

# Specialist Group Reports

## African Rhino Specialist Group

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### Rhino Conservation Priorities and Strategies

A draft of the new *Continental African Rhinoceros Status Summary and Action Plan* has been completed. It comprises 12 chapters dealing with: (a) past and current distribution, status, and conservation of African rhinos; (b) the conservation framework for African rhinos; and (c) action strategies. It includes a full list of AfRSG-rated priority projects. Comments on the draft plan have been received from the membership and these will be shortly incorporated into the final document before publication.

Donor funding needs to be more effectively mobilized to support African rhino conservation, and in this context many proposals have been evaluated at the request of funding agencies. Most have come from WWF and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Rhino and Tiger Conservation Fund). Projects from seven African countries (Cameroon, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, and Tanzania) and the U.S.A. have been reviewed. AfRSG recommendations on projects have often been adopted.

The AfRSG has successfully promoted its project on rhino identification training for game scouts, but is still seeking support for its rhino horn fingerprinting project.

### Cameroon

A meeting was held in Pietermaritzburg to discuss the situation regarding conservation of the last remaining black rhino (*Diceros bicornis longipes*) in Cameroon. An AfRSG member from WWF Cameroon, Steve Gartlan, and Jaap Schoorl (Coordinator WWF-NL/Cameroon Program) then visited Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park to be briefed on rhino conservation measures in the park, and especially to discuss anti-poaching strategies with the park conservator and head of the anti-poaching unit.

### Zimbabwe

The Chairman and two other AfRSG members, Holly Dublin and Nigel Leader-Williams, participated in the review of Zimbabwe's black rhino policy, held in December 1996. Written evaluations were submitted and a presentation given which described the critical factors for conservation success. The evaluations of Zimbabwe's current approach were well received, and many identified critical success factors that were adopted at the seminar for inclusion in their policy. The need for constructive partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental agencies were recognized. Zimbabwe still conserves significant rhino populations, and the point of "no return" has definitely not been reached.

### Kenya

At the request of Tim Oloo, Kenya's official country representative of the AfRSG and rhino program coordinator for Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), he and KWS's chief rhino researcher Daniel Njaga were hosted jointly in September by the AfRSG Natal Parks Board and Wild Solutions. Approaches for estimating carrying capacity in South Africa were discussed; the latter being central to making offtake decisions to manage rhino populations for maximum productivity, a core principle for successful rhino conservation action advocated by the AfRSG. Population monitoring and the importance of producing regular status reports on the performance and management of populations were also discussed. Kenya currently holds 420 (or 88%) of the East African subspecies of *Diceros b. michaeli*, and only Namibia (598 *D.b. bicornis*) and South Africa (1,204, mainly *D.b. minor*) hold more black rhino. The success of Kenya's rhino program is therefore critical for the survival of the African black rhino. Thus, through its network of

members, the AfRSG is playing a valuable role by facilitating the sharing of knowledge and expertise between range states experiencing common rhino conservation problems.

Following approaches by private landowners and KWS, we intend to visit Kenya later this year to review and discuss rhino and vegetation monitoring and carrying capacity estimation.

## Tanzania

The group's Scientific Officer, Richard Emslie, assisted the Tanzanian rhino coordinator in the planning of a proposed field survey of two areas in the Selous Game Reserve known to have small breeding populations of black rhino. Advice was given on survey techniques, sample design, and data analysis. The primary aim of the Selous surveys is to determine the distribution and numbers of rhino in the two areas to decide where Intensive Protection Zones (IPZs) should be set up to protect the remaining rhino. The AfRSG strongly promotes efforts to protect rhino populations from poaching, recognizing that it is generally only where sufficient levels of anti-poaching effort have been deployed that poaching has been significantly slowed or stopped. The group strongly supports proposals to concentrate law enforcement efforts in the Selous Game Reserve into IPZs rather than spreading effort too thinly throughout the area. The planned surveys are necessary precursors to setting up IPZs in the Selous. On request, AfRSG members also commented favorably on the proposed staffing levels for future IPZs in Selous.

## AfRSG and CITES

A preliminary briefing document entitled "Towards evaluating the effectiveness of rhino conservation actions" was drafted for the CITES Standing Committee meeting in December 1996. This resulted from CITES Res. Conf. 9.14, which called for the use of indicators to provide a basis for evaluating policy interventions pursuant to CITES. The document describes a preliminary conceptual model, and considerable effort will be required to develop an effective means of differentiating

the effects of various management actions, e.g., trade bans vs. *in situ* security.

Thirteen AfRSG members were among those who were asked by IUCN's trade officer to review and technically comment on the proposed amendment to the Appendix II downlisting of South Africa's southern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum simum*). This forms part of the process by which IUCN and TRAFFIC aid governments by preparing objective and technical analyses of all proposals submitted for consideration at the upcoming Conference of the Parties to be held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in June.

## AfRSG Provides Evidence in Aggravation of Sentences in Recent Court Case

On the request of a wildlife investigation of the Natal Parks Board, the Scientific Officer appeared during a recent court in a South African case to give evidence in aggravation of sentences relating to four people convicted of the illegal possession of one rhino horn and one elephant tusk. On the count of the illegal possession of the rhino horn, the four were fined a total of R85,000 (far more than the horn was worth on the local illegal market) or a total of 9 years, 8 months in jail. The magistrate was quoted in the press as saying "it must be clear to people who do the actual illegal hunting that the court will not find it difficult to imprison them."

## Presentations

The Scientific Officer presented the AfRSG triennium report on behalf of the group at the IUCN SSC meeting held in Montreal in October 1996.

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# Species

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