicals or predators that we've introduced into their environment, these are profiles of the animals who most need our time, attention and protection.*

*It is our hope these short articles will inspire you to get involved on whatever level you feel most comfortable: whether that's by donating your time or money to organizations dedicated to helping the animals we profile, traveling to see them in their natural environment, or personally contacting local, national or international government representatives to let them know that when an animal disappears forever, it is everyone's loss. To that end, we'll make mention of an organization or two at the end of each article dedicated to helping the animal we've profiled.*

*We encourage you to enjoy the diversity of life on Earth and to share in the stories of the animals that live alongside us, but that nevertheless remain On The Brink...*

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## PRZEWALSKI'S HORSE
### *(Equus ferus przewalski)*

**By J. Mark Robinson**

Imagine showing up at the court of the 19th century Russian czar with the hide and skull of a horse that was practically unknown in the west. When explorer Nikolai Mikhailovich Przewalski returned to Russia from one of his geographic expeditions to Central Asia, he brought with him remains from a horse that was already rare in its native environment; and less than 100 years later, it was seen for the last time in the wild.

By the end of WWII, there were only about 40 Przewalski's (also known as the Asian wild horse) remaining in captivity. However, due to the efforts of a variety of European zoos (which had imported the animals at the turn of the century), their numbers started to slowly increase. Captive breeding was also initiated in China at the Xinjiang Wild Horse Breeding Center with the goal of reintroducing the species to its native habitat in China and Mongolia. A successful reintroduction program was

also started in Hungary, where close to 100 are now living in relatively wild conditions.

Places such as zoos, the Khustain Nuruu National Park, the Takhin Tal Nature Reserve, Khomiin Tal, and the Hungarian wild have a combined population of approximately 2,000 Przewalski's horses. These hardy animals, with bristly manes that stand straight up, can endure temperatures that drop well-below freezing. But perhaps, especially in the day-and-age of disappearing species, the most remarkable feature of the Przewalski's is that they are the only surviving bred of wild horse that remains.

Recently named by the Wildlife Conservation Society Institute (WCSI) as one of 2010 "Rarest of the Rare," it was also noted as being one of 2010's animal success stories. Notes Kent Redford, director of the WCSI, "While the news is dire for some species, it also shows that conservation measures can and do protect wildlife if given the chance to work."

*For information on the Przewalski's horse, visit the Smithsonian National Zoological Park online at: www.nationalzoo.si.edu*

*Photo credits: iStockphoto.com*

Posted July 2010

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## THE SUMATRAN TIGER
## *(Panthera tigris sumatrae)*

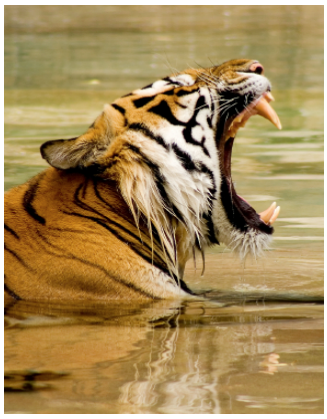
### By Jon Deinzer

The last stronghold for tigers in Indonesia is the small island of Sumatra. Tigers were once widely known on the islands of Java, Bali and Sumatra and their numbers were measured in the thousands. However, the sub-species found on Java and Bali were exterminated in the 20th century. The last sighting of a tiger on the island of Bali dates back to the mid 1930's and the last recorded sighting on the island of Java was in 1976. It's a sad fact that these magnificent animals are gone forever.

This leaves the Sumatran tiger as the last surviving tiger sub-species found in Indonesia. Smaller than typical tigers, the Sumatran males averages about 8' in length and weighs in at about 265 lbs. The females are slightly smaller and lighter. This smaller frame helps the tiger maneuver quickly through the jungle. Highly evolved to their surroundings, the webbing between their toes, when spread, helps the Sumatran tiger to become a very fast and efficient swimmer. They have been known to chase their prey into the water where their swimming ability helps to make a successful kill. Interestingly, popular belief has it that the reason orangutans spend such a minimal amount of time on the ground is their fear of tiger attacks.

Sumatran tigers can breed at any time during the year, however they prefer to mate in

the winter and spring. Gestation is normally around 100 days, with tigers reaching full maturity somewhere around four years of age. A typical litter is two or three cubs, however there can be as many as six. Cubs leave the den for the first time after three months, but are completely dependent on the female until they reach about six months old when their killing instinct begins to develop. By the time they are approximately a year-and-a-half, they can hunt for themselves but are completely independent by the age of two. Life expectancy in captivity is twenty years; in the wild - much, much less.



