Rhino database workshop

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A one-day rhino database workshop organized by AfRSG was held at KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife headquarters to coincide with the visit of a Kenyan delegation on a knowledge-exchange visit in October 2000. Delegates were exposed to the new Kenyan rhino data management system (a variant of Peter Erb's Namibian rhino database system), the rhino components of KZN Wildlife's corporate wildlife database, the new SADC-funded WILDb database, and an HTML-based system for storing and managing rhino photographs and sighting data. A presentation on KZN Wildlife's intelligence database system was also given. The meeting enabled database developers to see what their colleagues had been doing as well as give each other ideas of good features that could be added to improve their systems. Seeing the basic structure of the databases was also useful for the developers of RHINO software, who can now use this knowledge to help create data files and import them into RHINO from these Access-based databases.

Rhino security matters

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During the Kenyan knowledge-exchange visit to South Africa, discussions were held regarding the possibility of Rod Potter of KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife holding a scene-of-the-crime workshop in Kenya to train local KWS staff in techniques to use, and so maximize the chance of successful arrest and prosecution in rhino poaching cases. Mr Potter briefed the meeting of the southern African Rhino and Elephant Security Group (RESG) on these techniques. As part of the SADC rhino program, he will produce a manual on crime-scene techniques and hold hands-on training courses on them in the region. Simon Milledge of TRAFFIC and Mr Potter gave presentations at the RESG meeting on horn stockpile control, registration and microchippping. Richard Emslie also gave a presentation on rhino horn fingerprinting, giving results to date and outlining current work.

Since the AfRSG's one-day rhino database workshop, the WWF-funded KZN Wildlife intelligence database system has been completely rewritten in Access, enhancing the program's capability to answer queries. Potentially this intelligence database system could be used with minor modifications in other range states. Representatives from Namibia visited KwaZulu-Natal to examine the system, and Samantha Watts gave a presentation on the database at the RESG meeting.

Resuscitating RESG also creates opportunities for greater cooperation between range states on security issues such as transponder capacity, intelligence databases, forensic investigative techniques and scene-of-the-crime training. It is a forum for learning what approaches have resulted in successful convictions and sentencing of those involved in rhino poaching or illegal horn dealing.

As part of the process of developing horn fingerprinting analysis techniques, Richard Emslie presented a paper at the South African Statistical Association Conference in November 2000. Progress to date and suggested approaches for dealing with outstanding statistical problems were discussed. Useful discussions were also held with professional statisticians and horn fingerprinting staff at Anglo American Research Labs. Potential ways to simplify and reduce the cost of lab analyses are being investigated with AARL, and further expert statistical help is being sought to deal with analytical problems. Novelty detectors will be examined to see if they can successfully identify if samples come from areas not yet covered in the horn fingerprint database. At recent rhino workshops in both Kenya and Zimbabwe, appeals were made to collect horn samples to fill in the gaps in the continental horn database.