

Northern White Rhinos Born At Garamba

Two more northern white rhino calves (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) were born in Garamba National Park, Zaire, in September-November 1987. This brings the known number of northern white rhinos at Garamba to 21.

During a series of rhino recce flights in June we had been able to distinguish one more male, bringing the number at that stage to at least 19. The new calves were seen in a series of flights carried out in December. Only 15 of the known individuals were seen on these flights. We therefore cannot be certain that none were poached during the previous few months when the rehabilitation project aircraft and the research aircraft were out of action, a fact which was known to the local people. However, it is extremely rare that we were able to find all individuals in one series of flights. In particular, it is virtually impossible to find them when the grass is still taller than the rhinos themselves, as it is at the end of the year. We found no carcasses or other signs of poaching in the southern section occupied by rhinos, and none has been reported from foot patrols in the area.

The known population of 21 consists of 5 adult males, 5 adult females, 2 sub-adult males which are almost physically (but not yet socially) adult, 2 slightly smaller sub-adult males and 1 sub-adult female that were born in 1983, one male juvenile and one female juvenile that were born in 1985 and have left their mothers on the birth of new calves, 1 juvenile female born in 1985 that is still with her dam, 1 juvenile female born in 1986 and 2 unsexed infants born in 1987.

Nine calves are known to have been born and survived the 4.5 years since our IUCN/WWF/FZS/UNEP survey in March 1983, a year before the Garamba Rehabilitation Project started; this rate of reproduction considerably exceeds that in captivity under present conditions. Only 3 of the 5 known adult females had calves at heel when the project started but for nearly 2 years all 5 have been with juveniles. The mothers of the 2 newest calves had other calves at heel and the recent births were after intervals of 29-30 and 31-33 months since the previous births. Other observed interbirth intervals in the Garamba population (for 2 females, including one of the mothers of the new calves) were between 24 and 30 months.

The IUCN/WWF/FZS/UN ESCO Garamba Rehabilitation Project has completed its initial 3 years and has been extended for a further 3 years. The improvements to the park and the increase in the rhino population have fully justified the decision to protect the animals within, their natural habitat, but the operations in the park still rely heavily on international aid. A long-term continuation of some form of aid and the development of tourism to improve the park's income will continue to be important for the survival of the rhinos and the park.

Two separate sightings of northern white rhinos have recently been reported from Southern National Park in Sudan (P. McClinton and A. Guillet, pers. comm.). While this confirms that some still remain in Sudan, the current political situation there means that very little can be done about them and the best hope for the survival of the subspecies in the wild remains with Garamba.

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NEW AERSG CHAIRMAN

In December, David Cumming retired from the Zimbabwean Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management in order to establish the WWF Multispecies Animal Production Systems Project (based in Zimbabwe), and also stepped down as Chairman of AERSG. The Chairman for the next IUCN triennium will be David Western, and the AERSG office is therefore moving back to Nairobi. The previous AERSG Scientific/Executive Officer, Raoul du Toit, is now undertaking a WWF-funded rhino monitoring project in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe.

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The aim of *Pachyderm*, the AERSG Newsletter, is to offer members of the group, and those who share its concerns, brief research papers, news items and opinions on issues directly related to the conservation and management of elephant and rhino in Africa. All readers are invited to submit articles (up to 3 000 words), black and white photographs and 'graphics for publication; articles may be edited. Material published in *Pachyderm* does not necessarily reflect the views of AERSG, SSC, IUCN or any organisation supporting

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This issue was edited by Raoul du Toit and David Cumming.