

2023 Report

IUCN SSC African Rhino Specialist Group



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NUMBER OF MEMBERS
49

Mission statement

The AfRSG mission is to promote the development and long-term maintenance of viable populations of the various sub-species of African rhinos in the wild.

Projected impact 2021–2025

The AfRSG wants to: (1) establish and enhance healthy and persistent rhino populations through advising and facilitating the efficient protection and dynamic biological management of African rhinos within their natural range; (2) foster multiple values of rhinos for all peoples' well-being through promoting sustainable conservation; (3) facilitate research, collate information and report on the status of African rhinos to the IUCN and other parties; (4) support targeted communication to a wide range of stakeholders; (5) ensure effective leadership through the capacity building and mentorship of the next generation of rhino conservationists; (6) promote sustainable finance and good governance for African rhino conservation, and (7) manage, monitor and evaluate the Group via effective, efficient, and transparent governance.

Targets 2021–2025

ASSESS

T-006 Collection of rhino population data from all range states in 2022 and 2024.
Status: On track

T-013 Submission of joint IUCN/TRAFFIC report for CoP19 in 2022.
Status: Achieved

T-014 Review Range state proposals for IUCN TRAFFIC Analyses in preparation for CITES COP19 in 2022.
Status: Achieved

T-016 Provide comments within one month on CITES related matters when requested by IUCN in preparation for COP19 in June 2022.
Status: Achieved

T-019 Identify Red List Authority in the review and update Red List entries based on updated continental statistics.
Status: Achieved

T-023 Publish at least two articles in *SPECIES* by 2024.
Status: Not initiated

T-026 AfRSG meeting proceedings and continental population estimate completed within two months of the 2022 meeting.
Status: Achieved

T-029 Review at least two scientific papers per year until 2024.
Status: Achieved

T-030 Publish at least two rhino-related papers from AfRSG membership per year.
Status: On track

PLAN

T-005 Attend at least one SADC RMG and EACRMG meeting when invited by 2024.
Status: Not initiated

T-009 Assist in the delivery of at least three national plans by the end of 2024.
Status: Achieved

T-011 Completion of the population prioritisation draft by 2021 and accepted by AfRSG in 2022.
Status: On track

T-012 Review the Continental Rhino Plan by the end of 2024.
Status: On track

T-020 Develop a potential Green List for the rhino population by 2024.
Status: Achieved

T-025 Held the 2022 AfRSG meeting with >80% members attendance.
Status: Achieved



Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*)
Photo: Jamie Gaymer, Ol Jogi Conservancy

T-033 Fund the AfRSG secretariat to deliver on core activities through to the end of 2024.

Status: On track

T-035 Appoint a new Scientific Officer (SO), Programme Officer (PO) and Vice Chairs (VCs) for the specialist group.

Status: On track

ACT

T-007 Provide expert witness advice or information to be used in aggravation of sentence evidence or opposing bail within a month of the request.

Status: Not initiated

T-008 Compile information and arguments to advise on expert witness reports/statements/info handbook for magistrates and guide document for prosecutors by 2024.

Status: On track

T-010 Provide support towards the introduction or management of rhinos into at least six conservation areas by 2024.

Status: On track

NETWORK

T-002 Attend the IUCN next SSC Leaders meeting.

Status: Not initiated

T-027 Update and operationalize the AfRSG website in 2022.

Status: On track

T-032 Develop a strategy for capacity building of young rhino conservationists in 2021 through the establishment of a working group.

Status: Not initiated

T-034 Ensure the delivery of required activities by Task Forces and working groups.

Status: On track

T-037 Attend the EAZA TAG meeting.

Status: Achieved

T-038 Ensure over 70% attendance rate in miscellaneous meeting requests, such as AsRSG (attend meetings), RhoDIS International W/S follow-up/CITES Security Meeting, technical meetings, BRREP, RESG/INTEPOL ECWG, in the reporting period.

Status: On track

T-040 AfRSG member appointed by September 2021.

Status: Achieved

COMMUNICATE

T-015 Attend the CITES meetings and provide a technical role at the next CITES COP19.

Status: Achieved

T-022 Complete Chair report (at most one per year) as requested by *Pachyderm* editor by 2024.

Status: On track

T-028 Provide all media requests up to date, factually based comments as required.

Status: On track

T-031 Maintain a functional Whatsapp group communication platform.

Status: Achieved

Activities and results 2023

ASSESS

Red List

T-019 Identify Red List Authority in the review and update Red List entries based on updated continental statistics. (KSR 7)

Red List Authority identified, and updates made based upon the latest population data. Ongoing.

Result description: Dr Sam Ferreira was appointed as the Red List focal point in the AfRSG.

Research activities

T-006 Collection of rhino population data from all range states in 2022 and 2024. (KSR 5)

National and continental rhino population data collected: Ongoing.

Result description: The AfRSG has now moved to collate rhino data annually. A Task Force completed a data access and use policy for the AfRSG. This provides the purpose, scope, and policy statement that define data access and conditions of data use. Data collation for 2023 is in progress.

