
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

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Next Af RSG meeting

The AfRSG Office has been busy planning for its next meeting which is due to be held in Namibia in April 1998. One of the tasks of the meeting will be to update and collate continental rhinoceros numbers, and I will report back on the latest updated figures to emerge in the next edition of *Pachyderm*.

CITES

The Chairman and Scientific Officer were part of IUCN's delegation at the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP) to CITES held in Harare, Zimbabwe in June 1997. A number of other AfRSG members also attended COP 10, either as part of their country delegations, or as members of WWF, TRAFFIC and other NGO delegations, with one member sitting on the CITES Secretariat. Due to the length of time spent debating the downlisting of African elephant populations and the lifting of ivory trade-bans in three proposing countries, limited time was left for discussion of the proposed annotated downlisting of 'South Africa's white rhino population to allow a regulated trade in horn some time in the future, but with an initial zero quota. In effect this proposal sought support for the continued efforts by South Africa to investigate the desirability of reopening the trade, and in particular to continue the development and investigation of possible control measures to prevent illegal laundering of horn which might threaten other taxa of rhinos. Although IUCN did not make any interventions from the floor on the South African rhino proposal, the Parties to the Convention were able to consult IUCN and TRAFFIC's review of the white rhino downlisting proposal, to which many AfRSG members provided input. The white rhino proposal was narrowly defeated, just failing to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority. When the South African proposal was put to a secret ballot later in the proceedings, it again got a majority of votes, although with a significantly reduced majority.

At COP 10, the CITES Secretariat expressed its appreciation and support for the assistance given to it by the AfRSG.

A limited print run of the **first** edition of the AfRSG's newsletter, African Rhinos, was also produced and distributed at COP 10.

Development of 'Indicators of Success'

In the last edition of *Pachyderm* I discussed the progress that had been made in developing indicators of success (called for in CITES Resolution Conf. 9.14) with a view to using these indicators in future to evaluate policy interventions pursuant to CITES. The need for a workshop, including the participation of rhino horn trade and conservation experts, to develop the process further was highlighted. At COP 10, the CITES Secretariat recommended that the Parties provide financial support to the AfRSG to enable the Group to hold the workshop. The representative of the SADC countries in Committee II also spoke strongly in favour of funding the proposed workshop. Unfortunately, despite this strong support, severe budget cuts meant that the Parties to CITES were unable to support any new projects.

The AfRSG has therefore prepared a project proposal which it has sent to the CITES Secretariat who will use this proposal to source funds for the workshop. It is provisionally planned to hold the workshop in mid-September 1998 (contingent on funding). The process of developing the "indicators of success" is also scheduled to be discussed at the upcoming AfRSG meeting.

AfRSG involvement in rhino poaching and horn dealing court cases

In South Africa (Africa's main rhino range State), past sentences for those convicted of rhino-related crimes have generally not been commensurate with the severity of the crimes committed (often with only paltry fines

being imposed). In an attempt to improve this situation, the AfRSG's Scientific Officer appeared (at the request of Natal Parks Board's Wildlife Investigators and the Endangered Species Protection Unit of the South African Police Service) as an expert state witness in South African rhino horn dealing and poaching cases in KwaZulu-Natal during 1997. In each case, the Scientific Officer worked closely with the investigating officer and prosecutor, and presented both written and verbal statements to the court arguing in aggravation of sentence. In particular, the Scientific Officer stressed the seriousness of rhino crimes, and the need for the imposition of heavy sentences to act as a deterrent.

In the **first** case, the four convicted of illegal possession and attempted dealing in one rhino horn were sentenced to a total fine of R85,000 (approximately US\$17,000), well above the local black market value of the horn, or a total of 9 years 3 months in prison.

In the second case, a man convicted of poaching four white rhinos received the maximum sentence of ten years in jail (plus an effective additional two years for stealing a vehicle used in the crime) without the option of a fine. This was the first time that the maximum jail sentence for a rhino **crime** had been imposed by a South African court. Field conservationists were very pleased with the sentence.

Horn fingerprinting

The AfRSG has obtained sponsorship from the World Wide Fund for Nature to undertake its horn fingerprinting project. Pilot projects have indicated that trace element and stable isotopic analysis of horn samples provides a chemical signature specific to different locations. The problem to date has been that samples from only a limited number of areas have been analysed, and there is a need to increase the number of baseline areas for which horn fingerprints are available. The AfRSG office has therefore initiated the process of obtaining samples of horn for this project from as many key and important populations throughout the continent as possible. The project also seeks to refine the statistical analysis procedures used to discriminate between different areas.

In the most recent rhino horn dealing case in South Africa, the results of stable carbon isotope analysis of the horn in question was presented in court for the first time, and showed that the horn in question was definitely that of a black rhino. With the delay caused by the postponement of this case, it is hoped that additional

horn-fingerprinting data obtained from this horn, and results of trace element and other stable isotopic analyses can be analysed to shed light on the likely origin of the horn.

