

- 53 Preliminary results on movements of a radio-collared elephant in Lobeke National Park, south-east Cameroon
Leonard Usongo
- 59 Importance of anti-poaching measures towards successful conservation and protection of rhinos and elephants, north-eastern India
Bibhab Kumar Talukdar
- 66 Elephant poaching and ivory trafficking in African tropical forests with special reference to the Republic of Congo
Tom Nishihara
- 75 Trade in rhino horn from eastern Africa to Yemen
Esmond Martin and Lucy Vigne
- 88 Opinion**
- 88 Why the name of the white rhinoceros is not appropriate
Kees Rookmaaker
- 94 Notes from the African Rhino Specialist Group**
- 94 Workshop proceedings on the biological management of the black rhino now available online
Richard H. Emslie
- 94 Black rhinos reintroduced to North Luangwa National Park, Zambia
George H. Kampamba
- 95 Update on the status of Botswana's rhino populations
Mercy Masedi
- 96 The SADC Rhino Recovery Group is established
Roy Bhima
- 99 New RHINO 2.0 population estimation software scheduled for release
Richard H. Emslie, Rajan Amin and Kevin Davey
- 101 Notes**
- 101 Rhino Resource Center
Kees Rookmaaker
- 102 Rhinos in Chitwan
Pralad Yonzo
- 103 North-west Namibian desert-dwelling elephant project
The Namibian Elephant and Giraffe Trust
- 104 Fonds pour des petites subventions du Groupe de Spécialistes de l'Éléphant d'Afrique
- 107 Guidelines for contributors**
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NOTES

Rhino Resource Center

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When a large contingent of the world's rhino community met at the International Elephant and Rhino Research Symposium held in Vienna in June 2001, current issues were discussed in a workshop with the incomparable facilitation of Ulysses Seal, who recently passed away (Walker 2003). The perception was widespread that the communication between rhino researchers in different continents and countries needed to be improved to be able to use all funds effectively and efficiently (Delegates of the international rhino community 2002). We are all aware that there is a considerable store of knowledge about the five living species of rhinoceros in Africa and Asia, published in books and papers or stored away in reports and dissertations. While acknowledging the importance of the existing data as a foundation for further research and management issues, access to the literature is time-consuming and often impractical. With the initial support of the International Rhino Foundation and SOS Rhino, several steps were taken after the Vienna Symposium towards the establishment of a Rhino Resource Center (the RRC) dedicated to storing and disseminating everything pertaining to the rhinoceros.

Considerable progress has been made in the last two years. The Rhino Resource Center has been registered as a charity in The Netherlands and a board has been constituted with Dr Nico J. van Strien as chair, Prof. Dr Rob Visser as secretary-treasurer and Dr Esmond Martin as the first international member. The initiative has received the endorsement of the IUCN Species Survival Programme, as well as the African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups. With Kees

Rookmaaker as the chief editor, assistance with elusive French sources is volunteered by Dr Henri Carpentier of Paris.

As a result of earlier projects and decades of interest in the rhinoceros, a substantial amount of literature on the five species of rhinoceros has already been assembled. At the moment (June 2003) the collection has close to 8700 references dating from Roman times up to the latest books and articles, available in original or photocopies. On average, 100 titles are added every month. Some are short paragraphs in longer papers, others are full-length studies. There is no limitation as to subject, as long as one of the five species of rhinoceros is mentioned in the text. The list of topics is surprisingly wide, ranging from the traditional biological disciplines of taxonomy, ecology, behaviour, nutrition and morphology, to husbandry, management and veterinary studies, to the importance of the animal in different cultures. In fact, the rhinoceros is found in so many studies in such a variety of interests that it is safe to say that anybody venturing outside their immediate speciality is likely to find some new and refreshing insights in the works of colleagues in other disciplines.

The RRC is set up to get the right information to the right people at the right time. It is an aid to researchers in the field, where access to publications is often greatly limited. There is need to distribute the available data in traditional ways of publishing, like books or CD-ROMs. We hope to edit much-needed books on each species of rhinoceros and to produce an atlas of the rhinoceros with historical and

current data on distribution, status, and trade for each range country. While the means to achieve these products are being explored, the RRC has opted to give access to all data through a Web site on the Internet, registered as www.rhinoresourcecenter.com

Currently the Web site contains a full bibliography of all titles in the collection, which can be searched by author, date or word in the title. There is also access to a database of 'notes' on the rhinoceros, which again can be searched by subject, species or geographic location. Whatever the interest of the user, the result is a list of relevant data, which not only gives the full title of the publication, but also the exact text pertaining to that particular topic. When the original author wrote in German, French or Dutch, the section on the rhinoceros is found in an English translation, often translated for the first time. At the moment, about 3000 references have been analysed according to subject matter, emphasizing the literature of the 20th century.

While this is only a beginning, there is ample scope for the RRC to be established as a centre for all infor-

mation on research, conservation and management of all five species of rhinoceros. There will be a database of all current workers on the rhinoceros in the field and in captivity. However, to achieve optimum benefit for the global rhino community, the work of the RRC needs to be expanded and upgraded. The work can be done only when there is long-term commitment of funding from organizations, zoological gardens or individuals, who can thus make an important contribution to rhinoceros research and conservation.

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Rhinos in Chitwan

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'The Curse of Success' is the title of an article by T.R. Adhikari that appears in *Habitat Himalaya*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2002. The author, who has been involved in anti-poaching since 1991, examines the classic success of Nepal's rhino conservation. Rhinos have dramatically turned around from the brink of extinction. Establishing the Royal Chitwan National Park brought this about. In it, rhinos increased from 147 animals in 1972 to 544 in 2000. The rapid recovery of the rhino population in the Chitwan Valley, however, has set off frenzied poaching that may knock off the rhino's growth rate. Although a network of anti-poaching units has been formed, poaching increased drastically in 1998 and peaked at an all-time high in 2002.

Rhino poachers have become much more organized. Some took advantage of the breakdown in law enforcement caused by Nepal's major political upheaval to engage in their activities. Anti-poaching units have been weakened as informants have been

completely removed since 2001. In addition, the Maoist uprising has affected the army, which has vacated 24 guard posts in the park and now maintains only 10. Moreover, the media has over-exposed anti-poaching activities. Now poachers move into villages to carry out their operations inside the park. Access to the park's rhinos is easy because the national highway runs around the park and all rhino habitats lie adjacent to settlements. Early detection of poacher movements must therefore be the key.

These factors suggest that the conservation effort needs restructuring, emphasizing knowledge over capital. In the long run, arresting or suppressing poaching is foremost—but it is not the end. Therefore, a road map for conserving the rhino, based on contemporary knowledge, is much needed.

Details of this publication are available by downloading a free electronic copy through www.resourcehimalaya.org. Or write to Resources Himalaya, GPO Box 2448, Kathmandu, Nepal.