T-023 Publish at least two articles in *SPECIES* by 2024. (KSR 5)

Number of scientific publications about species research that acknowledge SSC affiliation: 0

Result description: There have been no articles published in *SPECIES*. Even so, 27 scientific papers were published that had members of the AfRSG as co-authors in 2023. The AfRSG will encourage members to include the AfRSG and IUCN SSC as affiliations. The AfRSG uses its *Pachyderm Journal* as an information-sharing platform on an annual basis.

T-029 Review at least two scientific papers per year until 2024. (KSR 5)

Number of scientific reviews: 13

Result description: The Scientific Officer (SO) and the Chair provided scientific support through peer-review of 13 scientific papers for the following journals: *Oryx*, *Journal of Zoology* (Lond.), *Public*

Library of Science, Biodiversity, Ecological Letters, Animals, African Journal of Wildlife Research, Biological Conservation, Ecological Economics, Global Ecology and Conservation, Journal for Nature Conservation, Journal of Accounting & Organizational Change, and Acta Ethologica. The SO also provided scientific support through the examination of the following PhD dissertation: 'The effects of resource variability on the demographic rates of black and white rhinoceroses'.

T-030 Publish at least two rhino-related papers from AfRSG membership per year. (KSR 5)

Number of scientific publications about species research that acknowledge SSC affiliation: 27

Result description: A total of 27 peer-reviewed papers were published by members (although the actual number of papers with SSC acknowledgement is not known, we are encouraging amongst the members). These focus on factors including the effects of dehorning on population productivity, influences of rainfall on conceptions, factors influencing reproduction on Black Rhino, stress linked to poaching and social interactions, group composition impacts on reproduction in captivity, security risks and influences on a protected area, detection of wildlife crime, human-wildlife conflict influences, and poaching forensics, all influences on accounting for trends in rhinos, the genetic restoration of Black Rhino in South Africa and Black Rhino mitochondrial DNA embedded in the genetic population structure and diversity in Black Rhino across the continent.

Policy

T-014 Review Range state proposals for IUCN TRAFFIC Analyses in preparation for CITES COP19 in 2022. (KSR 5)

Number of proposals reviewed: 1

Result description: A funding proposal with TRAFFIC was submitted to the Biodiversity Challenge Fund of Britain's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as part of effective data collation for the preparation of the CoP20 Report.

PLAN

Planning

T-009 Assist in the delivery of at least three national plans by the end of 2024. (KSR 8)

Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 1

Result description: In 2023, the new Chair and Scientific Officer were extensively involved in the revision of the South African Black and White Rhino Plan, albeit in

different roles than formally representing the AfRSG. The plan has been approved for publishing.

T-012 Review the Continental Rhino Plan by the end of 2024. (KSR 8)

Number of conservation plans/strategies updated: 1

Result description: For the African Rhino Conservation Framework, a first draft was shared with the Reference Group, which recommended simplification and format considerations. Next, the entire membership will be consulted. The key strategic insights focus on rhino species as integrated across range states and the contributions they make to ecosystem and people's well-being. A final draft is now in preparation for printing.

T-020 Develop a potential Green List for the rhino population by 2024. (KSR 8)

Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 1

Result description: The SO and some AfRSG members, together with the IUCN Green Status team conducted a Green List status assessment for Black Rhino. The document has been submitted to the *African Journal of Wildlife Research* for publishing.

T-033 Fund the AfRSG secretariat to deliver on core activities through to the end of 2024. (KSR 8)

AfRSG Secretariat are sufficiently funded: Ongoing.

Result description: The AfRSG Secretariat consists of the Chair (Dr MH Knight, who will be replaced by Dr Dave Balfour at the start of 2024), the Programme Officer (Ms Keit Mosweu) and the Scientific Officer (Dr Sam Ferreira). Expenditure for 2023 was \$68,400. Funding comprising \$70,000 for 2023 came from USFWS, IRF, OAK and Save the Rhino Foundation.

T-035 Appoint a new Scientific Officer (SO), Programme Officer (PO) and Vice Chairs (VCs) for the specialist group. (KSR 8)

Appointment of new SO, PO and VCs in 2021: 3

Result description: The SO and PO are still operating. The AfRSG has appointed a new Chair, Dr Dave Balfour, and he will have the prerogative to establish a support function as needed.

ACT

Conservation actions

T-010 Provide support towards the introduction or management of rhinos into at least six conservation areas by 2024. (KSR 10)

Number of conservation translocations conducted: 2

Result description: During 2023, the AfRSG reviewed 10 different proposals or management documents in six different range States. Two translocations were successfully carried out to Garamba National Park, DRC and Zakouma National Park, Chad.

NETWORK

Capacity building

T-032 Develop a strategy for capacity building of young rhino conservationists in 2021 through the establishment of a working group. (KSR 2)

Number of people trained in conservation action: 0

Result description: There has been limited progress after the Secretariat of the AfRSG engaged with USFWS on a mentoring program, with the Oak Foundation on range States government participation, and with the rhino and Pangolin Anti-Poaching Foundation and Academy. A re-ignited focus is on developing a PhD qualification and project for the Programme Officer.