With fewer than 400 known tigers left in existence, the Sumatran tiger is doomed unless the thoughtless trade in its body parts is stopped and its natural habit saved. Acceleration of deforestation for agriculture and rampant poaching mean that even without a further loss of life, the tigers hopes of a successful come back may have run out. Although it is now illegal to hunt tigers in Indonesia, countries such as China, Taiwan, South Korea and other neighboring Asian nations still clamor for medicines made from the bones and skins of these tigers. Until education can quell the thoughtless demand for body parts, it appears that the fate of the Sumatran tiger is identical to that of its extinct cousins'.

*For information on conservation efforts directly aimed at helping the Sumatran Tiger, go to: www.tigertrust.info.*

*Photo credits: iStockphoto.com*

Posted June 2010

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## THE ALBATROSS
## *(Diomedeidae)*

### By Erin Caslavka

Take a look at any one of a number of healthy seashores and you're likely to glimpse the albatross, a tube-nosed seabird that gets its name from its unusual bill. Formed from several plates of horn and equipped with two tubes that eliminate the salt they ingest in sea water, the albatross' bill is an extraordinary example of a physical characteristic that's paramount to its owner's survival.

Albatross primarily reside in the polar and sub-polar regions of the Southern Hemisphere, and all albatross species are birds of the open ocean. They are so comfortable on the water, in fact, that they spend the vast majority of their time there, only flying to shore when they're seeking a mate, breeding or raising their young.

Due to their long, slender wings, they require winds of at least 7 mph or they become incapable of taking off (another reason why their time at sea is so much preferred). However, once airborne, they can cover thousands of miles using their 12-foot wingspan to help keep their 25-lb. bodies in the air. They also tend to glide, rather

than beat their wings.

Of all the albatross species, the Amsterdam albatross is the most threatened, with only about 130 remaining; for the waved albatross, the situation is much the same. This species is found off the coasts of Peru and Ecuador, with its breeding grounds on Espanola Island, in the Galapagos. Although the bird is protected, disease and the negative effects of tourism are the factors that contribute most to its critically endangered status.

Another concern for the birds - in particular the royal albatross - is their vulnerability whenever fishing fleets are around as the birds tend to swallow bait laid out by fishermen, complete with hooks.

At the beginning of the 20th century, entire colonies of albatross were wiped out as a result of a desire for their feathers, which were popular as filling material for bedspreads and pillows. These days (in addition to the aforementioned hazards of fishing) industrial pollution, swallowing hard bits of plastic they mistake for food, and the introduction of domestic animals in areas they've historically used for breeding have also contributed to the sharp decline in their numbers. And because most albatross species only hatch a single chick every two years, any disruption to their breeding cycle is hard to compensate for.

Protection and conservation efforts of the albatross have expanded to include a variety of organizations working together to try to further understand the place that seabirds have in the ecology of the worlds' oceans. However, until adequate steps can be taken to ensure their safety from fishing lines, gill nets and pollution in the waters they call home, the future of their survival remains at stake.

*For information on the albatross species of the Pacific Ocean, visit: www.pacificseabirdgroup.org*

*For information on the albatross species of Australia, go to: www.birdsaustralia.com/au*

*For the Save the Albatross global campaign (sponsored by Birdlife International), visit: www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/albatross*

*Photo credits: iStockphoto.com*

Posted April/May 2010

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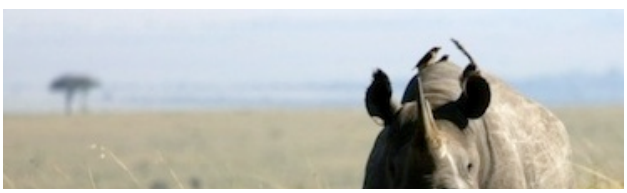
## THE BLACK RHINOCEROS
## *(Diceros bicornis)*

### By Jeannine Clark



Most of us will probably never catch a glimpse of the gentle and timid rhino in the wild. Shy and seldom seen, rhinos have no natural

predators except for humans, and are not naturally aggressive unless startled. Like people, rhinos greatly impact other species with their actions. For example, black rhinos in Africa only browse on the tips of shrubs and small trees, pruning them and keeping growth under control, thus allowing other species to thrive in an ecosystem that works for all living within it. If rhinos disappear from their habitat, so do many other animals.

If numbers are a clear-cut way to determine an equation, consider this: in the past 100 years, the black rhino population has decreased by 96%, making it the fastest-declining of the five rhino species worldwide. Out of the four subspecies of black rhinos - eastern, southwestern, southern central and western - the latter is thought to already be extinct. This alarming fact not only has conservationists troubled and working tirelessly to combat the sharp decline in the numbers of the remaining three subspecies, but this by-product of human interference (through poaching and loss of habitat) affects every future generation as each species' departure impacts the next.

