NOTES FROM THE AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

Deaths in Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania

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The Ngorongoro Crater black rhino population (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*) has lost five animals since mid-2000. Lions preyed upon one calf in May 2000, and the mother of the ill-fated calf died in September 2000. The mother might have died of serious injuries, possibly following an encounter with an elephant or sustaining injuries in a fall off the crater rim, according to information the Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority has received.

Perhaps more dramatically during the last year, unconfirmed babesiosis (a tickborne protozoan disease) is suspected to have claimed the lives of a one-year-old female calf in August 2000 and two cows, both in January 2001. The permanent secretary and the director of wildlife have visited Ngorongoro to inspect the situation. A prolonged drought that claimed the lives of many herbivores, including some 300 buffalos on the crater floor, is suspected to have greatly contributed towards poor animal health, and consequently the animals in poor condition were more susceptible to tickborne attack.

Measures have been taken to safeguard the crater population. Between 23 and 29 January 2001, Dr Pete Morkel with Tanzanian veterinarians embarked on prophylactic treatment of the remaining crater population, darting the rhinos with a dose of Berenil.

Fortunately, the crater has since received good rains, and it is hoped the population will soon again begin to increase.

Kenya implementing a new black rhino information management system

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In 1992, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) developed a database to improve knowledge of Kenyan rhino numbers and to address the needs of rhino security. Though the database met its initial objectives, it did not adequately incorporate the biological considerations that have recently become paramount for managing and conserving Kenya's growing black rhino populations. In 1998, KWS, in collaboration with private and community sectors, assessed how the existing database addressed key conservation needs. This review resulted in a detailed specification being drawn up for a new information management system that would significantly assist in the daily and longer-term conservation management of Kenya's various black rhino populations.

It was decided that such a system should operate at both the sanctuary level and KWS headquarters. It should enable rhino staff at headquarters to effectively monitor progress and coordinate conservation efforts across all rhino sanctuaries and parks (public and private) by collating and analysing up-to-date field data.