T-034 Ensure the delivery of required activities by Task Forces and working groups. (KSR 2)

Task Force and Working Groups deliver on activities based upon need of AfRSG: Ongoing.

Result description: The AfRSG revised the Task Forces (TF) and Working Groups (WG) and had six TFs and 11 WGs on-going for the next cycle until the 15th members meeting due to take place in 2025. In 2023, the AfRSG continued to make use of five TFs and eight WGs. Two TFs completed activities and have been disbanded. Three WGs were merged with other existing WGs.

Membership

T-040 AfRSG member appointed by Sept 2021. (KSR 2)

Number of SSC members recruited: 48

Result description: In 2023, five members retired from the group. Membership is now at 48 members.

Synergy

T-027 Update and operationalize the AfRSG website in 2022. (KSR 2)

Website functional: Ongoing.

Result description: The AfRSG website in the IRF site is updated with regular open-access information. In addition, the AfRSG has established a private site on the WeNaturalist platform.



Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) in the thicket
Photo: Cathy Dreyer

T-037 Attend the EAZA TAG meeting. (KSR 1)

E-mail correspondence, meetings attended, and presentations given and EAZA TAG correspondence: 1

Result description: In June 2023, the AfRSG attended the EAZA TAG meeting virtually. The agenda included updates on the Black Rhino re-introduction at Grumeti and the Northern White Rhino Project, including the position of the White Rhino EEP. The meeting reviewed the outcomes of the TAG evaluation and discussed feedback from the EEP Committee, including the role of Rhino TAG advisors. Additionally, the group planned actions for adopting the One Plan Approach for rhino conservation and set the agenda for the next TAG meeting in Helsinki.

T-038 Ensure over 70% attendance in miscellaneous meeting requests, such as AsRSG (attend meetings), RhodIS International W/S follow-up/CITES Security Meeting, technical meetings, BRREP, RESG/INTEPOL ECWG, in the reporting period. (KSR 3)

E-mail correspondence meetings attended, and presentations given and EAZA TAG correspondence: 75%

Result description: The Chair participated in the 20-year review of the successful WWF Black Rhino Expansion Project (BRREP). The Chair also provided support in selecting proposals for the IRF inaugural Rhino Research Fund, and addressed the African Parks Board on continental rhino conservation to emphasise its constitutional responsibilities, accountability, and opportunity in taking over the management of the Platinum Rhino Facility. The AfRSG virtually attended the Zimbabwe National Rhino meeting.

COMMUNICATE

Communication

T-022 Complete Chair report (at most one per year) as requested by *Pachyderm* editor by 2024. (KSR 12)

Number of Species e-bulletin, Save Our Species newsletter, SSC Groups' newsletter editions produced: 1

Result description: In 2023, the Chair report was published on *Pachyderm*. Knight, M., Mosweu, K. and Ferreira, S.M. (2023). 'African Rhino Specialist Group Chair report Rapport du Groupe de Spécialistes du Rhinocéros d'Afrique'. *Pachyderm*, 64, 13–30.

T-028 Provide all media requests up to date, factually based comments as required. (KSR 12)

Media engagements: 5

Result description: The SO and Chair provided responses to different media enquiries regarding, the (unsuccessful) auction of Platinum Rhinos, the new research that the sizes of home-ranges and social interactions of rhinos that have been dehorned to deter poaching have been affected, the joint IUCN and AfRSG press release on African numbers for World Rhino Day to Daily Maverick, the interview on News Radio Programme (BBC) about the new figures released showing a slight rebound in rhino numbers, and finally on a press release on the latest status and trends in rhino populations for World Rhino Day.

T-031 Maintain a functional Whatsapp group communication platform. (KSR 12)

Operational and functional Whatsapp group: Achieved.

Result description: AfRSG's Whatsapp group is very active and remains a useful platform for members to exchange information.

Acknowledgements

Rhino range states in Africa are thanked for their on-going contribution of information to the Secretariat. The AfRSG is also grateful to Save the Rhino International (SRI), the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhino and Tiger Conservation Fund (USFWS RTC), the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and Oak Foundation for support provided to the AfRSG Scientific (SO) and Programme (PO) Officers and the Chair to enable them to render this invaluable service to the group. The WWF in Namibia is also thanked for their support to the Chair.

Summary of achievements

Total number of targets 2021–2025: 31

Geographic regions: 30 Africa, 1 Europe

Actions during 2023:

Assess: 6 (KSR 5, 7)

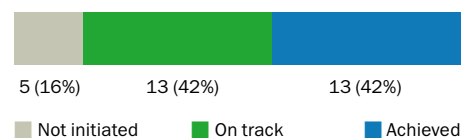
Plan: 5 (KSR 8)

Act: 1 (KSR 10)

Network: 6 (KSR 1, 2, 3)

Communicate: 3 (KSR 12)

Overall achievement 2021–2025:





Species

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Survival Commission
and Secretariat

Part I