
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

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Activities over the past year, since the African Rhino Specialist Group's (AfRSG) meeting in February 1996, have focused on the revision of "A Continental African Rhinoceros Status Summary and Action Plan" and technical support to a number of rhino range states.

African Rhino Action Plan

A draft of the new *African Rhino Action Plan* has been completed, and reviewers' comments are being incorporated into the final text before printing and distribution later this year. The plan comprises twelve chapters dealing with: (1) past and present distribution, status and conservation of African rhinos; (2) the conservation framework for African rhinos; and, (3) action strategies. Apart from appearing in hard copy, it will also be made available in due course on the web.

CITES

A preliminary briefing document entitled "Towards evaluating the effectiveness of rhino conservation actions" was drafted for the CITES Standing Committee meeting in December 1996. This resulted from CITES Res. Conf. 9.14, which called for the development and application of indicators to provide a basis for evaluating policy interventions pursuant to CITES. The document describes a preliminary conceptual model, but considerable additional effort will be required to develop an effective means of differentiating the effects of various policy and management actions in range and consumer states. The identification of appropriate, robust and measurable indicators of these management actions will not be an easy task. To move the process we plan to liaise closely with the Asian Rhino Specialist Group and TRAFFIC, and to hold a small workshop of rhino horn trade and conservation experts. This will probably take place in early 1998, funds permitting, with a view to develop fully a working model prior to CITES COP 11.

At the request of IUCN's Trade Officer, 13 AfRSG members reviewed and provided technical advice on

the proposed amendment to the Appendix II listing of South Africa's southern white rhinos *Ceratotherium simum simum*. In addition, a comprehensive review of TRAFFIC's report reviewing trade controls and conservation actions in response to CITES Resolution Conf. 9.14 was completed by the AfRSG's Scientific Officer, Richard Emslie, and a number of AfRSG members. This work highlights the role which IUCN plays in providing assistance to governments in critically evaluating proposals and policies relating to CITES.

Zimbabwe

I, and two other AfRSG members, Dr. Holly Dublin and Professor Nigel Leader-Williams, participated in the review of Zimbabwe's rhino policy held in Harare in December 1996. Written comments were submitted and presentations given which described the critical factors for conservation success. The evaluation of Zimbabwe's current approach was well received, and many of the critical success factors recommended were adopted at the seminar for inclusion in the revised policy. The need for constructive partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental agencies was recognised. Zimbabwe still conserves significant rhino populations, and the point of "no return" has definitely not been reached.

Kenya

Kenya's official country representative on the AfRSG, Tim Oloo (Kenya's Rhino Co-ordinator), visited the AfRSG office in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, to discuss approaches for estimating black rhino ecological carrying capacity, population monitoring and the importance of producing regular status reports on the performance and management of populations. Kenya currently holds 420 (or 88%) of the East African subspecies of *Diceros bicornis michaeli*. Only Namibia (598 *D.b. bicornis*) and South Africa (1,204, mainly *D.b. minor*) hold more black rhinos. The success of Kenya's rhino programme is therefore critical to the survival of the African black rhino. Thus,

through its network of members the AfRSG is playing a valuable role by facilitating the sharing of knowledge and expertise between range states experiencing common rhino conservation problems. Richard Emslie and I are likely to visit Kenya later this year following invitations from the Kenya Wildlife Service and the private landowners to discuss a number of rhino conservation techniques and issues.

Tanzania

Richard Emslie assisted the Tanzanian Rhino Coordinator in the planning of a proposed field survey of two areas in the Selous Game Reserve known to have small breeding populations of black rhino. Advice was given on survey techniques, sample design and data analysis. The primary aim of the Selous surveys is to determine the distribution and numbers of rhinos in the two areas, so as to decide where Intensive Protection Zones (IPZs) might be set up to protect the remaining rhinos. The AfRSG strongly promotes efforts to protect rhino populations from poaching, recognising that it is generally only where sufficient levels of anti-poaching efforts have been deployed that poaching has been significantly slowed or stopped. Furthermore, the Group supports proposals to concentrate law enforcement effort in the Selous Game Reserve into IPZs rather than spreading effort too thinly throughout the area. The planned surveys are necessary precursors for any plans to establish IPZs in the Selous.

Cameroon

A meeting was held in Pietermaritzburg to discuss the situation regarding conservation of the last remaining West African black rhino (*Diceros bicornis longipes*) in Cameroon, which are thinly scattered throughout the northern part of the country. An AfRSG member with WWF Cameroon, Dr. Steve Gartlan, and Mr. Jaap Schoorl (Co-ordinator WWF-NL/Cameroon Programme) then visited the Hluhluwe-

Umfolozzi Park where they were briefed on anti-poaching and rhino security strategies by the Natal Parks Board. The critical status of Cameroon's rhinos requires the urgent formulation and implementation of a plan to save this subspecies.

Zaire

Since the outbreak of civil war in Zaire, at the end of 1996, Garamba National Park has experienced a degree of instability. While the Park's headquarters was first occupied by mercenary forces, it was later taken over by members of the rebel forces who remain there today. Though there have been rumours of new poaching activity from gangs infiltrating the Park from the north, the current situation for the northern white rhinos (*C.s.c.*) remains unclear. In 1996, the AfRSG/WWF Technical Assistance Mission prioritised the need to build capacity of the Park's guards to carry out anti-poaching activities. AfRSG helped to establish communications between WWF and the Game Rangers Association of Africa, who may be able to provide such specialised training when conditions in Garamba permit.

AfRSG's Sponsors

While the AfRSG could not operate without the invaluable contributions of its members; many of our activities, from the holding of meetings and the drafting of strategies to the provision of technical advice, would be seriously curtailed were it not for the generous funding received from a number of sponsors. In particular, I should like to thank the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the UK Department of Environment and the European Commission for supporting the Scientific Officer for the past three years; and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, WWF, the United Nations Environmental Programme, the African Wildlife Foundation, the Howard Gilman Foundation and the Natal Parks Board for covering administrative expenses or providing funds for specific activities.