

# Specialist Group Updates

## African Elephant Specialist Group

### *The African Elephant Database*

The new African Elephant Database (AED) manager has started tackling a large stack of survey reports from around Africa that have been compiled since the 1998 update. A number of outstanding issues and ideas still need to be resolved before the next hard-copy update. These include improving the reliability, quality and sourcing of range data; the integration of some of our data on human–elephant conflict with data on elephant status and distribution; and the use of other important data layers to further conservation of the species.

### *Central African Programme Office*

A Programme Officer has been recruited to facilitate the work of the Group in Central Africa and will be based in the IUCN Regional Office for Central Africa in Yaounde. The position is particularly timely now, with the African Elephant Specialist Group actively involved in developing a sub-regional Strategy for the Conservation of Elephants in Central Africa.

### *Pachyderm*

The African Elephant Specialist Group has been awarded an additional year of support to cover editorial costs through the generous contribution of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's African Elephant Conservation Fund. We are hoping to reconstitute the editorial board, and appoint a non-group member to be the Chair of this board, to form strategic objectives for the journal and to tighten up on quality control in all aspects of its production. It is hoped that in so doing, we can continue the production of this very popular publication while not overly taxing the volunteer network behind its production.

The website (<http://indaba.iucn.org/external/themes/ssc/sgs/afesg/>) has been given a 'new look'. New features include a "Frequently Asked Questions About Elephants" section and links to a number of new documents on elephant conservation. We hope these changes will make the site appealing to a wider audience.

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## African Rhino Specialist Group

African Rhino Specialist Group members continue to assist range States in developing and revising national rhino conservation strategies. A number of members participated in a workshop held by the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism to review and revise the Namibian black rhino conservation strategy; some members have also commented on drafts of a revised

Botswana rhino strategy; and others continue to remain actively involved in official rhino conservation committees in all the major range States. A past high level joint mission to Cameroon by the African Rhino Specialist Group, IUCN, IUCN France and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) discussed the development and implementation of an emergency conservation plan. Following this, surveys have been underway to confirm if sufficient animals remain to form a founder group that can be consolidated in a sanctuary.

The performance of a number of "key" and "important" rated black rhino populations in recent years has declined as rhino densities have been allowed to increase in some parks following conservative removals.

This has significantly reduced some black rhino metapopulation growth rates. Given the importance of maintaining rapid growth, the Specialist Group obtained funding

from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Rhino Programme, and organized a technical Rhino Management Group Workshop to review and recommend biological management strategies to maintain rapid metapopulation growth rates. Delegates from the four major range states that together conserve 97% of Africa's black rhino attended this successful July workshop. If the workshop recommendations (in particular the revised harvesting strategy) are implemented, it is expected that metapopulation growth rates should increase in future.

The training course in monitoring techniques based on the identification of individual rhinos has been revised. The module on condition assessment has been completely re-written, and new posters have been made, to reflect the results of collaborative work between condition assessment experts in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. This provides a standardized scoring system that can be used throughout all range States. An additional module on "clean" rhino (those without any obvious distinguishing features) has also been added to the course. The course was used in a training course in rhino identification techniques, attended by delegates from Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition Namibia, Kenya and Tanzania also have sets of the training course. Updated course manuals and posters have been distributed to many existing set holders and response to the course continues to be positive with orders for more copies continuing to come in.

The African Rhino Specialist Group continues to be an active Consortium member of the Italian-funded SADC Programme for Regional Rhino Conservation. The group would like to acknowl-

**Response to the monitoring training course continues to be positive**



edge the continuing support it receives from WWF for many of its activities. Without this support, the secretariat couldn't function, biennial meetings wouldn't be held, and the group would be much less active. The group is also grateful to the United States Fish & Wildlife Service for providing additional funds to help sponsor the production of two editions of its joint journal (with Asian rhino and African Elephant Specialist Groups), *Pachyderm*.

*Richard Emslie, remslie@kznwildlife.com*

## Bison Specialist Group – North America

The beginning of the new intersessional period has ushered in new Co-Chairs for the European and North American sections of the Bison Specialist Group. Dr. Wanda Olech with the Department of Animal Genetics, Warsaw Agricultural University, is heading up the

European Group. Dr. Cormack Gates with the Faculty of Environmental Design, University of Calgary, Alberta, is leading the North American

Group. Dr. Gates has started to restructure the Bison Specialist Group (North America) membership in anticipation of an active period for bison conservation. A priority for the Specialist Group is to produce an Action Plan for North American bison. Delaney Boyd, a graduate student with the University of Calgary Faculty of Environmental Design, and Officer of the Bison Specialist Group, has started to coordinate drafting of the status survey in collaboration with group members. The survey will consider the historical and cultural significance of bison, bison ecology and conservation biology, legal status and listings, population descriptions and management, habitat issues, genetics and taxonomy, and disease. The Bison Specialist Group (North America) will identify priority information gaps, threats and possible conservation actions needed to develop an Action Plan. This initiative aligns with the IUCN Strategic Plan for 2000-2010, which has set a target for assessing the status of all mammals by 2002. The Specialist Group will evaluate the status of North American bison using the IUCN Red List Criteria and will recommend a listing designation for each subspecies of bison to the IUCN/SSC.

The threats to bison conservation include reduced genetic diversity, hybridization between subspecies, infiltration of cattle DNA, exotic diseases, habitat loss, increasing land use pressure from industrial development, agricultural expansion, commercialization and domestication of

bison, transboundary and inter-jurisdictional disputes, and reintroduction difficulties. Consequently, the Bison Specialist Group will be very active in the coming months and years.

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## Cactus and Succulent Specialist Group

The IUCN/SSC Cactus and Succulent Specialist Group (CSSG), as the IUCN Red List Authority for cacti and succulent plants, has started assessing the cacti and succulents according to the new IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. The project was stimulated by the group's former Chairman, Prof. Edward F. Anderson, who was very active in Red Listing during his trip to Mexico in February, just before his unexpected death. Thanks to the participation of several group members, over 400 species, all in the Cactaceae, have been evaluated.

These assessments are currently in the review process for inclusion in the 2002 IUCN Red List. Although the more than 400 assessments made so far represent an encouraging start towards the evaluation of the global status of threat of this plant group, only evaluations of cacti were submitted and these are strongly biased towards Mexican and Eastern Brazilian species.

It has been estimated that there are over 10,000 species of cacti and other succulents worldwide, and the evaluation of their conservation status represents an overwhelming challenge for the group. Although the deadline for submissions for the IUCN Red List has now passed, we will continue compiling assessments for the next annual update of the Red List. We plan to advance in the evaluation of additional cactus species throughout the distribution range of the family. However, members of other critical succulent plant families, such as the Agavaceae, Amaryllidaceae, Crassulaceae, Euphorbiaceae, and Mesembryanthemaceae, urgently need to be assessed. Consequently, during the following phases of this project we wish to encourage Cactus and Succulent Specialist Group members holding relevant knowledge of either cacti or other succulent plants to support the Red Listing process.

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**The Group will evaluate the status of North American bison**

