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# Chairman's Report: African Rhino Specialist Group

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The decision, taken at the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group (AERSG) meeting in Gaborone in July 1991 to split into separate groups for rhinos and elephants should provide new momentum to the efforts to conserve these marvellous mega-herbivores of Africa. Certainly, the re-emergence of the African Rhino Specialist Group (AR SG) after a ten-year period of coalition will allow more time for formulating conservation strategies for the endangered black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* and northern white rhinoceros *Ceratherium simum cottoni*, and for addressing other key issues.

Before giving an overview of the current state of rhino conservation and some of the challenges that lie ahead, I believe that it would be useful to summarise the role of the Group; its mission is to promote the long-term conservation of Africa's rhinos and, where necessary, the recovery of their populations to viable levels.

As the next decade probably will decide the future of rhinos, this mission needs to be translated into effective conservation management action. To achieve this, increased efforts will be made not only to design appropriate management guidelines and strategies, but to integrate these into existing conservation programmes. Active participation in the Group's activities by conservation managers from the various countries will therefore be crucial. The membership of the Group will be finalised by mid-1992, so detailed discussions on these initiatives will only be possible in the latter half of the year.

The current numerical status of African rhinos was one topic discussed at the Gaborone meeting, and the detailed estimates by species and country for 1991 are presented later. The results are particularly encouraging for white rhinos. The northern subspecies has increased from 18 to 30 since 1987 and the southern subspecies from 4,630 to 5,590 over the same four-year period, the latter representing a growth rate of approximately 5% per year. South Africa conserved over 5,050 of these, by far the largest population. Yet black rhino numbers continued to decline, from an

estimated 3,830 in 1987 to 3,450 in 1991, albeit at a slower rate than experienced earlier in the 1980s. The most significant populations were found in Zimbabwe (1,400), South Africa (771), Namibia (479) and Kenya (398).

Poaching continues, with at least 100 black rhinos killed in Zimbabwe during 1991 and the white rhino populations in Swaziland being decimated. Law enforcement programmes appear to be holding the situation in South Africa, Namibia and Kenya. Several conclusions may be drawn, namely that trade measures have proved inadequate to protect rhino populations, poaching pressure remains a very serious threat, and that intensive field management efforts can be effective. Recent measures taken include the formation of a special unit to combat illegal trade in endangered species in South Africa, the de-horning of rhinos in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, and the creation of the Tanzania Rhino Project. In addition, regional or national conservation strategies are being, or have been, designed for Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and Kenya; and rhino working groups formed in a number of countries in an attempt to co-ordinate activities. The trend is towards small, well-protected and managed 'sanctuaries' as found in South Africa and Kenya, and which are now being adopted elsewhere. Such areas provide sound investment opportunities for funding agencies.

The slowing in the rate of decline in the black rhinoceros can be explained simply by there being fewer soft targets, but the populations in many countries have been depleted to dangerously low levels. Less than half the 14 countries with black rhino populations have more than 50 rhinos, and only one of the three subspecies, namely *D.b. minor*, numbers more than, or anything close to, the minimum recommended figure of 2,000 animals required for genetic viability. There may be only 50 of the West African sub-species *D.b. longipes* remaining and these are scattered throughout Cameroon. In addition, the northern white rhino is restricted to a single population in Zaire.

The ARSG clearly faces many challenges, but it has a firm foundation from which to build. Currently we are involved in a resurvey of the Cameroon black rhino population and this will be followed by an assessment of the available conservation management options. As for the future, the Rhino Action Plan needs to be reviewed and updated, a centralised database and reporting system designed,

and issues related to resource utilisation addressed.

The new ARSG will meet for the first time near the end of 1992, and until then activities are likely to be limited. With the wealth of expertise and experience available within the Group, I am confident that several important initiatives will be identified and put into effect.

**Table: Population Estimates for Black Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* and White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* in Africa in 1991**

Country	Black Rhino			White Rhino			Source
	Population estimate: size and reliability	Populations: no. of and trend		Population estimate: size and reliability	Populations: no. of and trend		
Angola	±50 (4)	S ?		0			Hall-Martin
Botswana	10+ (4)	S ?		56 (3)	S ?		Gavor
Cameroon	±50 (4)	4 Down		0			Alers
CAR	±5 (4)	S Down		0			Doungoube
Chad	0?		Down				Daboulaye
Ethiopia	0?	S Down		0			Allen-Rowlandson
Kenya	398 (1/2)	19 Up		57 (1)	5 Up		Wanjohi
Malawi	5 (3)	1 Stable		0			Hall-Martin
Mozambique	50+ (4)	S Down		0?			Hall-Martin
Namibia	479 (2)	4 Up		80 (2)	5 Up		Joubert
Rwanda				0			Gakahu
Somalia				0			Gakahu
South Africa	771 (2)	14 Up		5,057 (2)	171 Up		Brooks
Sudan				0			E. Martin
Swaziland	6 (1)	1 Stable		60 (2)	3 Stable		Hall-Martin
Tanzania	185? (4)	S ?		0			Gakahu
Uganda	3 (2)	? Stable		0			Edroma
Zaire	0			30# (1)	1 Up		Smith
Zambia	407 (4)1+	Down 0			Down		Mvima
Zimbabwe	1,400 (3/4)	± 20 Down		250 (3)	10 ?		du Toit
TOTALS	3,452	Down		5,590	Up		

**Key:** S : populations scattered  
: population size unknown but very small  
# : population of northern sub-species *C.s. cottoni*

Reliability (1) Total count of census: (2) Estimate based on rhino survey within last two years  
(3) Estimate based on rhino survey more than 2 years ago, or recent non-specific survey  
(4) Guess or recent non-specific survey