Zimbabwe is home to the fourth-largest population of black rhinos, numbering a mere 490 in 2008. But that country's population is in severe danger due to poaching. Zimbabwe is one of the poorest, most unstable countries in the world, and as a result of the continually deteriorating political and economic climate, there's been a dramatic upsurge in wildlife poaching. Rhinos are poached primarily for their horns (which are made up of finely compacted hair), as they're believed to possess aphrodisiacal qualities. The horns are also used in Africa and Asia for decorative purposes. Despite the ban on poaching in 1980, rhinos are still continuously hunted. Baby rhinos (usually staying with their mothers for protection until they are 3-5 years old) have been found by their mother's side long after she was shot and killed.

Conversely, there are about 14,500 southern white rhino still left in the wild in Southern Africa, and their survival today is a conservation success story as their numbers were less than 100 in 1895. However, in recent years, the northern white rhino subspecies has been pushed to the brink of extinction due to poaching in Northern Congo. The civil war in that country has made accessibility for conservation organizations near impossible, and it is now believed that only 10 northern white rhinos remain in Garamba National Park.

Translocation of rhinos from high-risk areas to safer locations is one way groups such as the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) address dwindling populations. Conservationists with IRF also treat rhinos with snare wounds or other injuries and return them to the wild, as well as help authorities track, apprehend and prosecute poachers. With intensive tracking, medical treatment and monitoring of rhinos, their hope is to ensure the rhino's safety and increase their overall numbers.

Usually, the average person's primary (or only) exposure to the second most massive land animal in the world is via the ones kept in captivity: where, though not ideal, at least they are protected. In September of 2001, Emi, who lives at the Cincinnati Zoo, gave birth to a healthy 72.6-pound calf named Andalas. This was the first time in 112 years that a Sumatran rhino successfully reproduced in captivity. (A female rhino can give birth only once in three years, with a gestation period lasting 15-16 months.)

Far more likely is the fact that most of us will never get to see them grazing on herbaceous plants or wandering the plains in Africa or Asia; but if more isn't done to

save this powerful animal in the wild, they may soon be lost to us forever.

*If you'd like more information regarding rhino conservation or find out ways in which you can help with conversation efforts of the black and/or white rhino, the following are good sources of information:*

*www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/species/black-rhino/*

*www.rhinos-irf.org/rrc/*

*http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/rhinoceros/african_rhinos/white_rhinoceros/*

*www.worldwildlife.org/species/finder/rhinoceros/rhinos.html*

*Photo credits: courtesy of the Rhino Resource Center*

Posted March 2010

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## THE INDIAN HOG DEER
## *(Axis porcinus)*

### By Jennifer C. Cook

As one of the smallest deer in the world, the hog deer is a good example of what it means to have a "short man's complex." The male hog deer is one of the more aggressive of his species, which is especially pronounced when it's mating season. In autumn, male deer will gather out in the open and antagonize one another hoping to get noticed. The males will focus on only one female when they're in pursuit of an amorous encounter, but unlike other types of deer they don't utilize a mating call: fighting amongst themselves is the only known form of a mating ritual. Still, while some may perceive the tiny deer's aggressive behavior as a compensation for their lack of height, their short stature does come in handy.

Once the mating season is over, the deer return to the tall grasses closest to riverbeds in the Pakistan and Indian mountain ranges. If all goes well, after a gestation period of about six months the female hog deer will give birth to only one deer, which is kept hidden in the grasses of the riverbeds to protect them from predators like Bengal tigers. This means that most deer are born during monsoon season, when new grass is plentiful. The newborns are born brown, not bearing the spots of their older counterparts, but it's common for them to develop spots during the winter months. However, their coloring isn't the only thing they use for cover: it's thought that the reason for this deer's pig-like name is because it runs with its head low to the ground, and doesn't leap like other deer - keeping it relatively unnoticed by predators.

Unfortunately for the hog deer, housing developments and other projects have lead to dwindling numbers. Developments like building dams for the river Indus have caused disruptions in the deer's ability to access its food supply and to hide from their natural predators. Once plentiful in the region of southeast China, the deer are now near-extinct there and unfortunately their numbers are dwindling elsewhere. The hog deer has also become a favorite target of game hunters on private reserves.

However, Chinese scientists at the Yongde Nature Reserve have been seeking ways to encourage breeding in the wild as they hang on to the hope that the hog deer will be able to restore its population.

