

Conservation of Rhino, Cameroon, (Project 1759): Dr Pierre Pfeffer, of the Paris Natural History Museum, President of WWF-France, visited the United Republic of Cameroon in April and May 1980 to help the government set up a programme for protection of the black rhinoceros and to study tropical rain forest reserves. The visit was preceded by talks between Mr Francis Fabre, member of the Board of Trustees of WWF International, and President Ahidjo of Cameroon. Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, Founder-President of WWF, also discussed these questions with President Ahidjo.

Dr Pfeffer reported:

During our tour we came across nine black rhinos, involving seven different individuals. In addition, in all the areas traversed, we noticed tracks and fairly recent droppings. We were also informed of a number of sightings by other people. The data confirmed the presence of several nuclei of populations of the black rhinoceros throughout the north of Cameroon, from the 8th parallel almost to the 10th. The main nuclei are in the Faro Reserve and in the Benoué and Bouba Njida National Parks, but others of some importance are scattered round these protected zones. The presence of rhinoceros has recently been confirmed on the Mayo Kebi, 50 km northeast of Garoua, as well as in three regions south of Garoua. A small population exists in the Tjoliré forest. Other rhinoceros inhabit the Vaimba hunting block, northwest of Bouba Njida National Park.



Dr Kes Hillman, Chairman of the IUCN/SSC African Rhino Group, examines a dead rhino from which the horn has been cut. Photo: Jackson

Several small populations of rhino are scattered south and east of the Faro Reserve west of the Benoué National Park, and particularly in the area south of the road between this park and that of Boba Njida. It is probable that the whole area north of the Vina river, east of Ngaundere, harbours a fairly scattered population of rhinoceros and should be surveyed and protected. The same is true for the area between Ngaundere and the Faro Reserve.

Obviously, it is extremely difficult to estimate the numbers of a species so dispersed over so vast an area. But we were agreeably surprised on this, our first visit to Cameroon since 1973, when we had been rather pessimistic about the rhino's status, to find that it had not deteriorated and that, on the contrary, we found populations that were quite viable and reproducing at a normal rate: out of the seven rhinos observed we saw two young of 1 to 2 years and one aged 3-4 years.

According to Mr Andrew Allo, Director of the Wildlife School at Garoua, air and land censuses carried out in 1976, 1977 and 1978, estimated the number of rhinos at 50 for Bouba Njida National Park and surroundings alone. On the other hand, Mr Pierre Fotse, Provincial Delegate for Tourism for the North, estimates the numbers of rhinos for this region at only about 20, with about the same number (15-20) for the Benoué National Park.

In view of the number of animals we came across and the tracks we saw, it seems certain that the areas we surveyed, which represent only a small part of the rhinoceros range in Cameroon, harbour an appreciable number of rhinoceros.

Thus, even at a conservative estimate, it does not seem to be excessive to estimate the total number of black rhinos in the north of Cameroon as at least 100. It should be noted that all these animals are found within a relatively limited area and that if they are well protected several of the nuclei which are at present separated, could expand and link up with each other.

Of all the present threats to the black rhino population in Cameroon, poaching is obviously the greatest. Although they have been protected by law for nearly 30 years, the numbers of the species - which is reproducing normally - are remaining stationary or increasing in insignificant numbers, whereas the normal rate of increase of black rhinoceros populations is at least 5%.

It seems certain, therefore, that a small number of these animals are killed each year. Our enquiries nevertheless showed that, happily, there is no real demand for rhinoceros horn in Cameroon - except as a curiosity or souvenir. So there is no strong commercial motivation, at

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least for the present, and if rhinoceros are occasionally killed it is basically for meat and for want of more sought-after game such as buffalo, antelope or elephant.

In north Cameroon, poachers are often foreigners, from Chad or particularly Nigeria, in mobile bands and often dangerous. Shortly before our arrival, the Warden of the Waza National Park a person of high ethical and professional worth, was murdered during a clash with one of these bands of poachers. The struggle against organised gangs of poachers requires means which the National Parks and the Department of Forest do not possess at present and which are essential to them.

It is also probable that one or two rhinos are killed in the hunting blocks by hunters who do not bother to take the trophy for fear of punishment, but who want to satisfy their vanity by boasting that they have shot a rhino. This was probably the case of the rhinoceros, found dead and intact by students of the Wildlife School at Garoua, inside the Bouba Njida National Park, but on the edge of a hunting block.

The development of cotton cultivation in the region between the Benoué National Park and that of Bouba Njida, is clearly a limiting factor for the expansion of the rhinoceros and large fauna generally. Enough land should therefore immediately be made into a reserve to provide a viable "bridge" between the areas already protected.

Another threat arises from the pressure of Nigerian people, whose land has been emptied of its fauna, and from refugees from Chad, in northern Cameroon, estimated to number nearly 300,000.

Despite the possible dangers, several factors are particularly favourable for the development of a conservation programme for the rhinoceros in northern Cameroon. They are:

- the absence, at present, of poaching directly aimed at this species;
- the relatively low density of human population in the area;
- the existence of a good network of trails and landing strips, as well as the airport at Garoua, which would facilitate the organisation of effective surveillance;
- the possibility of using national and foreign personnel of high standard, through the Wildlife School, the Peace Corps volunteers and the cooperation of the French, and probably the Germans;
- help given by the traditional authorities,

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particularly by the Lamido (Sultan) of Rey Bouba, whose influence is considerable and who has taken the rhinoceros under his personal protection;

- finally, the declared intention of the Cameroon government, and particularly of the Tourist Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water, Forest and Hunting, to do everything to save this species.

Conclusion: The black rhino conservation programme in Cameroon has two essential advantages:

- the species is represented by a population which has not reached the critical threshold and which is distributed in such a way that it will increase fairly rapidly if effectively protected;

- the Cameroon government, at the highest level, is ready to do the maximum on its part if, in view of the country's other development problems, the international community does its share for this project.

All projects concerning rhinoceros are of the greatest urgency. Both threats and favourable conditions can change very rapidly and threaten the rhino's future. Immediate action is necessary, for the Cameroon authorities, as well as for international bodies.

Dr. Pierre Pfeffer
President, WWF-France

WWF/IUCN STATEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL
TRADE IN RHINO PRODUCTS
(Full Text)

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have received a report from their consultant, Dr Esmond Bradley Martin (Projects 1724, 1936), on the international trade in rhinoceros products, based upon survey work undertaken in Africa and Asia. The report will be made widely available for the information it reveals on the nature of this trade, covering such topics as the uses to which rhino products are put, the pattern of prices in recent years, geographical aspects of the trade and a quantitative assessment of world consumption of rhino horn. The report is the first comprehensive account of its kind, bringing together and evaluating data already available, as well as new information brought to light by Dr Bradley Martin's research. The conclusions are alarming, for they point to continuing pressure on the already highly vulnerable five species of rhino. In this statement, IUCN and WWF highlight the