

# Foreign Projects

by Tom Begg

I would like to present a résumé of our two current projects — Saving the Sumatran Rhino in Indonesia, and Saving Gorilla Orphans in the Congo — and to outline plans for three further projects. The current ones will be reported in detail elsewhere in this issue.

Our agreement with the Indonesian government was to catch eight rhinos (four pairs) in the doomed Torgamba forest in northern Sumatra to form a breeding nucleus in captivity. At the time of writing (early October) we have caught seven animals, but regrettably three have died. Subur, the female who came to Port Lympne as a mate for Torgamba (see last year's report), died in October 1986, and this is reported later in the magazine. Napangga, a male, who was exchanged with the Malaysian wildlife department for a female which is now the mate of Jalu in Jakarta, died this summer in Malacca Zoo of as yet undisclosed causes. The third death took place within hours of capture as a result of panic at being trapped. The current position as a result of our capture operation is that there is a pair in Jakarta, Torgamba on his own at Port Lympne, and a pair (Meranti and Rokan) in our forest camp in Sumatra, awaiting shipment.

Our rescue operation in the Congo to save the lives of orphaned gorilla babies caused a good deal of controversy and attracted wide public attention. It is with great pleasure and many thanks to numerous people both within and without our organisation that I can report on the excellent state of Kouillou, Sounda and Sangha, who are currently halfway through their statutory six month quarantine period. Madame Yvette Leroy, a French business woman living in the Congo, has for some time, with the knowledge and full consent of the government, been looking after orphan gorillas confiscated by the wildlife department. On her recommendation the Minister of Forests visited Howletts while on business in Europe, and was so impressed with what he saw that he asked us to take the orphans. Application to the British CITES authority (the Department of the Environment) to issue an import licence was rejected on the grounds that the wild population would be endangered, as it was

considered that our action constituted a trade. An appeal against the decision was made, and after a meeting of those concerned, at which the opinions of learned zoologists were heard, the original decision was reversed. In the meantime one of the original four animals, together with a newcomer, died, so it was with great relief that Yvette Leroy arrived with three babies and their Congolese keeper. An agreement has been drawn up and signed by John Aspinall and the Minister of Forests, which provides for the building, equipping and staffing of a gorilla orphanage within the site of Brazzaville Zoo.

Reintroduction of a species to a protected natural environment is the aim of all responsible zoo owners, and we are currently investigating the possibilities with regard to the Przewalski horse and the Pakistan desert cat (*Felis ornata*). Delegations have met with Russian authorities over the last few years, but so far no horses have been released. We are in a position with our present numbers to consider returning a complete herd to the wild. While the process is of course not as simple as just that, we hope that our efforts will in due course be successful. Discussions with interested parties on the return of *F. ornata* to Pakistan continue. We feel quietly confident on that front.

Our Sumatran rhino project in Indonesia has provided us with valuable experience which could stand us in good stead should a similar venture with the Javan rhino present itself. This species, thought to number around 50, is only present in one national park in Java and is thus the rarest mammal in the world. It is under similar pressures to the Sumatran rhino, but with the much lower population is under imminent threat of extinction. Our overseas project manager, Francesco Nardelli, presented a proposal for the conservation of the species (see HELP Newsletter no. 8). Time is running out for the Javan rhino and the sooner a firm plan of action can be arrived at and implemented the greater chance there is of slowing down his eventual demise.

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Desert cat

(Photograph Terry Whittaker)