

Javanese tiger believed still in existence

The Javanese tiger (*Panthera tigris sondaica*) may have been declared to extinct by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1994, but recently clues discovered by a researcher are believed to be evidence of the tiger's existence, especially in the forests of Central Java's Muria mountain range.

Covering an area of nearly 70,000 hectares, the mountain range encompasses the three neighboring regencies of Jepara, Kudus and Pati.

"I believe the animals are still alive in the mountain range," Javanese tiger researcher Didik Raharyono, 42, told The Jakarta Post, recently.

A biologist at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Didik said that his belief was based on his 14 years of research and efforts to look for evidence of the Javanese tiger in the area.

The latest evidence, he said, was a 5x6 centimeter piece of skin he believed to have come from a Javanese tiger.

He said he had obtained the piece from Muali, a staffer at the Pati Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA).

Muali, who is also the head of the Clereng Natural Preserve Resort, said he got the skin from a trader of antique goods at a traditional market in Kudus. The trader bought the skin from a hunter who was said to have killed the animal in the Muria mountain range's Rahtawu subdistrict in 2008.

Yet, he said, further examination was needed to make sure the skin was really that of a Javanese tiger and not of a Sumatran tiger, which had had similar stripes.

"That is why I handed over the skin to Didik for further testing," said Muali, adding that locals had often reported that they sighted Javanese tigers in the mountain range area.

Didik, who was 90 percent sure that the sample had come from a Javanese tiger, said that in 2000, a Javanese tiger was found dead in Colo, Kudus, after eating a goat carcass that had been poisoned by an employee of the local tourism agency.

Didik also said he found traces of the carnivore in the mountain range in 1998.

Didik said that based on testimony by locals, there might be a change in the physical appearance of the Javanese tiger found in Muria mountain range.

Scientific notes describe Javanese tigers as bigger than Sumatran tigers (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*), but locals who claimed to have spotted the animal in the Muria area said that it was small but had big feet.

“This could be the result of long-distance walks, because of the hilly habitat,” Didik said.

He said the Javanese tigers had originally lived in lowland habitats, but that the conversion of these areas had pushed the tigers into mountainous areas.

Based on his research, Didik said that the Muria mountain range was not the only site where traces of Javanese tigers were found. He said he previously found evidence that the animals also live in the Meru Betiri and Gunung Raung National Parks in East Java.

Different evidence was also reported by activists at the Muria Research Center, an environmental NGO.

“We found the feces of a Javanese tiger while hiking in the Muria range from July to August 2011, when we were heading to the Termulus Peak to be precise,” activist Imam Khanafi said.

Panthera tigris sondaica

- Inhabited the Indonesian island of Java
- Small compared to other subspecies of the Asian mainland, but larger in size than Bali tigers
- Males weighed between 100 and 140 kg with a body length of 200 to 245 cm
- Females were smaller than males and weighed between 75 and 115 kg on average
- Their nose was long and narrow, occipital plane remarkably narrow and carnassials relatively long.
- Had long and thin stripes, which were slightly more numerous than the Sumatran tiger
- Preyed on deer, wild boar, water fowl and reptiles