



# ED DATA BOOK

## The Black Rhinoceros – *Diceros bicornis*

R. Emslie

**W**hen I was born in 1957, there may have been as many as 100 000 Black Rhinos in Africa. Numbers were already declining, however, and by 1970 it was estimated that there were approximately 65 000 left. Poaching for horn escalated during the 1970s and 80s, partly due to increased demand for horn for traditional Oriental medicine and also for making traditional dagger handles (*jambiya*) in Yemen, and because of increasing opportunities for wholesale commercial poaching in a number of range states (due to wars, abundance of military weapons, collapse of national economies, corruption, reduced levels of expenditure on field conservation and so on). All this resulted in a catastrophic 96% decline in Black Rhino numbers leading up to 1992, when perhaps just 2 475 animals remained.

Black Rhino numbers then appeared to level out between 1992 and 1995, with increases in South Africa and Namibia cancelling out declines in some other range states.

In a very encouraging development, the latest statistics for African rhino (for 1997, and compiled at the AfrSG's April, 1998, meeting with some figures updated in June 1998) indicate that continental Black Rhino numbers have started to increase, and by 1997 numbered 2 600 in the wild (excluding speculative guesstimates), with an additional 240 in captivity worldwide.


Four range states, South Africa (1 043), Namibia (707), Kenya (424)








and Zimbabwe (339), conserve the bulk of the animals, while another six countries together conserve the remaining 86 or so Black Rhino.

The most critically endangered of the four recognised Black Rhino sub-species remains the Central Western *Diceros bicornis longipes*, which is now restricted to a small and highly fragmented population of about ten animals spread over an area of 3 000 km<sup>2</sup> in northern Cameroon. These small pockets of rhinos are probably genetically and demographically doomed unless they can be



consolidated into one well-protected population. However, apart from the high expense and logistic difficulty in doing this, concentrating the remaining animals is likely to make them increasingly vulnerable to poaching unless adequate security can be implemented.

The Eastern Black Rhino, *D. b. michaeli*, showed a very slight increase from 476 to 485 between 1995 and 1997, and the majority (88%) occur in Kenya. A number of these populations have been performing sub-optimally and may be overstocked.



 <b>BOTSWANA</b>	– Moremi & Game Drive Camps  Okavango   Linyanti/Savuti Channel	Chitabe Camp & Chitabe Trails Mombo Camp & Little Mombo Duba Plains Jedibe Island Camp Jao Camp Kwetsani Camp Vumbura Camp Xigera Camp DumaTau Savuti Camp Kings Pool Camp Linyanti Tented Camp
 <b>MALAWI</b>	– Liwonde National Park – Northern Lake Shore	Mvuu Wilderness Lodge Chintheche
 <b>SOUTH AFRICA</b>	– Maputaland/Northern Natal	Rocktail Bay Lodge Ndumo Wilderness Camp
 <b>ZIMBABWE</b>	– Kariba Hwange	Matusadona Water Lodge Makalolo Plains Camp Little Makalolo Chikwenya Camp Linkwashia Camp
 <b>NAMIBIA</b>	– Damaraland Etosha Sossusvlei	Damaraland Camp Ongava Lodge Sossusvlei Wilderness Camp
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58-4

The South Western Black Rhino, *D.b. bicornis*, continues to perform excellently, with Namibia conserving 95% of the estimated 741 animals (up from 626 in 1995).

The most numerous subspecies, the Southern Central Black Rhino, *D.b. minor*, occurs in six range states of which South Africa, with 976 (72%), and Zimbabwe, with 339 (25%), are by far the most important.

Based on the country reports at the AFRSG meeting, it appears that levels of poaching are generally down, although undercover wildlife investigators indicate there is still interest in poaching rhino and/or dealing in rhino horn. It is hoped that the increasing imposition of severe sentences in some range states, such as a 20-year jail term in Namibia and 10 years in South Africa, may act as a deterrent.

Concentrated field protection of populations, ongoing monitoring, sound biological management to maximise population growth (including founding additional new populations), building good relations with and empowering neighbouring communities in a positive political, social and economic environment, co-operation between state and private sector rhino conservationists, enhancing the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, the adoption and implementing of strategic national metapopulation-based rhino conservation plans, the wise use of state and donor funds, and continuing efforts to reduce the illegal horn trade, have all been key components of successful Black Rhino conservation in the field.

In essence, successful rhino conservation is like football – to regularly win one needs to both have a good defence (ie sound law enforcement and community support for conservation) and to have a potent attack which scores two or three goals



John Ledger

*A South Western Black Rhino about to demonstrate just why they have a reputation for being bad tempered.*

a game (sound monitoring and biological management aiming to maximise population growth rates). While effective field protection is vital, given poor population growth, one's ability to withstand any outbreak of limited poaching is compromised. The Endangered Wildlife Trust has made significant contributions to biological management of Black Rhino through its contributions to the applied Black Rhino 2000 research project, and ongoing Black Rhino monitoring in the Pilanesberg National Park.

However, experience has shown that it is hard to build and maintain an effective rhino conservation programme in countries experiencing widespread civil unrest and economic collapse. Demand for horn and a negative enabling environment are perhaps the greatest threats to rhinos in Africa. In South Africa and many other key range states, declining state budgets for conservation are also a cause for concern.

While the majority of Black Rhino are still conserved in state-run protected areas, by 1997 private landowners conserved 17.5% of the remaining animals in the wild. In contrast to the situation with White

Rhinos, the majority of Black Rhino on private land are not privately owned, but are being managed by the private sector on a custodianship basis on behalf of the state. The custodianship model has proved successful in both Kenya and Zimbabwe where, during periods of heavy poaching in the past, Black Rhinos fared better in private reserves than on state land. Numbers of Black Rhino have bred up in one Kenyan private sanctuary to the extent that it has become one of the major donor populations supplying rhino to restock state land. In Zimbabwe, more Black Rhinos are now managed by the private sector on a custodianship basis than are conserved in state-run protected areas. Having some rhinos being managed on a custodianship basis also allows state conservation agencies to concentrate their efforts and limited budgets to protect remaining rhino in state-run parks.

Red Data Book status: Endangered, CITES Appendix I 🐾

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