

Specialist Group Updates

African Elephant

Report on the 6th Members' Meeting

Thirty-four of 48 African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) members attended the 6th members' meeting, 4–8 December, 2003 at the Mokuti Lodge, Namibia, funded by the European Commission. Mr. Martin Brasher, Director of the Global Division of the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Dr. Malan Lindeque, the Permanent Secretary for Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and other MET officials participated actively throughout.

Meeting Highlights

Multiple species of African elephant

During the meeting, recent genetic and morphological studies on the African elephant were discussed to determine whether a change in taxonomic status of the African elephant was warranted. After much discussion, participants agreed that more studies were still needed before the Group could formally accept the division of the African elephant into multiple species.

Listing of the African elephant by Red List criteria

Taking full advantage of the presence of experts from across the continent, the Group worked on a Red List assessment of the African elephant for inclusion in the 2004 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The figures from the *African Elephant Status Report 2002* and the *African Elephant Action Plan* were used for a comparison at the national, regional and continental levels. It was also agreed that the AfESG would continue, through its internal procedures, to work on the listings at the sub-regional level.

The role of captive use in the in situ conservation of the African elephant

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of captures of elephants from the wild for a wide variety of uses including in zoos and for elephant-back safaris. In light of this and after much debate, a statement was issued that makes it clear that, as such activities had no direct benefit for *in situ* conservation of the species, the AfESG did not endorse the removal of African elephants from the wild for any captive use.

New Task Force on local overpopulation of elephants

The adverse impacts that high densities of elephants can have on biodiversity are well known and some Range States, especially those in Southern Africa, are currently grappling with the best way to reduce elephant populations to sustainable levels. However, as up-to-date information on the various methods to control elephant populations is not easily available to relevant practitioners, the Group formed a special task force to compile a technical document describing the options available. Subject to the availability of funds, the final product will be made available

and widely disseminated in French, English and Portuguese.

Meeting participants also heard the results of the latest cutting-edge elephant research on the continent and were given the opportunity to discuss priority issues such as human-elephant conflict and illegal killing and trade of meat and ivory. Also, the first stages of a scenario planning exercise to explore possible futures for the African elephant across its range, over the next 30–50 years captured the imagination of all members.

Leo Niskanen, Senior Programme Officer



6th African Elephant members' meeting

African Rhino

The African Rhino Specialist Group (ARSG), as a consortium partner, continues to give technical direction and input to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation (RPRC). Activities include the recent release of four black rhinos in Botswana, completion and testing of the Law Database and additional Scene of the Crime Investigation training courses in Swaziland and Botswana. Various software and other computer tools continued to be improved for successful application in a number of Rhino range states. A recent technical mission to Angola aimed to evaluate possible rhino conservation options in that country, and a similar mission to Maputo and Limpopo National Parks in Mozambique is planned.

The five rhino introduced to North Luangwa National Park (see *Species 40*) have settled in well and are being very closely monitored. These rhinos were introduced through the cooperative efforts and hard work of South African National Parks, Frankfurt Zoo, Frankfurt Zoological Society, the Zambian Wildlife Authority and the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation.

The Namibian Ministry of the Environment and Tourism (MET), as part of a joint MET/WWF funded project, has undertaken another successful block count of black rhino in Etosha National Park. A follow-up workshop was held in Etosha (with assistance of the Group's Scientific Officer) to discuss the results of the 2002 and 2003 counts and discuss future counts. Plans are currently being made to extend such counts to Kruger National Park.

Modules for the “Sandwith” rhino monitoring training course for field rangers have been revised in the light of experience at identification training of trainers courses held in South Africa and Kenya. In addition, new trainees’ booklets are available electronically and will hopefully be produced in a number of local languages shortly. A successful stakeholder workshop was convened in the Kunene region, Namibia, with participants from community conservancies, traditional chiefs, local organizations, tourist concessionaires and government representatives. This workshop reviewed biological management, and reached agreement on requirements and priorities for rhino translocations.

The Group will next meet in Tsavo West National Park, Kenya in June when the status of all Africa’s rhino populations will be reviewed, reports from the range states considered, programmes and approaches presented and a number of workshops to develop strategies held. Meetings of the SADC Rhino Recovery Group and SADC Range States will also take place.

A lone black rhino has been discovered in Rwanda, and attempts are being made to improve security and obtain a mate for it.

It is with sadness that I have to report that in early December 2003, the official Tanzanian representative on the African Rhino Specialist Group, Mr Matthew Maige, was killed during a robbery at his house in Dar es Salaam. He will be sorely missed. The Group is considering setting up a fund in his name to sponsor a young East African rhino conservationist to attend future Group meetings.

Once again the Group would like to thank WWF’s Africa Rhino Programme, WWF-US and WWF-South Africa for their support, which continues to allow the Secretariat to function.

Martin Brooks, Chair

Asian Elephant

Our new website:

<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/sgs/asesg/>

The Asian Elephant Specialist Group has launched its own website, hosted by IUCN which will detail all the activities of the Group as well as provide necessary information on the Asian elephant and its conservation. An electronic version of the 1990 Action Plan for Asian Elephant Conservation, draft chapters of the revised action plan for members’ inputs and comments, and member contact details have all been posted. The site will benefit the Group by enabling better networking and communication, as well as the wider conservation community by providing updated information from the field. There will be a separate section to answer queries from students and the general public on various subjects related to

the Asian elephant. Efforts to produce an online version of *Gajah*, the Group’s peer-reviewed journal are underway.

Updating the Asian Elephant Action Plan

The revised Action Plan for Asian elephant conservation is currently being edited and will be published by the end of this year.

South East Asia Programme Office

The Group’s South East Asia programme office has finished its first round of operations. The Group is grateful to the services of Mr. Joe Heffernan, Programme Coordinator, of the Fauna & Flora International (FFI) Indo-China Elephant Programme, and FFI International for providing the office space, as well as the support of DETR, (now DEFRA) UK.

Joshua David, Assistant to the Chair

Bryophytes

Promoting bryophyte conservation in South America

A workshop, International Bryophyte Conservation – Current Status and Future Work, was held in Mérida, Venezuela earlier this year, organized by the SSC Bryophyte Specialist Group, the International Association of Bryologists and local bryologist Dr. Yelitza Leon and her team. This was the first workshop to be held in South America and addressed bryophyte biology, research, and conservation. The Red List of Bryophytes was discussed and the need to assess more species for possible inclusion was stressed. Other topics covered included raising public awareness and training bryologists in biodiversity and conservation work as well as in the use of mosses and liverworts in rainforest monitoring. Guidelines were drafted on how scientists should carry out bryophyte collecting in an ethical and non-destructive way.

Bryophyte Specialist Group

The revised Action Plan for Asian Elephant conservation will be published by the end of the year