*For more information on the Indian Hog Deer visit the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) at: www.iucn.org.*

Posted March 2010

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**THE POLAR BEAR**
**(*Ursus Maritiumus*)**

**By Katey Pfeil**

Worldwide, ice caps are diminishing at an alarming rate - and unfortunately, those suffering the brunt of this crisis had nothing to do with its origins in the first place. The majestic polar bear, which has thrived in the Arctic for centuries, is now in danger of becoming extinct as his frozen platforms, which provide habitat and food, vanish forever.

Polar bears are known for their massive bodies, weighing in at around 1100 pounds. Their bodies supply the fat that will keep them warm throughout the year, while their white coats provide ideal camouflage. In every way, the polar bear is naturally equipped for life in frigid North Pole regions. The polar bear is the second-largest land predator, outdone only by the Kodiak bear. Polar bears are 8-9 feet long and stand an impressive 5-6 feet high at the shoulder. Sadly, scientists estimate there are as little as 20,000-25,000 polar bears alive in the wild.

Over the last several decades, increased stress to polar bear habitats has had a negative effect on their growth rate. Besides climate change, factors such as drilling, industrial mishaps like oil spills and increased human interactions (recreational tours promoting polar bear sightings, etc.) have all hindered the bear's delicate breeding and gestation periods. However, the cruel sport of polar bear trophy hunting is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of man's negative impact on polar bear populations: Although such hunting is banned in Alaska, Canada (where about 60% of the world's polar bear population lives) has not yet banned the sport that encourages individuals to kill bears and export pelts and body parts.

However, scientists are emphatically citing global warming as the main variable responsible for polar bear population decline. Although there are conflicting opinions regarding that theory, according to the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC), Arctic ice caps have shrunk by a size equivalent to the size of California - times six. This is alarming news for the Arctic's bears, since the melting ice will result in total obliteration of their habitat in the not-too-distant future. Although polar bears could stay on land throughout the year and not drown, there would be no way for them to access their food sources (such as seals and fish) that dwell underneath the ice's surface. As a result, fading ice caps force the bears to swim

greater distances in a desperate attempt to locate food. Such stress causes them to loose dangerous amounts of body fat, which often results in reproductive problems such as birth-defects and the inability to produce milk for their young. Sadly, the increased distance the bears must swim in order to find food often causes fatigue and even death.

Furthermore, some scientists believe that the sea has declined severely over the last half century, while additional declines of 10%-50% are expected by 2100. Because of their long gestation periods and the current speed of global warming, it seems unlikely that the bears will be able to adapt to their changing environment.

Conservation efforts dedicated to preserving the polar bear are currently focused on convincing the U.S. government to include the bear on the endangered species list in order to provide the bears with greater protections, including increased habitat security. Outside of the U.S., organizations such as the NRDC are working to protect Canada's polar bears (of which over 600 have been killed in the last decade.)

Protections will come from banning trophy hunting and ending global trade in polar bear parts by pushing for stronger international protections under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

*For more information on current conservation efforts on behalf of the Polar Bear, visit: www.polarbearsinternational.org or www.iucn.org. To learn how you can get involved in relieving the Polar Bear's struggle via direct donations, visit the Natural Resources Defense Council at: www.nrdc.org.*

*Photo credit: iStockphoto*

Posted February 2010

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**THE KIWI**
***(Apteryx australis)***

**By Jon Deinzer**


One of the saddest and most ironic issues involving endangered species is when the animal in question is the national symbol of a country. That's just the situation that the New Zealand government is trying to rectify with *its* national symbol, the kiwi.

The kiwi is a small (about the size of a chicken),


wingless, nocturnal bird that is found only in the dense rain forests of New Zealand. They eat insects, are monogamous and usually lay only one egg per mating season.

New Zealand's national bird was intensively hunted as a source of meat and feathers by the indigenous Maori tribes; however, arriving European settlers also hunted the kiwi in abundance. As a result of the decimation of its population, at the beginning of the 20th century all hunting of the kiwi was banned and soon afterward the birds were placed under strict protection.

By 1998 the kiwi population had plummeted to fewer than 100,000 birds, but recent statistics (taken in 2008) have shown a further decline to about 70,000. The current rate of decline is about 6% a year, which will have the largest of the five accepted species of kiwi (the brown) extinct within 75 years. Besides habitat loss, the biggest threat caused by humans was the introduction of animals to the islands. Prior to the arrival of people there were no terrestrial mammals that could prey on these flightless birds. With domesticated dogs as the number one predator of adult birds, cats head the list for predation of juvenile birds (up to 90% in some unprotected areas). Stoats (a type of weasel), rats and possums have also contributed to their demise, as have road accidents when they're hit by moving cars.

