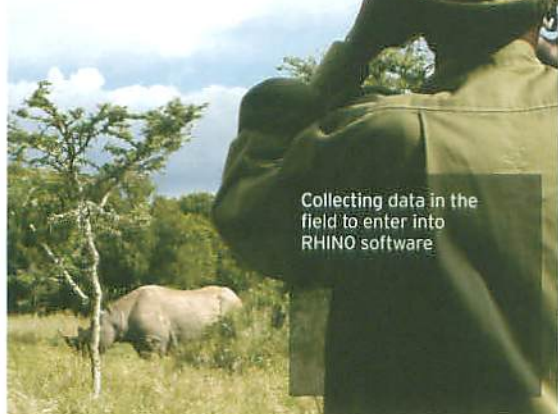


# The African Rhino Specialist Group and its work

**Richard H Emslie**  
Scientific Officer  
IUCN SSC AfRSG

**Martin Brooks**  
Chairman  
IUCN SSC AfRSG



ALL IMAGES: RICHARD EMSLIE

The continental strategic framework for rhino conservation in Africa is provided by the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Species Survival Commission's (SSC) African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) and its continental African Rhino Action Plan.

The AfRSG comprises a Chairman, a partially funded Scientific Officer (SO), representatives of most African rhino range states and a variety of rhino experts who operate as a network to address both strategic (e.g. government rhino policy) and implementation challenges for rhino conservation, ensuring that the best scientific knowledge is used as the basis for decision-making and field conservation programmes.

To achieve this, meetings attended by the 30-40 members are held every two years, and in addition individuals or groups of members are assigned to contribute to important international, regional (e.g. the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation) and national initiatives where their expertise is required. The value of the face-to-face nature of the exchanges helps establish a sense of belonging to a serious and relevant professional peer group, which

strengthens the confidence and influence of government rhino conservation managers in particular. The AfRSG compiles the official continental African Rhino statistics at its two-yearly meetings and it has been mandated to supply CITES with a report on the latest African status and trends in time for its next Conference of the Parties. Much of the required data for this will be collated at its next meeting, scheduled for June 2006. The AfRSG Chairman, SO or individual members can also be approached by any range state wishing technical support or advice. Obtaining core support is never easy, and the AfRSG is very grateful to Save the Rhino International for the recent partial support it has received for its SO.

The SO and other AfRSG members have assisted many range states and conservation agencies with the development of their national rhino conservation plans. The SO has co-authored and coordinated the development, revision, production and distribution of the AfRSG's rhino identification monitoring course, which is now in its fifth edition. Instructors have been trained (and provided with materials) from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania

and Botswana. By promoting the use of standardised techniques, rhino monitoring data can now be compared across the continent.

The AfRSG also provides training and software tools to assist conservation agencies estimate the sizes of their rhino populations with confidence levels (e.g. how to use "RHINO" software to estimate numbers using ground monitoring sightings data, where not all animals are individually recognisable; or by providing spreadsheet tools to assist management authority staff plan and analyse a block count data in very large parks such as Etosha NP). The SO is currently planning surveys of the last remaining population of Northern white rhino in Garamba National Park and an adjoining hunting area. He recently has also been assisting Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park staff with checking and analysis of their black rhino monitoring data. The resultant population estimates are being used by Ezemvelo-KZN-Wildlife to decide how many rhinos should be translocated from each section in the Park, with a view to improving the underlying productivity of remaining rhinos in the Park. The SO continues to promote improved biological management of rhinos, and there are encouraging signs that in some populations underlying performance is starting to improve following translocations.

The SO has recently helped catalyse the development of a Law Enforcement database for use by specialised police units, wildlife investigators and field conservation managers. The SO is also pioneering the use of computer training videos to help users to learn and use rhino-conservation-related software.

The AfRSG also seeks to help donor agencies (including the EAZA Rhino Campaign) spend what money they do have effectively, by reviewing and priority rating project proposals.



Left and right: Training courses are an important part of the AfRSG's work



## £2,500

In December 2005 Save the Rhino's Trustees agreed a grant of £2,500 to support the work of the AfRSG's Scientific Officer, with a second, repeat instalment due in December 2006.