

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

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The third meeting of the African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) was held in Itala Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, from 12-17 February 1996, and was attended by 30 members and contributors from 14 different countries, mainly African range states. This was followed by a two-day trip to the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park, during which the Natal Parks Board's conservation management programmes for both the black and southern white rhino were presented and discussed.

The meeting comprised reports from the range states, a re-assessment of the status and trends of Africa's

rhinos, the identification of key and important rhino populations, and presentations and discussions on a wide variety of issues relating to trade, conservation and management techniques and strategies. In addition, during workshops, the system for rating rhino conservation projects and programmes was revised to include a category for projects of national importance, a terms of reference of the monitoring assistance mission to Garamba National Park was developed, and definitions of wild and captive breeding, as well as some indicators to develop the effectiveness of rhino conservation measures as required by CITES, were developed.

Table. Numbers of white and black rhinos in Africa, by country and subspecies, in 1995 (Compiled at the February 1995 AfRSG meeting.)

COUNTRY	WHITE RHINO		TOTAL <i>cottoni</i>	TREND	BLACK RHINO				TOTAL	TREND
	<i>C.s</i>	<i>C.s</i> <i>Simum</i>			<i>D.b.</i> <i>bicornis</i>	<i>D.b.</i> <i>longipes</i>	<i>D.b.</i> <i>michaeli</i>	<i>D.b.</i> <i>minor</i>		
BOTSWANA	20*		20*	Stable				?	?	Down
CAMEROON						7*			7*	Down?
ETHIOPIA							1*		1*	?
IVORY COAST	4		4	Up						
KENYA	122		122	Up			420*		420*	Up
MALAWI								2	2	Stable
NAMIBIA	107		107	Up	598				598	Up
SOUTH AFRICA	7095		7095	Up	29		33	962	1024	Up
SWAZILAND	41		41	Up				9	9	Stable
TANZANIA							22	10*	32	?
ZAIRE		31	31	Up						
ZAMBIA	5		5	Stable				?	?	Down?
ZIMBABWE	138		138	Stable				315	315	Stable
SUDAN			?	?						
ANGOLA			Extinct		?			?	?	
MOZAMBIQUE			Extinct					?	?	
TOTALS	7532	31	7563	Up	626	7	476	1298	2408	Stable

**Total excludes speculative guestimates and so true population size may possibly be higher. Speculative guestimates include animals listed as guestimates at the May 1994 AfRSG meeting and for which there is no new information. Speculative guestimates also include animals for which there is some circumstantial evidence that they exist (or have not been killed) but this evidence may be old or unreliable. Thus, the totals in the table do not include estimates for rhinos that are believed to be or may be present, but where there is very little or no information on their status.*

African rhino numbers and trends

The numbers and trends of black and white rhinos in the range states, presented in the table, are particularly encouraging and confirm the trends just established in 1994.

The numbers of southern white rhinos *Ceratotherium simum simum* increased to 7,532 from 6,784 in 1993, with five countries recording increases and none declines. The northern white rhino *C.S.cottoni* population in Zaire now stands at 29, after two rhino were poached in the first quarter of 1996.

The current black rhino estimate of 2,408, while appearing slightly lower than the estimates of 2,475 and 2,550 in 1992 and 1993 respectively, excludes speculative guestimates which account roughly for the difference. However, while the black rhino trend on the continental scale is stable, this is largely due to a combined increase of the South African and Namibian populations of 308 rhinos (23%) since 1993. Many countries continue to experience declines.

There are currently 11 "key" black rhino and 12 "key" white rhino populations, which are considered critical to the survival of the six recognised subspecies.

The incidence of recorded poaching declined during 1994-95 and the possible reasons for this were discussed. The high level of security currently applied in most of the large populations, the limited number of "soft" targets available, and supply exceeding demand in the consumer states were all possibly relevant, although it is extremely difficult to separate the effects of increased security and changes in trade dynamics. It may well be that poachers are targeting the few remaining areas where security programmes are poorly developed and poaching goes largely unrecorded.

Selection of conservation priorities

It was agreed that projects or programmes requiring external funding would be rated in one of three categories (in priority order): **Priority Continental**, **Important Continental** or **Nationally Important**. All the existing projects, and a number of new ones, have been rated and lists are available on request. The

highest priority projects are either linked to one of the 23 "key" rhino populations or address issues of national or international significance to the long-term survival of the various taxa.

Northern white rhino strategy

The future management of the 30 northern white rhinos in Garamba National Park, Zaire, and the nine in captivity (San Diego and Dvur Kralove) was discussed at a workshop held at White Oak, Florida, in October 1995. While a metapopulation management approach, as favoured by the AfRSG, was not adopted, the Zairian authorities expressed an interest in pursuing planning for a second wild population elsewhere in Africa. In addition, some consolidation of the captive rhinos at Dvur Kralove was agreed upon (subsequently to be put on hold due to development at San Diego) and the AfRSG was requested to evaluate the Garamba monitoring programme. The latter was subsequently expanded to include an assessment of the security programme, with the mission timed for late April 1996. The recent poaching of two rhinos in Garamba highlights the vulnerability of this population and underlines the extreme urgency of securing its safety and making decisions that will enhance the survival prospects of this taxon.

Continental Action Plan

Good progress has been made with compiling the new Action Plan for African rhinos and it should be completed and published by the middle of 1996. It will be a concise, yet comprehensive, document providing information on the distribution and status of African rhinos, conservation goals and conservation priorities.

Communication

The poor response to requests for short contributions to the proposed AfRSG newsletter has delayed publication of the first issue, although I am confident that this will appear during 1996. Communication with the Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG) was enhanced through the attendance of the Scientific Officer, Richard Emslie, at both the AsRSG meeting and at a population viability assessment workshop on the Sumatran rhino in late 1995.