Very few eggs mature to adult birds. Here are some facts provided by kiwi organizations:

1. On average, 50% of all kiwi eggs fail to even hatch. Some causes are bacteria, genetically unhealthy embryos, or the adult female was disturbed by predators.

2. Of the eggs that do hatch, about 90% of the chicks die within six months. 70% of these are killed by cats and stoats, and the rest die of natural causes.

3. About 10% of all kiwi chicks survive the first six months and fewer than 5% reach adulthood.

All is not lost however, as the New Zealand government has set up five kiwi sanctuaries on the mainland of New Zealand: three of these are located on the North Island and two on the South Island. Both are managed by the Department of Conservation and allow for the control of breeding pairs and monitoring of the young chicks, thus increasing their survival rate. Further benefits are the monitoring and identification of stoats, rats, possums and discoveries as to how to manage the populations of these predators in the future. (For example, a recent industry in New Zealand involves the harvesting of wild possums for their fur, which is extremely soft, warm and lightweight. With the island of New Zealand currently under siege by massive population explosions of wild possums, this is a creative solution to a troublesome issue.) In the North Island sanctuaries, the progress has been profound: Kiwi numbers have increased so

dramatically that their population is expected to double by 2015.

With a solid commitment to conservation efforts such as these, with any luck the New Zealanders will be able to save their national symbol for the enjoyment of generations to come.

*For more information on what's currently being done to assist the Kiwi in its recovery efforts, go online to: www.savethekiwi.org.nz. For information on the Kiwi in general, as well as where you can see the bird in captivity, go to: www.willowbank.co.nz or www.terranature.org/kiwi.*

*Photo credit: iStockphoto*

Posted January 2010

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## THE EURASIAN OTTER
## *(Lutra lutra)*

### By Erin Caslavka

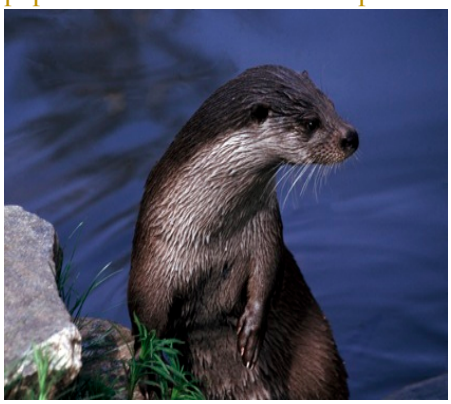
You might think of the European Otter as a sort of Don Juan of the waterways. Staking out his geographical claim (which he'll mark up to thirty times a day to indicate his presence to potential partners or competitors), the male otter will set up house with several females in different locations within his territory. After they become pregnant, he'll dutifully stay with each one until she has her cubs (usually two or three at a time) which are born blind and without fur in underground burrows called "holts." But once the cubs arrive, he'll take off in search of other companionship and leave the care and feeding of the young solely to their mother.

A wanderer by nature, the European otter hunts in swampy areas and will travel over vast tracts of land in search of food. Its favorite delicacy is eel, but it will hunt for what is easily caught. Items on the otter's menu include fish, frogs, birds, crustaceans, insects and small mammals such as rats or rabbits. Its agility as an underwater hunter is impressive, and it can swim for up to 1,300 feet before surfacing to breath. The fur on an otter is likewise remarkable as the oil its body produces makes the hairs so water repellent that its skin never gets wet.

Once seen as a pest, the otters were hunted for sport as well as for their fur. Nevertheless, they were able to maintain their population until the 1950s when pollution in European waterways wreaked havoc on the areas it called home. Given that it's a shy and nocturnal animal, the otter was already difficult to spot but it's become even more so due to a severe decline in its numbers. Because otters rely so heavily on fish for nourishment (they need to consume 20% of their body weight every day), their pesticide-laden meals helped to condemn them as a threatened species until conservation efforts were stepped up to save them from certain extinction.

The good news? In some areas where pesticides and hunting have been banned, the European otter is making a comeback - with Ireland seeming to lead the way in terms

of numbers of otters recorded. Breeding populations are once again returning to their previous haunts, and with any luck this fast and furry philanderer will once again populate the shorelines of Europe.



*For more information on what's currently being done to assist the Eurasian otter in its recovery efforts, go online to: www.otterspecialistgroup.org. For information on another organization involved in recovery efforts for the sea otter (another imperiled species), contact the Monterey Bay Aquarium at: www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/sorac.asp.*

*Photo credit: iStockphoto*

Posted January 2010

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