

Baluran Banteng herd dying out

The herd of Java banteng, a species of wild cattle, in the Baluran National Park in Situbondo, East Java, has further dwindled; from 22 animals in 2011 to a mere handful by late last year.

“The banteng herd in Baluran must be reviewed because no bulls have approached the two cows in our breeding enclosure,” Wildlife Conservation Forum (FOKSI) head and Indonesia Safari Park director Tony Sumampauw said.

The two banteng cows, aged around two years old, have been placed in a special enclosure measuring 0.7 hectares in the Bekol area since July 2012. To expedite supervision, animal keepers were brought in from the Indonesia Safari Park II in Prigen, Pasuruan, East Java. The enclosure is equipped with an electrified fence. The two banteng cows are part of the Java banteng breeding program initiated by the Forestry Ministry to save the animals from extinction. In the program, the two cows are expected to mate naturally with bulls in Baluran and breed.

“The scent of the cows should have stimulated banteng bulls in a matter of months, but disappointingly only wild cattle and buffaloes have approached the breeding enclosure,” said Tony.

To make sure of the presence of the Java banteng in Baluran, several teams searched for their tracks in the 25,000-hectare national park. However, they have yet to find any.

“We can no longer tolerate poaching of the Java banteng. I urge an end to poaching the Java banteng because there are only a few left,” he said.

The Baluran National Park is one of the oldest national parks in Indonesia. It was established by A.H. Loedeboer, a Dutch hunter, in 1928. In September 1937, Baluran was dedicated as a wildlife refuge by the Dutch colonial government. It is the only conservation area with a wide savanna in Java, resembling that of Africa, and the Java banteng is its main mascot.

Baluran is also home to 444 flora, and around 155 bird, species. In 1996, the Java banteng was listed as an endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). However, the Java banteng has not been listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) despite the fact that its listing has been proposed since 1996.

The global population of the banteng is estimated at no more than 8,000 animals, perhaps less than 5,000. Its herds have seldom been able to reach more than 500 animals in each of its habitats.

Besides Baluran, the Java banteng can also be found in the Ujung Kulon National Park in Banten, which in 2003 was estimated to have between 300 and 700 animals, as well as in the Cikepuh-Cibanteng Natural Refuge in Pangandaran, West Java, and in Malang and Kediri in East Java. In Baluran, the number of banteng was listed as 320 in 1996, but in 2007, only 34 remained.

ProFauna Indonesia head Rosek Nursahid said poaching by members of the military had also contributed to the decline in the Java banteng herd in Baluran. He urged the Forestry Ministry to step up patrols to prevent poaching. “The drop in the banteng population is due to poaching by members of the local community as well as the military,” said Rosek.