Zimbabwe

In the last edition of *Pachyderm* I mentioned the participation of AfRSG members in a workshop to review Zimbabwe's rhino policy. Following the workshop, I am pleased to report that the Zimbabwean Minister of the Environment and Tourism has subsequently published and released the country's new Rhino Policy and Management Plan, and that it incorporates many of the critical success factors recommended by the AfRSG members at the workshop. It is encouraging that the new plan recognises the need for constructive partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental agencies, by requiring the establishment of national and provincial rhino management committees which are to include representation by stakeholders from government, and also from the private sector and civil society. However, it is concerning that a number of properties which currently form part of Zimbabwe's black rhino conservancies have recently been designated for expropriation by the government to provide additional land for resettlement.

Following CITES COP I 0, the Chairman and Scientific Officer took the opportunity to visit and be briefed on rhino and community conservation initiatives in the Save Valley and Bubiana conservancies and at Malilangwe. A meeting was also held with the Warden of Gona-re-Zhou National Park to discuss park security.

The Scientific Officer and another AfRSG member also attended a meeting in Harare in December 1997 to discuss a possible SADC rhino conservation project that might be funded by the Italian Government,

Northern white rhino

The situation on the ground in Garamba National **Park** in the Democratic Republic of Congo remains extremely serious, with poachers having moved into the rhino's core area, and a number of carcasses and horns having been found. Only about twenty rhinos may remain, and a more accurate estimate of the number of rhinos surviving will only be available later following more aerial survey work.

Project review and priority rating

The AfRSG office has continued reviewing and priority-rating proposed projects on the request of a number of funding organisations, in particular the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and US Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhino and Tiger Conservation Fund.

AfRSG sponsors

Once again I would like to acknowledge the generous funding received from a number of sponsors, without which the AfRSG's activities would be seriously curtailed. The initial three year contract for the AfRSG's Scientific **Officer** (jointly funded by the UK Department of the Environment (UK DOE), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the European Commission) ended in mid-October 1997. I would particularly like to thank the UK Department of the Environment for providing the necessary bridging **finance** to support the Scientific Officer's work till the end of June 1998. 1

hope that the necessary funds can be secured to employ the Scientific Officer for the remainder of the IUCN quadrennium: please contact me should you be able to provide any support. The close relationship and collaboration between WWF and the AfRSG continues, and support for the work of the AfRSG comprises one of the five major core programmes of WWF's efforts on behalf of African rhinos. WWF will be the major sponsor of the next AfRSG meeting scheduled for Namibia in April 1998, has continued to provide support to the Chairman, will finance an edition of *Pachyderm*, and has provided the necessary funds to enable the horn-fingerprinting project to be undertaken. Mount Etjo Safari Lodge is thanked for generously offering the AfRSG a significant discount to support the holding of the next AfRSG meeting. US Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhino and Tiger Conservation Fund is also thanked for supporting the revision and production of a new edition of the "Training programme for field rangers involved in rhino population monitoring".

RAPPORT DU PRESIDENT: GROUPE DE SPECIALISTES DES RHINOS AFRICAINS

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Prochaine réunion du GSRAf

Le Bureau du GSRAf a été très occupé par la préparation de la prochaine réunion qui doit se tenir en Namibie, en avril prochain. Un des points importants de la réunion sera de remettre à jour et de rassembler les chiffres concernant les rhinos du continent, et je présenterai mon rapport sur les tout derniers nombres dans la prochaine édition de *Pachyderm*.

CITES

Le Président et le Responsable scientifique faisaient partie de la délégation de l'IUCN à la 10e Conférence des Parties à la CITES, qui a eu lieu à Harare, au Zimbabwe, en juin 1997. Un certain nombre d'autres membres du GSRAf ont aussi assisté à la COP 10, soit en tant que membres de leur délégation nationale, soit en tant que membres du WWF, de TRAFFIC ou de délégations d'autres ONG, dont un représentant siège

au Secrétariat de la CITES. En raison du temps passé à débattre du déclassement des populations d'éléphants d'Afrique et de la suppression de l'interdiction du commerce de l'ivoire dans les trois pays qui la demandaient, il ne restait plus que peu de temps pour discuter de la proposition de déclassement de la population de rhinos blancs d'Afrique du Sud afin de permettre un commerce réglementé de la corne dans un avenir raisonnable, mais avec un quota de zéro pour commencer. En réalité, cette proposition demandait le support des efforts suivis fournis par l'Afrique du Sud pour analyser l'opportunité de la réouverture du commerce et particulièrement pour poursuivre la mise au point et les recherches de mesures de contrôle réalisables, afin d'empêcher le blanchiment illégal de corne, qui pourrait mettre en danger d'autres taxons de rhinos. Bien que l'IUCN n'ait fait aucune intervention au sujet de la proposition de l'Afrique du Sud sur les rhinos, les Parties de la Convention ont pu consulter la position de l'IUCN et de TRAFFIC sur la proposition