

Nepal claims rhino success

THE Nepalese authorities have claimed success in the conservation of one of the world's most endangered species - the one-horned rhino. They said that numbers had increased by more than 25% in the past six years. The latest census puts the number of the one-horned rhinos in Nepal at more than 600 - a growth rate of 4% a year. The Director-General of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Tirtha Man Shakya, said at a news conference that this was a conservation victory. This has come at a time when environmentalists have been expressing concern that the rhinos are dying in increasing numbers in recent years.

However, there were also reports of growing poaching in the two national parks where the rhinoceroses live. More than 20% of total rhino deaths is blamed on poaching. But Mr Shakya said that despite the recent increase in the deaths of rhinos, the overall result of the conservation programmes and the anti-poaching laws had been a success. He said the transfer of rhinos from an over-populated national park in southern Nepal to another in the west had had a good effect on increasing their numbers. Poachers in Nepal face a jail sentence of 15 years and a fine of \$7,000.

One-horned rhinos are only found in Nepal and the eastern Indian states of Assam and West Bengal. India has the highest number of rhinos in the world - the latest count puts the number at 1,300.

- Sushil Sharma, Kathmandu
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