

IUCN Helps Zaire Rehabilitate Garamba

In the last issue of this Newsletter, Dr. Kes Hillman presented a status report on the Northern White rhino in Sudan and Zaire, and drew attention to the precarious status of the sub-species and the need for urgent conservation action. As a result of Dr. Hillman's survey work, it appeared that the only viable population of Northern Whites was to be found in the Garamba National Park in north-east Zaire on the border with Sudan. Here, too, the situation was critical, with just 15-20 rhinos surviving, according to an aerial survey carried out by Dr. Markus Borner of the Frankfurt Zoological Society in conjunction with Dr. Hillman and the Zaire authorities.

A few weeks after the aerial survey in Garamba, AERSG members met in Harare, Zimbabwe on April 13th, and one of the main items on the agenda was Garamba. After lengthy debate, the meeting concluded that the priorities established at the Rhino and Elephant Specialist Groups' meeting at Wankie in 1981 remained unchanged, and that the conservation of the Northern White rhino was still of the highest priority. The Harare meeting viewed the survival of this sub-species as a test-case for the effectiveness of conservation action in Africa, and recommended 3 main courses of action:-

1. that an approach should be made to the Zaire authorities to allow the translocation of a breeding nucleus from Garamba to the United States.
2. that law enforcement capabilities in Garamba should be upgraded, commencing with the immediate posting of an effective law enforcement officer to the Park.
3. that efforts should be made to search for and relocate outlying individuals within the former range of the Northern White rhino.

The meeting considered that translocation of the surviving Northern Whites in Garamba into captivity presented the only viable alternative to save the sub-species at this critical stage. *In situ* action was considered far too risky because of the very low numbers remaining, the consensus being that the rhino population was already well below the threshold level for survival in the wild. The meeting recommended that the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria, AAZPA (which was already drawing up contingency plans for the translocation, reception and management of the White rhinos to the United States in conjunction with AERSG Chairman Dr. David Western), should make a high-level approach to the Zaire's authorities to secure their approval for the operation. In turn, the meeting requested IUCN to initiate field action to rehabilitate Garamba and to search for outlying rhinos.

Others were less certain of the advisability of translocating the rhinos. The Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), whose representative Dr. Markus Borner played a leading role in the Garamba survey, felt that, however desirable, translocation of the rhinos to the US. was unlikely to be a politically viable option. FZS recommended an alternative course of action: captive propagation within Zaire perhaps within Garamba National Park itself with high security protection and expert care.

A third option was put forward by Drs. Kes Hillman and Patrick Rogers (UNDP Chief Technical Advisor to the Zaire Institute for the Conservation of Nature, IZCN). They

maintained that conservation of the White rhino *in situ* was not only a viable alternative, but was also the only politically acceptable and ecologically sound approach. In their view, conservation of the Northern Whites was more than just a matter of conserving the gene pool (which indeed could be achieved equally well in a captive situation) but of conserving the sub-species as an integral part of the Garamba ecosystem. In addition, the proponents maintained that conservation of the White rhino *in situ* was essential because of the symbolic nature of the rhino as far as national conservation efforts in Zaire are concerned. It was this option which IZCN appeared to favour most.

Finally, a compromise position was advocated by AERSG Chairman, David Western, whereby an "end-point" for rhino numbers would be established. In this scenario, all concerned parties would agree in advance to a critical minimum number at which all field efforts to save the sub-species would cease and captive propagation ensue. This proposal has been tentatively discussed with IZCN, who are receptive, although no firm agreement has been reached at this stage.

While the discussions on what specific action should be taken to ensure the survival of the rhino continued, IUCN put the wheels in motion to implement AERSG's second recommendation the rehabilitation of Garamba which no-one denied was an essential step. In June, Mankoto Mbaelele, Scientific and Technical Director of IZCN, flew to Nairobi together with Pat Rogers, for discussions on the design and implementation of the rehabilitation programme. A project was drafted and endorsed by IUCN and IZCN. Meanwhile, approaches were made to the World Wildlife Fund, Frankfurt Zoological Society and UNESCO's World Heritage Fund to provide funding for the programme, with positive results. By August, a detailed proposal for a \$ 440,000 rehabilitation programme had been drafted and submitted to IZCN and IUCN for approval. WWF, FZS and UNESCO had all agreed to meet their share of the cost of the 3-year programme, and arrangements were underway for the purchase and delivery of equipment and supplies called for in the project document. As a stop-gap emergency measure, WWF/IUCN provided IZCN with urgently needed anti-poaching equipment and supplies in order to safeguard the park until the main rehabilitation programme could begin.

At the time of writing, final approval for the implementation of the full programme has been given by the Zaire authorities and one of the two expatriate positions called for in the project document, that of Technical Specialist, has been filled. The other post, Senior Management Advisor, has yet to be filled, although a decision is expected shortly. Meanwhile, British Leyland have responded to an urgent appeal from WWF and provided 4 Landrovers at cost price for immediate delivery, thus short-cutting the usual lengthy waiting list which would have delayed start-up by several months. Other urgently needed equipment, such as a complete radio network designed by African Wildlife Foundation's Communications Specialist, Howard Wood, is already on its way to Garamba.

The appointment of the Senior Management Advisor and the signing of the Contract and Project Document between IUCN and IZCN will set the stage for the

implementation of the second of AERSG's Harare recommendations, just 7 months later – no mean feat when one considers the slow turning of bureaucratic wheels. Hopefully, the project will be in full swing before the dry season in Garamba gets well underway, so that a start can be made on re-vamping the anti-poaching operations before the poaching intensifies.

The question still remains: what specific action should be taken to ensure the survival of Garamba's rhinos' the subject of AERSG's first and priority recommendation?

The IZCN/IUCN Rehabilitation Programme is not designed to fulfil this objective and the Project Document clearly states that additional action of some form is necessary if the rhino population is to be saved. What this action should be, and who should carry it out, remains a thorny question, and there is little doubt that the various alternatives will be a topic of lively discussion at the forthcoming AERSG meeting in Nairobi in December.

Robert Malpas

News in Brief

CONSERVATION OF ELEPHANT IN SIERRA LEONE

With only 1.2% of the original forest zone left in Sierra Leone, the decline of endemic fauna is the most dramatic of all the west African coastal countries. A recent survey by Drs. Harold Roth and Gunter Merz, carried out in the country under the auspices of SLENCA (Sierra Leone Environment and Nature Conservation Association), and with partial funding from WWF/IUCN, has looked at what effect this massive reduction in the habitat has had on the Sierra Leone forest elephant population.

The report shows how agriculture has restricted the elephants to small groups. Only those in Gola East and Gola North Reserves (150 animals, occupying 50,000 ha) have a chance of long-term survival, and only if the present trend of at least 5% population decrease each year is stopped.

The research team considered that a comprehensive long-term management and development plan for these reserves is now vital. Recommended conservation measures include: marking boundaries, strategically posting game wardens and patrols, establishing a buffer zone, and providing access to visitors. The team felt that controlled rotational forestry in Gola North would be acceptable, so long as a hunting ban is effectively maintained.

Drs. Roth and Merz recommended that Gola West and East be proclaimed a National Park, and Gola North a game reserve. The feasibility of such legislation is, however, uncertain. In recent years, Sierra Leone has experienced a dramatic economic decline, and there is a great need for foreign exchange. Timber is a major source of income for the nation and, with so little forest left which is suitable for logging, it seems unlikely that the government will set aside major logging concessions in Gola West and East for wildlife conservation. The recent development of a major saw mill and logging complex adjacent to Gola, funded by West Germany, will inevitably increase the pressure on these forests still further and is an additional economic argument for proceeding with existing logging plans.

DEMAND FOR EEC IVORY BAN

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) on 30 June 1983, issued a statement demanding that the EEC propose a regulation banning the import of ivory into the Community, similar to the regulation concerning whale products.

C.A.R. ELEPHANT POPULATION THREATENED BY POACHING

Recent findings from Parc National Gounda St. Floris indicate that if efforts are not made to improve anti-poaching operations, the park's elephant population of about 2,500 could disappear within several years. It is estimated that some 532 elephants were injured or killed during this year alone. The report, compiled by a WWF/IUCN project team working in the park, gives a detailed account of the previous year's poaching activities in Gounda. 32 fresh elephant carcasses, with tusks removed, were found by the research team, predominately in the dry season from March to May. There were spear wounds in the hind quarters and autopsies revealed haemorrhaging by an unknown source of poisoning. Horse tracks leading to camps were sometimes observed.

Besides monitoring the population, other research is being carried out on the elephants. R.G. Ruggiero is carrying out an elephant time budget study. By compiling five to six hundred hours of observations on various individuals, and statistically analysing, a clearer picture of habitat utilization will emerge. Useful dietary information is also collected and the species of plant noted.

In Southern Gounda, K.L. Nelson is investigating the diurnal and seasonal variation in elephant movements. During the cold season (Jan/Feb), groups of 50 gather in the floodplain and are active, except around mid-day. In the hot dry season (March/April), groups of less than 15 rest near the wooded escarpment, moving only at night. Unfortunately, Nelson has also observed that elephants will return to poached areas less than one month after killings have occurred. However, knowledge of their seasonal and diurnal movements will aid in their protection.

BURUNDI HURRIES TO EXPORT IVORY

There is pressure for Burundi to export its ivory to Belgium before January 1st when all EEC countries join CITES. Attempts to get Burundi to sign CITES still proceed.

Burundi has only one elephant (in a zoo) but twelve tonnes of ivory per month are exported. This ivory probably originates from neighbouring countries: Zaire, Tanzania and perhaps as far as Somalia.